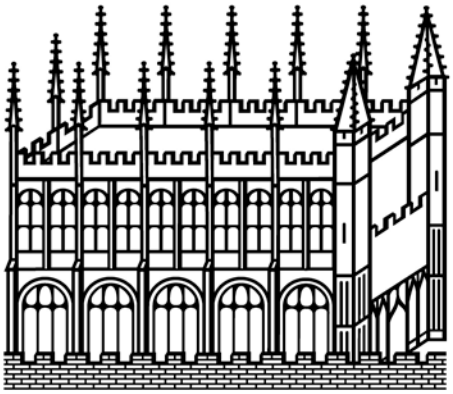

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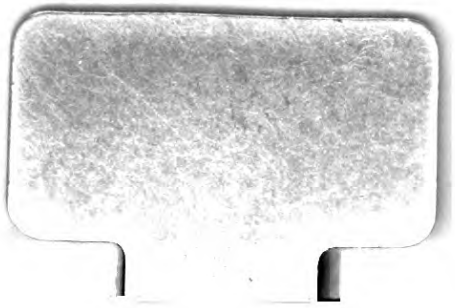

THE CANON

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THE CANON

by

A. C. BENSON

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I

MRS. CUTHBERT DAVENANT and her eight-year-old boy Austin were coming briskly along the road in the compact little hamlet of Polcrello. On their right were the miniature white-walled irregular houses, each with a strip of garden, gay with the late summer flowers. On their left was the quay and the estuary, now brimmed with the sad-coloured tide. In the sea-pool half a dozen fishing-boats rode at anchor, and a dozen row-boats, tied up to the quay, stirred and swayed in the gentle current. There were only a few loungers about. Phil. Janeway, the old fisherman, smoking a leisurely pipe seated on a fish-box, got up as they passed, pulled amiably at his hat, and exchanged a few words with Mrs. Davenant. Across the creek the pastures were brown with drought, and the trees, darkened to a metallic green, stood motionless in warm, still air. Above and beyond the hamlet the oak-copses of Nan-Zephron Manor-house clothed the steep hillsides, with the gaunt moorland of Caer Brynon looking over. Half a mile away, a white house on the water's edge nestled in the coolness of the copse, and at the end of the village two tall granite posts, with stone balls on the top, marked the entrance to the little domain of Menerdue.

Mrs. Cuthbert-Davenant was approaching thirty, but she wore a girlish air as she came lightly along in her white gown and broad-brimmed straw hat. Her big brown eyes glanced quickly in all directions with an air of delighted animation, and her half-parted lips had the suspicion of a smile. The boy beside her did not much resemble her. He was tall for his age and moved quickly in his loose

flannel suit, his arm through his mother's. But under his upstanding curly hair there was a touch of something almost melancholy in the finely-cut, fresh-coloured features.

Mrs. Davenant stopped. " Oh, Austin," she said, " I wish you would go in and have a word with Aunty Pel. She will be sure to know I have been twice to the village to-day and haven't seen her—but I *must* go back, or Daddy will be waiting for tea."

" Oh, not to-day, Mummy—won't it do some other day? "

" Why, what are you afraid of? "

" Oh, I'm not afraid—but there might be someone with her, and I mightn't know what to say."

" Well, never mind then, old boy."

They walked on a few paces in silence. Then Austin, drawing his hand from his mother's arm, said, " Yes, Mummy, I will go. But tell me what I must say."

" That's right, darling," said his mother approvingly. " Give her my love, and say that I want to ask her about the green bee-hive."

" Yes, I can begin with that. I needn't stay long, need I? "

" You needn't stay a moment—but Aunty Pel will be pleased if you stay a little."

Austin ran back to the hamlet, waved his hands at the gate of one of the cottages to his mother, who had stopped to watch him, and disappeared from view.

Mrs. Davenant, smiling to herself, ran off up the drive, and presently came out on an open space where the house of Menerdue stood. At the end nearest the village, there stood bulkily up an ancient stone-built battlemented tower, with small windows, on to which was joined a house with a white façade; there was a gravel sweep in front,

half carved out of the hill, and to the right a stone-walled garden ran steeply up into the wood, the wall of which, bordering the drive, was richly festooned with tropæolum in clusters of scarlet flowers, and blue-sprayed ceanothus.

Mrs. Davenant went in quickly at the front door, flinging her hat down on the table in a little marble-paved hall, and went in at a door on the left. It was a long, low room, the three tall windows of which looked out over a terrace to the creek. It was a pleasant place, with its big chintz-covered chairs and a good many white-painted shelves full of books. There were old-fashioned water-colours on the walls. Near one of the windows was a tea-table laid for a meal, and beside it in a deep arm-chair, immersed in a book, sat a tall, lean clergyman, habited in a cassock, in spite of the heat of the weather, with one knee crossed over the other, and wearing strong, serviceable, dusty boots. His hair and beard were a crisp curly brown, grown rather long, and decidedly unbrushed. His features were handsome but somewhat worn of aspect. He raised his large dark eyes with an abstracted air, but melted into a very sweet smile at the sight of his wife, and rose ceremoniously to his feet.

Mrs. Davenant put her hand on his as she passed, and he raised it to his lips and kissed it. She smiled at him and proceeded to make the tea.

" I am afraid I am a little late, dear," she said, " but it is difficult to disentangle oneself from Mrs. Trenoweth's sentences—why didn't you begin? "

" I was in no hurry, dearest," said Mr. Cuthbert-Davenant, " except for your precious company. Indeed, I had lost myself in this book—a strange and terrible book —how did you come by it? "

He held up a novel before her: " Oh, that! " she said,

" it came with the library books—I looked into it and thought it rather tiresome and affected."

" Indeed, no," said Mr. Davenant, " there is a deplorable reality about it—a most cynical and grudging view of life—it seemed to me like the despairing talk of lost spirits. Tell me, dearest, does this in your opinion at all represent the prevailing tone of society at the present time? That would be a distressing thought! "

" I don't think you need be anxious, Henry," said Mrs. Davenant. " I expect it much more represents the chatter of some discontented little artistic coterie."

" It would be a relief to think so," said Mr. Davenant. " I would read it as a painful duty, if I thought it would reveal even a single aspect of the modern mind? "

" No, dear, you had much better not read it, unless you are prepared to study a dozen more such books. You take things too seriously, you know, and draw such far-reaching conclusions."

She drew the book smiling from his hand. At this moment the door opened, and a little girl of about six came decisively into the room and marched straight to her father, standing at his knee. He caught her up, enfolding her in his arms, and kissing her hair and cheek. " My Cynthia! Daddy's own treasure! Come to see Daddy? "

" I expect she is thinking of a second tea," said her mother. " She has had her tea in the nursery."

" Want to have tea with Daddy, too! " said Cynthia, firmly.

" And so you shall, my darling," said Mr. Davenant.

Cynthia surveyed the table, and pointed with a small finger at a plate of biscuits. " These won't hurt her? " said Mr. Davenant.

" No," said Mrs. Davenant, adding, " Cynthia represents another aspect of modern thought."

Mr. Davenant smiled at his wife and shook his head. Cynthia munched contentedly, putting her little bare legs on her father's other knee.

" Where is Austin? " said Mr. Davenant.

" Having tea with Aunty Pel, I expect," said Mrs. Davenant. She told the incident in detail.

" Ah," said Mr. Davenant with a sigh, " he has his father's unhappy diffidence; but more fortunate than I, he has his mother's generous power of repentance."

They talked lazily on. Mr. Davenant, at Cynthia's command, extemporized a chapter in an interminable romance entitled Brother Martin, an anchorite who was supposed to have lived at the ruined hermitage in Nan-Zephron wood, and to have had many surprising adventures of a mildly pious order. In the middle Austin burst in, with all the pride of a social triumph. Aunty Pel had been discovered at tea with her niece, Mrs. Pendarves, the wife of a coastguardsman. He had had tea, a saffron cake, some raisins and some peppermints, and he had told them a story out of one of his books, which Aunty Pel had said was the most interesting story she had ever heard. Cynthia listened open-eyed and presently murmured " want to go to tea with Aunty Pel."

The story of Brother Martin remained unfinished, and presently the children trotted away. Mr. Davenant rose and stood beside his wife, taking her hand in his own.

" How are you to-day, dear? " she said, looking up at him.

" I am quite well now," said Mr. Davenant. " You and the children bring me back to life and love. It is only when I am alone that I suffer from these anxious and harassing thoughts. In spite of all my blessings, I feel that I am too inactive, too happy, too free from any sort of strain or suffering."

" Can't one wait till it comes? " said Mrs. Davenant, stroking his hand. " You do everything in this place—the people know you and trust you and depend on you."

" Yes, dear, but that is your doing and not mine."

" Then your sermons round about—I am always hearing of them."

" They are enjoyed," said Mr. Davenant, " they are certainly enjoyed! But I ask myself, Do they touch the heart? Does a single one of my hearers confess a sin or do a kindness because of my words—I fear not."

" Do you think we need find reasons for all we do? " said Mrs. Davenant, " or go about looking for results? I am afraid I should come very badly out of such a scrutiny."

" You are the light of my life," said Mr. Davenant, very gravely, " and the light of the lives of all who know you. Is that nothing? "

Mrs. Davenant made no reply, but put her lips to his hand. Then rising, she said, " It is too hot to walk—come and sit out on the terrace, dear—shall I read to you? "

" If it would not weary you, my dearest."

As they went out, Mrs. Davenant said, " So Robert and Cynthia will be down here on Saturday? "

" Yes—you will like that? "

" I should like it more if I thought that you liked it."

" I have a great regard for Robert and Cynthia," said Mr. Davenant. " They do their duty in a way that shames me. They behave to me with wonderful generosity and forbearance. But it would be lacking in candour to pretend that I felt at ease with them. Their atmosphere alarms and disquiets me. The great, powerful, careless, good-natured world—it is disconcertingly strong. They make me feel my weakness."

" Poor Robert! " said Mrs. Davenant. " He always seems to me so little conscious of his greatness—and

Cynthia has not a thought in the world except for his happiness."

"I know it, I know it," said Mr. Davenant, ruefully. "Robert is most unaffected, and Cynthia is the most unselfish woman I know but one—yet I tremble before them."

"Yet they find you so interesting!"

"Well, dearest, I will follow the example of Austin—*ex ore infantium*."

"Yes, he's a dear boy," said Mrs. Davenant, "and I am sure you were just like him when you were a boy."

"God forbid that he should resemble me!" said Mr. Davenant.

"Well, you won't expect me to agree to that!" said his wife.

II

THE Manor-house and estate of Nan-Zephron, on the hill above Menerdue, was the property of Robert, Lord Helford, Molly Cuthbert-Davenant's second cousin. Molly's father, Arthur Davenant, had been brought up as the heir to his uncle, the old Lord Helford, a whimsical, cross-grained and eccentric man; but Arthur Davenant died in the early years of his marriage, leaving a widow and an only daughter, Molly.

Robert Davenant was a clerk in the Foreign Office when the title and great estates devolved on him. He soon after married a Miss Cynthia Wykeham, a beautiful and high-spirited girl, but with a crude and outspoken habit of speech that made her many enemies. Robert and she had many quarrels, and eventually separated by mutual consent. It was soon after the separation that Robert came to stay at Menerdue with Mrs. Arthur Davenant, and formed a close and intimate friendship with Molly, so close indeed that they were subjected to considerable misrepresentation. The leader in this unpleasant gossip was Mr. Cuthbert, the Vicar of Polcrello, who had long loved Molly. He was a gloomy and eccentric ecclesiastic, with passionate religious beliefs, and his slanderous insinuations had been relentlessly exposed by Lord Helford.

Lord Helford had, however, become reconciled to his wife, and embarked upon a successful political career. He and Molly had been very genuinely in love with each other, though they had kept their passion within bounds. Indeed it was Molly to a great extent who had prevailed upon Robert to return to his wife. But the love-affair, followed

by the sudden death of Molly's mother, had made Molly seriously ill, during which time a close friendship had grown up between Lady Helford and Molly.

Molly had settled at Menerdue, which she inherited from her mother, and Mr. Cuthbert who had never ceased to love her proved a very helpful friend in her trouble. Eventually, to the disgust and consternation of Lord and Lady Helford, Molly married Mr. Cuthbert. He took her name, in accordance with her mother's will, in addition to his own. They had two children and continued to live at Menerdue. The tenant of Nan-Zephron, a Mr. Temperley, died, a few years after Molly's marriage, and Lord and Lady Helford determined to make it their country home. They became more or less reconciled to Mr. Cuthbert-Davenant.

Lord Helford had been included in the Liberal Cabinet some ten years earlier, but his party were now in opposition. He had proved, however, very resourceful in counsel and efficient in debate, and was marked out for promotion, if his party returned to office.

Lord and Lady Helford had one child, Bobby, who was at this time nine years old. Molly's children, Austin and Cynthia, were respectively eight and six.*

* The earlier history of Molly's love-affair with Lord Helford, and his reconciliation with his wife is related at length in a previous novel, "The House of Menerdue."

III

THE Helfords had duly arrived at Nan-Zephron on Saturday, and appeared at the morning service on Sunday at Polcrello. Molly had not seen them for six months, and it was a great delight to her to regard them from the Vicarage pew across the narrow chancel. She was struck afresh with the quiet magnificence of the pair. The rôle of *grande femme* sat very becomingly on Cynthia. She was even more handsome than before, Molly thought, and appeared more masterfully unconscious of her surroundings than ever. A quiet glance passed between herself and Robert. She thought him a shade more solidly built, and a touch of courteous boredom, as though he had been summoned from the consideration of more important affairs, gave him a look of great distinction. Molly, however, had her hands full to prevent the signals of mutual recognition and esteem lavished by her children upon the smiling Bobby opposite.

When her husband entered in robes and took his place, Molly had a moment of pride. He, too, in his own way, she felt, had the look of a man absorbed in great visions, as of an ambassador in bonds. He took no notice whatever of Lord and Lady Helford—to have been personally aware of any of his fellow-creatures during a church service would have been to the Vicar a piece of sheer profanity. He read the service finely, with a moving pathos in his low and solemn voice, and preached a sermon on the duty of courtesy in family life, which Molly thought showed a great delicacy of insight.

They all walked back together, the three children chattering eagerly, Molly with Lord Helford, and the Vicar with Lady Helford. Robert's talk with Molly was tenderly affectionate, lingering over the old days of their first friendship. There seemed no smallest detail that he did not remember. The Vicar replied with serious dignity to Lady Helford's shrewd questions about the affairs of the parish. She kept a close eye upon all details and required very explicit information. But all the time the Vicar was endeavouring to suppress in his innermost mind a secret dread that he was experiencing an unholy gratification at his association with distinguished persons. He endeavoured, not very successfully, to remind himself that all were equal in the sight of God. There was no snobbishness about the Vicar, but he responded naturally to a sense of hierarchy, the earthly counterpart of the Seraphic Thrones, Principalities and Powers.

They separated at the gate of Menerdue. Bobby was allowed, in response to Austin's fervent entreaties, to go to luncheon there, and Molly undertook to transmit him safely to Nan-Zephron by tea-time. Lord and Lady Helford took the upper road through the wood, and a promise was exacted that all the Menerdue party should come up to luncheon on the following day. The Vicar attempted to excuse himself, but Robert said that he particularly desired to have his advice on a matter of parish business.

Bobby was a delightful child, with much of his father's cleverness and his mother's directness. He was adored by Austin and Cynthia, while he himself had an affection for his Aunt Molly which Lady Helford often said would make her jealous if she had been capable of jealousy; while even the Vicar was captivated by Bobby's

ingenuous requests for explanation, and said to Lady Helford, as a well-meant compliment, that Bobby was almost the only child he knew of whom he could say confidently that he appeared to be endowed with Samuel's ear.

IV

NAN-ZEPHRON was a house of great antiquity and beauty. It had originally been built round a courtyard, and the front and side-wings were intact; but the fourth side had fallen into disrepair, and consisted only of a wall much overgrown with creepers and pierced by traceried windows. On the further side of this was a long, paved colonnade, looking out over the surrounding woodlands to the creek.

Here, after luncheon, Molly and Lady Helford were sitting over their coffee. The children had gone off to the garden, and Lord Helford had taken the Vicar to his study. Lady Helford had lit a cigarette, but Molly had declined to follow her example.

" You used to smoke, Molly dear."

" Yes, but Henry doesn't approve. He says it is a subtle form of intoxication."

" That is rather tiresome! "

Lady Helford sat back in her chair surveying Molly watchfully. Molly met her gaze with a smile.

" I wonder if you would answer a question truthfully, darling Molly, if I asked you? "

" I think so," said Molly—" but there are some things which had better not be put into words . . . and your questions go rather straight to the point, you know."

" Well, I shall try—it seems a long time since I had you to myself. Are you still just as unreasonably and irritatingly happy as you used to be? "

" Yes," said Molly, " I can answer that. I am! "

" But Henry—he is rather magnificent, you know, and

his sermon this morning was very fine—he seems to me more of a personage than he used to be—Henry has got a clerical mind, dear. Don't you ever feel stifled and oppressed by that? All his doctrines and stuffy traditions—do you believe a word of them? "

" I don't get as far as understanding them, I am afraid," said Molly. " I haven't got a metaphysical mind—even Robert has had to admit that! "

" But is not Henry vexed by that? He has got the capacity for being shocked which only the clergy and their female admirers possess. I can't think how they cultivate it. If Bobby went that way I should break my heart. You don't mind my talking like this, Molly? "

" Of course not—I agree with you entirely."

" But how do you manage with Henry? "

" Oh, he falls back upon the uncovenanted mercies. He says that I inherit the Christian instincts, and do not require so much instruction."

" But does he really believe all this nonsense himself ? "

" He thinks he does; but haven't most people, Cynthia dear, a lot of principles and ideas in the top drawer of their mind, which have nothing to do with what they really are? You haven't, of course, and Robert hasn't; and I don't think I have; but we are all three of us rebels, and bring our reason to bear. Most people have no use for reason."

" Then you mean that Henry has got all the right qualities underneath? "

" Of course he has, dear. He is the most incredibly affectionate person I have ever seen or heard of. If anything happened to me or the children, he would be quite capable of dying. He is sensitive, scrupulous, right-minded beyond words. Of course he is very helpless—but his emotions are so strong that I sometimes feel he

keeps these beliefs and principles of his like a sort of shield—quite unconsciously—to save him from going mad or worse."

"But the way he behaved about you and Robert—spreading loathsome reports about you?"

"Why then, poor dear, I think he *did* go mad—his passions boiled over. Cynthia, till I really knew Henry, I didn't believe that there were such fiery furious passions in the world at all. Even now, I hear them simmering sometimes. When he heard of the way that brute, young Bowen, had treated Jenny Palmer, I thought he would go raging mad—I never saw such rage."

"You have done wonders with him, Molly."

"No, I have only loved him—no one had ever dared to do that before."

"I don't think I should like living on a volcano!"

"Cynthia, I believe I enjoy it! You see I am not afraid of him; and then I have never had any ideas or occupations of my own, like you and Robert. I only cared about people—and now I have got about as big a task as a woman can have—keeping my dear man sane and happy. I have the delight of being wanted and needed at every moment. You have it too, in a way; Robert has his own kind of helplessness, but he isn't a primitive creature like Henry; and what I have to do is the sort of thing that we women really *can* do, and it keeps me happy—it is the cold and self-sufficient man that baffles me."

"And does Henry suspect it?"

"Certainly not—he is grateful to me, but for all the wrong things."

They sat in silence for a minute or two. Cynthia caught Molly's eye and smiled.

"So you persist in being happy? Buried in the country, managing a frenzied clergyman. If you had come to us,

Molly, as we wanted you to do, I would have married you long ago to a nice young peer or a member of Parliament."

" I don't care about the world, Cynthia."

" Yet it is very amusing. I enjoy managing it, just as you like taming your tiger! "

" There's just one little thing," said Molly. " I sometimes think that Henry hasn't quite enough to do here."

" What would you like him to have? " said Cynthia. " We could manage anything in reason for you. A living—a canonry? Speak to Robert about it. The Bishop is coming to stay a couple of days with us very soon."

" No," said Molly, " Henry has got a sort of hold over the parish here, which I don't think he will ever get anywhere again. He is not a pastor at all—he has no idea that people are different from each other—they are *the laity*—communicants or catechumens, or else outcasts. He would fret himself to death over a new parish. I want him to have some preaching work. His sermons are really very splendid sometimes. As long as he is instructing and not being heckled, he is truly magnificent."

" Well, I'll see what we can do," said Cynthia. " I think you are probably right."

" But now I won't say another word about myself," said Molly. " How are things going with you? "

" Oh, splendidly," said Cynthia. " I personally like being in opposition. I keep the party together, I feed the hungry and round up the stragglers. I make an excellent shepherdess. Robert reads and writes a good deal. I wish he had more companions though. You must try to see something of him. Will Henry approve of that? "

" I doubt it," said Molly. " He thinks Robert an Erastian, and mistrusts his influence. He really is transparently jealous."

" I can't think how you can stand it," said Cynthia.

At this moment Lord Helford and the Vicar appeared on the terrace. The Vicar came up to them with a child-like look of glee. " Lord Helford is being very good to us, Molly. He is giving us a parish-room and a billiard-table; and he assures me that superiority in billiards depends far more upon skill than upon luck. I always deplore the demoralizing effect of an appeal to chance upon human beings. It is rife with danger, I consider."

" Oh, billiards are all right," said Lord Helford. " Well, Henry, I am glad that is settled. I shall come down in a day or two, and you shall show me the site, and I will get Saunders to make out some plans—I shall enjoy this."

" You are too good," said the Vicar. " Molly, my dear, we must be going. Where are the children? "

" In the garden, I think," said Lady Helford. " I will send and have them collected. Molly, don't forget that we shall expect you and Henry to dinner to meet our new Bishop—he comes on Thursday."

" I shall welcome the opportunity of a talk with his Lordship," said the Vicar. " I have not yet paid my respects to him, and hardly know what manner of man he is. He is said to be an organizer. I confess I had rather hear that he was a true Father in God! "

" Ah, you will be a better judge of that than we shall! " said Lord Helford.

V

WHEN the Cuthbert-Davenants reached Nan-Zephron for dinner, on the Wednesday evening, they found they were the last to arrive—Molly could not ever conquer a tendency to be slightly late. They were conducted by the smiling butler, an old friend of Molly's, into the big dark-panelled drawing-room, which was marvellously cool, in spite of the exhausted heat outside. Molly glanced at her husband, and though she saw that he was suffering agonies of shyness, and probably endeavouring not to pray over so trivial a matter, she could not help admiring his tall, lean, strongly-knit form, the fine pose of his head, and his bright rather severe eyes. It was not a formidable party. Lord Helford was talking to Mrs. Pelly-Carew, the good-natured, voluble wife of a neighbouring squire. The squire himself, a small, black-haired, sturdy man, was talking in a hampered way to Mr. Vivian, the Rector of Respurva, an ample man with a hot, cheerful face, whom Mr. Cuthbert-Davenant more than suspected of leanings to Socinianism. The Bishop, a strongly-built man of medium height and sanguine complexion, with large expressive features and rather short grey hair, which made him appear older than his years, was in animated conversation with Lady Helford, who came forward and embraced Molly. " I am afraid I am a little late," said Molly, without meekness. " My dear Molly, I should hardly know it was you if you weren't last—I'm sure at all events it wasn't Henry's fault! " Then turning to the Bishop, she said, " Bishop, this is my cousin, Mrs. Cuthbert-Davenant, and Mr. Cuthbert-

Davenant, our Vicar." Mr. Davenant bowed low, and then going down on his knees, said in a resonant voice, " My Lord, I crave your blessing! " The Bishop, without embarrassment raised his hand and said a few words of blessing, and then as Mr. Davenant rose up, shook him warmly by the hand. The rest of the party, particularly Mr. Vivian, were stupefied with astonishment. Lady Helford with a secret smile, swept off the ladies and the men followed after, Mr. Vivian talking in gentle tones to Mr. Davenant as though he had just recovered from a dangerous illness.

In the dining-room, Lady Helford said to the Bishop, " Bishop I am going to be unselfish, and divide you up as much as I can." She accordingly put Molly between him and her husband. Molly plunged into talk with the Bishop, and found him delightful. She asked if he was finding his way about the diocese. " Yes, pretty well, considering the estuaries," said the Bishop. " I'm not a crow and can't fly," as Archbishop Temple said; Cornwall looks a compact place on the map, but all the creeks seem to be about thirty miles round. My old friend, Canon Priestley, told me I should find a lot of spadework to do, by which he meant making the acquaintance of a great many pleasant and interesting people; and my spadework hitherto has resolved itself into a long perspective of luncheons and dinner-parties."

" But you mustn't be taken in," said Molly, smiling. " I believe that at first sight we Cornish people are the most effusively welcoming people in England—but we have secrets, and we guard them. Those are what you have got to find out."

The Bishop turned round and surveyed her with a peculiar and scrutinizing look. " Yes," he said, " I have become aware of that—I have a feeling sometimes, in an

empty church, in a room in an old house, that someone has just gone out, that a crowd has just melted away."

Beyond the Bishop, Molly caught sight of her husband's severe face: he was refusing, she saw, all proffer of meat and drink. She had little doubt that he was disappointed in the Bishop's spirituality.

Lady Helford leaned forward and said to the Bishop, " I hear that Mr. Vivian is going to carry you off for a meeting to-morrow? I suppose that goes on all the time. I can't help wondering what you find to say."

" Oh, the old story," said the Bishop. " It is fortunate that most of my audiences don't have to hear me more than once."

" May I venture, my Lord," said the Vicar, in a hollow voice, turning to him, " to express my sense of disappointment at what you have said? The old story, yes, but the story that is always new. May we not regard the Gospel in the truest sense as good *news?* "

The Bishop fixed his eyes on Mr. Davenant, but did not at once speak. Then he said, " Yes, Mr. Davenant, you do well to remind me. It was not, however, the truth of my message that I was calling in question, but my own imperfect delivery of it. Besides, as Faraday said to his class at the Royal Institution, ' we cannot burn a diamond every day.' "

" I am justly rebuked, my Lord," said the Vicar, with an inclination of his head.

" Come, Henry," said Lady Helford lightly, " we mustn't condemn even the Bishop unheard. Robert says that is one of the perquisites of a Minister—to be scolded for what he is going to say."

" No," said the Bishop, good-humouredly, " but Mr. Davenant is quite right; a public speaker who begins by apologising for having nothing to say is unpardonable. My

old history lecturer at Oxford knew better. He used to enunciate the most familiar things with the air of communicating a priceless piece of information which could be obtained under no other circumstances and from no one else."

" Yes, indeed, Bishop," said Lord Helford from the other end of the table. " Mr. Gladstone had that gift. His audience sat spell-bound by the importance of his statements, and by their own good fortune in being permitted to hear them; and when you came to try to repeat them afterwards, you couldn't remember a word of what he had said."

" And what you could remember you did not believe," said Mr. Pelly-Carew, in an unexpectedly loud voice. " The harm that man did—it is incredible! " His voice died away suddenly in his throat, and he experienced all the horrors of a reaction. He remembered that the Bishop was said to be a strong Liberal. Mr. Vivian flung himself into the gap, " Mr. Pelly-Carew is certainly right," he said—" in a sense, that is. No one dislikes the trend of Mr. Gladstone's politics more than myself. But I always maintain that he was a genuine man. Did he not always attend early matins, my Lord? "

" I believe so," said the Bishop.

" It was all a pose," said Mr. Pelly-Carew. " You had only to look at him! However, perhaps it kept him out of mischief for the time being."

" I am afraid," said the Bishop, laughing, " I must plead guilty to being a Gladstonian."

" Ah," said Lord Helford, " that will all die away in the soothing atmosphere of the House of Lords. You must be a Tory and go to heaven."

The talk broke suddenly into groups. Mr. Pelly-Carew began apologising to Lady Helford: " I was betrayed into

it by anger—when I think of that man!" Mr. Vivian assured Mrs. Pelly-Carew of his staunch adherence to Tory principles. The Bishop conversed quietly with Mr. Davenant. Molly smiled at Lord Helford, and said in a low voice, " I am afraid Henry has been rather a firebrand to-night. Mr. Vivian seemed aghast at his demanding a blessing."

" Oh, but I thought it splendid," said Robert. " Henry really does play the game whatever happens—and the way he snubbed the Bishop! "

" Will he mind it? " said Molly.

" Mind it? " said Robert. " He admired and liked it. A Bishop doesn't get stood up to by most of his parsons; and this Bishop is a first-rate specimen, no pomposity and plenty of gumption. Look here, Molly," he went on, " I am going to speak to the Bishop to-night. Cynthia told me what you had said, and I am going to tell the Bishop he *must* find something for Henry to do, without taking him away from Menerdue. You are not going to be taken away from here if I know it. The more I see of Henry the more I admire him. I have no sort of doubt that he is a very remarkable man—there are unexpected depths in him. To get his Diocesan's blessing the first time he sees him, and then bowl him out for his secularity—that was worth seeing."

Molly's eyes glowed. " Robert, you are a darling! You have quite come round to Henry, and I love you for it."

" No, but I haven't," said Robert, " I think he is a big man—bigger than I thought—but I can't pretend I get on with him. He thinks me incurably frivolous. But the point is that you are happy. If you had been unhappy, I should never have forgiven him. But dearest Molly, I must have you all to myself for a whole day soon—I sicken for a talk. I shall make it a condition with the Bishop that

he has Henry over to Truro for twenty-four hours. I shall say that he is a man who wants well squeezing."

They sat out afterwards in the colonnade, the creek glimmering softly among the dark trees and the owls hooting in the wood. Lady Helford showed her gifts as a *saloniste*. She gave everyone a turn with the Bishop, and moved the party about like the pieces on a chess-board. Robert and Molly sat in a corner. " We must go to the old Hermitage again, Robert," she said. " The sacred walk, do you remember, and how I gave you the water of the spring to drink. I thought I had lost everything in those days, but it seems I was just finding people—Henry and Cynthia—and I have kept *you* all the time."

" My own Molly," said Robert, " but it was you who did it all! You pushed Cynthia into my arms, and then you enticed Henry out of his den; and now the Bishop is going to fall in love with you. What did you say that made him so serious at dinner? "

" I only told him we had secrets in Cornwall and kept them."

" Is that so, dear? Have you secrets of which I don't know? "

" Oh, you are not a real Cornishman, Robert. If you were you would understand."

VI

THE party drifted away. Molly and Henry, who had driven up, prepared to walk down. She put her arm in his.

" I was very unfortunate to-night," said Henry in a hollow voice. " I grieved you, my treasure. About the Bishop's blessing, I am unrepentant—that is a mere matter of Catholic discipline. Vivian thought me affected; but then he is more than half a Socinian—did you ever hear more disingenuous talk than his? "

" He was trying to be a peacemaker, Henry."

" Then I have misjudged him; but you cannot make peace by throwing your pearls into the mire. Where I was wrong was in not showing the Bishop due respect, but I cannot tolerate levity from a Father in God. I abased myself before him, and I think him a good man, though he wore, not becomingly, the mark of a courtier; but then he struck home."

" You take things too seriously, dear."

" No, dearest—I can make no terms with what is earthly, sensual, devilish."

" Which was which? " said Molly.

" I have grieved you again," said the Vicar, " but your patience is heavenly. You can forgive even me."

" There is nothing to forgive, dearest; do I not love you? "

A very different dialogue was proceeding in the smoking-room. The Bishop was wearing an old flannel coat over his apron, and smoking a pipe. " What did you think of

all our little friends to-night?" said Lord Helford over his cigarette.

"Marvellous, marvellous!" said the Bishop. "It is just so wherever I go. Vivian is a commonplace fellow of course, but I expect a good sort. I wish parsons would not *hedge* so."

"They do it with the highest motives," said Lord Helford, "it is not unknown among politicians."

"But that little bulldog, Pelly-Carew," the Bishop went on,—"Is that his name? I seldom saw a man fire up so."

"Oh, he's a very interesting type," said Lord Helford. "He is one of the small native squires—he has fifteen hundred acres of land at Boswithan, and an old house; and in the time of Henry II there was a Carew at Boswithan, with fifteen hundred acres and an old house. It has come down in the direct line, father to son. He ought to have been a Duke at least by now, starting so far back. But there has never been one distinguished member of the family, though very few rogues. And what an odd physical type! He isn't the least like anyone about, except some other small squires. He belongs to a different breed —something neolithic, I expect."

"Well, he is a wonder," said the Bishop musing. "Then there's your cousin, Mrs. Cuthbert-Davenant—a perfectly charming—girl, I had almost said. She is a kind of small squire herself, isn't she? But not neolithic?"

"No, she isn't primitive!" said Lord Helford. "She is the greatest friend we have in the world—I must take you down to see her."

"But her husband is the most amazing figure of all," said the Bishop. "I have heard a little about him. The blessing—that was unusual, but there was no hedging about that. And how he shut me up at dinner! There was

no hedging about that either. It was most refreshing! I wish more of my parsons spoke up like that—then we should know where we were."

"You had some talk with him?"

"Yes, I got my knife in in turn," said the Bishop, laughing. "Discipline must be maintained."

"I want you to do something for him," said Lord Helford; "I don't know if you can, but I will tell you how things stand. He is a sort of mediæval saint, with a whole devil's cauldron of passions within him. When I came here first he was eating his heart out, in debt, desperately in love with Molly, shunned by his parishioners. How he ever won Molly's heart, I don't know. That is one of the mysteries not given to men to understand. But they are strangely happy, only he hasn't got enough to do. He thinks he has won over the parish, but they only come to church for Molly's sake. He has developed into a very fine preacher, quite remarkably so. Couldn't you make him a sort of itinerant preacher?"

"There's no money for that sort of thing, unfortunately," said the Bishop.

"Oh, he doesn't want money—Molly is quite well off."

"I might perhaps make him a Canon—unpaid, of course—and get him to conduct some Missions. But wouldn't he take an extravagant line about the Church? That would not do at present."

"No, I don't think so," said Lord Helford. "He preaches about quite ordinary matters. But, of course, I don't know much about that. He would go his own way and he can't be driven. He fears nothing and no one."

"Well, I will think it over," said the Bishop. "You won't expect me to pledge myself, and I must make a few inquiries. People like Vivian will think I have taken leave of my senses, of course—but that doesn't much matter."

VII

Truro.

Dear Mr. Cuthbert-Davenant,

I am going to ask you to help me, and I am sure that you will not fail me. I want a Canon-Missioner for the Diocese, who would go about and conduct missions, perhaps half a dozen in the year, under my direction. I do not wish you to leave Polcrello, as you have a hold there, and what I propose can perfectly well be combined with the work of a small parish.

I cannot, I am sorry to say, offer you any stipend; but I offer you an honorary Canonry, which does not require residence.

There is one thing which I must say. I want these Missions to be of a practical and devotional kind, dealing with character and problems of Christian life. I do not want them to be doctrinal and still less ecclesiastical. The time is not ripe for that. But I cannot deal fully with that in a letter. The point is that I want you to work as an ambassador and not as a militant champion. You may not be able to pledge yourself to this, but without insisting on your vow of obedience, I shall be disappointed if you cannot help me.

If you feel disposed to consider it, will you come over and stay a night with me, and we will discuss the matter. I hope you will do this in any case. Please give me a choice of days, as I am very much occupied just now.

My kindest regards to Mrs. Davenant.

Very sincerely yours,
Frederic Truron.

This letter arrived at Menerdue on a Saturday morning. The Vicar read it, and read it again. It was an entire surprise to him. He thought that he had made a bad impression on the Bishop, who had said to him with a courteous frankness at Nan-Zephron that though he did not in the least resent his criticism, it should have been made in private and respectfully, not in public and argumentatively. " We are fellow-workers," he had said, " and not political opponents."

And then in his secret heart success, reputation, respect, honour were very dear to the Vicar, though he did his best to crush them down. That he should be a Canon of the Cathedral was a thing of which he had not dreamed. A smile which he could not control lit up his eyes and lips. He handed the letter to Molly: " Please read this, dearest," he said. " It at all events shows the Bishop in a magnanimous light."

Molly read it, and coming round to him put her arm round his neck and kissed him. " This is splendid, Henry," she said. " I don't know when I have been so much pleased. No one can help the Bishop better than you."

" He ties my hands very much."

" Not more than if he asked you to preach a temperance sermon. You would not feel that he had tied your hands by asking that."

" I have no doubt at all of the Bishop's courage and sincerity—I have grave doubts about his Churchmanship."

" But you can join hands with him in preaching about Christian life," said Molly.

" Yes, but what is it all to lead up to? You cannot kindle men's emotions only to tell them that they have no share in the inheritance of the Saints."

" I cannot believe that you will refuse," said Molly. " It would be the greatest possible disappointment to me."

" We must not mix up personal considerations with it, my treasure. I am a consecrated priest with a deposit of faith to guard. He waives my holy obedience; he lays no command upon me."

" You will at least go to see him? "

" It were discourteous to do otherwise."

A day was soon found, and Molly wisely abstained from further comment. She felt that the more that her husband's compliance was taken for granted, the more he would feel that he was not swayed by spiritual considerations. But it was clear to Molly that he was in high and joyful spirits. He went off like a schoolboy for a holiday. Molly reflected that they had not been parted for twenty-four hours since their marriage.

VIII

IT had been arranged that Molly should take the children up to Nan-Zephron for the day. Cynthia charged herself with the responsibility of looking after them, and Molly was to go off with Lord Helford for a long ramble. Molly was surprised to find how deeply she desired a long talk with Robert. There was a little veil between them. He had never, she felt, quite understood or forgiven her marriage. For the first few years after it, she had seen very little of the Helfords; she had written fitfully, but it was impossible to persuade her husband to go and visit them. But since they had come to Nan-Zephron, there had been a return to the old friendship.

And now she felt that she had her chance of persuading him that she was content. He had acquired a certain respect for the Vicar, or at any rate discerned his picturesqueness; and now Molly felt that he could not have urged her husband's claims on the Bishop, unless he had been convinced of his fitness for some bigger work. But she also realized that Robert and Henry were radically different. Robert took a tolerant, good-humoured and slightly cynical view of human nature. He thought of the average man as a somewhat servile drudging creature, impervious to reason, a mixture of sentiment and convention. Henry on the other hand thought of human beings as noble fallen creatures, perverse and wilful, ready to be first scared, then uplifted, and finally initiated into Church privileges. Molly herself hardly knew which of the two views attracted her least. She herself thought of human beings as naturally inclined to goodness, full of inconsis-

tency, but capable of great nobility and generosity under the stimulus of personal affection. Robert thought that personal advantage was the mainspring of life. Henry, that the Church's system, if only it could be forcibly enough explained, was the key; Molly, that affection was the only motive force worth considering.

She delivered the children, wild with excitement, into Cynthia's competent hands. They loved and admired Aunt Cynthia, and gave her instant and unreasoning obedience.

Robert and Molly set off about noon, Robert carrying some packets containing lunch. It was a cloudless day, but freshened by a sea-breeze. Their first visit was to be paid to the Hermitage, and then they were to have a long stroll upon the downland by the cliffs.

" I suppose there is no real doubt about Henry accepting this business? " said Robert.

" None at all," said Molly, " but he likes to keep himself waiting. He has been hunting out his personal motives like rats from a stack, and disposing of them one by one."

Robert surveyed her with a smile. " I can't make out what you feel about Henry," he said. " You don't mind exercising your wit upon him."

" Yes, the only chance is not to take him too seriously."

" But how do you get on about the Church privileges, Molly? You are to my mind a complete pagan."

" Oh, Henry is very good about that. He says I have Catholic instincts, which do almost as well as principles. I am really very much in the same boat as Cynthia is with regard to yourself. She has not the slightest idea what politics mean."

" She knows a Whig when she sees him. But it is very convenient that she has no political animosities—we keep on excellent terms with our opponents."

" But you have political passions? "

" I mistrust the democracy; but then whatever happens, people have got to be governed, while there is no necessity for their being confirmed."

" But you have a religion, Robert? "

" I have strong personal instincts, and there are many faults I detest. But I don't think of God as backing one political party or one denomination."

" Oh, we won't go on talking like this, Robert. I want to talk very seriously to you to-day. I am more grateful to you than I can say for what you have done for Henry. I don't expect you to like him, because you can't bear unreasonable people. But I have always felt, Robert dear, that you have never quite forgiven my marriage, and that is really the one and only shadow over my life just now. There is something fastidious in you—you feel as you might if I had married a negro. Isn't that so? "

Robert stopped and looked at her. She could see that his breath came and went quickly, and that he was deeply moved.

" Don't let us be polite, dearest Robert! Don't let us miss this chance of saying what we feel. You won't hurt me by anything that you say."

" It isn't a very noble confession," said Robert at last. " You had become, and you are still, so near and dear to me—nearer than Cynthia, Molly, though not more dear —that I *can't* reconcile myself to your taking up with and caring so much about a man who seems to me so ungoverned —so ungovernable! Of course, I feel a kind of tumultuous grandeur about Henry—he blazes with courage and zeal; but I feel him—don't mind this—to be a fanatic in grain, he would burn people if he could, and that temper of mind is indescribably horrible to me. That is the barrier which I can't cross! "

" Yes, I see. I see all that. I must have a minute to think about it."

They were out of the wood and near the ruin. The broken gable showed above the thickets; in a moment they were beside the spring.

" Just as it was," said Robert, " no change except that the trees are a little taller—Good God, Molly, how I ached for you that first day that we came here! How near we were to the edge! And I am not sure, if we had fallen over, that we should not have had something more worth having than our own little contented happiness. I wonder?"

" I was nearer the edge than you, Robert. You had your beloved reason behind you—I had nothing except my mother. I did so want to be all you wanted. But something held me back, though I knew I had only to say one word . . . and yet I believe that I love you better now than I ever did—Can't you believe that? "

Robert seated himself on the bank of turf and took her hands in his. She bent over him and kissed his forehead, and then sat down beside him.

" Yes, Molly, I repent," he cried. " You have come back to me once more."

" No, Robert dearest, I am not going to accept that. I am going to explain. Don't you see, dear, that both you and my dear Henry have built up something—out of your minds, I suppose—which overshadows you? You call it reason, Henry calls it the Church. He argues from his instincts just as subtly as you do from yours—and what you cannot bear in him is exactly what he cannot bear in you. There is no real answer in life to these intellectual claims. You are both of you scared by the voice of your minds criticising and judging. I see it all so clearly, but I can't express it."

" But, darling Molly, you have a conscience too, which

you obey. If you had not obeyed it, where should we have been to-day?"

"Oh, but I don't obey my conscience," said Molly. "I act first, and then it approves or disapproves. No, it is something else that I obey."

"What is it?"

"I suppose you wouldn't like me to call it God, Robert? God and love, perhaps the same thing, I don't know. And Robert dear, Henry obeys that more often than you do!"

"So I am become the real fanatic?"

"Yes, because you are colder about it. Henry is full of passion—that is why I went to him, I think."

"He can't have worshipped you more than I did, Molly."

"No, but women don't want worship—they want men to say, 'I can't do without you. I want you from the crown of your head to the sole of your foot!' They want to be captured."

"Then I lost you by being too reasonable?"

"Yes, dear—a part of me. But you have not lost me, nor I you. You are nearer to me than Henry, and I am more near to you even than Cynthia."

"And yet I mayn't make love to you?"

"No, Robert—what I feel for you is something better than that. Can't you see that I could never speak to Henry, or you to Cynthia, as we have talked to-day?"

"I feel there is something wrong somewhere."

"Ah, Robert, I have my children, and Cynthia has Bobby—no men can ever have children in the same way that women can."

They were silent, worn out by the tenseness of their emotion. But Molly's gaze was untroubled, while Robert sat with knitted brows. Molly put her hand to his forehead.

" The old sign," she said. " Robert, let it be—don't *think* about it; that has been your trouble. Why not just *feel ?* Why not let us have lunch? I'm dying for food!"

Robert looked at her, shook his head, and got out his parcels.

IX

WHEN they had finished their sandwiches, and drunk the water of the well, Molly said, " And now I am not going to say another word about Henry."

" I thought you had so much to say."

" Yes, I had. But it is no good talking things out—you would only get bored. Long arguments don't change anyone's opinion. It is the short, sharp sentences like daggers that pierce and hurt, or the few bare words which bring a joy or a hope, those are the things which change one—and even so, not at once."

" Well, Molly dear, I am not convinced. I feel as if you had given your jewels away to a highwayman—but then I don't know what women want! "

" They don't want definite things like men; they want to jump off the cliff into the sea. They do not care about being comfortable. They know what matters and what does not matter."

" They seem to want a parliamentary vote very badly just now."

" They only want to know what it feels like to have a vote, Robert. They will never use it."

" Perhaps not—but meanwhile they give a lot of trouble."

" Never mind about women, Robert. I want to hear about yourself."

" There is very little to tell. I'm quite contented."

" Are you happy? "

" Quite as happy as I need be. I have got most of the things that other people want. They don't seem to me very exciting now that they have come my way; but I like

my work. I think it is well worth doing. Cynthia is an angel. She never makes difficulties, and I expect she does much more for me than I know. I have only one wish unfulfilled."

" What is that? "

" Why that I could see more of you, Molly. You make me feel a different man. I plod along quite contentedly—and suddenly I come within reach of you, and it is like a burst of music in the air. In an ordinary way, I look at the ground. When I am with you, I look at the view."

" Don't turn my head with compliments."

" They aren't compliments. It is just the bare truth. I become aware that I have a soul. Is it very treacherous to Cynthia to say that I wish I had met you first? "

" It would never have done—things are much better as they are. I should never have satisfied you. You would now have been writing books and going to hear concerts."

" Or going to worship the sunset, like dear old Temperley."

" I often go to see Mrs. Temperley," said Molly. " She is very pathetic—she has no one to scold her, no one to make the best of! She has fallen in love with a dog, and is petting it to death. That is the awful part of marriages, Robert. A man dies, and a woman loses not only her man but her occupation."

" It's a queer business altogether, Molly. Such large hopes, such flashes of beauty, such unpleasant surprises —and the best that can happen seems to be to get your nose to some grindstone or another in a corner."

" What a disgusting description of life," said Molly. " It seems to me like a wood full of flowers and birds."

" Yet you have had bad times, dear."

" Only because I wanted to pick the flowers and put

the birds into cages. Let them fly, if they like, to the shadow of the pines."

" Molly, when you talk like that, I feel I can't do without you. You go to my head."

" Robert, I love you for saying that. But we must go on. I have got all I wanted. Let us go to the cliff."

" If you will promise not to throw yourself over."

" I should be borne up by the breezes to-day, Robert. You would see me dropping, dropping gently, like a bird, till my feet touched the shingle."

Robert rose to his feet and held out his hands to Molly. She leapt up, and put her arm in his.

" Henry wants me to rebuild the chapel here," said Robert.

" Don't encourage him. One oughtn't to build up ruins."

" He thinks that St. Bybi wants more recognition. When he says that sort of thing, I don't know where to look. Do you remember how when Pusey lost his only son Philip, who had been translating the works of St. Cyril, Pusey said, through his tears, that he had little doubt that St. Cyril would be introducing Philip to some very pleasant people in Paradise."

" Henry would agree with him, Robert. It vexes you, I know; now I think it is enchanting that people can say and think such things—as I do when my Cynthia brought in some guano dust from the garden to put on Henry's head to make the hair grow."

They walked along the cliff-top, peeping down gullies, watching the tide flood the sleeping pools below, gazing at the shadowy steamers stuck on the sea's rim.

" The worst of this sort of day," said Robert, " is that I don't know how to go back to my work and our tiresome visitors."

" I thought the Bishop delightful," said Molly.

" Ah, yes, but he comes to the point at once. One feels as if one had known him all one's life. The people I suffer from are the people whom I *have* known all my life, but when they turn up, I feel as if I had never seen them before. Why do most people hold one at arm's length, Molly? "

" Because they feel they are all prickly, or afraid that you are."

" I suppose that means me."

" No, you are not prickly, Robert. You are only encased in steel."

" But I don't always wear it? "

" No, you have taken it off to-day—but you have worn your armour, you know, ever since I married Henry."

" It's all gone now, Molly. You shall never feel it again."

They got back to tea and found the children being scandalously overfed. Austin greeted his mother as if he had given up all hopes of seeing her again in the world. Cynthia said severely, " What have you and mummy been doing all day long, Uncle Robert? Aunt Cynthia said you would be running races."

" Yes, we ran races, Cynthy," said Robert, " but Mummy always won."

" Oh, but you are such an old, old man," said Cynthia.

X

MOLLY awoke early the next day, and heard the earliest birds begin their drowsy song in the garden. She was in a radiant mood, too happy to sleep. Henry, she had no doubt, had by now accepted the very work to suit his restless energy; and better still, she felt that the shadow between Robert and herself had passed away. The two anxieties of her life had been simultaneously removed. The only thing which in the least degree troubled her was that the long day spent with Robert had revealed to her not only how intensely she cared for him, but had revived the old craving for his society and companionship. There was no one in the world, she felt, who so fitted into her mind as Robert. He evoked the most eager and lively part of her. His presence seemed a perpetual challenge to her to be at her best, and she could be at her frankest with him, speaking the unuttered thought as it rose in his mind.

Now this was not so with Henry. In talking to him it was necessary to use a diplomacy, to translate her thoughts into a language he would understand, and indeed to suppress the most daring of them. Speculation of any sort distressed Henry. If he did not openly disapprove, he might be hurt and distressed. Light sayings of hers, she had found, rankled in his mind. They were felt by him to be criticisms of himself, or rebellious thoughts of God, or subversive of the holy order and governance of the world which he believed to exist. To herself and Robert a large part of life was mysterious, unintelligible, ill-arranged or at best fortuitous. But it was not so with Henry. Angels and demons stood at his elbow and whispered into his ear;

a joyful impulse was often detected and repelled as the work of Satan masquerading as a seraph. A dreary, undeserved disaster, a corroding affliction, was a chastisement, a trial of faith, an opportunity. Her husband's God seemed to Molly, in moments of irritation, to be a bully and even a sneak. He prepared pitfalls for the saints, and blinded their eyes that they should not observe them. In the first days of their marriage she had contested these opinions; he never rebuked her, and seldom, indeed, argued with her. But she soon discovered that such discussions wounded and distressed him, and learned quickly with the instinct of love what to leave alone. Molly had little respect for traditions and opinions, but these outrageous doctrines did not provoke her. She rather felt an ever deeper pity for one who had to live in so fantastic a darkness, who was obliged to stop his ears and fly headlong from some thought which to Molly appeared beautiful and delightful; or welcome with a noble sort of patience, as a heaven-sent affair, a trouble which to Molly was merely a paltry and unpleasant obstacle to be endured and circumvented, and forgotten as soon as possible.

But now once more Robert's talk brought back to her an intense craving for a greater and more fearless freedom in life. The very flash of independence that her first solitary night since her marriage brought her was in itself a luxury. Not that she dreaded or hated the thought of her husband's return—he was too dear to her for that; but it had been at all events a holiday, and now the beloved work of helping her anxious and often sombre companion along the road would begin again.

She fell into a light sleep, in which her dreams were eager and sweet; and then came Austin's tap at the door. He hurried in at her voice, flung himself down beside her, and held her long in his embrace. His head was still full

of yesterday's adventures. The pony, the bathe in the swimming bath, the strawberry-garden, Aunt Cynthia's jokes. " We only wanted you, Mummy; I kept turning round to speak to you, and you were not there! "

They went out and bathed together. Cynthy would not bathe; she preferred to fish, and caught a little fish for her breakfast, which she took off to the kitchen, expressing a polite regret that she had not time to catch another fish for Mummy and another for Austin.

Mr. Davenant arrived just before luncheon, in a mood of solemn radiance. He had walked from the station, and was both hot and tired. But he could not get a word with Molly, for the children flung themselves upon him, and told him their adventures at Nan-Zephron, with many interruptions and contradictions. " Mummy went off with Uncle Robert," said Austin, " and they ran races." Molly saw a little shadow on her husband's face. " Yes, I had a walk with Robert," she said.

" Ah, you must have enjoyed that! "

" Yes, it was a long time since I had had a good talk with him."

He nodded, a little impatiently, and no more was said.

After luncheon he went off to his study, and as he did not return, she went there, and found him on his knees at a little prie-dieu beside the window. He looked round and smiled at her, and a moment later rose to his feet.

" I so much want to hear all that has happened, Henry. You will not care to walk? Shall we sit on the terrace? "

" Yes, dearest, I have much to tell you. It has been an occasion of strange happiness to me. I am to be admitted Canon less than a month hence, at matins. But that is a small matter, though a joyful one."

" Tell me all from the beginning."

" That is only your right, my dearest."

They sat together, looking out upon the creek.

" I arrived," said Mr. Davenant, " about the season of tea. The Bishop was absent, but his chaplain received me, a cheerful and brisk young man, whose godliness I take on trust—I had no proof of it. We spoke of indifferent things. When the Bishop arrived, he took me to his little chapel first—this was a grateful surprise to me—and we prayed together for guidance. He is a man of prayer, without doubt, though his words did not come easily to him. He then laid his design before me, in some detail. I need not weary you with that. But he brought before me certain considerations which I admit I had overlooked. He reminded me that our holy mother the Church had been, for a century or more, little more than a jealous step-mother to her Cornish children, had exacted her hire, but had withheld her love and care, had ministered reluctantly and grudgingly. ' The wonder,' said the Bishop to me, ' is not that the Church is hampered and mistrusted, but that she exists at all.' He then showed me how the sectarian preachers and enthusiasts of the day had at least kept the Spirit alive by ignorant and even misleading instruction. ' We must not think,' he said, ' to enter as conquerors and seize upon their labours—we must earn the right to be their pastors, as men that have betrayed their trust.' He spoke almost with heat, but I thought it sat finely upon him. I pleaded for more Catholic teaching, but he said No, they were as babes that must be fed with milk at first, not with strong meat.

" I cannot say that I think him to be right. I said so to his face. I said that we must not come as traders offering merchandise, but as the Wise Men with gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh."

Mr. Davenant stopped speaking and gazed at the sea.

" What did he say to that? " said Molly softly.

" He was very wroth," said the Vicar, " he showed a godly anger. I cannot recall his words, which were courteous enough, but he said that, though he respected my zeal, I must not set my experience against his, and he reminded me, with severe gravity, of my vow of holy obedience. ' You are to serve me in this, my son,' he said. ' I did not ask your counsel.' I was justly rebuked, and prayed him on my knees for forgiveness, and said that I would do all that he asked. He blessed me, and said with a smile in which I recognized something heavenly, that he knew me to be a man of my word, and that he would trust me wholly and entirely, and say no more of any conditions. And then we again resorted to his chapel, where he blessed me exceedingly, and, by imposition of hands, consecrated and set me aside for my work. And in the prayer that he made, I seemed to discern that he believed that I might even found an order of faithful priests, to do likewise.

" I hardly know how the evening passed. Meat was set before us. There was talk, but I was in little mind to join. There was family worship, and I spent much of the night in prayer. This morning little passed between us, but he asked me to prepare for a mission some two months hence, at St. Sibbald's, I understood. He will write to the priest there—his name escapes me—and I am to journey there and confer with him."

" You are happy, dearest, about it all? "

" I am more than happy, my treasure. I am set apart, I am sent, a way is prepared for me to walk in, I am to be a messenger of righteousness! "

They were silent for a little, her hand in his. His face glowed with a visionary light, and his lips moved. Presently he came back to earth again.

" There are one or two things, my dearest, that I would say. I trust that Lord Helford had no hand in all this? I

am half ashamed of the suspicion—but though I respect your cousin and think him a dutiful man, he seems to me to dwell among the tents of Kedar. I should not like him to have had a hand in this."

Molly nerved herself to be truthful. " Robert certainly talked about you to the Bishop; but he had admired your sermons very much, and thought that you should have a wider audience."

" I could wish he had not intervened," said Henry, but more sadly than irritably. " The word of a Peer of Parliament carries weight. The Bishop I know now to be a man of prayer and to put godliness first—but he is not unaware of the world's opinion."

" But *someone* must tell the Bishop about you," said Molly. " The people in the village would not dare to do so. Robert seems to me the natural person to speak. He certainly did not use his influence; nor do I think that the Bishop is a man who would be dictated to."

" You are right, my darling," said Henry, with an air of relief. " It was an unworthy thought."

He was silent again, and seemed, so Molly thought, to be embarrassed.

" There is something else, dear Henry, that you wish to say to me—I see it in your face. Please do not keep anything back."

She made no doubt that he wanted to speak about her walk with Robert the day before. But he said:—

" There *is* another matter, dearest—a matter of domestic arrangement. You will not I know—I should be miserable else—read into it any lack of affection and trust. But I must henceforth be much alone. I must give myself much to meditation and prayer. The little chamber, up the turret-stair, in the tower . . . might that be my cell henceforth? "

" Why, *of course*, dearest," said Molly. " It is just the place—very quiet, and you would not be disturbed there."

" But that is not all, my dearest. It would not, would it, seem strange or unkind if I were to move my bed there, and sleep there henceforth? I am consecrated to this work, and I must be more remote from earthly things. It does not mean that I shall love you less, my darling one; but our love must be a different one henceforth—it must not be bound by any mortal chains."

Molly looked at him for a moment in silence, and her eyes filled with tears. He leaned forwards, took her in his arms, and kissed her passionately.

" Forgive me, dearest—I cannot speak otherwise; but we must sacrifice what is dearest in life, however sweet and pure, to the Heavenly Vision. Therefore was I called and justified . . . " sobs choked his voice.

" Dearest Henry, yes, I understand."

" We need not speak of this again, my Molly. It has been a sore shadow on my mind—but the door is opened to me and I must go in thereat. I must learn to be alone with God."

XI

HENRY lost no time in inaugurating his new programme. He had his turret-chamber fitted up after the manner of the well-known picture of St. Jerome's study. A crucifix and a skull were in an alcove, there were a few shelves of books, a della Robbia relief of the Blessed Virgin; a rough seat of deal, with a wide desk in front of it, ran round one corner of the room, the other being occupied by a small, hard camp-bed. At first the children used to invade him, and he could not resist their blandishments, till he took to locking the little door which opened from the turret-stair on the landing below. He practised greater austerity in the matter of food and drink. But all this gave him a nobler aspect than ever. His eyes became wide and solemn, and his whole face thinner and more expressive. But at the same time he showed himself a fonder father than ever, while in his hours of ease he seemed to depend more and more upon Molly's company, though as they walked or sat together, Molly often became aware that his mind was far away, treading a shining tract among the stars, or communing with forces beyond her ken. In the village he began to be regarded with a certain awe.

It was not altogether a happy time for Molly, because she felt that the gap between their minds was widening, and there seemed less and less that she could do for him. She asked him once or twice what his work was, and whether he was preparing for the Mission. " Not directly," he said, " I am breaking up the fallow soil. I search out my spirits, and learn from the corruptions of my own fallen nature the evil I would combat in other souls."

" Oh, Henry dearest," she said, " don't make the mistake of overlooking your virtues."

" My treasure, they are not mine—they are but the faint reflections of your own sweet stainlessness."

When the day came for the installation, the Helfords insisted on motoring them over, and accompanying them. The Church was well filled, possibly as much for the sake of the Lord-Lieutenant, as Robert now was, as for that of the new Canon. The service was preceded by a very sweet prelude on the organ, which hung high among the towering arches of the choir; and this filled Molly, who was deeply sensitive to music, with a sense of almost unearthly happiness.

The service proceeded as far as the end of the psalms. Then there was a pause, and Molly was thrilled at the sight of her husband being conducted from the vestry with a noble and unconscious dignity of mien. He was led by two of the Canons to the Bishop's throne, where some questions were put to him, which he answered in a loud voice, and then read the First Lesson, all in a tone, as Robert said afterwards to Molly, as if he had been reluctantly inducted into the Papacy, but once inducted, was fully prepared to rule with diligence. The Bishop preached what Molly thought an almost perfect address, indicating the work that the new Canon was undertaking, and then tracing the lines on which such work should be done,—with a bold ideal of holiness, and yet with infinite tenderness for the weaknesses of human nature, not as a dictator or a denouncer, but as an interpreter, to show unto man his uprightness.

Mr. Davenant assisted the Bishop in the Celebration, and it was strange for Molly to kneel between Robert and Cynthia, and to hear her husband's voice thrill and tremble as he gave her the cup of blessing.

They went afterwards to lunch with the Bishop, who showed himself as good a host as he had been a guest, and had an animated political discussion with Robert on the subject of the Gladstonian ideal of attractive virtue as opposed to the Whig theory of judicious respect, in which the Bishop more than held his own. Mr. Cuthbert-Davenant said little, hardly tasted food, and looked and moved like a man in a dream.

The Bishop after lunch carried off the Canon for a short talk. The others strolled about the garden.

" Whatever happens," said Cynthia, " Henry was and will be by far the most magnificent personage in the Cathedral."

" Yes," said Robert, " the Bishop made a fine figure, but Henry looked like the heir of all the ages, and a priest after the order of Melchisedech, rather than a member of what I fear he regards as a mushroom Protestantism."

" I have always thought the Church of England rather a comfortable domestic institution," said Cynthia, " but really I felt there was something dignified about it to-day."

" The sort of glamour," said Robert, " which hangs about the House of Lords, as compared with the fussy and commonplace atmosphere of the House of Commons."

They drove back mostly in silence. But there was one more surprise for Molly. Henry took the evening service in the Church, and after a very simple and homely sermon on humility, he made a long pause, and then looking round upon the Church, which was unusually full, he said, " I have had a great and wholesome lesson to-day; called as I have been in a moment from following the sheepfolds, to take my place in the Mother Church of this See, I have seen in a flash of insight my own unworthiness, my crying need for forgiveness and redemption. Henceforth I am

here among you as one that serveth. There can be no one in this Church so shamefacedly aware of my many negligences and ignorances as myself; I here ask pardon of all whom I have offended, or whom I have failed to serve, with deep humility. But together with my abasement, God has sent me a purifying joy, of which I make you sharers. I return to sow the word of God afresh, to humble duties in vineyard and fold; and I entreat you to think of me as one who has sinned much, and to whom God has been strangely merciful. I have wandered far, like the Prodigal Son, in pride and self-will, and my punishment is that I am welcomed home again with feasting and music and song."

XII

THE Canon's mission at St. Sibbald's was to be carried out in the first week of September, and in the interval he secluded himself more than ever. Yet though he spent most of the day in his oratory, Molly did not like to absent herself from the house, and was ashamed of the persistency with which her thoughts flew to Nan-Zephron. Cynthia's robust affection swept Molly's mind clear of brooding fancies, but it was Robert to whom her thoughts constantly turned. He had all the old attraction, the old alternations of humour and melancholy, but he seemed to Molly a far bigger man than he had been in the old days, more controlled, less mastered by fastidiousness, and with altogether a larger view of life. The Canon had now dropped even the pretence of being interested in local matters; he still luxuriated in the company of his children, though he saw them less often. But he appeared to Molly to be entirely absorbed in spiritual ideas, and it seemed to her too that he would have spoken freely to her about his reveries, but for the fact that he could expect neither response nor sympathy. He was very tender and affectionate to her, but he relapsed into long silences; and Molly began to feel as though she were dealing with an artist of whose technique she was so ignorant that she could not even profess an intelligent curiosity. Molly made only a frontal attack upon life; but the Canon was evidently preparing for a campaign with feints and masked assaults. He meant to woo his hearers to religion by normal and familiar paths, and then to twist them round and confront them with Catholic tradition, as the only logical outcome of their divine aspira-

tions. It was to be a campaign, and the Canon's head was full of spiritual strategy.

He was to stay at St. Sibbald's; and Molly's unregenerate mind was beginning to crave quite unreasonably for Robert's presence and company. She could not be of any use to Henry, but she spent much time with the children. Bobby came down almost daily; and sometimes Robert and Cynthia would motor up to the door and beg her to come out with them. But she made it plain to them that she must be at Henry's disposal.

" It is awful to me," said Cynthia, with an upward glance at Henry's turret, " to think of poor Henry sitting up there alone and spinning his theological webs to catch the ungodly."

" It is to be for their good," said Molly.

" I wonder," said Robert, rather impatiently. " I don't believe one can run religion on intensive lines in England, any more than one can run politics on those lines. The Anglo-Saxon above all things desires to be let alone. He comes to his own conclusion, God knows how, and it is very often a bad conclusion."

" We are not Anglo-Saxons down here," said Molly.

" The only difference in religion," said Robert, " is that the Cornishman wants his feelings to be harried, and not to come to any conclusion at all."

A few days before the mission, Henry after breakfast said to Molly, " My dearest, I have received a letter this morning which has been a great relief to me. It is from Father Knowles of St. Sibbald's. I have been feeling increasingly anxious that you should accompany me to this mission of mine, because I feel that I shall have an opportunity of putting before you categorically the foundations and ground-plan of our faith—a thing which seems un-

suitable for private conversation. I was afraid, however, that it would cause some inconvenience. But Father Knowles writes kindly this morning to say that though he fears he could hardly make you comfortable in the Rectory—he is a celibate—there are excellent lodgings close by which he has secured. I did not speak of this before, fearing that it might be a disappointment to you if it could not be arranged. The only thing I am anxious about is that you should not be too lonely, for Father Knowles and I will be much occupied in spiritual exercises. But it will give you opportunity for meditation, without which mere exhortation is often surprisingly unfruitful."

Poor Molly was aware that of all suggestions that could have been made, this was the most unwelcome. " Of course, dearest, if you wish it," she said, averting her face.

" It will not be against your own wish, I trust? "

" No, dearest, I shall love to hear you—but what about the children? "

" I thought perhaps that Lady Helford would not mind having them at Nan-Zephron."

" It might be managed, perhaps. . . . I don't feel sure about Robert."

" *You* could prevail upon Robert to oblige you, I imagine," said Henry, with the least little trace of perceptible irritation.

" I had better run up and see them."

" If you would oblige me, dearest. But I trust this will not disturb you. It is the dearest wish of my heart that you should know how I stand in the matter of faith. I have blamed myself often for not laying it fully before you—and this seemed to me a heaven-sent opportunity, the answer to many secret prayers."

Molly called Austin to accompany her to Nan-Zephron.

But she was distracted and absent-minded, aware at once both of rebellion against her husband's plan, and of a deep personal disappointment. Austin chattered on. "Are you going to Daddy's mission, mummy? "

" Yes, dear, I think so."

" I wish he wouldn't have missions. Does he make it all up like a story? "

" Yes, that is why he is a Canon, dear."

" I don't like his being called Canon, mummy. It sounds so silly, as if he would be fired off."

" It is spelt differently, dear."

" Yes, I know—but it sounds silly. Oh, mummy, did you see that? I believe it was a long-tailed tit. I want a long-tailed tit's egg so much."

" Trerice will find you a nest next spring—but mind, only one egg."

" Oh, but a tit has so many eggs. I don't think they would miss two. Do they count them over every morning? "

" I don't expect so, dear."

" Bobby has got an osprey's egg . . . and a Hobby hawk's. . . . The osprey's nest was in one of the tall fir trees in Mornay Creek. Jim climbed up it—wasn't it brave of him? "

She arrived at Nan-Zephron and found Cynthia in her room. " My dear Molly," said Cynthia, rising, " how nice this is! What is it all about? "

" Plans," said Molly. " May I have a word with you? "

Austin was despatched in search of Bobby. Molly told her story.

" Of course we will have the children," said Cynthia. " Bobby will be wild with joy. But I must say it is rather a shame. What on earth will you do alone in lodgings? "

" Meditate," said Molly, " that is part of the treatment.

But Cynthia dear, I couldn't disappoint Henry. He said it was an answer to prayer."

" Oh, dear me," said Cynthia. " These parsons expect so much—' preferential treatment,' as we call it."

" If I thought it would do any good, I wouldn't mind," said Molly, " but I am sure he will only be disappointed. I simply can't understand his way of looking at things."

" Robert never expects me to understand politics. If you had married a business man, he wouldn't expect you to understand foreign exchanges."

" No," said Molly, " but then this is Henry's *life*—or he believes it is. He feels like a man in a beautiful garden, and that I am shut out. He wants me to share his joys."

" Why can't he leave you alone? "

" He does," said Molly. " No, I ought not to say that. The life such as you and I live isn't very real to him. He plays at it as he might play a part in a play."

" It makes me feel quite sick," said Cynthia. " It seems to me very little better than a man taking to drink."

" No, dearest Cynthia, it is not like that! Henry's love for me and the children is the most real thing he has in the world. But he is like a child, who can only play one game. Just now he is tremendously excited. He has never had anything big to do in his life. He has always been dreaming of having a big part to play—he is ambitious and romantic—and now he feels like one of the Apostles. But he doesn't want to coerce me. He only wants to give me a priceless gift, which I from a sort of blindness can't see to be the explanation and the end of life. He is not being selfish at all, but just the reverse."

" Well, Molly, that's a generous way of looking at it. But it is a dreadful bore. Robert has been looking forward to seeing something of you, and he will be furious."

" I am afraid I was looking forward to it too," said

Molly. " Really, Cynthia, the way you make me free of Robert is amazing. If Henry was always running up to see you, I believe I should be jealous! "

Cynthia laughed. " I wonder if I *could* make Henry fall in love with me," she said. " I think I must insist on going to one of his missions. But, Molly, don't be absurd, darling. Robert wants amusement of a kind which I can't give him. I'm quite aware that he is in love with you, and you with him; and that sort of sympathy is the one thing that money can't buy. His walk with you the other day did wonders for him. Why shouldn't you have your share? I don't forget, darling, that you gave him back to me. *I* couldn't have done that."

" And I thought you a hard and scheming woman, Cynthia; may God forgive me! "

" I was, Molly, I was. I'm not sure that I am not still. It is you that we all want, and you cut yourself into as many pieces as you can! "

Molly rose to her feet and gave Cynthia a generous kiss. " You must break it to Robert—I daren't," she said.

Cynthia broke it to Robert after lunch. " Oh, damn that infernal fellow," he said, with much irritation, " and damn all people who do ugly things for good motives! This all comes of yielding to feminine influences, and spurring on the Bishop to make him a Canon. I knew there would be the devil to pay. The more you give these parsons, the more they take."

Cynthia smiled: " I suggested to Molly that I should get Henry to fall in love with me."

" I wish to heaven you would," said Robert, " that would take his attention off Molly for a bit. She really is a perfect slave."

" Never mind," said Cynthia. " You have been very

patient with me for a long time, and you deserve to be rewarded. You shall have your turn with Molly—I'll invent something."

" The horror is," said Robert, " that when these saints set their minds on a thing, no one else matters. They become instruments for fulfilling the Divine purpose. A saint like Cubby belongs to the same class as the Inquisitor who burns the saint. They are both fundamentally cruel. I have a great mind to go to the Mission myself."

" My dear Robert! "

" Damn it, I suppose my soul is worth saving."

" I doubt if Cubby would think so! "

XIII

ROBERT insisted on sending over Molly and the Canon in the car to St. Sibbald's, which was about twenty miles away. The drive was a beautiful one, now out on bare moorlands with views of distant hills, now dipping into wooded valleys and crossing the head-waters of solitary creeks. Henry was in a mood of solemn elation, and Molly soon found that though he attended with a courteous deference to any of her remarks on the scenery, his mind released swung back into a reverie of the subject of which he gave but a single hint. They were driving through a bare, scattered village, with a gaunt church among wind-tortured trees, when he said, " Think what it means, my dear one—the reconquest of this land for Christ! "

St. Sibbald's was a small, straggling town, built for the most part of a slaty stone. The church had a fine ancient tower green with lichen. They drove in at a gate and up to a lean, stone-built rectory, standing in a very neglected garden. Father Knowles, a small, bull-necked man, came out to meet them, habited in a cassock. He had a rapid, husky utterance, and a smile which seemed to have no connection with his immediate context. " You are welcome, Mrs. Cuthbert-Davenant, Canon, you are welcome—we have longed for you with a holy expectation. It is indeed a high honour to St. Sibbald's to be selected for your first visitation. There is great spiritual deadness here. It is a valley of dead bones, which at your word will rise up on their feet. We shall see great things."

The Canon, not ill-pleased with his reception, smiled

gravely and said, " The Bishop intimated to me that in spite of your devoted labours, the place was in much need of spiritual renewal."

" Too true," said Father Knowles. " Of my own humble labours I say nothing—but my predecessor, Mrs. Cuthbert-Davenant, with the best intentions in the world, dealt the Church at St. Sibbald's a shattering blow, from which she has hardly begun to recover."

" Indeed," said the Canon with concern, " I had heard that he was a hard-working man."

" Yes, but on what lines? " said Father Knowles. " This place, I regret to say, was a hotbed of Evangelicalism. Matins and Evensong on Sundays were largely attended. Mere social functions! Evening Communions, I shudder to say, were the rule. No daily offices, no Saints'-day Eucharists—on Saints' days, indeed, not a mouthful of prayer obtainable—no attempt at worship, hearty sermons, a bed-gown surplice, frequent hymns of the boneless order, house to house visiting—it was indeed the abomination of desolation."

" The old Evangelicalism had some sterling virtues," said the Canon deprecatingly.

" Not here, I assure you," said Father Knowles. " It was just like a family party. Poor Terry bustled about from morning to night, retailed all the gossip, gave half-pence to the children—there was no discipline, no ideals, just the old unsanctified life."

" And now things are going better? " said Molly.

" Yes, I think so," said Father Knowles. " I did not temporise. I made a clean sweep; by the Bishop's advice, which has proved, I regret to say, to be misjudged, I abstained from introducing vestments at first. But I put up two additional altars at once, and established some of the traditional devotions. Of course I emptied the Church,

but I was prepared for that. It is quality not quantity that I aim at—and now I am building it up, stone by living stone. Only a few months ago I got my Choral Eucharist, which is very jolly. The prospect is full of hope, and the Canon, I doubt not, will send us on our way rejoicing."

" We must have much communing over all this," said the Canon, with an air of authority. " The service to-night? "

" Is at six o'clock," said Father Knowles, " a service of preparation. An initial barrage, to use a military metaphor. You will preach, I hope, in cotta and tippet? It is what we are used to here."

" If you can provide them," said the Canon, " I will gladly conform to your use."

" I must express my regret, Mrs. Cuthbert-Davenant," said Father Knowles, turning somewhat reluctantly to her, " that I could not receive you in my poor house. I live like a hermit. But while the Canon reposes, I will conduct you to Mrs. Redfern's lodging. She is a good woman," he added, with a fervent air, " a devout frequenter of the Church. She is permitted to tend the Blessed Virgin's altar, to replace the weekly flowers, to mend the choristers' cottas, and perform other small offices which she esteems as a high privilege."

" I shall need no repose," said the Canon rather grimly, " except the refreshment of prayer. My dearest, you will pardon me if I leave you in Father Knowles' hospitable hands."

Father Knowles took the Canon to the study, and returned to Molly, who was regarding the bare and slatternly room in which they had been talking, with considerable melancholy.

They walked away together, Father Knowles carrying her bag.

" Mrs. Cuthbert-Davenant," he said. " It is a high privilege to welcome the Canon here to-day. What a noble presence, if I may be allowed to say so! He will prove a light to lighten the Gentiles! It must be a privilege to you to share his visions. May I ask one question? I am uncertain from something that he said in a letter whether he insists on reservation or not? I should feel more free to discuss the matter if I felt certain. I like to know a man's root principles."

" I am sorry to say," said poor Molly, " that I don't even know what reservation is."

Father Knowles looked at her in silence, and said with a lumbering courtesy: " These are after all technical details. One more thing. Is it he or yourself that is cousin to our much-respected Lord-Lieutenant? "

" I am Lord Helford's cousin," said Molly, " my husband is Vicar of the parish in which he lives, and they are old friends."

They arrived at Mrs. Redfern's door; it was a neat little place. Mrs. Redfern, who had been waiting anxiously in her parlour, hurried out to meet them. " Here is Mrs. Cuthbert-Davenant," said Father Knowles. " You must use her well! You must not forget that she is cousin to Lord Helford, the Lord-Lieutenant. And now I must leave you. Mrs. Redfern will conduct you to the Church in good time, to the Vicarage pew."

Mrs. Redfern was a pale, rather depressed-looking woman; she seemed somewhat overpowered by the grandeur of her visitor. She took Molly to her bedroom, a somewhat stiffly shrouded place, and asked about tea. Molly said that she hoped Mrs. Redfern would have tea with her. Mrs. Redfern went tremulously away; but half an hour later, as they sat at tea together, Mrs. Redfern, emboldened by Molly's frank questions and her open

smile, was pouring out an animated torrent of talk. Molly was amused but not surprised to hear that Mrs. Redfern —though she was careful to say that Father Knowles was a very earnest man—was yearning after the unregenerate Terry and his cheerful wife. " We seemed so comfortable, ma'am, with Mr. and Mrs. Terry. They knew all about everybody, and what they had died of, and what they had left behind them. They didn't make no mistakes, and always knew what everyone's children were doing, and where they were married. And they always made the right jokes, the jokes that you recognize, so to say. But Father Knowles don't hold with that. He makes more of the Church, and you will find it very pretty—but he does not take much stock of the people. They say of him that if he comes to see you, he doesn't ask enough questions, and that if you go to see him, he asks too many. But, of course, there's ways and ways."

Molly asked about the congregation. " Oh, there's not many of them ma'am, but there will be a crowd to-night. You see the Bishop, so they say, has asked the Canon, and the Bishop made a very good appearance here. He spoke up cheerful, and didn't preach from a form."

" Does Father Knowles preach standing on a form? "

" No, it's a different kind of form, ma'am. It means reading off from a paper. Besides it was got abroad that the Rev. Davenant is a converted man, and a grand man to look upon."

She prattled on: " Father Knowles does shift to and fro in Church a deal, ma'am, and picks at his chest with his fingers, and ducks, and his voice is that husky and hollow you would think that he'd took cold—and his looks don't favour him—no, he ain't what would be called popular, but he is wonderful earnest and explains what it all means. But it ain't quite the Gospel light, ma'am? "

They went in good time to church, which was to Molly's mind strangely and unpleasantly embellished with cheap pictures, coloured images and long streamers of silk. The church filled up quickly and was soon crowded. At intervals Father Knowles put his head out of a door in a partition, and presently a wheezy harmonium began to play, and then Father Knowles in a cassock and biretta appeared, gave out a hymn, which was sung with unction, and conducted the Canon to the pulpit.

Even in his unaccustomed garb, Molly was struck by her husband's dignity and gravity.

At the close of the hymn, he knelt and said a few words of extempore prayer; and then rising told the congregation very simply and movingly what he had come to do. Molly felt a thrill of admiration at the simplicity and tenderness of his voice and manner. There was not a word of any sectarian import. " I have come here, in fact," he ended by saying, " to increase, my dear brothers and sisters, if I can, your joy in the Lord. There are many troubles in this world which befall us all alike, and visit the good as well as the bad. But there is a joy possible behind all such troubles—the joy of knowing that our feet are set on the road to God, and that He waits to receive us, if we are faithful, and to enfold us in His embrace.

" We can't live without joy—if all goes heavily with us, we have no strength left to bear one another's burdens, hardly even our own. I shall go through in the course of the week some of the hindrances which many of us feel, the hindrances that keep us away from the joy that awaits us. And apart from the services, I shall be in the Church here every afternoon from three to six, so that anyone who cares to come and have a talk with me may do so. It is wonderful how even putting a trouble into words makes it lighter. That is all I shall say now—I understand that

your Rector has done much to prepare you for my coming; I shall only ask you to pray for yourselves that you may see light, and for me that I may be able to hold up the Cross of Jesus before your eyes and hearts."

There was great and evident emotion in the Church. A good many people, Molly saw, put their hands to their eyes, and it moved her inexpressibly.

She waited at the vestry door with Mrs. Redfern. As Henry came out with Father Knowles, he saw her and turned to her with a little cry of pleasure. " Henry," she said in a low voice, " it was beautiful—most beautiful and touching. I . . . I did not think it would be like this." He caught her hand in his and pressed it to his lips, and she could see a touch of triumph in his eyes. " I shall come and see you to-morrow, my darling," he said, " soon after breakfast. You are comfortable I trust." " Most comfortable," she said, adding, " This is Mrs. Redfern! "

The Canon shook Mrs. Redfern's hand warmly with a bow. " Mrs. Redfern, I am sure you are all that is good and kind," he said. He then went on with Father Knowles, and as they went, Molly heard Father Knowles say, " A very friendly and effective opening, sir—but, of course, you will soon be far more precise and definite than that. It is the Church's system that must be well rubbed in."

" Father Knowles," she heard her husband say with a touch of iciness, " I shall speak as my heart bids me, and as the Holy Spirit gives me power to speak."

XIV

THE week passed for Molly like a strange dream. Mrs. Redfern's conversation proved a certain standby. It trickled at first slowly from the jar, but she was soon reassured, and now gushed in a full flow. Molly was deeply interested in people—she sometimes feared it was the only thing in which she *was* interested—and she had often said that the only thing she had never had enough of was autobiography; but now it seemed to her that her appetite was for once going to be gratified. What, however, surprised her was that she saw more and more of her husband. The religious exercises and spiritual communings of which she had been led to expect so much seemed to have come to a cessation.

The addresses, which were mostly in the evening, seemed to Molly to increase in insight and beauty every day. She was astonished at the purity and vigour of her husband's eloquence, and she became aware that as a stylist he was a real artist. The old pomposity of utterance, the far-fetched allusions which she had even mildly rallied him about in the early days of her marriage, now emerged again; but here they were in place. They were dignified and engrossing; and then Molly became aware that her husband had been always a rhetorician, playing with phrases and building them up; and that what had sounded extravagant in ordinary talk were not in the least degree elaborate as a spoken discourse. She saw, in fact, that he must have been suffering all his life long from an artistic suppression, and still more from that total lack of appreciation and admiration, which is like death to the artistic nature. Her husband had never been praised.

Father Knowles, however, wore a more and more dissatisfied air. But her husband said nothing of what was going on, till one day, when he had been unusually silent, he said suddenly, " The fellow complains that I have as yet said nothing practical—yet I have had many secrets told me—many burdened hearts have unpacked themselves in words before me. My dearest, it has come home to me in regret and shame how much unopened sin even a little place like this can contain."

" But why shame and regret, dear? " said Molly.

" Because in my own little fold," said Mr. Davenant, " there has been no such revealing to me of guilty secrets, no such unloading of mouldered sin. Either I have been unfaithful, or my flock have been deceitful."

" But isn't it far easier, dear, for people to tell their sins and sorrows to a stranger? I can understand that it would be much more difficult to tell secrets to anyone whom one was likely to meet day after day. There would be a sense of shame about that, but here there is only pity and forgiveness."

" It may be so," said the Canon. " I trust it is. But I fear it may only be the compassion of your pure and generous heart that makes excuses for me."

" No, Henry, no—it is just a fact of human nature. But what does Father Knowles want or expect? "

" The washing of pots and cups, the fringes and pomegranates of the ephod, the baking of curious breadstuff, the burning of exotic incense. The man's heart is set on these trifles. It is to these things that he would lead his flock. ' Why not go straight to the point? ' he inquired of me; to which I replied, ' I am coming as fast as I can.' I told him in my annoyance of my pledge to the Bishop, and he said that the Bishop was a mere Sadducee. I replied in my growing anger, that it was at least better than a stiff-

necked Pharisee, in which I fear he saw some mean allusion to his own unfortunate conformation of visage."

Molly was overcome by a sudden access of laughter at this. A faint smile overspread the Canon's face.

" What will you do, dear? " she said.

" Do? " said the Canon. " I shall continue to lead these poor souls up the arduous ascent I have devised for them. Step by step I shall lend them a helping hand. I shall pour contempt on these fripperies. I shall tell them the parable of the guest and the wedding-garment—which, in unbecoming mirth, the fellow said to me must have been an alb rather than a surplice—and warn them that a clean heart and a pure conscience is clearly intended. I shall bid them come in that garb, and that only, to the marriage supper of the Lamb."

He was silent for a moment, and then with an infinite tenderness, he said, " But for yourself, dear one? I would not pry into the secrets of your soul, for I should find but a purity there which would abash me—but I would ask—and assuredly I press for no answer—has any word of mine brought you nearer to the truth which I have striven to uphold? "

" Yes, dearest," said Molly, much moved. " I can answer that simply enough, and I will. I do see, as I never saw before, that you and I are looking in the same direction and desiring the same things. But I must also say that I think we see things differently. You see these great spiritual things with a passion and a distinctness which does not come to me. I feel as if I had been with you up a very high mountain, and had a sight of glorious and far-off things. But I could not live at such heights. I love people, and I love them better if they are good—but I am interested, pleased, amused by all sorts of little details, which all seem to me to be part of the people I

know and love—I must do things in my own small way, but it is good for me to have been where I have been with you. You are like a poet or a prophet, and see things with a great sweep and range. But someone must do the humbler things, and they are all that I am capable of."

She hardly knew if he was pleased or the reverse by her words. But she saw at least that he was grateful for her frankness—and in some strange way, which she could not quite comprehend, while she recognized him as a great and towering spirit, she felt nearer to him than she had ever felt before.

" The dear, sweet, serviceable Molly! " he said, softly. And she felt a deep sense of gratitude and happiness that she had come to St. Sibbald's with him.

XV

BUT the climax was reached on the Sunday. There were more communicants than had ever been seen at St. Sibbald's before, even in the days of Mr. Terry's comfortable evening communions. Father Knowles seemed in a state of stubborn disapproval. At the morning service the Canon preached on the *Te Deum*. He expatiated on the concert of angels and their triumphant strains, the white-robed company of saints, the glories of the Eternal Son. His words rose to a pitch of extraordinary eloquence. Then he made a long pause, looking all about the Church.

"And what do we find next, my dear friends, after this almost exhausting conflict of splendour? A change of mood, indeed, but what a blessed change! 'We *therefore* pray Thee, help Thy servants.' Not *in spite of* all the out-breaking fire and music of Heaven, but *because* of them. We have been among the clouds, and now our feet are on earth again. But we are not to shrink back, and say that it is all too great and high for us, we are not to be abased or humiliated. We are to turn to the Father dwelling in light, and ask Him *therefore* to help us in our little creeping, troubled lives. There is to be no problem so small but it can be illumined by the everlasting glory, no life so humble but it can receive the reflection of the light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world."

Then he read the vision of the Pilgrim's Progress of the man with the muckrake, and the angel proffering him the celestial crown; "I will not add any words of mine to that. I will only entreat you not to be so careful of the dirt and

straws of the street, as to refuse the crown which awaits the grasp of the toilworn and reluctant hand."

Molly waited for him outside the Church. Father Knowles came out a moment later, bowed a little sullenly to Molly, and then said, " Just before I came down to Church this morning I had a wire from the Bishop. He will be here for tea—will you be good enough, Mrs. Davenant, to come to the Rectory and meet him—he will stay for the evening service."

Molly smiled and said, " We shall have other visitors, too. Lord and Lady Helford are coming over. I was not to mention this, Henry, and I was intending to give them some tea at Mrs. Redfern's—but perhaps I may bring them to tea too? "

" I shall be honoured," said Father Knowles, with a sudden revulsion of feeling towards the Canon. " I only hope I can entertain them in a manner suitable to their rank and position. You seem to have a fascination, Canon, for the great ones of the earth. They come about you like bees! I could indeed have dispensed with the Bishop, of whose vital sympathy I am not sure; but I shall be interested to meet Lord and Lady Helford."

" It is no act of mine," said the Canon, " which has occasioned this intrusion. I should have preferred no extraneous additions to your flock. But it will not affect what I have to say."

Robert and Cynthia turned up in the course of the afternoon. " I knew we ought not to do this, Molly," he said, " but I was really very curious about it all. I am very critical about public speaking—rather a connoisseur in fact. Henry's village sermons seem to me so good in their way, that I feel that on a big occasion, when he is putting out all his powers, he may turn out to be a real orator. Shall I make a confession? I hardly ever hear a sermon of

his without having the tears come suddenly into my eyes with some turn of phrase or inflection of voice."

" His addresses have been extraordinarily good here," said Molly, " and have had a strange effect on the people. I don't know how far down the effect goes—and I myself don't really understand the attitude of mind he is driving at—but in spite of all that, I think them wonderfully *beautiful*—I can't doubt that! "

" He is an artist, I expect," said Robert—" that would explain everything about him—his mixture of sensibility and hardness—Molly, I ought not to have said that! It proves at all events, my saying that, that I'm not an artist."

" Oh, Robert, as if I should mind! I'm not one of the people who think that any criticism of anyone for whom one cares is a treachery."

Presently Molly said, " The Bishop is coming over to hear him."

" We shall be like the three witches in ' Macbeth.' "

Presently they adjourned to the Rectory. They saw the Bishop's car waiting, and in the bare Rectory sitting-room they found him talking to Father Knowles, who wore a pragmatical and self-important air. They were seated with difficulty, and Father Knowles paid shameless court to Robert, neglecting his other guests. Robert did not seem much to relish his company, and Molly heard Father Knowles say to him, " If you could but use your influence in the matter, my lord—a few words would do it—it would make all the difference in the world." She heard Robert say rather drily, " I will keep what you say in mind, Mr. Knowles, but there are a good many people who feel differently, and I should require much more evidence that it was desired and desirable." Tea was brought in, very plentiful and good. Father Knowles

apologised for Henry's absence, but added that he wished to remain undisturbed until the service. " I wonder if I might say a few words to him? " said the Bishop, to which with infinite complacency Father Knowles said, " He particularly hoped, my lord, that you would not ask to see him." Molly was infuriated by this, and was about to intervene, when the Bishop smilingly said, " He is quite right, Mrs. Davenant—if we Bishops had the courage to do that, our sermons would perhaps be more worth hearing than they often are."

The conversation became more general, and something was said about the proposal to remit a number of sentences of imprisonment in view of the approaching coronation.

The Bishop said, " No, I don't think I approve of that."

" I am afraid," said Robert, smiling, " that the spiritual peers don't hold a good record in these matters. They have always, I think, voted against any mitigation of punishment."

" I daresay," said the Bishop lightly, " but don't you think that in a civilized country when laws are elaborately codified and sentences revised, and appeals allowed, it is an entire mistake to treat them as though they were probably excessive? That seems to me to belong to a barbarous regime, where the administration of justice is constantly affected by the ill-temper of the judge."

" That is all very sensible," said Robert. " But I am inclined to think that remission is a thing more in the style of the Prodigal Son."

" And what does Father Knowles think? " said the Bishop.

" I? " said Father Knowles, with an air of infinite tactfulness, " I agree with Lord Helford's heart, and with his lordship the Bishop's head! "

" These men! " said Lady Helford. " They are posi-

tively swayed by argument. Now Molly and I know, without a moment's thought, exactly what ought to be done."

The time for Evensong drew near; and presently Father Knowles conducted his distinguished visitors to the Church. The Bishop was to robe at the Rectory.

Molly was amazed to see the Church, which was crowded from end to end and with people standing in the aisles. At last the poor harmonium began to croon its aged song, and the dignitaries made their appearance. Molly could not help being struck by the contrast—the Bishop shrewd, unembarrassed, sensible. Henry entirely rapt in a mystical vision, and Father Knowles wholly inglorious, to whatever world he was allotted.

The sermon was really a very noble affair; it began most simply, a quiet summary of the way of holiness; but after this it sprang into flame, the preacher proclaiming the incredible beauty and splendour of the inheritance to which humble daily service entitled the patient saint. Molly had been deeply moved by the tenderness of the earlier part; but now, bright and ardent as the preacher's vision was, she became aware that such an existence as her husband described held no reality for her, offered her nothing that she could contemplate with any sense of happiness. It seemed as if all the trivial relations of life, which made up so much of it, were to be swept away; and she felt that the ordered phalanx of the saints, with the hierarchy of Heaven poised higher and higher above them, might be a momentary and uplifting spectacle, but merged every individual preference and hope and imagination in a meaningless and unsatisfying parade. If this was to be Heaven, thought Molly, it could hardly be more alluring than the nethermost hell, where at all events the victims of sin preserved some faint semblance of human character.

But this was not so with the audience who exhibited every sign of ecstasy, and but for the presence of the Bishop, Molly thought, would have broken out into hallelujahs and ejaculations or praise.

The Bishop sat in his chair quiet and immovable. Father Knowles seemed to be occupied in counting the numbers of the congregation.

It came to an end; and a moment later the Bishop rose and said a few words—that God had vouchsafed them great grace and deliverance at the hands of his servant, and that he trusted that there were many present who would go on their way in newness of life. " But though," he said, " we may at moments gratefully and hopefully gaze up into the heights of Heaven and be assured of the eternal glories—yet we must not forget that between us and the vision of the Highest there must lie a faithful pilgrimage, a patient continuance in daily effort." He then gave his blessing in the words of the Confirmation service, " Bless these Thy children with Thy heavenly grace, that they may continue Thine for ever . . . and daily increase in Thy Spirit more and more, till they come unto Thy heavenly kingdom." It was said with a deep and dignified tenderness, and seemed to Molly to strike exactly the right note.

It was now nearly eight o'clock; the Bishop went to the vestry, where he remained some little time. Robert and Cynthia decided not to wait for him. " It was magnificent," he said to Molly, " quite magnificent! He had them all in the hollow of his hand. I have never heard anything to touch it—he is a great speaker." But even as he said the words, there was an unuttered thought, which met Molly's unuttered thought—" What could come of it? Was it not rather like an intoxicating potion, wine rather than bread? "

" You must be very proud of him, darling," said Cynthia.

Molly went back to Mrs. Redfern's, who was in a very exalted state; Mrs. Redfern gave her some food, constantly uttering old pious ejaculations, which seemed to Molly to come out of a remote and forgotten past. " Many," said Mrs. Redfern, " had been converted, some had even been sanctified—it was an outpouring of the spirit, hallelujah! "

A little later, Henry himself came in a very solemn mood, but not as much exalted as Molly had feared. He said that after a meal, short and silent, Father Knowles had excused himself and gone to bed. " I could not wonder at it," said Henry, " for when we came to the vestry, the Bishop said very gravely that he had some words for us both. He thanked me first, shook my hand, said it had been a great awakening, and praised my words and expression, but all very temperately. Then he rebuked me. He said that I had trusted too much to excitement and imagination. He said that we knew little or nothing about the life of Heaven, and that it was a mistake to offer to men and women a pageant, of which even a child would tire—the real hope of Heaven was the reunion with all whom we hold dear, and intercourse unclouded by human frailty. It was well and faithfully done, and I thanked him heartily. Then he turned to Father Knowles, and said with great sternness that he discerned in him, and had heard of him, that he was envious and niggardly in his encouragement. " Your people," he said, " have received a great impulse to good. See that this is nurtured and fed. These rites and robes, on which your heart is set, are vain things to save a man. They are but a decent custom to keep higher things in remembrance."

" Did *the Bishop* say all this? " said Molly.

" The words no doubt are mine," said the Canon, " but it was his drift. He is an upright man, far beyond me in

strength of purpose and wisdom, and I can serve him faithfully."

He told her that there were a few more interviews to hold, but that by midday he would thankfully return to his more humble but also more serviceable ministrations.

XVI

ON returning to Menerdue, Henry had, of course, a violent reaction after the strain of the Mission. Molly had fully expected this and was prepared for it, but she was not prepared for its violence. He hung about her all day like a sick child.

" You are very good to me, my dearest one," he said to her one evening when she had been trying to invent occupations for him all day in vain. " But this mission has filled me with grievous doubts as to my fitness for the work which the Bishop had laid upon me."

" The Bishop did not think so, Henry—and little Mrs. Redfern, I told you what she said, that it was an outpouring of the Spirit upon the parish."

He smiled at this, but presently went on, " It shows me the shallowness of my faith. I believe the quality of it to be sincere, but I have no reserves of trust or confidence. It seems to me now to have been all a string of idle words, and now that I have time to reflect, I think I treated Father Knowles ill. But I was angered by his sullen looks and his paltry suggestions. I should have spoken plainly to him, warned him of his danger, prayed instantly with him. But I did none of these things."

" It was not a mission to Father Knowles, Henry. I think he would need a separate one of his own. It was to his congregation—and how they flocked to hear you! "

" Yet all I said seems unreal," said the Canon, regarding her ruefully. " Here are you, my treasure, your own unchanged self—as sweet and true to me when I carried you to St. Sibbald's and left you by yourself in stuffy lodgings,

as you are to me now when I am vexed by an evil despondency. But I am a mere shadow of a man, filled with regrets and anxieties, wishing that I had spoken differently, wishing that I had altogether held my peace. That first evening, when I began to speak to those poor souls, I had a constraining impulse to say to them that I was unworthy to give them any counsel or consolation whatsoever. I should have done better to have followed that impulse, and to have removed myself from the pulpit with all convenient speed."

" Oh, Henry, you *can't* feel like that after what happened. You brought home religion in a marvellous way to all those poor people—think what it must be to have to listen to Father Knowles Sunday after Sunday. And I won't allow Mrs. Redfern's lodgings to be called stuffy."

The Vicar smiled mournfully. " You are the true Christian, my dearest; you are anchored to realities. As for poor Knowles, he feeds his congregation, I surmise, so diligently on a diet of husks, that their hunger for the truth is whetted. But it is when I compare myself with you, my dearest, that my heart seems heaviest. You go to and fro, you fulfil the humble and holy duty of a Christian day by day, yet I, forsooth, must hale you to St. Sibbald's to hear my instruction—and what do *I* do day by day here? I visit my flock reluctantly. I indulge myself in visionary meditation and unstable prayer, I shower my windy phrases from the pulpit, I call myself a Christian pastor—and worse than all, I am filled with Satanic pride and self-satisfaction by being named a Canon and being called of men Rabbi. I am sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal. These last days I have been even unable to pray sincerely; I feel little or no gratitude for my Redemption, and none at all for my preservation."

" But, Henry," said Molly, putting her arm round him,

" is not this a case in which other people *must* decide? You heard what the Bishop said; and I have not heard a single word of anything but gratitude and admiration for your preaching. You have made a great effort and are exhausted by it. Do not all people who really give themselves away thus suffer from reaction? "

" My dearest, you shame me," said the Canon. " Would I could believe your precious words. But I must not trouble your peace. I must at least be brave enough to be silent."

" Don't you understand," said Molly, " how much dearer you are to me for speaking? "

Such scenes were not of infrequent occurrence—but a few days later there came a long letter from the Bishop, thanking the Canon in no measured terms for his Mission. " You may have erred a little," he wrote, " in the direction of spiritual excitement, and I should hope that you may in the future aim at a quieter tone, especially as I gather that your delicate and penetrating treatment of daily problems was even more effective than your loftier flights. But I cannot doubt that you have given St. Sibbald's a real spiritual awakening, and I am particularly grateful to you for having so loyally obeyed the suggestions I made to you." He went on to say that he hoped that at the end of November the Canon would undertake to hold a mission at Port Mervin, on much the same lines, but with special reference to the difficulties of a seaport town.

The Bishop added in a P.S.: " As a mark of my entire confidence in the inspiring character of your sermons, I wish you also to undertake the sermon at the Cathedral at the special service held there on the evening of Jan. 1st next."

This letter, to Molly's surprise, seemed entirely to remove the Canon's depression. She began to realize that,

as Lord Helford had said, his nature was deeply dependent upon approval and admiration.

The Canon plunged again with radiant zeal into meditation, and immured himself again in the Oratory—Molly, a little troubled by the sudden extinction for the need of her tendance and sympathy, foresaw ahead of them a long series of lonely weeks, interspersed by seasons of acute spiritual elation, followed by periods of depression. At the same time, left to herself once more, she began day after day to long more and more for Robert's talk and company. Robert and Cynthia were due to go to London early in October, and she sadly thought how many weeks of the summer had passed without seeing anything of them, except for occasional calls and chance encounters. It was plain to her by that time that Robert and Henry instinctively disliked and mistrusted each other; that Robert was prepared to tolerate Henry more for her own sake than Henry was willing to tolerate Robert. Henry frankly disliked going to Nan-Zephron, and any proposal on her part to go there filled him with a dim sense of jealousy.

But it happened that an elderly cousin of Robert's and her own, Miss Edith Davenant, came to stay at Nan-Zephron. Lady Helford came down to ask them to go up to dinner to meet her. The Canon pleaded that he was far too closely engaged to come—that his work required concentration. Lady Helford, with a decisiveness which commanded Molly's wonder, said that they would of course excuse him, but that Miss Edith would be deeply hurt and disappointed if she was not allowed to see something of Molly. " She must come to luncheon with the children; we will send them down after tea, and Molly must stay to dinner." The Canon, glad to have escaped, threw Molly unhesitatingly to the wolves and capitulated.

When the day arrived, the Canon was very mournful over the whole affair. "I shall feel sadly lonely, my dearest. This cousin of yours, Miss Edith Davenant, is she a woman to whom any deference should be paid? Describe her to me. What is the extent of your acquaintance with her?"

"She stayed here once or twice in the old days, Henry. She is a kindly and affectionate woman. She lives in London and is hospitable. She is very rich. Old Lord Helford left her a considerable fortune, which ought, I believe, to have gone to Robert."

"Her fortune, I conceive," said Henry, "hardly entitles her to respect. Lord Helford is already as wealthy as a Christian has any need to be. Is she herself a Christian woman?"

"Very much so," said Molly. "Indeed she wrote to me when we were engaged, and said how glad she was that I was to marry a clergyman."

"Indeed?" said the Canon, obviously impressed. "How would it be, my dearest, if we asked this good woman to luncheon on Sunday?"

"That would be splendid, Henry."

"She would not expect any luxurious apparatus?"

"No, she is the simplest of women. She would dearly like to see you."

"Will you arrange it then, my dearest? I should be sorry to vex any relation of yours, especially if she is entitled to our respect. We should not need to ask Lord and Lady Helford to accompany her?"

"No, of course not."

"Then so be it, my dearest. I shall count the hours till you return."

Molly was almost ashamed of herself as she went up through the woods to Nan-Zephron. She might have an

hour or two alone with Robert. Miss Edith was very much as she remembered her, a stout comely woman, who made friends with the children at once, and, indeed, presented each of them shamelessly with a sovereign, a larger sum than they had ever possessed in their lives. This made the children grave and preoccupied.

Cynthia had arranged everything for Molly's delight. She carried off Miss Edith for a drive. The children rushed off to the garden. Robert and Molly went off for a walk together to Mornay Creek.

" Oh, Molly, this is delicious! But why can't we see you oftener. That was really why we came to Nan-Zephron? "

" You know why as well as I do, Robert."

" Isn't Cynthia ingenious? She knew beforehand exactly what would happen. It was why she asked Edith here. But it seems so ridiculous that you should be chained up like a dog at Menerdue."

" Jealousy seems the one thing one can't get past, Robert—the jealousy in a good man takes such righteous shapes. And yet I think I love Henry better for being a little jealous. It shows he wants me, at all events."

" Yes, but there is no reason why he should growl over you like a dog over a bone. I shouldn't mind if Cynthia walked with him all day long."

" Wouldn't you mind if she went to him for religious consolation, for something you couldn't give her? "

" I should very much mind Cynthia becoming religious, but I shouldn't mind what parson she ran after."

" And all this after poor Henry's sermon? "

" Ah, I have changed my mind about Henry."

" What do you think now? "

" Well, he isn't a saint by any means. He is more like St. Anthony tempted by fifty charming devils. But he is

a first-rate artist. By Jove, Molly, that sermon of his was a fine affair. I didn't believe a word of it. But he went soaring up like an eagle, and then came sailing down. That's the best chance for Henry—encourage him to be an artist."

" If I mentioned the word he would scream with horror."

" Of course, dearest Molly. But never mind about him or Cynthia or anyone. It is you I want to know about. What have you been doing? "

" Henry has had a fearful reaction—he was like a child with a toothache. He couldn't understand why he suffered so. He didn't know he had emptied out his soul, and that the cistern would have to fill again."

" I said we wouldn't talk about Henry."

" Yes, but that is the preface. I have had to look after him, and I had no time for anything else."

" It does seem a shame that you should be sacrificed."

" Robert, I am *not* being sacrificed. My only complaint is that I can't see you oftener. If that was possible, my life would be an entirely happy one."

" We must manage it. Cynthia said she would get Henry to fall in love with her, but she hasn't made much progress. What I want, Molly, is to go off somewhere with you, and to talk to you all day long."

" I should like that too—but for rather a different reason. I can hardly tell you why."

" I must know."

" Well, Robert, it is this. If I could see you oftener, I could care about you in exactly the right way. But now that we are so much apart and yet so tantalisingly near, I am afraid . . . how shall I put it? "

" That you are beginning to care for me in the wrong way—is that it? "

" Yes, dearest, I think that is it. I think even Cynthia might be jealous if she knew how much I cared. You are constantly in my mind. I see you as you sit, stand, move, talk. It is like a kind of thirst which can't be satisfied."

Lord Helford stopped short and turned to her. They were still in the wood, and it was dark under the trees. He looked at her with a troubled look. Molly with her eyes wide open, her lips parted, her hands clasped, met his gaze. She seemed to him no older than the girl he had first seen at Menerdue.

" Molly, you mustn't talk like this, or I shall give way."

" No, Robert, you won't give way, and I shall not either. All that is behind us. But isn't it strange? That you should love Cynthia as you do, and that I should love Henry as I do, and yet we should feel as we do about each other. You seem a part of myself. I have things in my mind I do not say to Henry or to Cynthia, but there is nothing I cannot say to you. You understand even before I speak. I care for Cynthia, Henry, the children, each in their own way and with a bit of my mind. I care for you with the whole of it."

" Molly, this is pure madness. It is just so that I care for you, but I hardly dare admit it to myself."

" Then it isn't quite the same, Robert, because it is the deepest thing in my life."

" Did you bring me here to tell me all this? I feel almost like St. Anthony myself when you talk as you have been doing."

" Why shouldn't you know it, Robert? You were the first person who awoke my heart. I cared for my mother, but hardly consciously. But I have told you, because I wanted you to know the truth. We had begun to drift apart, and I wanted you to know exactly what I felt all the time."

XVII

THERE seemed for a moment nothing more to say. They came out of the wood, and found themselves on the edge of the creek. To their left a steep bluff covered with great old Scotch firs stood out into the estuary, with hardly room at its base for more than the narrow sandy cart-track which led down to the sea. The tide was running out, a swirling, turbid stream in mid-channel, the mud above thickly covered with a dense olive-green vegetation. Opposite them and to the left, where the creek wound into hills, nothing but deep woodlands were visible, and the air was full of the soft sighing of innumerable trees. They stood together for a moment, looking out at the creek, and as they stood Robert slipped his hand through Molly's arm, which closed welcomingly upon it. Some minutes passed thus, not happily; for Molly was conscious as through a veil of sense, of the swift and anxious workings of Robert's mind.

Suddenly she was attracted by the rapid and silent approach of a figure on the sea-ward track. It was the Canon. He had seen them, and he was walking towards them with an intent and gloomy look upon his face. He was in the rough black clothes with black stockings which Molly had induced him to substitute for his cassock on his walks.

Molly felt a quick motion of Robert's hand clasping her arm; but he did not withdraw his arm, and she was conscious of a momentary thankfulness that he had not done so.

She waved her hand in sign of greeting to her husband,

and did her best to smile at him as he came nearer. She was aware of a strange conflict within herself—she was ashamed of not being able to smile naturally, yet aware of a sense of fear, and deeper yet of a sense of anger that there should be any need to be afraid.

He came up and stood beside them, and then in a low and hurried tone, as if excusing himself, he said, " I was restless at home and came out for a walk upon the headland. But I had no purpose of intruding. I fancied you would be all out in the car."

" But you *don't* intrude," said Molly. " Lady Helford has gone over to Gerrans with Edith, and we thought we should prefer a walk."

" So I see," said the Canon, heavily.

" And now that we have met you," said Robert, in a careless way, " won't you continue your walk with us, and come up to tea to see Edith? "

The Canon made a gesture with his hand as if of assent. They turned to the left, and then Robert dropped his hand from Molly's arm.

It was an awkward encounter, for a few paces further on was a spot associated for ever in Molly's mind with two meetings with her husband—once when he had made almost insolent love to her as a girl, reproaching her with taking up with Robert, and once again two years later, where after her mother's death she had come upon him asleep beside a tree, and he had given her very strong and tender advice about her sorrows—the first moment, she had often felt, that the thought of love had sprung up in her heart for him.

Molly had very little doubt in her mind that this walk had been made in order that he might revive the memory of that second meeting; and though it was more evident to her that his mind was all aflame with anger and sus-

picion and sick distracted fancies, she had a pang of pity for him. She put her arm through his, but he made no responsive movement.

" Do you see the bones of the old fishing-boat, Molly? " said Robert, lightly, " out there at the elbow of the channel. That was the boat," he said, by way of explanation to the Canon, " that my queer old predecessor used to go out fishing in. It grounded there, and he had to wade ashore."

The Canon said nothing, but strode heavily on. A moment later he stopped and said, " I must after all ask you to excuse me—I have overtaxed my strength somewhat, and I think it will be prudent for me to return home by the quickest route."

" Then I shall go with you, Henry," said Molly.

" No," said the Canon, " I particularly desire—nay, I insist—that you should not. Otherwise I shall feel I have intruded. Pray continue your cousinly confidences."

He raised his sullen eyes, which seemed to blaze with an inward fire. Robert made an impatient movement.

" No, Robert," said Molly, " let Henry do as he likes," and turning to her husband she said: " Henry, I will do exactly what you prefer, but I shall be feeling anxious till I get back home—let me go with you."

" Have I not spoken? " said the Canon; and with that he turned from them and tramped gloomily away, turning up the path which led to Menerdue among the trees, and never turning his head.

" Oh, what shall I do? " said Molly, turning to Robert. " Had I not better go with him? "

" No, Molly, no," said Robert in great anger. " It is detestable that a man should behave like a savage; it is damnable! What does he imagine? Let him go, and cool his anger—let him pray if he likes. He is not in the least unwell. He only made that excuse to leave us."

" I wish this had not happened," said Molly, with an anxious air. " And yet I am not sure that it isn't a good thing."

" It is monstrous," said Robert. " You are not his slave or his prisoner. One can't shut one's wife in a small tower, and reward her with one's love. Marriage is not the destruction of all previous friendships and ties. If that is what is meant by a sacrament, the fewer we have the better. I shouldn't mind so much if he was just humanly jealous—but he regards it as a matter of right and wrong."

" Oh, Robert," said Molly, " you must not talk like that. Considering everything, I think Henry behaved rather well. We shall see. I have a bad time before me, but it will give me a chance of stating my case, which I have never dared to do. Henry's idea of marriage is certainly that it concentrates affection. After all, if he knew what we had said to each other and what we feel about each other, he would have to be very saintly not to complain."

" Never mind, dearest Molly. You can always make your home with us if things become impossible. But why not take the war into the enemy's country, and say plainly that you must not be cut off from all your old friends? "

But the spring of their happiness was broken for the time. Molly talked fitfully and absent-mindedly. After tea she asked to be excused staying to dinner, saying to Cousin Edith that Henry had passed them on their walk and did not seem to be very well; and that she would feel happier if she were with him. Cynthia was about to remonstrate, but Robert put his finger to his lips, and she forbore to speak. Molly drove off with the children, who were full of excitement and delight.

XVIII

WHEN she returned to Menerdue, she found that Henry had come in and was immured in the Oratory. He had said that he would not want any dinner. Hearing the voices of the children, however, he came out and was vexed to find Molly. He froze up into himself at the sight of her. " You were to have dined at Nan-Zephron."

" Yes, Henry, but I couldn't stay up there wondering if you were unwell. How are you, dear? "

" A small matter—some slight pain in my head," but he seemed somewhat mollified, and consented to have dinner with her.

But at dinner he hardly spoke; and while Richards was in the room, Molly talked feverishly about Cousin Edith and her kindness to the children.

" I do not like their receiving other people's money," he said, severely. " Money should be regarded as a sacred trust, not to be made a mere source of pleasure."

" I will try to persuade them to put some of it by."

" I think you are hardly strict enough with the children. They seem to have their own way in all things."

Molly did not reply, as she felt almost impelled to do, that he himself indulged them in everything, and left all discipline to her."

" I pull them up if they are obviously naughty, dear. I think it is better that they should begin by expecting to be loved. You are wise in doing that with them, and they are always ready to do as we wish."

" They should learn that the world is more severe than kind."

" They will learn that *in* the world."

" Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth."

" Yes, but being told that is what makes it so difficult for many people to learn to love God."

" To love God is the first duty of man."

" But one cannot love as a matter of duty—at least one has to be sure of the love first."

He said no more, and presently rose as if to leave her. But she felt that the moment had come, and putting out her hand to him, she said, " Let us have a talk first, my dearest. I have something that I must say to you."

He did not take her hand; but he sat down in a chair opposite her with a very dark and sullen air.

" Do not look at me like that, Henry. You frighten me."

" Perhaps it is something in your own heart that makes you afraid."

" No, dearest. I am not frightened by anything that I have said or thought or done. It is your displeasure that I fear, and I fear it all the more because it is unjust. Let me speak plainly. When you came upon Robert and me to-day, you were angry because you thought I loved him too much. Is not that so? "

He did not answer and looked fixedly at her. Her anger began to rise.

" We must not leave this unspoken of, Henry."

" You command me to speak? "

" Yes, if you choose to express it so."

" I came round the corner of the hill, and I saw you with Lord Helford, looking in silence at the creek, his arm in yours as a lover's might be. I did not accuse you even in my inmost heart of any least unfaithfulness. But I saw that you loved him, and that you shared with him the allegiance you owe to me."

" Henry, that is a hideous thing to say. Is marriage to end

all friendships and affections? Robert was very dear to me before I had any love for you. I will be plain with you. It has been the only shadow over my life that the bond of affection between Robert and myself seemed to have been loosened. I cannot, because I love you best of all, sacrifice all other loves and affections. I had just told Robert how truly I loved him. This was my own act. He had said no word to me that any brother might not say to any sister. If you had a sister would it be treacherous for you to continue to love her? Should I have cause to complain because you love our children so much?"

"This is a different kind of love—it is an allegiance that cannot be divided or shared."

"Then you have ceased to love me because I love Robert?"

There was a long and painful silence. Mr. Davenant rose slowly to his feet, and raised his hands in the air. "My dearest," he said, in a hollow voice, "you have torn a rent in my soul and the light streams in. May God forgive me! At the sight of you to-day the devil leapt into my heart armed with power. I could have smitten Lord Helford down. I seemed bound hand and foot, and to leave you with him rent me with sore pain. It is because I love you so desperately and passionately, even more than I love my God, that Satan has such power over me. I unsay every word, I cast out of my mind every base thought, I cry to you for help and forgiveness, my angel of light! You are pure as driven snow and I am fast bound by Satan. Love whom you will, and as you will. But for the sake of our children, for the sake of all you hold most dear, have some pity for a miserable wretch who loves you too well for his own happiness and better than his own salvation."

He flung himself on his knees beside her, sobbing and crying out. She soothed and comforted him as she would have comforted a fevered child.

XIX

FOR many days after their strange talk the Canon was much subdued, and took a pathetic infinity of pains to encourage Molly to go to Nan-Zephron. Lady Helford, with Miss Edith Davenant, had come to luncheon on the Sunday as had been arranged. But Lord Helford was still in a condition of deep annoyance at the affront put on him by the Canon at Mornay Creek, and he did not come to church with them. His anger was increased by the thought that on the whole he had not acted well, and that, to say the least, it was rash for Molly and himself to be quite so outspoken. He felt that there was an explosive mixture brewing; and here again he blamed himself. If he had accepted Molly's marriage more loyally instead of making it clear that he was chagrined by her choice, there would have been no need, he saw, of this impassioned reconciliation.

One of his reasons for disliking the Canon was that under all his whims and oddities Lord Helford recognized in him a reserve of moral force and volcanic passion which he knew that he himself lacked. The Canon was infinitely the stronger man, and Robert disliked the feeling that even after all the Canon's intolerable behaviour to Molly and himself in the early days of their friendship, and the abject performance that he had made, it was still obvious that his love for Molly was of an altogether deeper quality than his own. And he disliked, too, the sense that the Canon saw through his weaknesses, and regarded him with a moral disapproval. In fact, though it was certain that at any crisis the Canon could be counted upon to be-

have worse than himself, and that his own handling of any situation would be far more dexterous and scientific, yet Robert recognized that the Canon was the bigger and more forcible man.

The Canon had intended to proffer Robert some fantastic apology after church, and thus his absence was a relief; but he spoke to Molly on the subject and begged her to see Robert with all possible expedition, and remove his wrong impression.

Molly accordingly went on to Nan-Zephron with Lady Helford and Miss Davenant after lunch, during which the Canon had been lumberingly civil. Lady Helford, to whom Robert had given a brief account of the incident, was relieved to find that the Canon was pathetically eager to reassure Molly.

As soon as they arrived at Nan-Zephron, Molly went straight to Robert's room. He showed traces of his vexation, but looked inquiringly at her as she entered. She went up to him, and he made as if he would have kissed her, but she drew back, feeling in a flash a shrinking from doing anything which could have confirmed her husband in his justifications, and scenting, too, a certain danger in the confession of mutual dearness that had passed between them.

" It is all over, Robert. He was very angry when I got home, and was very stern and distant with me. Fortunately I did not keep my temper altogether, and he made his peace. It was, or might have been, very alarming."

" I hate the idea of his bullying you."

" He didn't bully me—he broke down altogether. Robert, his love is a very tragic thing, far more tremendous than anything that either I or you have ever felt for each other. It is like thunder and lightning—something irresistible and devastating."

" And yet you love him? "

" Better than ever, I think. Robert, you and I are playing with edged tools."

" What do you want? " He spoke curtly but not roughly.

" I want it all to be a simple and quiet thing—something understood, not spoken of."

" I'm in your hands, Molly."

" You may think it was I who began it again. I did. I could not bear to have a shadow between us."

He put his arm round her for a moment.

" But I meant every word I said. I will never fail you, Robert, if you need me. I don't think I shall ever be afraid of Henry any more. Promise me you will say nothing to him about it."

" He was infernally insolent."

" You can afford to overlook that. And it wasn't insolence. His mind was all in flames."

" Molly, I am very obedient. You make me do exactly what you wish. You are the only person I know who always has her own way. You seem to be so guileless, and yet you wind us all round those little fingers of yours."

XX

NOT long after this came an unexpected letter from the Bishop inviting the Canon and Mrs. Cuthbert-Davenant to stay with him for a week-end. He added, " This is not a casual piece of civility. I want to have some talk with the Canon, and I very much hope you will *both* come."

The Canon pleaded hard to be allowed to refuse. He said that he did not like leaving his flock on Sunday. But as there was now an elderly retired clergyman living not a mile away at Boscarnon, who frequently helped the Canon in his services and was very acceptable to the parishioners, this reason could not be considered substantial. He went on to plead the interruption to his work, his unfitness for social gatherings. But Molly was obdurate. " After what the Bishop says it is our duty to go." The Canon moaned but acquiesced, and for the days preceding the visit he went about with a long face, and complained that he was utterly unsettled.

They arrived as bidden on the Friday afternoon for tea. It was a relief to the Canon's mind that there proved to be only two other guests—the Bishop's widowed sister, Mrs. Phillimore, a genial, fresh-coloured woman, and her daughter, a pleasant girl of eighteen. The Canon had had a vision of cars driving up loaded with luggage, and discharging laughing cargoes of county magnates. But he was entirely incapable of finding occupation for himself, and he disliked vague talking, " when I feel," he said, mournfully, " as if I were merely smearing something over a gap "—and, indeed, his own contributions to a conversa-

tion were generally of an original and authoritative kind. However, all went well the first evening. The Bishop carried off the Canon after tea and talked business. The chaplain was very attentive to Miss Phillimore who was shy and pretty; while Molly found it a refreshing thing to have a good talk with a new person, whose outlook on life was both good-natured and shrewd. Mrs. Phillimore talked interestingly about her brother the Bishop. " It was a real case of *nolo episcopari*," she said. He had been an archdeacon and a canon, with a certain amount of leisure. " I am made for small things," he had said to her, " I have very little initiative. I can manage an Archdeaconry, especially as I have not the ultimate responsibility. And as I have some time to read and think, I can put some stuff into my sermons." " He was really a very useful man," went on Mrs. Phillimore, " and nowadays it is so rare to find a man who doesn't want to go somewhere else, and do what they call ' wield a wider influence,' that I think they might have let him alone, and be thankful for the example of an unambitious parson. But the Archbishop wouldn't hear of it. ' The very reason which makes you want to stay makes it to my mind a duty for you to go,' he said. But my brother and I don't much believe in inspiring people in rows."

" But he is happy here, isn't he? He seems so much liked everywhere."

" Not very happy, I think," said Mrs. Phillimore. " He ought to have a wife. He says he goes about talking gossip to pleasant people, and giving congregations meals of scraps and fragments. And then he comes back here and lives like a hermit, and writes letters day and night. He says he is always in a hurry."

Molly laughed, " and yet what we admire about him is that he is so fresh and unconventional, not a bit pompous,

always wide awake and unembarrassed. He isn't in the least like my idea of a bishop."

" That seems to be the highest praise that a bishop can get nowadays, strange to say," said Mrs. Phillimore, " but it is very nice of you to say such things, and I shall let one or two of your remarks filter into his mind when he is a little bored."

" I should have thought he was never bored."

" He is bored by having to do so much that isn't a clergyman's work. He says that eighty per cent. of what he does could be done just as well by a Christian solicitor. But as you have been so nice about him, I will tell you what he says about your husband. He is immensely struck with him. He says he is a man of genius—though I dare-say that is not always the most comfortable thing for the relations of the man of genius."

Molly laughed. " Oh, my dear Henry is a very domestic person; and I really believe he is a great preacher; but he is sensitive about going into the world. He has been dreading this visit. It would have been a relief to him if he could have sprained his ankle. I hope you will be kind to him. He really does need a little touch with other minds. He doesn't believe as well of other people as they deserve. It is only because he does not know them."

Mrs. Phillimore leant forwards beaming. " We will make a bargain," she said, " I will take on your husband and give him the benefit of my views of life, if you will take on my brother. He makes friends very easily with men, but he wants a woman-friend."

" I could see that the other day. He was staying with our next-door neighbours, the Helfords, and Lord Helford took to him tremendously. But Lady Helford couldn't quite make him out. She said that he smiled as if he had just heard some absurd story to her disadvantage."

" That is only his shyness," said Mrs. Phillimore. " The Helfords are your cousins, I think? Lord Helford seems to be regarded as a very rising man everywhere. Do you find him interesting? "

Molly smiled. " Yes, very much so," she said. " But he and his wife are very old friends of mine; and one of the interesting things about him is that he doesn't seem to enjoy his success very much."

" Does anyone? " said Mrs. Phillimore. " Fred says that if he ever makes a hit, he is always bothered by feeling that he will be expected to go one better next time."

At dinner that evening Mrs. Phillimore did marvels with the Canon. She asked him questions, she listened respectfully. He became quite animated. When he went upstairs with Molly, she said to him, " Mrs. Phillimore found you very good company to-night, Henry."

" She seems a gracious person," said the Canon. " I doubt not that she was a crown to her husband. But it is wonderful what disguises these elect ladies can assume."

" Oh, I think that is very unfair! "

" I make no accusation of falsity against her," said the Canon, " indeed, I have reason to think her sincere. But I am suspicious of these swift intimacies. She is accomplished undoubtedly; and as the Bishop's sister, I assume that she is virtuous. That must suffice for to-day."

XXI

THE next morning the Canon's desperation was very great. The thought of an entire day, with none of his accustomed occupations, no private lair of his own, and what he called " cyclic " conversation at meals was grievous to him. He comforted himself, however, by the thought that he would walk down morning and evening to the Cathedral for service. To walk in a procession, however scanty, in his own Cathedral, was deeply pleasing to him; he was not concerned with being observed; it was a " due solemnity."

All this however was eclipsed by the Bishop desiring him to give a very short sermon in the Cathedral at the Sunday morning service. He said that he would have apologised, but that he expected his Canon Missioner to be a man of resource.

The Canon accepted with undisguised satisfaction. " The one point, my lord," he said, " at which I demur is that you speak as though the brevity of the discourse diminished the labour thereof. Brevity may be the soul of wit, but it is likewise the despair of the composer. When I preach long sermons, it is because I have not the time to make a short one. If eloquence be gold, concise eloquence is much fine gold."

The Bishop added that a little room adjacent to the Chaplain's was at his disposal for a study; and the Canon's equanimity was entirely restored. " I know not," he said, " why I should so much prize solitude. It is not that I cry aloud or contort myself, as I have known men to do believing themselves to be unobserved. But only in solitude,

if my wife will pardon the phrase, do I feel myself the master of my fate."

In the afternoon, the Canon, having discoursed largely at luncheon, betook himself to his sermon. Mrs. Phillimore had a call to pay; the chaplain took Miss Phillimore down to see the Cathedral, and the Bishop asked Molly to walk with him.

" I should love a walk," said Molly, " I should have gone off for a walk on my own account if you had not asked me. Men are so odd about walks—they think it necessary to have a reason for a walk, if possible a high-minded reason."

The Bishop laughed. " One drops exercise as one gets older—it is simply the conservation of energy—besides, I don't believe in *habits* for a Bishop, they are one of the luxuries he is obliged to give up."

They walked along a little valley to the east—the Vale of Idless, the Bishop said. At one point they diverged from the road, and followed a sandy track up among oak copses, and came out at length in an open space where there was a great circular earthwork, half overgrown with copse and half with rough turf, with beautiful views up little silent valleys with streams descending, distant clumps, lonely hill-farms.

" It is a curious thing," said the Bishop, " the power that a view like this has over the mind. I have no associations with country like this at all; it has no great features; but it makes me think almost with horror of Swiss pine-clad slopes and snow mountains, or the bare, burnt-up Italian country. This old fortress is a sign of sad, unquiet, cruel days, no doubt, but it gives one a kind of comfort—like the words, ' for that shall bring a man peace at the last '—Is that all very fanciful? I am not a militant priest myself, and it is often a struggle to me to have to force

religion on people; but one has to do it, because there are so many evils which cannot be made terms with. But a place like this seems to admit one to the inside of religion —the beautiful part of it, where there is no need of contending. Does that seem to you all very far-fetched? "

Molly was listening intently to the Bishop with wide-open eyes.

" No, indeed," she said, " it seems to me perfectly true —I am glad to have it all put into words. I love woods and valleys very much, but I never see the meaning of them unless someone interprets them. Robert—Lord Helford, you know—used to say things like that."

" Yet I think that the people who can express it," said the Bishop, " don't generally feel it as much as the people who don't express it. What you say about Lord Helford is very interesting. I have never seen that side of him. I should have thought he would have despised such things."

" Ah, you have only seen him in his armour," said Molly. " But Robert is more a dreamer than a man of affairs."

" And they often make the best men of affairs," said the Bishop, " because they are not really taken up by the affairs."

" Cynthia does so much for him, you know," said Molly. " She is exactly the wife he wants. She is never tired or moody or huffy, and she thoroughly enjoys things."

" They are two of the most interesting people I have met," said the Bishop, " they are so tremendously on the spot, and yet seem to have so much in reserve."

" They are the greatest friends I have," said Molly, " and what you have said about them is perfectly true. Cynthia is very strong—the strongest person I know, as strong as steel. But Robert is a man who wants a great

deal of help. Perhaps that is what makes him so interesting to a woman."

" Yes," said the Bishop. " It is astonishing, you know, the awful and deliberate deception fostered by novelists and casual chatterboxes, under which young men are brought up with regard to the nature of women—at least, I was, though I daresay it is different now—to regard them, that is, as tender, clinging, innocent, sensitive creatures, when they are three times as tough as men and four times as practical—that is in dealing with affairs of the moment. Where they fail, I think, is in forecasting the result of what they do, and in—but why should I bring you away to a lonely oak-wood to harangue you on the nature of women? "

" Oh, do go on," said Molly, " men talk nonsense to us, or flatter us, but they so seldom analyse us in our own presence. Do finish what you were going to say."

" Well," said the Bishop, " I was only going to say that women can't or don't learn by experience—but that isn't because they are flighty, but because they are so tough. It is toughness and self-confidence which makes people sceptical."

" I think that is partly true," said Molly, " but the reason is that women are so determined to sweep an obstacle aside, and show their power, and have their own way, that they forget for the moment that the only real way out is to wait and do nothing—women hate inaction."

" Yes," said the Bishop, " but now, Mrs. Davenant, I am going to do something very unconventional. I ought to be married, of course; all bishops ought to be married —and I am constantly finding the need of a woman's advice. I don't mean that I should always take it, but they are excellent at diagnosing what has happened—I want to have two or three real friends among women in

the diocese to whom I can talk freely. Mind, I don't want mere expert advisers—I want them to be friends first and advisers next, because one can't really talk over a difficult problem of the kind I am thinking of with anyone but a friend. After all, there is plenty of scriptural precedent! "

" I am afraid I don't care very much about that," said Molly—" the scriptural precedent, I mean. You won't find me orthodox or even pious. It is one of my husband's greatest trials, that I can't understand doctrines. I couldn't be of any use to you as an adviser. I never know the reason of anything. But, of course, I should like to be friends. I liked you the moment I saw you. Let us begin by that, and chance the advice."

The Bishop smiled, a big friendly smile, took her hand in his and gave it a little shake. " Then that's a compact," he said—" and I must quote a text—we can do nothing without texts, you know. ' Now I know that the Lord will do me good, seeing I have a Levite for my priest.' "

" It sounds very great," said Molly, " but how it applies I can't conceive."

" Yet it is such an ingenious quotation," said the Bishop.

They walked back together, glad of each other's company; the Bishop extraordinarily attracted by the eager friendliness and frankness of this beautiful young woman, Molly feeling a sense of comfort and repose. They began to talk of her husband. " I am going to get a great deal of fine work out of him," said the Bishop, " he is a real lighter of torches. Where did he find that magnificent style? It is the most moving thing I ever heard; and he has a real hard insight into people's hearts and minds. You would think he was absorbed in thought and wholly unobservant, yet he must see a great deal quicker and further than I do."

Molly laughed delightedly. " Oh, Henry is a wonderful

person: he comes on you round most unexpected corners. He exults in his work for you—it exactly satisfies his desires and ambitions—my only fear is that he may overdo it. When he is interested in anything, he is like a dog behind a rabbit—nothing will stop him, and," she added, with a laugh, " it is just as well not to get in his way."

The Bishop laughed. " Yes, but that is exactly what I have got to do! The difficulty about your husband is that he lives, I won't say at such a high level, because I think he is a man over whom small impulses and little motives have much power—he is sensitive, in fact—but he lives at times at an exalted level, and he probably does not allow nearly enough for the weakness and inconsistencies of humanity; he expects them to follow at full speed; and I expect he might easily be hard upon the souls who flagged and sat down to rest. How did he get on with Father Knowles? "

" He developed a great disdain for him," said Molly; " he was careful to say at intervals how much he respected him. But it didn't seem to me that the respect went very far."

" Poor Knowles," said the Bishop, " he is an enthusiast in his own way and a very fearless man, but he is—dare I say this?—a snob. He doesn't consider things on their own merits, but according to the consideration they enjoy. The fact that you and the Canon are cousins of the Lord-Lieutenant, weighed very much with him, though to speak candidly, the same fact had some weight with me."

" Henry would be miserable if he knew that," said Molly.

" Yes, but he won't know that," said the Bishop. " I will tell you what I mean. English people, even Cornish people, are naturally deferential. It isn't a matter of reason, it is a matter of instinct. Your husband has, I

need not say, a fine touch of originality. He is naturally dramatic. If he were an unknown clergyman, this would easily be mistaken for eccentricity. But with Lord Helford in the background, ordinary people take the solidity for granted, and acquit a well-connected man of worldliness or pose. I see that you dislike what I am saying," he went on, turning to Molly, " but that is the sort of thing that a Bishop *has* to weigh. He has to take the world as it is, and not as it ought to be. If Father Knowles were Lord Helford's cousin, the fact would not carry any weight with me. But with your husband it is entirely different. A genius is apt to be mistrusted. But just as Ruskin gained consideration because he was known to be a man of wealth, and just as Newman welcomed the accession of Pusey, because he had two earls for his two grandfathers, your husband's social position gives him a certain prestige—it is like the jam with the powder."

" I am afraid it all seems to me rather worldly," said Molly.

" Yes, my dear Mrs. Davenant," said the Bishop, putting his hand on her arm in a paternal fashion, " but that is because you haven't a touch of worldliness in your composition; and that is why I want you as a friend, to save me from becoming the prudent and judicious man that bishops are apt to become."

XXII

THINGS went very smoothly after this. The Canon, after finishing his sermon, was in high good humour at dinner. He had been for a very agreeable stroll with Mrs. Phillimore, who had contrived without flattery to increase his self-esteem. He confessed to Molly before they went down to dinner, that he had discovered, somewhat to his dismay, that the pomps and vanities of the world had some attraction for him. " I should hesitate," he said, " to describe this gathering here as a giddy throng, but the social simmering, the freedom of talk, the unstudied jocoseness of the party, finds some response in my mind. At Nan-Zephron, my dearest, it is not so. Alas, I there feel the pressure of the vain-glorious world, the subtle influence of rank and Mammon—it freezes me, and my lips are sealed—but here there is a sanctification even in our mirth; we are merry, as the pilgrims were merry, in the house of Mr. Gaius. I shall not regret having come here. God grant that I shall not crave for a greater frequency of such interludes."

" Oh, Henry," said Molly, " it does you so much good. It only proves what I have said before, that you are too suspicious of the goodness of the world."

" If I thought, my dearest, that there were more of these sanctified households, I should perhaps be tempted to revise my estimate of humanity. But it is not enough to be harmless as doves, except for the pure and guileless, like your dear self. We are bidden to be wise as serpents as well."

They were talking that evening about some of the old sacred stones and cromlechs of Cornwall and what they

stood for. " I would have you observe," said the Canon, " how often these cirques of stone stand for the images of arrested mirth—the Seven Dancers of Bosvedra, the Merry Maidens of Lamorna, and many others. The instinct to dread the abandonment of the human heart to joy is a true one. Even in a temperate and friendly gathering like the present, we must curb our enjoyment—we must remember Jerusalem in our mirth."

" I think that is rather a counsel of perfection," said the Bishop. " Someone said the other day that spiritual progress was sure to be slow, till we all recognized that every day was Doomsday. I don't agree with that—that seems to me to be the shadow of superstition—the fear of provoking a malign power."

" It was nobly said, my lord," said the Canon. " We have to give account of every idle word."

" That would be prohibitive of a good many of the hymns we sing," said the Bishop.

" We must regard hymns as a species of spiritual relaxation," said the Canon.

" Yes, they are certainly much relaxed," said the Bishop. " But my point was that to live happily, we must live unconsciously. We must not take account of every breath we draw, or follow the course of digestion of every morsel we eat. That is to be a valetudinarian."

" Do you never play with your children, Canon Davenant? " said Mrs. Phillimore. " I am sure you do. Does he not, Mrs. Davenant? "

" Yes," said Molly, smiling, " the children decline to listen to my stories or to play with me when my husband arrives."

" How do you reconcile this with your conscience? " said Mrs. Phillimore.

" It would seem," said the Canon, " that I am to be tried

at the domestic bar. Perhaps I do not reconcile it to my conscience. I confess I find the games of children strangely alluring. We play at keeping school together, and when I enact the part of an unruly urchin, they chastise me deservedly. But when they would chastise me unduly, I beg them in pity to desist. Such appeals seldom fail. Thus I initiate them mirthfully into the sorrowful experiences of the world."

This description of the Canon's games with his children proved too much for the chaplain and Miss Phillimore, who abandoned themselves to laughter unreservedly. The Canon was in great good humour, " I perceive that I am misjudged," he said. " But restrain your mirth. It would be painful to his lordship—to say nothing of myself—if two granite monoliths, one on either side of his front-door, remained the unhappy monuments of our hitherto innocent diversions."

Later in the evening a game of whist was suggested, and to Molly's amazement her husband readily consented to play, after saying solemnly that if bridge had been suggested, he could have taken no part in a game which gathered up into itself and enhanced the demoralizing elements which by a proper display of skill could be entirely eliminated from whist. Moreover, as Mrs. Phillimore's partner, he not only played a very sound game, but demonstrated to her with some asperity the disasters which she had brought upon their alliance by not properly attending to his leads.

Molly and the Bishop sat talking quietly beside the fire, but at the end the Bishop said, " You seem to know a great deal too much about the game, Canon. They thought they had invited a dove to join them, but they have caught a serpent."

" Alas," said the Canon, " in my undergraduate days I wasted much irrecoverable time in this unhappy pastime.

No child of mine should ever receive my sanction to indulge in it. Yet it has a curious and attractive mathematic of its own, and in a circle like the present, where no deep corruption need be feared, I may be forgiven for parading the melancholy dexterity which I gained from my youthful indiscretions. We are indeed sadly bound by the chain of our sins! But just as one who has gained money by sinful absorption in business may be forgiven if he applies his gains to good and holy objects, so I may be pardoned if by the scars of my fall I have conduced in any way to an evening of sanctified enjoyment."

There was a loud and general laugh; the Canon surveyed them with a mournful air of resignation; and Molly had a sudden pang at the thought of how little she had suspected her husband of these strange reserves of humour which he had hitherto kept under so severe a repression.

She almost feared, knowing how his moods shifted, that there would be some reaction. But as they were preparing on the following morning to go down to the Cathedral service, he said to her a little shamefacedly, " My dearest, I trust you did not think that last night I deviated from my spiritual character in reviving these old trivialities? I have felt strangely light-hearted in this house, and in any case, it will be a call to increased vigilance and faithfulness in the future."

" My dearest Henry," said Molly. " I delighted in all that happened. You were the life and soul of the party. I am sure they were most grateful to you for the way you threw yourself into what was going on. I feel, indeed, as if I had not done enough to encourage you in these amusements."

" My dearest," he said, " you inspire in me all that is best and highest in my life. These are mere passing diversions. Besides, I regard the presence of the Bishop as in itself a virtual absolution."

XXIII

THE Canon preached a very fine little sermon in the Cathedral, about the discerning of Christian values underneath the social values. His point was that the social values had absorbed into themselves many true Christian instincts and ideas, and that it was a mistake to begin religious life by mistrusting the world. It was not an emotional appeal, most of it, though at the end, as the Bishop said to Molly afterwards, the fire suddenly kindled the wood upon the altar.

Molly had only a short *tête-à-tête* with the Bishop in the course of the day, but she felt much drawn to him by his equable good sense, his unfailing good humour, his great courage and hopefulness; and his brotherly confession of loneliness had touched her even more. He said to her on the Sunday afternoon, when they walked up to the little church on the hill behind the house, that he hoped that if she found any difficulties in her life in which he could be of use to her, she would consult him. He said that bishops had very little authority in modern days, but they had a vague prestige, which made it perhaps easier for them to intervene without impertinence than it was for most people. " We have come down to the humble rôle of peacemakers," he said with a smile; " perhaps it is a pity we did not begin with it! " He went on to indicate with a tender delicacy that he understood that a man like her husband, with an extraordinary power of language, and an originality almost amounting to genius, throwing a peculiar impressiveness into all he did, might find that his words had a more trenchant quality than he himself was

aware; that he would in the future have to mix with a good many of the clergy and that collisions might ensue, " so that if at any time you find any tension existing, I may be able to spare both you and your husband some anxiety. I believe," he went on, " that I can say without exaggeration that I am at least discreet." Molly thanked him eagerly, and said she would not hesitate to do so.

They reached home about midday on Monday, and Molly had never known her husband so gay. She could hardly have understood, even if he had been able to explain it to her, how much this visit, the friendliness of the Bishop, his own acceptance as a man of dignity and position, had meant to him. He had the artist's unassuageable need of recognition, and that it had come to him without his having schemed for it, and as a result of his undoubted gifts, was deeply satisfying to him. He kept breaking into little reminiscences of the visit, how much at home he had felt in the Cathedral, how the other guests had deferred to him, on what far-reaching schemes the Bishop had consulted him.

When they reached home the children welcomed them as if they had returned from the tomb. But Molly was concerned to find a note from Robert asking if she could come up and see Cynthia who was not very well. " It would be a Christian duty to comply," said the Canon. " I will endeavour to fill your place with the children—they shall walk with me. I can do no serious work to-day; it shall be a day of thanksgiving and domestic festival."

Molly sped off to Nan-Zephron after lunch, and found Robert in some anxiety. Cynthia had taken a chill three days before; had resisted it, and gone off on Saturday to look over an outlying farm, and had finally been so obviously wretched all Sunday, that Dr. Grimes had sent her peremptorily to bed. " I have never known her to be

ill before," said Robert, " and I don't like the way she has submitted to the doctor's orders."

" Oh," said Molly, cheerfully, " she will soon be about again—she is the strongest person I know."

Robert took her up to Cynthia's room. Cynthia seemed very bright and cheerful, took Robert's hand in both her own, and put her lips to it, laughing at his anxiety. " I have been overdoing it," she said, " it's just a case of a day or two in the stable and a warm mash. I shall be as idle as I know how."

But when Robert left the room, Cynthia's smile and her gaiety fell from her suddenly like a mask. " I am very ill, dearest Molly," she said. " I have never felt like this before. I am not given to dreaming, you know, but half the night I felt as if I were falling, falling into a pit of darkness."

Molly inquired into her symptoms—they were nothing but a bad throat, a little difficulty of breathing, aching in the limbs.

She did her best to reassure her, but with little effect. " No," said Cynthia, " I am one of those strong people who suddenly goes pop. I have never been able to take a holiday, not that I have ever wanted it; but I feel—how do I feel?—as if I were a boat which had suddenly and softly grounded on a mud-bank. But don't let me talk about myself. How have you fared? "

Molly told her all about the visit, and her husband's success. " He really is an amazingly humorous man, you know. I have often seen it lurking in him, putting out its nose from a burrow like a rabbit. But at Truro it came out into the open. I feel vexed that I haven't encouraged it more. I am afraid I haven't a strong sense of humour myself. But this has really been a tremendous time for Henry. You know his solemn manner? "

Cynthia nodded.

" Well, to my surprise," said Molly, " I think he half *intends* it to be laughed at. The chaplain and Miss Phillimore burst out laughing at the end of one of those tirades of his, and I thought he would be vexed—but there he was, smiling and blushing like a child."

Then Molly went on to tell the episode of her walk with the Bishop. " Yes, dearest Molly," said Cynthia, severely, " Henry is a humourist without knowing it, and you are a flirt without knowing it. Those open eyes, those parted lips of yours make everyone fall in love with you. How dangerous you might have been if you had wanted to be dangerous! Of course, Robert was one of your earliest victims. He won't look at me when you are there. After your last big talk with him, he said to me, " the worst of Molly is that she spoils one for everyone else."

" He is much more devoted to you than he is to anyone."

" Yes, I am necessary to him, and Robert would always be in love with anyone whom he needed. He is a real polygamist."

But a moment later Cynthia became serious again. " Everything tires me, dearest Molly," she exclaimed. " What can I do? "

" Shall I stop and look after you? "

" Henry wouldn't like that."

" Oh, he would allow anything just now; besides with you I am safe—it is Robert's influence he mistrusts."

" No, dearest Molly! If you stayed with me, Robert would be more anxious than ever—besides, I have a nurse coming. Dr. Grimes is bringing her this evening. What am I to do with her? I hate people whom I can't order about."

" I will wait till she comes—would you like that? "

" Yes, dear. I have some things I want to say to you, Molly. They won't make you anxious, dearest? "

" No," said Molly. " I know what it is to be ill, and how unreal all one's ideas become."

" Well then, dear, regard these ideas as unreasonable. I am ill, really ill. What would happen to Robert and Bobby if . . . if I were to die? "

" I wouldn't think about that, Cynthia," said Molly, more alarmed than she cared to show.

" I don't feel to-day as if I were going to die, so it won't hurt me to talk about it. But I felt like it yesterday. I felt suddenly struck down. But if it were so, Molly, it would be a bad business for Robert. He really can't look after himself, I mean in practical ways. He ought to marry again, and it ought to be a young woman. Robert needs youth about him. Don't say I am not young, but I have tried to keep young—harder than I ought."

" You have succeeded, dear."

" They will want him to marry a bustling, managing, well-preserved woman. The sort of woman like Helen Upchester. Don't allow it Molly. He will listen to you—he won't listen to anyone else. Don't mind what I am going to say next—Even if you were free, Molly, I shouldn't wish him to marry you, though of course he would want to. Do you think I am jealous? "

" No, dearest Cynthia. You are quite right. I should never have done for Robert. I knew that at the bottom of my heart all the time."

" You are the dearest friend he has," said Cynthia, " let that be enough. What he needs as a wife is a pretty, good-humoured, sensible girl with a head on her shoulders. I can't suggest one. But you must promise me this, Molly. You must go into it carefully with Agnes Mainwaring—she is the most level-headed of all my friends—and you must somehow *make* him do it. Promise me this."

Cynthia, her fine head pillowed on her arm, looked at Molly with shining eyes.

" My dear Cynthia, this is all really too absurd! "

" I know it is—but you know how practical my mind is. It always turns to facts."

" But these are fancies."

" Well, it will make my mind easier. I hate trailing away from a place without having given all the proper tips—promise, dear."

" Well, I promise," said Molly, affecting to smile.

" Bobby will be all right—he's a dear boy—he would like to have little brothers and sisters . . . that has been part of the price, Molly."

Molly looked at her in silence, wondering.

" Now I shall surprise you again, Molly. I want Henry to come and see me to-morrow, and I want to see him alone."

" Won't that upset Robert? "

" Oh, Robert will know that I don't want to see him as a clergyman. But I *partly* do. I want to talk to him about you, dear, but I want to talk to him about myself. I understand what you feel about Henry, Molly. He is harsh and firm; but when one is in trobule, he will be like a great rock to lean upon. He has no fear—and I am frightened, Molly."

" About what, dearest? "

" Not about myself exactly. I can take things as they come. But I am frightened about Robert. Henry must lend you to Robert for a little."

" Cynthia, you mustn't talk like this."

" I'm not delirious, Molly. I soon may be. I hope I shan't say anything disgusting. You must keep Robert away."

It was at this moment that Dr. Grimes arrived, with a

tall, amiable-looking nurse. He greeted Molly with a pat on her shoulder, he took Cynthia's hand, and asked her some bluff questions. Cynthia liked Dr. Grimes, and answered pertly. He introduced the nurse. " And out you go, Molly—you have made Lady Helford tired. She is going to have tea and be quiet. No, no more talking, nurse. Lord Helford may look in and Master Bobby—but they are not to stop and talk. You hear me, Lady Helford! "

" You needn't be so fierce, Dr. Grimes. You will make me think I am ill."

" You are not very ill, at present; but you can easily make yourself so, if you are not sensible."

He put his arm through Molly's and led her away.

No sooner had the door closed, than Molly said, anxiously, " What do you think about her, Grim? " He put his finger to his lips in sign of silence. The door of a little dressing-room was open in the passage. Dr. Grimes led her in and closed the door. There were bottles on the table, and a curious rough metal cylinder.

" She is ill, undoubtedly," said Dr. Grimes in a low voice, " pneumonia—broncho-pneumonia we call it. But she is a very strong woman, and I think she will pull through. There is no immediate cause for alarm, but we must wait on events. But she is not a very good patient. She is disobedient, and she worries about Lord Helford—she doesn't seem to trouble about herself."

" May I be with her? " said Molly.

" Yes, it will do her good—but she ought not to talk too much. You could spend the afternoon with her."

" She spoke of wanting to see my husband."

" The deuce she did? " said Dr. Grimes, pulling a face. " Why do you think she wants to do that. She doesn't go in for Church things much, does she? "

" I think she wants to ask him to let me be with Lord Helford."

" H'm," said Dr. Grimes. " Yes, I think the more you can be with Lord Helford the better. He is a very nervous fellow."

" Then you approve? "

" My dear Molly, do I ever not approve of anything you suggest? You wind me round your finger—as you do with all of us."

Molly was too sick at heart for any pleasantries. " Does Lord Helford know what is the matter? " she said.

" He does not—I hinted at the possibility. I propose to tell him now."

" Mayn't I tell him? " said Molly.

" Certainly, if you wish—it is not a matter where I should stand upon etiquette. You may believe me or not as you like, Molly, but the telling of these things to the people who love and have to look on, is the one thing I am a complete coward about still."

Molly went straight to the study. Lord Helford started up out of a chair where he had been sitting, smoking and making pretence to read.

" I have had a long talk to her," she said, in reply to Robert's anxious look, " and I have seen Dr. Grimes—he says she has a touch of pneumonia, but she is very strong, and there is no need for any immediate alarm."

He drew a long breath, and raised his hand to his brow, looking at her with a strained expression.

" That's very bad, Molly."

" No, Robert—not yet, at all events. Grim never minces matters—you always hear the worst at once from him."

" Yes, that is so." She could see that he was a little relieved.

" He says that you and Bobby may just look in, but not more. She must not be allowed to talk or tire herself. But she was very much herself this afternoon."

" Sit down for a minute, Molly. Have you had tea?—let us have some. Don't go away just yet."

" One thing will amuse you, Robert. Cynthia wants to see Henry to-morrow. She said that you would know she didn't want to see him as a clergyman. She only wants to borrow me from him for a day or two."

" Yes, dear Molly—do come and spend all the time here you can."

When Molly got back home, the Canon seemed rather disposed to be aggrieved at her long absence. " I have tired the children out, my dearest, and I have tired myself out too. It seems to me strange that the Helfords should not have divined that you would wish to spend a day at home after your long absence."

" Please don't say that, Henry dear," said Molly; " Cynthia has pneumonia—she has a nurse, just arrived—I had a long talk to her, and she is no worse to-day, but Robert seems distracted. Cynthia wishes to see you to-morrow morning."

" What is that? " said the Canon, staring at her in blank amazement. " Lady Helford wishes to see me? Think you that she desires some spiritual help?—her affliction would thus be fruitful indeed."

" Oh, Henry, it is simpler than that. She is frightened of what may happen—not for herself; I think she is the bravest creature I know—but for Robert; she holds his life together for him."

" I do not know Lady Helford as well as you do, my dearest," he said; " and it would be useless and worse than useless for me to express an opinion. Of her courage and dutifulness it were idle to speak. But, I ask myself, has her life known any sanctification? "

" Well, Henry," said Molly, with a sense of secret revolt against this summary judgment, " you will see her to-morrow, I hope, and be able to judge for yourself. She seems to me one of the most entirely devoted and brave people I know or could imagine."

" I trust your judgment is the true one," said the Canon. " Far be it from me to set up my imperfect opinion against yours, my dearest. I will say no more."

XXIV

ALL that night, Molly, waking again and again from troubled sleep, felt herself the prey of an insupportable anxiety. Cynthia had not looked ill, had not spoken in the withdrawn and hollow voice of illness. Her glance had been as clear, her tone as emphatic as ever. But the deliberate way in which she had faced the situation, and the concise bareness of her talk, as of one forced to arrange much in a short time, seemed to her unlike anything which Cynthia had ever thought or said before. She walked up to Nan-Zephron with her husband, the misery gnawing at her mind, though it was clear to her that Henry did not think seriously of it. Robert met them, and said Cynthia did not seem any worse. Presently Cynthia sent down a message that she would see Henry.

She was sitting up in bed, propped with pillows, and with a purple fur-edged tippet round her shoulders. She looked, Henry thought, singularly noble and tranquil; but he was struck with a certain remoteness in her air. She spoke clearly, but with much coughing at intervals. She asked the nurse to leave them. " You shouldn't talk very much, my lady," the nurse said, as she withdrew, to which Cynthia replied by a smiling nod.

Henry shook hands with her in silence. " It is good of you to come so promptly," said Cynthia, " I have one or two things I must say to you, but I must be brief—I have not much breath." She lay silent for a moment, looking at him. " You know I am going to die? " she said, suddenly.

The Canon murmured some conventional protest.

" Well, at all events, I know it," she said, " which is all that matters. But this is the point, Henry. You have made my dear Molly very happy—and I am more than grateful for that. She is entirely devoted to you. But you must not spoil her life. Molly is one of those who will give all that is demanded of her and more. But, Henry, you do not wholly trust her."

" You are mistaken," said the Canon, knitting his brows and turning pale. " I trust her implicitly—I trust her far better than I trust myself."

" That may well be so," said Cynthia. " But you do not trust Robert and his friendship with her—and if you trusted Molly as you say, you would have no fear of any friendship she might have."

" Lady Helford," said the Canon, " your logic is relentless. But I will speak as plainly as you have done. It is not that I do not trust Lord Helford as a man of honour. He has said, in times past, many bitter and wounding things to me, which are forgiven. But his view of God and man—for he ignores God and despises man—is intensely repugnant to me. I see him industrious, able, public-spirited—but I ask myself on what it is all based, and I ask in vain. My wife is, I believe, the purest and tenderest soul alive, and I cannot bear that this stainless soul should be tarnished—that is my fear."

" But," said Cynthia, with some difficulty, " what if Molly sees, too, that Robert is not a wholly happy man—what if she is trying in her own way to help him to be happier? What have you ever done or tried to do to put Robert on what you would consider the right track? "

" He has given me ample evidence of his contempt of all that I hold most dear. He thinks of me as holding ridiculous beliefs, and as a builder-up of high-sounding phrases."

" And so, as a priest, you mistrust and despise him? You forgive him, as you call it, and wipe your hands of him."

" These are hard words, Lady Helford. What could I have done that I have left undone? "

" Henry, I don't want to quarrel with you—and now less than ever. I can respect your beliefs, though I do not share them. If I seem to speak harshly, it is because you are harsh yourself. If I were to plead with you, you would think me weak. You have no pity. You claim everything from Molly, and you cannot bear that she should give the least atom of love to others, because you claim it all for yourself. If you are surrounded with care and love yourself, you have little thought of others' needs. The only happiness you concede to others, is what you yourself permit them. You can and do help others, but you cannot bear that they should go straight to God for it—it must come through you."

" Is not that the duty of a priest? Is that not why he is called—to interpret God to other souls? Are they not free to choose whether or no they will receive grace through the appointed channels? "

" So that if you have not the time or the inclination to go in search of the lost sheep, it must continue lost? " said Lady Helford.

" I did not come here to be told my duty by . . . by——"

" By an unbeliever," said Cynthia. " Well, tell the Bishop exactly what I have said, and ask his opinion."

" It were unseemly to discuss myself further," said the Canon. " Your words are not unnoted. But I came to see if I could be of assistance to you."

" There is only one way in which you could help me, Henry. I care little about myself. I have made many mistakes, and have done foolish and cruel things, though I

did not know them to be foolish and cruel at the time. But I do not repent of them, and I would not undo them. Whatever Power put me in the world is taking me out of it; and that Power has been kind to me, and has turned my worst mistakes into blessings. But Robert will need help, and I cannot bear to leave him unhelped. Let Molly help him. Robert understands her idea of God, even if he does not understand yours. I don't pretend that I am happy to die—I am most miserable, because I must leave Robert—but if I thought that you would let Molly do her best for him, I should be more content."

" Yes, Lady Helford, I can promise that—and I will do my best to keep my promise. It may be that I have been selfish; but God forbid that I should deny to others the precious gift that Molly has given to me."

Lady Helford put out her hand. " Good-bye, Henry," she said. " Whatever I have said, I know you to be a man of your word. You have helped me—I don't even know that we disagree as much as you think. But you are afraid of the wrong things."

A violent fit of coughing seized her. She made a sign that he should touch a bell beside her; and the nurse hurried in. The Canon went to the window and looked out. He was very unhappy. He felt that a mirror had suddenly been held up to him, and he did not like what it had revealed.

" No pity . . . fearing the wrong things." Were these true words?

The nurse touched him on the arm; " Lady Helford thinks you might wish to say a prayer," she said. He knelt down at the side of the bed and said the Lord's Prayer. Lady Helford put her hand for a moment on his, smiled at him, a smile full of meaning. He went out, troubled and wondering.

He met Dr. Grimes coming along the passage, who greeted him with a look of surprise. " How is she? " he said in a low voice. Dr. Grimes shook his head and went on.

Downstairs he found Robert and Molly talking together on a sofa in low tones. The old insurgent impulse of dislike surged up within him, but he crushed it down.

" Lady Helford seemed wonderfully herself," he said, in reply to Lord Helford's look. Then he turned to Molly, " I must return, dearest," he said; " you will wish to remain here, and I will not expect you back until I see you. I will take charge of the children." He went rapidly away.

A few minutes later the nurse came quickly into the room and said that Dr. Grimes wished them to come at once. They found Cynthia deadly pale, breathing heavily. She opened her eyes wearily as with a great effort, smiled at them both, murmured a few unintelligible words. Then her head fell back and she died, holding a hand of each.

Robert stood, pale and dark-eyed, looking down at her. He kissed the hand he held, and looked dizzily round. Molly, at a sign from the Doctor, went to him and led him out. When they had closed the door, he said to her faintly, " No dear, not now—leave me by myself. Will you find Bobby and tell him?—don't let him see her."

Later in the day the Canon came up, having heard the news. He did not ask to see Lord Helford, and Molly went out to speak to him. He was very grave and pinched of aspect. " I will not speak of this, dearest," he said. " I am too sore bewildered—I am sending your things up. Stay here and do what you can. Were it not best that Bobby should come down with me?—he will be happier with the children—they will console each other in their own way."

" Dearest Henry," she said, putting her arm round him. " How good of you! Yes, that will be best, of course." She went and told Robert. " Oh, that is good of him! " he said, but did not move from his chair. Molly went and found Bobby—his father had sent him out into the garden. He ran to her and clung to her, dazed with childish grief, and went very willingly, the Canon shouldering Bobby's little bag, and talking quietly to him. She went back to Robert, who sat dry-eyed at his table, writing necessary letters. She sat down at another table, wrote, too, as he directed, and occasionally he asked her a question. He made all necessary arrangements with perfect self-control. So the dull hours wore themselves away with leaden-footed delay.

XXV

MOLLY'S grief for Cynthia, great as it was, was a thing which it seemed to her must be deferred for a time and not indulged, and her only desire and task appeared to be to find some means of comforting and helping Robert. He would not speak of Cynthia at all. He did all that had to be done with rigid precision, but he appeared to Molly to be like some soft creature of the sea torn from its shell and tumbled on the hot and thirsty sand. He missed his wife at every turn. It had not been in one sense an intimate relation. One of Cynthia's most practical virtues had been that she made no claim to share the workings of Robert's mind, and so far from being jealous of those who did, she encouraged by all the means in her power Robert's companionship with those who shared his interests in politics, literature and art. But Robert's mind was a solitary one. Molly, for instance, knew nothing of his political aims or artistic visions, except by chance; what he communicated to her was his criticism of and attitude to life, and his view of the personalities with whom he came in contact. Molly could, in fact, hardly picture to herself what his relation with Cynthia had been. He admired Cynthia's beauty, the unfailing grace of her presence, her fresh and wholesome vitality, and he depended entirely upon her advice in all practical concerns. Deeply as he grieved for her, and acutely as he missed her constant attention to his smallest needs, her unfailing good nature, and the cheerful unconcern with which she faced the little contretemps which his sensitive nature dreaded, it yet seemed to Molly that,

deeper than all, he suffered from a sullen resentment at a blow which had shattered his defences; and she could devise no means of reassuring him.

The Canon had told her in a guarded way something about his last interview with Cynthia, though characteristically enough he said nothing of the indictment of his own methods and instincts which she had framed. But for the time being, his jealousy of Robert seemed to have evaporated. He pressed Molly to remain with Lord Helford, he took charge of the children, including Bobby, who remained with them.

" Lady Helford," he said, " displayed in her last talk with me a degree of devotion to her husband which I had by no means suspected. I cannot say that I thought her a spiritually-minded woman. She seemed strangely oblivious of her duty to God, which appeared to occupy no place in her mind. Yet I am compelled to revise my estimate of her. I deemed her a worldly woman immersed in business and social measures. I now discern in her, I cannot say a disinterested view of life, but a determination to safeguard in all respects her husband's interests. There seemed no room for any other thought in her mind. I could not feel satisfied that she discharged the *whole* duty of man, but her loyalty to her husband was beyond praise. She was very insistent that if she were taken away, we should do all we could to help Lord Helford; and though I could not but feel that her method of dealing with Lord Helford perhaps tended somewhat to emasculate his character, by guarding him from the normal cares of a high position, yet I feel it to be a duty for us to fulfil her wishes as far as possible."

Robert himself depended pathetically on Molly's presence. One day he seemed to be disposed to discuss his immediate prospects.

" I ought to be going back to town, Molly," he said abruptly to her. " I suppose they could do without me, but I can be useful in the House. What *ought* I to do? "

" If you feel you can go back to work, Robert, I am sure it would be best."

" But what can I do without her? " he said, with an irritable gesture. It was almost the first time he had spoken of Cynthia. " I am a broken reed without her. How can I pick up all the threads? I ought not to have left everything to her, as I did. It was that which broke her strength down."

" She enjoyed it, Robert. I think she had a very happy life. It is not the work which one enjoys that breaks one down—it is anxiety and disappointment and lack of work and interest which damages people."

" You don't think she blamed me? "

" Blamed you, my dearest Robert? What she did for you was the joy of her life."

" It is a fiendish business, life! One is encouraged to go on one's way, everything is smoothed out, one is drawn into complete and utter dependence upon someone, only to have the whole contrivance smashed to bits before one's eyes. She did not want to die; she loved life, every moment of it. And where is she now—who can tell us? Even the beloved Henry can only talk amiably about celestial choirs! "

" Don't speak bitterly about Henry, dear," said Molly. " He was filled with admiration in that last talk with Cynthia for her devotion and love. He only desires to help."

" How can he help? One minute she is beside me, smiling, loving me, keeping all trouble and mortification from me; and the next minute the door slams and she is gone. A loving dispensation, no doubt—but for whom? "

" Don't let us talk of that," said Molly. " I feel deep down in my heart that somehow life does not contradict itself. But let us speak of your wishes and plans."

" I have neither," said Robert. " My life is broken to pieces."

" If you went to London, Robert, is there anyone, any relation of yours or hers, who could be of use to you? "

" No one but yourself, Molly—and you are tethered here. You have missions to attend! "

" Robert, don't try to make me more miserable than I am. Quite apart from yourself and from all it means to you, do you think that Cynthia's death means nothing to me? "

Her voice faltered into tears. " Forgive me, Molly," he said, coming up to her and putting his arm round her. " It is horrible and atrocious of me to speak like this—no one can help me but you, and you know it."

She smiled at him, and took his hand in both her own. " Robert," she said, " of course I can't leave Henry alone here with the children. But could you stand all four of us in London for a month? I think it might be good for Bobby to have the children."

" Bobby, yes," he said. " What can I do for him? It breaks my heart to see him, and yet I can find no word to say to him."

" You can have him with you a little more," said Molly. " He is deeply devoted to you, and he is bewildered. But if you could take all of us in, I don't think you would find Henry troublesome. He has work to do, and he will enjoy the London churches. I could be much at your disposal, and we could discuss what should be done."

" But Henry would never allow it, Molly. Of course it is what I should like best."

" I think he will do anything he can. He always does faithfully whatever he undertakes. Shall I speak to him? "

" Yes, Molly dearest, do—the idea of having you with me for a little is the first comfort I have had. You are far too patient with me. I feel so horribly alone and lost."

XXVI

MOLLY propounded her scheme to the Canon. To her surprise he consented willingly enough. "We must do what we can to help the poor fellow," he said, "and somehow this helplessness of his endears him to me. He seemed to me before this so enveloped in armour of proof against all calamity and untowardness, so furnished with strength and resource and masterfulness and disdain, that I had believed he could not be wounded. Would it could lead him to substitute for his earthly weapons the heavenly panoply! I shall be strangely uprooted—but a sight of London may be good for the children—it may kindle their imagination somewhat. Here we are circumscribed, it would be idle to deny. My presence, I will take care, shall be in no way obnoxious to the sufferer—and," the Canon added, in a somewhat shamefaced way, "I may admit to you, my dearest, that since I have engaged in this larger spiritual warfare, my heart is hot within me. I would fain see face to face the kingdoms of the world and all their glory, that I may not be unaware of what it is that I have to do batttle with. Spiritual wickedness in high places—that next I would discern. It is or may be as an inspection of the forces arrayed against us! And then, I must frequent great preachers. One cannot graft another's style upon one's own, but I must look into other methods of presentment; I must spoil the Egyptians—for my brethren in the great metropolis, however blurred their spiritual insight may be, are at least adepts in rhetorical devices unknown to the lonely student. Yes, dearest, we shall do well to go, and may even receive profit, though not

unmindful that our main business is a work of charity and mercy."

Molly was thankfully amazed by the cordial approval given to the scheme.

All went well. Robert was much averse to going by train, and motored up with Molly and Bobby. The Canon, with the nurse, conveyed the children next day by train.

Molly was glad that she had accompanied Robert. It was evident that his return to a scene, so closely connected with Cynthia at every turn, was a real agony to him. But he bore himself, she thought, very gallantly, and bestirred himself to make arrangements for the comfort of the children, and of the Canon in particular, to whose use a small and secluded sitting-room was allotted. But the first evening had a tragic serenity, which Molly felt she could never forget. Cynthia was absolutely identified with the house, as its life and centre. Every order had come from her, and there had been no detail too small for her to keep in mind.

Bobby went off to bed early, and the two were left alone together. " Where shall we sit? " Molly said, as she entered the little drawing-room used by the Helfords when they were alone. " No, not that chair," said Robert, hurriedly, and then correcting himself, " Yes, dear Molly, sit there. One must not be at the mercy of all these details." She sat down near the fire, and Robert came and sat on a settee along the wall, so that he was close to her. While Bobby was with them, they talked fitfully; but Robert sent him off to bed, kissing him affectionately, and holding him for a moment in his arms. Bobby came and embraced Molly fervently, expressing dumbly his relief that she was there with them. When he had gone—the house was very quiet, in its warm and lofty dignity—Molly, turning to Robert, saw with distress the awful look of fatigue and

misery on his face, a sleepless anguish as of a man pricked by innumerable stings. She would like to have gathered him into her arms and pillowed his head upon her heart—but this impulse she resisted, and took his listless hand in her own and kissed it. " Robert dearest," she said, " I would give my life to bring you any sort of ease or comfort. There must be *some* way out, some way that we can find together." He looked at her gently, but seemed too much worn out even to smile a response. " Ah, dearest," he said, " if you could but have taken her place, there would be some comfort then—she would not have wished otherwise, I think. But we are apart, you and I. And yet you are even nearer to me, in many ways, even than she was. I could not always read her mind. She had a strong will, but she bent it always to anticipate and fulfil my wishes. I sometimes think she might have schooled me more, though I could not have said this to her. But I can read your mind, Molly, as I can my own. Ever since she died, you have thought nothing of your own sorrow. Again and again I have seen you turn your back upon it, though I cannot quite understand what your sorrow for her is."

" It is so many things at once," said Molly. " It is the missing of one who was always brave and true, and could not deceive; and in whose eyes one could always see a love that came out to meet one; and then there is the wonder why, when she loved life so much, she had to go—and the wonder as to where she is gone and what she is—lost in the dark, perhaps," said Molly, faltering. " And then there is all that the loss of her means to you—it is heart-breaking to sit by and see one whom one loves suffer horribly, and to be unable to do anything to bring it to an end—and there is Bobby, too."

They were silent a little, and then Robert said, " I can't sorrow like that, Molly. I suppose it is for myself that I

am sorrowing. I don't even know if Cynthia exists at all—and if she does, she will be as brave and as decided as she was here . . . but I am not going to go on being helpless like this. I have been stunned, but life is coming back to me. I have my work to do, I have Bobby to look after. I must simplify things somehow. I can't do all that Cynthia did. I shall make a clean sweep of everything except this house and Nan-Zephron . . . but it isn't that which I am afraid of. It's the loneliness of it all. I haven't the trick of finding my way into other people's hearts. I am afraid of giving myself away, suspicious of others' unlikeness—of their contempt. Many people seem to me stupid and base; and even the decent ones are fortified with principles and conventions which appear to me meaningless. Now that Cynthia is gone, my heart comes running back to you—you seem my only hope."

" Don't let us look too far ahead, Robert. We are together now, and we will wait, and see what we can devise. I had a long talk with Cynthia, when she thought she was going to die, about everything. I can't tell you yet what she said. But I shall not fail you."

They talked a little more, vaguely and fitfully; and when at last she rose to go, he caught and held her in a long embrace.

XXVII

THE next day the Canon arrived with the children, and Molly had to plan the arrangement of the disjointed household. Bobby, she found, had been attending a day school, and Austin was sent there too. A young and enthusiastic teacher was discovered to come in and give Cynthia a few lessons in the mornings. Molly was chiefly concerned about her husband. But the Canon proved to be the easiest part of the problem. He had a friend who was working in a small College of Mission priests in Holborn. He spent a good deal of time with them. He shared their work and their services, and announced with a solemn glee that he proposed to master the pathology of the human heart. The days settled down to a sort of routine. Robert held many political consultations, gave interviews, attended the House of Lords. The evenings had at first been a source of anxiety to Molly, but the Canon proved a considerable help. He had many singular experiences in Holborn, which he related at dinner in a still more singular manner, with a strange mixture of tenderness and humour. After dinner he used to efface himself. Molly, meanwhile, did the honours of the house, and received the few callers, mostly relations, who paid their respects. In the late evening she sat with Robert, who sometimes worked and sometimes talked. Molly was more than relieved to find that his moods of acute depression seemed less frequent. A different kind of intimacy grew up between them; the intimacy of daily habitude and common problems.

One of Molly's earliest visits was made to Lady Agnes

Mainwaring, whose name Cynthia had mentioned to her. She was warmly welcomed by a little brisk and bright-eyed woman, to whom she told what Cynthia had said, and was surprised to find it received with deepest emotion. " Cynthia was my best friend," said Lady Agnes, through her tears—" almost impossibly so! We were at school together, and Cynthia ruled us all with a rod of iron. She allowed no sentiment—we often said that she was intended to be a man, and she used to evoke the strangest romantic passions among the girls. But she had, though she was good-natured enough as a rule, an extraordinary power of being crushing. ' Don't let me hear another word of this nonsense,' I can hear her saying. But she took a fancy to me, and I found out almost by accident how affectionate she could be. But when she went out into the world, I was, I believe, her only confidante. She hated mean, malicious, unclean things with all her heart, and loathed the sort of young men that made love to her. Then Robert came along, and though I don't think she was in love with him, she was immensely flattered by his attentions, and puzzled about him. But she squabbled with Lady Ann, and there followed all those wretched troubles with Robert. He despised her intellect, and said many bitter and wounding things to her. His mixture of strength and weakness appealed to her; but she did not feel she had anything to give him—and that's the first condition of loving. I expect you know more of what happened later than I do. Of course, she was jealous of you at one time, but I shall never forget her delight when she found out what you were really like. She said to me that she had found in you someone whom she could absolutely trust, and could love even more than she trusted. I'm going to say something very extraordinary to you. When she and Robert patched up a reconciliation, she fell deeply in love with him. She found out that though

he was very sensitive, he had really an amazing strength and toughness of character, and perceived that however much he felt things, he could still go on his way wretched but unchecked. I remember her saying to me that she was brave, simply because she had no imagination and could only see one thing at a time—but that Robert was brave in spite of an imagination that built up all possible consequences and unpleasantnesses in the most vivid way. But so essential did she think you to Robert's happiness, that she positively talked over with me, in that calm way of hers, what steps she could take to get herself divorced, so as to leave him free to marry you. Can you believe that? But I stuck to it that *she* was the wife he wanted—and soon after his own affection began to revive. But if Cynthia had really felt that his happiness demanded freedom, she would have thrown herself into the bottomless pit to get herself out of the way."

" Ah, I never guessed all that," said Molly, " yet it does not surprise me in the least. But what can we do? "

" Nothing at present," said Lady Agnes. " Robert is the last person in the world to do anything for sensible and prudential reasons. He will have to fall in love."

" But as we are being so frank," said Molly, smiling, " he is at the present moment in love with me."

" No wonder," said Lady Agnes, smiling at her. " But in any case I doubt if he ought to marry anyone like you. I expect you are a person who gets her own way? "

" Not intentionally," said Molly.

" Ah, that's the worst kind of all," said Lady Agnes. " But I doubt if Robert is as unhappy as he thinks. He has had a great shock, no doubt. But only very big people and very little people can be thoroughly unhappy, and Robert isn't either quite big enough or quite little enough for that. I don't forget that you love him. After all, he is the kind

of man that *does* evoke the love of women. The very big man doesn't need it—the little man can't win it. But Robert is the sort of man who can play a great part in the world without being vain. He has a sharp-edged mind, and yet he is something of a dreamer too; and then there is his great personal charm. It seems rather dreadful to be talking like this about filling Cynthia's place—but yet I can imagine how furious she would be if from reasons of sentiment we refused to discuss it. I will think it all over carefully, and we will have another talk soon."

Molly came away much lightened by this talk. She had a strange feeling, almost as though Cynthia herself had been present; she remembered how at any crisis Cynthia never said, " This is too awful for words," or tried to probe into the causes or effects of anything, but always said, " What can we do? " and made notes on the little pad that always lay on her writing-table. Yes, there was certainly a sound as of Cynthia in the air. Cynthia, alert and calm, seemed to lean from a hidden window and wave to her.

XXVIII

ANOTHER visitor she had, who did much to restore her balance of mind. The Bishop came lightly in one afternoon to ask how things were going. It was now November, and he wanted the Canon in December. " But I am not going to let him take *you* away this time. How is the great man? I will tell you as a secret, that I am getting him invited to preach at St. Paul's and the Abbey. That is the best of your husband, that he never comes short of expectations. Moreover, I want to take him to lunch with the Archbishop, who has heard of him and is curious to see him. Will you allow that? "

" Of course," said Molly. " I don't think that these things ever do Henry anything but good. He doesn't force himself upon people, and so invitations appear to him as testimonies to his work. I made the mistake once of thinking him self-sufficing and indifferent to praise—but recognition is like sunshine to him."

" Our English suspicion of praise," said the Bishop, " is one of our most expensive qualities. We are really a diffident folk, and enjoy praise so much that we cannot believe it to be wholesome or right. It is a convenient thing, however, for the few people like you and me, who use praise judiciously, because while it is so rare, it is more thirstily valued."

Presently he inquired about Lord Helford. " I have no doubt it has been a knock-down blow to him," he said, " but he isn't the sort of man who collapses. I ought to say some of the conventional things perhaps, but I did not know Lady Helford well enough to understand her, and I

doubt if she approved of me. I expect she would agree with Maurice that the temptation of the spiritual man in all ages is to be a liar and a sneak! But she was one of those vivid natures who make it easy to believe in immortality—a strong, fresh force like that cannot cease to exist. I am not going to pretend, to you at all events, that I have any sort of definite idea how people exist under disembodied conditions, but our business is somehow to bridge gaps. The sentimental person feels it a duty to leave gaps unbridged, but there is no time for that. If life goes on, we need not inquire *how* it goes on—that is the least fruitful of all speculations. If it doesn't continue, the speculation is more fruitless still. But don't think that I am trying to brush all the pain and uneasiness of grief aside. That is the price we pay for love—and it is worth it—but it has to be paid. No one can be comforted, and if they can, they are not worth comforting. The thing is to face life under the new conditions."

Molly smiled and nodded. " There is one thing I would like to ask you," she said. " I don't want Robert to get in the way of depending too much upon me to do things in my prosy way, for I shall have to leave him, and the whole situation will have to be faced again. Ought I to cut adrift altogether? I have no doubt that he ought to marry, but that can't be forced upon him. What I am afraid of is that if I slipped away now, he would simply mope."

" No," said the Bishop, " it is possible to be too bracing! Get him to come down to spend Christmas with you. Don't be in a hurry. It is a pity he has so little religion. I have an old-fashioned belief in prayer as a very real thing indeed—I even believe it to have a scientific basis."

" I am afraid that the last thing Robert would do would be to begin praying when he was in trouble. That he would think very base."

" I am not sure he would not be right. It is a healthy impulse, at all events not a morbid one."

" I don't want to be under false pretences," said Molly. " I am afraid that formal prayers, read from a book or composed beforehand, are very little good to me either. I believe very much in a sort of looking up, both when one is very happy or very unhappy—but the moment it gets beyond a thought, it seems unreal. May I give you a silly illustration? When I am travelling by train I like to go at intervals and look at the engine. I feel an affectionate gratitude to it for being so hot and dusty and oily and strong, but I couldn't write a poem to it! That is what I feel about prayer—the terrible amount that God has to do and think of! I couldn't come pushing in with a small bill! "

The Bishop laughed. " I ought to say that is profane," he said. " But one has to get to the other side of things like prayer and the sacraments somehow. I reached it through a very ordinary door, the door of religion, which has to serve for most of us. But when I pass through, I find you and one or two other wonderful people there already—I can't conceive how you got there! "

XXIX

THE Bishop acted promptly, as he always did. A day or two later the Canon, with a triumphant solemnity of mien, handed Molly a letter from the Dean of Westminster inviting him to preach there at an evening service. She read it and handed it back to him, saying, " How splendid, Henry! You have no doubt about *that*, at all events? " He shook his head, " In one sense, no, my dearest," he said. " I go where I am sent. But I am bewildered in the depths of my heart. I know not how to interpret these high favours which are shown to me. In the old days of darkness and humiliation, when God seemed to be taking away from me even the little trust committed to me, when my hearers at Polcrello became fewer every month, and I was myself enwound as with snakes by the most sordid subterfuges of poverty—in those days it seemed to me like a despairing dream that I should ever be permitted to plead the cause of God before the world. Once, indeed, my dearest, when I was in London in those days, and heard a subtle and cold-hearted priest preach from the Abbey pulpit what seemed to me a lean and cringing Gospel, betraying, it seemed to me, with a kiss, the inmost secrets of his faith, my heart burned within me to have stood there in his place—to strike the rock like Moses for the refreshment of the toilworn host. How far away it seemed, as I sat there poor and despised, my heart the prey of thievish malignities!—and now my Lord and Master showers upon me His favours day by day: I am to preach the living Gospel over the bones of kings and statesmen."

He looked at her, his eyes flashing and his head uplifted.

" But, Henry, you have won all this by your gifts, your work, your experience—what is there to doubt about? "

" I ask myself, my dearest," said the Canon, " whether, behind all this show of honour, there may not lurk some snare of Satan—for these high choices, if over-confidently made, provide materials for our bitterest falls. Am I to be tested and found wanting? Even though I preach to others, I myself may be a castaway. If I glory in my gifts and honours, if I delight in promotion and consideration, a worse thing may come upon me. Were it not better to avoid with proud abstention these occasions of falling, and pray to be delivered from temptation? "

" Dear Henry, I can't understand this. If God sends big things for a man to do, isn't it very suspicious to try to find poison in the cup? "

" Dearest, you have a discerning instinct. I must not turn my back upon an opportunity merely because I mistrust my own frailty."

A week later came the Bishop's invitation. He did not leave the Canon any choice. He simply said that the Archbishop wished to make his acquaintance, and had asked him to bring the Canon to luncheon at Lambeth.

The Canon went in some trepidation, and Molly did not see him till dinner, when Lord Helford, who had been told of the invitation, asked him what had happened, and what he thought of the Archbishop.

" A truly pathetic figure," said the Canon. " He seemed to me a man of earnest piety and great administrative ability endeavouring to strike an uneasy balance between time and eternity."

" But I want to hear *all* about it," said Molly.

" I drove there with the Bishop," said Mr. Cuthbert,

with much relish—" we passed by towers of stone and battlements more befitting a fortress than a place of peace. Great gates were clanged and swung open—high archways bestrode the road. We were conducted up a great stairway to an immense and richly-furnished room overlooking a great garden. There were other guests of whom I could take but little account. A lady of gracious demeanour greeted me. We conversed of trivial things, I with such calm as was granted me. Other ancient females hemmed me in. His Grace entered with a rapid step, and the Bishop presented me, having notified me that no special act of homage would be required of me. We walked along great corridors among bowing menials."

" Oh, come," said Lord Helford, " I believe the Archbishop lives very simply."

" Perhaps I exaggerate," said the Canon, " in my awe-struck condition I seemed aware only of multitudes. I am certain at least that a liveried footman held the door open. We sat down in a great hall, hung with portraits, and to my amazement, His Grace desired me to sit by him. Rich dishes were proffered at my elbow—I waved them away. His Grace spoke of my work in Cornwall; he questioned me as to the comparative strength of various denominations. I said, I hope with courtesy, that I regarded all such statistics as tares sown in the field of Christian endeavour. He spoke about the need for organization, and I said that to organize insufficient forces served but to emphasise their weakness, while if they were sufficient, organization was unnecessary. He rallied me, not unkindly, on being an individualist, and spoke of diversity of gifts. But he seemed to me a man so burdened by cares of state that he had no leisure for framing or delivering a direct message. I said something of this, and he replied that the care of all the churches was, even in apostolic times, felt as a burden.

" We cannot always choose our function," he said; and I felt him to be a man of tender and faithful heart. I thought at one moment of suggesting to him that he might perhaps do more for the Gospel if he doffed his policies and became a poor curate once again. But this thought I was not courageous enough to utter. He paid me some further civilities, but there was one of the ancient ladies on the other side of me to whom I owed some species of communication. The meal was not protracted. We returned to our original saloon, and I held trivial conference with some of my fellow-guests, who seemed decent and respectful folk. But there was little unction, and few beckonings of the spirit; it was just a decorous and stately domestic gathering, underneath which Christian instincts and principles might fairly be inferred."

" I am afraid you are disappointed?" said Lord Helford.

" No, I would not say that," said the Canon; " if active evidences of Christian effort were lacking, I at least discerned in His Grace a decided undercurrent of Christian purpose. I saw no signs of corruption and many of integrity. The Archbishop was humble in demeanour and accessible. That is much to be able to say. If I was not able to trace a more direct resemblance to the Day of Pentecost, I was able to say to myself that I was evidently dealing with an established Christian order far removed alike from Mesech and from Kedar."

" Well," said Lord Helford, " I am glad you can say as much—a more original account of a visit to Lambeth I have certainly never heard! "

Molly cast a sidelong look at the Canon, who seemed to her to be considerably gratified by this rather one-sided compliment.

The Bishop happened to drop in to tea a day or two later. Molly asked him with much interest about the

Lambeth visit. " Henry gave us an extraordinary account of it. I do not know quite what he expected. He was impressed by the Archbishop's solid goodness, but he described it rather like a scene out of the Arabian Nights."

The Bishop laughed. " The Canon certainly made a great impression. You know the sort of thing it really is —a brief gathering of a few occupied people, who don't want to talk shop, and would like, if they could, to soak a little of the technical flavour out of their minds! The Archbishop was very much attracted by the Canon. He said to me that he felt him to be a mixture of the fervour of Zechariah repressed by the tactfulness of Daniel. He said that the Canon had beautiful manners and a noble appearance—and he added, smiling, that he was like a forest fire reflected in a still pool. I thought that a very fine description."

" It is perfect," said Molly. " The Archbishop must be a darling. I should like to know him."

" That would be easy enough," said the Bishop. " Yes, the Archbishop is a great man. He is old and wise, and he gives me the impression of seeing *through* things by dint of exquisite sympathy and unwearied patience, more than anyone I know. He has never lost a youthful freshness of mind, and he has found out that stupidity is a harder foe to fight than wickedness."

" Henry said that it didn't remind him of the Day of Pentecost at all."

The Bishop laughed loudly—" No, indeed," he said. " But we can't live by a series of explosions."

" Who were all the ancient ladies he spoke of ? "

" Ancient ladies ! " said the Bishop. " Can he have meant the Archbishop's daughters? There were two of them present—they are very nice sensible women; one is married to a parson, Courtenay, who was there."

" I think on the whole," said Molly, " that I had better not go to Lambeth. I am sure I shall be disappointed."

" But there is a practical point I want to mention," said the Bishop, " and in passing, may I drop conventions, and call you Molly—I can't think of you by any other name? "

" Yes, *do*," said Molly. " I shall like that very much.'

" Well, the Archbishop wants to get a good preacher in London. He has discussed it with the Bishop of London. The Archbishop says that the good preachers here, of whom there are several, are a little conventional. There is an ecclesiastical tradition which it is hard to break loose from. He wants something more frankly original. He doesn't want to swamp a man by sending him to a big and perhaps fashionable parish—and I have told him frankly that I can't spare the Canon from Cornwall. But he would like to get the Canon up for, say, a couple of months, to give a course at some big church. There are things called lectureships at some of the older churches; and he says the Canon ought not to be immured in a remote peninsula. What do you think about it? "

" I wouldn't like to drop Henry into London," said Molly. " I am sure that a London parish would kill him—and I don't think he has got parochial gifts. But I am equally sure that a *bit* of London would call out his powers more than anything. He is an architect of words, but he has not got quite enough experience to make bricks with. He doesn't know enough people, or know them well enough to see how skilful people are at concealing all that is best in them."

XXX

IN November the Canon went down to Cornwall for a mission; and the Bishop insisted that he should then come and spend a month with him at Truro, in order to map out the mission work for the diocese as carefully as possible.

Molly and the children were to stay in town, and a week before Christmas they were to go down to Menerdue. Lord Helford, however, gratefully declined to stay with them, though he asked if Bobby might do so. He said that he preferred to be at Nan-Zephron, and he added that he did not want to fall into a morbid habit of avoiding the place. By this time he had sold Colearne and the Somersetshire estates, all but the little manor-house of Wotton Davenant, one of the earliest possessions of the family, which Cynthia had for a time made her home.

The Bishop wrote to Molly about the Canon's visit to Truro. *I have more reasons than one*, he said, *for this. It is quite true that I want to map out the work, but I also want to get as familiar with your husband as possible. He has at present rather a disturbing influence upon me. I forget when I do not see him how unlike other people he is, and what a strange dominance his mind backed by his manner has. Your husband can only carry one thing at a time in his mind—all his will-power and all his imagination is concentrated upon it; and then the dramatic quality of his mind, his emphasis, his tremendous vitality, tend to divert one's own thought-currents. I feel constantly as if I were one of an audience whom he was haranguing—I can't contradict, I can't interrupt. I want to get past this—at present I can only do so when I rather lose my temper and assert myself.*

Then, too, if I may say so, I think you have rather too hard a task before you. Lord Helford admires your husband, but the two could never be quite at ease, because Lord Helford dissembles his principles and purposes, and your husband underlines his. I want you to do your best for Lord Helford, who seems to me to need real assistance to accommodate himself to the ways of the world, which he was rather encouraged to disregard. If he does not do this he will lose some of his effectiveness.

At present you are the only person in whom he has the relief of confiding, and I think he should have that relief.

Molly acquiesced; and she could not help feeling that it would be a relief. Considerate as both Robert and Henry had been, and careful as the Canon was to obliterate himself, there was still a sense of strain in Molly's mind when the two were together. She could see Robert getting restive and perverse under Henry's gigantic assumptions and perpetual grandiloquence, and she could see Henry wince at some semi-cynical remark of Robert's. Indeed, they took each other at surface value, and Molly had to be watchful and employ a constant diplomacy.

One evening they had dined together, and Robert was sitting with Molly in the library. Molly, observing him, was glad to see how much of late he had lost the worn and tortured look of the early days of his bereavement. He was turning over some business documents which had just arrived; when he suddenly raised his eyes and encountered her look fixed upon him.

" Well, are you satisfied? " he said.

" Very nearly—not quite."

" Molly dearest, how this brings me back to the old Menerdue days when we used to sit together. All that has gone between seems like a sad dream. I don't think I ever came so close to life as I did then. There really

seemed some chance of my becoming a reasonable human being."

"You are much more reasonable than you were, Robert. I remember how your suspicion and contempt for other people used to bewilder me. It seemed so little worth while, when you were so far ahead of them."

"But that is just what I am not. I am simply one of the people who partly by good fortune and partly by temperament am fitted to exploit the world. I hate people *en masse*—it humiliates me to be one of a flock, browsing on the same pasture, drinking at the same stagnant pool."

"I can't think why you trouble your head about it—other people don't molest you."

"No, but one has to govern them by a knowledge of their disgusting weaknesses. I don't want to make them any better or happier. I don't think they deserve it—I have no delusions about humanity, or about myself either. I can't think what it is all about. The Power which created man seems to have had such fine ideas and such wretched material."

"It's no good trying to launch me into metaphysics," said Molly. "I don't see things that way."

He looked at her and smiled! "Yes," he said, "it is a sign of ill-health to begin grubbing among the origins. But tell me what I am to do, if you are so severely practical. I must have some new plan. I am living very aimlessly."

"I think you ought to begin to see something of other people."

"Ah, that's the trouble," he said. "People used to be administered to me in little doses by Cynthia—and I used to be cautiously injected into them."

"You ought to be thinking about marrying."

"Oh, good God!" said Robert. "Besides, dear Molly, I am in love with you—Why need I pretend? I thirst all

day for a sight of you, and these evenings are the only faint approach to contentment that I have. No, I'm not going to make love to you, dear," he added, seeing that a shadow passed over her face; " I know that's no use—but I sometimes think what it would be like to carry you off all alone to some great cool house on an island in a lake among the roots of the mountains—to have you always beside me, with no one to intervene—to put all these complications and gatherings and functions behind me—Why isn't it possible? And it doesn't make it easier to reflect that it *is* possible."

" But this rapture would last for about six weeks," said Molly, " and the post would keep arriving, and inquisitive people would begin calling. You haven't enough imagination, dearest. You can't get further than the lake."

" You don't seem to have much use for me, Molly."

" I can't do without you, that's all. But it's no good trying to torture each other—and prosaic as it sounds, that kind of sweetness isn't all. There are more beautiful things."

" Ah, you believe in self-denial."

" Only when one likes it better than giving way."

" But if a thing seems the most beautiful thing in the world, mayn't one follow it? "

" It would not be the most beautiful thing unless we were both agreed about it. But you mustn't push me too hard, Robert; I might give way."

" If I thought that! "

" But you don't! It isn't that I am sensible or cold-blooded or even prudish—I am none of the three. If I were a professional sinner, I should be a very shameless one. It is that you are allowing your sentiment to direct your imagination. You don't trust your imagination as I trust mine. I don't really care what people would say or

think. But there are too many exciting and enchanting things to do, and to do this one thing would cut off a hundred others——"

" But all this seems to me just the quintessence of prudence."

" It isn't prudence, dearest—it's all the other people whom I can't let go—you for one."

" I don't understand."

" Why, Robert, if I yielded, the time would come when you would curse me and even hate me for cutting you off from your real life—don't let us be stupid! "

Robert looked at her for a moment, and then rising and seating himself on the arm of her chair, put his arm round her and drew her to him. She faced him, smiling.

" To think that I can come no nearer," said Robert; " but I love you well enough to do what you wish—do with me what you will."

XXXI

MOLLY and the children, including Bobby, reached Menerdue a week before Christmas. The Canon was to join them two days later from Truro, and Lord Helford was to motor down in the course of the week.

The children were wild with delight at getting back home, and Molly herself, revisiting her village friends at Polcrello, was very much touched to find how much she was welcomed, and how emphatically she had been missed. Then, too, she was deeply moved by the almost childlike delight of the Canon at returning to home ways, and realized from what he said, how cheerfully he had resigned himself in London to what was at best an uncongenial atmosphere. He had, of course, been greatly stimulated by his change of experience in London along the lines of his own work, but he spoke very guardedly about Robert. "His demeanour," said the Canon, "convinced me, as nothing else could have done, of his real devotion to his wife, and on this head I shall have an unshaken regard for him—I had hardly believed him capable of a solid attachment. But, my dearest, you will not resent it if I say that Lord Helford seems to me to erect a barrier of self-will against any accession of spiritual experience. He does not try to discern deeper issues and opportunities in his loss. At times he even seemed to me hardly to believe in the continuance of human existence beyond the grave, and to be practising a mere stoical resignation."

"People are very differently made, Henry. I think Robert has been trying very hard not to be disabled by

his sorrow—it is difficult to believe passionately even in love, if you feel that love itself may come to an end."

" I do not deny his patience and his courage," said the Canon. " Indeed, the courage of one who has no faith in immortality is a matter of bewildered amazement to me. But does he believe neither in divine promises nor human instincts? "

" He has a scientific mind," said Molly; " he needs evidence, and the more he desires to believe, the more anxious he is not to be carried away by emotion."

" To me," said the Canon, " emotion seems to be an infinitely more trustworthy and altogether greater thing than logical reason. Feeling is surely a higher thing than any process of cautious inference."

" I am afraid I don't understand these things," said Molly; " but if they *are* so, it seems to me not to matter much whether one believes them or not; though of course it is more comfortable to believe them."

" Our time on earth is brief," said the Canon, " and our future happiness may depend on our willing acceptance of the truths of faith in our lifetime."

" Oh," said Molly, " I could not believe in the goodness of God at all, if I thought that he could handicap anyone by giving him a sceptical mind, and then requiring him to believe in his lifetime things for which there is little direct evidence."

" I fear that Robert has been arguing these points with you, my dearest ? "

" No, indeed," said Molly, " we seldom spoke of them. What I tried to do was to persuade him not to lose his hold of life altogether. I want him to marry again. That was what Cynthia hoped. The difficulty is to persuade him to see people."

Molly became aware that as she spoke, a certain tension

had been relieved in her husband's mind. He smiled benignly.

" You can put up then a little longer," he said, taking her hand gently, " with your crabbed old husband's limited range of mind? I am always aware that there is a latitude of speculation, a dislike of taking anything for granted in Lord Helford's attitude to life, which is congenial to you."

" Yes, dear Henry, I am afraid I am very undisciplined. But you are very good to me, and let me go my own way. I am happy to be at home again and with you, though I cannot help pitying Robert's loneliness."

" I can grieve for that myself."

He went on to tell her something about his visit to the Bishop. " I feel myself enlarged by my visit. The Bishop is lacking in fervour; he has too great a respect for normality and common-sense considerations. I am no doubt too much inclined to overlook them. But he says rightly that his duty is to all his flock, and he rebukes me for making too close a selection. He begs me to leave something for God Almighty to do. He said to me, ironically enough, but forcibly, that I am too much inclined to anticipate the Day of Judgment, and to address myself to those whose salvation is already assured. He says that our business is by all means to save some, and that Christianity is not a mere vocation but a world-wide society. I oppose him in argument at the time, but a few days pass, and I find myself of his opinion. He has a true regard for you, my dearest; he says that you have a fine spiritual instinct, and bring home the spirit of Christ to those whom I cannot approach. All this I endeavour to apprehend."

They talked a little of what they could do about Lord Helford. " I can't bear to think of him all alone at Nan-Zephron," said Molly. " He would not come here, and

solitude is bad for him. Then there is Bobby. He said to me that he didn't like the idea of his daddy being all alone —couldn't he go there? But Robert doesn't know what to talk to Bobby about. He can chatter to a party of children on occasions, and make the sort of jokes that amuse them— as a sort of performance. But he couldn't sit with Bobby and say little or nothing. He doesn't see that children don't want to be talked to, and talked down to, and he isn't at ease with immature minds."

" If I were in Lord Helford's place," said the Canon, " I should keep Bobby all to myself; he is a dear boy, and visibly touched by the spirit. I think that he might desire to enter into holy orders some day."

" If Robert thought that," said Molly, smiling, " he would certainly take Bobby away from us."

" It shall remain an unexpressed hope," said the Canon.

" But still," said Molly, " I am quite at a loss what to do. I could go there a certain amount, of course; but I want to be more with you and the children now. I can't *make* him invite anyone; and the more I am with him, the more he depends on me for company. I don't grudge him a moment of my time, but I want to get him to act—not merely to bolster him up."

" Could we not consult the Bishop? "

" Yes, perhaps we might—but we mustn't get in the way of turning to him to get us out of all our difficulties. Don't be shocked, Henry, by the way, if you overhear the Bishop calling me ' Molly.' It was his suggestion."

" I should not have supposed it emanated from you," said the Canon, " and a bishop may indulge unchidden in these innocent familiarities. You do not, I imagine, propose to address him as Frederic? "

" Not unless he asks me," said Molly.

Ah," said the Canon, with a sigh, " I fear I am essentially old-fashioned. These oblique sentimentalities, if I were bidden to practise them, would cause me nothing but an abashed confusion of mind. I dare not even say Robert to your cousin. Strange as it may appear, I should shun the interpretation which such as Mr. Vivian would annex to it. But it is not unworldliness in me; it is but the lumpishness of the bourgeoisie."

XXXII

MOLLY became aware at this time that there was a certain shadow over Henry's mind which she connected somehow with his visit to the Bishop. She could not quite interpret what it was. Sometimes he would say a few words which made her think he was going to begin a serious talk, but it all faded away again. She knew by this time that the only way to get Henry to speak freely was to leave him alone; if one questioned him or probed for a thought, it was easy to alarm him. Moreover it was amazing to her what inconceivably small matters might and did develop into a sore in his mind.

Now, it seemed to her, he was brooding over something hidden. He worked away solidly enough, but the buoyant mood had left him; and she realized that his nature was one which could not live happily in the present, but needed to be sustained either by some agreeable memory, or by some interesting future event, which he could anticipate with pleasure.

He went away for a couple of days to preach two special sermons in one of the northern Cornish parishes, and Molly was surprised by a wire from the Bishop asking if he would find her at home in the afternoon.

He came in due course about half-past three. He suggested that they should go and stroll on the cliffs.

" I am always having clandestine assignations now with someone," she said.

The Bishop laughed and said, " Ah, Molly, you are one of those ingenuous *tête-à-tête* people with whom everyone thinks he has a private understanding. It seems to me, by

the way, that a Bishop's life affords quite singular opportunities for flirtation—his assignations and caresses are dismissed as ecclesiastical."

" What has my dear Henry been doing? He behaves as my old spaniel used to behave when he had eaten the bones out of the pig-tub! He goes about with embarrassment written on every feature."

" It's rather a delicate matter, Molly. He blames himself that your faith is not as robust and definite as his own. He thinks that the wife of a canon missioner ought to be more of a dévote. He wants me of all people to urge you to take a more definite line, but he says that it is difficult for him to intervene, because at every minute of the day he behaves like a sinner and you like a saint. ' My dearest Molly,' he said to me, ' doesn't even need an occupation to keep her good.' "

Molly's face relaxed into a smile, " Well, Bishop, won't you proceed ? "

" But, Molly, I feel rather the same myself. I really don't know what your views are, while I am quite sure that your instincts are far ahead of mine—but couldn't you say something which would enable me to tell him that there is no great difference between you and him? "

" There *is* a difference," said Molly, " but it doesn't seem to me important; and I can't put these things into words. I think that Henry and I act on very much the same principles. But I think that the conduct of life—religion, if I must use the word—is a very big affair, and can be applied in many different ways: all it requires is that one should be interested rather passionately in *something* outside oneself—admire it, want to pursue it—some people get it out of art and books, some people, like Robert, out of politics, some people by adventures or falling in love, sloppy people like myself by having to do

with other people; and some people through ritual and doctrine. But it is all a question of the thing seeming beautiful. I am quite sure that Henry's religion appears very beautiful to himself and some others—but what bewilders me is that he and people like him think it is the *only* way to be religious, or at all events the best way; and I can't really believe that God has a preference for that sort of religion, or that He is educating the whole world gradually into practising it. It seems to me something much bigger than that; but it matters little so long as it takes one away from thinking one's own selfish comfort the most important thing in the world."

" That is perfectly clear so far," said the Bishop.

" Oh, but I am much more vague than that," said Molly. " I should judge most ordinary people's nearness to religion—the people in the village here, for instance—more by the number of friends they had than by anything else. I wish I could express it better; but the point is that I think Henry's way is quite a good way—the best for him—but only one of many ways, and he thinks it is the best way for everyone: and I am afraid in my secret heart I should think the world a very stuffy and tiresome place if it was all on Henry's lines. I like variety—don't you? But this is all a very confused statement, and though I tried to avoid it, rather a priggish one."

" It is neither confused nor priggish, Molly—it is very much what I feel myself, though to admit that, lays me open to the retort, ' Then why are you a bishop? ' I think that the Church is a very good society for ordinary people, or could be made so with a little less punctilio. But though I think the Church provides on the whole a good way of life, and particularly for the numerous people who have not got ideas or enthusiasms of their own, I quite agree that there are finer and quicker, though pos-

sibly steeper, ways of getting to God. The Church seems to me a highway—but the genius and the idealist make their own way up the hillside and the crags."

" Then you positively encourage me *not* to fall into line," said Molly, " as long as I can march a little with the soldiers, like the boys and girls in a village when the squad goes through? "

" Yes, Molly, go your own way. If you regarded a bishop's authority, I would order you *not* to conform."

" But I regard *your* authority," said Molly, " though I don't do what Robert tells me *because* he is Lord-Lieutenant! "

" I will put it all straight with the Canon, you may be sure. *He* has some idea of spiritual obedience, though he is one of the most disobedient men I know. But anyhow, I am glad to have had this talk. Would it surprise you to hear that you have done me good? "

" Because it makes your own virtues stand out so much stronger," said Molly.

" Ah," said the Bishop, " they have given up stoning the saints—but the instinct of persecution never dies; and it is far more common among women than among men! "

XXXIII

CHRISTMAS came—never very congenial to Molly. She had little use for anniversaries, and envied her husband his power of putting himself in prescribed frames of mind. The Canon once said to her on Good Friday that sorrow over the sin of the world and his own personal sinfulness culminated in the horrified apprehension of the Passion, but with the Easter light beginning already to shine through. All this Molly felt to be impossible to her. She did not grieve particularly over the sins of the world at any time, unless she was confronted with direct evidence of it; and the Redemption of the world, necessary as she sometimes felt it to be, was a fact in the past, and could not to her be realized by a dramatic effort as being still unaccomplished. Molly had indeed been moved by her husband's vivid descriptions of the Passion to a deep sense of the pathetic loneliness of the Divine sufferer, touched with a physical repulsion for the terrible detail of the scene—but she wondered if any good purpose could be served by dwelling on the bodily anguish of any sufferer; and when the Canon said, as he did with harrowing emphasis, that his hearers must remember that it was the subsequent as well as the previous sin of the world which had made the Divine sacrifice necessary, Molly could only rebelliously feel that the whole transaction, if thus divinely planned, was an expedient that made it harder and not easier to have an implicit faith in the Father's all-embracing love and care.

It was more or less the same with her feelings about Christmas—the Canon claimed the joy of his hearers by

representing it as symbolical of the deepest experiences of family joy—but here again Molly felt that joy must be a spontaneous thing evoked by circumstances, and not an emotion that could be experienced at the word of command about an event which the emotions of humanity had invested with so much legendary detail that it was impossible for her to realize it as a veritable and actual fact—angelic choirs bursting into song under the starry midnight, princes from Eastern lands offering royal gifts to a child born in the shelter of a humble village inn. It was not that she did not realize the touching beauty of the romantic detail. But Molly's mind had no power of creating fantastic imageries and adornments; her emotion was aroused by actual and concrete things, shy caresses and intercepted glances of love, and her pleasure in Christmas arose from the sight of reunited family groups in the village at their gates, rather than in the heavenly pomps of that far-off morning.

Robert made his way to church from Nan-Zephron; and as the Canon in a triumphant voice, which afforded jubilant evidence of his own exaltation, proclaimed the splendours of the Nativity as if it had been the jewelled and apparelled magnificence of an Italian picture, Molly, holding a child's hand in each of her own, watched Robert as he sat opposite her at the end of the carved chancel seat appropriated to Nan-Zephron, with Bobby beside him, and a very different emotion to that inculcated by the Canon filled her mind and brimmed her eyes with tears.

He no longer looked ill; but there was something in his face that she had never seen before. In the happy days of his marriage he looked content, as though his mind was filled with ideas and plans that claimed all his vital energies. He seemed a man freed from all ordinary and sordid cares, and at liberty to move among big and far-

reaching designs. But now there was a deep listlessness about him, a tiredness of soul, as of a disconsolate prisoner. He looked, she thought to herself, like an unhorsed warrior who had lost his shield, wounded and humiliated. She knew so well what he needed, the sense of vigilant resource at hand which Cynthia had always given him; and she lost herself in an unuttered prayer that he might find what he was even too hard-pressed to go in search of. It was as if she had seen some beautiful musical instrument lying unstrung and mouldered. She was aware that if he had been of coarser fibre he would have suffered less—and yet she did not wish him to escape suffering that way.

He raised his eyes and encountered hers fixed upon him, and she saw a little smile play over his face; then she was pleased to see that he put his arm through Bobby's, who looked up gratefully and nestled closer to his father.

They came out of church together; she was pleased again to see Robert shaking hands with all the bystanders; and she was inconsequently amused at the fact that though Robert did little for his tenants, and indeed seldom gave their concerns a thought, his prestige, his natural simplicity of accost, the shadow of his loss, made those handshakes into an august ceremony; and she was aware that the little performance would be more talked about and valued in the village than her own far more exuberant and natural greetings. They would have missed her more, she knew; but she could not communicate this particular thrill.

Robert came to their midday meal, and though the communication between him and the Canon resembled a conscientiously planned but not very spontaneous charade, yet Robert was delightful with the children, and Molly found herself admiring, as she had often done before, the easy dexterity of his talk and his power of comprehending

without effort the exact range of the childish horizon. He repeated the precise details of a Christmas conversation between the owls of Nan-Zephron wood that he had heard overnight, the feathered visitors they were expecting, the anxiety whether there would be enough mice to go round, and the constitution of the Christmas pudding made of holly-berries and sloes.

As soon as the meal was over the Canon announced that he and the children would walk to the Pen-vedra beach, as he had reason to think that a good many shells had been thrown up by the late rough weather, and he hoped there might be some cowries among them. This left Molly free to walk up to Nan-Zephron with Robert. She promised she would be back for tea, after which the Canon was to tell the children a story, followed by games.

They went off together. " I am afraid that all this is a great trial to you, Robert," said Molly.

" Not more than anything else—do I make a very poor show? "

" No one would guess there was anything wrong—you were wonderful at lunch."

" The misery," said Robert, " is that the more you try to forget yourself, the more the misery leaps on one round the corner, and yet I hardly know *what* the misery is."

" That's the worst of all miseries, dear—a misery which one can explain is bearable! "

" But I'm not going on like this. I am taking your advice—besides, I find that solitude up there is absolutely devilish. One remembers, remembers; and whether the memories are pleasant or sad, they bring the same gnawing pain with them; I shall really go out of my mind if it continues; but I'm not going out of my mind. I have actually written to ask Harry Mainwaring and Lady Agnes and their girl to come and spend a few days."

" That is very sensible, Robert."

" We shall see! It gives one something that one must do, anyhow. Agnes was Cynthia's great friend. I hope she won't want to talk about her."

" I don't think she is like that. Cynthia would not have wanted to talk about Agnes, if Agnes had died. You can't talk about the people you love, only about those you like."

" Or dislike," said Robert—" but you approve? I must plough up my mind."

" Do you know the girl? "

" It depends where one meets her—in their house I know her from other people."

" She is quite nice."

" Ah, Molly dear, don't begin on that. You said that Cynthia wanted me to marry—tell me what she said."

" She was very insistent, Robert, and I am sure you ought to know it. It was the day before she died. She had a presentiment she would die, and she had no thought for herself, only for you. She said you needed someone to take off the strain of ordinary tiresome things, otherwise you would take them too seriously and waste your time—and for Bobby's sake too."

She spoke with her eyes cast down, but on looking up saw that Robert was sitting pale and deeply moved.

" Did she say all this? It seems very strange."

" Of course she didn't think she would die so soon—it was a vague presentiment. I didn't think there was the smallest danger, and rather scoffed at her. I don't think she was fully serious either. She half excused herself by saying that her imagination always ran on practical lines."

" But one cannot marry because someone else thinks it advisable. Cynthia may well have thought I could not get on without a wife, considering what she did for me. But one can't marry as one can buy a horse—reckoning up its

points, and deciding after balancing good and bad. Marriage can't be arranged on those lines—and supposing that one married a wife for supposed practical gifts, and it turned out either that she was unpractical, or, what would be worse still, was practical and wanted me to be practical too, it would be disastrous. The wonder with Cynthia was that she enjoyed the whole thing so much, and yet never wanted me to sympathize or even to pretend to be interested."

" Of course, dearest Robert! I ought perhaps not to have mentioned it at all. Her wishes ought not to be regarded as *sacred*. She would have hated that. But I thought you had better know that she had no *jealousy* about it—and there's no idea that she wanted to hurry you into it. The only thing she seemed to be quite clear about was that she didn't want you to marry somebody like me."

" That doesn't sound sympathetic."

" Oh, but Cynthia and I understood each other—and I quite agree. You don't want a sympathetic background—you are a solitary creature, Robert—but business carried on, in which you could intervene if you chose. You want someone definite—now with all my virtues, I am even vaguer than you. We can't fall into line with other people, Robert. It would be like walking with someone who couldn't keep step."

" Couldn't you spend your life with me, Molly? '

" Robert dearest if you were free and wanted me, I would marry you in five minutes, though I don't think it would be a good thing for either of us. But I didn't mean to hustle you, dear. I only want you not to put the idea of marriage out of your mind altogether."

Molly went back to Menerdue early. The custom was that she should have a tea and Christmas tree in the village for the children of the place; the household attended and

helped, and then returned home for tea and presents, after which the Canon told a story. These stories were an unceasing wonder to Molly. He would take a legend and embellish it, and often seemed hardly to know what he was going to say next; but it all came fresh and beautiful, sharply imagined and delicately phrased out of the Canon's mind. He would sit with Cynthy on his knee, his eyes dwelling on vacancy, and she never felt a stronger sense of the beauty of his mind and his genius of expression than then.

To-day he told the legend of St. Christopher, with much new and curious detail. Molly could almost have cried at the sense of dreariness he imported into the life as he depicted it, of the saint, sitting in a wattled hut among the pines in a deep river-valley, with the brown foaming river roaring and rattling its boulders down from the mountain where the snow was melting fast. " He would have liked," said the Canon, " to have been a bright-armoured knight riding from castle to castle, and doing great deeds upon the road. He was as strong as the best of them, he knew, and had the speech and manner of a knight—but he also knew that the only way in which he could please God was by waiting day after day to carry travellers across the river, wading breast high, and thrusting his iron-shod pole among the shingle. So he stayed, and at last, on a winter night, when the wind roared in the pines and the river drove all its tumbling eddies past him, he heard in the wood beside him the crying of a child." He made a long pause, so long that the children besought him to go on, and Molly could never forget how startingly and visibly the old tale came from his lips. He was living in it, Molly knew; and in that evening she saw, as she had never seen before, the grim suppression which all his earlier life and ministry had been.

XXXIV

ROBERT wrote to Molly to say that his three guests were arriving on the following Monday. He said: *As you are to a great extent responsible for my having guests at all, I implore you to come to dinner to meet them and to help me through; and Henry too, if possible. My heart sinks at the idea of having three people on my hands for four whole days—but then it equally sinks at the idea of a perspective of lonely days.*

Molly went to consult Henry, and wondered, as she went, whether it was amusing or the reverse that she could never count upon knowing what her husband would do. This time she determined to make a bold bid.

" Robert wants us both to go to dine on Monday to meet the Mainwarings who are coming to stay with him."

" Who are the Mannerings? The name is unfamiliar to me, save for a romance of Walter Scott's."

" This is spelt differently. Lady Agnes was Cynthia's great friend. Sir Charles is a harmless baronet—the daughter I don't know."

" My dearest, I think I can hardly manage this. My life is becoming a mere series of dinner-parties. They are not always unpleasant, but one learns few of the secrets of the heart at a dinner-party. The social mask baffles me; and I am sorely in need of concentration and seclusion."

" Yes, but this is rather a special occasion. It was owing to my advice that Robert invited guests at all. Besides, I want Robert to marry again—he must have a wife—and he will not be able to find one unless he sees some people."

" Dearest, it is too soon to think of Lord Helford marrying. It would affront all decency. Natural grief must have its due period."

" I don't want Robert to marry at once, of course. But he takes longer to get used to people than most of us. Cynthia wanted him to marry again—she told me so, the last time I saw her."

" You surprise me. A wife should hardly scheme to fill her own place thus. Marriage is a mystical union. The whole affair seems to me unduly precipitate! "

" Dear Henry, I should not have mentioned marriage at all. Delia Mainwaring is a nice girl, I hear, and her mother was Cynthia's great friend. Robert might be drawn to her. The truth is that he depended so much on Cynthia that he is in a very miserable state. I don't want him to marry in a hurry, but I very much want him to be married."

" I hardly see how my presence would further your project, my dearest, But you are right in thinking that we must do what we can to save Lord Helford from morbid reveries. I will go if you desire it."

" It is very good of you, Henry."

" Not so, my dearest—it is my work that I am thinking of, not my convenience. You take these social functions lightly. But to me a party such as this means a time of anxious foreboding, a brief period of social elation, and a reaction of unavailing regret."

" And yet you give so much enjoyment! "

" Too often at the cost of my self-respect. But let us speak no more of this—I will not fail you."

They found the party waiting their arrival. Sir Charles proved a gentle and accommodating old man. Lady Agnes, just as Molly remembered her, a brisk and eager woman. She greeted Molly warmly and introduced her daughter,

a quiet, friendly girl, not strikingly beautiful, but with a certain innocent charm which Molly liked on the spot.

The Canon shook hands with much dignity, but did not seem to consider it incumbent upon him to make conversation. At dinner, Molly found herself between Robert and Sir Charles, with Miss Mainwaring the other side of Robert. Lady Agnes laid siege to the Canon, and by deftly introducing the merits of a well-known London preacher, very soon had him started. " Far be it from me, Lady Agnes," Molly heard him saying, " to define or vilify the channels of divine grace. I am told that any church where Mr. Wynn preaches is thronged with worshippers. I myself went out into the wilderness to see him, and found a reed not so much shaken in the wind as courteously dallied with by a passing zephyr. Had he been *shaken*, there would at least have been some species of agitation. But I could discern none. Of all those present he was the least embarrassed. The roll, to use the prophet's image, was evidently sweet upon his lips, but I saw no sign of its being bitter in the belly."

Lady Agnes, who had no idea to what he was alluding, looked thoughtfully at the Canon and said, " You mean . . . you mean that some astringent quality is needed? "

" You are perfectly right," he said, smiling. " Finely phrased! The first duty of the preacher is to proffer sour grapes, and to be sure that the children's teeth are set on edge. Not till then can he uplift and console."

Sir Charles was drawn into the vortex.

" But is there not, Canon Davenant, a certain unpleasantly journalistic tinge in too much of the preaching of the day—a desire at all costs to provide sensation? "

The Canon launched into a dissertation on the difference between sentiment and emotion. Molly wondered to what extent Sir Charles and Lady Agnes had been coached

beforehand—but they had clearly got their lesson by heart.

She turned to observe Robert and Delia Mainwaring; and it was perhaps with the tiniest pang that she found him talking to Delia with that touch of provocative irony that she remembered so well in her first talks with him. " But what mysterious power," he was saying, " dictates feminine fashions? You hear of thousands of women reading the women's page simultaneously, and telephoning to their hairdressers almost tearfully for an appointment for bobbing or shingling—whatever it may be. Is there an inner council sitting day after day, as we sat in the Cabinet, and announcing the momentous decision to the Press? "

" I don't know," said Delia, laughing, " it's in the air, I think. One suddenly *knows* what is right, just as one suddenly knows one has the ' flue.' "

" What do *you* do, Molly? "

" Oh, I just *date*, I suppose. Fortunately men don't know about these things. Henry thinks I am clad in duffle grey. It is the sharp glances of the other women, like needles, that do the mischief. You don't know how one tingles all over, when one goes out in London, after being long in the country."

" The thing that annoys me," said Robert, " is to see women standing outside the big shops—are they drapers or costumiers?—not meaning to buy, not discussing, just stupefied with wonder and worship. I and my friends don't stand spellbound before a tailor's shop."

" Why should you? " said Delia; " but men are just as bad—they all wear the same things at the same time. *Someone* orders them about. But he doesn't understand the mystery, does he, Mrs. Davenant? "

" Let him think it is a mystery," said Molly. " We

don't care about dress, really, nor do we dress to please our husbands. We just do what is right! "

Delia glanced at her with a delightful smile. " Don't betray my deficiences of costume to Lord Helford," Molly said. " I have been writhing under your glances ever since I came into the room."

" You both look very nice to my eyes," said Robert. " You shall tell me after dinner what is wrong, Miss Mainwaring."

It was the old Robert, magically restored. Molly fell to wondering whether Robert was producing on Delia the same impression which ten years ago he had produced on herself, that he had not a care in the world! There seemed no effort about his light-heartedness.

The talk soon became general, and the Canon took the lead. He warned his hearers against cinema shows on the singular ground that the more lifelike an artistic representation became, the more it forfeited the dignity of art.

" Art," said the Canon, " is a thing that must be of all time—it must not be localized. How comes it," he said, " that we read Shakespeare and Virgil with the sense that we are reading what might be happening all about us? "

He looked round defiantly. Robert said flippantly that when he read Virgil as a boy his feeling was rather that it had not happened anywhere at any time, to which the Canon said triumphantly that no stronger testimony could be paid to the truth of his contention, that the vitality of art was not a matter of time or space.

After dinner Robert managed to intimate to Molly that he wanted her to have a talk with Delia. They talked about Cynthia, to whom Delia had been devotedly attached.

" I can only say," said Molly, " that I saw her first when I had every reason to think her hard and unfeeling, and that in two minutes I felt I had a place in her heart—

which I never lost. I have never met anyone so absolutely reliable."

Delia's eyes glistened—she looked round the room and then said in a low voice, " But Lord Helford—we heard he had been quite crushed by her death."

" Ah," said Molly, " you wonder that he seems so cheerful? That is like him, as you will find when you know him better. His sorrow and bewilderment have been —and indeed are—quite tragic. But he has got what they call the *point of honour*—he is a man who feels that he has no right to let his troubles overflow on others—and so he gets misunderstood. You must not be taken in. I want you to know him; he is my greatest friend, and he wants friends very much now. You must not expect him to talk of Cynthia. He has hardly even mentioned her to me, and I have been with him ever since. Do try to like and understand him. Some people wear a mask of indifference, but he wears a mask of vivacity."

Molly saw Delia's ingenuous eyes wandering in the direction of Robert. He was arguing with a smiling air and quick little emphatic gestures with the Canon. " But Henry," they heard him say, " you mustn't erect a ghost, and then win our gratitude by demolishing it."

" Not so! " said the Canon, with a lofty and yet complacent air—" it is you and Sir Charles who embody the images of your fear, and are ashamed of your timidity when I show you that it is but a turnip and a newspaper! "

" What *can* they be talking about? " said Delia.

" I daresay nothing more exciting than the Poor Rate," said Molly. " My husband always speaks in parables."

" I think Canon Davenant is the most magnificent-looking man I have ever seen," said Delia, simply.

XXXV

THE Mainwarings were to leave on the Saturday. On the Thursday they visited Truro, and the Canon was bribed into accompanying them by the promise that the party would attend the afternoon Cathedral service, a solemnity dear to the Canon's heart. Accordingly they motored there. Robert himself drove, and on the way there, Miss Mainwaring sat beside him. The Canon, in excellent spirits, entertained the party by narratives of the most picturesque order of the adventures of Cornish saints, such as SS. Ja and Corentin. St. Ja, it seemed, was accustomed to hold little classes of men and women for instruction in the faith, but when he became half-deaf and half-blind from age, his discourses became so intricate and lengthy that he was deserted by his catechumens, whose places were obligingly filled by a company of angels, for fear that the aged saint should feel neglected. St. Ja, after a long harangue on some abstruse doctrine, would say, " Have I made all clear, my children? " " Yes, you have made all clear, dear Father," the angels would reply. " Have you heard enough, my children, or will you hear more? " " More, dear Father, more! " the angelic audience would reply. St. Ja, in fact, in his last years, would frequently deride the neighbouring saints for the smallness of their classes. " You should improve your talents, my brothers, as I have done. I have daily ever larger classes and ever more attentive."

The wonderful thing to Molly, listening to these old tales, was that on her husband's lips they seemed neither ridiculous nor tedious, but infused with poetry and pathos.

" Where do you get all these wonderful stories from, Canon? " Lady Agnes said. " Is there any book where I could find them? " " The material, Lady Agnes," said the Canon, with a slight hesitation, " can be found in various collections of ancient legends. But I could not recommend your reading them in the rough. They are barbarous, improbable, and sometimes, I regret to say, at variance with our modern conventions of decorum! "

On the way back, Robert suggested that Miss Mainwaring would like to hear some of the Canon's stories, if he was willing to draw further on his stores. He consented with alacrity.

" I am never reluctant," he said, " to sing some of the songs of Zion," and accordingly Molly joined Robert in front.

" So your time of trial is nearly over," she said, as they went slowly up the long hill of Lemon Street, with the column at the top.

" Yes, Molly, and it has been easier than I expected. Lady Agnes is a fine creature. I have been able to talk to her a little about Cynthia."

They went on fencing a little over what was foremost in both their minds.

" How do you like Miss Mainwaring? " said Molly, at length, with affected unconcern.

" She is a very nice girl," said Robert. " Always willing to talk, never chattering vaguely, never wanting to be admired, and always ready to be amused, even by my jokes. And then she has made tremendous friends with Bobby. She is to go down to Guildford to see him at school."

Molly, to her own dismay, was stricken with a sudden incapacity to speak, and a deep sense of shame at realizing that she would have preferred him to say that he had

found her tiresome. " I am so glad," she found strength to murmur.

" But it won't do, Molly," Robert went on. " I am not going to make any pretence. It is you that I want, every moment. My one satisfaction about this dreary expedition was that I meant to get you to myself a little. Can't we ever meet, dearest girl? "

" Oh, Robert, you know how things are," said Molly, perilously near to crying. Then with a smile she said, " Henry brightened up visibly when I said to him that I wanted you to marry again. He professed to be shocked, but only because marriage was a mystical union."

" It is this transcendental view of marriage which spoils so many people's lives," said Robert. " You know the story of the mediæval baron, who loved a neighbouring baron's wife. The inconvenient husband died, and the baron went to the funeral, and proposed to the widow as soon as they got back to the castle, only to find that she had accepted the knight who had walked back with her from the funeral. They didn't, in those days, set much value on their wives' conversation—they only demanded that they should be comely and buxom—whatever buxom may mean."

"It suggests something solid and amiable," said Molly.

" I hate solidity," said Robert. " But Molly, the visit has shown me, even though I have had some pretty bad times, that I must have someone about."

Molly's heart gave an uncanny leap and seemed to stand still.

" So I am going to ask Edith to take mercy on me, and come and take charge for a bit. I can get on with Edith, and the servants will like her. I live in terror of the servants giving notice. I am full of ludicrous apprehensions."

" I should think Edith will be delighted to come—she likes a spacious scene."

" But it is all a wretched makeshift at best," said Robert. " I feel as if there had been an earthquake, and my house had fallen down, and I were picnicking in the ruins. I don't want ideas—I have too many of my own. But I want *something* very badly. Though I am tough in certain ways, I am very vulnerable."

" We are all of us that, dear."

" No, Molly—Cynthia was not; she was incredibly brave. You are not, I don't know why, but you seem to have some hidden strength to draw upon. What is your secret, dearest? "

" Perhaps if I told you, I should lose my power."

" I think it is because you live *in* people, not only *with* them. To wound you is like wounding water—it flows on, as clear as ever."

" Robert, if you speak like that, the nape of my neck will blush, and Agnes will think you are making love to me."

" That is just what I *am* doing."

" We are getting very rash, Robert. Do you think I am leading a double life? "

" Not a double one, Molly, but twenty different lives. Universal Love! How dull it sounds, unless you see it being done."

The miles melted away. As they drew near home, Robert said:

" There's only one thing more, Molly. Miss Mainwaring wants to make friends with you—she told me so. Will you take her out for a walk to-morrow—and let her know you?"

" You think I am feeling jealous? "

" I hope you are—it is all your own fault. I am only

doing what you told me. If you want to keep me for yourself, you have only to say the word."

" I don't want to lose you, dearest. But I want you even more to be happy."

" Happy! " said Robert. " What a word! "

XXXVI

MISS MAINWARING came down to Menerdue to lunch. The Canon was very complaisant. He had discerned, he said, a certain mediæval restfulness in Miss Mainwaring's face, which refreshed him. And then, too, though he was diplomatically silent about it, it amused Molly to see how transparently he lent his aid to the erection of any wall which should tend to exclude Robert. What delighted Molly was the childlike way in which, if he were asked to meet people whom he disliked or suspected of being worldly, his work became instantly in arrears and of paramount importance; but if for any reason he wished to see or conciliate any guest, the work fell into the background, and the guest became either a model of virtue, to whom it was right to show respect, or a sensitive creature whom it would hurt to be overlooked. What pleased Molly so much was to realize that the Canon was wholly unconscious that the reason he gave was not the real reason, and never suspected that his own likes and dislikes were ultimately consulted.

As soon as they had begun lunch the Canon said with an air of great solemnity:

"You find Lord Helford greatly afflicted, Miss Mainwaring?"

"I am sure he is afflicted," said Miss Mainwaring, "but I don't think I should guess it from his talk."

"Ah, that is his chivalrous nature," said the Canon; "he cannot bear that his own private sorrows should cause others any uneasiness."

After a short pause the Canon began again.

" Lord Helford is an able man, is he not? "

" Yes, indeed," said Miss Mainwaring, " he is so ready and witty. Papa says he thinks him the most agreeable man he knows."

" He is one of the pleasantest companions conceivable," said the Canon; " he has a singular charm. Moreover, there is very solid intelligence behind. I should never wonder if he became Prime Minister."

A short inverval; then:

" Would you call Lord Helford a spiritually-minded man, Miss Mainwaring? "

" I really hardly know him well enough to say," said Miss Mainwaring in some embarrassment. " He seems very kind-hearted."

" Lord Helford's sympathy with institutional religion is not very great; but to my mind he has a deep and genuine piety at the bottom of his nature, which he is apt to dissemble. But that betokens an excess of modesty, I believe, rather than any lack of conviction."

Never had Robert before taken shape in Henry's talk as so devoted and gentle a *preux chevalier*. Molly watched him with intense amusement as he unmasked his guileless batteries, one by one.

When at last Molly and Miss Mainwaring set off there was a touch of embarrassment over them. Molly felt quite sure that Miss Mainwaring had been told about her friendship with Lord Helford, while Miss Mainwaring could not fail to perceive that her mother had taken some quiet pains to encourage conversation between Lord Helford and herself. But Delia Mainwaring was a very artless, genuine and simple-minded girl. She was modest about her powers of pleasing. She had been a little alarmed by Lord Helford at first, but had been much relieved at finding him so pleasant and brotherly; while she regarded

Molly with unqualified admiration as being the most natural and unselfconscious young woman she had ever seen.

But Molly was vexed with herself. She thought Delia a thoroughly nice girl, and theoretically likely to make a good wife for Robert. But practically her whole mind seemed in a ferment, with little bubbles of rebellion rising constantly and involuntarily to the surface. It was one thing to scheme for Robert's happiness. It was quite another to push him into the arms of this particular charming girl, and to leave them to their bliss. And she could not keep out of her talk a touch of irony of which she was heartily ashamed.

Miss Mainwaring was enchanted with Menerdue and the creek and the village and the steep woods of Nan-Zephron, and to Molly's relief she praised the right things. But they were both of them unconsciously fencing, and keeping at arm's length the only thing it was important for them to talk about. But Molly broke the ice.

" I should like to ask you," she said, " what you think about Lord Helford? I who have seen him constantly since Cynthia's death am hardly able to judge. It was, of course, a great tragedy to him—the greatest tragedy that could have befallen him."

" I have only seen Lord Helford two or three times before," said Miss Mainwaring, " but he doesn't seem to me very different—I don't think that he seems tragic at all."

" When people have a great shock like this," said Molly, " the misery of it for a time gets worse and worse, as they find out their loss at every turn—but then they suddenly begin ascending instead of descending, as they get used to missing the familiar figure."

" But some people never get over a loss like this—isn't that so, Mrs. Davenant? "

" Oh, you must call me Molly—everyone does; besides, I believe that you and I are going to be friends."

Miss Mainwaring looked at Molly with a shy gratitude which completely melted the little icy crust on Molly's heart.

" I hope so," she said; " I should like to think that very much."

" My dear, it is so," said Molly, impulsively, and suddenly felt very old and experienced. She went on: " Delia, I should like to tell you about Lord Helford. Ten years ago he came to stay with us at Menerdue. He was very wretched. He had quarrelled with his mother whom he loved very much, about Cynthia—and those quarrels are the worst of all. Then when she died, with the quarrel not healed, he quarrelled with Cynthia about his mother—and they parted company. Robert is a curious mixture. He has a great number of interests, he has a natural artistic gift—he is always even unconsciously comparing and judging; and he is very sensitive on the surface—a very little thing upsets him; but deeper down he is tough and almost hard. Robert can go on living made miserable by criticisms or disapproval, and yet never change his mind. That is what makes him so effective as a politician. But he finds it very hard to make intimate friends. That charming manner of his is rather a shield against intimacy. He seems to show you so much of his heart that he appears to have nothing left to show."

" I think that is all rather terrifying," said Delia, listening with wide open eyes.

" Not really," said Molly, " for if he once really cares for anyone, he is not critical at all. You are entirely sure of him. He may speak irritably and sharply—but it doesn't matter. You know he doesn't mean to hurt; and he is absolutely faithful."

" But," said Delia, shyly, " don't be vexed with me—but I don't quite understand why you tell me all this? I don't think Lord Helford is particularly interested in me and my concerns. He seems to me like a man leaning out of a window and talking cheerfully to people in the street, and one doesn't know what is going on in the room behind him."

" Don't begin by being prejudiced against him, Delia. The reason for what I have said is this. I am very much devoted to Robert, and your mother was to Cynthia. We feel now that Cynthia is gone, how friendless and lonely Robert is. I have my own home to look after and your mother has hers; but Robert in losing Cynthia seems to have lost so much. I want to get a few close friends round him. Of course one doesn't want to drive you into being friends—nothing comes of that; but if he seems to want to make friends with you, don't keep him at arm's length. Don't be frightened of him."

A look of relief came over Delia's face. " Why, of course, if that is all. I pity Lord Helford very much and I would like to do anything I could to help. But I'm not clever or bookish—I have no ideas."

" But that isn't wanted, dear. Cynthia knew and cared nothing about books. I care very little about them. Robert doesn't want to discuss things at all—he has a few men friends with whom he does that. But don't let us make too serious an affair out of it. He is a lonely man and just now he is a sad man. Strange as it may appear, there are hardly any houses in London where he feels at home."

" I'm more than ever glad we have had this talk," said Delia. " I don't know why, but I feel as if there was something mysterious in the air. The only person who didn't seem to be holding cards was Bobby. I think he's a very nice boy. I'll anchor on to Bobby."

" Have you got any particular hobbies of your own? " said Molly.

" No, I just take things as they come along—I haven't any performances I want to get off on people. At home I rather run papa—mamma isn't as strong as she was quite, and she's always terrified that papa will discover it; so I trot about with him, and I haven't any particular—what shall I say—aspirations."

" That's right," said Molly, approvingly. " On the whole I don't think that women want private vocations. They are always looking round the corner half the time waiting for someone to come along and admire. Men are not like that. They are as serious about their work as children are about their games, and even if they are knocked flat they go on doing things lying down! And now I must be getting home. Don't forget we are friends —and let me have an *invoice* some time! " And Molly took her blithe little companion in her arms and sealed the compact with a kiss.

XXXVII

ONE morning the Canon got a letter from the Bishop asking him to come over to Truro to see him, and suggesting that he should stay the night. He held it out with a certain radiance of self-importance which was getting familiar to Molly.

"These interruptions!" he said. "I suppose they are an ordinance of man which one must submit to for the Lord's sake. But this work is apt to take from me the one thing that is needed to accomplish it—silence and recollection and solitary prayer."

"But the Bishop depends so much on you, dear. It is a great thing to be wanted."

"Assuredly I shall go—I must get there in time for the Cathedral service. I must take robes. Indeed, I think it would be well to leave a set of robes at the Cathedral. Do you suppose that the Bishop would be vexed if I appeared in a cassock at his dinner-table?"

"No, he would like it."

"You seem to know your Frederic's tastes," said the Canon with an ingratiating smile.

He started after luncheon. Molly took Austin and walked up to Nan-Zephron. It had been arranged that Bobby should go to school very shortly, and Austin begged to be allowed to see him before he went.

"Do you think Bobby will like school, mummy?"

"Yes, I expect so."

"They won't be able to bully Bobby, will they? He will be too strong."

"There's no such thing as bullying at schools now, dear."

" Not like Tom Brown? Oh, it must be like that—you can see it's all true."

" It used to be—but that is a long time ago."

" Oh, I should think there would be some bullying. Harry said they bullied a boy at his school because he would eat mustard with mutton. There is a pig-table at Harry's school."

" What is that? "

" Oh, if you behave badly at dinner you have to go and eat your dinner there standing up with your back to everyone."

" That's rather a good idea."

" It's dreadful to stand with your back to people when they are laughing at you. Nanny used to put me in the corner sometimes when I was very naughty. You can look at the wallpaper, but you feel everybody's eyes running into your back. I always pity daddy in church when he stands up at the altar with his back to everyone."

Thus they beguiled the time. On reaching Nan-Zephron Austin flew off to find Bobby, and Molly went straight to the library.

The library was a big room lined with books in high oak presses. There was a great writing-table covered with papers. Robert was sitting on a sofa near the fire reading. He looked worn and worried; Molly went quickly across the room and stood in front of him. He threw his book down, and caught her hands in his own.

" Oh, Molly dearest, this is delightful. How did you get here—I was thinking about you and wishing for you, but I never expected to see you."

" You should have more faith, Robert."

" Would that help me? Molly, how incredibly young you look. I don't believe you are a bit older than when I saw you first. Is that the result of faith? "

" Partly, I think; but more a good digestion."

" I have had a beastly morning. A great pile of papers from Percival. I must go up to town in a day or two—there's to be a debate in the Lords, with an opportunity of saying some damaging things. The Government is getting into hot water."

" And they count on you to make it hotter. Do you like that? "

" Oh, it passes the time—I rather enjoy getting a good edge on . . . but there came first one person and another. It really is very tiresome having land. I have a great mind to let this place again. My chief reason for coming was to see you, and I don't see you. I had no idea what Cynthia must have been let in for. However, I shall be free at Easter. Edith comes on 1st February."

" There seems to be an idea," said Molly, " that Henry will be up in town most of Lent. He has got a preaching job at one of the big city churches—the Archbishop managed it. Could you take us in? "

" Of course."

" Will Edith like it? "

" Yes, she will love it—she likes you and the children, and she admires Henry."

" I have got something serious to say."

" I know—well do your worst." He drew her down to the sofa beside him and put his arm round her, kissing her on the cheek.

" It's about Delia."

" Oh, damn Delia! She's a nice girl enough—a very nice girl, if you like. But I am not going to be turned over to her like this. It is all very well for you with all your little lovers—I hear you have added the Bishop to your list—but I can't make love to more than one woman at a time."

" Robert, when you speak like that I feel I ought to leave you severely alone."

" You can't, Molly. If ever two people belonged to each other, it is you and me."

" But Delia is a charming creature. The one thing I was doubtful about was whether she had enough of a temper —I think you want that in the background—and I think she has. We had a very curious talk. I began by being frantically jealous. But I don't think she has the slightest idea of our intrigues."

" *Our* intrigue," said Robert, scornfully.

" Well, my intrigue, if you like. She rather fired up at the suggestion that you took any interest in her."

" I don't—except that I want her to be friends with Bobby. So she didn't like me? "

" Yes, she admired you immensely, and she was very sorry for you. It only needs a little spark! "

" Molly, it is *disgusting* to talk like this. It is like bargaining for a fair Circassian."

" I don't want to rush you into anything. You are so suspicious. I only want you to see something of her. It is no good evading it. You will have plenty of people thrown at your head when you begin to go about again. You have got all that counts in the matrimonial market."

" My dear Molly, you are talking like Lady Sturminster. I never heard anything more low."

" Well, we will leave it then. But when I come up to town, I warn you you will have to see her. She will come as *my* friend."

" Another captive, I suppose! You women are extraordinary. You meet a strange girl at dinner. You kiss her when she goes away. Next day it is Christian names and no more secrets. That is the sort of thing that shocks a right-minded man."

" It's better at all events than men's ways," said Molly. " I was reading a book the other day in which two young men were making friends; when they met, one of them said, ' You old ass,' and twisted his friend's arm, and the other replied by three or four hard kicks. I don't see that that is an improvement."

They talked quietly on till Bobby and Austin entered the room. Bobby came up and stood by his father. Austin pushed on to the sofa by his mother and took her hand.

" May I go down to tea at Uncle Henry's? " said Bobby.

" If you are asked, old man."

" Ask him, mummy," said Austin.

" Yes, of course—I must go," said Molly, disengaging herself from Robert's arm. He kissed her again, as she rose to her feet. " Good-bye, dearest Molly. I'll try to see you before we go, but anyhow we shall see you in London."

" Am I to come too, Uncle Robert? " said Austin.

" Ask your mother," said Robert, smiling. " Of course you will bring the children, Molly—Edith would not forgive you if you didn't."

" Is cousin Edith to be there? " said Austin. " But Bobby will be at school—what a pity! "

" Perhaps you and I will go down and see him, Austin."

As they went down through Nan-Zephron wood, Austin said, " Do you like Uncle Robert very much, mummy? "

" Yes, dear—he is like a brother to me."

" That's not how Cynthy and I behave."

" No, but you will when you are older."

" Do you like Uncle Robert more than daddy? "

" I like them both just as much as they deserve."

That was a difficult morsel. Austin took his mother's hand, but held his peace.

XXXVIII

MOLLY and the Canon came up to town to find Edith and Robert installed. Edith was very cheerful and good-natured, but rather voluble and redundant. Molly could see that she had already got slightly on Robert's nerves. But Edith, who was a clever woman in her way, was aware of this, and the very first evening drew Molly into her room when they retired to bed, and asked for a little talk. Edith was a handsome, dignified, rather solid woman, who carried herself well, and spoke with the emphasis and decision which as the possessor of a large private fortune she was privileged to use. " I can't tell you, my dear Molly, how delighted I am that you have arrived, and the dear Canon too, whom I have fallen head over ears in love with. He seems so high above us all! But I'm an elderly woman, dear, and I have got in the way, living alone, of rather speaking my mind and laying down the law. It is *dreadful!* In fact, I rather *bore* Robert, though he is very polite. He rather frightens me with his quiet, clever look; and then I lose my head and talk more and more and louder and louder. But you know exactly how to talk to him, and as to the Canon, I feel it a privilege to listen to anything he may choose to say. But you must give me a *hint*, dear, if I do anything foolish; and I shall love to have you here, and the darling children—you mustn't let me spoil them—and we shall all have a happy time together. I feel it such a privilege to be chosen out of all Robert's friends, to help him; and you must tell me, dear, if there is anything the Canon ought to eat or not to eat. I'm not here as a hostess, but just as an old house-

keeper, to see that all my clever family have things as they like them."

For answer Molly hugged her good cousin warmly and said she was a darling, and that she would feel able to talk quite plainly to her about anything in the world. Molly indeed felt that the perfectly simple, large-hearted, good-natured woman, generous and entirely human, was the one desirable element in the rather heterogeneous household.

The Canon had to give a couple of short addresses in the week, and a Sunday evening sermon at the big City church, St. Hilary Hazards, near Blackfriars. He made friends with the Rector, who had offered him the lectureship on the recommendation of the Archbishop. The Rector, Prebendary Bradbury, was a big, handsome man with silvery hair, rather of the type that the Americans call " price-raisers." He had a touch of Irish blood and a natural eloquence of a perennial order. He catered diligently for the public, and he was quite determined to make Canon Davenant the ecclesiastical sensation of the season. But he was clever enough to see that Canon Davenant would be easily repelled by any suggestion of popularity; and so he represented his congregation as a little band of earnest seekers after truth, and of an intellectual standard not easily satisfied by ordinary preaching.

The Prebendary was invited to dine quietly at Helford House, which completed his satisfaction. Robert thought him a tiresome and vulgar man, but Edith found him splendid, and the Prebendary departed with roseate visions of a sunny deanery floating before him.

Molly went to hear Henry several times, and found herself wondering afresh at the strange beauty and originality of her husband's mind. The little weekday discourses were on the practice of holiness for people living the busy life of the world, and were enlivened by many quaint and

forcible touches. Whether it was the Canon's eloquence, and the sharp contrast of his freshness of vision with conventional sermons; or whether it was the Rector's encomiums and placards, it can hardly be determined; but after the Canon had been preaching for a week, the congregation suddenly swelled. There were queues at the doors of the Sunday sermons, and the Canon began to be quoted in the evening papers as a sayer of startling maxims. Though he affected to despise all this, Molly could see that he was deeply pleased, not by the sensational evidence of popularity, but as a proof that he was at last in direct conflict with the hosts of Midian.

It was not thought well to give formal dinner-parties at Helford House, but a good many of Robert's friends and colleagues were asked in to dinner, and Molly became gradually more and more aware of the great part which Robert was playing in the political world; and what impressed her still more was the fact that he had so rarely spoken of this. She supposed that it must be a pleasure to him to find himself wielding such an influence; but he never showed the least egotism on the subject, nor even deprecatingly quoted the compliments of his supporters. Indeed, Molly was surprised to see how deeply congenial to the Canon was the evidence of any sort of popularity, while Robert on the other hand treated such comments with an obvious disdain.

Molly had had a long talk one evening to Sir Henry Fitch, a high permanent official. The talk had drifted to Robert, and Sir Henry had expressed his satisfaction at seeing that Robert's private sorrows had not in any way blunted the edge of his mind.

" Perhaps you hardly know, Mrs. Davenant," said the great thin-lipped man, looking serenely through his spectacles, " the extent and nature of the hopes that some

of us feel about Lord Helford. His resourcefulness, his quickness, his invincible modesty, his matchless sense of honour lead us to regard him as our natural leader. Indeed, if Lord Helford were just a little more commonplace, and could lay a little louder emphasis upon the obvious, his premiership would be certain. He does not concede quite enough to the rank and file; he is a little mysterious, even formidable, to the second-rate minds that ballast the political barque. But if he does secure the lead, he will retain it. If his party should return to power (I am supposed to have no political sympathies myself) it is just a question of whether he would be Foreign Secretary or Premier. But it is important—I may say this to you privately—that he should not seclude himself. Everyone knows the strength of his attachment to his wife; and this by itself is in his favour—but he must not be overpowered by it."

When Molly told something of this to Robert next day, he laughed and said, " Old Fitch—yes, he is rather a sentimentalist."

" But doesn't it please you? "

" Yes, in a way. It shows which way things are going. But I don't mean to intrigue for anything. I am not going to flatter and conciliate all these bounders. It is a disgusting business. I don't want to get power that way. I am willing to spend any amount of time and energy over these problems—they interest me enormously—but it would sicken me if I were chosen for any reason except that I was the best man for the job."

" But you must make some concessions."

" My dear Molly, I do it day after day. I listen to bores, I discuss possibilities; but I am not going to pretend that I think anyone's advice worth more than it is worth. I am not going to give pledges or to be beholden to people."

" I didn't mean that, Robert. Couldn't you be a little more genial and forthcoming? "

" I do my best, Molly; but to listen to a stupid man explaining something which I understand better than he does, doesn't merely bore me—it makes me physically ill."

" Robert, you are a hopeless aristocrat."

" No, dear, not in that sense. I take off my hat to clearness of mind and a sense of honour wherever I see it."

" Robert, you are very impressive in this mood."

" Then I won't say another word on the subject, Molly. I don't want my mind to get in the way between you and me. I don't want to be admired by you or anyone. I want you to love me, and other people to be civil to me. That's all I ask."

XXXIX

BOBBY had gone off in January to a private school near Guildford. Robert had taken him down, and had liked the trim, fresh aspect of the place, the smart little boys, the paternal discipline and friendly interest that seemed to prevail. The Head Master was a genial and smiling man, who had been a considerable athlete, and had taken the opportunity of hinting this incidentally to Lord Helford, as a qualification for being able to sympathize with the boys.

"We know, of course," he said to Robert, "that there is a perhaps undue glamour in the youthful mind about athletics. They are the short cut to the fame which I suppose in our heart of hearts we all desire; but we must not let them be regarded as the be-all and end-all of human endeavour—though it is true to say that athletics have smoothed the path to success for many men of no great intellectual force."

Lord Helford had said to Molly rather testily on his return, that the modern private school was the most delicately adjusted compromise he knew between virtue and public opinion, and that the moral code by which it was administered was a very dexterous blend of the gentlemanly and the prudential. The Head Master had said that the whole life of the place was ordered on the theory of avoiding undue strain, and at the same time so filling the day with occupation that the boys would hardly have time to get into mischief.

Bobby's letters were cheerful enough at first. Then it became clear that he was feeling a little oppressed by

never having any time at his disposal. Then they became rather definitely unhappy, saying that he was counting the days to the holidays, and that he didn't feel he had any friends. Robert showed these letters to Molly, who agreed that for a boy of Bobby's particularly good-natured and affectionate temperament there must be something amiss. He determined to go down and see Bobby, but before the day was settled for his visit, there came a letter from the Head Master asking if he could find it convenient to come down and see him on a matter of some importance.

Robert at once motored down to Guildford, and arrived there in the early afternoon, the day being a half-holiday.

He was shown into the Head Master's study, a big room on the ground floor of what had evidently been a Georgian mansion, on to which the school buildings had been added. He looked out on to a big playing-field, surrounded by great elms. Football was going on, in three adjacent grounds, and a game of hockey. Each game was being conducted under the auspices of a young master, and the little bare-kneed figures in bright-coloured jerseys frisking about made an almost ideal picture of happy boyhood. The Head Master appeared in a rather solemn mood, and began by apologizing.

" If I had known we might be expecting you, we should of course not have allowed your boy to go out with the friend who called to see him."

" Gone out with a friend? " said Lord Helford. " I don't understand. What friend of mine has come down to see Bobby? "

" I am rather in a difficult position," said the Head Master. " The young lady asked me particularly not to let you know she had been down. I thought it was odd. But she told me that she had lately been staying with you."

" Oh, Miss Mainwaring, I suppose," said Robert. " But where have they gone? "

" To Guildford, I expect. She said she would give Bobby some tea and bring him back in good time. But if you wish them to be recalled, I can send a messenger down to see if they can be found."

" Will you? " said Robert, " and meantime we can have our talk."

The Head Master then with infinite circumlocution said that he was a little uneasy about a set of boys; he had gathered from the matron that there seemed to be a certain amount of unpleasant and undesirable talk. " I have reason to think that it has gone no further than talk —but you know what boys are—so easily influenced. And I consider the moral standard of the school in all matters connected with purity to be my first concern."

" Certainly," said Robert. " But how does Bobby come to be mixed up with them? I think him a remarkably clean-minded boy—entirely guileless in fact."

" Have you spoken to him on the subject, if I may ask, Lord Helford? "

" Yes, in a general way. I told him to keep clear of any nasty talk or dirty ways. I don't approve of going too much into detail—it does more harm than good."

" I am quite of your opinion—in fact that is the method I myself pursue. But he is one of the five reported to me, as being suspiciously regarded by one of my maids, a most sensible and experienced woman."

" You have not yet investigated it? "

" No, Lord Helford. I thought you might prefer to do so—if I investigate, I have to act."

" Yes, I see. You might have to send boys away? Is that it? "

" Yes, if I thought the interests of the school demanded it."

" Well," said Lord Helford. " I am grateful to you for communicating with me. But I have great confidence in

Bobby. I don't think he is a sensual-minded boy at all. On the whole I should prefer your investigating it; and if you thought that things had really gone wrong, I should certainly agree that he had better change his surroundings. How old are the boys concerned? "

" Twelve and thirteen. Bobby is the youngest of all. I hope you do not think that I have acted unadvisedly? "

" No, indeed—quite the contrary. I know that great vigilance is necessary. But of course one does not want one's boy to be mixed up in things of the kind."

" What will you do about waiting for Miss Mainwaring?"

" I will just stroll about," said Lord Helford, " if I may—I should like to have a few minutes to think this over."

" Naturally," said the Head Master. " If you care to look round the playing-fields, I will let you know the moment they arrive."

Robert went off to the playing-field and walked about in great anxiety. It was profoundly humiliating to him to have this experience thrust upon him. He had a great confidence in Bobby, and the shock evoked in him a tumult of emotion. He blamed himself very severely for not having been more explicit, thinking that Bobby's extreme innocence and good nature might have been taken advantage of. But the fact that Bobby's later letters had been unhappy, gave him a certain degree of encouragement. Still, not only was the idea of the possibilities profoundly distasteful to his fastidious mind, but he also dreaded the slur on the boy's character that might result, and the fact that it was just the boys on whom some antecedent taint had rested who often found it most difficult to remain unblemished. He thought with a sort of anguish how decisively and sensibly Cynthia would have handled the situation; and there came on him, too, a horror of the

tragic elements of life, and of the way in which an ingenuous character might acquire a life-long blemish from a perfectly thoughtless and even guileless concession to temptations of which the very nature might not be understood.

The boys flashed hither and thither in their games, their shrill voices penetrating the still air. It all seemed so transparently animated and idyllic . . . and yet there was this ugly shadow in the background.

He was aroused from his reverie by seeing a figure approaching along the gravel path. It was Delia, alone. She came up to him in evident agitation, her pretty eager face with a touch of pallor, her eyes wide. Robert raised his hat and shook hands with her.

" I hardly expected to find you here, Miss Delia—we could have come down together."

" Please don't be vexed, Lord Helford," said Delia, with a touch of breathlessness in her voice. " I got a note from Bobby this morning saying he was very unhappy and could I see him. He said he didn't want anyone to be told. You know I made friends with Bobby at Nan-Zephron and promised to come and see him here. I didn't think anything about telling you, I am afraid. I only felt I couldn't leave him alone, if there was anything I could do, and I came straight down."

" Please don't think I am anything but glad that Bobby should have a friend like you—I think it very good of you —you did perfectly right. If I did have a touch of vexation it was only that the Head Master asked me to come down, and when I got here Bobby had gone out."

" Yes, I am sorry," said Delia, looking more reassured. " But I felt sure Bobby wouldn't have written like that

unless he was feeling very unhappy. May I tell you about it? The Head Master's man found us in Guildford, and we hurried back. I told Bobby to wait and let me have a word with you first. I said that you might be surprised at finding me here."

" Yes, do tell me anything you have heard. The Head Master told me that he thought Bobby had got into a bad set, and I can't help feeling rather anxious."

" I don't think you need be. Bobby has been very miserable. He is rather mysterious about it all, but these boys who are older than him, rather took him up and were nice to him. Then he found out that he didn't like them; they spoke in a way he didn't like, and wanted him to join in things he didn't like. He said he tried to keep out of their way, but they were always at him, and he was sure you wouldn't like it—and he was altogether in a miserable state of mind."

" What you say is a great relief to me," said Robert. " It is what I hoped might be the case. I trusted Bobby to behave decently, but I thought he might have got drawn into things without knowing they were wrong."

" Oh, that I am quite certain about," said Delia. " He hasn't joined in anything he thought you wouldn't like. But what he said was that he didn't know how long he could go on or how to keep clear of the boys."

" Have they been bullying him, do you think? "

" No, trying to persuade him—he didn't tell me any details. He said they were horrid beasts."

" Well, I am very grateful to you, Delia—I really am. Most people would have sent him a foolish note, and told him it would all come right."

They went in together, and found Bobby waiting in the library, a room next the Head Master's study. He looked anxiously at his father, and came up to him. Robert put

his arm round him and kissed him. " Well, old boy? " he said. " You seem to have quite a lot of visitors."

Bobby clung to his father's arm. " You don't mind my asking Delia to come and see me? " he said. " I didn't want to bother you, daddy."

" I know, old man—it's all right. But don't ever think you bother me. I'm not going to have my own boy unhappy. Delia has told me something about it, and I am sure you have behaved just as I should like you to behave. And now we will just make it all right with the Head."

" You won't tell him what I said about the other boys? " said Bobby, anxiously.

" Certainly not, if you don't wish it."

" I think I can get on all right," said Bobby, " but I got in a fright yesterday."

" Another time you can write to me too. But look here, Bobby, stay here with Delia, and I will go and have a word with the Head. I won't give you away."

Robert found the Head in his study. " You have seen your boy, Lord Helford? " he said. " I trust you are satisfied that things have not gone amiss? "

" I am satisfied that Bobby hasn't done wrong," said Lord Helford. " But I have not questioned him, and he declines to give the other boys away. But there is something amiss, and I would rather that you investigated the matter, as you suggest. But I hope you will make it clear that Bobby has not told tales? "

" Certainly I will, I admire a boy who will not exculpate himself at the cost of others."

Lord Helford nodded. " Of course I shall be anxious to know the result," he said.

" I shall see all the boys concerned to-night," said the Head, adding, " I should be sorry if this destroyed your confidence in the school."

" Not at all," said Lord Helford. " It seems to me you have acted vigilantly and sensibly. One can't hope to avoid such difficulties altogether; and I had far sooner that a head master had his eyes open and acted, than that he should live in a fool's paradise and think all his boys saints and angels."

The Head thanked him. " It is the one nightmare that schoolmasters have," he said.

Robert asked for a few minutes alone with Bobby. The Head Master carried off Delia to tea, and sent Bobby into the study. He came in anxious but smiling.

" I'm sorry I wrote to Delia, daddy."

" You needn't be, old man. Make friends with her as much as you can; and now look here. I haven't told the Head a word about the other boys, but I understand it all. He will see you and question you. Just tell him quite straight what has happened. But I trust you down to the ground. Keep clear of this kind of thing always. It brings nothing but trouble. And don't feel ashamed at any time to tell me anything, Bobby dear. Most people have temptations of different kinds, and you will always be safe in telling me—I won't give you away, and I know you won't do anything that I shouldn't like and . . . and that your mother wouldn't have liked. Just believe that my one wish is to have my dearest boy good and happy. I care about that more than I care about anything."

He clasped the boy in his arms and kissed him. " You mustn't think that I am ever too busy or occupied not to want to hear anything you would like to say. You are my own dearest boy, now and always."

XL

AFTER tea, during which Robert was glad to see the pleasant way in which the Head talked to Bobby, and Bobby's evident delight in being thus distinguished, Delia said something about her train. " No, I can take you back," said Robert.

The farewells were soon said, and Robert was intensely relieved to see that Bobby was not, as he feared might be the case, morbidly anxious to be taken away with them. " Stick it out, old man," he whispered in Bobby's ear. " It will be all right now—and if you want me, I will run down at any time." Bobby looked up at him and smiled.

Delia and Bobby exchanged a fervent hug—and the car moved slowly out of the gates.

" He will be all right," said Robert. " He has plenty of pluck."

" He's the dearest boy I know," said Delia.

" You have done wonders," said Robert, looking at Delia's charming face, which still showed signs of agitation. " You have just put it all on the right lines. If it had been left to the Head and me, we might have scared Bobby and sealed his lips."

" Oh, thank you so much," said Delia. " It seemed to me that I had done all the wrong things, when the messenger told us you were here. I felt such an idiot for rushing off wildly without even asking mamma what I had better do."

Robert felt a sudden and lively emotion in the presence of this fresh young creature, who had done so much for the love of Bobby, and had acted with sense and spirit.

" I should have *hated* to vex you," said Delia.

A strange fancy rushed unbidden into Robert's mind. Was it only for Bobby's sake that she had done this?

He took her hand in his own—" Delia," he said, " you have taken on Bobby, much to his advantage. Would it be possible for you ever to thinking of taking on his belongings as well? "

She stared at him with a sudden amazement, and a light came into her face.

" I . . . I don't understand, Lord Helford."

" Don't you? " he said, smiling; " I'm not going to rush you into anything. But here am I, a very solitary person, very much in want of a companion. Would you find me an impossible companion? Perhaps you think you don't know me enough for this sort of talk; but I am quite in earnest—will you let me try to see if I can persuade you? These things come very suddenly, Delia. I trust you very much, I love you for loving Bobby—you would soon be very dear to me for your own sake. You have made yourself very dear to Molly, who is the best friend I have."

But Delia sat unresponsive, though she did not take her hand out of Robert's.

" Lord Helford, I don't know what to say, I never thought of this . . . and I don't pretend I don't like you . . . but it is all so sudden."

" My dear Delia," said Robert, gently, " there's no need to be startled. I don't expect you to say ' yes ' all at once. But my mind won't change about this, and now that I have spoken it seems as if I had know it all along . . . but give me a chance. Perhaps I seem impossibly old? But let me see something of you and find out for yourself what I am really like. Ask Molly about me, if you like."

" But you are so clever, Lord Helford, and so . . . so important. I know nothing about the things you care about. You would find me a perfect idiot."

" Delia, dear, people don't fall in love with each other's conversation. It is just you that I want."

A little smile hovered over Delia's eyes and lips, and she half returned the clasp of Robert's hand.

" I'm afraid it is all a mistake," she said. " You were touched by my wanting to help Bobby. You don't know what a little duffer I am."

" Well, I shall hope," said Robert, lifting her hand for a moment to his lips. " I am not trying to flirt with you, Delia. I am quite in earnest. I shall get Molly to arrange something to-morrow—no, not to-morrow—we must get this wretched business about Bobby settled first. But I shall hear to-morrow. Come in to tea, and I will tell you all about it."

" Yes, I should love to do that," said Delia. They were silent after that. There seemed but one thing they could speak about, and words, to both of them, seemed already to have overshot the reality.

XLI

ROBERT felt that he must tell Molly at once what he had done. He hardly knew if he was glad or sorry, and still less did he know what Delia thought about him. On the whole he felt rather glad that he had spoken. He was fond of Delia, and liked everything about her. He was not deeply in love with her, but he felt that he could quite easily make love to her. What had toppled him over had been the way in which she had rushed to Bobby's help, and he was glad that it had happened so, for otherwise he felt that he was capable of drifting on, vaguely interested in Delia, admiring her when he saw her, but not thinking much about her in her absence.

Edith, who kept early hours, went up to bed. The Canon had long since disappeared, and Robert had gone off to his library after dinner. Molly sat on for a little in the drawing-room, looking extraordinarily young in a black dress—the Canon liked to see her in black—and with a string of pearls, that had been her mother's, round her neck. She had noticed that Robert was abstracted at dinner and had said little, and she felt sure that there was something he wanted to tell her. Molly did not indulge much in fancies about the future nor recollections of the past; she was satisfied at the way things were going. Robert seemed to be recovering his spirits, and was more like himself every day, while the Canon was as pleased with his new responsibilities, as he called them, as a child with a new toy.

The door opened and Robert looked in. " I thought I might catch you for a minute," he said.

" Yes, dear, I was waiting," said Molly, " I knew you wanted to see me."

" Two very unexpected things have happened to-day," he said. He told her in a few sentences about Bobby. " I don't think you need be anxious about that," said Molly. " And even if the other boys had led him wrong, I shouldn't be very anxious. Bobby's mind couldn't be made a nasty one by anything of the kind. Don't you think," she added, " that people make a great mistake by classing all such things together in a hurried, shame-faced way, and putting them under lock and key? It isn't reprobate to be tempted, and if such things arise out of a real affection, I think they can hardly be called wrong. And some people—like Trilby—go wrong out of mere good-nature. The horror is when people's minds get filled to the brim with such things, and when they expect to find everyone else as unclean as themselves."

" Yes, Molly, I think you are right—though it is rather an unusual view. But it is difficult to draw the line, and it is better to keep clear of the taint altogether."

" But it isn't a taint exactly," said Molly. " It seems to me that when two people live together who are not in love at all, it is infinitely worse than when two people who are in love go wrong. Yet one is respectable and the other is disreputable in the eyes of the world."

" Henry would say it was a sacrament."

" Yes, but the thing is much older than any sacrament."

" But about Bobby—I don't think there is anything amiss—but I can't bear his being unhappy."

" Beyond a certain point, no. But one has to fight things out some time or other."

" Then you wouldn't take him away? "

" I don't think so, Robert. I would wait and see how

he got on. I'm sorry he has had to face things so early; but he has faced them."

"Will you have a talk to him about it all?"

"I think not, Robert. He had better forget all about it."

"I haven't yet told you whom I found there with Bobby."

Molly turned round and looked at him in surprise.

"Delia was there—Bobby had written her a note to say he was unhappy, and she had rushed off to his assistance."

"That was nice of her—what I should have expected."

"We came back together—and now comes my second piece of news—I took your advice."

"You did *what?*"

"I offered her my heart."

"Oh, Robert, that was a mistake. You didn't offer your heart at all; you offered her your gratitude for Bobby's sake."

"That turned the scale perhaps; but I felt I could manage the other."

"What did she say?"

"She was very much surprised, and said it was all a mistake. However, I said I should ask her again."

"Oh, this is all wrong. Delia is a very diffident girl. She requires to be captured; she doesn't want excellent reasons."

"I thought you would have approved," said Robert, looking rather crestfallen.

"Oh, I am infinitely touched, Robert dear, that you should have thought of what I said at all. But I was only trying to inoculate you with the idea that you must get a wife, and Delia seemed to me the obvious person."

"But I have done it in the wrong way?"

" Robert, I can't tell you what I feel. I would marry you myself on the spot, to reward you, if I were free. But I am afraid you have frightened her. She must be thinking of all that it means instead of thinking about you. She is not what they call an ambitious girl, and the only way would be to persuade her that you simply couldn't live without her. Now she will feel as if she had been offered a well-paid post."

" Oh, well, there's no harm done. If she won't have me, she won't; and I shall not die of it."

Molly shook her head. " Worse and worse," she said.

" She is coming to tea to-morrow to hear about Bobby. You must set it right, if you wish to. But I warn you that if she says no, I shall resign myself to caring about you and you only."

They had risen and were standing together. For answer she put her arm round his neck and kissed him on the cheek. " Never mind," she said, " we must disentangle things somehow."

Robert heard next day from the Head Master, who said that he was glad to be able to exonerate Bobby entirely. He had resisted all temptation, and made no secret of his dislike of all the suggestions made. The Head Master added that he had traced the mischief to one particular boy, who would not be allowed to return. The others were to have another chance. He went on to say that he would make it clear to the other boys that Bobby had not only told no tales, but had done his best to shield the others. The whole affair, he ended by saying, might be regarded as a blessing in disguise.

He showed the letter to Molly, who gave it him back after reading it, and said, " It certainly is well disguised."

" The whole thing from beginning to end is a perfect horror to me," said Robert. " The awful thing is that these poor little wretches should drift into a thing of which they don't know the bearings, and without any idea how it might damage them for life."

" But that part of it is *our* folly," said Molly.

" Yes," said Robert, " I don't see how it can be expected that the Almighty should modify his arrangements to suit superior private schools—but it seems all a very discreditable tangle."

" I don't think your objections go very deep," said Molly. " But now about the other matter, I don't think I shall do any good by beginning upon Delia and telling her how tame and considerate you are. That is just what frightens her. If you could have torn her limb from limb! "

" I can't do these things violently," said Robert.

" No, you are too civilized. There must be violence somewhere. Now I flung myself screaming into Henry's arms. He simply had to sacrifice himself."

Robert smiled and shook his head. " Yes, that is the only thing you ever did of which I disapproved."

" Oh, the will that we call our own has very little to do with these matters," said Molly.

Delia arrived to tea in a condition of obvious and visible embarrassment, which was not decreased when she was shown into the library and found Robert alone. He rose to his feet at her entrance and handed her the Head Master's letter. " There," he said, " so that is all right—and I look upon you as Bobby's preserver. If you hadn't had a talk with him first, I think we should have scolded him into dumbness. But as it was, I was able just to give the Head Master the right sort of hint, and like a sensible man, he has found out for himself what he knew already. But I am deeply grateful to you."

" Oh, I did nothing," said Delia, smiling as she gave him back the letter.

" And now, Delia, there's the other thing about which I spoke to you. I am not going to unsay it, because I meant it every word. But I took you by surprise, and I am sorry for that. And I won't say that my speaking as I did was not connected with what you had done for Bobby; but it was simply because I found you had behaved as very few people indeed would have behaved, and exactly as I should most wish my dearest friend to behave. But I am going to leave it all alone for the present, and I am going to try to persuade you that I am not the awful sort of personage that you seem to think I am. But I shall behave as if nothing had happened, and I want you to do the same. I don't want you to begin by being afraid, because I want you to like me and trust me, if you can. You can't begin by cutting me, you know."

" I don't want to do that," said Delia, considerably reassured; " and I don't think I am as much afraid of you as I thought."

" At all events we can come and have tea," said Robert, putting his hand in Delia's arm for a moment, and leading her to the door. " There are only Edith and Molly and the Canon—now, *there's* a man that I am afraid of, if you like."

" I'm not afraid of being frightened intentionally," said Delia; " for then you know where you are; but the Canon always talks as if he were changing trains at a station, and was afraid of not finding a seat in the next train."

" Yes, he is on a very long journey indeed," said Robert. " He has been travelling ever since I knew him—but he won't come to much harm with Molly near him."

They went in to tea; and found the Canon relating a remarkable incident which had happened that day at St.

Hilary's. He had been shown a photograph—a group of the members of a boys' club—and he had been able to pick out at once and correctly all the boys who had been confirmed.

" There was but one doubtful case," said the Canon, in a high, mournful voice. " I hesitated long about it, and finally decided in his favour. I proved to be wrong; the boy had not been confirmed. But," added the Canon, triumphantly surveying the circle, " it appeared that the boy in question had been prepared for confirmation, but not actually confirmed, owing to his father's objection at the last moment."

" How clever of you," said Edith. " What *did* you go by? "

" By mere instinct," said the Canon, " there was a touch of happy mystery about the faces of the boys who had been confirmed."

" I wonder if you could do the same with a group of members of the present Cabinet," said Robert.

" You do well to be sceptical, Lord Helford," said the Canon; " we must proceed with due caution in such matters. But I doubt," he added, with a mournful smile, " if I should be successful with the distinguished body you suggest. I should fear that more than one of them might, by subsequent secularity—I say no word of moral evil—have parted with the impress of the Divine Grace."

In such moods as this it was impossible to say whether the Canon was serious, or whether he was enacting a high line of ecclesiastical farce.

" Those of us," he added, " like my dear Molly and Miss Mainwaring, whose lineaments have not yet been hardened by obstinate rejection of light, should be careful not to entertain the least thought that might debase—though not for facial considerations alone."

" It is very unkind of you, Canon," said Miss Edith, smiling, " to class me with reprobates like Lord Helford and yourself."

" My dear Miss Davenant," said the Canon, " I spoke most thoughtlessly. I was not passing any judgment upon the characters of any of those present. I was but referring to a certain malleability which can be credited to the very youthful. Your own face, if I may say so, bears witness to a life of spotless benevolence."

" Well," said Robert. " I am at all events condemned in good company."

" Lord Helford," said the Canon, " your face bears the visible mark of a high and noble chivalry—a quality which however admirable in itself, may yet be—I do not say that it is—very far from the Kingdom of God."

" To which," said Robert, smiling, " I feel bound to add a few words of friendly admonition. Edith, you must henceforth be on your guard against personal vanity. When you look in the glass you must say, ' That is not myself—it is only the result of my experience.' Molly is, I know, beyond the reach of admonition; but Delia, I must implore you to continue malleable! "

The Canon smiled approval. " And now," he said, in the tone of an approaching benediction, " now that however lightly I have sown the precious seed in a few Christian hearts, I must betake myself to my more serious studies."

" Now that's the sort of thing," said Edith, as the door closed behind the Canon, " which makes our dear Henry such a delightful guest—so unexpected. I doubt if so original a remark has been made at any tea-table in London to-day."

" I certainly won't lay odds," said Robert.

XLII

"MY dear Delia, you look worried—what is the matter?"

"I expect you know, Molly dearest. I know I oughtn't to come charging in like this in the middle of the morning; but I felt I must see you." And Delia bent down over Molly, as she sat writing, and gave her a long, straightforward kiss.

"Yes, I know something about it—nothing that you would mind my knowing; but why don't you wag your tail and look pleased? There's nothing final about it. You aren't even asked to say yes or no. You are only asked to see something of a very delightful man, whom many people would give their ears to know—and if when the time comes, you don't like the idea of it, you can say no. You're not going to be bullied into anything. I'm quite ready to intervene."

"I don't like the idea of it at all, Molly. I feel as if I was the fly asked to walk into the spider's parlour. I lay awake half last night and thought about it. I even began to suspect you of having a hand in it."

Molly laughed: "Well, I did have a hand in it, Delia. I think Robert wants a wife, and surely it isn't an insult to you, when there are literally hundreds of girls about who would fall down flat before him, that you should be the first to be thought of?"

"But isn't it beginning at the wrong end?"

"It is the end at which most people begin."

"Molly, I shall begin to suspect you of being worldly, if you talk like this."

" Well, tell me exactly what you feel."

" It's this. I love Bobby very much. I can't tell you how awfully pleased I was at his sending for me. I was almost glad that he should be in trouble that I might try to help him out. But Lord Helford simply terrifies me. Of course I admire him tremendously, and when he was so nice to me at Nan-Zephron, and took so much trouble to amuse me, I was delighted. But he didn't amuse me really—you want someone of your own age to do that, who really knows what you feel, and who in the middle of a crowd of old people is like a friend among a lot of enemies. Now I feel like that with Bobby—he understands how stupid most old people are."

" But Robert is not particularly old, and certainly not stupid."

" No, but he is not on my side of the line—and the idea of his making love to me and wanting to kiss me, makes me shiver."

" I will tell him he is not to try to kiss you, if you like. There is nothing very dreadful about it—he has often kissed me."

" Yes, but then you are his cousin."

" He didn't kiss me because I was his cousin."

" Yes, but you are more his age; besides you are so clever."

" I know nothing about his politics, Delia. Nor do I care in the least about them, except that they are his favourite game. I know very few of the people he knows. We never talk about books or art or all the things he is interested in—he doesn't want to talk about them to you or me."

" What do you talk to him about? "

" Oh, people, and things which happen, and a good deal about each other."

" But you are not in love with him, Molly? "

" Yes, dear, I am—I think him the one person in the world."

" But what about the Canon? "

" Oh, he is the other person in the world."

" But you don't want to hand Lord Helford over to someone else? "

" I will tell you exactly. Cynthia was one of my dearest friends, and I was thankful that she was Robert's wife. She knew how much we cared for each other, and she was very glad it was so. But when she thought she was dying —though no one else thought so—she told me that she wanted him to marry again, and not anyone like me, but someone (though she didn't say this) like herself; and I quite agreed. Now I think you are in some ways like Cynthia—and that is the greatest compliment I can pay you, for Cynthia was the bravest, straightest, and most devoted woman I have ever known. You see, I want Robert to be happy above everything, and I would do anything to make him happy, but when it came to the point—I'm going to be perfectly frank—and when I thought you might be the sort of wife he wanted, I had a sudden pang at the idea of someone coming in between him and me, and for about forty-eight hours I rather hated you, Delia. I was horrid to you that first talk we had, don't you remember? But then, dear, you showed me, not intentionally, of course, what you were like—and I thought, and still think that you would be able to make Robert happy."

Delia cast a troubled glance at Molly. " It's rather awful to think of all these things going on behind the scenes. I feel like a pawn in a game of chess."

" It is going on all the world over, dear."

" I don't feel as if I could take on people like that."

" I think it was a pity Robert spoke to you when he did. But he was very unhappy about Bobby, and very grateful to you for helping. What is wrong at present is that you don't know Robert well enough to be sorry for him."

" I know he is very sad about Cynthia," said Delia, " but I don't see what else there is to be sorry for. He has everything in the world he wants."

" Except one thing," said Molly, thinking of her mother's earnest words about Robert.

" What is that? "

" Happiness! He is a very able man, he is very successful, he is rich. But he cares little for all these things, though he would not like to lose them. He is sensitive, easily hurt, impatient. I don't think he will ever be happy, as you or I can be; but the one chance for him is to have someone close at hand whom he can depend upon and trust. Cynthia made him as happy as he could be. But, Delia dear, you mustn't feel you are being driven into this. I think you could make him happy if you loved him enough to want to do so; but if you married him without caring, you wouldn't make him happy at all."

" I don't think I want to marry at all," said Delia; " I want to go on as usual."

" I know, dear. *How* well I know! I remember I was frightened at the idea of Robert coming to stay with us. I enjoyed my life enormously and it seemed all exactly cut out for me; but it all came quite suddenly, and when I found out that I could help Robert, and that what he wanted was affection and trust, well, everything else fell into the background. But I was happier than I had ever been before."

" But you couldn't marry Lord Helford," said Delia, " so you were all right. I would do a great deal to help him, if I could help, almost anything except marry him."

" There's no great mystery about being married, Delia. We pretend to men that there is, to make them think it worth while; but it is a very obvious affair."

" I don't feel like that," said Delia. " I like the obvious things—but it would be dreadful to be so tied down to anyone."

" That is the fun of it," said Molly. " If one wasn't tied down, one would always be trying experiments—and there isn't time for many experiments."

" Of course, too," said Delia, pursuing her own thoughts, " everyone would think me a fool for saying no—and mamma would be dreadfully disappointed, and papa would think me crazy. I know all that, and it worries me."

" I shouldn't trouble my head about that," said Molly. " You are not going to be bullied into marrying him, but still less must you bully yourself into doing it. My advice is that you should just see him a little—he won't bore you —and feel perfectly free. If you find that you couldn't stand the idea, then don't dream of it. I feel it a duty to find a wife for him, but I should feel a criminal if I pushed some nice girl into his arms who didn't care for him. In fact, if I see you don't care for him, I shan't let you marry him."

" What will you do? " said Delia.

" Tell him to drop it."

" Will he do what you tell him? "

" Yes, I think so."

" I still don't see," said Delia, with a sigh, " where I come in; and still less where the Canon comes in! "

" If you *do* marry Robert," said Molly, with a touch of severity, "you won't need any explanation on either point. But you shall *not* be worried, Delia dear. I understand w hat you feel; and if at any time you say to me that you

can't bear any more, it shall be dropped at once. There, will that comfort you? I care far too much about you to cast you to the wolves."

At this moment the door opened and Robert appeared. He looked from one to the other: " Am I intruding? " he said. " It looks to me as if someone was being what they call ' carpeted,' and for the life of me I don't know which."

" We have been administering comfort to each other, Robert. We poor women are much misunderstood. We do all the work of the world. . . ."

" And the men come in and take the credit; I know. It's very hard, but I want you or both of you or either of you to do one little job more. I have got to go and talk political secrets with Balston, who is ill at his house up in Regent's Park—it's a thing I never do, going to see people."

" Robert, you are a real old-fashioned grand seigneur."

" Not at all! It's a great thing to have a rule about things of this kind. People accept it as a matter of course, and feel deeply grateful if you break it. The talk won't take long, and then I thought as I was going all that way I would go and look at the new aquarium in the Zoo."

" Not I," said Molly, " I can't bear seeing things in captivity."

" Even if you know that they live longer and keep in far better condition than wild things? "

" Oh, but Robert, think of their loss of self-respect."

" That is all sentiment—Delia, will you come? "

Delia went. She had never seen Robert quite in this mood. He said nothing about their talk, paid her no compliments.

" I do like seeing things through water," he said, as they stood in front of one of the tanks. " Look at that sharp-nosed fish and the swirl of silver bubbles—look at the colour of the pebbles, and that horned thing sitting

humped on the rock, twiddling his antennæ. I could look at this for ever." He put a friendly arm through hers, and they went on to the next tank. A squid with glaring eyes drew all his soft tentacles in and slid out of sight; a flat fish with uneasy mouth and crooked eyes undulated softly across the gravel. " That's rather a nightmare," said Robert. With her awe-inspiring suitor in this mood Delia soon lost her self-consciousness. They rambled about talking like two children.

XLIII

LENT came to an end, and the Canon was much preoccupied about the Three Hours' Service which he was to take at St. Hilary's. Molly saw very little of him in these days, but was aware that he was extremely happy, in the frame of mind of an artist painting a big picture, who has turned the corner, is satisfied with his conception, and has only the beloved task of *finishing* ahead of him. She determined to accompany him. The Prebendary had reserved seats for herself and Edith, but Molly was almost frightened by the crowd. Every seat on the floor of the church and the galleries was crowded, and people stood in aisles and gangways. The Prebendary in his cassock moved about marshalling and accommodating the crowd, a stately and courteous figure. Molly found herself dreading the appearance of Henry upon the scene. She could not imagine how any human being could assume the responsibility of exhorting and directing such a mass of humanity. Neither was it a mere sensation-loving crowd. She saw among the audience many well-known men, unimpassioned critical people who would have no sympathy either for quaintness or sentiment. The organ began a soft and mournful music by some old composer, with all the exquisite beauty born of intense concentration and repression, the great pedals giving the effect of darkness and solitude. It was like the sad intentness of a single human heart which had lost its old eager happiness, and wondered to find its renunciation whispering secrets hitherto undreamed of.

Henry came slowly down the centre of the church,

seemingly unconscious of the scene, ascended the pulpit, and surveyed the congregation with a piercing look. He wore a black tippet over his surplice which brought out the uplifted gravity of his face. He gave out a hymn, and at the end of it, speaking in low, clear tones, began what seemed at first to Molly almost too bare and simple a discourse. She had very nearly a sense of disappointment when the first section came to an end; but there was a sense of some hidden passion in the air, a reserve of emotion which somehow made itself felt. And then with each successive section he seemed to trace the ascending scale of humanity, with a poignant emphasis. The passage which most moved her was that on the words " I thirst." The Canon in giving out the phrase itself spoke like a man uttering something so strange and terrible as to be almost unbelievable. He went on to trace the frame of mind of a man with tenacious worldly ambitions, the unappeasable longing for recognition, the narrow soul abiding in the hollow vale of echoes, listening anxiously for the plaudits which it has designed should follow every calculated word. " Such a nature comes no nearer to the joyful simplicity of the free heart; his own necessities and cravings twine round him like serpents. He cannot be content to have laboured, to have done his best, unless the crash of foolish approbation attends every movement. Yet if we work in that spirit, God gives us our desire; He tosses the gifts we have chosen contemptuously to us, and sends leanness withal into our soul."

His words cut like knives, and Molly felt it to be a terrible revelation of the bitterness of his earlier life. Indeed that, she felt, made the strength of his appeal, that it had the sharpness of a personal desperation; and he went on to say that it was clear from a hundred hints in

the Gospel that the thirst to anticipate His success was the sorest trial of the Saviour's human life.

But it was when he came to deal the words " it is finished "—which he pronounced with a great triumphant emphasis—that the address reached its noblest height. He depicted the intense relief, the rush of utter ecstasy into the suffering soul at being permitted to see for an instant that the work which seemed a moment before so impossibly far-off, so infinitely beyond the reach of effort or prayer, was actually accomplished, and that nothing was left but the easy and delightful act of death—" the most blissful recorded utterance of all recorded human speech. The soul in this utter passion of peace needs no pealing of uplifted trumpets, no ranked solemnity of angels. He has put all that behind Him; it would be but a mere wearisome formality, a meaningless interruption. He leaps straight from the torture and the dropping blood, and the howling mob and the fond laments of those who should have known and loved Him better, straight to the calm of eternity—straight to the Heart of His Father and His God." An irrepressible shiver of emotion seemed to pass over the congregation, and Molly felt her eyes choked by a sudden gush of tears. It seemed to her that she had never before seen the passionate quality of her husband's spirit and the surpassing beauty of his hopes—even though she was at the same time aware that she could not cast the world aside with the great gesture of disdain that the Canon gave. Molly found Edith frankly sobbing beside her, but what moved her most was the extraordinarily rapt look which she saw on so many of the faces that had seemed most critical. The Canon had certainly triumphed; his speech had all the overmastering beauty of an outburst of Divine song.

Molly and Edith waited in the car outside the vestry.

There was a great crowd of people waiting in the street, and when the Canon appeared with the Prebendary, who conducted him with a respect he would hardly have conceded to a prince of the blood, a few people pressed forward to shake his hand, and as they moved away hats were taken off in a respectful silence. " Poor souls! " said the Canon, loftily.

" Dearest Henry," said Molly to him, " I can't find *any* words to tell you how beautiful it was. Don't you feel any joy at that sight—you must! " " Nothing," said the Canon; " I feel nothing whatever except the deepest contrition and shame."

Only one further allusion did the Canon make to his sermon. He had gone upstairs with Molly, and at the door of her room—his own room being on the floor above—he said, " May I come in, dearest, for a moment."

" Why, of course! "

" A great door was opened to me to-day, dearest," he said. " I did my best, and I cannot pretend that I did not at the time gain a certain unworthy enjoyment from the scene. But hardly was it over than it became as ashes in my mouth."

" My dearest Henry, you must not say that. It was the most beautiful thing I have ever heard—full of beauty, from end to end. I have never seen people so deeply affected."

" You are very good to me," said the Canon. " But dearest, I had but one thought in my mind. It was for you that I made preparation, and for you that I spoke. It has always been of the nature of a grief to me that, recognizing as I do your own deeper and truer spiritual instinct, we two have never been able to make humble access to the Cross of Christ by the one path through which I can approach it. If I could feel that my darling Molly could

go hand in hand with me—it was for her sake that I spoke to-day—it would be indeed a crown of happiness."

He had taken her hand in his own and bent down smiling. She put her arm round his neck and kissed him.

" Dearest Henry, what am I to say? I would say anything to please you, but I know you don't wish for that. I did feel how utterly beautiful and noble it all was—but, dearest, I can't see it like that. God is mysterious to me and far-off; I hardly even know if I love Him, except as the giver of love. But all about me I see people whom I can and do love with all my heart; and it is thus that I get nearest to the best that I know."

" You have warrant in Scripture," said the Canon, " for beginning thus! As for me, I come at the love of men—in so far as I come at it at all—through the love of God. It is all included in that larger love."

" Henry, do not press me. I must know, before I can love. I know you, and I love you truly. You have never failed me; and I love you better every year. Is not that enough? "

" It should be enough," said the Canon, gently, disengaging himself from her embrace. " Bless you, my darling! " And then he turned and went wearily and dispiritedly away.

XLIV

Lord Helford to Molly Davenant

Helford House.

Dearest Molly,

I think things are moving. Delia is certainly a darling, in her own way; what I like particularly is that the fact that I am (outside of the personal factor) a decidedly eligible match doesn't make the faintest difference to her—rather the other way; also that if she doesn't understand what I say, she doesn't pretend to; nor does she ever do what the nicest women are liable to—namely discuss one's own subjects, hoping that personal sympathy will atone for lack of definite knowledge. She is getting more used to me, and I discern not only a strong sense of humour but a very sound judgment of character. All this is, however, by the way—mere adjuncts to a great personal charm; something very fresh and innocent and beautiful about her. The way she looks after that rather tiresome old papa of hers is delightful to see. Does this all sound rather cold-blooded, as if I were appraising a pretty slave? It isn't so. Anyone more free, more independent, more needing to be really wooed, I don't know. You see I didn't begin it proprio motu, *but " taught by the priest," as the marriage service says. I was, of course, quite wrong to speak to her as I did—you were entirely right about that—it looked as if I expected the ripe fruit to drop off if I merely raised my hand. But it was quite unconscious insolence on my part. What made me speak to her was the sudden sense I had how much I cared for Bobby, and the fact that she loved him as she did made me perhaps feel that I was a little included.*

Of course, what I miss in her is the sort of perception and sympathy you gave me from the first, rising to every imaginary fly, and seeing the point before I had made it—good God, Molly, what a marvellous time that was at Menerdue, when I was so sore and dreary, and you met me at every point. I shall never feel what I felt then for any other living creature. But then you kept me in order, for I should have been capable of anything, any flight, and wildness. You never lost your hold and I owe the solid happiness of my life to you and Cynthia—though I was badly hit when you took Henry.

It seems, indeed, as if you and I were polygamists at heart —but I expect that most people are, only we *dare to recognize it. Indeed, I am not sure that the kind of concentrated devotion that the most admired partners have is not a cramping and disabling thing. Write and encourage me. Whatever happens, you are the one and only spirit in the world that I recognize as mine—and no day ever passes without long and* thirsty *thoughts of you, my darling.*

Your Robert.

Molly to Robert

Menerdue.

Dearest,

I am thankful you wrote. Good luck to your fishing. You are right, it won't be easy. I, of course, having no very exciting or exacting duties, can't always restrain pangs of what would be jealousy if I didn't love Delia and you so well; but are now only a kind of envy. And yet I don't know. My dear Henry needs me very much just now. He has worn himself out over this London business—I so wish you had heard him speak that day; there was a kind of splendour about his visions which I can perceive and admire, though I can't adopt the visions. And now he is suffering cruelly from the reaction; it takes the form of feeling himself a charlatan,

though the letter-bag is crammed with the screeds of inquirers. The children, too, are much in my mind, and Austin is beginning to be aware of his father's moods and rather to resent them; and Cynthy is extremely wilful. So I have my hands pretty full with diplomacies which you would find tiresome.

It is strange to me that though I love you with every bit of my being, I yet have never had any doubt that I was right to marry Henry, nor do I regret it in the least; I would do anything to help him, and love being able to do so. Moreover, I still think that if I had married you I should have taken from you more than I could have given you. Were ever two people so strangely divided? Yet I am not conscious of cutting my heart into slices and handing it round.

You will have some time off at Easter I suppose? Can't you get the Mainwarings down? Or shall I ask Delia to come here. I could write on for ever, but my hive is buzzing and I must go.

Your own Molly.

Molly was indeed anxious about the Canon. He could not work, and he had no hobbies. He took long walks which tired him out. He sat aimlessly in the drawing-room turning over books. He talked in a sombre way, and complained that in whatever he read he found a melancholy reflection of his own worst tendencies. " John Wesley forbade his preachers to scream—he said that screaming imperilled the soul. I am finding the truth of that . . . all that I do and see is ominous—the monotonous ebb and flow of the burdened tide, the sea-birds wailing as they seek their meat. . . . Molly, what has befallen me?—my heart is dry as summer dust."

One day as he was reading he suddenly put down his book and lay back in his chair closing his eyes. She

was beside him in a moment. " A passing giddiness," he said; " I have felt it often of late, a strangely unmanning sensation." Molly begged in vain that he would see Dr. Grimes—" No, dearest, it is nothing. I am in no degree unwell—it is a mere ailment. But I am strangely suggestible, to use a deplorable word. If I am told by a casual person that I am looking well, I am well all day. If I am told that I look ill, I feel ill at once. It is a detestable weakness. Dr. Grimes would only make me feel ill."

He was adamant. But Molly contrived to look in upon Dr. Grimes and told him.

" H'm," said Dr. Grimes, " what has he been doing? "

Molly told him all about the London time. Dr. Grimes knitted his brows.

" He has overdone it, of course: that is temperament. But he ought not to get vertigo at his age. He must take things easy for a bit, Molly."

" You aren't anxious about him? "

" Not in the least—but it mustn't go on."

" What does it mean? "

" That he has probably lived what you and I would call six months in those six weeks. It is a form of brain-tiredness. He had better do nothing."

" He does do nothing—except lament his sins," said Molly, smiling.

" Oh, he may do that," said Dr. Grimes; " all run-down people do. But he ought to loaf, and very few highly-strung people *can* loaf."

" He is always rather miserable if he isn't working."

" I don't think *you* will ever suffer from giddiness Molly."

" I didn't consult you about myself, dear Grim—I have always plenty to do! "

" Well, I can't advise anything. I can only say he

mustn't *work*. If he works, it may become serious. It's a danger signal."

" Danger of what? "

" Oh, that depends—general nerve-prostration. I wish he would see me—I would scare him."

" Yes, but he won't," said Molly, " he is afraid of being scared."

Unfortunately a letter came from the Bishop asking the Canon to consider the possibility of a mission in May. Molly did not know what to do.

" What shall I say to the Bishop, dearest? " said the Canon, over the Bishop's letter. " I cannot tell him that I have lost my faith—that I have no interest in the saving of souls. That would be the truth."

" It only means you are tired, dear. Tell the Bishop, or let me tell him how things stand."

" No, dearest, we must not do that. I must set myself doggedly to it."

Molly in despair wrote to the Bishop, entreating him to find some way out, and not to give her away. The Bishop wrote her a comforting note, and a week later wrote and asked the Canon to come over and see him.

" Dearest Molly, this visit is impossible. I am not fit for these secular festivities. My only desire is to spend the brief remainder of my days in peace and penitence. It is in vain that I plan a message of hope, and call to remembrance my song. I am, indeed, like the burdened patriarch, a brother unto dragons and a companion unto owls."

" That's not a very encouraging description of your devoted family," said Molly, laughing.

" My dearest," said the Canon, " you shame me by the application! It was mere thoughtlessness. I am shocked at my folly. . . ." He rose from his chair, and moved towards her, when he suddenly staggered, put his

hand to his head, and would have fallen if she had not caught him.

She got him to bed and sent for the doctor. He was soon himself again and murmured thanks and apologies. But he was content to lie and slumber for the rest of the day; he would not even be read to. He asked to see the children, and was amused by Cynthy telling him that she expected he had been playing at spinning round. But he showed no animation. The doctor came and he answered his questions mechanically.

" What is it? " he asked.

" Not much amiss, Canon, at present. But you mustn't go on having these turns. You have simply been overdoing it, and you must be content to lie here for a day or two—do nothing you don't like. If Molly tries to read to you, don't attend."

When the children had gone to bed, Molly came and sat with him, reading quietly to herself.

" You mustn't *bother* yourself, dearest," he said once, gently; " I know you like to be free."

" Henry, dearest, I am happiest here."

He smiled, and presently murmured a little to himself; and soon after fell asleep, breathing evenly, like a child.

XLV

AFTER two or three days in bed, the Canon was markedly better, but remained in a rather apathetic state. Molly, however, found when she consulted him that he was in favour of her asking Delia to stay with them; and soon after her arrival Robert and Bobby arrived at Nan-Zephron.

Robert was very anxious that the Canon should try a little motoring, and the doctor approved. Robert used to take the Canon out for the afternoon, and he developed a great taste for being conveyed to some secluded place, a village by the sea, or a wooded valley with a falling stream. Then Robert and either Molly or Delia, as the case might be, would leave him there, tucked up in a rug and gazing silently about him, while they took a stroll round and rejoined him. Sometimes it was Delia who came, but she would on other days go off with Bobby and the children. Sometimes she would sit with the Canon in the open air on a sunny morning, and a real though dumb friendship sprang up between them. " I approve of your Delia," he once said to Molly. " In these exhausted moods of mine, I like company, but I do not desire to be ministered to, still less to be questioned. My mind seems to be slowly battling against a current of broken thoughts, and Delia can be silent without either repression or embarrassment. If I were stronger, I would endeavour to build the foundations of her faith which seems to me a haphazard one. But meanwhile I recognize in her a sisterly spirit."

It was a strange time for Molly; the members of her little company often paired off together and left her solitary.

Robert commented on this one day, and said, " You mustn't think I am deserting you, dearest Molly. But the truth is that when I can get you, I want no other company; and if I am to make unobtrusive love to anyone else, I must be out of your reach." He smiled not very cheerfully and went on, " It is rather a singular position, you know, Ferdinand despatched by Miranda to make love to Phyllis. In a book, it would seem to be fantastic—but in real life, I get much attached to Delia—she is so absolutely transparent! "

There was a day when Molly's fortitude rather gave way. The Canon had been a little fractious in the morning, and complained that he was being kept from his work. " These good doctors are so concerned with the body and its frailties that they forget that the mind can be perverse as well. My mind aches with inanition, my soul desires comfort. How willingly would I consult some spiritual superior, if there were one in whom one could have the smallest confidence."

" You can't want me to aid and abet you," said Molly, " against the explicit advice of Dr. Grimes."

" Could you not persuade him? Could he not see that I must be about my Father's business? "

" Why not ask the Bishop? "

" The Bishop is too much used as a machine to thwart the promptings of the Spirit."

So he continued; and Molly became almost impatient with his childish persistence. A deep desire to have a talk with Robert by way of contrast assailed her—she had not spoken to him for a week. It was arranged at luncheon that she should go out with Robert and the Canon; and then she became aware that the plan was not pleasing to Delia. However, it was settled so, though it was with a twinge of something like annoyance that Molly realized she had a rather fretful team to drive.

They drove that day down to a tiny fishing hamlet on Penkevil Creek. The little stone-built houses huddled picturesquely together, where the stony road came down rather steeply between two rocky bluffs. There was a quay of rough stone, and a sandy beach, with the wild copse coming down nearly to the water's edge, beyond which was a great seaward-facing headland known as Trevanion, the upper part a down of golden green, and the lower part a great sweep of dark rocks touched here and there as by a painter's brush with golden lichen; among the buttresses and pinnacles, high caves ran into darkness.

The Canon settled down very comfortably among his furs, looking out to the sea with its shadowy melting rim, and Molly, as she went with Robert down the quay-stair leading to the beach and waved her hand to him, thought that she had never seen him look so magnificent, with his great uplifted brow and mournful eyes. But of what was he thinking?—how little after all she knew of the daily and hourly current of his thoughts!

They determined to walk to the headland, and as they stepped on to the sandy level, strewn with sea-wrack, Robert looked smilingly at her and said, " My dear Molly, what is this? "

" What is what? "

" You have seemed to me of late absolutely determined never to do what you liked—to spend all your time marshalling your pawns! "

" Oh, Robert, it was just that—I felt I *must* have you by yourself a little. Henry has been so persistent this morning about getting back to work! "

" Oh, you have *earned* it," said Robert. " I don't doubt that: and good God, don't suppose that I haven't been longing to see you—though I seldom have the chance."

" You know the difficulties."

" Yes, but who makes them? Has it ever occurred to you, darling Molly, that ever since we made friends, you have always been engineering plans which end in our not being together. First of all you sent me back to Cynthia; then when Cynthia got round that, you married Henry; and now you are doing your best to get me married again."

" I know it sounds hopeless—but what am I to do? I can't live without you. . . ."

" And you won't live with me. Wouldn't it have been simpler—I am not saying this to vex you—if you had put your first scruples aside, and allowed us to go where our hearts were leading us? "

" They wouldn't have led us very far—and we should not have been able to get back."

" But Molly, seriously, isn't what you have brought about worse—that we should love each other, and yet be both living or planning to live with someone else. You said to me once that the only justification of love was love itself."

" I am sure I never said anything so neat! But it doesn't go against my theory—I don't think we need confine our love to one person."

" But doesn't that open the door to many undesirable things? "

" Yes—but the theory that you may live with someone without loving them opens many worse doors. I never held that."

" I see you are quite inflexible, and quite unreasonable," said Robert, " but I'm not going to be vexed. I will take anything you will give me."

" How does your suit prosper? "

" Oh, Delia's a perfect darling."

" What more do you want? "

" That she should think *me* a perfect darling."

" Robert, don't be hard on me, dearest. I am not the untroubled philosopher you seem to think. I don't like giving anyone any share in you."

" I'm not hard on you, my own darling. The fact is that we are none of us worthy to kiss your feet. You want to give everyone whatever they want, and you give all you have without a thought—and it ends in our all wanting more."

They had passed the woodland now and the black rocks of Trevanion began to tower above them. Molly stopped and looked up at them.

" It's all a sort of cowardice, Robert. I suppose there are places like this in life, steep and black, which no one can climb—and I suppose I don't like admitting it, but go on trying to believe it is all wood and field and stream."

" Perhaps it is like the fiction by which I dare to call this grim place mine."

" Does it belong to you? "

" Yes—but in what sense? I can't do anything to it or with it. It stands up here and defies us all—what does it care whom it belongs to."

" I see what you mean. You think I claim life too much for my own."

" I'm as suspicious of life as I am of these cruel break-neck precipices—I think *you* trust life too much. We don't live for ever."

" I'm not so sure."

" Well, if we continue to exist, it only makes the complications worse. What does Cynthia think, if she is aware of it all, of our plans? "

" Cynthia trusted life even more than I do."

Robert put his arm round her as she stood gazing at him with wide eyes and parted lips.

" I'm very tired of it all, Molly. Even you defy me. Why can't I have my will with you? "

" Don't be tired, Robert darling—don't even think about being tired. Life comes upon us, wave upon wave. We dread it, perhaps, but it doesn't hurt us, and passes on. Could I do anything but bless life for giving me you? You want to pull life to pieces like a flower. I want to look at it, to breathe its breath, to love it—even to leave it."

" Oh, Molly, you are right. You give me a new kind of strength—but you leave me and I forget—why can't I have you always with me? "

As often happened to them, they suddenly seemed to reach the depth of their thought, and to have no more that they could say. They turned their backs upon the bleak precipice, now growing bleaker as the day declined. The waves fell softly, the back-ebb hissed over the shingle, and a faint light of sunset came out beyond the cold hills, and touched the creek with liquid lines of faintest gold.

XLVI

WHEN Molly returned home, she found that Delia had returned from an afternoon at Nan-Zephron. The Canon soon retired to bed, and later in the evening the children, tired by a strenuous day of general romping, went gratefully to their repose, so that Molly found herself alone with Delia. Molly was a little disturbed by her talk with Robert. It was as if she had explored the vaults which lay behind her contented life, and found them filled with high explosives. It seemed, too, as if an intangible veil had fallen between herself and Delia. Delia was not one who could diplomatically disguise her feelings, though she was reserved about them; and what Molly felt was that the cord of communication between herself and Delia had been somehow severed. She spoke at last, for she was acutely sensitive to any shadow cast over a friendship, and at this time especially she did not wish to be out of touch with Delia.

"Delia, has anything gone wrong?"

"Nothing particular—why do you ask? Perhaps I am a little tired."

"I feel as if I had done something of which you disapprove."

"It is not that, Molly dear. You have done nothing. Perhaps it is that I have a feeling, and am rather ashamed of having it."

"You didn't like my carrying Robert off to-day—was that it?"

Delia smiled and blushed. "Perhaps I thought I was rather packed off with the children, told to run away and play."

" I know the feeling, Delia, when one knew that the authorities were going to talk over one's case, and felt one had a right to stay."

" Something like that. I feel a little as if I were a card in someone's hand, and was not being considered on my own merits."

" Perhaps you have grown up all of a sudden? "

" No, Molly, it is not only that. How can I say it? Of course I know that you are Lord Helford's greatest friend and that he does very much as you advise."

" I don't think he takes my advice. But he is apt to see rather clearly the different sides to a question—and then it is often a help to talk things over with someone. But he always makes up his own mind."

" Do you care for him very much, Molly? "

" Yes, very much. I would do anything to make him happy."

Delia looked at her long and earnestly. " You told me that once before," she said, " and I think I have changed my mind about him. He seemed to me to have everything in the world, but now I don't think he is happy."

" And you would help him if you could."

" Yes, Molly dear, that's what I mean. I do not know why I should not tell you. He has been so good to me all this time, and done exactly what I wished about . . . about what he asked me; and I think he is quite wonderful."

" And you would like him to ask you again? " said Molly, smiling.

" That sounds so horrid," said Delia, " and I don't really see how I could help him. I am *stupid*—I don't mean about ordinary things, but I am stupid deep down inside."

" What nonsense! the only stupid people are the people who haven't an idea in their heads except how to amuse

themselves. You are not like that. But Robert hasn't changed his mind. He cares for you very much, so much that he doesn't mean to bother you."

" But he wouldn't bother me," said Delia; " he wouldn't bother me at all . . . you must think me a dreadful weathercock, Molly, when I began by being so much annoyed at the idea that I was to be pushed in to fill a gap. But it all came over me like a flash, when I came down here. I hadn't happened to see Lord Helford for a fortnight, and first I began to feel that I was very dull, and then suddenly I felt how very much I did want to see him . . . and now I think about him all day long," said poor Delia, blushing and confused; " do you really think, Molly, that he *does* care about me? "

" He cares very much—I have already told you so."

" You won't tell him anything, Molly."

" I shall do what I think best. But confess one thing, Delia. When I went off with him to-day, didn't you think I was taking too much on myself, and perhaps coming in between him and you? "

" It was disgusting of me," said Delia.

" You see what these men are! I began by being jealous of you, and now you are beginning to be jealous of me. You and I, who are simply made to be friends! Men aren't worth it, Delia."

" Oh, but they are so much to be pitied."

" Very well. I shall tell Robert that you pity him so much that you will consent to listen to him."

" Molly, if you dare! But I am glad I have told you—it was beginning to weigh on my mind. . . . But tell me once more, Molly—do you *really* think he cares? Sometimes I think so, and then I wake up in the morning and think what a conceited little beast I am. . . . Molly I have never felt anything like this for anyone before."

"I should think not—that is part of your charm."

"I used to think it silly. I used to wish I was a boy. Now I think it the most wonderful thing in the world."

"You will do, Delia. And now I must go to sit with Henry."

XLVII

THE morning arrived when Delia was to leave Menerdue. Robert was to take her back by car to London. Ever since Molly's talk with her, she had gone about in a state of open happiness, and even the Canon who had grown very much attached to her, told her that she went about the house like Primavera, " heralding the tiptoe coming of light and spring," which temporarily, at all events, reduced her to silence.

Delia and Molly had a brief interview in a corner. " There was one thing I wanted to ask you, Molly," she said. " You know what we talked about . . . did you . . .? "

" No," said Molly, " I didn't—I thought he had better find out for himself—he very soon will. Let him believe it occurred to him first."

" I think you were right, Molly; but how can I thank you for what you have done?—to think that I should have felt at first that I was being interfered with, almost driven like a sheep to market."

" I thought you would soon see what a fine creature he is—inconsistent, of course, full of moods, but never mean or petty; hasty and even unfair sometimes, but never ungenerous . . . but you must have the fun of finding this all out for yourself."

" The *fun!* " said Delia; " it all seems to me the most serious thing in the world."

One of the things that most delighted Molly was the way in which Bobby, who was to accompany them, took Delia into his adoring charge. He hung about her, he

fetched and carried, he snuggled into the car beside her. Austin and Cynthy were a little vexed by his preference, and felt themselves somewhat neglected by an old friend. " A dividing force! " thought Molly to herself, remembering what Cynthia Helford had once said to her; and Molly wondered for a moment if she had made the mistake of trying too much to annihilate the severing force of love from her own life.

They sped away; and even Robert himself seemed to have a tranquil gaiety such as Molly had not seen in him since Cynthia died.

Molly turned back with a sort of rueful flatness to her own concerns. The Canon openly bemoaned the departure of Delia, the children found each other's company unusually uninteresting. Molly wondered what she could do to revive the flagging spirits of her little circle.

She thought she would pay a visit to Aunty Pel, who had a wonderful power of kindling a languid situation into life, and discovering the joy of the Lord in the most unpromising corners.

She found Aunty Pel, her housework done and her little sitting-room arranged for sociability with abundant woolwork, reading the Bible with an expression on her face such as children wear when they are drawing Christmas gifts from a bran pie. The Bible was full of surprises to Aunty Pel, and none the worse because they were placed there, she fancied, for her immediate and special comfort.

Molly was enveloped in an ample embrace. " Well, Aunty Pel," she said, " so we have sent all our fine folks away, and are all wondering what to do with ourselves. You never feel like that, Aunty, I'll be bound? "

" No, dearest Miss Molly," said Aunty Pel, with a wide smile. " I find the dear Lord's commandments exceeding broad, and though I take delight more than most in the

gathering of friends, yet I feel company rise up sometimes like a cloud between me and the dear Lord's countenance —and when I wake up to His likeness, I am satisfied."

" What did you think of my new friend, Delia? "

" Birds of a feather! I said to myself, Miss Molly, when I saw her stepping with you down the street."

" Oh, Delia's very different from me—she's much more sensible."

" People can be too sensible, my dear, and waste their time in scrubbing the moss off the stones, the dear Lord's pretty covering."

" How did you think Lord Helford was? "

" Ah, dear Miss Molly, I don't know. He wears a mask on his face. Not an unkind mask, but he doesn't like his heart being looked into. He doesn't trust the Lord abundantly. But it comes to my mind, Miss Molly, that she might make him a good wife. It is true he is older by a deal; but they say that the best lover is the one that has a touch of the father about him."

" That's just what I think, Aunty. I think they are made for one another."

" Then to be sure, it's the dear Lord's work," said Aunty Pel. " But I look on his lordship and you as brother and sister, and a sister isn't always best pleased when her brother loves a strange countenance better."

" I don't think Delia's countenance is a strange one at all! "

" Ah, that's my manner of speaking. You always like to make a little fun of Aunty Pel."

" I know, I know," said Molly, patting Aunty Pel's stout hand. " But you approve, don't you? "

" It's the Lord's dear will that I try to see in all this, my darling," said Aunty Pel. " But you have your own dear husband, and though the Canon is a true man of

God, it ain't like feeding in a green pasture to be much with him. But a husband is like a kettle of fish—the more trouble it gives you, the better the dish."

" You think I am trying to attend to too many kettles, Aunty ? "

" The Lord himself puts the words in your mouth, my darling Miss Molly. 'Twas not for me to say them. But they all come about you like bees, and I sometimes think there ain't enough honey to go round."

" You are quite right, Aunty. I must draw my horns in a little."

" Like a snail, so be it? " mused Aunty. " But, darling Miss Molly, we can't *begin* with the joy of the Lord. The sufficient grace comes first. I know well that you have seen affliction by the rod of His wrath. But though that has been blest to you, you can't keep all your dear pets for ever in the fold. Your heart may go out to follow them, but that mustn't draw you away from tending those that remain. The Lord takes them away one by one, blessed be His name. All that were mine He has taken away "—and Aunty Pel's eyes dimmed with large tears—" but I bless His holy name, for them, and for the joy He sends into my heart, that I may give of it to all that are athirst freely."

Molly returned to Menerdue much comforted. The thought of the old woman, whose life had been a series of tragic losses, sitting exultant in the little house, with her door and her heart open to all, gave her a sense of something splendid and heroic, made out of the simplest materials and yet ineffably beautiful. Whatever disasters had happened, Aunty Pel was a conqueror. That seemed to her more like the Kingdom of Heaven, than the Canon's high triumph among the serried ranks of melodious angels.

XLVIII

Lord Helford to Molly

My darling Molly,

It has all come about so simply, and I find myself surprisingly happy. Would you like to know the finale? We three got on together like a house on fire; we landed at Salisbury, and had dinner; and the delightful nonsense that Delia and Bobby talked made me feel rather an old buffer. Very soon after they became suddenly and grossly sleepy, and rushed off to bed. I read my book and thought about you. Then I went off, and as I passed, looked into Bobby's room. He had gone to bed, and Delia was beside him, sitting on his bed, with Bobby curled up very comfortably in her arms. "So this is what going to bed means," I said, like the heavy father. "Oh, Daddie, come and sit here, too," said Bobby, "it is all such fun." Delia looked up at me in a curious way, and it seemed to me the moment had come. I said: "Well, we all get on so well together it seems as if it would be a pity to separate?" Delia got up, still holding Bobby's hand, and I said to Bobby, "What would you say to having this elderly lady for your mother?" "Oh, do, *Delia," said Bobby, "just* do. *That would be splendid—I'll do anything you tell me." "You can't resist* that," *I said to her; and she didn't.*

Of course, it won't be just yet awhile. That is understood. My hands are very full just now, and the convenances *must be thought of. I shall go on with Edith for a bit; and I must try not to be as foolish about Delia as I feel inclined to be. But I shall be able to see her constantly, and must remove the last shadow of deference which surrounds me in*

her mind. I don't believe that any of the various conveniences I have to offer have the slightest weight with the dear girl. But I have told her that she must learn her business, and act as a kind of secretary to me for a bit.

But, Molly dearest, don't think for a single instant that this makes or will make the smallest difference in our *love affair. It all seems to be happening in a different region. What a number of regions there are inside us, to be sure. Nor do I forget Cynthia in my mirth. Indeed, I have a strange and rather awe-inspiring feeling that somehow I am adding to Cynthia's happiness. My Delia is extraordinarily good about that. It is a comfort to me that she loved Cynthia so much. But all this happiness is of your contriving. I don't know a single person in the world who could have behaved as you have done. I don't believe you have ever given yourself a thought, and I can't tell you with what amazement I regard it all. I mustn't write more, my darling. But I will tell you this, that Delia has seen this letter. She looked rather aggrieved at the phrase about deference. But when it came to the end, she burst into tears, and said to me, " Can you really? I wouldn't hurt Molly for anything."*

Your loving Robert.

Miss Mainwaring to Molly Davenant

Yes, darling Molly, it is as you have said, and I don't know what to say to you by way of thanks. Robert (that seems strange, but he won't let me say anything else) showed me his letter. I think I do understand what you have done. And, Molly, if you can't bear it, I will clear out even now. Robert says you are quite used to giving him away, which sounds rather cruel. But if you do *approve, I will take it as a gift from you with all love and gratitude possible. I can't help saying once more what a little fool I was. I felt so high*

and mighty when it all began, and now it makes me simply shiver to think what I should have lost. Molly, my own darling, *Your Delia.*

The two letters put Molly's mind into a strange turmoil. The joy that bubbled up so briskly from both the letters gave her a pang, in spite of herself. She experienced, as not rarely happens in life, a sharp and distinct contest between her will and her inclination. She knew quite well that she had had her will, and that what had happened was her doing, and she had not the smallest intention of drawing back. On the other side her heart cried out that she had been a fool. That she had for the second time given Robert away, when she might have kept him for herself, and her heart ached with an almost physical pain at the loss. For a moment her own home duties and affections looked dull and faded to her. It was her passion for Robert that gave her the support she needed.

She told the Canon the news as dispassionately as possible. He manifested very little interest, and seemed on the whole rather inclined to pity Delia. " It must be confessed that Lord Helford, as in the psalmist's prayer, takes delight in that which is good. The choicest gifts of heaven fall freely into his hands."

A moment later he was again bewailing his own indolence; and Molly, using every naïve device to reassure him, was conscious of the amazing contrast of her husband in the pulpit, expounding with an almost oracular solemnity, and at the same time with a real and acute perception, the slow gradations of the heavenly path.

" It is because I have preached so often more what I hoped than what I believed that this spiritual dryness has descended on me. Would it not be better, dearest Molly, to spend the brief remainder of my days in penitential seclusion? "

Molly was overcome by a humorous consciousness of the fact that this was exactly what the Canon was doing, and that it was very far from being a spiritual affair.

" You are exhausted, dear," she said. " You give yourself too freely—but I ought not to say *too* freely because you bring comfort to so many people. Could you not perhaps read quietly, and allow yourself for once to be idle? "

" The wisdom of the world is foolishness to me in such a mood as this, my Molly. I lie here in unappeasable dumbness, feeling that I am forsaken of the Spirit. Would I could think it were but a purgatorial discipline to cleanse my mind of pride and vanity! But this desolate mood takes my God from me."

" Oh, don't say that, Henry."

" It does—it takes my God from me. I am in darkness as one that hath long been dead."

" The Bishop said to me that people found it hard to remember that they paid a price for their virtues as well as for their sins."

" The Bishop! " said the Canon, disdainfully. " It is a cynical maxim framed by the mind of an unsuccessful Sadducee."

" You mustn't say such things of the Bishop, Henry."

" He is my Father in God," said the Canon, " but we are all human; and it is not censorious for the humblest Christian to detect and disallow the lapses from grace into which even his spiritual superior may be sometimes betrayed."

Fortunately, at this juncture, the children arrived carrying their father's mid-morning refection, the greater part of which was bestowed upon them for their filial service.

Molly was enabled to dash off two brief letters to the happy pair.

" Dearest Robert," she wrote, " you will know exactly what I feel. I am thankful you have found Delia, for I think you have been looking for each other for some time. There are only two things I would add—one is that Cynthia desired this, and if she knows—I can't speak lightly about such hopes—she is happy in your choice. I don't think—I have never been able to think—that the precise earthly relation matters very much. It isn't marriage and all that it means which is the sacrament, but a certain kind of trust which gives or is ready to give everything *to a true lover. I believe that people can have as many such lovers as they have time and capacity for; at least I see no reason against it. And then I will say that I am not afraid about* our *tie. My heart is always ready and waiting for you whenever you need it, for it seems to me that you and I have gone past all the doors and barriers of the house of life, and come out into a place of liberty. I do not know that I can say that quite of anyone else; for my dear Henry has a way of hiding himself in uncanny cupboards of which I don't possess the key. So bless you, Robert, now and always, and Delia too.*

" Your own Molly."

She threw her pen down with a little gesture of impatience, walked to the window and stood, her hands clasped behind her, surveying the creek ruffling its grey waters in a racing wind. Then she went back and wrote again.

Dearest Delia, I was so thankful to get your dearest letter. I won't say that I give up Robert to you, because our friendship, his and mine, is a thing past giving up. But I trust and love you entirely, and almost envy you the pride of being able to do for Robert what Cynthia did and what I could not do. I don't mean all the practical things only, dear,

though they come in. But he wants someone whom he really loves, on whom he can entirely depend, and who will bring out the best that is in him—and this you can do and will do. And I don't forget Bobby. I would like to say *all this to you. It looks stiff and formal when it is written down. But I want you to believe that there isn't a single thought in my heart at all but that of thankfulness and trust.*

Your loving Molly.

XLIX

MOLLY was not quite sure whether she was glad or sorry when next day after luncheon the Bishop walked in. Her first thought was that of pleasure, her next a little fear that the Canon would think that she had sent for him.

Perhaps this second thought came into her face, for the Bishop took her hand in both of his own, and said, "You aren't as glad to see me, Molly, as I had hoped. How goes it?"

"It doesn't go at all just now," said Molly. "Saints like to tether themselves, they don't approve of being tethered."

"And you think that the Canon will suspect that you have sent for me to tell him to lie down?" said the Bishop, smiling.

"That was it!" said Molly. "That's almost as good a guess of yours as . . . as I should have made myself."

"I am sure that things have been happening to you, Molly," said the Bishop, scrutinizing her face. "I read strange matters in your eye. Come, confess, and you shall have absolution. Where is the Canon?"

"Upstairs resting—leaning his breast against a thorn."

"Well, I will see him at once then, and we will get a talk afterwards."

Molly led him upstairs to the oratory, and they found the Canon there looking very cross indeed. He rose when they came in.

"I thought I would come and see how my right-hand man is getting on," said the Bishop.

The Canon knelt for his blessing. " It was a kind thought, my lord. I trust it *was* a thought of yours, and that you were not importuned to come."

" No," said the Bishop. " Indeed, I think that the only communication I have had with Mrs. Davenant was when she wrote to tell me of your illness and warned me *not* to come."

" That were a seeming discourtesy? "

" No," said the Bishop, a little sharply, " it was nothing of the kind. Indeed, I took for granted that it was your own expressed wish. May I have a few words on business with you, Canon? "

The Canon came to attention. He recognized his superior officer.

After half an hour the Bishop came down. " He has had a bad turn, I am afraid," he said. " But I will say this, that he is a very loyal subaltern; and I have given him something to be ashamed of, which is the kind of tonic that these unhappy saints require. I don't expect you are sharp enough with him—if only you were a scold, Molly! "

" That's not my line."

" So I see. Well, of course he had played himself out. I hear his London addresses were magnificent. But I have told him that if spiritual ecstasies are to distract him from the practice of homely virtues, he might as well take to drink at once."

" What *did* he say? "

" He laughed. He has a curious sense of humour. Molly, he's a big man, but he is a *dramatist*. You have found that out? "

" Yes, but it is quite innocent. I think he naturally stages whatever he feels."

" Well, he is worth all your care and love," said the Bishop; " he is the only man I have met whom I knew

to be a man of genius at first sight. But you mustn't take his sorrows too much to heart."

" I don't," said Molly. " I'm afraid they rather amuse me."

" That's right," said the Bishop. " And if I may say so, it is that little touch of wholesome callousness that makes you what you are. You don't know, Molly, to what an extent you have won my heart! "

" I don't think a bishop ought to make love to his canon's wife."

" Oh, yes, Molly, you do! You expect everyone to make love to you. You know that if I dared, I would take you in my arms and hug you, especially when you look as you do to-day—what vexes you, dear Molly? "

Molly told him all her news, as simply as possible.

" I am very glad about this," said the Bishop. " Lord Helford isn't a man who can stand alone. He is a great man in his way, but he needs a pedestal. You don't like giving him up, Molly? "

" I suppose not," said Molly. " I am glad—I wouldn't have it otherwise. Indeed, I brought it about, in a sense —and then suddenly my heart gives me a great tug, and I feel that I have somehow missed the most beautiful thing in the world; you needn't give *me* something to be ashamed of, Bishop, because I have got it already."

" My dear Molly," said the Bishop. " You don't know —how should you—that you have found something a great deal more beautiful. You are like the women with the precious ointment, only you are not a sinner. You give the most precious thing in the world to person after person. The Canon and I talk about having souls, and probably all we do is to drive a few sheep into a pen. You give us all the water of life. No, I *won't* hold my tongue. You go on, day after day, just loving people. What more

do they want? It is not the professional sort of love that I give. I try to behave to people as if I loved them—that's a poor substitute. I bless God for letting me know you, Molly! I want you to *know* all this, because it is very discouraging sometimes to go on doing our best, when no one seems to notice it. And now about the Canon. He is obviously not fit for real work yet, and I have forbidden him to do any. But I am going to get him to correct the proofs of the Diocesan Calendar—nice dull work; and when that is done I will find him something else."

"It *is* good of you," said Molly, leaning forwards and smiling, "to do all this for me. It isn't the first time that you have come in, like a fresh breeze, and blown away my troubles. And I am not going to pretend that I don't like having great big juicy compliments, and whether there's any truth in them or not, I like you to say them—though it is rather feeble not to be able to get on without them!"

The Bishop rose to go. His fresh face with the bright boyish-looking eyes was very comforting to Molly. "Don't get morbid again, my dear," he said. "Just write to me; I can't do what you do—but I can open windows and sweep rooms clean." He took Molly's hand, and put his lips to it, and was gone in a moment.

Molly going upstairs to the Canon found him in a very chastened frame of mind.

"The Blessed Hugh of Lincoln," he said, "once boxed the ears of a confirmation candidate for irreverence to Holy Church. His lordship to-day metaphorically boxed my ears, and I honour him for it. Dearest Molly, I have been very selfish with you, and you have been as an angel of heaven to me, beloved. Do not desert your cross-grained husband. It is good for me that the Bishop should admonish me; but it is better still that I should receive

comfort from my dearest wife, who forgives me until seventy times seven."

" Is that a sum, daddie? " said Cynthy, who had been listening open-eyed to this tirade. " I think I could do it on my little slate."

L

THE spring came and melted into summer; and poor Molly, in spite of her resolutions, began to drift into a despondent condition herself. The Canon seemed to get better, but any attempt at serious work brought back his giddiness. He would not leave Menerdue, and Molly's time was much taken up by looking after him. Then Austin had gone to school, and both Molly and the Canon missed him greatly. Cynthia, though a plump and pretty child, had no great affections, and thought of little but her own immediate needs and wishes. Then, too, Molly heard little from either Robert or Delia. Delia had come by slow degrees into a solid and sustained adoration of Robert, which to him proved an irresistible charm. Her innocence, her sweetness of temper and her conspicuous good sense were to him like the freshness of the morning. No public announcement had been made of the engagement, but it was generally taken for granted, as they were often seen together. The result of it all was that the two were very much preoccupied with each other, and though Robert kept up a regular correspondence with Molly, his letters was full of the startling discoveries which he made in the process of excavating Delia's mind and spirit, while Delia's letters, written in measured terms, were little more than an oft-repeated hymn of praise.

Molly could have borne it if only the Canon had frankly opened his heart to her; but he was consumed by a dreary wretchedness, due to the repression of his artistic faculties, but which he persistently attributed to the assaults of the Evil One. He spent long days, as the weather grew warmer,

in a garden-chair on the little terrace, his elbows propped on the arms, his hands folded over his mouth, staring blankly at the creek. He performed the services in hollow monotones, and nothing but sheer necessity could induce him to visit a parishioner. She recognized that what he needed was to be treated with cheerful equanimity, but much as she pitied him and longed to comfort him, there crept into her mind a feeling akin to mere pity for one who seemed to collapse so helplessly, and to make no effort whatever to recover animation. More than once she had to control sharply her inclination to blame him, when he rejected one after another every little plan which she made for his distraction. The Bishop proved a great stand-by; he wrote to her often, bracing little notes, but with much underlying affection and sympathy.

It was a hot and breathless July day, with a veil of grey cloud over the sky producing a wide-flung and wearisome glare, that she went out to the terrace to find Henry, having just received a message from Aunty Pel that she was ill, and would be grateful for a word from the Canon.

She found him sitting in his accustomed chair, lost in melancholy inaction, and when he looked at her in reply, she was troubled to see how morose the expression of his face had grown, and how strong was his irritation at being asked to do anything definite.

She proffered her request. The Canon shook his head. " Won't you go and give her a few words, Henry? She wouldn't trouble you for nothing."

" I have nothing to give to these poor souls—no faith, no hope, no charity. I am like the grasshoppers that came up from the pit whose faces had but the likeness of men. Not even our Maker himself can make light to shine out of darkness."

" I sometimes think that if you tried, dearest, you would find it not so dark as you thought."

" I have spoken! " said the Canon. This was a phrase of his that had often vexed Molly; it seemed to express so divine a finality.

" I don't, of course, want you to make a great effort, Henry," she said. " Aunty Pel would not expect it either. She knows that you are ill, and she would be all the more pleased if you took the trouble."

" You think I feign illness? " said the Canon with some asperity. " These incessant demands upon my time and strength are very grievous to me. If I am fit to pay such pastoral visits—which above all things make virtue to go out of me—I am able to resume the labours to which by God's grace I was called and bidden."

" But this needn't be a pastoral visit, Henry—just a friendly call. Aunty Pel will be so disappointed."

The Canon looked at her with inexpressible irritation. " So be it. If I am thus constrained against my will and aptitude to fulfil these pastoral duties, then I will further apply myself to my mission studies."

" Dear, you are not constrained—it is a mere neighbourly word. You must not turn to your work yet. Grim is clear about that; and the Bishop was decisive too."

" The Bishop! " said the Canon. " He is susceptible to womanly blandishment—I have even, at my darkest, compared him in my mind to the elder in the book of Susanna, which we are to read for our instruction."

Fortunately this allusion was lost upon Molly, but her patience was wearing thin. " The Bishop," she said, " knows the value of your work too well to hurry you. But I won't press it, Henry. I will see that Aunty Pel does not misunderstand."

" You will forgive my saying, Molly, that I greatly

dislike these clipped and over-familiar names. They are unseemly on the lips of a Christian pastor. With such syllables may dogs and cats be summoned and chidden, not Christian men and women."

" Very well, dear," said Molly; it was clear to her that further conversation would only increase his irritability. She walked slowly away, half hoping that he would call her back; but he sat moodily huddled in his chair.

After luncheon, at which the Canon hardly spoke, but sat with eyes fixed on vacancy, Molly went off to the village. She found Aunty Pel a little overcome by the heat, and told her that the Canon was not well enough to come. Aunty Pel found means to rejoice in the fact that she and the vicar were fellow-sufferers, and included in the same fruitful chastening. The old woman, though showing signs of much discomfort, yet contrived to overflow with faith and thankfulness. Molly could not help feeling that she was far more fitted by grace to pay the Canon a pastoral visit than vice versa.

When she got home, however, an unpleasant surprise awaited her. Richards came in to say that after she had left the Canon had emerged from the study carrying a load of books and papers, had taken them up to the oratory, and had rung the bell, sharply demanding that his inkpot, dry from long disuse, should be filled. " He looked that flushed, Miss Molly, that I would hardly have known him, and he spoke to me as fierce as might be. I sent up Miss Cynthy to him, but he would not let her in."

Molly's heart sank. What could she do with this overgrown child, so resentful and so undisciplined. She hurried up the turret stairs, tapped, and was not answered. She went in. The table was spread with books—and what caught her eye was a sheet of paper with MO scrawled in large, shaky capitals. The arm-chair was overturned, and

on the floor lay the Canon on his back, his mouth wide open, darkly flushed, still and motionless. She rang the bell furiously and raised his drooping head to her knee—but by the time that Richards had arrived in haste, she knew that all was over. They laid his body on his bed. Richards went for the doctor, and Molly sat for an hour of stunned wretchedness, holding her husband's great lean hand, and gazing in an incredulous misery at the noble lines of his austere face. Even in death he seemed to frown upon her.

LI

IT was nearly three months after the Canon's death, and the Bishop was sitting with Molly on the little terrace. He had been very good to her; he had come down for the funeral, and he had stayed for a week, helping Molly with the few things that needed doing, and comforting her through what had been a very desolate time. It was not the same crushing sense of misery as had befallen Molly when her mother died. That had been the loss of someone older, wiser, stronger, on whom she had depended; who stood between her and the world, and with whom she had enjoyed an almost unbelievable outspokenness. No secret of her heart had been hidden from her mother—and now in her sorrow she felt that there had hardly been any secret and inner thought which she had shared with her husband. But his extreme dependence on her, the trustfulness he had arrived at, in spite of an overwhelming tendency to jealousy, his transparent goodness, the confused and almost grotesque texture of his mind, all combined to form in Molly's mind a figure of surpassing childlikeness, and her grief for him was like the unreasoning grief of a mother over a sickly and peevish child. He seemed to her in thought to be so utterly pathetic. The scared sorrow of the children had been her first care; and then it became a great consolation to talk about Henry to the Bishop, whose admiration for the Canon's powers and for his great guilelessness was a help to her. The Bishop represented him to her frankly as a man of high artistic gifts, who arrived at his success by a concentration of one faculty, and paid the price of being

in other ways immature, and even stubborn with the instinctive stubbornness of the child. Sometimes Molly gave way to morbid thoughts. She might, she thought, have been more to her husband, she might have sacrificed her own clear convictions to the generous hypocrisy of a more cordial assent.

" But, my dear Molly," said the Bishop, " all this is out of proportion. You made Henry a very happy man, out of a very unhappy one. You gave him all the best that life offers. He seemed a man doomed by a refractory and almost violent temperament to miss all the ease and joy of life, and you gave him them with both hands. He gained everything by the exchange, and you gained the devotion of a very exacting spirit, and a task which few people would have had the courage to face. I don't pretend that a willing self-sacrifice is not in itself a great and abiding joy —but it is not right or worthy to think that more was required of you. I cannot bear that you should think it. I look upon him as a man surprisingly and almost undeservedly blest, and I know of no one in the world who would have served love with such unflinching patience as yourself."

" I see what you mean," said Molly, " and I am grateful to you for speaking like that. But Henry made me a very happy woman, and he paid far more for loving me than I did for loving him. But I might have gone farther than I did to meet him."

" No, I don't think even that is true," said the Bishop, " there is a limit to concessions. One can't throw over the vital beliefs of one's innermost mind. I am all for dropping minor differences. But you did this, to be frank, far more than he ever did."

" Yes, but whatever Henry believed, he believed passionately. All that I opposed to his beliefs, was a general disinclination to believe anything."

" Opinions don't matter," said the Bishop. " Your love for him was a richer thing than even his love for you. You wanted him to live life in his own way and at its best. He wanted others to live their lives in his way and to accept his smallest prejudices and preferences. But one can't treat love as a bargain, as an addition and subtraction sum."

He was silent for a moment, and then added:

" I beseech you, Molly, to rest content with this, that you made him happy in spite of a very unhappy temperament, and far happier than anyone else could have made him."

Molly reached out her hand and took the Bishop's for a moment. The Bishop smiled at her.

" Tell me," he said—" it isn't that I wish to change the subject if you want to say more—but how does the Helford affair prosper? "

" Beyond all belief," said Molly. " They seem entirely taken up with each other. Poor dear Robert has been very good to me. But he and Henry were made to misunderstand each other, and Robert thinks my marriage was the mistake of my life; and one can't be very effective in sympathy when one feels, as Robert does, that I have been in a sort of prison all these years."

" I have never quite understood your friendship with Lord Helford," said the Bishop. " You seem to me almost more removed from him in temperament than you were removed by temperament from Henry."

" Robert would not like me to say what I am going to say; but the reason why he could not get on with Henry was because they really were a good deal alike. Robert is just as intolerant, only he is intolerant intellectually and Henry was intolerant morally."

" Yet you were and are very much attached to both."

" Yes, I suppose that one thinks that one could help to remove that particular shadow. Neither Robert nor Henry trust other people—mostly because they don't know other people. They both play a definite part. It is their defence against their fear of life."

" You aren't afraid of life, Molly? "

" No—it seems to me at worst a good thing spoiled."

" But what spoils it? "

" Our own fear of it."

" It brings horrible things with it, Molly."

" They are bad at the time, of course—but they don't damage us much."

" They interrupt us."

" Only because we don't understand what our real business is."

" What is it, Molly? "

" Living on, loving on, joining hands, giving what we can."

" But, Molly, those are just the things that most people find dull. I do, for instance. I spend most of my life going and coming; and instead of meeting people, I only meet their idea of what I should wish them to be. Now your Henry, he at least had the power of kindling people's hearts and minds."

" Do you miss him? "

" Yes, I do. I was a little afraid of him, of course; but I knew that I had discovered a treasure. I felt about him —shall I say it—that he was a great ploughman—he broke up the surface soil."

" Not a sower of seed? "

" No, his teaching was a stimulant, not a food."

They were silent a little. Then the Bishop said, " What are your plans, Molly. Oughtn't you to go away? "

" No, indeed," said Molly. " When are you going to

send us a new vicar? I must wait and see him through the first stage—and Cynthy—she wants a little ploughing up, I think."

" I wish I could come and be your vicar myself."

Molly looked at him and smiled.

" I mean it. I feel that anyone can do my work; but I want to try some of the experiments you suggest. I want to live among people. You see how dangerous your eloquence is! When may I come again? "

" You mustn't come if you are going to be converted the wrong way round," said Molly. " Delia is coming here for a week very shortly, and Robert hopes to come for two or three days."

" Will you like that? "

Molly looked at him for a moment with a half-smile. " I am a little afraid of shocking Delia," she said, " and when Robert comes—well, I am not quite sure that I *shall* like it. It is so easy to think lovers are silly. Of course that is very base! "

" Well, let me know at any time. You don't know how much I want to make things easier."

LII

DELIA arrived for a visit to Menerdue in a state of obvious embarrassment. At her first greeting she was far more overcome than Molly.

"Oh, Molly, I am so sorry for you. I have thought about you ever since. What am I to say about it? What can anyone find to say?"

"There's no need to say anything, Delia. We both know what has happened, and I am sure that you understand. Anyone who loves other people, as you do, understands. It is the people who don't understand who talk about Henry's eloquence and devotedness—but I don't care about that. It is *him* that I miss, something behind all those things and yet made up of them—with all his queernesses and fancies and his strange, solemn talk and his mistrust of all the things he did not know about. It all comes in; and I miss him at every turn. I loved doing all I could for him, but one could not do much; and I feel as if I could have done so much more—but the Bishop says that is morbid nonsense."

"Did he say that? I think that was rather cruel."

"No, Delia, it wasn't cruel—when one grieves like this, grief soaks back into all one's memories. But it ought not to do so, and the Bishop was quite right. Why should not one keep the joyful memories unspoiled? I was very happy with Henry."

"I should have been afraid of him. There seemed to me something violent and merciless behind—but I am sure he was a very good man."

"No, Delia, he wasn't good in *that* way. And he *was*

violent—he cared about things and he hated things in a tempestuous way. But none of his faults were concealed. And behind it was an immense power of loving, and a need of being loved, which made me love him. I have been loved by many people, but I shall never be loved like that. My mother's love was a fierce thing too, but Henry's was like a great fire. Shall I tell you one thing? The last words I had from him were angry words. I wanted him to go and see Aunty Pel, and he thought he was being forced to do things. He said that he might just as well begin his own work again—and he did begin it, and that was what killed him."

" How dreadful for you, Molly? "

" No, dear, I don't feel that. It was so like him to make a tragedy out of it. If ever he had to do something he did not want to do, it became a tragedy. I don't think he would ever have been able to work again, and I would rather that he died than have been as miserable as he would have been."

" But, Molly, death is so terrible. As long as people live, you can do something; but when they die, you can do nothing. It is like coming to the edge of a precipice . . . they have fallen down there. . . . You don't know where they have gone or what they are."

" Something quite definite happens to us when we die, Delia. It doesn't matter what *we* think about it—no thoughts of ours, no hopes or fears alter it. It is just there, the same for all of us; and I think that when we are the other side of it it will seem quite natural—as natural as being born."

" Yes, dearest Molly, you are right, I am sure, but I can't think about it like that."

" You have every reason to want to live, dear. But when you begin to lose the people you love best, you *have*

to think about it. It is no use just dumbly rebelling. Whatever the power behind life and death is, it has some big plan, much bigger than our immediate joy or sorrow. I don't know what the plan is, but I somehow trust it."

" But you don't want to die, Molly."

" No, I want to live more than ever—love goes on multiplying."

Delia looked strangely at Molly. " Molly, dear," she said, " you won't mind my saying this, but I am rather shocked to find you so calm. You don't talk quite like yourself. I feel as if you were strung up too tightly."

" No, Delia dear, it isn't that. My mother's death broke me all in pieces—and Cynthia's—that hurt me even more, it seemed so cruel. But this? I don't know. My dear Henry was an unhappy man—he wore a crown of thorns. I think he had had as much of life as he could stand. He was a prisoner released. I don't find it difficult to think of him now as happier than he ever was."

" It seems all so strange to me," said Delia. " The mere thought of death frightens me now, when I am so happy."

" Delia dearest, I am so thankful; and you are making Robert so happy. He seems to me years younger."

Delia rose and enveloped Molly in a close embrace. " You make *me* happy, Molly. I sometimes think that that is all you think about, to give away your happiness to everyone. I can't believe that it's anything in me that makes Robert happy. Molly, I couldn't have believed that any man, that anyone in the world, could be as dear and splendid as Robert. I think about him every minute of the day—it makes me feel almost ill sometimes, I long for him so. What can I do to help him? "

" Just be yourself, Delia—it is that that he wants."

" And then there is Bobby thrown in," said Delia. " It was just the one thing I always wanted, a little brother."

LIII

THREE days later Robert arrived at Nan-Zephron. He wrote two notes and sent them down to Menerdue.

"I have had a line from Robert," said Molly to Delia.

"So have I."

"He wants me to go up to-morrow morning to see him."

"Yes, Molly—do *please* go! I quite understand he wants to see you alone. Go up and have lunch there and walk with him. He says he will come down with you to tea. I will stay here and wrestle with Cynthy."

"You don't mind?"

"Mind? Of course he doesn't want me interrupting. I know exactly what Robert feels about you."

The car came down and fetched Molly up to lunch. Robert was waiting at the door and took her to the library. He took her in his arms and kissed her; and Molly had a moment of yielding. To see his eyes dwelling upon her, to be taken to his heart, held in his arms. . . . It seemed for a moment as if she had reached the end of a long journey and was at home at last. The tears filled her eyes.

"Molly dearest, how terrible it has been for you. I wished I could have been with you."

"Oh, no, Robert—I would have asked you to come; but you didn't understand Henry, you know. How could you?—And yet it was all so simple."

"I could have made friends with him," said Robert. "He was very fine. I admired him, but he did not trust me. I felt him to be a much bigger man than myself, but he was volcanic, and I am naturally prim. But I trusted him because you loved him—that was enough for me."

" He was much simpler than you, Robert, and I could do far more for him that I could ever do for you."

" Delia wrote to me about your talk with her, Molly."

He pressed Molly to come away from Menerdue—to come to London—to come abroad; he would take a villa on the Riviera.

" You ought to get away, Molly, for a time—right away."

" My dear Robert, it is wonderfully good of you—but I can't go away now—I must start the new parson, and then there are the children. The fact is that you have never been able to believe in my happiness here with Henry. I don't want a change. I want to get used to my loss. I am not broken to pieces, as I was by my mother's death—but to lose one who loved me so much and so unreasonably in spite of everything that he believed and thought, and for whom I could do so much, seems like losing all my real life."

" Yes, Molly, I quite understand—and it breaks my heart to think of you all alone. It can't be, it mustn't be. . . . I seem to be always finding you and losing you, dear; because you will never keep anything for yourself. You mustn't be angry with me, Molly, if I speak plainly—this has brought back with a rush all that your love has meant to me. And now we are free—you must come back to me, my own Molly."

" You mustn't tempt me, Robert. I won't pretend any more. If we *were* free, it would be different. I would have come, if you wanted me. But you *can't* leave Delia—it is not to be thought of."

" She would leave me if she knew what I felt."

" But she must never know. Delia is not like you and me. She can only love one person at a time. It sounds very abandoned to say that you and I are different. Love is a

wholly sacred thing to her, a thing profaned by sharing it. It isn't so with me—to me it is beautiful—a kind of music —and the bodily delights, which is all that love means to many people, seems to me merely a sort of ritual, full of meaning if love is there, worse than brutal if it is not. But even though I believe this, it must not be allowed to devastate other lives, or even to distress people who don't understand it, or even furtively attempted."

" Ah, Molly, that is a belief which very few people can dare to hold—I don't hold it. I am simply weak; but whatever I do, I always come back to your love—it is the one thing in the world for me, and if I miss it again, I don't know what will become of me. I do love Delia—she is beautiful, innocent, brave—but my life only touches hers at a few points. But I can't do without you, Molly— it was a *torture* to me that you should be bound to Henry. It sickened me sometimes to think of it. But you said long ago that if I said I really wanted you, you would come to me—and I claim your promise."

But Molly shook her head. He drew her to him, he kissed her passionately. She burst into tears. " Robert dear, you only increase my misery by this. It isn't a question of being bound in honour to Delia—it goes far beyond that. You have made her love you, and you must love her in her own way. It is as if I saw you throw Bobby to a wolf to save yourself . . . it would be shameful of me to consent . . . you must keep your promise and for love of me."

" I can't pretend," he said, " it is too bad for that. Must we not obey love above everything? "

" No," said Molly, through her tears, " there is something even beyond that! "

He gave an impatient gesture and sat silent, looking at her.

" It would have been better if we had never met."

" No, Robert—I won't even allow that. To love you has been the strength of my life—it has held me up through everything."

" And yet you fail me now."

" Beloved, if you really feel that, we must part, when I need you most."

" I can't live at these heights, Molly. A sacrifice like this seems a starved and ugly thing."

She smiled at him, so sweetly, that his passion nearly overmastered him. He took her hands in his and drew her to him.

A gong sounded in the house. " The wholesome voice of the world," said Molly. He turned from her in anger and despair. . . .

LIV

"WE must go a new walk to-day," said Molly, after lunch. "There are too many ghosts about. And I won't argue it any more, Robert. I am beyond the reach of reason."

"You are beyond everything—I can't come near you!"

"And yet I feel to-day that I am almost inside your mind and heart."

"Molly, you mustn't talk like this. I can't bear it."

"We must. We can't be lovers, Robert, though I should not be as much ashamed of that as you would be."

"I would take you on any terms."

"You know you would despise me. You are very fastidious, Robert. It is one of your charms. You are worth taking trouble to please."

"How *can* you talk like this, Molly?"

"You see I am right. Don't you also see, dearest Robert, that we must get away from the tragedy mood? You mustn't disappoint Delia; I must go back to my mild duties."

They went through the woods inland, and came out into a little lane winding among its stone-piled, moss-grown banks and its sheltering hazels. Now and then they had a peep of wide uplands and pasture fields with the fresh grass upspringing.

"It is very tame and friendly up here, Robert. It is better than ecstasies and agonies!"

They came to a little church at last among wind-swept trees—there was a glint of water in the creek far down a little copse-clad valley.

"You don't love Cornwall as I do, Robert—I could not live anywhere else."

They looked into the church, its plastered walls stained by green lichens, its pitch-pine pews, its humble altar.

" What an incredibly dreary little place," said Robert.

" Yes—it must have meant something once. It has forgotten its old pleasant secrets now; life has ebbed away from it—it is a failure; but Henry would have found something to love in it."

" He loved his visions better than life. Aren't you doing that to-day, Molly? "

" Perhaps—but I love life very much."

" Don't go on to talk about the worth of suffering—that would be too much."

" Robert, it isn't suffering when there is love behind it—it becomes the best of all joys."

" Oh, Molly, that is nonsense! "

" You may call it what you like, if only you won't be hard on Delia."

They came down at last through Polcrello, and on to Menerdue. It had been a hard day for both of them, and they looked exhausted. The children, who were up with Delia in the wood above the drive, came rushing down to greet Robert. Delia followed them—an enchanting sight, thought Molly. Robert put his arm round her and kissed her, and drew her arm through his.

They sat at tea together, but it was hard to talk. After tea Robert went off to Nan-Zephron with Delia. Molly talked to the children; but a reaction from the mood of the day came on, and a deep-seated misery of mind, began to flow like a bitter stream across all that she said or thought. The bare and empty days ahead of her came round her like dull phantoms. How had she had the heart and the strength to refuse Robert? She knew that he was deeply hurt and despondent, and yet the only alternative seemed more hopeless still.

LV

AFTER their evening meal, Molly and Delia were alone together. They had both been silent. Molly was worn out by the battle of the day, a battle with herself, a battle with Robert. She felt dreamily as though the worse elements in herself and Robert had combined, and had nearly conquered them both. Indeed it had not seemed to her like one of the old talks with Robert, but like a nightmare dreamed by half-frenzied people, imagining a freedom which they did not possess. She would have liked to talk as usual to Delia, but she found herself relapsing time after time into the dark tide of dreams. If, indeed, Robert and she had been free, could they not have clasped their bliss at last? Molly became aware how much of her life with Henry had been a struggle. Much as she had loved him, they had never come very near to each other. He had not abated a single jot of his knowledge, not indeed of life, for that he had never had—but of the inner divine principle on which all life was arranged—a stifling system which, as Molly had often felt, could only be held by a persistent abstention from all common human experience. Yet of late years her Henry's knowledge of the human heart had often startled her. He seemed to know what was in man, but to build up his idea of God as a being precisely calculated to deal strictly and locally with human problems—a tribal deity. Whereas to Molly the idea of God was only possible by recognizing that the human problem was only a very small part of His preoccupation.

Molly had lived very fast and very sorrowfully in the

last few weeks. The heart-breaking pathos of Henry's life had come home to her—its cramped area, its vapid dogma, its petty code—and all this was wedded to a great artistic gift, and an almost passionate desire to claim the recognition of a race whose outlook he despised.

Delia brought a low stool up to Molly's chair, took her hand and held it, putting it often to her lips or against her cheek.

" Molly darling, are you very tired? "

" More tired than I hoped you would notice, dear."

" Are you too tired to listen? I have something I want to say."

" No, dear. Say what you like."

" Molly, the sight of you and Robert as you came in together, and my talk with Robert later on have all shown me something which I ought to have seen before."

" What was that? "

" That you belong to him and he to you."

" Did you think that? Yes, it is true in one way—we have been through a great deal together. I daresay he has told you about his old troubles: I lived through them with him day by day. But that is a matter of friendship—just *knowing*. He belongs to you now, Delia, in a different and even better way."

" But I don't feel like that, Molly. I feel like a child that has pushed in between its father and mother."

" You need not feel like that, dear; Robert loves you."

" I thought so. I think so still. However long I lived, whatever happened to me, he would be the one person in the world for me; but I love you too, Molly."

" Then do what I wish, dear, and marry Robert."

" I can't come in between him and you. I must tell you what happened to-day. I went up through the woods with

him, and he seemed to me to be strange: it was as if he had been a long journey and had come back, having forgotten all about me. I was angry with him, Molly. I will not tell you what I said; but I felt I had been treated like a plaything. He was very kind to me and patient—but he seemed to me to have something so big in his mind that he couldn't care very much what I said. I grew more angry, and said I would set him free, and that it was wicked of him to have made me care so much for him. I was like a scolding schoolgirl, and he was so—what can I call it—so grand. He said, 'But it was you that made me care for you, Delia.' And then I broke down and cried, and he took me in his arms, and I said I would do exactly what he wanted, and he said that nothing was changed for him. And then I came back here, and I saw at once in your face, Molly, that you had been through something dreadful—and it all flashed across me; Molly dearest, I don't mean to be a villain; I don't pretend I don't love him, and I don't feel as if I could live without him. But I am not going to come between the two people I love best in the world, and spoil their lives for them. You needn't explain anything—I see it all. I should not be happy if I married Robert now, and he would not be happy, and you would not."

"But my darling child," said Molly, clasping Delia close. "I am *not* going to marry Robert. I love him too well for that. You will be able to make him happy; and so long as you trust me, I can still do something to make him happy. He and I are friends, as close friends as it is possible to be; but to speak plainly, dearest Delia, we could have been lovers long ago if we had so chosen —but that is only a little part of love. What *would* make me happy, Delia, is that you should marry him, and let me keep my friendship with him."

"But, darling Molly," said Delia, "you are giving away

your own right to happiness again. Why should you? Why shouldn't you turn on me and say, 'Get out, you little wretch!' However long I lived with Robert, I should never be to him what you are."

"Perhaps I am content with that."

"You make me despise myself," said Delia. "I feel so little when I think of you and Robert."

"Well, go on being little. Delia, don't you see how Robert wants you. I have never known him so happy before. Don't let us think about all the things he *might* want, but only about what he actually *does* want. Even I—if I really couldn't exist without Robert, or thought he couldn't exist without me, I should whisk him away without the smallest remorse."

"I don't believe a word you say," said Delia. "But I will do as I am told, if you will swear to me that you are not behaving like this to make it easier for me."

"I swear," said Molly, kissing her on the cheek. "Do you think I am betraying you with that kiss?"

"I don't feel happy about it," said Delia, musing. "But it wouldn't do, would it, for both of us to drop him?"

"That is what is called inspired common sense," said Molly. "And now, Delia, you must let me go to bed. I feel like a worn-out shuttlecock—and if it is any consolation to you, I shall sleep like a top."

"I won't bind you to anything," said Delia, "you shall tell me in the morning."

LVI

THE two were very thoughtful of her that last week. "I suppose," Molly said to Robert, "that you have interviews with your sweetheart, but I really don't know when." But however much a pair of lovers wish to include some dear one within their raptures, there are mysteries, exaltations, flashed messages, intercepted glances that no one can share or interpret.

Molly was conscious more than once of her unregenerate heart; while she was relieved in one way by Robert's acceptance of her decision, she had a deep sense of forlornness that he had accepted it; while Delia's silent passion of gratitude was more comforting.

One soft and fragrant night Robert came down to Menerdue and dined with them. He was at his best, Molly thought, in the mood in which she was proudest of him, gentle, neither intellectual nor emphatic, and yet with no lack of the quiet irony which kept him free from any cloying sentiment.

Molly had confessed her inability to deal with or indeed make any reply to a certain sort of egotistical flourish and assumed diffidence.

"What does such a talker expect women to do or say?" said Robert.

"Oh, to say, 'How wonderful you are!' or to flash a significant glance across—all rather furtively—or to say, 'We really must continue this conversation some time!'"

"I don't know that I quite recognize that," said Robert.

"Oh, no woman, however devout, would ever try *that* on with *you*, Robert."

" I am so formidable? "

" You can be, of course—when your face looks like a mask and you have a particular thin kind of politeness."

" Why, that is when I am most afraid."

" And least civilized," said Molly; " like a mediaeval knight—how I hate the ' Mort d'Arthur ' people! "

" What, all that magnificent chivalry? "

" It was all so futile. They bored holes through each other, they chopped away—it didn't prove anything except their own conceit—and they mostly died young."

" You don't value courage? "

" Above everything, Robert, when it is used for something worth while, and isn't merely a sort of insolence."

" Isn't she a termagant, Delia? "

" No, I love Molly when she flares up."

The dusk settled down, luminous and intense, like a gem. They went out on the terrace, to the intermingled scent of woodlands and brine. While they walked, the pertinacious Cynthy, an elf in pyjamas, stole upon them. Robert seized upon her and hoisted her to his shoulder. " What are you here for, you little pixie? "

" To take the air, Uncle Robert. How thin the hair is on the top of your head! I can't hold on to it."

" Well, if you stay up now, you can't bathe with Aunt Delia in the morning," said Molly. " You will be too tired."

" Give her to me, Robert," said Delia, advancing. " Now, Cynthy, I can't do without you in the morning. I'll come upstairs with you till you go to sleep."

Cynthy allowed herself to be persuaded.

" She's a jolly little object," said Robert, as she was borne away.

" Yes, but I don't make her out," said Molly, " she doesn't care about anyone."

They paced on alone. " Come up into the wood, Molly," said Robert, putting his arm in hers. " It's too good to be true, a night like this."

" Delia? " said Molly.

" Oh, I shall have years and years to talk to her in," said Robert. " Molly, are you really satisfied? "

" You have behaved very well," said Molly, " are *you* satisfied? "

" Not in the least."

" You ought to be. Delia is an incredibly generous creature."

" I don't deny it. I love her very much, Molly—I am not giving her a bit of my heart only. But then you are here and you are going to be alone, and I can't bear it, Molly."

" Oh, I daresay I shall find a ram caught in the thicket."

The path wound in among the glimmering tree-boles, and overhead the broken lights filtered softly through. There was a soft sighing overhead, not as of sorrow but as of joy on the edge of rest. They could hardly see each other's faces except when they came out every now and then into an open space.

" Oh, Molly dearest, I *can't* let you go," said Robert. She put her arms about him and her cheek to his.

" It will never be good-bye, Robert, between us two."

" But, Molly, it is atrocious for us to part at all. It breaks all your rules of life, and as I haven't any rules, it simply breaks my heart."

" No, Robert, hearts don't break. That is not what they were meant for."

" Oh, Molly, don't be so philosophical."

" I'm not the least philosophical. I'm just holding on to something with both hands."

" Something good or bad? "

" Bad, Robert—even you would be appalled if you knew what I was capable of at this moment."

" Molly, don't say such things."

" I shall *not* let go—but don't think lightly of it. I am in the hottest of the fire."

" You frighten me, dearest."

" Oh, Robert, what am I to do? "

He felt her tremble in his embrace.

" Robert, I must rest a moment."

They sat down together under a great oak, on a mossy cushion. The moon rose higher over the wood with a sickly almost wicked light, and the tree-trunks took on a clustered and huddled life of their own. The shadows gathered thickly.

" Oh, Robert dearest, even now you do not understand."

" I will do just as you wish, dearest Molly. Whatever you wish, I will face it. Nothing shall separate us."

" It isn't that, Robert. It is that very wish of yours that separates us."

" What wish? It is my turn not to understand."

They sat in silence for a long time. Then Molly rose up. " We must go back," she said, " or Delia will be alarmed—and, Robert dear, forget how strangely I have behaved. It was the last struggle and you have helped me through."

They walked in silence back, clasped close together, and passed in at the gate of Menerdue. Suddenly Robert stopped, put his hands to his head, and uttered a groan.

" I see, Molly, I understand," he said.

LVII

TWO days later Robert took Delia back to London. The three parted, almost in silence and on the brink of tears. When they had gone, Molly went back to the drawing-room utterly exhausted. Standing at the window and gazing out over the creek, a flood of unutterable bitterness came over her. She seemed to herself to have gone stubbornly on throwing precious things away. One surely was not meant to strip oneself bare of every reason for living. The poison passed into her veins. Why had she not reserved for herself a single consolation—she did not know. She sank into a chair and holding a book in her hands abandoned herself to the deepest melancholy.

A little before luncheon a car came swiftly to the door, and a moment later the Bishop came in.

" Ah," he said, " I guessed as much when I saw Lord Helford at the station this morning. So he and Miss Mainwaring have left you? "

Molly nodded wearily.

" Between the upper and the nether millstone, dear Molly? But it won't last, at least not for you. Come, entertain me. I came on purpose to keep you company."

Molly smiled and rose from her chair.

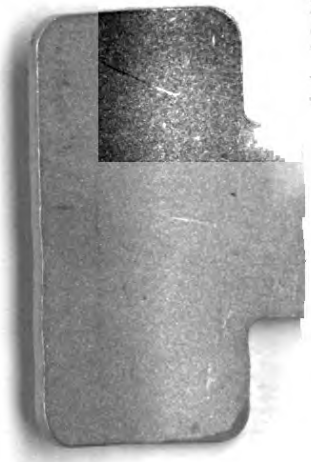
" The poor lovers this morning," said the Bishop, with an uplifted finger, " were stealing away as if they had done something to be ashamed of. Perhaps you broke down a little, Molly? "

" Yes, very nearly. I must not tell you, as it is safely over, what entered into my mind. You would not believe it of me."

" Oh, yes, I would. Nothing surprises me. Besides, I can guess. You nearly threw Miss Delia over? "

Molly nodded again.

" Now my dear Molly," said the Bishop, coming up to her and taking her hands in his own, " let us have no more of this. You have been in the worst sort of torture, I can see. I grant it was inevitable—but in these last two months you have had to bear a load too heavy for anyone. You would like to curse God and die, no doubt. But you *won't* die, and you *will* come back to life and happiness again. There is no specific ill-will to you anywhere in heaven or earth. It is your own generosity which has landed you in all this—one pays a price for every emotion, and the finer the emotion, the more awful the price. But I am going to take command for once. I will get my sister to come down to me, and the day after to-morrow I shall expect you and Cynthy and Cynthy's nurse. No, I won't be refused. Listen—I love you better than I love anything in the world, but I am not going to make love to you—at all events not now. You want a doctor, and I am a good doctor on the whole. You can't get on without making someone happy, Molly, and you must come and make me happy in whatever way you like. That is my prescription . . . no, you are not too tired, and you are not too wretched . . . if you say any more I shall excommunicate you. Now, Molly, give me some lunch. I have an appointment at three, up Falmouth way: Molly, I think of you all day long. The way you bewitch us is disgraceful. I can hardly do my work for thinking of the curve of a certain eyebrow. There's a disgraceful confession for an elderly bishop. . . . Oh, come! "

For Molly put her hands upon his shoulders and kissed him.

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