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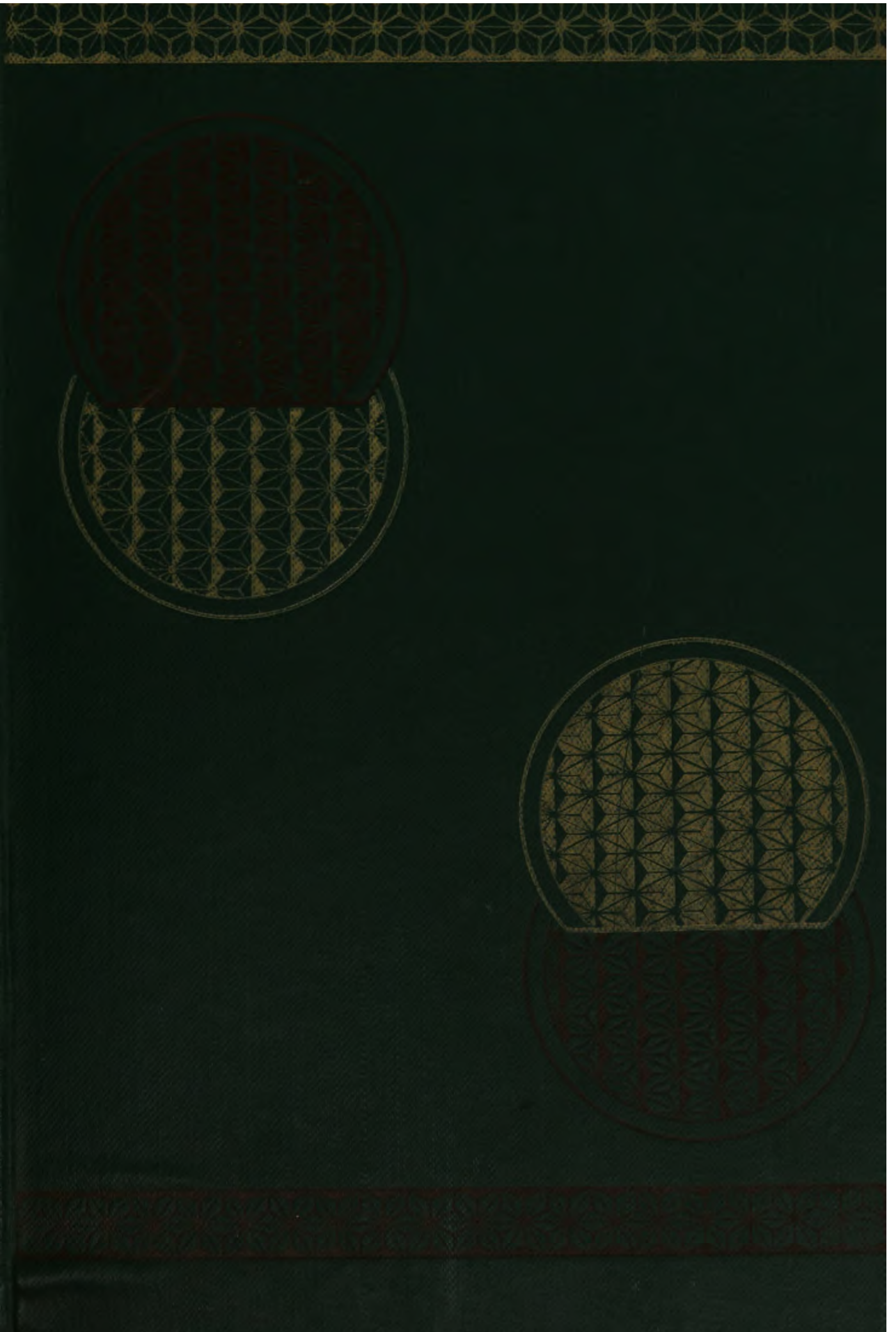
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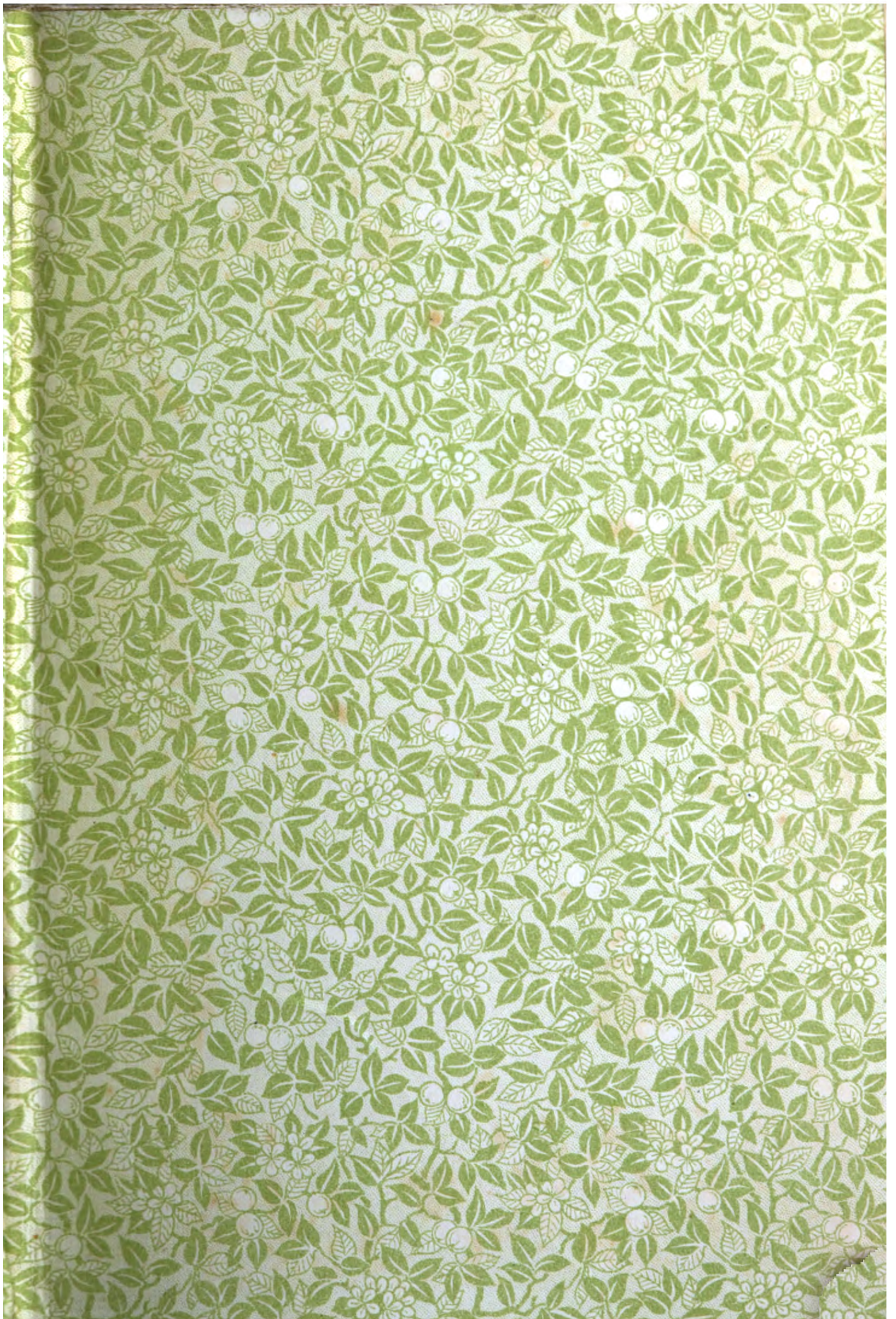
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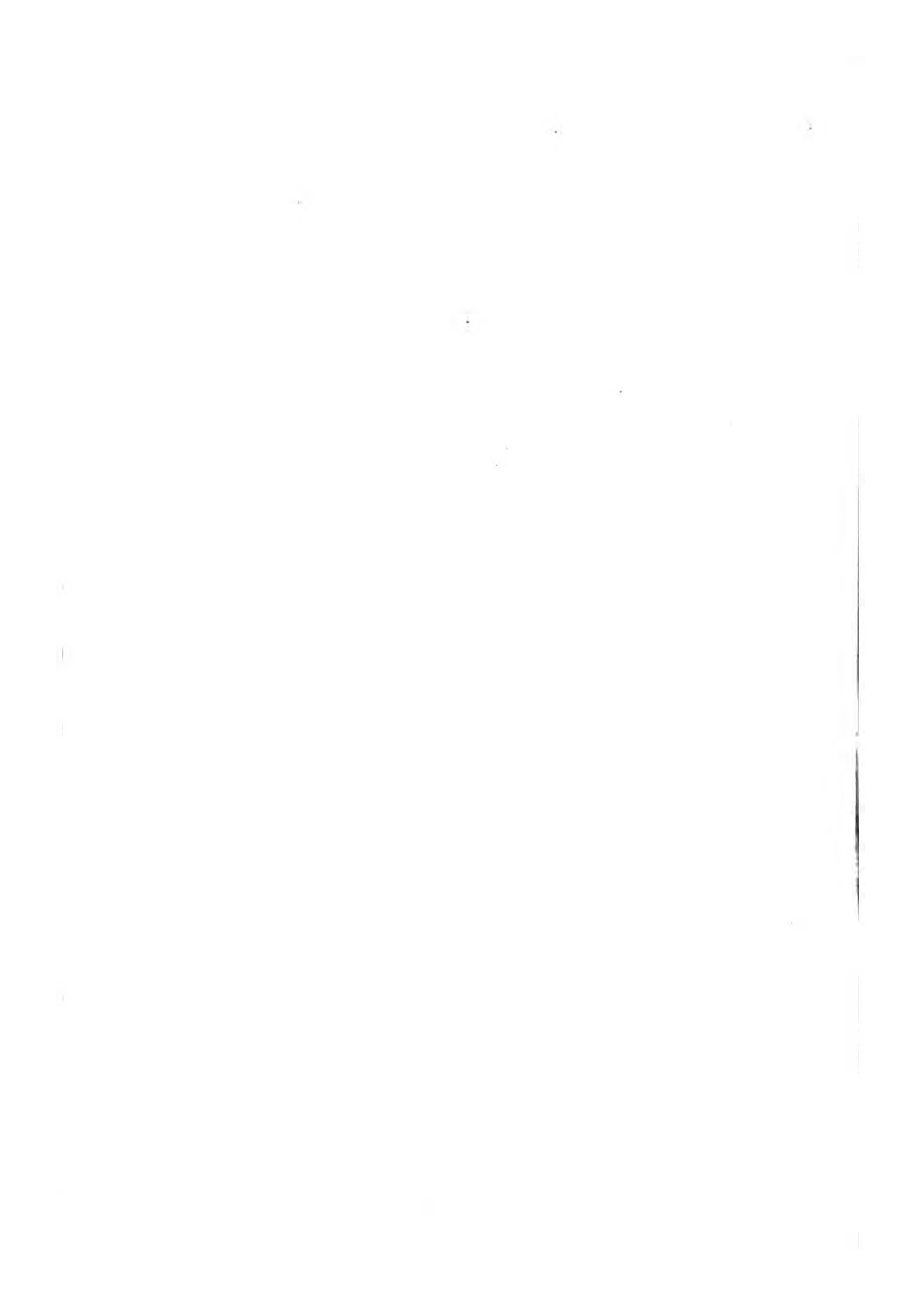


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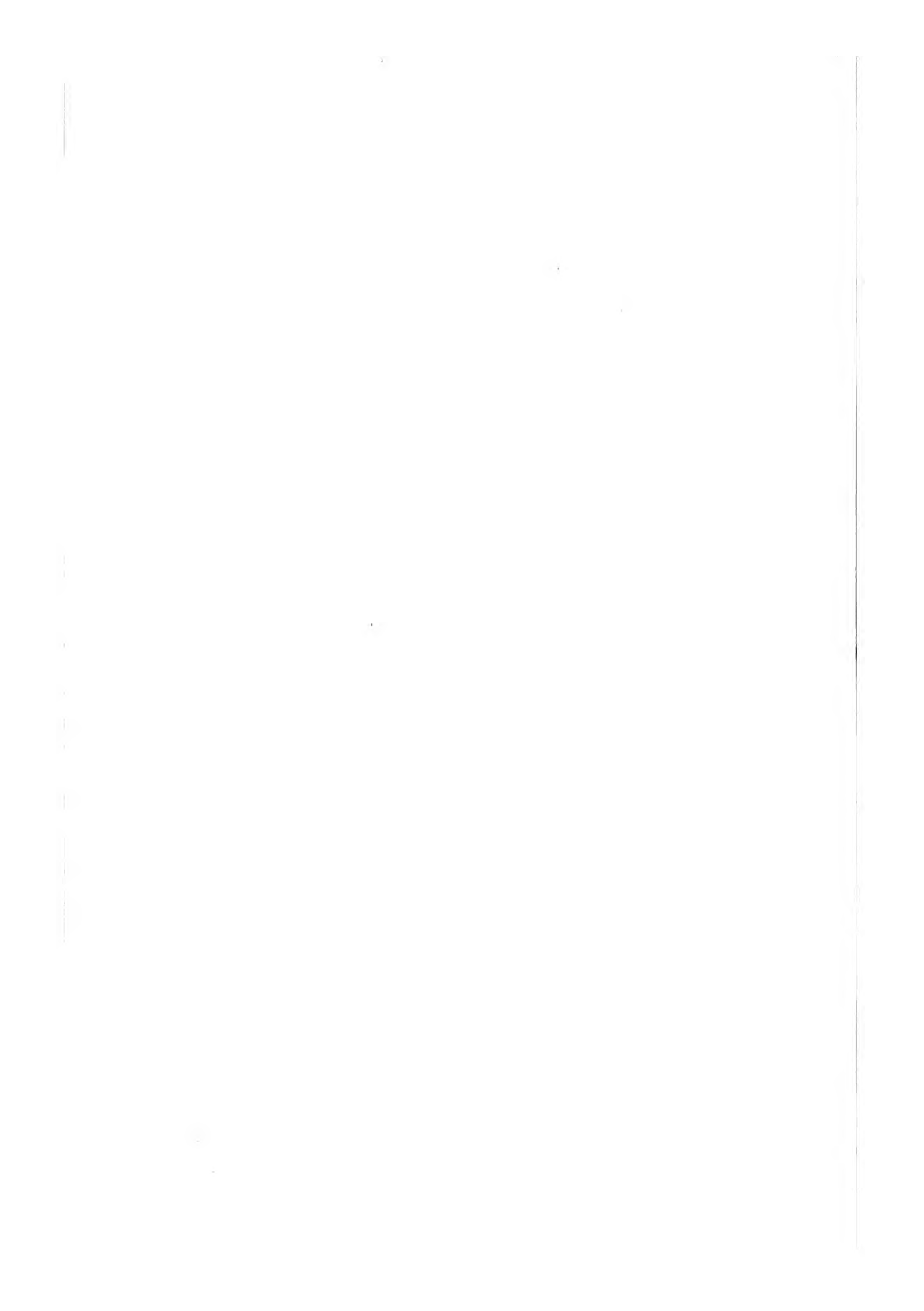












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# P H I L I S T I A

BY

CECIL POWER

*i.e. (Char. & Grant & Co. London)*



IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

London

CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY

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# PHILISTIA.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### HARD PRESSED.

A WEEK or two later, while 'The Primate of Fiji' was still running vigorously at the Ambiguities Theatre, Arthur Berkeley's second opera, 'The Duke of Bermondsey; or, the Bold Buccaneers of the Isle of Dogs,' was brought out with vast success and immense exultation at the Marlborough. There is always a strong tendency to criticise a little severely the second work of a successful beginner: people like to assume a knowing air, and to murmur self-complacently that they felt sure from the beginning he couldn't keep

up permanently to his first level. But in spite of that natural tendency of the unregenerate human mind, and in spite, too, of a marked political bias on the author's part, 'The Duke of Bermondsey' took the town by storm almost as completely as 'The Primate of Fiji' had done before it. Everybody said that though the principles of the piece were really quite atrocious, when one came to think of them seriously, yet the music and the dialogue were crisp and brisk enough to float any amount of social or economical heresy that that clever young man, Mr. Arthur Berkeley, might choose to put into one of his amusing and original operas.

The social and economical heresies, of course, were partly due to Ernest Le Breton's insidious influence. At the same time that Berkeley was engaged in partially converting Ernest, Ernest was engaged in the counter process of partially converting Berkeley. To

say the truth, the conversion was not a very difficult matter to effect; the neophyte had in him implicitly already the chief saving doctrines of the socialistic faith, or, if one must put it conversely, the germs of the disease were constitutionally implanted in his system, and only needed a little external encouragement to bring the poison out fully in the most virulent form of the complaint. The great point of 'The Duke of Bermondsey' consisted in the ridiculous contrast it exhibited between the wealth, dignity, and self-importance of the duke himself, and the squalid, miserable, shrinking poverty of the East-end purlieus from which he drew his enormous revenues. Ernest knew a little about the East-end from practical experience; he had gone there often with Ronald, on his rounds of mercy, and had seen with his own eyes those dens of misery which most people have only heard or read about. It was Ernest who had suggested this light



satirical treatment of the great social problem, whose more serious side he himself had learnt to look at in Max Schurz's revolutionary *salon*; and it was to Ernest that Arthur Berkeley owed the first hint of that famous scene where the young Countess of Coalbrookdale converses familiarly on the natural beauties of healthful labour with the chorus of intelligent colliery hands, in the most realistic of grimy costumes, from her father's estates in Staffordshire. The stalls hardly knew whether to laugh or frown when the intelligent colliers respectfully invited the countess, in her best Ascot flounces and furbelows, to enjoy the lauded delights of healthful mine labour *in propriâ personâ*: but they quite recovered their good humour when the band of theatrical buccaneers, got up by the duke in Spanish costumes, with intent to deceive his lawless tenants in the East-end, came unexpectedly face to face with the genuine buccaneers of the Isle of Dogs, clothed in real

costermonger caps and second-hand pilot-jackets of the marine-storedealers' fashionable pattern. It was all only the ridiculous incongruity of our actual society represented in the very faintest shades of caricature upon the stage; but it made the incongruities more incongruous still to see them crowded together so closely in a single concentrated tableau. Unthinking people laughed uproariously at the fun and nonsense of the piece; thinking people laughed too, but not without an uncomfortable side twinge of conscientious remorse at the pity of it all. Some wise heads even observed with a shrug that when this sort of thing was applauded upon the stage, the fine old institutions of England were getting into dangerous contact with these pernicious continental socialistic theories. And no doubt those good people were really wise in their generation. 'When Figaro came,' Arthur Berkeley said himself to Ernest, 'the French revolution wasn't many paces behind on the track of the ages.'

‘Better even than the Primate, Mr. Berkeley,’ said Hilda Tregellis, as she met him in a London drawing-room a few days later ‘What a delightful scene, that of the Countess of Coalbrookdale! You’re doing real good, I do believe, by making people think about these things more seriously, you know. As poor dear Mr. Le Breton would have said, you’ve got an ethical purpose—isn’t that the word?—underlying even your comic operas. By the way, do you ever see the Le Bretons now? Poor souls, I hear they’re doing very badly. The elder brother, Herbert Le Breton—horrid wretch!—he’s here to-night; going to marry that pretty Miss Faucit, they say; daughter of old Mr. Faucit, the candle-maker—no, not candles, soap I think it is—but it doesn’t matter two-pence nowadays, does it? Well, as I was saying, you’re doing a great deal of good with characters like this Countess of Coalbrookdale. We want more mixture of classes, don’t we?’

more free intercourse between them; more familiarity of every sort. For my part, now, I should really very much like to know more of the inner life of the working classes.' 'If only he'd ask me to go to lunch,' she thought, 'with his dear old father, the superannuated shoemaker! so very romantic, really!'

But Arthur only smiled a sphinx-like smile, and answered lightly, 'You would probably object to their treatment of you as much as the countess objected to the unpleasant griminess of the too-realistic coal galleries. Suppose you were to fall into the hands of a logical old radical workman, for example, who tore you to pieces, mentally speaking, with a shake or two of his big teeth, and calmly informed you that in his opinion you were nothing more than a very empty-headed, pretentious, ignorant young woman—perhaps even, after the plain-spoken vocabulary of his kind, a regular downright minx and hussey?'

‘Charming,’ Lady Hilda answered, with perfect candour; ‘so very different from the senseless adulation of all the Hughs, and Guys, and Berties! What I do love in talking to clever men, Mr. Berkeley, is their delicious frankness and transparency. If they think one a fool, they tell one so plainly, or at least they let one see it without any reserve. Now that, you know, is really such a very delightful trait in clever people’s characters!’

‘I don’t know how you can have had the opportunity of judging, Lady Hilda,’ Arthur answered, looking at her handsome open face with a momentary glance of passing admiration—Hilda Tregellis was improving visibly as she matured—‘for no one can possibly ever have thought anything of the sort with you, I’m certain: and that I can say quite candidly, without the slightest tinge of flattery or adulation.’

‘What! *You* don’t think me a fool, Mr.

Berkeley,' cried Lady Hilda, delighted even with that very negative bit of favourable appreciation. 'Now, that I call a real compliment, I assure you, because I know you clever people pitch your standard of intelligence so very, very high! You consider everybody fools, I'm sure, except the few people who are almost as clever as you yourselves are. However, to return to the countess: I do think there ought to be more mixture of classes in England, and somebody told me'—this was a violent effort to be literary on Hilda's part, by way of rising to the height of the occasion—'somebody told me that Mr. Matthew Arnold, who's so dreadfully satirical, and cultivated, and so forth, thinks exactly the same thing, you know. Why shouldn't the Countess of Coalbrookdale have really married the foreman of the colliers? I daresay she'd have been a great deal happier with a kind-hearted sensible man like him than with that lumber-

ing, hunting, pheasant-shooting, horse-racing lout of a Lord Coalbrookdale, who would go to Norway on a fishing tour without her—now wouldn't she?'

'Very probably,' Berkeley answered: 'but in these matters we don't regard happiness only,—that, you see, would be mere base, vulgar, commonplace utilitarianism:—we regard much more that grand impersonal overruling entity, that unseen code of social morals, which we commonly call the *convenances*. Proper people don't take happiness into consideration at all, comparatively: they act religiously after the fashion that the *convenances* impose upon them.'

'Ah, but why, Mr. Berkeley,' Lady Hilda said, vehemently, 'why should the whole world always take it for granted that because a girl happens to be born the daughter of people whose name's in the peerage, she must necessarily be the slave of the proprieties, devoid of

all higher or better instincts? Why should they take it for granted that she's destitute of any appreciation for any kind of greatness except the kind that's represented by a million and a quarter in the three per cents., or a great-great-grandfather who fought at the battle of Naseby? Why mayn't she have a spark of originality? Why mayn't she be as much attracted by literature, by science, by art, by . . . by . . . by beautiful music, as, say, the daughter of a lawyer, a doctor, or, or, or a country shopkeeper? What I want to know is just this, Mr. Berkeley: if people don't believe in distinctions of birth, why on earth should they suppose that Lady Mary, or Lady Betty, or Lady Winifred, must necessarily be more *banale* and vulgar minded, and commonplace than plain Miss Jones, or Miss Brown, or Miss Robinson? You admit that these other girls may possibly care for higher subjects: then why on earth shouldn't we, can you tell me?'



‘Certainly,’ Arthur Berkeley answered, looking down into Lady Hilda’s beautiful eyes after a dreamy fashion, ‘certainly there’s no inherent reason why one person shouldn’t have just as high tastes by nature as another. Everything depends, I suppose, upon inherited qualities, variously mixed, and afterwards modified by society and education.—It’s very hot here, to-night, Lady Hilda, isn’t it?’

‘Very,’ Lady Hilda echoed, taking his arm as she spoke. ‘Shall we go into the conservatory?’

‘I was just going to propose it myself,’ Berkeley said, with a faint tremor thrilling in his voice. She was a very beautiful woman, certainly, and her unfeigned appreciation of his plays and his music was undeniably very flattering to him.

‘Unless I bring him fairly to book this evening,’ Hilda thought to herself as she swept with him gracefully into the conserva-

tory, 'I shall have to fall back upon the red-haired hurlyburlying Scotch professor, after all—if I don't want to end by getting into the clutches of one of those horrid Monties or Algies

## CHAPTER XXVI.

## IRRECLAIMABLE.

THE occasional social articles for the 'Morning Intelligence' supplied Ernest with work enough for the time being to occupy part of his leisure, and income enough to keep the ship floating somehow, if not securely, at least in decent fair-weather fashion. His frequent trips with Ronald into the East-end gave him something comparatively fresh to write about, and though he was compelled to conceal his own sentiments upon many points, in order to conform to that impersonal conscience, 'the policy of the paper,' he was still able to deal with subjects that really interested him, and in which he fancied he might actually be doing

a little good. A few days after he had taken seriously to the new occupation, good Mrs. Halliss made her appearance in the tiny sitting-room one morning, and with many apologies and much humming and hawing ventured to make a slight personal representation to wondering little Edie.

‘If you please, mum,’ she said nervously, fumbling all the while with the corner of the table-cloth she was folding on the breakfast table, ‘if I might make so bold, mum, without offence, I should like to say as me an’ John ’as been talkin’ it hover, an’ we think now as your good gentleman ’as so much writin’ to do, at ’is littery work, mum, as I may make bold to call it, perhaps you wouldn’t mind, so as not to disturb ’im with the blessed baby—not as that dear child couldn’t never disturb nobody, bless ’er dear ’eart, the darling, not even when she’s cryin’, she’s that sweet and gentle,—but we thought, mum, as littery

gentlemen likes to 'ave the coast clear, in the manner of speakin', and perhaps you wouldn't mind bein' so good as to use the little front room upstairs, mum, for a sort o' nursery, as I may call it, for the dear baby. It was our bedroom, that was, where John an' me used to sleep; but we've been an' putt our things into the front hattic, mum, as is very nice and comfortable in every way, so as to make room for the dear baby. An' if you won't take it as a liberty, mum, me an' John 'ud be more'n glad if you'd kindly make use of that there room for a sort of occasional nursery for the dear baby.'

Edie bit her lip hard in her momentary confusion. 'Oh, dear, Mrs. Halliss,' she said, almost crying at the kindly meant offer, 'I'm afraid we can't afford to have *three* rooms all for ourselves as things go at present. How much do you propose to charge us for the additional nursery?'

‘Charge you for it, mum,’ Mrs. Halliss echoed, almost indignantly; ‘charge our lodgers for any little hextry accommodation like the small front room upstairs, mum—now, don’t you go and say that to John, mum, I beg of you; for ’is temper’s rather short at times, mum, thro’ bein’ asmatic and the rheumatiz, though you wouldn’t think it to look at ’im, that you wouldn’t; an’ I’m reely afraid, mum, he might get angry if anybody was to hoffer ’im anythink for a little bit of hextry accommodation like that there. Lord bless your dear ’eart, mum, don’t you say nothink more about that, I beg of you; for if John was to ’ear of it, he’d go off in a downright tearin’ tantrum at the bare notion. An’ about dinner, mum, you’ll ’ave the cold mutton an’ potatoes, and a bit of biled beetroot; and I’ll just run round to the greengrocer’s this moment to order it for early dinner.’ And before Edie had time to thank her, the good woman was out of the

room again, and down in the kitchen at her daily preparations, with tears trickling slowly down both her hard red cheeks in her own motherly fashion.

So from that time forth, Ernest had the small sitting-room entirely to himself, whenever he was engaged in his literary labours, while Edie and Dot turned the front bedroom on the first floor into a neat and commodious nursery. As other work did not turn up so rapidly as might have been expected, and as Ernest grew tired after a while of writing magazine articles on 'The Great Social Problem,' which were invariably 'declined with thanks' so promptly as to lead to a well-founded suspicion that they had never even been opened by the editor, he determined to employ his spare time in the production of an important economical volume, a treatise on the ultimate ethics of a labouring community, to be entitled 'The Final Rule of Social Right Living.' This valuable economical

work he continued to toil at for many months in the intervals of his other occupations ; and when at last it was duly completed, he read it over at full length to dear little Edie, who considered it one of the most profoundly logical and convincing political treatises ever written. The various leading firms, however, to whom it was afterwards submitted with a view to publication, would appear, oddly enough, to have doubted its complete suitability to the tastes and demands of the reading public in the present century ; for they invariably replied to Ernest's inquiries that they would be happy to undertake its production for the trifling sum of one hundred guineas, payable in advance ; but that they did not see their way to accepting the risk and responsibility of floating so speculative a volume on their own account. In the end, the unhappy manuscript, after many refusals, was converted into cock-boats, hats, and paper dollies for little Dot ;



and its various intermediate reverses need enter no further into the main thread of this history. It kept Ernest busy in the spare hours of several months, and prevented him from thinking too much of his own immediate prospects, in his dreams for the golden future of humanity ; and insomuch it did actually subserve some indirectly useful function ; but on the other hand it wasted a considerable quantity of valuable tenpenny foolscap, and provided him after all with one more severe disappointment, to put on top of all the others to which he was just then being subjected. Clearly, the reading public took no paying interest in political economy ; or if they did, then the article practically affected by the eternal laws of supply and demand was at least not the one meted out to them from the enthusiastic Schurzian pen of Ernest Le Breton.

One afternoon, not long after Ernest and Edie had taken rooms at Mrs. Halliss's, they

were somewhat surprised at receiving the honour of a casual visit from a very unexpected and unusual quarter. Ronald was with them, talking earnestly over the prospects of the situation, when a knock came at the door, and to their great astonishment the knock was quickly followed by the entrance of Herbert. He had never been there before, and Ernest felt sure he had come now for some very definite and sufficient purpose. And so he had indeed; it was a strange one for him; but Herbert Le Breton was actually bound upon a mission of charity. We have all of us our feelings, no doubt, and Herbert Le Breton, too, in his own fashion, had his. Ernest was after all a good fellow enough at bottom, and his own brother: (a man can't for very respectability's sake let his own brother go utterly to the dogs if he can possibly help it); and so Herbert had made up his mind, much against his natural inclina-

tion, to warn Ernest of the danger he incurred in having anything more to do or say with this insane, disreputable old Schurz fellow. For his own part, he hated giving advice; people never took it; and that was a deadly offence against his *amour propre* and a gross insult to his personal dignity; but still, in this case, for Ernest's sake, he determined after an inward struggle to swallow his own private scruples, and make an effort to check his brother on the edge of the abyss. Not that he would come to the point at once; Herbert was a careful diplomatic agent, and he didn't spoil his hand by displaying all his cards too openly at the outset; he would begin upon comparatively indifferent subjects, and lead round the conversation gradually to the perils and errors of pure Schurzianism. So he set out by admiring his niece's fat arms—a remarkable stretch of kindness on Herbert's part, for of course other people's babies are

well known to be really the most uninteresting objects in the whole animate universe—and then he passed on by natural transitions to Ernest's housekeeping arrangements, and to the prospects of journalism as a trade, and finally to the necessity for a journalist to consult the tastes of his reading public. 'And by the way, Ernest,' he said quietly at last, 'of course after this row at Pilbury, you'll drop the acquaintance of your very problematical German socialist.'

Eddie started in surprise. 'What? Herr Schurz?' she said eagerly. 'Dear simple, kindly old Herr Schurz! Oh no, Herbert, that I'm sure he won't; Ernest will never drop *his* acquaintance, whatever happens.'

Herbert coughed drily. 'Then there are two of them for me to contend against,' he said to himself with an inward smile. 'I should really hardly have expected that, now. One would have said *à priori* that the sound

common-sense and practical regard for the dominant feelings of society which is so justly strong in most women, would have kept *her* at any rate—with her own social disabilities, too—from aiding and abetting her husband in such a piece of egregious folly.’—‘I’m sorry to hear it, Mrs. Le Breton,’ he went on aloud;—he never called her by her Christian name, and Edie was somehow rather pleased that he didn’t: ‘for you know Herr Schurz is far from being a desirable acquaintance. Quite apart from his own personal worth, of course—which is a question that I for my part am not called upon to decide—he’s a snare and a stumbling-block in the eyes of society, and very likely indeed to injure Ernest’s future prospects, as he has certainly injured his career in the past. You know he’s going to be tried in a few weeks for a seditious libel and for inciting to murder the Emperor of Russia. Now, you will yourself admit, Mrs.

Le Breton, that it's an awkward thing to be mixed up with people who are tried on a criminal charge for inciting to murder. Of course, we all allow that the Czar's a very despotic and autocratic sovereign, that his existence is an anomaly, and that the desire to blow him up is a very natural desire for every intelligent Russian to harbour privately in the solitude of his own bosom. If we were Russians ourselves, no doubt we'd try to blow him up too, if we could conveniently do so without detection. So much, every rational Englishman, who isn't blinded by prejudice or frightened by the mere sound of words, must at once frankly acknowledge. But unfortunately, you see, the mass of Englishmen *are* blinded by prejudice, and *are* frightened by the mere sound of words. To them, blowing up a Czar is murder (though of course blowing up any number of our own black people isn't); and inciting to blow up the Czar,

or doing what seems to most Englishmen equivalent to such incitement, as for example, saying in print that the Czar's government isn't quite ideally perfect and ought gradually and tentatively to be abolished—why, that, I say, is a criminal offence, and is naturally punishable by a term of imprisonment. Now, is it worth while to mix oneself up with people like that, Ernest, when you can just as easily do without having anything on earth to say to them?'

Edie's face burnt scarlet as she listened, but Ernest only answered more quietly—he never allowed anything that Herbert said to disturb his equanimity—'We don't think alike upon this subject, you know, Herbert; and I'm afraid the disagreement is fundamental. It doesn't matter so much to us what the world thinks as what is abstractly right; and Edie would prefer to cling to Herr Schurz, through good report and evil report, rather than to be

applauded by your mass of Englishmen for having nothing to do with inciting to murder. *We* know that Herr Max never did anything of the kind; that he is the gentlest and best of men; and that in Russian affairs he has always been on the side of the more merciful methods, as against those who would have meted out to the Czar the harsher measure of pure justice.'

'Well,' Herbert answered bravely, with a virtuous determination not to be angry at this open insult to his own opinion, but to persevere in his friendly efforts for his brother's sake, 'we won't take Herr Max into consideration at all, but will look merely at the general question. The fact is, Ernest, you've chosen the wrong side. The environment is too strong for you; and if you set yourself up against it, it'll crush you between the upper and the nether millstone. It isn't your business to reform the world; it's your business to live in it; and if



you go on as you're doing now, it strikes me that you'll fail at the outset in that very necessary first particular.'

'If I fail,' Ernest answered with a heavy heart, 'I can only die once; and after all every man can do no more than fill to the best of his ability the niche in nature that he finds already cut out for him by circumstances.'

'My dear Ernest,' Herbert continued quietly, twisting himself a cigarette with placid deliberateness, as a preliminary to his departure; 'your great mistake in life is that you *will* persist in considering the universe as a cosmos. Now the fact is, it isn't a cosmos; it's a chaos, and a very poor one at that.'

'Ah, yes,' Ernest answered gravely; 'nobody recognises that fact more absolutely than I do; but surely it's the duty of man to try as far as in him lies to cosmise his own particular little corner of it.'

'In the abstract, certainly: as a race, most

distinctly so ; but as individuals, why, the thing's clearly impossible. There was one man who once tried to do it, and his name was Don Quixote.'

'There was another, I always thought,' Ernest replied more solemnly, 'and after his name we've all been taught as children to call ourselves Christians. At bottom, my ideal is only the Christian ideal.'

'But, my dear fellow, don't you see that the survival of the fittest must succeed in elbowing your ideal, for the present at least, out of existence? Look here, Ernest, you're going the wrong way to work altogether for your own happiness and comfort. It doesn't matter to me, of course ; you can do as you like with yourself, and I oughtn't to interfere with you ; but I do it because I'm your brother, and because I take a certain amount of interest in you accordingly. Now, I quite grant with you that the world's in a very unjust social condi-

tion at present. I'm not a fool, and I can't help seeing that wealth is very badly distributed, and that happiness is very unequally meted. But I don't feel called upon to make myself the martyr of the cause of readjustment for all that. If I were a working man, I should take up the side that you're taking up now ; I should have everything to gain, and nothing to lose by it. But your mistake is just this, that when you might identify your own interests with the side of the 'haves,' as I do, you go out of your way to identify them with the side of the 'have-nots,' out of pure idealistic Utopian philanthropy. You belong by birth to the small and intrinsically weak minority of persons specially gifted by nature and by fortune ; and why do you lay yourself out with all your might to hound on the mass of your inferiors till they trample down and destroy whatever gives any special importance, interest, or value to intellectual superiority, vigour of character,

political knowledge, or even wealth? I can understand that the others should wish to do this; I can understand that they will inevitably do it in the long run; but why on earth do you, of all men, want to help them in pulling down a platform on which you yourself might, if you chose, stand well above their heads and shoulders?'

'Because I feel the platform's an unjust one,' Ernest answered, warmly.

'An excellent answer for them,' Herbert chimed in, in his coldest and calmest tone, 'but a very insufficient one for you. The injustice, if any, tells all in your own favour. As long as the mob doesn't rise up and tear the platform down (as it will one day), why on earth should you be more anxious about it than they are?'

'Because, Herbert, if there must be injustice, I would rather suffer it than do it.'

'Well, go your own way,' Herbert answered, with a calm smile of superior wisdom; 'go your

own way and let it land you where it will. For my part, I back the environment. But it's no business of mine; I have done my best to warn you. *Liberavi animam meam.* You won't take my advice, and I must leave you to your own devices.' And with just a touch of the hand to Edie, and a careless nod to his two brothers, he sauntered out of the room without another word. 'As usual,' he thought to himself as he walked down the stairs, 'I go out of my way to give good advice to a fellow-creature, and I get only the black ingratitude of a snubbing in return. This is really almost enough to make even me turn utterly and completely selfish!'

'I wonder, Ernest,' said Ronald, looking up as Herbert shut the door gently behind him, 'how you and I ever came to have such a brother as Herbert!'

'I think it's easy enough to understand, Ronald, on plain hereditary principles.'

Ronald sighed. 'I see what you mean,' he said; 'it's poor mother's strain—the Whitaker strain—coming out in him.'

'I often fancy, Ronald, I can see the same two strains in varying intensity, running through all three of us alike. In Herbert, the Whitaker strain is uppermost, and the Le Breton comparatively in abeyance; in me, they're both more or less blended; in you, the Le Breton strain comes out almost unadulterated. Yet even Herbert has more of a Le Breton in him than one might imagine, for he's with us intellectually; it's the emotional side only that's wanting to him. Even when members of a family are externally very much unlike one another in the mere surface features of their characters, I believe you can generally see the family likeness underlying it for all that.'

'Only you must know how to analyse the character to see it,' said Edie. 'I don't

think it ever struck me before that there was anything in common between you and Herbert, Ernest, and yet now you point it out I believe there really is something after all. I'm sorry you told me, for I can't bear to think that you're like Herbert.'

'Oh, no,' Ronald put in hastily; 'it isn't Ernest who has something in him like Herbert; it's Herbert who has something in him like Ernest. There's a great deal of difference between the one thing and the other. Besides, he hasn't got enough of it, Edie, and Ernest has.'

## CHAPTER XXVII.

## RONALD COMES OF AGE.

‘STRANGE,’ Ronald Le Breton thought to himself, as he walked along the Embankment between Westminster and Waterloo, some weeks later—the day of Herr Max’s trial,—  
‘I had a sort of impulse to come down here alone this afternoon: I felt as if there was an unseen Hand somehow impelling me. Depend upon it, one doesn’t have instincts of that sort utterly for nothing. The Finger that guides us, guides us always aright for its own wise and unfathomable purposes. What a blessing and a comfort it is to feel that one’s steps are continually directed from above, and that even an afternoon stroll through the great



dreary town is appointed to us for some fit and sufficient reason! Look at that poor girl over there now, at the edge of the Embankment! I wonder what on earth she can have come here for. Why . . . how pale and excited she looks. What's she going so near the edge for? Gracious heavens! it can't be . . . yes . . . it is . . . no, no, but still it must be . . . that's what the Finger was guiding me here for this afternoon. There's no denying it. The poor creature's tempted to destroy herself. My instinct tells me so at once, and it never tells me wrong. Oh, Inscrutable Wisdom, help me, help me: give me light to act rightly! I must go up this very moment and speak to her!'

The girl was walking moodily along the edge of the bank, and looking in a dreamy fashion over the parapet into the sullen fast-flowing brown water below. An eye less keen than Ronald's might have seen in a moment,

from her harassed weary face and her quick glance to right and left after the disappearing policeman, that she was turning over in her own mind something more desperate than any common everyday venture. Ronald stepped up to her hastily, and, firm in his conviction that the Finger was guiding him aright, spoke out at once with boldness on the mere strength of his rapid instinctive conjecture.

‘Stop, stop,’ he said, laying his hand gently on her shoulder : ‘not for a moment, I beg of you, not for a moment. Not till you’ve at least told me what is your trouble.’

Selah turned round sharply and looked up in his face with a vague feeling of indefinable wonder. ‘What do you mean?’ she asked, in a husky voice. ‘Don’t do what? How do you know I was going to do anything?’

‘You were going to throw yourself into the river,’ Ronald answered confidently; ‘or at least you were debating about it in your

own soul. I know you were, because a sure Guide tells me so.'

Selah's lip curled a little at the sound of that familiar language. 'And suppose I was,' she replied, defiantly, in her reckless fashion; 'suppose I was: what's that to you or anybody, I should like to know? Are you your brother's keeper, as your own Bible puts it? Well, yes, then, perhaps I *was* going to drown myself: and if I choose, as soon as your back's turned, I shall go and do it still; so there; and that's all I have to say about it.'

Roland turned his face towards her with an expression of the intensest interest, but before he could put in a single word, Selah interrupted him.

'I know what you're going to say,' she went on, looking up at him rebelliously. 'I know what you're going to say every bit as well as if you'd said it. You're one of these city missionary sort of people, you are; and you're going to tell me it's awfully wicked of

me to try and destroy myself, and ain't I afraid of a terrible hereafter! Ugh! I hate and detest all that mummery.'

Ronald looked down upon her in return with a sort of silent wondering pity. 'Awfully wicked,' he said slowly, 'awfully wicked! How meaningless! How incomprehensible! Awfully wicked to be friendless, or poor, or wretched, or unhappy! Awfully wicked to be driven by despair, or by heartlessness, to such a pitch of misery or frenzy that you want to fling yourself wildly into the river, only to be out of it all, anywhere, in a minute! Why you poor, unhappy girl, how on earth can you possibly help it?'

There was something in the tone of his earnest voice that melted for a moment even Selah Briggs's pride and vehemence. It was very impertinent of him to try and interfere with her purely personal business, no doubt, but he seemed to do so in a genuinely kindly rather than in a fussy interfering spirit. At

any rate he didn't begin by talking to her that horrid cant about the attempt to commit suicide being so extremely wicked ! If he had done that, Selah would have felt it was not only an unwarrantable intrusion upon her liberty of action, but a grotesque insult to her natural intelligence as well.

'I've a right to drown myself if I choose,' she faltered out, leaning faintly as she spoke against the parapet, 'and nobody else has any possible right to hinder or prevent me. If you people make laws against my rights in that matter, I shall set your laws aside whenever and wherever it happens to suit my personal convenience.'

'Exactly so,' Ronald answered. in the same tone of gentle and acquiescent persuasion. 'I quite agree with you. It's as clear as daylight that every individual human being has a perfect right to put an end to his own life whenever it becomes irksome or unpleasant to him ; and

nobody else has any right whatever to interfere with him. The prohibitions that law puts upon our freedom in that respect are only of a piece with the other absurd restrictions of our existing unchristian legislation—as opposed to the spirit of the Word as the old rule that made us bury a suicide at four cross roads with a hideously barbarous and brutal ceremonial. They're all mere temporary survivals from a primitive paganism: the truth shall make us free. But though we mayn't rightly interfere, we may surely inquire in a brotherly spirit of interest, whether it isn't possible for us to make life less irksome for those who, unhappily, want to get rid of it. After all, the causes of our discontent are often quite removable. Tell me, at least, what yours are, and let me see whether I'm able to do anything towards removing them.'

Selah hung back a little sullenly. This was a wonderful mixture of tongues that the

strange young man was talking in! When he spoke about the right and wrong of suicide, ethically considered, it might have been Herbert Walters himself who was addressing her: when he glided off sideways to the truth and the Word, it might have been her Primitive Methodist friends at Hastings, in full meeting assembled. And, by the way, he reminded her strangely, somehow, of Herbert Walters! What manner of man could he be, she wondered, and what strange sort of new Gospel was this that he was preaching to her?

‘How do I know who you are?’ she asked him, carelessly. ‘How do I know what you want to know my story for? Perhaps you’re only trying to get something out of me.’

‘Trust me,’ Ronald said simply. ‘By faith we live, you know. Only trust me.’

Selah answered nothing.

‘Come over here to the bench by the

garden,' Ronald went on earnestly. 'We can talk there more at our leisure. I don't like to see you leaning so close to the parapet. It's a temptation ; I know it's a temptation.'

Selah looked at him again inquiringly. She had never before met anybody so curious, she fancied. 'Aren't you afraid of being seen sitting with me like this,' she said, 'on the Embankment benches? Some of your fine friends might come by and wonder who on earth you had got here with you.' And, indeed, Selah's dress had grown very shabby and poor-looking during a long and often fruitless search for casual work or employment in London.

But Ronald only surveyed her gently from head to foot with a quiet smile, and answered softly, 'Oh, no ; there's no reason on earth why we shouldn't sit down and talk together ; and even if there were, my friends all know me far too well by this time to be surprised at anything I may do, when the Hand guides



me. If you will only sit down and tell me your story, I should like to see whether I could possibly do anything to help you.'

Selah let him lead her in his gentle half-womanly fashion to the bench, and sat down beside him mechanically. Still, she made no attempt to begin her pitiful story. Ronald suspected for a second some special cause for her embarrassment, and ventured to suggest a possible way out of it. 'Perhaps,' he said timidly, 'you would rather speak to some older and more fatherly man about it, or to some kind lady. If so, I have many good friends in London who would listen to you with as much interest and attention as I should.'

The old spirit flared up in Selah for a second, as she answered quickly, 'No, no, sir, it's nothing of that sort. I can tell *you* as well as I can tell anybody. If I've been unfortunate, it's been through no fault of my own, thank goodness, but only through the hard-hearted-

ness and unkindness of other people. I'd rather speak to you than to anyone else, because I feel somehow—why, I don't know—as if you had something or other really good in you.'

'I beg your pardon,' Ronald said hastily, 'for even suggesting it : but you see, I often have to meet a great many people who've been unhappy through a great many different causes, and that leads one occasionally for a time into mistaken inferences. Let me hear all your history, please, and I firmly believe, through the aid that never forsakes us, I shall be able to do something or other to help you in your difficulties.'

Thus adjured, Selah began and told her whole unhappy history through, without pause or break, into Ronald's quietly sympathetic ear. She told him quite frankly and fully how she had picked up the acquaintance of a young Mr. Walters from Oxford at Hastings : how this Mr. Walters had led her to believe he

would marry her : how she had left her home hurriedly, under the belief that he would be induced to keep his promise : how he had thrown her over to her own devices : and how she had ever since been trying to pick up a precarious livelihood for herself in stray ways as a sempstress, work for which she was naturally very ill-fitted, and for which she had no introductions. She slurred over nothing on either side of the story ; and especially she did not forget to describe the full measure of her troubles and trials from her Methodist friends at Hastings. Ronald shook his head sympathetically at this stage of the story. ‘ Ah, I know, I know,’ he muttered, half under his breath ; ‘ nasty pious people ! Very well-meaning, very devout, very earnest, one may be sure of it—but oh ! what terrible soul-killing people to live among ! I can understand all about it, for I’ve met them often—Sabbath-keeping folks ; preaching and praying folks ; worrying, bothering, fussy-

religious folks ; formalists, Pharisees, mint anise-and-cummin Christians : awfully anxious about your soul, and so forth, and doing their very best to make you as miserable all the time as a slave at the torture ! I don't wonder you ran away from them.'

'And I wasn't really going to drown myself, you know, when you spoke to me,' Selah said, quite apologetically. 'I was only just looking over into the beautiful brown water, and thinking how delicious it would be to fling oneself in there, and be carried off down to the sea, and rolled about for ever into pebbles on the shingle, and there would be an end of one altogether—oh, how lovely !'

'Very natural,' Ronald answered calmly. 'Very natural. Of course it would. I've often thought the same thing myself. Still, one oughtn't, if possible, to give way to these impulses : one ought to do all that's in one's power to prevent such a miserable termination

to one's divinely allotted existence. After all, it is His will, you see, that we should be happy.'

When Selah had quite finished all her story, Ronald began drawing circles in the road with the end of his stick, and perpending within himself what had better be done about it, now that all was told him. 'No work,' he said, half to himself; 'no money; no food. Why, why, I suppose you must be hungry.'

Selah nodded assent.

'Will you allow me to offer you a little lunch?' he asked, hesitatingly, with something of Herbert's stately politeness. Even in this last extremity, Ronald felt instinctively what was due to Selah Briggs's natural sentiments of pride and delicacy. He must speak to her deferentially as if she were a lady, not give her alms as if she were a beggar.

Then for the first time that day Selah burst suddenly into tears. 'Oh, sir,' she said, sobbing, 'you are very kind to me.'

Ronald waited a moment or two till her eyes were dry, and then took her across the gardens and into Gatti's. Any other man might have chosen some other place of entertainment under the circumstances, but Ronald, in his perfect simplicity of heart, looked only for the first shop where he could get Selah the food she needed. He ordered something hot hastily, and, when it came, though he had had his own lunch already, he played a little with a knife and fork himself for show's sake, in order not to seem as if he were merely looking on while Selah was eating. These little touches of feeling were not lost upon Selah: she noticed them at once, and recognised in what Ernest would have called her aboriginal unregenerate vocabulary that she was dealing with a true gentleman.

'Walters,' Ronald said, pausing a second with a bit of chop poised lightly on the end of his fork; 'let me see—Walters. I don't know

any man of that name, myself, but I've had two brothers at Oxford, and perhaps one of them could tell me who he is. Walters—Walters. You said your own name was Miss Briggs, I think, didn't you? *My* name's Ronald Le Breton.'

'How curious,' Selah said, colouring up. 'I'm sure I remember Mr. Walters talking more than once to me about his brother Ronald.'

'Indeed,' Ronald answered, without even a passing tinge of suspicion. That any man should give a false name to other people with intent to deceive was a thing that would never have entered into his simple head—far less that his own brother Herbert should be guilty of such a piece of disgraceful meanness.

'I think,' Ronald went on, as soon as Selah had finished her lunch, 'you'd better come with me back to my mother's house for the present. I suppose, now you've talked it over

a little, you won't think of throwing yourself into the river any more for to-day. You'll postpone your intention for the present, won't you? Adjourn it *sine die* till we can see what can be done for you.'

Selah smiled faintly. Even with the slight fresh spring of hope that this chance rencontre had roused anew within her, it seemed rather absurd and childish of her to have meditated suicide only an hour ago. Besides, she had eaten and drunk since then, and the profoundest philosophers have always frankly admitted that the pessimistic side of human nature is greatly mitigated after a good dinner.

Ronald called a hansom, and drove up rapidly to Epsilon Terrace. When he got there, he took Selah into the little back breakfast room, regardless of the proprieties, and began once more to consider the prospects of the future.

'Is Lady Le Breton in?' he asked the



servant: and Selah noticed with surprise and wonder that this strange young man's mother was actually 'a lady of title,' as she called it to herself in her curious ordinary language.

'No, sir,' the girl answered; 'she have been gone out about an hour.'

'Then I must leave you here while I go out and get you lodgings for the present,' Ronald said, quietly; 'you won't object to my doing that, of course: you can easily pay me back from your salary as soon as we succeed in finding you some suitable occupation. Let me see, where can I put you for the next fortnight? Naturally you wouldn't like to live with religious people, would you?'

'I hate them,' Selah answered vigorously.

'Of course, of course,' Ronald went on, as if to himself. 'Perfectly natural. She hates them! So should I if I'd been bothered and worried out of my life by them in the way she has. I hate them myself—that kind: or,

rather, it's wrong to say that of them, poor creatures, for they mean well, they really mean well at bottom, in their blundering, formal, pettifogging way. They think they can take the kingdom of Heaven, not by storm, but by petty compliances, like servile servants who have to deal with a capricious, exacting master. Poor souls, they know no better. They measure the universe by the reflection in their muddy mill-pond. Nasty pious people is what I always call them ; nasty pious people : little narrow souls, trying hard to be Christians after their lights, and only attaining, after all, to a sort of second-hand diluted Judaism, a religion of cup-washing, and phylacteries, and new moons, and sabbaths, and daily sacrifices. However, that's neither here nor there. I won't hand you over, Miss Briggs, to any of those poor benighted people. No, nor to any religious people at all. It wouldn't suit you : you want to be well out of it.

I know the very place for you. There are the Baumanns: they'd be glad to let a room: Baumann's a German refugee, and a friend of Ernest's: a good man, but a secularist. *They* wouldn't bother you with any religion: poor things, they haven't got any. Mrs. Baumann's an excellent woman—educated, too; no objection at all in any way to the Baumanns. They're people I like and respect immensely—every good quality they have; and I'm often grieved to think such excellent people should be deprived of the comfort and pleasure of believing. But, then, so's my dear brother Ernest; and you know, they're none the worse for it, apparently, any of them: indeed, I don't know that there's anybody with whom I can talk more sympathetically on spiritual matters than dear Ernest. Depend upon it, most of the most spiritually-minded people nowadays are outside all the churches altogether.'

Selah listened in blank amazement to this

singular avowal of heterodox opinion from an obviously religious person. What Ronald Le Breton could be she couldn't imagine ; and she thought with an inward smile of the very different way in which her friends at Hastings would have discussed the spiritual character of a wicked secularist.

Just at that moment a latch-key turned lightly in the street door, and two sets of footsteps came down the passage to Lady Le Breton's little back breakfast-room. One set turned up the staircase, the other halted for a second at the breakfast-room doorway. Then the door opened gently, and Herbert Le Breton and Selah Briggs stood face to face again in blank astonishment.

There was a moment's pause, as Selah rose with burning cheeks from the chair where she was sitting ; and neither spoke a word as they looked with eyes of mutual suspicion and dislike into each other's faces. At last Herbert

Le Breton turned with some acerbity to his brother Ronald, and asked in a voice of affected contempt, 'Who is this woman?'

'This *lady's* name is Miss Briggs,' Ronald answered, pointedly, but, of course, quite innocently.

'I needn't ask you who this man is,' Selah said, with bitter emphasis. 'It's Herbert Walters.'

A horrible light burst in upon Ronald instantaneously as she uttered the name; but he could not believe it; he would not believe it: it was too terrible, too incredible. 'No, no,' he said falteringly, turning to Selah; 'you must be mistaken. This is not Mr. Walters. This is my brother, Herbert Le Breton.'

Selah gazed into Herbert's slinking eyes with a concentrated expression of scorn and disgust. 'Then he gave me a false name,' she said, slowly, fronting him like a tigress. 'He gave me a false name, it seems, from the very

beginning. All through, the false wretch, all through, he actually meant to deceive me. He laid his vile scheme for it beforehand. I never wish to see you again, you miserable cur, Herbert Le Breton, if that's your real name at last. I never wish to see you again : but I'm glad I've done it now by accident, if it were only to inflict upon you the humiliation of knowing that I have measured the utmost depth of your infamy ! You mean, common, false scoundrel, I have measured to the bottom the depth of your infamy !'

'Oh, don't,' Ronald said imploringly, laying his hand upon her arm. 'He deserves it, no doubt ; but don't glory over his humiliation.' He had no need to ask whether she spoke the truth ; his brother's livid and scarlet face was evidence enough against him.

Herbert, however, answered nothing. He merely turned angrily to Ronald. 'I won't bandy words,' he said constrainedly in his

coldest tone, 'with this infamous woman whom you have brought here on purpose to insult me; but I must request you to ask her to leave the house immediately. Your mother's home is no place to which to bring people of such a character.'

As he spoke, the door opened again, and Lady Le Breton, attracted by the sound of angry voices, entered unexpectedly. 'What does all this riot mean, Herbert?' she asked, imperiously. 'Who on earth is this young woman that Ronald has brought into my own house, actually without my permission?'

Herbert whispered a few words quietly into her ear, and then left the room hurriedly with a stiff and formal bow to his brother Ronald. Lady Le Breton turned round to the culprit severely.

'Disgraceful, Ronald!' she cried in her sternest and most angry voice; 'perfectly disgraceful! You aid and abet this wretched

creature—whose object is only to extort money by false pretences out of your brother Herbert,—you aid and abet her in her abominable stratagems, and you even venture to introduce her clandestinely into my own breakfast-room. I wonder you're not ashamed of yourself. What on earth can you mean by such extraordinary, such un-Christian conduct? Go to your own room this moment, sir, and ask this young woman to leave the house immediately.'

'I shall go without being asked,' Selah said, proudly, her big eyes flashing defiance haughtily into Lady Le Breton's. 'I don't know who you all may be, or what this gentleman who brought me here may have to do with you: but if you are in any way connected with that wretch Herbert Le Breton, who called himself Herbert Walters for the sake of deceiving me, I don't want to have anything further to say to any of the whole pack of you. Please stand out of my way,' she went on to Ronald, 'and I shall



have done with you all together this very instant. I wish to God I had never seen a single one of you.'

'No, no, not just yet, please,' Ronald put in hastily. 'You mustn't go just yet, I implore you, I beg of you, till I have explained to my mother, before you, how this all happened; and then, when you go, I shall go with you. Though I have the misfortune to be the brother of the man who gave you a false name in order to deceive you, I trust you will still allow me to help you as far as I am able, and to take you to my German friends of whom I spoke to you.'

'Ronald,' Lady Le Breton cried, in her most commanding tone, 'you must have taken leave of your senses. How dare you keep this person a moment longer in my house against my wish, when even she herself is anxious to quit it? Let her go at once, let her go at once, sir.'

'No, mother,' Ronald answered firmly.

‘ We are commanded in the Word to obey our parents in all things, “ in the Lord.” I think you’ve forgotten that proviso, mother, “ in the Lord.” Now, mother, I will tell you all about it.’ And then, in a rapid sketch, Ronald, with his back planted solidly against the door, told his mother briefly all he knew about Selah Briggs, how he had found her, how he had brought her home not knowing who she was, and how she had recognised Herbert as her unfaithful lover. Lady Le Breton, when she saw that escape was practically impossible, flung herself back in an easy-chair, where she swayed herself backward and forward gently all the while, without once lifting her eyes towards Ronald, and sighed impatiently from time to time audibly, as if the story merely bored her. As for poor Selah, she stood upright in front of Ronald without a word, looking neither to the right nor to the left, and waiting eagerly for the story to be finished.

When Ronald had said his say, Lady Le Breton looked up at last and said simply, with a pretended yawn, 'Now, Ronald, will you go to your own room?'

'I will not,' Ronald answered, in a soft whisper. 'I will go with this lady to the rooms of which I have spoken to her.'

'Then,' Lady Le Breton said coldly, 'you shall not return here. It seems I'm to lose all my children, one after another, by their extraordinary rebelliousness!'

'By your own act—yes,' Ronald answered, very calmly. 'You forgot that last Thursday was my birthday, I dare say, mother; but I didn't forget it: it was; and I came of age then. I'm my own master now. I've stopped here as long as I could, mother, because of the commandment: but I can't stop here any longer. I shall go to Ernest's for to-night as soon as I've got rooms for this lady.'

'Good evening,' Lady Le Breton said, bowing frigidly, without another word.

‘ Good evening, mother,’ Ronald replied, in his natural voice. ‘ Miss Briggs, will you come with me? I’m very sorry that this unhappy scene should have been inflicted upon you against my will ; but I hope and pray that you won’t have lost all confidence in my wish to help you, in spite of these unfortunate accidents.’

Selah followed him blindly, in a dazzled fashion, out on to the flagstones of Epsilon Terrace.

‘ Dear me, dear me,’ moaned Lady Le Breton, sinking back vacantly once more, with an air of resignation after her efforts, into the easy-chair ; ‘ was there ever a mother so plagued and burdened with unnatural and undutiful sons as I am? If it weren’t for dear Herbert, I’m sure I don’t know what I should ever do between them. Ronald, too, who always pretended to be so very, very religious ! To think that he should go and uphold the

word of a miserable, abandoned, improper adventuress against his own brother Herbert ! Atrocious, perfectly atrocious ! Where on earth he can have picked up such a woman I'm positively at a loss to imagine. But it's exactly like his poor dear father : I remember once when we were stationed at Moozuffernugger, in the North-West Provinces, with the 14th Bengal, poor Owen absolutely insisted on taking up the case of some Eurasian woman, who pretended she'd been badly treated by young Walker of our regiment ! I call it quite improper—almost unseemly—to meddle in the affairs of such people. I dare say Herbert has had something or other to say to this horrid girl ; young men will be young men, and in the army we know how to make allowances for that sort of thing : but that Ronald should positively think of bringing such a person into my breakfast-room is not to be heard of. Ronald's a pure Le Breton—that's undeniable,

thank goodness ; not a single one of the good Whitaker points to be found in all his nature. However, poor dear Sir Owen, in spite of all his nonsense, was at least an officer and a gentleman ; whereas the nonsense these boys have picked up at Oxford and among their German refugee people is both irreligious, and, I may even say, indecent, or, to put it in the mildest way, indecorous. I wish with all my heart I'd never sent them to Oxford. I've always thought that if only Ernest had gone in for a direct commission, he'd soon have got all that absurd revolutionary rubbish knocked out of him in a mess-room ! But it's a great comfort to me to think I have one real blessing in dear Herbert, who's just such a son as any mother might well be thoroughly proud of in every way !'

While Lady Le Breton was thus communing with herself in the breakfast-room, and while Herbert was trying to patch up a hollow truce

with his own much-bruised self-respect in his own bedroom, Ronald was taking poor dazed and wearied Selah round to the refuge of the Baumanns' hospitable roof. As soon as that matter was temporarily arranged to the mutual satisfaction of all the parties concerned, Ronald walked over alone to Ernest's little lodgings at Holloway. He would sleep there that night, and send round a letter to Amelia, the housemaid, in the morning, asking her to pack up his things and forward them at once to Mrs. Halliss's. For himself, he did not propose, unless circumstances compelled it, again to enter his mother's rooms, except by her own express invitation. After all, he thought, even his little income, if clubbed with Edie and Ernest's, would probably help them all to live now in tolerable comfort.

So he told Edie all his story, and Edie listened to it with an approving smile. 'I think, dear Ronald,' she said, taking his hand

in hers, 'you did quite right—quite as Ernest himself would have done under the circumstances.'

'Where's Ernest?' asked Ronald, half smiling at that naïve wifely standard of right conduct.

'Gone with Mr. Berkeley to the trial,' Edie answered.

'The trial! What trial?'

'Oh, don't you know? Herr Max s. They're trying him to-day for uttering a seditious libel and inciting to murder the chief of the Third Section at St. Petersburg.'

'But he said nothing at all,' Ronald cried in astonishment. 'I read the article myself. He said nothing that any Englishman mightn't have said under the same circumstances. Why, I could have written the libel, as they call it, myself, even, and I'm not much of a politician either! They can't ever be trying



him in a country like England for anything so ridiculously little as that !’

‘ But they are,’ Edie answered quietly ;  
‘ and dear Ernest’s dreadfully afraid the verdict will go against him.’

‘ Nonsense,’ Ronald answered with natural confidence. ‘ No English jury would ever convict a man for speaking up like that against an odious and abominable tyranny.’

Very late in the afternoon, Ernest and Berkeley returned to the lodgings. Ernest’s face was white with excitement, and his lips were trembling violently with suppressed emotion. His eyes were red and swollen. Edie hardly needed to ask in a breathless whisper of Arthur Berkeley, ‘ What verdict ?’

‘ Guilty,’ Arthur Berkeley answered with a look of unfeigned horror and indignation. He had learnt by this time quite to take the communistic view of such questions.

‘ Guilty,’ Ronald cried, jumping up from

his chair in astonishment. 'Impossible! And what sentence?'

'Twelve months' hard labour,' Berkeley answered, slowly and remorsefully.

'An atrocious sentence!' Ronald exclaimed, turning red with excitement. 'An abominable sentence! A most malignant and vindictive sentence! Who was the judge, Arthur?'

'Bassenthwaite,' Berkeley replied half under his breath.

'And may the Lord have mercy upon his soul!' said Ronald solemnly.

But Ernest never said a single word. He only sat down and ate his supper in silence, like one stunned and dazzled. He didn't even notice Ronald's coming. And Edie knew by his quick breath and his face alternately flushed and pallid that there would be another crisis in his gathering complaint before the next morning.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

## TELL IT NOT IN GATH.

As they sat silent in that little sitting-room after supper, a double knock at the door suddenly announced the arrival of a telegram for Ernest. He opened it with trembling fingers. It was from Lancaster :—‘ Come down to the office at once. Schurz has been sentenced to a year’s imprisonment, and we want a leader about him for to-morrow.’ The telegram roused Ernest at once from his stupefied lethargy. Here was a chance at last of doing something for Max Schurz and for the cause of freedom ! Here was a chance of waking up all England to a sense of the horrible crime it had just committed through the voice of its duly accredited

judicial mouthpiece! The country was trembling on the brink of an abyss, and he, Ernest Le Breton, might just be in time to save it. The Home Secretary must be compelled by the unanimous clamour of thirty millions of free working people to redress the gross injustice of the law in sending Max Schurz, the greatest, noblest, and purest-minded of mankind, to a common felon's prison! Nothing else on earth could have moved Ernest, jaded and dispirited as he was at that moment, to the painful exertion of writing a newspaper leader after the day's fatigues and excitements, except the thought that by doing so he might not only blot out this national disgrace, as he considered it, but might also help to release the martyr of the people's rights from his incredible, unspeakable punishment. Flushed and feverish though he was, he rose straight up from the table, handed the telegram to Edie without a word, and started off alone to hail a hansom cab and

drive down immediately to the office. Arthur Berkeley, fearful of what might happen to him in his present excited state, stole out after him quietly, and followed him unperceived in another hansom at a little distance.

When Ernest got to the 'Morning Intelligence' buildings, he was shown up at once into the editorial room. He expected to find Mr. Lancaster at the same white heat of indignation as himself; but to his immense surprise he actually found him in the usual sleepy languid condition of apathetic impartiality. 'I wired for you, Le Breton,' the impassive editor said calmly, 'because I understand you know all about this man Schurz, who has just got his twelve months' imprisonment this evening. I suppose, of course, you've heard already all about it.'

'I've been at the trial all day,' Ernest answered, 'and myself heard the verdict and sentence.'

‘Good,’ Mr. Lancaster said, with a dreamy touch of approval in his tone. That’s good journalism, certainly, and very smart of you. Helps you to give local colour and realistic touches to the matter. But you ought to have called in here to see me immediately. We shall have a regular reporter’s report of the trial, of course; but reporters’ reports are fearfully and wonderfully lifeless. If you like, besides the leader, you might work up a striking headed article on the Scene in Court. This is an important case, and we want something more about it than mere writing, you know; a little about the man himself and his personal history, which Berkeley tells me you’re well acquainted with. He’s written something called ‘Gold and the Proletariate,’ or whatever it is; just tell our readers all about it. As to the leader, say what you like in it—of course I shall look over the proof, and tone it down a bit to suit the taste of our public

—we appeal mainly to the mercantile middle class, I need hardly say; but you know the general policy of the paper, and you can just write what you think best, subject to subsequent editorial revision. Get to work at once, please, as the articles are wanted immediately, and send down slips as fast as they're written to the printers.'

Ernest could hardly contain his surprise at Mr. Lancaster's calmness under such unheard of circumstances—when the whole laborious fabric of British liberties was tottering visibly to its base—but he wisely concluded to himself that the editor had to see articles written about every possible subject every evening—from a European convulsion to a fire at a theatre,—and that use must have made it in him a property of easiness. When a man's obliged to work himself up perpetually into a state of artificial excitement about every railway accident, explosion, shipwreck, earthquake, or

volcanic eruption, in Europe, Asia, Africa, America, and the islands of the Pacific Ocean, why then, Ernest charitably said to himself, his sympathies must naturally end by getting a trifle callous, especially when he's such a very apathetic person to start with as this laconic editorial Lancaster. So he turned into the little bare box devoted to his temporary use, and began writing with perfectly unexampled and extraordinary rapidity at his leader and his article about the injured and martyred apostle of the slighted communistic religion.

It was only a few months since Ernest had, with vast toil and forethought, spun slowly out his maiden newspaper article on the Italian organ boy, and now he found himself, to his own immense surprise, covering sheet after sheet of paper in feverish haste with a long account of Max Schurz's splendid life and labours, and with a really fervid and eloquent



appeal to the English people not to suffer such a man as he to go helplessly and hopelessly to an English prison, at the bare bidding of a foreign despot. He never stopped for one moment to take thought or to correct what he had written ; in the excitement of the moment his pen travelled along over the paper as if inspired, and he found the words and thoughts thronging his brain almost faster than his lagging hand could suffice to give them visible embodiment. As each page was thrown off hurriedly, he sent it down, still pale and wet, to the printers in the office ; and before two o'clock in the morning, he had full proofs of all he had written sent up to him for final correction. It was a stirring and vigorous leader, he felt quite certain himself as he read it over ; and he thought with a swelling breast that it would appear next day, with all the impersonal authority of the 'Morning Intelligence' stamped upon its face, at ten thousand

English breakfast tables, where it might rouse the people in their millions to protest sternly before it was too late against this horrid violation of our cherished and boasted national hospitality.

Meanwhile, Arthur Berkeley had stopped at the office, and run in hastily for five minutes' talk with the terrible editor. 'Don't say anything to shock Le Breton, I beg of you, Lancaster,' he said, 'about this poor man Schurz who has just been sent for a year to prison. It's a very hard case, and I'm awfully sorry for the man myself, though that's neither here nor there. I can see from your face that you, for your part, don't sympathise with him; but at any rate, don't say anything about it to hurt Le Breton's feelings. He's in a dreadfully feverish and excited condition this evening; Max Schurz has always been to him almost like a father, and he naturally takes his sentence very bitterly to heart. To tell you the truth, I

regret it a great deal myself; I know a little of Schurz, through Le Breton, and I know what a well-meaning, ardent, enthusiastic person he really is, and how much good actually underlies all his chaotic socialistic notions. But at any rate, I do beg of you, don't say anything to further excite and hurt poor Le Breton.'

'Certainly not,' the editor answered, smoothing his large hands softly one over the other. 'Certainly not; though I confess, as a practical man, I don't sympathise in the least with this preposterous German refugee fellow. So far as I can learn, he's been at the bottom of half the revolutionary and insurrectionary movements of the last twenty years—a regular out-and-out professional socialistic incendiary.'

'You wouldn't say so,' Berkeley replied quietly, 'if you'd seen more of him, Lancaster.' But, being a man of the world, and having come mainly on Ernest's account, he didn't

care to press the abstract question of Herr Max's political sincerity any further.

'Well,' the editor went on, a little testily, 'be that as it may, I won't discuss the subject with your friend Le Breton, who's really a nice, enthusiastic young fellow, I think, as far as I've seen him. I'll simply let him write to-night whatever he pleases, and make the necessary alterations in proof afterwards, without talking it over with him personally at all. That'll avoid any needless discussion and ruffling of his supersensitive communistic feelings. Poor fellow, he looks very ill indeed to-night. I'm really extremely sorry for him.'

'When will he be finished?' asked Arthur.

'At two,' the editor answered.

'I'll send a cab for him,' Arthur said; 'there'll be none about at that hour, probably. Will you kindly tell him it's waiting for him.'

At two o'clock or a little after, Ernest drove home with his heart on fire, full of

eagerness and swelling hope for to-morrow morning. He found Edie waiting for him, late as it was, with a little bottle of wine—an unknown luxury at Mrs. Halliss's lodgings—and such light supper as she thought he could manage to swallow in his excitement. Ernest drank a glass of the wine, but left the supper untasted. Then he went to bed, and tossed about uneasily till morning. He couldn't sleep through his anxiety to see his great leader appear in all the added dignity of printer's ink and rouse the slumbering world of England up to a due sense of Max Schurz's wrongs and the law's incomprehensible iniquity.

Before seven, he rose very quietly, dressed himself without saying a word, and stole out to buy an early copy of the 'Morning Intelligence.' He got one at the small tobacconist's shop round the corner, where he had taken his first hint for the Italian organ-boy leader. It was with difficulty that he could contain him-

self till he was back in Mrs. Halliss's little front parlour ; and there he tore open the paper eagerly, and turned to the well-remembered words at the beginning of his desperate appealing article. He could recollect the very run of every clause and word he had written : ' No Englishman can read without a thrill of righteous indignation,' it began, ' the sentence passed last night upon Max Schurz, the author of that remarkable economical work, " Gold and the Proletariate." Herr Schurz is one of those numerous refugees from German despotism who have taken advantage of the hospitable welcome usually afforded by England to the oppressed of all creeds or nations '—and so forth, and so forth. Where was it, now? Yes, that was it, in the place of honour, of course—the first leader under the clock in the ' Morning Intelligence.' His eye caught at once the opening key-words, ' No Englishman.' Sinking down into the easy-chair by the flowers

in the window he prepared to run it through at his leisure with breathless anxiety.

‘No Englishman can read without a feeling of the highest approval the sentence passed last night upon Max Schurz, the author of that misguided economical work, “Gold and the Proletariate.” Herr Schurz is one of those numerous refugees from German authority, who have taken advantage of the hospitable welcome usually afforded by England to the oppressed of all creeds or nations, in order to hatch plots in security against the peace of sovereigns or governments with which we desire always to maintain the most amicable and cordial relations.’ Ernest’s eyes seemed to fail him. The type on the paper swam wildly before his bewildered vision. What on earth could this mean? It was his own leader, indeed, with the very rhythm and cadence of the sentences accurately preserved, but with all the adjectives and epithets so ingeniously altered

that it was turned into a crushing condemnation of Max Schurz, his principles, his conduct, and his ethical theories. From beginning to end, the article appealed to the common-sense of intelligent Englishmen to admire the dignity of the law in thus vindicating itself against the atrocious schemes of a dangerous and ungrateful political exile who had abused the hospitality of a great free country to concoct vile plots against the persons of friendly sovereigns and innocent ministers on the European continent.

Ernest laid down the paper dreamily, and leant back for a moment in his chair, to let his brain recover a little from the reeling dizziness of that crushing disappointment. Then he turned in a giddy mechanical fashion to the headed article on the fourth page. There the self-same style of treatment met once more his astonished gaze. All the minute facts as to Max Schurz's history and personality were



carefully preserved; the description of his simple artisan life, his modest household, his Sunday evening receptions, his great following of earnest and enthusiastic refugees—every word of all this, which hardly anyone else could have equally well supplied, was retained intact in the published copy; yet the whole spirit of the thing had utterly evaporated, or rather had been perverted into the exact opposite unsympathetic channel. Where Ernest had written ‘enthusiasm,’ Lancaster had simply altered the word to ‘fanaticism;’ where Ernest had spoken of Herr Max’s ‘single-hearted devotion,’ Lancaster had merely changed the phrase into ‘undisguised revolutionary ardour.’ The whole paper was one long sermon against Max Schurz’s Utopian schemes, imputing to him not only folly but even positive criminality as well. We all know how we all in England look upon the foreign political refugee—a man to be hit again with impunity, because he has

no friends; but to Ernest, who had lived so long in his own little socialistic set, the discovery that people could openly say such things against his chosen apostle at the very moment of his martyrdom, was a hideous and blinding disillusionment. He put the paper down upon the table once more, and buried his face helplessly between his burning hands.

The worst of it all was this: if Herr Max ever saw those articles he would naturally conclude that Ernest had been guilty of the basest treachery, and that too on the very day when he most needed the aid and sympathy of all his followers. With a thrill of horror he thought in his own soul that the great leader might suspect him for an hour of being the venal Judas of the little sect.

How Ernest ever got through that weary day he did not know himself; nothing kept him up through it except his burning indignation against Lancaster's abominable conduct. About

eleven o'clock, Arthur Berkeley called in to see him. 'I'm afraid you've been a little disappointed,' he said, 'about the turn Lancaster has given to your two articles. He told me he meant to alter the tone so as to suit the policy of the paper, and I see he's done so very thoroughly. You can't look for much sympathy from commonplace, cold, calculating Englishmen for enthusiastic natures like Herr Max's.'

Ernest turned to him in blank amazement. He had expected Berkeley to be as angry as himself at Lancaster's shameful mutilation of his appealing leader; and he found now that even Berkeley accepted it as an ordinary incident in the course of journalistic business. His heart sank within him as he thought how little hope there could be of Herr Max's liberation, when even his own familiar friend Berkeley looked upon the matter in such a casual careless fashion.

‘I shall never write another word for the “Morning Intelligence,” he cried vehemently, after a moment’s pause. ‘If we starve for it, I shall never write another word in that wicked, abominable, dishonourable paper. I can die easily enough, heaven knows, without a murmur: but I can’t be disloyal to dear Herr Max, and to all my innate ingrained principles.’

‘Don’t say that, Ernest,’ Berkeley answered gently. ‘Think of Mrs. Le Breton and the baby. The luxury of starvation for the sake of a cause is one you might venture to allow yourself if you were alone in the world as I am, but not one which you ought to force unwillingly upon your wife and children. You’ve been getting a trifle more practical of late under the spur of necessity; don’t go and turn impossible again, at the supreme moment. Whatever happens, it’s your plain duty to go on writing for the “Morning Intelligence.” You say with your own hand only what you think

and believe yourself: the editor alone is responsible for the final policy of the paper.'

Ernest only muttered slowly to himself, 'Never, never, never!'

Still, though the first attempt had failed, Ernest did not wholly give up his hopes of doing something towards the release of Herr Max from that unutterable imprisonment. He drew up a form of petition to the Home Secretary, in which he pointed out the reasons for setting aside the course of the law in the case of this particular political prisoner. With feverish anxiety he ran about London for the next two days, trying to get influential signatures to his petition, and to rouse the people in their millions to demand the release of the popular martyr. Alas for the stolid indifference of the British public! The people in their millions sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play, exactly as if nothing unusual in any way had happened. Most of them had never heard at all

of Herr Max, or of 'Gold and the Proletariate,' and those who had heard understood for the most part that he was a bad lot who was imprisoned for trying nefariously to blow up the Emperor of Rooshia. Crowds of people nightly besieged the doors of the Ambiguities and the Marlborough, to hear the fate of 'The Primate of Fiji' and 'The Duke of Bermondsey;' but very few among the millions took the trouble to sign their names to Ernest Le Breton's despairing petition. Even the advanced radicals of the market-place, the men who figured largely at Trafalgar Square meetings and Agricultural Labourers' Unions, feared to damage their reputation for moderation and sobriety by getting themselves mixed up with a continental agitator like this man Schurz that people were talking about. The Irish members expressed a pious horror of the very word dynamite: the working-man leaders hummed and hawed, and regretted their inability, in their

very delicate position, to do anything which might seem like countenancing Russian nihilism. In the end, Ernest sent in his petition with only half a dozen unknown signatures ; and the Home Secretary's private prompter threw it into the waste-paper basket entire, without even taking the trouble to mention its existence to his harassed and overburdened chief. Just a Marylebone communist refugee in prison ! How could a statesman with half the bores and faddists of England on his troubled hands, find time to look at uninfluential petitions about an insignificant worthless nobody like that ?

So gentle, noble-natured, learned Herr Max went to prison and served his year there uncomplainingly, like any other social malefactor ; and Society talked about his case with languid interest for nearly a fortnight, and then straightway found a new sensation, and forgot all about him. But there are three hundred

and sixty-five days of twenty-four hours each in every year ; and for every one of those days Herr Max and Herr Max's friends never forgot for an hour together that he was in prison.

And at the end of the week Ernest got a letter from Lancaster, enclosing a cheque for eight guineas. That is a vast sum of money, eight guineas : just think of all the bread, and meat, and tea, and clothing one can buy with it for a small family ! ' My dear Le Breton,' the editor wrote—in his own hand, too ; a rare honour ; for he was a kindly man, and he had learned, much to his surprise, from Arthur Berkeley, that Ernest was angry at his treatment of the Schurzian leader : ' My dear Le Breton, I enclose cheque for eight guineas, for your two articles. I hope you didn't mind the way I was obliged to cut them up in some unessential details, so as to suit the policy of the paper. I kept whatever was really most distinctive as embodying special information in them. You



know we are above all things strictly moderate. Please send us another social shortly.'

It was a kind letter, undoubtedly a kind and kindly-meant letter: but Ernest flung it from him as though he had been stung by a serpent or a scorpion. Then he handed the cheque to Edie in solemn silence, to see what she would do with it. He merely wanted to try her constancy. For himself, he would have felt like a Judas indeed if he had taken and used their thirty pieces of silver.

Edie looked at the cheque intently and sighed a deep sigh of regret. How could she do otherwise? They were so very poor, and it was such an immense sum of money! Then she rose quietly without saying a word, and lighted a match from the box on the mantelpiece. She held the cheque firmly between her finger and thumb till it was nearly burnt, and let it drop slowly at last into the empty fireplace. Ernest rose up and kissed her tenderly. The

leaden weight of the thirty pieces of silver was fairly off their united conscience. They had made what reparation they could for the evil of that unhappy, undesigned leader. After all Ernest had wasted the last remnant of his energy on one eventful evening, all for nothing.

As Edie sat looking wistfully at the smouldering fragments of the burnt cheque, Ernest roused her again by saying quietly, 'To-day's Saturday. Have we got anything for to-morrow's dinner, Edie?'

'Nothing,' Edie answered, simply. 'How much money have you left, Ernest?'

'Sixpence,' Ernest said, without needing to consult his empty purse for confirmation—he had counted the pence, as they went, too carefully for that already. 'Edie I'm afraid we must go at last to the poor man's banker till I can get some more money.'

'Oh, Ernest—not—not—not the pawn-broker!'

‘ Yes, Edie, the pawnbroker.’

The tears came quickly into Edie’s eyes, but she answered nothing. They must have food, and there was no other way open before them. They rose together and went quietly into the bedroom. There they gathered together the few little trinkets and other things that might be of use to them, and Ernest took down his hat from the stand to go out with them to the pawnbroker’s.

As he turned out he was met energetically on the landing by a stout barricade from good Mrs. Halliss. ‘ No, sir, not you, sir,’ the landlady said firmly, trying to take the parcel from him as he went towards the door. ‘ I beg your pardon, sir, for ’avin’ over’eard what wasn’t meant for me to ’ear, no doubt, but I couldn’t ’elp it, sir, and John an’ me can’t allow nothink of this sort, we can’t. We’re used to this sort o’ things, sir, John and me is ; but you and the dear lady isn’t used to ’em, sir, and didn’t

hought to be neither, and John an' me can't allow it, not anyhow.'

Ernest turned scarlet with shame, but could say nothing. Edie only whispered softly, 'Dear, dear Mrs. Halliss, we're so sorry, but we can't help it.'

'Elp it, ma'am,' said Mrs. Halliss, herself almost crying, 'nor there ain't no reason why you should try to 'elp it neither. As I says to John, "John," says I, "there ain't no 'arm in it, noways," says I, "but I can't stand by," says I, "and see them two poor dear young creechurs," meanin' no offence, ma'am, "a-pawnin' of their own jewelry and things to go and pay for their Sunday's dinner." And John, 'e says, says 'e, "Quite right, Martha," says 'e; "don't let 'em, my dear," says 'e. "The Lord has prospered us a bit in our 'umble way, Martha," says 'e, "and we ain't got no cause to want, we ain't; and if the dear lady and the good gentleman wouldn't take it as a liberty," says 'e, "it 'ud

be better they should just borryer a pound or two for a week from us," says 'e, beggin' your pardon, ma'am, for 'intin' of it, "than that there Mr. Le Breting, as ain't accustomed to such places nohow, should go a-makin' acquaintance, for the fust time of his life, as you may say, with the inside of a pawnbroker's shop," says 'e. "John," says I, "it's my belief the lady and gentleman 'ud be insulted," says I, "though they *are* the sweetest unassomin'est young gentlefolk I ever did see," says I, "if we were to go astin' them to accept the loan of money from the likes of you and me, John, as is no better, by the side of them, nor old servants, in the manner o' speakin'." "Insulted," says 'e; "not a bit of it, they needn't, Martha," says 'e, "for I knows the ways of the aristocracy," says 'e, "and I knows as there's many a gentleman as owns 'is own 'osses and 'is own 'ounds as isn't afraid to borryer a pound or so from 'is own coachman, or even from 'is own groom—not

but what to borryer from a groom is lowerin’,” says ’e, “in a tempory emergency. Mind you, Martha,” says ’e, “a tempory emergency is a thing as may ’appen to landed gentlefolks any day,” says ’e. “It’s like a ’ole in your coat made by a tear,” says ’e; “a haccident as may ’appen to-morrer to the Prince of Wales ’isself upon the ’untin’ field,” ’e says. “Well, then, John,” says I, “I’ll just go an’ speak to ’em about it, this very minnit,” says I, and if I might make so bold, ma’am, without seemin’ too presumptious, I should be very glad if you’d kindly allow me, ma’am, to lend Mr. Le Breting a few suvverins till ’e gets ’is next remittances, ma’am.’

Edie looked at Ernest, and Ernest looked at Edie and the landlady; and then they all three burst out crying together without further apology. Perhaps it was the old Adam left in Ernest a little; but though he could stand kindness from Dr. Greatrex or from Mr.

Lancaster stoically enough, he couldn't watch the humble devotion of those two honest-hearted simple old servants without a mingled thrill of shame and tenderness. 'Mrs. Halliss,' he said, catching up the landlady's hard red hand gratefully in his own, 'you are too good and too kind, and too considerate for us altogether. I feel we have done nothing to deserve such great kindness from you. But I really don't think it would be right of us to borrow from you when we don't even know how long it may be before we're able to return your money or whether we shall ever be able to return it at all. We're so much obliged to you, so very very much obliged to you, dear Mrs. Halliss, but I think we ought as a matter of duty to pawn these few little things rather than run into debt which we've no fair prospect at present of ever redeeming.'

'*Has* you please, sir,' Mrs. Halliss said gently, wiping her eyes with her snow-white

apron, for she saw at once that Ernest really meant what he said. 'Not that John an' me would think of it for a minnit, sir, so long as you wouldn't mind our takin' the liberty; but any'ow, sir, we can't allow you to go out yourself and go to the pawnbroker's. It ain't no fit place for the likes of you, sir, a pawnbroker's ain't, in all that low company; and I don't suppose you'd rightly know 'ow much to hask on the articles, neither. John, 'e ain't afeard of goin'; an' 'e says, 'e insists upon it as 'e's to go, for 'e don't think, sir, for the honour of the 'ouse, 'e says, sir, as a lodger of ours ought to be seen a-goin' to the pawnbroker's. Just you give them things right over to John, sir, and 'e'll get you a better price on 'em by a long way nor they'd ever think of giving a gentleman like you, sir.'

Ernest fought off the question in a half-hearted fashion for a little while, but Mrs. Halliss insisted upon it, and after a short time Ernest



gave way, for to say the truth he had very vague ideas himself as to how he ought to proceed in a pawnbroking expedition. Mrs. Halliss ran down the kitchen stairs quickly, for fear he should change his mind as soon as her back was turned, and called out gaily to her husband in the first delight of her unexpected triumph.

‘John,’ she cried, ‘—drat that man, where is ’e? John, dear, you just putt your ’at on, and purtend to run round the corner a bit to Aston’s the pawnbroker’s. The Lord have mercy upon me for the stories I’ve been a-tellin’ of ’em, but I couldn’t bear to see them two pore things a-pawnin’ their little bits of jewelry and sich, and Mr. Le Breting, too, ’im as ain’t fit to go knockin’ together with underbred folks like pawnbrokers. So I told ’im as you’d take ’em round and pawn ’em for ’im yourself; not as I don’t suppose you’ve never pawned nothink in your ’ole life, John, least-

ways not since ever you an' me kep' company, for afore that I suppose you was purty much like other young men is, John, for all you shakes your 'ead at it now so innocent like. But you just run round, there's a dear, and make as if you was goin' to the pawnbroker's, and then you come straight 'ome again unbeknown to 'em. I ain't a goin' to let them two pore dears go pawnin' their things for a dinner nohow. You take them two suvverins out of your box, John, and putt away these 'ere little things for the present time till the pore souls is able to pay us, and if they never don't, small matter neither. Now you go fast, John, there's a dear, and come back, and mind you give them two suvverins to Mr. Le Breting as natural like as ever you're able.'

'Pawn 'em,' John said in a pitying voice, 'no indeed, it ain't come to that yet, I should 'ope, that they need go a-pawnin' their effectks while we've got a suvverin or two laid

by in our box, Martha. Not as anybody need be ashamed of pawnin' on occasions, for that matter,—I don't say as a reg'lar thing, but now an' then on occasions, as you may call it; for even in the best dookal families, I've 'eard tell they *do* sometimes 'ave to pawn the dimonds, so that pawnin' ain't in the runnin' noways, bless you, as respects gentility. Not as I'd like to go into a pawnshop myself, Martha, as I've always been brought up respectable; but when you send for Mr. Hattenborough to your own ressydence and say quite commandin' like, " 'Er Grace 'ud be obleeged if you'd wait upon 'er in Belgrave Square to hinspeck 'er dimonds as I want to raise the wind on 'em," why, that's quite another matter nat'rally.'

When honest John came back in a few minutes and handed the two sovereigns over to Ernest, he did it with such an unblushing face as might have won him applause on any stage for its perfect naturalness. 'Lor' bless your

'eart, sir, he said in answer to Ernest's shame-faced thanks, touching the place where his hat ought to be mechanically, 'it ain't nothing, sir, that ain't. If it weren't for the dookal families of England, sir, it's my belief the pawnbrokin' business wouldn't be worth mentionin', in the manner o' speakin'.'

That evening, Ernest paced up and down the little parlour rather moodily for half an hour with three words ringing perpetually in his dizzy ears—the 'Never, never, never,' he had used so short a time since about the 'Morning Intelligence.' He must get money somehow for Dot and Edie! he must get money somehow to pay good Mrs. Halliss for their board and lodging! There was only one way possible. Fight against it as he would, in the end he must come back to that inevitable conclusion. At last he sat down with a gloomy face at the centre table, and pulled out a sheet of blank foolscap.

‘What are you going to do, Ernest?’ Edie asked him.

Ernest groaned. ‘I’m writing a social for the “Morning Intelligence,” Edie,’ he answered bitterly.

‘Oh, Ernest!’ Edie said with a face of horror and surprise. ‘Not after the shameful way they’ve treated poor Max Schurz!’

Ernest groaned again. ‘There’s nothing else to be done, Edie,’ he said, looking up at her despondently. ‘I must earn money somehow to keep the house going.’

It is the business of the truthful historian to narrate facts, not to palliate or extenuate the conduct of the various actors. Whether Ernest did right or wrong, at least he did it; he wrote a playful social for Monday’s ‘Morning Intelligence,’ and carried it into the office on Sunday afternoon himself, because there was no postal delivery in the London district.

That night, he lay awake once more for

hours together, tossing and turning, and reflecting bitterly on his own baseness and his final moral downfall. Herbert was right, after all. The environment was beginning to conquer. He could hold out no longer. Herr Max was in prison ; the world was profoundly indifferent ; he himself had fallen away like Peter ; and there was nothing left for him now but to look about and find himself a dishonourable grave.

And Dot? And Edie? What was to become of them after? Ah me, for the pity of it when a man cannot even crawl quietly into a corner and die in peace like a dog, without being tortured by fears and terrors beforehand as to what will come to those he loves far better than life when he himself is quietly dead and buried out of the turmoil !

## CHAPTER XXIX.

## A MAN AND A MAID.

IF Ernest and Edie had permitted it, Ronald Le Breton would have gone at once, after his coming of age, to club income and expenditure with his brother's household. But, as Edie justly remarked, when he proposed it, such a course would pretty nearly have amounted to clubbing *his* income with *their* expenditure ; and even in their last extreme of poverty that was an injustice which neither she nor her husband could possibly permit. Ronald needed all his little fortune for his own simple wants, and though they themselves starved, they couldn't bear to deprive him of the small luxuries which had grown into absolute necessities for one so

feeble and weak. Indeed, ill as Ernest himself now was, he had never outgrown the fixed habit of regarding Ronald as the invalid of the family ; and to have taken anything, though in the direst straits, from him, would have seemed like robbing the helpless poor of their bare necessities. So Ronald was fain at last to take lodgings for himself with a neighbour of good Mrs. Halliss's, and only to share in Ernest's troubles to the small extent of an occasional loan, which Edie would have repaid to time if she had to go without their own poor little dinner for the sake of the repayment.

Meanwhile, Ronald had another interest on hand which to his enthusiastic nature seemed directly imposed upon him by the finger of Providence—to provide a home and occupation for poor Selah, whom Herbert had cast aside as a legacy to him. As soon as he had got settled down to his own new mode of life in the Holloway lodgings, he began to look about for



a fit place for the homeless girl—a place, he thought to himself, which must combine several special advantages; plenty of work—she wanted that to take her mind off brooding; good, honest, upright people; and, above all, no religion. Ronald recognised that last undoubted requirement as of absolutely paramount importance. ‘She’ll stand any amount of talk or anything else from *me*,’ he said to himself often, ‘because she knows I’m really in earnest; but she wouldn’t stand it for a moment from those well-meaning, indiscriminating, religious busy-bodies, who are so awfully anxious about other people’s souls, though they never seem for a single minute to consider in any way other people’s feelings.’ After a little careful hunting among his various acquaintances, however, he found at last a place that would exactly suit Selah at a stationer’s in Notting Hill; and there he put her—with full confidence that Selah would do the

work entrusted to her well and ably, if not from conscientiousness, at least from personal pride, 'which, after all,' Roland soliloquised dreamily, 'is as good a substitute for the genuine article as one can reasonably expect to find in poor fallen human nature.'

'I wish, Mr. Le Breton,' Selah said, quite timidly for her (maidenly reserve, it must be admitted, was not one of Selah Briggs's strong points), 'that I wasn't going to be quite so far away from you as Notting Hill. If I could see you sometimes, you know, I should feel that it might keep me more straight—keep me away from the river in future, I mean. I can't stand most people's preaching, but somehow, your preaching seems to do me more good than harm, really, which is just the exact opposite way, it seems to me, from everybody else's.'

Ronald smiled sedately. 'I'm glad you want to see me sometimes,' he said, with a

touch of something very like gallantry in his tone that was wholly unusual with him. 'I shall walk over every now and then, and look you up at your lodgings over yonder; and besides, you can come on Sundays to dear Edie's, and I shall be able to meet you there once a fortnight or thereabouts. But I'm not going to let you call me Mr. Le Breton any longer; it isn't friendly: and, what's more, it isn't Christian. Why should there be these artificial barriers between soul and soul, eh, Selah? I shall call you Selah in future: it seems more genuine and heartfelt, and unencumbered with needless conventions, than your misters and misses. After all, why should we keep up such idle formalities between brethren and fellow workers?'

Selah started a little—she knew better than Ronald himself did what such first advances really led to. 'Oh, Mr. Le Breton,' she said quickly, 'I really can't call you

Ronald. I can never call any other man by his Christian name as long as I live, after—your brother.'

'You mistake me, Selah,' Ronald put in hastily, with his quaint gravity. 'I mean it merely as a sign of confidence and a mark of Christian friendship. Sisters call their brothers by their Christian names, don't they? So there can be no harm in that, surely. It seems to me that if you call me Mr. Le Breton, you're putting me on the footing of a man merely; if you call me Ronald, you're putting me on the footing of a brother, which is really a much more harmless and unequivocal position for me to stand in. Do, please, Selah, call me Ronald.'

'I'm afraid I can't,' Selah answered. 'I daren't. I mustn't.' But she faltered a little for a moment, notwithstanding.

'You must, Selah,' Ronald said, with all the force of his enthusiastic nature, fixing his

piercing eyes full upon her. 'You must, I tell you. Call me Ronald.'

'Very well—Ronald,' Selah said at last, after a long pause. 'Good-bye, now. I must be going. Good-bye, and thank you. Thank you. Thank you.' There was a tear quivering even in Selah Briggs's eye, as she held his hand lingeringly a moment in hers before releasing it. He was a very good fellow, really, and he had been so very kind, too, in interesting himself about her future.

'What a marvellous thread of sameness,' Ronald thought to himself, as he walked back rapidly to his solitary lodgings, 'runs through the warp and woof of a single family, after all! What an underlying unity of texture there must be throughout, in all its members, however outwardly dissimilar they may seem to be from one another! One would say at first sight there was very little, if anything, in common between me and Herbert. And yet

this girl interests me wonderfully. Of course I'm not in love with her—the notion of *my* falling in love with anybody is clearly too ridiculous. But I'm attracted by her, drawn towards her, fascinated as it were; I feel a sort of curious spell upon me whenever I look into her deep big eyes, flashing out upon one with their strange luminousness. It isn't merely that the Hand has thrown her in my way: that counts for something, no doubt, but not for everything. Besides, the Hand doesn't act blindly—nay, rather, acts with supreme wisdom, surpassing the powers or the comprehension of man. When it threw Selah Briggs in my way, depend upon it, it was because the Infinite saw in me something that was specially adapted to her, and in her something that was specially adapted to me. The instrument is duly shaped by inscrutable Wisdom for its own proper work. Now, whatever interests *me* in her, must have also interested Herbert

in her equally and for the same season. We're drawn towards her, clearly; she exercises over both of us some curious electric power that she doesn't exercise, presumably, over other people. For Herbert must have been really in love with her—not that I'm in love with her, of course; but still, the phenomena are analogous, even if on a slightly different plane—Herbert must have been really in love with her, I'm sure, or such a prudent man as he is would never have let himself get into what he would consider such a dangerous and difficult entanglement. Yes, clearly, there's something in Selah Briggs that seems to possess a singular polarity, as Ernest would call it, for the Le Breton character and individuality!

‘And then, it cuts both ways, too, for Selah was once desperately in love with Herbert: of that I'm certain. She must have been, to judge from the mere strength of the final revulsion. She's a girl of intensely deep passions—I like people to have some depth to their character,

even if it's only in the way of passion—and she'd never have loved him at all without loving him fervently and almost wildly: hers is a fervent, wild, indomitable nature. Yes, she was certainly in love with Herbert; and now, though of course I don't mean to say she's in love with me (I hope it isn't wrong to think in this way about an unmarried girl), still I can't help seeing that I have a certain influence over her in return—that she pays much attention to what I say and think, considers me a person worth considering, which she doesn't do, I'm sure, with most other people. Ah, well, there's a vast deal of truth, no doubt, in these new hereditary doctrines of Darwin's and Galton's that Herbert and Ernest talk about so much; a family's a family, that's certain, not a mere stray collection of casual acquaintances. How the likeness runs through the very inmost structure of our hearts and natures! I see in Selah very much what



Herbert saw in Selah : Selah sees in me very much what she saw in Herbert. Extraordinary insight into human nature men like Darwin and Galton have, to be sure ! And David, too, what a marvellous thinker he was, really ! What unfathomed depths of meaning lie unexpected in that simple sentence of his, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made." Fearfully and wonderfully, indeed, when one remembers that from one father and mother Herbert and I have both been compounded, so unlike in some things that we scarcely seem to be comparable with one another (look at Herbert's splendid intellect beside mine !), so like in others that Selah Briggs—goodness gracious, what am I thinking of ? I was just going to say that Selah Briggs falls in love first with one of us and then with the other. I do hope and trust it isn't wrong of me to fill my poor distracted head so much with these odd thoughts about that unfortunate girl, Selah !'

## CHAPTER XXX.

## THE ENVIRONMENT FINALLY TRIUMPHS.

WINTER had come, and on a bitter cold winter's night, Ernest Le Breton once more received an unexpected telegram asking him to hurry down without a moment's delay on important business to the 'Morning Intelligence' office. The telegram didn't state at all what the business was; it merely said it was urgent and immediate without in any way specifying its nature. Ernest sallied forth in some perturbation, for his memories of the last occasion when the 'Morning Intelligence' required his aid on important business were far from pleasant ones; but for Edie's sake he felt he must go, and so he went without a murmur.

‘Sit down, Le Breton,’ Mr. Lancaster said slowly when Ernest entered. ‘The matter I want to see you about’s a very peculiar one. I understand from some of my friends that you’re a son of Sir Owen Le Breton, the Indian general.’

‘Yes, I am,’ Ernest answered, wondering within himself to what end this curious preamble could possibly be leading up. If there’s any one profession, he thought, which is absolutely free from the slightest genealogical interest in the persons of its professors, surely that particular calling ought to be the profession of journalism.

‘Well, so I hear, Le Breton. Now, I believe I’m right in saying, am I not, that it was your father who first subdued and organised a certain refractory hill-tribe on the Tibetan frontier, known as the Bodahls, wasn’t it?’

‘Quite right,’ Ernest replied, with a glim-

mering idea slowly rising in his mind as to what Mr. Lancaster was now driving at.

‘ Ah, that’s good, very good indeed, certainly. Well, tell me, Le Breton, do you yourself happen to know anything on earth about these precious insignificant people ? ’

‘ I know all about them,’ Ernest answered quickly. ‘ I’ve read all my father’s papers and despatches, and seen his maps and plans and reports in our house at home from my boyhood upward. I know as much about the Bodahls, in fact, as I know about Bayswater, or Holborn, or Fleet Street.’

‘ Capital, capital,’ the editor said, fondling his big hands softly ; ‘ that’ll exactly suit us. And could you get at these plans and papers now, this very evening, just to refresh the gaps in your memory ? ’

‘ I could have them all down here,’ Ernest answered, ‘ at an hour’s notice.’

‘ Good,’ the editor said again. ‘ I’ll send a

boy for them with a cab. Meanwhile, you'd better be perpending this telegram from our Simla correspondent, just received. It's going to be the question of the moment, and we should very much like you to give us a leader of a full column about the matter.'

Ernest took the telegram and read it over carefully. It ran in the usual very abbreviated newspaper fashion: 'Russian agents revolted Bodahls Tibetan frontier. Advices Peshawur state Russian army marching on Merv. Bodahls attacked Commissioner, declared independence British raj.'

'Will you write us a leader?' the editor asked, simply.

Ernest drew a long breath. Three guineas! Edic, Dot, an empty exchequer! If he could only have five minutes to make his mind up! But he couldn't. After all, what did it matter what he said about these poor unknown Bodahls? If *he* didn't write the leader, some-

body else who knew far less about the subject than he did would be sure to do it. He wasn't responsible for that impalpable entity 'the policy of the paper.' Beside the great social power of the 'Morning Intelligence,' of the united English people, what was he, Ernest Le Breton, but a miserable solitary misplaced unit? One way or the other, he could do very little indeed, for good or for evil. After half a minute's internal struggle, he answered back the editor faintly, 'Yes, I will.' 'For Edie,' he muttered half audibly to himself; 'I must do it for dear Edie.'

'And you'll allow me to make whatever alterations I think necessary in the article to suit the policy of the paper?' the editor asked once more, looking through him with his sleepy keen grey eyes. 'You see, Le Breton, I don't want to annoy you, and I know your own principles are rather peculiar; but of course all we want you for is just to give us

the correct statement of facts about these outlandish people. All that concerns our own attitude towards them as a nation falls naturally under the head of editorial matter. You must see yourself that it's quite impossible for us to let any one single contributor dictate from his own standpoint the policy of the paper.'

Ernest bent his head slowly. 'You're very kind to argue out the matter with me so, Mr. Lancaster,' he said, trembling with excitement. 'Yes, I suppose I must bury my scruples. I'll write a leader about these Bodahls, and let you deal with it afterwards as you think proper.'

They showed him into the bare little back room, and sent a boy up with a hastily written note to Ronald for the maps and papers. There Ernest sat for an hour or two, writing away for very life, and putting on paper everything that he knew about the poor Bodahls. By two o'clock, the proofs had all come up to

him, and he took his hat in a shamefaced manner to sally out into the cold street, where he hoped to hide his rising remorse and agony under cover of the solitary night. He knew too well what 'the policy of the paper' would be, to venture upon asking any questions about it. As he left the office, a boy brought him down a sealed envelope from Mr. Lancaster. With his usual kindly thoughtfulness the editor had sent him at once the customary cheque for three guineas. Ernest folded it up with quivering fingers, and felt the blood burn in his cheeks as he put it away in his waistcoat pocket. That accursed money! For it he had that night sold his dearest principles! And yet, not for it, not for it, not for it—oh, no, not for it, but for Dot and Edie!

The boy had a duplicate proof in his other hand, and Ernest saw at once that it was his own leader, as altered and corrected by Mr. Lancaster. He asked the boy whether he



might see it; and the boy, knowing it was Ernest's own writing, handed it to him at once without further question. Ernest did not dare to look at it then and there for fear he should break down utterly before the boy; he put it for the moment into his inner pocket, and buttoned his thin overcoat tightly around him. It was colder still in the frosty air of early morning, and the contrast to the heated atmosphere of the printing house struck him with ominous chill as he issued slowly forth into the silent precincts of unpeopled Fleet Street.

It was a terrible memorable night, that awful Tuesday; the coldest night known for many years in any English winter. Snow lay deep upon the ground, and a few flakes were falling still from the cloudy sky, for it was in the second week of January. The wind was drifting it in gusty eddies down the long streets, and driving the drifts before it like whirling dust in an August storm. Not

a cab was to be seen anywhere, not even a stray hansom crawling home from clubs or theatres ; and Ernest set out with a rueful countenance to walk as best he might alone through the snow all the way to Holloway. It is a long and dreary trudge at any time ; it seemed very long and dreary indeed to Ernest Le Breton, with his delicate frame and weak chest, battling against the fierce wind on a dark and snowy winter's night, and with the fever of a great anxiety and a great remorse silently torturing his distracted bosom. At each step he took through the snow, he almost fancied himself a hunted Bodahl. Would British soldiers drive those poor savage women and children to die so of cold and hunger on their snowy hilltops ? Would English fathers and mothers, at home at their ease, applaud the act with careless thoughtlessness as a piece of our famous spirited foreign policy ? And would his own article, written with his own poor thin cold fingers in

that day's 'Morning Intelligence,' help to spur them on upon that wicked and unnecessary war? What right had we to conquer the Bodahls? What right had we to hold them in subjection or to punish them for revolting? And above all, what right had he, Ernest Le Breton, upon whose head the hereditary guilt of the first conquest ought properly to have weighed with such personal heaviness—what right had he, of all men, directly or indirectly, to aid or abet the English people in their immoral and inhuman resolve? Oh, God, his sin was worse than theirs; for they sinned, thinking they did justly; but as for him, he sinned against the light; he knew the better, and, bribed by gold, he did the worse. At that moment, the little slip of printed paper in his waistcoat pocket seemed to burn through all the frosts of that awful evening like a chain of molten steel into his very marrow!

Trudging on slowly through the white stain-

less snow, step by step,—snow that cast a sheet of pure white even over the narrow lanes behind the Farringdon Road,—cold at foot and hot at heart, he reached at last the wide corner by the Angel at Islington. The lights in the windows were all out long ago, of course, but the lamps outside were still flaring brightly, and a solitary policeman was standing under one of them, trying to warm his frozen hands by breathing rapidly on the curved and distorted fingers. Ernest was very tired of his tramp by that time, and emboldened by companionship he stopped awhile to rest himself in the snow and wind under the opposite lamplight. Putting his back against the post, he drew the altered proof of his article slowly out of his inner pocket. It had a strange fascination for him, and yet he dreaded to look at it. With an effort, he unfolded it in his stiff fingers, and held the paper up to the light, regardless of the fact that the policeman was watching his pro-

ceedings with the interest naturally due from a man of his profession to a suspicious-looking character who was probably a convicted pick-pocket. The first sentence once more told him the worst. There was no doubt at all about it. The three guineas in his pocket were the price of blood!

‘The insult to British prestige in the East,’ ran that terrible opening paragraph, ‘implied in the brief telegram which we publish this morning from our own Correspondent at Simla, calls for a speedy and a severe retribution. It must be washed out in blood.’ Blood, blood, blood! The letters swam before his eyes. It was this, then, that he, the disciple of peace-loving Max Schurz, the hater of war and conquest, the foe of unjust British domination over inferior races—it was this that he had helped to make plausible with his special knowledge and his ready pen! Oh, heaven, what reparation could he make for this horrid crime he

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had knowingly and wilfully committed? What could he do to avoid the guilt of those poor savages' blood upon his devoted head? In one moment he thought out a hundred scenes of massacre and pillage—scenes such as he knew only too well always precede and accompany the blessings of British rule in distant dependencies. The temptation had been strong—the money had been sorely wanted—there was very little food in the house; but how could he ever have yielded to such a depth of premeditated wickedness! He folded the piece of paper into his pocket once more, and buried his face in his hands for a whole minute. The policeman now began to suspect that he was not so much a pickpocket as an escaped lunatic.

And so he was, no doubt. Of course we who are practical men of the world know very well that all this foolish feeling on Ernest Le Breton's part was very womanish and weak and overwrought; that he ought to have done

the work that was set before him, asking no questions for conscience' sake; and that he might honestly have pocketed the three guineas, letting his supposed duty to a few naked brown people somewhere up in the Indian hill-country take care of itself, as all the rest of us always do. But some allowance must naturally be made for his peculiar temperament and for his particular state of health. Consumptive people are apt to take a somewhat hectic view of life in every way; they lack the common-sense ballast that makes most of us able to value the lives of a few hundred poor distant savages at their proper infinitesimal figure. At any rate, Ernest Le Breton, as a matter of fact, rightly or wrongly, did take this curious standpoint about things in general; and did then and there turn back through the deep snow, all his soul burning within him, fired with dire remorse, and filled only with one idea—how to prevent this wicked article to which he had contributed

so many facts and opinions from getting printed in to-morrow's paper. True, it was not he who had put in the usual newspaper platitudes about the might of England, and the insult to the British flag, and the immediate necessity for a stern retaliation ; but all that vapouring wicked talk (as he thought it) would go forth to the world fortified by the value of his special facts and his obviously intimate acquaintance with the whole past history of the Bodahl people. So he turned back and battled once more with the wind and snow as far as Fleet Street ; and then he rushed excitedly into the 'Morning Intelligence' office, and asked with the wildness of despair to see the editor.

Mr. Lancaster had gone home an hour since, the porter said ; but Mr. Wilks, the sub-editor, was still there, superintending the printing of the paper, and if Ernest liked, Mr. Wilks would see him immediately.

Ernest nodded assent at once, and was



forthwith ushered up into Mr. Wilks's private sanctum. The sub-editor was a dry, grizzly-bearded man, with a prevailing wolfish greyness of demeanour about his whole person; and he shook Ernest's proffered hand solemnly, in the dreary fashion that is always begotten of the systematic transposition of night and day.

'For heaven's sake, Mr. Wilks,' Ernest cried imploringly, 'I want to know whether you can possibly suppress or at least alter my leader on the Bodahl insurrection!'

Mr. Wilks looked at him curiously, as one might look at a person who had suddenly developed violent symptoms of dangerous insanity. 'Suppress the Bodahl leader,' he said slowly like one dreaming. 'Suppress the Bodahl leader! Impossible! Why, it's the largest type heading in the whole of to-day's paper, is this Bodahl business. "Shocking Outrage upon a British Commissioner on the Indian Frontier. Revolt of the Entire

Bodahl Tribe. Russian Intrigue in Central Asia. Dangerous Position of the Viceroy at Simla.” Oh, dear me, no; not to have a leader upon *that*, my dear sir, would be simply suicidal!’

‘But can’t you cut out my part of it, at least,’ Ernest said anxiously. ‘Oh, Mr. Wilks, you don’t know what I’ve suffered to-night on account of this dreadful unmerited leader. It’s wicked, it’s unjust, it’s abominable, and I can’t bear to think that I have had anything to do with sending it out into the world to inflame the passions of unthinking people! Do please try to let my part of it be left out, and only Mr. Lancaster’s, at least, be printed.’

Mr. Wilks looked at him again with the intensest suspicion.

‘A sub-editor,’ he answered evasively, ‘has nothing at all to do with the politics of a paper. The editor alone manages that department on his own responsibility. But what on earth would you have me do? I can’t stop the

machines for half an hour, can I, just to let you have the chance of doctoring your leader? If you thought it wrong to write it, you ought never to have written it; now it's written it must certainly stand.'

Ernest sank into a chair, and said nothing; but he turned so deadly pale that Mr. Wilks was fain to have recourse to a little brown flask he kept stowed away in a corner of his desk, and to administer a prompt dose of brandy and water.

'There, there,' he said, in the kindest manner of which he was capable, 'what are you going to do now? You can't be going out again in this state and in this weather, can you?'

'Yes, I am,' Ernest answered feebly. 'I'm going to walk home at once to Holloway.'

'To Holloway!' the sub-editor said in a tone of comparative horror. 'Oh! no, I can't allow that. Wait here an hour or two till the

workmen's trains begin running. Or, stay; Lancaster left his brougham here for me to-night, as I have to be off early to-morrow on business; I'll send you home in that, and let Hawkins get me a cab from the mews by order.'

Ernest made no resistance; and so the sub-editor sent him home at once in Lancaster's brougham.

When he got home in the early grey of morning, he found Edie still sitting up for him in her chair, and wondering what could be detaining him so long at the newspaper office. He threw himself wildly at her feet, and, in such broken sentences as he was able to command, he told her all the pitiful story. Edie soothed him and kissed him as he went along, but never said a word for good or evil till he had finished.

'It was a terrible temptation, darling,' she said softly: 'a terrible temptation, indeed, and I don't wonder you gave way to it; but we

mustn't touch the three guineas. As you say rightly, it's blood-money.'

Ernest drew the cheque slowly from his pocket, and held it hesitatingly a moment in his hand. Edie looked at him curiously.

'What are you going to do with it, darling?' she asked in a low voice, as he gazed vacantly at the last dying embers in the little smouldering fireplace.

'Nothing, Edie dearest,' Ernest answered huskily, folding it up and putting it away in the drawer by the window. They neither of them dared to look the other in the face, but they had not the heart to burn it boldly. It was blood-money, to be sure; but three guineas are really so very useful!

Four days later, little Dot was taken with a sudden illness. Ernest and Edie sat watching by her little cradle throughout the night, and saw with heavy hearts that she was rapidly growing feebler. Poor wee soul, they had

nothing to keep her for: it would be better, perhaps, if she were gone; and yet, the human heart cannot be stifled by such calm deliverances of practical reason; it *will* let its hot emotions overcome the cold calculations of better and worse supplied it by the unbiassed intellect.

All night long they sat there tearfully, fearing she would not live till morning; and in the early dawn they sent round hastily for a neighbouring doctor. They had no money to pay him with, to be sure; but that didn't much matter; they could leave it over for the present, and perhaps some day before long Ernest might write another social, and earn an honest three guineas. Anyhow, it was a question of life and death, and they could not help sending for the doctor, whatever difficulty they might afterwards find in paying him.

The doctor came, and looked with the usual professional seriousness at the baby patient. Did they feed her entirely on London milk?

he asked doubtfully. Yes, entirely. Ah! then that was the sole root of the entire mischief. She was very dangerously ill, no doubt, and he didn't know whether he could pull her through anyhow; but if anything would do it, it was a change to goat's milk. There was a man who sold goat's milk round the corner. He would show Ernest where to find him.

Ernest looked doubtfully at Edie, and Edie looked back again at Ernest. One thought rose at once in both their minds. They had no money to pay for it with, except—except that dreadful cheque. For four days it had lain, burning a hole in Ernest's heart from its drawer by the window, and he had not dared to change it. Now he rose without saying a word, and opened the drawer in a solemn, hesitating fashion. He looked once more at Edie inquiringly; Edie nodded a faint approval. Ernest, pale as death, put on his hat, and went out totteringly with the doctor. He stopped

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on the way to change the cheque at the baker's where they usually dealt, and then went on to the goat's milk shop. How that sovereign he flung upon the counter seemed to ring the knell of his self-respect! The man who changed it noticed the strangeness of Ernest's look, and knew at once he had not come by the money honestly. He rang it twice to make sure it was good, and then gave the change to Ernest. But Dot, at least, was saved; that was a great thing. The milk arrived duly every morning for some weeks, and, after a severe struggle, Dot grew gradually better. While the danger lasted, neither of them dared think much of the cheque; but when Dot had got quite well again, Ernest was conscious of a certain unwonted awkwardness of manner in talking to Edie. He knew perfectly well what it meant: they were both accomplices in crime together.

When Ernest wrote his 'social' after Max



Schurz's affair, he felt he had already touched the lowest depths of degradation. He knew now that he had touched a still lower one. Oh! horrible abyss of self-abasement!—he had taken the blood-money. And yet, it was to save Dot's life! Herbert was right, after all: quite right. Yes, yes, all hope was gone: the environment had finally triumphed.

In the awful self-reproach of that deadly remorse for the acceptance of the blood-money, Ernest Le Breton felt at last in his heart that surely the bitterness of death was past. It would be better for them all to die together than to live on through such a life of shame and misery. Ah, Peter, Peter, you are not the only one that has denied his Lord and Master!

And yet, Ernest Le Breton had only written part of a newspaper leader about a small revolt of the Bodahls. And he suffered more agony for it than many a sensitive man, even, has suffered for the commission of some obvious crime.

‘I say, Berkeley,’ Lancaster droned out in the lobby of their club one afternoon shortly afterwards, ‘what on earth am I ever to do about that socialistic friend of yours, Le Breton? I can’t ever give him any political work again, you know. Just fancy! first, you remember, I set him upon the Schurz imprisonment business, and he nearly went mad then because I didn’t back up Schurz for wanting to murder the Emperor of Russia. After that, just now the other day, I tried him on the Bodahl business, and hang me if he didn’t have qualms of conscience about it afterwards, and trudge back through all the snow that awful Tuesday, to see if he couldn’t induce Wilks to stop the press, and let him cut it all out at the last moment! He’s as mad as a March hare, you know, and if it weren’t that I’m really sorry for him I wouldn’t go on taking socials from him any longer. But I will; I’ll give him work as long as he’ll do it for me on any terms; though, of course, it’s

obviously impossible under the circumstances to let him have another go at politics, isn't it?'

'You're really awfully kind, Lancaster,' Berkeley answered warmly. 'No other fellow would do as much for Le Breton as you do. I admit he's absolutely impracticable, but I would give more than I can tell you if only I thought he could be made to pull through somehow.'

'Impracticable!' the editor said shortly, 'I believe you, indeed. Why, do you remember that ridiculous Schurz business? Well, I sent Le Breton a cheque for eight guineas for that lot, and can you credit it, it's remained uncashed from that day to this. I really think he must have destroyed it.'

'No doubt,' Arthur answered, with a smile. 'And the Bodahls? What about them?'

'Oh! he kept that cheque for a few days uncashed—though I'm sure he wanted money at the time; but in the end, I'm happy to say, he cashed it.'

Arthur's countenance fell ominously.

'He did!' he said gloomily. 'He cashed it! That's bad news indeed, then. I must go and see them to-morrow morning early. I'm afraid they must be at the last pitch of poverty before they'd consent to do that. And yet, Solomon says, men do not despise a thief if he steal to satisfy his soul when he is hungry. And Le Breton, after all, has a wife and child to think of.'

Lancaster stared at him blankly, and turned aside to glance at the telegrams, saying to himself meanwhile, that all these young fellows of the new school alike were really quite too incomprehensible for a sensible, practical man like himself to deal with comfortably.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

## DE PROFUNDIS.

AFTER all Ernest didn't get many more socials to write for the 'Morning Intelligence,' as it happened; for the war that came on shortly after crowded such trifles as socials fairly out of all the papers, and he had harder work than ever to pick up a precarious living somehow by the most casual possible contributions. Of course he tried many other channels; but he had few introductions, and then his views were really so absurdly ultra that no reasonable editor could ever be expected to put up with them. He got tired at last of seeing his well-meant papers return to him, morning after morning, with the unvarying legend, 'Declined

with thanks ; ' and he might have gone to the wall utterly but for the kindly interest which Arthur Berkeley still took in his and Edie's future. On the very day after his conversation with Lancaster at the club Arthur dropped round casually at Holloway, and brought with him a proposal which he said had just been made him by a colonial newsagent. It was a transparent little *ruse* enough ; but Ernest and Edie were not learned in the ways of the world and did not suspect it so readily as older and wiser heads might probably have done. Would Ernest supply a fortnightly letter, to go by the Australian mail, to the Paramatta 'Chronicle and News,' containing London political and social gossip of a common-place kind—just the petty chit-chat he could pick up easily out of 'Truth' and the 'World'—for the small sum of thirty shillings a letter?

Yes, Ernest thought he could manage that.

Very well, then. The letter must be sent

on alternate Wednesdays to the colonial news-agent's address, and it would be duly forwarded by mail to the office of the Paramatta 'Chronicle.' A little suspicious, that item, Berkeley thought, but Ernest swallowed it like a child and made no comment. It must be addressed to 'Paramatta, care of Lane & Co.,' and the payments would be made fortnightly through the same agency. Arthur watched his friend's face narrowly at this point again; but Ernest, in his simple-minded, unsuspecting way, never noticed the obvious meaning of this little deception. He thanked Arthur over and over again for his kindness, but he never guessed how far it extended. The letters kept him employed for two days a week, or thereabouts, and though they never got to Paramatta, nor any farther than Arthur Berkeley's own study in the little house he had taken for himself at Chelsea, they were regularly paid for through the colonial news-agents, by means of a cheque which really owed

its ultimate origin to Arthur Berkeley himself. Fifteen shillings a week is not a large fortune, certainly ; but still it is considerably better than nothing, when you come to try both methods of living by practical experience.

Even so, however, Ernest and Edie had a hard struggle, with their habits of life and Ernest's delicate health, to make both ends meet upon that modest income. They found the necessity for recourse to the imaginary pawnbroker growing upon them with alarming rapidity ; and though the few small articles that they sent out for that purpose never really went beyond kind Mrs. Halliss's kitchen dresser, yet so far as Ernest and Edie were concerned, the effect was much the same as if they had been really pledged to the licensed broker. The good woman hid them away carefully in the back drawers of the dresser, sending up as much money for the poor little trinkets as she thought it at all credible that any man in his



senses could possibly advance—if she had given altogether too much, she thought it probable that even the unsuspecting Le Bretons would detect the kindly deception—at the same time remarking to John that ‘if ever them pore dear young creechurs was able to redeem ’em again, why, well an’ good; an’ if not, why, they could just find some excuse to give ’em back to the dear lady after pore Mr. Le Breting was dead an’ gone, as he must be, no doubt, afore many months was over.’ What wretched stuff that is that some narrow-minded cynics love to talk, after their cheap moralising fashion, about the coldness and cruelty of the world! The world is not cold and cruel; it is brimming over everywhere with kindness and warmth of heart; and you have only got to put yourself into the proper circumstances in order to call forth at once on every hand, and in all classes, its tenderest and truest sympathies. None but selfish, unsympathetic people themselves ever find it otherwise in the day of trouble. It is

not the world that is cold and heartless—it is not the individual members of the world that are cruel and unkind—it is the relentless march of circumstances—the faulty organisation which none of us can control, and for which none of us is personally responsible, that grinds us to powder under its Juggernaut wheels. Private kindness is for ever trying, feebly and unsuccessfully, but with its best efforts, to undo the evil that general mismanagement is for ever perpetrating in its fateful course.

One day, a few weeks later, Arthur Berkeley called in again, and on the stairs he met a child playing—a neighbour's child whom good Mrs. Halliss allowed to come in and amuse herself while the mother went out charring. The girl had a bright gold object in her hand; and Arthur, wondering how she came by it, took it from her and looked at it curiously. He recognised it in a moment for what it was—a gold bracelet, a well remembered gold bracelet—the very one that he

himself had given as a wedding present to poor Edie. He turned it over and looked closely at the inside: cut into the soft gold he saw the one word 'Frustra,' that he himself had carved into it with his penknife the night before the memorable wedding.

'Where did you get this?' he asked the child.

'Mrs. 'Alliss give it me,' the little one answered, beginning to cry.

Arthur ran lightly down the steps again, and knocked at the door of Mrs. Halliss's kitchen, with the tell-tale bracelet in his hand. Mrs. Halliss opened the door to him respectfully, and after a faint attempt at innocent prevarication, felt bound to let out all the pitiful little secret without further preamble. So Arthur, good, kind-hearted, delicate-souled Arthur, took his seat sadly upon one of the hard wooden kitchen chairs, and waited patiently while Mrs. Halliss and honest John,

in their roundabout inarticulate fashion, slowly unfolded the story how them two pore young creechurs upstairs had been druv that low through want of funs that Mrs. Le Breting, God bless 'er 'eart, 'ad 'ad to pawn her poor little bits of jewelry and such like : and how they 'adn't 'ad the face to go an' pawn it for her, and so 'ad locked it up in their drawers, and waited hopefully for better times. Arthur listened to all this with an aching heart, and went home alone to ponder on the best way of still further assisting them.

The only thing that occurred to him was a plan for giving Edie, too, a little relief, in the way of what she might suppose to be money-getting occupation. She used to paint a little in water-colours, he remembered, in the old days ; so he put an advertisement in a morning paper, which he got Mrs. Halliss to show Edie, asking for drawings of orchids, the flowers to be supplied and accurately copied

by an amateur at a reasonable price. Edie fell into the harmless friendly trap readily enough, and was duly supplied with orchids by a florist in Regent Street, who professed to receive his instructions from the advertiser. The pictures were all produced in due time, and were sent to a fixed address, where a gentleman in a hansom used to call for them at regular intervals. Arthur Berkeley kept those poor little water-colours long afterwards locked up in a certain drawer all by themselves: they were sacred mementoes to him of that old hopeless love for the little Miss Butterfly of his Oxford days.

With the very first three guineas that Edie earned, carefully saved and hoarded out of her payments for the water-colours, she insisted in the pride of her heart that Ernest should go and visit a great London consulting physician. Sir Antony Wraxall was the best specialist in town on the subject of consumption, she had

heard, and she was quite sure so clever a man must do Ernest a great deal of good, if he didn't even permanently cure him.

'It's no use, Edie darling,' Ernest said to her imploringly. 'You'll only be wasting your hard-earned money. What I want is not advice or medicine; I want what no doctor on earth can possibly give me—relief from this terrible crushing responsibility.'

But Edie would bear no refusal. It was *her* money, she said, the first she had ever earned in her whole life, and she should certainly do as she herself liked with it. Sir Antony Wraxall, she was quite confident, would soon be able to make him better.

So Ernest, overborne by her intreaties, yielded at last, and made an appointment with Sir Antony Wraxall. He took his quarter-hour in due form, and told the great physician all his symptoms as though he believed in the foolish farce. Sir Antony held his head

solemnly on one side, weighed him with puritanical scrupulosity to a quarter of an ounce on his delicate balance, listened attentively at the chest with his silver-mounted stethoscope, and perpended the net result of his investigation with professional gravity; then he gave Edie his full advice and opinion to the maximum extent of five minutes.

‘Your husband’s case is not a hopeful one, Mrs. Le Breton,’ he said solemnly, ‘but still, a great deal may be done for him.’ Edie’s face brightened visibly. ‘With care, his life may be prolonged for many years,—I may even say, indeed, quite indefinitely.’ Edie smiled with joy and gratitude. ‘But you must strictly observe my rules and directions—the same that I’ve just given in a similar case to the Crown Prince of Servia who was here before you. In the first place, your husband must give up work altogether. He must be content to live perfectly and absolutely idle. Then,

secondly, he must live quite away from England. I should recommend the Engadine in summer, and Algeria or the Nile trip every winter; but, if that's beyond your means—and I understand from Mr. Le Breton that you're in somewhat straitened circumstances—I don't object to Catania, or Malaga, or even Mentone and the Riviera. You can rent furnished villas for very little on the Riviera. But he must in no case come farther north, even in summer, than the Lake of Geneva. That, I assure you, is quite indispensable, if he wishes to live another twelvemonth. Take him south at once, in a coupé-lit of course, and break the journey once or twice at Lyons and Marseilles. Next, as to diet, he must live generously—very generously. Don't let him drink claret; claret's poor sour stuff; a pint of good champagne daily, or a good, full-bodied, genial vintage Burgundy would be far better and more digestible for him. Oysters,



game, sweetbreads, red mullet, any little delicacy of that sort as much as possible. Don't let him walk; let him have carriage exercise daily; you can hire carriages for a mere trifle monthly at Cannes and Mentone. Above all things, give him perfect freedom from anxiety. Allow him to concentrate his whole attention on the act of getting well, and you'll find he'll improve astonishingly in no time. But if you keep him here in England and feed him badly and neglect my directions, I can't answer for his getting through another winter. . . . Don't disturb yourself, I beg of you; don't, pray, give way to tears; there is really no occasion for it, my dear madam, no occasion for it at all, if you'll only do as I tell you. . . . Quite right, thank you. Good morning.—Next case, McFarlane.—Good morning. Good morning.'

So that was the end of weeping little Edie's poor hardly-spared three guineas.

The very next day Arthur Berkeley happened to mount the stairs quietly, at an earlier hour than usual, and knocked at the door of Ernest's lodging. There was no answer, so he turned the handle, and entered by himself. The remains of breakfast lay upon the table. Arthur did not want to spy, but he couldn't help remarking that these remains were extremely meagre and scanty. Half a loaf of bread stood upon a solitary plate in the centre; a teapot and two cups occupied one side; and—that was all. In spite of himself, he couldn't restrain his curiosity, and he looked more closely at the knives and plates. Not a mark of anything but crumbs upon them, not even butter! He looked into the cups. Nothing but milkless tea at the bottom! Yes, the truth was only too evident; they had had no meat for breakfast, no butter, no milk, no sugar; it was quite clear that the meal had consisted entirely of dry bread with plain tea

—call it hot water—and that for a dying man and a delicate over-worked lady! Arthur looked at that pitiable breakfast-table with a twinge of remorse, and the tears rose sharply and involuntarily into his eyes. He had not done enough for them, then; he had not done enough for them.

Poor little Miss Butterfly! and had it really come to this! You, so bright, so light, so airy, in want, in positive want, in hunger even, with your good, impossible, impracticable Ernest! Had it come to this! Bread and water; dry bread and water! Down tears, down; a man must be a man; but, oh, what a bitter sight for Arthur Berkeley! And yet, what could he do to mend it? Money they would not take; he dare not even offer it; and he was at his wit's end for any other contrivance for serving them without their knowledge. He must do what he could; but how he was to do it, he couldn't imagine.

As he stood there, ruminating bitterly over that poor bare table, he thought he heard sounds above, as of Edie coming downstairs with Dot on her shoulder. He knew she would not like to know that he had surprised the secret of their dire poverty; and he turned silently and cautiously to descend the stair. There was only just time enough to get away, for Edie was even then opening the door of the nursery. Noiselessly, with cat-like tread, he crept down the steps once more, and heard Edie descending, and singing as she came down to Dot. It was a plaintive little song, in a sad key—a plaintive little song of his own—but not wholly distressful, Arthur thought; she could still sing, then, to her baby! With the hot tears rising a second time to his eyes, he groped his way to the foot of the staircase. There he brushed them hurriedly aside with his hand, and turned out into the open street. The children were playing and tumbling in the

sun, and a languid young man in a faultless frock coat and smooth silk hat was buying a showy buttonhole flower from the little suburban florist's opposite.

With a heavy heart Arthur Berkeley turned homeward to his own cosy little cottage; that modest palace of art which he had once hoped little Miss Butterfly might have shared with him. He went up the steps, and turned quickly into his own small study. The Progenitor was there, sitting reading in an easy-chair. 'At least,' Arthur thought to himself, 'I have made *his* old age happy. If I could only do as much for little Miss Butterfly! for little Miss Butterfly! for little Miss Butterfly! If I could only do as much for her, oh, how happy and contented I should be!'

He flung himself down on his own sofa, and brushed his eyes nervously with his handkerchief before he dared look up again towards the Progenitor. 'Father,' he said, clutching

his watchchain hard and playing with it nervously to keep down his emotion, 'I'm afraid those poor Le Bretons are in an awfully bad way. I'm afraid, do you know, that they actually haven't enough to eat! I went into their rooms just now, and, would you believe it, I found nothing on the table for breakfast but dry bread and tea!'

The Progenitor looked up quietly from the volume of Morley's 'Voltaire' which he was at that moment placidly engaged in devouring. 'Nothing but dry bread and tea,' he said, in what sounded to Arthur a horribly unconcerned tone. 'Really, hadn't they? Well, I dare say they *are* very badly off, poor people. But after all, you know, Artie, they can't be really poor, for Le Breton told me himself he was generally earning fifteen shillings or a pound a week, and that, you see, is really for three people a very good income, now isn't it?'

Arthur, delicate-minded, gentle, chivalrous Arthur, gazed in surprise and sudden distress at that dear, good, unselfish old father of his. How extraordinary that the kindly old man couldn't grasp the full horror of the situation ! How strange that he, who would himself have been so tender, so considerate, so womanly in his care and sympathy towards anything that seemed to him like real poverty or real suffering, should have been so blinded by his long hard working-man life towards the peculiar difficulties and trials of classes other than his own as not to recognise the true meaning of that dreadful disclosure ! Arthur was not angry with him—he felt too fully at that moment what depths of genuine silent hardship uncomplainingly endured were implied in the stoically calm frame of mind which could treat Edie Le Breton's penury of luxuries as a comparatively slight matter : after all, his father was right at bottom ; such mere sentimental

middle-class poverty is as nothing to the privations of the really poor ; yet he could not help feeling a little disappointed for all that. He wanted sympathy in his pity, and he could clearly expect none here. ‘Why, father,’ he cried bitterly, ‘you don’t throw yourself into the position as you ought to do. A pound a week, paid regularly, would be a splendid income of course for people brought up like you or me. But just consider how those two young people have been brought up ! Consider their wants and their habits ! Consider the luxury they have been accustomed to ! And then think of their being obliged to want now almost for food in their last extremity !’

His father answered in the same quiet tone—not hardly, but calmly, as though he were discussing a problem in political economy instead of the problem of Edie Le Breton’s happiness—‘Well, you see, it’s all a matter of the standard of comfort. These two friends of



yours have been brought up above their future; and now that they've got to come down to their natural level, why, of course, they feel it, depend upon it, they feel it. Their parents, of course, shouldn't have accustomed them to a style of life above their station. Good dry bread, not too stale, does nobody any harm: still, I dare say they don't like coming down to it. But bless your heart, Artie, if you'd seen the real want and poverty that I've seen, my boy—the actual hunger and cold and nakedness that I've known honest working people brought down to by no work, and nothing but the House open before them, or not that even, you wouldn't think so much of the sentimental grievances of people who are earning fifteen shillings a week in ease and comfort.'

'But, Father,' Arthur went on, scarcely able to keep down the rising tone of indignation at such seeming heartlessness, 'Ernest doesn't earn even that always. Sometimes he

earns nothing, or next to nothing; and it's the uncertainty and insecurity that tells upon them even more than the poverty itself. Oh, Father, Father, you who have always been so good and kind, I never heard you speak so cruelly about anyone before as you're speaking now about that poor, friendless, helpless, penniless, heart-broken little woman!

The old shoemaker caught at the word suddenly, and looking him through and through with an unexpected gleam of discovery, laid down the life of Voltaire on the table with a bang, and sat straight upright in his chair, nodding his head, and muttering slowly to himself, 'Little woman—he said "little woman!" Poor Artie, Poor Artie!' in a tone of inexpressible pity. At last he turned to Arthur and cried with a voice of womanly tenderness, 'My boy, my boy, I didn't know before it was the lassie you were thinking of; I thought it was only poor young Le Breton. I see it all now; I've

surprised your secret ; you've let it out to me without knowing it. Oh, Artie, if that's She, I'm sorry for her, and I'm sorry for you, my boy, from the bottom of my heart. If that's She, Artie, we'll put our heads together, and see what plan we can manage to save her from what she has never been accustomed to. Don't think too hardly of your old Progenitor, Artie ; he hasn't mixed with these people all his life, and learned to sympathise with them as you've done, my son ; he doesn't understand them or know their troubles as you do : but if that's her that you told me about one day, we shall find the means to make her happy and comfortable yet, if we have to starve for it. Dear Arthur, do not think I could be harsh or unfeeling for a moment to the woman that you ever once in passing fixed your heart upon. Let's talk it over and think it over, and sooner or later we'll surely find the way to accomplish it.'

## CHAPTER XXXII.

## PRECONTRACT OF MARRIAGE.

WHETHER Ronald Le Breton's abstruse speculations on the theory of heredity were well founded or not, it certainly did happen, at any rate, that the more he saw of Selah Briggs the better he liked her; and the more Selah saw of him the better she liked him in return. Curiously enough, too, Selah did actually recognise in him what he fancied he recognised in himself, that part of his brother's nature (not all wholly assumed) which was just what Selah had first been drawn to admire in Herbert himself. It wasn't merely the originality of his general point of view: it was something more deep-seated and undefinable than that—

in a word, his idiosyncrasy. Selah Briggs, with her peculiar fiery soul and rebellious nature, found in both the Le Bretons something that seemed at once to satisfy her wants, to fulfil her desires, to saturate her affinities: and with Ronald, as with Herbert before, she was conscious of a certain awe and respect which was all the more pleasant to her because her untamed spirit had never felt anything like it with any other human being. She didn't understand them, and she didn't want to understand them: that constituted just the very charm of their whole personality to her peculiar fancy. All the other people she had ever met were as transparent as glass, for good or for evil; she could see through all their faults and virtues as easily as one sees through a window: the Le Bretons were to her inscrutable, novel, incomprehensible, inexplicable, and she prized them for their very inscrutability. And so it came to pass, that almost by

a process of natural and imperceptible transference, she passed on at last to Ronald's account very much the same intensity of feeling that she had formerly felt towards his brother Herbert.

But at the same time, Selah never for a moment let him see it. She was too proud to confess now that she could ever love another man: the Mr. Walters she had once believed in had never, never, never existed: and she would raise no other idol in future to take the place of that vanished ideal. She was grateful to Ronald, and even fond of him: but that was all—outwardly at least. She never let him see, by word or act, that in her heart of hearts she was beginning to love him. And yet Ronald instinctively knew it. He himself could not have told you why; but he knew it. Even a woman cannot hide a secret from a man with that peculiarly penetrating intuitive temperament

which belongs to sensitive, delicate types like Ronald Le Breton's.

One Sunday evening, when Selah had been spending a few hours at Edie's lodgings (Ronald always made it an excuse for finding them a supper, on the ground that Selah was really his guest, though he could not conveniently ask her to his own rooms), he walked home towards Notting Hill with Selah; and as they crossed the Regent's Park, he took the opportunity to say something to her that he had had upon his mind for a few weeks past, in some vague, indefinite, half-unconscious fashion.

'Selah,' he began, a little timidly, 'don't you think it's very probable we shan't have Ernest here much longer with us?'

'I'm afraid it is, Ronald,' Selah answered. She had got quite accustomed now to calling him Ronald. With such a poor, weak, sickly fellow as that, why really, after all, it did not much matter.

‘ Well, Selah,’ Ronald went on, gravely, his eyes filling with tears as he spoke, ‘ in that case, you know, I can’t think what’s to become of poor Edie. It’s a dreadful contingency to talk about, Selah, and I can’t bear talking about it ; but we *must* face these things, however terrible, mustn’t we? and in this case one’s absolutely bound to face it for poor Edie’s sake as well as for Ernest’s. Selah, she must have a home to go to, when dear Ernest’s taken from us.’

‘ I’m very sorry for her, Ronald,’ Selah answered, with unusual softness of manner, ‘ but I really don’t see how a home can possibly be provided for her.’

‘ I do,’ Ronald answered, more calmly ; ‘ and for their sakes, Selah, I want you to help me in trying to provide it.’

‘ How?’ Selah asked, looking up in his face curiously, as they passed into a ray of lamplight.



‘Listen, Selah, and I’ll tell you. Why, by marrying me.’

‘Never!’ Selah answered, firmly, and with a decided tinge of the old Adam in her trembling voice. ‘Never, Ronald! Never, never, never!’

‘Wait a minute, Selah,’ Ronald pleaded, ‘till you’ve heard the end of what I have to say to you. Consider that when dear Ernest’s gone (oh! Selah, you must excuse me; it makes me cry so to think of it), there’ll be nowhere on earth for poor little Edie and Dot to go to.’

‘Did ever a man propose to a girl so extraordinarily in all this world,’ Selah thought to herself, angrily. ‘He actually expects me to marry him in order to provide a home for his precious sister-in-law. That’s really carrying unselfishness a step too far, I call it.’

‘Edie couldn’t come and live with me, of course,’ Ronald went on, quickly, ‘if I were a

bachelor; but if I were married, why then, naturally, she and Dot could come and live with us; and she could earn a little money somehow, no doubt; and, at any rate, it'd be better for her than starvation.'

Selah stopped a minute, and tapped the hard ground two or three times angrily with the point of her umbrella. 'And *me*, Ronald?' she said in a curious defiant voice. And *me*? I suppose you've forgotten all about *me*. You don't ask me to marry you because you love me; you don't ask me whether I love you or not; you only propose to me that I should quietly turn domestic housekeeper for Mrs. Ernest Le Breton. And for my part, I answer you plainly, once for all, that I'm not going to do it—no, never, never, never!'

She spoke haughtily, flashing her eyes at him in the fierce old fashion, and Ronald was almost frightened at the angry intensity of her contemptuous gestures. 'Selah,' he cried,

trying to take her hand, which she tore away from him hurriedly : ‘ Selah, you misunderstand me. I only approached the subject that way because I didn’t want to seem overweening and presumptuous. It’s a very great piece of vanity, it seems to me, for any man to ask a woman whether she loves him. I’m too conscious of all my own faults and failings, Selah, to venture upon asking you ever to love me ; but I do love you, Selah, I’m sure I do love you ; and I hoped, I somehow fancied—it may have been mere fancy, but I *did* imagine—that I detected, I can’t say how, that you did really love me, too, just a very very little. Oh, Selah, it’s because I really love you that I ask you whether you’ll marry me, such as I am ; I know I’m a poor sort of person to marry, but I ventured to hope you might love me just a little for all that.’

He looked so frail and gentle as he stood there pleading in the pale moonlight, that

Selah could have taken him to her bosom then and there and fondled him as one would pet a sick child, for pure womanliness ; but the devil in her blood kept her from doing it, and she answered haughtily, instead : ‘ Ronald, if you wanted to marry me, you ought to have asked me for my own sake. Now that you’ve asked me for another’s, you can’t expect me to give you an answer. Keep your money, my poor boy ; you’ll want it all for you and her hereafter ; don’t go sharing it and spending it on perfect strangers such as me. And don’t go talking to me again about this business as long as your sister-in-law is unprovided for. I’m not going to take the bread out of her mouth, and I’m not going to marry a man who doesn’t utterly and entirely love me.’

‘ But I do,’ Ronald answered, earnestly ; ‘ I do, Selah ; I love you truly and faithfully from the very bottom of my heart.’

‘ Leave off, Ronald,’ Selah said in the same

angry tone. 'If you ever talk to me of this again, I give you my word of honour about it, I'll never speak another word to you.'

And Ronald, who deeply respected the sanctity of a promise, were it only a threat, bided his time, and said no more about it for the present.

Next day, as Ronald sat reading in his own rooms, he was much surprised at hearing a well-known voice at the door, inquiring with some asperity whether Mr. Le Breton was at home. He listened to the voice in intense astonishment. It was his mother's.

'Ronald,' Lady Le Breton began, the moment she had been shown into his little sitting-room, 'I didn't think, after your undutiful, ungrateful conduct—with that abominable woman, too—that I should ever have come to see you, unless you came first, as you ought clearly to do, and begged my pardon penitently for your disgraceful behaviour. It's

hard, I know, to acknowledge oneself in the wrong, but every Christian ought to be above vindictiveness and obstinate self-will; and I expect you, therefore, sooner or later, to come and ask forgiveness for your dreadful unkindness to me. Till then, as I said, I didn't expect to call upon you in any way. But I've felt compelled to-day to come and speak to you about a matter of duty, and as a matter of duty strictly I regard it, not as any relaxation of my just attitude of indignant expectancy towards yourself; no parent ought rightly to overlook such conduct as yours on the part of a son.' Ronald inclined his head respectfully. 'Well, what I've come to speak to you about to-day, Ronald, is about your poor misguided brother Ernest. He, too, as you know, has behaved very badly to me.'

'No,' Ronald answered stoutly, without further note or comment. Where the matter touched himself only he could maintain a

decent silence, but where it touched poor dying Ernest he couldn't possibly restrain himself, even from a sense of filial obligation.

'Very badly to me,' Lady Le Breton went on sternly, without in any way noticing the brief interruption, 'and I can't, of course, go to see him either, especially not as I should by so doing expose myself to meeting the person whom he has chosen to make his wife. Still, as I hear that Ernest's in a very serious or even dangerous condition——'

'He's dying,' Ronald answered, the quick tears once more finding the easy road to his eyes as usual.

'I considered, as a mother, it was my duty to warn him to take a little thought about his soul.'

'His soul!' Ronald exclaimed in astonishment. 'Ernest's soul! Why, mother, dear Ernest has no need to look after his soul. He doesn't take that sordid, petty, limited view of

our relations with eternity, and of our relations with the Infinite, which makes them all consist of the miserable, selfish, squalid desire to save our own poor personal little souls at all hazards. Ernest has something better and nobler to think of, I can assure you, than such a mere self-centred idea as that.'

'Ronald!' Lady Breton exclaimed, drawing herself up with much dignity; 'how on earth you, who have always pretended to be a religious person, can utter such a shocking and wicked sentiment as that, really passes my comprehension. What in the world is religion for, I should like to know, if it isn't to teach us how to save our own souls? But the particular thing I want to speak to you about is just this: couldn't you manage to induce Ernest to see the Archdeacon a little, and let the Archdeacon speak to him about his deplorable spiritual condition? I thought about you both so much at church yesterday, when the dear



Archdeacon was preaching such a beautiful sermon ; his text was like this, as far as I can remember it. “There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.” I couldn’t help thinking all the time of my own two poor rebellious boys, and of the path that their misguided notions were leading them on. For I believe Ernest does really somehow persuade himself that he’s in the right—it’s inconceivable, but it’s the fact ; and I’m afraid the end thereof will be the ways of death ; and then, as the dear Archdeacon said, “After death the judgment.” Oh, Ronald, when I think of your poor dear brother Ernest’s open unbelief, it makes me tremble for his future, so that I couldn’t rest upon my bed until I’d been to see you and urged you to go and try to save him.’

‘Mother,’ Ronald said with that tone in which he was well accustomed to answering Lady Le Breton’s religious harangues ; ‘I don’t

think you need feel any uneasiness whatever on dear Ernest's account, so far as all that's concerned. What does *he* want with saving his soul, mother? "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it." Remember what is written: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven."'

'But, Ronald,' Lady Le Breton continued, half angrily, 'consider his unbelief, his dreadful opinions, his errors of doctrine! How on earth can we be happy about him when we think of those?'

'I don't think, Mother,' Ronald answered gently, 'that Infinite Justice and Infinite Love take much account of a man's opinions. They take account of his life and soul only, not of the correctness of his propositions in dogmatic theology; "Other sheep have I which are not of this fold—they also must I bring."'

'It seems to me, Ronald,' Lady Le Breton rejoined coldly, 'that you don't in the least

care for whatever is most distinctive and characteristic in the whole of Christian doctrine. You talk so very very differently on religious subjects from that dear, good, excellent Archdeacon.'

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

## A GLEAM OF SUNSHINE.

LADY HILDA TREGELLIS rang the bell resolutely. 'I shall have no more nonsense about it,' she said to herself in her most decisive and determined manner. 'Whether mamma wishes it or not, I shall go and see them this very day without another word upon the subject.'

The servant answered the bell and stood waiting for his orders by the doorway.

'Harris, will you tell Jenkins at once that I shall want the carriage at half-past eleven?'

'Yes, my lady.'

'All right then. That'll do. Don't stand staring at me there like an image, but go this minute and do as I tell you.'

‘ Beg pardon, my lady, but her ladyship said she wanted the carriage herself at twelve punctual.’

‘ She can’t have it, then, Harris. That’s all. Go and give my message to Jenkins at once, and I’ll settle about the carriage with my lady myself.’

‘ She’s the rummest young lady ever I come across,’ the man murmured to himself in a dissatisfied fashion, as he went down the stairs again: ‘ but there, it’s none of my business, thank goodness. The places and the people she does go and hunt up when she’s got the fit on are truly ridic’lous : blest if she didn’t acshally make Mr. Jenkins drive her down into Camberwell the other mornin’, to see ’ow the poor lived, she said ; as if it mattered tuppence to us in our circles of society ’ow the poor live. I wonder what little game she’s up to now? Well, well, what the aristocracy is coming to in these days is more’n I can fathom, as sure as my name’s William ’Arris.’

The little game that Lady Hilda was up to that morning was one that a gentleman in Mr. Harris's position was certainly hardly like to appreciate or sympathise with.

The evening before, she had met Arthur Berkeley once more at a small At Home, and had learned from him full particulars as to the dire straits into which the poor Le Bretons had finally fallen. Now, Hilda Tregellis was a kind-hearted girl at bottom, and when she heard all about it, she said at once to Arthur, 'I shall go and see them myself to-morrow, Mr. Berkeley, whether mamma allows me or not.'

'What good will it do?' Arthur had answered her quickly. 'You can't find work for poor Le Breton, can you? and of course if you can't do that you can be of no earthly use in any way to the poor creatures.'

'I don't know about that,' Hilda responded warmly. 'Sympathy's always something, isn't it, Mr Berkeley? Nobody ought to know

that better than you do. Besides, there's no saying when one may happen to turn up useful. Of course, I've never been of the slightest use to anybody in all my life, myself, I know, and I dare say I never shall be, but at least there's no harm in trying, is there? I'm on speaking terms with such an awful lot of people, all of them rich and many of them influential—Parliament, and Government offices, and all that sort of nonsense, you know—people who have no end of things to give away, and can't tell who on earth they'd better give them to, for fear of offending all the others, that I might possibly hear of something or other.'

'I'm afraid, Lady Hilda,' Berkeley answered smiling, 'none of those people would have anything to offer that could possibly be of the slightest use to poor Le Breton. If he's to be saved at all, he must be saved in his own time and by his own methods. For my own part, I don't see what conceivable chance of success in

life there is left for him. You can't imagine a man like him making money and living comfortably. It's a tragedy—all the dramas of real life always *are* tragedies ; but I'm terribly afraid there's no conceivable way out of it.'

Lady Hilda only looked at him with bold good humour. 'Nonsense,' she said bravely. 'All pure rubbishing pessimistic nonsense. (I hope pessimistic's the right word—it's a very good word, anyhow, even if it isn't in the proper place.) Well, I don't agree with you at all about this question, Mr. Berkeley. I'm very fond of Mr. Le Breton, really very fond of him ; and I believe there's a corner somewhere for every man if only he can jog down properly into his own corner instead of being squeezed forcibly into somebody else's. The worst of it is, all the holes are round, and Mr. Le Breton's a square man, I allow : he wants all the angles cutting down off him.'

'But you can't cut them off that's the very



trouble,' Arthur answered, with just a faint rising suspicion that he was half jealous of the interest Hilda showed even in poor lonely Ernest Le Breton. Gracious heavens! could he be playing false at last to the long-cherished memory of little Miss Butterfly? could he be really beginning to fall just a little in love, after all, with this bold beautiful Lady Hilda Tregellis? He didn't know, and yet he somehow hardly liked himself to think it. And while Edie was still so poor too!

'No, you can't cut them off; I know that perfectly well,' Hilda rejoined quickly. 'I wouldn't care twopence for him if I thought you could. It's the angles that give him all his charming delicious originality. But you can look out a square hole for him somewhere, you know, and that of course would be a great deal better. Depend upon it, Mr. Berkeley, there are square holes up and down in the world, if only we knew where to look for them ;

and the mistake that everybody has made in poor Mr. Le Breton's case has been that instead of finding one to suit him, they've gone on trying to poke him down anyhow by main force into one of the round ones. That goes against the grain, you know; besides which I call it a clear waste of the very valuable solid mahogany corners.'

Arthur Berkeley looked at her silently for a moment. as if a gleam of light had burst suddenly in upon him. Then he said to her slowly and deliberately, 'Perhaps you're right, Lady Hilda, though I never thought of it quite in that light before. But one thing\* certainly strikes me now, and that is that you're a great deal cleverer after all than I ever thought you.'

Lady Hilda made a little mock curtsy. 'It's very good of you to say so,' she answered, half saucily. 'Only the compliment is rather double-edged, you must confess, because it

implies that up to now you've had a dreadfully low opinion of my poor little intelligence.'

So after that conversation Lady Hilda made up her mind that she would certainly go the very next day and call as soon as possible upon Edie Le Breton. Nobody could tell what good might possibly come of it; but at least there could come no harm. And so, when the carriage drew up at the door at half-past eleven, Hilda Tregellis stepped into it with a vague consciousness of an important mission, and ordered Jenkins to drive at once to the side street in Holloway, whose address Arthur Berkeley had last night given her. Jenkins touched his hat with mechanical respect, but inwardly wondered what the dickens my lady would think if only she came to know of these 'ere extrornary goin's on.

At the door of the lodgings Hilda alighted and rang the bell herself. Good Mrs. Halliss opened the door, and answered quickly that

Mrs. Le Breton was at home. Her woman's eye detected at once the coronet on the carriage, and she was ready to burst with delight when the tall visitor handed her a card for Edie, bearing the name of Lady Hilda Tregellis. It was almost the first time that Edie had had any lady callers; certainly the first time she had had any of such social distinction; and Mrs. Halliss made haste to usher her up in due form, and then ran down hastily to communicate the good news to honest John, who in his capacity of past coachman was already gazing out of the area window with deep interest at the carriage and horses.

'There, John dear,' she cried, with tears of joy in her eyes, forgetting in her excitement to drat the man for not being in the back kitchen, 'to think that we should see a carriage an' pair like that there a-drawin' up in front of our own very 'ouse, and Lady 'Ilder Tergellis, or summat o' the sort, a-comin' 'ere to see that

dear little lady in the parlour, why, it's enough to make one's 'eart burst, nearly, just you see now if it reelly isn't. You could a' knocked me down with a feather, a'most, when that there Lady 'Ilder 'anded me 'er card, and asked so sweet-like if Mrs. Le Breting was at 'ome. Mr. Le Breting's people is comin' round, you may be sure of it; 'is mother's a lady of title, that much we know for certing; and she wouldn't go and let 'er own flesh an' blood die 'ere of downright poverty, as they're like to do and won't let us 'elp it, pore dears, without sendin' round to inquire and 'assist 'em. Married against 'er will, I understand, from what that dear Mr. Berkeley, bless 'is kind 'eart, do tell me; not as I can believe 'e married beneath 'im, no, not no ways; for a sweeter, dearer, nicer little lady than our Mrs. Le Breting I never did, an' that I tell you. Sweeter manners you never did see yourself, John, for all you've lived among the aristo-

cracy : an' I always knew 'is people 'ud come round at last, and do what was right by 'im. An' you may depend upon it, John, this 'ere Lady 'Ilder's one of his relations, an' she's come round on a message from Lady Le Breting, to begin a reconciliation. And though we should be sorry to lose 'em, as 'as stood by 'em through all their troubles, I'm glad to 'ear it, John, that I am, for I can't a-bear to see that dear young fellow a-eatin' 'is life out with care and anxiety.' And Mrs. Halliss, who had always felt convinced in her own mind that Ernest must really be the unacknowledged heir to a splendid fortune, began to wipe her eyes violently in her delight at this evident realisation of her wildest fancies and wishes.

Meanwhile, upstairs in the little parlour, Edie had risen in some trepidation as Mrs. Halliss placed in her hands Lady Hilda Tregellis's card. Ernest was out, gone to walk feebly around the streets of Holloway, and she

hardly knew at first what to say to so unexpected a visitor. But Lady Hilda put her almost at her ease at once by coming up to her with both her arms outstretched, as to an old friend, and saying, with one of her pleasantest smiles.

‘ You must forgive me, Mrs. Le Breton, for never having come to call on you before ; but I have been long meaning to, and doubting whether you would care to see me or not. You know, I’m a very old friend of your husband’s—he was *so* kind to me always when he was down at our place in dear old Devonshire. (You’re a Devonshire girl yourself, aren’t you? just as I am. I thought so. I’m so glad of it. I always get on so well with the dear old Devonshire folk.) Well, I’ve been meaning to come for ever so long, and putting it off, and putting it off, and putting it off, as one *will* put things off, you know, when you’re not quite sure about them, until last evening. And then

our friend, Mr. Arthur Berkeley, who knows everybody, talked to me about your husband and you, and told me he thought you wouldn't mind my coming to see you, for he fancied you hadn't much society up here that you cared for or sympathised with: though, of course, I'm dreadfully afraid of coming to call upon you, because I know you're the sister of that very clever Mr. Oswald, whose sad death we were all so sorry to hear about in the papers; and naturally, as you've lived so much with him and with Mr. Le Breton, you must be so awfully learned and all that sort of thing, and no doubt despise ignorant people like myself dreadfully. But you really mustn't despise me, Mrs. Le Breton, because, you see, I haven't had all the advantages that you've had; indeed, the only clever people I've ever met in all my life are your husband and Mr. Arthur Berkeley, except, of course, Cabinet ministers and so forth, and they don't



count, because they're political, and so very old, and solemn, and grand, and won't take any notice of us girls, except to sit upon us. So that's what's made me rather afraid to call upon you, because I thought you'd be quite too much in the higher education way for a girl like me ; and I haven't got any education at all, except in rubbish, as your husband used always to tell me. And now I want you to tell me all about Mr. Le Breton, and the baby—Dot, you call her, Mr. Berkeley told me—and yourself, too ; for, though I've never seen you before, I feel, of course, like an old friend of the family, having known your husband so very intimately.'

Lady Hilda designedly delivered all this long harangue straight off without a break, in her go-ahead, breathless, voluble fashion, because she felt sure Edie wouldn't feel perfectly at her ease at first, and she wanted to give her time to recover from the first foolish awe of that meaningless prefix, Lady. Moreover, Lady

Hilda, in spite of her offhand manner was a good psychologist, and a true woman: and she had concocted her little speech on the spur of the moment with some cleverness, so as just to suit her instinctive reading of Edie's small personal peculiarities. She saw in a moment that that slight, pale, delicate girl was lost in London, far from her own home and surroundings; and that the passing allusion to their common Devonshire origin would please and conciliate her, as it always does with the clannish, warm-hearted; simple-minded West Country folk. Then again, the deft hints as to their friendship with Arthur Berkeley, as to Ernest's stay at Dunbude, and as to her own fear lest Edie should be too learned for her, all tended to bring out whatever points of interest they had together: while the casual touch about poor Harry's reputation, and the final mention of little Dot by name, completed the conquest of Edie's simple, gentle little woman's

heart. So this was the great Lady Hilda Tregellis, she thought, of whom she had heard so much, and whom she had dreaded so greatly as a grand rival! Why, after all, she was exactly like any other Devonshire girl in Calcombe Pomeroy, except, perhaps, that she was easier to get on with, and smiled a great deal more pleasantly than ten out of a dozen.

‘It’s very kind indeed of you to come,’ Edie answered, smiling back as well as she was able the first moment that Lady Hilda allowed her a chance to edge in a word sideways. ‘Ernest will be so very very sorry that he’s missed you when he comes in. He’s spoken to me a great deal about you ever so many times.’

‘No, has he really?’ Lady Hilda asked quickly, with unmistakable interest and pleasure. ‘Well, now, I’m so glad of that, for to tell you the truth, Mrs. Le Breton, though he was really always very kind to me, and so patient with all my stupidity, I more than half

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fancied he didn't exactly like me. In fact, I was dreadfully afraid he thought me a perfect nuisance. 'I'm so sorry he isn't in, because the truth is, I came partly to see him as well as to see you, and I should be awfully disappointed if I had to miss him. Where's he gone, if I may ask? Perhaps I may be able to wait and see him.'

'Oh, he's only out walking somewhere—ur—somewhere about Holloway,' Edie answered, half blushing at the nature of their neighbourhood, and glancing round the little room to see how it was likely to strike so grand a person as Lady Hilda Tregellis.

Hilda noticed the glance, and made as if she did not notice it. Her heart had begun to warm at once to this poor, pale, eager-looking little woman, who had had the doubtful happiness of winning Ernest Le Breton's love. 'Then I shall certainly wait and see him, Mrs. Le Breton,' she said cordially.

‘What a dear cosy little room you’ve got here, to be sure. I do so love these nice bright little cottage parlours, with their pretty pots of flowers and cheerful furniture—so much warmer and more comfortable, you know, than the great dreary empty barns that most people go and do penance by living in. If ever I marry—which I don’t suppose I ever shall do, for nobody’ll have me, I’m sorry to say: at least, nobody but stupid people in the peerage, Algies and Berties and Monties I always call them—well, if I ever do marry, I shall have a cosy little house just like this one, with no unnecessary space to walk over every time you come in or out, and with a chance of keeping yourself warm without having to crone over the fire in order to get safely out of the horrid draughts. And Dot, now let me see, how old is she by this time? I ought to remember, I’m sure, for Mr. Berkeley told me all about her at

the time; and I said should I write and ask if I might stand as godmother; and Mr. Berkeley laughed at me, and said what could I be dreaming of, and did I think you were going to make your baby liable to fine and imprisonment if it ever published works hereafter on philosophy or something of the sort. So delightfully original of all of you, really.'

Once started on that fertile theme of female conversation, Edie and Hilda got on well enough in all conscience to satisfy the most exacting mind. Dot was duly brought in and exhibited by Mrs. Hallis; and was pronounced to be the very sweetest, dearest, darlingest little duck ever seen on earth since the beginning of all things. Her various points of likeness to all her relations were duly discussed; and Hilda took particular pains to observe that she didn't in the very faintest degree resemble that old horror, Lady Le Breton. Then her whole past history was

fully related, what she had been fed on, and what illnesses she had had, and how many teeth she had got, and all the other delightful nothings so perennially interesting to the maternal heart. Hilda listened to the whole account with unfeigned attention, and begged leave to be allowed to dance Dot in her own strong arms, and tickled her fat cheek with her slender forefinger, and laughed with genuine delight when the baby smiled again at her and turned her face to be tickled a second time. Gradually Hilda brought the conversation round to Ernest's journalistic experiences, and at last she said very quietly, 'I'm sorry to learn from Mr. Berkeley, dear, that your husband doesn't get quite as much work to do as he would like to have.'

Edie's tender eyes filled at once with swimming tears. That one word 'dear,' said so naturally and simply, touched her heart at once with its genuine half unspoken sympathy.

‘Oh, Lady Hilda,’ she answered falteringly, ‘please don’t make me talk about that. We are so very, very, very poor. I can’t bear to talk about it to you. Please, please don’t make me.’

Hilda looked at her with the moisture welling up in her own eyes too, and said softly, ‘I’m so sorry: dear, dear little Mrs. Le Breton, I’m so very, very, very sorry for you! from the bottom of my heart I’m sorry for you.’

‘It isn’t for myself, you know,’ Edie answered quickly: ‘for myself, of course, I could stand anything; but it’s the trouble and privations for darling Ernest. Oh, Lady Hilda, I can’t bear to say it, but he’s dying, he’s dying.’

Hilda took the pretty small hand affectionately in hers. ‘Don’t, dear, don’t,’ she said, brushing away a tear from her own eyes at the same time. ‘He isn’t, believe me, he isn’t. And don’t call me by that horrid stiff name, dear, please don’t. Call me Hilda. I should



be so pleased and flattered if you would call me Hilda. And may I call you Edie? I know your husband calls you Edie, because Mr. Ronald Le Breton told me so. I want to be a friend of yours; and I feel sure, if only you will let me, that we might be very good and helpful friends indeed together.'

Edie pressed her hand softly. How very different from the imaginary Lady Hilda she had pictured to herself in her timid, girlish fancy! How much even dear Ernest had been mistaken as to what there was of womanly really in her. 'Oh, don't speak so kindly to me,' she said imploringly; 'don't speak so kindly, or else you'll make me cry. I can't bear to hear you speak so kindly.'

'Cry, dear,' Lady Hilda whispered in a gentle tone, kissing her forehead delicately as she spoke: 'cry and relieve yourself. There's nothing gives one so much comfort when one's heart is bursting as a regular good downright

cry.' And, suiting the action to the word, forthwith Lady Hilda laid her own statuesque head down beside Edie's, and so those two weeping women, rivals once in a vague way, and now bound to one another by a new-found tie, mingled their tears silently together for ten minutes in unuttered sympathy.

As they sat there, both tearful and speechless, with Lady Hilda soothing Edie's wan hand tenderly in hers, and leaning above her, and stroking her hair softly with a sister's fondness, the door opened very quietly, and Arthur Berkeley stood for a moment pausing in the passage, and looking in without a word upon the unexpected sight that greeted his wondering vision. He had come to call upon Ernest about some possible opening for a new writer on a paper lately started; and hearing the sound of sobs within had opened the door quietly and tentatively. He could hardly believe his own eyes when he actually saw

Lady Hilda Tregellis sitting there side by side with Edie Le Breton, kissing her pale forehead a dozen times in a minute, and crying over her like a child with unwonted tears of unmistakable sympathy. For ten seconds Arthur held the door ajar in his hands, and gazed silently with the awe of chivalrous respect upon the tearful, beautiful picture. Then he shut the door again noiselessly and unperceived, and stole softly out into the street to wait alone for Ernest's return. It was not for him to intrude his unbidden presence upon the sacred sorrow of those two weeping sister-women.

He lighted a cigar outside, and walked up and down a neighbouring street feverishly till he thought it likely the call would be finished. 'Dear little Mrs. Le Breton,' he said to himself softly, 'dear little Miss Butterfly of the days that are dead; softened and sweetened still more by suffering, with the beauty of holiness glowing in your face, how I wish some good

for you could unexpectedly come out of this curious visit. Though I don't see how it's possible: I don't see how it's possible. The stream carries us all down unresistingly before its senseless flood, and sweeps us at last, sooner or later, like helpless logs, into the unknown sea. Poor Ernest is drifting fast thitherwards before the current, and nothing on earth, it seems to me, can conceivably stop him !'

He paced up and down a little, with a quick, unsteady tread, and took a puff or two again at his cigar abstractedly. Then he held it thoughtfully between his fingers for a while and began to hum a few bars from his own new opera then in course of composition—a stately long-drawn air, it was, something like the rustle of Hilda Tregellis's satin train as she swept queenlike down the broad marble staircase of some great Elizabethan country palace. 'And dear Lady Hilda too,' he went on, musingly: 'dear, kind, sympathising Lady

Hilda. Who on earth would ever have thought she had it in her to comfort that poor, weeping, sorrowing girl as I just now saw her doing? Dear Lady Hilda! Kind Lady Hilda! I have undervalued you and overlooked you, because of the mere accident of your titled birth, but I could have kissed you myself, for pure gratitude, that very minute, Hilda Tregellis, when I saw you stooping down and kissing that dear white forehead that looked so pale and womanly and beautiful. Yes, Hilda, I could have kissed you. I could have kissed your own grand, smooth, white marble forehead. And no very great trial of endurance, either, Arthur Berkeley, if it comes to that; for say what you will of her, she's a beautiful, stately, queenlike woman indeed; and it somehow strikes me she's a truer and better woman, too, than you have ever yet in your shallow superficiality imagined. Not like little Miss Butterfly! Oh, no, not like little Miss Butterfly!

But still, there are keys and keys in music ; and if every tune was pitched to the self-same key, even the tenderest, what a monotonous, dreary world it would be to live and sing in after all. Perhaps a man might make himself a little shrine not wholly without sweet savour of pure incense for beautiful, stately, queenlike Hilda Tregellis too ! But no ; I mustn't think of it. I have no other duty or prospect in life possible as yet while dear little Miss Butterfly still remains practically unprovided for !'

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

## HOPE.

FROM Edie Le Breton's lodgings, Hilda Tregellis drove straight, without stopping all the way, to Arthur Berkeley's house at Chelsea; for Arthur had long since risen to the dignity of an enfranchised householder, and had bought himself a pretty cottage near the Embankment, with room enough for himself and the Progenitor, and even for any possible future domestic contingency in the way of wife and children. It was a very unconventional thing for her to do, no doubt; but Lady Hilda was certainly not the person to be deterred from doing anything she contemplated on the bare ground of its extreme unconventionality; and so far

was she from objecting personally to her visit on this score, that before she rang the Berkeleys' bell she looked quietly at her little bijou watch, and said with a bland smile to the suspicious Mr. Jenkins, 'Let me see, Jenkins; it's one o'clock. I shall lunch with my friends here this morning; so you may take the carriage home now for my lady, and I shall cab it back, or come round by Metropolitan' Jenkins was too much accustomed to Lady Hilda's unaccountable vagaries to express any surprise at her wildest resolutions, even if she had proposed to go home on a costermonger's barrow; so he only touched his hat respectfully, in his marionette fashion, and drove away at once without further colloquy.

'Is Mr. Berkeley at home?' Hilda asked of the pretty servant girl who opened the door to her, mentally taking note at the same time that Arthur's æsthetic tendencies evidently extended even to his human surroundings.



‘Which Mr. Berkeley?’ the girl asked in reply. ‘Mr. Berkeley senerer, ’e’s at ’ome, but Mr. Arthur, ’e’s gone up this mornin’ to ’Olloway.’

Hilda seized with avidity upon this unexpected and almost providential opening. ‘No, is he?’ she said, delighted. ‘Then I’ll go in and see Mr. Berkeley senior. No card, thank you: no name: tell him merely a lady would like to see him. I dare say Mr. Arthur’ll be back before long from Holloway.’

The girl hesitated a moment as if in doubt, and surveyed Lady Hilda from head to foot. Hilda, whose eyes were still red from crying, couldn’t help laughing outright at the obvious cause of the girl’s hesitation. ‘Do as I tell you,’ she said in her imperious way. ‘Who on earth do you take me for, my good girl? That’s my card, see; but you needn’t give it to Mr. Berkeley, senior. Now go and tell him at once that a lady is waiting to see him.’

The innate respect of the English working classes for the kind of nobility that is supposed to be represented by the British peerage made the girl drop an instinctive curtsey as she looked at the card, and answer in a voice of hushed surprise, 'Yes, my lady.' She had heard Lady Hilda Tregellis spoken of more than once at her master's table, and she knew, of course, that so great a personage as that could do no wrong. So she merely ushered her visitor at once into Arthur Berkeley's beautiful little study, with its delicate grey pomegranate wall paper and its exquisite unpolished oak fittings, and said simply, in an overawed manner, 'A lady wishes to speak to you, sir.'

The old shoemaker looked up from the English translation of Ribot's 'Psychologie Anglaise Contemporaine,' with whose intricacies he was manfully struggling, and rose with native politeness to welcome Hilda.

'Good morning,' Hilda said, extending her

hand to him with one of her beaming disarming smiles, and annihilating all that was most obtrusively democratic in him at once by her pleasant manner. 'I'm a friend of your son's, Mr. Berkeley, and I've come here to see him about very particular private business—in short, on an errand of charity. Will he be long gone, do you know?'

'Not very,' the Progenitor answered, in a somewhat embarrassed manner, surveying her curiously. 'At least, I should think not. He's gone to Holloway for an hour or two, but I fancy he'll be back for two o'clock luncheon, Miss ——ur, I don't think I caught your name, did I?'

'To Holloway,' Hilda echoed, taking no notice of his suggested query. 'Oh, then he's gone to see the poor dear Le Bretons, of course. Why, that's just what I wanted to see him about. If you'll allow me then, I'll just stop and have lunch with you.'

‘The dickens you will,’ the Progenitor thought to himself in speechless astonishment. ‘That’s really awfully cool of you. However, I dare say it’s usual to invite oneself in the state of life that that boy Artie has gone and hoisted himself into, most unnaturally. A fine lady, no doubt, of their modern pattern; but in my day, up in Paddington, we should have called her a brazen hussey.—Certainly, if you will,’ he added aloud. ‘If you’ve come on any errand that will do any good to the Le Bretons, I’m sure my son’ll be delighted to see you. He’s greatly grieved at their unhappy condition.’

‘I’m afraid I’ve nothing much to suggest of any very practical sort,’ Hilda answered, with a slight sigh; ‘but at least I should like to talk with him about the matter. Something must be done for these two poor young people, you know, Mr. Berkeley. Something must really be done to help them.’

‘Then you’re interested in them, Miss—  
ur—ur—ah, yes—are you?’

‘Look at my eyes,’ Hilda said plumply.  
‘Are they very red, Mr. Berkeley?’

‘Well . . . . ur . . . . yes, if I may venture  
to say so to a lady,’ the old shoemaker  
answered hesitatingly, with unwonted gallantry.  
‘I should say they were a trifle, ur, just a  
trifle roseate, you know.’

‘Quite so,’ Hilda went on, seriously.  
‘That’s it. They’re red with crying. I’ve  
been crying like a baby all the morning  
with that poor, dear, sweet little angel of a  
Mrs. Le Breton.’

‘Then you’re a great friend of hers, I  
suppose,’ the Progenitor suggested mildly.

‘Never set eyes on her in my life before  
this morning, on the contrary,’ Hilda con-  
tinued in her garrulous fashion. ‘But, oh,  
Mr. Berkeley, if you’d only seen that dear  
little woman, crying as if her heart would break,

and telling me that dear Ernest was dying, actually dying; why—there—excuse me—I can't help it, you know; we women are always crying about something or other, aren't we?'

The old man laid his hand on hers quietly. 'Don't mind *me*, my dear,' he said with genuine tenderness. 'Don't mind me a bit; I'm only an old shoemaker, as I dare say you've heard before now; but I know you'll be the better for crying—women always are—and tears shed on somebody else's account are never thrown away, my dear, are they?'

Hilda took his hand between hers, and wiping her eyes once more whispered softly, 'No, Mr. Berkeley, no; perhaps they're not; but oh, they're so useless; so very, very, very useless. Do you know, I never felt my own powerlessness and helplessness in all my life so much as I did at that dear, patient little Mrs. Le Breton's this very morning. There I sat, knowing she was in dire need of money

for her poor husband, and wanting sufficient food and drink, perhaps, for herself, and him, and the dear darling baby; and in my hand in my muff I had my purse there with five tenners—Bank of England ten-pound notes, you know—fifty pounds altogether, rolled up inside it; and I would have given anything if only I could have pulled them out and made them a present to her then and there; and I couldn't, you see; and, oh, Mr. Berkeley, isn't it terrible to look at them? And then, before I left, poor Mr. Le Breton himself came in, and I was quite shocked to see him. I used to know him a few years ago, and even then he wasn't what you'd call robust by any means; but now, oh, dear me, he does look so awfully ill and haggard and miserable that it quite made me break down again, and I cried about him before his very face; and the moment I got away, I said to the coachman, "Jenkins, drive straight off to the Embankment

at Chelsea ;” and here I am, you see, waiting to talk with your clever son about it ; for, really, Mr. Berkeley, the poor Le Bretons haven’t got a single friend anywhere like your son Arthur.’

And then Lady Hilda went on to praise Arthur’s music to the Progenitor, and to speak of how much admired he was everywhere, and to hint that so much genius and musical power must of course be largely hereditary. Whereat the old man, not unmoved by her gentle insinuating flattery, at last confessed to his own lifelong musical tastes, and even casually acknowledged that the motive for one or two of the minor songs in the famous operas was not entirely of Arthur’s own unaided invention. And so, from one subject to another, they passed on so quickly, and hit it off with one another so exactly (for Hilda had a wonderful knack of leading up to everybody’s strong points), that long before lunch was ready, the Progenitor had been quite won over by the



fascinations of the brazen hussey, and was prepared to admit that she was really a very nice, kind, tender-hearted, intelligent, appreciative, and discriminating young lady. True, she had not read Mill or Fawcett, and was ignorant of the very name of Herbert Spencer ; but she had a vast admiration for his dear boy Artie, and she saw that he himself knew a thing or two in his own modest way, though he was only what the grand world she moved in would doubtless call an old superannuated journeyman shoemaker.

‘ Ah, yes, a shoemaker ! so I’ve heard somewhere, I fancy,’ Lady Hilda remarked brightly, when for the third time in the course of their conversation he informed her with great dignity, of the interesting fact ; ‘ how very delightful and charming that is, really, now isn’t it ? So original, you know, to make shoes instead of going into some useless profession, especially when you’re such a great

reader and student and thinker as you are—for I see you're a philosopher and a psychologist already, Mr. Berkeley'—Hilda considered it rather a bold effort on her part to pronounce the word 'psychologist' at the very first trial without stumbling; but though she was a little doubtful about the exact pronunciation of that fearful vocable, she felt quite at her ease about the fact at least, because she carefully noticed him lay down Ribot on the table beside him, name upward; 'one can't help finding that much out on a very short acquaintance, can one? Though, indeed, now I come to think of it, I believe I've heard often that men of your calling generally *are* very fond of reading, and are very philosophical, and clever, and political, and all that sort of thing; and they say that's the reason, of course, why Northampton's such an exceptionally intelligent constituency, and always returns such thorough-going able logical Radicals.'

The old man's eyes beamed, as she spoke, with inexpressible pride and pleasure. 'I'm very glad indeed to hear you say so,' he answered promptly with a complacent self-satisfied smile, 'and I believe you're right too, Miss, ur—ur—ur—quite so. The practice of shoemaking undoubtedly tends to develop a very high and exceptional level of general intelligence and logical power.'

'I'm sure of it,' Hilda answered demurely, in a tone of the deepest and sincerest conviction; 'and when I heard somebody say somewhere that your son was . . .—well, *was* your son, I said to myself at once, "Ah, well, there now, that quite accounts, of course, for young Mr. Berkeley's very extraordinary and unusual abilities!'

'She's really a most sensible, well-informed young woman, whoever she is,' the Progenitor thought to himself silently; 'and it's certainly a pity that dear Artie couldn't take a fancy to

some nice, appreciative, kind-hearted, practical girl like that now, instead of wearing away all the best days of his life in useless regret for that poor slender, unsubstantial nonentity of a watery little Mrs. Le Breton.'

By two o'clock lunch was ready, and just as it had been announced, Arthur Berkeley ran up the front steps, and let himself in with his proprietary latch-key. Turning straight into the dining-room, he was just in time to see his own father walking into lunch arm in arm with Lady Hilda Tregellis. As Mrs. Hallis had graphically expressed it, he felt as if you might have knocked him down with a feather! Was she absolutely ubiquitous, then, this pervasive Lady Hilda? and was he destined wherever he went to come upon her suddenly in the most unexpected and incomprehensible situations?

'Will you sit down here, my dear,' the Progenitor was saying to Hilda at the exact

moment he entered, 'or would you prefer your back to the fire?'

Arthur Berkeley opened his eyes wide with unspeakable amazement. 'What, *you* here,' he exclaimed, coming forward suddenly to shake hands with Hilda; 'why, I saw you only a couple of hours since at the Le Bretons' at Holloway.'

'You did!' Hilda cried with almost equal astonishment. 'Why, how was that? I never saw *you*.'

Arthur sighed quietly. 'No,' he answered, with a curious look at the Progenitor; 'you were engaged when I opened the door, and I didn't like to disturb you. You were—you were speaking with poor little Mrs. Le Breton. But I'm so much obliged to you for your kindness to them, Lady Hilda; so very much obliged to you for your great kindness to them.'

It was the Progenitor's turn now to start in

surprise. 'What! Lady Hilda!' he cried with a bewildered look. 'Lady Hilda! Did I hear you say "Lady Hilda"? Is this Lady Hilda Tregellis, then, that I've heard you talk about so often, Artie?'

'Why, of course, Father. You didn't know who it was, then, didn't you? Lady Hilda, I'm afraid you've been stealing a march upon the poor unsuspecting hostile Progenitor.'

'Not quite that, Mr. Berkeley,' Hilda replied, laughing; 'only after the very truculent character I had heard of your father as a regular red-hot militant Radical, I thought I'd better not send in my name to him at once for fear it might prejudice him against me before first acquaintance.'

The Progenitor looked at her steadfastly from head to foot, standing before him there in her queenly beauty, as if she were some strange wild beast that he had been requested to inspect and report upon for a scientific purpose.

‘Lady Hilda Tregellis!’ he said slowly and deliberately ; ‘Lady Hilda Tregellis! So this is Lady Hilda Tregellis, is it? Well, all I can say is this, then, that as far as I can judge her, Lady Hilda Tregellis is a very sensible, modest, intelligent, well-conducted young woman, which is more than I could possibly have expected from a person of her unfortunate and distressing hereditary antecedents. But you know, my dear, it was a very mean trick of you to go and take an old man’s heart by guile and stratagem in that way!’

Hilda laughed a little uneasily. The Progenitor’s manner was perhaps a trifle too open and unconventional even for her. ‘It wasn’t for that I came, Mr. Berkeley,’ she said again with one of her sunny smiles, which brought the Progenitor metaphorically to her feet again, ‘but to talk over this matter of the poor Le Bretons with your son. Oh, Mr. Arthur, something must really be done to help

them. I know you say there's nothing to be done ; but there must be ; we must find it out ; we must invent it ; we must compel it. When I sat there this morning with that dear little woman and saw her breaking her full heart over her husband's trouble, I said to myself, somehow, Hilda Tregellis, if you can't find a way out of this, you're not worth your salt in this world, and you'd better make haste and take a rapid through-ticket at once to the next, if there is one.'

'Which is more than doubtful, really,' the Progenitor muttered softly half under his breath ; 'which, as Strauss has conclusively shown, is certainly a good deal more than doubtful.'

Arthur took no notice of the interruption, but merely answered imploringly, with a despairing gesture of his hands, 'What are we to do, Lady Hilda? What can we possibly do?'



‘Why, sit down and have some lunch first,’ Hilda rejoined with practical common-sense, ‘and then talk it over rationally afterwards, instead of wringing our hands helplessly like a pair of Frenchmen in a street difficulty.’ (Hilda had a fine old crusted English contempt, by the way, for those vastly inferior and foolish creatures known as foreigners.)

Thus adjured, Berkeley sat down promptly, and they proceeded to take counsel together in this hard matter over the cutlets and claret provided before them. ‘Ernest and Mrs. Le Breton told me all about your visit,’ Arthur went on, soon after; ‘and they’re so much obliged to you for having taken the trouble to look them up in their sore distress. Do you know, Lady Hilda, I think you’ve quite made a conquest of our dear little friend, Mrs. Le Breton.’

‘I don’t know about that,’ Hilda responded with a smile, ‘but I’m sure, at any rate, that

the sweet little woman quite made a conquest of me, Mr. Berkeley. In fact, I can't say what you think, but for my part I'm determined an effort must be made one way or another to save them.'

'It's no use,' Arthur answered, shaking his head sadly; 'it can't be done. There's nothing for it but to let them float down helplessly with the tide, wherever it may bear them.'

'Stuff and nonsense,' Hilda replied energetically. 'All rubbish, utter rubbish, and if I were a man as you are, Mr. Berkeley, I should be ashamed to take such a desponding view of the situation. If we say it's got to be done, it will be done, and that's an end of it. Work must and can be found for him somehow or somewhere.'

'But the man's dying,' Arthur interrupted with a vehement gesture. 'There's no more work left in him. The only thing that's any use is to send him off to Madeira, or Egypt, or

Catania, or somewhere of that sort, and let him die quietly among the palms and cactuses and aloes. That's Sir Antony Wraxall's opinion, and surely nobody in London can know half as well as he does about the matter.'

'Sir Antony's a fool,' Hilda responded with refreshing bluntness. 'He knows nothing on earth at all about it. He's accustomed to prescribing for a lot of us idle good-for-nothing rich people'—('Very true,' the Progenitor assented parenthetically;) 'and he's got into a fixed habit of prescribing a Nile voyage, just as he's got into a fixed habit of prescribing old wine, and carriage exercise, and ten thousand a year to all his patients. What Mr. Le Breton really wants is not Egypt, or old wine, or Sir Antony, or anything of the sort, but relief from this pressing load of anxiety and responsibility. Put him in my hands for six months, and I'll back myself at a hundred to six against Sir Antony to cure him for a monkey.'

‘For a what?’ the Progenitor asked with a puzzled expression of countenance.

‘Back myself for a monkey, you know,’ Hilda answered, without perceiving the cause of the old man’s innocent confusion.

The Progenitor was evidently none the wiser still for Hilda’s answer, though he forbore to pursue the subject any farther, lest he should betray his obvious ignorance of aristocratic manners and dialect.

But Arthur looked up at Lady Hilda with something like the gleam of a new-born hope on his distressed features. ‘Lady Hilda,’ he said almost cheerfully, ‘you really speak as if you had some practicable plan actually in prospect. It seems to me, if anybody can pull them through, you can, because you’ve got such a grand reserve of faith and energy. What is it, now, you think of doing?’

‘Well,’ Hilda answered, taken a little aback at this practical question, ‘I’ve hardly

got my plan matured yet ; but I've got a plan ; and I thought it all out as far as it went as I came along here just now in the carriage. The great thing is, we must inspire Mr. Le Breton with a new confidence ; we must begin by showing him we believe in him, and letting him see that he may still manage in some way or other to retrieve himself. He has lost all hope : we must begin with him over again. I've got an idea, but it'll take money. Now, I can give up half my allowance for the next year—the Le Bretons need never know anything about it—that'll be something : you're a rich man now, I believe, Mr. Berkeley ; will you make up as much as I do, if my plan seems a feasible one to you for retrieving the position ?'

The Progenitor answered quickly for him : ' Miss Tregellis,' he said, with a little tremor in his voice, ' —you'll excuse me, my dear, but it's against my principles to call anybody my lady :

—he will, I know he will; and if he wouldn't, why, my dear, I'd go back to my cobbling and earn it myself rather than that you or your friends should go without it for a single minute.'

Arthur said nothing, but he bowed his head silently. What a lot of good there was really in that splendid woman, and what a commanding, energetic, masterful way she had about her! To a feckless, undecided, faltering man like Arthur Berkeley there was something wonderfully attractive and magnificent, after all, in such an imperious resolute woman as Lady Hilda.

'Then this is my plan,' Hilda went on hastily. 'We must do something that'll take Mr. Le Breton out of himself for a short time entirely—that'll give him occupation of a kind he thinks right, and at the same time put money in his pocket. Now, he's always talking about this socialistic business of his; but why

doesn't he tell us what he has actually seen about the life and habits of the really poor? Mrs. Le Breton tells me he knows the East End well: why doesn't he sit down and give us a good rattling, rousing, frightening description of all that's in it? Of course, I don't care twopence about the poor myself—not in the lump, I mean—I beg your pardon, Mr. Berkeley,'—for the Progenitor gave a start of surprise and astonishment—'you know we women are nothing if not concrete; we never care for anything in the abstract, Mr. Le Breton used to tell me; we want the particular case brought home to our sympathies before we can interest ourselves about it. After all, even *you* who are men don't feel very much for all the miserable wretched people there are in China, you know; they're too far away for even you to bother your heads about. But I *do* care about the Le Bretons, and it strikes me we might help them a little in this way. I know a

lot of artists, Mr. Berkeley; and I know one who I think would just do for the very work I want to set him. (He's poor, too, by the way, and I don't mind giving him a lift at the same time and killing two birds with one stone.) Very well, then; I go to him, and say, "Mr. Verney," I say,—there now, I didn't mean to tell you his name, but no matter; "Mr. Verney," I shall say, "a friend of mine in the writing line is going to pay some visits to the very poor quarters in the East End, and write about it, which will make a great noise in the world as sure as midday."'

'But how do you know it will?' asked the Progenitor, simply.

Hilda turned round upon him with an unfeigned look of startled astonishment. 'How do I know it will?' she said confidently. 'Why, because I mean it to, Mr. Berkeley. Because I say it shall. Because I choose to make it. Two Cabinet ministers shall quote it



in the House, and a duke shall write letters to the "Times" denouncing it as an intensely wicked and revolutionary publication. If I choose to float it, I *will* float it.—Well, "Mr. Verney," I say for example, "will you undertake to accompany him and make sketches? It'll be unpleasant work, I know, because I've been there myself to see, and the places don't smell nice at all—worse than Genoa or the old town at Nice even, I can tell you: but it'll make you a name; and in any case the publisher who's getting it up 'll pay you well for it." Of course, Mr. Verney says "Yes." Then we go on to Mr. Le Breton and say, "A young artist of my acquaintance is making a pilgrimage into the East End to see for himself how the people live, and to make pictures of them to stir up the sluggish consciences of the lazy aristocrats"—that's me and my people, of course: that'll be the way to work it. Play upon Mr. Le Breton's tenderest feelings. Make

him feel he's fighting for the Cause ; and he'll be ready to throw himself, heart and soul, into the spirit of the project. I don't care twopence about the Cause myself, of course, so that's flat, and I don't pretend to, either, Mr. Berkeley ; but I care a great deal for the misery of that poor, dear, pale little woman, sitting there with me this morning and regularly sobbing her heart out ; and if I can do anything to help her, why, I shall be only too delighted.'

'Le Breton's a well-meaning young fellow, certainly,' the Progenitor murmured gently in a voice of graceful concession ; 'and I believe his heart's really in the Cause, as you call it ; but you know, my dear, he's very far from being sound in his economical views as to the relations of capital and labour. Far from sound, as John Stuart Mill would have judged the question, I can solemnly assure you.'

'Very well,' Hilda went on, almost without

noticing the interruption. 'We shall say to him, or rather we shall get our publisher to say to him, that as he's interested in the matter, and knows the East End well, he has been selected—shall we put it on somebody's recommendation?—to accompany the artist, and to supply the reading matter, the letterpress I think you call it; in fact, to write up to our illustrator's pictures; and that he is to be decently paid for his trouble. He must do something graphic, something stirring, something to wake up lazy people in the West End to a passing sense of what he calls their responsibilities. That'll seem like real work to Mr. Le Breton. It'll put new heart into him; he'll take up the matter vigorously; he'll do it well; he'll write a splendid book; and I shall guarantee its making a stir in the world this very dull season. What's the use of knowing half the odiously common-place bores and prigs in all London if you can't float a

single little heterodox pamphlet for a particular purpose? What do you think of it, Mr. Berkeley?’

Arthur sighed again. ‘It seems to me, Lady Hilda,’ he said, regretfully, ‘a very slender straw indeed to hang Ernest Le Breton’s life on: but any straw is better than nothing to a drowning man. And you have so much faith yourself, and mean to fling yourself into it so earnestly, that I shouldn’t be wholly surprised if you were somehow to pull it through. If you do, Lady Hilda—if you manage to save these two poor young people from the verge of starvation—you’ll have done a very great good work in your day, and you’ll have made me personally eternally your debtor.’

Was it mere fancy, the Progenitor wondered, or did Hilda cast her eyes down a little and half blush as she answered in a lower and more tremulous tone than usual, ‘I hope I shall, Mr. Berkeley; for their sakes, I hope I shall.’

The Progenitor didn't feel quite certain about it, but somehow, more than once that evening, as he sat reading Spencer's 'Data of Ethics' in his easy-chair, a curious vision of Lady Hilda as a future daughter-in-law floated vaguely with singular persistence before the old shoemaker's bewildered eyes. 'It'd be a shocking falling away on Artie's part from his father's principles,' he muttered inarticulately to himself several times over; 'and yet, on the other hand, I can't deny that this bit of a Tregellis girl is really a very tidy, good-looking, respectable, well-meaning, intelligent, and appreciative sort of a young woman, who'd, maybe, make Artie as good a wife as anybody else he'd be likely to pitch on.'

## CHAPTER XXXV.

## THE TIDE TURNS.

WHEN Ernest Le Breton got a letter from the business house of a well-known publishing firm, asking him whether he would consent to supply appropriate letterpress for an illustrated work on the poor of London, then in course of preparation, his delight and relief were positively unbounded. That anyone should come and ask him for work, instead of his asking them, was in itself a singular matter for surprise and congratulation; that the request should be based on the avowed ground of his known political and social opinions was almost incredible. Ernest felt that it was a triumph, not only for him, but for his dearly-loved

principles and beliefs as well. For the first time in his life, he was going to undertake a piece of work which he not only thought not wrong, but even considered hopeful and praiseworthy. Arthur Berkeley, who called round as if by accident the same morning, saw with delight that Lady Hilda's prognostication seemed likely to be fulfilled, and that if only Ernest could be given some congenial occupation there was still a chance, after all, for his permanent recovery ; for it was clear enough that as there was hope, there must be a little life yet left in him.

It was Lady Hilda who, as she herself expressively phrased it, had squared the publishers. She had called upon the head of the well-known house in person, and had told him fully and frankly exactly what was the nature of the interest she took in the poor of London. At first the publisher was scandalised and obdurate : the thing was not regular, he said—

not in the ordinary way of business ; his firm couldn't go writing letters of that sort to unknown young authors and artists. If she wanted the work done, she must let them give her own name as the promoter of the undertaking. But Hilda persevered, as she always did ; she smiled, pleaded, cajoled, threatened, and made desperate love to the publisher to gain his acquiescence in her benevolent scheme. After all, even publishers are only human (though authors have been frequently known to deny the fact) ; and human nature, especially in England, is apt to be very little proof against the entreaties of a pretty girl who happens also to be an earl's daughter. So in the end, when Lady Hilda said most bewitchingly, 'I put it upon the grounds of a personal favour, Mr. Percival,' the obdurate publisher gave way at last, and consented to do her bidding gladly.

For six weeks Ernest went daily with Ronald and the young artist into the familiar



slums of Bethnal Green, and Bermondsey, and Lambeth, whose ins and outs he was beginning to know with painful accuracy; and every night he came back, and wrote down with a glowing pen all that he had seen and heard of distressing and terrible during his day's peregrination. It was an awful task from one point of view, for the scenes he had to visit and describe were often heart-rending; and Arthur feared more than once that the air of so many loathsome and noxious dens might still further accelerate the progress of Ernest's disease; but Lady Hilda said emphatically, No; and somehow Arthur was beginning now to conceive an immense respect for the practical value of Lady Hilda's vehement opinions. As a matter of fact, indeed, Ernest did not visibly suffer at all either from the unwonted hard work or from the strain upon mind and body to which he had been so little accustomed. Distressing as it all was, it was change, it was variety, it was

occupation, it was relief from that terrible killing round of perpetual personal responsibility. Above all, Ernest really believed that here at last was an opportunity of doing some practical good in his generation, and he threw himself into it with all the passionate ardour of a naturally eager and vivid nature. The enthusiasm of humanity was upon him, and it kept him going at high-pressure rate, with no apparent loss of strength and vigour throughout the whole ordeal. To Arthur Berkeley's intense delight, he was even visibly fatter to the naked eye at the end of his six weeks' exploration of the most dreary and desolate slums in all London.

The book was written at white heat, as the best of such books always are, and it was engraved and printed at the very shortest possible notice. Terrible and ghastly it certainly was at last—instinct with all the grim local colouring of those narrow, squalid, fever-stricken dens,

where misfortune and crime huddle together indiscriminately in dirt and misery—a book to make one's blood run cold with awe and disgust, and to stir up even the callous apathy of the great rich capitalist West End to a passing moment's ineffective remorse; but very clever and very graphic after its own sort beyond the shadow of a question, for all its horror. When Arthur Berkeley turned over the first proof-sheets of 'London's Shame,' with its simple yet thrilling recital of true tales taken down from the very lips of outcast children or stranded women, with its awful woodcuts and still more awful descriptions—word-pictures reeking with the vice and filth and degradation of the most pestilent, overcrowded, undrained tenements—he felt instinctively that Ernest Le Breton's book would not need the artificial aid of Lady Hilda's influential friends in order to make it successful and even famous. The Cabinet ministers might be as silent as they chose, the

indignant duke might confine his denunciations to the attentive and sympathetic ear of his friend Lord Connemara ; but nothing on earth could prevent Ernest Le Breton's fiery and scathing diatribe from immediately enthraling the public attention. Lady Hilda had hit upon the exact subject which best suited his peculiar character and temperament, and he had done himself full justice in it. Not that Ernest had ever thought of himself, or even of his style, or the effect he was producing by his narrative ; it was just the very non-self-consciousness of the thing that gave it its power. He wrote down the simple thoughts that came up into his own eager mind at the sight of so much inequality and injustice ; and the motto that Arthur prefixed upon the title-page, 'Facit indignatio versum,' aptly described the key-note of that fierce and angry final denunciation. 'Yes, Lady Hilda had certainly hit the right nail on the head,' Arthur Berkeley said to himself more

than once : ‘ A wonderful woman, truly, that beautiful, stately, uncompromising, brilliant, and still really tender Hilda Tregellis.’

Hilda, on her part, worked hard and well for the success of Ernest’s book as soon as it appeared. Nay, she even condescended (not being what Ernest himself would have described as an ethical unit) to practise a little gentle hypocrisy in suiting her recommendations of ‘ London’s Shame ’ to the tastes and feelings of her various acquaintances. To her Radical Cabinet minister friend, she openly praised its outspoken zeal for the cause of the people, and its value as a wonderful storehouse of useful facts at first hand for political purposes in the increasingly important outlying Metropolitan boroughs. ‘ Just think, Sir Edmund,’ she said, persuasively, ‘ how you could crush any Conservative candidate for Hackney or the Tower Hamlets out of that awful chapter on the East End match-makers ;’ while with the Duke,

to whom she presented a marked copy as a sample of what our revolutionary thinkers were really coming to, she insisted, rather upon its wicked interference with the natural rights of landlords, and its abominable insinuation (so subversive of all truly English ideas as to liberty and property) that they were bound not to poison their tenants by total neglect of sanitary precautions. 'If I were you, now,' she said to the Duke in the most seemingly simple-minded manner possible, 'I'd just quote those passages I've marked in pencil in the House to-night on the Small Urban Holdings Bill, and point out how the wave of Continental Socialism is at last invading England with its devastating flood.' And the Duke, who was a complacent, thick-headed, obstinate old gentleman, congenitally incapable of looking at any question from any other point of view whatsoever except that of his own order, fell headlong passively into Lady Hilda's cruel little trap, and

murmured to himself as he rolled down luxuriously to the august society of his peers that evening, 'Tremendous clever girl, Hilda Tregellis, really. "Wave of Continental Socialism at last invading England with its what-you-may-call-it flood," she said, if I remember rightly. Capital sentence to end off one's speech with, I declare. Devizes'll positively wonder where I got it from. I'd no idea before that girl took such an intelligent interest in political questions. So they want their cottages whitewashed, do they? What'll they ask for next, I wonder? Do they think we're to be content at last with one and a-half per cent. upon the fee-simple value of our estates, I should like to know? Why, some of the places this writer-fellow talks about are on my own property in The Rookery—"one of the most noisome court-yards in all London," he actually calls it. Whitewash their cottages, indeed! The lazy improvident creatures!

They'll be asking us to put down encaustic tiles upon the floors next, and to paper their walls with Japanese leather or fashionable dados. Really, the general ignorance that prevails among the working classes as to the clearest principles of political economy is something absolutely appalling, absolutely appalling. And his Grace scribbled a note in his memorandum-book of Hilda's ready-made peroration, for fear he should forget its precise wording before he began to give the House the benefit of his views that night upon the political economy of Small Urban Holdings.

Next morning, all London was talking of the curious coincidence by which a book from the pen of an unknown author, published only one day previously, had been quoted and debated upon simultaneously in both Houses of Parliament on a single evening. In the Commons, Sir Edmund Calverley, the distinguished Radical minister, had read a dozen



pages from the unknown work in his declamatory theatrical fashion, and had so electrified the House with its graphic and horrible details that even Mr. Fitzgerald-Grenville, the well-known member for the Baroness Drummond-Lloyd (whose rotten or at least decomposing borough of Cherbury Minor he faithfully represented in three successive Parliaments), had mumbled out a few half-inaudible apologetic sentences about this state of things being truly deplorable, and about the necessity for meeting such a distressing social crisis by the prompt and vigorous application of that excellent specific and familiar panacea, a spirited foreign policy. In the Lords, the Duke himself, by some untoward coincidence, had been moved to make a few quotations, accompanied by a running fire of essentially ducal criticism, from the very selfsame obscure author; and to his immense surprise, even the members of his own party moved uneasily in their seats during the

course of his speech ; while later in the evening, Lord Devizes muttered to him angrily in the robing room, ‘ Look here, Duke, you’ve been and put your foot in it, I assure you, about that Radical book you were ill-advised enough to quote from. You ought never to have treated the Small Urban Holdings Bill in the way you did ; and just you mark my words, the papers’ll all be down upon you to-morrow morning, as sure as daylight. You’ve given the “Bystander” such an opening against you as you’ll never forget till your dying day, I can tell you.’ And as the Duke drove back again after his arduous legislative efforts that evening, he said to himself between the puffs at his Havana, ‘ This comes, now, of allowing oneself to be made a fool of by a handsome woman. How the dooce I could ever have gone and taken Hilda Tregellis’s advice on a political question is really more than I can fathom :— and at my time of life too ! And yet, all the same,

there's no denying that she's a devilish fine woman, by Jove, if ever there was one.'

Of course, everybody asked themselves next day what this book 'London's Shame' was like, and who on earth its author could be ; so much so, indeed, that a large edition was completely exhausted within a fortnight. It was the great sensational success of that London season. Everybody read it, discussed it, dissected it, corroborated it, refuted it, fought over it, and wrote lengthy letters to all the daily papers about its faults and its merits. Imitators added their sincerest flattery ; rivals proclaimed themselves the original discoverers of 'London's Shame' : one enterprising author even thought of going to law about it as a question of copyright. Owners of noisome lanes in the East End trembled in their shoes, and sent their agents to inquire into the precise degree of squalor to be found in the filthy courts and alleys where they didn't care to trust their own

sensitive aristocratic noses. It even seemed as if a little real good was going to come at last out of Ernest Le Breton's impassioned pleading—as if the sensation were going to fall not quite flat at the end of its short run in the clubs and drawing-rooms of London as a nine days' wonder.

And Ernest Le Breton? and Edie? In the little lodgings at Holloway, they sat first trembling for the result, and ready to burst with excitement when Lady Hilda, up at the unwonted hour of six in the morning, tore into their rooms with an early copy of the 'Times' to show them the Duke's speech, and Sir Edmund's quotations, and the editorial leader in which even that most dignified and reticent of British journals condescended to speak with studiously moderated praise of the immense collection of facts so ably strung together by Mr. Ernest Le Breton (in all the legible glory of small capitals, too,) as to the undoubtedly disgraceful condition of some at least among

our London alleys. How Edie clung around Lady Hilda and kissed her! and how Lady Hilda kissed her back and cried over her with tears of happier augury! and how they both kissed and cried over unconscious wondering little Dot! And how Lady Hilda could almost have fallen upon Ernest, too, as he sat gazing in blank astonishment and delight at his own name in the magnificent small capitals of a 'Times' leader. Between crying and laughing, with much efficient aid in both from good Mrs. Halliss, they hardly knew how they ever got through the long delightful hours of that memorable epoch-making morning.

And then there came the gradual awakening to the fact that this was really fame—fame, and perhaps also competence. First in the field, of course, was the editor of the 'Cosmopolitan Review,' with a polite request that Ernest would give the readers of that

intensely hot-and-hot and thoughtful periodical the opportunity of reading his valuable views on the East End outcast question, before they had had time to be worth nothing for journalistic purposes, through the natural and inevitable cooling of the public interest in this new sensation. Then his old friends of the 'Morning Intelligence' once more begged that he would be good enough to contribute a series of signed and headed articles to their columns, on the slums and fever-dens of poverty-stricken London. Next, an illustrated weekly asked him to join with his artist friend in getting up another pilgrimage into yet undiscovered metropolitan plague-spots. And so, before the end of a month, Ernest Le Breton, for the first time in his life, had really got more work to do than he could easily manage, and work, too, that he felt he could throw his whole life and soul into with perfect honesty.

When the first edition of 'London's Shame'

was exhausted, there was already a handsome balance to go to Ernest and his artist coadjutor, who, by the terms of the agreement, were to divide between them half the profits. The other half, for appearance' sake, Lady Hilda and Arthur had been naturally compelled to reserve for themselves: for of course it would not have been probable that any publisher would have undertaken the work without any hope of profit in any way. Arthur called upon Hilda at Lord Exmoor's house in Wilton Place to show her the first balance-sheet and accompanying cheque. 'What on earth can we do with it?' he asked seriously. 'We can't divide it between us: and yet we can't give it to the poor Le Bretons. I don't see how we're to manage.'

'Why, of course,' Hilda answered promptly. 'Put it into the Consols or whatever you call it, for the benefit of little Dot.'

'The very thing!' Arthur answered in a

tone of obvious admiration. 'What a wonderfully practical person you really are, Lady Hilda.'

As to Ernest and Edie, when they got their own cheque for their quarter of the proceeds, they gazed in awe and astonishment at the bigness of the figure; and then they sat down and cried together like two children, with their hands locked in one another's.

'And you'll get well, now, Ernest dear,' Edie whispered gently. 'Why, you're ever so much fatter, darling, already. I'm sure you'll get well in no time, now, Ernest.'

'Upon my word, Edie,' Ernest answered, kissing her white forehead tenderly, 'I really and truly believe I shall. It's my opinion that Sir Antony Wraxall's an unmitigated ignorant humbug.'

A few weeks later, when Ernest's remarkable article on 'How to Improve the



Homes of the Poor' appeared in one of the leading magazines, Mr. Herbert Le Breton of the Education Office looked up from his cup of post-prandial coffee in his comfortable dining-room at South Kensington, and said musingly to his young wife, 'Do you know, Ethel, it seems to me that my brother Ernest's going to score a success at last with this slum-hunting business that he's lately invented. There's an awful lot about it now in all the papers and reviews. Perhaps it might be as well, after all, to scrape an acquaintance with him again, especially as he's my own brother. There's no knowing, really, when a man of his peculiar ill-regulated mercurial temperament may be going to turn out famous. Don't you think you'd better find out where they're living now—they've left Holloway, no doubt, since this turn of the tide—and go and call upon Mrs. Ernest?'

Whereto Mrs. Herbert Le Breton, raising

her eyes for a moment from the pages of her last new novel, answered languidly: 'Don't you think, Herbert, it'd be better to wait a little while and see how things turn out with them in the long run, you know, before we commit ourselves by going to call upon them? One swallow, you see, doesn't make a summer, does it, dear, ever?' Whence the acute and intelligent reader will doubtless conclude that Mrs. Herbert Le Breton was a very prudent sensible young woman, and that perhaps even Herbert himself had met at last with his fitting Nemesis. For what worse purgatory could his bitterest foe wish for a selfishly prudent and cold-hearted man, than that he should pass his whole lifetime in congenial intercourse with a selfishly prudent and cold-hearted wife, exactly after his own pattern?

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

## OUT OF THE HAND OF THE PHILISTINES.

ERNEST'S unexpected success with 'London's Shame' was not, as Arthur Berkeley at first feared it might be, the mere last dying flicker of a weak and failing life. Arthur was quite right, indeed, when he said one day to Lady Hilda that its very brilliancy and fervour had the hectic glow about it, as of a man who was burning himself out too fiercely and rapidly; you could read the feverish eagerness of the writer in every line; but still, Lady Hilda answered with her ordinary calm assurance that it was all going well, and that Ernest only needed the sense of security to pull him round again; and as usual, Lady Hilda's practical

sagacity was not at fault. The big pamphlet—for it was hardly more than that—soon proved an opening for further work, in procuring which Hilda and Arthur were again partially instrumental. An advanced Radical member of Parliament, famous for his declamations against the capitalist faction, and his enormous holding of English railway stock, was induced to come forward as the founder of a new weekly paper, ‘in the interest of social reform.’ Of course the thing was got up solely with an idea to utilising Ernest as editor, for, said the great anti-capitalist with his usual charming frankness, ‘the young fellow has a positive money-value, now, if he’s taken in hand at once before the sensation’s over, and there can be no harm in turning an honest penny by exploiting him, you know, and starting a popular paper.’ When Ernest was offered the post of editor to the new periodical, at a salary which almost alarmed him by its

plutocratic magnificence (for it was positively no less than six hundred a year), he felt for a moment some conscientious scruples about accepting so splendid a post. And when Lady Hilda in her emphatic fashion promptly overruled these nascent scruples by the application of the very simple solvent formula, 'Bosh!' he felt bound at least to stipulate that he should be at perfect liberty to say whatever he liked in the new paper, without interference or supervision from the capitalist proprietor. To which the Radical member, in his business capacity, immediately responded, 'Why, certainly. What we want to pay you for is just your power of startling people, which, in its proper place, is a very useful marketable commodity. Every pig has its value—if only you sell it in the best market.'

'The Social Reformer, a Weekly Advocate of the New Economy,' achieved at once an immense success among the working classes,

and grew before long to be one of the most popular journals of the second rank in all London. The interest that Ernest had aroused by his big pamphlet was carried on to his new venture, which soon managed to gain many readers by its own intrinsic merits. ‘Seen your brother’s revolutionary broadsheet, *Le Breton*?’ asked a friend at the club of Herbert not many weeks later—he was the same person who had found it ‘so very embarrassing’ to recognise Ernest in his shabby days when walking with a Q.C.—‘It’s a dreadful tissue of the reddest French communism, I believe, but still, it’s scored the biggest success of its sort in journalism, I’m told, since the days of Kenealy’s “*Englishman*.” Bradbury, who’s found the money to start it—deuced clever fellow in his way, Bradbury!—is making an awful lot out of the speculation, they say. What do you think of the paper, eh?’

Herbert drew himself up grimly. ‘To tell

you the truth,' he said in his stiffest style, 'I haven't yet had time to look at a copy. Ernest Le Breton's not a man in whose affairs I feel called upon to take any special interest ; and I haven't put myself to the trouble of reading his second-hand political lucubrations. Faint echoes of Max Schurz, all of it, no doubt ; and having read and disposed of Schurz himself long ago, I don't feel inclined now to go in for a second supplementary course of Schurz and water.'

'Well, well, that may be so,' the friend answered, turning over the pages of the peccant periodical carelessly ; 'but all the same I'm afraid your brother's really going to do an awful lot of mischief in the way of setting class against class, and stirring up the dangerous orders to recognise their own power. You see, Le Breton, the real danger of this sort of thing lies in the fact that your brother Ernest's a more or less educated and cultivated person.

I don't say he's really got any genuine depth of culture—would you believe it, he told me once he'd never read Rabelais, and didn't want to?—and of course a man of true culture in the grain, like you and me now, my dear fellow, would never dream of going and mistaking these will-o'-the-wisps of socialism for the real guiding light of regenerated humanity—of course not. But the dangerous symptom at the present day lies just in the fact that while the papers written for the mob used to be written by vulgar, noisy, self-made, half-educated demagogues, they're sent out now with all the authority and specious respectability of decently instructed and comparatively literary English gentlemen. Now, nobody can deny that that's a thing very seriously to be regretted; and for my part I'm extremely sorry your brother has been ill-advised enough to join the mob that's trying to pull down our comfortably built and after all eminently respectable, even if



somewhat patched up, old British constitution.'

'The subject's one,' Herbert answered curtly, 'in which I for my part cannot pretend to feel the remotest personal interest.'

Ernest and Edie, however, in the little lodgings up at Holloway, which they couldn't bear to desert even now in this sudden burst of incredible prosperity, went their own way as self-containedly as usual, wholly unconcerned by the non-arrival of Mrs. Herbert on a visit of ceremony, or the failure of the 'Social Reformer' to pierce the lofty ethereal regions of abstract contemplation where Herbert himself sat throned like an Epicurean god in the pure halo of cultivated pococurantism. Every day, as that eminent medical authority, Hilda Tregellis, had truly prophesied, Ernest's cheeks grew less and less sunken, and a little colour returned slowly to their midst; while Edie's face was less pale than of old, and her smile

began to recover something of its old-fashioned girlish joyousness. She danced about once more as of old, and Arthur Berkeley, when he dropped in of a Sunday afternoon for a chat with Ernest, noticed with pleasure that little Miss Butterfly was beginning to flit round again almost as naturally as in the old days when he first saw her light little form among the grey old pillars of Magdalen Cloisters. Yet he couldn't help observing, too, that his feeling towards her was more one of mere benevolence now, and less of tender regret, than it used to be even a few short months before, in the darkest days of Edie's troubles. Could it be, he asked himself more than once, that the tall stately picture of Hilda Tregellis was overshadowing in his heart the natural photograph of that unwedded Edie Oswald that he once imagined was so firmly imprinted there? Ah well, ah well, it may be true that a man can love really but once in his whole lifetime ; and

yet, the second spurious imitation is positively sometimes a very good facsimile of the genuine first impression, for all that.

As the months went slowly round, too, the time came in the end for good Herr Max to be released at last from his long imprisonment. On the day that he came out, there was a public banquet at the Marylebone dancing-saloon; and all the socialists and communards were there, and all the Russian nihilists, and all the other wicked revolutionary plotters in all London: and in the chair sat Ernest Le Breton, now the editor of an important social paper, while at his left hand, to balance the guest of the evening, sat Arthur Berkeley, the well-known dramatic author, who was himself more than suspected of being the timid Nicodemus of the new faith. And when Ernest announced that Herr Schurz had consented to aid him on the 'Social Reformer,' and to add the wisdom of age to the im-

petuosity of youth in conducting its future, the simple enthusiasm of the wicked revolutionists knew no bounds. And they cried 'Hoch!' and 'Viva!' and 'Hooray!' and many other like inarticulate shouts in many varieties of interjectional dialect all the evening; and everybody agreed that after all Herr Max was *very* little grayer than before the trial, in spite of his long and terrible term of imprisonment.

He *was* a little embittered by his troubles, no doubt;—what can you expect if you clap men in prison for the expression of their honest political convictions?—but Ernest tried to keep his eye steadily rather on the future than on the past; and with greater ease and unwonted comforts the old man's cheerfulness as well as his enthusiasm gradually returned. 'I'm too old now to do anything more worth doing myself before I die,' he used to say, holding Ernest's arm tightly in his vice-like grip: 'but I have great hopes in spite of everything for

friend Ernest ; I have very great hopes indeed for friend Ernest here. There's no knowing yet what he may accomplish.'

Ernest only smiled a trifle sadly, and murmured half to himself that this was a hard world, and he began himself to fear there was no fitting feeling for a social reformer except one of a brave despair. 'We can do little or nothing, after all,' he said slowly ; 'and our only consolation must be that even that little is perhaps just worth doing.'

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

## LAND AT LAST : BUT WHAT LAND

LONG before the 'Social Reformer' had fully made its mark in the world, another event had happened of no less importance to some of the chief actors in the little drama whose natural termination it seemed to form. While the pamphlet and the paper were in course of maturation, Arthur Berkeley had been running daily in and out of the house in Wilton Place in what Lady Exmoor several times described as a positively disgraceful and unseemly manner. ('What Hilda can mean,' her ladyship observed to her husband more than once, 'by encouraging that odd young man's extraordinary advances in the way she does is really more

than I can understand even in her.')

But when the Le Bretons were fairly launched at last on the favourable flood of full prosperity, both Hilda and Arthur began to feel as though they had suddenly been deprived of a very pleasant common interest. After all, benevolent counsel on behalf of other people is not so entirely innocent and impersonal in certain cases as it seems to be at first sight. 'Do you know, Lady Hilda,' Berkeley said one afternoon, when he had come to pay, as it were, a sort of farewell visit, on the final completion of their joint schemes for restoring happiness to the home of the Le Bretons, 'our intercourse together has been very delightful, and I'm quite sorry to think that in future we must see so much less of one another than we've been in the habit of doing for the last month or so.'

Hilda looked at him straight and said in her own frank unaffected fashion, 'So am I, Mr. Berkeley, very sorry, very sorry indeed.'

Arthur looked back at her once more, and their eyes met. His look was full of admiration, and Hilda saw it. She moved a little uneasily upon the ottoman, waiting apparently as though she expected Arthur to say something else. But Arthur looked at her long and steadfastly, and said nothing.

At last he seemed to wake from his reverie, and make up his mind for a desperate venture. Could he be mistaken? Could he have read either record wrong—his own heart, or Hilda's eyes? No, no, both of them spoke to him too plainly and evidently. His heart was fluttering like a wind-shaken aspen-leaf; and Hilda's eyes were dimming visibly with a tender moisture. Yes, yes, yes, there was no misreading possible. He knew he loved her! he knew she loved him!

Bending over towards where Hilda sat, he took her hand in his dreamily: and Hilda let him take it without a movement. Then he



looked deeply into her eyes, and felt a curious speechlessness coming over him, deep down in the ball of his throat.

‘Lady Hilda,’ he began at last with an effort, in a low voice, not wholly untinged with natural timidity, ‘Lady Hilda, is a working man’s son——’

Hilda looked back at him with a sudden look of earnest deprecation. ‘Not that way, Mr. Berkeley,’ she said quietly: ‘not that way, please: you’ll hurt me if you do: you know that’s not the way *I* look at the matter. Why not simply “Hilda”?’

Berkeley clasped her hand eagerly and raised it to his lips. ‘Hilda, then,’ he said, kissing it twice over. ‘It *shall* be Hilda.’

Hilda rose and stood before him erect in all her queenlike beauty. ‘So now that’s settled,’ she said, with a vain endeavour to control her tears of joy. ‘Don’t let’s talk about it any more, now; I can’t bear to talk

about it: there's nothing to arrange, Arthur. Whenever you like will suit me. But, oh, I'm so happy, so happy, so happy—I never thought I could be so happy.'

'Nor I,' Arthur answered, holding her hand a moment in his tenderly.

'How strange,' Hilda said again, after a minute's delicious silence; 'it's the poor Le Bretons who have brought us two thus together. And yet, they were both once our dearest rivals. *You* were in love with Edie Le Breton: *I* was half in love with Ernest Le Breton: and now—why, now, Arthur, I *do* believe we're both utterly in love with one another. What a curious little comedy of errors!'

'And yet only a few months ago it came very near being a tragedy, rather,' Arthur put in softly.

'Never mind!' Hilda answered in her brightest and most joyous tone, as she wiped the joyful tears from her eyes. 'It isn't a

tragedy, now, after all, Arthur, and all's well that ends well !'

When the Countess heard of Hilda's determination—Hilda didn't pretend to go through the domestic farce of asking her mother's consent to her approaching marriage—she said that so far as she was concerned a more shocking or un-Christian piece of conduct on the part of a well-brought-up girl had never yet been brought to her knowledge. To refuse Lord Connemara, and then go and marry the son of a common cobbler! But the Earl only puffed away vigorously at his cheroot, and observed philosophically that for his part he just considered himself jolly well out of it. This young fellow Berkeley mightn't be a man of the sort of family Hilda would naturally expect to marry into, but he was decently educated and in good society, and above all, a gentleman, you know, don't you know: and, hang it all, in these days that's really everything. Besides,

Berkeley was making a pot of money out of these operas of his, the Earl understood, and as he had always expected that Hilda'd marry some penniless painter or somebody of that sort, and be a perpetual drag upon the family exchequer, he really didn't see why they need trouble their heads very much about it. By George, if it came to that, he rather congratulated himself that the girl hadn't taken it into her nonsensical head to run away with the groom or the stable-boy! As to Lynmouth, he merely remarked succinctly in his own dialect, 'Go it, Hilda, go it, my beauty. You always were a one-er, you know, and it's my belief you always will be.'

It was somewhere about the same time that Ronald Le Breton, coming back gladdened in soul from a cheerful talk with Ernest, called round of an evening in somewhat unwonted exultation at Selah's lodgings. 'Selah,' he said to her calmly, as she met him at the door to

let him in herself, 'I want to have a little talk with you.'

'What is it about, Ronald?' Selah asked, with a perfect consciousness in her own mind of what the subject he wished to discourse about was likely to be.

'Why, Selah,' Ronald went on in his quiet, matter-of-fact, unobtrusive manner, 'do you know, I think we may fairly consider Ernest and Edie out of danger now.'

'I hope so, Ronald,' Selah answered imperturbably. 'I've no doubt your brother'll get along all right in future, and I'm sure at least that he's getting stronger, for he looks ten per cent. better than he did three months ago.'

'Well, Selah!'

'Well, Ronald!'

'Why, in that case, you see, your objection falls to the ground. There can be no possible reason on either side why you should any

longer put off marrying me. We needn't consider Edie now; and you can't have any reasonable doubt that I want to marry you for your own sake this time.'

'What a nuisance the man is!' Selah cried impetuously. 'Always bothering a body out of her nine senses to go and marry him. Have you never read what Paul says, that it's good for the unmarried and widows to abide? He was always dead against the advisability of marriage, Paul was.'

'Brother Paul was an able and earnest preacher,' Ronald murmured gravely, 'from whose authority I should be sorry to dissent except for sufficient and weighty reason; but you *must* admit that on this particular question he was prejudiced, Selah, decidedly prejudiced, and that the balance of the best opinion goes distinctly the other way.'

Selah laughed lightly. 'Oh, does it?' she said, in her provoking, mocking manner.

‘Then you propose to marry me, I suppose, on the balance of the best Scriptural opinion.’

‘Not at all, Selah,’ Ronald replied without a touch of anything but grave earnestness in his tone—it must be admitted Ronald was distinctly lacking in the sense of humour. ‘Not at all, I assure you. I propose to marry you because I love you, and I believe in your heart of hearts you love me, too, you provoking girl, though you’re too proud or too incomprehensible ever to acknowledge it.’

‘And even if I do?’ Selah asked. ‘What then?’

‘Why, then, Selah,’ Ronald answered confidently, taking her hand boldly in his own and actually kissing her—yes, kissing her; ‘why, then, Selah, suppose we say Monday fortnight?’

‘It’s awfully soon,’ Selah replied, half grumbling. ‘You don’t give a body time to think it over.’

‘Certainly not,’ Ronald responded, quickly,

taking the handsome face firmly between his two spare hands, and kissing her lips half a dozen times over in rapid succession.

‘Let me go, Ronald,’ Selah cried, struggling to be free, and trying in vain to tear down his thin wiry arms with her own strong shapely hands. ‘Let me go at once, there’s a good boy, and I’ll marry you on Monday fortnight, or do anything else you like, just to keep you quiet. After all, you’re a kind-hearted fellow enough, and you want looking after and taking care of, and if you insist upon it, I don’t mind giving way to you in this small matter.’

Ronald stepped back a pace or two, and stood looking at her a little sadly with his hands folded. ‘Oh, Selah,’ he cried in a tone of bitter disappointment, ‘don’t speak like that to me, don’t, please. Don’t, don’t tell me that you don’t really love me—that you’re going to marry me for nothing else but out of mere compassion for my weakness and helplessness!’



Selah burst at once into a wild flood of uncontrollable tears: 'Oh, Ronald,' she cried in her old almost fiercely passionate manner, flinging her arms around his neck and covering him with kisses; 'Oh, Ronald, how can you ever ask me whether I really really love you! You know I love you! You know I love you! You've given me back life and everything that's dear in it, and I never want to live for anything any longer except to love you, and wait upon you, and make you happy. I'm stronger than you, Ronald, and I shall be able to do a little to make you happy, I do believe. My ways are not your ways, nor my thoughts your thoughts, my darling; but I love you all the better for that, Ronald, I love you all the better for that; and if you were to kick me, beat me, trample on me now, Ronald, I should love you, love you, love you for ever still.'

So they two were quietly married, with no audience save Ernest and Edie, on that very Monday fortnight.

When Herbert Le Breton heard of it from his mother a few days later, he went home at once to his own eminently cultured home and told Mrs. Le Breton the news, of course without much detailed allusion to Selah's earlier antecedents. 'And do you know, Ethel,' he added significantly, 'I think it was an excellent thing that you decided not to call after all upon Ernest's wife, for I'm sure it'll be a great deal safer for you and me to have nothing to say in any way to the whole faction of them. A greengrocer's daughter, you know — quite unpresentable. They'll be all mixed up together in future, which'll make it quite impossible to know the one without at the same time knowing the other. Now, it'd be just practicable for you to call upon Mrs. Ernest, I must admit, but to call upon Mrs. Ronald would be really and truly too inconceivable.'

At the end of the first year of the 'Social Reformer,' the annual balance was duly audited,

and it showed a very considerable and solid surplus to go into the pocket of the enterprising Radical proprietor. Ernest and Herr Max scanned it closely together, and even Ernest could not refrain from a smile of pleasure when he saw how thoroughly successful the doubtful venture had finally turned out. 'And yet,' he said regretfully, as he looked at the heavy balance-sheet, 'what a strange occupation after all for the author of "Gold and the Proletariate," to be looking carefully over the sum-total of a capitalist's final balance! To think, too, that all that money has come out of the hard-earned scraped-up pennies of the toiling poor! I often wish, Herr Max, that even so I had been brought up an honest shoemaker! But whether I'm really earning my salt at the hands of humanity now or not is a deep problem I often have many an uncomfortable internal sigh over to this day.'

'There is work and work, friend Ernest,'

Herr Max answered as gently as had been his wont in older years; 'and for my part it seems to me you are better here writing your Social Reformers than making shoes for a single generation. One man builds for to-day, another man builds for to-morrow; and he that plants a fruit tree for his children to eat of is doing as much good work in the world as he that sows the corn in spring to be reaped and eaten at this autumn's harvest.'

'Perhaps so,' Ernest answered softly. 'I wish I could think so. But after all I'm not quite sure whether, if we had all starved eighteen months ago together, as seemed so likely then, it wouldn't have been the most right thing in the end that could possibly have happened to all of us. As things are constituted now, there seems only one life that's really worth living for an honest man, and that's a martyr's. A martyr's or else a worker's. And I, I greatly fear, have managed somehow

to miss being either. The wind carries us this way and that, and when we would do that which is right, it drifts us away incontinently into that which is only profitable.'

'Dear Ernest,' Edie cried in her bright old-fashioned manner from the office door, 'Dot has come in her new frock to bring Daddy home for her birthday dinner as she was promised. Come quick, or your little daughter'll be very angry with you. And Lady Hilda Berkeley has come, too, to drive us back in her own brougham. Now don't be a silly, there's a dear, or say that you can't drive away from the office of the "Social Reformer" in Lady Hilda's brougham.'

THE END.

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