FARQUHARSON OF GLUNE

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Cover art

FARQUHARSON OF GLUNE

BY

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'THE ALTAR OF LIFE,' 'THE GLOW-WORM,' ETC.

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TO

MRS. GEORGE ALEXANDER

IN MEMORY OF

NEVER-FAILING KINDNESS

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PART I

THE GOAD

"I have not, as some do, bought penitence with pleasure!"—SHELLEY.

"When the soul arms for battle she goes forth alone."—LYTTON.

FARQUHARSON OF GLUNE

CHAPTER I

"The potter, also tempering soft earth, with labour fashioneth every vessel for our service, and of the same clay he maketh both vessels that are for clean uses, and likewise such as serve to the contrary; but what is the use of these, the potter is the judge."—*Wisdom* (Douay Version).

Two men, leisurely climbing a steep moor in the north of Perthshire, stopped near the summit to read a sign-post which pointed out the way to Glune.

No one was in sight. Poverty held Glune in bondage, and such attractions as she yet could offer were not of the type which appeal to casual trippers and excursionists, eager for gossip and refreshment after a stiff walk up-hill. For a solitary shop, from which emerged the pervading smells of leather, peppermint and onions, represented all that local enterprise could compass, even at Bruchill, the nearest village. Cottage upon cottage was empty, and those that were still inhabited, showed evidence of neglect. Women standing at their doors, stared dully at the unaccustomed travellers; children playing in the ill-kept gardens were heavy-eyed and pallid. No joy of life, no hospitality was offered. The most persevering Bohemian or antiquarian, drawn to the desolate spot by love of adventure or tradition, was eventually pulled up short at sight of the empty lodge, the impenetrable castle gates, high and with narrow grilles, which shut in the vast wilderness of tangled growth and ruin.

Grief and sorrow had concentrated about Glune, until, for Scotsmen, it had become a second Escorial. Inanimate things are as tragic in their way as human beings. A man or woman, however crushed and broken, has moments of quickened vitality in which hope springs, even if mockingly. Otherwise brains would snap. But a room which a strong personality has made vital with its presence, becomes temporarily as a place of the dead. The Escorial does not depend on shape or colouring for its impression of gloom; its air breathes tragedy on the tenderest April morning. Glune had something of that same relentless force of character which makes the Escorial one with the relentless character of its founder. But whereas jolting trains and the pitiless volubility of Cook's guides bring the palace in view a full hour before you reach it, there was but a single point from which Glune actually could be seen, so sheltered was it from inquisitive eyes by the reserve and mystery of wood and hill.

Had there been one to see, he might have wondered what freak of fate had led the present travellers to a spot so lonely and obscure, and again, what chances

had combined in fellowship two men outwardly quite incompatible. Each of them had the hall-mark of the public school upon him, but there their likeness ended. For the elder was of the type which willingly pays a guinea to advertise its arrivals and departures in the *Morning Post*; while the younger was a mere boy, whose heart as yet stirred only to the love of sport. Explorers, shooters of big game, men who had dared and done, were Cummings' models. Where Brand, his companion, was hourly handicapped by ill-health, the young man's greatest trial as yet was his total inability to achieve what could be called a moustache by any but the most biassed relative.

Brand was indeed insignificant, one degree only removed from actual deformity. His mouth twisted uncontrollably when he smiled, and one shoulder was higher than the other, although a well-known tailor had done his best to remedy the defect. His eyes, set close together, were unusually light in tone, and apt to evade the glance direct. He had a trim Vandyke beard, and was dressed neatly and well. His complexion was pale, and he bore his single eye-glass as one who tolerates the defects it magnifies, because he is convinced that his Creator's designs are generally crude. Some women found him interesting; the more refined shrank back from him instinctively, and wondered why. On the other hand, his knowledge of great cities and their haunts at nightfall, and an unusual memory and gift of tongues lent him an air of distinction which was admired and imitated by younger men within his circle. Cummings, for instance, thought he leaned upon a stick rather from choice than necessity, and would have given a fortune to exchange his own stereotyped courtesies for Brand's easy assurance.

For the lad, tall and athletic, with a trick of blushing, had yet to find himself. The pages of his life, so far, were singularly blank. He had the sensitive nostrils and frank gaze of a man susceptible—almost too susceptible—to influence and impressions, yet good breeding had often made him elude opportunities which less artistic natures coveted.

That beauty of any kind would sway him you saw at a glance; beauty of soul and shape, Divine and human. Had he not in certain instances been kept back by the fitness of things, he would have invariably given himself joyously to its influence, as a swimmer to the sea, playing with it, while knowing that it had the power to drown. His eyes were a dreamer's eyes, able to see the Beatific Vision on Clapham Common—a faculty not often met with in a man so broad of chest and lean of flank. So far as personal courage went, Cummings' might have carried him through almost any form of mediæval torture, except the deprivation of his means of washing. At Eton and Sandhurst he had passed through many dubious escapades unscathed, delightfully blind to "scum and rot," as he mentally summed up certain vagaries of his companions.

But he was now of the age which believes worldly experience to be a nec-

essary factor of life. In the last few days he had begun to be ashamed of his own ignorance of inessential things.

It diverted Brand to play with, some said corrupt, such natures. He had won the lad as tactfully as a woman might have done, luring him step by step until confidence was established. Once that was done, the rest was easy. Little by little the sanctuary of Cummings' thoughts was invaded; his circumstances, his surroundings, his hopes betrayed, until his soul lay naked in the day. Another man, with so definite an end in view as Brand had, might have hastened matters and spoilt all. He made no such mistake.

"Looks and means," he said now dreamily, in the quiet high-bred voice, which was one of his most valuable assets. "You ought to do well in life, with both in your grasp. Few women withstand either, and none both; and later on you'll realize that success in life nearly always augurs a swish of frills and furbelows in the background." He looked at Cummings critically. "Remember what wins women wins fame. She's wanton too. You have more than your share of good things, my dear fellow. The only point you really lack is confidence, the recognition that you can hold your own as well in a crowd as in a *tête-à-tête*. If a man doesn't believe in himself he'll never get even a woman to believe in him."

"Oh, come now, I always think I'm such an awful ass," Cummings protested. His conversation was still in the ejaculatory stage. But he was pleasantly excited. What boy of his age would be unsusceptible to the flattery of being sought after by an older man? A chance meal in an anglers' inn, where space and table-cloths were equally limited, had given Brand his looked-for opportunity; a glass or two of Burgundy, and the discovery of a remote connection, warmed the acquaintance into friendship. Across the border such kinship made a closer tie than south of the Tweed, Brand asserted. The two men joined forces on the strength of the statement. Long walks and rides were the result—the first links in a chain which was to rivet more than one future.

"Men of my age are not apt to make mistakes in character," the elder man continued, after a pause. Cummings, eagerly listening, failed to see the irony of his tone. "You say you haven't brains enough for diplomacy; I beg to differ. That's a career worthy of a man of influence, like you. With a good private income such as you have, and Calvert to back you—why, you could pull the strings of the world, if some one showed you how to set about it, and incidentally have a good time."

"We've always gone in for the Army or the Church in our family, you see," said Cummings, simply disposing of the question. "As to what I've got in the money line it isn't worth speaking of; two thousand a year doesn't go very far in the Cavalry. Besides, of course my uncle might marry, and he's not absolutely bound to leave me his money; in any case I never count on it, though I'm supposed

to be his heir. Rather a low-down game waiting for a dead man's shoes, don't you think?" He stopped awkwardly, finding it rather difficult to frame the right words in the face of Brand's mocking smile.

By now they had left the main road, striking a sheep track across the narrow pass which separated Glune from distant Bruchill. Even the broad road had been singularly deserted; here, neither browsing cattle nor sheep broke the gloomy lines of the spurs, deepening from purple to indigo. Grey clouds hung low, heavy with tears. The silence was eerie; one of the two men felt its spell. To detach yourself from man is often to come near to God, but there was something sinister in this unsmiling landscape, which savoured more of the powers of darkness than of light.

So far the two had walked in close companionship, but now, quickened by the wider life of the hills, and lashed by the mountain air, Cummings unconsciously set a pace which kept time with his rapid thoughts. Brand's words fell meaninglessly in his ears, like pebbles thrown to lure a terrier but sucked in by the tide before the dog had time to reach them.

Brand tried to keep up with his companion, but failed. His forehead grew clammy with the effort. He broke down at last, catching his breath with a choking cry that pulled up Cummings abruptly in his hot pursuit of fugitive visions.

The boy turned, scarlet and confused. "I'm awfully sorry I dashed off like that. Here, take a pull from the flask. Do forgive me, old chap. It was beastly bad form of me forgetting——" He stopped in embarrassment, taken aback by the curious change that broke out in dull white patches on Brand's face at his words.

But Brand was of the world worldly, not likely to lose the object he had in view because of a temporary obstacle which tact could bridge. There was no trace of resentment in his answer.

"You must remember my grey hairs. I'm quite ready to rest if you are. There's lots of time, and you've had rather a strenuous week, I gather? Although I'm a distant relation, I've only actually met Martin Calvert once, and then I found him a tough customer. Isn't a visit there rather a test of endurance? A bit of a bore between ourselves, eh? No leniency to one's little failings to be met with in that quarter. People say blood is thicker than water; one's relations always think it means that one is thicker-skinned."

"My uncle has been most awfully good to me, you know," Cummings said, with some embarrassment.

Brand flicked his cigar ash lightly.

"A millionaire's virtues can be seen with the naked eye, my good fellow. Once you step into the dead man's shoes of which we were speaking just now, your friends and enemies alike will find you possessed of a thousand admirable qualities, to whose existence they were blind before. 'To him that hath shall be

given' is about the only scriptural injunction that society ever lays to heart, you know."

"Oh, come now, that's a bit satirical," cried Cummings impatiently, flushing again. The pass had narrowed into a gloomy gorge, through which it was impossible for two to walk abreast. The younger man stopped short, glad of an excuse to change the conversation.

"What extraordinary country! Nothing but waste land. What's wrong with the soil? It was right enough by Bruchill. Whom on earth does this belong to?"

It was said of Henry Brand in Pall Mall clubs, that were he hurled headlong into the heart of Central Africa he would know the name and sum up the exact precedence of any tribe he came across.

He answered deliberately. "There are about thirty thousand acres of this desert all told. And it belongs to Farquharson of Glune.

"Farquharson of Glune," Cummings repeated. The name rang familiarly. "Didn't a Farquharson once marry one of the Kilmaurs? Stay—I seem to remember some story—wasn't there a rumour——" He broke off abruptly, knitting his brow.

"Stories! There have always been stories about Glune and its inmates, past and present," said Brand. "Tragedies mostly. The Farquharsons of Glune are all men of violence; leaders of forlorn hopes; knights-errant to distressed damsels, saints or outcasts; fierce heroes from whose doings tiresome bards make tiresome music—you know the sort of thing."

Cummings not only knew "the sort of thing," but held it very sacred, so he kept his peace.

"Well, what's the present Farquharson of Glune thinking about to let good land lie fallow like this?" he asked.

"Farquharson of Glune is about ten years old," said Brand. He gave his explanations complacently, with the air of a broker propitiating his client with some valuable tip. "He lives with his mother, and they're poor. There are two kinds of poverty as you know, the poverty of the man who sells one or two horses out of his racing stud, and stops playing bridge if the points are more than half-a-crown a hundred, and the poverty which slowly starves itself to death to keep inviolate the terraces and gardens and bedchambers which Royalty has—honoured with its presence."

He stopped to cut and light another cigar; he was a connoisseur in cigars, the bill for which was paid by other men.

"The last is the kind of poverty the Farquharsons could tell you all about—if they told anybody anything."

"Poor souls! And, meantime, this all runs to waste. The timber's excellent—why don't they sell it? Does Kilmaurs know anything about it all? I thought

Scotch people prided themselves on hanging together. The clan's rich enough. Why can't somebody buy——"

The elder man interrupted with a laugh.

"Buy Glune! Mrs. Farquharson would starve first. Probably will. She's got the old Covenanter blood in her veins. It leaves taints. The elder son—did you ever hear how Douglas Farquharson died?" He paused significantly.

Cummings hesitated. "Something about it; not a pretty story."

Brand shrugged his shoulders. "Suicide is seldom artistic. Douglas was always a bungler; he tried several means before he was successful. Mrs. Farquharson turned off the whole staff of servants and labourers on the estate (with the exception of her own old nurse, who had lived with her since childhood) on the day of the funeral. Everything that could be sold with decency was sold; everything, that is to say, that could be taken from the house by night. To the best of my belief neither friend nor relation has been inside Glune since, nor is Richard allowed outside the gates, except to go to the kirk on Sunday. You know how entertaining that is—black gown, tuning fork, and paraphrases—damnation measured out by the square yard. A cheerful outlook for a lad, isn't it?"

"Cheerful!" Cummings echoed the word with a deep breath. It struck him for the first time that he took too many things in this world for granted, that there were indeed a hundred and one good times in such a life as his which he failed to appreciate fully. He had imagination; he could enter into the lonely boy's revolt at the betrayal of his childhood, his indignation at the grey life Glune demanded, alike tributes to its power. Memories of his own pleasant childhood came back to him in vivid contrast, recalling its sunshine and glow: competition and excitement, friendly rivalries in work and play; small sacrifices for sport that brought their own reward; his father's pride in him, his mother's love, their rooted—if delightfully absurd—conviction that he was bound to excel in anything he undertook, his personal ardour and ambition, the thrill of success....

He turned impulsively. "There must be something to do? Surely one could do something?"

Brand laughed again.

"It's hardly your business, is it?" he asked in a calm philosophical tone that shamed the young man's enthusiasm into silence. "Besides, it would be interference in what parsons tell us is the great scheme."

The boy winced. His father had come into the family living as a matter of course; a genial atmosphere of piety had sweetened the limited disappointments of Cummings' youth.

"That bugbear of religion," Brand went on, "what atrocities are committed in its name! 'God made all men equal.' What a lie! Some men are born to go under. In the fight for mere existence no allowance is made for frailty. Unless a

man can keep up with his fellows, he must drop out of life's race. Some of us are doomed at the outset, fashioned and shaped and moulded in God's image, only to be ground down to powder by the great Juggernaut of circumstance, like that beetle under your heel."

He pointed contemptuously to the road.

"The days of miracles are passed, if they ever existed. Unless Richard Farquharson gets away from his surroundings, he will never have a chance in life. Stunted in mind and doubtless in growth, half starved, friendless, and unloved, pent up all day with a mad mother and an old woman of seventy—what can he do? It wasn't only in the much abused Herod's time that innocents were massacred. Take the police records of to-day.... No! don't, they're ugly reading." He stopped again. "Richard Farquharson's next-of-kin is now at Oxford. He has a father who moves with the times. He'll get on. The patriots of old bought titles with their blood, but gold is cheaper. This man wiped off one of a prince's debts, and got a knighthood for the privilege."

"Look," said Cummings suddenly. The two men stopped near the summit of a heather-covered spur, overlooking the castle. Cummings took a few steps forward, mounting to the crest, and then with that instinctive reverence, which one must be very young or very pure instantly to respond to, raised his cap.

Bleak, barren, desolate, perched like an eyrie upon the peak of a lonely moor, Glune held herself against the winds of heaven. Storms might come, storms did come, thunder would break, lightning and gales destroy, this or that avenue of trees. The spaces in the forest, the gaps and rents in the more cultivated landscape of the drive only served to give a clearer view of the severe outline of the grey building, about which such green things as strove to grow were ruthlessly cut down.

Some houses are almost human in their characters and impressions. In an English hospital Cummings had once seen the death of a veteran pensioner, a corporal who had served at Balaclava under his grandfather. Something in the look of the rugged stone, defaced but defiant in its pride and poverty, recalled the light in the old man's dying eyes as he said, "I've served my time, sir, eighty years of it all told, and I've got my faculties to the end, which is more than many a man can boast." Glune seemed as if it would keep its faculties to the end too.

The young man looked across to the further hills and down at the castle soberly. The grey of the afternoon had broken; the long, narrow windows opposite had captured the reflected light, a blood-red light which flamed out dazzlingly. The shadows of the pines and firs cut the rank grass of a neglected lawn immediately in front of the house; the glow of the sky was repeated in the running water of a little burn at the base of the hill. So far as eye could see, a chain of purple hills stretched loftily. Hills full of warmth and colour, and the mystery

which compels a man's attention. So infinite, so eternal they seemed, that facing them the petty jars of daily life took their true value; and young as he was, Cummings realized in a flash that only what children call "big things" are of account in Heaven's reckoning—love, penitence, and sacrifice.

"I'm not with you," he cried, stammering and stumbling over the hasty words. "What you say can't be true. A boy who lives here has got his chance. I bet you anything you like he'll make something of it. Stunted! narrow! He needn't be! Why, if the boy is only strong enough to climb these hills and look about him, he'll educate himself instinctively. Not in book lore, of course, but book lore isn't all, nor even much. Learning from Nature is like learning at your mother's knee, you can't forget it." He caught his breath uncomfortably, and then ran headlong on, as though he were ashamed of being ashamed to speak. "Both make one feel—why, more, they make one know—that there's a God in the machine somewhere."

His companion had moved away. His limp showed very perceptibly at that moment. The western windows of Glune were dull red now, flushing and scintillating like rubies in a curious setting.

Cummings stood still for a moment, obviously discomforted, his face brick-red from the rare effort of wrestling with unaccustomed thoughts. Then he ran on lightly for a yard or two, and joined his companion.

"Rotten luck, the whole thing," he said good-naturedly. "Let's stop at the inn at Bruchill, and drink the poor little chap's health as we pass, eh? I'm sick to death of all this arguing."

Brand raised his eyebrows. His face was livid, except where an angry smear of red had broken out below the cheek-bone.

"Oh—were you arguing?" he asked.

CHAPTER II

"Suffering of body and soul is civil war."—MAUD STEPNEY RAWSON.

Thrown upon his own resources practically from four years old, Richard Farquharson at ten was older than many boys of his age. His memories grouped themselves into scenes, one was his nightmare.

That dreadful day! Did he really remember it, I wonder, or was it merely a mental landmark in that valley of vision to which his old nurse had taught him the way of escape from the harshness and austerities of his life at Glune?

He thought of it sometimes with that strange sort of pride which very sensitive children, and children of a larger growth who have gone forward in spite of inward shrinking, feel when recalling at a safe distance an experience which at the time had strained their courage to breaking-point. A raw, cold day, the first of days which were all raw and cold; a line of dark shadows clustered together in the gloomy hall, forming an impenetrable circle about one central shadow deeper than the rest, across which heavy drapery, a pall, was thrown. Upon this unknown object the look of all was fixed; child as he was Richard shrank back from it. He longed and feared to know what was beneath. And presently strangers appeared, six figures, which formed into a rigid line led by one familiar shape, which for the first time struck terror into his heart—his mother.

The circle broke, pierced by strangers; there was a dreadful grating sound as the men bent beneath the weight of a heavy burden. Then all filed out, and Richard, a tiny child, was left forgotten, in a silence that frightened him so that he could not cry out nor move, a paralyzing silence that clutched him with ghostly fingers and strengthened its grip as the massive door clanged against him with an echo that mocked the four-year-old child, left alone in a place where dishonoured Death had just held revel.

His nurse remembered him, and ran back to fetch him five minutes later. But that five minutes of mental agony had done a work which was never to be effaced. The powers of evil had come paralyzingly close, and nothing can compare with the terrors of helpless childhood. Like dying saints, children have eyes to see what is invisible to others. Children's dreams are not necessarily pleasant. There are some whose souls are laid bare to the onslaughts of devils as well as angels. Even the deaths of good men and women are not always, nor even often, peaceful.

To Richard, cowed and trembling—picture him; a small boy in a white sailor suit, with tiny fingers battering vainly at the great oak door whose latch was beyond his reach!—the five minutes of desertion spelled eternity. The Bible had already taught him that a day might be as a thousand years. His momentary vision as to the real meaning of the verse was kept alive in him thereafter by the weekly sermons of the Forbeggie minister, who loved to dilate—under some fifteen or sixteen headings—upon the torture of impenitents by cheerful means of "worms of the damned that dieth not and fire that is never to be quenched."

So much for the dark side of the picture, but Richard had many compensations.

Fide et Fortitudine was the motto of his race; he learnt its lessons early. Let

him but keep his inheritance, and he would not grudge one of those many supperless occasions which helped to retain the mere necessities of a clan deriving from Macduff, Thane of Fife. He loved his land, and throve quite joyously upon austerities that would have broken the spirit of a less hardy lad.

His natural reserve was fostered by enforced solitude. The days went swiftly. To be more or less alone in the world, except for a collie dog, is certainly not to be unhappy when every other bird comes to your call, when stoats and ferrets even are familiar friends. Richard's mind, dependent upon nature for its amusements, was seldom called upon to translate the word disappointment. The peace which wrapped him round became his dear possession, and was peopled with invisible playmates. There was a hut in the park near the river, some three miles away, where Dan, the collie, and he played the parts of settlers in a land full of enemies. He knew the range of every object within view. He altered the defences day after day, laying down wire entanglements, building rough stockades, or primitive trenches, with loopholes and head cover, in all of which Dan took a profound interest.

Richard was his own stern critic, and yesterday's work was pulled down on the morrow, until a day came when, after subjecting it to the severest tests he knew, he found it good.

Continually burrowing in dirt, growing in experience, could the heart of boy ask more?

Nature is a jealous mistress, but she gives openly of her best to the lover who lives with her as whole-heartedly as did Richard. He never felt the want of toys or ordinary amusements. The elation that came to him at times was very sweet and bore him far.

His eye and ear presently became so well trained that from a great distance he could detect a moving object, and with the wind blowing gently towards him, and his ear to the ground, could distinguish a single footfall on a path nearly a mile away, like any scout. Blindfold, or in the dark, he made his way across Glune without a slip. Books of travels in far countries, stories of Burnham and other members of the brotherhood of the intrepid, taught him to destroy the tracks of his incoming and outgoing, so that every step of the way to special places of concealment had in it the thrill, the enchantment of an adventure.

To one who has never been to a theatre, a country life becomes a beautiful play of birth and death; things move and have their being, that he may see them pass to their appointed end. The green earth is the stage, Nature the playwright, and God Himself the Great Scene Painter.

Richard's tutor, a half-blind village schoolmaster who came for three hours daily when Mrs. Farquharson could afford to pay his meagre fees, was the only "outside" person whom he ever saw. Between the boy and his mother, there was

neither freedom nor confidence. He shrank away if he heard the rustle of her dress. Her presence in the house acted upon him like the presence of death. It was as if she stood with uplifted hand always ready to strike some covert blow at one of his innocent pleasures. He told her nothing; what was there to tell? She looked upon the things he loved with terror.

Morning and evening found him bidden to stand, mute and resentful, beside her erect form in its accustomed place, a high-backed chair in the study where his father's papers and diaries were collected. Her frozen lips—lips tightened into a line so hard that he always thought it must hurt her to move them, would touch his forehead stiffly in greeting, as one touches a thing with loathing and abhorrence. Of bosom throbbing at his approach, and the light of motherhood in her eyes, which she stifled as she heard him coming, he knew nothing. He would leave her rejoicing at a hard duty again accomplished. That she longed for him hungrily all day long, that she stealthily followed him to his play, that her spare tense figure was often shaken by passionate longing to clasp the slender limbs that had once lain warm and quiet beneath her heart, he never knew.

Only the exceptional man or woman bears the strain of a great shame and sorrow with no outside help. Mrs. Farquharson's pride in her son went side by side with ceaseless fear. Richard's fatal likeness to her dead firstborn, dearer far than Richard because he was the child of early wifehood, stabbed her heart. She had loved that child too well; forgetfulness of God by the mother had been visited by God upon the son, she told herself. And to watch another pay the price of your own sin is sin's most bitter penalty.

In Douglas Farquharson's case, there had been that sudden extraordinary return to a vicious type which occurs occasionally in a family that has for centuries bred fine men and fair women. When, page by page, after his death the record that proved his guilt was spelled out by his mother, the only plea she could urge in his defence was that the selfishness of her own love, given to man instead of God, had marred and distorted the human image by its very fervour.

She had "counted it a glory to make vain things." Her care had been, like the potter, "to strive with the goldsmiths and silversmiths." The voices of husband and child had made such triumphant music in her ears, that God's sublime call was drowned; she had bartered Heaven for a brief hour of human rapture, to find that God was a God of vengeance as well as love and love a two-edged sword which can wound or kill.

That very night, on her bedroom wall, she thought she saw a warning written in letters of flame. "His heart is ashes and his hope vain earth, his life more base than clay." ... "Being himself mortal, he fashioneth a dead thing with his hands."

Day after day, as Richard grew stronger and more handsome, she asked

herself if he were born only to inherit his brother's legacy of dishonour. He looked frank and open enough, but eyes that shone as purely as his had been the casket of lies, and lips which had met hers more easily had given themselves to what was incredibly base.

The dead are often nearer to us than the living. Mrs. Farquharson's dead were scourges. When Douglas killed himself the shock broke his father's heart. By day and night his mother made silent pilgrimage to two lonely graves.

One morning, drawn early to the cool solitude of the river after a sleepless night, she saw her boy bathing, a slim white figure without an ounce of superfluous flesh on his bones, with every muscle developed, and skin like satin, shining purely against the deep banks and undergrowth; a picture framed by pines, through which the light of the autumn dawn came slowly. Hidden from him, she watched with look wide and tender, with eyes as moist as the supple limbs from which he shook the water of the burn, standing strong and vigorous, breathing quickly after his swim, unconsciously rejoicing in his power. Bone of her bone, flesh of her flesh, she thrilled again with proud remembrance that she had borne pain for him and given him life.... Then his characteristic gesture the impatient pushing of the wet hair from his forehead, reminded her suddenly of his brother. She shrank back as if a spirit of evil pursued her.

Between herself and God there was a wall too high for mercy or prayers to pierce. Her religion forbade her to pray for her dead—prayers for the dead were heresy. In the blindness of her despair she invented a species of soul crucifixion striking with almost frenzied agony at the root of her love for Richard.

He at least should never know how she loved him; discipline and duty should be the twin lights to guide his way, never the false light of a selfish love.

After this she instituted a new and more terrible rule of discipline, both for herself and her son. Richard came to her daily as before, but now even the conventional kiss was denied him, and three hours' study of complicated points of doctrine took its place. The fate of sinners was the prevailing theme, the punishment of sins of whose very existence he was unaware. In the narrow hot room he would stand rebellious, either answering at random or not answering at all. Outside, bees hummed and birds sang, and insect life was joyous. The world he loved stretched very far in infinite fairness, God's exquisite world that had hitherto raised his thoughts to its Maker. "His brother the wind, his sister the earth," had seemed to point the way to a God worth loving. But how could he but hate the dreadful God of the ancient law into whose power it was so terrible to fall, the God who raised His hands only to strike, who broke the heart of His children as men break stones by the wayside, and had so little pity for the innocent child of shame?

Yet this was the God with whom he was brought in hourly contact, this

Being who saw evil where Richard was convinced no evil was. Why was it wrong, for instance, to love inanimate things so passionately, to weep at a bird's death and rejoice at its birth? Why should not his face light up at sight of the small furred and feathered things, which were his only friends? He would escape for hours to be in their company, and pay the penalty for such adventures later, when, sought for with terror, he was met with punishment and humiliation.

Only when he was alone would passionate tears come, choking sobs that shook the boy's body and were succeeded by stoniness. Sorrow may melt the heart like dew; rebellion breaks it.

Night after night, prostrate upon the floor of her room, Mrs. Farquharson would pray for her son with tears of blood, as one who would wrest grace from the Almighty. And night after night, in his attic, Richard would lie awake, lonely and impenitent, thinking himself loveless and neglected while love was burning at his very door.

CHAPTER III

"Not
So much as even the lifting of a latch,
Merely a step into the outer air."—LONGFELLOW.

The picture-gallery ranked high in Richard's list of compensations.

Although it was the sanctuary of fine records, he always associated it with the last definite memory of his elder brother. Two or three days before Douglas chose that easy way of shifting responsibilities which it takes a brave man or woman to evade, Richard had been carried pick-a-back by his elder brother down the long gallery; had been shown, with a certain solemnity, pathetic in view of what was so soon to occur, portrait upon portrait of their ancestors, notably men who were famous for good rather than great deeds.

There were two especial portraits before which they lingered, Richard remembered afterwards—that of their great-great-grandfather, upon whose tomb, by the wish of his country and his tenantry, the motto, "Noble by birth, noble in all things else," had been engraved; and one of his wife, known in her day as "The Ivory Mayde," because of the dazzling fairness of her skin. A contemporary

poet wrote of her—

"Snow her fayre body—snowier white her soul."

"Something worth while, old chap, to have that said of one," Douglas had commented, and Richard, bored at the delay, overcome by the gloom and seclusion of the gallery, and long array of still figures in unaccustomed clothes; remembered butting at him with his head until his brother cried out for mercy and moved on.

The portraits—the knights in armour who guarded the entrance to the rooms so jealously, awed him still, but not as of old. They were his friends now, like the squirrels, and passionate love and pride thrilled him each time he entered the gallery. The deeds they had done, the records they had left, few even in Scotland could match. The blood they shed made a sea of glory which reflected the light of God; merely to cross the threshold was an act of faith.

Richard could have prayed to some of these more easily than to an unknown God. He knew their histories, man for man, woman for woman. Before some he habitually paused longer than before others. Had the veil invisible between that world and his been rent, and the familiar shades taken fleshly form before his eyes, and called to him, he would not have known fear. He was theirs and they were his; he faced them buoyantly, with head erect.

His mother and nurse shunned the gallery, believing it to be haunted—so much the better!

Time after time, generally at dead of night, but sometimes even in the day, Richard himself had fancied he heard the stir and rustle of a silken skirt close beside him, and saw the flash of some dead soldier's dirk. Whereupon, the moment being critical, a cold draught from some open door would generally blow in upon him, keen and sharp like the wind in mountain heather, to announce some ill-timed interruption of his nurse. Afterwards—a shrill scolding and imprisonment in a room from whose window he would immediately get out. Richard had no compunction as to flight when it was thus forced upon him, but by the time he returned the dream unfortunately, like many a later dream, would have had time to break.

"Do you think that is what dreams are made for, Dan—only to break?" he asked his collie sometimes. Whereupon Dan would look up with the profoundly wistful negation of one who, although dumb, is wiser than his master.

Eight—nine—ten—eleven.

The old clock on the stairs in the west wing clanged asthmatically, hesitat-

ing between the strokes as one who doubted its ability to make the final effort. It was out of repair and past use, like most of the furniture of Glune. But Richard loved it. In Prince Charlie's days the worn clock-case had sheltered one of his forbears, a Farquharson who, while carrying despatches to the Prince, was tracked and discovered by the enemy. Richard loved to poke his fingers into breathing holes which had been hastily bored at the back of the case, while armed men were clamouring for admittance at the very gates of Glune.

From the first, it was to the call of valour and endurance that the boy's heart leapt. Hunting about in an old lumber-room he had once come upon a box of marvels—forgotten papers and documents which he looked at, and went back to, and wept salt tears over, time after time. Every relic in the house was dear to him. The torn plaid upon which Charlie Stuart's bonny head had lain, in the days before that brave heart had turned to water, and innocence was drowned in a flood of despair and shame—the tattered fragment of silk, once a flag, which a Farquharson had died upholding, a century before; a sporran stained quite lately with the blood of his grandfather—and a host of like treasures, witnesses of what a man should do, and of what alone was worth attempting.

Richard slept in a little attic near the tower, far from his mother's and the nurse's rooms. Bare as a monk's cell, it was "all his own." He swept it out and tidied it for himself daily; no woman's foot, so far as he knew, had ever trod the staircase which led to it since he was first moved there four years before.

Eight—nine—ten—eleven—midnight at last.

The boy, with a start, shook himself free from his dreams and woke, as was his habit, to full and immediate consciousness of his surroundings. This eve of his twelfth birthday was a crisis in his life, high time for one who had made up his mind to be a leader of men to turn his back on childish things. And Richard, true to that unconsciously dramatic instinct of imaginative childhood which inspires children in the little plays they make from common incidents of every-day life, set about his task dramatically enough.

For years he had kept nightly tryst with a certain portrait in the gallery; an image which kept alive in him the only spark of tenderness that remained after long months of frozen silence and reserve. It was an unnatural tryst for a boy of twelve, but Richard's life was all unnatural. And love, which craves so passionately for outlet, has sometimes to content itself with the inanimate, instead of what is living and responsive.

We have our favourites, even among ancestors. It was a certain Margaret Cunningham, daughter of that Earl of Glencairn who, being of the Privy Council of James V, was taken prisoner by the English in the year 1542, at the battle of

Solway, who had won Richard's heart. Marrying a Farquharson, she died six months later, "whereat," tradition said, "she waxed exceedingly joyful, since her whole heart's love had been given since childhood to her cousin of Kilmaurs, but her parents, being worldly, would not permit the marriage, since Farquharson of Glune had more land and a finer heritage."

True to his sex, Richard had been vanquished by the most tender, the most lovable little face in the whole gallery. It was to this picture that he confided his dreams, his ambitions; it was to this one of all others that he found it so infinitely hard to say farewell. But say farewell he would, notwithstanding, for the hardening process had already begun in him. He had to make his way in life; and such a way could not be carried out at home. Beyond the park gates and the empty lodge lay a world from which he meant to wrest power to restore Glune to her former beauty. Tragic and broken, she was to him as a living woman, who needed his help and claimed it as her due. And the one way he could really help her was to go.

He had packed a chosen few of his belongings; of money he had none. But he was strong on the bread of hardship. Dan would, of course, be his companion; no one else. Richard had guessed the secret of this life's success. Unhampered by ties of kinship or love, alone, a man may hope to find the key of that secret cupboard in which the world conceals her few prizes.

Richard pushed the door of the picture-gallery wide, and stood on the threshold for a moment, a look of resolve on his stern young face. These—his best loved—would understand what it cost him to leave them. The older faces seemed to turn to him, expectant. Through the stained glass windows with their emblazoned coat-of-arms, a steady stream of moonlight flowed triumphantly, taking the colour of the glass it came through—now rose and now pallid green. Not less steadfast the light in the painted eyes of some of the men he looked upon, martyrs in their way—men who had fought and died for a Cause—whose purposes, like his, nor tears, nor smiles, nor force could turn.

With his hands clenched very firmly and an uncomfortable tightening of the throat, Richard looked straight and long at the portrait of his ancestress to-night, and thought again, as he had often thought before, how strange it was that God did not make mothers in a mould like this. And in that moment he committed every line of the portrait to memory, never to be erased—the oval face, and soft hair, a dark curtain, banded over the low white forehead; the grave eyes that pursued you to the door, eyes painted with a hint of tears, a favourite trick in a certain school of art; the turn of the proud head, the white neck visible beneath a veil of drapery. The moonlight fell upon all lovingly. One little beam of light travelled upwards and tried to linger in the shadows of the misty eyes.

Richard turned, his heart throbbing convulsively. Was that a footfall? He

[image]

"GRAVE EYES THAT PURSUED YOU TO THE DOOR"

crept for shelter to the picture of a malignant-looking gentleman of the tenth century, whose full-length portrait moved on pulleys, and which was now drawn out to an acute angle, half across the gallery, as Dan started forward. Both waited in silence for some time, but the sound—if sound it were—was light at best, and did not return.

Richard came back to Margaret Cunningham. Sentimentality was childish, the sort of thing a future empire-builder must infallibly renounce.

"Good-bye," Richard said gravely; "Dan and I shan't be here again for ever so long. We're going away—both of us—but we mean some day to come back. I'm growing up, you see; I'm going to make my name, and a big future, and keep Glune."

In spite of the brave words he walked away from the picture drearily enough, fancying that Margaret's eyes were extraordinarily misty, because his own were drowned in tears.... He shivered. How cold it had become! He must have been there far longer than he intended; his bare feet on the parquet floor were cold as death. He whistled to Dan, who had, contrary to his usual custom, scampered away to snuffle anxiously at the door.

Outside, through one light pane of glass, Richard could see the snow thick on the white stone balustrade. How silently and swiftly it must have fallen! When he came in there were only a few flakes. Eager to be off, he ran down the gallery. But Dan, evading his master's hand with a whine, leapt forward again, scenting eagerly, and then scratched at the door with a low whine of terror.

Something had fallen in the corridor beyond the gallery, something heavy and dark. Something that pressed against the door that Richard strove to open, at first gently, then with a sudden sickening dread that taxed his self-control. As the door gave way at last, it pressed the unknown obstacle back with it slowly—the unknown obstacle at the sight of which the boy fell on his knees with a cry. For it was a woman's figure—his mother's—which lay prone in the moonlight, with thin arms stretched towards him, giving way too late to the longing they had crushed for years.

Face to face with death for the second time, Richard found himself more wondering than pitiful, more perplexed than sad. How swiftly God's arrows struck—how unerringly! The terrified, staring eyes were fixed in their last challenge of the Almighty Power. Even in death there was no peace.

The hand—cold as of old—fell from his grasp.

He tried to close the dreadful eyes, but failed; tried once again, and failed, and then rose, panting. His cry had awakened his old nurse. She came to him feebly, candle in hand, with Dan sniffing at her ankles. At sight of his master the dog ran forward, and then, as if aware of mourning, crouched quietly on the floor beside the dead. And Richard, looking down upon his mother, and hearing Nurse Ailsa's lamentation shrill out of the silence, realized that this was indeed the end of the old hampering life, that he had put away "childish things" once and for all.

PART II

THE SPUR

"He had stamped with steady hand God's arrow-mark
Of dedication to the human need;
He thought it should be so, too, with his love.
He, passionately loving, would bring down
His love, his life, his best (because the best),
His bride of dreams, who walked so still and high
Through flowery poems as through meadow-grass,
The dust of golden lilies on her feet,
That she should walk beside him on the rocks,
In all that clang, and hewing out of men,
And help the work of help which was his life,
And prove he kept back nothing—not his soul."

E. B. BROWNING.

CHAPTER I

"You and I are the only mortals that I know of who ever found a way to each other's inner being by the touch of the hands."—GEORGE DU MAURIER.

Making as it does for desultory conversation and tempered criticism of your neighbour's failings, the half-hour after tea in a country house is one of the most pleasant of the day. Confidences spring from it, and intimacies ripen. Lovers drift happily away from their chaperones, knowing their absence will be unnoticed. The elder folk, who find interest and joy in each other's company, move together with no conscious effort into friendly nooks and corners where they are unobserved. Silences fall quite naturally on such occasions. Nobody minds them. They are, indeed, keys of that deeper confidence which is one of life's most beautiful gifts.

The five or six members of Lord Creagh's house-party who collected in his study day after day at the same hour, ostensibly to admire the tropical plants for whose cultivation he was famed, had come to look upon this reunion as the most vital of the day.

"Wit and brilliance depend almost as much on the furniture of a room as on the furniture of a mind," thought Evelyn Brand, one of the two women in the group, giving herself up, as Celts do, to the characteristic atmosphere. "Even Lady Mary Wortley-Montague herself could never have made her brilliant epigrams on a black horse-hair sofa backed by magenta curtains and stuffed birds in glass cases. The Nonconformist conscience, if it did but know it, owes quite half of its solidity to the mahogany four-poster in which it came to life. 'Victorian suites' make you formal and stilted, just as chintz and lavender and lattice windows compel discretion and a modest blush. How I love lavender! Why, age itself would fall quite tenderly upon the occupant of such a house as I would furnish if I could—a tender place of peace and perfume. Grey hair and gentle influences go together; old age should win one as a lover instead of capturing one as an enemy."

Under the spell of her idea, Evelyn fell into one of those quiet abstractions which her husband had found so convenient before marriage and so melancholy after.

And yet discriminating eyes looking at her for the first time would have seen mystery rather than melancholy in her gaze, thought the man who was sitting beside her watching the progress of her dream with a gentle smile. Creagh, many years before, had lost the woman whom he loved so well that for her sake all other women could count upon his friendship. But he had his favourites. He was, for instance, one of Evelyn's staunchest admirers. Belonging to the type of man who achieves nothing very vital himself, he was always the cause of

achievement in others. Many years ago Evelyn's husband, who had a dangerous habit of epigram, nicknamed Lord Creagh "The Holy Freak," and the name stuck.

Creagh's head and body looked like two balls, one large, one little. They grew together with no perceptible join. He had so short a neck as to make a turn-down collar appear positively high, whilst his legs were as out of proportion to his body as most men's incomes are to their desires. His plain face was withal so genial that a woman must have been prejudiced indeed to look upon it without pleasure; his words took weight from their sincerity.

Each member of the little group which had gathered in the study was, in his way, a celebrity. Creagh's invitations attracted interesting persons. As the head of one of the oldest families in Great Britain, his rank secured him from small aims, even in friendship. Unlike most men, he chose his acquaintances with more care than his dinner. Himself an ardent Roman Catholic, he took the widest pleasure in the companionship of those whose openly professed beliefs ran absolutely counter to his own. Your next-door neighbour at his table was as likely to be a Parsee as a Protestant, and his widowed sister, who kept house for him at Creagh, had once been present at a luncheon where one of the guests was a small Brixton tradesman (captured in the very act of trespassing on the estate), and the other the new British Minister at Rome.

Beadon, Colonial Secretary in the late Ministry, sitting on the left of Mrs. Brand, was probably the best known man present. Comic papers made him familiar to the public; he had a clever face, which lent itself to caricature. Clean shaven and wiry, he looked rather like a dapper priest. His eyes were alert and keen; his friends said that upon one occasion only had his judgment been proved to be false. His enemies were naturally as the sands of the sea; they bit and snapped at him in the House of Commons like so many angry curs, but generally withdrew the worse for the fray. His heel of Achilles was his only child, Dora, a lady who had received more proposals than the average American heiress—partly because of her mother's fortune, and partly because of her father's position—and complacently believed them all to be the tribute of her personal charms.

Short and squat, sallow, and of bad figure, with colourless hair, which the products of the hairdresser and the attention of a maid alone made passable, Miss Beadon was one of those extremely plain women whom men call "a good sort" for lack of a more distinctive term; a type which too often after marriage proves the exact antithesis of early promise. A woman is not necessarily amiable because she has no personal attractions. Miss Beadon was chattering just now with much animation to Lord Meavy, a new-comer, home on leave for the first time since his appointment as Governor of South Africa. Long experience had shown her the advantage of being first in the field with a possible "lion."

Meavy was more like a poet than a statesman. Slender and romantic, with

pointed beard, he had the tired eyes of a man who has persistently cut short his sleep until Nature, in revenge, denies him rest in the few remaining hours he might otherwise snatch. He liked Miss Beadon; she was negative, so did not tax his brain, and he was susceptible, like most men, to her obvious appreciation of his society.

Washington Hare, who had the fourth seat in the circle, leading literary critic of the *Times*, was a complete contrast in type to Meavy. Seventy-three years old, gaunt and rugged, his intellect was as mature, his judgment as virile, as that of a man in the prime of life. He called his art a trade, with a grim smile, and loved it passionately. Bad craftsmen fled his presence as if it conjured before them a grim array of the infinitives they had split and the phrases they had worn too well.

His voice, breaking in raucously upon a discussion in which he had hitherto taken no part, attracted Mrs. Brand's attention.

"Carlyle summed up the question," he said, "when he called universal history the history of great men who had worked in the world. The nation needs great men just now. Mediocrity and indifference are the curses of the empire. Mediocrity produces cheap content with small successes, and indifference is deadly poison—a kind of gangrene of the soul. Indifference is infectious. Unluckily, the men who catch its breath do not die swiftly. Themselves immeasurably corrupt, they live to corrupt others."

"Come now, I can recall the names of three great men, all living," suggested Creagh good-humouredly.

"Oh—well—you are indulgent," said Beadon dryly. "Two of them are bitter enemies, and the third celebrated his seventieth birthday lately."

"I suppose there are some younger men somewhere," Dora Beadon put in gaily. "Father won't let them come to our parties because he's so afraid they will all want to marry me! But surely they exist."

"Take our young politicians," Hare continued, ignoring Miss Beadon's interruption, and warming to his subject as the babble of talk died down. "Not an ounce of stamina in the lot. One particularly young gentleman in the Ministry happens to have pushed himself to the fore, but he won't stay there. The party, as a whole, is hypnotized by those of its members who have a few sparks of magnetic force. On our own side it's as bad. We've got men of average intelligence, and average intelligence is a most stultifying quality. Two-thirds of sublime folly and a fraction of wisdom produce a better leader than any amount of average intelligence can compass. And as for the sacred fount, immortal fire, food of the gods, call it what you will, that undefined quality that leads men on to dare forlorn hopes and brave martyrdom—the House of Commons would not recognize it if it were there. And yet without it, men are impotent. They themselves move

and have their being, but cannot produce life in others."

"Isn't your vital element patriotism?" asked Evelyn. "I always think a man should love his country like his wife, with knowledge and tenderness and passion and forbearance. In nine cases out of ten, nations fail just as women do, for trivial causes. Both may slur common duties, but the big crisis finds them ready. If her husband's love is waning a woman will strain every nerve to keep it, just as a nation will appeal to her sons when the enemy has issued his ultimatum."

"Very soon the nation's appeal will be vain," said Meavy. "We forget as no other nation does."

"Is that because, as every Englishman is an embryo hero, we count upon him in our hour of need?"

Meavy laughed.

"Tactfully turned, Mrs. Brand. It sounds very nice, but I'm afraid it's not really the case. As for patriotism, it's a lost art. Love is not love at all without an element of passion, and passion is a fire which must have fuel to be kept alive. Most modern men and women are incapable of loving anything with ardour, except themselves. If they swear by a special county it's merely because they happen to be landowners, not from tradition nor history. Men back the merits of a manufacturing town, because it gives them daily bread. There is a man on the St. Pancras Board of Guardians now who boasts, 'I made my money 'ere, and 'ere I'll spend it.' The fact of being British does not stir a man; one doubts if he remembers it unless he is on the Continent."

"There are those who say England is doomed," said Beadon. "Since we left Gordon to his fate the old fighting spirit waxes more and more frail. For heaven's sake don't quote the South African War as a proof to the contrary. Quite half of that wild enthusiasm was a phase of social hysteria. We are all mad on excitement now; we prostitute our very ardour. If we can't get recreation by one means we get it by another. Drink, drugs, lovers—all come under the same category. At times these fail to allay us. We see red then, like other nations, but we have no national outlet like Southerners, with their bull-fights and the like. So war—in countries to which we can be transported with all the latest comforts of civilization—breaks the monotony."

"Aren't you too pessimistic?" said Creagh thoughtfully. "Personally I believe in the hour and the man. We are at a critical point just now, I admit, both individually and as a nation, but I believe that a man will come with the need, as he has always come since the world began."

"Oh, England's merely superficially corrupt," said Hare. "If the right surgeon were to operate she would be cured."

"And which of us is skilful enough to perform the operation? No one in the present Ministry. We've only got two sound men—men whom we trust. Both

have had their day."

"England may be corrupt," said Evelyn, "but she's not ignoble. Like a woman, again, she finds herself and loses herself, and then has to find herself once more. Do you remember Borrow's prayer? I found it in some old book as a child, and learnt it by heart; it's wonderful. It seems to apply now. 'If thy doom be at hand, may that doom be a noble one.... May thou sink, if thou dost sink, amidst blood and flame with a mighty noise, causing more than one nation to participate in thy downfall. Of all fates, may it please God to preserve thee from a slow decay, becoming, ere extinct, a scorn and mockery for those self-same foes, who, though they envy and abhor thee, still fear and honour thee even against their will.'"

There was a pause.

"In England's extremity oughtn't we to pray that prayer each day?"

"'May more than one nation participate in thy downfall,'" repeated Beadon gravely. "Amen to that."

"Now, do say it all over again, slowly," said Dora Beadon, who had a knack of reducing any serious conversation to a commonplace level. "Have you got a pencil, Lord Meavy? Oh, thanks so much; how good of you!—and some paper? Now again, Evelyn; don't hurry so, there's a dear; I really like it, and I'm so short of quotations for my extract book just now."

But Evelyn was leaning forward. Throughout the little interlude her look, slightly narrowed and anxious, had been fixed on Creagh. She touched his arm suddenly, in triumph.

"You spoke of the hour and the man—and you are keeping both from us. You've planned the one already, my dear Dick, and you've arranged that the other should appear. It's no use denying it. I've been cudgelling my brains ever since you spoke last, wondering who on earth you could possibly have in view."

Hare frowned at her beneath his heavy eyebrows.

"There you are again, Mrs. Brand, with your visions and dreams. And you're so horribly right too, as a rule! I don't like your uncanny ways. Not so many years ago you would have been burned as a witch, and you'd have richly deserved it."

"It's her Celtic blood," Creagh explained, patting her hand affectionately. "I might have talked to you sordid English until doomsday and you would never have guessed what she has just stated as a fact. You're quite right, Evelyn; I've heard of a man who might do. A man of very high intelligence and power. He's young, and has made his way already, out of England. Some of you may even have heard of him; he specializes in the rather uncommon line of empire building."

"Well, that's a useful characteristic," said Meavy enviously, thinking of

South Africa's many needs.

"Not a soldier, I hope," Hare grumbled, true to civilian prejudice.

"His name is Farquharson," said Creagh. "He was once Farquharson of Glune; his brother's story must be familiar to you all. I fancy things have always gone dramatically with him. He ran away from home at twelve years old; just how he kept body and soul together for the next few years no one knows. Then—through some accident—he came across and was of service to Martin Calvert, the millionaire who had just disinherited his heir, Jack Cummings, for becoming a Catholic."

Beadon whistled.

"The man who did so well in the last Indian famine business? A secular priest, isn't he? Self-exiled to the most fever-stricken district in the country?"

"Yes." Creagh hesitated. "It was a case of what is so often called 'The foolishness of the Cross.' Well, from a human point of view it certainly resulted in one man's loss and another man's gain. Calvert, like David, was cursing God in his heart when he met Farquharson. As for the lad—well, you know some of you how he was brought up in that stern Scotch school which begets defiance of God and enmity of man under some circumstances. I think the fact that Farquharson had thrown off every scrap of faith in things Divine and human appealed to Calvert doubly at that moment, and strengthened his desire to keep him. The Cummings episode was a bad blow."

"So he put Mr. Farquharson in his nephew's place?" said Evelyn.

Creagh nodded.

"He carried him off, then and there, put him through his paces with some elementary work to see what he was capable of, then gave him the lowest place in the office, kept him at the mill, ground from him his last grain of work, like the hardest taskmaster, led him on by successive rises to his own private secretaryship, and then shipped him to Taorna and gave him a magnificent chance of making name and fortune."

Hare rose, grumbling.

"Don't pin your faith on such a broken reed. You'll make a mistake. The man's had things too easily. What age is he? Thirty? I thought so. Why, a man worth calling a man ought to contest every inch of the way until he's forty; the law of the survival of the fittest obtains in politics as elsewhere. There ought to be an injunction to prevent people coming into money easily—money, in any case, mars ten men for the one it makes. While Calvert's alive to keep him in order, your young man may possibly play the game for a bit, and even achieve a certain success. Mark my words, after Calvert's death his *protégé* will marry some designing woman, who will use him as the means to a title, and gratify her ambition at the cost of his career."

"Or one who makes him happy," said Beadon grimly. "That's quite as bad, although more rare."

Creagh shrugged his shoulders.

"What a cynical lot you are! So far as Farquharson's methods go, I have had to take them on trust. I only know the results of his work; I should advise you to read them for yourselves in a blue-book which will be out very shortly. But Calvert we all know is as shrewd as any Scotsman, and just as little liable to err. Ask him what he thinks of the man; make him tell you what means Farquharson employed to annex that little island whose pearl fisheries quadrupled Calvert's income." His eyes twinkled. "It's an Arabian Night's tale in its way."

"Pearl fisheries! that sounds attractive," said Dora Beadon, her eyes gleaming so far as such pale eyes could gleam.

"May we really ask Mr. Calvert about it? You expect him to-day, don't you?" asked Evelyn quietly.

Creagh looked at his watch.

"They should be here now. By the way, my dear, Farquharson hates your sex as well as all religion. Both men were on their way up north, so of course I asked them to stay; but their rooted antipathy to Papists won't allow them to spend a night under my roof." He smiled good-humouredly. "They'll dine here instead, and put up at the inn." He looked around at the group. "Seriously, I believe Farquharson to be a great man in his way. I want you all to help him if you can."

"I think they have arrived. Hark! they are coming along now," said Evelyn.

Creagh, with a startled exclamation, hurried forward to meet the newcomers. The study door opened upon a long corridor, down which footsteps were heard approaching. A little wave of expectation stirred those who stayed behind, but no one spoke.

Each member of the group was intent on his own thoughts and conjectures. Meavy watched eagerly; the man might be useful to him, he wanted new blood for South Africa. Beadon's smile was non-committal; he had his doubts of Farquharson's capacity. He knew Lord Creagh's weakness for hero worship, and his new brooms occasionally left more dust behind them than they cleared away. Dora Beadon was interested in the stranger because of his youth and sex and chance of making money. It was perhaps the last factor which weighed heaviest in the scale of her regard. Hare, an acute observer, was the most interested of all; men of character appealed to him; he looked to them to uphold the traditions of the race. Evelyn, with perceptions quickened by the dramatic setting of the scene, followed the young man every step of the way, wondering how its beauty would affect him.

The entrance to this house would be for Farquharson the threshold of his

career; surely he could not pass along the lovely lanes which led to it hedges festooned with wild blossom, unmoved. Rising, always rising, the way was one of pleasant scents and sounds, its foliage brilliant with the stir of butterflies, and spring's caress. Past deep gorges, and ever winding circuitously up the hill, it opened out at length upon the moor. Evelyn wondered if Farquharson, too, would feel its power, to her as magnetic as that of the Karroo of South Africa, which most people call barren and desolate. Evelyn had given herself up to the Karroo; its immensity, its pathos, had flooded her soul and left traces which would never be washed away. Its wide spaces and streaks of crude colour, the lines of hills in the distance, now curved and rounded as delicately as a woman's breast, now straight and slim, like an index finger pointing to the sky, the peace and awe broken at intervals by a flight of ostriches from a tiny farm, or by the figure of a solitary rider abruptly outlined against the strong yellows and browns and purples and greens which blossomed for such eyes as could distinguish them—all touched her infinitely. She felt as if God's Voice must penetrate the silence, and that to hear the Voice was to obey.

But where the Karroo had calmed, Dartmoor always frightened her. She loved Creagh itself, but the moor which one must cross to come to it was surely, as a whole, more cruel than peaceful. It wantonly played with men and women whom it bred, who looked to it for protection. Its bogs had buried little harmless children; it cheated and deceived prisoners trying to escape in the fog, walking round and round in ever-widening circles, only to fall at last, starved and exhausted, to find a cordon of warders drawn about them, and the prison walls in view.

She wondered if Farquharson would leave it as gladly as she had done for the valley, to which they must presently descend again.

Creagh itself lay low; one came upon it through one of the finest fir plantations in England. There was a natural opening in the hills beyond, and within sight of the study window the little ribbon of water widened to the sea, and was itself lost in the greater power, an augury of life.

"Up to the hills, down to the valley, and then Eternity," thought Evelyn.

Creagh, Farquharson and Calvert stood talking together at the open door for a moment or two more before entering. Calvert's brow was riddled with lines; one would have called him a stern man until his face lit up and became transfigured at some casual remark of Farquharson's. This was a man who had worked hard for his money, you could see; if life had brought him much, it exacted full payment for its every gift.

Calvert had begun to help Farquharson because he foresaw that the latter

was one who would get on, Evelyn decided quickly; but he helped him now from love, not charity. The world which only knew him in his aspect as a shrewd business man would never divine the later motive. But Evelyn's heart went out to him impulsively, as it always went out to those who gave, whatever the bestowal.

Farquharson himself, the prominent factor in the group of figures, alone was in the shadow. Between him and Evelyn, Hare, Beadon and Dora stood; it was not until he was actually within a few feet of her that she saw him clearly. And then it was rather of his mental than of his physical aspect that she received the real impression. Tall and well made, dark and pale, he had presence and distinction, and remarkable composure. Supremely conscious of himself, the knowledge did not disturb him for a moment. Most men depend upon the external view for an effective entry; Farquharson's was attractive. But it was actually the singleness of the man's aim, his sincerity and sense of grip that carried conviction to the critical little group which concentrated its interest in his approach. It saw that he was born to succeed. For he not only had his goal in view, but would attain it.

"Wait, though," thought Hare. "No strong man yet but can be turned by a slight obstacle."

Steady and resourceful, knowing that he was being weighed in the balance, Farquharson busied himself with weighing others. No single detail of his surroundings was lost upon him. Evelyn watched him rapidly gauge and sum up one after another, the character of each person present.

In Beadon he recognized a man who might help, for whose favour he must in any case bid openly. He was a necessary factor in his—Farquharson's—career; without him nothing could be done. Between the young man and Hare, the rugged critic, an odd kind of attraction would exist; loyalty even in antagonism. Meavy, the idealist, Farquharson passed over with a cursory glance; a weak man, this, whatever the world might say. Creagh's cordiality he could appreciate, but native caution made him fear to trust it. People did not usually give without some adequate return, and for the moment he did not see how he could serve Creagh. Miss Beadon, as a woman, he ignored; his glance simply disposed of her. Her presence or non-presence meant nothing to him. As for Evelyn, he knew her name, and she had influence. He distrusted women with influence, but they were worth conciliating.

Their eyes met. He started slightly.

Before him stood a woman whose face changed indescribably, but who always possessed fascination. Slender and pale, Evelyn's one real beauty lay in the shape of her features, the modelling of her face; in the extraordinary light and shadows that made her eyes profound, her look a spur to flick a man's blood into action, or a caress in which he might find peace. And as Farquharson looked

another picture rose suddenly before him, a vision of his childhood. The oval face, the dusky hair that waved back from the forehead, the turn of the rounded throat, the shape of the small head, all were familiar. He recognized them. They were his own—he had loved them long ago. He had stood before them night after night in the picture-gallery at Glune.

"A woman to dream of and to work beside." As Kilmaurs had written about Margaret Cunningham, in a lyric the ink of which had faded many years before, so Richard Farquharson felt now for the woman of his dreams. Here, in the flesh she stood before him, perfect companion, perfect lover and wife. He looked half smiling at her hands—the hands he had loved in the picture—and for the first time wondered what it would be to a man to feel such hands about his throat, drawing him down in mute surrender.

"*Non so dirvi la sensasione che mi danno.*" A scene in D'Annuncio's play came back to him; the sight of the slender figure recalled Bianca Maria's passionate appeal to Anna, when the blind woman's hands were passing, feature by feature, across the girl's face, feeling for the beauties which she could not see, but for which others hungered.... "*Sembra che le vostre dita vedano.... E come uno sguardo che insista, che prema, sembra die tutta l' anima discenda all' estremita delle vostre dita.*"

"*Sembra che tutta l' anima discenda all' estremita delle vostre dita.*"

He could not have spoken the words aloud, for no one heard them. But there are thoughts which have wings, like birds, which fly home to nestle in their natural sanctuary. Evelyn drew back, disturbed and tremulous, like a child who stands hesitating at the door of a room which it has always wanted to enter, but which has been barred until now.

In the music-room beyond, a professional pianist was playing the opening chords of one of Brahms' preludes. The notes echoed like the accompaniment of powerful thought. Evelyn, moving back unconsciously, swayed with sudden vertigo.

Farquharson turned to answer some question of Beadon's. Hare crossed to Evelyn; it seemed to her afterwards that he must have interposed his massive figure between her and Farquharson. He spoke, and the sense of his words came to her vaguely, like a dream.

"A strong personality—that. The man sees clearly and acts promptly, and

will usually get what he wants."

CHAPTER II

"We live in deeds, not years; in thoughts, not breaths;
In feelings, not in figures on a dial.
We should count time by heart-throbs. He lives most
Who thinks most, feels the noblest, acts the best.
And he whose heart beats quickest ...
Lives in one hour more than in years do some
Whose fat blood sleeps as it slips along their veins."
PHILIP JAMES BAILY.

"Is that all I can do for you, ma'am?"

"You might put another little pearl pin at the back of my bodice, please, Emily; I can't quite reach it. Thank you; that's very nice."

The third housemaid—Mrs. Brand had never had a maid of her own in her life—withdrew with a last gratified glance at her handiwork. She thought her "lady" in an inexpensive gown had a better appearance than any other member of the house party. All servants liked Evelyn; she treated them as human beings, not automatons.

Mrs. Brand looked at her watch. Yes, there was still a quarter of an hour's grace before dinner. She switched off the electric light, and, drawing a chair beside the open window, leant out to the night and drank in its wonderful perfume. There was never a place so full of sweet scents and sounds as Creagh.

Some one else had dressed quickly too. The echo of men's voices rose presently from the verandah below. She recognized them with a start as Creagh's unmistakable chuckle of delight broke out at something Farquharson said. Then the younger man pulled his chair forward—she heard the sound grate on the stone—and took up the thread of talk again with an alert and interested air. Evelyn, curiously tired, listened for a moment to the murmur of voices without taking in the full significance of words which occasionally reached her. Creagh seemed to be unfolding some plan of campaign, to which Farquharson said but little in reply. His tone was deliberate and extraordinarily final; one or two words reached

Evelyn clearly. She drew back further into the shadow, fearful of playing the part of eavesdropper.

The frayed edge of her gown, mended and adapted almost beyond recognition, caught her eye. She went to her work-basket and mended it mechanically. It was draped with the lace of her mother's and her own wedding veil, and sweet with the scent of lavender bags where it had been laid. The skirt was made from the fifteen-year-old Court train of her bridal gown; a pearl spray clasping the flowers at her breast was one of Creagh's numerous wedding gifts, her fan and handkerchief another. Every appointment of her dress to-night recalled her marriage. The maid had put out another gown upon the bed, which Mrs. Brand had discarded, choosing by preference that which she had worn the night before. Evelyn had to practise every pitiful little shift of poverty "to keep up an appearance."

Only Henry Brand knew the precise amount of their income. Its fluctuations and diminutions were a constant terror to his wife. There were times when money, obtained how she did not know, seemed fairly plentiful; again, at other times, her desk was laden with unpaid bills, and she worked far into the night to make the money wherewith to meet them. She photographed and painted, and could turn her hand to journalism as easily as to upholstery. Accustomed to do without from childhood, she had limited her personal wants to absolute necessities; she was, moreover, a practical woman who could cook and sew or do housework better than most of the people she employed.

A world which generally expels its social paupers was singularly lenient to the Brands. Some of the great ladies of the land drove down at night to the tiny flat in West Kensington, where Evelyn dispensed hock-cup and home-made cakes, without a murmur; it was said that two young duchesses, rival beauties, had come incognita on one occasion behind thick veils inside a motor 'bus. The latest explorer, the coming man, gravitated naturally to a place where every guest was made to feel individually welcome. Evelyn's reunions recalled something of the famous *salons* of the past. Her tact and sympathy drew opposing bodies together; the little circle had grown from a mere gathering of intimate friends to be the coveted goal of those who wished to meet important persons on an easy and natural footing. Converging opinions met and mixed here like rivers in the sea.

Mighty political battles had been fought out in Evelyn's presence. A famous K.C., with more truth than gallantry, boasted openly that she was the one woman in England who was just and temperate in argument, and the present Prime Minister had said he would drive willingly four miles farther out of London to be welcomed by such a hostess at the end. Unlike most women, technicalities did not alarm her. Men who came to discuss their business investments found in

her as ready a listener as men of action. Nor did she shun, although she never actually invited, the confidences of her own sex. The pain of others hurt her physically; to give real sympathy is, after all, to let "virtue go out of one." Most men and women shun sorrow as if it were leprosy. But in the bank of feeling Evelyn's account was always overdrawn.

It was certainly a point in Henry Brand's favour that he had so early foreseen his wife's possibilities.

His one brief hour of popularity had long since passed. There were unpleasant stories about him. He was, for instance, sole trustee under his father's will, and the money was equally divided between himself and the two unmarried daughters, at whose deaths it would revert to him, failing their marriages, in which case the husbands would have life-interests in the estate, and, if there were issue, the children would eventually succeed. The younger of the two Miss Brands was fragile and delicate; a course of the systematic bullying and petty tyrannies by which a man can make his sisters' lives unbearable, made her run away one night and take refuge in a convent, whose stern *régime* presently brought about her death. The elder sister, stronger in will and brain, was more difficult to deal with; but there are many forms of cruelty practised by those amongst whom we live unrecognized by the law, and which the law has so far never punished. Brand made this woman's life a martyrdom; her every action was thwarted, and every pleasure arrested midway towards its fulfilment. In time her spirit broke. She lived with him because she could never break away; unluckily for her, she had none of that special knowledge which enables a better educated woman to make her own way in the world, and defy those enemies of the household who can be the most bitter and unyielding. Marian Brand was found in bed one morning dead, with a broken bottle of chloral at her side. Brand was the first to break into the room. Accustomed to come down late he had missed his sister's usual preparations for his comfort. The frightened servants at his heels never saw him pick up a letter addressed to himself which lay upon the bed, and which he presently destroyed.

But trustees who benefit by certain deaths under a will must needs go warily, and facts like these leak out in time, however carefully concealed. Brand, pleasantly aware of the world's forgetfulness found it advisable to travel abroad for a while.

It was not, indeed, until after his marriage that he was again universally received. Even now he was only allowed access to the houses where Evelyn was a popular guest because from the first she had refused all invitations which did not include him. The position galled him, although he made the best of it; he had aged of late years, his limp becoming daily more prominent, and the stoop from the shoulders stiffening with time.

Evelyn herself seldom looked back or forward, but to-night, for some unknown reason, as she sat in the dusk by the open window, a tide of memory swept her along to the shore of her youth. Past days of dreams and personal ambitions—how far she had drifted from them lately! The red and black days which marked special epochs, beginning with her childhood in the convent and ending with her marriage, came before her in a series of pictures. She looked at her dead youth, and felt anew the shocks that killed it.

The prim convent parlour, the chairs set staidly with their backs to the wall, the discreet solemnity of the drab curtains, the precision with which each book, each print was arranged, how well she knew them all! Entry into those solemn precincts was a matter of reflection. Evelyn remembered rushing in once, as a child—the subsequent correction.... Fortunately perhaps for her, her personal visitors were few and far between at that time. When she was two years old her mother died. She scarcely knew her father. Her uniform, the air of repression with which she had been taught to receive guests, raised a high wall of separation between the handsome, easy-going Indian officer, whose interest in life was bounded by polo and "shikar," and the decorous child, whose passionate revolt against her surroundings he was not wise enough to guess. It was not his fault. He knew nothing of children, and Evelyn's weekly mail letters, written under the personal supervision of the Reverend Mother, were scarcely valuable as evidences of character.

Colonel Harcourt usually wrote to announce his return to England, but, on Evelyn's fourteenth birthday, he arrived unexpectedly. She found him the parlour, nervously dog's-earing the pages of one of Lady Georgina Fullerton's novels. He looked unusually big and ill-at-ease, even for him. Evelyn saw with horror that the *Catholic Times* and *Universe*, the Reverend Mother's personal property, which were invariably folded in their original folds when read, to be posted to a poorer French community, had been crushed almost out of shape by his nervous fingers, and lay in an untidy heap upon the floor.

In one hand Colonel Harcourt convulsively clutched a large brown-paper parcel. Evelyn tried to turn her eyes from it in vain. She knew it was for her—her birthday present, and her heart leapt. What a day of days it would be! Perhaps—her eyes glowed at the thought—her father might even take her to some place of amusement.

Colonel Harcourt started as she ran towards him. Something about her reminded him of her mother. Her look was so gay, her cheeks so flushed, and, in her hurried obedience to the lay sister's call, a long tress of dark hair had escaped from its restraining ribbon.

He stared her up and down, disconcerted, suddenly conscious of difficulty in his self-appointed task.

"Time passes very quickly," he complained; "how you've grown! I've brought you a present for your birthday, and, now I see you again, I'm not quite sure you'll like it. And I chose it so carefully too!"

"Whatever it is, I shall love it," Evelyn cried ecstatically. To unwrap her own parcel was in itself a joy to one to whom parcels were practically unknown. In her heart of hearts she thought the presents given her by her companions in the convent were dreadfully pious and dull. She had had a mother-of-pearl rosary from her godmother—the fourth given her in six months—a rosary-bag from a school-fellow, a coloured lithograph of "Nostra Signora del Perpetuo Succorso," from the Reverend Mother, framed in perforated card by a nun who was quite wrongfully supposed to be an artist of merit, and four printed "*Mottoes*" from the sisters, the "Virtues" of which were heavily underlined, to point no doubt a needed moral.... Evelyn felt guilty as to the personal significance of many, such as, "*Venial sin, persistently indulged in, becomes mortal,*" and "*Never forget your vile body will at last be food for worms.*" Evelyn was constantly being corrected by the nuns for disorderly habits and impatient words.

Under the outer covering of brown paper, sheets of tissue were closely folded. The girl unwrapped each more tenderly than the last. The shape was odd, unwieldy, and cumbersome—what could it be? A vase? Too light, surely; but then Indian pottery was not really heavy. Something in filagree, perhaps? None of the other girls had a father who lived in India; this present would be unlike any of the others. She tore back the last covering—to disclose a wax doll, dressed in purple velvet and tinsel and imitation Valenciennes lace.

"The eyes open and shut," her father said complacently. "And if you press it here"—he groped with some diffidence in the lower region of the blue satin sash—"it says 'good-morning,' and 'how are you?' quite like a gramophone."

"It must have been dreadfully expensive," Evelyn answered. Her voice was low. The disappointment was acute. Then she pulled herself together, and faced him bravely. "Thank you so much, dear father. How kind of you to choose it all yourself."

"I'm afraid you've got a cold, my dear," said Colonel Harcourt, withdrawing apprehensively. His glance wandered to the wall in search of distraction from the sight of his sick child, successfully evading the picture of St. Lawrence on the grid-iron, only to light upon the martyrdom of St. Agnes, from the details of which he visibly shrank. "Good God, what awful pictures! How you can——" He stopped abruptly and seized his hat. "Well I've some news for you. I'm sorry I can't take you out to-day." It struck him that the delicate oval face might have found a more suitable frame than the stiff black sailor hat which the nuns had chosen for it. "You won't mind, I know; I've got an engagement I can't break. I'm going to give you a new mother, my dear; I'll bring her to see you some day,

and then we'll take you to the Zoo?" He halted again, inwardly convinced the future Mrs. Harcourt, to whom he had described Evelyn as "only a baby," would resent the inconvenient size of his offspring. "Now good-bye, my dear; you'll be wanting to play with your doll. God bless you."

The last unintelligible ejaculation was intended to convey his strict observance of that piety which is demanded of all who pass through convent gates.

He was gone. Evelyn heard his footsteps die away, and caught his relieved farewell to the sour-faced portress before the front-door clanged. She could almost hear the breath of relief he would draw as the tension of the last few uneasy moments snapped.... What did he know of her? What did he care to know? A new mother!—A new *mother*!

She ran down the corridor, sweeping aside the restraining hand of a nun who tried to stop her. She wanted Sister Veronica; Sister Veronica would understand; Sister Veronica was still young. Sister Veronica was daily corrected for evil-doing; Sister Veronica's heart had not yet turned to stone.

"That's well over," Colonel Harcourt congratulated himself complacently, hailing a hansom. "What a prison it is—harder to escape from each time. They'll make a nun of the child eventually, I suppose. Perhaps it would be the best thing, after all."

But Evelyn was not of the material which makes nuns. The convent appealed to her neither as an escape from sin, nor a barrier to temptation. She loved part of the life, and turned from much in loathing. When she was seventeen it frightened her no longer. Her childish rebellion at petty penances, at the narrow outlook of women whose breasts had never thrilled at the touch of a child's lips, yet who pathetically demanded the title of "Mother" as a cherished claim, had changed to pity. Each grim line that repression had seared on brow or cheek seemed now to Evelyn as a wound received in mortal combat against the glowing, ardent youth that leaped so fearlessly in her own veins at sight and sound of growing things, green shoots of trees, showing timidly, early violets lifting shy heads, the twittering of the mother bird teaching her young to spread her wings. She knew and understood no more of her own nature than this—that it was good to live in spring and summer and early autumn, while even some winter days had their own stinging joy—that the blood which was daily wet on Mother Veronica's discipline, the hair-sheet by which that young and tender flesh was lacerated, were alike protests against intoxicating dreams.... Yet dreams were sweet, and why should they be broken?

Another picture. The convent chapel this time; the hour of Benediction which she loved. Warm glow from the altar, warm glow about her heart. A suffused radiance from the lamps that burned day and night before the Body of the Lord; a wave of light, from the candles upon the altar, that seemed to roll upward as the incense soared, a vivid golden cloud that changed its shape momentarily, and was always beautiful, carrying your eye higher and higher until its glance rested at last in perfect peace upon the jewelled monstrance and pyx that held the Sacred Host. The nun's song stilled—that swan-song of dead womanhood—the hush of concentrated prayer—silence—the tinkling of a bell—the blessing that bathed one in a sea of light....

Music again; the organ only. The sense of human breath, temporarily suspended, returning simultaneously to a vast crowd that had for a short while been swayed by an eternal mystery. The shuffling of feet, the changed poise of many bodies, the jingle of rosaries, hastily kissed and put away, the rhythmic filing out of obedient convent boarders, outer air flowing in. But for some time afterwards Evelyn would move in a dream-world, a little detached from, a little unaware of, the gay chatter and talk of her companions in their recreation hour. One day, when in this mood, she was called to the parlour. Her father and stepmother awaited her with a strange man. It had been suggested that Evelyn was to sail with her parents for India, three months later, but Mrs. Harcourt, who, though no longer in her first youth, possessed some charm still for the other sex, had dreaded the rivalry of the younger woman, and was in consequence untiring in her efforts to alter the arrangement. Henry Brand, an acquaintance of her husband's, had been struck by Evelyn's beauty when visiting the convent in a friend's company one day to hear the music. He offered himself now as a solution to the problem.

"Would you like to be married, Evelyn?" her stepmother demanded abruptly. Something in the rapt look of the girl's face showed her that direct methods would be best. "Your father and I are anxious about you; we feel sure that you are much too delicate for India. Mr. Brand says that he wants to marry you, and we should like to leave you in his care."

"Why—should I mind? Yes, of course I'll marry him if you wish me to," said Evelyn dazedly. She had never cared to dwell on the thought of India in her stepmother's company; marriage with any one—the veriest stranger—would be better. She looked at Henry Brand gravely and sedately as he came to her and took her hand. The expression of her father's face, half-ashamed, and half-relieved, perplexed her; as her stepmother sprang forward, she shrank back from the hilarious embrace. The woman glanced at her husband and nodded. All three conspirators had counted upon Evelyn's obedience. Convent training does its work, and the moment had been especially propitious.

"Quite a leading of Providence, in fact," said Mrs. Harcourt, summing up the situation to everybody's satisfaction.

The last picture—the last, at least, upon which Evelyn chose to linger. Her wedding, hastened to fit in with her parents' autumn visits, and to prevent the possibility of a change.

The Oratory this time, large and massive; it felt very grey and cold after the convent chapel. A short Mass and no music—Henry Brand was avowedly a Protestant, but had no fixed belief. There were strangers in the congregation. Some one sobbing—why should Sister Veronica cry? Distractions pouring in; Evelyn pondered as to the meaning of certain directions given her by her confessor; she wondered if she would be allowed to visit the different altars of the church after the ceremony; she noticed a brilliant feather in a lady's hat; for the first time she felt a little shy and lonely. She wished that every one would not look at her; there were some pretty people to look at! She hoped she would be happy; she thought how nice it would be to be married, to have a man—even if his back were not quite straight—to go about with, instead of a mere nun. In future she would be able to wear nice clothes, to move freely in the world, to read what she liked, and be taken to public places where she might even meet some of the people she had crowned with laurels—Chamberlain, Curzon, Kitchener.

How wicked she was! She shut her eyes and knelt up very straight, practising every art she knew against the onslaught of distraction. Above the altar was a picture of the Blessed Virgin and the Eternal Father, painted by a French father of the community, after a design by Sebastian Concha of Turin. She looked from it to the cartouche above, the gilt heart surrounded by rays; then on again to the central picture. Little, forgotten stories of St. Philip Neri came back to her; little, forgotten maxims. She remembered how, on one occasion, a rich noble had come to St. Philip, full of his worldly plans and ambitions. The saint had listened patiently to the confidences, as was his habit. But at the end—"And then?" ... he asked.

Her dreams of happiness, her hopes of success, both seemed to sweep her towards the mysterious shore of marriage—that Sacrament which Catholics approach with prayer and fasting. So far so good. But—then? ...

The church faded; she was lost in the whirl and confusion of amused spectators, who pelted her with rose leaves and confetti, praising her beauty till she blushed. She drove off with her husband, still half-intoxicated with excitement. Then came a picture to which she shut her eyes, the first of a long series, black-

ening with time.

CHAPTER III

"They should take who have the power."

Martin Calvert was a business man, pure and simple. But he had withal a certain clairvoyance which enabled him to detect in others such qualities as would produce the most marketable and satisfactory results.

Starting life with a fairly large income, he had slowly but surely added to it, by effective, if unsensational, means. He had travelled in many countries, discarding the methods of the Yellow Press and its like, comparatively early in his career. It seemed to him that a man only reached permanent fame by being sincere himself and dealing sincerely with human problems. His sense of honour was so acute that it entered even into his business transactions. He had, of course, to make use of the weakness of others to a certain extent, to bend opportunity to his will on occasions; but he set about his work with a straightness not always, nor even often, found in Wall Street. Yet he had learned something from America, although it was said of him in that country that he missed more chances of making fortunes in a day than most men did in a lifetime.

But his round million of money satisfied him after all. He had no near kith or kin to work for, and, patriotic as a man may be at heart, impersonal ties seldom stir his blood so deeply as do those of family. Evelyn was right, he had learned by now to look upon Farquharson almost as his son. He had recognized him from the first as being a man of power, and the incident of their meeting was dramatic. A big ecclesiastical procession was marching one Easter down the Rambla at Barcelona; Calvert, standing at a street corner, was watching it with immense disapprobation. The crowd surged onward, sweeping all before it like a mighty flood; a child, running suddenly across the path of the procession, slipped, and was trampled out of sight almost without a cry, lost in the religious exaltation that is so often blind to human claims. From the opposite side of the road a man dashed forward; so sudden was his movement that it arrested even the half-dazed crowd. The child was saved. He had borne it away before more than the first ranks of the spectators knew what had happened.

The promptness, the surety of the action, appealed to a man to whom swift decisions came naturally. The rescuer was neat, but shabby. Calvert invited him to his hotel.

Farquharson made no claim on Calvert's pity or patronage. But, after a few judicious questions, the older man discovered that the stranger was of some social significance, and had been out of employment for about three weeks. The secretary for whom he had last worked in an office had absconded with the contents of the till. Calvert had important business letters to send to England that evening. He hired Farquharson's services then and there for the night, and presently gave him a place in his office.

And now, fifteen years later, he looked back upon this act of impulse as being the wisest of his life. From a commercial point of view, Farquharson had paid his way. More than that, he had healed an old sore in Calvert's heart; he had renewed the man's lost faith and hope. And Calvert was old enough to realize that in life the things we can touch and lay hold of are not always or even often the most valuable.

The dinner hour, usually a propitious moment in which to discuss claims and urge the need of benefactions, was almost always a cause of annoyance to Calvert. He hated ostentation; the very men who were anxious to gain his favour frequently lost it by offering him out-of-season delicacies on gold plate. Once, at a small dinner party in New York, where over a thousand dollars had been spent on table decorations alone, Calvert rose at the fourth course and struck the table with a blow which shook the gay, luxurious crowd from its apathy.

"You have got starving men outside," he said. "Every dish you have set before me, to my mind, is wholesale murder. You and your ways remind me of Babylon; beware lest her fate overtakes you."

But the startled guests broke in here with hilarious shrieks of laughter. The episode was supposed to have been got up by the host as a new form of entertainment to pique their jaded palates.

Conforming to custom in his own house, Calvert always offered his guests champagne at dinner, but he himself invariably drank ale. Democrat as he was, he could complain of nothing in the meal that had just been served at Creagh. It was characteristic of his host; good and simple without display. And the talk through the dinner was genial and unaffected; something in the atmosphere of a room which has grown warm with human kindness calls for a like response from those of its occupants who are sensitive to influences.

Calvert felt his own mind expand. He had talked openly, as he seldom talked, and Farquharson was at his best. The elder man took a pride in watching

this child of his deliberate choice, who never failed him. Farquharson was a man who had from the first seen two moves ahead in the game of life, and Calvert, himself a skilled player, gladly acknowledged himself beaten by a pupil to whom he had taught the rudiments of hazard.

The drawing-room at Creagh was essentially a pleasant room. Innumerable flowers, books and reviews, Lady Ennly's spinning-wheel and lace pillow, kept in constant use, gave it a homely, old-fashioned appearance. Calvert, aware of comfort, although unable to analyze its cause, crossed the room to Mrs. Brand, who withdrew to a distant corner as the men entered the room.

She swept her skirt aside, and pointed to the seat beside her.

"How nice of you to come and speak to me! I thought you meant to," she said.

Calvert smiled.

"Lord Creagh told me you were just like that. 'Confide in Mrs. Brand, tell her everything you want; the more direct you are the more she'll like you,' he said. Now, I'm a plain man, Mrs. Brand, and have never been used to women and their ways. I deal with facts, not illusions." He seated himself more comfortably in his chair, obviously preparing for an intimate talk. "I'm commercial through and through, you know; if I want a thing I like to pay its proper price. Now, I want something from you, and you're not the sort of woman to take any price at all. That annoys me, because I haven't the faintest shadow of a claim upon your interest."

Evelyn was silent for a moment.

"Women aren't very active powers in the world as a rule," she said; "I'm a dabbler. I paint little pictures, I write little stories and do fancy work, for money—that's all. I think I could have been a good mother, but I've never had a child. There's nothing in this world of my very own I can shape and mould as I should love to shape it. I suppose I like to play with lives as other women do with stocks and shares. It's just another form of speculation. So when men who can do things—there aren't many of them!—are good enough to trust me, to confide in me even the tiniest inkling of their plans and hopes, I'm very proud." She waited. "I've always had one big ambition. I've wanted to do something to help on, even in the smallest way, some one who'll do big things; to show that I believed in him before the world had the least knowledge of what he was capable. I think you re going to give me my opportunity—I know what you want, of course; any one would, who saw you with Mr. Farquharson. You want every scrap of help for him that you can get. Now, mind, I don't really see where I come in, for he's a man who won't need even you for long. He stands alone; he'd always like to, wouldn't he?"

"You're right; he'd always like to," Calvert admitted slowly. There was some

sadness in his tone.

Evelyn put out her hand.

"It's a good trait, isn't it? It hurts other people, of course. I think no one gets on in the world without hurting some one else in the process. But there are times when one thanks God that one was just the person who was called upon to make that special sacrifice which was counted on and taken, so very simply. Not that I see there should be any sacrifice in Mr. Farquharson's case. He is your *protégé*. Everything he does will tell for you. He came to you with a handful of irons, and you gave him fuel and lit the fire, and you'll be even prouder of the fact some day than you are now. Well, if you can let me put in even one tiny piece of wood to keep that fire alight, you may guess how delighted I shall be."

Calvert gave a sigh of relief.

"Thank you. You're right, of course. I'm acting the part of beggar for the boy's sake. You are—forgive me, I don't mean it rudely—a sort of fashionable cult. You know a great many persons, and everybody likes you. Some one once said of you that if a man really wanted the key of the Foreign Office secrets he would hunt for it in your flat. And they said, too, that you were as straight as a die: it's a quality one doesn't invariably find in political women. I want it to be under your wing that Richard"—he was unconscious of the lapse—"meets people. I'd like him to go into the world as a friend of yours. Oh yes, Creagh can do a lot for him, I know; but Creagh's religion puts off many people. You're a Romanist, too; but, then, one lets a woman have her little failings. Now, in many ways I'm broad-minded; Farquharson's political opinions and mine are at opposite poles, for instance; but I want him to have a free hand. There'll be a change in the Ministry soon. I give our present Government six months. We've decimated the Army, and the Navy's at boiling-point; the Labour candidates and Irish members are aggrieved as usual. You know what all parties think about the Education Bill—one needn't go into that; and I hear hints of so-called Licensing reforms, which will set the country by the ears."

He waited.

"Yes?" said Evelyn.

"During the winter I want Farquharson to meet men who are likely to form the next Ministry," said Calvert deliberately, lowering his voice. "To meet them intimately and often—under convenient auspices. I should like them all to forgather at your house. You bring the right people together, and you make them talk."

"I only listen."

Calvert laughed again.

"The music of a man's voice is very sweet in his ears. You're a born diplomat, Mrs. Brand. You and Richard have a quality in common—you're both 'mas-

ters of the unspoken word and slaves of the word you have spoken.' I don't want a cheap success for Richard. He's a man of men; in my heart I believe him to be the one man who can save our country in its crisis." There was a little pause. "It sounds sentimental to say it, but I love England. So does he. His pulses beat to music which most men only hear once in a lifetime. Things must come to him in time. He mustn't eat his heart out wanting them. For the country's sake as well as his I'm in a hurry. He ought to have a place in the next Cabinet."

Music was seldom permitted at Creagh, the conversation was usually too good for it. But a French opera singer was amongst the guests that night, and the words of her song came to them, clear and pathetic, in the pause that followed—

"Cet espoir, hélas! d'un avenir doré
Ces apparitions, ces rêves ont duré,
Le temps d'une aube boréale,
Et mon esprit partit aux fabuleux
Ou l'on pense cueillir les camélias bleus
Et trouver l'amour idéale."

How long would Calvert's dream last?

"I should like to know Mr. Farquharson better," said Evelyn presently. With the exception of Farquharson and his host, the remaining guests had gathered round Madame de Mirelle. Not to have paid for a professional entertainment is the surest factor in its enjoyment. As her voice died away, tenderly, like a caress, the buzz of talk rose and fell easily, and drifted to them at intervals. Presently the accompanist began a few modulations, preparatory to the prelude of the next song.

"I will do what you say, of course; I will gladly make opportunities, if Mr. Farquharson will take them."

"He only needs a chance," said Calvert. "Look at me." He rose heavily from his chair and stood before her: a man of loose build, large and solid; the type of man whom a photographer would pose beside a writing-table, with right hand extended on an open book, against a "good library background," like some suburban mayor. "I'm not a romantic figure, am I? but I've had my dreams, as romantic as any lover's, and Farquharson materialized one of them. I want to materialize his now as a thank-offering."

Evelyn said nothing. She looked up with eyes quick with sympathy, that drew him gently to her side again.

"I wanted an island to play with—to administrate," said Calvert after a pause. "It was the first definite plan that came to me after a blow which shook my world. You know about that, probably. I had nothing of my own left to care for. Kith and kin had either died or left me—they cared for nothing but my money. I wanted some one thing—in default of a person—a place I could do as I liked with—could run on my own lines—make in my own image, as you would have made your child. They were Utopian lines, maybe, which I meant to follow, but I wanted a commercial success too. There were plenty of useless places to be had as a mere matter of barter; some of them even carried titles with them! They didn't do. Hobbies—as hobbies—don't appeal to me. I went to Stamford's and bought maps; spent hours at the Geographical Society in Savile Row, groping in Parliamentary Reports, and so forth, until I found a spot which seemed to be all I wanted. And one day, very shortly after, Farquharson and I set sail for Taorna."

His eyes softened as a man's eyes soften when he recalls a splendid vision.

"If you could see it," he said impulsively, "you'd understand then all that the first glimpse of it meant to me. It's as dear to me now as it was then. It was Farquharson's first voyage. We got there early one morning, soon after dawn. Our bagahalow drew in to the shore as slowly and rhythmically as a gondola. There was light and colour everywhere. Bamboo skiffs, their decks flush with the sides, floated by, steered by negro slaves, singing. The oil of their skins gleamed like polish. The whole scene——" He stopped, seeking for the right expression. "It throbbed with the sunlight. Naked boys near the shore were diving into the water, not for pennies as they do in Madeira, but to catch shining fish in their hands, or in bright nets. A herd of little black babies with big stomachs were rolling over and over in the lemon-coloured sands, under the charge of atoms of three and four years old, twirling tops made out of whelk shells."

"For nobody knew what the bagahalow was bringing," said Evelyn softly.

"Unconscious, all," said Calvert grimly. "That was what touched me—and their patience. On the shore a group of slaves stood chained together; they had unhealed wheals across their shoulders, and the fetters had cut into their arms and made festering sores. I've lived too long out in the East to call black men my brothers, but injustice sticks in my gorge. All the voyage I'd been digesting a volume of evidence as to the Sheikh's ways of dealing with offenders."

He knocked the ashes off his cigarette with care. Lady Ennly, more accustomed to the society of men than women, allowed her guests to smoke in the drawing-room.

"Well, that's not pretty, and the scenery was," he said. "I can see it all now. A hill like a tower standing over five hundred feet high faced us, and dotted all over the islands were groups of Wanabi mosques with minarets. At the base of the hill there were the remains of the old capital, a white stone city, so brilliant in

the sunshine that we had to shade our eyes. But everything was brilliant. Taornian sportsmen hunting gazelle in the distance, I remember, were riding horses with gold and crimson trappings, and in the east some women, unconscious of our field-glasses, had pushed back their masks; they carried baskets of citrons on their heads, and wore upper garments rather like red chemises, with flapping orange-coloured trousers. But all the colour concentrated in the gardens; hibiscus, pomegranates, plumbago, every tropical fruit and flower almost that you can think of grew in profusion."

Madame de Mirelle was singing again, a Bedouin love song this time.

"They were chanting something not unlike that song she's singing," said Calvert, jerking his broad thumb in the direction of the music-room. "It had a sort of droning note—pathetic almost. I suppose a sentimental man would have taken it as a call ... it meant a lot to me somehow."

"It must have meant still more to Richard Farquharson," said Evelyn slowly.

"He knew all along I was making him ready for some trial of strength; what it was he didn't know. I'm not the man to speak of dreams until they are within an ace of realization. He scored off me on one point, I remember. I'd made arrangements for our landing; amongst other items I'd ordered suitable conveyances. They sent us white donkeys of the swift Taornian breed, for which they're famous. Their tails and manes were very smart with henna, but they had neither reins nor stirrups. Our choice lay between them and camels. I chose a donkey, because it was less far to fall from." He paused.

"Go on, please," said Evelyn.

Calvert nodded.

"Curious how such details stay with one. I remember the very words I used to Farquharson at that moment, the look on his face as he listened. I purposely gave my order as though I were telephoning for a restaurant table. I said, 'I mean to have this island. You must get it for me. I'll give you a free hand, but everything must be fixed up before I leave for the next meeting of the Kimbala Mines in a week's time.' And Farquharson"—his eyes narrowed, and he smiled the slow smile of a man who looks back on a pleasant memory—"Farquharson turned very sharply; it was a savage place, you know, and he would have to deal with savages. So far he hadn't come across them. He said——"

Evelyn leant forward.

"Yes?"

Calvert laughed.

"He said, 'Right, sir. Look out, or you'll be off that donkey in another moment.' And that was all we ever said about the matter till the thing was done."

Dora Beadon swept across the room, a pair of youthful members of the Upper House in her train.

"Evelyn, your behaviour at parties is simply execrable. You've kept this corner all the evening, and everybody wants it, it's so comfy." Then in an undertone—"Now, do be grateful to me, there's a dear. I felt I must in common charity relieve you of that dreadful old fogey. And, besides, you haven't told me yet how you like my gown. Felice sat up all night giving the finishing touches, and was as cross as fourteen hundred sticks all day in consequence. Maids are so utterly unbearable."

"It's a lovely frock," said Evelyn, honestly admiring the beautiful material which no art could drape in graceful folds upon Miss Beadon's short, fat body. "Let off Felice to-night, Dora dear. I'll come and put you to bed if you'll let me. You don't know what a good maid I am."

"You'd ruin any decent maid in a month," said Dora shortly, her mouth twisting into curves which always showed displeasure. "It's a good thing you're never likely to have one. Felice is paid to wait on me; you aren't. Don't talk nonsense, Evelyn. Servants are made for us, not we for servants. If they fall ill they can go, and more fools they, when you think of the wages we give them. Oh"—with a brilliant smile—"isn't that Mr. Farquharson? Do come here, won't you? We've kept a place for you in this corner. Evelyn, isn't that Lady Wereminster calling? I wouldn't keep her waiting if I were you."

CHAPTER IV

"Thou shalt do a deed and abide it."—LEWIS MORRIS.

"If I were a younger woman, Richard Farquharson is a man I should fall head over ears in love with," announced Lady Wereminster, pausing at Evelyn's door on the way to her bedroom. "I mean no disrespect to Wereminster, of course; than whom it would be difficult to conceive a more opposite type. But the man sweeps one off one's feet, by sheer force of vitality and power. The guileless maiden of my time—it's a type that no longer exists, my dear; the birth of the twentieth century killed it—would have been vanquished at first sight, and suffered from vapours for a week. I suppose you have taken him under your wing, Evelyn? I noticed his political godfather making overtures to you in a recess. Well, you have a *protégé* who'll do you credit this time. Not like some of your lame dogs, who

only used their mended limbs to kick you later. No, it's no use hushing me down, Evelyn. Other people have eyes and ears beside yourself, you know. Don't you remember making everybody's life unbearable until you'd secured an important colonial appointment for the husband of some impossible woman who looked like a suffragette and lived in the suburbs? After she'd spent the extra three hundred a year for twelve months or so she began abusing you because you hadn't got them an appointment in England instead. And there was another woman, who had twins or triplets, or something tiresome and embarrassing. You sold your best lace to provide the unprovided guest with the requirements of decency, and then the mother complained that the things you gave her had been bought at Peter Jones's instead of Steinmann's."

Evelyn laughed.

"Come now, you're the last person to preach. Your house has always been known to be the refuge of the socially destitute."

"One has to pay for one's title even if it's an old one," said Lady Wereminster. "It tacks on about thirty per cent. on the price of a yard of ribbon and lessens your income from five hundred a year upwards in charitable demands. But about Richard Farquharson. I believe that man's made of the right stuff, Evelyn."

She laid her hand on the younger woman's arm with a sudden access of gravity.

"My dear, I'm an old woman, and in my heart of hearts I'm as troubled for my country as though she were my child. All about me are signs of decay. I see young people spending twice as much a week on pleasure as their parents would have spent on the necessities of life in a year; I see every principle I was taught in childhood violated and outraged. Private betrayals, political treason, public indifference, contempt of religion, lightness in marriage are everywhere. Signs of the times, Wereminster says. It breaks his heart like mine. I was brought up to rank honour and truth and sincerity as everyday virtues, and marriage a church ceremony so solemn that it made one weep. I think we need some national upheaval or shock to make us realize how we've sunk morally."

"A strong man in politics, for instance, to take us by our shoulders and give us a good shaking?"

"Exactly. And that's just what Richard Farquharson would enjoy doing! The man will make history, my dear, or I'm no judge of character."

"I'm glad you've made friends with Mrs. Brand," said Creagh. It was past midnight, but he and Beadon had agreed to walk with Farquharson and Calvert so far as the village inn. "She's a woman of wide interests and sound common sense. By the way, she asked me if I knew any details of how Mr. Farquharson arranged

that island scheme for you. She said I was not to press you if you had any objection to telling her."

"It's a long story," Calvert said slowly. "Farquharson never will speak of it. I think he went through worse things than I knew even. To start with, he had to go disguised to the bazaar, a thing not one Englishman out of a dozen could have carried through successfully, even with his knowledge of Arabic."

"He tossed the whole thing off to-night in a phrase when I spoke to him about it—said circumstances played into his hands, and it was merely a question of watching and waiting."

"There was a fairly complicated plot involved," said Calvert dryly. "To make you understand what happened I ought to explain something of the actual geographical situation. Taorna, you may know, is the chief of a group of islands that a good many Powers have coveted in their day—Turkish, Muscatian, Persian, even Portuguese. She was known to be a prize, her pearl fisheries only needed to be adequately worked on modern lines to bring in a big revenue. The Shah of Persia had had his eyes on that fishery for some time, and had planted secret agents very intelligently amongst the inland tribes of the Shiite sects. They sowed discontent and dissension—and we reaped the benefit."

Calvert stopped to light his cigar.

"Let the two others get on ahead a bit. Farquharson hates to hear me tell this story. Well, the island is divided into two parties; one being pro-Sheikh Aba, the other pro-Shah Omar. The Persians based their claim on the fact that, centuries before, Taorna had been an appanage of the Persian crown, under a certain race of kings."

"There were, in fact, the makings of a revolution, which you successfully turned to your own ends?" Creagh suggested, smiling.

"To England's eventually, I hope. Mind you, the scheme was Farquharson's. He began by sending a man to communicate with the British Consul at Benuni. Benuni is a port on the western coast of Persia. A British political resident lives there under the protection of a few gunboats. Sailors are always ready for a fight, as you know; it's a pleasant variation from the day's work. The Shiite revolution was timed to take place on Thursday night at ten o'clock. The palace was to be rushed and the Sheikh taken off to await the Shah's decision concerning which especial form of lingering death his end was intended to take. The Shah's claimant was, of course, to be immediately installed in place of the deposed ruler."

"And then——?"

"By ten o'clock on that same Thursday night the muzzles of two British gunboats were pointing at the mouth of Zut harbour, ready to protect my interests." There was a twinkle in Calvert's eyes, but his voice was preternaturally solemn. "Farquharson had been forced to represent, of course, that my person

was in peril. You can count on the British Navy's disinclination to inquire unreasonably into the precise cause of these little affairs. I fear that the Commanders of those gunboats, young lieutenants both, gathered from the wording of Farquharson's appeal that my actual purchase of the island had taken place a few hours before it actually had; in his hurry he omitted to mention the exact time of the transaction." Creagh chuckled. "It was the death-blow of the plot. Half the population made for the shore, to see what the gunboats meant, and what Power they represented. And simultaneously, in the courtyard of the palace, Aba and his chiefs proclaimed that in view of the fact that the British had discovered a plot against his life, he had placed himself under their protection. Only a question or two was asked. The gunboats answered them."

"But I don't see——"

"Farquharson had interviewed the Sheikh first, of course," said Calvert simply. "He had made his way into the private apartments, every inch of the way to which was guarded. How he did it I don't know. Even by day only the members of the immediate household were allowed to approach within praying distance of the burying-place of his ancestors, where he had ensconced himself. I know Farquharson only reached him at the peril of his own life. He said the old man was quite reasonable under sheer stress of terror, and delighted to accept four lakhs of rupees for the transfer of the island. I told you he was old, and, luckily for us, his sons were lepers. I gave him his summer palace for his own use and that of the heirs immediate of his body in their lifetime. They were not to go beyond the walls without a permit for fear of insurrection. Aba was possibly the more amenable because he was frightened out of such wits as he still possessed at the thought of being killed in the same way that he had killed so many others."

"The three men actually were sent to prison then?" asked Creagh.

"Call it free accommodation in an hotel, it sounds better," Farquharson corrected blandly. He had caught the last words as the men approached.

"I take it that a liberal supply of palm-oil greased your way through those closed doors," said Creagh, turning.

Farquharson laughed.

"Oh, I had luck all through. I lighted upon the most useful drug in the bazaar, an excellent remedy for sleeplessness."

"I should like to hear more about your doings, Mr. Farquharson," said Beadon curiously.

"They're worth hearing." Creagh's tone was hearty. "He ran a great risk, but it was to some purpose. You and I know how useful Mr. Calvert has been to us, Beadon; how often his munificent gifts have helped the nation through tight places when our own exchequer has run dry. I'm sure he would be the first to acknowledge that he owes much of his fortune to Mr. Farquharson's help."

Calvert nodded approvingly. Things were panning out as he hoped. He appreciated Creagh's praise, but his eyes were fixed on Beadon—the man who, politically speaking, held Farquharson's future in his hand.

And for the moment Beadon was silent. Then—

"What did you yourself get out of it all?" he asked abruptly. "At first I was under the impression that you were Calvert's secretary, but some one told me to-night that you held an even more important post."

Calvert laid his hand affectionately upon the young man's shoulder.

"He is Administrator of Taorna," he said; "our report will be published in a few days. You will see then that the appointment is no sinecure. I think I may say that we work the resources of our island to the uttermost; we challenge you to make the fullest inquiries into our methods and criticize them fairly. Japan took thirty years to grow; we've taken ten. Even the present Government knows what our trade is: we have been useful to England already. We have our own fleet and our own Army, our own line of steamers for transport, our Chamber of Commerce and Council. Farquharson is the power behind all these; he holds them in the hollow of his hand. He works, I pay." A new note came into Calvert's voice, a note of gravity. "I have made him ruler over a few things already; at my death—God willing—I mean to leave him in a position where he may rule many things."

Creagh and Beadon walked away in silence. It was not until they had reached the lodge gates that the former spoke.

"Well, what have you decided to do for him?"

Beadon smiled.

"That's just like you! So you take my belief for granted, eh? Well, you're right. One might not like him, but one must believe in him. That impassive, implacable type of man always gets on. Look at his chin! But one can't decide these things in a hurry. There's the Blue Book to be looked through first.

"Oh, if it only depends on the Blue Book"—Creagh shrugged his shoulders—"that's right enough. I read the proofs this morning."

CHAPTER V

"... A bar was broken between
Life and life ...
In spite of the mortal screen."—BROWNING.

An American's advice to Farquharson at this particular juncture of his career would have been to "make things hum." The phrase itself is vulgar enough, but, employed with discretion, American methods have something in their favour. Farquharson, for one, knew their value. He brought infinite tact to bear upon his capture of London; to have captured London is, luckily for the nation, still to have captured the world.

He started well, of course. He had come at an effective moment, and his coming was judiciously pioneered. Then, too, he had the right influence to back him, and an amazing personality. It was impossible to ignore or be indifferent to him; he set too big forces in motion. Among the leaders of society he awoke, indeed, something like enthusiasm, and the plastic mob followed. Commercial enterprise has not yet robbed us of our love of the romantic, and there was something essentially romantic about Farquharson's past.

"The man takes one back to Scherazade and her thousand and one tales," Lady Wereminster decided. "He's unique. If he were to disappear before your eyes on a magic carpet, or turn your inferior electro-plate into solid gold, or vice versa, at an afternoon call, it wouldn't surprise you in the least. And yet he is utterly without pose. Then the man's voice! Well, Gladstone could talk about nothing for a solid hour or two, and make you think you were overflowing with knowledge until you analyzed what he had told you in cold blood. I believe this man could go on talking half the night, and hypnotize you into believing the most incredible facts."

That Lady Wereminster should take up any new-comer so warmly was in itself a proof of Farquharson's success. Hare rallied her on the subject.

"You've a positive *flair* for him. How long will it last?"

Lady Wereminster shrugged her shoulders.

"One must be in the fashion; his name is everywhere, like Odol advertisements."

Things had, indeed, opened out amazingly for the new-comer. Public curiosity was awakened, and public curiosity is another way of spelling success. Then, too, the political horizon was uniformly dull. Farquharson's doings were a positive godsend to the Press. The Stock Exchange was soon alive to his importance; Taorman bonds went up in leaps and bounds two days after his arrival.

Beadon, coming to visit him one morning and finding him at work with his secretary upon a mail from which he had separated a pile of invitation cards,

glanced from them to him dubiously. Even distinguished people were anxious to be the first to exploit this man of the future; social charity, which popularizes your entertainments with no commensurate demands upon your purse-strings, is just as much sought after in Park Lane as in South Kensington.

"Feeling rather helpless, eh?"

Farquharson pointed despairingly at the invitations.

"Shall I accept or refuse the lot wholesale?" Beadon frowned.

"A difficult question. A secretary can't help you here; very few people could. It doesn't do to go everywhere; it lessens your value. And you can't afford to waste a moment's time upon unnecessary people. No, the Press is no guide. In the *Morning Post* you'll find long accounts of functions you mustn't dream of being seen at." He took up four or five invitations haphazard, glancing at the names. "Merrimans, Churchleighs, Halliways—what impertinence! You must refuse all those. I'll tell you who could help you—Mrs. Brand. She's a great friend of Creagh's; you met her at his house, I think. Put yourself in her hands—you can't do better. She's a good woman, always ready to help. Give her the whole bundle and take her advice implicitly."

It was the second time that the idea had been mooted to Farquharson.

He sat for a moment idly after Beadon had left, pondering. This would be the first occasion on which he had ever appealed to a woman for help. More, indeed, almost the first time that he had been brought into intimate companionship with one. To know a woman well you must see her in her home, surrounded by her individual accessories, the little personal touches which are so sure a guide to character. And he wanted to know Evelyn better, to trace the exact extent of her resemblance to the portrait at Glune, which in the days of his worst loneliness he had re-christened as his "Bride of Dreams."

He motored down to West Kensington that very afternoon, and found Mrs. Brand in and alone. He went directly to the point, as was his habit; her slight hesitation in accepting surprised and even slightly piqued him. People were usually proud to do small services for him.

They met again next day by arrangement; he found her work practical and business-like, and she was quick in decision like himself. It was the first of many visits.

Little by little Calvert dropped out of the fray; having put his man in the arena, he could trust him to hold his own against any opponent. He was beginning to feel his age. But now at last he seemed on the verge of reaping his reward for many yeas' toil and struggle. Farquharson had saved him from going to the grave a disappointed man. For Calvert had loved Cummings like a son, and the

lad's change of front had dealt his uncle the sharpest blow of his life. The Roman Catholic priesthood was, in Calvert's view, a network of intrigue and deception, the betrayal of a man's heritage of freedom; he looked upon Cummings as an enemy of the State.

Calvert's interest had been purely impersonal at first; courage is after all instinctive, and may spring as easily from love of adventure as from nobler motives. "The crowded hour of life" is no real test of character. But Farquharson won him in spite of himself. He outstripped Cummings in a stride. Farquharson was born to give orders, Cummings to obey them. Calvert found himself erecting a pedestal for the one, while for the other he had made a home.

Calvert watched the growth of Farquharson's friendship with Mrs. Brand with openly expressed delight. Farquharson needed softening. The situation might have proved a trifle awkward in some cases, but Brand was a mere nonentity—an asp whose sting had been drawn long ago. Some years before a matter of a somewhat shady business transaction had brought the two men together; Brand had presumed on his distant connection with Calvert to use his name, and had been at once repudiated by the elder man. By now he had probably forgotten the incident. There had doubtless been many transactions of a like nature in Brand's career.

To Evelyn, these daily meetings with Farquharson were the fulfilment of a great ambition. She had wanted this ideal companionship all her life; the real "give and take" from which alone happy marriages are formed, if men and women would but realize the fact. It seemed to Evelyn that to be useful to such a man as Farquharson, to be at hand whenever he wanted her, and away when her presence might have been a distraction, to listen and understand his aims while keeping her independent judgment, to share the undramatic part of his work and leave him the substantial success, was a task any woman might be proud of. She threw herself with absolute ardour into his most minute interests and schemes; after a time he trusted her even with the outline of plans which had not yet taken tangible shape, recognizing the value of her quick perceptions and sincerity.

"You limit my acquaintances, but you yourself know far too many people," said Farquharson one day abruptly. "They make claims upon you and you give in to them. When I left you the other day there were four people waiting in the dining-room, pensioners, claimants, I don't know what they were, but they annoyed me. You are a woman who could do something if you set your mind to it. If these good folks want sympathy, let them go to an idle or frivolous person who can afford to spend on them the time you should devote to better things. Every one should have a set purpose in life; trivial claims and small anxieties distract one in spite

of oneself."

"What set purpose can there be in the life of an ordinary woman of no especial talent?" said Evelyn. "Only women of genius have real lives of their own. Most of us are like poor little Alice—'part of the Red King's dream'—or some one else's. If I died to-morrow, some of my friends would canonize me and the rest forget. As far as acquaintances go, one divides them into two sets: those one likes to know, and those who like to know one. I am nice to the first because I want to be, and nice to the second because I ought. I am not applying the rule to you, of course—what is selfishness in a woman is singleness of purpose in a man, remember."

Farquharson frowned.

"Leave cynicism to others. By the way, we haven't looked at my morning letters yet."

At the Wereminsters' dinner party a week later, Farquharson was paired off with Dora Beadon, encased as usual in her unyielding armour of self-esteem. It was a compliment for which he was not perhaps sufficiently grateful. He always found Miss Beadon dull, but to-night she harassed him with a stream of impertinent questions intended to show sympathy: "Why on earth don't you do this? Haven't you really done the other? Everybody says——" and so forth.

"One hears of you on all sides," she said archly. "Oh, we all know about these little West Kensington visits of yours; there will be quite a scandal if you don't take care. I suppose you'll think we're all dreadful gossips, but you can't expect charming women to talk nothing but politics all day, can you? Personally, I always think a man wants a thorough change when he comes home. Suppose he's in an office, for instance, why, the last thing in the world he should do when he gets back is to talk over troublesome business with his wife."

"I've heard a good many unsympathetic and incapable wives urge that as an excuse for obvious neglect," said Farquharson dryly.

"Well, I know I never let my father say a word about politics or anything he's really interested in—it's ever so much better for him to hear what I've been doing all day," said Dora, defending herself.

"Salt, please."

Miss Beadon reddened slightly and tried another tack.

"You lazy person, there is some on your left. You've got an ally worth having in Evelyn Brand, by the bye. Father says he has never known even her work so hard. She's rather an extraordinary person too, you know. She can make any one do anything she wants. Well, I suppose one shouldn't say it"—she laughed consciously—"but pretty women generally can, can't they?"

"Mrs. Brand's power doesn't depend on mere looks," said Farquharson shortly. Across the table, as he spoke, he met the full look of her animated face, too pale for perfect beauty to-night, yet glowing with what, had he been a man whose mind lent itself readily to religious thoughts, he would have called the light of the spirit.

There were other far prettier women present; there were many more notable in the world's eyes. He looked with distaste at his colourless companion—her name would be published in the papers to-morrow and Evelyn's omitted. Yet scarcely one topic of conversation was broached that night at table, of which Mrs. Brand had not some special knowledge—knowledge so eminently marketable that, had it been in her husband's possession, the little West Kensington flat might soon have been exchanged for more congenial quarters.

"Fancy your not admiring her," Miss Beadon rattled on, delighted. "She's certainly very white to-night, and of course her features never were good. But if one's fond of a person their looks make little or no difference to one. Love is the only permanent beauty doctor, I think."

Miss Beadon always gave out her platitudes with the triumph of one throwing a searchlight on a gloomy corner.

"Don't you agree with me?" she asked coquettishly, mentally determining to bombard Meavy with the same phrase later.

"Love's a subject I know nothing of, I'm afraid," said Farquharson impatiently. Yet he paid Dora Beadon the tribute of remembering one of the many hints she had let fall. What she implied was true; he did already owe Evelyn a big debt of gratitude. The hours she had spent in his service, the letters she had written, the advice she had given on social matters, even the parties she had planned, the expense to which she had been put, her sympathy—he had taken it all for granted, as though she were his wife and it his due.

Thinking it over later, he was aghast at his own lack of consideration. Then, characteristically, he made the best of things. Woman was made for man after all. Was it Joubert or some other French philosopher who said one should choose for a wife only such a woman as he would choose for a friend were she a man?

A wife! The word, coming so readily to his lips, startled him. A wife ... a helpmate and companion, the tenderest of mistresses, and best of friends. For a moment he saw a vision, a picture of what his life might be with such a woman....

Such thoughts were not for him. Abruptly leaning out of the motor, he hailed a passer-by, a mere casual acquaintance, who was delighted to be recognized. He even drove on to the man's rooms in an access of quite unusual cordiality.

The little interruption dispersed the vision. But it came back to him, as dreams will, when he turned on the light in his empty room and stood for a

moment absently by the table laden with its mass of documents and official pamphlets. It looked bare and cold—not right, somehow.

Wife! He tried to close the door of his heart upon the thought in vain. He said Evelyn's name aloud, and smiled as he re-christened her.

"Evelyn—that would do for the world. To me she must always be Eve, the first woman."

He drew a long breath, and set to work. The rough draft of accounts in connection with a native industry he was opening out in Taorna had to be checked and examined before dawn.

CHAPTER VI

"Those who want to lead must never hesitate about sacrificing their friends."—LORD BEACONSFIELD.

Miss Beadon returned from the Wereminsters' dinner party even more than usually self-satisfied. The Prime Minister himself had had a chat with her, while as for Farquharson, he was constantly at her side. Another conquest, she supposed—one worth considering this time, for Farquharson was in his way a *parti*.

After all, as nominal housekeeper to her father, life had little more to offer her. Even the best servants like a change of place occasionally! The wife of an important man gets more attention than his daughter. And some important post would doubtless fall to Farquharson's share ere long. Dora had only to mention the matter to her father, to let fall a few of those ready tears which so quickly subjugate a man's will and reason, to get her way later, when there was a change of Government. Her father was notoriously—she flattered herself most men were—indulgent where her wishes were concerned.

Miss Beadon blissfully believed that all her acquaintances who had done well in life, owed the position to her patronage. "So and so would never have got that post by himself. Why, I had to beard the Prime Minister in his den and do my poor little best to get round him before he consented," she would say, in reference to some coveted appointment which obvious merit, or a signed note from Beadon, had procured. Outsiders, recognizing her vanity and her father's

weakness, played up to both because the game paid so well. If to make Miss Beadon believe she was the *deus ex machina* of all social and political events was to secure her father as ally, it was worth while to frame a few extravagant compliments, and spend half-an-hour or so, which might have been more amusingly employed, in her company.

Miss Beadon fell a very easy prey to the schemes of intriguing mothers. She was besieged with requests for recommendations by indolent young men who had no qualifications for any opening which demanded work. At public meetings she was invariably pursued by wives of provincial town-clerks eager to advance their husbands' opportunities; she plaintively complained that at bazaars her stall was the rest-house of nervous mothers with marriageable daughters, who reckoned on Miss Beadon's philanthropy to procure them coveted invitations. Bred in the atmosphere of favour, and herself totally unable to tell good from bad, Dora distributed smilingly innumerable small acts of favour, of which either her father, or some minister anxious to please him, ultimately paid the cost. Miss Beadon had the credit of a good action, which was all that mattered so far as she was concerned. One questions if the Holy Father grants his indulgences with as much inward satisfaction as did Dora.

The night after the Wereminsters' dinner party, the Beadons and some others had been invited by Hare to meet at his rooms and hear a famous scientist lecture on radium. Functions like these bored Dora inexpressibly, but to-night her maid was closeted with her for over two hours before she succeeded in pleasing her dictatorial mistress. For Farquharson was to be present, and Miss Beadon had always laid to heart the adage that attractive clothes complete a man's subjugation.

So Felice, who had been kept up until the small hours of the previous morning, was made to arrange and unpick, to drape and re-drape, to alter and exchange article upon article of Dora's attire.

"Mademoiselle est ravissante!" she cried at length, with the easy lie of the Latin races, as, the task completed, Miss Beadon surveyed her reflection in the mirror with a satisfied smile. From crown to foot she represented wealth, and yet how simple was the whole costume! The dress itself was suitable only for a *débutante* in her first youth—Dora always dressed twenty years younger than her looks—but her jewels were worth a fortune.

Brand, arriving at the party with his wife rather late in the evening, noticed them at once and took in their significance.

"You have excelled even yourself to-night," he said, adopting the tone of solemn fervour in which a very pious Catholic speaks of relics. "Better not say such things, perhaps, but circumstances are sometimes too strong for one. Yours is a regal power, Miss Beadon, yet you dispense your favours with quite exquisite

simplicity."

Dora looked up, surprised. Up to the present she had found little in common with Brand; now she began to think she had misjudged him.

"Oh, well, it's always nice to help one's friends," she said, awkwardly fingering her fan. "Evelyn does it too, doesn't she? She and Mr. Farquharson are quite inseparable, I hear."

"Oh, Evelyn——" Brand shrugged his shoulder, and, obeying the invitation of her gesture, seated himself deferentially beside her. "What of that? Compare her years to yours, my dear young lady. Why, she's like a mother to Farquharson. I dare say they are really about the same age, but Evelyn's hard life makes her appear many years his senior. Now you, young and fresh——" He paused and sighed. "Ah, Richard Farquharson's a lucky fellow in more ways than one," he said daringly.

"I can't think what you mean. How quite absurd of you!" giggled Miss Beadon.

"You must really ask the Brands to dine next week, father," she announced a little later. "We've all been mistaken in Mr. Brand, I'm sure; there's ever so much more in him than one would think. We had a most interesting talk together just now. And I'm rather sorry for him, too. I'm afraid dear Evelyn doesn't make him happy. She's such an icicle, and from what he said to me just now I'm sure he's a man of extraordinarily deep feelings. There's nothing sadder, dear, is there, than to see a woman sow sympathy broadcast as Evelyn does, and yet not spare a grain of it for her husband?"

Easy indifference to the faults and failings of ourselves and our personal friends carry a man unscathed through many a social dilemma, but there are certain obvious misdemeanours to which he cannot well be blind. Sin—if it be but brave in face of danger—does not actually alienate us as mere meanness does. Love in itself, for instance, glows with so white a flame that its reflection lights the face of any woman who has given herself for love alone. Such a one hangs hourly upon the cross of wounded honour, crowding more sacrifices for her lover into a day than most of us can compass in a lifetime. But women who lie for the sake of lying, who secure confidences by base means to sell or betray them at the first prick of jealousy, and men who run up gambling debts and leave their womenkind to pay them, are on a different level. They return, like dogs, to their vomit, and the stench is surely foul in the nostril of God and man alike.

Yet even for these allowance is made—so prone is society to condone the

faults of its immediate circle, if the men are good-natured enough to entertain dull dowagers at dinner parties, and the women in question have large enough balances at their bankers' to give large sums in public charity or to found philanthropic annuities. A witty raconteur, Brand's eye for detail, and memory for those trifles which sum up many of life's minor comforts, had stood him in good stead for some years. Luckily for him, they failed him only when he could count upon his wife's popularity to keep him in the position he had once held unaided. Some men "drop out or go under" without wincing; Brand was not of the number. His hold upon his social niche, such as it was, was insecure enough, at best; he meant to grasp it, to which end he laid successful siege to Dora Beadon.

He was no coward; he faced facts unflinchingly when alone. Only a fool makes the same mistake twice in life, the wise man turns mistakes to his own ends. He knew well enough where he had gone wrong.... Handicapped at the outset, he had still won some prizes early in his career. The first years of his social life were eminently successful; he played a good hand at whist, and learned the knack of paying compliments discreetly. He made himself indispensable to the type of person anxious to give parties, but unluckily a trifle hazy as to how the actual invitations should be worded. He dabbled tentatively in stocks and shares, with singular good fortune, as it appeared to those who did not know his methods, paying part of his way by taking boys abroad at the request of their parents. After a time it became known amongst his friends that "Brand was a good fellow, always ready with a pony when you needed one!"—at sixty per cent. interest, and the amount doubled if the day of reckoning brought no cheque. His influence grew; amongst those who had not borrowed from him he began to be quoted as a man to apply to when you were in difficulties of any doubtful nature, one who would help you pleasantly to evade the consequences of almost any imaginable action. Oh yes, Brand, too, had been a favourite in his day.

But night falls suddenly upon tropical days; it had so fallen upon Brand's.

He dated his ill-luck to the hour of meeting Cummings. Yet he had never paid more attention to the development of any scheme. At the beginning everything seemed to play into his hands. His idea, of course, was ultimately to oust Cummings from his position as Calvert's heir, and afterwards very delicately to insinuate himself into the vacant place. He manoeuvred Cummings through the open door of the Catholic Church with quite consummate skill—no female convert could have thrown herself into the task with greater ardour. From thence to the priesthood, after Calvert's indignant repudiation of Cummings and his creed, was an easy, and obviously a final, step. But the sincerity of Cummings' detachment had lifted him to heights which Brand could never realize. Never for one moment did he regret his vocation, his only sorrow being at his relations' pain and the withdrawal of his uncle's trust. Actual financial loss affected him not at

all. The priest's eyes now were as clear and steady as when, a boy, he had stood upon the Glune road, nervously trying to match his untried blade of argument against the older man's skilled weapons. His smile, when it came, illumined his whole face. If it were possible—yet how could it be possible?—Brand might have thought him happy in his life.

So much for the scheme; Calvert himself upset its fulfilment. Rumours of Brand's treatment of his sisters had reached the older man, and on the single occasion when, in the past, Brand and he had come across each other, he taxed him openly with having done to death two innocent women. More than this. He accused him of having cleverly engineered Cummings into "that hotbed of lying and deception, the Roman Church." He stated facts so clearly that the pose of outraged honour and hurt susceptibility, with which Brand at first met his attack, broke down completely. The very setting of the interview was undignified. It took place in the hall, with butler and footman within hearing.

"There's a notice up, inside, no dogs admitted," said Calvert grimly.

Advancing years weakened convictions; Brand always hoped that with increasing age Calvert's opinions might change. But with Farquharson's entry into Taorna, the last hope died. It was doubly unfortunate for Brand that, at this period, his name should often have been mentioned in connection with a notorious case where there was a strong inference of blackmail, even if it could not actually be proved.

Oh, those hysterical women, with their love of keeping letters!

All this took place some years before Brand's marriage. He went abroad again until the storm blew over. This rumour, at least, had never reached Evelyn. Had others, he wondered? In all such matters she was so strictly rigid; he often wondered if her uncompromising views of sin were the result of temperament or convent education. Uncompromising to sin, that is to say—not to the sinner. His wife seemed to separate action from actor. The sin itself was loathsome, repulsive—it made her shrink. The sinner was wounded, and for him she had healing balms and ointments. But where another woman would have slurred over the cause of the hurt, she spoke of it confidently by name, confronting adultery or theft as she would any other mortal combat.

"We talk of Magersfontein and Colenso," she said once. "If we'd met sin on another kind of battle-field and been defeated, why should we be ashamed to call the battle-field by its own name?"

That Evelyn was original her husband conceded—at times he even took a certain pride in her looks and ways. They were useful. But her attitude to him personally was unendurable. She had never loved him, of course—such a man does not ask for love; he would not have recognized it had he found it. On the other hand, he had never claimed anything from her to which she had not made

instant response so far as she was able. She had swept his floors and cooked for him, in their poorer days, like the docile wife of any village labourer; she had mended his reputation as well as his clothes, Hare once said, chuckling. When he was ill she nursed him; when he was well she stayed with him or left him as he wished. But day by day the wall that separated them grew higher; he had married a pliable child, who had become a woman in an hour.

If he spoke of it at all—which was seldom, for, try as he would, he could find no tangible ground for complaint—it was only to rail at her religion.

"Those damned priests and directors are behind this pose of yours. I'll break it down, as well as you, before I've done with you."

In an access of fury one day he dragged from her bedroom wall a Delia Robbia plaque of the Madonna and Child, before which a lamp was burning, and flung it to the ground.

Evelyn was smiling when he turned to her.

"Do you think one's faith depends on such things?" she asked, carefully gathering up the broken pieces. "They're quite immaterial. Your lover's picture is in your heart, whether you have his photograph or not. I'm sorry you broke this, it is one of the few valuable things we have. You may break or burn every outward needless symbol that I have, if you choose—I'll put them away if you dislike them. What you do or what you don't do doesn't touch anything in me. You killed my love long ago, and as for faith—that's just between myself and God."

She blew out the lamp, when he cursed her, and it was never lighted again.

Points of view such as these were indescribably irritating. In his excuse it must be admitted that with increasing years Brand's physical health had grown worse; long paroxysms of pain often seized him when he was alone. Once he had been man enough to fight against his irritability; he tended it now, watering it with his sense of ill-usage, and kept its fruits for his wife. Her unshaken calm, her peace, her air of quiet rest and strength when he was nervous and suffering, tried him beyond words; there were times when he could have stopped short at nothing to wreck her control, to subdue the unconquerable spirit that passed through the mines and tunnels of the world, as though the way was lit by an enduring light. The idea grew to an obsession. He himself was powerless to hurt her; he must act through some one else. Life had been unfair to him throughout; it had marred him first, then broken him. Well, it should mar and break her too.

And if in the fall some other enemy could be made to suffer too, so much the better ... some one to whom the gods had been lavish, as in the case of Richard Farquharson.

Farquharson was drawn to Evelyn, Evelyn was drawn to Farquharson; there was no doubt of that. And Miss Beadon meant to marry Farquharson, and,

by herself, would never accomplish her purpose. Why, there were all the elements of a successful comedy in view if Brand could only teach the puppets their parts.

An opportunity came shortly. A few days later, as Brand was sitting in his little smoking-room, where the best, the most comfortable chairs and sofas were collected, he heard his wife's knock at the door.

He glanced at the open letter in her hand through half-closed eyes as she approached.

She held it out for him to read.

"Mr. Calvert's chauffeur has just brought this. The Bedfords have lent him their box at the opera to-night; the Beadons are going, and he wants us too. The man is waiting for an answer. We're free, of course, but you don't care for Wagner opera, do you?"

Brand took the letter and read it with unusual deliberation.

"'*Tristan and Isolde*, and please be in your place a quarter of an hour before the orchestra strikes up. We are a party of six,'" he quoted slowly. "That means Calvert, Beadon, Miss Dora, you and I and Farquharson, I suppose."

"Am I to refuse or accept?" asked Evelyn. "You look very tired to-night. Are you up to going?"

"I'm right enough," said Brand. "I think—I'm sure, in fact, it will amuse me, although, perhaps, that wasn't exactly the intention of the composer."

He looked at her from head to foot critically, then fumbled in his waistcoat pocket and drew out a sovereign.

"Get some flowers to wear—malmaison carnations for choice, if the neighbourhood can produce them. The colour suits you. This is the first invitation Calvert has ever given me, it mustn't be the last. Remember, I rely upon you to do all you can in that direction. Wear white to-night by the bye, you're one of the few women who can; and if the carnations fail, get roses of the same shade."

"Thank you," said Evelyn, lingering still. So sudden, so complete a change of manner made her vaguely uneasy. Brand never gave her money without expecting its full value back in kind.

"Give yourself plenty of time to dress, Evelyn. I want you to look your best. It's really an occasion."

He was still smiling as she closed the door.

CHAPTER VII

"Je connais trop tard quel est l'essential!"—E. ROSTAND.

"Oh, my dear, I'm so glad you've come to look after me," said Miss Beadon; "I was getting quite embarrassed amongst this tribe of men."

She tried to pull Evelyn playfully down beside her as she spoke into the vacant seat she had kept between herself and her father, but Calvert interposed.

"I want Mrs. Brand next me, Miss Beadon. We've business to talk over." He lowered his voice. "I'm going to plunge into things as usual. Farquharson and I have just been discussing his plan of campaign. You've worked wonders for him already; I'm trusting to you to concentrate your influence at this critical moment. He's been seen and felt already, but he's not actually been heard in public. Now I know you've great influence with Beadon——"

Farquharson, entering the box at that moment; overheard the last sentence, and came straight to Mrs. Brand.

"Is my chief worrying you again on my behalf?"

"I refuse to be drawn by that lure," Evelyn laughed lightly. "Don't be ridiculous. I haven't done a single thing for you as yet. Mr. Calvert's right, you know; you ought to speak soon in public. It's the only way to touch the man with the vote, the great uneducated majority. Why, I've seen two or three thousand people at the Albert Hall absolutely swaying to one man's words. Oh, oratory is the power of powers. To play on your audience like an instrument—there's nothing so telling. When *The Ambassador* was being acted at the St. James's Theatre, the manager used to let me go behind and listen in the wings. The big scene was the one between Violet Vanbrugh and Fay Davis, you know, and Violet Vanbrugh had certain words to say—I've forgotten the actual phrase—which always either warmed the house to frenzy or left it cold. I used to stand with my eyes shut waiting for that speech—one became in time so sensitive to the atmosphere of the house as to know before it was given exactly how it would be received. I've never heard you speak; but I know just how the world's going to take your speech when you make one."

"Yet I haven't done much in that line," said Farquharson. "The plain audience I'm accustomed to is quite different to critical London. Our whole system in Taorna is different to your system here, of course. We can't afford to have wastrels in our Assembly. The people elect their Council from amongst men who've been proved to have the island's interest at heart. And then each man has his own right of judgment. When an appeal comes before us, we vote according to our individual opinion, not according to party. The President has the casting vote. We put men on their honour, as it were; we don't necessarily oppose because we belong to the Opposition, nor do we change our opinions unanimously because we're afraid to face a general election. If at any time during his tenure of office a minister is found to have failed in his duty according to the opinion of a quorum of his colleagues, he has to come before a sort of political court-martial."

"I'm afraid our methods here are less straightforward," said Evelyn. "I know of at least one by-election where an inefficient candidate was pulled through solely because his canvassers said he had a sick wife whose death would be hastened if he didn't get the seat."

"As a matter of fact he hadn't lived with her for years, and neither of them took the least interest in the other, but his agent waxed positively hysterical over the sentimental aspect of the case. Had there been universal suffrage I've no doubt that the wife would have plumped her vote for the rival candidate," said Beadon. "By the bye, Farquharson, you're in favour of Tariff Reform, of course. Mrs. Brand asked me the other day to persuade you to speak for us at our monster meeting at the Albert Hall next Monday. You would be in good company; we have a fine show of speakers."

"Delighted, of course," said Farquharson impassively. "It begins at eight o'clock, doesn't it?" He took out his note-book.

Brand eagerly interposed.

"Mr. Calvert has just promised to dine with us that evening. Will you come too? Lady Wereminster always invites my wife to her box; Lord Meavy and Lord Creagh are coming too. We shall have to feed at an unearthly hour, but perhaps you won't mind that under the circumstances."

"Thanks very much, I shall be delighted," said Farquharson again.

Evelyn, amazed, leant back in her seat and whispered to her husband under cover of her fan.

"I didn't know that they were coming. When did you ask them?"

Brand bent down, adjusting his opera-glasses.

"Don't give yourself away. The others will be glad enough to come if Calvert and Farquharson do. Once capture the coming man and others will follow. You must help me, Evelyn; it means everything to me to have it known Calvert visits us."

"Of course I'll do my best. Oh, hush!" said Evelyn. The orchestra had begun playing the first notes of that exquisite prelude to *Tristan and Isolde* which, *motif* by *motif*, leads from the first confession of love by way of desire and magic and mystery to the deliverance of death.

Wagner opera was to Farquharson a new experience. He had come that night in a cynical enough mood. The darkness that enfolded the great assembly in its mantle, the hush and tension under which it laboured, listening without movement, rather as one corporate body than as a crowd of separate entities, struck him at first as a mere pose. But presently the power and strength and pathos of the music carried him away as it carried others. This was real flesh and blood; impatience, ardour, glory, the very song of the sea, transport and passion, blending with underlying chords of human sorrow—each in turn rang true.

And as he listened old memories came thronging back, memories at once exquisite and painful. For now the sufferings of his childhood spread before him like an allegory whose language his mature eyes could read; they had been encrusted for years with the ice of bitterness. But here, under Evelyn's influence, the ice had melted. He detached himself, the man, from the sturdy boyish figure which had flinched and wavered, but yet never given way, and saw how the fire of manhood had been kindled by those hours of stress. Wind and rain, storm and torrent, had formed his character, and mountain fastnesses had been his playground. The whole story of his childhood was a preparation for the battle he was fighting now. His ceaseless combats with men and things, even the mimic raids and sorties he had made as a child upon invisible foes, had stood him in good stead later when struggle was as infallibly his portion as it is the portion of certain men to sleep beside the hearth.

But if life for him was a battle-field, it was no less a battle-field for the woman at his side. His foes were worthy opponents, men of strength who brought their artillery to bear upon his little stronghold; hers were mere thieves of the night, but both came armed with weapons that drew blood.

Apart in body, separated from each other by every natural barrier, the wheel of the potter, whose toil is endless, had shaped the rough clay of these two human beings from very similar moulds. The voice of the great religion to which Evelyn belonged has its unworthy exponents; it is not always in a convent that the purest souls are reared. "*Factus obediens usque ad mortem crucis*," is sometimes chanted solemnly by those who betray unconsciously the souls of others; who impose little straws of restrictions upon backs already bent to breaking by God's unswerving laws. Should a Catholic sin, the fault is shrieked from the housetops, so high a standard is demanded of man or woman who subscribes

to that high faith.

Yet the limits of Catholicism and the limits of Calvinism—apart as they seem—can touch. The bigot of the one may be as the bigot of the other. The gospel of detachment had been preached to Evelyn until, for a short time, she let herself drift upon the waters of submission, and since habitual and unquestioning obedience must crush in time the strongest spirit, yielded in the matter of marriage to the direction of her stepmother and father as she would have yielded to that of a spiritual adviser. Now, too late, she knew that for this retribution would be exacted hourly, for God strikes—not as men do, at the mere twigs and blossoms of human frailty, but at the very roots of being.

Unconsciously the thoughts of the man and woman in the box moved on converging lines and met, as the music below swayed onward and upward in Tristan and Isolde's exquisite duet.

"*Isolde.* So stürben wir,
Um ungetrennt—
Tristan. Ewig einig—
Isolde. Ohne End'—
Tristan. Ohn' Erwachen—
Isolde. Ohne Bangen—
Tristan. Namenlos
In Leib' umfangen—
Isolde. Ganz uns selbst gegeben,
Der Liebe nur zu leben?"

The spell of the music, rising to that passionate climax of the love song in the second act where Night the Revealer points the way of human transport to culminate in the superb Song of Death, broke the earthly barriers of speculation, and two souls in the audience called to each other as before the judgment seat and became temporarily one. Such things have been since the world came out of chaos, and will be until it returns again to the void. There is but one mate for each man and woman in the world, and until they recognize the fact and learn with patience to await that note of absolute conviction which is the one infallible guide to happiness, marriages will fail as they fail now, and the Church will give its empty blessing to those ill-assorted pairs whom God for ever leaves unblessed.

"... Traut allein,
Ewig heim....

Du Isolde,
Tristan ich,
Nicht mehr Tristan,
Nicht Isolde....

Endloss ewig
Ein-bewusst:
Heiss erglühter Brust
Hochste Leibes-Lust!"

"I always wish that the music of *Peer Gynt* could have been written by Wagner,"

said Evelyn. "Think what he would have made of Anitas' last words: and the magic of the Troll Kingdom, and the great scene, as eerie in its way as the Brocken scene in *Faust*—don't you really know it? Towards the end of the play, just before he meets the Button-Moulder, Peer Gynt, the failure, is standing alone on the moor with charred trees and desolation all about him. Mist has risen, and all the world is full of little voices. Tiny thread balls sweep before him—they are the thoughts he should have followed. Dewdrops fall—his unshed tears; withered leaves drift to and fro in his path and dazzle him—watchwords he should have spoken; broken straws lie at his feet—an epitome of his life. It's all so like one's own life, void and valueless. And yet things started well enough. The very trees flowered, the dewdrops were like gold in the sunshine, and one heard pleasant voices in the woods, as a child."

"I've been thinking of my childhood too to-night," said Farquharson. "My love for Glune has been with me through everything. Out in Taorna, that night I was waiting in the Place of Sepulchres, I had a dream—a vision, if you like to call it so—and Glune stood before me, as brave, as broken, as courageous as of old. I could see the gorse in bloom and the peewits circling round and round, and Dan waiting patiently as he always waited.... I shall never forget the day that dog died mercifully, it was in my arms. The man who made this music must have been through heaven and hell too in his day. Glune has been through both, and so have most of us Farquharsons."

"I sent my soul through the Invisible,
Some letters of that after-life to spell;
And by and by my soul return'd to me
And answer'd, 'I myself am Heaven and Hell,'"

Evelyn quoted below her breath.

"Oh, aren't those lovely words?" broke in Dora Beadon, impatient at having been left so long to the companionship of Calvert and her father. "Rossetti's, aren't they? Oh, Omar Khayyám, is it? Well, he's much the same. One of my *attachés*, a student at the Academy, promised to set them to music for me."

"Miss Beadon is a great devotee of music," said Brand gravely; "she has a pianola and three gramophones."

Evelyn laughed.

"Dora dislikes musical people as much as I do. We spread the gramophone story to frighten them away, don't we, Dora?"

"I shouldn't mind them so much if they were only clean," said Miss Beadon. "Or if they wore better clothes! There's always a ready-made thirty-shilling-the-suit look about them, don't you think, Mr. Farquharson? By the way, Evelyn, you mustn't annex Mr. Farquharson any longer; I really insist upon his coming over here for the last act."

Calvert's eyes and Brand's met for once in the intimacy of mutual amusement. Dora Beadon was laying her snares a trifle flagrantly.

Well, Richard might do worse, Calvert thought. With so uncompromising a face and figure Miss Beadon should certainly be a docile wife, and she had money and position. Calvert had seen many brilliant matches fail, two stars outshining one another and falling into oblivion. He looked with awakened interest at the girl; the shadow of the box was kind to her, and her pleasure at having drawn Farquharson from Evelyn had given her for once an almost intelligent expression. He smiled benignly and drew Evelyn's attention to the pair, with a genial little nod of approval.

It was only at parting that Farquharson got an opportunity of speaking again to Mrs. Brand.

Then—"I owe the Albert Hall Meeting to you?" he said, with meaning. "It's another debt. No, don't deny it; you help every one. What was said of Madame Recamier is true of you, '*Elle était pour ses amis la soeur de charité de lour peines, de leur frailtés, el même un peu de leur fautes.*'"

CHAPTER VIII

"The Sacraments are seven—Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Communion, Penance, Extreme Unction, Holy Order, Matrimony.... Each has its own particular office: all give grace; but besides ordinary graces, they are intended to bestow the special grace which may be required to meet particular wants."—BISHOP BAGSHAWE.

"A lady to see you, sir."

"Oh, bother!" Cummings took the card impatiently, and then gave a startled exclamation. "Tell her I'll see her in half-a-minute."

The sight of Evelyn's card revived old memories; he smiled, absently fingering it for a moment before entering the little sitting-room. It was years since he had seen her. He remembered her as an undisciplined child; a small person with ideals which were never realized, an odd mixture of dreams and contradictions. Knowing Brand and Brand's capabilities as he did, no one was more surprised than Cummings at the marriage.

Partly for love of the cause, partly to kill thought, he had done the work of ten in his district, until at last his health gave way completely. A stray bishop paying pastoral visits in the neighbourhood took him in hand, and summarily ordered him away at a moment's notice on a sea-voyage and six months' leave. Medical opinions at home were slightly alarming; on his arrival in London he was packed off to Brighton within twenty-four hours.

As he opened the door of the little sitting-room he thought at first that it was the old unchanged Evelyn of childhood who greeted him so warmly. But to read men's souls is part of the priestly office, and there was something in her air of enforced gaiety which made him look at her more closely.

"You dear!" she said, holding his hands in hers as if they were a source of strength. "Isn't this a nice surprise? Lord Creagh offered to drive me down, and I couldn't resist the chance of routing you out."

"You are just one of the few people I wanted to see," said Cummings. "One of my last remaining links with the past. I won't have another soul admitted while you're here. You'll let me smoke, won't you? I want to hear about everything and everybody. I'm going to have my say first, yours comes later. If you talk as much as you used, I shan't get a look in when once you've started."

She became more at ease as he spoke. He pulled an arm-chair up to the empty grate, and wedged a shiny black horse-hair cushion at her back.

"Now begin about home, please. Is my mother's complexion still like a Greuze? How absolutely lovely she was once! Some one told me that my father had sold his hunters and taken to driving out in a governess car behind a fat pony. Surely that isn't true—they've not lost money, have they?"

"He is very changed," said Evelyn, hesitating. "He has become a total ab-

stainer. Don't look so aghast, Jack; I believe in a way it suits him. A year ago he had a stroke which shook his nerves a good deal, and your mother is a chronic invalid, you know. She was thrown from the box-seat of a coach at the four-in-hand meet three years ago. We think some sort of vertigo must have seized her."

She looked pityingly at the bent form of the man beside her.

"We can't always be young, dear Jack," she said, with her eyes full of pain. "I always think the most obvious compensation of old age is its inability to feel, as we younger people do. The blows which fall on old people scarcely seem to shake their serenity. But they shatter us. Oh yes, it must be nice to be old. Your parents are marvellous considering all they have gone through. And, you see, you were their life, their all, and they won't let themselves be happy in your peace. Oh, my dear boy, don't look like that; things will come right in time—at least that's what I'm always telling other people," she added, faltering a little.

Cummings walked up and down the room for a moment or two before answering.

"*Pone, Domini, custodian ori meo....* Yes, we say those things to others, but they don't always convince us. There are times when horrible spiritual dryness grips you, and you grope for days and weeks in absolute darkness, knowing that you yourself have raised the veil between you and the light."

"Sacrifice and death—somebody said those were the only terms on which the God of life has made life to exist," said Evelyn softly. "The French talk of the soul's secret garden as though it were a place of promise and perfume. I always think one's secret garden is Gethsemane. And sweat broke out even on Christ's brow in Gethsemane, you know. 'All bound together with one chain of darkness, and to themselves more grievous than the darkness.'"

"But the saints had a very great light," said Cummings. He shook his head back with a characteristic little gesture of decision. "Do you know what it is, Evelyn, suddenly, for no reason, when you are saying the same prayers in the same way, kneeling on the same step, practising the same austerities, whatever they may be, neither more nor less, to have your hardness break down and your heart like a little child's again? That has come before; it will, it must, come again."

Evelyn sighed wearily.

"It seems to me that sometimes one believes with one's heart and sometimes with one's head. I suppose the best of all is when the two work together. One can plant flowers in other people's gardens even when they won't flourish in one's own back yard. It's the same principle as telling a rosary. After you've hammered out half-a-dozen Pater and a hundred or so Aves, they begin to take some meaning, don't they? 'Vain repetitions' have their comfort after all. I heard such a nice story the other day about two dear Evangelical old ladies. At seventy-

five and eighty, foreseeing the near approach of death, they began to take lessons on the harp, because they thought the knowledge could be turned to account later on in Paradise.

"Oh, delicious!" said Cummings. He pulled the blind up, so that the light fell more fully on Evelyn's face. "I've finished whining. Now tell me how the world has been treating you for the last few years."

Evelyn moved away restlessly to the window.

"What a nasty mean trick to let in that glare. You used to tease me as a child," she said from the back of the room. "What made you take these stuffy rooms, Jack? They're very ugly and uncomfortable."

"I didn't anticipate the visits of my female friends," said Cummings. "Come here, Evelyn; be a good girl and—you know the rest. No, I'm not chaffing now—you're bothered, aren't you?"

"I rather wish I hadn't come, Grand Inquisitor," said Evelyn. "Well, put down those glasses then; they worry me." She came and stood behind his chair. "Things are so horribly mixed up, Jack. One thinks perhaps it's—dangerous to go to a special place and see a special person—and then some one who has the right compels one to. Do you think what St. Philip Neri said about the way of escape was true?"

"Ungrammatical—but fairly concise for a woman. By the bye, I always gave St. Paul the credit of the remark you quote," said Cummings, his eyes twinkling.

"I wasn't thinking of that obvious text," said Evelyn triumphantly. "Capecelatro says what I mean—'Paradise was not made for cowards.' St. Philip always told one to face foes visible and invisible, as you know. But"—she bowed her head—"there was one particular temptation he told us to fly from the moment we recognized even the barest shadow of possibility of its coming near us."

There was a little pause.

"Yes?"

"Oh, I can look you in the face," said Evelyn hurriedly, coming forward. "It's not quite a temptation, Jack. A shadow, rather, that I'm flung against."

"But a substantial shadow."

"I'm shut up in the room with it," said Evelyn. "I believe I'm exaggerating. The whole thing may just be a senseless scruple, or vanity, and yet——"

"A cloud no bigger than a man's hand on the horizon," said Cummings softly.

Evelyn sat down.

"I suppose I'd better tell you all about it. I believe I meant to from the first. And yet there's nothing really to tell. You remember when I was a child I always wanted to be in everything—at the head of it, as a rule. Well, I honestly have been able to help one or two people since—it's the old childish vanity again,

perhaps. There's one special person I've met often, and been a little—only a very little—useful to; everything has combined to bring us together, interest, ambition, sympathy. You see, the man doesn't trust women, but he trusts me—vanity again, I suppose you'll say. Sometimes I make excuses; I say not at home, and then he goes away." She stopped for a moment. "Then a note comes from his great friend, asking some little favour, saying that only I can do for him the special thing that is just wanted at the moment, and so it all begins again. The man's a hard man naturally, and I want to soften him. He's more gentle than he was, and kinder. He doesn't believe in anything; that's another point. I wish he could meet you, or some one like you who has fought battles and found faith. I can't talk about those things—I never have; I don't think born Catholics often do; we're lazier, perhaps, than converts. But he guesses what it all means to me, I fancy."

Cummings waited.

"I feel like a rat in a cage sometimes," said Evelyn passionately. "I gnaw a bar of my cage and make a passage, and then I'm put into another cage with stronger bars and told to stay there."

"Come to the light," said Cummings. "Yes, I thought so. You're overwrought and overdone. Well, I say to you as I should say to any other woman, 'Go away.' Remember the accommodation muscles of one's soul need rest just like those of one's eyes. Their focus gets strained too. And there's another point." He hesitated for a moment. This was hard to say under the circumstances, knowing Brand as he did. "Something about marriage. Remember that marriage garments have to be fitted like any others; they don't always suit at the first trial or the last; but, unlike other clothes, you may neither sell them nor give them away."

He turned away. His window opened on to a narrow side-street; a hawker selling decayed vegetables and flowers was calling his wares a few doors away. Children, playing hop-scotch on the pavement below, wrangled and screamed over the game. From the Western Road came the jar and clatter of motor omnibuses. Everything was noisy and turbulent.

"So I'm to go away," Evelyn said at last, blankly, drawing a deep breath. "That's your decision. Well, I suppose you're right. The real country must be very sweet now. Late the other night, coming back from Weybridge, we stopped by the bridge to hear the nightingales in the woods, just about midnight. I know a tiny cottage where I can go quite by myself and be rural. There's a farm near which is kept by the kindest, fattest woman I've ever seen—just like a very amiable porpoise. She has cows and poultry, and once she let me try to milk a cow. It took me a quarter of an hour even to get the bottom of the pail damp. Suppose I go there later, Jack? There's a big meeting at the Albert Hall next week, which I've absolutely promised to do some work for, and go to."

"Take your cottage, by all means, but please have mercy on the cows," said

Cummings. "You'll get off as soon as you can, won't you?"

They stood for a moment looking at each other—friends whose paths might probably never cross again. Then Evelyn went out with bent head. Cummings watched her go. When she was out of sight he made the sign of the cross and sat down wearily in his chair.

CHAPTER IX

"A woman wishes and believes; a man wills and achieves. The wish of the woman ripens into a faith; the will of the man hardens into a fact."—J. S. BLACKIE.

From floor to ceiling the Albert Hall, which normally contains ten thousand people, was packed to overflowing.

Tickets for the great Tariff Reform Demonstration had been begged, borrowed and bargained for; it was said that a newly made peer had given a hundred guineas for a box. Orderly files of subdued men and women—the prevailing characteristics of an English crowd are melancholy and dejection—stretched spirally like a huge serpent, outside each separate door, awaiting the remote chance of returned seats. Hawkers had pursued them to the edge of the barrier, chaffing them and harassing them with a motley row of wares—gaudy painted flags and ribbon badges, highly coloured and totally unreliable programmes of the evening's performance, printed on coarse handkerchiefs, Japanese fans and cheap scent, photographs of the leading members of the League, postcard views of their homes and pets, sticks of chocolate, strips of gay-coloured tissue papers tied together with string and known to the initiated as "ticklers." It was a typical crowd except for its magnitude: street loafer, cab-runner, British workman, bank clerk and wide-eyed child who never stopped eating oranges, the suburban man of business with his family, the socialist reformer whose personal habits made his immediate neighbourhood unwholesome, the cynic who complained aloud of his own special wrongs and the evils of the Empire, the people's orator who swelled with importance and big words, and spoke with patronage of the King—all were there.

The night was still young, and the policemen, still good-natured, bore with patience the ceaseless effort of the crowd to break down the barriers. Again and

again they piloted such privileged beings as had tickets through the seething, jostling lines of massed humanity; no easy matter, in view of momentarily increasing numbers. Good-natured still, they bore the banter and abuse of the great army of the ticketless as the crowd swayed to and fro with love of excitement, that strange passion for "seeing things"—from however uncomfortable a position—which stirs most human breasts.

"London may have its ten men or its million on the brink of absolute starvation, but while the half-penny papers exist, it can count upon a given number of spectators wasting hour after hour of idleness outside any public building where an important function is in progress," said Lady Wereminster, arriving early.

Inside the hall itself, the brilliant gas-jets lit a brilliant throng.

The gallery was packed so closely as to suggest a probable need of the nursing sisters and ambulances outside—now and again a solitary figure in the background, man or woman, was lifted upon the shoulders of the person in front to catch a momentary glimpse of the hall below. But nearly everywhere, spaces accustomed to hold one as a rule held two on this occasion; in the body of the hall whole extra rows of stalls were added. The padded arm-chairs in the boxes had been taken out and cane seats substituted, and in the larger boxes so many as twenty or thirty people were assembled. Amongst these were some of the most notable and distinguished men in England. Statesmen, diplomats, men who had helped to uphold or save their country, bishops, admirals, generals, explorers, war-correspondents, critics, leaders of society and commerce. Many women were in evening dress; some wore jewels. Lady Wereminster was holding a reception afterwards to meet the chief speakers of the Tariff Reform League.

Almost every opera-glass was focussed upon the central platform where the Executive Committee sat with their friends, eight rows of them all told, each member of whom was notable in his own line, and could be recognized by the man in the street, even without the aid of the printed programme. The entrance of many more immediately prominent than others had been cheered, but, except when the organ pealed out its jubilant marches or national songs, at intervals, during the assembling of the meeting, the tension was so great that hardly a sound or movement broke it.

Evelyn, leaning forward in her box, with quickened breath and leaping pulses, wondered if, with the exception of the four great functions of the century, a more impressive sight had ever been seen in England. For like the Jubilee and Coronation and the passing of the quiet dead, this was essentially a "one man's show."

Unmoved, and with absolute composure, the veteran leader made his triumphal entry in the midst of men and women who had for once lost all their national calm, whose senses were wrought up to the highest pitch of almost fren-

zied welcome, whose enthusiasm echoed in cheers so loud that the great building seemed to rock in sympathy. The storm of feeling swept alike from stall to gallery in a wild rush of gesticulation and movement, so that in every part of the house there was a confused blur of white waving arms, of fluttering handkerchiefs and lace scarves, of flags and banners floating triumphantly in welcome. There is still a heartier ring in British cheers than in those of any other nation, although they come but seldom.

The moment was over, men and women sat back in their places, physically spent, and a gasp of relief came simultaneously from the hall. Much the same note broke from the men who reached the summit of Dargai, with ranks thinned and broken by the enemy's rolling stones and concentrated fire; one hears such a sound sometimes from a woman who looks upon her child for the first time. Then the audience began to settle down to its practical work of the night.

There was a mighty rustling of papers while the agenda was examined by some twenty thousand persons at the same moment.

The chairman's opening speech was brief. He left them, he said, to the care of the man who had their interests at heart; a man whose aim was to keep British factories in England, to give to her sons of the Colonies, who had so lately fought and bled for her in South Africa, a preference in trade above that offered to foreign nations whose secret ambition was to lower our flag and dim our glory. He called upon "the man of the evening" to speak; cheers followed. A moment later "the man of the evening" was upon his feet.

His first words justified the presence of the great audience. One of his hearers heard them with sickening dread. One by one, straight and to the point, the telling phrases fell, delivered in a quiet voice that carried even to the gallery, as fiery comments from that quarter testified. As an Imperialist, Evelyn rejoiced; the speech was historic, it would live: but as a woman, her heart fell, aware, as only the sensitive are aware, of every point the great leader made and how he made it.

What remote chance had Farquharson of making his mark to-night? The ground was being cut under his feet. How hard to follow on an expert speech like this, which seemed to say all that could be said, which dealt sharply and subtly with every argument against Protection in a voice that became ever the gentler and more penetrating after the characteristic pause which, to one versed in the ways of public speakers, invariably heralded some especially telling or sarcastic phrase.

Farquharson was to second an important resolution which followed the great Fiscal Reformer's speech, a resolution which Beadon was to propose. The Leader of the Opposition had pleaded influenza as an excuse for dealing with the subject very tersely, and leaving its actual explanation to a man who, should he

win his political spurs to-night, would be his colleague in the House. He was giving Farquharson his chance in every sense of the word for Evelyn's sake.

And now the long-looked-for moment had come, and she trembled. That critical crowd! So eager to thrust at the one weak point in the armour even of its own knights. How would Farquharson face it? He had told her that he did not excel especially in public speaking; what if he failed? And why—why did it matter so to her of all people?

Beadon could always be relied upon to amuse his audience. He did not attempt to meet his leader on his own ground; the aim of his brief speech seemed to be merely to lighten the tension which succeeded the conclusion of the former speech, given in words of solemn warning, rendered the more intense in view of the speaker's having appeared so little in public of late years.

As the Leader of the Opposition took his seat a pleasurable flutter of anticipation moved the audience. Like women at a bargain sale, they eagerly watched the advent of the latest novelty. Hare, well to the fore amongst the critics, raised his field-glasses towards the platform. In the arena there was a little hum of expectation. Even the reporters below the platform laid their fountain pens and pencils down to stare up half in curiosity, half in interest, wondering what signs of nervousness the administrator of a place which had never been heard of until ten years ago would show as he rose to confront the largest concourse of people he had addressed, amidst the perfunctory applause of a few friends.

But there were no signs of nervousness to detect in Farquharson's assured step as he moved forward or in the glance he flashed over the hall. He had himself in hand from the first. So much Evelyn could see. Not a movement, not a tremor betrayed his emotion, yet the emotion was there, she knew. She knew that his heart beat to it; that, as before the eyes of a drowning man, a vision of past and present opened before him as he looked down upon the audience.

Evelyn caught her breath. Only once before had this wave of absolute momentary unconsciousness swept over her, leaving behind a definite physical sensation as though every drop of blood had ebbed from her body and the little torch of life was flickering out. All was dark. For the moment she heard nothing and saw nothing and could do nothing but pray. All her remaining will seemed concentrated on one point, a frantic appeal to God that this man, to whom it meant so much, and who had no near kith or kin at hand to ask for him, should do his best, that the crisis should prove no crisis at all, but triumph.

The wave of faintness passed; presently, out of a tangled confusion of sound she distinguished the notes of a voice familiar and yet strange, a voice whose magnetism seemed to have drawn every soul in the hall to one central spot on the platform. Her tired brain righted itself by sheer strength of will. She meant to notice every detail; next morning he would expect her to know just what portions

of his speech had told, how the crowd had taken this and that dubious point. She called up every faculty of criticism and judgment in view of his demand, weighing and balancing, like an opponent, the new line Farquharson had taken, his methods, his choice of language, his rare actions—not with those of the average politician, not even with an acknowledged master of debate like Beadon, but with the orator of the evening, the man who, since Gladstone's death, had been known as the best speaker in the House of Commons.

And as she listened her thoughts swept back to all that she had read of other statesmen—Pitt, Burke, Peel, Palmerston, Bright, Cobden, Disraeli and Gladstone—men whose names lived still in England, and would live for ever. For Farquharson beat his leader. His was the real gift of oratory, form combined with substance, a flow of eloquence and imagination kept in check by reason—the Heaven-sent inspiration which comes, perhaps, to half-a-dozen men within the century. His audience did not applaud—applause would have interrupted. They listened spell-bound, every thought given up to the quiet figure on the platform, who made use neither of sensational phrase nor dramatic gesture, but held them by sheer force of brain and personality, as he marshalled an array of facts against which there seemed to be no appeal.

"The mantle of Elijah..." said Lady Wereminster below her breath. But Evelyn did not answer. Through her opera-glasses she saw the tears of pride on Calvert's cheeks and Creagh's delighted expression—"Wasn't I right this time, you fellows?" she could almost hear him say. There was a tender smile on Hare's face as he turned in Evelyn's direction and nodded, bringing the palms of his hands together in noiseless applause at the same time. And she saw more still. A wonderful light had leapt in Farquharson's eyes as he bowed his acknowledgments; the light which, having once seen, no woman can mistake, as he looked straight at her and through her, as though laying his triumph at her feet.

There was a voice in her ear.

"Ex-cel-lent," whispered Brand. "You've done very well, my dear. I'll make it worth your while." He stooped down and patted the disarranged lace of her fichu with the air of a proprietor. "I saw that look. There's not much I don't see, you know. But I'm an amenable husband, and won't interfere; indeed, if you go on playing your hand as well as you're playing it now, I shall have nothing to complain of. Whatever happens, you are to keep in with Farquharson—do you hear? Whatever happens, mind!"

Lady Wereminster looked down ruefully at her glove. She had herself in hand again.

"Good gracious, look at that. Split right across, my dear, with all this clap-

ping. How my maid will scold me! She ran about all over London for them, trying to match the colour of my gown, and in the end we had to order them from Paris. As for that young man, he's wonderful. The eighth wonder of the world—he must have escaped direct from Ephesus. I only hope his head won't be turned after this. Why, Evelyn, what's the matter?" She turned to a young King's messenger at her side. "Here, help Mr. Brand to get his wife out of the box; she's fainting."

"Indeed, no; I've never fainted properly in all my life," said Evelyn. But she went outside obediently, summoning wit and courage to her aid. The air was cooler there, the platform hidden. She laughed and talked with the others while Brand waited on her assiduously, the image of a devoted husband, plying her in turn with smelling salts and scent, and Dora Beadon's ever-ready fan.

But her thoughts were turbulent; the scruple was no scruple now, but visible danger. A thousand dreads and terrors shaped themselves before her, ghosts of the past, and newer and more terrible phantoms. How far could she trust herself—how far trust him? Then, too, she had looked into a man's heart that night—her husband's; even she, who forgave much, would never forget what she had seen. Cummings was right, she must go at once; escape for a time at least from the hideous knowledge of what her husband was, more clearly defined now than ever before. And meantime and afterwards she must go on living with him, must show herself in public beside him as his possession, must return with him that very night to West Kensington to share his bed and board. She must suffer all, must bear all, insults, wrongs bodily and mental, bracing will and spirit, nerving her frailty to meet such horrors as convention called upon her to endure.

This was life, this was duty; this stern uncompromising Catholic ideal of marriage, the Sacrament. It was not true, it was not true! Those whom God had joined together were joined for all eternity, but what had God had to do with her own and many another such marriage?

CHAPTER X

"Faith is required of thee ... not understanding."—THOMAS À KEMPIS.

Public praise does not always come to him who has legitimately earned it. A man

gives his life to extend the commercial resources of his native town, and hears the devotion and sacrifice of some man of means who has just presented a handsome donation to the fund openly acclaimed at local meetings. By twelve o'clock next day the steps of No. 50 Carlton House Terrace were besieged by a crowd of district messengers and telegraph boys with an array of communications for Miss Beadon. Everybody believed her to be the one behind Farquharson's success of the previous evening, and Dora was the last woman in the world to deny a rumour so obviously to her advantage. Indeed, by the time she had mastered the contents of all her numerous congratulations, she had persuaded herself that the young man owed his appearance on the Albert Hall platform to her, and to her alone.

And now she set to work seriously to weigh the pros and cons of the situation. Miss Beadon, remember, was no longer a *débutante*. She realized that her name had appeared sufficiently often in daily papers with the same prefix. There is a limit to public credulity—it is difficult to believe that one woman has refused every eligible suitor in the marriage market. But Miss Beadon had still to find that convenient person who would add to, instead of detracting from, her present position.

Farquharson, who, virile and determined, had a fighting spirit and a great capacity for work, seemed to solve the problem. Dora realized that to gain her point she must lay siege to Farquharson before his position was established. She had heard her father and other ex-ministers talk openly of his talents; had heard the wildest predictions of infatuated women taken seriously even by men like Hare and Creagh.

If she were ever to hold him, the chain must be forged soon. But how to deal with such a man? Dora had, of course, no doubt as to her personal charms, but Farquharson was a misogynist. He had made as many enemies as friends by his aloofness. So ordinary wiles and ruses would probably leave him cold, and she must summon stronger forces to her aid. Her father was naturally the trump-card in her hand; moral suasion or dissuasion, in politics, is often a synonym of social blackmail.

Evelyn must be confided in, naturally,—one went to Evelyn for sympathy as one went to Paquin for frocks—both supplied "the superior article." Evelyn, all the same, had done her best to commandeer Farquharson—Dora supposed he pitied her. The Brands were so very badly off. There could be no question of rivalry, of course, where Evelyn was concerned; nor was Dora likely to be jealous. Even had Evelyn not been married and a Catholic, one is not jealous of a woman who has to go through the season with three frocks, and turn last winter's gowns, Miss Beadon mused. Evelyn had a tiresome knack of pandering to men's vanity, though—or why should they all combine to rave so idiotically about her?

Only the generous appreciate generosity. And gratitude is an ephemeral

bloom which flowers in too few gardens.

The capture of Farquharson—from a different aspect—was the object of Brand's thoughts too. Eminently practical, he was the first to acknowledge what a mistake he had made the night before. If he knew Evelyn at all, she would avoid Farquharson for the future; religious women were like that—they always ran off at a tangent when you tried to pull them up. Somehow or other she must be conciliated; must be made to meet the man again on some plea impossible to withstand.

Appeal to Evelyn's love of help and you won her at once. Unluckily, in the present instance Farquharson seemed rather in the way of conferring than of receiving favours. Other means must be used, as powerful, if less obvious.

It was precisely at this crisis in his thoughts that, sauntering slowly in the direction of Hyde Park Corner, Brand came face to face with Dora Beadon.

Farquharson's pressure of work, which had been rapidly increasing for the last few days, came to a climax on the morning after the Albert Hall meeting. Acquaintances with whose name he was scarcely familiar telegraphed congratulations; his friends thronged to his flat in relays. The Taornian Council cabled a long code message; the Stock Exchange and Wall Street felt the movement. His secretaries were kept so busily employed that he was forced to send his valet with a handful of notes to interview the representatives of the less important Press, who had been found upon his doorstep with the morning milk.

But Farquharson was not openly exhilarated or depressed. He was too sure of himself to be easily surprised. Last night his pulses had beaten a trifle quicker, of course; conflict braced him. But it was the pride of moving men, not doubt of his ability to move them, which thrilled him. The Albert Hall meeting was a matter of course; a thing he had worked for, and planned. Christmas Day falls on the 25th of December; he was as certain of his success as that the festival would not be altered.

Calvert, entering his room at the luncheon hour, found him cool and collected, absolutely unruffled by events which might legitimately have stirred him.

So busy was he that it was not until comparatively late in the afternoon that he had time to think of Evelyn. Perhaps he took her rather for granted, too. His faith, after all, was based on surer reasons than the average man's trust; he had proved her loyalty and endurance more in a month than most men would in a lifetime. From her alone of his friends there was no morning greeting, but he was not disappointed. Even in small matters it was impossible to mistake her. He was to dine that evening at the Brands'; she would tell him then what she could scarcely say in a letter.

The last few weeks had altered him more than he knew. Between him and Calvert there was now a sympathy and tenderness which had never existed in

Taorna. Farquharson had been a machine then, a magnificent machine which could be relied upon to produce the best work—nothing more. Now he was human.

Too human, probably, he thought suddenly, realizing in a flash how his work was tending to the moment when he would reach the Brands'. "Peace after Toyle" was what Evelyn brought, absolute rest of mind and body. A dangerous quality to come in contact with when it belonged to the wife of one's neighbour.

For primitive man may be awakened in even the most hardened diplomatist. And Farquharson was not naturally hard. Love of victory, too, counts—the spirit which makes a man want to carry off the woman he loves in face of danger, and put her before him on his horse and look back laughing with bullets whizzing about them, and a precipice ahead, for sheer love of devilry and adventure and desire to possess the thing he wants.

To Evelyn, counting the hours till dawn, and saddened when dawn came because it brought the parting of the ways, it seemed that life, so broad and beautiful only yesterday, had narrowed again into the old grey road without a turning. All that had made life so sweet lately must go now: the little plans, the little projects to help Farquharson, their daily meetings, ...; all that had brought colour into the monotonous road, had made it fragrant and glowing—how fragrant, how glowing she had never realized till now when she must make up her mind to stand aside for evermore; hardest of all, perhaps, possibly to watch another woman in her place.

For she could no longer cheat herself with half-truths, and talk of vanity and imagination. Last night the very beating of her heart betrayed her. In the strange inconsequence of memory, her mind went back to five years before, when two Glasgow engineers, who were building a temporary bridge at Comrie, talked slightingly in her presence of "*little Highland burns*," when wise men of the neighbourhood told them that their bridge was built too low, and that they had not allowed for the rising of the floods. For those same little burns took counsel together, biding their time, waiting until a night when all was still, when they suddenly drew the forces of the mountain and swept down the hillside in a mighty torrent, gathering strength as they went, carrying all before them, undismayed, until at last they reached the temporary bridge and tore it from its moorings, to play with it in mid-stream as children play with a broken fragment of wood.

So love, once recognized, sweeps all before it, honour, loyalty, faith, a torrent that nothing can withstand, nothing compel or alter but the will of God....

A little book lay open on her writing-table, a frequent companion. It had comforted her before; she wanted comfort now. She opened it at random, and her eyes fell on these words—

"To be fully satisfied shall not be granted thee.... Be valiant in doing as well as suffering things repugnant to nature.... Do that which is against thy inclination and let alone that which thou art inclined to. That which is pleasing to others shall go forward; that thou would'st have shall not succeed. Others shall ask and shall succeed. Thou shalt ask and not obtain."

"*Others shall ask and shall succeed*." That sounded like Farquharson. "*Thou shalt ask and not obtain*." Was that herself—an omen of the future?

She took up her pen to write a note postponing Farquharson's visit that evening. For once she must run counter to her husband's interests; she was in a mood to welcome even the physical roughness with which he was wont to meet her failures to obey him. Just then he entered with a letter, a pencilled note obviously scrawled with great rapidity upon a visiting-card of Dora Beadon's, enclosed in an envelope.

"I met Miss Beadon just now in the street," Brand said. "She asked me to give you this. She said it was very important, and that she wanted a reply at once by wire."

He watched her closely as she read the letter.

It was short and to the point—

"DEAREST EVELYN,

"Will you help me? I have asked the one man in the world I want to meet to dine with us to-night, and he has declined on the score of going to you. Do not suggest putting him off—he will guess that I have asked you. But will you have me too? You have often told me that I ought to marry—well, I've met the one man in the world who could persuade me, and I owe it all to you.

"Evelyn, you must! I count on you.

"D.B."

"She wants the answer now?" Evelyn repeated dazedly. She put her hand to her head. Calvert's little gesture on the opera night came back to her; a thousand trivial incidents which pointed the way to further possibilities of intimacy between Dora and Farquharson.

"Here's a telegraph form," said Brand. He pushed it towards her, tapping

impatiently on the floor. "Well, what are you waiting for? I thought you were a woman of decision."

"Miss Beadon wants to dine here to-night," said Evelyn slowly. The words were wrung from her. Was this the solution of the problem? It was so difficult to judge. She had not meant to see Farquharson again before she left town, but now——

"You are to accept," said Brand, with his hand heavy on her shoulder. "To accept—do you hear?"

He stood waiting as she wrote her answer, noticing the hesitating, illegible scrawl, that was so utterly unlike Evelyn's usual firm hand.

"Miss Beadon, 50 Carlton House Terrace, Shall expect you to-night at eight o'clock.—EVELYN."

"Good!" he said jubilantly. He took up his hat. "I'll take it myself. Clever woman! We're getting thoroughly well in with the Beadons. Miss Dora's a nice girl, too. What a match she'd be for a man who's starting in his career. She'd get him to the top of the tree in half the time it would take any one else."

He left the room whistling. Evelyn, alone, sat on idly at her table, her hands resting upon the book of telegraph forms. Well, she had had her day, a perfect one. No one could take that from her. But there was to-morrow to face, and all the to-morrows still to come.

CHAPTER XI

"Whether you be men or women you will never do anything in the world without courage. It is the greatest quality of the mind—next to honour."—J. L. ALLEN.

Lady Wereminster put up her lorgnette and looked round Evelyn's cheerful little sitting-room at Bramley with intense dissatisfaction.

"Comfortable in its way, yes. But, my dear child, why on earth should you come to such a dull place in the height of the season? You must have had some

reason for it. Illness, economy? You are not a woman of moods to do things purposelessly or in a temper. And to go away and leave no address too! I tell you every one's talking about it. The charm of the country indeed! The world won't swallow that. It only looks upon the country as a means of wearing a different set of smart clothes, that's all. And you yourself have always waited until August to go to the country until now.

"I wish you were not so reserved, Evelyn. You've made enemies, you know; women like you always do. You know they say that in a successful play an audience has to be taken into the author's confidence from the first act. Well, the world's like an audience, and wants to know one's secrets too. (It'll betray them at the first opportunity, but no matter.) It doesn't understand you. It calls itself Christian, but it sees Christian principles so seldom that when it comes across them it suspects their probity at once. When it meets a person who helps others for the sheer love of giving help, like you, it says, 'Hallo, there's something behind this; I must set to work at once and rout it out!' And on it switches its most powerful flashlight of envy and malice.

"Don't contradict me, my dear. When I was young I believed I knew better than any one else, and now I'm sure of it. If I hadn't learnt something of life by seventy-five, I should be a fool. You're quixotic, and quixotry is out of date. Now-a-days we only take trouble because we want to get on, to fill our pockets, or be advertised. Politics—art—we try to excel in these because it will make people talk of us. As for charity——! In nine cases out of ten charity is the refuge of the uncharitable—the means by which elderly spinsters and widows of no social importance foist themselves on the notice of a public which would never have heard of them under any other circumstances, and delude themselves in the belief that they are personages."

"I wish you'd have some lunch or something," said Evelyn blankly; "you'd feel ever so much better then."

Lady Wereminster chuckled.

"A polite way of stopping my tongue, eh? But what I've said is for your good, Evelyn, as unpleasant things always are in the view of the person who says them. Every one's discussing this sudden flight of yours, and the world can't talk about anything long without saying something scandalous. And we all miss you so! Creagh's depressed, Wereminster's so irritable that I can hardly face him at meal-times, and as for Dora Beadon, she's more odious than ever."

"You dear old impostor, I've only been away a week!"

"A week, my dear—a day's enough to start a sensation in London, if it's properly spread. You see, try as you will, you can't escape being a personality. You're known, and you're watched. Must I speak plainer? Well, then—when it happens that the motor of a very notorious personage has been waiting outside

your house day after day for six weeks or more, and the visits suddenly cease and you run away into the country, the world scents out a quarrel, and begins agitating itself as to the meaning of it all."

"I care very little for the world's opinion," said Evelyn.

"No incense, please," said Lady Wereminster sharply. "Not care for the world—a good-looking woman like you! Stuff and nonsense! You're living in the twentieth century, not the sixteenth. People can't go and stand on pillars like St. Simeon Stylites, and be comparatively disregarded. The telephone has made that impossible. Why, if anybody did such a thing now, within half-an-hour he would have a row of Pressmen at his feet, expecting him to fall off."

"But I don't want to sit on a pillar or do anything remarkable," said Evelyn. "I came here because I was tired out. I had a lot of work over that Albert Hall meeting, you know. As for Mr. Farquharson, the one or two things we did together are over now. One doesn't expect a future Prime Minister to go on calling on insignificant people like ourselves day after day."

"Umph!" Lady Wereminster looked her up and down critically. "The man's not in Parliament yet, even. So you were tired out? And never let one of your friends know? Is the air supposed to be especially good here, by the bye?"

"It's the best in Sussex," said Evelyn promptly. "We are I don't know how many hundred feet above the sea. There's no known disease we can't cure in about ten minutes. Didn't you notice the russet-apple faces of the village children as you came?"

"All I can say is you don't do the air credit," said Lady Wereminster; "you're drawn and pale, and you've got deep lines under your eyes. And your *protégé*, by the way, has scarcely been heard in public since you left. If you don't come back and look after him, people will say the famous Albert Hall speech was his swan-song."

Evelyn laughed outright.

"What utter nonsense! My dear lady, there's nothing that man can't do. If he's quiet now it's for a purpose. He means to show us we can't do without him and so force our hands."

"Perhaps you're right," said Lady Wereminster slowly, proceeding once more to enfold herself in a voluminous motor veil. "By the way, you never asked me how I found out your hiding-place. Your husband gave me your address—in the very strictest confidence. I'm not sure he hasn't given it to other people too. I saw him standing in a corner last night at the Beadons' party, with Mr. Farquharson; the future Prime Minister wrote down something on his shirt-cuff as your husband left. It may have been an appointment, I don't know." She turned briskly. "Well, there's the motor. You won't change your mind and let me take you back? Good-bye, then, wilful woman."

She was gone. And Evelyn, standing alone at the gate watching her out of sight, found her voice at last and called, "Come back, come back," too late. She even ran a few steps in the direction that the motor had taken before realizing the utter futility of her action.

Only one's thoughts can keep pace with a forty horse-power car!

Half-indignant, half-despairing, she repeated Lady Wereminster's words. So the world was talking, was it? Well, it had no respect of persons. She was blamed in good company. In days of old, a king's conduct was supposed to be beyond reproach; now-a-days even his Majesty's actions were occasionally called into question by the daily Press to whom he gave the liberty which they thus abused. Surely an insignificant person like herself could afford to let the world say what it would and bide her time. For sooner or later evil tongues bring evil on themselves; they carry their own corruption with them.

The poison of asps killed Cleopatra in her day. And souls and reputations are alike easily slain. For herself it did not matter. But Farquharson had his foot on the ladder of success. He was in the thick of enemies; this, the outset of his campaign in England, was the critical period. He must not be checked now, whatever happened.

Too late to repair it, she saw the mistake she had made. She had run away like a frightened school-girl—run away from thoughts and fears and memories which had only taken a stronger hold on her in the past week. A little forethought—a hint of enforced economy to Lady Wereminster, and she might have got some post as chaperon to a girl abroad, and let her flat. There was her husband to be reckoned with, of course, but with board and lodging paid for, she herself could have managed on very little money, and long experience had shown her that Brand well paid was Brand well satisfied.

In solitude, in contemplation, the heart sounds the depths of its own bitterness. Solitude brings peace for the worker who has a task to fulfil which its special conditions make imperative, or for the mystic, already detached so far from earth that human longings can no longer reach him. But in the restless and passionate spirit, it breeds new restlessness and passion. Only the glare of the world can blot out certain dreams and visions, only the hum of Vanity Fair stifle the voice that calls in darkness.

Bareheaded, her hair stirred by the light breeze, hardly conscious of where she was going, Evelyn walked on and on, looking neither to right nor left. Dusk deepened and found her still searching aimlessly for peace which had for ever escaped her. She had eaten nothing since morning, and now it was nearly nine o'clock. Physically spent and broken by the struggle, exhausted and fainting, she knew suddenly that she could not walk a step further. There was an opening in the little wood beyond which offered temporary shelter. She was making her

way to it, blindly groping in the darkness, when from behind she saw two great lights sweep rapidly upon her, like an animal on its prey. She gave a startled cry. The car slowed down; the man who was driving it got down. It was Farquharson.

How did he guess who it was? Trembling, she turned to meet him. He lit a match and held it in front of her, looking straight into her eyes as it burned out. He was pale, and his mouth was set in the determined lines she knew.

"So you thought you could escape me!" he said, laughing.

It seemed to Evelyn afterwards that years passed in the moment he held her to him, stifling her fluttering cry with the torrent of his words.

"You ran away, did you? That was very cowardly, Eve. Didn't you know I should move heaven and earth to find you? As a matter of fact, no heroics were necessary; I asked Brand for your address last night and got it at once." The explanation was so typical! "I have been trying to get to you all day; I came here, in fact, two hours ago, but they didn't know at the cottage where you had gone, so since then I've been chasing you all over the county." He took her face in his hands; he could not see its expression, but he felt her quiver. "I've learnt a lot of things since I saw you last, Evelyn," he said, very gently. "You can't go on living with your husband, that's one thing. I can't go on living without you, that's another. Where are the matches?" He let go of her to light up again; even in that moment it struck her how unlike the things that happen in real life are to the scenes in books. His eyes were alight with triumph; there was no tragedy here, only joy. He asked no questions, he was sure of himself and sure of her, strong in the hope of victory.

"Career—did I hear you say something about my career? Careers don't depend upon conventional morality. Besides, it's only a question of shifting the scene. If England won't have anything to do with us, there's always Taorna, my own place with my own laws. Or if we want a bigger field—America. They let one have the courage of one's own opinions there."

He stopped. His eyes looked past her, on into the world he had never seen where they could begin life together. The darkness hid his face or she would at once have wept and rejoiced at its look of half-boyish exaltation. He had had to wait and work and fight for things all his life; but they had come to him. Unconsciously from childhood he had waited and worked and fought for this—so surely it was his.

Voiceless still, she swayed in his slackened clasp, and he bent down, wondering. His voice softened.

"Still nothing to say for yourself, Eve? Won't you even tell me that you're glad? Try to understand. It's you who are living a lie, not I. Real adultery is to

live your life with the wrong man, as you are now. You're made for me, and I for you. The world shan't dare to throw a stone at you—I'll see to that. We'll win through everything, hands down. Love's the fulfilling of the law. Sinning against it is the one unpardonable crime. It's when a man does that, that he deserves the hell to which he's probably already sent the woman who loves him."

"Wait," said Evelyn at last. "Let me think—I must think." She put out her hand to warn him back. She was face to face with naked facts; it had never been Farquharson's way to lie to those he trusted; he was not lying now. There would be no concealment in his actions now or ever, so far as she was concerned; he would take and keep her in view of the world, because he thought she was his by right of love. So strong, indeed, was he that he might even wrest a certain sympathy from the world for his courage and daring.

His words had driven away her faintness; they were, after all, but the echo of those she had already stifled in her own heart. Weakened and unnerved by the day's fast, they sounded in her ear like a trumpet call. Here, beside him, away from husband and friends and priests and confessors, there swept before her a sudden glorious vision of they two together defying the world and yet trampling upon it. Were they strong enough to point the way, to sacrifice themselves openly and without shame that the great truth behind his words might reach mankind and help others, weaker than they, to see the exquisite sanctity of a tie that would be to them for ever sacred?

But what of faith, what of religion? She might defy the world's judgment, there was still God's to confront. Hell would be to bring punishment on another; her own soul might go, but what if she plunged his into everlasting fires? Suddenly Cummings' words came back to her; the boy's words, not the priest's.

"You're not playing the game, Evelyn," he had said once, more gravely than occasion seemed to warrant, when she had just successfully evaded some trivial rule he had been at pains to teach her. "One must always play the game in life, however trivial it may seem."

"*One must always play the game in life, however trivial it may seem.*"

Perhaps she said the words aloud; she never knew. He started.

"My dear, my dear," she said, "I can't!" She hid her head on his shoulder, not daring to face him. She heard him draw a deep breath, and stand tense and rigid. She drew back. "You don't want heroics, nor do I. I am not afraid of the world or you. You'd be good to me for ever, and the best of our friends would be friends still, whatever happened. As for you, you're too big a man for me to harm you here—your career, I mean. But that's not all. There's God and there's eternity. They frighten me, not for myself, but you."

"Eve——!"

She put out her hand again.

"Don't—don't dear, have some pity!" The anguish of her tone arrested him midway to her. He stopped short, a man who had received a mortal blow.

"No—never again. It will all be harder for you because you're a man and I'm a woman," she said, "but you've got to get on without me, and you will, you will! That's the beginning and the end of it. Oh, there's not a spark of all your generosity to me that I don't love and worship. And it will all be dreadful in the future. But it's just got to be.... And we must meet, too, ordinarily, in front of people and by ourselves, as if to-day had never come to us, as if we'd made a mark and crossed it from our lives. We shall do it, and get through—because we've got to, because we're strong, because we love each other."

She heard the beating of his heart, she felt its pulses against her hand as he drew her to him for a moment in spite of what she had said, in voiceless pleading while they clung together, and she wondered, with a little smile, if death would be more bitter.

Silence again. He understood he could not move her. Then darkness, full and complete.

She heard him go from her, heavily; the car throbbed. Presently there was a flash of light as it whirled past. It was well, perhaps, that he did not see her look of dumb agony as she stood alone, shaking from head to foot, straining her ears to hear the last echo of the car, making herself ready to face the long walk back and the long life ahead.

PART III

THE BETRAYAL

"Iniquity shall bring all the earth to a desert, and wickedness ... o'verthrow the thrones of the mighty."—*Wisdom* (Douay Version).

CHAPTER I

"As for them whose heart walketh after their scandals, I will lay their way upon their head, saith the Lord God."—ECCLESIASTICUS.

"Black thoughts breed black ills to those who think them." ... "Curses, like chickens, come home to roost."—MRS. HODGSON BURNETT.

"After all," said Miss Beadon solemnly, "there's nothing like a man's sympathy. Men are so much more helpful than women. With women, some outside element always seems to spoil the completeness of sympathy. Jealousy as a rule, of course. How much I've suffered from that no one will ever know."

"So one would naturally imagine," said Brand gravely. "The gods have been unusually kind to you, Miss Beadon."

Dora smiled consciously.

"Oh, I dare say I have as many disadvantages as other women really. Of course I've come in contact with a great many interesting men, that's in my favour; I always think experience broadens one's point of view. Most women are so extraordinarily petty. Now look at Evelyn, even. I used to think she was my best friend, but she hardly helps me now. Since that night I dined at your house, and you guessed how matters stood with Mr. Farquharson and me, and put things before me with such wonderful delicacy and tact, she has never invited me once, unless I deliberately asked her to do so. And he's such a busy man now—he has very little time to come here. Besides, of course it's a little awkward when every time a man dines with you the papers get hold of it. Now with Evelyn it's different. The public eye isn't always upon her as it is upon me."

"No man worth calling a man would willingly compromise a woman he cared for," said Brand.

He leant back in his chair and looked at Miss Beadon critically. Beadon had married beneath him, of course; all the world guessed as much, and Brand knew every detail of the story. Dora was pre-eminently her mother's daughter; she had fallen an easy prey to Brand's flattery. Little by little he had made himself indispensable to her for the last few weeks. She consulted him now about her engagements and her gowns. He had made her the means of paying off many an outlying score which had rankled for years. Little by little, he told himself, his luck was turning; he was regaining his old power and position. In time, if things went on as well as they were doing, he would again become a force to be reckoned with. If he could but obtain some permanent hold on Miss Beadon, the conquest of a great portion of the social world would be easy, and if he could but marry her to Farquharson——

But Farquharson himself was a stumbling-block in the plan. He had got

on, not slowly and surely as other men may, but in leaps and bounds. Lady Wereminster declared that he had signed a bond with Satan. Brand saw no way of pointing out how valuable an asset a charming and tactful wife would be; for that matter neither adjective applied to Dora. The two men seldom came in contact now; they had nothing in common, and Farquharson's reserve and courtesy were more baffling than open antagonism.

Occupied with public affairs, and in much social request, it was difficult to think of Farquharson as having either time or inclination to play the part of a modern suitor—to woo the object of his affections with lunch at one restaurant and tea at another, and dinner at a third and supper at a fourth, after the modern mode. Indeed, so far as Miss Beadon was concerned, he scarcely seemed to recognize her existence. But for Brand, one doubted if even Dora could have construed his "good-mornings" and "good-nights" into the protestations of undying love.

A clever and unscrupulous woman can usually get what she wants without help. But Dora was not clever. Her platitudes, her plainness, told against her. Things seemed at a deadlock. It is not much use to have written what you think is a successful comedy if all the leading characters refuse to play the parts you have assigned to them.

As well attempt to influence the elements themselves as Farquharson. Unless Evelyn could be made to intervene. But Evelyn, once so tractable, was unmoved now by threats or pleading; nothing would induce her to meet Farquharson voluntarily.

Ah, but what if she could be used unconsciously? Suddenly Brand saw light. What had he told Miss Beadon just now? "A man will never willingly compromise the woman he cares for." If Farquharson could be made to think that he had put Evelyn in a false position, he would take the readiest means of disproving the statement. And the announcement of a man's engagement or marriage to one woman is the best public contradiction of his interest in another. Once Evelyn's name was called into the question, Farquharson was the man to act quickly. Let Miss Beadon be but near at such a moment, and she would seem the easiest solution of the difficulty.

"I may be able to help you," Brand said after a pause. "It won't be easy—it may give me and those I love infinite pain. But friendship isn't worth much if one isn't willing to risk a great deal for it, and I am sure you are the last woman in the world to forget such a kindness."

He spoke meaningly. Dora held out her hand. Her vanity was piqued, and as much of her heart as such a woman can give was involved. Generally, to set her

heart on anything meant that it became hers very shortly. These unaccustomed barriers had completely unnerved her; she would have taken any means to secure Brand's help.

"You can count on me," she said, ready at that moment to promise him anything he asked. "There's nothing you can ask of me that I won't do for you in the future if you'll only help me now. I mean it; and I never break my word."

Brand smiled.

"Oh, well, it won't be a very serious matter. Perhaps I shall ask you to do some little service for me later on, but I don't suppose it will tax your resources as wife of—the Prime Minister, shall we say?"

They were walking in the direction of Knightsbridge. The clock at the Guards' Barracks struck the hour.

"Suppose you go and see Evelyn now? I see a way of helping you which must be put in train at once." He lifted his hat, and, crossing to Hyde Park Corner, hailed a hansom. "The *Crystal* offices, Fleet Street," he said.

"Mr. Brand, *Mr. Brand*, did you say? What on earth can the man want with me? Take him to the library, James, and say I'll come as soon as I can."

Lady Wereminster, erect and stately, gave Henry Brand the mere tips of her fingers, and withered him with her most disconcerting stare. She knew that to meet an unwelcome guest in complete silence puts him at the most serious disadvantage. Her quick eye took in every detail of Brand's faultlessly arranged air of distress. "Good Heavens, the man looks like a mourner; even his tie-pin is in keeping. Has he come to borrow money, or what?" she wondered.

"Lady Wereminster, forgive me. May I sit down?"

The voice was low and broken. Lady Wereminster raised her eyebrows, allowing but one word to escape from her tightly pursed lips.

"Certainly."

Brand hesitated.

"I have come to consult you about a matter that is very near my heart, Lady Wereminster. A matter that concerns Evelyn's welfare. Otherwise I should never have dreamed of intruding upon you."

"The time between half-past two and a quarter to three is usually spent in idleness," said Lady Wereminster grimly. "Go on, please."

"I shall go straight to the point," said Brand. "I am in great trouble, I've heard rumours——" He stopped again, choked by emotion, while Lady Wereminster watched him with a look of stone. "A man can fight his own battles, good or ill scarcely matter where his character is concerned. But when the name of the woman one loves best——" He corrected himself hastily, seeing his

hostess's momentary expression of surprise. "When one's wife's name is spoken with ever such slight levity, it's another matter." He paused, shielding his face with his hands, pent-house fashion, as though utterly overcome.

Lady Wereminster looked rather pale.

"To what, pray, are you alluding?" she asked.

Brand looked up desperately.

"Have you seen this week's *Crystal*, Lady Wereminster? It came half-an-hour ago. I've kept it from Evelyn till now. You know those accursed problems that they print weekly—one's meant to read between the lines. The ghastly part of them is that they are veiled under so damnable and complete a cloak of anonymity."

"Will you kindly oblige me by being more explicit?" asked Lady Wereminster, after a glacial pause.

Brand turned, at bay, his eyes flashing. He was really playing his part excellently.

"There's something about Evelyn!—about Evelyn!—in the paper."

"An unopened copy is on the table beside you," said Lady Wereminster. "Will you kindly read me the paragraph to which you refer?"

Holding the table for support, Brand read on slowly, giving each word its full significance.

"'*A woman who contemplates an eventual ménage à trois is wise not to marry an athletic husband.*'

"'*Gratitude is a virtue, remember, though it does not always lead to virtue where politics are concerned.*'

"'*He was lately seen in Sussex, where she had temporarily taken up her residence.*'

"'*After all, more ways than one lead to the Divorce Court.*'"

There was a long pause.

"And you mean to tell me," Lady Wereminster began very slowly. Then she stopped, her voice was shaking.

Brand bowed his head.

"Unmistakable. I heard a man laugh at it just now in the club. 'Farquharson and——' he said. Then he saw me."

Lady Wereminster put out a warning hand.

"No names, please; it's not safe even here. Oh, if I were a man!" Her eyes blazed. "Couldn't one horsewhip the editor? or—no, that would make a scandal at once. That's where people like these have everything in their hands. Nothing is so easy to spread as a lie about a woman. One word of suspicion and you could blacken Una herself. This must be stopped—but how? What can we do?"

For the first time in her life she was identifying herself with Brand, even

consulting him on mutual terms.

"They are bound to go on meeting. And now at every turn there will be eyes to watch and lips to sneer. If I had my way, I'd have the people who spread lies like these stand naked in a public pillory. There's a jealous woman or women behind it, of course. Trace any scandal to its source, and you will find that the one man or woman from whom it originally emanated was the one who would benefit by its being spread. In a question of work, you will find it is the woman beaten in her own field by a younger woman, socially superior, who starts the scandal; in love, the vanquished rival. Scandal can't create itself; there's always at least one pair of lying lips to bring it into being."

"What if the man were to—but then he never would——" Brand faltered.

Lady Wereminster threw up her hands with a cry.

"You have it," she said; "there's only one way he can stop it. He must marry. People must think that she has been his confidante throughout—has known about it from the first. She's not the kind of woman to stand up against a stab in the dark like this. It would kill her!"

"But is Farquharson likely to marry? Is there any one with whom his name is associated?" said Brand doubtfully. "He never seemed to me a marrying man."

"That's not the question," said Lady Wereminster decidedly. "The whole point is that he must save her. Good Heavens, that Evelyn should be the talk of any club!" She rang the bell violently. "Give me the paper. I shall go and see Mr. Farquharson myself at once, and put the matter straight before him. He owes everything to Evelyn, and he's brought this upon her. They say it's always the woman who goes to the wall in these matters. Well, she shan't in this case, if I have to take the man to the church myself. Good-bye, and thank you."

She extended a hurried forefinger and waved him to the door. He bowed, well satisfied.

"Order the victoria at once, James; I'm in a hurry."

Taking out her glasses, Lady Wereminster re-read the paragraph line by line.

"Oh, if I had but seen Evelyn lately! But meeting Miss Beadon when I ran in the other morning stopped my going for a week. 'Sussex'—and 'politics'!—Oh, Evelyn, Evelyn!"

CHAPTER II

"The cleverest of all devils is opportunity."—VIELAND.

"Evelyn, you must help me," said Miss Beadon angrily. "How can you say no, and be so horribly cruel? It's such a tiny favour to ask; it shan't cost you a penny, I promise, if you'll only come. I'll let the carriage pick you up." She was on the verge of tears.

Evelyn, to whom tears came with difficulty, thought that they caused other women acute mental agony like her own.

She held out her hand.

"Please don't cry, Dora. There's more in this than you know. I've got to think things out. Be quiet for a minute, dear."

On the face of it it was a small thing Miss Beadon was asking, merely that Evelyn should make a point of accompanying her to the last reunion that night in Hare's rooms before he left town. Evelyn had already accepted the invitation tentatively, meaning only to go if she heard that Farquharson would not be present. At large parties they were able to avoid each other easily. They had never been much together in public. But at so small and intimate a gathering as this—Hare was expecting only ten or twelve people—they must infallibly be thrown together and meet as though things were on the old footing, before their bitter-sweet secret had drawn them near.

But now Dora had come to demand Evelyn's help, and she was made to confront the very thought which she most dreaded. Dora wanted to marry Farquharson. Evelyn shut her eyes and tried to think what life would be under such changed conditions. If the idea was no longer new, it was none the less terrible. Spiritual forces may be called up to battle with many foes successfully, but there are times when spiritual forces fail, when foes from within, the very roots of our nature, take arms against us. It seemed to Evelyn at that moment that the civil war within her was sapping the very life in her body. She could have stood aside to watch Farquharson rise higher and higher, alone, unhampered, even although every step took him further from her, but how could she bear to see him live his life out with another woman, reaping the small domestic joys, gathering in time, perhaps, even the perfect fruit of the tree of life?

"Thou shalt ask and not obtain." The words came back to her. This was, perhaps, what God demanded of her, the penalty for having come near sin. Daily crucifixion—not a mere seven hours agony, but one which would endure to her life's end.

And yet the horrible selfishness of the point of view! What right had she to deny him such little gifts as he might secure from life, which is so rarely bountiful? His inward life, all its purposes and ambitions, would be hers, and in a

career like his there must inevitably be dark moments when home comfort and joys, which he had never had, might brace him to meet his difficulties, and nerve him, by sheer force of reaction, for future battles.

She looked at Dora critically. Perhaps they had all misjudged her. Her heart seemed to be set upon her object with absolute determination; and if she loved Farquharson enough, nothing else mattered. Love was what he needed—love near at hand, love wrapping him round. The love which "feels no burthen, gives all for all and is all in all, which watches and, sleeping, slumbers not, when weary is not tired."

"You love Mr. Farquharson—you want me to understand that you really love him?" she said at last. "Love is such a big thing, Dora, I often wonder if girls understand it. Modern men and women take more trouble to choose a housekeeper than they give to the choice of a life-long companion. Marriage is all give and take—and there's more in those words than you will ever realize until you've gone right through the marriage service, and come out at the other side. It's a thing of deadly gravity, marriage, not a mere shifting of responsibility, or the prospect of a better position, or the escape from home discomfort. You are one of the lucky people to whom none of these three incentives need appeal. Oh, Dora, there are so many unhappy marriages in this world, and I'm so tired of them! Do make up your mind that yours shall be a beautiful success, not just a brilliant one."

"You always take things so seriously," Dora said tartly. "Of course I love him. Why should I want to marry him rather than any one else? It's not as if he were the only one. I'm only asking you to chaperon me for this one evening, not a lifetime, and it's nothing to make such a fuss about, after all. I never get an opportunity of saying a word to him without everybody seeing. Even servants may be reporters in disguise. It makes even me unlike myself; and I know it's only the fear of being seen and watched that keeps him from speaking to me. When he was not so important he used to talk to me quite a lot, and quite intimately. I remember one night at the Wereminsters' when he spoke of you—implied he liked you, but said you weren't his style, or something of the sort. For such a man that meant a lot. I'm not a woman to make confidences, as you know, so I appreciate reserve in others. I've come to you because you've seen everything from the first. You're married, you've got all you want; why can't you help me by giving me one or two of the opportunities nobody else in the whole world knows that I long for?"

This sounded plausible enough. Dora's ways were not as Evelyn's, but that was perhaps a mere matter of temperament. And the glow of sacrifice burns with so white a flame that it illuminates even those trivial objects that it falls upon.

"I'll come," said Evelyn, sighing. "What time shall I be ready?"

"We ought to be there at half-past nine," said Dora. "Will you be with us at nine-fifteen? Then we can have a talk first. By the way, you'd better take a cab, Evelyn, after all—you do live such an awfully long way out."

"Thanks. Then you don't think me an interfering old woman?" said Lady Wereminster.

"I think you are very kind," said Farquharson courteously. His tone was final. He rose and held out his hand, and Lady Wereminster, who was known amongst her circle of intimate friends as "The Social Tyrant," meekly acquiesced and left him.

"The man's extraordinarily reassuring," she told herself as she drove away. "He says very little. But he's a man of his word, and he'll do as I want. There's nothing he wouldn't do for Evelyn. I didn't dare even say I was sorry for him. And these are matters that the world would tell you you might not even pray about!" ...

Farquharson, left mercifully alone, went back to the table in his study and sat down heavily. Blue Books, pamphlets, the records of his work lay all about him, in orderly piles; Farquharson was nothing if not scrupulously neat; his life lay there. Methodical, orderly, brilliant, complete—which adjective best described it?

Yet in that moment it all seemed to him of little worth, little real value. After all, to have your name in men's mouths for a season, what is it? Success and enmity go hand in hand; the man or woman who finds the highest is beset by a thousand treacheries and betrayals. The little bank clerk, with his hundred and fifty pounds a year, setting out to his work in the morning unnoticed, and unenvied, and returning to the woman he loves at the close of office hours, has a happier lot than the most important statesman in the empire. His small cup is full to the brim with wholesome wine and water; that of the other is mixed with vinegar and gall.

What had Farquharson's country done for him that he should work for it? It had given him a legacy of dishonour, it had torn his heritage from him. Why should he sow in blood, that the wastrel and incompetent should reap the fruit of his toil in ease? Why should he spend himself that England, who reared heroes only to spit upon them, should put him on that pedestal which had so often, of late years, turned to a pillory? And yet other men had braved and achieved so much more than he.

His mind leapt back to Kabul; to the doings of a little Corps of Guides, Hamilton, Jenkyns, Kelly and the rest. Who remembered those deathless heroes now? Hamilton, the most intrepid, he who had charged over two thousand of

the enemy, first with four men, and then with three, and last of all alone, had his memorial in stone at Dublin. But stone cannot speak or glow. Cold and immovable, it is the symbol of a nation's heart.

Yet the call of one's country is strong. Now, at this moment, when he, the strong man, wavered between allegiance to her service and denial of her claims, weighing duty in the scale with happiness, her voice rose with the calm insistence which drives a man to do the thing he would not—to achieve what, humanly speaking, we should call impossible. Peace and ease might have been Farquharson's in Taorna—life with the woman he loved. He knew his power; he underrated Evelyn's. He faced again in that moment the temptation to take her away against her will, maybe, strong in the certainty that he could satisfy her, that they would find together something which the average man and woman could never attain.

But the voice of the nation spoke, implacably. "I want you. You must stay. I shall bruise and break you. No matter, you are dust, you can return to the dust from which you came. You may ride in my car of progress day and night, neither sleeping nor resting so long as your wits are keen and your intellect alert. Once your eyes fail or your hand trembles, I shall have no further use for you. From nothing you came, to nothing you may then return. But my car will go on, and you will have driven it for a little time."

Yes, he must stay. And if he stayed, he must make this sacrifice for Evelyn; he must give up his dearest dream. For, grimly as he faced life as a whole, he had always cherished the thought of marriage as his one hope of human salvation. What he had said to Evelyn was true; not mere words, but conviction. He believed that a man should only give himself in marriage to the one woman who could make an equal gift of mind, body and soul, the supreme trinity of surrender. Marriage was a sacrament—marriage as God instituted it, not the false union that convention recognized.

"And now the dream must go," he said aloud. His thoughts went back to the old phrase of the picture gallery when he had spoken to Dan. "Yes, dreams are only made to break, I suppose." He got up. "Since one woman is as much or as little to me as another, if I can't have Eve as my wife—I'll leave it to chance, and propose to the first unmarried woman, if she will let me, who speaks to me to-night at Hare's."

"At last!" Miss Beadon said. "I thought you were never coming." She was standing near the door, awaiting Farquharson's entry. She knew the value of a convenient position. "We have hardly seen anything of you of late." For once she was a trifle nervous. "But I've read all your speeches. Father has told me how splendidly

you've got on."

Not the ideal woman this, but a woman who at least could sympathize, who would not need to be taught the necessities of her position. Farquharson looked at her gravely. Something of her self-complacency had left her; she was nervous and a little tremulous as to the result of this meeting, for which she had plotted so eagerly.

"I have something to say to you," he said. "I must speak to these people first, and then—— See, there are chairs in that little recess. Will you wait for me there in ten minutes' time?"

CHAPTER III

"Youth from the windows of his innocence
Sent forth his soul to scan the future years.
Homeward it brings this strange intelligence—
'In life there are no tears.'

We who are older, shake our heads and say
'Another tale, we know, we who are men.'
But haply Youth espies the deathless years,
Seeing beyond our ken."

"I am not sorry that, after all, you were not there," wrote Lady Wereminster to Hare, a few weeks later. "The Burial Service always strikes me as comparatively gay when matched with the amended Marriage Service of the Church of England. The one gives hope; the other preaches duty instead. There is no romance in it, no mysticism. You are practically told it is your duty to marry because you are not good enough to remain unmarried, that you must bring children into the world because it would look so remarkably odd if you did not. As to the meaning of it all, whether it is to the glory of God or your next-door neighbour, the advertisement editor of the *Morning Post* is the best judge. Anyway, he is the person who immediately benefits.

"Did I tell you that Richard Farquharson and Dora Beadon were indissolubly united at St. Margaret's, Westminster, yesterday afternoon, by the bye? I

suppose you read all in the papers; there was fuss enough, in all conscience. Miss Beadon saw to that. I dislike that girl more than ever. Is there anything more annoying than the incompetence of a woman who cannot fill the position she was born to?

"And now what will happen? I feel responsible, having set the machinery in motion. As a girl, I played with lives quite easily; it amused me to turn fate, or juggle with purposes the meaning of which I could not fathom. Now, in old age, I have grown afraid. Souls are such tiresome things. I know old Akbar said, 'I never saw any one lost on a straight road,' but occasionally one wonders if there are any straight roads left, now the County Council has played so many tricks with London streets?

"Dora Beadon is neither a fish nor a vegetable. She belongs to the new world which we have created in this after-Victorian era. Don't think I complain of her hypocrisy; I suppose we are all hypocrites more or less. I was one when I tried to persuade a man with a career to marry a selfish woman, with what I hoped to be a nondescript character, because I wanted him to save the reputation of a woman who reminds me more of my niece Asenath than any one I have ever met. As Dora is nondescript, she may be amiable. But—that mouth of hers! Have you ever seen it in repose?

"Well, now they are started for good or ill. I pin my faith on the man's ambition. All life's a compromise. No woman can have both a Grecian nose and a perfect figure; no man can have success and happiness. And success means more to a man than to a woman. If we are human, there's no single moment in which we would not lay down the biggest prize the world can offer us at the feet of the man we love, and say, 'Please take it, dear; I only won it for you.' But a man likes to have his prize in a substantial form, and keep it on his sideboard, so that his wife can show it, very highly polished, to his guests. Look at the presentation cups in our men's messes! The trophies, challenge cups! Why, a man can't even kill a big salmon without having it photographed or modelled in a glass case. We women kill our salmon every day and no one knows it.

"So I dispose of Richard Farquharson. He is off my conscience. Life will give him something, although it is not the thing he wants. And Dora—she need not complain; she will have a little more wealth, a little more luxury, a little more panoply of amusement and flattery; that is enough for her. But there's still Evelyn.

"She came to the wedding. He made her—her husband. Oh, if she were only a less good Catholic! It is a magnificent system. It reduces its subjects to such a pitch of subjection that they obey in spite of themselves. The happiness, the welfare of one unworthy little soul—what does it matter, so long as the Vatican coffers are full, so long as the Celebrations on high days and festivals have still

their proper number of spectators? Inviolable, magnificent, the one wall that will never be broken, it rears itself ever higher and higher as the ages roll on, cemented with the blood of a thousand victims whose names will never be written in any book of martyrology.

"You like human problems, so I give you one. There they stand, the three of them, as opposed in temperament as any of the subjects in Browning's *Ring and the Book*. I cannot depict them; I cannot even prophesy. Very long ago I found that God knew a great deal more than I did—a fact that hardly seems possible to the cocksureness of youth. So—wicked old woman as I am supposed to be by many of my best friends—I end this letter to you, who know me well, with a real pious intention.

"You remember the story of the bishop who was told the ship upon which he was travelling was about to sink? I will try and quote it from memory—

"'The sea it was rough and the ship it did lurch,
And it blew without reason or ruth;
And the consequence was this mainstay of the Church
Suffered much for the sake of the truth.

And the sea it grew rough, and the night it grew black,
And the rain-drops fell heavy and thick,
And the bishop he heartily wished himself back,
While Rangoon—it might go to Old Nick!

"Oh, skipper, I really enjoy a good blow,
And 'tis truly a glorious sight;
But your candid opinion I'm anxious to know—
Do you think there is danger to-night?"

The skipper he hitched himself up, and he laughed,
Then he suddenly grew very grave,
As a hurricane squall seemed to stagger the craft,
And she buried her nose in a wave.

And he said, "Well, your Grace, it's a dirtyish night,
But whether the vessel will ride,
I really can't tell you; you'll know before night,
In Providence we must confide."

"Good gracious!" the bishop exclaimed in dismay

As he clutched at his old shovel hat;
"This is terrible, skipper; you don't mean to say
That really it has *come to that*!"'

"I think it has 'come to that' in this instance too!"

PART IV

THE BESTOWAL

"Human endurance is the one miracle left in the world."—E. ROBINS.

CHAPTER I

"Lord, I have laid my heart upon Thy altar,
But cannot get the wood to burn;
It hardly flames ere it begins to falter,
And to the dark return.

'Tis all I have—smoke, failure, foiled endeavour,
Coldness and doubt and palsied lack;
Such as I have I send Thee; perfect Giver,
Send Thou Thy lightning back."
GEORGE MACDONALD.

"Let men see, let them know a real man who lives as he was meant to live."—MARCUS AURELIUS.

The sensation of pain does not immediately strike a man who is severely

wounded; first, he feels a sting like a lash, then numbness succeeds, presently he falls.

Mental pain is, after all, very like physical. Acute shock paralyzes mind and soul; it puts a clog in the wheel of human machinery. Great calamities do not necessarily stop human functions from fulfilling their duties; a man eats or drinks, or may, in exceptional cases, even sleep as well in the first moment of a great crisis as before. Body and soul are braced to the day's routine; for a time they continue their offices unchecked. But presently the chill and paralysis of thought and action spread throughout his being. Then ordinary work is impossible. Merely to live is a labour, the most trivial effort an arduous achievement.

In paralysis, limbs refuse to obey the message of the brain, or, misinterpreting it, do the thing they would not. So, when the roots of a life's happiness have been struck, the soul cannot hear the message of the over-wrought body that pleads to it for help in vain.

In the days that followed, Farquharson and Evelyn travelled again, invisible companions, down the same *via crucis* of agony and shame. To Evelyn, perhaps, the path was the more difficult to tread because for the first time faith had failed her. "Doubt comes," says the Catholic Church, "to those who wilfully play with sin." Unyielding, inflexible, she would have those who profess her faith remove themselves from the first taint of guilt, failing to help even the sorely wounded if he who suffered were one whose imminence brought danger. It is another of the paradoxes with which faith abounds; there are times when these same paradoxes raise an impenetrable wall against which the human heart beats vainly—bruised, bleeding, outwardly broken.

Doggedly Evelyn kept to the open evidences of her belief, sure of their truth, though unable to find comfort in them. She knew priests who had done the same, men who had striven for weeks and years against overwhelming apathy, alone in the desert of temptation. She knew one who had died so, to whom no ray of illumination had come even at the last, although only she and his confessor knew as much. He was a man who had helped more men and women than any other member of his brotherhood; faith seemed to be given him merely to be spent in the service of others.

But he was a man, and she was only a woman. And peace of some kind must surely have approached him, if one believes at all in supernatural influences, from the very atmosphere of the praying souls he stood amongst at Mass, from the mere nearness of the Sacred Host. Evelyn lived in an atmosphere of cynicism and doubt; it pressed upon her, bearing her down now that she had no rival force with which to combat it. And because by the narrow channel through which one doubt enters a thousand may follow, she found that the silence and solitude she had once loved were now thronged with ghosts, ghostly visions of the love she

might have had but would not, and the life she might have lived with him she loved, one in companionship, one in ambition, one in the most dear and sacred intimacy of marriage, one in failure, one in success, one in the love of the children whose feet they would never now hear, whose lips would never now meet their own.

There is no hell which equals in intensity the hell of an imagination so vivid as to create being from what is void. When Farquharson left the church with his wife, Evelyn followed them every step of the way home. She looked on to the future; she forced herself to pray for their happiness, while in her heart she knew that happiness would be her death-blow. As she had striven for him in the past, using all the human forces at her command in helping him attain the thing he wished, so she strove now to make herself desire that he should have the best life has to offer, not the mere earthly wreath of laurels, but the unfading crown of peace.

But Farquharson, although she did not know it, had a harder task. He had tied himself for life to a woman who violated his every belief, whose nature warred with his at every turn. Realist and man of purpose as he was, his dear belief that in the world somewhere, somehow, there lived a second Margaret Cunningham whom he would ultimately possess, had sweetened all his work since he left Glune. When he met Evelyn he knew the dream was true, and Glune and she were absolutely at one. He pictured her its fitting mistress, visiting every haunt of his childhood, satisfying every memory and tradition, washing away with her tender tears the bitterness that had grown part of his heritage, as labourers would clear away useless timber and refuse, making all wholesome and clean.

Glune was his now again, a princely wedding gift from Calvert and Beadon, but all pleasure in the possession was gone.

A French writer once said that it is impossible to predict of any woman the exact change that marriage will make in her. We have all seen love turn to hate in a few hours under certain circumstances, but there are subtler changes still. Great emotions may bring havoc to certain natures; change comes inevitably, whether the emotions be great or small. Perhaps Dora had cared for Farquharson so far as in her lay before he became her husband, but now he was her property, an object of daily use, as important, perhaps, as her sponge or toothbrush, but quite unworthy of any deep regard. It was better to be with him than without him. It never struck her that she owed him any duty; if she thought about the matter at all it was merely to consider that a beneficent Creator had brought him into being for the special purpose of accompanying her when she wanted him, and transacting

the business that she had slurred even as an unmarried woman; investing her money to its best advantage, and paying bills about whose magnitude she no longer felt even the smallest compunction.

With those early days of marriage she was entirely content and satisfied. No doubt of her ability to please him crossed her mind; the useless are invariably self-satisfied. She had mapped out a motor tour which was intended to outdo anything that other brides had accomplished; restless, untiring, she swept Farquharson on from place to place, great towns and cities whose very stones breathed glory and mystery, under the shadows of mountains which at night looked cold and full of awe, types of the crushing power that seemed to rule men's destinies, but which were warmed and quickened to life by the first gleam of the morning sun. Beauty, tradition, mystery, these things meant nothing to Dora, and Farquharson, who longed to stay, was openly derided. Of late years he had had little or no time to spare for the love of nature which had trained him as a boy; he steeped his soul in colour which she did not even see.

They went from big hotel to big hotel; nights spent in little village inns bored Dora inexpressibly. Day after day she went out of their road to buy the English papers. If their tour was not mentioned in them she flung them aside; when it was, she collected the cuttings eagerly. Farquharson realized that for his wife the meaning of life was resolved into a single hope—that the glare of publicity should be for ever upon them. He thought of the future. He could picture her at Glune, entertaining the Press, dragging out his relics, giving chapter and verse succinctly of all those dear records which had made him what he was. She would gossip with the villagers, she would leave no stone unturned to find out all about his childhood, and then repeat it at her next afternoon call. Nothing was sacred to her, and now for Evelyn's sake he had learned to look upon women as sacred, and to try to understand something even of his mother's nature. Women like Dora would drag her memory and his brother's in the dust that they might make suitable headlines for an "interview."

It was for this he had bartered his dream—for this and to save a woman's honour.

Well, there was work to do; thank God for work. Daily routine has saved many a man's brain from snapping, before now.

Farquharson returned to town after six weeks' absence to find great arrears and accumulation of work, which he welcomed. Various by-elections were taking place all over the country; the issue of the next election mainly depended upon the people's decision concerning Tariff Reform *versus* Free Trade. Since the great Protectionist leader was unable through illness to carry on the contest, Farquhar-

son was appealed to on all sides as the worthiest exponent of the cause. He was invited to speak in the north, in the midlands, south and west alike.

In Taorna, too, there were difficulties. The position of the man he had left to act for him wanted strengthening. The Council for once was undecided; Farquharson's message flashed across the sea and was obeyed. Beadon read its terms and smiled.

"Men talk of grit," he said, "but you've got grip. Do you never lose touch of what you've once held?"

"That's a real man," was Hare's comment as he read next morning's paper. "What he has done for Taorna, he can do for England. I am beginning to have hopes for her. One man has saved his nation before now."

That the country was passing through a crisis was apparent. Farquharson had set men talking. His speeches spread dissatisfaction and dissension, and unrest alone will make a nation rise. The Ministry sent its best men to oppose him; in one important ward it was even rumoured that the Liberals had bribed men to heckle and annoy the candidate whom he supported. But on the night in question it was Farquharson who faced them, having persuaded his somewhat timid follower to plead temporary illness. And as he spoke better than he had ever spoken before, even his enemies were silenced.

Up in the north, that hot-bed of Liberalism, men weighed his words and were discomfited. It was their force, their overwhelming conviction which told with these level-headed men of business, who, unlike their Irish neighbours across the sea, were seldom swayed by impulse or carried away by enthusiasm. In Rowan, the nearest town to Bruchill, a Radical constituency from time immemorial, a meeting was held eventually, at which it was decided to ask Farquharson to stand in place of the retiring candidate. The news came at breakfast. It touched him very deeply; he had waited for this, hoping against hope, and refusing other invitations against the wishes of his party. He handed it to Dora without comment.

She flung it down.

"A trumpery second-rate place like that! You'll refuse, of course," she said.

Farquharson took his seat in the House as Member for Rowan three weeks later. After that matters moved more dramatically than usual in the undramatic House of Commons. Amongst its members may be found a great crowd of wavering and irresponsible beings delighted to identify themselves with a real leader; they followed Farquharson like sheep. A certain Bill, just brought forward, had roused the nation's indignation; it touched all classes, since every insurance office held large shares in the especial traffic which it threatened. The Bill gave Farquharson

an early opportunity of taking his stand in the House, and he made the most of it.

A few weeks later, in a crowded assembly representative not only of British but of foreign interest, as the Strangers' and the Speaker's Galleries were both full, Beadon proposed a vote of censure on the Government, which was seconded by Farquharson in a speech that turned the scale. The motion was carried by an overwhelming majority. The inevitable General Election followed, and event followed event in quick succession. Conservative agencies mustered all their forces, and Farquharson was bidden to speak in every direction. The pendulum swung round, and the Conservatives returned to power with a gain of twelve seats on the last amazing Liberal majority of three and a half years before.

CHAPTER II

"If glory does not intoxicate you continually, do not stand beneath her banners."—THE PRINCE DE LIGNE.

"Historians and the Press make the mistake," said Hare, "of treating the nation as a party. She is an individual, subject to fluctuations of health and reason, capable, like a true woman, of reaching any height or any depth. She is baffling, inconsistent, base, and noble within a breath. Wise men predict her rise or fall according to her temperament and environment. Look at Spain. Melancholy to the roots of her being, mysterious, ardent—she has those qualities which attain to the utmost height of glory for a while, then decline. The Escorial shows one side of the nation; much the same brooding silence and enmity as were the hall-marks of the Inquisition. I doubt if any man or woman can fully understand what made inquisitors act as they did until they have been to Spain. There is no power so cruel as that of a faith which literally obeys the scriptural injunction of destroying limb by limb the body which turns to evil and forsakes good. In Grenada you have another side, everything steeped in colour and mystery. Moorish, of course—how few of us realize, by the bye, that Spain was held by the Moors for an even longer period than she has been under the sway of the Spaniards. But Spain needs balance. Till she gets it she will never be a great nation. Take Italy, again. Had she cultivated her pagan characteristics, as opposed to the qualities which

priests would tell you make for ultimate happiness, she would have done better. As it is, she is rebellious, chaotic, a mass of intrigue and suspicion, unreliable and weak. Germany—ah! there's a power to be reckoned with, scarcely, in my mind, to fear. Her death-blow is ambition. She is a one-man country, and one man is liable to err. France is a house divided against itself; a nation of charming women and irreligious men. In her dissensions our security lies. Russia"—he shrugged his shoulders—"with her internal troubles and her exchequer at so low an ebb, we need not fear her. In the future aspect of the Alliance, I fancy China and Japan united may be our bitter enemies. Theirs is a waiting game. At Berlin and Paris and London you will find students from these countries assimilating all that we can teach them, wisely using the best means that other nations can furnish for their own ends. You have the dominant characteristics of different types in every case. The real diplomatist deals rather with the Russian, the Italian, the Spaniard, than with Russia, Italy, and Spain."

"Quite a good lesson in foreign affairs at first hand," said Lady Wereminster, turning to her neighbour, Meavy, who, a disappointed man, had had to resign his post through ill-health. "Given, if I mistake not, to some end. Has anything unusual struck you about our little party to-night?"

Meavy looked round.

"Calvert, our host—Farquharson and his wife, Creagh, Beadon, Hare, the Brands, your husband, you and myself—your sex is in the minority, Lady Wereminster."

"Precisely the same party that was down at Creagh to meet Mr. Farquharson on his first introduction to English social life," said Lady Wereminster. "That was a year ago. Since then——"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Tides ebb and flow, men come and go," quoted Meavy dreamily.

"One man's arrived," said Lady Wereminster. "A year ago we were bemoaning the drowsiness of the Empire. She has awakened now. I suppose, to carry on Mr. Hare's simile, she has had a good shaking. Every one needs it in his day."

"I'm sure *I* don't," said Dora Farquharson, breaking in. "Richard, do scold Lady Wereminster. She says I need shaking—I'm sure I don't, do I?"

"Oh, if we all got our deserts——" put in Hare somewhat grimly.

"Now Richard needs shaking if you like," continued Dora, who had begun, since marriage, to consider herself something of a wit. "He is the most *impossible* husband. Always off somewhere, at anybody's beck and call but mine. A dear boy, of course, but hopeless to live with. If he had married an unamiable wife I don't know what he would have done. When he's at home, he always says he is too busy to be disturbed."

"You don't agree with the axiom that women ought to marry men they

dislike because it is the only way of avoiding them, then?" said Lady Wereminster.

Dora simpered.

"Oh no. I was always romantic—just the opposite to Richard. Not that I want to complain of you, old boy." She leant across the table and tapped her husband on the arm. "You're quite a good sort in your way; you don't mind your little wife chaffing you occasionally, do you?"

"No man is a hero to his—wife," Creagh misquoted gently.

Lady Wereminster flashed.

"Don't tar us all with the same brush. There are wives and wives, remember; most of us ought to go through a training school for marriage. I'm sure useless subjects enough are taught in modern schools. 'How to be a good wife' would be an attractive variety."

"Modern girls' schools are becoming more like boys'—delightful playgrounds."

"I approve of hockey and the rest in their way," said Lady Wereminster. "If the modern woman would only take her marriage as seriously as she does her games she might even bring human nature into repute again. Marriage is the only profession which a woman enters with absolutely no doubt of her competency. She may be the most irresponsible creature in the world, but she thinks the art of ruling a household is like love or measles—easily caught. I don't know how it is in your Church, Evelyn, but in ours no spiritual director would dream of suggesting advice in such a matter unless he were directly asked to interfere. And yet the duties are apparent. Any woman may make or mar any man with whom she is in daily contact. A woman can drag a man down in more ways than one. A wife can belittle her husband at every turn—can, by persistently treating him as an inferior in his own house, end by making him inferior. She can swamp his energy with her idleness, freeze his love of work with her indifference, fritter his money away on trifles until he loses all desire to save for a rainy day, deny him pleasure and outlet at every turn. I have no sympathy for such wives when their husbands leave them. In many cases, indeed, they would never stay but for the children."

"'A training school for wives founded by the Countess of Wereminster,'" said Brand maliciously. "High fees, of course. Shall we draw up the prospectus now? Will you accept my wife and Mrs. Farquharson as teachers, Lady Wereminster?"

"Delighted—if you'll agree to go in for the necessary examination as a husband," said Lady Wereminster promptly.

"'We do not what we ought,
What we ought not, we do,

And lean upon the thought
That chance will bring us through,'"

suggested Creagh, smiling.

"Talk of duties," interposed Mrs. Farquharson, raising her voice, "mine are simply appalling. They were bad enough in my father's house; they are a hundred times worse now. But, of course, in my position they would necessarily be very arduous. And in the future—oh, but I mustn't talk of that; that's a political secret."

"Rather an open one," said Brand very softly. "We have eyes and ears, Mrs. Farquharson. Your husband deserves the splendid luck you have brought him."

"Oh well, it is a good thing, isn't it?" said Dora proudly. "But how did you know? Of course it has been rumoured for some time, but my father only decided things to-day, and we don't want it in the papers for another twenty-four hours."

"It's an appointment in which his peculiar talents will tell," said Brand, drawing a bow at a venture.

"At first it was a toss-up between that and the Colonies," said Dora. "But—but in the present state of——"

"Foreign affairs?" suggested Brand.

"They thought—yes, they thought he would be more useful in that Office."

"Yes, it's a big post," said Brand abstractedly. He looked at his watch. "I wonder how much longer we're going to sit here. I have to make my excuses early to Calvert to-night; a friend of mine is ill, and I promised to go to him straight after dinner." He lowered his voice again. "I tell you this in confidence, of course. My wife has taken out a patent in the art of little human kindnesses, you know; she doesn't like it infringed even by me." He smiled a little pathetically.

Dora put out her hand.

"I know how good you are—no one better. Why, you even helped me once!"

"Ah, that—that was nothing. But some day I shall come upon you for the fulfilment of your promise, Mrs. Farquharson."

Dora looked up, vaguely startled. Brand's tone was intentionally grave.

"My promise? Oh, I remember. Of course I'll do what I can. There's the signal to move," she said hurriedly, gathering her fan and gloves together.

Farquharson stifled a sigh of relief as his wife left the room.

"That woman's insufferable," said Lady Wereminster. "How the man stands her I don't know. She trades on the patience that she knows he must possess to have reached his present position. Any woman, alas! has it in her personal power to make life unendurable for her husband, but I know of no surer method than persistently to wound his dearest susceptibilities. Dora treats Richard like a

schoolboy—she would degrade a grocer if she lived with him long enough. 'My this, my that'—she makes me sick One feels tempted to remind her that the wife. who lays so frequent a stress on the possessive pronoun where her husband and children and house are concerned, is always suspected of holding them insecurely. Did you ever hear the story of the man who married a rich, vulgar wife, inclined to talk of 'my money, my garden, my furniture my dinner party,' etc., by way of pointing out the fact that she had paid for them? Before a room full of people one day she asked him, after some temporary absence, where he had been. 'Trying on your new trousers, which have just come back from the tailor's,' he answered. I hope she laid the lesson to heart."

"I wish you'd learn to take care of yourself, Evelyn," she went on, inconsequently, peering sharply at Mrs. Brand. "There ought to be some one at hand who would take care of you, and pet you, and carry you off to the country every time those hollows come under your eyes. You think too much, Evelyn. And unless you can kill thought, thought kills you, remember. That's why light amusements that take one out of oneself are popular."

"I get a lot of change one way and another," said Evelyn. "I go out, I mean."

"It's no good to go out if you don't go out with the right person," said Lady Wereminster. "One has always to pay a price for happiness, although it does not seem to cost much at the time. Women sign a blank cheque for it—a most foolish proceeding. It's filled in by the recipient, and when the amount falls due there's nothing left to meet it. But we are poor economists, and even spend ourselves if we have nothing else to spend."

"I can't have you two monopolizing each other all the evening," complained Dora Farquharson, looking up, aggrieved. "I wish those men would come up. How long they are. It's always so dull without men. And you must both be longing to be let in to this evening's secret—oh, perhaps you don't even know there is a secret?"

"If you know it, it can no longer be called one," said Lady Wereminster tartly.

Dora bridled.

"I think a woman should begin as she means to go on, in marriage. I told Richard from the first that I expected to know everything about his work—all the secrets, I mean; not the dull part."

"And what did Mr. Farquharson say?"

"Say!" Dora laughed. "Why, he never says anything. I suppose the so-called great people are usually dull and commonplace in private life. I always tell Richard that if I had only been allowed a trial trip in marriage I should never have said yes. He's a dreadful old stay-at-home, you know; doesn't really care to go out or to bother about one at all. He doesn't realize what a change it means

to a girl who has been accustomed to a whole train of admirers all her life."

Lady Wereminster put up her lorgnette.

"My dear Dora, don't talk about your youth to a woman who was present at your christening."

"Oh, she can afford to," said Evelyn gently. She slipped her hand into Mrs. Farquharson's. "Are we ever to know the secret, Dora? and is it one that will please us all, or only you?"

"Oh, everybody will know it in forty-eight hours," said Dora, mollified; "but I think you are to be told to-night. It was Mr. Calvert's plan; he thought the announcement would make rather a charming climax to the evening. What an old cat Lady Wereminster is," she added, watching her opponent withdraw to a distant corner and settle herself comfortably in an arm-chair with the evening paper. "She never has a kind word for anybody. Fancy her trying to snub me; luckily I can afford to overlook that sort of thing in my position. Why, they say Richard may be anything at this rate. Of course, after a time I shall make father resign in his favour; he's nearly sixty-five, and no man's really worth anything in politics at that age. Besides, he should make way for Richard. I'm very ambitious, you know; there's nothing I don't mean to get for my husband. Look what I've done for him already. He would never have been heard of but for that Albert Hall meeting. Oh, it's no good talking of Taorna. Who in the world cares about Taorna except a few people on the Stock Exchange? I think it's only my duty to impress upon Richard a proper sense of the obligation he's under, don't you?"

There is a limit to endurance.

"Obligation?" cried Evelyn indignantly. Mrs. Farquharson started. There was something in the other woman's voice that struck even her as unusual. "You've married a man in a million, Dora; a man in whose dictionary the word impossible is unknown; whom people are proud to know; whom you told me you loved. I don't believe he owes you anything, or any one else for that matter. If he did, there could be no possible question of obligation. In real love there's no bickering over trifles; you give, if you must call it giving, as you breathe, and as easily. Oh, Dora, Dora"—she put her hand on the girl's arm again—"don't make the mistake most women do and quarrel over the ridiculous difference in the change of a letter or two between meum and tuum!"

Mrs. Farquharson rose, with an assumption of dignity.

"My dear Evelyn, if I didn't know you so well, I should really think you were jealous. Never mind, dear; I'll try to forget it. I was always one of your best friends, you know. By the bye, would you mind just putting a pin in my waist-band? It seems to have slipped somehow. Yes, it's a pretty frock, isn't it? But Paquin's getting very tiresome; I had to send up for it three times. They said it took five women forty-eight hours each, sitting up all night, merely to finish

that embroidery. That alone cost six guineas a yard—but it looks nice, doesn't it? I always think you look so nice in that dear old frock of yours—you really do wear your things wonderfully, Evelyn."

"Time makes one's dresses become trusted friends," said Evelyn wearily. How useless either to protest with or advise such a woman! "Was that your husband's voice?"

As the men entered she moved again to Lady Wereminster's side, and Meavy, in obedience to her signal, crossed to Mrs. Farquharson.

"Well, what do you think of my boy's progress?" said Calvert. He seated himself between the two women, and Creagh and Beadon joined the group. "That last speech of his added a very important seat to your long list of victories. I'm a Liberal myself, as you know, but I can't say I was sorry we were beaten on that occasion."

Creagh laughed.

"For once I was right, eh, Beadon? Do you remember one afternoon when we were talking about the man and the hour?"

"You have the man, but the hour has not yet struck," said Hare gravely. "After triumph, reaction."

"You mean that in our national cocksureness lies our peril?" said Beadon. "We say we expect a fight, and then go to sleep on feather-beds in comfortable security."

"I often think we are like careless housemaids," said Lady Wereminster, "who let the dust accumulate in corners, and bitterly resent the necessity of cleaning them out."

"The truth is," said Hare, "we're getting too luxurious. Even for sport, men don't deny themselves now as they did at the beginning of the century. Love of luxury has spread even to the lower classes. A district messenger boy thinks himself very ill-used if he hasn't got his own bicycle, and our grooms' sons learn the piano. We make extravagance our god, not duty. Palatial hotels and motor-cars between them have killed home life in England. People won't realize it's a much greater compliment to be asked by their friends to dine in private houses instead of restaurants."

"I know that modern girls spend more on their dress in a month than I did in a year," said Lady Wereminster. "I remember a young niece telling me that it was impossible to go through a London season with less than twenty-five new evening frocks. I used to wear book-muslins, and looked a great deal nicer in them then, Wereminster says, than my own great-grandchildren do now in hand-painted chiffon."

"It's the tendency of the age," said Hare; "our class sins worse than any other in that respect. Luxury is a blight which has fallen upon the world; within the last ten years it has grown to be part and parcel of our existence. In the old days politicians and diplomatists took their duties seriously, and never grumbled at hard work. If a man does eight hours' work now he thinks himself ill-used, and goes to the country to recuperate. Duty is irksome—it always was—but fifty years ago men faced it as a force to be reckoned with, not to evade. Our blood was blood then, and ran red. Moral anæmia had not paled it."

"The good old days," said Creagh, smiling. "Let us hope our grandchildren will talk of us as we are now talking of our forbears, and bend the knee before our memories as we do now before the memories of our heroes. Beadon's the man to go for, Hare; we are in his hands. Tell him to preach your gospel to his Ministry, to impress upon them the policy of constant energy and watchfulness, as opposed to drastic reforms which, alas! too often end in sloth."

"The policy of the late Government reminds one of Lady Wereminster's simile," said Beadon. "The Ministers certainly swept out a good many rooms, but they left them bare."

"Isn't it nearly time to tell our news?" said Calvert. "I have a little *bonne bouche* for you, Mrs. Brand—I know how much it will mean to you, the woman to whom Richard owes so much. Neither he nor I forget it, if you have." He took her hand, and patted it affectionately.

Evelyn could not answer. There was a mist before her eyes.

"By the way, what I am about to say is in the strictest confidence," said Beadon. "But where is Mr. Brand? Oh, he had to leave early, I remember. I don't want it to reach the Press for fully forty-eight hours, as Richard's is the first appointment to be filled in my new Ministry. He is to be the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs; the appointment has only just been confirmed. I think nothing can suit him better. His gift of languages, his tact and diplomacy and unwearying patience—all will tell to their fullest."

Lady Wereminster clapped her hands.

"Hurrah! How glad I am! Come here, Mr. Farquharson, to be congratulated. Now you'll go on from strength to strength."

"I'm delighted, my dear fellow," said Creagh, his face glowing with satisfaction. "It's the best thing for the country. But I don't know that I envy our neighbours across the sea, though; they'll tackle a rough customer in you."

"Good," was Hare's comment; "you deserve it.

"Now we can sleep in peace," said Lord Wereminster benignly, "and sing 'I fear no foe' with some conviction."

Evelyn alone of the congratulatory group was dumb. To have one's prayers answered openly is sometimes a betrayal of what those prayers have meant to one. Farquharson came quietly up to her, and, voiceless still, her eyes searched his face. How he had aged the last few months! There was a great patch of grey hair on the right-hand side of his brow. She wondered if she would ever see again the look of boyish exaltation he had had that night at Bramley.

Hare, glancing at them, quietly drew Lady Wereminster's attention to the fact that Mrs. Farquharson was still sitting apart from the rest with Meavy. "Would it not be correct to congratulate her too?" he suggested.

"And you—have you nothing to say?" Farquharson asked. They were practically alone for the first time since his marriage.

Evelyn looked down. Her eyes were wet.

"Don't—don't!" she said; "it's beyond all words—the gladness, I mean. You know the little desert song—

"'No one but God and I
Know what is in my heart.'

That's what I feel."

"Now, Evelyn, Evelyn, come over here with my husband, or I shall feel quite jealous," called Mrs. Farquharson from the other end of the room.

CHAPTER III

"A sacred burden is the life ye bear:
Look on it, lift it, bear it solemnly;
Stand up and walk beneath it steadfastly;
Fail not for sorrow; falter not for sin,
But onward, upward, till the goal ye win."
F. A. KEMBLE.

"Once upon a time," said Lady Wereminster, "I used to meet treachery with open-

ness. I believed that to raise the standard of right meant victory. Now I know it doesn't, from this world's point of view. Men and women who batten upon each other, who, being insensitive to the feelings of others, mock at the halt and blind, get all they want from life. Life, like the judge in the importunate widow story, gives only to those who ask persistently."

"I used to pride myself on asking very little from life; now I've found out that what I want is priceless," said Evelyn. Lady Wereminster had come in to see her one afternoon after a big function at Holland House, and stayed, as was her custom.

"You think you're alone in your suffering," said Lady Wereminster; "well, you're not. Your friends suffer with you, they see you shamed and broken in the world's eyes, and they stand on the pillory with you, and are beaten with stripes as you are. Don't think I'm trying to force your confidence. I'm not. I only want you to know what people like you so seldom realize, that, as you walk to the Cross, a host of invisible followers pursue you, the people you've helped, the people who love you, the people to whom your hurt is more than their own. We're not all of us called upon to make great sacrifices, Evelyn. It's only a few people like you in a century upon whom the demand is made. If I were a pagan I should say that the gods were jealous of the gift of love. Take any of the lives you know, and you'll see that, where love is, the real communion between men and women, the tie is rudely broken either by death or some more imminent disaster. I keep my faith in spite of being sure that the Great Power behind only allows us to taste supreme joy for a short time. Human beings are born with the capacity of holding a certain amount of strength and force and happiness. If they take all their happiness at once, as those of us do who drink the cup at its fullest, they must go thirsty for the remainder of their days."

She turned suddenly and held out her hand to Evelyn.

"You don't want to talk about it, I know. I don't, either. I had to tell you, for I'm an old woman who has seen many seeming injustices in the world, and who will rebel against them to the end—and so I am sorry for you. Because I believe in happiness I should have arranged the world differently to the way in which God has arranged it. But because He is God, and has rolling centuries to match my little half-hour of knowledge, I fold my hands and trust His purposes, although I absolutely fail to see their meaning. Now let's talk of something else. Have you seen Dora Farquharson lately?"

"Only casually in the street," said Evelyn. "She seems rather to have avoided me of late."

"Nor her husband?" asked Lady Wereminster, intent on fastening her cloak.

Evelyn shook her head.

"We live very far out, you know, and of late, even had the Farquharsons

been disengaged, we've entertained so little that I've had no excuse for asking them."

"If you had asked her, she'd have refused to come," said Lady Wereminster from the door. "She's jealous. A woman who is common at heart takes common means of showing jealousy. But, mark my words, the time will come when Dora's in trouble, and she'll send for you then irrevocably as the one person she can trust."

Fond as she was of Lady Wereminster, Evelyn saw her go with a sigh of relief. Unseen wounds hurt enough in any case, without being torn open daily by our friends.—How hot and sultry it was!

One of the minor evils of what is called the artistic temperament is its dependence on the changes of the season. So far, Evelyn had loved spring and summer, had counted the days till April like a child awaiting some coveted adventure. She loved to see the orchards break into bloom, on the way to Kew; the first pink flush of almond blossom, the coming of little green shoots on barren trees had struck her with a new significance each year till now. The gradual coming of life was so tender, so wonderful, so mysterious.... But this year, the light and glow, the call of mating birds, the caress of the soft air, only served to deepen her sense of pain. Everything spoke of the joy and promise of life from which she stood aloof. Nature itself seemed to have taken up arms against her, and its array of happy changes found her lonely and sad.

The ordinary routine of life went on, untouched by mood or whim. It was an especially busy season, but lately she had lost her hold on things, and found it difficult to keep up even the little weekly salon in which she had once taken such pride. To be mated with sorrow is little by little to lose all vitality and youth; the lassitude that had come upon Evelyn presently became physical, gripped her closer day by day, as she strove against it with ever-weakening strength. Society had no longer any power to amuse her; indeed she dreaded going out, lest she should be forced to listen to more of Dora's confidences about Farquharson. Religion left her cold. At home, Brand was perhaps a trifle more cynical than before; he had found her vulnerable spot, and turned his knowledge to account. On those rare evenings when they were alone together in the little flat at West Kensington (she often dined now in her own room), she would surprise him sometimes watching her through half-closed lids, and smiling as if at some private reminiscence.

"Why do you look at me like that?" she asked one night, when for the third time she had met his mocking look fixed full upon her.

"Oh, I grant you it's rather amazing that a man should find anything to look

at in his wife after so many years of marriage," said Brand, flicking the ash from his cigarette. "You should be flattered at the compliment. A husband's tribute to his wife's charms is worth at least twice as much as that of any—other. By the way, our Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs is mounting steadily up the ladder of fame, isn't he?"

"The papers seem to think well of him," said Evelyn coldly.

The postman's knock at the door brought welcome interruption in the shape of a bulky letter from Cummings. She took it to her room.

"By the time this reaches you I shall have set sail for the East once more," he wrote. "I have got all the good I shall out of my trip; it's no use staying any longer. It was like you to try to make my father and mother see me again—I knew they would not. Amongst many jealous mistresses—ambition, pleasure, the quest of forgetfulness or peace—love of home never loses her sway on a man's heart. A man may travel far and try to stifle, in other countries and other surroundings, the claims of his own lands and his own people, but their voices compel him, until at last he is bound either to obey or else for ever to cut himself adrift. And for the future I shall cut myself adrift.

"It was like you, too, to collect all that array of good things for my people; thank you for them all. Not one will be wasted, and I shall look upon them with very especial gratitude, because you thought of me in your own trouble.

"For that you have got to face trouble—perhaps are facing it now—I know. I have thought about you again and again lately, when fighting my own battles. The hardest test of faith, after all, is to fight when one is not sure the cause is good. Thank God that you and I both know ten thousand difficulties do not make one doubt. Beneath every paradox of the Catholic Church truth lies concealed, if we will but dig down to it. But there are days when toil is impossible; when merely to attempt work so hard and difficult brings sweat to one's brow. And you will tell me, very truly, that, face to face with mental wreckage, to talk of paradox is small comfort.

"You are a unit of a big battalion; only a unit, but you count. There are others to right and to left, in front and in rear of you; they will fall if you fail. You know that a regiment once was lost through one man's cowardice. You and I have got to go on, whatever happens. We are not great generals—we are under command. Obedience is our watchword.

"I remember in the South African War, before a certain action, the general sent out an army order to his men, which I copied at the time, but cannot lay my hands on just now. It ran something like this: 'You are dealing with a treacherous enemy; one who seeks to lower your honour by his own intrigue. Face that fact,

and face him; it is the only way.' The one simple thing in life for you and me lies in the fact that, after all, we have but one thing to do. We are fighting under a standard that we are going to uphold to the end. We shall bleed for it—a few drops of blood, more or less, really don't matter; we shall probably fall for it—we shall have to remember then to hold our heads up, because the world might think that we were afraid; we shall die for it, knowing that it is still raised high in the sight of men, and that it will so rise, please God, through all the coming centuries as it has done in all its glorious past.

"Rather cold comfort I am giving you, I suppose you will say. But you have been abroad, and seen life under different aspects, and watched great issues come to a climax as I have. Out in India, at the great Mahomedan festivals, I have walked ankle-deep through narrow streets reeking with blood. I once stood by the unlit *ghât*, and watched a man's dead body thereon, and saw his little widow of twenty years old set a light to the pyre with her own slender fingers, in default of a son old enough to undertake the office. Such things make one think.

"I shall never forget her shriek when the flame rose, nor the dreary misery of her look when, afterwards, she collected her husband's ashes, and, being only a peasant, was stripped of her fine garments, stripped of her ornaments, stripped of all that made life bearable from her limited point of view, to begin a new life of drudgery working in the fields, scorned and mocked by all, an unclean being to be stoned by the very boys in the street because, as a widow, she had lost her caste.

"Experiences like these wrench you out of yourself, and make you thank God you are not God to judge between the sins and errors of nations and of individuals. You and I rebel at drinking our cup of vinegar and gall because we are merely human, and so don't like the bitter draught. But it is because sin came first, that there is so much suffering now. Better drink the bitter cup to its dregs here than pay the penalty of drinking it hereafter. And whether or no it comforts us at the moment, the light of faith is still ours. 'May we walk therein until the day of eternal light breaks forth, and the shadows and figures pass away.'"

"You've been worrying again," said Lady Wereminster, returning. "Don't. Nothing in the world is worth worrying about more than half-an-hour. *Worrying* about, I said, not grieving over. Legitimate grief at a legitimate blow is one thing—racking your brains out adjusting something which ought never to have gone askew is another. Worry puts a spoke in the wheel of thought; it may stop the machinery from moving. And then——" She shrugged her shoulders significantly.

"I don't think any self-respecting person can be well in this weather," said

Evelyn; "it would be rather rude not to acknowledge its power."

"It's no use looking at the door," said Lady Wereminster; "I am not going for hours yet. I returned with the intention of bullying you, and shan't stir until I've done it. I am in a bad temper, and must wreak it on somebody. One ought to give way to one's temper sometimes, you know, on the principle of a kettle boiling over and doing serious damage."

"I'm quite impervious to your tempers," said Evelyn; "they are more easy to deal with than the amenities of other people!"

"This is an unlucky day," said Lady Wereminster, seating herself. "Wherever I turn I run up against Dora Farquharson. Nothing annoys me more. I shopped in Sloane Street this morning—she was there. I lunched with Lady Ennly quite unexpectedly; unluckily, that dear idiot Creagh had run across Dora in the Park, and brought her on. She patted her husband on his back all luncheon time; metaphorically, of course—mercifully for him he was absent. If I were a caricaturist I should draw her putting him flat on his stomach across her knee and thumping him as if he were a troublesome infant. If that woman lived with Savonarola, she would bring him down eventually to the level of Simple Simon in the old nursery rhyme."

"Oh, she can't do him any real harm," Evelyn said. "You do exaggerate things so delightfully. The marriage is not successful, I know—but no one would know it wasn't if she had any tact. For he's patient enough and forbearing."

"Too forbearing," said Lady Wereminster. "If a man marries a fool he should treat her according to her folly. Once to give in to a blatant self-sufficient creature like Dora Farquharson is to give in for all eternity, and so pave the way to your own downfall. Fools and scandal-mongers are at the bottom of all the mischief in the world. There are very few systematic schemers and plotters, in spite of Sicilian melodrama. Mrs. Farquharson has a common soul. One doesn't know how to deal with such a woman; the whole art of social warfare has to be relearned. She's flagrant; she uses every one; she's used you; in the old days she traded on her father's influence; now she trades on her husband's."

"Dora is rather inconsiderate," said Evelyn. "Her husband's success might well turn her head."

"Oh, her head's a tee-to-tum," said Lady Wereminster; "you have only got to touch it with the finger of flattery for it to spin round and round like a top. She gives me a sort of moral vertigo. It's rather a dangerous quality, by the bye, for the wife of a Minister in so important an office. A judicious questioner could get anything in the world out of Dora Farquharson; she'd be worth a fortune to Fleet Street——" She stopped abruptly.

The eyes of the two women met.

"Yes?" said Evelyn.

"This is a secret," said Lady Wereminster, dropping her voice; "a real secret, mind. Your husband's out, isn't he? and the servant, I suppose, is concealed in that dark hole of yours you call a kitchen. All the same, I would be rather glad if you would open the door and take the trouble to look well down the passage before I tell you what I've got to say."

"How absurd you are," said Evelyn, returning. "You're quite safe; there's no one in the house. I've looked in every room and under the beds!"

"Thank you," said Lady Wereminster, with a sigh of relief. "It's a serious matter, really, Evelyn. You know what friends Wereminster and Beadon have always been—allies from boyhood. Wereminster, of course, is like a rock. You strike and strike at him, and you don't get even the vaguest echo. He's the safest man in the world to confide in. He always declares he would never have found out that he was in love with me if I hadn't told him first. And though I talk so much, I don't as a rule talk personalities. That's why people look upon us as safety valves, and we learn a good deal about small intrigues and difficulties that other people never hear."

"Don't say names, will you? I do so hate being told what I'm not meant to know."

"If I don't tell somebody I shall burst," said Lady Wereminster. "You're safe. You're a well; people pour their souls into you, and other people lean over from the brink and see nothing. It appears that various small matters have leaked out lately in the Press, and no one can account for the authorship. And in each case, unluckily, the impression given has been true. So far only comparatively minor matters have been disclosed; but who knows when something really important won't be given away before its time, and so lead to irreparable harm? I know, as a fact, that the P.O. is worried about it."

"How long has this been going on?"

"Six or eight months. That's the unfortunate part of it. It dates back to the time when Richard Farquharson was made Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. Oh, don't look like that—nobody suspects him, but it's an unlucky incident. Why, even his appointment, which was, so far as we know, known only to the King and his immediate household, to the Prime Minister and to the *personnel* who met at Mr. Calvert's famous dinner party on the second of November, was announced in all the morning papers, although Mr. Beadon had expressly told us that it was to be kept private for the next forty-eight hours."

"Mr. Beadon has new secretaries, I suppose," said Evelyn. "He would probably require more help as Prime Minister than as Leader of the Opposition."

"Oh, they're above reproach," said Lady Wereminster; "personal friends mostly, and all men who have worked with him for years. Besides, it's not necessarily John Beadon's news that has been given away. It is chiefly minute turns

of the tide which affect the rise and fall of shares, etc. Anyway, the whole position is discomforting, a source of real annoyance to the Prime Minister and his colleagues."

"Stocks and shares," repeated Evelyn. She had grown very pale. "Yes, of course an intimate knowledge of foreign affairs would make all the difference in speculation. But no one, however base, could do such a thing—no one in our set, I mean——" She faltered.

"Some men and women would do anything for money," said Lady Wereminster. "What's happened so far does not affect the nation *en grand.* It's merely that events have proved that small founts of knowledge, whose source is supposed to be only known to the initiated, have obviously been tapped by some mysterious person, whose identity is as yet unknown. And as these things deal mainly with his office they look like stabs in the dark aimed at Mr. Farquharson himself. Such a man must have enemies, of course, but I never knew—did you?—that any special person bore him a grudge?"

"I want to ask you a question," said Evelyn. Her husband found her in the hall, awaiting him, when, some time after midnight, he turned the key in the door. "You have been comparatively generous to me lately. So far as I know, our income is the same as it has always been, but you have been less troubled about money matters. Why?"

Brand put one hand on her shoulder heavily, and with the other dragged her face sharply upwards into the full glare of the electric light, and looked at her searchingly.

"I think I shouldn't make too many inquiries into the question if I were you," he said deliberately. "Your way of life and mine are not quite the same. I am a plain man, and I go a man's way to work. I don't pose or talk cant. Luck comes my way now and again, although it's more often dead against me. It's with me now, and I mean to make the most of it. I owe part of it to you, you know, and that's why I've been generous."

"You owe it to me—to *me*?" said Evelyn blankly.

He pulled the door-chain, laughing, and she heard him laughing again as he went up-stairs. The night was warm, but she stood shivering like a frightened

child in the empty hall at the thought which struck her.

CHAPTER IV

"If we could see ourselves as others see us, many of us would wear a mask"—ANON.

"It destroys one's nerves to be amiable every day to the same human being."—LORD BEACONSFIELD.

In work, says an old philosopher, a man may find his refuge for all ills of the mind; to drink deep of the fount of knowledge is to bring peace to the troubled soul. But work had been too long the mainspring of Farquharson's life for him to find in it now the comfort which might have lulled another man's anxiety. His life had been one of toil throughout. At Glune he had wrestled and fought for freedom; in the succeeding years, after his escape, he had struggled for knowledge and mere daily bread; in Taorna, fortune and fame had been his two objectives; in England he sought power. And after a time strain tells even upon the strong. It is often the most brilliant brain that snaps.

A normal man must have an outlet for his feelings and emotions. Farquharson's long self-repression in the past had made him the readier to be swayed by the right woman's influence when it came. He had never fully realized all that his daily communion with Evelyn had meant until after the wrench of their parting at Bramley.

The pain that can be sympathized with openly is endurable, but hidden pain is crushing. There is conceivable relief for a surcharged brain which can explain the why and wherefore of its sorrow; but in the world daily we meet widows who were never wives, and whose despair is the more hopeless because they have no lawful claim upon our sympathy.

In his separation from Evelyn, Farquharson had lost the friend, companion, helpmate, and bride of his dreams. Work—to a habitual worker—cannot heal so deep a wound as this; only complete change of circumstance and scene might possibly change a man's thoughts after such a blow. And for him there was no change. Shorn of all joy and pride in his work, he yet toiled ceaselessly at it;

returning daily to a home which, worse than being bare and desolate, contained the wrong woman.

There are women who pry into the smallest details of a man's privacy. Farquharson's dressing-room even was not his own. In certain moods Dora discovered that the angle of his looking-glass pleased her better than her own; short of actually locking the door against her, he was never secure from interruption even there. She had developed a thousand whims and fancies since her marriage. She had her own boudoir and drawing-room, and a little sanctum on the stairs which she called her library, where she began to write many letters which were never finished, and to grapple with accounts which were always thrown aside a moment later. Farquharson, unaccustomed to women's society, never once thought of forbidding her to invade his own large and austerely furnished study at the back of the house; it was not until returning unexpectedly one day he found her rummaging amongst some papers on the table that he spoke to her with unusual severity.

"You have your own room, Dora; kindly keep there. I can't allow you to come here. There are papers of importance which mustn't be touched. What's that you've got crumpled up in your hand? It looks like—why, these are some notes Blair made for me this morning. How did you manage to get hold of them?"

"It's perfectly absurd that Mr. Blair should be allowed to come in here and go out as he likes even if he is your secretary, when you forbid your own wife to come in," said Dora angrily. "Stupid old notes, I'm sure I don't want them; I brought in papers of my own, and I suppose they've got mixed up, somehow. They're written on just the same sort of paper as Louise's bill. How on earth was I to know the difference? Besides, anyway it's absurd to make such a fuss about a trifle like that. If I did happen to glance at your dull notes and see a word or two, who has a better right than I to read them, after all?"

Farquharson smoothed out the paper and glanced down it.

"There's nothing that matters in this as it happens. Blair's quite a careful boy; he would never leave out anything really important. But we are rather busy people, Dora, he and I, and he has his own way of arranging things. He's complained to me before now that they're upset and made disorderly by your coming in. Now, I don't suppose, for instance, that you've the smallest notion where you got this from. Try and tax your memory, and put it back in exactly the same place."

"How absurd, how maddening you are!" said Dora, fuming. "What on earth does it matter where the stupid old things come from?" She tore the paper into a dozen pieces and flung them down, white with rage. "You shut me out from everything. What's the good of being the wife of a man in your position if you keep everything so secret? I'm the same as yourself; I've a right to know everything

that you know. I know there is some big intrigue going on at this very moment between England and—well, you know which foreign Power better than I; all the newspapers are hinting at it—anybody would give anything to get hold of a little private knowledge about it. But here you are keeping it all to yourself, when it's my right to know, when you ought to confide in me. It's hateful, it's despicable, it's absolutely lowering; no wife in the world was ever treated so cruelly as you treat me."

Farquharson sighed hopelessly.

"We had better understand each other once and for all. I should have thought that you, the daughter of a man who, in the past, was once Colonial Minister, would have understood matters without need of explanation. With an ordinary wife things may be different, I don't know. The wife of a man holding my office must be content to know neither more nor less than the rest of the world about the work he is engaged in. A man's political and domestic life are absolutely apart. We have a lot of years before us, Dora, to live out side by side. This point must be made clear now. You must submit to me utterly in this; in everything else I give you your own way, so far as is compatible with common sense. It seems to me a monstrous thing that you should even contemplate the possibility of my being a spy to satisfy your curiosity. Leave my room now, at once, and remember that I put you on your honour never to enter it again without permission."

"How dare you? how dare you?" cried Dora, catching her breath hysterically. "It's my right, it's my due, to go where I like and do as I choose. I won't be shut out of your life like this. You owe everything to me, and this is your gratitude. Taorna—who cares twopence-halfpenny about Taorna and what's done there? If I hadn't pleaded with and begged my father to give you some place in the Ministry, do you think you'd be there now? If you hadn't married me you would have been nowhere and done nothing. And what have I gained through marriage with you? I was happier before. People loved me and admired me. You never give me a word of love or admiration. You go out with me—yes, because you've got to; because it's to your advantage to show me off at parties. But you never even notice my new gowns; you never even take the trouble to pay me one of the compliments I was surfeited with, till I met you. I might be—why, I might be just like anybody else the way you treat me; not a woman of importance, a woman with wealth and charm, and all the rest of it—who expects to hear a trumpery secret now and again, as her right, and is grudged even that."

She stopped for want of breath, and caught at the table for support.

Farquharson leant back in his chair and looked at her critically. He was very pale.

"Three minutes by the clock, my dear Dora. There's a prize given at Dun-

mow annually to the woman who talks longer and faster than any other in the competition. It doesn't matter what nonsense she talks. You would do well to enter for it. I believe it comes off in July."

Dora turned suddenly and confronted him. He looked at her as at a stranger. He had had little experience of hysterical women; the outward signs of his mother's conflicts with self had been so sternly repressed that it was only lately that he had guessed how often that rigid figure quailed under the strain of its inward wounds. No other woman had come into his life as more than a momentary pastime till he met Evelyn. The sight of his wife's short, stricken figure roused no pity in him, only disgust. He had had no very high ideal of women in childhood; that he should have linked himself to a woman whose motives were so mean, one who, having no real interest in the cause, could seek to degrade her husband's honour for the mere sake of satisfying personal curiosity, of flaunting her knowledge in the eyes of others, roused his disgust and shame.

He put his watch down on the table.

"In five minutes I shall expect you to leave the room," he said. "If you haven't withdrawn by then I shall ring for your maid. In any case I should advise you to send for her. You aren't yourself. I think even the glass in my dressing-room would fail to satisfy you as to your appearance at the present moment."

His cigarette case lay on the table; he reached his hand out for it, but paused midway.

Dora sprang at him, her eyes blazing. She clutched his arm in her grasp, almost like a mad woman.

"I hate you," she gasped. "You've killed my love. What right have you to make me suffer? to hurt me so appallingly, mentally, spiritually, physically? When I think of all I've got to bear for you it almost drives me mad. It's too humiliating and degrading. Weeks, months of pain for you—for you that I hate. I've seen the doctor to-day; he left just before you came. Nothing can save me. I've got to have a child—a child that will be like you, hard, cruel and implacable."

For a moment Farquharson sat in silence, aghast, shaken at the torrent of words. This was the explanation, then; the excuse of all the waywardness and hysteria he had not understood. He hardly knew if he was glad or sorry at the news. The dream-wife he had longed for would never now be his; ... the dream-child he had longed for, for whose dear sake he had striven to win Glune....

Dream-bride, dream-mother—he shut his eyes. And Dora was the reality, and Dora was suffering.... His anger died, and a wave of tenderness and sympathy, pity for her as well as for himself, and awe and wonder that even in this moment the new tie pulled at his heart-strings, made him stretch out his arms to her, and take her on his knee almost as though he loved her.

"My dear, my dear, forgive me. I didn't understand or know—I ought to

have guessed and been kinder to you," he said, holding her close.

But even in the moment of reconciliation a picture shaped itself before his eyes—a picture which he resolutely strove to put away, but which returned again and again during the night. How differently the dream-wife would have told him—and what would it not have meant to him and to her?

CHAPTER V

"Every work that is corruptible shall fail, and the worker thereof shall go with it."—ECCLESIASTICUS.

To achieve success by certain ways is not, after all, very difficult. The schemers and plotters, even the merely selfish, have all in their hands for a time. One need not necessarily be wicked to flourish as a green bay-tree. Persistently to use other people to your own ends, to appeal to pity at the right moment, to take what is offered you as your due, without gratitude or sense of obligation, is to lay a very sure nest-egg of security for the future.

Brand had planned and schemed to some avail. He had every right to be satisfied with the result. For years he had cherished the remembrance of slights long since forgotten by their authors. Well, he had been able to wipe off a great many of such slights lately. He had struck at Evelyn through Farquharson; he had struck at Lady Wereminster through Evelyn; he had struck at Farquharson through Dora; he would strike at Calvert through Farquharson. It was quite simple, after all, to pull the strings of puppets so foolish as to be swayed by the great forces of love and honour, no matter how important the stage on which they played.

Sitting at ease in the lounge of the Grand Hotel at Brighton one afternoon in June, he reviewed the situation critically. He was better off than he had been, too—always a pleasant matter of contemplation. Secretly as he worked, he was recognized by the Press as a man who could tap many mines of marketable knowledge, "one in the know," as the phrase goes, unhampered by petty scruples as to parting with his knowledge for a valuable sum. He had easily learned the

journalists' knack of dressing his knowledge in pertinent phrase; that fact told too. Thanks to Evelyn, he was received everywhere now; the world forgets very easily, unless its memory is jogged. The inscriptions on his sisters' tombstones were now illegible for want of care, and Brand himself was not the type of man whom ghosts haunt.

He was careful in small details, sure in his heart that Evelyn could not do more than suspect him, and had no means of proving her knowledge. Her hands were tied too. To prove that Dora Farquharson had told her husband's secrets to a man who, in turn, sold them to the daily Press, was, after all, to drag down Farquharson from his high place. Cæsar's wife—he laughed; in this case she had proved a very useful buffer! Since the episode in the hall, Brand had been more careful in concealing matters from his wife. He went to another banker, and kept his cheque-book under lock and key, for instance—not that that was necessary with Evelyn—but he took care that she should no longer benefit by the price he was paid for his items of news.

And, little by little, he was sowing seeds of suspicion among the Opposition. It was his dearest hope to drag Farquharson's name in the dust. He never forgot that it was Farquharson who had ousted him for ever from the place which he might have taken in Calvert's regard. For ever?—the man was old and weak now; who knew but if Farquharson failed him he might not lend a more willing ear to the voice of the ready sympathizer, who was also a near connection?

In any case Brand was content to wait. Until he is found out, a cheat is bound to win the greatest number of tricks in a game of skill.

Then, too, a physically weak man likes to show his power; he is often more cruel than a stronger man. Brand's meetings with Dora afforded him constant amusement. At first she had tried to baffle and evade him; Dora was the last woman in the world to hold to a bargain when once she had reaped its full benefits. They had quite a disturbing scene one day. She was fully alive to the advantages of her position. As Farquharson's wife she could go anywhere, do anything. And she knew that, did he once learn by what means she had won him—that she had allowed Evelyn's name to be brought into disrepute that she might win her little pitiful triumph, he was capable of repudiating her at once. No love bound them. Separation, scandal, the dreariness of life under such changed conditions—these were unpleasant changes which no woman of sense would wish to face.

Brand worried her very little at first, merely drawing her on to disclose small items of news more on the level with Farquharson's appointment. Little by little his demands grew. Much of Farquharson's work was done in cypher at the Foreign Office, but there were certain notes and jottings often in his personal possession at Chester Street. From time to time Dora had got possession of these notes for him. Lady Wereminster was right. In one way and another a good

many important disclosures had been made. Some of these Brand sold directly to the Press, others he used entirely for his own advantage, and was the richer man thereby.

He had a great scheme in view now—to get a copy of some of the terms of this Foreign Treaty about which there was so much controversy. A third Power would give the weight of each word in gold for even a hint of its contents.... But how to get it? Dora had given herself away so ridiculously on that occasion when Farquharson had found her in his room; she had admitted losing her head through absolute terror after his discovery that she was searching amongst his papers. That was the worst of women, particularly women in her condition. Never level-headed at best, approaching motherhood threw some of them completely off their mental balance, particularly those who, like Dora, rebelled against its very thought.

Oh, he had got to the crux of the difficulty, doubtless. He smoked on meditatively, eyeing, one by one, the typical little groups of men and women who were gathered near him: rich Jews, with over-dressed families, actresses, manufacturers' wives from the Midlands, a loud-voiced, blatant throng. Places like these always amused Brand; their little pitiful attempts to compete with the attractions of foreign hotels were so lamentable in their failure, they reminded him of a young bride's efforts to rival an experienced woman of the world.

An *habituée* of the place, a woman to whom he had spoken casually on one or two occasions, came up and seated herself beside him. "You always remind me of Burns' poem, Mr. Brand," she said archly. "You look 'like a chiel amangst us takin' notes.' Aren't you often abused socially for being so critical?"

"Critical—now I wonder what you mean by critical?" said Brand.

The woman laughed again, tugging ruthlessly at her gloves.

"Oh, pulling holes, I suppose. You look at us all as though you could strip us threadbare. I've heard lots of people say the same. Now tell me, aren't you a great personage in London?"

Brand smiled.

"I am only a looker-on, dear lady. Now and again I give or withhold a word of advice. That's all. Few people have your perspicacity. Men of force are usually supposed to have athletic physiques. Now sport, and all things appertaining thereto, have always seemed to me—rather cruel and terrible. They are always subtle pleasures which appeal to me. Goths and Philistines say that the taste of absinthe reminds them of bad drains; whereas to me it's of a quite unparalleled purity. Now there's an odd flavour about life as there is about absinthe; and the odder it is the more it appeals to me."

"I think my friend wants me," said the lady, rather nervously. She swept away hurriedly. Brand watched her exit with a smile. Provincial women have

only one charm; it is easy to be rid of them when once they bore you. You have only to hint at abnormality, or give the merest suggestion of what, in their own vernacular, would be called "improper," to send them scuttling away like frightened sheep.

He rose leisurely and looked at the clock in the hall. Two—no, Mrs. Farquharson was eight minutes late. Careless, that. For the future he must make her realize that he expected her to be punctual. The position had shifted; it was he who now directed, and she who had to obey.

He crossed to the far corner of the lounge, seating himself under the alcove immediately facing the door. Presently the green car arrived, and he saw Dora emerge from it hurriedly, and run up the broad steps, with some amusement. Her obvious inner tremors were a tribute to his power. She spoke to the hall porter anxiously, and was ushered in full of apologies and mental disturbance.

"I thought I should never get off," she said. "It takes such an awful time to get down here, and the chauffeur took a wrong turning at Croydon. I daren't risk coming to such a place again. What should I do if Richard were to question the man as to where I've been? He knows I never do anything without a motive."

"I should have thought you were accustomed to inventing excuses by now," said Brand deliberately. "You've had a good deal of experience, one way and another. You have brought the papers, I suppose? Here, look at the Sketch. Hold it in your left hand, so. Put your bag underneath on your lap; take out the papers, and pass them to me presently. Not just yet, those people over there are looking. Thanks. You're sure they are what I want?"

"Of course they are what you want," said Dora. "Understand, this is the very last thing I'm going to do for you. I've paid you back a thousandfold for the little you did. For that matter, you did me the worst turn you ever did to any one in all your life. My marriage has brought me nothing but misery and discomfort."

"Oh, so you think you have paid your debt, do you?" said Brand. "Tea for two, waiter, please. Hot cakes I think you like, Mrs. Farquharson; or, as it's summer, would you prefer sandwiches? Yes, cucumber sandwiches, I think, please—anything cool. You were saying—by the way, how much you amuse me, Mrs. Farquharson!"

"Amuse you!" repeated Dora. She pulled her veil down again, shrinking back into the corner as two strangers from the sea front, who had come in for tea, passed by and glanced at the pair curiously.

"Cream? Sugar?" asked Brand. "What, no sugar? I should take it if I were you."

He handed her her teacup with some deliberation. "There's one quality that you lack, Mrs. Farquharson—you have all other charms, of course. You don't balance things quite aptly. Now, as a matter of fact, you owe me a debt that

can never be properly repaid. I've done the utmost that a man can do for any woman—I've even jeopardized my wife's honour that you might gain what you desired." He shrugged his shoulders. "The fact that what you then gained is now of no value to you doesn't matter at all. The point is that you haven't paid your debt off yet—that there's still more to be done before you and I can properly call quits."

"More still!" said Dora. She was very pale, and her hand was shaking. "More still!" Her voice rose hysterically.

Brand leant back in his chair.

"You shall be free after this one more act, I promise you. It's comparatively a difficult job, I grant. You know that, owing to widespread dissension on the frontier, there's a question of a certain treaty between a very important Power and England. The terms of that treaty intimately concern another Power—she is anxious to know how far her welfare is attacked. Your husband is sure to have notes relating to the negotiations amongst his papers. He is a careful man—you may find it difficult to distinguish them from the rest of his possessions. So on this occasion I must ask you to be wholesale in your methods; you must get at the whole contents of his safe and send them to me. What I don't want I shall destroy—be sure of that."

"The whole contents of his safe!" repeated Dora. "What you ask is monstrous. I can't do it—no one can; no one but I and his secretaries know where he keeps his keys. Why, he has often locked up the door of his room himself, since he found me there. The other matters were comparatively easy—mere questions of notes and things that were filed with his ordinary papers. This is impossible; I can't do it—-I won't. It could be traced to me, and he would kill me if he knew."

Brand watched her blandly. He thought suddenly of his wife, and of how she would have met such an appeal. The question of her husband's honour, the welfare of her country, meant absolutely nothing to Dora Farquharson. All she dreaded was punishment of her own action, the fear of being found out. She was, indeed, panic-stricken at the thought; little livid patches had broken out on her cheek.

"You would prefer that I should tell your husband the truth, then?" said Brand pleasantly. "Do take another sandwich. The truth not only about what happened before his marriage, but what has happened since? You are not a very discreet woman, you know. All the communications you've sent me—that you have got hold of so cleverly at my request—have been addressed in your own handwriting; most have been accompanied by personal letters explaining the nature of the matter sent. I am afraid your position in the world would not be very secure, Mrs. Farquharson, when these facts were made known socially. Farquharson is an implacable sort of person, you know; he would always put the

honour of his country above that of his own. There would be no question as to which he would sacrifice, and very unpleasant things are said of women who do as you have done. Now, with one little act you can free yourself from me and my demands. The very wholesale nature of the case will look like commonplace burglary. I've got a little instrument here with which you can break the lock of your husband's safe quite easily, also a duplicate key of the study door in case of accidents—an expert made it, and your work will look like that of an expert. I shall want those papers before the end of the week after next. When once they are in my hands I'll never trouble you again." He took out his watch. "It's time you were starting off, isn't it? I've got an appointment in ten minutes. You'll just get back in time for dinner. Good-bye now. Don't forget your promise."

"My promise? But——" began Dora again, and broke off, as if hypnotized by his angry movement. She seemed incapable of doing more than repeat his words. She stared at him in hopeless bewilderment, swaying, as though the light of ordinary intelligence had been wiped from her face. He looked at her sharply and then rang the electric bell behind him. When he spoke again his voice was kinder.

"Get this lady a brandy and soda—a stiff one, please. Drink it off at once; that's right." He took her hand in his and closed her fingers over the key and little instrument. "Put that in your pocket. If I were you I should set about that task to-night, Mrs. Farquharson—it is always better to get a job over. It's quite a little thing really, you know. And in twenty-four hours you will feel a new woman, free from all your worries and difficulties and obligations. You will have done good to a friend who is sincerely fond of you, and, if you are wise, no harm can possibly come either to you or to anybody you care about through your action. You promise, then? That's right. Good-bye."

He walked bare-headed out to the vestibule and watched the car out of sight, speeding back on its way home to Chester Street.

CHAPTER VI

"For you, for me, the cup of trembling...."

It seemed to Farquharson in the days that followed Dora's announcement, that he

lived and moved in a dream. As a rule, the realization of fatherhood only dawns upon a man when his child is in his arms. But to him, already, the dream-child was a tender promise. It swept away so many of the supernatural barriers between him and Dora. She had failed him in every office of friend and companion and wife, but she might yet redeem the past by giving him this dear possession, the child whose future he could mould in his own lines, to whom he could give the fruits of his own toil and his ambition. Beadon, Hare, Creagh and Lady Ennly alike noticed the change in his manner to his wife. Her shortcomings and failings no longer seemed to disturb him; where he had been merely patient before he was now gentle and tender. He studied her comfort even in the merest trifles; he toiled the more hopefully at his work in the knowledge that sure comfort and help would dawn presently. To a man of a certain temperament, the presence of his living child may even atone for the otherwise irreparable loss of his dearest hope. Farquharson wanted to give his son all that he himself had been robbed of in childhood. He could look back on his past life now with the detachment of a mere spectator, for every rough place that he had trod, he meant to make a happy playground for the boy. That is after all a fitting end of toil and labour, that a man should forge the sword which his heir's hand is to wield, that he should deny and discipline himself that his son may be the better braced for conflict with the foes within.

So Dora's reproaches left him unmoved, only a little pitiful, perhaps, that she could not see things as he did, that to her the coming joy was no joy at all, only annoyance and restraint. Not a day passed but she made some further claim upon his purse; never economical, she became absolutely reckless in her expenditure, and when he attempted to restrain her he was met by a flood of tears and angry protestations.

"Any one but you would be glad to do what little you can for me at such a time," she would cry out, flushing and paling in turn. "The doctor said I was not to have one moment's worry, and anxiety about money matters is worse for me than anything. If you grudge me what I need, I shall ask Mr. Calvert for money—he wouldn't be a multi-millionaire if it were not for you. Oh, so you see reason at last! Any other man in your place would have given me a cheque at once, instead of making such a cruel scene about it."

In Dora Farquharson's excuse it may be urged that she was temporarily beside herself with discomfort and anxiety. Brand had given her as his utmost limit of time a fortnight in which to do him a service which she thought it would be impossible to carry out. He had expected the papers to be in his hands within two or three days of her visit to Brighton; when they did not reach him, he wrote her the first of a series of letters which, though couched in careful language, contained veiled threats which were only too intelligible to her. Fortunately for her,

the actual negotiations were suspended for a week, owing to some official delay, which gave her time to mature her plans. She was not a clever enough woman to scheme and plot for herself, she had been accustomed in the past merely to state her wants and have them fulfilled by those about her. Where other matters had been concerned, Brand had given his directions, and she had obeyed implicitly.

But this was irksome, dangerous even—it required even a certain mechanical aptitude to be carried through successfully. She offered him money; besought him to release her from her promise. But Brand refused.

"It's not a very serious matter after all that I am asking you," he said. "A man is never surprised at his wife's curiosity. If you're careful you won't run the least chance of your husband's discovery; if he were even to find you in his room again, he would merely think you were suspecting him of some intrigue or temporary breach of faith. No one knows his movements so well as you do. You have only to take the first opportunity of his being kept late at the House to get me exactly what I want."

"But sometimes he goes back to his study on his return and sits up all night working," said Dora.

Brand shrugged his shoulders.

"What if he should on this occasion? It only means that he will discover his loss a few hours earlier, that's all. You've only got to warn me, to send me a code telegram under an assumed name three hours before you get the papers, as we have already arranged, for me to be punctually outside your window ready to receive them at the hour you name. If you do your work properly, Farquharson could turn the whole house topsy-turvy, ravage it from garret to cellar and find no traces. I assure you it's all as simple as the alphabet," he laughed; "the very ABC of trivial burglary to help a friend."

"For the first time in my life I feel almost sorry for Mrs. Farquharson," said Lady Wereminster a few days later. "She's got the most extraordinarily furtive and hang-dog air; I met her just now in a Bond Street shop and touched her on the shoulder, and she started as if she were being shot. Are you going to the House tomorrow night, Evelyn? Mr. Calvert says the Government expects a rather furious attack upon this Treaty question; it will resolve itself, of course, mainly into a personal attack upon Richard Farquharson. He's hated by the Press, you know; I suppose because they can get nothing out of him. For that matter, I suppose all the public is longing to know something about this business of the Treaty; it involves so many issues. The prospect of a Continental war isn't cheering in view of the fact that our Army was decimated, and the strength of our Fleet lowered, by the late Government. One can't wipe out their mistakes with a sweep of the

pen, or an eloquent word or two. By the way, my nephew was lucky in the ballot, and sent me two spare seats in the gallery. If you can come, I'll sit there with you if you like."

"Oh, I've been longing to go," said Evelyn. "How good you are. It seems to me that we are on the brink of a worse crisis than we have faced for years—only absolute tact and diplomacy will see us through. Mr. Farquharson has both, luckily; he will need them to-morrow night."

"I should think he would," said Lady Wereminster grimly. "What the House of Commons is coming to I don't know. We are getting as bad as the French Chamber. The language we use is absolutely scriptural in its plain speaking. At the beginning of the century it was said of our political system that it resolved itself into a succession of great duels; it seems to me now to have become an arena in which one man faces an angry rabble of men who shriek defiance and invective. We are losing our national dignity and reserve, Mr. Hare says; I think he's right. I suppose Mr. Farquharson knows what he has to expect, if not I should like to warn him. They say he exceeds his rightful powers of office—they always say that, of course, of a strong man. They forget that when he came into office he had to deal with what in many ways was an almost impossible situation, that in spite of all our royal visits to other nations and our own reception of royal guests, there is not a Power but covets our possessions. A fig for alliance, I say. There is a Power that is very nearly allied to us by blood which has done us serious mischief before now in our diplomatic relations, and will again."

"I think that Mr. Farquharson can stand the sort of personal challenge you speak of better than most men," said Evelyn. "A man in his position expects disparagement and injustice. He laughs at it all, to begin with—and then he has the proud patience which lives down taint and contumely. Mud may be thrown at him; it may even soil him for a time, but not for long. Love of country is the strongest force in him, and impersonal love raises a man to great heights."

She turned suddenly to Lady Wereminster, smiling. "Oh, my dear, don't let us insult him by fearing the issue of to-morrow night," she said. "I believe in atmosphere: let's surround him with trust and confidence and hope. He'll win through this time of crisis, and every other, and be successful, no matter what lies are told of him or what evil is wrought."

Meantime, at home Dora, preparing for an early dinner, went into her husband's room.

"Father tells me that he thinks I ought to be at the House to-morrow night," she said. "He says you're going to make a speech on something important; it's a great bore, but I suppose I'll have to go."

"I don't think it's in the least necessary," said Farquharson.

Dora shrugged her shoulders.

"I at least am not accustomed to putting myself in the wrong, whatever you are," she said.

CHAPTER VII

"Danger, the spurre of all great mindes...."—G. CHAPMAN.

"Got on your coat of mail?" said Beadon cheerfully, next afternoon.

Farquharson laughed.

"I rather enjoy a scrimmage, you know—'Though the House of Commons lately has justified its title,' to quote Lady Wereminster. As a matter of fact I think the Assembly in Taorna would hold its own against our English methods any day."

"In my heart of hearts I don't approve of government by party, as you know. Party too often resolves itself into person. Political bouts are like wrestling matches: they open out a wide field of corruption. But in England, of course, there can be no other method," said Creagh.

"Oh, it's undoubtedly one that gives rein to intrigue and self-aggrandizement. I was talking to H—— the other day"—Farquharson mentioned a leading member of the Opposition. "There's a man with a brain if you like, virile even in his way. He knows as well as you or I that as a mere question of the country's safety it is absolutely necessary that we should keep our policy with regard to these present troubles on the Continent as secret as possible. He said as much, in fact. Yet he'll heckle and hustle and harass us to-night with the rest, running absolutely counter to his own convictions to strengthen the war-cry of his party."

"Of course you're a born man of war," said Beadon. "Conflict braces you. You've got a tough job on to-night, though. To-night's questions have been framed very carefully, and have a distinct challenge in them. Our opponents aren't such fools as to think that even the British public—gullible enough, Heaven knows—would contemplate a Secretary of State giving away news about a Treaty before it had actually been framed. Unfortunately, a third Power is involved. The

tie of blood which undoubtedly binds us to it has given the Opposition its opportunity of inflaming the country against us. The Press has taken the matter up, of course. What conscience-prick would it not stifle for the sake of a glaring headline or poster? You know, all of you, that we are hemmed in on all sides, that we are really in a tight place this time. The utmost tact has to be exercised to save our being involved in a big European war, as that third Power, which shall be nameless, has undoubtedly a right to expect its claims to weigh with us in our negotiations."

"And the foreign Press, of course, is watching the issue of to-night's debate with lynx-eyes—whelps of war waiting to spring the moment they are unleashed," put in Farquharson.

"Farquharson trusts to his art of talking eloquently for hours without imparting one item of the required knowledge to carry him through to-night's crisis," chuckled Creagh. Then, more seriously, "All the same, you've never been present at a real scene in the House, Farquharson—I don't think you take the matter quite seriously enough. Beadon tells me that you haven't even prepared your speech; that you're trusting in that power of gripping the House, which has certainly so far never failed you."

"But there's another tiresome question involved—that of the letter of the impetuous Sovereign whose facility with the pen has already led him into such regrettable complications," drawled Meavy languidly. "The halfpenny papers make great capital out of that."

"But that letter wasn't written to Farquharson, but to Gaunt," said Creagh impatiently. "What has Farquharson to do with it?"

"He sent me a copy, unluckily," said Farquharson. "You needn't worry about that. It has never left my possession for a single instant. Personally, I should have torn it up, but our respected colleague thought it wise to keep a copy lest anything untoward should happen to the original."

"You've got it locked up in there, I suppose?" said Beadon, pointing to the safe. "Well, that's right, particularly as you always lock up this room now when you leave the house."

"The fact remains," said Meavy, "that no man of our time has ever been so fiercely abused as you by the Press I speak as one who knows, having had my share of it. I believe you've got a very dangerous enemy to deal with—the more dangerous because unknown. I think somebody has been stirring up the Press against you personally. Did you see that scurrilous article in the *Crystal* last week? It almost said in plain words that you were not to be trusted. You see, one or two minor points have leaked out lately that had no business to have got published at all, and, unfortunately, they have been matters which concerned your department."

Beadon shook his head.

"Farquharson scoffs at all that; it is immaterial, though puzzling. Personally, I think they point the way to treachery, and in such cases"—he spoke very gravely—"one's enemies are usually those of one's own household. Farquharson has a large retinue of employés—I believe that one of them has been bought."

"Impossible, my dear fellow," said Farquharson impatiently. "Your imagination runs away with you. The members of my household are kept very strictly in their own places, and I have every confidence in my secretaries. As far as the actual fight goes—well—it doesn't bother me. Remember, I was never at a public school; I had to wait to see red until I was a man."

Creagh frowned.

"I agree with Meavy. You don't take things seriously enough, Farquharson. You men of one idea, who go straight to the point and disregard all obstacles, are the very ones who trip over a mere stone in the path."

Farquharson leant back in his chair and looked from one to the other, smiling.

"Well, if I were ill at ease, your conversation is hardly likely to inspire me with confidence," he said. "You're wrong, though—if there's treachery anywhere it's in the F.O. itself. After all, a good many people go in there on one plea or another, and other nations employ a very much greater number of secret agents than we do. As for to-night"—he rose and stretched himself—"I'm looking forward to my scrimmage. I may get a bit knocked about myself, but I shan't let my opponents go unscathed." He looked at his watch. "I ought to be off now. Von Kirsch wants another interview; he's ill in bed, poor chap. He had a motor accident the other day, you know. I can't get down to him and back under three hours."

"Isn't that running things rather close? Better dine with me; it's nearer the House," said Beadon.

"Thanks," said Farquharson, "I think I'll get a chop there instead. Time is short anyway, and one can't hurry a sick man. I shan't have more than ten minutes or so to spare for a meal. Good-bye, then, for the present." He went off whistling.

Beadon looked after him, smiling affectionately.

"He's brightened up a lot lately. Success suits him."

"You are the more troubled of the two about to-night," said Meavy, watching him intently.

"Oh, well, that's natural," said Creagh. "Besides, Beadon's been on the sick-list. His doctor threatens all sorts of complications if he goes on working as he has done lately."

"The brunt of to-night's battle will fall on my son-in-law, who is more than

capable of meeting it," said Beadon. "I'm a bit run down, that's all. Who's that at the door? Oh, you, my dear."

He went forward and greeted Dora with a playful tap on the shoulder.

"You're looking very anxious, Dora; what's the matter? You mustn't worry about to-night; Farquharson's got himself well in hand, as always."

"Oh, to-night—I wasn't thinking about to-night," said Dora nervously. She stood by the study table looking from one man to the other, rapping it impatiently with her fingers. "Richard says he is not coming back again. Do you know where he's gone? As usual, he didn't say."

"He was hurried at the last," said her father. "He's got a long journey before him and won't be back for another three hours, he said. Then he'll go straight to the House. You are coming, of course; everybody will be there."

"Three hours," repeated Dora blankly. "Are you sure he said three hours?—And he won't be dining at home, you are quite certain that he won't come back? Oh"—she looked 'round the room—"what about Mr. Blair and Mr. Jefferson? I suppose they'll be coming here to work in his absence?"

Beadon produced a key from his pocket.

"No, my orders are to turn you all out and lock the door. Blair and Jefferson are to await Richard at the House. You're looking very pale and worried, Dora; why not come off with me now, and tell your maid to bring your evening things later? You're a grass-widow to-night, aren't you?" He glanced round the room. "Off with you all. There, now, that's right."

He locked the door and pocketed the key.

"Don't wait for me," said Dora nervously; "I've got things to do. If you go off now I'll join you at dinner; I couldn't possibly get to you before. Good-bye, Lord Creagh. Good-bye, Lord Meavy. Yes, father, you can count upon me. But do go now, I'm really busy; I won't ring for the men, I'll go to the door with you myself."

The door closed. She stood for a moment silent, fingering two keys in the bosom of her dress, looking round despairingly, starting at every sound and peering into the corners like a hunted animal at bay. Sure at last of being alone, she slipped into her boudoir, and, going to the writing-table, took out a telegraph form and proceeded to write hurriedly.

"I've got the three hours to myself," she said; "more, even, because he's dining out. What a fool I was to say I'd go to father. And yet I don't know, it will be better to be away in case either of the secretaries comes back and discovers the loss before to-morrow morning. I shall have to send the telegram to Mr. Brand myself; I can tell Felice that I'm going to the Park for a minute or two. Good

Heavens, how white I am! I hope to goodness she won't guess there's anything wrong."

"A most uncomfortable place," said Lady Wereminster. "Have you got any room at all, Evelyn?" She looked icily in the direction of the lady at Mrs. Brand's right hand. "There's only one thing in the world that would ever make me in favour of franchise for women, and that is, that I should immediately use my power to press the passing of a Bill that would enable us, as spectators, to see and hear and to be seen and heard in the House of Commons. Grilles belong to the Middle Ages, and as nobody is even middle-aged now-a-days, one resents their existence."

"How full it is already," said Evelyn; "every seat taken. Look at the hats, and just see the Strangers' Gallery and the Speaker's!"

"Everybody flocks to a tussle like this," said Lady Wereminster, disposing of her skirts as comfortably as the limited space would allow. "Let us see what's to be the first question of the evening? These twopenny-halfpenny matters they're discussing now don't count. No, I absolutely refuse to keep quiet, Evelyn. Nothing important's going on. If the wife of the Member for East Mumsted—the mere prefix stamps the place as vulgar and suburban—is anxious to hear her husband stammering trivialities upon a matter which interests nobody except himself, she can give him unlimited scope for boredom in his own home circle. Give me the Agenda again, or whatever they call it, Evelyn. Good Heavens! we've got at least three-quarters of an hour of this before the business of the evening comes on. Who's that at the door?—Mr. Beadon, Mrs. Farquharson and Mr. Calvert. Fancy Dora honouring her husband by coming! Let's go and speak to them outside, shall we? I hope your husband's in vein to-night, Mrs. Farquharson."

"Well, we're in for a stormy evening," said Beadon cheerfully, piloting Lady Wereminster to a place of comparative seclusion. "Farquharson hasn't turned up yet even. I never saw such a man, he thrives on criticism. He knows as well as I that there is a regular organized claque of Irish Members here to-night ready to shriek him down, 'spoiling for a row,' as we used to say at Eton."

"Now, I'm not a betting man, as you know, Lady Wereminster," interposed Calvert, smiling genially, "but I'm ready to lay you long odds that that boy of mine arrives at the last moment cool and collected, with every fact marshalled and an indomitable flow of courage and good-will that would break the back of the most determined enemy. He's got the gift of humour, and in time that tells with the most angry crowd. They're up in arms against him to-night, I know; I can't quite make it out. He's got on too quickly, I suppose, and made enemies."

"A strong man is always loved or hated," said Evelyn. "Mr. Farquharson is not only an orator, but he knows how to hold his tongue. Such men are always

attacked. Think what Cobden and Bright had to suffer in the Anti-Corn League agitation, and O'Connell in the Repeal year! And they were men with vulnerable spots, and the world hasn't found out Mr. Farquharson's weak spot yet."

"If they once rouse him they'll be amazed," Beadon said. "He's a man who asks no quarter and gives none. Well, I think you'd better take your seats, don't you?" He glanced at his watch. "In a quarter of an hour or so Farquharson will be speaking. Oh, there's Jefferson calling me; I expect Farquharson's come. Take care of yourself, my dear." He gave Dora's hand an affectionate squeeze before hurrying away.

"So your seat's near ours?" said Lady Wereminster, somewhat displeased. "Evelyn"—in urgent parenthesis—"if that woman begins cackling at inopportune moments, you have my full permission to envelop her in my chuddah, and make the attendant take her out.—Well, the hats have been replaced by their owners now—I really don't know that the change is for the better. We were a middle-class lot enough eight or nine years ago, but now so many Labour Members have come in——!" She raised her eyes expressively. "One vacant seat only on the Ministerial benches—Mr. Farquharson's—oh, he's filled it now. A man of great distinction, your husband, Mrs. Farquharson; he's got the hall-mark of birth upon him as well as intellect. Thank goodness no one would ever think that his seat was paid for by working men's sixpences."

"Oh, he's very well in his way, as husbands go," said Mrs. Farquharson. "My father was certainly right in taking him up so warmly."

"That's the third time you've had to pick up that odious creature's bag," said Lady Wereminster in an undertone. "I never saw anybody's fingers shake so. I wish to goodness she was sitting further off. She makes me feel quite nervous."

"Oh, do be quiet now, there's a dear," said Evelyn. "Mr. Farquharson's rising. Ah!"

Farquharson's opening words were drowned in a low rumble of muttered comments and hisses. Then suddenly, as if at some preconcerted signal, the Labour Members, the Irish Party, and a great number of the Opposition, whose voices were never heard except on these occasions, broke into a clamour of groans. Evelyn grew pale. The scene was so overwhelming, coming as it did after a period of slackness and indifference, that even the Speaker's call to order was disregarded, and when eventually there came a lull, it was tense with envy and hatred.

Calvert was right. Farquharson faced the storm with the air of one who, at a policeman's bidding, is held up by street traffic. He looked perhaps a trifle bored at first; the delay was not serious, but inconvenient.

When at last he could make himself heard, he repressed the cheers of his colleagues with a gesture; Beadon, knowing his wishes, also hushed them down.

There was a speck of dust on his right-hand shirt-cuff; he waited to flick it off deliberately with his handkerchief in the pause before he took up the broken thread of his speech.

When, in next day's papers, Evelyn read the report of his words, she wondered no longer at the spell he exercised over his audience, as, every nerve quickened by the strain he had just gone through, he spoke straight to the heart in simple language and a voice that even his enemies declared brought back memories of O'Connell in its passion and sweetness. The silence of the great hall is often broken by voices raucous and harsh and stammering; there were some who listened now for the mere sake of hearing the silver tongue ring unaccustomed echoes. Others, again, were swept away by the flow of easy words, chosen apparently with consummate care, yet which were in reality inspired by the moment's conflict; words carrying conviction because they were given with all the force of personal magnetism, and all the art of accomplished extempore oratory. Men shifted their positions as they listened; the anxious expression on Beadon's face and that of Farquharson's colleagues deepened into pride. On the Opposition benches lounging and brooding figures braced themselves. It was as though a clear flood and torrent had swept suddenly throughout the House, breaking down barriers, washing away envy and malice and lack of charity by sheer force of its onslaught, by reason of its purity and its wholesomeness.

Farquharson spoke to a silent House, a House which hung upon his words. But suddenly from the distance another noise made itself heard—cries, shouting and disturbance. Evelyn and those about her did not take the interruption seriously at first. Yet presently it penetrated to the body of the House; Members broke free from the spell of Farquharson's words and turned, uneasily aware that some important matter was in progress.

The shouts concentrated, then reached even to the gallery. One or two Members left their places, attendants were seen hurrying, now at the gallery door, and again in the lobby below that immediately faced the Ladies' Gallery. Farquharson went on speaking, apparently unmoved, but he had lost his hold upon his hearers. Every eye was turned away from him in the direction of a white-faced member of the Government who, at Beadon's direction, handed him a slip of paper.

Outside the House the noise reached its climax, the shouting of an angry mob at bay. Evelyn saw other Members come back hurriedly; there were whispered colloquies between separate members of the Opposition; the Irish benches were almost deserted. Then suddenly Beadon rose to his feet, catching convulsively his collar; he flung his hands up, with an inarticulate cry, and fell down as though he had been shot.

Evelyn heard the outside cry taken up again by those within the House it-

self, and saw peace broken visibly as though an earthquake had rent the whole assembly. Farquharson had leapt to Beadon's side, and was bending over him; for a moment the business of the House was set aside in the sense of imminent personal disaster. Impervious to private sorrow, the Leader of the Irish Party sprang upon his feet, gesticulating and pointing at the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. And Evelyn saw the men of his own party turn to look at Farquharson as though they could not trust the evidence of their own eyes; she saw him break and falter as the word "traitor" rang through the House.

In the Speaker's Gallery, confusion, horror; in the Peeresses' Gallery, a flash of light as women in evening dress rose hurriedly from their seats; in the Strangers' Gallery, a murmur of comment and dissension; the body of the House, convulsed with new and overwhelming emotion, collapsing like a house of cards.

An attendant with papers was at the door of the Ladies' Gallery; there was a rush in his direction. Evelyn must have pushed forward and bought one, how she hardly knew. She was just about to open it when Dora Farquharson, at her side, caught at her arm and fell, terror-stricken, across the seat; she felt Lady Wereminster snatch the paper from her with shaking fingers, and, while she was lifting Dora to her feet, she looked over her shoulder and read the headlines of the page aloud.

"*Treachery in the Foreign Office; the text of the secret Treaty in the hands of a Foreign Power. A European war inevitable.*"

Below: "*The Emperor's letter to Lord Gaunt given verbally. Startling disclosures.*"

CHAPTER VIII

"The longer I live the more I am certain that the great difference between men—between the feeble and the powerful, the great and the insignificant, is energy, invincible determination—a purpose once fixed, and then death or victory. That quality will do anything that can be done in this world; and no talents, no circumstances, no opportunities will make a two-legged creature a man without it."—SIR F. FOWELL BUXTON.

"I have been sitting here with my pen in my hand, wondering how to find words in which to tell you what really happened at that awful scene in the House of Commons," Lady Wereminster wrote to Hare next day, with shaking hand. "I want to put it all down in plain English, to make myself see the main facts more clearly—at present my whole vision seems blurred and vague. I now know something of what women felt when they stood outside a door and knew that within the room their husbands were being racked. One of my nieces was out in South Africa during the war, you know. She told me that one of the most terrible things she saw was a man, a common soldier, in one of the hospitals at Kimberley, who had been wounded by expanding bullets in the hand between the thumb and forefinger, and in the thigh. Both, under ordinary conditions, would have been mere flesh-wounds; as things were, the space between the forefinger and thumb had swollen as high as a muscular man's arm, and the wound in the thigh was in the same condition. But the man could not die, and medical convention prevented his doctor from putting him out of pain. He lingered on, to Mary's knowledge, in agony, from the battle of Roidam, which took place on the fifth of May, until she left Kimberley on the thirty-first of the month. Throughout that time he had not even momentary cessation from torture. And when she went away the doctor told her that the man's vitality was such that he might well last a fortnight longer.

"A fortnight—think! Remembrance of that suffering man flashed back to me the other night in the House. Nobody likes having to see physical pain; as for mental pain, the only way we treat it is to slur it over. Like St. Thomas, we can only understand wounds we can put our fingers into and probe.

"But you have imagination; you can guess what last night meant to Richard Farquharson and us all. He had been warned that some mischief was afloat, but he never dreamed how far it could go. He came in quite buoyant and undismayed; the first taunts and invective left him unmoved. He bore them down by sheer force of will; giving one rather the impression of facing his enemies 'with his tongue in his cheek,' as Shakespeare says. But presently he began to realize that matters were serious enough to bring the best he had in him to the fore, and then he did indeed give us the best he had of truth and sincerity. He shook off his cynicism and indifference like a cloak. The words sound cold—oh, if I could but make you hear the man's speech as we heard it, spell-bound, breathless! Old members of the House, who had been there for forty and fifty years, say they never heard any speech approach it. I suppose he actually reached the summit of his power in those few moments. Then downfall came.

"The panic that spread as the news about the Treaty filtered through the House was absolutely indescribable. Farquharson never flinched. That's where blood tells. A man of the people in a like crisis would have wavered and lost his

head. But when our class is face to face with imminent peril, mental or physical, we are encompassed with a host of silent witnesses, before whom it is impossible to quail. Voices of our dead forbears murmur, 'We are watching you from the heights. We, too, knew danger in our day, and met it. And our blood flows in you, remember. Be true, not only to yourself, but to the dignity of your race.'

"You will remember the story of that Marquis in the Revolution who, driving to the guillotine with other aristocrats, finely attired, sniffed at a rose to the last, because, as he explained, the smell of the rabble so annoyed him?

"We found afterwards that influence had been at work undermining all one side of the House with suggestions and innuendoes. It appears that the whole of the Opposition was expecting some dramatic *dénoûment* to Farquharson's speech; what it was they didn't know, but they were prepared for some great climax which would tell in their favour. Anonymous letters had been sent to individual members; the whole work had been done subtly. But for that I doubt if there would have been that instantaneous reaction, the sudden change of aspect between a great assembly hanging on a man's words, one with him in spite of themselves, and a body of men scenting treachery and dishonour, furious at having been fooled and tricked. It took one back to Pilate's house, to the judgment of Christ, when the crowd cried 'Crucify Him, crucify Him!'

"They say that but for Mr. Beadon's seizure a vote of censure would have been moved at once. Under the circumstances it was impossible to go on with the ordinary business of the day; at the moment we all feared that the poor Prime Minister would actually die in his seat. The House was adjourned. There are rumours of Mr. Farquharson's resignation, but I heard just now that he absolutely refuses to give up his post until he is assured that he has lost the confidence of the country. It seems as though he could not take in the fact that he had hardly a friend in the world except our own little coterie. He got on too well and too quickly not to arouse envy and jealousy on all sides.

"I send you, under separate cover, some cuttings from the papers; the leading ones were of course non-committal, the others are full of invective and denunciation. As for the *Moon*, it did not mince matters at all. Caring not a jot what it said so long as it just escaped the law of libel, it practically accused Farquharson of selling the nation for his own ends. As you know, he has never been popular with the Press. No newspaper can say of him, 'This is my puppet; I pull the strings and he does as I direct.'

"It is now supposed that Mr. Farquharson's study and safe must have been opened by duplicate keys on the afternoon of the great crisis in the House. The question is how an impression could have possibly been taken of the key of the safe, as it never leaves Mr. Farquharson's personal possession. The safe was ransacked, nearly everything in it being taken—everything official, I mean; private

papers were left. Detectives are at work on the affair, of course.

"It appears that Mr. Farquharson went out early that afternoon, leaving the Prime Minister to lock the door. Lord Creagh, who was with Mr. Beadon all the time, says that he never parted with the key until he returned it to his son-in-law. Both of Mr. Farquharson's secretaries can prove alibis on the day in question; the servants have borne irreproachable characters for years. The fact that Richard himself spent the afternoon with Herr von Kirsch, the representative of that Government into whose possession this special information was proved to have been given that very day, is dead against him. Mr. Farquharson means, I hear, 'to face the music' to-night; the papers will tell you that most of the other Ministers have been suddenly stricken down with influenza. Wereminster says that the party is in a state of absolute panic; they got into office on a wave of public emotion, and are terrified lest the tide should turn.

"Did I tell you that Dora Farquharson was there? Somehow or other, I don't know how, the three of us got together at the door of the Ladies' Gallery, and were the first to read the paper—Evelyn, Dora and I. I think Evelyn did one of the pluckiest things I ever saw a woman do in my life. There was such confusion in the House below that no noise in the Ladies' Gallery was likely to be specially noticed. The tumult was shocking and the rush. With Dora Farquharson clinging to her arm she read the news aloud, and calmed the tumult. 'They dare to say Mr. Farquharson has done this thing,' she said; 'it is a lie. It may not be proved to-day or to-morrow, but it is a lie all the same.' You should have seen those women pause. We are like sheep, after all; we follow our strong leader, be it man or woman. Another woman took Evelyn's cue; she was, I think, one of the heads of the women's franchise movement, or some such thing. Anyway she was quick enough to see that in a moment of national excitement it would speak well for women if they could comport themselves quietly and with dignity. To quote the morning papers, 'In spite of the disturbance and dissension below, the occupants of the Ladies' Gallery withdrew in perfect order, and with no signs of excitement, a great contrast to the prevailing attitude of the House.'

"Evelyn and I led the way with Dora Farquharson. She had, of course, to be taken home at once and put to bed. One dreads the advent of the evening papers; more still the comments of the foreign Press. And if we dread them, what must Richard Farquharson feel? I never knew how much I loved my country until now. These low little papers!—every stone they fling hurts me personally. To hint of corruption and bribery here, in England!—I am only a woman, and I feel this acutely. Again, what can it be to Richard Farquharson? As things stand, it is as though he had wounded almost to death what he loves best and would sacrifice most for. This is a blow at his heart, and a blow at the nation. How to meet it, decadent as we are, demoralized by that love of luxury and advertisement which

brings us day by day nearer disaster and downfall?"

CHAPTER IX

"Never make a defence ... before you are accused."—CHARLES I.

In youth, a great crisis may only spiritualize and refine the features; in maturity, it leaves ineradicable scars.

The first great blow of Calvert's life had embittered him; the second left him shattered. Farquharson was like his son, more to him in some ways than his own son would have been. Parents have always to face the possibility that their children may go absolutely contrary to their wishes; the transfusion of two souls may create a being which develops on entirely different lines from those desired by they who willed it to exist. But Farquharson had fulfilled Calvert's every hope; his appointment in the Ministry was the culmination of Calvert's ambition. Calvert, looking upon him, felt that he could say his *Nunc Dimittis* thankfully; how easy to depart in peace when one had left behind, as legacy to the empire, so strong a man of war!

But human strength is, after all, limited; no single unit can hold on steadily against a battalion of armed foes. Farquharson woke the day after the attack in the House to find himself hemmed in, surrounded by enemies, his name bandied from one man to another, in the dockyard, on tubs at Hyde Park Corner, in open booths at Walworth Bridge Road. The socialists saw their opportunity and made the most of it: "A starving man may steal a loaf of bread and be sent to prison for five days—this man, who has sold the secrets of his nation, will probably go unscathed because he is of gentle birth."

It was torture to Calvert to go out that day; he never knew when in 'bus or tube or district railway he would hear Farquharson's name spoken contemptuously by strangers. For men spoke of circumstantial evidence, and "Circumstantial evidence is the hardest to disprove, and frequently unreliable," as a great criminal lawyer once said. Brand had done his work well. But—"In so gloomy a climate as ours we must expect the powers of darkness to prevail," said Lady Wereminster.

Stunned and horrified, Farquharson himself did not at first take in the full

force of the rumours that were being spread about him. It was impossible to conceive that he should be suspected of treachery. When, the night before, he lost grip of his audience, he had at first believed that it was through some fault of his own. He had never seen suspicion in men's eyes before. But next day's papers were more explicit. Men and women discussed the subject over the luncheon table, at Princes or the Piccadilly Hotel. "Such a pity—one had always thought Mr. Farquharson quite a nice-minded man." There is after all no ball so light to fling as that of a man's or woman's character, and no sport so amusing to the players.

When the question of moving the vote of censure was fixed for the next evening, Calvert's last hope died. Who was there to stand by Farquharson? Beadon was lying sick to death. Shock had snapped some lesion of the brain, and he lay paralyzed. Richard would pull through, of course—what would he not pull through? But the older man felt the shame, the ignominy of his position almost as keenly as he did himself. Farquharson, called to account for his actions by a set of men who did not know the meaning of the word honour; Farquharson, impeached by some who could scarcely spell the word—Farquharson, steady of purpose, sure of aim, a king amongst puppets, held in contumely, derided, blackened a little as a man or woman must always be blackened by the mud thrown even by the very scum of humanity.

It was bitter, it was unbearable. Calvert counted the hours until the moment when, across the Bar of the House, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs would have publicly to repudiate a deed which the powers of hell themselves would never have forced him to commit.

Evelyn, instead of having been paralyzed by the shock, found it had quickened every instinct. She felt as if she were charged with a new and strange force, a kind of super-consciousness which made her the recipient of a thousand telepathic messages, along which communications carried with the speed and safety of a telegram. It took her away from ordinary surroundings and left her indifferent even to all Brand said and did—although he naturally spared her nothing. There is an inner chamber to every heart, a place of refuge and concealment of which at times one may mercifully turn the key. Evelyn withdrew there now when he attacked her; safe within its four walls, she listened to his criticism of Farquharson as one listens to the ravings of a madman. He could touch her no longer; he could hurt her no more. That is the comfort of receiving a mortal wound. The thrust of spear and bayonet may tear and lacerate to an unendurable pitch of torture, but a blow at the heart kills.

"As we have seen nothing of Mrs. Farquharson," said Lady Wereminster, "we will charitably suppose that for once she has been of use to her husband. There are women who fail in every minor office who can yet rise to occasions. And a man in trouble must have sympathy, no matter from what source. Dora Farquharson has got the opportunity of her life if she did but know. Never expect me to pity a woman who can't keep her husband. She's a fool, and I hate fools. Men are naturally more domestic animals than women. The ties of daily intimacy make enduring claims upon them. A man may be consumed by the fire of undying passion for one woman, but he's dependent on the one he lives with, if she will only minister to his daily needs, and never let his supply of whisky or cigarettes run short, and be ready with a new dish or a soothing medicine as each is required."

"If Dora fails her husband now——" said Evelyn. She stopped.

"Oh, if it were but the ideal marriage," said Lady Wereminster. "With the right woman he would have braved all this and carried it through triumphantly. They have been married long enough now to have begun to form the deeper ties of union and of confidence. It partly amuses, partly hurts me when people talk of the early days of marriage as though all the sweetness and ardour and passion and tenderness of life were concentrated in them. When two people really love each other those things not only endure and strengthen, but take exquisite sanctity as years go by. The plant strengthens. Its blooms are finer. As the years go, its colour and texture are fit to grow in the Garden of God. Something of the Eternal Love has filtered directly through from some crevice of heaven and shone upon them; their scent isn't of this world, but eternity."

"And you think that might apply to Mr. Farquharson and his wife?" said Evelyn. She stood quite silently, looking away from Lady Wereminster.

"Never," said Lady Wereminster; "but men are human. They're like dogs who are hurt. They cringe away into corners where, for a while, they miss accustomed voices, and presently creep out, ready to lick the hand of even the hardest master so long as he is master. When men are hurt they slink off, in much the same way; but daily routine tells. They are creatures of habit, who miss even the harshest voice if they have once got used to it. Dora Farquharson is on the spot, and there's the other tie.... How far that will tell one doesn't know. Fatherhood affects different men differently, but I have an idea it will constitute a strong claim on Mr. Farquharson."

There was a knock at Evelyn's bedroom door; her maid entered with a letter.

"The man is waiting for an answer, ma'am."

"Excuse me," said Evelyn. The letter was from Mrs. Farquharson, so hurried, so incoherent that she did not at first grasp the meaning of the few excited

words.

"Please come at once, no matter what you're doing. I must have you; I must speak to you. I am almost out of my mind with agony and horror; you mustn't fail me. Richard doesn't know I'm writing. I don't know what to do. For God's sake, come at once."

"She's failed him again," said Evelyn slowly. Lady Wereminster snatched the letter from her.

"It isn't that at all. Here, get on your things, I'll take you on in the car. That it should come to-day of all days—poor Mr. Farquharson!"

Dawn—cold, grey, chilling. The stir and bustle of servants' steps; low voices. The household at Chester Street had been hurrying to and fro sending telegrams and dispatches and messages ever since Evelyn had arrived at twelve o'clock on the previous day. While the Leader of the Opposition was preparing his vote of censure on the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, and such members as were in the country were hurriedly returning to town in order to be present at one of the most dramatic debates of the century, the fate of Farquharson's child hung in the balance between life and death.

Lady Wereminster was right; when Evelyn entered the house she saw at once how matters stood and sent for the doctor. She had found Dora in a state bordering on frenzy, bitter, reproachful, incoherent. The torrent of words with which she was met dazed Evelyn so that she could scarcely take in their full force; Farquharson, very still and pale, was standing upright by the fire-place in the dining-room, listening with a face that might have been carved in marble, so still was it, so utterly expressionless. But Evelyn, entering, saw the deep lines cut obliquely from nostril to lip; saw the furrows in the brow, cut as if by a chisel—those lines of ineradicable pain which the years deepen instead of smoothing.

She swept across the room, and, catching Dora's trembling figure in her arms, put her hand above the girl's mouth and checked the hideous torrent of words.

"You must come up-stairs at once to your room," she said sharply. "You've sent for the nurse, of course, Mr. Farquharson? Then please do so at once. Come up with me, Dora—or, better still, let your husband carry you. No, I'm not going to listen to a word now; you're better for the moment, and this sort of scene does you no good at all. You may think I'm speaking harshly, but I'm not. Send for Felice, Mr. Farquharson, will you? Or, if she's hysterical, the head housemaid, please; she's a sensible woman."

"It's awful, it's ghastly," said Dora, fighting them both, as they tried to carry her up-stairs, between spasms of pain. "It's unendurable, and I won't bear it.

Doctors are beasts; I know this man won't give me chloroform until the very end. I won't bear it till the end, do you hear? Why should I be tortured so for a man I loathe? I won't have it, I tell you; I won't have it!" Her voice rose to a shriek. "Make the doctor come, Evelyn; make him give me something. I won't stand it, I tell you; I won't stand—oh, God——"

This was the prelude of hours of revolt and rebellion. It seemed to Evelyn that for a lifetime she had listened to Dora's ravings. She tried to excuse them on the score of delirium, and failed. In some ways Dora was a typical modern woman, eager to take all that life offered her and pay no penalty; rebellious at the gift of a new responsibility which compelled her to take life from another point of view.

Nurse and doctor both came presently, and then another nurse was sent for, Mrs. Farquharson was too unmanageable for one alone.

Evelyn, sitting in the room beyond, was called for ceaselessly. No one could do anything so well as Evelyn. No one else fanned Dora in the right way, or knew when she wanted her pillows moved. Now she must have her head laved; now she wanted special scent on her handkerchief. The pillows were wrong again now.... No, Evelyn could not have anything to eat at this moment. How could she when Dora was in such pain? She could go down-stairs and have something presently, when the nurse had finished her meal.

But the "presently" never came. Hour after hour Evelyn sat, waging perhaps the hardest battle of her life, as Dora's rebellion gave way to hatred, and hatred to passion so intense that the very room seemed charged with it. Evelyn had seen Farquharson come to the door; from her bed his wife had recognized him, and poured out such a torrent of contempt that Evelyn ran to her and put her hand upon the quivering mouth.

She dragged her tired limbs now to the head of the stairs, but Farquharson had gone. She wondered which would be the hardest ordeal, the facing of that stern tribunal before which he would presently stand at bay, or the one through which he had just passed.

Of late Evelyn's prayers had been merely mechanical. To-night they concentrated; let him have this at least, dear God—one thing in the world which might comfort and cheer him.... But where it became a question of the child's life or Dora's there was, in Dora's mind, no choice. She had never wanted the child from the first, she loved her own life.

At midnight Evelyn heard Farquharson return. She knew by the sound of his footsteps that the vote had gone against him. She tried to disengage her hand from Dora's, but failed. By the time she was free, he had gone to his own room; she heard him move heavily across it.

Physically spent herself after hours of struggle with a woman whose strength in intervals of pain was almost incredible, Evelyn watched day dawn, with a face that was haggard and worn. Dora's shrinking at pain she would have borne so gladly shattered her. In moments of physical anguish souls are revealed, and she had never seen Dora in so pitiful, so low, so unworthy a light as she did now. Wearied out at last, she moved mechanically, like one in a dream, going to and from the sick-room as she was bidden. Dora had got her way; the doctor had administered chloroform long before he would have given it in the case of a courageous patient. Sitting alone in the little anteroom, Evelyn watched grey shadows come and go, frightened servants stepping on tiptoe, the doctor and the nurse, even Farquharson, whose ravaged face put him beyond the reach even of her spoken sympathy. In the house it was presently rumoured that the real struggle with death had begun; the piteous struggle of the child to whom Dora had denied any chance of vitality which might have given her one added pain.

The end came in the morning as light trembled into being. As if in a dream, Evelyn heard a cry that pierced her heart; a cry that seemed to sound the death-knell of her own dream-child, that put Farquharson further away from her. Some smell of chloroform or ether—she was no longer able to distinguish between the two—was penetrating into the inner room. When presently her name was called, it seemed to make a definite atmosphere through which she feebly groped her way to Dora's bedroom. One of the nurses met her there with a tiny bundle in her arms. Evelyn took it; it was pitifully light.

"He may not live," the nurse said; "the doctor thought his father would like to see him. I must go back to the room, Mrs. Farquharson is so dreadfully nervous and hysterical; we are both quite worn out. Just hark at her now! Would you kindly take the baby down, Mrs. Brand."

The gods have an unlimited belief in one's powers of endurance. Slowly, with breaking heart, her eyes drowned partly for self-pity, partly for fear lest the flickering little life she held might breathe its last before the end of her journey, she went downstairs and entered the sitting-room where Farquharson stood waiting. She saw his face as he greeted her, its pallor, its anxiety transfigured suddenly by the light which comes but once in a lifetime to a man, and that only when he looks upon his firstborn son. Without a word he held out his arms; without a word Evelyn handed him her dear burden. Then the room rocked, she put out her hands blindly, swaying. So bitter, so cruel, so overwhelming was the moment's agony, that it was as though a chord had snapped in her heart, and left her struggling for breath. But Farquharson neither saw nor heard. She closed

the door gently—how she did not know—and left him alone with his son.

CHAPTER X

"The cord breaks at the last by the weakest pull."—Old Spanish Proverb.

At one point in pain, all sense of value dies. Nothing is left but the overwhelming realization that, throb by throb, it will increase until it reaches the climax, when a woman bites her pillow to stifle her shrieks, and a man in all probability blows out his brains—the shortest way of escape. To the woman there succeeds what may be called reaction, a temporary lull, in which body, mind and soul are alike so bruised and stricken that, possibly from sheer weariness, sleep may come for a brief hour. But next day the pain begins again and concentrates again, and so on and on from day to day and week to week, the only change being that soul and mind and body become daily a little more bruised, a little more stricken.

This is worse than a mere period of spiritual dryness; it is an active wrestling with the powers of hell. It is in such moments that religion fails, and the faith to which one was born seems to spell restriction. One would prefer to fling it away altogether, to deny its truth, to escape to a world where the light of the heart might give out its full radiance, even if the soul shrank in gloom.

Doubts creep in in such moments of peril. Catholics do not mince matters. They do not expect to cheat God in their lives and the devil in their deaths by tardy repentance. If they sin, they risk eternal damnation, and know it.

The description of a picture she had once seen had often been in Evelyn's thoughts lately. God sat in judgment on His throne. Before Him was ranged a tribe of kneeling figures—kings laying down their sceptres, soldiers their swords, queens their jewels, men their symbols of ambition, women their guerdons of beauty. Some hung back as though unwilling to give up so soon all that was pleasant. In the foreground of the picture knelt a young girl's shrinking form. Her eyes, mystical and reverent, were looking at the throne; she held one hand bravely outstretched, but the other was concealed within the drapery of her gown. In the hand that pointed direct to God there was the half of a little human heart, her own, all that she had to give, for the other half was withheld. Amongst so vast a crowd of worshippers she thought that perhaps God might not see the

gift she offered was divided.

Torn with conflict, every energy, every force concentrated on one prevailing thought, the daily routine of her life temporarily suspended, what had Evelyn now to give God? Little pitiful utterings of prayer, the mechanical moving of lips to the rhythm of habitual words—that was all. Yet, after all, what proof had she that what she had been taught in childhood was true?—Think of the bitterness that would come, if at the end of life, when the secrets of all are revealed, we were to find that we had given up love, in bitterness and agony, for the sake of a phantom God and a phantom creed....

The thought passed. Belief held her still. But in the conflict between self and soul lay her real torment.

It was the sight of Farquharson's child that had broken her, a child born in rebellion and anger, wresting its life from the God of Being in spite of its mother's cowardice. She felt as if her own child had been stolen from her. Wounded and weeping tears of blood, she must stand by and watch it in another woman's arms.

The inscrutable laws of human destiny! Call them rather those of blind chance, since some of us seem born only to be first tossed to and fro on the waves of disaster, and then thrown, helpless and mangled beyond recognition, upon the shore with other refuse.

It was in such a mood as this that Evelyn awaited Lady Wereminster's arrival a week after the vote of censure. Farquharson had allowed himself this specified time in which to battle with public opinion. If at the end it still went against him he would hand in his resignation. It is only when a man is called upon to defend his honour that he knows which are his friends and which his foes.

All through the week Evelyn had hoped against hope; had worked and striven on his behalf as much as she dared, only to meet an icy wall of indifference. The world had given its verdict. Temporarily the Farquharsons were to be ostracized. When your acquaintances in high places are openly accused of bribery and corruption by the foreign Press, it is high time to revise your visiting-list. Obviously Mr. Farquharson had to resign. That he should continue to hold such an important post would make matters very uncomfortable for all who knew him. Eventually things might blow over; but in the meantime society shrugged its shoulders, and shook its discreet skirts free from the least trace of contamination.

"The time is up. We shall know Mr. Farquharson's decision to-night," Lady Wereminster said. "I must save you from hearing the news shouted in the open street. I shall come on to see you directly his announcement is made, if it is made to-night."

The moments crept by, and hours, while Evelyn waited. Mercifully she was alone. Brand had been called to the country on some mysterious business, and she had sent her servant away for the night. West Kensington is not usually a neighbourhood where there is much traffic during the social hours of the evening; its inmates are more inclined to go by foot or rail to their engagements than by carriage or motor. But it seemed to Evelyn that night that the streets were full of noise and movement. Time after time she heard the approaching hoot of a motor, and went to the door to find that the sound existed only in imagination.

But Lady Wereminster came at last, slowly, with head bent and lagging steps. Her news was written on her face. Evelyn drew her into the inner room without a word.

"He has resigned," Lady Wereminster whispered. "And he looks as if it were his death-blow."

"I must try to tell you consecutively," she went on presently. She stretched her hand out trembling towards the liqueur glass of brandy which Evelyn had poured out for her, and drank it off at a gulp. "I'm unnerved, I suppose. It was one of the most awful things I've ever witnessed. The scene in the House the other night was nothing to it; men were beside themselves then with the sudden shock, the very noise and tumult helped to carry one through. But to-night there was a frozen silence, a great icy wall of horror and contempt and deadly purpose, that turned the very blood in one's veins. When Mr. Farquharson entered, I thought of a time in Egypt when I had seen the people shrink from a man who was stricken with leprosy. One looked to right and left and asked, 'Where are his friends? Where are the people who have canonized him and idolized him, fawned at his feet, and cringed before him?'"

There were tears in her eyes; she stopped abruptly. Evelyn, quite tearless, listened.

"And then?" she said.

"It was as though when he spoke they were stripping him threadbare," said Lady Wereminster, her mouth rigid. "To my mind, he dealt with charge upon charge with absolute sincerity and conviction. His hearers listened with the air of spectators at a play, a play whose chief actor lacked what the French call *vraisemblance*. There's nothing so impossible to grip as an audience that has wrapped itself in the cloak of indifference. I suppose at heart there isn't a man in the House but covets Farquharson's position; not a man but thinks he could fill it as adequately were he called upon to do so. And jealousy, as you know, has been at the root of every betrayal, of every libel, since the world began."

"Were there no cheers, no interruptions?" asked Evelyn. Her hands, gripped tightly together, alone betrayed her. "Surely his colleagues cheered him? It was the least they could do."

"There's not a man amongst the lot," said Lady Wereminster. "They were all deadly nervous. Each waited to see what his neighbour was going to do before he dared act on his own initiative. One or two nodded to Farquharson, that was all. There was only one course open to him, and he took it."

"He resigned, then?" said Evelyn.

"He explained very clearly at the beginning of his speech that it was the only course open to him under the circumstances. The whole affair being without precedence, I understand that he was practically given a free hand in his way of dealing with it. He said that he had from the first courted the fullest inquiry; he had immediately put matters into the hands of Scotland Yard. Everything that could be done had been done to compel the Power which had bought the information to admit from what source it was obtained. Up to the present moment its refusal was absolute. He accounted briefly for his actions on the day in question; even reading a letter from Von Kirsch, which, in my view, entirely cleared him. He said he knew that as yet he stood in the position of a man who had not legally proved his innocence, but that up till now he had not thought it possible that his fellow-members should seriously suspect him. In the face of public opinion, which he supposed was echoed by the House, he would resign his office until he was once more asked by his colleagues to take a seat in that great assembly. The whole speech was on these lines—direct, concise and manly. But he ended as he had begun, in silence."

"Silence!"

In the street below a man and woman were singing the refrain of a popular music-hall melody. The windows of the little flat opened on to the street, so in the pause that followed the words echoed distinctly, accompanied by the giggling murmur of the crowd, and the strumming of three primary chords on the piano-organ.

"Don't you wish 'e might get it, Bill?
Oh, ain't he a powerful man!"

"Good-bye, I'm going now," said Lady Wereminster brokenly. "The street boys will be here soon, calling the extra specials. Well, you're prepared for them now, thank God. Go to bed soon. You're looking absolutely dead beat." She took the girl's face in her hands and turned it towards the light of the little lamp which stood upon the three-cornered table by the mantelpiece. "Your heart's been bad again, hasn't it? Your face has got its old grey look—the look that always frightens me."

"Oh, I'm all right," said Evelyn tonelessly.

At the door Lady Wereminster turned suddenly back and put her arms round Evelyn again, as tenderly as a mother.

"Hold on," she said; "you are one of those who must hold on, because we expect you to. So far you've been brave, Evelyn; don't give in now."

Usually a quiet sleeper, Lady Wereminster found that night that her thoughts were as clear, her mind as capable of action, as in the day. She had a pleasant little boudoir attached to her bedroom; at about two o'clock in the morning she rose from her bed and flung herself down upon the couch, a most unusual proceeding.

To be able to see from only one point of view is indescribably consoling. Unluckily for her, Lady Wereminster could put herself in other people's places, could judge the result of her own work as critically as she judged the work of others. When she had, more or less, compelled Farquharson to marry, she had acted emotionally; her one idea had been to save Evelyn from threatened scandals. She had not reckoned, for one moment, on Farquharson's temperament. She had practically bid him seek a wife—any wife. What was the result? She forgot that she was dealing with a reckless and adventurous man—the type upon which one can never count with certainty. There had always been a spark of dare-devilry in Farquharson's nature. She had expected him to weigh the various advantages of the various charming ladies who tripped across his social stage as possible candidates for marriage. Instead of doing this, he had flung himself headlong into the first abyss which gaped before him. It would have been worth another man's while perhaps to marry Dora; but Farquharson could get on without Beadon's influence. And Dora's character was, as any woman of discernment would observe, one which must inevitably repel and alienate him. Such women are like cancerous growths; they eat away a man's vitality, robbing him in time of strength and force of will.

And she was responsible for this outrageous marriage—she, Mary Wereminster. She who had always prided herself upon her judgment and balance. Lives are, after all, very dangerous chemicals to play with. Mix the wrong two together, and disaster follows.

With the best intentions in the world, what had Lady Wereminster compassed after all? She had not really saved Evelyn; there are times when even a surgeon decides that a disease is inoperative. She had taken Farquharson from a life of comparative peace and thrown him into one of petty annoyance and difficulties—jars which strain such a man's endurance to the utmost. Lady Wereminster did not for one moment believe that Farquharson had committed the act of which he had been accused; but she thought that he might possibly have been careless, and, if it were so, his failure was due to the consequence of

that mad marriage into which she had pitilessly flung him. So the tragedy, the betrayal, the very position that her nation stood in at the moment, was due to her own folly, her own ruthless activity.

Impulsively spoken words, letters written under misapprehensions, can never be withdrawn. If as a child one makes a mistake in a sum, one can erase the figures and add them up afresh. But in life a mistake once made is irremediable, as Lady Wereminster knew.

CHAPTER XI

"To all men there comes the last battle."—GEORGE STEVENS.

The door closed with a bang. How final it sounded! Almost as if Lady Wereminster were going out of her life, Evelyn thought. She put her hands to her head. Momentarily she was overpowered by the strange, sudden faintness which had come upon her so often lately.

It passed, and she went back to the sitting-room, waiting with a set purpose. Sooner or later he would come. She looked for no merely human message. Between two hearts that beat absolutely as one there is no need for such communications in moments of great crisis. The one calls to the other, and the other obeys.

At about eleven o'clock, the echo of boys' voices calling the news rang through the open windows. Evelyn, still strangely idle, listened unmoved. She heard front doors being hurriedly opened, the shuffling of many feet up and down the kitchen steps; now and again voices from bedroom windows calling to the men below to wait for a moment until some hastily-awakened servant had time to get down and unlatch the door. Even in West Kensington such news had its interest. Evelyn pictured the thousand and one faces which, in London, were at that moment bending over "late specials," reading the lines which crushed a man's career, temporarily at least, and broke his heart.

The noise lulled. With ears extraordinarily quickened, Evelyn had heard the sound die away in the direction of Hammersmith and Fulham. The words echoed in her brain, like a discordant piece of music, recurring again and again—

"RESIGNATION OF THE SECRETARY OF

STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS!"
"MR. FARQUHARSON'S RESIGNATION."

Then new sounds came to distract her; the bustle of feet as the last Tubes disgorged late occupants returning from the theatre; the whir of an occasional taxi-cab; the hurrying wheels of hansoms; the almost inevitable discussion as to fares.

Silence again. Then a new chorus of sounds—altered in character. This was the hour when belated clients were turned out from public-houses. They were uncertain, stumbling footsteps that passed now, confused voices, readily roused to mirth or anger. She heard a jumble of conflicting notes, annoyance, irritation, cajolery, laughter, broken at last by a policeman's voice and a sharp order to move on.

Then silence again. Nothing, now, but the bark and growl and eventual whimper of a stray fox-terrier shut out from the house opposite, and the never-ending wailing of cats, which sounds so exactly like the cry of a frightened child.

Two o'clock—three o'clock. He was late. Evelyn, hearing the clock strike, tried to move, and found herself held in the grip of almost intolerable physical pain. For hours she must have sat in one position, leaning forward in her chair, with hands lightly crossed upon her knee; every limb was cramped. She crossed to the window, and pulled aside the blind for a moment. In the daytime the windows were alight with a thousand eyes; now they were blank and sightless. The street was deserted; the reflection from the lamp showed a long expanse of deserted pavement.

Then from afar she heard the sounds of approaching footsteps, firm, determined; belonging to one she knew. Her thought had drawn him as she wished. She let the blind fall, and going to the hall door awaited his coming.

We read, mostly in books by spinsters, a great many unnecessary details of what in their view is a scene of passion. But when a man is overwhelmed and broken it is the mother-love of the woman he cares for most to which he looks for peace and security. There are no sweeter or more tender services than those which a woman can offer her lover under such conditions, and nothing draws them nearer than his temporary dependence.

Farquharson came in blindly, like a dazed man, gripping her arm with a strength he did not realize. She knew there was some new pain behind his stricken eyes; when the hospitable gods give you a bitter cup to drink they are very careful to fill it full. He sat in absolute silence for a while, and she knelt beside him. It struck her afterwards as a wonderful proof of the tie between them

that he did not question her when she met him at the threshold, that he took her waiting, her expectation, her very silence for granted.

It was a long time before he turned. Then he looked her full in the face, with eyes from which all the light and youth had gone.

He caught his breath.

"You have heard the news?" he said. "I thought so. The streets were alive with people last night. I was pressed to buy papers over and over again on my way here. The result had barely been announced in the House when a message reached me from home"—Evelyn winced—"from the nurse, to tell me that *my wife*"—he laid stress on the word—-"was ill, and wanted me. As I was leaving the House, at the very door, I was stopped by another messenger, it was an important cable in reference to a big Russian question; it required special knowledge. The man who is taking over my work had to deal with it then and there, and couldn't without help. I stayed. That meant ten minutes' delay, but it had to be. It took me another eight minutes to get home. Two minutes before my son had died in agony, left by the nurses in order that they might attend to Dora, who was in violent hysterics because she thought they were neglecting her to look after my child."

He pushed Evelyn's hand away and walked to the mantelpiece. The light of the little electric lamp defined every line, every feature, with all the havoc that the night had wrought.

"My dear! my dear!" said Evelyn brokenly. There was a fierce battle in her heart, but she stood silently beside him, and dawn filtered slowly through the half-drawn blinds.

"I could not have left him but for you," Farquharson said, after a pause. "He's lying there now in my dressing-room, on a little bed of flowers; there were flowers enough in her room and to spare; I took them. Have you ever seen a dead baby, Eve? He's like marble now, the little mouth all set and cold—you would never think it, but he smiled at me only yesterday. He knew me, you know. I know they say it's absurd that a baby of a week old should, but I'm sure he did. He used to clutch my finger—you would never have believed how strong he was!—and snuggle in here in the bend of my arm, where I'm holding you now. I had to be everything to him, you see; his mother had never even had him in the room from the first." He stopped abruptly. "When I went in to tell her he was dead, she said, 'Well, I'm afraid that's the end of your hopes of an heir, Richard. I shall never go through this again, I assure you.'"

"Don't, don't," said Evelyn; "I can't bear it!" She caught him in her arms and held him close, with strength that seemed to have been given her for that one purpose.

But presently she spoke; clearly, concisely.

"You asked me once to go away with you, Richard, and I refused. You had your life before you then, and you could do without me. Now you have nothing. Do you know how I suffer with you in every ache that's tearing your heart-strings at this moment? I had my dream-child too, dear—its loss was bitter enough, but yours was worse. You've got the touch of little, living fingers to remember, the light of dear wee smiles that were your very own from the beginning. If you want me still I'll come to you anywhere, anyhow, so long as I can be with you and comfort you. When you could do without me, religion was strong enough to keep us apart, but now it isn't. Things are too hard for us, and I've given in."

"Eve——!"

He looked at her, stupefied; hardly understanding what she said.

She pulled the blind back.

"See, there is the dawn. Our dawn, Richard. There shall be no grief or repining if you take me, dear. I'll make you as happy as I can, and give you all I have and all I am—your absolute possession, bought by pain."

The light from the east came in upon the man and woman, standing close together, more in the position of two persons who had been one for many years than that of lovers whose lips had met only for the second time. They watched it touch the commonplace houses of the dreary street with its transfiguring light. As Evelyn looked, a sense of peace came over her. After all, it was the conflict which had been so infinitely bitter, the civil war between soul and body, reason and heart.

"You needn't speak," she said; "I know what you've decided. Let me know in a few days when you want me to come, what you want me to do. You'll have to say good-bye to your little son, you see; you'll let me come and say it too, won't you? Good-bye till then."

"*When I want you*—God!"

"Now you must go!" She faltered; all that the man had suffered showed in his last words.

He kissed her and went out. The sun rose, flooding her with light as she stood on the doorstep watching him. He thought of her many times afterwards as he saw her at that moment, tall, pale, yet radiant, unashamed, with eyes mystic and sad, and features a little drawn but spiritualized by the night's waiting and suffering. She looked as though peace encompassed her, stilling the turbulent forces which had enfolded her so long. Had she been summoned before God just then she would have used the very selfsame words in which she spoke to

Farquharson: "Things were too hard for us—I have given in."

PART V

VICTORY

"Love ... when weary, is not tired; when straitened, is not constrained; when frightened, is not disturbed, but like the lively flame of a torch all on fire, mounts upwards and securely passes through all. He that loves most willingly embraces all that is hard and bitter.

"... If the works of God were such as might be easily comprehended, they could not be called wonderful and unspeakable."—THOMAS À KEMPIS.

"It were not hard to suffer by His Hand,
If thou couldst see His Face;—but in the dark!
That is the one last trial:—be it so.
Christ was forsaken, so must thou be too:
How couldst thou suffer but in seeming, else?
Thou wilt not see the face nor feel the hand,
Only the cruel crushing of the feet,
When through the bitter night the Lord comes down
To tread the wine-press—Not by sight, but faith....
Endure, endure—be faithful to the end."—MRS. HAMILTON KING.

CHAPTER I

"'Tis not the grapes of Canaan that repay,
But the high faith that failed not on the way."

Lines written upon a photograph.

At the same hour as Evelyn and Farquharson parted, Hare, wrapped round with all the paraphernalia of illness, sitting beside his window at an hotel in Biarritz which faced the Plage, braced himself by force of will to write a letter which he felt impelled to send.

"By the time this reaches you, dear Evelyn, I shall be dead. I shall leave instructions with the solicitor to whom I telegraphed six hours ago, that this letter shall be held back until the end. I have always been fond of you, as you know; it is not often given to childless men to meet with their ideal daughter; but in my heart I have always regarded you as that. I have been powerless to save you from the consequences of your actions, to spare you one lash of the whip with which the malicious sprites which govern this world's happenings have seen fit to scourge you. Throughout the vicissitudes through which you have passed, I have stood detached, a critical spectator. You might have resented my explanation in life; you are amongst those who forgive with exquisite tenderness the past impertinences of the dead.

"I suppose instinct led me to read you aright throughout. I saw you, as a child, battling against the inevitable; you are waging the same war to-day. You may, or you may not know, a phrase which is bandied about by 'common people' in Hindoo bazars—'Likka hai'—'It is written.' From the first, you have had to brave the most cruel enemies that can beset a woman—enemies of the household—secret enemies; enemies far more powerful, of faith and doubt.

"People will tell you that at the end, our thoughts are usually concentrated upon self—that the scenes of a man's mimic life pass each in turn before him in succession. I have not found that to be true. I am thinking of you now, your doubts, your difficulties, the problems that you are grappling with, which you have never told me, but which I have never mentioned until now.

"I am not a pious man, as you know. I pay no attention to the ordinary claims of religion. I take precisely the same pleasure in the Tenebrae of the Catholic Church, as I do in the Burial Service of the Church of England. In both you are swept from your ordinary course of placidity on the waves of the eternal. In the first, you have the dull rhythm of sound, with breaks, and curious changes of key and tune—if tune it may be called which is so Gregorian in its methods. Working up, step by step, with the disciples in their vigil with the Lord, you have the putting out of candle upon candle, the pause, the heart-stirring silence, culminating in complete darkness symbolical of dissolution. That is dramatic and intense. In the second, you have the direct voice of God. St. Paul never spoke with so clear a note as in his wonderful description of the triumph of things spir-

itual over things temporal. 'We shall not sleep, but we shall all be changed.... There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power.... As is the earthy, such are they that are earthy; and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly.... The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.' We can never find words to match these either for concentration or for power.

"Catholicism is, as you know, not so abhorrent to me as it is to some Anglicans. To begin with, I am an historian; that in itself is a strong point in favour of a creed which personally I dislike. I think myself that it was a good thing for England when she threw off the yoke under which she had bled for so many centuries; my greatest contention against the Catholic power is her interference in the politics of nations, and her attacks on men's independence. On the other hand, I admit that one of the first charges we bring against her exponents is a paradox; we call them too worldly and too mystic; complaining that their eyes are fixed so steadily on the vision of Heaven, that they fail to recognize ordinary precautions which men of business, dealing with men of business, should observe. There are a million paradoxes in the Church; you can explain them only by admitting her claim, acknowledging her, like Christ Himself, to be the possessor of two different entities, Divine and human.

"I have known many Catholics in my day; I have never known one like you. You weigh all questions fairly, without prejudice, but shed on the solution of great problems the light of an undying faith. You know I obey no active claims of religion; yet I have never willingly abjured God in my heart. Mine is a negative quality, not aggressive. I am as sure that, were your faith called into question, you would go to the rack to uphold its most trivial point as I believe in God myself. There are many who trust you in this way; I am one of the number. If you failed, their faith would shatter; it would be as the foundation of a house sinking suddenly.

"Many things have been denied you in life, those things even which you most ardently wished, and for which from our human point of view you were most fitted for. But this is yours: The power to point the way by example; to uplift, as a living witness of its purity, the creed to which you have subscribed, and against which here in England so many barriers are raised of scorn and contumely and indifference.

"Here, on the very brink of the unknown, having gone through life as best I might, faultily. no doubt, but as, I hope, a gentleman to the last, I look to you with failing eyes and raise my hat in farewell. And perhaps I see you more clearly

now than I ever did. You have been led away by emotion in your day; the devil seldom errs in aim; in your case, he has lodged his shaft in your most sensitive spot. Other women fall through egotism or ambition; you would fall through pity. But you are eminently logical. Should the time come when you are face to face with a great crisis, I beg you to remember my words and to pause and inquire. You would sacrifice yourself to one; yes, but would you sacrifice others? And there are many others who look to you as I do now, as the living witness of the purity of a faith which has kept its pre-eminence in spite of scorn and mockery and scourging—a faith which will, I think, always endure.

"The sea has lashed itself into absurd frenzy as I write. The sea can be very cruel. It longs to destroy, to tear and rend, like any human being. Three or four nights ago, as you doubtless read in the papers, it broke up a big ship like matchwood; it met and battered the men who tried to fight it beyond recognition, from mere wickedness. The sea and life are very alike in their methods. Life mars and mutilates the body. But if the soul has been true to itself, it looks upon those human wounds as outlets through which it may creep hour by hour, filtering through earthly channels to be one at last—bleeding but satisfied—in the image of its Creator.

"You have the ordinary human struggles against poverty to confront, amongst others. I have neither kith nor kin of my own. I have left you what I die possessed of, absolutely, with the exception of a few small legacies which I desire you should give as soon as possible to the members of my own household, my servants and personal attendants. Money has its value—at times it may even remove you out of the way of a disaster which you could not otherwise escape. And I know that in the past you have suffered many small inconveniences through being unable to give in charity as much as you wished. Now you are my almoner—chosen because of my explicit trust, both in your guardianship, and in the beacon of light to which you look, which guides so many faltering footsteps in the eternal way."

CHAPTER II

"I hold the world but as the world, Gratiano;
A stage where every man must play a part,
And mine a sad one."—SHAKESPEARE.

The great decisions of our lives are generally made in very undramatic settings. There is no stage music to carry us through the dreaded moment; we live through a crisis, and take up the thread of ordinary life again without a pause.

Morning dawned dull and grey, inclined to be rainy. Breakfast was served at eight-thirty as usual; at nine o'clock Evelyn interviewed her cook-general. Half-an-hour later she was hard at work upon the ordinary duties of the day. There was household linen to mend, silver to clean, china to be dusted; we have to go on with our daily work until the heavens mercifully fall.

There was no item of regular routine which she omitted: not even that of prayer. Yet Evelyn was no hypocrite. She knew quite well what the Church would say of her decision; she knew that she was risking her hold even on Christ's all-embracing pity. For the wantons and sinners He had forgiven had come to Him in shame and penitence, meaning to sin no more. In the one Biblical incident where He was brought in contact with a woman who expressed no remorse for the past, He Himself had given His injunctions solemnly—even while forbidding others to condemn her—"Go thou and sin no more."

Evelyn, of her own deliberate choice and will, from whatever motive, was setting out upon the path which religion and the world alike call iniquitous. The point of difference between the two judgments lies in this alone, that whereas the Catholic Church tries to stamp out and does actually condemn deeds which may for ever be concealed from those about us, the world condones all sin that clokes itself attractively, until the cloak is torn away. Then it is prompt to give sentence.

Those who, like Evelyn, make their choice in something of the spirit of a martyr, neither shirk nor evade the details of their fall. She was offering herself to Farquharson as the alternative of worldly fame. Had he retained his post in the Ministry she would, little by little, have drifted away from his life. But as things stood, this was impossible. Last night she had seen him shorn of every ambition, every hope, bereft of power and honour, shamed and broken, disappointed and disillusioned, forced to live with a woman who, once only uncongenial, was now actively abhorrent; stricken to the core of his being by the loss of the little son whose tender breath upon the waters of life had turned its gall and bitterness into sweetness and solace.

Now, having made her decision, there would be no turning back, no failure in carrying out the least of the many arrangements which it demanded.

Mechanically, she set about her task of tidying the house, of setting in more precise order that which was always orderly. She had withdrawn what little money she had in her banking account, and left it in the table drawer; Brand should not be pecuniarily the worse for her absence. She wrote to various friends offering them the flat for the season; she told them to deal direct with her solicitor,

at 88 New Square, Lincoln's Inn, as she was going away shortly. She would not saddle her husband with the rent of a flat when he could live in bachelor quarters far more cheaply and conveniently.

There were a few personal possessions of her own, too, which were of value—an old diamond pendant, a pearl necklace which her grandmother had left her, a sapphire bracelet her godmother had given her at her marriage, and a few other wedding presents which were marketable. She telephoned to a jeweller whom she could trust, and interviewed him in the afternoon. The result exceeded her expectations; she was able to leave over two hundred and fifty pounds in bank-notes and cash in the table drawer, for her husband to dispose of as he chose.

Five o'clock struck before Evelyn had time to think of herself. And then it was only a very ordinary incident that recalled her. In her bedroom, on her mantelpiece, there stood a plaster cross which she had bought in Italy some years before. It was unusual in its way, the work of a man she had rescued from starvation. The cross was shaped conventionally enough, but the Figure upon it was clumsy and distorted. It looked like a travesty of suffering, an almost grotesque image of the sublime sacrifice. Of late, she had noticed that the pedestal on the right side of the cross had worn away a little; in her hurried dusting, the maid had perhaps given it a knock which made it likely to overbalance. Evelyn came into the room suddenly, and the Image fell, shattered, at her feet—crushed into so many pieces that nothing would mend it. She lifted it up with a little cry of dismay; one may renounce one's creed, in action, yet worship it in the temple of the heart.

She did not often enter Brand's dressing-room, so full was it of little things which jarred. Over his bed there was the figure of a satyr chasing a nude figure; water dripped from the woman's limbs, surprised while bathing. The walls had been distempered in a pale green tone which gave significance to the frames of the other pictures, mostly reproductions of French impressionist studies, types of the art of Claude Monet and his followers. One showed a naked woman lying on a bed with black sheets and black pillows; round her neck was a narrow band of black velvet. Another was the picture of a ballet-dancer, done by a leading member of the New English Art Club, a clever study in its way. In the foreground was the flare of footlights, concentrating their illumination upon the bare boards of a Paris music-hall stage. The central figure was that of a ballet-girl with whirling skirts and disordered hair; she was leaning forward, smiling, as she danced, at an audience roused to the utmost pitch of frenzy by the suggestion of pose and gesture. Another was the copy of an old French print, called in simple language, "Le Bouquet." A woman was lying in a wood, her head resting on a mound; her

lover was kneeling beside her, looking down; he was crushing a bunch of roses against her breast and its disordered drapery.

The writing-table was in the window. Evelyn crossed to it; it was dusty. She cleaned and tidied this room herself, remaking the bed, which the servant had made carelessly; washing the glasses of the pictures, and the frames; tidying the dressing-table and polishing the wardrobe. When all was done she stopped to look back at her work, to see if anything was forgotten. The waste-paper basket was still full.

She slipped off her apron and emptied the contents of the basket in the folds. She was just gathering the bundle up when a stray word caught her eye. She glanced back at it, puzzled, suddenly suspicious. "Concession?"—that was not a term of which one made general use. She took up the torn slip of paper—"... *garding the terms of the concession.*"

The first word was broken, but it was obvious enough: "Regarding the terms of the concession." What did that mean? The note was in Brand's handwriting; to what concession did he refer? Forgotten words and acts returned to her; the terrible suspicion raised by Lady Wereminster's innocent words—the scene in the hall, now some time back.

She stood for a moment looking down, bewildered; then bolted the door and prepared slowly to sift, one by one, the contents of the basket. Brand was a careful man. He had disposed of the torn-up pieces of his notes of the Treaty which he had stolen from Farquharson in various channels. Some had been thrown from the window; others scattered in the wind on his way to the Strand; there were but a few pieces of the original paper upon which he had scrawled his first rough translation of the cypher in the waste-paper basket, which Evelyn's careless maid-servant had left there for more than a week, because it was not noticeably full.

She had set out upon the table certain familiar words and phrases in an unfamiliar shape. As yet she did not take in their full force. Yet they rang, with curious insistence, at the door of her heart; she was sure that in some way they affected the welfare both of herself and him she loved. Fate—rather, God—had decreed that she should find them and act upon her knowledge.

She looked at them again, amazed and stupefied. They had been written in a hurry, and blotted, seemingly, upon soiled blotting-paper; the words, even the separate words, were blurred and almost unintelligible. Yet some stood out, clear and distinct: "Treaty—concession—negotiations," the very name of the Power involved. And all these she recalled; she had read them on the morning after the great scene in the House; they were the terms of the Treaty which Farquharson was supposed to have sold to the Power that coveted England's supremacy.

Why should Brand have copied them when he could have cut out the more

concise account that was printed in the daily papers? ... And this work showed signs of obliteration and change, as though translated by an unaccustomed hand; there were many erasures and corrections. In one case, for instance, there was the revision of a complete sentence which had obviously been misunderstood at first by a reader unversed in the code.

Evelyn had caught up the heap of scattered fragments in her hurry. Such portions as had been destroyed had evidently been chosen in haste, picked at random from a number of torn pieces; for occasionally one could put together half a consecutive line, while often again whole lines were missing. The notes and letters were in various handwritings. White to the lips, her face set and stern, dreading she knew not what, she separated those which were not written by Brand from those which were. Pausing a moment to reflect, she went back to these, and patiently grouped them into little heaps, piecing them together with infinite care. Amongst others there was a note from Dora—this was the first time she had learned that Mrs. Farquharson was in communication with her husband.

Dora's note—oh, the rashness of women!—was dated two days before these inexplicable notes of Brand's. "I don't see how I can do what you want," she had written; then a few lines were missing, "should you press me ... can't hold up against ... too strong ... as you wish ... time is short ... we have ... hurry. Cruel of ... he has never done much for me ... should think ... his piece of mind? ... Miserable ... unhappy ..."

A few odd fragments of note-paper were still left in the basket, written in a strange hand. Evelyn took these out. They contained a brief message arranging an immediate interview, signed with the name of the man through whose hands it was suspected, failing Von Kirsch, that the stolen notes had passed.

The envelope was addressed to Henry Brand.

"*To-day at four-thirty—Meningen.*" And the date upon the letter was one never to be forgotten.

"*To-day at four-thirty—Meningen.*" Evelyn repeated the words aloud. The sound reached her meaninglessly, in confused vibrations, as sounds reach the ears of the deaf. For the moment reason swayed; how could she grapple with the difficulties that faced her? with all that the little scraps of paper involved?

Cold, stern, pitiless, Evelyn stood beside the table, looking down at her work. How clear things seemed now, and yet—could they be clear? Would any Englishman, however poor, be treacherous to his country where her honour was imperilled, where her safety was threatened? Would any wife betray her husband to save herself? Her heart answered her. Only a man like Brand—the man with whose life she had been linked indissolubly; only a woman like Dora—without heart or imagination.

This must be given to the world—at once. Her heart leapt. Farquharson

would be saved—by her—his character re-established. Once reinstated he would hold his own; the stronger for the seeming fall, he would go on from strength to strength.

But what of her? He would not need her now. And what of Brand? Shamed and broken, proved a traitor, forced perhaps to pay the penalty of his crime, how could she desert him now?

Yet—how to stay? She shuddered. No, to stay was impossible. But she must safeguard Brand as far as possible. There was no one she could take into her confidence, no one to help her. And again there was so much to do, so little time to do it in!

Evelyn knew something of official methods in dealing with secret agents; the country which had benefited by Brand's betrayal of the negotiations would be the last to help him. Yet he must be got away at once, to another country under another name. He was staying at Seaford; from there it would be easy to get to Newhaven; if she wrote at once, he would get her letter by the second post at latest, he could in all probability take the morning boat to Dieppe, and from thence journey inland. There was a little village she knew of, a few miles from Paris, where he would be secure until he had arranged his plans. Or he could ship straight to Marseilles; there were no towns more easy to be lost in than Marseilles and Barcelona, hotbeds of cosmopolitan intrigue.

Her brain cleared. She would arrange to meet Brand at Marseilles, to give him the money which she dared not trust by post. A cheque was, of course, too dangerous to be thought of for a moment; notes even might be traced, so could money orders and drafts upon foreign banks. It would take an hour or two at least to change so large a sum of money into the English gold which alone was secure.

So much for the practical side; what of the human?

How could she go back to her old life now, when the new life had been within her very grasp? Hourly to spend oneself for others, to wake in the morning with no thought but how best to equip relations and friends with armour to shield them from the world's slings and arrows, to be a sort of model housekeeper with no wages, is doubtless excellent and useful, but it is not life.

She went into the little sitting-room and stood where she had stood a few hours before, her lover's arms about her, his kiss on her hair. It was the hour of her life, all she would ever have. Other people talked of love; she knew what it was. There was a difference. She had always known it in her heart; known what it might be to surrender herself utterly, in the way which most human beings cannot realize, bending will and mind and heart in joyous service, one with her husband, as Lady Wereminster had meant when she said that only in the later days of marriage was its summit reached—because to the right man and the right

woman custom only deepens the tenderness of first tremulous ties and changes their promise to fulfilment.

Her love and Farquharson's was born of conflict and sacrifice. It is the only love which survives. For years her life had been actively paralyzed; the frozen blood in her veins had warmed at his touch. When, at parting, she had seen his eyes kindle at the reflection of the light in her own, her heart had leapt radiantly, as though for the first time conscious of its power. Yet now at the very moment when life had opened out limitlessly, she must turn her back upon it, must shut out the glowing picture.

Must she shut it out? Must she? Would he wish it? She could give him the human happiness which he craved, peace and oblivion.

Peace, when he had left his wife? And what of Evelyn herself? Before her stretched two paths. Which should she take?

There were voices in her ear; the voice of her director, stern, implacable; the voice of conscience, loud and shrill; Cummings' voice, grieved and pitiful.

"Marriage is a sacrament," said one; "how have you observed it?" "You have abandoned yourself to sin; you have renounced your safeguards of salvation, abjuring the help of your creed for the sake of a passing illusion," said another. "Alas! because of you, Christ is crucified daily," said the third. "Not a wound of His but bleeds afresh when you sin." "How can there be aught but eternal damnation for him who sets his hand to the plough and turns back?" asked the first. "Faith encompassed you as a garment," said the second. "You have rent its mantle. You have stripped yourself to stand in voluntary wantonness before the eyes of men, you who were made in the image of your Maker, upon whose brow there has been set the seal which for ever places you apart from your fellow's—the mark of God by which He knows His own, that you are ready to sear now and efface."

"You plead love as your excuse," said the third sadly. "But is it love to drag down the soul of another into eternal conflict? A mother refuses her child what it wants, although it hurts her to deny him, because she knows he cannot take the thing he would without harm. God knows best."

"It is the eleventh hour," said the first; "but the Church has spoken and you must obey. Therein lies her power; she does not plead, but she demands. You subscribed to her irrevocable tenets as a child; they hold you still. No merely human power is mighty enough to withstand her, because she rests upon unshakable foundations, and you, unstable and derelict as you are, still know that from afar the beacon of light shines, that although you have strayed now from your Mother, she will guide you to the end."

A derelict—a human derelict. Yes, it was true—the words described her.

She fell down on the floor of the little sitting-room, sobbing great tearless

sobs and beating fruitlessly at the air. Useless to fight the most perfect, the most complete, the most unanimous system that has been since the world began. The Catholic Church is like a wonderful machine; unlike that made by man, it cannot break down. Evelyn was its child, bred in obedience. Once, many years ago in Liverpool, she had seen some wonderful invention which revolved at the rate of some hundreds of turns in thirty seconds. Unluckily for her, she entered the room just after a serious accident. A careless workman standing near had been caught by the wheels and cut to pieces before it could be stopped. The invention itself was beyond praise; it had done incalculable good to humanity. Only a few comparatively worthless lives had been sacrificed to it. That was all. It had helped millions. Was that not also true of the Church?

She rose wearily. Time was passing.

She took up her pen and wrote to Brand, sealing the letter.

"I hope that this will reach you in time, that you may catch the morning train to Marseilles. I have found the absolute proof in your own handwriting that you stole the Treaty. I am withholding these proofs for twenty-four hours; that will give you time to leave the country. You will, of course, change your name. If you go at once, on receipt of this, to the Hôtel de Londres, I will meet you as soon as possible, within twenty-four hours or forty-eight, as the case may be, with about two hundred pounds in English gold. That should make your position clear until I have time to carry through my intention—which is to make over to you, under whatever name you permanently assume, the hundred pounds a year which I received from my father.

"At the Hôtel de Londres I shall ask for Mr. Hendry. See that your name is booked as that in the hotel register."

Evelyn fastened the letter deliberately. No very difficult task this. But—what of her letter to Farquharson?

For here—how many sides took arms against her? Nature—cowardice—physical frailty, even. They were so mighty an array, these almost visible temptations which struck at the very root of her being, which surrounded her and weighed her down with a solid panoply of strength. And to meet them she had but her piteous array of threadbare honour and tottering faith.

For Farquharson it was different. Those who have fame cannot reasonably expect love; life is as best a compromise. Farquharson's career was wide and high. The fate of nations lay in his hand; nations, like individuals, move mechanically to a set tune. The average man deals in small issues; his view is bounded by his neighbour's fences. But Farquharson's boundaries were limitless; they stretched from empire to empire.

"I send you these enclosures," she wrote at last, "they explain themselves. I trust to your honour to keep them back for two and a half days from your receipt of this letter. You have borne so much already; you will bear this for me. This alters everything, of course. You won't need me now. Had I been able to atone in the smallest degree for your shame and betrayal, you know that I would have given myself gladly, without a moment's hesitation. But your career is opening out again before you. You are not mine really, you see; you never were mine in the biggest sense. Men like you are too big to be bound down by a woman's love; you will reach your goal the quicker because you haven't me beside you. Everything is settled; my husband's escape and my own. It will tell in his favour if I too seem involved in the inevitable scandal. We shall have to stand or fall together in this. Such help as I can give him by identifying myself with his interests must be his—is, in fact, his due, considering that in my heart I violated every law of God's that bound us.

"Don't try to find me; I have to take my courage in both hands as it is. There are some things beyond expression.

"Good-bye. That's a cold word to say. I doubt if it ever has been said with a more profound sense of farewell. We shall never meet again in the future; we have met too often in the past. Yet how sweet it has been, some of it—worth every pang, every wound. How sweet it might have been, you and I know.... But we cannot stand against God's will.

"I could write on for ever—what's the use? We know the truth. We belong to each other, now and always. The two lives which stand between us now are shadows, which once in eternity will disappear."

She folded the two letters, addressed them, and went down-stairs to post them herself. There was a letter with a foreign postmark in the box; she recognized the handwriting as Hare's, although so weak and tremulous. She held it for a moment in her hand, wondering what it contained; Hare was an infrequent correspondent. She decided to post her letters first, and read his message afterwards. There was so much still to be done that night. She had still to arrange her own plans of escape. To Marseilles she must inevitably go—but afterwards? That lay on the knees of the gods. When once she had seen Brand, she would take the next train out to the unknown.

CHAPTER III

"They kill me, they cut my flesh ... what then? ... In matter of death carry thyself scornfully ... either the gods can do nothing for us, or they can allay the distemper of thy mind. If they can do nothing, why dost thou pray?"—MARCUS AURELIUS.

To overwrought nerves there is occasionally something soothing in the movement of a train. Evelyn, on her way to Marseilles, looked back to the rush of events of the last few days with amazement and wonder. By the same post as Hare's letters there had come one from his solicitor; a brief announcement of the fact that he had received instructions from his client authorizing him to communicate with Mrs. Brand immediately upon his death. The solicitor wished to see Mrs. Brand, if possible, within the next twenty-four hours, as she, amongst others, benefited by the will. Would she telephone to 8431, Central, at once to fix a meeting?

She had met him then and there, in view of her sudden departure abroad. It was necessary to make a fresh will; having disposed of Hare's legacy in charity, the solicitor obeyed her instructions regarding her husband, without restriction. An hour later found Evelyn ready to leave England, to start a new life under new conditions. Through the train windows she watched village after village flit by, as though she was looking at the shifting scenes of a biograph. Only dimly aware of beauty, she whirled through the kaleidoscope of colour, of full and fragrant orchards, of fields of daffodils, by vineyards and woods, until at last she reached the coast, and before her the view of the Mediterranean stretched, in its eternal blue. She had gone through the hours of travel oblivious and stupefied, hardly conscious even of the occasional stoppages of the train.

Brand was awaiting her, he had arrived twelve hours before. Their interview was brief. He took the money, and promised what she asked. He would never trouble her again; this was the end.

She did not take his hand; she could not. At the last he turned.

"You're a good woman, Evelyn," he said suddenly.

That chapter of her life was closed, and she set out for the unknown.

She was bending her steps towards a radiant vision—Monserrato. Years before, on a night's journey from Barcelona, she had come upon it unexpectedly in the dawn. Her fellow-travellers in the compartment had departed; she was just then alone with her companion, a portly lady of uncertain age, who would have slept profoundly through an earthquake. Tired and over-wrought, Evelyn had for some time been looking at the landscape with eyes which scarcely took

in its significance. Suddenly, on her right, there rose a vision so startling, so mysterious, that for a moment she believed it to be the image of her brain, a supernatural vision. Spire upon spire showed before her, serrated hills, bare and austere, grey and cold in the first gleam of the morning. She saw their outlines distinctly for a full half-minute; then, as the railway line swerved, they were lost to sight, and for a little while she thought they were a dream. They looked so like hills of illusion, behind which lay God's gift of eventual peace. But as the train converged towards the station the hills came suddenly close again, and she knew them to be real.

So near at hand, they almost terrified her. One realized in face of them how Ignatius Loyola had toiled, barefoot, every step of the way across those rugged paths. They were an obvious *viâ crucis*. To step across them in shoes, with the ordinary trappings of civilization, was sacrilege; they compelled renunciation, the absolute denial of all that life held dear, before a believer dared set foot on that sacred pathway.

Well, she had proved her right to stand there, to walk in the way of the martyr. The bleeding of human feet is, after all, a temporary small inconvenience; when the soul bleeds, God tests its loss and gain.

Hour after hour went by; she was too tired to think or read. Now and again a sharp pain at her heart, like a blow, brought her to herself, and she had to raise herself from the cushions against which she had fallen, limp and lifeless, absolutely apathetic, to gasp for breath. The little physical interruption cleared her brain; she looked quite clearly at the future, and knew what its ensuing hours would bring. In time, probably, she would take up old threads again. Habit is strong, and friends assertive; bury herself as she would, some one would find her out and come inevitably for help or pity. But she would have to draw now upon the well of bitterness instead of a sacred fount. No matter. The water looked as crystal clear; those who sipped it would not know from what source it had sprung.

Before her interminable days, immeasurable nights. The nights were the worst. Already terror seized her in its grip. She had awakened to find herself calling upon Farquharson with passionate frenzy; shrieking to him to come and help her bear what could not be borne alone; to drive away, if it were but for an instant, the host of shapes that threatened her, the inward foes that tore at every bleeding fibre, and mocked her as they bathed themselves in the blood of her heart. When she was awake, she longed for sleep; when sleep came, she prayed for wakefulness.

That way lay mania; better death. Ah, but death comes so seldom to him

who craves it as a boon; it only robs the mother of her son, the husband of the wife he cherishes, the little, helpless baby of his mother's care!——

She fell into a troubled sleep.

She woke to find the beauty of the Mediterranean on her left, its exquisite coastline soft with the flush of evening. Leaning back in hopeless weariness, she wondered how, had she come face to face with her Maker at that moment, she would have justified her existence. For a short while before she had asked herself, in all gravity, why she should give up all that life held dear for the sake of what might be after all, the beautiful dream of a young Nazarene, who died for the sake of His philosophy, as many others did before his time?

Yes, love had been her betrayer, the seducer of her soul. In the old legends the gift of love was always made by the good godmother. Treasure as it was thought to be, it had sharp facets which wounded the heart of her who pressed it to her bosom.

Looking at life now with that sense of curious detachment which comes to some of us when we stand on the brink of a moral precipice, it seemed to her that God had given His Great Gift of Love for this, and this alone—to show by the mutability of earthly things—even by the very highest passion which human love can attain—the necessity of leaving all for eternity, of tearing every human chord and tie to shreds, that from the broken strands we might weave a tiny ladder upon which wearily to climb into God's Kingdom.

One compensation had been given her. She had helped the man she loved. She had made him forget the bitter memories of his childhood; she had rejoiced at his success, and mourned with him in pain; she had reinstated him in the eyes of the world he loved, and made it possible that he should leave behind an honoured name. Only one thing was wanting.... But suddenly a vision formed; her life was full of visions now—she could not tell reality from dreams. She saw the open door of a little church on the hillside, far away in a distant land, but full of the presence of God. She saw the light of faith issue from it in a visible stream, pouring like a mountain torrent down the hillside, giving life to flowers which sprung up on the way. Up the steep hill a traveller came; he moved faintly and wearily, the light had gone from his eyes; she recognized him. Slowly Farquharson came to the door, there to stand blinded in the transfiguring light shed from the jewelled monstrance high upon its throne. And a man came forward, a man with outstretched hands, whose look was very welcoming—Cummings. She heard his voice ring out with a great gladness: "This is what she wished; it was for this that she laid down her life...."

Now she was nearing her goal—had come, indeed, almost within range of Monserrato's message. But there was Barcelona to go through first; that wild hell of intrigue and rebellion, the threshold of unbelief. Its noise, its tumult, its gaiety, its dissipation, lay visibly before her as the train crept slowly in, on its long pause in the station. She got out wearily—it was strange how her limbs had dragged these last few days—and took her breakfast in the little *fonda*. She sat there motionless, watching the hurrying cosmopolitan crowd of passengers go swiftly to and fro. Barcelona harbours the refuse of many nations, and of itself breeds anarchy and terror. But on beyond—not very far the great pinnacles of Monserrato were raised high in the heavens. Barcelona might lie and cheat and steal and vomit infamy; nothing could break the force of those eternal hills beyond, and nothing sully them.

She had still a journey of three hours before her. The train came at last and she got in. This was not the season for tourists; in all probability she would be alone in the convent. She knew what she had to expect: a bare room, with its plain bed and chair, a crucifix upon the wall, the mere necessities of life—more, after all, than had been offered to the Mother of God at Bethlehem.

It seemed to her as she approached the little station that she caught an echo of faint Gregorian music, the only music that such mountains could give back. It rang like a distant chant. Sometimes she seemed to catch a word or two, a kind of *Nunc dimittis*, the song of the soul from which all earthly trappings had fallen away, which was setting out, weary and travel-stained, on its last journey.

The train slowed down. She rose. The breath of the mountains was upon her now, solemn and mystic. Above her, in the dusk, they loomed massive and upright, like great giants. Past their base the footsteps of at least one saint had gone; the way was wet with the blood of pilgrims.

The place of suffering—made by sufferers. Well, she had earned her right of entry.

CHAPTER IV

"The perfect beauty of the body and soul thou saved
In thy passion for God's sake, He who is Pity.

> Was the trial sore?—temptation sharp? Thank God a second time.
> Why comes temptation but for man to meet
> And master and make crouch beneath his foot,
> And so be pedestaled in triumph?"—R. B. BROWNING.

A night of stupor, in which Evelyn lay wide-eyed, staring out into the darkness, feeling the close presence of the mountains, whose solemn force penetrated even her bare bedroom. A day of comparative peace followed; of quiet detachment. The tranquil life was broken only by the sound of the convent bell.

At the back of the convent was a garden of roses which reminded her of the Valley of Vision in the Bible—roses, miraculously brought, said the legend, from a great distance. They had once bloomed white, but a drop of our Lord's blood, flowing from the Cross at Calvary, had stained them red. The rosery was backed by long lines of hills, each separate hill converged to a point; there were terraces full of perfume and colour, supernatural in their silence. Everything about her breathed prayer and sacrifice. In the chapel, of course, the twin forces concentrated; one expected as much—but they were visible, too, in the quietude of the deep ravines, bordered with ilex and box, the huge gorges, and in the little hermitage, to which a way was found by means of a path most perilous. Here—at the Cueva de Garin—she found a painted figure on the wall depicting a hermit who, having travelled there on hands and knees, lived on in that position till his death.

Only the greatest love, only the greatest suffering can be laid on the altar of Monserrato. It is like the corridor of Eternity; immortal life is only just beyond.

The hours crawled by sluggishly, wearily; Evelyn scarcely knew how. The monks offered the actual lodging free, but near at hand there was a *fonda* where simple fare could easily be obtained. It was not easy to think of the little ordinary conveniences of life in Monserrato; they scarcely seemed to matter; and Evelyn, setting out early next afternoon, began to make her pilgrimage towards the summit of the mountains, with labouring breath and faltering footsteps, unmindful of the fact that she had not tasted food for many hours.

She reached her goal only when sunset had painted the very ground she stood upon with roseate colours. Between herself and the highest heaven there stretched a gossamer veil of gold. And here at last was the reality for which she longed. She felt as though, had she but faith enough, she could have been carried through the whirling spaces upwards and onwards to a place of rest whose beauties were undreamed of by even the purest saint in the little monastery below.

She stayed there for a long while—longer even than she knew. The light failed. She rose slowly to her feet. Descent was difficult; she knew now how

weak she was. Now and again she stumbled. Over her eyes there was a strange dimness, the gradual decay of thought. Presently limbs and brain alike refused their offices. She felt as though she were being taken up bodily into the grip of some great grey, mocking Shape that held her to itself and paralyzed her. But she pressed on, guided by some unswerving instinct, to the door of the convent. There, and there only, she dropped in the act of pulling at the bell.

Some one came; some one carried her into her room. She revived when water was poured on her forehead and her hands were laved. They left her. After a while she recovered sufficiently to undress. Presently all was still.

There was no sound in the convent now, not even in the chapel; the dull droning of monks in their lonely cells, chanting offices of penitence and remorse, did not reach her. And now in this infinitely lonely hour, alike afar from friend and foe, a kinder form seemed to come close, one which she did not recognize, yet which made clear those hidden things about which she still feared to ask.

Away in the distance, very far away, as she passed swiftly through those grey shadows of oblivion which so many of us would welcome as friends, she saw the figure of her lover up to the last standing erect and triumphant on his little pinnacle of fame, the living symbol of that for which she had come near renouncing every hope of the hereafter which held her at that very moment in its grip. The vision dispersed. Through the room, very slowly, she thought she felt little streams of cold air filtering; they made a dull rhythm, like the running water of a Highland burn. She tried to listen to their music, but could not; in the hour of death the brain, last servant to escape from the house of a powerful master, mocks our call. She struggled desperately to come back from the long passage down which her weakened spirit was being compelled—the last effort of one who was born a fighter. Over her body an icy sweat had broken, in her limbs there was no longer warmth or life. She listened to the beats of her heart striking dimly like the hammer of a clock that was running out. This, then, was death—the truce to struggle.

She was too tired even to be glad. But suddenly light broke.

At the beginning of life there had been offered to her, as there is offered to each one in turn, the choice of many banners, one of which she was bound to uphold until the end—fame, wealth, peace, honour, and love and sacrifice, which go together.

She had chosen the banner of love and sacrifice. Very feebly she sought to grasp it now; it seemed to her a visible fragment which she must wave as her breath died. She fell back. And suddenly out of the darkness she seemed to smell the perfume of a rose, a pure white flower that turned deep red before her eyes.

Was it fancy, or did the Figure on the wall, the crucified Christ, turn His head? All was blurred and indistinct, but once again she thought she heard Far-

quharson's saddened voice in her ears, and Farquharson's touch laid tenderly on her brow. She tried to say his name, but her stiffening lips would not frame it. She tried to grasp her rose, but it fell in dust.

In his cell below, an old monk, weeping, lifted his voice in passionate appeal.

"Oro supplex et acclinis
Cor contritum quasi cinis,
Gere curam mei finis."

In the morning they found her still and quiet, in the possession of the one good gift which life had brought her. Her face was turned, her fingers pointing towards, but not grasping, the little wooden crucifix upon the wall. So they unhung it and laid it on her breast.

THE END

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