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VOL. 3793.

THE RING FROM JAIPUR.  
BY  
FRANCES MARY PEARD.

IN ONE VOLUME.

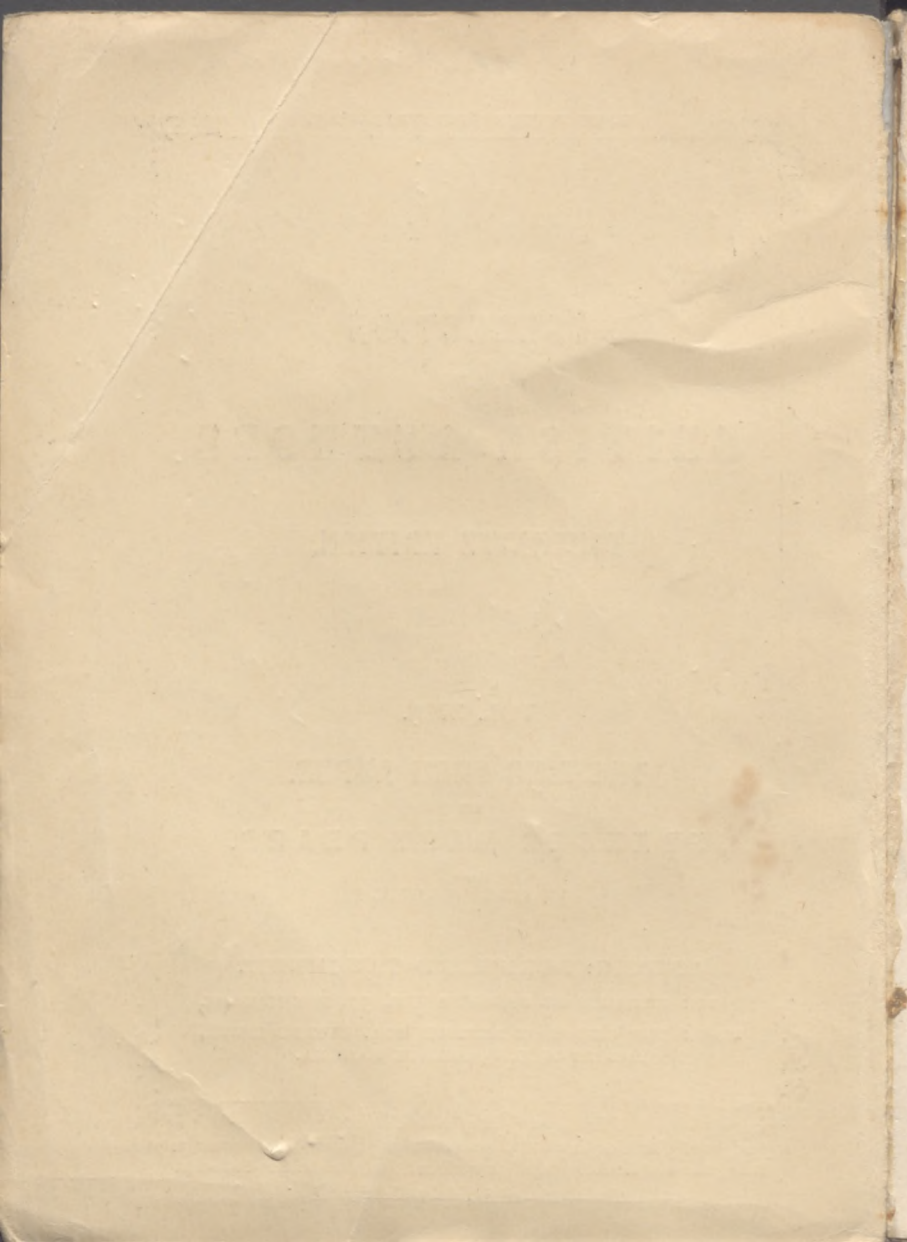
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I N O N E V O L U M E .

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THE  
RING FROM JAIPUR

BY

FRANCES MARY PEARD

AUTHOR OF "THE ROSE-GARDEN," "NEAR NEIGHBOURS,"  
"NUMBER ONE AND NUMBER TWO," ETC. ETC.

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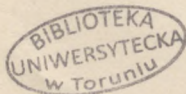
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1905.

THE  
RING FROM JALPUR

"A ring.  
What of it? 'Tis a figure, a symbol, say;  
A thing's sign: now for the thing signified."

BROWNING.



Ms. B. 3. 27

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## THE RING FROM JAIPUR.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### A BREACH.

HE reached the door, hesitated, came back.

"Then everything's altogether at an end?" he said in a voice which he was trying to control.

"I think not," she said, opening her eyes. "So far as I am concerned, I feel as if everything might be just beginning."

"Rot!" he answered roughly. "You know better."

Patty flung him a look of genuine surprise.

"Do you mean to say you don't understand yet!" she exclaimed. "And I have been explaining it to you so nicely and clearly."

"Explaining! What you can't explain away is, that you're my wife. By all the laws of God and man—my wife."

He repeated the words doggedly, savagely, standing stiffly as he spoke, like a man braced to meet a blow. But he did not look at her. She was sitting on a broad fender stool, for though it was India, it was December,

and December in a northern province. Big logs were crackling on the hearth, and the fire-light fell on the dark red of her hair. At his speech she opened her eyes more widely, and she laughed.

"Mike," she protested gaily, "really you are too funny! You do love to fly off at a tangent."

Whatever might be the cause, he was very angry, very much moved, for he swore a big oath in answer, and she put up her hand, and shook her head reprovingly.

"It is quite unnecessary to quarrel," she said, "quite. I have made up my mind, and nothing will change it. Please don't count upon such a possibility. But there is no reason why our parting should be anything but friendly."

He made an impatient movement, and she stopped.

"Oh, go on!" he said.

"I was going to say that if you talk and act in this violent manner——"

"Well?"

"Well—then I can't answer for the consequences."

"Consequences!" he repeated with heat. "I should be glad to know what could be worse than what you're doing?"

"Many things." She clasped her hands round her knees and repeated her words. "Many things. I don't at all wish to quarrel; and I suppose you would prefer to remain friends?"

"Friends! Friends with one's wife!"

They were echoing each other, as people do when they get angry.

"Why not? We always have been friends; indeed,

to tell you the truth, Mike, I don't believe we've ever been anything else——”

“You've no right to say that,” he interrupted.

“Right? But I liked it, I like it still. Don't imagine that I am complaining.”

He looked at her up-turned face, wavered, came a step nearer, and his voice broke.

“Then if you've liked it, Patty, why can't you have a little patience? I didn't know. Friends! Good God! I've worshipped the very ground you walked on, every hair of your head, I—I——”

“I know you have,” she admitted, regarding him calmly. And then she smiled. “I believe, to tell you the truth again, Mike, that you've worshipped a little too much. I suppose we're all made differently. I can't feel the same. It isn't in my line. I can't warm up to it. I'm half afraid that—that——”

“That what?”

“That it bores me.”

Mike Hamilton turned sharply away. He stood with his back to her, resting his hands and drumming with his fingers on the table, and once again he had to put a strong bridle on himself.

“If that is your feeling——” he was beginning, when she unexpectedly interrupted him.

“I think it is.” She got up and stood behind him, and for the first time there was a stir of trouble in her voice. “Honestly, I'm not quite sure, but I think it is. It's not your fault, Mike, and I expect there's no help for it. I'm ready to admit that it may be something wanting in me, but at any rate you've got to own that I have never deceived you. Before we married I told .

you what I felt, and you said it was all right; but it couldn't have been. You couldn't have understood. I've never worshipped you, and I've never wanted to be worshipped. I thought we should always be jolly together, as Jack, and Phil, and Cissy, and I were. But it isn't the same. It isn't in the least the same. I think they and I suit each other better. If you only knew how awfully I want to see them again! And the dogs."

Bitterness surged in his heart. He had staked everything and lost. He was untouched by her appeal; he did not even recognise a certain pathos in the childish words. He was conscious only of the cruel truth that she did not love, had never loved him; that he had read in her words and actions gracious signs which did not belong to them; that, in short, he had been an idiot, who bored her. He said in a hard voice—

"Certainly, if I weigh as nothing against Jack, and Phil, and Cissy, and—the dogs, you are wise to go. I suppose I may inquire whether you are aware of the talk it will create in the station?"

"Oh, quite," she said, indifferent again. "And I am sure they should be very grateful to me at that gossipy old Club for giving them something new to talk about."

"It doesn't seem to occur to you," he insisted, "that the talk may not be very pleasant for me."

She smiled radiantly.

"That depends upon yourself, doesn't it? If you go about looking injured and forlorn, you may be sure they will say disagreeable things. I don't mind in the least, but you might. If you'll take my advice, you'll

pull yourself together, lose a little at bridge, and be as cheery as Captain Anderson and Mr. Stamford, who are in the same plight."

"You're mistaken," he said eagerly. "Mrs. Anderson and Mrs. Stamford have gone home much against their will. They couldn't stand the climate."

She laughed.

"Couldn't they? Mike, for a man who has seen something of the world, you are really astonishingly simple. Come, shall I make you an offer? If Mr. Stamford wants to send anything after his wife, as he is a friend of yours, I'll go out of my way and leave it at Monte Carlo. It's very kind of me, because I shall be counting the minutes. But I will."

Now that his eyes were opened to it, it was this medley of shrewdness and childishness which baffled Mike Hamilton. Counting upon the one, the other faced him. He stood in the same position with his back turned to her, and when he spoke, there was a mechanical and hard ring in his voice.

"I had better understand. Do you ask me to say that you, too, have gone home on account of your health?"

"What do you think?" she returned lightly. "Wouldn't it be better to confine yourself to what you said of them, and give out that I couldn't stand the climate? It's true, I can't." And she slightly shivered. "I loathe—oh, how I loathe!—the heat, and the dust, and the natives, and the dried-up feeling, and the servants with lying chits, and the whole life——"

"Including your husband."

"No," she answered reflectively; "no. I don't hate you yet——"

"Come, that's something to be grateful for," he broke in with a laugh, which it was not good to hear.

"—but I might. That's what I'm afraid of."

"Glad you haven't touched bottom yet. I suppose, now, you never were afraid of hating Jack, or Phil, or Cissy, or—the dogs?"

"How could I! I wish you wouldn't speak of them in that tone. Of course they are different."

"Naturally. A husband can't hope to attain that higher level."

She looked at him in some perplexity.

"You haven't known me so long. And—somehow they and I always understand each other."

Was there a catch in her voice? He faced round abruptly.

"Look here, Patty. What is it I don't understand? I try."

The dreamy look in her eyes vanished, and a laugh flickered in them again.

"But, my dear Mike, that's just it. You try so hard—and so do I, though you mayn't believe it. They and I don't try. We just do it."

He looked at her with a great impetus of hope.

"Mightn't it come to the same in the end?" he asked eagerly. "As you say, we haven't known each other so long, and I always told you I was a thick-headed fellow. If you'd only have a trifle more patience——"

"But," she interrupted, "that's what I thought—that by-and-by we should fall into each other's ways. I give you my word that I haven't been the least bit unreasonable. I have waited and waited, until now I

feel as if I could wait no longer. For it is useless. It doesn't get in the least nearer. I am very sorry."

And again he turned away with an angry gesture.

"Looks like it," he muttered.

"Yes. Sometimes I am very sorry," she persisted. "Only just now, when I know I am going to see them all so soon, I can't feel sorry about anything. You ought not to expect it."

"Oughtn't I? Certainly what you expect me to understand now, is beyond me. Has it happened to strike you in the midst of this extreme contentment, that it's not the pleasantest position in the world for a man to be left to kick his heels here while his wife goes off to amuse herself in England?"

She slightly shrugged her shoulders.

"I can imagine worse positions—for the man. But we have gone over the pros and cons so often, don't you think we had better only consider the inevitable? When is the boat? Oh, I know; on the thirty-first, and this is the fifteenth. I shall not have any great preparations to make. But, Mike, tell the syce to bring round the dog-cart to-morrow at twelve, and I will go and leave cards at all the gates, and spend two mortal hours in doing the righteous things you so often rebuke me for not doing. When I go away, I shall leave quite a nice impression behind me. Are you not pleased?"

He did not answer. He could not, for a cold hand seemed to have gripped his heart, and killed something there. He walked to the door, and this time passed out without so much as a backward look. His wife, who had not been his wife for a year, let him go unnoticed. No thought came to her that there was more

in this departure than the mere going out of a room, that it might be no less than a passing out of her life. She sat down again on the fender stool, leaned her head against the indigo-coloured phulkaris, and stared into the fire with dreamy happy eyes. Already she had forgotten his reproaches, in the satisfaction of a leap of thought to her old home. What delight would not her return cause to one and all! She would not even write until one week beforehand, because the promise and the fulfilment were to come so closely together. Her resolution, indeed, had been sudden. Seized with a wild and impulsive desire to get home, she had startled, hurt, amazed her husband. Hurt him too much for him to attempt to use authority; which, moreover, she would have certainly disregarded. Authority she had never admitted, it would not have occurred to her to connect the word with Mike, and hitherto in the careless security of a surface happiness, he had made no more than an occasional jesting attempt to assert it. But now, when the very foundations of life seemed to be slipping from beneath his feet, he reproached himself for what had suddenly turned into weakness. There was nothing else for which he could reproach himself. All his honest love he had given, never doubting that hers, which she owned to be uncertain, would blossom out, once they were together and alone. By nature he was light-hearted and hopeful. Circumstances, which had denied him little, tended to make him the more so. He was not only an eldest son, he was also independent. The move to India, which came immediately after his marriage, he had welcomed. A keen soldier, his profession meant much to him, India he already knew and liked, and it



was natural that he should paint brilliant pictures of a life where he would have his Patty to himself.

But, to his dismay, he found that she hated it. Instead of the colour, and the glamour, and the mystery interesting they oppressed her. She, who had never known what fear was when in England, who could ride across country like a bird, was curiously and unexpectedly daunted by her new surroundings. On their way north from Bombay they stopped at Ahmedabad, that she might see the exquisite marble carvings, the street crowds with their shifting colours, the wild peacocks, the monkeys swinging from tree to tree. Mike had been certain that these things would delight her, and he had to face disappointment. For she was not even indifferent; more than once he found her shuddering. The strangeness was distasteful, and, foiled in his hopes, he assured himself that the strangeness must grow into familiarity before liking would begin. Here, again, he was mistaken, more mistaken than he knew. His wife went to the hills, came back to Peshawar, went through polo and races and the usual round of gaieties. But she never relaxed from her first insistence that it was unlike England, and therefore hateful. Still Mike, manlike, stumbled blindly along. When he thought of it at all, it was to tell himself that other women had passed through the same preliminary shrinking, only to settle down happily later. Patty made no secret of her feelings, but she laughed and jested as she had always jested, and he did not notice that sometimes there crept a touch of hardness into her jests. He did not notice. He was boyishly content. Patty was his, his pretty Patty. India might not be so jolly as England, but he had so far been in

luck, liked his work, liked his regiment, and had his wife to himself, without brothers and a sister hanging round, who were, though he dared not say so to her, sometimes a nuisance. This was enough for him; if there were anything he did not altogether understand, he set it on one side, as sure to come right in time.

And into this serene atmosphere, a sudden and amazing thunderbolt hurled itself. One day Patty told him that she was going home.

At once, too. He laughed in her face, the thing was so absurd, so impossible! She took no notice, kept her temper, still jested, but never wavered. Arguments, pleadings—all were ignored. And at last it had come to this, that her passage was taken, and the final days lay before them.

Mike had hoped that when parting was so near, remorse would awaken. But he was wrong. Her step was lighter; her laugh gayer. She left him no delusions. She allowed all her relief and joy to be frankly apparent. Nor would she own to herself that he had any cause for complaint. She had tried, failed, and been miserable—why, then, should she go on trying, failing, and being miserable?

Not for that had she left them all.

## CHAPTER II.

### THOUGHT OUT.

A BIG polo match was on at Peshawar, and the usual gay drift of sightseers streamed towards it. The natives had been waiting long, a bed of blossoming turbans,

rose-red, white, blue, orange, edging the ground, all bathed in the clear and radiant sunlight of December. Here and there, among the Europeans, it glittered on the gay clothes of some native ruler, but otherwise the English crowd was cooler in tone, and more restlessly shifted its positions.

Patty, in her dog-cart, was driving Mrs. Musgrave, the major's wife, a dark and very beautiful woman, of whom, from one cause and another, she saw more than of anyone else in the station. From the first moment of knowing, instinct had disposed her to like her, although Mrs. Musgrave was not popular at Peshawar. She was silent, and went her own way, holding aloof from what is called society. She had almost markedly held aloof from Patty, to the extent, perhaps, of raising a spirit of contradiction in the young wife, who set herself determinedly to win her. To a certain extent she had succeeded, but she could not often induce Mrs. Musgrave to come to her bungalow.

It might have been for this reason that, until now, she had not become aware that Patty's idea of going home had grown into a fixed intention. And for some reason or other it troubled her greatly.

"You cannot be serious, Patty," she said earnestly. "I will not believe it."

Patty laughed gaily.

"Sometimes," she said, "I can hardly believe it myself. It seems too good to be true."

"Too inconceivable, you should say! What excuse have you?"

"None. What would you not give to be me?"

"I would not be you—no, not for the best pony in

the Patiala team! You don't know what you are doing. Think better of it, Patty."

Obviously she was very much stirred; and the other looked at her with some surprise. But she shook her head.

"I can think of nothing except the joy of finding myself at home again."

"Home!" repeated Mrs. Musgrave, impatiently. "Surely your home is with your husband?"

"In India? No, thank you, Pleasance. I never married India."

"You married with your eyes open. You married a man whose profession was likely to take him all over the world."

Patty laid the lash lightly across the mare's back.

"I suppose," she said meditatively, "that people may make mistakes. Did you never make a mistake yourself?"

The other wife winced. She felt that her pleading was useless, and dropped the subject.

"Often," she allowed. "Does not that set one wishing to prevent other people's?"

"Nobody can." We must find things out for ourselves. Captain Eustace was talking about it only yesterday."

"Captain Eustace!" Pleasance made no attempt to conceal the touch of scorn which crept into her voice.

"Well, why not? He can make himself very pleasant when he chooses; and there is a real bond between us, for he hates India as heartily as I do. In fact, he's going home. In the same boat," she added, with a mischievous twinkle; keenly alive to the amusement of

shocking her companion. "Are you horrified, Pleasance?"

But Mrs. Musgrave only raised her eyebrows.

"Not in the least. I merely wonder you can face the prospect."

"Why?"

"To be bored for three weeks!"

Patty's laugh rippled out again.

"You forget, I am going home, I couldn't be bored. Here we are on the ground. I wonder whether this place would not be as good as any? Why is Mike not here to see to us? Mr. Lawless"—she leaned forward to speak to a man who was strolling by—"do you happen to have seen my husband?"

"He's about somewhere; at the other end with the ponies, I expect. No one will see much for the dust, but you've dropped into a decent spot enough. I don't think you can do better. So I hear you're off home, Mrs. Hamilton?"

"Indeed I am. On the thirty-first."

"That's Eustace's boat. Lucky to have someone you know on board."

"Am I?" returned Patty calmly.

He changed his tone.

"It's hard luck, of course, for you to have to go back so soon."

She looked at him.

"Why? On the contrary, I am counting the days."

Mrs. Musgrave stirred uneasily, and half an hour later, Lawless, emerging from a cloud of dust, remarked to another man—

"Things must be bad between Hamilton and his

wife. She's just told me she's counting the days before she gets off."

"Sounds bad for him. Did you watch that last chucker? Stopford got his goal in grand style."

And meanwhile Patty looked on at the picturesque scene, the bright flashing colours, the turbans, the glitter, the keen dark faces, the circling ponies, the vivid sky, and was not seeing them at all. What she really saw was a square creeper-covered house, a big garden, father, mother, brothers, sisters, dogs, with rapturous welcome lighting up the dear faces. How could she have borne to leave them! The wonder grew as she realised what it meant to be going back. They were only secondary thoughts which occupied themselves with her husband. Mike was vexed, unreasonably vexed, but he would come home himself one day, and, added to the others, he would be delightful. For she had liked him much, very much indeed, *there*. The mistake lay in their not having all kept together. Her ideas were so crude that she had no sympathy, no tolerations for his ambitions. He should not have brought her out of green Devon to these horrible parched, famine-clawed countries, where she could never see her people, and where she had eaten her heart out with aching longings. Her narrowness was the narrowness apt to limit the borders of a large family, measuring everything by its own standard, seeing little interest outside. She was like a young bird whose horizon is bounded by the circle of its nest. And in Mike Hamilton's eyes, here had lain her special charm, in the freshness, the contentment, the simplicity, which were unlike other people. Possibly he had been over-hasty or over-confident in his treatment of this un-

developed soul, for the charm had failed. He had assured himself that once alone with her, all she had given to the others would be his, that the little flame he had fanned into life would grow and grow, and become more glowing. But sometimes, alas, little flames die out; and Patty's, if not dead, was certainly less alive.

Had she loved him, she could hardly, for instance, have talked as she talked that evening when Mike's best friend, Sir Robert Chester, dined with them. The Commissioner, a middle-sized, thick-set man, with a head partly bald, keen eyes, dark moustache, and a firm chin, quickly became aware how much her anticipations of delight hurt the young husband. It appeared to him at first that she was tormenting of set purpose, and he was angry. But he soon changed his mind. As a fact, she was a child, a child in all things, years, thought, heart. It was not malice which prompted her, but the indifference of unconsciousness. He—the looker-on—had quickly hit upon this truth. He would have been glad of the opportunity of saying to Mike that it was not so much that she had changed to him as that he had never won her. What he did say was to himself, "Shut up, and don't meddle!" since, to a man, to meddle stands at the very head and front of domestic sins.

So he remarked no more than—

"Where do your people live, Mrs. Hamilton?"

"In Devon—South Devon."

"That's my sister's part of the world. I wish you'd be so good as to look her up, and let me know what you think of her."

"I will indeed."

"Thank you. Elizabeth is not to be trusted in her

reports of herself." He scrawled an address and handed it to her. "That's the place."

"It is not far from us," she said eagerly. "I will be sure to see her and report. And it will be something with which to fill my letters. You see, Mike doesn't care for the things I care about at home, or the people. He pretends that he doesn't know one from the other."

Mike was leaning back in his chair, one hand restlessly fingering a wineglass.

"Not for want of hearing of them," he returned, with a touch of sullenness in his voice which Sir Robert was quick to note. It confirmed him in his idea that Mike had been trying to break her away from the others, before getting a grip himself. Aloud he said—

"You may be sure, Mrs. Hamilton, that when you are at home, your husband will be greedy even for crumbs."

"I am," she said eagerly. "I want two mails where I only get one."

"Ah, you are homesick."

"I've never been anything else."

Hamilton jumped up.

"If you'll excuse me, I've just remembered that the Chief at Pindi wants me to meet someone coming up at two in the morning or thereabouts, and I've got to see the ressalidar about it. Nano!"

A white-clad figure appeared.

"Huzoor?"

"The cigarettes for the sahib. I'll be back within the hour, Bob. Don't go. Try some cold hump."

He did not look at his wife as he passed out of the



room, and the Commissioner, glancing at her, thought that he detected a small flicker of surprise in her eyes. But the next moment she laughed.

"Mike is not quite himself to-night," she remarked; "and it really is for no better reason than because I am going home."

"Isn't that enough?" asked Sir Robert, gravely. "Isn't it a little unexpected?"

"No," she said. "Or if it is, it should not have been. Could he have imaginèd for a moment that I intended to give them up?"

"Most women have to face that position when they marry, if by giving up you mean not living any longer at home."

Patty shook her head with determination.

"I am resolved to live at home for part of every year," she declared. "I do not see that you can call that unreasonable; but if it is, I cannot help it. Here I have been for ten months—ten weary dreary months, and I tell you truly that I can bear it no longer."

He looked quickly at her, when she had spoken those astounding words, but he read nothing in her face to justify a hint of deeper meaning. Childish eagerness was there—no more. Her thoughts had flown home, her lips were curved in a smile. For a moment he was silent, then he shrugged his shoulders.

"Pleasant for Mike."

"Oh," she returned quickly, "Mike must learn. He ought to have known from the first, and he must learn." Seeing his face, she added, "Well? What do you mean?"

"I was wondering," he said, "as you propose this

instructive course for Mike, whether you mightn't with advantage join the class yourself."

She looked at him with unconcealed indignation.

"You don't understand," she replied. "You're a man."

"Exactly," he agreed meditatively. "Doesn't that help me to understand—Mike?"

"Mike? Possibly. Do you know what I think? I think you all hold with each other, and that men are brought up to expect that everything must give way to their wishes."

"Deluded creatures!" he exclaimed.

"So I maintain," said Patty dryly.

"But supposing you are right—which you'll not expect me to admit—own that the fault lies with adoring mothers and sisters. Are you not yourself an adoring sister? Come?"

She turned on him at once.

"Jack and Phil are different—quite different."

Looking at her he wondered, not for the first time that night, that a woman should remain such a child, and at this moment it was undeniable that she did not give the impression of even her twenty years. Her face, without being beautiful, had an alert and eager charm of youth, which both interested and provoked. The dark red of the hair claimed your first glance, then you noticed the small nose, the chin a little up-lifted, the straight good-tempered brows, the fun which sparkled in the brown eyes. Slender and tall, she stepped with a curious lightness which suggested a desire to run. She was undauntedly strong in her likes and dislikes, painting her opinions in vivid, not to say lurid, colours, ad-

mitting no modifications, despising middle courses, clinging with passionate tenacity to the crudest of ideas, wilful, lovable, annoying, and everything frankly. If she became unfriendly, there was no concealment; if she were indifferent, the fact was patent. More than once her outspokenness had landed her husband in hot water, for which he had never reproached her. He had always been patient with her, more than patient. The mistake he made was that while flinging himself, heart and soul, into the interests of his profession, he let her perceive that it bored him to listen to the home letters, the village topics, the petty details, which were food and life to Patty. He had not seen much of her home. He thought of her father as a shy studious clergyman; of her mother as a kindly woman with a mind of sand, receiving every impression and retaining none. What they had to say interested him not at all. And at first Patty could not believe it. She had given him entry into the magic circle, she expected him to share her enthusiasms; when at last she became aware that he was indifferent, she was sure that he was less to her than they, and impatiently resolved to submit no longer to the separation.

Sir Robert was a man of insight, and it did not take him long to probe the workings of this not very complex character. About Mike, whom he knew much better, he felt less sure, for something in Mike's manner had left an impression of angry resentment which might mean mischief. With Patty a light touch was desirable, and, conscious of clumsiness, he wished for his sister Elizabeth. But he had to speak.

"Then I gather that you are going home for no very serious reason. Only to please yourself?"

She leaned back, smiling.

"Only to please myself."

"Well, perhaps you will allow me to remark, out of my experience, that you are an uncommonly lucky woman, and Mike an uncommonly easy-going fellow."

Patty looked up at him.

"He could not prevent me," she said, "unless he locked me up."

"Hum. Couldn't he cut off the supplies?"

At this idea she laughed gaily.

"He wouldn't venture on such a drastic measure. Besides, if one thinks about cost, when I am at home, I shan't be costing him anything. You see, I have gone into it all. He will get rid of the bungalow and live in quarters. Really, he will economise."

The Commissioner opened his eyes. Had she no conception of acts for which a heavier price had to be paid than could be covered by money?

"And," she went on, "if I stayed, I should grow unendurable. I feel it. I never quarrelled before, but now I am on the verge of quarrelling with every woman in the Station. I don't mean such women as the colonel's wife, but quite inoffensive little people; I hate them, and they hate me. I can't blame them for being horrid, because very soon I should be horrid myself, and that would be worse for Mike than just letting me go for a time. Don't you see?"

"I am wondering what you mean when you talk of a time?"

"Certainly a year. You couldn't expect me to return for the hot season. No. If Mike wants me before that time, he must come home on furlough. He's

much nicer there than out here." And she laughed again.

"Why didn't you stick to your dolls, my dear lady?" Sir Robert asked coolly.

She turned an indignant look upon him.

"You suppose we do nothing but amuse ourselves. That is man all over. If you knew better, you would know that my home life is far more useful than this. There, one is wanted. Here, if I try to do anything for the natives—and it is all against the grain, because they frighten me so horribly—they cry out that I am spoiling them. No, I must go."

"Leaving Mike to his fate."

"Leaving Mike to the fate he has chosen. He likes it—I don't."

"And if——" Sir Robert hesitated. In the face of this crude youthfulness, his suggestion seemed almost brutal. "If he finds he can get on without you?"

She smiled confidently.

"Do you mean altogether? I don't think he can. If he does——"

"Yes."

"Then I suppose he must."

"Good Lord!" Sir Robert muttered under his breath; "she doesn't know that she's playing with powder. To fling away Mike's love as if it were a worthless toy. Poor Mike! Poor old chap!"

And she went on calmly.

"I've thought it all out."

He stared at her blankly. Thought seemed the last

thing connected with her amazing action. But when she had repeated "I've thought it all out," he felt that argument was useless and said no more.

### CHAPTER III.

#### IN THE STREETS OF PESHAWAR.

THERE are bazars in India where the eternal mystery of the East seems to gather and fill the place, until the uncomprehending Western mind, seeking to lay down clear outlines, and to move in logical sequences, aches with the vain effort, and turns baffled from dim corners which lie open to sight, yet breathe unknown dangers; from a face which he is somehow conscious has become an inscrutable mask; from a sound intelligible to the shifting furtive crowd, yet to him, the master, without significance. Possibly this is well. It is conceivable that a certain thickness of imagination, which fails to be impressed by vague terrors, has to do with the success of English rule in India. The greater number of Englishmen, grumbling at their task, yet look straight before them at an aim called duty, and, in its quest, what they cannot understand they cheerfully dub as rot. Something has to be done, and they do it, leaving shadowy mysteries to take care of themselves. Every now and then a man with another kind of nature goes under; but, as a whole, the method works out well.

The strange Eastern glamour which hangs about the Peshawar streets is not so subtle as that found farther south. Nor is this surprising, for here many northern races jostle, and the races are more openly turbulent,

more fierce, more likely to be at strife with each other, than elsewhere. Here is the *malik* who has crossed the zone of plain from Jamrud, the iron-clad looking fort at the mouth of the Khaibar, and who will hurry back before dark sets in, to avoid being sniped—owing to a private blood-feud among his relations or neighbours—as soon as he leaves the British protected road. Here are hawk-nosed Afghans, who, having brought their caravan through the Pass, and sold their splendid carpets, pistachio-nuts, and dried grapes, are now reloading the great gurgling Bactrian camels with the corrugated iron dear to the Amir for the return journey on the next open day. Here are strange figures in poshteens or sheepskin coats, Sikhs, fierce Pathans with dyed beards; here are gold embroidered turbans, splendours, squalors, treasures from Kashmir; mud cupboards for shops, where tea is drank from smoking samovars, a confusion of Asiatic faces, a medley of tongues, silver, copper, cursings, curiosity; an English nurse on her way from the Medical Mission, a fanatic mullah, a quaint little child in a black satin long skirt, with dark hair hanging round her tiny face, come somehow from the steppes of Tartary.

And Sir Robert Chester, piloting Patty Hamilton through the tangle, wondered how much it meant to her.

“I am going,” he said, “to take you to the top of this gateway, in order to give you a bird’s-eye view of the city.”

If he intended to awaken her to enthusiasm, he was disappointed. Yet it was a curious outlook. The spot where they stood over-topped the flat-roofed mud houses, and the upper life which thus became visible, was hardly less populous than the swarming life below. Mat screens

and low walls fenced each roof, and within each enclosure clustered the family, cooking, working, sleeping on string beds, playing—the little brown children—in absolute security. Here and there were stuck cages of fighting quails, from another corner a talking mynah chattered vehemently, and a man calling to a flock of pigeons brought them to his feet and on his shoulder, then with a wave of the hand, sent them circling over the city, always to return to him like a flash of opalescent light. Luminous sunshine, inky shadow, movement, busy groups, roofs stretching far away; on one side the open plain spreading to blue mountains, on another a deep slash where a narrow street cut the mud walls asunder. To Sir Robert all was familiar yet always absorbing, and he could have lingered for an hour watching the working of that upper world, the odd little dramas which unfolded themselves before his eyes. But Patty was not even looking. She was waiting, impatiently waiting.

“Shall we go?” she said, the moment she caught his eye.

So they stumbled down the stone staircase, Sir Robert with a comical impression of failure. He was trying to interest Patty in the country from which she was fleeing, and he perceived that the task might be beyond him. When, as they turned into the narrow street, they met and were joined by Captain Eustace, he wondered whether an adverse kind of interest was not at work. For Patty was undisguisedly glad to see him.

“Oh,” she said, with a sigh of relief, “I know you hate these crowds as much as I do!”

“Fully,” returned Eustace. “Some of the lot are most awful brutes.” He ranged himself as he spoke on



her other side. "I've just had an encounter with an insolent beast of a yogi or mullah, or whatever they call them up here. He's been hanging about and getting hold of my men, and they were all in such a blue fright when he took to cursing freely, that I tackled the fellow myself and kicked him out. I doubt his meddling with me again."

The District Commissioner was listening attentively.

"A mullah, did you say? And you struck him? Don't forget that up here you're in a hotbed of fanaticism."

"Well, sir," argued the other with some heat, "you wouldn't have had me leave him to preach his poisonous stuff to my men, would you? I don't trust one of them, and if they listened to him, they might give us a heap of trouble. These beggars have it a lot too much their own way, and lord it over the natives as if they, not we, were the masters. They want a lesson. There he is, by Jove! A beauty, isn't he?"

A lean brown figure, with long hair and wild eyes, stood on the steps of a small temple, itself no bigger than the tiny shops around, and scowled at the Englishman. Eustace laughed derisively, but Sir Robert, whose ears were quick, detected certain muttered curses from either side and pushed on.

"Hot-headed young idiot!" he reflected uneasily. "Couldn't he have had the sense to leave a mad faquir alone!" He walked quickly, pondering upon a suspicion that a certain unrest was simmering in the streets, and that this man might be the exciting cause. There was one Mir Khan, who he knew might give him information, but it was not well to go to him until later. All that he

could do for the next three or four hours was to be on the alert for signs.

Patty was in pursuit of home presents, and now they stopped before an open shop, where two or three men squatted on their heels, tracing elaborate designs in white wax upon a coloured ground. The wax was carried on the ball of the thumb, and drawn with a stylus on the material, fearlessly, unhesitatingly, without pattern, and without a swerve. Eustace had no good to say for the work, but whether from a spirit of contrariety or actual admiration, Patty laughed at him for his fastidiousness. The men were bidden to come to her verandah on the following day.

"And where next?" demanded the Commissioner.

And here fell out a slight disagreement. Patty, it appeared, desired to go to Fath Khan, the old Afghan rug-merchant, but when Captain Eustace prepared to accompany them, she demurred.

"No," she said, "no; you would be no good. Sir Robert will go with me and see that I am not swindled. I'll show you my treasures on the boat."

She laughed as she spoke, but the Commissioner saw that Eustace was annoyed.

"I don't know why you imagine that I should allow you to be swindled?"

"No?" said Patty. "I suppose it is a sort of intuition. I feel sure you cannot haggle well."

His countenance cleared. The man was harmless, but he had an overmastering vanity.

"I hate haggling, it is true," he said. "I offer a price and if they do not accept, I go. That is my plan, and I don't know that it isn't as good as any

other. But as you have Sir Robert, and I am due at the Club——”

“Sir Robert is a tower of strength,” she returned gaily, over her shoulder. “If you see Mrs. Musgrave, tell her I shall be at the Club by-and-by.”

For the second time in the last two days there had come a parting which meant more to Patty than she knew. She nodded a good-bye, and presently she and her companion turned out of the golden sunshine into a cavernous passage leading to small rooms heaped round with dusty and costly rugs and carpets.

The District Commissioner watched Captain Eustace depart with an uneasiness for which he could not altogether account. He knew his provinces well enough to be aware of a certain faint and yet menacing vibration in the atmosphere. He could not explain it, he could not place it, could not even swear—convincingly—that it was there, and yet—he was sure. It might be merely the evil consciousness of a small border raid imminent that night, which, successful, would result in an unfortunate sentry being found stabbed at his post, and rifles gone, in spite of the high walls surrounding the barracks. It might, again, be the fermenting of a more involved political intrigue. Anyway, it was necessary to keep his eyes open, and contrive an unsuspected interview with Mir Khan. The walk with Eustace had quickened his uneasiness. Captain Eustace was a brave intolerant man, who had shown want of judgment and tact when dealing with his native regiment, and was disliked by the men. Such incidents as that of to-day were not infrequent. They might mean little at one time; at another, suddenly become serious. The fanatic,

with his fierce eyes, was probably mad, but in India madness may have to be reckoned with as a power rather than a hindrance. It was likely that there was nothing in the situation to be called threatening, yet it required handling, and Sir Robert's mind played craftily round many possibilities as he tossed aside the rubbish the old Jewish-featured Afghan was trying to palm off on Patty, and demanded the better things he had in store.

"As you're here, you may as well see them," he said to her. "There. That's a good rug."

"But I like this one. Mother *would* so admire it," Patty announced, pointing to one of the objected; "and it would do splendidly for covering a hole we burnt in the dining-room carpet. Please make him sell me this."

"He'll do that with all the pleasure in life," said Sir Robert, shaking his head with the rueful indignation we feel when the best is discarded for the worse. "Mrs. Hamilton, be persuaded. It's worthless."

But she only laughed.

"I like it," she said.

"Then, remember, it's your own doing. I'm not responsible."

"Yes; I shall tell everyone that you helped me. I wish now that I had let Captain Eustace come with us. His face would have been a study."

The Commissioner joined good-humouredly in the laugh against himself.

"It's all very well, but you have made me lose the prestige it has cost me hours of chaffering to obtain. Fath Khan is rejoicing in his sleeves, believing that at last he has circumvented the Lord-Sahib."

He laughed, but the vague uneasiness remained, and through the bargaining which followed, his ear strained itself to catch a muffled sound, somehow suggestive of the pad of running feet. Then one of the men who was showing the rugs slipped out, and immediately Sir Robert rose and rather ostentatiously stretched himself.

"I hope you won't mind, Mrs. Hamilton," he said, looking at his watch, "but it is later than I thought, and I am afraid I ought to go. Do you want anything more?"

She was disappointed, and showed it.

"Yes, I do," she said. "I want rough turquoises for Cissy."

He gave an order.

"Fath Khan will send up two or three dozen for you to choose from."

And as she lingered, he went before her to the door. There he paused to ask if he might smoke, and while striking a match, cast keen glances up and down the street. Nothing was to be seen, except a comparative emptiness, upon which Patty remarked as they went along.

"Where has the crowd vanished?" she said. "How much pleasanter and airier it is! One can see the shops in comfort. Oh, there is a puce-coloured Bokhara petticoat, which I really must buy."

But Sir Robert refused to stop. His eye had caught sight of a hurrying native police officer, and he signed to him to come across.

"Excuse me for one moment, Mrs. Hamilton," he said hastily, as he drew the man aside, and put a question in Hindustani. "What's up, inspector?"

"Bad business, sir. The base-born have stabbed a sahib."

It was swift intuition rather than a train of reasoning, which made Sir Robert ask under his breath, "Captain Eustace?" But whisper as it was, Patty heard, and noted the man's silent gesture of assent.

"What is he telling you, and why does he look so scared?" she asked quickly. "It is something about Captain Eustace."

The inspector hurried away in obedience to the Commissioner's sign, and Sir Robert turned quietly to Patty.

"He is unused to responsibility, and disturbed because there is a little trouble among the Pathans. Mike will tell you there often is."

The colour faded from her face.

"And Captain Eustace?"

"Yes. He's down there. I asked. And as soon as I can get you home, I'm going there myself."

She looked at him doubtfully, and he met her eye without flinching.

"There's the padre," she suggested. "He will see me home."

But Sir Robert, with a sick consciousness as to where the chaplain was hastening, shook his head.

"Here comes Mrs. White's carriage. That will do better."

And he stopped the landau, gave a hasty explanation to its occupant, a direction to the coachman, put Patty in, and was off.

"Did he say to our house? I meant to go to the Club," said Patty, staring.

But Mrs. White had enough experience of India to admit authority without questioning.

"So I had intended. All the same, I think we will do what we are told."

"Why? Do you think he meant there was danger? Is there any fear of a rising?"

There was a little tremor in her voice.

"Nothing to alarm yourself about. These border tribes are often troublesome."

"The people frighten me," owned Patty. "Still you have been here so long you will know." She gave a sigh of relief. "I cannot tell you how I rejoice to think that I shall be out of it so soon! Captain Eustace has the same feeling. He hates it all."

Mrs. White looked grave.

"Captain Eustace is perhaps not very well suited to India," she remarked hesitatingly.

"And Patty Hamilton less so!" She turned a charming smiling face towards her companion. "You will never make me think Peshawar anything but odious."

"Ah, you have not seen it when the peach-blossom is out, or the roses. And look!"

For, to their left as they drove, and bordering the broad treeless plain, rose the mountains, lightly lit with the soft radiance of the setting sun. A new dumb awe struck Patty which she could not have explained, but which kept her silent until they turned at a gate, and drove through the compound towards a low one-storied house, with a broad verandah clasping it, and a door, which looked like a window, hung with a bamboo chick. A great bongainvillæa gorgeously climbed the verandah, where Mrs. Musgrave sat. She came hastily forward, and Patty was instantly startled,

"Pleasance! What is it?"

She gave no answer until they were in the drawing-room and alone, then—

“Haven’t you heard?”

It was evident that she was very much shaken.

“We have heard nothing,” said Mrs. White.

“It is terrible. Poor Captain Eustace——”

“I knew it,” murmured Patty. She clutched the back of a chair, and her hand dropped.

“He has been stabbed.”

Mrs. White cried out in distress, and Patty forced herself to raise her head. Her eyes were full of horror.

“It’s impossible!” she cried. “He was with us. Is it true? Are you sure?”

“Sure. Your husband met me at the gate and told me. Some fanatic, they say. It is awful!”

The other women looked at each other, speechless. Patty was trembling.

“Where is Mike?” she asked.

“Gone there, no doubt,” answered Pleasance, with a shudder. “One knows there may be excitement, and they may require the troops. What can have caused it?”

Patty half rose, and sat down again.

“I am afraid he was unpopular, poor man, and not very prudent in his treatment of the natives,” returned Mrs. White in her slow measured voice. “And of course these faquirs are half of them mad, and often very violent. This is a fanatical place. I know my husband has long felt uneasy, for he was relieved to hear that Captain Eustace was about to quit the country.”

“In the same boat with me,” said Patty with a short nervous laugh. Her face was colourless, and Mrs. Musgrave came close and touched her.



"Order tea," she said under her breath. "Don't let your khitmatgar think that you are frightened."

One of the lessons which the ruling race, men, women, and children, have to learn in India. One which they had practised during those dark December days when, while England mourned her dead in peace, the women in India danced and smiled, and hid aching anxious hearts behind a mask of gaiety. So now Patty, obedient to the call, ordered, and sat down to a tea which seemed to choke her. Mrs. White was listening carefully.

"I trust no disturbance will follow, but one never can tell," she remarked. "This is probably the outcome of a sort of smouldering excitement, which has puzzled my husband of late. At the same time, it has served the purpose of keeping them prepared, for which one may be thankful."

Pleasance flung back her head.

"You may be sure that nothing will follow. This one deed is horrible, horrible—but I am not afraid of anything more."

Nor did she look as if she would go down before fear.

"I am," said Patty, in a terrified whisper. "I am afraid of anything and everything in this dreadful country. My grandfather and grandmother were both killed in the Mutiny. That haunted me. And now—he. And he would so soon have been gone!"

"It is a blessing there is no wife to pity," Mrs. White murmured. "Does anyone know whether his father or mother are alive?"

"Both."

"Ah, poor souls! Hark! is that anything?"

For through the strained silence they heard the quick trot of a horse.

"Only someone riding fast," said Mrs. Musgrave. "Patty, throw the buttered toast into the fire, and make Muhammad bring some more. Pull yourself together. Don't look like that."

"I daresay you are feeling anxious about your husband; but, believe me, there is no real cause for alarm," Mrs. White said consolingly. "Should they be required, the troops will be at hand. In all probability the police will be amply sufficient. Captain Hamilton runs no danger."

The young wife stared at her, and caught her breath. She was not thinking of her husband. Always before her eyes rose one white face, changed, stiffened, awful, and beyond this tragedy there seemed no place for anything else in the world. Pleasance glanced at her uneasily.

"Of course," she said, "it shocks you doubly, because—— Did you say you saw him this afternoon? How? Where?"

It was better for the girl, at any cost, to talk it out than to sit still with that stony expression, which made her friend fear what conclusions Mrs. White might not draw. Patty must be protected from herself, and for her husband—that most of all. It relieved her when the words came stumbling out.

"He walked with us—Sir Robert and me. There was nothing. I don't remember anything. The streets were crowded—yes, and there was a dreadful man—we saw him—he said he had found him making mischief in his regiment. I think he was a mullah or something.

Do you think"—and she shuddered—"it was that man who—who——"

"Possibly," said Mrs. White; "very probably, indeed. It is what I had imagined; because these fanatics stick at nothing. And afterwards?"

"Afterwards he left us. That was all," Patty said dully. She spoke like a person in a dream, but the next moment buried her face in her hands.

Mrs. Musgrave got up from her chair, walked to the window, and drummed with her fingers on the pane.

"Well, we may make up our minds to hear no more until someone comes," Mrs. White exclaimed with a sigh. "You may be sure your khitmatgar knows every detail, but I never think it wise to question one's servants unless one is absolutely certain they are to be trusted. Of one thing I believe we may all feel confident—a few Gurkhas will restore order."

Her quiet monotonous commonsense fell unheeded on Patty's ears. For the first time in her life tragedy had touched her, and the trouble of it seemed unbearable. Pleasance, glancing at her across the room, dreaded what she might say. She did not know how much of the disturbance might be natural and ordinary, how much more closely personal, and—more than ever—she felt the necessity of protecting two people. She came back abruptly, and answered Mrs. White.

"It stands to reason there must be more behind, though we are not likely to know it. Possibly poor Captain Eustace had irritated the man before, insulted his religion, or—— Ah, here is your husband!"

And she turned with relief as the judge, a man with grey hair and a kindly ample face, came into the room.

It was at least on the cards that his coming would bring restraint. He did not sit down.

"I saw the carriage," he said to his wife. And then he added gravely, "I see you all know."

"The bare facts," she answered. "But we are most anxious. Are things quiet?"

"Quite. There was just the chance of a row after the poor fellow dropped, because they resented the seizure of that wretched fanatic. But the police were too strong for them from the first, and when Anderson brought up a couple of dozen of his little Gurkhas at a run, it settled it altogether."

Patty broke in eagerly.

"But he? Is he really—dead?"

"Oh, the blow killed him immediately," said the judge, sadly. "It was given with tremendous force."

"And," said Mrs. White, "you don't know the cause?"

He shook his head.

"It's a wretched incomprehensible business; the sort of wicked senseless flare-up that comes, one never knows why. One thing is certain. If there's one man good for fighting it, it's Chester. Now I must get home, Millicent. Can you come?" His eyes fell on Patty, and something in her face made him add kindly, "I assure you, Mrs. Hamilton, you need be under no sort of apprehension. Your husband will be here very shortly to answer for himself."

"Have you time to drive round by the Club?" asked his wife. "I want to order some things from the go-down."

"If you will come at once. Good-bye, Mrs. Hamil-

ton. I repeat that you have not the slightest cause for uneasiness."

As the door closed, Pleasance turned anxiously to her companion.

"That is good hearing," she said; and at the words Patty moved impatiently. "Now, at least, you know that your husband is safe."

"Why should he not be safe?"

"There is always the chance of a stray shot," the other insisted.

"Oh!" Patty shook herself restively. "You all of you can think only of the might-have-beens! They can take care of themselves. As for that poor man, nobody cares. Mrs. White can go off and order groceries!"

Pleasance hesitated. Then she spoke very gently.

"Remember, they have all been in some danger, and when Captain Hamilton comes——"

"Well?"

"Mightn't it hurt him if you showed no consciousness of this?"

Patty's nerves were all ajar, and she flamed into sudden resentment.

"Why do you say so? One would suppose you knew my husband better than I know him myself!"

Pleasance was immediately conscious that her interference had been a mistake, and she was too proud a woman to attempt to cover it.

"No," she replied; "no one need suppose any such untruth. That I knew him well in old days is undoubtedly a fact. It was this which made me speak, and I was foolish."

"Indeed!" said Patty, quickly. And Pleasance went on—

"I told you when first we met that Captain Hamilton and I were old acquaintances."

"I remember. Where did you meet?"

"In London."

"Did you see much of each other?"

"A good deal," Pleasance admitted, after a scarcely perceptible pause.

"Why didn't you marry him?" The question was shot out abruptly, and answered as quickly—

"Perhaps because he saw you meanwhile."

"I see," answered Patty, nursing her knee. "I think it was a pity. You might have suited him better."

Mrs. Musgrave flushed, but she had herself well in hand.

"Possibly," she admitted. "You see, we did not try the experiment."

And for a moment Patty looked at her curiously. Then her face returned to its former trouble, and she drew a long breath.

"What a time one has to wait to know anything!" she exclaimed. "I think waiting the most unendurable penance in the world!"

"Well, I am going," Mrs. Musgrave said, rising. "Everything is absolutely quiet, and your husband will be here in a few minutes. Good-bye."

For she had heard, as his wife had not, Captain Hamilton's step pass through the passage to his room beyond, and, of all things, she did not wish to meet him. It may have been that Patty's unexpected words had raised an unexpected turmoil in her heart, for as

she walked home it terrified her to realise with what force old words and old looks had rushed back upon her. She had always told herself that if Patty asked questions she would not say a word which could deceive her, and she had carried out her resolution, she had allowed her to see that—not so long ago—she had known Mike Hamilton very well. The two, indeed, had seemed to their friends on the very verge of an engagement, when Patty unconsciously came in the way—Patty, and a few hasty words; for Pleasance was hasty—so hasty that, finding herself deserted, she accepted Major, then Captain, Musgrave, at home on leave from India. How could she have done so! She had never found an answer to the question. Perhaps she was glad to put the seas between herself and Mike; but, if that were so, never was the irony of fate more noticeable than when Mike's regiment came out, and her husband, wishing to remain in India, exchanged into it. It was a blow, but she accepted the situation with the courage which was hers. She stifled the revolt in her heart; neither by word nor look would she trench on the dead past.

But was it dead? For death ends suffering, and not all her courage could persuade her that she did not suffer. She told herself that she suffered for the mistake she had made—the mistake which was always with her. It was true, but not all the truth. She tried to avoid Patty; but Patty would not be avoided. Then she tried to like her, and succeeded. Suddenly came Patty's obstinate resolve, and, with a touch of despair, Pleasance felt that the fight was harder than it should have been. For now, instead of driving Mike out of her thoughts, she had to argue on his side, to try to bring home to

the young wife how good was the gift of love she was despising, to join forces with him, whom she wanted to forget.

And with rebellious Patty in England, with deserted Mike bringing his woes to her, asking for her sympathy—how could she bear it? how could she hold her own? For now she had not only her own turbulent heart to reckon with, but the fear of his on the rebound.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### PLEASANCE FAILS.

PESHAWAR was quiet. The tragedy had been but the isolated act of a fanatic, not the outcome of intrigue, and the strong hand having struck, swiftly and surely, the unrest hid itself with cursings in squalid corners of the bazars, or fled across the border to find a more advantageous foothold. Military and civilians, men and women, with faces both stern and pitiful, had followed the gun carriage which took poor Eustace to the pretty burying-place, where bougainvillæa climbs over the entrance, tall poinsettias border the paths, and violets in their thousands blossom on the graves. All that could honour the dead was done.

And Patty Hamilton's first shock of horror had spent itself.

She was, however, restless without understanding why. No change had crept into her plans. Certainly there was no lessening, as she more than once assured herself, in the joy of anticipation. She even went her way un-



disturbed by opposition; for Mike made no further effort to shake her resolve. He spoke openly of the necessary arrangements, showed her the agent's letters, and applied for leave to take her down to Bombay. All this he did, yet there were other points where even she could not but notice a silence. He asked her no questions. He did not even suggest. What had become of Mike, whose eyes followed her every movement with a worship which she resented? Where was that other Mike who had come and gone with easy confidence, and not so much as a doubt that he was as dear to her as she to him? Where? She frowned impatiently. For she was certain that she preferred this more impersonal attitude. It was what she had asked for in her own mind. And if it were her departure which brought about the good comradeship on which she had counted when she married, what could be better?

What, indeed?

So when one or two women of her acquaintance, a very disapproving colonel's wife among them, inquired if it were not a sad trial to her to leave her husband in these young days of marriage, Patty met them with a direct cheerfulness which sent them away remarking to each other that she was a heartless little creature, who evidently would let nothing and nobody interfere with her own whims.

The blame was often repeated in Mrs. Musgrave's hearing, but it did not seem to her the most serious part of the affair. Knowing Mike as she knew, it was the effect on him she dreaded. And it was the hope of enlisting Mike's best friend on her side, which led her to stop Sir Robert Chester as he was going into the Club

after a set of tennis. She was acting reluctantly, and it gave her usually composed manner a touch of nervousness.

"I am wondering," she said, "whether you have a little time to spare?"

"Enough for anything you may want," he answered readily.

She hesitated, then said smiling—

"Will you think me very fanciful if I tell you I have a craving to look at the mountains? If you would walk there with me?"

"The only obstacle are the flannels," he said, looking down upon himself. "I could change, but it would delay you. If you don't mind——"

"Not in the least, if you are not afraid of their compromising the dignity of a Commissioner-Sahib."

He laughed.

"Dignity has to endure greater shocks."

"Then I will send home the ayah with the child and the books."

She walked towards the dog-cart, and as he watched her, he realised more than ever before what a beautiful woman she was. Her long white coat, the brown fur at her throat, suited her, and the mask of stillness which she often carried on her face had dropped. There was a splendid fire in the dark eyes, a scarcely veiled eagerness thrilling her expression. Something was stirring her, and Sir Robert wondered what it might be.

"Which way?" he asked.

"Anywhere," she returned quickly, "anywhere out of the town. I am so sick of baked mud and the smells of the bazars. Only for the moment, though," she went

on, with a laugh which he fancied was forced. "Generally I love India. I am not like Mrs. Hamilton. By the way, Sir Robert, you know the Hamiltons well, don't you?"

This was it then.

"Mike I know very well," he answered, "but Mrs. Hamilton I never saw until a week ago."

She walked a few quick steps before saying—

"Can you do nothing to prevent her going back to England?"

"I! My dear lady, what do you take me for?"

His tone was so shocked that she laughed again, but she spoke gravely enough.

"Forgive me. I know it is suggesting a great deal, but if you are his friend, I think you should understand that to Captain Hamilton her leaving him may be a very serious blow. During your life in India, you must have seen more than one similar case, out of which quite unexpected harm has grown——"

He was startled, and he interrupted her—

"Surely it is not unusual. Health——"

"Yes, health. But this is not health."

"Not?"

"It is simply that she has never cared for her life out here, that she is sick of it all, and wants to get back to her own people. Do you think the knowledge of this a good legacy to leave with her husband?"

She spoke with a certain reluctant heat. She had told herself that she would go no further than to put the matter coldly and indifferently before the man who was Mike's friend, and leave him to act as he thought best. But she had failed to speak quite coldly, the more because she felt with a tremor that he might turn

the responsibility upon her. Why could not she—Patty's friend—herself speak? And it was impossible to explain that Patty's own words had sealed her lips. Sir Robert took time to answer.

“Possibly not,” he said at last. “But—excuse me—it isn't only a question of what is good for him, it is a matter of interfering between man and wife. And—excuse me again, Mrs. Musgrave—that I cannot do.”

So she had failed, for his tone was hopeless, and she was not the woman to follow a hopeless track. They had passed along a tree-bordered road to the edge of the open plain, and before them lay the mountain wall she had ostensibly come to see, rose-tinted and grey in the low sun, with clefts where blue shadows gathered, and here and there touches of strange glitter. From their feet the arid sun-scorched neutral-toned plain stretched to the very walls of Peshawar, and, directly in front of Pleasance, a buffalo shuffled along with a boy perched on its broad back. She stared at it without seeing, and the next moment came the question she feared.

“But you yourself? Can you do nothing? After all, she's the one to be got at. It's a woman's job,” said Sir Robert.

“I have said all I can. She will not be persuaded.”

“Then we must stand aside. There's no more to be done,” he said quickly, with a man's dislike for an unauthorised task.

It stung her.

“I suppose so,” she said. “It is of course better to allow one's friends to walk over a precipice than

to make oneself unpleasant by putting oneself in their way."

"I think you are unjust," he replied. "Interference in such a matter as this strikes me as simply impossible. Hamilton wouldn't stand it. Don't you see that if her ill-health is a fiction, it's the fiction he presents us with, and we can't refuse to accept it?"

"I don't know," she said wearily. "You must judge of yourself. I should have imagined that if friendship were to be of any use, it must be tough enough to bear a strain."

This time it was he who was nettled.

"Though we may not agree as to methods, I should like you to believe that I am not indifferent. It has worried me, though I may not see it in such a serious light as it appears to you. There is one thing I may say. Do you know that Hamilton is moving heaven and earth to get to South Africa?"

She turned quickly, gladly.

"No!"

"He is."

"Oh, I hope you will help him!"

"You think it desirable?" He spoke with some curiosity, for the conversation had puzzled him.

"I am sure that it is desirable," she said earnestly. "Do you not see that if he goes, there will be something to take the soreness out of his heart before it has time to do mischief? It will give an excellent reason for his wife having gone home; and for her—for her, too, it would be an awakening."

"I see."

"You will help him, will you not?"

He shook his head.

"It's out of my province, I'm sorry to say. If worse come to the worst, I'll get at such as I can. But I doubt. The truth is, they don't like this leakage of officers from India, and have pretty well put a stop to it."

Pleasance did not hear. She was having it brought home to her that Mike was trying for South Africa, and his wife knew nothing. How far these two had fallen apart! And yet it did not surprise her. She understood, as Patty might, perhaps, never understand, the stiff pride lying at the root of his easy-going character; the resentment with which he would meet her indifference, once the indifference was forced upon him. What had passed she did not know, but she was confident that Patty, in her ignorance, her childishness, her wrong-headedness, had struck hard. And her thoughts so absorbed her that she did not take in the sense of what Sir Robert was saying, hardly, indeed, knew that he was speaking at all. But at last the words reached her brain. He was talking of Patty.

"Really, I think there's a lot of excuse for her," he said, "considering how young she was, little more than a child, and how she was whisked out of her family and set down here, where everything was strange, and, it seems, obnoxious to her. Come to think of it, it is hard."

Mrs. Musgrave did not answer. As usual, the man was making excuses for the woman, and the woman for the man. As usual, also, the excuses did not appeal to the other side. And her thoughts flew back to what seemed the only way out of the difficulty.

"Yes," she said at last, "if he gets to the war, it

may go far towards bringing things round. He will not have time to brood, and she will have time to miss him. He must go."

"I am half sorry I hinted at it. I am afraid the chances are scarcely to be considered."

But the idea had seized her.

"And he ought to go quickly. Before——"

"Before?"

"Before kind friends commiserate too much. You know what the colonel's wife will say, how the Club will talk. Can't that be silenced?"

He wondered as he listened what had brought this new and imperative ring into her voice. Usually it was as quiet as her face. Now it was unmistakably the outcome of strong feeling. She was herself aware that she had dropped her shield, and that a strange recklessness possessed her. "What did it matter," she argued, "if this man read more than others?" She hated the eternal repression, the constant struggle not to think of past days, not to give a moment's place to those wounding comparisons which struck at her directly she suffered herself to be off guard. She would not consider herself when she could fight for him, for she understood his nature too well, and how hardly he might take this act of Patty's. Hardly? It might shake the very foundations, kill trust, ruin life. She turned her face towards her companion, and there was a hunted look in the beautiful eyes, which led him to say cheerily—

"I'll do my best, depend upon it, and things may not be so bad as you fear. A nine days' wonder at the worst. Something will turn up to take the talk." And he might have gone on to tell her that the something

was imminent in a change of quarters, had not the habit of official reticence checked him, and possibly the sight of a burly man riding towards them. He changed into "Isn't this your husband?"

Face and manner dropped into their usual inscrutability.

"Yes," she said.

"Hallo!" began Major Musgrave, swinging himself heavily off his horse. "Who'd have expected to find you two in this God-forsaken quarter! Indulging my wife's sentimentality, Sir Robert? Very kind of you, I'm sure; for, though you mightn't think it to look at her, when I'm not concerned, she's the most sentimental woman in the country. Come, own up! Aren't you, Pleasance?"

She made no sign of hearing or of resenting the touch of mockery with which he emphasised her name. Sir Robert, on his part, had difficulty in keeping the distaste out of his answer.

"If it's sentimental to be glad of a little fresh air after the Club, most of us will have to own up," he said coolly.

The major laughed.

"Glad it suits somebody. It's not my style. Suppose you've heard the news?"

"It's impossible to say, until I know what it is."

"Ah, that's very fine. It all has to filter through you top-fellows before it reaches us poor devils. Of course you know. It's infernally hard to be first with anything in this beastly hole."

"You are first here, so far as I am concerned," Sir Robert spoke curtly.



"Hanged if I think there's much amusement in telling one's wife," he grumbled; "particularly when one hasn't the ghost of an idea whether she'll be pleased about it, or cut up rough. I daresay you know better than I."

"Hadn't you better let me hear what it is?" asked his wife gently.

"The regiment's got its transfer."

"Where?"

"Delhi. Does that please your highness?"

"There is nothing against it, I suppose?" she said.

"I can't be expected to know what you consider for or against."

"Is it hotter? Will it be too hot for the boy?"

"If it is, you'll be wanting to go off home like your friend over there. What an idiot Hamilton is to stand it, eh, Sir Robert?"

"Is he?"

The Commissioner's voice had never sounded more indifferent.

Musgrave stared.

"Why, man, it's what everyone's saying. It's plain enough she's making a bolt for it. Got the bit between her teeth, eh?"

"Are you speaking of Mrs. Hamilton or your mare?" asked Sir Robert, still smoothly.

The hint was unmistakable. The major would have liked to have blustered, but that it was not politic to take offence with a Commissioner who was, at any rate, hand and glove with men at the top of the tree. And a lighter form of attack and parry was beyond him. He gave a sullen grunt, and turned to his horse.

"Well, as I'm not wanted here, I'll go down to

the Club for a whisky and soda. The dust is beastly."

As he rode away, his wife stood motionless, staring at the mountains, which had lost their vivid colours, and withdrawn into mysterious glooms; and Sir Robert, glancing at her, wondered, not for the first time, what powers on earth, or under the earth, had ever brought about this marriage. The man's coarseness showed itself in every word. His face, which might once have been called handsome, was now red and broadened. His voice had thickened. He wondered so long that she looked round.

"The lights are fading. Shall we go?"

"How will you like Delhi?" he asked, by way of covering the silence.

"I? I haven't begun to think," she answered indifferently. "Probably I shall like it very much. There must be a great deal to see and trace there, and it will all be different. We've been here some time, and one does get a little sick of it—at least, some do, I imagine."

And he recognised that she held herself resolutely at bay against anything which sounded like complaint. Everything, it appeared, was to be presented for inspection rose-coloured.

"My only fear," she went on, "is about the boy. Here he has done so well. I suppose it *is* much hotter?"

"Wherever you were, you would have to take him to the hills for the hot months; so it doesn't much matter, does it?"

"His father cannot bear parting with him," she said with a smile. "However, there is no use in fighting against the common fate. India is made up of separa-

tions. How charming the air is now! I wonder if you agree with me in liking it better than any other hour of the twenty-four?"

"Not quite. If you were a hunter, you'd know there was nothing to equal the time of the 'wolf's brush,' that thin streak of grey which comes before the dawn."

"When I was young, perhaps, not now. Now, I like the ends better than the beginnings."

He looked at her, and possibly she detected a touch of pity in his look, for she immediately brightened.

"I believe you are a wonderful shot, Sir Robert. I suppose there is good sport round Delhi?"

"Good enough to give Hamilton the occupation we have decided will be best for him."

"Good enough, I daresay, to please them all." Her voice was quite cool and unconcerned, and he perceived that she meant to say no more about the subject she had drawn him out to discuss.

The mask was on again, but more than once he wondered why it had been lifted.

## CHAPTER V.

### SIR ROBERT FAILS?

THE transfer had done all that could be expected from it in turning the tide of talk from the ordinary station gossip towards new quarters, towards the disposal of furniture, towards the hundred and one anxieties which accompany a move. Even with the colonel's wife, the Hamiltons ceased to be the predominant subject.

Mike himself kept silence. He seemed to have doggedly accepted the approach of the day which, nevertheless, loomed before him like the end of everything, but he would not speak of it. Sir Robert, with a remorseful consciousness that he ought not altogether to fail Mrs. Musgrave, however little he had actually undertaken, tried more than once to approach the subject, only to find himself hopelessly frustrated. Half in vexation he went off upon another tack.

"You're going down to Bombay with Mrs. Hamilton, of course?" he asked Mike.

"Of course."

"But not without a stop?"

"Patty wishes it. I think myself the journey's too long."

"Much. Spend a night or two at Jaipur, and, I tell you what, Mike, I'll run down there with you. The Maharana has offered me some tip-top pig sticking, and as I've held on 'at work all these months, I've earned a few days' holiday."

"Pig? Ye gods?" said the other, with an envious groan. "All right. I'll arrange, and we'll stop at Jaipur."

"It makes a good break, and there's lots to show your wife."

To this Mike uttered no more than an inarticulate grunt. He turned the talk determinedly back to pig, and the ways of pig; whether his hide becomes as absolutely bullet-proof as the shikaris swore; whether, when wounded, he will face and charge his enemy; whether Udaipur or Jaipur offered the best centre. To all appearance here lay his strongest interest, and Sir Robert

assured himself that, while he displayed so healthy a zest for sport, Mrs. Musgrave's fears might without reservation be dismissed. He reflected that, being a woman, she laid too great a stress upon the results which might follow the shattering of a man's hopes. Given that with Mike things had gone so far as this, he had still his profession and his sport, which counted for much in his life.

Nor did he change his opinion when they travelled down to Jaipur. To him Mike seemed to be acting and speaking quite naturally. He showed no gloom, omitted no care for his wife, slept well, ate well, talked as he always talked. If any one of the three was a little more quiet than usual, it was Patty.

The pink-flushed city was looking its rosiest when, after sleep and baths, they drove out into its streets. Bullock carts, the carts with green domes, and the bullocks' horns tipped with gold; gay little ekkas, a white crowd—white always predominating, but made brilliant by sharp notes of colour, red, saffron, indigo, and the contrast of brown limbs and faces—a crowd which grouped itself and shifted restlessly for a length of two miles, and ended in the Ruby Gate, backed in its turn by blue hills; a street flanked on one side by a palace, and banked with bright stuffs and gleaming copper; houses daubed with the historic picture of an elephant and horsemen in gay red and blue, all aglow under the radiance of sunshine. Here stalks a camel, there an elephant sways, man-eating tigers snarl in cages, and the head of a cheetah looks through a sheet. The medley is strange even for the East, and in spite of Patty's want of appreciation of things Indian, Sir Robert

expected her to be thrilled with animation. Again he was disappointed. She made a polite effort to be interested, but it was evidently an effort, and she said at last abruptly—

“Do you really admire it so much?”

“Don’t you? How can one help it? Look at the colour.”

“It is such shabby sham! That pink—only just common plaster pretending to be something else. You can’t really call it beautiful? And the Hall of the Winds—winds, indeed! One good puff would blow it down like a pack of cards.”

“You mean you don’t feel any fascination?”

“Fascination!” she shuddered.

“Mike,” said Sir Robert with a laugh, “your wife will have none of it. She’s a rank unbeliever. What on earth are we to do?”

There was a moment’s pause. Then—

“Leave her alone, I suppose,” he said coldly. “She will soon be rid of us all.”

His eyes as he spoke met hers directly. Hers dropped. Perhaps in that instant some knowledge of what the choice she had so carelessly made, meant to him and to her, penetrated. Perhaps had she been an older woman, she would even now have hesitated.

“But I like to convince my friends,” argued Sir Robert ruefully. “I meant Jaipur, with its pink flushes and its fantastic shabby loveliness, to wile Mrs. Hamilton into admiration, and the show’s a dismal failure!”

Patty recovered herself with a laugh.

“Even Commissioner-sahibs must face failure sometimes.”

"Face—but not accept. I'll convert you yet."

She showed more admiration when they wandered through the Public Gardens, and came upon wild creatures penned about under the trees. But he noticed that, whenever it was possible, she chose out the more solitary paths, and that contact with natives seemed to cause her an involuntary shrinking. After that he watched her more curiously. And when in the evening he and Mike were smoking on a roof terrace under a moonlit sky, he put the question which had been growing in his mind.

"Has your wife ever had a fright in India?"

"No," returned Mike curtly.

"You're sure?"

"Sure." He added as an afterthought, "But I believe some of her people were killed at Cawnpore."

"That explains. My dear chap, it's hopeless to argue with heredity. Some sort of horror of the country is in her blood and prejudices her against it. It would require a very powerful motive to overcome it."

Mike looked at him with a queer smile.

"It might," he said. "And unfortunately she hasn't got it."

Sir Robert muttered a bad word under his breath. He saw too late what he had done. And to attempt to gloss over his slip would certainly make it worse. There was nothing left for it but to go on.

"It isn't the first time this sort of thing has come to my knowledge."

"No?"

"No. And I believe there's nothing for it but patience."

"Very likely," assented Mike indifferently.

Sir Robert, annoyed with himself and with Mike, would have liked to have asked what the devil he meant by that tone? But with a shamefaced consciousness that he had brought it on himself by an attempt to carry out Mrs. Musgrave's wishes, he abstained. The two men paced silently up and down the flat roof on which their rooms opened. Darkness had slipped swiftly over the city. Here and there the lights shot out irregularly, and a distant murmur, thumping of drums, clang of gongs, and the muffled clamour of the bazars—filled the silence without distinctly breaking it.

"By Jove!" said the Commissioner suddenly, "I'd give something to be going home, too!"

"I'd give something to be going off to Durban," Mike returned, with a jerk of his shoulders. "I call it awful hard luck to be stuck down here."

"Make the best of it, my boy. You won't go."

"Think not?"

"Certain. Musgrave's had a shot at it as well."

"Musgrave! That sweep!"

The Commissioner chuckled.

"Sweep—yes. But a good soldier. What can have possessed her to marry him!—Hallo, who's this!"

For a woman's figure rose out of the darkness, and a slender arm flew out from white folds.

"Huzoor!"

"Well, what?" asked Sir Robert testily. He was no longer in his own district, and had hoped to escape from petitions.

"Will the Presence buy? See, it is something beyond price."



"What is it?" asked another voice. Patty had come behind them unseen.

"Only a worthless old ring," returned her husband.

Sir Robert was holding the thing close to the glowing end of his cigar.

"It's a queer bit of work, though," he began slowly. "Old, beyond doubt, and I don't know that I've ever seen anything just like it before. What dost call it?" he added, looking up at the white figure.

"Huzoor, it is a wonder-worker. It will call back the heart that has strayed."

"One of their amulets," the Commissioner remarked still slowly. "Brings luck and all that sort of thing." He did not explain further, but he put another question. "Do not hearts stray in thy village, sister? Why part with the treasure?"

"My lord knows," said the voice faintly. "It is the famine."

What he read in the answer made him put his hand hastily in his pocket, but having done so he hesitated.

"Look here, Mike," he said, "you've a fancy for old curios. This is genuine. Will you buy it, or shall I?"

"I don't mind. But what's the good of a ring to me?"

"What's the good of a wife, man? Give it to Mrs. Hamilton, if she can put it on. Their fingers are astonishingly small."

"Yes, give it to me," said Patty, stretching out her hand. "Try my little finger."

The ring slipped on. The white veiled figure watched curiously.

"Lo, protector of the poor," she breathed, "he hath bound her. Is it well?"

"Husband and wife, sister. It is well—very well."

"How much does she want?" asked Mike, bringing a handful of loose rupees out of his pocket.

"What you like," said the Commissioner quietly. "This is no woman of the people. Very probably the whole family are starving, and have been too proud to ask relief."

"Starving!" cried Patty. "Mike, give her all you have there. And give her back the ring, I couldn't take it from the poor creature." She stretched it out impetuously, as Mike poured the silver into the slender hand.

"The mem-sahib buys it, but cares not to deprive the sister."

With an action full of dignity, she put aside the kindly proffer.

"Nay, sahiba, not so. Thy slave seeks not alms. Keep it safely, and let it bring thee blessing and bind thy heart to thy husband. Magic it is, but good magic, worthy its price, else had I not taken aught."

And quickly, before Patty could prevent her, she stooped and kissed the hem of her white dress. The next moment she had slipped into the shadows, leaving behind her a slightly discomfited trio.

"Oh, Mike, why did you let her go?" exclaimed his wife. "Surely something might have been done for her!"

"I expect we did just what she most wished, in allowing her to go without questioning," said Sir Robert.

Mike had possessed himself of the ring.

"Come into the light, and let's see what it looks like. Don't think much of your bargain, Bob. It's only a rotten old bit of metal."

"It's not the intrinsic value, of course," Sir Robert admitted, taking it in his hand. "But I stick to it that you've got something out of the common."

"Care to have it?"

"When you have just given it to me!" cried Patty, looking over his shoulder.

"You'll never wear it. To begin with, it must be very uncomfortable."

"Indeed, I shall wear it. There's something about it which appeals to me." And as he looked up in surprise, she added, "It's ugly, but it's odd. Yes, I shall wear it. Please let me have it, Sir Robert." She stretched out her hand and he nodded.

"You're quite right," he agreed. "It is odd."

But, to her surprise, he did not seem to notice her outstretched hand, for he gave it back to Mike, who tossed it up and down, before slipping it on her finger. The Commissioner felt it necessary to explain.

"I'm an unlucky dog. I might break the charm."

"But what is the charm?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Who knows? General good luck, I should say. Perhaps a good passage will come out of it. At any rate, stick to the thing."

She stood staring curiously at her finger. The light shining out from the room caught the rich tints of her hair, the whiteness of her skin. She looked very young, very slender, rather puzzled. Mike stuck his hands in

his pockets, and walked whistling to the door which led out on the leads.

"We've an early start, mind, to-morrow, Patty," he said. "I've ordered your chota haziri, and you'd better not stay up late."

"I am going," she said slowly. "Sir Robert, this is good-bye, isn't it?"

"My dear lady! As if one of the unwritten laws of India did not bind you to haunt railway-stations at any hour of the day or night that your friends come or go! You ought to have had another day, though, for Amber. Amber on an elephant. Doesn't that appeal to you?"

She shook her head.

"It's not fair. You haven't given me time to convert you."

"It would take more than a day at Amber to do that." And the touch of defiance was again perceptible in her manner. "To think that England is only three weeks off!"

"Only three weeks!" said the Commissioner maliciously. "I can imagine what London will look like afterwards. Slush and snow and fog and east winds, and the delights of January. How many envious longings you'll be flinging upon the sunshine you've renounced! Pile it up in your letters, Mike. Don't spare her."

It was all easy enough, natural enough; yet as that night, in his own room, he sat, pipe in mouth, legs stretched out, turning over a few official papers which it had been necessary to bring with him, Sir Robert's vagrant thoughts reverted to Mrs. Musgrave's words with

a new respect for her foresight. In spite of himself, they rankled. Had she not spoken, the signs were so slight they might have been lost on him; but now, with his eyes opened, they pointed to a certain change in Mike, a change, too, which suggested a vague uneasiness; for he began to think that it was more serious than he had imagined. It might be that resentment had struck deep roots in a kindly nature, where it had been reluctantly admitted; it might, again, be that something had passed between husband and wife which could not be quickly forgotten. The older man had loved the younger since the days when he had stood up for him at school, and thrashed a persecutor. He would have said he knew him well; yet it came back to his memory that once or twice he had encountered a strain of hardness which he could not label with Mike's other characteristics, and at this moment the remembrance was annoying. The upshot of his reflections was unsatisfactory. He returned impatiently to his papers, unable to assure himself that there was no trouble, yet equally unable to set it before himself in definite shape. That there was some sort of cleavage between husband and wife he could not doubt. It might, however, yet be mended. Why not? The coming separation might, after all, work for good. He supposed that it chiefly rested with her, and he wished that he had used his opportunities to study her more closely.

But it was now too late, and he called himself a fool, and went to bed in a bad temper.

Very early the next morning he was at the station, where a patient many-coloured crowd had squatted before the gate all night. Patty impressed him as looking

brilliantly young, and free from misgivings, and Mike—Mike was surely as usual. After all, Mrs. Musgrave was wrong, and he an idiot. Yet, when the dusty train moved on, and husband and wife stretched their hands to him for a parting shake, he found himself exclaiming—

“Hold onto the ring, Mrs. Hamilton!”

## CHAPTER VI.

### MOLLY.

DELHI is not only a city of memories, it is also still a city of dream wonder, although some thirty years ago, in a fit of tasteless righteousness, an English government white-washed decorations, pulled down the loveliest centre of the wicked old palace—so lovely, that the avenging soldiers when they broke in, hot-haste, fifteen years before, scarcely chipped off so much as a point of the delicate carving—and ran up in its stead hideous barracks. That wonder can never be replaced; but other wonders remain. For here is fretted lattice-work of radiant alabaster; here waters that reflect it, lingering in the tanks where queens have bathed; here jewelled flowers running over the walls in exquisite curves; here gold-bordered arches, under which the eye travels only to lose itself in beauty; here marbles, like pearls in their sheen; here shafts of clear sunshine, of luminous shadow; here scent of jasmine stealing in from the garden—

“If earth hath a bower of bliss,  
It is this, it is this, it is this!”

So, even in its fall, many have thought besides the man who encircled the beauty with these rapturous words; so thought Pleasance Musgrave as she stood on the marble pavement—white, daintily veined with faintest blues and pinks and yellows—and looked out at the broad Jumna, which had dried away from its walls and shrunk to a ribbonlike stream.

Near her an English girl sat sketching the marble loveliness—Molly Holmes, the sister of a district superintendent of police, who, having lately come out to join her brother, had immediately fallen over head and ears in love with Mrs. Musgrave. Pleasance bore the adoration with some impatience, yet with a certain relief. For with the girl she could always be frankly herself, whereas with the officers' wives she was forced, on one subject—her husband—to hold herself acutely on the defensive. It was one of the curious ironies of fate that she, who hated concealments, and found it difficult to stoop, must stoop to hide his weakness. Sometimes she thought it would have been easier had she loved him, but more often thanked God that such a pang was spared her. And yet—there was another sort of pang in the conviction that, if she had loved him, she would have had more influence, and the worst pang of all when it smote her that it had, perhaps, been her indifference which had encouraged him to seek forgetfulness in drink. She could not believe that he had been like this when she married him, and therefore it was that she found the stab unbearable, and told herself passionately that his nature was absolutely empty of sensitiveness, that no

efforts of hers could have kept him up, that it was not a deterioration which could be laid to her charge. But the gnawing consciousness gave an impetus to all her piteous attempts to bolster him in the eyes of all men, especially in the eyes of his regiment, who, also, to its credit be it said, whenever it was possible, gravely took its cue from her, and avoided accentuating its major's propensities.

Meanwhile, it was good, when it was possible, to forget.

"Pleasance!" called a young and imploring voice.

"Well?"

"Come and advise."

She strolled across, and, with her slender hands clasped behind her, stood looking at the girl's painting. Then she laughed.

"Is it so bad?" asked Molly humbly.

"I don't know. I don't know that it is bad at all. I laugh because courageous youth is always inspiring."

"And if I laughed," Molly retorted, "it would be at the absurdity of your talking as if you were ever so old. Why do you? It isn't like you to pretend."

"Pretend!" repeated Pleasance, with a gesture of dissent. "I dislike the fact too much to pretend. I know."

"You are three years older than I," said Molly stoutly.

"Four, if a day. And as if that were all! By-and-by you will discover that years don't count. Years are silly misleading things."

The girl looked quickly at her.

"You may talk, but you will not persuade people.



They know better." And as Mrs. Musgrave again shook her head, she went on—"Yesterday, at our bungalow, they were talking of you."

"Were they?" asked Pleasance, with interest. "It delights me to hear what people say, when it is nice. Was this nice?"

Molly nodded, and laughed.

"Do you suppose I would have allowed them to say anything else?"

"Ah!" Pleasance replied with a smile. "But that is being nice on compulsion. I'm very much afraid that oughtn't to count. However—who was there? Not the colonel's wife?"

"No. Mrs. Denton, Mr. Scott, and Captain Hamilton."

There was a short silence. Molly desperately sacrificed her best handkerchief to scrub out a light, and then looked up.

"You don't mind their talking, do you?" She asked the question anxiously, for it seemed to her that there was trouble in her friend's eyes.

Pleasance immediately flung back her head.

"I? Why should I?"

"Why should you, indeed? If you could have heard what they said—"

"But I didn't," she interrupted quickly, almost sharply. "I didn't, and I don't want to hear. If you only knew how sick I am of all the regimental gossip and idle talk, talk, about nothing at all! It seems to me to be the bane of so many lives. How can you encourage it?"

She spoke in a tone which confounded the girl.

"Oh, Pleasance!" was all she could say, and dumbly watched Mrs. Musgrave walk away to the low railing

overhanging the river bed. In a minute or two she was back and saying gently—

“You shouldn’t mind me so much, Molly, when I am cross. Of course it’s not your doing, that I might have known. You’re too young to take the lead; it would require a strong woman in a strong position, and even then she would probably fail. Besides, you would never allow them to say anything that was not kind.”

But Molly had been a little hurt.

“I am glad you are so far sure,” she said; “still I should like you to hear and judge for yourself. Mrs. Denton said how greatly she admired you, and wished she knew you better, but that you were difficult to get on with, and cold. You *can* be cold, you know. And Captain Hamilton agreed, only he said more. He said, to his thinking, you were one of the best and bravest women in India. That was all.”

That was all. Enough, however, to make the proud face quiver, and to bring a reluctant flush into the cheeks.

Molly saw nothing. But the silence made her uneasy.

“You’re not angry, Pleasance?”

“No. As I said, it’s impossible for you to prevent idle tongues from chattering. Besides, I suppose I ought to be flattered.” She recovered herself with a light laugh. “We’ll say that I am, and let that be the end of it. Have you nearly finished?”

“Quite.” The girl was putting her things together, for all the lovely opal tints on the marble were losing themselves in a blinding glare of sunshine, and further work was useless. “I don’t think that Captain Hamilton

can justly be called an idle chatterer," she remarked, still slightly on the defensive. "Egbert likes him particularly, and I feel very sorry for him."

"Yes?"

The tone was absolutely unconcerned.

"I don't think his wife ought to have left him. Everyone says that she wasn't in the least ill."

"And she never said she was."

"Then why did she go?"

"Oh," cried Pleasance impatiently, "what possible right have we to pronounce on people's private concerns!"

"Well, it can't be nice for him. Did he care for her?"

"Care! He was devoted."

Molly stood up and shook herself determinedly free of bread crumbs.

"You may say what you like. I'm quite certain that she shouldn't have gone."

"Oh, wise young judge!" Well, I dare say she will come back before next winter. You know in the hot weather we women are packed off to the hills, so where would be the good of her being in the country?"

But the girl persisted.

"I shan't go to the hills. I shouldn't dream of leaving Egbert. Was she nice?"

"She was charming."

Molly made a gesture of dissatisfaction. By this time they had left the Diwan-i-Khas, and were walking away through the garden, and past the big bushes of creamy jasmine.

"Then, couldn't you persuade her to stay?"

"I?" The sudden question was embarrassing.

"Yes. If you knew her well."

Mrs. Musgrave's face was troubled.

"I did what I could," she said with some hesitation. "I thought she would like the life better when she had given it a longer trial."

"She went because she did not like India? You may say what you please, Pleasance, but in your heart you know very well that she was wrong; and if you have any regard for her or for Captain Hamilton, you will do your very utmost to induce her to come back, and to come quickly."

Pleasance was startled.

"Why? What makes you think it so necessary?"

The question came almost against her will. She respected, it is true, Molly Holmes's commonsense, and it was possible that she wanted, if it were necessary to use argument, to be fortified with arguments suggested by others. Yet that alone would not have made her listen with an anxiety which held her breathless for the girl's answer. It came deliberately.

"Because he may find he can do without her."

"Molly, I can't think where you have picked up this wisdom of all the ages!" said Mrs. Musgrave, flushing slightly.

And Molly laughed.

"Out of the ages themselves," she returned. "We ought to be the richer for their legacies of experience."

They walked silently through the long, tunnel-like passage, until from under the Lahore gate they came out upon the broad space where a parade of native troops was just ending, and where, further away, lay the great

red and white Jama Masjid. The men were marching towards it in their turbaned ranks, and Mike Hamilton, who, on his way to his own quarters, had stood still to watch, came towards Mrs. Musgrave and her companion.

"You should have been a little earlier," he said. "There was a *ressaldar-major* whose rage against the new levies was awfully funny. It was hard work to keep one's countenance." He laughed again at the recollection. "You are going home, I suppose? May I come with you?"

He spoke to both, but he looked at Pleasance; and Pleasance was angry with him, and angry that she should feel anger instead of indifference. She answered coldly—

"No. I am not going home. I am going to ask Miss Holmes for tiffin."

"Are you?" Molly exclaimed joyfully. "That is delightful. Particularly as I have a fresh batch of *assafœtida* biscuits. The *khansamah* has learnt to make them beautifully."

And Mrs. Musgrave could have beaten her. For the suggestion had been an idea of the moment, and Molly should have covered, Mike should not have suspected it. He would suppose—— Let him suppose! Every now and then she rebelled passionately against him, herself, Patty, circumstances, fate, with the rebellion of a woman, frank by nature, yet obliged to walk warily, weighing every step.

*He may find he can do without her.*

It had been the voiceless fear of her own heart, and now another person had given it a voice.

She pulled herself together, to hear Molly hospitably pressing Mike to join them.

"Egbert said only this morning that he wanted to see you, and he promised to be at home for tiffin."

"Thanks, I'll come."

There was no shadow of reluctance in his acceptance. Pleasance wondered whether she could not plead a forgotten engagement. But while she wondered, she knew in her heart that no escape of this sort was possible. The worst she could do, was to allow him to suppose that she thought it necessary to avoid him. What was wanted was the calm unconcern of mere friendly acquaintance; and how hard it was to keep at that level when between them both lay the remembrance of—not so long ago! Yet—she looked round her—Delhi is truly a city of memories. There, before her troubled eyes, spick and span, and white, and rebuilt out of recognition, stood the Treasury, where nine Englishmen had deliberately fired the powder-magazine without a thought for their own lives. And because great deeds spread to far limits, undreamed of by the doers, that deed of self-sacrifice came now to hearten a woman's troubled soul.

So her voice and face were absolutely composed when they were all in Molly's little dining-room. Holmes, the policeman, was there, a quiet silent young fellow, whose eyes wrinkled into smiles under his sister's chaff—chaff, however, tempered by the profound conviction, already well recognised in Delhi, that his equal was not to be found among men in India.

That year talk, light or grave, had a tendency to drift into one of three subjects—the slackening war in South Africa, the famine, or the plague.

"It's been awful hard luck having to stick out here," Mike remarked. "I've ragged Bob Chester all I knew, for I must say I think he might have done something." He was speaking to Mrs. Musgrave, and went on with a laugh—"I suppose one's apt to think that, whatever one wants. And now it's too late. Now things are just dragging along to the end, and I'm not so keen."

"I should be keen," she answered; and, to his surprise, he was conscious of a note of unexpected reproach in her tone.

He turned quickly towards her, but Holmes was speaking in a quick low voice, which it was not easy to catch without attention.

"Myself, I think they're in the right," he said. "We haven't too many men out here, recollect, and if anything had gone seriously wrong in Boer-land, it's by no means impossible that we should have had, let us say, an echo of the trouble in India. That's what comes of a big empire like ours. If anything gets out of gear, it affects the rest of the machinery."

Mike had recovered himself.

"A good thing, too," he replied with a shrug. "Things would crawl intolerably if we didn't get a ruction or two to stir us up."

"They won't fail you," Holmes said quietly, his mind on a small packet of papers which had come into his possession by quite unauthorised methods. The next moment he was looking shy and uncomfortable, because his sister said "Egbert?" and he had a conviction that to be called anything so unusual as Egbert, was to be written down an ass.

However, it was his name, and he had to answer.

"Someone is outside," said Molly. "I think it is the padre."

The padre it was, and Holmes brought him in, a tall youthful—for that matter, all the men and women in India are youthful—shrinking figure, greatly embarrassed at finding Mrs. Musgrave, of whom he was mortally afraid, probably because her husband lost no opportunity of making himself disagreeable to the chaplain. So palpably afraid was he, that Holmes and his sister had to devote themselves to setting him at ease, and Mike got the word he wanted with Pleasance.

What he said was—

"When you spoke just now, did you mean to imply that I hadn't done my best to get to South Africa?"

She looked straight before her.

"No," she returned. "I couldn't have wished to imply anything of the sort. It was you who said you were no longer keen."

"And——?"

"And if it is so, isn't it a pity?"

"Why? It's too late to have much hope of a bullet finding a useful mission in my brain."

"That," she said quietly, "is the talk of a coward." He flushed angrily.

"You used not to hit so hard."

"Perhaps not. We all change, and in those days you weren't of so much consequence. You hadn't got a wife."

"If that," he said bitterly, "is my only claim to distinction, it doesn't at present amount to much."

Of this remark she took no notice.

"There is nothing going on in India of active fight-



ing just now, though I dare say, as Mr. Holmes hints, there is always underground unrest," she said slowly. "But that sort of thing doesn't affect you. And I suppose that, unless you can work off your energies in fighting or hunting something, this station life must become very wearisome to you men. Why don't you take up something?"

The next moment she could have beaten herself. Why did the longing to help him become at times so unruly and insistent that it carried her across the barrier she had been at such pains to pile up between them, the barrier of mere indifferent friendliness? For the very fact of finding fault with him, her very championship of Patty, was placing her on a different footing from the other women of the place. As if that were needed! As if it were not carefully to be avoided! To tell a man that his talk is the talk of a coward, is a break from the limits of mere indifferent friendliness. She knew it, and he knew it, which was more dangerous. He let her question linger before he answered it, and then his words came with great eagerness.

"I am sure you are right. What shall I do? What do you suggest?"

"Oh, I!" she exclaimed impatiently. "How can I possibly pretend to fathom what you have a mind for! Learn the flute. Consult Sir Robert. Write home and ask Patty."

And she managed to convey a certain aloofness in her suggestions which nettled him, as she intended it should. Perhaps it also influenced his answer.

"I doubt whether you understand the position," he

said, leaning forward in his chair. "I rather think it had better be explained."

"What do you mean?" she asked startled.

"I mean that Patty would not trouble her head in the matter."

The hardihood of his answer was unexpected. For the first time her beautiful eyes looked into his.

"You are unjust," she said quickly. "Most unjust."

"Pleasance!" Molly was bending forward, "we want you to be so kind as to post up Mr. Scott about the hospital work."

"If he will come with me, I will take him there, and tell him about it on the way," said Mrs. Musgrave, standing up with a swift consciousness of relief, a sentiment quite unshared by Mr. Scott, who would have preferred coffee in the verandah.

But there was no escape. Pleasance clutched her opportunity. After what had passed, she would not risk a walk home alone with Mike, who stood upright, a curious smile on his face, and watched her go without another word. Molly, after a few objections, followed her to the door.

"Come and smoke," said Holmes, hospitably. "My sister will see to the coffee presently. She is awfully keen on Mrs. Musgrave."

"Good woman," Mike blurted out.

"And hard lines," muttered Holmes, in reply. "Uncommonly hard lines. She sticks to him splendidly."

"The worse brute you are, the more a woman sticks, by what I can see," returned the other, with a growl in his voice, which might have been discontent or envy.

Said the policeman, lighting his pipe—

"You knew her before she married, Molly says?"

"Yes, I knew her."

And the question wakened remembrances which had better have been left sleeping. No woman's face had taken the place of his wife's, and he was as good a fellow as breathed, but he resented Patty's departure, and Molly had touched danger when she said he might learn to do without her. For the first month or two he was sore, angry, and miserable; now he was sore and angry, but less miserable. When a man once begins to find that he can get along without what had before seemed absolutely necessary for his happiness, it is surprising how swiftly he advances. And here what Pleasance had wanted for him did not come. If he had had fighting, or hard work, the healthy work which tries the strength of a man's muscles, and leaves him so dead tired that all he wants is to fling himself down and sleep the clock round; or even the unhealthy, which means grind and worry, and the conviction that you are trundling the wheel of the universe with everyone pushing against you, Mike would have flung himself upon it, and if he got through would have been satisfied with himself, and going home in a righteously masterful spirit, would have whisked Patty back in a more chastened and wifely mood. But because none of these things had come to him, and he was eating his heart out at an ordinary Indian station, the past and the future took undesirable proportions, and he began to think that he was suffering for having been a fool, and to wonder why he had been a fool. It was not to be expected that Pleasance should be kept out of such retrospects. She, he knew with pity, had also been a fool.

What was now making its way into his thoughts was that they had both been fools over the same matter.

He had never been actually in love with her, of that he was confident, but he had been extremely near it when Patty's red hair came in the way. And as he was free from conceit, he had not realised that she had given him her heart, but had an inkling that he could have gained it; which at the time seemed nothing, but now, when it had better have been forgotten, came back; came back, too, with a conviction that she still liked him well enough to wish to help him.

And Patty's last letter was two mails old, and one sheet in length.

## CHAPTER VII.

### HOME.

LONDON was wet enough and chilly enough to justify Sir Robert's prophecy. Sad, beyond the prophecy, too, with the sorrow of the death of the great Queen. But neither sorrow, nor wet, nor chill, could altogether damp Patty's glad enthusiasm. She had made the journey from Marseilles alone and without difficulty, and had begged that no one should meet her in London. The Leslies had always been accustomed to shifting for themselves, and Patty knew that to ask for an escort would be to lay herself open to a contemptuous charge of having changed. That, of all things, she was determined they should not say.

So she hurried through the little she had to do in

London, and went down by an early train two days after her arrival. She had the carriage to herself, and as she looked out of the window she thought with delight how good it was to be once more in England. It mattered nothing that it was cold and bleak, that clouds hung low, that mists rose thickly from the soddened grass. What she saw was that the grass was green, that the bare trees already showed the reddening of spring in their delicate traceries. And as she neared the west country these signs became more pronounced. It gave her a further thrill to catch a familiar inflection in the voices. Presently, she saw the river, soon the cathedral towers. Every landmark greeted her joyfully, and she sat smiling, turning her eyes from side to side, answering to the call of the land, and amazed that she could ever have consented to be torn away from it. •

But she had come back.

There was a cross journey to make before she could travel up towards the grey moor, but she had left London early, and the light had scarcely begun to wane, when she reached the little station with white palings and its narrow platform, and—yes, they were there, her father, and Jack, and Cissy, and the dogs. The next moment she was in the midst of a tumultuous confusion of questions and greetings, with the one porter touching his cap in the background.

“Mother’s all right. Only she thought somebody must stay at home.”

“This yours, Patty?”

“Phil? Why, of course, Phil’s at school.”

“Jack goes to Oxford next term. He’s cramming with father now.”

"You look well, Patty. Did you have a good passage?"

"Cis! I say! You'd better see after Dinah!"

For Dinah, with a characteristic thirst for knowledge, was bent on investigation of the engine, from which she had to be forcibly removed. As an afterthought, Patty's luggage was extricated from fish baskets, and made over to a friendly wheelbarrow; after which the family proceeded to climb the steep hill, pouring out much local information by the way, receiving many smiling greetings, and turning at last through a white gate, into a garden already golden with crocuses. Here stood the square-shouldered Rectory, and here, running from the door, came Mrs. Leslie, holding out her arms for Patty to fly into.

Later on, they sat round the fire.

"I can hardly believe that we have you again," murmured her mother; "and yet it seems so natural to see you there, that I can believe still less that you have ever been away. So good of dear Mike to spare you!"

"Stumps hasn't forgotten you one bit," Cissy asserted.

"Hasn't he!" contradicted Jack. "Much you know about it! He forgot first and then he remembered. He always was a fool."

"And you're always unfair to Stumps. Look at him now."

"Yes, look! Trust Stumps for priggish the best place."

Patty laughed and smoothed Stumps, who had curled himself on her soft dress. Then she breathed a deep sigh of contentment.

"I have dreamt of this so often," she exclaimed. "You can't any of you know how good it is to be back again."

"I can."

Cissy said the two words with enthusiasm, and Patty nodded.

"You can't quite, though," she went on, "because you can't imagine how much I hated India. Everything is horrid. The heat and the dust, and the dreadful things which happen. People talk about life being made so easy. I don't think so. What seems to please them, I call unnecessary."

"Meaning——?" said her father.

He was looking at her attentively.

"Meaning that you must have a dozen people to do what one person could perfectly well do alone. If I gave you a list of our servants, I don't think you'd believe me."

Mrs. Leslie leaned back with a little sigh.

"But you had them, my dear, at any rate you had them. That seems to me so extraordinary, that I really can't grasp it. Were they obliging? Weren't they always giving notice? If you only knew the difficulties we have here—some say the house is too bustling, and some that they can't stand the quiet; and as for fringes, I have had to give in altogether, which I never thought could happen. Only this morning the cook——"

But here Jack broke in. Mrs. Leslie's little speeches were seldom allowed to flow to their natural end.

"Patty, you'd better undertake Phil's rabbits. Cissy's no good since she's turned up her hair. She always forgets."

Swift repudiation followed from the indignant Cissy. She and Jack were twins, and showed their affection by squabbling between themselves, and resenting blame from a third person. The girl was thick-set and healthy looking, with a fresh and open face. Patty smiled at her.

"I noticed her hair directly," she said. "I think it looks very nice."

"Not carrots, at all events," grunted Jack, with a significant glance.

"Carrots! She had almost forgotten the term of opprobrium. Not thus had Mike alluded to the wonderful tint. She frowned slightly, and her father, who was the only one who watched her, noticed it.

"She's been to a dance," went on Jack scornfully.

Patty turned with interest.

"Cissy! You never wrote about it!"

"Yes, I wrote," said the girl. "I wrote before we knew you were coming home."

"Did you dance?"

"Toddy danced with her, of course," said Jack with a laugh; and Mrs. Leslie broke in.

"I do think that two or three letters must have gone out. I suppose someone will send them back, though it seems hardly worth while, does it? and one can hardly believe a penny stamp will do so much. But I am sure I wrote to tell you how very tiresome Ada Waller had been after promising to come as housemaid."

"You gave us short notice," remarked the rector tentatively.

"Yes."

The answer was brief, and did not diminish a certain



uneasiness which had grown on him. But he made no further diversion from the talk which flowed merrily round a hundred local subjects; ponies, bicycles, harriers, schools, paper-chases, old women, old men, girls who should go into service, service which the girls would not take. Once, and once only, was the limit of interest broadened. Cissy leaned forward and touched her sister's hand.

"What a funny old ring!" she exclaimed.

Patty looked at it.

"It is very old."

"And very ugly. Isn't it in the way?"

"Rather. But I have a fancy for it. It came to me oddly. I call it the ring of the woman of Jaipur."

And as she looked at it, involuntarily her voice grew gentler, and a mist stole over her eyes. For in that moment she seemed to be back in the soft darkness of the beautiful Indian night, she heard the distant and muffled thud of the temple tom-toms, she saw the shadowy white figure, Sir Robert, Mike—Mike most clearly of all. Almost she could have believed his voice was in her ears, almost she could distinguish the words.

Instead, Jack was telling her of an otter hunt.

The days which followed were days when she threw herself in her spirited fashion into all the occupations of her past life. Her aim was that everything should go with her as if she had never been away at all. She consoled her mother under the inevitable domestic difficulties; she went with her father to the whitewashed and thatched cottages, where she was welcomed with an almost embarrassing astonishment, and sometimes with

pity which was yet more disconcerting; she joined Jack and Cissy in their rides, she was so eager to be one of them again, that she even took part in a rat hunt, a pursuit which she had hated in the old days.

And, more than once, she assured herself that all was as it had always been. She did not know, yet, that we can no more take up our past than we can possess our future. If we go back, we go back as a ghost—to find our places filled.

Winter, in this Devonshire valley, came late, but came at last. Frost tightened his grip on the land, and Jack could neither think nor talk of anything but the chances of skating. He was continually in and out of the house, recording the degrees of frost, or bicycling over to the Stover ponds to report upon the prospects of their freezing.

For the twentieth time Mrs. Leslie remarked that it was terribly cold.

"Very healthy, though," returned Patty, shivering but undaunted.

"My dear, I cannot honestly think so. It gives your dear father sciatica, and me——"

Mrs. Leslie paused to consider what it was giving her, and Patty broke in—

"Let me get your knitted shawl for you, mum."

"Thank you, my dear," said Mrs. Leslie with a sigh. "I should be glad of it, but I did not care to ring for Clara, because she is new, and might complain that I was always ringing my bell; though really, when the kitchen and the drawing-room are all on the same floor, I almost wonder they should mind. But—Patty——"

"Yes."

"I am surprised to hear you say you like the cold, for I am sure—though I have such a wretched memory that I am always putting things away, and forgetting ten minutes afterwards where I put them—I am sure I remember how much you used to complain that Louisa—Louisa was with us then—would not be persuaded to make good fires."

"I like it now," Patty returned emphatically. "It is heat which I dislike. I hope the frost will last, so that we may get some skating."

"Ah, skating," said her mother vaguely, "skating, yes. If the young ones go, I suppose you will go, too, my dear?"

"Rather," replied Patty, with a laugh.

"Then"—Mrs. Leslie's manner became impressive—"I think—I am almost sure that you will see Marmaduke——"

"Marmaduke? You don't mean Toddy Gibson?"

Her mother held up imploring hands.

"Patty, my dear! Please don't."

"Don't what?"

"Don't call him Toddy as if he were a terrier or something—at any rate, not before Cissy. How can a girl think seriously of any man, however desirable, if he has a ridiculous name like that?"

But Patty was staring at her in blank amazement.

"Mum!"

"I am really certain that he admires her very much, and he is such a good fellow!"

"Toddy Gibson!"

"You know, my dear," went on Mrs. Leslie, disregarding, "that poor George was killed in South Africa

—poor dear things, they felt it most deeply, and I am sure everyone in the county was so sorry for them. I shall never forget what a blow it was to us all—some one one knew. But, of course, it is impossible to deny that it does make a change in Marmaduke's position, and, so devoted to Cissy as he is and all that, it seems such a pity that she should be laughed out of it. Dear Jack is such a boy, he can't understand. And, of course, one wouldn't do a thing to bring it about, only there can be no harm in wishing him to be called Marmaduke, and I thought perhaps if I spoke to you—You see, you were spared anything of the sort. You met dear Mike when you were away from home, so that there was none of this mocking at the poor man."

The young wife gave a short and angry little laugh.

"They could not have mocked at Mike," she said quickly.

But her mother shook her head.

"Oh, my dear, they could, they would—you don't know! And, as I said, in your case it was different, because he only came here after you were engaged. But poor Tod—I mean poor Marmaduke—they like him, but they laugh, and girls are so easily influenced. You see it, I am sure, with the servants. Just a word will put them off a really good place."

The thought still bewildered Patty.

"It can't be possible! She is such a child!"

"She is eighteen," said the mother with a little sigh. "And I don't think she is more of a child than you were when you married dear Mike. Your father always feared you were too young. I remember his saying so in this very room."

Had he been right? "Go home to your dolls, my dear lady!" The words had stung then, they stung more now. She jumped up and went to the door, but came back and kissed her mother impulsively.

"It is very amazing," she exclaimed; "but don't be afraid, mum. I won't laugh."

It was difficult to carry out her promise when, as her skates were being buckled on, a shy and awkward young man was dragged up unwillingly by Jack.

"Here's Toddy, Patty," he announced. "He didn't want to come. He's awfully afraid of you now you're married. But I thought perhaps you'd forgotten how to skate, and he could show you."

He was a very simple and honest youth, and though at first she had suspected Jack of sinister designs, she found herself well taken care of, so long as he was allowed to be silent. He had not been shy in old days, but it was evident that he looked upon her as having drifted into another orbit, and she was half amused, half provoked by the longing glances he cast at a circle of young skaters, among whom Cissy's skirts were in cheerful evidence. Patty herself would have liked to have joined them. But it was clear he did not consider this correct. He skated solemnly about the less crowded parts, and she submitted, hoping to induce him to talk. It ended, however, still silently on his part, and she was glad to return to the bank from which they had started, where apparently he thought he might leave her.

Just then she heard her name spoken, and recognised the voice of old Sir Thomas Browne. He was standing as near the brink as he dared, and by his side was a lady with a charming ugly face.

"Mrs. Hamilton," he began ponderously, "for the last five minutes I have been endeavouring, but in vain, to attract your attention."

"Really?" said Patty smiling.

"This lady is very desirous to make your acquaintance. Miss Chester. You know her brother, Sir Robert, she believes."

"Indeed I do. I am glad." Patty put out an impulsive hand. "I had your address, and was wondering how we could meet."

"Ah," smiled Elizabeth, "Robert told me he had extorted a promise from you to find me out."

"And to report upon your looks. He is anxious about you."

"We will talk of more interesting things before we begin on that subject," said Miss Chester, speaking lightly. "I am longing to hear what you can tell me about Robert. May I come down to you on the ice? I can't skate, but I don't tumble down."

Mrs. Hamilton quickly took off her skates.

"Now we will walk about so as to keep warm," she said. And as she spoke she wondered what made her so glad to meet Sir Robert's sister.

"And you saw him just before you left India?" asked Elizabeth, when she had listened for a little while.

"Just before."

"If you could know how jealous you make me!" said the other, with a rueful shake of her head. "Robert and I have been so much to each other all our lives."

"Couldn't you——" Patty was beginning, and checked herself. Miss Chester, however, anticipated the unspoken question.

"Naturally, everyone asks that," she said. "I tried it out there, you know, directly I was free to go, and broke down. The doctors forbid it absolutely. It has been the bitterest disappointment. And I am very sorry for you, for I am afraid you have gone through the same experience."

Patty coloured.

"No, I did not break down. I came home because I disliked India."

There was a pause.

"Then I am very sorry for your husband," Elizabeth said gently. "It is so hard for the men when their women folk have to leave them. The best news I could have of Robert would be that he was going to marry. Only he is so busy, that I don't know when he will have the time to find the right person."

She had not said a word which hinted at blame, and yet Patty felt an odd impulse to defend herself.

"I could not bear to be so far away from them all," she explained.

"It was a far flight for your first," the other returned gaily. "And, no doubt, soon you will be going back."

"No, not soon."

And this time there was a touch of defiance in Patty Hamilton's voice. Elizabeth, glancing at her, changed the subject.

"Are your people here?" she asked.

"There is my sister," answered the girl. It dawned upon her as she spoke that Cissy's laugh was unnecessarily loud, and then she was vexed with herself for admitting such a thought. Nevertheless, it made her

add hastily, "She is scarcely more than a child, as you may see."

"She is enjoying herself—as I see," said Miss Chester kindly. "And what a pretty sight it is!"

It was a pretty sight. The silvery ice, the swiftly curving figures, the bright faces, the grey trees with their exquisite tracery of branch, their clean strong stems; the sun, a red globe shining through the mist, in one spot a little blue smoke curling upwards. Elizabeth gave a half impatient sigh.

"How different it is from India, and how much they would like to be here!"

"Would they? I am not so sure about Mike. He loves India," his wife remarked hastily.

"He is such a good soldier, that of course he flings himself into his profession and its interests. But you may be sure that England always lies at the back of their thoughts. More than ever with him, now that you are here."

There was a silence. Perhaps Patty forgot that she was not alone.

"Yes," she said in a low voice, "I am here."

It was Miss Chester who at last began again—

"A rumour," she said, "has reached me—not through Robert himself—that my brother is likely soon to get a step."

"Mike's regiment is moving to Delhi. I hope Sir Robert's promotion will not take him further away."

"I don't know at all, but like you, I hope not. The two are good friends, and—perhaps especially in India—good friends are very good." She did not add what was in her mind, that friends were the more wanted



when wives went home. She only asked, "Did you find anyone out there you much cared about?"

"No," Patty answered carelessly. "At least there was Mrs. Musgrave."

"Mrs. Musgrave?" The name startled Elizabeth exceedingly. "Who was she? The beautiful Miss Pleasance Graves?"

"She is beautiful, and her name is Pleasance. It must be the same. Did you know her?"

"Only by name." She had been startled because she happened to have heard a good deal of the old liking between Miss Graves and Mike Hamilton. She was one of the few who can keep these tales to themselves, and as the hearing came but a little while before the announcement of Mike's engagement to Patty, she had not even repeated it to her brother in India. But now she felt as if she would like to know more. "Were you and she at the same station?"

"Indeed we were," Patty replied with a smile. "Her husband is Mike's major."

"Really?"

"He was promoted into the regiment, worse luck! He is a horror. We all wonder how she could have married him."

Elizabeth thought it not unlikely that Patty had more to do with this step than she knew. What she had now heard made her vaguely uncomfortable. The young wife had offered such an insufficient reason for her return, that she could not but suspect it might have left Mike sore. And Pleasance Graves on the spot, and her husband a horror! But as to Patty, least of all, could

she show her uneasiness, she took refuge in a well-worn truism.

"Marriages are inexplicable. I am sorry to hear she has made such a mistake. She was, by all accounts, a beautiful creature. I see my friends gathering together to go, and I have kept you in the most barefaced and selfish manner from skating. Please forgive me; and please, something else. I don't live so very far away, will you come and spend a day or two with me?"

"I should like it of all things," Patty said warmly. "But what am I to tell Sir Robert? You have said nothing about yourself."

Elizabeth laughed.

"Tell him we met on the ice. Doesn't that speak for itself? Bring any Indian photographs with you. Good-bye. I can't tell you how glad I am that we have found each other out."

The meeting had exhilarated Patty. Left to herself, she once more had her skates strapped on, and went gaily off to the young party. In her heart, she battled with a suspicion that they were noisier than was necessary; but she was ready with a hundred excuses, and was sure of a glad welcome among them. It surprised her when she became conscious that she was not to be admitted on the old terms. True, they were polite, but it was no longer the easy comradeship, the give-and-take which she had expected to find; she even questioned whether her coming did not cause a certain constraint. Jack asked whether she wanted someone to skate about with again, and once more offered up the easy-going Toddy.

"No, Toddy can't. Toddy is going to show me a wonderful cut," objected Cissy. "Go yourself, Jack."

"Get out! I shall stop and see the fun. Wait a minute, Patty, and I'll find someone for you."

"As if I wanted anyone! I came to see you," she said indignantly.

She went, nevertheless. It seemed to her as if they waited for her to go, as if she no longer belonged to them, as if a gulf had suddenly yawned between their life and hers. And, if it were so, whom had she got on her own side? Was another gulf opening which would leave her solitary?

## CHAPTER VIII.

### WITH PRIMROSES AND APPLE-BLOSSOM.

THE skating broke up suddenly, and, after a month of rough east wind, spring peeped out of sheltered nooks, and primroses ran riot in the hedges. Clouds scudded across the moor, to break into sweet fresh rain, and the scent of growing things, the gladness of young life, filled the air. The first joy of home-coming was over for Patty. She had settled down to the usual routine—rather, perhaps, had fallen into it, for she was curiously unsettled. Never before had she been so conscious of the delicate beauty about her, the film of tender green, the uncoiling of the ferns, the rush of happy streams. She had looked back upon them with yearning, but, now that she had them again, they did not satisfy her. For she was in the home life, and yet

out of it. From the first she had felt something of the failure, though she had refused to face it, telling herself feverishly that only time was wanted to break through this surface strangeness and put her in her own place. She was very young, she did not understand, and when the knowledge forced itself upon her, stared blankly at it, not knowing what to do with so unexpected an experience. Jack and Cissy were always friendly; but she had left them, and her position was changed. Cissy, moreover, was awaking to a consciousness that she was now Miss Leslie, and that certain prerogatives might make up for certain other distasteful obligations. She had no intention of yielding them.

Patty's thoughts wandered more and more to Mike.

She did not hear from him often, nor were her own letters frequent, and the silence came about partly from pride, partly from a sore conviction that he was not interested in the things she cared to write about. Had he wished to hear, he would certainly have questioned her. Yet there was another side, for she owned that her own people were curiously indifferent as to what she had to tell. Strange cities, strange customs, strange sights, claimed no more than a fleeting attention; in a moment the talk broke away, to flow back to the little narrow life among the hills. Even her father listened with closer attention to anything of local interest. Patty began to reflect, to take up the cudgels for India, to wonder sometimes whether she had not been like this with Mike.

She grew restless.

At Easter Phil came home, and his sister waited for him eagerly. But Phil, though he brought an increase

of exuberant life, had grown undemonstrative and shy. He adored Jack, and admitted Cissy to companionship, but he made Patty feel herself on quite another level. She would not have believed it possible that she could have borne to lose an hour of his holidays, yet it was with relief that she accepted Miss Chester's invitation to spend a few days with her.

When Elisabeth Chester liked, she could make it very charming for her guests. She made it very charming for Patty now. The house was of red brick, not large, and it lay under the shelter of the moor, with trees on either side to protect it from the winds, with a sunk road in front, and beyond the road a broad stretch of blue distance. It was good to look at, and yet more good to live in. In its dainty comfort, its pictures, its flowers, and its books, Patty could not but be conscious of a change from the Rectory. Here she was in a wider world, and—she had learned to recognise the fact. She recognised it more when Elizabeth talked.

"I hope you won't mind being alone with me," she said. "I had qualms as to whether it was quite fair, but I stifled them successfully. There is so much—so very much—that I want to hear."

They sat in the cheerful drawing-room, a fire crackled, the sun poured through an open window, and a caged bullfinch hopped restlessly from perch to perch. Patty looked at her hostess, and knew that talk about India was the talk she, too, most longed for. It was odd, also, suddenly to remember that she hated it—odd, and a little confusing.

"I am very glad to be alone with you," she an-

swered, "and I will tell you all I can. Where shall I begin?"

"I don't know," Elizabeth said simply. "You are dealing with a hungry person, not soon satisfied. You were at Peshawar, weren't you? I shall never forget the glory of my month there, and being taken up through the Khaibar. Isn't it beautiful?"

"I wouldn't go," said Patty, with a shiver. "Mike wanted to take me, but I refused. Those places always frightened me."

Elizabeth looked at her with some astonishment. Young, spirited, the girl struck her as little likely to yield to fear.

"I wonder why?" she said.

"I don't know. I sometimes wonder myself. But dreadful things do happen. There was one at Peshawar just before we left." She went on with difficulty—"An officer was stabbed."

"Oh! Someone you knew?"

"He had just left us—he had been walking with us—with Sir Robert and me."

And her voice faltered as it all came back. Elizabeth laid a kind hand upon her knee.

"How very, very terrible! I can understand such a horror making you hate the place, and long to get out of it. But the regiment is at Delhi now, isn't it?"

"Yes. And it wasn't that. I was coming before." An impulse which surprised herself made her add—"Sir Robert thought that I was wrong?" And she put the words in the form of a question.

"He was thinking of his friend, no doubt, and of how forlorn he would be," Elizabeth answered, with a

smile. She waited; but, as Patty remained silent, she went on—"Is your husband as good-looking as he used to be? I only saw him once or twice, but I must confess to having lost my heart to him. It was such a thorough soldier's face."

"Yes; it is."

"A long, drooping nose, hair and moustache brown—light brown. Come, aren't you a little bit jealous of such an impression on my memory? His forehead rather sloped back, and his eyes——"

"His eyes are his best feature," interrupted Patty hastily.

"They were very pleasant, I know; but I can't remember their colour?"

"Oh, grey!"

She was sitting up, keenly alive, and Elizabeth's own eyes twinkled with satisfaction. Perhaps it was not surprising that she made the mistake of supposing that, if the wife grew to realize her own failure, all would be right. Patty had been headstrong, but her heart was Mike's, and Elizabeth never doubted that he still loved her. She did not know that even a careless wound may strike at the very roots of love while love is young, and its roots are not held firm by the growth of years. That is why, with older people, we see bickerings and contradictions, and so little left of the outward semblance of love that we hardly believe that it can exist at all; and all the while the roots run deep, and refuse to be torn up by roughest strain. Elizabeth had lived longer than Patty by some dozen years or so, but not long enough to have learned this. And it was as well, for it might have dimmed even her bright hopefulness. Since

she first saw Patty, she had had a letter from Sir Robert, in which he said tersely—"Try to see Mrs. Hamilton, and do what you can to make her understand what a little fool she has been."

So Elizabeth was trying.

"I think you will like Delhi better than Peshawar," she said thoughtfully. "It is so alive with interest for us English."

"Not for me," Patty replied quickly, with a shudder. "If I could forget that mutiny, perhaps I should not so much mind India. The terror of it is somehow in my blood."

And she told her companion why. Elizabeth dropped her work, and listened to the story with attention.

"Oh, I am sorry!" she exclaimed impulsively. "Of course that makes it difficult for you."

"Because I always feel what has been may be again."

"Let us hope not. But if it were, you would like to be with your husband. Nothing would be so hard to bear as separation."

Patty was twisting a ring on her finger, and she did not immediately reply. But suddenly she put out her hand.

"Do you know Jaipur? Sir Robert made Mike buy this ring from a woman there."

Elizabeth looked at it curiously.

"Robert has a fancy for these old charms," she said. "I tell him he is half a pagan. And pray what particular virtue belongs to this?"

"I don't know. They wouldn't tell me. I don't think Mike knew himself. Good luck, Sir Robert said, and that I must always wear it. I always do. Why, I can't



think, but that evening at Jaipur seems clearer than any other time in India. Sometimes I could quite imagine myself there again—on the roof—in the night——”

Her voice sank dreamily, her eyes grew soft with a far-away look, and Elizabeth watched her with interest. Here was something she did not understand, which seemed to affect the young wife differently from other things. She made up her mind to ask her brother what he remembered about the incident. India is the land of mysteries, and her mind was too imaginative to refuse admittance to a mystery. What puzzled her was how Patty, who seemed unimaginative, should be so stirred. At length she brought her back to the commonplace by a question.

“Now that you are in England once more, I wonder how much it answers to your expectations? Sometimes I fancy that until we can round off our comparisons by returning to a place, we don’t get a really correct impression. For good or for bad,” she added with a smile.

Patty did not immediately reply. She could not. For the question, simple though it was, probed with a sudden and unexpected hurt, making her wince.

“I don’t know,” she said slowly; and apparently it was not the wider subject of England which was in her mind. “I don’t know. It seems to me that—that I am not so necessary to them all as I thought I was. I think when one goes away—one’s place gets filled up.”

“Always,” Elizabeth agreed promptly. “It brings a shock, but it is one of those laws of nature without which life could not go on. It doesn’t make life pleasanter for the one who comes back; but, after all, we don’t come as ghosts. We’ve got a place of our own.”

Patty was looking at her.

"You mean," she said with a momentary hesitation, "the new place?"

"I mean the new place."

"But if one leaves that?"

The other shook her head smiling.

"It may be dangerous. Isn't there the old proverb about nature and vacuums?"

For she knew quite well that the girl was referring to herself, and she wanted to bring possible dangers home to her. Again there was silence, and again Patty broke it.

"Did you say," she asked, "that you had never seen Pleasance Musgrave?"

"Never. I have only heard of her."

"She is beautiful."

"That I heard."

"The sort of beauty," pursued Patty, drawing a deep breath, and staring at the fire, "which men admire even more than women."

"And did you see much of her?"

"I did. I liked her from the first. I do like her," she went on with emphasis, and now she turned and looked straight in Elizabeth's face. She added, as it seemed, inconsequently, "Yes. I trust her."

Miss Chester found herself pondering upon this strange friendship. She had quick intuitions, and although the most obvious deductions might have been unfavourable to Mrs. Musgrave, she did not pin her faith upon the obvious, rather on the girl's conviction. For something told her that it was held in spite of strong draggings in a contrary direction, and she respected it,

Nor did after reflections shake her idea, but it made her all the more keen to send Patty back to India.

With this end in view she dropped careful words, and was at pains to take more for granted than she had direct cause for assuming. She talked cheerfully about Patty's return, she asked her to find room for a parcel for Sir Robert, she advised her to buy a Terai hat from André. It cannot be said that she got much in the way of answer. Patty had grown more silent, she let things pass. Elizabeth could not be certain that she made an impression; she had to be content when there was no word of absolute contradiction.

The moor had an unfailing attraction for Patty. Not a day passed but she found herself on it, and when Elizabeth knew that she liked to slip out there alone, she took care to let the opportunity recur. For it is alone that we must face the great decisions of life, and to face them in those broad solitudes is to be freed from many petty obstacles which hamper us in crowded places—to be more alone with God. Here were the sweeping lines running cleanly against the sky, fold upon fold, curve after curve; and although there was now the amazing colour of the autumn glory, colour there was, yet more delicate and more lovely. For at no time could be seen a tenderer gladder green than where the bracken unrolled its spirals, and the young grass, kept warm by winter snows, ran joyfully up to the grey and rugged tors, and wooed them into cheerfulness. At no time did the larks sing more triumphant songs above the other feathered folk. At no time was there a scent more wholesome than came now from the sweetness of grow-

ing things, and the moist earth, and the rush of innumerable mountain streams.

And Patty's awakening had brought her nearer to the throb of love which lay in the heart of the rejoicing.

She did not say anything to Elizabeth Chester until the carriage was at the door, and they stood together in the hall, and then it was only to hope that the autumn would not be too late for Sir Robert's parcel.

"Oh no. That was what I expected; for naturally you must wait until the hot season is over."

"Yes. But then——" said Patty, with her eyes wandering into the blue distance.

"Then!" repeated Elizabeth, smiling.

She went back to her room, well satisfied. By the next mail she would send the good news to her brother. For neither she nor Patty realised that there was another person to speak—the husband who had been left.

When she reached home, the girl's moods were many and various, but the restlessness never left her; and her father, who still watched, saw that it increased when the Indian mail was due, and that when this brought a letter from her husband, it seemed intensified. He had often thought of speaking to Patty, and trying to reach the trouble which, he was sure, existed. In his way stood a shy sensitiveness, and a great fear of treading clumsily on inner feelings which he regarded as sacred. This had often proved a bar between the coarser grain of some of his parishioners and himself; in one or two cases his evident respect for each man's conscience had gained a heart, but the larger number would have better responded to more direct speaking. Perhaps it was the same with his children—as yet. Perhaps this reverence

for their souls, this want of confidence in his own handling, were too delicate qualities for them to appreciate—as yet. Nevertheless, they were both fond and proud of him, and it is possible that Patty's eyes were opening to this as well as to other things. It always pleased her to walk with him to the outlying parts of the scattered parish.

It was a week or two after her stay with Miss Chester that they started together for a moorland farm; he, a tall thin figure with the stoop that comes from climbing hills, she, young, slender, buoyant. The cottage gardens were gay with spring flowers, the orchards flushed with pink apple-blossoms, and the smell of lilac was in the air. They breasted the steep road, and quite suddenly Patty spoke.

“Dad, don't you think I ought to go back?”

The appeal was so astonishing, so unexpected, that he had no words with which to answer. What he did say at last was—

“My dear, I have never yet understood why you came.”

She hesitated, and her reply could hardly be called a reply.

“Don't let mother be in too great a hurry to marry Cissy.”

His thin kindly face turned to her uneasily.

“Is she thinking of it? I very much hope not. I would rather the child had time to learn her own heart.”

“Yes,” agreed Patty eagerly. “That is just it. She has got to learn her own heart, and that's a lesson which isn't taught in the schoolroom.”

“No, my dear. Only life can teach it to us.”

He was vaguely uncomfortable, yet shrank from questioning her. It was likely she would say more if she were left to take her own way in the saying.

"It is a very hard lesson," was what she said. "That I am beginning to find out."

"Yes."

She stopped to gather a few primroses growing in a mossy hedge, and her face was turned away.

"Only beginning," she went on with an effort, "and yet I'm not sure that it isn't too late."

"No, no, no!" he protested in a troubled voice. "Patty, my child, you must not say that. I—I think, if you can trust me—you know I do not ask idly—it might be well if you could make up your mind to tell me a little more. You began by inquiring whether I thought you should go back to your husband?"

"And you said you had never understood why I came home. Well, it was dead against Mike's wish."

And as she stood and faced him, she threw up her chin with the little movement characteristic of her. He only answered quietly—

"I see. But why?"

"Because I wanted you all so much," she said with a break in her voice. "This was home, and I hated India, and felt as if I must come back——"

For the first time he interrupted her.

"Had Mike failed you?"

"Oh no, never! He was always good to me. Too good, I suppose. He told me once that he worshipped the very ground I trod upon; and I told him"—her smile was rueful—"that it bored me. It did. I wanted him to be more like Jack. So I said I should come home."

"Yes?"

"And that made him angry, very angry. I think"—she went on hesitatingly—"that he is still very angry."

"I hope he is," said her father in his gentle voice. For he recognized that if Mike ceased to be angry, it would be because he had ceased to care.

"He does not say a word about my going back."

"Ah!"

"He says very little about anything."

"It was not a slight thing, remember, to come against his wishes. I imagine, too, that it broke up his home."

"He has to go into barracks, and to live a good deal at the Club, of course. Mike couldn't order dinner to save his life. He'd be like that officer who did it for the whole year at once. On New Year's Day his khansamah used to appear and say solemnly, 'Chops this year, sahib?'" Patty's gay laugh, which her father had missed of late, rang out. "But you can't call a bungalow a home;" she added defensively.

They were climbing over fine and springy turf, through which here and there cropped up grey granite. White drifts of clouds sailed overhead, the larks were mounting and singing. She stood still and drew a deep breath of delight.

"This is so different! If only I could make you understand how different! Don't you pity me for having to give it all up? Don't you think that Mike might just as well come home himself?"

"You are asking a great deal, Patty; and—will you pardon me, my dear, if I add that I don't see what you have yourself to justify it."

"Then I suppose," she said, giving him a quick

look, and walking on again, "I suppose you would advise me to go out?"

"If he will have you."

"Dad!"

She was startled, startled out of measure. From no one else would the suggestion have stirred such amazement, from anyone else, indeed, she would have laughed it to scorn. But her father, her father whose gentle judgment always strained forbearance to its limits, that he should consider it within the compass of Mike's rights to forbid her return to him, came upon her with a shock before which her world reeled. He said no more, neither did he make any attempt to explain away his words, in spite of the trouble they had awakened; and she stood with eyes blindly fixed upon his face, blindly, because she did not see him, she saw only Mike. Not Mike, though, as she tried to picture him, as he had been before that December day in Peshawar, when he had made his last appeal and failed. The figure which rose before her eyes was another Mike, changed, cold, indifferent, careless, and she shivered at its approach. The next moment she flung her thought from her, fighting its pain with the confidence of youth. She even laughed as she spoke.

"You may be sure that he will have me."

"Let us hope so," Mr. Leslie returned quietly. "Certainly you will do well to offer."

"It cannot, of course, be at once," she explained. "No one goes to India for the hot weather. Besides, the voyage out would be unbearable, and I might fall in with the monsoon. Mike would not wish it at all. I will



write, however, by the next mail, and ask him to fix his own time."

And her father, as he looked at her, and saw the fresh charm of her young face, felt that, after all, she might be right. Mike could hardly withstand her.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE LADY OF SHALOTT.

PATY had always, as she once said, found waiting intolerable, but never had it been so intolerable as now. For in the morning the day yawned, grey and purposeless, before her, and at night she knew she would wake only to such another day. Nothing happened. Nothing could happen. In the country, indeed, there was much going on, for peace was declared; but with her there seemed a strange indifference to what, at any other time, would have stirred her very heartstrings. It was almost worse when a sudden hope sprang into life. Suppose that Mike, in his delight, could not put up with the tardiness of a letter, and telegraphed instead? And the hope brought with it the pang of a daily disappointment, for no telegram came.

She waited therefore, she was forced to wait, and how wearisome it was! Things which used to delight her lost all their freshness; questions round which excited talk rose and fell, shrank into such utterly indifferent subjects that she wondered how the others cared to discuss them. What did it matter whether one servant went and another came; whether the summer would

provide two or three cricket dances; whether the lawn-tennis match came off on Tuesday or Wednesday, or never came off at all? What did anything matter? She was sufficiently ashamed of her discontent to keep it to herself, although she was not without a suspicion that her father had penetrated it. She joined the others in spite of a growing conviction that she was no longer one of them, and she took remorseful fits of reading to the old people. To her fancy it seemed that, between the old and the young, she stood alone and companionless.

The weariness of it!

She took long and solitary walks up and down the hills among the foxgloves, by the side of streams, through the fragrant twisting lanes, with Stumps panting reproachfully at her heels. Often she would sit on a gate and stare at the far and beautiful distance. But if, as sometimes happened, she remembered her longings in India for one such day, she would spring down angrily, and wonder why it was changed. Or was it she?

Sometimes she glanced with a sudden suspicion at the ring, though the next moment she flung scorn at herself for the absurdity of connecting it with her longing desire to see Mike, and once more hear his voice. Looking steadily at it, no doubt it was only subtle association which brought before her in so extraordinarily vivid a degree, their last evening at Jaipur. Beyond that there was nothing to suggest out of the way powers, and certainly it was not a surprising association. Nor one she desired to lose. For, in spite of disappointments, in spite of weariness, Patty would not willingly

have parted with something which had come to her with them.

And, notwithstanding the tedious dragging of the hours, the weeks sped by with that amazing speed born of monotony. June passed, July came, and the next mail might bring his answer, might, but did not; and Patty, sick at heart, and torn by horrible misgivings, began to wonder how she was to live through another inevitable waiting. In the midst of the time came a summons from Elizabeth Chester, who wanted her because she was alone and ill.

She was more ill than had entered Patty's thoughts. Two nurses carried the burden of actual responsibility, but fear could not be so easily shifted, and for a few days fear was the dominant sensation with the young watcher. When she was herself, Elizabeth seemed to like her presence, and to be less restless if she were in the room; but she wandered a good deal, wandered, indeed, so far as to India, of which and of her brother she talked incessantly in a low quick voice. Sometimes another name came in, and then there was a ring of pain in the voice.

Of course Patty wrote to Sir Robert. She hesitated whether she should not telegraph, but the doctor was against it.

"What's the use of making the man miserable?" he urged. "It isn't as if it could do any good. Things will be settled one way or another before he could get here—long before. Write. And near the date the letter should reach him, send your telegram."

So Patty's letter went, crammed with details, and without one word of herself in it, though there again

she hesitated. But with Elizabeth's life at stake, what would Sir Robert care for her movements? And the days which followed were so burdened with deep anxiety and dread, that another mail came and passed, and she scarcely noticed Mike's silence. For from one cause and another, Elizabeth seemed to be altogether thrown on her hands. One aunt was nursing a sick husband, a second was in Switzerland, each wrote to say how thankful they felt that dear Elizabeth had so kind a friend at hand, and hoped, if there was anything they could possibly do, that Mrs. Hamilton would let them know.

After all, in spite of inexperience, perhaps Patty filled the place as well as they could have filled it, particularly so soon as Elizabeth began to mend. Unquestionably she had been very ill, but she got well more quickly than they expected, and she liked to lie on her pretty chintz-covered sofa, with the window open, and a bowl of roses by her side, and to talk to Patty.

"Oh, when shall I be able to write to Robert?" she exclaimed, with a rueful look at her thin hands.

"Soon." Patty smiled at her. "Meanwhile he has had a letter by each mail, and before he can possibly hear that you have been ill, he shall have a telegram to say that you are quite well."

One thin hand slipped into hers.

"You have been very good to me, Patty, and Robert will be more grateful than perhaps you can guess. I remember very little about these past days, but I have just dim recollections that I lived through them with him. Sometimes we were riding together, lost, in a terrible bare blinding desert with no green thing in it

except solitary *ak* bushes dotted about. There was famine when I was in India."

"There is famine now."

"And sometimes it was thick jungle, with tiger grass, and the waiting horror of a hidden crouching beast. But," and she smiled, "I believe that even then it was something to be together."

"Yes," agreed Patty eagerly. A few months ago she would have shuddered at the thought.

The two women, each absorbed in her own imaginings, dropped into silence, the only sound was the summer sound which is like nothing else in the world, the hum of bees round lime-blossoms. The air that came in at the window brought the scent of cut grass and mignonette, it was all profoundly peaceful. Then Elizabeth's old dog began to bark in the yard.

"There are the letters," she said. "In all these years Sweep has never learnt to tolerate the postman. But yesterday was the Indian day."

Patty jumped up and went hastily into the hall. It was true that, as Elizabeth had said, yesterday was the day for Indian letters; but hers would go first to the Rectory, and consequently only reach her now. The waiting had tried her, and she knew that even Elizabeth's eyes might be unendurable if there was a letter of Mike's to read, perhaps more unendurable if there was not.

But there was.

She flew with it to her room, tore it open, read, and stood staring. Mike did not wish her to come out.

For some minutes she remained motionless, trying to steady the impression. Then she sat down suddenly,

trembling, and took up the letter which had fallen on the floor. Perhaps she had made a mistake. Perhaps he only intended to warn her against going back in the hot weather. But it was not so. It was plainly put, beyond the possibility of a mistake. As she had found India so exceedingly distasteful, and had left him against his wish, he preferred that she should remain in England until some future time, when her tastes and his profession might prove less incompatible than at present. He hoped she was well and enjoying herself. He hoped to get away to the hills for a bit. Even Mrs. Musgrave, though she had stuck down as long as she could, was obliged to go on the child's account. One or two other things he hoped, and ended as her affectionate husband.

She was not to come. He did not want her. And that was all.

How long she sat there she did not know, nor how long it was before she began to get angry. But the anger, as usual, gave an impetus, and when she remembered Elizabeth, who might be feeling herself neglected, she went downstairs. She walked into the room holding her head high, yet several years older than when she left it, for Time has measurements of his own, not in the least limited by our little days and months and years. Elizabeth's perceptions were invariably quick, but she had been ill, and her nerves were shaken. It was natural that, looking up at Patty's face, she should immediately think of Sir Robert, and that her voice should tremble.

"You have had bad news," she exclaimed quickly,

"I?" returned Patty, in a hard and cheerful voice. "You are quite mistaken. I have heard that I need not go back to India, and, certainly, you will not expect me to consider this bad news."

And she faced her friend's eyes unflinchingly, without deceiving them at all. For Elizabeth had the power of looking into hearts.

"I am sorry," she said gravely.

"Why?" Patty pushed the question. "If Mike does not want me, why?"

"I should be very sorry indeed if I believed he did not want you."

"Well, I assure you that it is true. He tells me plainly that he prefers I should remain in England."

The tone was indifferent, but she moved where Elizabeth from her sofa could not see her face, nor did she attempt to break the silence which followed. So that it was Elizabeth who said at length—

"Patty, I begin to believe that you must have hurt him very much when you came home?"

"Perhaps. A little."

"Not more than a little?"

"I mayn't have been very nice. But"—the words wavered into something which sounded like a sob—"if he really cared, he could not have remembered it against me all this while."

Elizabeth did not know what to say, and wished more than ever that she had Sir Robert at hand with whom to talk things over. She had thought only of winning the wife, so that Mike's action startled her by its unexpectedness and she was vexed with herself because at this moment Mrs. Musgrave came into her mind.

Nor while the wound was so fresh, did she dare say much. She was too wise a woman.

At length she hazarded a remark.

"Perhaps you haven't said enough to convince him that you really want to go out. He may think you are unwilling."

There was a long glass opposite, and in it she saw that Patty had raised her head and was listening. She went on deliberately—

"It would not be very pleasant for him, would it? if you made another trial and that also failed. Write and say that this time you have made up your mind to stay. There are three or four months yet."

"Not quite," and Patty's correction came with a promptitude which made her friend smile. "I should leave early in October, or even before."

"Then write, write and tell him"—she would have liked to suggest "that you are sorry," but that she had a horror of appearing to dictate—"tell him that this time you promise to give your heart to India, and that his letter had been a disappointment. You will hear in ample time to take your passage. Or, as it is always so crowded then, you might take it, provisionally."

She offered this last bit of advice with hesitation, for it was evident that if Mike remained stiff and stubborn, it would be all the harder for his wife to feel that she held the means of going, and yet was not to go. She felt this the more when she saw how readily the girl seized the suggestion. But if it was a mistake, it had to stand and take its chance.

So the waiting, which by this time was to have been well over, dragged on again. With a new element in it



which did not make it easier for endurance, perhaps it might be more true to say, with other elements. For even before she had received her husband's rebuff, another doubt had been stirring in Patty's mind. She began to wonder whether she were wanted at the Rectory. And soon after, the doubt became more insistent. She came into the room one day when Cissy was uttering a complaint.

"Toddy would have liked to have slept here next week, and gone with us to the sports; but there isn't any room where we can put him up. It's a horrid bore, because he hates so going by himself, and he always has been with us. I suppose we couldn't manage, could we, with dad's dressing-room?"

"Oh no, indeed, my dear, that would be quite out of the question," said Mrs. Leslie, shaking her head mournfully. "It does seem a pity, as you say, for Mar-maduke is such a nice fellow, so improved, so gentleman-like, and so considerate; and I always like him to feel that he can come here whenever he wishes, for, of course, his poor mother could not be expected to care about such things as sports; not for a long time at all events. But we really could not manage it, for from several little things, I am sure that Clara has it in her mind to give notice; and if anything more were asked from her, she would do so, and I could not possibly go through it all again. It is too wearing."

That Cissy accepted the inevitable with her usual good humour, and departed singing, could not prevent Patty from perceiving that she was the person occupying the spare room. She sat down in the seat her sister had left.

"You would put Toddy in my room if I wasn't here, mum?"

"Well, my dear, I suppose we should; but you must not think of that, not an any account. I am sure we are only too delighted to have you. When you married, I never expected such a pleasure. I did not know how dear Mike would spare you to us. It *is* good of him! And Jack will be going off to Oxford soon, so there will be his room when Phil is not here."

Patty spoke with a scarcely audible hesitation.

"I shall be going too—perhaps."

And to her surprise, Mrs. Leslie's kindly face lighted up.

"Back to your husband, do you mean? My dear, that is excellent news. It isn't that we don't love to have you, and I am sure no one could give less trouble to the servants, when you remember to put your things away, and your shoes together—you were always rather forgetful about that when you were a child—but I can't help thinking of poor Mike"—all Mrs. Leslie's world were either poor or dear—"out there all by himself. It doesn't seem quite right, does it? Things do happen, when least we expect them. There was one poor thing, I remember, whose husband was mauled by a tiger—that was her first husband, and she has had two since. Still it does give one a turn to think of such dreadful possibilities."

Patty's eyes danced.

"Mike won't get the chance of shooting tigers, worse luck for him!"

"Well, there are other things, as we all know—snakes, and elephants, and plagues, and things. They

are always in my mind when you are out there. Still, if it were the rector, and he were alone, snakes or no snakes, I should want to be there, too. You see, my dear, when one has a husband——”

Her valiant speech ended with a sigh. She seemed to know very little about Patty's husband, and in a vague inconsequent way it distressed her. And, for the first time, the girl saw something of the trouble.

“Yes,” she said, looking down at the ring, “it is better that we should be together. So I am going back.”

And this time she spoke confidently. There was to be no more questioning.

Meanwhile she had not told her father that Mike did not wish her to come. She felt as if this wish required explanations which she had not to give, and she put it off from day to day until she received a certain packet from London. With it in her hand she went into his study, and laid it before him.

“Am I interrupting you?” she asked. “I wished you to know that I have secured a berth in the P. & O. for October. It is a little early, but will be the less crowded.”

“Then I imagine you have heard from Mike?”

“Yes,” returned Patty, drumming with her fingers; “You forwarded his letter when I was at Miss Chester's.”

She wondered whether he would express surprise that all these days she should have said nothing. But he did not. He only said—

“He approves?”

“No. He does not wish me to come.” And she threw up her head.

The rector turned over the ship papers.

"This is your ticket, it appears. I do not quite understand?" he remarked in a questioning voice.

"Yes, it is my ticket. Because I have written again—I have said things"—she faltered—"which I did not say before. I don't think he understood. This time I am certain that he will write quite differently. And you see—don't you?—that it would not have been safe to leave my berth uncertain. It was much more prudent to secure it."

He shook his head.

"You ought to know best. I wish I could be equally certain; but, my dear, I feel that you should be prepared for disappointment."

"It is impossible," she persisted. "He cannot refuse me."

"I cannot blame him if he does," he returned gravely. "However, let us hope. It may well be that I am growing old, and my life has impressed upon me that though one's mistakes are very mercifully forgiven, their results have to be faced. I hope earnestly that Mike will send for you." Something in her face made him add with great kindness—"I am afraid you are going through an unusually trying time."

She did not immediately answer. She gathered her papers together with their brilliantly coloured labels, walked to the window and leaned out. A fine rain was falling, and four or five great blackbirds were busy on the lawn. With her back turned to her father she said lightly—

"It is only for a month or two now. They will soon pass."

But in her heart she admitted that it was not only

trying, it was all but unendurable. Suspense has a peculiar hardship for impetuous natures, especially for the young, who have not yet been battered by the blows of disappointment, and Patty had often proclaimed that she would rather know the worst. It is after-life which catches at reprieve before the worst comes.

It was weary work, therefore, to begin the hungry waiting all over again, with—though this she was careful not to acknowledge to herself—an added fret of doubt. When she had written before, it had been with the courage of youth, and some of its wrongheadedness. She felt a magnanimous consciousness of concession, of stepping down from a pedestal; perhaps she believed she had but to hold out her hand for Mike almost to come from India to grasp it. Disillusionment had brought with it a restless fear. She had gone away from him, had he, too, gone away from her? If she turned to his letters, the fear showed itself more boldly. Something was out of tune.

She did not look ill. She was too young and too healthy to be changed by a few months' anxiety, but she was—as her father noticed—thinner, and there was a new expression in her eyes. The women in the cottages remarked upon it quite openly.

"You'm fretting, I reckon, poor dear soul! 'T'es bad, for certin, to have your husban' so many miles away, and to be forced to bide at home yerself—so 'tes!"

For answer, she never failed to smile confidently.

"I am going soon—very soon."

Elizabeth Chester had left home for change, so that no help was to be had from her. Very slowly the days

went by, and each one as it came, brought a certain torment, brought, also, the autumn splendour of purple and gold on the moor. It was on a day when this glory was at its height that the Indian letter she expected came to Patty. Her father put it into her hand.

"I met the postman at the gate," he explained, with what was almost an apology in his voice. At such a moment he was very desirous not to seem to spy upon her, and he was going away in some haste.

But she called him back. Now that the letter was in her hand, she felt that curious disinclination to open it which we all know. She detained her father while she gave him a long message with which she had been charged by the schoolmistress, although it would have borne, as he knew, a longer delay, and he understood that she was purposely avoiding the reading of the letter which she held. Then she had more to say about the sick mother of the young gardener, and the steps which it would be necessary to take before removing her to the hospital. When this subject was threadbare, she sought out Mrs. Leslie, who was writing as usual to ask the character of a servant.

"I am telling her everything, everything," she sighed. "They always declare they did not know what was expected of them. I am saying exactly how many we are in family; and as Jack will be away, dear fellow, I can truly assure her that for the greater part of the year we are only four."

"Three," Patty corrected decidedly. "I shall not be here."

In the hall she stood for a moment uncertain until she heard Cissy's laugh upstairs. Then she snatched

up her hat and gloves, and stole out of the house into the kitchen garden at the back. From this a green door opened into the road, and the road climbed the hill to the moor. Patty walked now like a person in great haste, but the letter was still unread.

When at last she stood still, she was on the top of the hill, and in the heart of the heather and the solitude. Besides herself, not a human figure was in sight, and the only sound was that of a very distant ring of bells, which came up from one of the valleys. Here she was quite safe from disturbance, yet, even now she waited with great deliberation, turning the letter in her hands many times, before opening and reading it. It was almost a repetition of the one she had received before. Mike did not wish her to come.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE WHITE SAPPHIRE.

PLEASANCE MUSGRAVE was not popular with the women of the regiment. It would not be fair to say that she was too beautiful, but, being beautiful, it may be owned that she was deficient in some other qualities which were wanted to counterbalance the beauty. So when, after a week's torture, she made up her mind that the child was fading, and must go to the hills, while the major was left to get on as well as he could—and how badly that might be, only she and Dr. Denton knew—they blamed her all round; and Molly nearly quarrelled with the whole station, including the colonel's wife, and

all the people whose favour was supposed to be essential for her well-being. She told her brother with determination that she had a great mind not to speak to one of them again; and Holmes chuckled, well aware that she was quite capable of carrying out her threat. But the next moment he looked at her remorsefully.

"It's all very fine," he said, "but I'm well enough aware you ought to be going yourself. It's simple madness for you, first year out, to think of sticking in Delhi through the grilling that's got to come. Of course you don't know what you're facing, but I do. You make me feel a brute."

Molly snapped her mouth tightly, and if she did that, all her friends had learnt that it meant business. When she opened it, it was to utter disparaging remarks about her brother, and to inquire whether he supposed she had come out to India to leave him to melt in the heat, while she amused herself at the hills?

"I never dreamed of your staying down."

"And I never had anything else in my mind. When the punkah's no good, I shall sleep on the roof. I've been looking forward to that, that and the fire-flies, ever since I came. I don't mean to be defrauded."

Holmes smiled, but his eyes did not wrinkle as readily as usual.

"What is it?" asked Molly, who knew him.

"Well——" he began uneasily, and stopped.

"Well?"

"It isn't only the heat. I oughtn't to let you face that, but I expect I should have to. Denton was up this morning, talking, and awfully anxious nothing should leak out——"



"I suppose it's the plague," said Molly composedly.

"No," returned Holmes; "that wouldn't be half so likely to touch Europeans. It's enteric, which doesn't sound a quarter so bad, but—well, I've seen enough of it to know how serious it can be. He's particularly anxious to get the women and children out of the place. Mind you, there's nothing very bad as yet, only a case here and there. But he sticks to it that it's getting a grip among the Tommies, that, and a lot of dengue fever out of those beastly bazars. And with the hot season at hand—Molly, you'll be a big anxiety if you persist in staying down."

"Oh! Is that all? Glad you told me. And now you'd better be off to the office, because I want to have a good go at the 'cello."

Holmes shrugged his shoulders as he went out of the room. If Molly knew him, he also knew Molly, and was only a little more aware than when he began his preachment that there would be no getting her to the hills that season. But in spite of his honest wish that she could have been persuaded to leave him, he was young enough to smile as he caught the strong triumphal chords hurled after him by the 'cello. He ran across the compound, telling himself hopefully that the girl was healthy, and that Denton was known to be a pessimist.

Molly kept her counsel. But sickness has a way of leaking out; the little world began to be afraid, and the usual rush to Simla and Mussoorie and Naini Tal was quickened. Pleasance was so unwilling to leave that she left it almost too long, and then the child's white face struck her with keen remorse. She made the doctor

swear to send for her if there were need; and Molly, although she was not supposed to be aware of any definite cause for uneasiness, was bound over to telegraph if a hint of danger came to her.

"And do take care of yourself," added Pleasance.

Molly laughed.

"I think I am rather glad you are all going," she said gaily. "Poor Captain Hamilton won't feel half so lonely with the other married men in the same predicament. All the same, don't expect me to forgive her."

Major Musgrave took his wife and child to Simla. He made a virtue of it, muttering many things about the confounded nuisance it was; while, really, he was delighted to get the chance of swaggering up and down the Mall with one or two disreputable acquaintances. Pleasance would have joined him, but that she shrank from these men. Perhaps she showed her repulsion too markedly, but it was always difficult for her to hide a strong feeling; and now, as she sat on the balcony of a small house perched on a shelf, beneath which the ground dropped, as it seemed, almost sheer to the plains with their barrier of snow-piled mountains, she reflected, with something like despair in her heart, that for her and the child there was no escape. Up here, where she had hoped to pass unknown, she would be looked at either with pity or disapproval, as the wife of a man who would be hustled out of his regiment if he were not so good a soldier that they could not well spare him. That would come some day, she was convinced. She so intensely loathed his failing that she, perhaps, over-estimated the severity of the world's judgment. The worst was that she felt herself to be ranged on the side

of the world. And she was always fighting the comparisons which forced themselves upon her, fighting them with an exhausting force of will. They tore at her now.

After awhile, however, the major went away, and she began to be comforted. She was away from Delhi, up in a quaint little clinging world of rickshaws and dandies, of flirtations, scandal, scarlet chuprassis, zigzags, ponies, flowers, deodars, rain, and fresh breezes. She refused invitations, sat in her wooden balcony with the boy, watched the changing of the grey-blue hills, and saw hardly anyone except Mrs. Denton, the doctor's wife, from whom she heard news of those who were left behind at Delhi.

Down in the plains there was the usual heat—dry heat at the start, like the blistering of hell; and presently the moist heat, which melts a man, body and soul, and leaves him pulp. Molly treated it lightly, almost enthusiastically at first, vowed that she enjoyed it, practised the 'cello, and made it a point of honour to keep her brother in cheerful working trim. Then the 'cello strings rusted, and, in spite of her efforts, energy oozed out at her fingers' ends. She could no longer sleep on the house-top because of the rains, and every drop of rain was so precious that grumbling could not be admitted; and when, before the hoped-for time, it stopped altogether, this it was known, spelt calamity elsewhere. Even round Delhi the crops were starved and poor, the long Ridge lay bare and blinding under the blazing sun, the pipal-trees bleached in the Silver Street, the Jumna glittered like a sheet of molten metal, the scorched bazars, with their unutterably evil smells, their dank and

withered garlands, their maddening drums and gongs, their panting packs of humanity, their violent shadows, their drugs, drinks, writhings, were horrible enough in the daytime.

At night it was worse.

For the monstrous heat, without visible cause in the heavens, is always more purposeless, more dreadful. Then the reeking city has no saving movement, no escape. Then it casts itself down on the house-tops, or gasps between mud walls in the choking dust. The monkeys escape to the trees in the Queen's Gardens, and sleep until the first grey hint of dawn wakes them to chatter; the poor night nurses in the hospital move from bed to bed to see whether the fevered sick are breathing where all else is breathless.

Dr. Denton, questioned by the authorities as to the health of the soldiers, allowed that, considering the heat, things were not so bad as he had expected, the number of enteric cases not having more than slightly increased, but——

“But!” echoed one of the Heads, savagely—he was overworked himself and ill—“But! If we attended to all the possible eventualities which could be conjured up, we should send every man in every regiment home to be nursed. Things are going well enough yet, so far as I see. Wait.”

So they waited.

Holmes and his sister had between them been hard at work, and the heat had sapped all the colour out of their faces. They had taken in a young civilian, who had fallen into the grip of fever. Holmes knew his people in England, and when she heard that the boy

was not, to all appearances, in for a bad attack, and wanted careful nursing more than doctoring, Molly did not rest until she had him brought to their bungalow. When he got better, and could fairly well manage for himself, she used to run up to the hospital and take a turn there, just, as she said, to keep her hand in. Holmes objected as much as he could, without making himself disagreeable; but Molly always had an excellent reason for going, and it would not have been easy to coerce her. Moreover, he could not deny that she was right in declaring herself to be as fit as possible; and she laughed in her brother's face when he made a weak suggestion that she should still go up to Simla.

Then Dr. Denton's "but" was suddenly justified.

Nobody quite knew why. Whether some particularly noxious drink came into favour and was largely gulped down in the bazars; whether it was the result of the heat upon a very young draft not yet seasoned for its work, nobody had the leisure to find out. Some cause or other brought the outbreak; the hospital was filled up in no time, nurses were telegraphed for from other centres, and the regiment sat down under canvas, and tried hard to believe that it was cooler.

But for a time things looked bad.

The major had sipped spirits with even less restraint than usual, for the doctor was worked off his legs, and could not attend to him. He had also, to do him justice, looked well after his men, with cursings it is true, but with no thought of sparing himself or of escaping out of the reek. He fought the fever as he would have fought any other enemy, taking stimulants, not to give himself courage, but because he said that pick-me-ups were the

things to pull him through. And one evening when the sky was changing to rose and green and sapphire, and Mrs. Musgrave was toiling up the hill towards her shingled house, a peon put into her hands this telegram from Molly—

*“Major Musgrave ill. If you come, come to us.”*

Her pale face grew paler. “If you come.” Could Molly doubt? Much she would not do for him, but this at least! Only how? The child must be thought of, for it was impossible that he should be taken into that fever-tainted heat. Her mind flew to Mrs. Denton, who was a kindly Irishwoman, with children of her own. Pleasance beckoned to a passing rickshaw, and went to her house.

“Will I not?” Mrs. Denton’s eyes filled with quick tears. “What could be better? My brats love him, and he’ll be as happy as a king. That’s settled. But see now, me dear, we must think about yerself. You can’t go alone.”

Pleasance smiled.

“That is nothing. You know that I’m accustomed to take care of myself. Now that I can feel the child is safe with you, the rest seems quite easy. What harm can come to me in a dhoolie?”

“You don’t look fit.”

“I am. Only—I must wait, I suppose, for dawn?”

There was no question as to this, and Mrs. Denton insisted on her fetching the boy and his ayah, and sleeping at her house.

“There’s the room, and the bed, and you’ll bring along yer bedding, and what more do we want? Then

I'll see you off in the morning, and feel better contented in me soul."

So in the first daffodil dawn, with the mists still clinging round the pines and the grey-green hills, and the fresh aromatic scents stealing out into the cool air, the coolies swung away down the zigzags towards the heated plains, and the old life which Pleasance had been trying hard to forget—the old life with its pain. When at length she reached Delhi, she drove at once to the Holmes's bungalow, and Molly, whose ears were on the strain, rushed out.

"Oh, you dear!" she cried rapturously. "I knew you'd come."

Pleasance held her at arm's length, so as to read her face.

"How is my husband?"

There was a momentary hesitation, which she noted.

"They think his strength is keeping up well."

"And where is he?"

"Dr. Denton decided that he would be best in the tent hospital. Come in, dear; your bath is waiting; and then you shall go."

Yes; that she must do. Fit herself for the nursing, get rid of the dust of the journey, and be ready for whatever she was allowed to do. But the long shaking, the plunge into the great heat, had exhausted her more than she knew. She stumbled dizzily as she passed through the bamboo chick, and a strong hand steadied her.

"You're done up, and no wonder," said a voice. "No one expected you so soon."

"I did, Captain Hamilton," said Molly firmly. "And

now you must wait, please, and drive her to the camp, for it is getting late, and Egbert is out."

It was all unreal, the outcome of some bad dream, Molly's thin drawn face only a part of it. What do dreams matter when a determined will can put them aside, and keep real facts before one? She was here to nurse her husband, the father of her child, and in her mind there should be no room for anything else, not fears nor fancies. Deliberately she made that resolve, and yet, as they drove out through the little compound, and between the bushes of glowing hibiscus, how was it possible that she should not remember the last time they had driven together, when he took her home from some picnic, when she fancied a question had been on his lips, and half longing, half dreading to hear it, had staved it off and angered him? That night Patty had come to the house.

The worst of it was that it was inevitable he, too, should remember. And the romance which had hung about those days was beginning to seem more real than the later and dearer one. For how could he help contrasting Patty, who for no more than a whim had fled across the seas, with this woman, come down into the heat which was slaying its dozens, to nurse a man who had neglected, insulted, belittled her? If he had married Pleasance—the gradual thought became insistent—would she ever have deserted him? She was silent; she kept her eyes resolutely before her; but, without turning his head, he could see the pure line of her profile, the perfect nose, the delicate curve of the short upper lip. And more insistent, and more dangerous, came



the conviction that in those past days he had been a fool.

He broke the silence at last.

"You'll take care of yourself, won't you?" he said in a low voice. "I'm half afraid they're all so worked there'll be no one to see after you."

"Oh," she replied hastily, "I hope not, I'm sure. I've not come to be an added trouble. I only wish I had never gone!"

There was remorse as well as pain in her tone, and Hamilton looked round with surprise. To him it appeared that she was doing all that woman could do, and more than other women had done, and he did not understand that her heart cried out against the net of circumstances which was involving her again. But it made him the more sorry for her.

"Suppose you had stayed, what could you have done?" he said.

"Nothing, of course," she returned, with a faint smile.

"Nothing. And the heat has been pretty strong. I don't believe the child could have stood it."

She did not at once answer. Her eyes were fixed on the white tents just drifting into sight. She had scarcely heard his words, and was but following the swing of her own thoughts, when she said suddenly—

"Patty—what do you hear from Patty?"

There was a flick of the whip, a sudden swerve of the horse, which took Mike's attention for a minute or two. Then he looked at his companion.

"Patty wishes to come out again," he said briefly.

Her head swam. Here, at once, was escape. The

restraint went out of her face, and she turned to him joyfully.

"That is news, indeed!" she exclaimed. "When?"

He made no answer. The silence might have warned her, but that she was so eagerly taken up with the gladness of relief. As, however, he remained silent, she repeated her question—

"When will she come?"

"Not at all," he said quietly. "I prefer that she should remain in England."

"But——" she began helplessly.

He shook his head.

"You are Patty's very good friend," he went on, "but even you do not understand. She made a deliberate choice, and she must abide by it."

"Abide by it!" she echoed, staring blankly at him.

"Certainly."

"You mean that when she says she is sorry, you will not forgive her?"

"She has not said she is sorry."

"Not in words, perhaps, but she proves it."

"Hardly. I am afraid I must repeat that you do not understand." And his tone was stubborn. "Will you get down here? This is the hospital tent."

She had forgotten. The syce jumped off and ran to the horse's head. Mike pitched the reins on the beast's back and silently helped her out. Her head was in a whirl, but she walked steadily into the big tent with its shadowy whiteness, its regular row of beds, a sister and three or four orderlies looking curiously at her; walked, after a momentary hesitation, to the furthest bed. The hesitation came back when she reached it,

and her face grew pitiful. Was this shrunk figure, this close-cropped head packed with ice, this tremulous and wasted hand which made shift to touch hers—was this the man whose almost aggressive vitality had mocked at weakness and suffering? And again, as she looked, came a rush of compassion. Suddenly she stooped and kissed him.

He laughed, and a note of mockery in the laugh was more like himself.

“When did you kiss me last? So it’s all up with me? Eh?”

“Why do you say so?” she asked gently.

“Because you wouldn’t have done that—else. Well, I don’t blame you. I haven’t given you the best of times, have I? And yet—perhaps if you’d let me forget now and then that I was a beast—we’d have got along better. That’s the worst of you good women.”

It was very difficult for Pleasance to speak. He had, she knew, some right on his side. She had done him a great wrong in marrying him, and the wrong was avenging itself upon her. It was little that she could do for him now. More than ever, she was conscious that they had grown to be strangers, and that she could not, even at this moment of separation, say to him the things which a wife should be able to say to her husband. The very smile with which he watched her held her aloof.

But his mood suddenly changed.

“It’s all the fault of that confounded doctor with a face like a punctured tyre. I should do if he wouldn’t measure his brandy so scurvily—I want more, I tell you. I suppose it’s no good even now asking you? You

might, though, if it helped to send me off the hooks. You won't? Confound you! How's the boy?"

"He is very well. I left him with Mrs. Denton. I didn't dare bring him down."

She was not sure that he heard her explanation, for again his mood had changed, and he was staring fixedly at the canvas wall.

"Except for one thing—you and he won't get much good out of me, even by my dying," he muttered. "I'm badly dipped. Pleasance, do you hear? Badly dipped."

"Yes?"

"But there is one thing——" he began, and stopped.

She believed he was wandering, and looked round for the nurse. He shook his head, clutched her wrist with more strength than she could have thought possible, and drew her down.

"They mustn't hear," he gasped. "Are you listening?"

"Yes," she repeated gravely. "But wait. You are very weak. I shall not go away."

"I shall, though," he said, with a queer twist of his face. "Don't argue. Do what I tell you. Is no one looking? Then—put your hand under my pillow."

She drew out a little inlaid box, which she had never seen before, and his eyes dwelt upon it hungrily.

"The key——" he signed towards his watch chain. "Right. Take it off." And suddenly his voice grew piteous. "It was for the boy, Pleasance, I swear it was for the boy!"

It seemed to her that he was at the end of his strength. What this meant was a problem, and she could not say anything to help him. He beat im-

patiently with his feeble hands, and she beckoned to one of the orderlies to give a restorative; but all the time his eyes fixed themselves imploringly upon her, and the instant they were alone again, he began to speak.

"Put the thing away. I tell you it's a big matter."

And the evident anxiety in his face startled her.

"A big matter!" she repeated. "What is it? What do you want me to do?"

"Stoop down." He muttered a name in her ear which sounded like Abúl Haidar.

"Abúl Haidar?"

"That's it," he said. And seeing that the words conveyed no definite meaning, he added with difficulty—"It's a white sapphire, worth a lot. Oh, I didn't steal it, he gave it to me—for a consideration. He wanted a word put in——"

"A bribe!"

The cry broke from her unawares. She stared at him open-eyed. The coming of death had changed him, and when he spoke it was almost in a whimper.

"It was for the boy," he faltered. Then as her eyes still held him he went on. "You can return it if you're so over-particular.—But you'll be awfully squeezed by those brutes.—It would clear a lot."

Her breath came and went quickly. She held herself in with difficulty.

"It shall be returned," she said, and somehow her voice sounded very far away.

"But you won't let them know?"

"Who?"

"The regiment," he explained anxiously. "If it

got about, it would be remembered against Harry—poor little chap!—he'd start life with a handicap. You must do it all from yourself—you can, you're a woman, and no one thinks the worse of a woman for fancying a bit of jewellery." He laughed feebly.

Pleasance turned from him with a passionate movement. She to be asked this—she whose delicate ideas of honour might have been accounted high-flown; she whose family pride resented the smallest speck of tarnish—she!

"Though you'll have to be careful, or the pension will be nobbled," he went on. "You might keep it, but Abúl Haidar is a beast, and may blab.—I wouldn't have the other fellows know."

Once more she spoke. Trying to remember that he was a dying man. Trying to keep the contempt out of her eyes.

"They shall not."

"No. You're a clever woman, you'll do it. Not for me, though, for the boy," he added, with the laugh she dreaded. "Perhaps when you see it—— But you mustn't fail me. Promise!"

Instead of any desire that she should retain it, the fear of possible disgrace was uppermost and insistent. He repeated the word "Promise!" and her head sank.

"I promise," she said under her breath.

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## CHAPTER XI.

## FOR THE SAKE OF OLD DAYS.

AFTER all, and as if to mock the forebodings of science, the fever did not reach the height which Dr. Denton had prognosticated. For this he had many reasons to offer besides what Molly declared to be the true one—that the heats were abating.

“I can even bear to look at your men’s ridiculous yellow trousers without winking,” she told her brother.

“Look! If you had to wear helmet and belt and spurs!”

Her thoughts had flown away.

“How is Major Musgrave to-day?”

“Sinking, by what I hear.”

Molly received the news silently, and her brother glanced at her. In answer to his look she said slowly—

“No one could wish him to live.”

“Perhaps not,” he agreed. “Anyway he’s had the most devoted nursing. How she can do it beats me. If he’d been the best husband in the world, instead of—”

He stopped abruptly, and she said—

“But that’s just it.”

“Why?” asked Holmes, with a perplexed consciousness that the ways of woman were beyond the comprehension of man.

“Because she has never been able to give him love——”

"How could she?"

"She married him," Molly replied gravely; "and now that he's dying, I believe her to be capable of making any sacrifice which he asked from her, as a sort of atonement. I do, indeed."

"I call it senseless," growled Holmes.

The two were walking along the broad ramparts skirting the narrow lane where John Nicholson was shot down. There were the mud walls of the houses, from whence came the enflading fire; there was the kikar tree, under which he had lain, wounded to death. Little naked brown children played in the dust, a pani-wallah clattered his cups, two women shrouded in white, passed with a clink of silver anklets, another woman in a crimson saree carried her boy on her shoulders, her brass lota balanced on outstretched palm. There, on their left, were the historic bastions. There, beyond the stretch of plain, now covered with trees and scrub, but then bared by English tactics, lay the long low rise of the Ridge—the never-to-be-forgotten Ridge, with its ugly upward pointing finger, ugly but significant, the memorial pillar of the heroic dead.

The low sun touched it with a glory of golden light, the keen sapphire of the sky softened into a tenderer blue. Molly stood and stared and pictured, until her eyes were wet.

"When one is here, it seems such a little while ago!" she said softly. "It might have been yesterday."

Holmes nodded.

"Suppose we go out of the Cabul and round to the Kashmir Gate?" he suggested.

She agreed happily. It was but seldom that she



got her brother to herself, and she wanted to make the most of it.

"The colonel's wife and all the lot of them will soon be coming down, I suppose?" she said.

"In a few days."

She made a face.

"Well, I'd just as soon they stayed away. The station is twenty times as nice without them."

He looked at her, and his tone was the tone of the brother who feels himself bound to take up the authoritative.

"Look here, Molly. This won't do. I can't have you setting yourself up against all these people. You've got to go about with your kind. Aunt Mary told me I was to see you didn't grow farouche and pugnacious and careless as to your clothes. She said that would be a very bad sign. Can't you send down to Bombay or somewhere and have some tidy things up?" he suggested, looking her up and down doubtfully.

"She told you something more," said Molly, with a twinkle. "*I* know."

"Never mind. She said that, and it's sense."

"She said," persisted the girl, shaking her head solemnly, "that unless you looked after all this, I should never marry. Now, didn't she?"

They began to laugh, to laugh so gaily, that two women in the lane below commented with scorn.

"*Ai*, sister, listen to the shameless ones!"

"It is always so. They laugh at nothing. I should know; for I have a cousin who is an ayah."

"And she told *me*," Molly pursued, "that by coming out I should probably ruin all your chances in life;

because, if you had me to look after you, you wouldn't care to marry; and if you did care, I should be jealous and stop it."

"What rot!"

She branched off.

"Egbert, I do wish, now that you have more time to spare, you would get me a talking mynah, and a mon-goose."

"Time! *Ai*, woman of words, what talk is this? *Aré, aré, aré!*"

"True talk. The reports are well up to date, and there is nothing new."

"There is always something new," said Holmes wearily. He knew Molly, and could open to her as freely as if she were his second self, and she expected this sharing of responsibility, and would have resented not getting it. So he said, as he would have said to a man, "I'm not grizzling, but it's hard for an Englishman, with no more than an average amount of brains, to get to the bottom of native crookedness."

"Your brains are all right," put in Molly. "Who's worrying?"

"I don't suppose you ever heard his name—Abúl Haidar. He's more than a match for me any day, when he likes, and he's so beastly cock-a-hoop at this moment, that I can't help thinking—— You haven't by any chance been pocketing a bribe, have you?"

"I haven't had the chance."

"It's not my business either—exactly," Holmes went on to explain; "only this interregnum, owing to the Commissioner's illness, keeps us all on the look-out. He's got to go home, poor chap!"

"Who gets the post? The deputy?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Not known. There's a rumour flying about, but I expect it's too good to be true."

"Nothing is too good to be true," said Molly the hopeful, breaking out into one of her 'cello cadences.

"*'He sang Darius, great and good.'*"

"What's this wonderful rumour?"

"That Sir Robert Chester is to have it."

"Oh," she replied. "And would he be what you'd like?"

"I should think so!" Holmes answered with enthusiasm. "He's simply first rate."

Molly was silent for a minute. Then she asked another question.

"Isn't he a friend of Captain Hamilton's?"

"Dare say he is. What of that?"

"I was thinking that he might be of some use," she answered gravely. "Has it never struck you, Egbert, that Captain Hamilton is very much taken up with Mrs. Musgrave?"

Holmes stared at her astonished.

"Molly! It isn't like you to talk scandal."

"Scandal! And of *her!*" she cried impetuously. "You ought to know better. She, indeed, poor darling! Is it her fault if his eyes follow her wherever she goes, if he is always at hand in case she wants anything? She! She does her very best to avoid him; that made me first notice it. Then—I may be wrong—I can't help fancying there was something between them, I mean before either married. And now, with that wife of his, leaving him in this inexcusable way, you must own that

it is hard lines for any man. How can he help comparing the two? She going off for no reason whatever but a whim, and Pleasance coming back to her horrid husband——”

“Shut up, young woman!”

“No;” Molly went on gravely. “His dying doesn’t make it less true. Coming back to nurse him as if he were the best man that ever breathed.”

Holmes looked exceedingly uncomfortable. There was a scathing perspicacity about the girl’s remarks, and he saw that she had not spoken lightly. She noticed his disturbance, and, woman-like, reverted to her remedy.

“Now you know why I am glad that Sir Robert is, perhaps, coming. For if he is his friend, he may set things right before it is too late. Don’t you see?”

“I see,” he returned reluctantly.

But he could not take the comfort she offered. Things, if they had gone wrong in the direction Molly suggested, were not likely to be mended by the simple counsels of the best friend that ever breathed. Her intuitions were shrewd and swift, shrewder and swifter than his, as he had repeatedly proved; but there were things she had not fathomed, and among them was the mischief wrought in a man’s life by a love which should never have crept into his heart.

The major lingered longer than the doctors had thought possible, lingered when one or two, struck down after him, had gone out either to convalescence, or to the little burial ground. In those last days he had wandered a good deal, and his wanderings made his wife sick with fear. It was impossible for her to be forever on the watch, and there was always danger that he

might betray himself. Nay, though commonsense told her the thing was impossible, she could have sworn sometimes that the fear had him, too, in its grip; that it lived in the restless eyes which turned to hers with a demand in them which never seemed to be satisfied, in the restless fingers which moved here and there, seeking.

Until at last the day came when eyes and hands moved no more.

Pleasance passing out from the dim and shaded whiteness of the tent, met Dr. Denton hurrying up. One glance at her face told him what had happened.

"Ah," he said, "so he has gone. He made a brave fight. He was a fine soldier."

A fine soldier. There lay his one appeal to kindly memory. This verdict—spoken by his regiment—was to be his boy's only inheritance. That must be kept at all costs, and the cost to her might be very great. For if once the story of the little inlaid box came out, there was nothing to expect but ignominy. She knew very well what would be thought of an Englishman, and an officer, who took a bribe; and she saw the shadow of his father's sin resting on her boy all his life long. It made her set her teeth with determination. Got back it must be, and quickly, before the thing oozed out, and she felt as if she would never know a moment's peace until she could fling off the burden.

Up to this time she had not glanced at the stone itself, but now, as she walked along the familiar road, and slipped—a pale ghost—into the Holmes's bungalow, she knew that the moment had come when she must see it. Molly was out, and she might count on being

absolutely undisturbed. So with shaking fingers she unlocked a drawer, took out the box, and by the key on her watch chain, opened it.

But she did not look at once, she looked straight before her, frowning. It was only by an effort that she turned her eyes to the thing, and saw, resting on a little cotton-wool as on a nest, a stone of the most exquisite soft brilliancy conceivable; not the brilliancy of the diamond, but with the loveliness of moonshine as compared with the keener glitter of the sun. Pleasance stared at it for a few moments amazed, in spite of her repugnance, at its astonishing beauty. She had seen such a gem before, of course, but never one which for radiance and softness approached to this. And it was not surprising, since the white sapphires of Abúl Haidar's house were famous through the length and breadth of India. Major Musgrave would have been not a little taken aback had he known that, not for a moment was its loss thought of as even possible. He wanted ready money, the jewellers were warned; the stone would be sold probably for much less than its worth, and would immediately be returned to its owner for re-purchase. Should anything so unexpected occur as an attempt to convey it to England, stronger measures would not be wanting. Abúl Haidar had tried a gift often before, and as often failed. Here he had unexpectedly succeeded with not half the trouble his failures had cost him. It had been but a careless display of jewels, a tray full of things worthless and precious, these among them, brought in; an assurance that they were as nothing, that, but for their worthlessness, he would ask the sahib to choose out one as a remembrance of their

friendship. His wife might perhaps be pleased with a white sapphire?

"Lo!" he reported contemptuously to his son, "it was done! The fool needed no humouring. And the Sirkar will not care for the tale to get abroad. Of a surety good must come of it to us."

Of all this Pleasance knew nothing—nothing but the bare fact that she had been unwittingly drawn into a mesh which was hateful to her. And she tried to put away the personal feeling and the shrinking, while she turned her thoughts to what must be done. The white sapphire must go back to Abúl Haidar. That stood out very clearly, and that alone; for as to the how, when, and where, her tired brain refused suggestions. She was forced at last to give it up for the day, to give it up, indeed, until after the funeral; and to suffer herself, weary, and buffeted by heavier strokes than Molly dreamt of, to be tended very kindly and gently by the girl. The world, her husband's world, was kind, too. Things were at an end with him, poor chap, and things might be forgotten. So in addition to the Dead March, the bandmaster gave an extra touch of poignancy to the ceremony, by striking up the Funeral March of a Hero, and the colonel's wife sent a wreath, and observed to her husband that if Mrs. Musgrave had any feeling, which she sometimes doubted, she could hardly fail to regret that she had left him at Delhi while she amused herself at Simla.

But they were not all like the colonel's wife. Mrs. Denton stayed away from the funeral in order that she might herself carry little Harry over to the bungalow, and be waiting there when Pleasance came back. Mrs.

Denton never knew how that kindly action of hers gave support to the wife's perhaps half-shaken resolutions. For the hatefulness of concealment, the longing to hand the thing over to Holmes, or to someone else who would take it back straightforwardly, and suffer the restitution to condone, so far as might be, the offence, had pressed so strongly upon her when she heard the throb of the muffled drums, and stood by John Nicholson's grave, that it was all she could do to withstand the impulse. Until she saw her boy. Then, with the touch of the baby fingers, came the fierce cry of motherhood. At least he should not begin his life carrying a stained name. For the father's name was his; hers did not matter. She gave a laugh as she recalled her husband's assurance to that effect. It was the first time such a distinction had come into her mind. Until now, she had been used to consider the woman's sense of honour as delicate as the man's, but apparently the world's code was different. And it was the world's code which she must think of now. So there must be no shirking.

Then she became aware that Mrs. Denton was speaking.

"Let him stay with me till ye've made your arrangements for going home. You don't look fit for anything. What will ye do?"

"I shall go home when I can," said Pleasance, and her voice broke into a sob.

Home. She clutched at the thought eagerly, feverishly; but she knew that she had a task which must be got through before that harbour was reached. And it was a very difficult task to accomplish by herself. Yet no one could help her. To take an Englishman into her



confidence, was to ask him virtually to compound a felony. Mike might do it for her, but what a position for him! It was impossible. Hers must be the risk, hers must be the obloquy, if obloquy came. Hers only. Molly?—but Molly, innocent warm-hearted Molly, who would have stood by her through evil and good report, she was the last person to admit into the meshes of a tangled web. Pleasance shook her head, shook it just as Molly herself knocked and came into the room carrying a tea-tray.

“Dear, I heard Mrs. Denton go, and I couldn’t stay away longer. May I come? Are you quite worn out?”

The soft warm tones seemed to bring healing. Pleasance felt as if she had never before known the worth of even uncomprehending sympathy. She turned and kissed her.

“I am not worn out. I can stand a great deal. Just now I have been thinking over matters, because there is so much for me to arrange.”

“Of course. But they are all dying to help you. Egbert and the padre, and Captain Hamilton”—it did not seem possible to leave out his name, when his had been the most eager offers of assistance. “Between them, if they’re worth anything at all, things will be put straight for you. So give yourself a chance.”

Mrs. Musgrave stood and looked at her.

“How good you and your brother have been!” she said slowly.

The girl was moving the things on the table, in order to make room for the tea, and as Pleasance spoke she took up the inlaid box.

“What a quaint little thing!” she exclaimed, with

the wish to change the subject, from gratitude to the commonplace.

"Yes," agreed the other indifferently. She did not think it necessary to make a mystery of the box, though she was careful to lock it up when she left the room. But an idea came to her.

Molly spoke, still fingering it.

"Egbert hopes you will come into the verandah this evening. It is cooler there, and no one else will be with us."

"Thank him," said Pleasance. "I shall be glad. Molly, does your brother know any one called Abúl Haidar?"

"I daresay. He knows everyone, I think. Why?"

She got no answer. Mrs. Musgrave's eyes had wandered, not out of the window, since Indian bedrooms have no windows, only odd little inlets for light, but into space. She drank the tea, and by-and-by, as Molly had suggested, came to the verandah, where dinner had been laid for two. Holmes took his at the Institute, joining them later, and they sat talking quietly under the stars, stars trembling out of unfathomable depths of blue.

Molly's thoughts were brought suddenly to earth by hearing Pleasance repeat her question.

"Mr. Holmes, do you happen to know Abúl Haidar?"

Holmes's head turned alertly, wonderingly.

"Abúl Haidar? For my sins, yes. Not from choice, I assure you. What, if it's not impertinent, makes you ask?"

She hesitated, and when she spoke, it did not seem like a direct answer,

"I suppose one could get into his zenana?"

"You, do you mean? Of course, as an English-woman, there'd be no difficulty. But—have you ever seen him?"

He put the question with intentional abruptness, and she shook her head.

"Never," she said simply.

He looked relieved.

"Then, if you'll take my advice, I should say, keep clear of the gentleman. He's really a disreputable old sinner, and the less anyone has to do with him, the better."

She appeared to consider, then—

"Thank you," she said. "This would be the zenana only."

"I'll go with you," broke in Molly hastily, her championship aglow.

"I would rather you did not," returned Holmes, in very measured tones, which his sister instantly resented. But before she could speak Pleasance had answered in a matter of fact voice—

"I must go alone. If I go, that is."

He caught at the uncertainty of her last words.

"I can't say to you what I said to Molly," he persisted with a half laugh. "But I wish you could see your way to taking my advice."

"Your advice?" She repeated the words eagerly. The next moment the light died out of her eyes. "As to not going, do you mean? That I cannot say. I must wait, I must think."

For the present she said no more, nor on the following day was there anything to point to the matter

on her mind. She was silent and pre-occupied, it was true, but in this there was nothing to cause surprise; and she begged Molly to go and play tennis as usual at the Institute, almost hurting the girl by her evident desire to be rid of her. After she had gone, she sat long in the verandah, so still and motionless that two or three green parrots chattered freely close by, and an inquisitive mongoose poked his head over a rim of earth, and peered at her with great interest. Then she drew the inlaid box from her pocket, opened it, and took out the sapphire. It was lying in the hollow of her hand when Captain Hamilton stepped through the chick at her back.

Pleasance was unaccustomed to conceal her actions, and the necessity did not strike her now. She quietly laid the stone in its box, closed the lid, and put out her hand. It did not disturb her that Mike should have seen it, for she would not have suspected him of suspicion. What annoyed, and gave a little flush to her greeting, was that he should be there at all; for she had particularly begged Molly to give orders that no visitors should be admitted. Here, however, he was, and as the meeting had to come, perhaps it was as well it should be got over at a time when she was feeling half numbed. So numbed, indeed, that at first she failed to realise that he was begging her to forgive him.

“I could not get leave to see you, and so I came without. It was impossible for me to rest without finding out whether there was not anything I could do—anything of any sort? Oh yes, I know quite well you have the Holmes’s; but you might remember that, after all, I am an older friend than the Holmes’s. It’s

awfully hard to be kept on the outside, and not allowed to do anything. There must be something."

He stood up straight before her, tall, strong, eager, his eyes fixed on her white face. All the past and all the future seemed in one brief moment to gather in a mist about him as he stood. With a slight movement of her head, which puzzled him, she pushed them away.

"Thank you," she said gently. "My friends are very kind."

"You must promise," he insisted; "promise to tell me if there is anything."

She remembered the last time that she had been called upon to promise, and shivered slightly. But as he was still waiting she was obliged to answer.

"Indeed I will. Though I do not think it is likely——"

He interrupted her in a low voice.

"For the sake of old days!"

"Oh no," she returned, still gently, but with an unmistakable rejection of the plea. "For the reason that you belong to my husband's regiment."

He turned impatiently from her, but the next moment came back.

"Why can't we face our position more frankly? I only ask you to remember——"

"That once we were boy and girl together. A great deal has happened since then."

"A great deal," he repeated quickly. "Your husband has died, and my wife has left me." He was standing up straight before her, and she felt the position so intolerable that she motioned him to take the

chair by her side. She wanted all her wits, and was not sure they had not deserted her. "I ask nothing," he said, "except remembrance. That I claim. That you can't deny me. What harm can it do anyone?"

"I do not see why it should do harm, indeed," she said with a smile, and a beating heart. "There was nothing in it which either of us could call tragic, was there? Most people have such small experiences at the back of their lives, giving out just a faint residue of sentiment which is quite harmless." Her smile grew whimsical. "Even wholesome."

He uttered an exclamation of impatience. In spite of her difficulty in steadying her voice, she was playing her part with an apparent ease which deceived and irritated him.

"I know nothing about sentiment——" he began; and she interrupted quickly.

"Of course not. That is on the feminine side."

"But I do know," he went on obstinately, "that you and I have both suffered for our folly, and I see no use in shutting one's eyes to facts. Your life——"

She interrupted him again, and this time her tone was cold.

"My life belongs to myself, and I have never complained of it. To clamour for pity seems to me very cowardly, and here in Delhi, even a woman would scarcely dare to be a coward. My life I chose deliberately, as you chose yours——"

She was leaning forward when she paused, because her breath came too quickly. But she did not show it. Her eyes, full of a sombre light, faced his unflinchingly.

"Well?" he asked, almost with reluctance.

"And now we must each live as we have chosen. But we can always live worthily. We need not suffer anything to rob us of that." Her voice softened, her eyes began to plead. "You are sore because Patty was too much of a child to know what she was doing when she went away. But she will come back, and all these divided days will be forgotten, and——"

She stopped.

Mike's orderly stood before them, breathless, but stiff at the salute.

"If you please, sir——"

"What?"

"The colonel, sir, sent me to say—Mrs. Hamilton's just arrived, sir."

## CHAPTER XII.

### HUSBAND AND WIFE.

As Mike Hamilton strode along towards the hotel, it must be owned that he was very angry. Patty's return was as unexpected as her departure, and each had placed her husband in a position which he felt to be ridiculous. It was true she had told him she was ready to come out again, but, although he now perceived that he should have been warned by the past, it had never entered his head that she would take such a decided and abrupt step as to come. She had done it, and he hardly knew how to meet her. For what Molly had foreseen had arrived. He had learned to do without her. Bitter reflections rose to the surface when he re-

called those past days. He had bored, and in all probability, would bore her again; with such anticipations, he felt more anger than welcome, and his thoughts were in a whirl.

A verandah surrounds the courtyard of the new Métropole, and into this open the rooms. A fat bearer, who was sitting outside the door to which Mike was directed, rose, salaamed, and knocked. Patty, surrounded by things she had dragged from her boxes, stood in the middle of the room. She started forward with her hands outstretched, a laugh which was tremulous, and a cry of "Mike!"

He kissed her on the forehead, he could do no less. But he did not speak.

"Weren't you astonished?"

"Very much."

"I wanted to surprise you. I would not even telegraph from Bombay. I got Major Westcott to find me a boy, and to help me with my things. Then I came off at once."

There was an appeal in her voice which he refused to notice. He only said quietly—

"Certainly you have surprised me very much."

She looked at him.

"You are glad, aren't you?"

He hesitated.

"I should have preferred for you to have done as I requested. When you suggested coming out, I believe I said I would rather you waited until I was more ready for you."

"Yes," she admitted, "you did. I did not think you meant it."



"Ah! That was a pity," he said briefly.

Evidently his words had startled her. She stood, looking down at the floor. In spite of her long journey, there was a certain fresh slim youthfulness about her, a delicacy of skin, an alertness of bearing, which she had brought from England, and which irritated him. He found himself contrasting them with another woman's weary looks, and heavy-lidded eyes, and the compassion which surged in his heart was not for Patty.

She made another effort.

"What do you wish me to do?"

"How can I say?" he demanded, more impatiently than he had yet spoken. "You've taken me altogether by surprise, and I've had no time to think out anything. I'm in barracks, of course. I suppose you'll want a bungalow, and where to find one I haven't a notion. Then when the regiment left Peshawar, all our things were sold, every stick."

"I see."

"You'd better hold on where you are for the present, unless, perhaps, you've formed other plans?"

"I'm not very comfortable, and there are white ants."

Her tone was plaintive.

"I daresay. But I see nothing else for it."

"Is Pleasance Musgrave in Delhi?" she asked after a pause.

"Where else should she be?" he answered impatiently. "Perhaps you don't know that her husband has just died?"

"Died! No!" For the first time she looked up at him quickly. "Do you mean now, lately?"

"A few days ago."

She shuddered.

"What was it? Was he stabbed, too?"

"Stabbed? What do you mean? Oh, you are thinking of poor Eustace. No. He died of enteric. There's been a lot about."

"Tell me, Mike," she said hesitatingly, "have you been ill yourself?"

"I? No. What on earth makes you fancy that?"

"Sometimes you did not write for such a long while."

"Didn't I? Well, I knew you had Jack, and Phil, and Cissy, and—the dogs."

He spoke with bitterness, and if her eyes had been raised to his he might have seen them brim with tears. But they were not. They were fixed on her hands, and on a ring which she was mechanically twisting round and round. Nevertheless, Mike felt a little ashamed of himself, and was not sorry to change the subject.

"I see," he remarked, "that you have kept that queer old thing."

"Yes," she replied, holding out her finger for him to look at it; "the ring of the woman of Jaipur. But in spite of Sir Robert's prophecies, I don't know that it has brought me any particular luck."

"No? I thought everything at Southcombe must go well."

"Oh, everything went well enough," she said indifferently.

They were silent. She was the first to speak.

"About Pleasance. Will she go back to England?" she asked.

He made a movement of impatience.

"How should I know? Probably. At any rate, she has stuck out here as long as she was wanted."

"Well, I shall see her."

She spoke in a very low voice, and he returned no answer. Instead, he took out his watch and looked at it. He was conscious that all he said betrayed irritation, and that if he was to gain a better command of himself, he must go away. It was not quite easy, for, although he would not acknowledge it, there was a certain forlornness in Patty's attitude for which he was unprepared, and which, if it did not appeal to love, made a claim upon his protection. He shook the impression from him impatiently.

"I must be off," he said. "As to what you will do, I don't see anything for it but that you should stay here, for the present at all events. We must see if anything turns up in the way of a bungalow. Meanwhile, I'll speak to your boy." He went to the door as he spoke, and his *kōi hai* brought the bearer. Mike briefly ordered him to look after the *mem sahib*, and to get some glass balls for her boxes to stand on. "That may circumvent the ants," he said, coming back; "though I won't answer for it. Good-bye, Patty."

It was the first time he had used her name, but no second kiss accompanied it. She did not answer. He left her standing in the middle of the scantily furnished room, with the things she had dragged out from her boxes lying about on the few chairs. As she looked at them they seemed, strangely enough, to make the room more dreary. The poor familiar things wanted welcome, and would not find it. She had packed them with a few misgivings, it is true, but with a gay conviction over-

riding all doubt that the moment she saw Mike, everything would be well between them. That he had told her not to come could not count for more than one of his old half-laughing requests, which he had set aside at her pleasure with a jest. There had been a shadow over their parting, but the shadow now seemed to her so reasonable that she only wondered he had not shown a deeper anger; a smile came straight from her heart as she remembered his displeasure. Beyond a doubt, her return would put everything right. Those had been her reflections—where were they now? And a great pity surged within her for herself—her poor mistaken insignificant self, for quite suddenly she had become insignificant. All her triumphant forecasts, all her rehearsal of what she would say to Mike, and what Mike, out of himself with joy, would answer back, fluttered forlornly away, poor ghosts, with no touch of reality about them. Mike was by no means over-joyful; her sharpened perceptions could almost have sworn that he was sorry to see her.

And if this were so, if she had, indeed, slipped out of his life, what was left to her?

Mike, meanwhile, was tramping the dusty road with the same vexation in his heart, the same frown on his face, with which he had gone to the meeting with his wife. He felt, angrily, that she had made the position yet more intolerable. Not a man or woman in the station but was aware that he did not expect her, and would snigger at this fresh proof that Mrs. Hamilton went her own way without taking the trouble to consult her husband's wishes. That in their interview Patty had not flaunted her usual lightheartedness, did not appeal

to him. He was ready to swear that it had been there, only for the moment repressed by the small unexpected inconveniences she had brought upon herself, and ready to bubble up as soon as he set himself, as of old, to give her what she loved. Then his vagrant thoughts strayed to Pleasance. The dark beauty of her face, the sadness of her wonderful eyes, the pathos of her position, touched with those old remembrances which of late had become so vivid, carried with them a dangerous fascination.

Again the haunting question came—Why had he been a fool?

The frown on his face deepened as he strode along, staring at the dust before him, where busy mynahs hunted. He passed the entrance to the Kúdsia Gardens, went through the Kashmir Gate, with the siege marks still on its front, and on the other side, just beyond the church, was brought up by Holmes's voice. Both men said "Hallo!" and Mike pulled himself together.

"Going my way?" he asked.

Holmes reflected for a moment, looking longingly at a shorter cut through a disreputable little street of colour-washed houses—red, yellow, and blue—with broken lattice-work, and rickety balconies, and swarms of brown children playing with broken pottery and faded flowers.

"I'm going the other side of the Jama Masjid," he said, "but I'll take your road, though it's a trifle longer." He burst out, "I'm a bit worried."

"Who isn't?" retorted Mike curtly.

Holmes glanced at him.

"By the way, though," he said, "I hear you're to be congratulated. Mrs. Hamilton has arrived, hasn't she?"

"She has," replied the other. Instinct made him add, "She's taken me rather by surprise, for I never expected her so quickly, and, as you may guess, haven't been able to arrange things for her."

The sweep of Indian hospitality is nearly unlimited, and Holmes was on the point of offering the shelter of their house, when he remembered Molly's strong prejudices against Mrs. Hamilton, and checked himself until he had seen her. He murmured something about the pleasure of the surprise, to which Mike did not respond. The two men walked together almost in silence, Holmes turning to look at some yellow-turbaned Sikhs who marched by. Then he returned to his own especial grievance.

"You know that brute, Abúl Haidar?"

"Don't know him, but I know he *is* a brute."

"He gives us more trouble than anyone in the district," Holmes declared wrathfully.

"What's he up to now?"

Holmes lowered his voice.

"He's contrived to get brought to my knowledge a cock-and-bull story of his own—of course it *is* a cock-and-bull story—about a bribe having been taken. I should have liked to have kicked his emissary out of the place; but I had to be civilly disbelieving. He vows he can produce evidence."

"May be awkward," Mike remarked, with a lift of his eyebrows. The matter did not much interest him, but he saw that his companion was uneasy.

"Deucedly so. It's all very well to mount the high horse, and tell him to do his worst, but I know, and you know, and he knows, that it's the sort of thing

the Government hates. You may as well come round with me."

So the two men walked round the beautiful mosque, all red sandstone and white marble, flecked with gold, to that noble side entrance, approached by numberless steps, before which gather the waiting camels, the little oxen, the sheep and the goats, the long empty waggons of wicker-work, the gaily-coloured ekkas. Women, shrouded in white from head to foot, sat near their carts, and men squatted beside the camels; but the space was large, and the Englishmen could talk without fear of jostling listeners.

Mike saw that Holmes was worried, and tried to call up the necessary interest.

"Have they let you know any details?"

"Not they. They keep it vague; dribble it out to us as they like. And the Commissioner not here."

"I suppose," said Mike, "you know that Chester has the billet?"

"No. Is it settled? I'm uncommonly glad to hear it—uncommonly. And the sooner he gets here the better."

"I've an idea he's coming down at once."

Evidently the news was a great relief to Holmes. His face cleared.

"It's hard if I can't keep Abúl quiet for the present," he said hopefully.

"He hasn't let out a hint of whom he accuses?"

"Not he. All that he cares is to let the fact leak out to our discredit, and that he's astute enough to manage, unless his mouth is stopped."

Mike Hamilton forgot his own perplexities in this

bigger complication, for in India the honour of the Government is the honour of the Army, and the honour of the Army is the honour of the man.

"I wonder," he said slowly, "what the bribe was, and why it was taken?"

"Always supposing the story to be true—which, mind you, I don't admit," Holmes returned, "I haven't an idea what it was for. I daresay nothing much. It's the getting it taken at all which would give those con-founded chaps the crow, and makes one so wild. As for what it was—perhaps you've heard of his white sapphires?"

"Not I."

"Well, they're famous, that's all. Known everywhere, and could be traced anywhere. See? That's the bad luck of it, and no doubt what he's played for. He says—well, what he says is, that one is missing, and that he wants the help of my men to find it—a sapphire in an odd little inlaid box. What he hints, of course, is that to find it we must look where he can't look."

"A white sapphire——"

Mike pulled himself up suddenly, struck by a sickening remembrance, only an hour or two old. An odd little inlaid box, and a white stone—he had seen both, noted them absently, and imagined that Mrs. Musgrave was turning over her own possessions. But now——

"It's not a valuable stone in general," said Holmes, surprised at his silence; "but these are said to be unique. If worse comes to the worst——"

He did not finish his sentence. They had turned into the Chandni Chouk, with its neem trees, its stuccoed houses, its shifting, many-coloured crowd, its straying



animals, its thieving monkeys. Before their eyes, one slipped from the low roof of a sweetmeat-seller's shop, thrust out a long skinny arm, stole a lump of sweetstuff, and in a moment had swung himself up again, chattering volubly. Glad of the change of subject, Mike burst into a laugh.

"There's an object-lesson in your own line, Holmes."

"I wish my thieves were as open in their operations," said the other, ruefully.

"Well, old fellow, I must get back. Sorry for your bother."

"And if you meet with a clue, give us the tip," returned the policeman, with a laugh at the unlikelihood of his suggestion.

But the tumult in Mike's mind as he turned away would have left his companion speechless could he only have fathomed it. For the more he reflected, the more certain he felt that under Holmes's own roof might be found not only a clue, but the thing itself. It was a white stone which Mrs. Musgrave held in the hollow of her hand, it was to a small inlaid box that she restored it—calmly and unblushingly, too, before his very eyes. Good Lord! were women like that? Did they not know the meaning of honour? He thrust the evil suggestion from him. If others could do so, she could not. He knew her to be absolutely straight, absolutely to be trusted—absolutely, absolutely; over and over again the word, which meant so much and so little, repeated itself in his brain, like the maddening tap of the coppersmith bird. But immediately another thought shot in, and he raised his head with an indrawing breath of relief. He was a fool. Of course the stone was not hers; it had

belonged to her husband, and she, poor soul, had no conception of how it had come to him, or what it meant. He had died, probably without carrying out his side of the bargain, and now Abúl Haidar meant to get its worth in another form. It all lay before him clearly; and, indeed, his guesses were accurate enough. What did not come before him so clearly was the fact that for a moment he had doubted her, that her figure had been shaken on its pedestal.

What should he do? How give her a word of warning?

For warned she must be, and quickly. He had heard enough from Holmes to be aware that the matter was serious, and he was appalled to think how small a chance might ruin, not only her husband's memory, but, which was much more important, the honour of the regiment. Mike's face, as he walked on to barracks, was not pleasant to look upon. If he could, he would have gone straight to the bungalow. But he could not. He was not free; and, if he had been, it would have been difficult to frame an excuse for a desire to see Mrs. Musgrave alone for the second time that day, with Molly in the house and evening coming on. His warning must wait for another opportunity, and never had the hours dragged so interminably. So silent was he at mess, and so gloomy, that the other men, who were disposed to chaff him over his wife's unexpected return, abstained, and kept their remarks until he had left them.

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## CHAPTER XIII.

## A QUESTION.

THE next day was Sunday, and Mike took his men to church parade, where the clash of arms, as they filed into their seats, marked a change since that Mutiny Sunday, when, with muskets left in barracks, the troops were practically defenceless. He saw Patty in the church, and knew quite well that as soon as he was off duty, she would be expecting him. But instead of going to the hotel, he made straight for the Holmes's house, and found Molly parting with Mrs. Denton outside the gate. She looked grave when he asked whether he could see Mrs. Musgrave.

"I don't know," she answered doubtfully. "She has the child with her, and—you must excuse me, Captain Hamilton—she does not care just now to receive visitors."

"She saw me yesterday," urged Mike persistently. Heavens, how long ago it seemed!

"Hardly by her own choice, I think," Molly returned in the same tone.

But he was not in the mood to draw back before difficulties.

"I am afraid I must see her."

"Not against her will," said Molly firmly.

"Yes. Even against her will. It is necessary."

His answer took the girl by surprise, and impressed her, as he intended it should, with a sense of urgency. She looked at him with a closer attention, and reading trouble in his eyes, said at length—

"If that is so——"

"It is."

"Then I will go and ask her."

But he stood in her way.

"Don't ask her," he insisted. "Say only what I have said to you, that it is necessary."

She was absent for a few minutes. When she returned—

"She doesn't at all understand," she said in a tone which was, as she intended it to be, on the defensive; "but if you have, as you imply, a reason for pressing it, she will see you in the verandah."

Pleasance was sitting in a basket chair, and the child, on a rug at her feet, clasped Holmes's terrier by the neck, with a rapture which was not shared by his victim. His mother looked pale, but she was more at her ease than she had been the day before.

"There is a chair," she said with a smile, "if you will take the trouble to turn out that woolly sheep. Molly says you have something to say to me. I expect it is a message from Patty? How is she? I can't tell you how delighted I am that she has arrived."

"It has been against my wish," he returned curtly; and something in his voice startled Pleasance.

She sat up and spoke with great eagerness.

"You do not really mean it," she said, "and I hope you will be very careful not to let Patty, for a moment, suppose that you mean it. It would hurt her cruelly. After what you said yesterday, I should like to beg you to be careful not to wreck the happiness of both your lives by rash words. Put yourself in her place. She was very young, you took her away from a home which

she adored, and expected her to forget it. She could not. It was perfectly natural. And now, you see, when she got home, she found it was you she wanted, after all. It is you who have brought her back. I am so glad."

He stared moodily before him, and there was no answering light in his eyes. The fascination of her personality had in these last weeks become very strong, it had never been stronger than at this moment. Without looking directly at her he seemed to see the splendour of the eyes, the whiteness of the neck on which the dark hair rested softly, the turn of the small head. What was it he had come to say? What did it matter? What did anything matter? And why would she persist in talking about Patty—his wife? He came to himself with a groan, which made her glance uneasily at him. For she knew—she could not but know—something of his feelings. She believed, she always had believed, that if Patty's heart could be awakened, these feelings would die out, and to herself the news of the young wife's return was like the lifting of a great load; it had been the desertion, the depression, which she had dreaded for their effect on him. Surely now their dangers were past!

"I am glad you are glad," he said with a short angry laugh. "But I did not come here to ask you to assist at the tableau of reconciliation Patty has sprung upon me."

She looked at him and her face became more grave.

"If you did not come on Patty's account," she said slowly, "I fail to see the reason of your coming."

"Oh, there is a reason," he returned. "Give me time. It's not the easiest thing in the world to explain."

Pleasance leaned back in her chair, and some shadow of bewilderment grew into her dark eyes. There was a strangeness, a disquiet, in his manner which she was quick to note, and it perplexed her. She said still slowly—

"I cannot judge, of course, but to my thinking, the best explanations are those which come to the point at once."

And nothing was further from her thoughts than what he had come to say.

"Then I'll take your advice." For the first time he turned his eyes full on hers. She met them unflinchingly. "Yesterday, when I came in, perhaps you'll recollect that you had something in your hand—it—it was a white sapphire, wasn't it?"

There was a silence which seemed to last for an eternity, and all the little colour died out of her cheeks. He looked at her despairingly, but he plunged on—

"From something I've just heard, I'm awfully afraid there may be trouble about it——"

She interrupted him.

"Trouble? What trouble?"

He did not answer the question.

"Can't I help you? You've got no one. I would do anything in the world."

He had forgotten the honour of the regiment. For the moment he remembered only the woman, and his last words came with a rush of passionate entreaty, on which her answer fell like ice.

"I don't understand," she said, still looking at him.

"It sounds as if you were accusing me of something? May I ask what it is?"

Then he turned away his face.

"I will tell you all I know," he said, feeling as if the words would choke him, and seeing neither the slight movement of her head with which she accepted the promise, nor the tenseness of her attitude. "Have you heard of a man call Abúl Haidar?"

Almost involuntarily her quivering lips formed the one word—"No," and the moment she had said it, she would have given years of her life to recall it. If he had waited she might have spoken, but he went on quickly—

"Well, he has always been a troublesome customer, remarkably slippery in his dealings, so that the Heads are anxious not to give him a handle. Particularly anxious that no one in the service should accept any present from him——"

He was expressing himself lamely, and he knew it; but she interrupted him.

"You are a long time over your explanation, Captain Hamilton. Do you wish to suggest that I have taken a—present?"

"You!" he exclaimed, and there was a world of reproach in his tone. "You! Why you have just told me you never even heard of the brute, and if anyone's word is to be trusted, it's yours. What it comes to is only——"

"What?" she interrupted impatiently again, for he found it difficult to go on, and she to wait. He stared at the hands he had clasped round his knees.

"That Abúl has some awfully valuable white sapphires,

and is calling all his gods to witness that one of them is gone."

She did not drop her eyes, though her lips whitened.

"And you think I have stolen it?" she repeated.

"Pleasance!"

He sprang to his feet, but she signed to him to sit down again.

"Mrs. Musgrave, please. Then may I hear what is your theory; for I suppose, acting as a detective, you have one?"

Her manner maddened him, as perhaps she intended it should. He set his teeth, and said grimly—

"My theory, as you call it—for you are unjust—is that he got someone who—who mayn't have known it was meant as a bribe, to accept a present. If you will know, I think this may have been your husband, and that Abúl, hearing of his death, wants to get back his stone. Of course I may be mistaken."

If he had said all that was in his mind, he would have added that Abúl was making the stir, because he knew the major's death had deprived him of the equivalent, whatever it might have been. But angry as he was, he abstained. The suggestion already seemed to him sufficiently brutal. And the next moment a little, apparently disconnected, action on the part of Pleasance, softened him the more. She took the child from the rug at her feet, and clasped him very closely in her arms. If he had but known it, she did it to strengthen her determination; but he read in it an appeal, and was ashamed. There was a change, too, in her voice, when she spoke; it was less defiant, and more self-possessed.



"And will you tell me what has led you to this conclusion?"

Mike stared blankly at her.

"What could I think? You had the sapphire in your hand yesterday."

She looked full in his face, and shook her head.

"You are mistaken," she said deliberately.

"Mistaken!"

"Yes."

"Oh," he exclaimed sadly, "I wish you would trust me."

"You imagined a moonstone to be a sapphire. The stones are alike."

Silence.

"And because my husband is dead, and cannot defend himself, you come to me to repeat these things, which not one of the regiment"—her voice broke passionately—"would have dared say in his hearing."

Mike rose unsteadily to his feet. The child began to struggle and to stretch out his arms for the dog, and Pleasance set him down, and rose herself. She threw back her head, and though white to her lips, again her whole attitude was defiant.

"If you tell me you haven't got the thing, of course that ends it," he said frowning perplexedly. "I should like you to understand that my only reason for coming was just the hope of helping you; and if I have made a mistake, as it seems, you must forgive it. You've made me feel as if I had been awfully cheeky, which was the last thing I intended." He looked at her, hoping for a word which might lighten his remorse; as it did not

come, he had to blunder on. "Anyway, I'm glad to know from your own lips——"

Again the longing to tell him the truth, the whole truth, surged in her heart. Again her eyes dropped on the unconscious child, and she did not speak. After that, how he went she did not know. It was only by suddenly finding herself alone that she awoke to the sense that he was gone—taking with him her lie.

She, who had worn her truthfulness with a proud security, as something which could never fail her; she, whose word had been so absolutely beyond a question that it had convinced Mike against the plain evidence of his senses, she had deliberately lied. The sin against God did not greatly trouble her, for He, she thought, would understand and pity. But before the judgment of her own self, she shrank, abased. And with the loathing there sprang up angry rebellion against the circumstances which enmeshed her. Her husband was dead, and she could not pretend, even to herself, that his death had been anything but a deliverance. But as the father of her boy, he was still living, binding her as he had never succeeded in binding her when he was alive. For then, at whatever cost, she had clung tightly to her self-respect; and now, its uttermost shred seemed to have been torn from her. Nor was her abasement yet at an end—end! it had only just begun. It remained for her to plot and plan, conceal, deceive, do everything which her soul abhorred, to keep from its uttermost humiliation the memory of the man whose life held for her nothing but one gradual humiliation—to keep her boy's future clean from the stain of his father's dishonour.

It was natural to her at the same moment when all this rushed upon her, to be glad that she had resisted the impulse to tell her secret to Mike Hamilton. She was a woman who never shrank from bearing her own burdens, and she saw now, what she had dimly felt then, that to take him into her confidence would have been shameful. This at least she had spared him, and she forced herself to rejoice.

Then it rushed upon her that all she had to do must be done without delay. Already rumour was afoot. Mike, indeed, had brought it so near that she had thrust out a lie to ward it off, and nothing remained but to make up her mind, and carry out her plan swiftly,—but not from where she was. Not from Holmes's house, since, if anything were discovered, it might do him, in his position, irremediable harm to be connected, however unconsciously, with the attempt. So she would go to the hotel promptly, that very day, even at the possible cost of hurting kind Molly's feelings beyond cure. She would make the not unnatural excuse of wanting to have the child with her, of dreading some little ailment, and the same reason would serve for Mrs. Denton. Excuses, she admitted drearily, were presenting themselves for her use with quite unaccustomed facility.

As for Mike, when he left the verandah, he carried perplexity written on his face. He did not, he could not doubt Pleasance; she was of those as to whom doubt is impossible. So, of course, it had been a coincidence. The stone was not a sapphire, but a moonstone, and he was so little of an expert that the mistake was exceedingly probable. And yet—with his first idea thrust resolutely on one side—something there

was which remained unsolved, some agitation on her part, an impalpable impression which left him certain that the matter disturbed her. It might have been anger at his suspicion, which, in the face of her denial, looked unfounded enough, it might—and his mind wandered here and there, touching each new subject with a question, and getting no answer. But throughout the process he was vexed, vexed because he hated mysteries, and thought she might at least have let him know what troubled her.

He met Holmes at the gate, and refused his invitation to tiffin.

"You forget," he said with a short laugh, "that I am a married man again."

"No," Holmes replied quietly. "I don't forget. I'm glad."

"By the way," Mike asked suddenly. "That affair you were telling me about. Have you made any more discoveries?"

"Abul Haidar's confounded sapphire?" Holmes instinctively dropped his voice, though no one was in sight. "Not a word. I've only remembered one thing, and that, to tell you the truth, has been puzzling me ever since it came into my head. Do you think it possible that Major Musgrave had anything to do with it?"

The honour of the regiment was back in Mike's mind with a rush.

"No, I don't!" he was beginning hotly, when Holmes put up his hand.

"A moment, please. This is only between ourselves, and we had better have it out. I know all you'd say,

one of yours, and *de mortuis*, and all the rest of it. I've said it myself, twenty times. The fact remains that the major wasn't good for much, one has to allow that point, even though he happens to be dead, and also that it doesn't strike one as an utterly impossible thing for him to do."

But Mike was not in the mood to allow anything.

"Your reason?" he said sharply.

"A small thing, you may say. Only that Mrs. Musgrave has asked me whether I knew Abúl Haidar, and whether she could get into his zenana. To me that points to something."

Mike stood dumb. To him Pleasance had unmistakably implied that she did not so much as know Abúl's name. If she had been false in this, why then—— His face grew rigid. Then it came to him that Holmes was waiting for an answer, had, to judge from his own sensations, been waiting for an hour or so. He pulled himself together and said with an effort—

"Little enough."

"Exactly," agreed the other, believing that Mike's brevity was due to his tenderness for whatever concerned his regiment. "In a way, you may say it's nothing at all, and yet it fits. That's the most one can say. I've been wondering," he went on, "whether Molly knows anything. I hope not, I'm sure, for it would put me in a very awkward hole."

"She'd tell you," Hamilton suggested, more for the sake of saying something than from any conviction; since, if Pleasance were lying, where would truth be found?

"She might. But she's very fond of Mrs. Musgrave. Well, there's the gong, if you're sure you won't come back?"

"Sure, thanks. Look here, Holmes."

"Yes?"

"If I were you, I'd put that notion out of my head."

"It's not in very firmly," returned the policeman, going off with a laugh.

It existed sufficiently, however, when Pleasance at tiffin announced her intention of moving that afternoon to the Metropole, to give him an unmistakable sensation of relief. Molly's outcry was so vehement that it was unnecessary for him to say much. But Pleasance never wavered.

"It sounds rude," she said, "but you will know better than to think so. You have been such kind friends that I have stayed on and on without compunction. Now I must go. I want the child to be with me. The ayah is packing my things, and will take them in a ticca gharri."

"If you really insist," said Holmes, feeling himself a hypocrite, "I will drive you and the child across."

"Thank you."

"I am horribly jealous. You are going because you want to be near Mrs. Hamilton," said Molly.

Pleasance was startled. In her effort to put Mike and his suspicion out of her thoughts, she had altogether forgotten Patty, and the remembrance gave her a pang. She wanted to be alone, alone to think out her plan, and, still more, alone to execute it. But she was obliged to answer.

"I shall be very glad to see her again, although I

am not going for that reason," she said with a quiet decision, which covered the fluttering of her heart, and stopped even Molly's arguments.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## IN A ZENANA GARDEN.

THE head of the Medical Mission was reading a letter she had just received.

"DEAR MISS RICHARDSON,

"I am told you have the entry into most of the zenanas in Delhi. Would you allow me to go with you to that belonging to Abul Haidar, and add to your kindness by treating my request as confidential?

"Sincerely yours,

"PLEASANCE MUSGRAVE."

A brief and unadorned appeal, and one which made Miss Richardson lift her eyebrows with a wrinkle of vexation. The hospital was full, there was more than one bad case among the native women, and she had no spare time at her disposal. Yet a certain directness and confidence in the few lines gave her an impression that the reason which prompted them was not a trifling reason. Something, too, she knew of Mrs. Musgrave, so far, at least, as that her husband had lately died; and on the whole, it did not seem probable that she, busy woman as she was, was being appealed to in order only to gratify a caprice. If that should turn out to be the

case, certainly she would be very much annoyed, but—— She closed a window through which a marauding monkey was in the habit of making his way in search of delicacies, and carried out her favourite theory that prompt decision with the chance of making a mistake, was better than indecision and more probable security, by resolving that Mrs. Musgrave should have her way. Further, with the word confidential before her eyes, she would go herself.

So Pleasance received an answer in a few lines, requesting her to be at the hospital on the afternoon of the following day.

She had seen Patty, and though Patty declared herself pleased, it immediately struck her that there was an indefinable change in her manner, which amounted to a loss of friendliness. It hurt her a little, though not so much as if she had not had other troubles weighing very heavily on her mind; and it crossed her mind whether Mike had perhaps mentioned his suspicions to his wife. If she had known of that conversation at the gate, she would have been more uneasy, but she did not know. Whatever other result her lie might have, she had no dream that it had failed in its object. At dinner the two women sat next to each other, and Pleasance, with her thoughts far away, alluded to Patty's return.

"You took us all by surprise," she said with a smile. "It was dramatic."

But Patty did not smile in answer. She looked straight before her.

"As to that, I do not know," she said. "I believed it to be necessary."



Pleasance was struck by the tone, and she called back her wandering thoughts.

"You were quite right," she agreed. "It was necessary. I have wondered more and more why you went."

"Have you?" Patty asked, and this time as she spoke, she turned quickly and looked curiously at her companion. "Were you aware of any particular reason why it should have been, as you apparently think it was, a mistake?"

And her words scarcely seemed to end there. It was not difficult to read in them something which sounded like a challenge. Pleasance answered it quietly.

"You know that from the first it struck me as a mistake."

"But why?"

"Simply because it pained your husband so greatly."

For a short while Patty did not reply. Then she said abruptly—

"As to that, he was soon reconciled to being left alone. Well, as you see, I have come back. Do you know why?"

"It does not seem difficult to guess," Pleasance went on in the same tone. Her thoughts had wandered away again to what the morrow might bring, but Patty's next words brought them back with a rush.

"It was on your account."

"Patty!"

"Yes. It has cost me a good deal, for I really do dread India." Her eyes had left her companion's face, her voice had grown dreamy, and as Pleasance noticed, she was absently twisting the old ring on her finger.

"I don't suppose you will believe me, but I came because I was growing so horribly jealous."

Pleasance was startled, very much startled. From what she had said, it was evident that if Patty was jealous, she could only be jealous of her. And the next words proved that she was right.

"It was of you, of course," Patty went on calmly. "I need hardly explain why. You and Mike had known each other very well in old days; you were the only person here for whom he was in the least likely to care, and when he wrote, your name came—well, very often."

Again she stopped, and again Pleasance waited. It was difficult to speak, and she wanted to hear all that Patty had in her mind. The next words were spoken with a great frankness.

"You understand—don't you?—that I should not be likely to say this, if I had not trusted you all through. I knew that I could trust you. And don't suppose that I was really afraid of Mike. I was not. I am sure that I was not. Please understand this whatever I say or do, for I can't be certain of myself. I see that he is changed. I think he was changing even before I left. Quite at the end I noticed it." Once more she paused, and when she went on, her voice was sharp with a ring of pain. "And now it is more. And I must tell you the truth, Pleasance, when he talks of you, and of how you stuck to your husband all through, and doesn't one bit try to hide that he is drawing comparisons between us, I hate—I just hate you!"

She flung out the words with a low intensity which left no doubt of their meaning. They came from her

heart. It was time for Pleasance to speak, and here, at least, there should be no quibbling with the truth.

"You have been very open with me, very open," she began in a low voice; "and I suppose what you have said would make most women angry. Perhaps I ought to be angry, but I am not. I am too thankful, too glad to be angry, though you may find it difficult to believe; and if you will listen patiently, I will explain why. Let me tell you first about myself. It is not very pleasant for me, but I want you to know everything, so that, whatever comes, there may be no dark corners out of which you may dread a surprise. Am I right?"

"Yes," returned Patty faintly. She wished and yet feared to hear.

But Pleasance meant to speak, and she would not be put off by the reluctant monosyllable.

"You say that you trust me," she pressed.

"Yes."

"Then," said Pleasance firmly, "it is quite true that, in the days before we both married, I loved your husband as a woman only loves once in her life."

She stopped abruptly. Patty's eyes were fixed on the opposite wall. She made a slight movement with her head. She had been sure of what she now heard, but none the less it came like a blow.

"He—he did not care like that. It might have come—I do not know—anyway you stepped between us, and there was an end of it. I had a chance of coming to India, and I took it. What happened next was not my fault, for you will understand that having done this in order to escape from old associations, it was not particularly pleasant for me when your husband's regiment

came out, and my husband, in order to avoid going home, exchanged into it. I did my best to keep on the barest terms of acquaintanceship, but you——”

“Yes,” admitted Patty, “that was my doing. I liked you. I insisted upon being friendly.”

Her face had cleared. She recognised the frankness with which Pleasance had spoken, and it had immediately relieved her vague fears as to the past. There was a pause, for her bearer, in his white dress and red sash, was offering them curry, and it was necessary to wait until he was further away. Then she looked at Pleasance, for there was more to be said, and Pleasance at once answered the look. It was for what she had yet to say that she had spoken at all.

“The trouble,” she began slowly, “after you came out, had nothing whatever to do with the fact that Captain Hamilton and I were old acquaintances. I was a cipher. He loved you with all his heart. And you failed him. You did not care. You did your very best to show him that you did not care. Now can you understand why I said I was glad to have those hard words said to me? If you are jealous, you have learned to care.”

This time two or three minutes passed before a sound came to break the silence. It had cost Pleasance so much to say all this, the confession of her love had been so repugnant to her pride, that it was no wonder that she felt as if she had reached the limits of her powers. But she had not. She knew that the young wife would claim more from her, and the next moment came the question which she dreaded.

“Why has he changed?”

"Ask yourself, not me, that question!" cried Pleasance, stirred into passion. "What do you take him for? Is the man a stone or an angel that he will bear having all his wishes tossed aside, bear being left for a whim, a caprice—bear being turned into a laughing-stock——"

Patty frowned angrily.

"A laughing-stock. Why?"

"What else, when all the regiment know that you went against his wishes, and came back without his knowledge."

"That would not change him. It is you who have done it." Her tone was sharp, and Pleasance looked at her.

"What is there strange, if, when you failed him, he turned to me—yes, you shall have the truth—to get the companionship which his wife should have been there to give? And you come back and wonder!"

The girl's face was flushed, and she breathed hard.

"I believe that I have come back, as I said—to hate you!"

"You need not," returned the other, more gently. "I have been more faithful to you than you to your husband. I have never—what is the word to use?—encouraged him. He has not even had the sympathy which I felt. And now I am going away, I am ended. We need never meet again. Everything rests with you."

Patty did not at once answer. Many conflicting emotions were struggling within her, but through them all an intuition that she was hearing the truth, the whole truth, was uppermost. Something told her that

she owed this woman gratitude, not hate. But she was young enough to believe that her own happiness was the chief thing on earth, and if she owned that she had flung it away, she wanted an assurance that it would come back to her hand. She spoke at last with great eagerness.

"Perhaps you are right. I believe you are. I know now I ought not to have gone, even though going home seems to have made me care, and put everything in a different light. I don't know how I could have been so blind. Only when you say that everything rests with me, I don't think you quite understand. It seems to me that it rests with Mike." She added in a low voice, "Is it too late? Does he really feel as he did?"

Pleasance had been greatly buffeted, this talk with Patty had alone cost her much, and when these questions came she pushed back her chair, and walked quickly out into the verandah, where it was night. She wanted to escape, but Patty, full of her own anxiety, followed her closely.

"Tell me," she urged.

"Oh!" cried the other, seized with a sudden exasperation, "how do I know? How should I know?"

"Tell me," Patty repeated unheeding.

And Pleasance answered dully—

"Not perhaps as he once felt, but if he did not care he would not be so angry."

"That is what my father said," replied the girl. And when Pleasance glanced at her almost in fear, she found to her surprise that she was smiling. She murmured, rather to herself than to her companion—"I shall win him back."

That night Pleasance tossed and turned in feverish unrest. The child slept quietly by her side, a ray of moonlight stole in through some unseen hole, and the horrid cry of a hungry jackal rose insistent in the distance. She grew so weary of her own unrest that at last she got up, opened the door, and looked out. Over the courtyard sprang a vault of deep unfathomable blue, in which the stars hung gloriously. She could not go further than the door, for the verandah had shrouded sleeping figures stretched along, but she stayed there, drawing strength from the vastness, the security, the sense of the Holding Hand, the amazing peace of the night. It was long since she had felt such a calm as it brought, and she lingered until there came the grey glimmer of the dawn, and the shadowy figure of a sweeper stole round the corner of the house. Then she went back into her room, and slept heavily.

Until she saw Miss Richardson, and was walking with her through the tortuous narrow streets, Pleasance had not dreamed of saying anything as to the nature of her errand to the zenana. It was not necessary. But now the idea flashed into her mind, and with it an impulse, probably awakened by the quiet face, on which both experience and strength had very markedly set their impression. Tell the whole she could not. That must always lie buried in her heart, wrapped about by fears. But so much as was possible she told, with the frank admission that more remained behind.

"You are wondering why we have come?" she asked.

"Yes," returned Miss Richardson, quietly. "But

there is no occasion for you to explain unless you like."

"I can tell you something." She spoke slowly, for it was necessary to weigh every word. "This man, Abúl Haidar——"

Her companion interrupted her.

"Have you ever seen him?"

"Never."

"Please go on."

"He is making an outcry for a stone which he has lost. How, I cannot explain to you, but it has unfortunately come into my possession, and you will understand that I am exceedingly anxious to get it back to him."

Miss Richardson did not immediately speak. She realised at once that they had embarked on a serious undertaking. She asked at last—

"Would not the post have been better?"

"Would it? I think not. He might have denied receiving it. It seemed to me the only sure way was to go myself. I could not have put it upon another's shoulders."

"I see. I wish it had been anyone but Abúl," said the other uneasily. "Then, what is your idea?"

"To place it in the hands of his wife, or his mother, if I fail to see him myself. But that is what I mean to try for."

"It ought not to be impossible." Miss Richardson's spirit began to rise at the prospect of difficulties. "I agree with you that it would be far more satisfactory to see him, and to give it to him without any third person being called in. If it would be for his interest he would



be quite capable of swearing it had not come back. Do not send your name. Only let him know that an Englishwoman desires to see him, and curiosity may bring him."

Pleasance nodded, and they walked on silently. The day was clear and bright, with a fresh air; one of those perfect days in the Indian cool season which entice new-comers into an assurance that there is no such climate in the world. But that is before they have begun to yearn for the fog and mud and familiar delights of England. Presently they turned into an alley with a high wall on either side. In one of these walls was set a door against which Miss Richardson struck, and was promptly admitted by a grinning black who salaamed deeply, and, without words, turned to lead them through the garden.

"I sent word that I was coming," she explained.

If Pleasance had not been so deeply pre-occupied, she must have been struck with the lavish beauty those high walls enclosed. The garden was large—much larger than might have been expected—and it was, also, delightfully shady. Besides a tall growth of pipal, neem and shisham, in which green parrots fluttered and chattered overhead; besides mangoes and silk cotton trees, there ran underneath a knotted mass of oranges, roses, pomegranates, the gorgeous flame-coloured bignonia, jasmine, and wild lemon, while here and there a tall palm towered above the tangle, a gourd twisting at its feet. The sunlight filtered sleepily through the trees, flashing silver on the little water-courses running straightly between the paths, flinging blue shadows on the marble of a fountain; touching a flock of luminous

pigeons which circled above a tank where every leaf found its reflection.

But while Miss Richardson glanced from side to side, Pleasance had her thoughts and her eyes elsewhere. A new idea had come to her, and she was hurriedly unwrapping the paper round a little box she held in her hand. She touched her companion and raised the lid.

"Look!" she whispered, and Miss Richardson looking, had a momentary glimpse of what might have been a beautiful gleam of imprisoned moonlight. The next instant Pleasance was folding it again in its covering. "It is possible," she went on, "that he might deny that it was here at all. Now he can't. Now you have seen."

"Yes, I have seen," returned the other, accepting her position of witness with some wonder, but without questioning. Life flung so many mysteries in her road, that she was content to leave much unsolved. Pleasance could not have given her confidence more wisely.

They turned an angle and the house lay before them, tumble-down and almost squalid in appearance, for not a few of its lattices were broken, and the balconies hung insecurely. Many times in the last days, Pleasance had pictured it to herself, but its unlikeness to her dreams did not strike her; indeed, she scarcely noticed it. Her thoughts were concentrated on what she held in her hand, all her movements were mechanical. She saw, without seeing, an arch and an arcaded courtyard, rich with decaying beauty; a crazy outer wooden staircase, up which the black preceded them, and she suddenly found herself in the midst of several women,

in an atmosphere heavy with scent, and airless, in what seemed at first a confusion of white and gold dresses, of small dark smooth heads, of brown faces, of tiny feet and hands. But with the knowledge that the moment was here, her self-composure all at once came back. She looked at Miss Richardson, and followed her movements. She began to consider the faces, and to gauge positions. One was old and fat and richly bejewelled. The others showed her great respect, and she guessed that she was Abúl's mother. The remaining women might be his wives and young sisters. As for what they said, she could only understand a word or two, and she vaguely resented the presence of the grinning black at the door. They clustered round her like children, her visit evidently causing them great delight. Miss Richardson acted as interpreter.

"They wish to know how many children you have?" she said, and the answer of "One" was followed by a quick demand as to whether the sahiba had attained, and a gentle murmur of satisfaction that the child was indeed a son.

Pleasance, clasping the little box, stood like a beautiful statue, while the other women busily flitted round her, touching and examining every detail of her black dress. The question they had asked and she had answered, brought with it a quickening of her resolution, if possible, a stronger resolution. It was for her boy's sake that she was here. That his father's name might be kept clean for Harry. That was all, and that was enough. She moved to Miss Richardson's side.

"Have you asked?" she said.

"Not yet. They do not understand haste."

But presently she was certain that something was being urged on the mother. Something was stirring the dark faces, she saw wondering looks cast in her direction, the mother shook her head, evidently the point was not easily carried. More than once they all spoke together in a soft twitter, above which Miss Richardson's quiet tones went steadily on. At last, to the great relief of Pleasance, the black was bidden to carry a message from his mother to the shahzada.

The older woman, shapeless figure that she was, spoke not without dignity.

"A thing of value to return to my son? I know not what that can mean. But since the sahiba desires to place it in his own hand, I have bidden Ali ask him to do us the grace to come among us. Yet truly the ways of the Huzoors are not our ways, and this is English fashion, not ours."

Miss Richardson moved to the side of Pleasance.

"Be ready," she said in a low voice.

There was no need for the warning. Ready! Every nerve was ready. The thing she clasped scorched her hand, and her cheeks flushed. She forced herself to be still, and as she had great powers of self-control, the women, who were looking curiously at her, noticed no outward signs of white disturbance. Nor when Abúl Haidar appeared at the door, fat and oily, in an oddly mixed dress of cotton trousers, velvet coat, and gold-braided smoking-cap, was any tremor apparent. What he saw was a beautiful woman standing quietly in the middle of the room, looking gravely at him without a sign of embarrassment. He did not know who she was, and he showed his astonishment so openly that to Miss

Richardson it became offensive. But she saw to her relief that Mrs. Musgrave was unconscious. She was, indeed, so absolutely dominated by one thought, that she had no room for self-remembrance. When she heard him speak in English, the words did not reach her ears, she only knew that her task seemed suddenly easy. She went towards him, and held out the box.

"This," she said, "is yours. It was a mistake. I have brought it back."

She spoke without a falter; but it was all she could say. He took it from her hand mechanically; then as he slowly removed the paper, keeping his little eyes fixed upon her face, he felt what it was and knew who stood before him.

"You, Mrs. Musgrave? Oh yes, all right, all right. But you are wrong. It was not mistake. It was—what you would call a gift, a gift, all right." A subtle inflection carried the suggestion that, had he chosen, he might have used a stronger word. "Your husban' and I great friends, oh yes, very great friends, and I gave it him. You must keep it. It is not mine any longer. It is nothin'. Only a pretty little stone. I have so many. Now I have seen you I am glad you should have it. You are very welcome to that or—to anythin'."

His smile was openly insolent as he held the box towards her; but again Pleasance was spared. She had turned to Miss Richardson, and in answer the English-woman moved quietly to her side.

"Your Highness will excuse us," she said deliberately. "Mrs. Musgrave wished to return your property herself, in order that there might be no doubt you had received it." And her tone, too, had its suggestion.

For the first time he looked at her.

"Oh, you Lady Head of Mission," he said, with a change of manner. "Have they given you coffee? You will stay? My wife always pleased to see you."

But Miss Richardson shook her head. She detained Pleasance to make the necessary polite speeches, and then the two women found themselves once more walking through the gardens, preceded, as before, by the black. The Head of the Mission was ruffled.

"The man is odious!" she said indignantly.

"Is he?" Pleasance asked simply. "I did not notice."

For all the world had changed to her in these last minutes. A great weight had rolled off. Reaction might presently set in, but for the moment she was joyous, smiling, looking at the things which before she had passed unseeing. As she glanced at her, Miss Richardson was amazed at this change. She had gone in with a grave and smitten woman, now she saw that she was not only beautiful, but young, and that the dark eyes were radiant.

"How charming it is here!" she cried with eagerness. "As enchanting as a garden in a fairy tale. What roses! And the squirrels. I have often thought I should like to see a race between a squirrel and a lizard. I wonder which would win?"

Miss Richardson was very well pleased. Though she meant to forget them, some of the words which Abúl had dropped told her who was the receiver of the white sapphire, and she could understand the wife's relief at having compassed its return. It was very evident. She herself had been made angry by a certain air of triumphant superiority in the manner of Abúl,

which, while it irritated, left her vaguely uneasy. It was plain, however, that it had failed to daunt Mrs. Musgrave. The load was gone, and, while she was thinking so, Pleasance spoke again, and again drew a deep breath.

"I was afraid that I should not get it to him, or that perhaps he would pretend he had not received it. He cannot say so now."

"No," said Miss Richardson. But the momentary pause she made was born of distrust of Abúl, and Pleasance noticed it. She reiterated her words, with a touch of the old anxiety.

"He cannot. You are witness."

"Yes. I am witness."

"It has changed everything to me. I was very uneasy when we came."

"So I saw."

They looked at each other as they reached the door, and, feeling all was well over, Pleasance smiled. With this happy smile on her face, she passed through the door, while Miss Richardson lingered to give something to the black.

And in the lane, riding side by side, and absolutely close to Pleasance when she came out, were Mike Hamilton and Holmes.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE RING IS LOST.

SOMETHING there was in this sudden encounter, in the smile on Mrs. Musgrave's face, in the amazing fact that she was coming out of a garden belonging to Abúl

Haidar, coming out, too, so far as they saw, alone, which turned the two men's blank amazement into most visible embarrassment. Their immediate impulse was to ride on. Mike, it is true, half reined in his horse, but the next instant he was again abreast of his companion. And they were out of the lane and in a very much crowded street before either spoke. Then Holmes said quietly—

“Did you see who that was?”

“Yes,” answered Mike, hoarsely.

“What does it mean?”

“I wish to God I knew!”

Holmes glanced at him. Something in his voice betrayed a deeper stir than the occasion seemed to warrant.

“You recollect,” he said, “that she spoke of wishing to get into Abúl Haidar's zenana, and that I advised her against it. I think I mentioned it to you?”

He had. And Mike recollected—was not ever likely to forget—that it was after this expressed desire of hers that she had implied to him her absolute ignorance as to Abúl's existence. In another woman, he might have shrugged his shoulders and thought of it as a not impossible slip; but with Pleasance, in whose truthfulness he had placed implicit confidence, it was a shock which blurred and confused all his previous certainties. He became aware the next moment that Holmes was still speaking.

“I can't help thinking that somehow or other she has let herself get mixed up with this confounded white sapphire.”

“Why?”



The question shot out fiercely, the more fiercely because Mike's own thoughts had travelled unwillingly in the same direction.

"Why? Well, what have we just seen? Then I can't fit in anyone else, which would be a weak enough reason if it stood alone. *Ai*, sonling, look out!" He pulled his big waler on one side just in time to avoid an infant, naked and rotund, who was engaged upon an erection of sherds in the middle of the street. "*Accha*, mother, no harm is done," he went on, as a girl, no more indeed than a child herself, rushed out from a doorway with a shrill cry of fear, dragging a faded saree across her face, and setting the baby on her hip. "Sure, the son is unhurt, and there is a pice to buy him sweet-meats with." Holmes rode on silently for a short distance, and as Mike did not speak, he added, "I believe a woman would sell her soul for a diamond, or its like."

"Not Mrs. Musgrave," said Mike doggedly.

Holmes lifted his eyebrows. His profession had planted in him a certain skin-deep cynicism.

"I don't feel so sure. I must know a good deal more before I absolve her. Something must be up, to take her to that old scoundrel's. What is it? Why couldn't she tell me straight what she wanted?"

Mike's frown deepened.

"I can't pretend to be clever enough to answer your riddles," he said grimly. "They're beyond me. She may have a reason, probably has. I don't know what it is, and it isn't likely I ever shall. Talk about women. The longer I live, the more plainly I see a man can't be expected to guess what they're up——" He changed his words—"to understand them. Their code and ours

are different, I suppose. At any rate, that's all we've got to fall back upon."

They rode side by side in silence, until the crowd thickened, turbans of all colours, slender brown legs, beggars with their gourds, sarees, crimson and indigo, and the clash of silver armlets; as they approached the bazars, to these sounds were added the beat of the little hour-glass drum, and the faint tinkle of a sutara. Holmes was thinking of the worry, Mike of the woman. The vein of hardness which ran through his character cropped up again. It was always difficult to him to forgive where he had given his trust and lost it. He had to call back his thoughts with an effort when Holmes spoke again.

"I'm very glad that Sir Robert comes at once."

"When?"

"To-morrow. Sharp work for him, just posted as he is."

"Awfully."

"Well, you see, this illness of the Commissioner has been hard on all here. Dacres, the deputy, is a thorough good fellow, but he's new, and we want a strong hand with a good bit of experience to back it up. That we get in Sir Robert."

"Where does he go?" asked Mike absently.

"Comes to us. We've a good deal to talk over, and Molly can put him up all right, and—this is an informal sort of visit, you know," Holmes ended apologetically.

"My dear fellow, he couldn't do better."

"I don't expect it to please the big-wigs, all the same. Red-tape will probably put in a protest, and

Sir Robert will hear of it again," said Holmes with a laugh.

He received no answer. Mike's mind had wandered off to the subject which at this moment was uppermost. He asked himself a dozen questions, and to not one of them did an adequate answer present itself. What had been Pleasance's action? Where lay the entanglement? What extraordinary motive had dragged her down to deceit? For an extraordinary motive must have existed. Even with the shattering of her image, it was impossible to admit Holmes's suggestion that she was one who would sell her soul for diamonds. To the wonder followed a curious hark-back upon Patty. Patty's faults had, at least, been unmistakably above-board; she had never troubled herself to hide or even clothe them with excuses. Why he should invariably compare the two women he did not ask himself, nor, indeed, could he have given a reason; but perhaps it was the wish to carry on the comparison at once, which led him, on separating from Holmes, to ride to his wife's hotel. She was out, he was told, had gone to the General-Sahib's, and had asked, if he came, that he would follow her there. It was a garden-party, and, although he had forgotten all about it, there was no question that he ought to go; and he hastily rode back to his quarters, changed, and made the best of his way to the General's house.

The garden was full of people, and Mike had to run the gauntlet and provide a good many cups of tea from the tables laid out under the trees, before he saw a chance of freedom. Patty's old enemy, the colonel's wife, did not lose her opportunity.

"I see you have Mrs. Hamilton back again. You

must be really growing accustomed to having surprises sprung upon you, Captain Hamilton, if it is true, as I hear, that her return was as unexpected as her departure."

Mike bowed.

"I am very much indebted to you for your congratulations."

Her remark had not been intended for congratulation, as he knew very well, but she could not openly disclaim the intention, and had to content herself with remarking in a high voice—

"Oh yes, I assure you that I was exceedingly glad to hear she had come back. I always point out to my husband that, when the wives are absent, the husbands require a great deal more looking after."

"Is that really your experience?" asked Mike smoothly, for he was aware that she had not at once followed her husband when the regiment was sent out. "I am afraid it must have curtailed your stay in England."

"My dear fellow," said a junior captain five minutes afterwards, "may I inquire what on earth you have been saying to the mother of the regiment? Dear thing! She has just informed me she never knew anyone deteriorate so rapidly as you. Deteriorate's an awful long word, anyway, and she stretched it about half a mile. I wish I'd implored her to spell it," he added thoughtfully.

"Have you seen my wife?" Mike asked with a laugh. This little encounter with the colonel's wife had done Patty some good with her husband, since it had obliged him to defend her.

"Haven't I, then! I've been worshipping her—in

the distance, mind, because I couldn't get near her—for the last half hour. You might have stayed away, and given a poor devil a chance. She's up there, watching the Badminton."

Mike went off in the direction pointed out, and presently came upon the game and its onlookers. Patty was sitting with her back turned to him, so that she was unconscious of his approach, and for a few minutes he saw her, himself unseen. The brightness of the beautiful hair first caught his eye, the small ear, the cheek—and he wondered if it were shadow or actual change which made the cheek look less round and girlish than it had been a year ago. The doubt caused him for a moment to forget the trouble he carried in his mind, and an impulse led him to walk up behind her, and speak over her shoulder.

"I have been looking for you," he said.

She started and turned quickly, and he could have sworn that a flash of pleasure leapt into her eyes. It faded, no doubt, but unless he deceived himself, it had been there.

"I suppose you felt you must put in an appearance," she remarked, and the words were spoken rather as an assertion than a question. "Otherwise, these functions are not very much in your line."

"Not much. I should have forgotten all about it, but that I went to the hotel; and they told me where you had gone."

"I would have waited if I had known," she answered, after a momentary hesitation.

"Thanks. That wasn't in the least necessary. After I got here, I was told off for tea-table duty, and then

Bertram showed me where you were." He glanced round. "I'm afraid, from what he said, that my appearance may have caused a dispersal."

Patty raised her eyebrows.

"What did he say?"

"That there was no getting near you."

"He could not have tried very hard. But I told them to go. I think they had said all they had to say, and—a little more."

They fell into silence. Mike began to wonder whether he had arrived at the same point as the other men, and at last was driven to hazard a fatuous remark.

"It's pleasant enough here, under the trees."

"It's out of the dust, at all events," she returned. "One is grateful for any green after that bare ground round the hotel."

He glanced at her with a little remorse. Some days had passed since her arrival, and he had taken no steps towards giving her a house of her own. He began to retrace the past, and to wonder whether his conduct had not been harsh.

"You would be happier in a bungalow?" he asked.

Again she hesitated, and this time he noticed it.

"Oh, I don't know," she said. "If you dislike the idea, it's hardly worth taking any trouble about it. When you spoke of it the other day, I think you said there were difficulties."

She spoke indifferently, and the indifference galled him. He felt suddenly a strong wish to make her look at him.

"There are. But I don't suppose they are insuperable."

"No?"

"Have you heard of anything yourself?"

"I have not inquired."

"Do you care to see one which the Musgraves had when first they came? It's not very inviting, but it's passable, and I could try to get hold of it."

She made a slight movement, but she did not turn. And if she were stirred, she kept the stir out of her voice.

"You know it well?"

"Fairly well."

Patty stood up.

"The set is over, and I think I have had enough of it all. I suppose there is nothing against our going?"

"Nothing," returned Mike. "But you have not told me what you think about the bungalow."

"You had better arrange anything you like," she said listlessly. In the same tone she added, "Is Pleasance interested in getting rid of it?"

"No," Mike replied briefly.

She dropped the subject. One or two men joined them, and instead of leaving immediately, they lingered, strolling about among the oranges and roses. The air was delightfully cool and pleasant. As for the talk, it followed the ordinary lines. The usual wonder was expressed as to whether the winter rains were likely to fall in the Punjab, or whether a yet worse famine year was in store for India. The usual suggestions were made as to the arrangements for a coming gymkhana. A small current of guesses and of comment flowed in the direction of the new Chief Commissioner.

"If one can believe all they say, we're in luck," re-

marked a young Assistant Conservator of Forests. "They vow in dealing with the natives, he's Ai."

"Ai all round," growled an elderly collector from the north.

As the Hamiltons came up, the colonel's wife stood in their path, unwisely bent upon retaliation.

"Ah, Captain Hamilton," she cried in her high-pitched voice, "so you have really managed to capture your wife! If you take my advice, you'll be careful how you let her out of your sight, otherwise she'll be slipping off again before you know where you are."

"Slim enough for it, isn't she?" said Mike with a laugh, for the colonel's wife was broad and heavy, and it was well known that her size was a grief to her. "By Jove," he went on, as they turned out of the gate, "I never thought of it before, but I believe that's why she hates you so viciously."

It was the first time he had spoken with the old ease, but Patty scarcely noticed the change. She had noticed something else.

"Do the others say—that sort of thing?" she asked; and her voice was slightly broken.

It was his turn to become indifferent.

"Not to my face."

She read the meaning in his reservation, and it made her silent. The road was dusty—they met ox-carts and camels trooping out of the city—and Mike, glancing at his wife's dainty dress, felt compunction.

"You ought to have had the cart. Why didn't you order it?"

"I didn't want it."

"How did you get here?"



"Lady Mannering brought me. I could have gone back with her if I had chosen, but I preferred walking."

She said no more, except to remark upon the great mosque, its red walls glowing in the sunset lights, and to this Mike made no reply. His thoughts had grown sombre again, having betaken themselves to the problem of the day. The longer he reflected upon it, the more acute became his sense of disappointment and injury. And though more than one explanation suggested itself, nothing could do away with the grievance that she had not only refused to trust in his friendship, but had deliberately lied to him. Why? It was a puzzle, and he began to feel a vague wonder as to what Patty, if she knew the facts, would say. Unaware, as she was, of what was passing through his mind, his sudden question—which was not sudden to himself—stung her like a lash.

"Do you see much of Mrs. Musgrave at the hotel?"

"Much? Not, perhaps, so much as you might expect," she returned coldly.

"I don't know that I expected anything. I asked because you and she are old friends. You used to meet often at Peshawar."

He offered the reason lamely, and she allowed a touch of scorn to be audible in her voice.

"We are not old friends as I understand you are. I almost wonder you never told me *how* old."

Something in the tone in which she spoke awoke in him a vague uneasiness; but it was only vague, for nothing would have been farther from his thoughts than that those old days should be remembered against him by Patty. He had, it is true, had moments in which he

allowed himself to doubt whether they had not worked out in folly, but he would have been very much surprised if anything had led him to suppose that his wife had guessed at these moments, and for the present he was only concerned with the more immediate doubt as to whether his belief and confidence in Pleasance Musgrave had not been a worse folly. He felt as if they had been barbarously killed, and the pain made him indifferent to signs which, in a calmer moment, he might have noted. So he only said—

“Did it matter? If you have been together these last days, I should like to ask you something.”

Patty looked at him with astonishment. She would not answer. She waited.

“Has she ever mentioned the name of a certain Abul Haidar?”

She still paused. What did these questions mean? Finally she replied in one word—

“Never.”

It was more difficult for him to frame his next words, and he felt that they came awkwardly.

“I needn't say I'm not asking you to repeat anything she may have said in confidence.”

“I imagine not,” said Patty. She looked very directly before her, and carried her head high.

“No,” he returned, gravely unheeding. “Nor can I explain to you why I ask. I daresay it surprises you. And perhaps you may guess there is some reason—something which might bring trouble on Mrs. Musgrave.”

She shivered slightly.

“It is because I want to ward off the trouble. We are afraid that she is letting herself be mixed up with a

very doubtful business—behaving, at least, very unwisely,” he said slowly.

He paused. His wife was staring at him, for this was not what she expected to hear.

“I don’t understand,” she said. “Are you talking of Pleasance?”

“Of Mrs. Musgrave—yes. I don’t think she can understand, either, what risks she runs, and it has occurred to me that you might get her to talk freely to you, and perhaps manage to give her a word of warning.”

“I! Surely you don’t mean what you say!” Patty cried recklessly. “Surely such a word would come more effectively from you!”

She had struck, but he did not notice the blow. He was too much taken up with his own thoughts. He said only—

“I think not. In fact, to me she said she didn’t know the man.”

She stared at him.

“Well, what more do you want? That ends it.” And her voice was hopeless, dreary.

“I wish it did,” he persisted. “Unfortunately, there isn’t a shadow of doubt that she does know something about him, I’m afraid enough to lead her into a great deal of trouble. It might be possible for you to give her a hint?”

“No,” she said coldly. “I cannot.”

“Cannot?” He looked at her in surprise, and she repeated her words.

“No. I cannot.”

And her determination was so evident that he made no attempt to change it.

After he left her he was slowly walking back towards his quarters, when he suddenly altered his mind, turned, and went up on the Ridge. Sunset was creeping on, and, when he reached it, the city, with its minarets, lay distant and delicately dark against the rose tints of the sky. Above it stretched a long grey sweep of cloud, shaped like great brooding wings. The western side of the cloud was all afire with crimson, the other melted into soft depths of gloom, and ended in filmy vapours. Overhead, and towards the east, spread the wonderful afterglow, answering to the call of the vanished sun. A mass of low trees lay between the Ridge and the city; on one side rose the Observatory and Hindu Rao's house; not a sound was heard, not a figure broke the stillness; over all rested infinite peace, and the immortal memory of the dead.

Something held Mike there, but not the thoughts which the place evokes—the thoughts which can hardly fail to stir the most careless. All over the world there are sacred spots where English blood has been poured out, English heroism carried England through impossible difficulties, and amid such spots the dead in India keep their ground most securely. Mike was always, even if it were unconsciously, open to these impressions, yet this quiet evening they floated round him without once penetrating to his mind. He tried to realise them, tried to call up pictures of the long siege; he lingered long—lingered, indeed, until the sky changed into a dark fulness of blue, and a young crescent moon brightened out of its depths. But it was useless. The past, heroic as it was, had no power to affect him, because he was altogether taken up with the vague wonder and hurt

which had come into his life. He had believed in Pleasance—absolutely. He could not believe in her any more. Whatever excuses she might make, however much others might be tempted to condone, the fact remained that to him she had undoubtedly lied. At first it had seemed impossible, amazement followed, and now amazement had given place to resentment. For he was a hard judge, at any rate so far as women were concerned, although possibly a certain tribute lay in the height of the standard by which he measured them—a standard certainly higher than he expected his fellows to attain to—a standard which he had set up to the memory of a dead mother.

Pleasance knew him better than he knew himself. He had never really loved her, though twice in his life he had come near the loving, and, although he was troubled, already the attraction had faded. He wronged her now by his uncompromising judgment, for the one fact that she had stepped out of that brute's garden alone, and with—good Heavens! with a smile upon her lips—was alone sufficient to condemn her. The comparison stepped in again. Conceive Patty in such a position! He swore under his breath at the bare thought.

So he left the Ridge to the night and the jackals, and walked back to the barracks and mess. For the first time there burnt in his heart a definite wish that the separation between himself and his wife might be ended. After all, she would hardly have come out in this unauthorised fashion unless she cared more for him than she had caused him to suppose. Besides, in the ordinary course of things, long years lay before them.

If these were to bring anything but grey misery, each must be ready to move towards the other.

Also, she was very young, and he remembered that Chester believed the dislike for India, which had culminated in her leaving it, was owing to a hereditary horror for which she was scarcely responsible. He had noticed, with some surprise, that she still wore the odd old ring, so without any intrinsic value that its sole worth to her must consist in the fact that it had been his gift. Let it be admitted that it was a somewhat lordly advocacy he brought forward on her behalf, and an easy forgetfulness of the lengths to which he had allowed his own thoughts to stray. He would have owned that he expected more from his wife than from himself.

And so far was Patty from realising how surely he was beginning to draw towards her again, that she was lying face downwards on her bed, not crying, for crying came very hardly to her, but uttering dry tearless sobs. If, from what had passed at the garden-party, she had hoped something, his questions on the way home had filled her with despair. Why had he walked with her? To engage her good offices for Pleasance. She did not doubt Pleasance. Jealous she was, but the jealousy sprang from a conviction that she had herself cast away Mike's love, and that through her own desertion an old fancy had been reawakened in his heart. She possessed a sense of justice, often wanting in women, but which had been set firmly in her mind by her father's example. And she had swift intuitions which assured her that she could trust Mrs. Musgrave's word. But neither justice nor intuitions could prevent her feeling very miserable,

Undaunted youth had leapt to the belief that she had only to come back, only to put forth her powers, and she could quickly win Mike to her side. Now she began to feel that she was beating vainly against a stone wall. She remembered the chill of their first meeting. She recalled that he had asked no questions, shown no more interest in her people than when she was there before, and this though he had no longer the excuse of being wearied by their names, for she had been careful not to mention them. But she began to resent his silence, and especially she resented it for her father.

She sat up at last, for it was nearly dinner-time, and although she felt as if she could hardly bear to face Pleasance, she called her pride to her aid, and was ashamed of the impulse to give way. That, at any cost, she would overcome, facing her fate, even if it were the fate of an unloved wife, without the world discovering that she so much as flinched. And by the world she meant Pleasance. All the same, at this high-strung moment, her eye falling upon the Jaipur ring, she impetuously tore it off, and flung it into a corner of the room. Sir Robert had told her that it was to bring luck; but what luck had come to her? And yet the next minute she was down on her knees, searching feverishly in the corner where it had rolled—searching, however, in vain, for it was not to be found, and she could only comfort herself with the assurance that the servants would surely bring it to light on the next day. Her finger felt strangely bare without it, and even Pleasance noticed that it was gone.

Patty had not much to say.

“It has rolled out of sight in my room, I know

exactly where it fell, and I have told Ahmed that it must be found to-morrow."

"It is such a quaint old thing that one can't help fancying it has a history," said Mrs. Musgrave. "I don't remember it when you were out here before."

She was smiling, and more like her old self than Patty had yet seen her.

"Sir Robert got it from a woman at Jaipur. He knew no history."

"I think it must have one," said Pleasance quietly.



## CHAPTER XVI.

## PLEASANCE AND PATTY.

THE search for the ring, which had appeared so very simple a proceeding, was in vain. Patty had flung it from her with force, and it had, in all probability, rolled or rebounded in a contrary direction. Still, considering that the room was small, and the furniture, to say the least, scanty, it was curious that with so many eyes brought to bear, it failed to be discovered. Patty was more annoyed by the loss than she could have supposed possible. She told herself impatiently that the thing was not only valueless, but inconveniently clumsy, so that more than once she had been on the point of discarding it. Nevertheless, she had got used to wearing, also, as her friends remarked, had fallen into a trick of twisting it, and, at the same time, when she allowed her thoughts free play, was carried back in a vague and dreamy, yet vivid, manner to that evening on the flat roof at Jaipur. So that now she felt almost as if she had done a wrong to the white-veiled woman by flinging away her ring.

Molly rode over the next morning to see Mrs. Musgrave. She found her playing with the boy, and when Molly came in she looked at her with a smile.

"What a day for a ride! You make me envious."

"Come. You shall have my horse, and I'll send the syce back for the pony."

But Pleasance shook her head.

"To-morrow, then?"

"Not to-morrow or any day. If I could have my own way, I should at this moment be packing hard for England."

The girl was not an annoying friend. Though her face fell, she did not therefore cry out against Pleasance for her anxiety to leave them all. She knew there were other things besides friendship to be considered in this world of unrest. She said quietly—

"I shall miss you more than you know, but it will be better for you when once you are off. Are you sleeping?"

"Pretty well."

Molly had brought with her a bunch of roses, and as she arranged them in a glass she glanced at Pleasance, and thought her lips looked blue.

"How soon can you get away?"

"I wish I could say," returned the other quickly. "There is business which must be settled first."

And she gave no hint that what she called business meant the scraping together enough money to take them to England. The major had left debts, and little besides, so that it had been necessary for her to write home, ask her banker to sell out some money of her own, and telegraph the results. Now that she had got rid of the white sapphire this all seemed trifling, but it kept her in India. She walked restlessly about the room, and Molly watched her wistfully.

"Are you sure you are treating us fairly?" asked the girl, presently. She took off her white pith hat, and

sat down on the floor by the child. "I'm not. It seems to me there must be something we can do."

"There is nothing," interrupted Pleasance firmly.

But Molly went on as if she had not spoken.

"You are very far from home, and, except ourselves, I don't believe there's a single person you'd turn to, is there?"

"No one."

Pleasance rested her hands on the girl's shoulders, and smiled down into her eyes. Neither said any more, for Molly knew that words were not really wanted, and that her friend would understand all she had meant to imply. But she saw also that her offer was not to be accepted, and she was disappointed.

"By the way," she said at last, "I didn't come only to see you. I brought a note for your friend, Mrs. Hamilton."

"The ayah shall take it across. She and Harry are going to the Kudsia Bâgh."

Molly tossed it on the table, and Pleasance carried it and the boy out of the room. When she came back she asked—

"Have you seen Patty yet?"

"I saw her yesterday at the General's. I was playing tennis, but I squinted at her whenever I got the chance. Oh, she's pretty enough, if that's what you want me to say. And she was graciously pleased to walk away with her husband, though she didn't come with him. I wonder how he can be civil to her."

"It's not like you to be so unjust," said Pleasance gravely. "What do you know of the circumstances?"

"Nothing at all. Egbert would tell you that makes

me so competent to form an opinion," retorted Molly with a happy little laugh.

"If you saw anything of her you would like her."

"Should I? Well, my dear, you're not going the right way to work to bring it about."

"Why?" asked Pleasance, startled.

"You stand up for her too much. Blame her a little, and I shouldn't dislike her half so violently. However, just to please you, I'll own this much, I think it's a good thing she's come back, and I hope she feels sorry that she ever went. Well, I must go, if I am to get any ride. I daresay the syce is walking that unfortunate Broad Gauge up and down in the sun."

"Broad Gauge?"

"Yes. Because he has a back like an elephant. Egbert is happy under the delusion that it makes him safer. My beloved Egbert knows a great deal, but nothing whatever about horses. Well, good-bye."

And she jumped up.

"Come again soon, Molly."

"Trust me! You know, don't you, that Sir Robert Chester is coming to us to-day, worse luck!"

"No, I didn't know. And why worse luck?"

Molly's eyebrows went up.

"For no particular reason," she admitted lightly, "because I don't happen to have ever seen him. But it bores me when big wigs come to stay. I'm always afraid the furniture will seize the opportunity to fall to pieces, the chuprassis take away my breath, I daren't practise the 'cello, and I never know what the khansamah will do next. To add to all this, that tiresome Egbert in-

sists that we must have people to meet him at dinner to-morrow, and he has made me ask the Hamiltons, and the colonel and his wife. Isn't it awful?"

"It will all be very nice," said Pleasance with a smile. "I am certain that you will like Sir Robert."

But Molly was not to be coerced.

"Not I. People praise him too much. I'm sick of his name already. All the same, I suppose I'm glad he's coming, for Egbert's sake. He's been a good deal worried lately, poor boy!"

"Has he?"

"This isn't the easiest place in the world to work. He hasn't said much about it, but"—she paused and frowned—"I fancy some English person has been getting into trouble. At least, he asked me one day if I'd been pocketing a bribe."

Pleasance stood staring at her. Only an hour ago she had been feeling almost light-hearted with the belief that this burden was rolled away, and here it was back upon her again. She forced herself to speak.

"Oh, I hope he will have no trouble of that kind."

"I hope not," agreed Molly gravely. "At all events, when Sir Robert comes he must work the inquiries, and take the responsibility upon his own shoulders, and that's the one reason which makes me feel decently civil towards him. I do so hate seeing poor Egbert look as if he were weighed down with the cares of the whole empire. They've no business to poke them upon him. It's simply disgraceful, and so I shall tell Sir Robert. Good-bye, Pleasance. I wish you'd go out. You look dreadfully pale."

"I am going," she replied, "to the Kudsia."

She went. But she did not follow her child as she had at first intended. She walked quickly to a part where the trees grew so thickly that in winter it was unpopular with the ayahs and the bearers and their *bábá-log*. She could hear the cries of encouragement, "Shâ-bash, son of my heart!" "Run, missee, run! lo, the ball is there!" but the sounds did not really disturb her, she was even grateful for the assurance that a human element was near. For among all the conflicting emotions which rent her, she was chiefly conscious of an extreme forlornness. She had rejoiced too soon. Everything was rolling back upon her. She began to see that it was too big a thing to be got rid of by her small efforts. She had imagined that it was done with, and so profound was the relief that it had scarcely affected her to open the door upon Mike and his friend. Her purpose was carried through, carried through more easily than she had ever hoped, without, so far as she knew, a suspicion floating round her husband. For surely, now that he held the jewel in his hands again, Abûl Haidar could do nothing, say nothing, to betray? There had been moments when she had doubted her own powers, and these moments had been dreadful. Then followed an extraordinary peace, and now a sickening reaction had set in. Now possibilities, now consequences, rushed upon her; now she remembered the denials in which she had involved herself; now she recalled the look of amazement in Mike's face when she emerged upon him. Then it had scarcely touched her consciousness, now it came back vividly.

Yet, after all, if he thought ill of her, she ought to

be glad, and take heart. For it would—she knew his character well enough—it would put an immediate end to the fancies, the comparisons, the remembrances, with which circumstances had surrounded her. Once disbelieving, he would fall from her with scarcely a struggle, and go back, heart and soul, to Patty, whom he really loved.

She ought to be glad—she was. She had worked for the end which had, after all, come without her working. If only she had not lied! She, of all women the most secure and proud in her innate truthfulness, to be so degraded! She might not have been wrong. In that moment the strong outlines of her conscience looked blurred and doubtful. But whether it was wrong or excusable her false word brought its nemesis. It looked easy enough to go home and never again see Mike Hamilton. There was actual rest in the thought, and if she could have had her way, India would not have held her another day.

But to go with the dark shadow of a lie between them; to have no memories in his heart which the passing years might keep clean and without shame, there was anguish, there lay the eternal bitterness of parting. It was this which she fought in silence in the shade of the Kudsia Bágh.

Mike played lawn tennis that afternoon at the Institute, and afterwards came upon his wife in the library, talking to the sister of an Assistant-Secretary.

“Not playing, Patty?” he remarked.

“We thought of it,” she answered listlessly; “but neither Miss Forrest nor I was very keen.”

"Rather a pity. There have been some good sets."

She was silent.

"I've been to see that bungalow I spoke of, to-day."

"Yes?"

"It might do. It's not so bad. It's roomier, any way, than the hotel. You'd really better go and have a look at it."

"Why should I? Settle it yourself as you please, you and——" She checked herself abruptly. "You and the owner."

"I think it'll do, and I believe you'd like the garden; but yours must be the final word," he urged.

Again Patty did not answer, and Miss Forrest put in a remark as to the difficulty of finding a convenient bungalow in Delhi.

"I think myself," she said, "that the Commissioners, and the people who live in camp, are the ones to be envied."

"Camp's not bad," he acknowledged. "Come, Patty," he went on, "if you can't go to-day, go to-morrow. It won't do to let the house slip through our fingers, when there's nothing else. You'll know with half an eye whether the rooms will do."

"Very well," she replied reluctantly. "Now I must go."

"I'll see you home."

"Thanks, but Miss Forrest is driving me in her victoria. Good night."

She turned away, and he was left with an irritable discontent. He had intended to walk back with her,



perhaps to take her for a longer stroll. The next moment she returned.

"Could you look in to-morrow morning?"

"Certainly."

"Without inconvenience?"

He looked at her steadily.

"Isn't that an unnecessary question?"

"I think not," she answered, meeting his eye with equal steadiness. "But I ask, because I have lost my ring, the Jaipur ring, and if we are to meet Sir Robert at dinner, I should be sorry not to be able to show it to him."

"I see. Suspect anyone?" Mike demanded.

"Oh, no, I am certain that no one has taken it. I knew when it fell in the room, and I should have thought I knew exactly where. But it's not to be found, and I must have a thorough search to-morrow. I fancied you might help me."

"Of course. Though I'm not much good in a hunt for anything."

She said no more, and he watched her drive away with Miss Forrest.

The next morning there was an early parade. When it was over he rode to the Metropole, and knocked at his wife's door. It gave him an unexpected surprise to find Pleasance already before him, and half the furniture in the centre of the room. Patty scarcely turned round.

"We are hunting for the ring," she said.

He and Pleasance were shaking hands.

"I have not seen you since Patty's return," she began and corrected herself. "Oh yes, on Sunday, I forgot."

Her composure angered him.

"And since that," he returned. "I passed you two days ago, coming out of a garden."

She raised her eyes steadily. "Yes," she said, "coming out of a zenana garden. It was a wonderfully beautiful place."

There was an imperturbability in her voice which his own overwrought feelings resented.

"Abúl Haidar's," he said carelessly.

"Abúl Haidar's. Exactly." And she turned quietly to Patty. "I really don't think there is any other corner where we can look, do you? My ayah would say it was certainly magic, and I am quite unequal to assist in dealing with magic. Perhaps your husband may be more successful."

"I? Not likely. I'm a plain man. I only understand what is straightforward," he answered significantly.

When she had gone, Patty still stood in the midst of the room looking after her, until she turned suddenly on him.

"Abúl Haidar," she repeated. "That is the man you wished me to question her about?"

"Well—yes."

"What does all this mystery mean? What is Pleasance supposed to have done?" And as he remained silent, she went on impatiently—"Having said so much, I would really advise you to trust me altogether, or I shall find out from someone else. I suppose you would prefer my not asking questions?"

"Very much," he replied grimly.

"Then tell me yourself."

"You won't talk about it?"

"*Do* I talk!" She flashed the words at him.

"It's Holmes's affair, you must understand. Not mine. Lately he's been a good deal bothered by one of those underground currents of rumour, which crawl out of the bazars or some such black sinks of iniquity, no one knows how, and leave a foul deposit of slime or worse wherever they go. What they've left now is a nasty hint that someone's been going in for a bribe."

Patty's face showed her to be listening very attentively.

"But," she suggested, "can't you stop such rumours? Where is the good of being masters?"

"Stop them." He laughed. "You'd know better if you knew more. Stop them in one quarter and they trickle out in another."

"Well?"

"Well, the bribe was a gem, a white sapphire. So much we know."

"I never heard of a very valuable white sapphire."

"Perhaps not. I believe most people say the same; but these are unique, historic. Holmes thinks there's no doubt of their value, and it shows the confounded craftiness of the man in making one of them the bribe."

"Why?"

"Because being so well known, it can be traced anywhere."

"I see. Go on, please."

But Mike was beginning to find his task difficult,

and he hesitated. Patty did not speak, but she fixed her eyes upon him.

"It sounds inconceivable, I know," he said at length. "Still I believe I've seen the thing in Mrs. Musgrave's hands."

Patty stirred.

"When?" she asked, and her tone was sharp.

"It was one day when I was calling at Holmes's," returned Mike slowly.

"Did you say anything to her about it?"

"Then I'd heard nothing, d'you see? Afterwards—yes. I believe it was that very day. Holmes let out something and I thought it only fair to ask her——"

"Did you tell Mr. Holmes?" she interrupted.

"Do you suppose I should have been such a sweep?" he replied hotly. "No, I asked her, and mentioned Abúl Haidar's name. She stuck to it that what I had seen was a moonstone, and, as for Abúl, she had never so much as heard his name. Now——"

"Now?"

"Well, that must have been a lie. You heard what I said, Holmes and I met her full face, turning—alone—out of that brute's garden. She couldn't deny it. She couldn't. But what does it mean?"

Patty had suddenly sat down. Her young face was set in a frown, and she was staring hard at the white-washed wall opposite. It was amazing that her husband should be discrediting Pleasance—Pleasance who was her rival. And she herself had nothing to do with it, was not responsible, had no means of judging absolutely who was right and who was wrong. She had only to keep silence, and as it seemed, allow facts to speak for them-

selves. Meanwhile he went on in a low voice, and again she listened very intently.

"I don't know that I should trouble my head much about it; one might leave it to find its own level, if it wasn't that the regiment may get itself mixed up."

"The regiment?" she repeated blankly. "How?"

"How? Naturally enough. Of course the business started with the major. I don't for a moment believe she had anything to do with its beginning. But it was after his death that I saw the thing, and then, if she had cared, she could have got it put straight." She was silent, and he went on with insistence—"You see that, don't you?"

"Yes, I see that," she said slowly.

Her next question, however, gave him a sensation of danger.

"To whom should she have gone?"

"To me—to Holmes."

Patty's face turned upon him like the face of a young judge.

"And dragged you both into her trouble. I know nothing of white sapphires, or of this Abú! you talk about; but I know Pleasance. How can you doubt her?"

"She lied," he replied stubbornly.

"You have not heard what she has to say."

"Nothing can alter it."

"Supposing it was, as you suppose, her dead husband who took the bribe, how could she possibly speak?"

"Come. You don't really believe any woman would

be over tender as to *his* memory, particularly if she found herself in a tight place?"

Patty shook her head, and stood up with a flush on her face.

"You are wrong," she persisted. "I can't give the explanation, but I am certain that there is one."

"For a lie?"

"Yes, if you like to have it so—for a lie. If she told one, you may be sure it was the straight thing to do." And she laughed.

He lit a cigar, and looked at her.

"Didn't you want me to have a go at hunting for your ring?"

"Please. See if you can tackle the magic."

"Tell me first where you dropped it? Have your fingers grown so thin?"

She still laughed, but a little shamefacedly. "I didn't drop it."

"Oh."

"I flung it," she explained, as if it were the most natural thing in the world. "I pulled it off, and flung it into that corner."

"Oh."

The second "Oh" annoyed her.

"What on earth does it matter how it got there! All I want is to find it again."

"Exactly." His eyes had wandered over the room, and now he took out a knife and opened it. "Exactly," he repeated. "I was only wondering what led to the action."

"One may get tired of one's things every now and then, I suppose?"

"Who would deny it."

"Tired of being teased even," she said, with a little movement of her shoulders.

"I beg your pardon," he said, suddenly grave. "I had forgotten."

What he had forgotten he did not explain, nor, curiously enough, did she inquire, though for a moment she seemed about to speak. She only watched him closely as he walked to the corner she had pointed out, went down on his knees, and dug his knife into a not very noticeable crevice. He was on his feet again immediately.

"There," he said, "is your ring."

She stared at him in bewilderment.

"How did you find it! It is simply amazing! I am sure Ahmed scraped in that hole more than once."

"Magic, I suppose," he returned with a light laugh. "Apparently, for some unexplained reason, I am the person who is always to give it to you. We'll tell Bob to-night, and he'll respect it more than ever. He has a very easy corner in his heart towards this sort of thing. Do you wish me to put it on?"

She held out her hand, the bewildered look still lingering in her eyes, and once more the ring was on her finger. He was still smiling, but she was very grave.

"Then you'll meet me to-night at the Holmes's?" he said.

"Couldn't we go together?"

"Afraid not. I'll tell them to get you a decent ghari." As he was going he came back. "What about the bungalow?"

"Oh, take it by all means. I asked Pleasance about it, but it seems they got rid of it when she went to the hills, and she has nothing whatever to do with it now."

"Of course not. But I should prefer your seeing it."

"Then I'll go this afternoon, and tell you what I think at dinner. However, I am sure it will suit us very well."

"Right. This evening, then."



## CHAPTER XVII.

## IN THE LIGHT OF THE MOON.

MOLLY HOLMES despised nerves and nervousness, and all their attendant flutterings; yet she was not altogether at ease while she waited for her guests in her drawing-room. With an abundance of flowers, it is true, it had an unusually effective air; she, also, though this did not cross her mind, looked, not perhaps pretty, but young, and capable, and good. As for her white dress, which had caused her many doubts, Pleasance had slaved over it, draping it with white and silver Indian stuff, and amazing Molly by the unexpected results. She felt quite at ease about her dress, but for the rest, things loomed doubtfully. There was the khitmatgar, for instance, she was prepared for his making some inconceivable muddle; she thought it extremely likely that the presence of Sir Robert's two scarlet clothed chuprassis might produce a demoralising effect; Sir Robert himself was a stranger, and Patty and the colonel, and more than all, the colonel's wife, were enough to paralyse her efforts. Her brother, with easy Indian hospitality, laughed at her, but her mind carried a burden of fears, which she would have died sooner than acknowledge.

Sir Robert arrived late, so that before dinner he and his host met only for a few minutes in Holmes's room, where a clerk was putting away papers.

"I shall want nothing more to-night, munshi-ji," in-

timated Holmes; and when he had gone, the two men sat down and looked at each other. "Have you heard anything more from Abúl?" asked the policeman.

"Just what he means one to hear, and just what might be expected—vague hints. It's this vagueness, of course, which puts one in a hole. One might wring the neck of a good stiff lie, but poisonous unpalpable stuff floating about is the very devil."

"Can he do any real harm?"

"Who? Abúl? No, not exactly. It's the mere fact of such a thing getting discreetly hinted, and—hang it all!—the possibility that there's something definite at the back of it, which makes one sick. I suppose you've got some notion in your head as to where one has to look for the other end?" Holmes did not immediately reply. He was thinking, and Sir Robert, glancing at him, added with the air of a man on whom light was beginning to dawn, "By the way, this explains one or two matters I couldn't make out. I was awfully puzzled by a peremptory request from friend Abúl that I would make a young fellow, one Mushi Gopal Das, probationary deputy collector at Meerat. Of course, that showed he'd something up his sleeve."

"What did you tell him?"

"That I'd see him hanged first—politely, you understand. Well, Holmes"—he lifted his head, and drove his hands deep into his pockets—"there's more to hear. We haven't got to the other end."

"It has struck me," said the other, and he spoke in a low reluctant voice, "whether Major Musgrave might not have had something to do with it."

Sir Robert received the suggestion in silence. Presently he said—

“He’s dead, isn’t he?”

“Yes.”

“What are your grounds for suspicion? Did they occur to you before his death?”

Holmes shook his head.

“No, since. His wife has been asking questions about Abúl, and the other day, Hamilton and I met her coming out of his garden—the women’s part.”

The Commissioner looked keenly at him, and there was another silence. Then—

“D’you think he was as bad as that?”

“I don’t know. Somebody’s been bad,” he added helplessly.

“Have you spoken to her on the subject?”

The other man moved uneasily.

“No, I haven’t,” he admitted. “She was staying here at the time of her husband’s death, and she’s a tremendous friend of Molly’s, and, to tell you the truth, I funked it.”

“I see. She’s a friend of Miss Holmes, you say?”

“Yes.”

“You don’t think your sister could get an explanation?”

“I shouldn’t like to set her on it. Molly is so loyal, she would resent it.” Holmes’s smile was tender. “When she has a friend, she does puja to her.”

“Well,” said Sir Robert, sitting up, “I must ask her myself. It may all end in smoke, or a coincidence, and from what I personally know of Mrs. Musgrave, it would take a good deal to convince me that she had been

mixed up with anything shady. Still, one had to remember that the major was her husband, and undoubtedly those inquiries of hers would seem to point to something. What can she know of Abúl? And—did you say you met her coming out of his garden? Anyone with her?”

“Alone—so far as we saw.”

“Who are ‘we?’”

“Hamilton was riding with me.”

The Commissioner jumped up from his chair, with a shake of his broad shoulders which he allowed himself when he was perplexed.

“I shall have to get to the bottom of it, somehow,” he said; “but I hope to goodness it’s not going to be complicated by women. There’s no more to say at present, is there, Holmes? Shall we go?”

With Molly were the Hamiltons, and two or three men, chiefly politicals, who were interested in seeing their new chief. Introductions were followed by the arrival of the colonel’s wife, bent upon monopoly of Sir Robert, as well as upon offering many suggestions for his future administration. Afterwards, when Holmes had taken her in to dinner, and she found herself facing Patty, who was on his other side, she took the opportunity of haranguing the world in general upon the evils of Indian domestic life, and the extraordinary conduct of officers’ young wives in particular.

“You may not think it, but I can assure you,” she asserted emphatically, “that when I look round me, and see their foolish conduct, I am disposed to thank Heaven that I have no daughters of my own.”

She eyed Patty as she spoke, and Patty smiled her sweetest in answering—

“I am sure that everyone will agree with you.”

The colonel, accustomed to diversions, broke in—

“Seen Mrs. Musgrave yet, Mrs. Hamilton?”

“Oh yes,” returned Patty, “we are at the same hotel.”

“Ah, poor lady, poor lady! Very sorry for her, very sorry indeed. I suppose there’s nothing one can do?” He lowered his voice. “I’m afraid she’s badly off. Her husband—he was an excellent soldier, not his own best friend, I fear, eh? She’s going home, I presume?”

“I believe so.”

The colonel’s wife leaned forward.

“Are you talking of Mrs. Musgrave? The best thing she can do. Of course she will marry again. Meanwhile, were I *you*, Mrs. Hamilton, I should very strongly urge her to leave India, and that on every account.”

Patty’s gaze was on the other end of the table. She did not turn her head, or so much as give a sign that she had heard. But the dinner-party was not large, and the significant words easily reached Mike’s ears. He could not interfere, though he, as well as his wife, understood their hidden intention, and for the first time he and Patty changed places in his mind. Up to this moment he had chosen to think of himself as the one injured, her impetuous movements having drawn down on his shoulders his world’s raillery. Now it flashed upon him that his own desertion had been more flagrant, more injurious—that if hers had been folly,

his own had been perilously near to sin. He looked quickly, attentively at her, so attentively indeed, that the force compelled her eyes to turn to his. What did he read in them? Reproach, perhaps; regret, perhaps; not love, he was certain. It might be a long time, if ever, before love awakened. But he would wait; he would wait.

After dinner, when the men came into the drawing-room, Sir Robert made straight for Patty.

"At last!" he exclaimed, sinking down on the sofa by her side. "I began to think I was never to have a word with you."

She smiled.

"I knew you would want to hear a great deal about your sister."

"To hear—yes. But there is something else I want much more. Elizabeth has told me a little of what you did for her, she says she can never tell me all."

"That is only her fancy."

"No. You will not get out of it so easily. You will have to put up with my gratitude, though I feel as if all words were inadequate. Believe, though, that I *am* grateful."

She turned to him quickly.

"I am very grateful, too," she said simply. "I can't tell you what Elizabeth was to me, or thank you enough for letting me know her."

"I can believe it," he said, smiling.

Why she said it she never knew, unless something in his voice recalled her days on the moor; but she went on—

"Perhaps you have heard from her that she had a great deal to do with my coming back to India?"

"Had she?"

"Possibly I might have come any way. I am not sure. I think, without her, I should have waited longer, and then——"

As she paused he looked at her.

"Then it might have been too late."

"You were right to come," he said with a nod.

"I believe I was. I am sorry I ever went away. You warned me."

"I dare say I mulled it by meddling."

"No. I understand much better now what was the danger. Then I did not really understand at all."

And something in her voice made him turn his head away, and say remorsefully—

"I was to blame. I might have said more. I should have been more persistent if I'd listened to Mrs. Musgrave." As she remained silent he went on, "She feared you were making a great mistake."

"She knew," returned Patty vaguely, "better than I." She glanced down at her hands, lying idly in her lap, and his eyes followed hers.

"Ah!" he cried with great interest. "I begin to feel gratified. I see in one matter you minded me, for you kept the ring."

"What was to be the charm?" she asked suddenly.

"My dear lady, what did I tell you? Good luck, of course."

"Then it has failed, for it hasn't brought me so much as a fraction of good luck."

"The impatience of youth! Keep it, keep it, and let me have another look at the thing."

She took it off, and offered it to him, but he would not take it. He examined it as closely as he could in her own hand. She laughed.

"I believe you are afraid of it."

"I am—mortally."

"Yet you gave it to me?"

"Pardon me. I persuaded your husband to give it to you. I'm responsible for nothing else."

"Oh!"

She laughed again, a little queerly, and at this moment Mike and Molly walked across the room. Sir Robert stood up, and Molly took his seat.

"We've come to see what is going on," she explained, "because you two seemed so much more cheerful than we were."

"Mere surface cheerfulness," corrected Sir Robert. "Mrs. Hamilton is reproaching me for my very natural terror on the subject of her ring."

"Terror?" repeated Mike. "Let's have a look, Patty."

She gave it to him, and he turned it about.

"It doesn't bite, that I can feel. Suppose you try, Miss Holmes."

Sir Robert interposed.

"No, no. Don't leave me under these intolerable imputations. Let me have it, Mike."

He carried it to the lamp, examined it very closely, and came back. Molly put out her hand.

"My turn next, please."

He handed it to her gravely.



"By all means. You complete the circuit."

"Sir Robert knows more than he will say," hazarded Patty. "I believe the woman at Jaipur told him what he has never confided to us. I try to extract something, but it is quite in vain."

"Never mind," returned the Commissioner. "You do what I tell you, and it will all come right. One moment, Miss Holmes."

And he took it from her, and returned it to Mike.

"What on earth am I to do with the thing?" asked Mike, staring.

"Give it back to your wife, of course. Isn't it hers?"

"Do you know what she did the other day? Pitched it into the corner of her room, and then there was the work of the world to find it again."

Patty coloured.

"You should tell them," she said, speaking with a little effort, "that no one could find it until you came."

"Yes, that's been saved up for you, Bob. More magic."

"Good magic," retorted Sir Robert with a laugh. "Mrs. Hamilton, I've a hundred things more to say to you, but I must go now and talk shop with the Inspector-General."

Mike went with him. Molly remained behind.

"Sir Robert is not alarming, is he?" said Patty with a smile. And Molly laughed.

"Did Pleasance tell you that I didn't like the prospect? You see, this is my first dinner-party, and I was

rather appalled. If Pleasance could have been here, I should not have minded one bit."

"You know her very well?"

"She has been my best friend ever since I came out," the girl said warmly. "I don't know what I should have done without her. But she is an old friend of yours, isn't she?"

Instinctively Patty changed, and became watchful.

"Not of mine," she said. "My husband knew her, in England."

And Molly was surprised by a ring of pain in the few words. She looked straight before her and answered deliberately.

"Old or new, one knows that Pleasance must always be a good friend to anyone. She is so perfectly loyal and trustworthy. It will be very hard to lose her."

"Does she go soon?"

"I think so. As soon as she possibly can. Of course there are matters to be arranged. She looks so ill that one will really be thankful when she is off, and I hope England will give her more peace than she has found in India."

Oddly enough, this was not the last word about Pleasance which was spoken to Molly that night. When the guests had all departed, and Holmes had been called out of the room to give orders to a subordinate as to some trifling matter, Sir Robert showed a distinct disinclination to retire to his own room, and intimated to Molly that five minutes in the verandah was a relaxation in which she might safely indulge. When they had put aside the bamboo chick and stepped out, he drew two chairs to a spot which commanded the room, de-

claring that it was the best spot from which to appreciate the moon.

"The night is beautiful, and if I might only be allowed to smoke, I should say it was absolutely perfect."

"Oh, please!"

To be expected to give leave to a Chief Commissioner to smoke was the most embarrassing incident of the evening; she hated herself for growing red, and remembered that she had no intention of joining the ranks of Sir Robert's adherents. So far he had been harmless, but if he dreamed of patronising either herself or Egbert, it was certain that she would hate him. Meanwhile the unconscious subject was striking a fusee and saying—

"I want to thank you for getting together just the people I wished to meet."

Was this patronage? She glanced suspiciously at him, decided it was not, and allowed herself to answer naturally—

"I'm glad. But it was Egbert's doing, not mine. He told me whom to ask."

"Yes."

She drew a deep breath.

"To tell you the truth, I'm very glad it is all over. It had to come one day, of course, and the first attempt must always be horrid."

This was more than she meant to say. Would he dare to praise her attempt? If he did ——! But he did not. He only remarked—

"It strikes me that your brother has done admirable work since he came here."

And the expression of his praise was so entirely

that of man for man, and not of head for sub., that she leaned back in her chair, well satisfied, and with an effort abstained from saying anything less modest than—

“He works very hard.”

No woman is able to resist that complaint which is also a tribute to the man she most cares for, and Sir Robert smiled, unseen.

“I am sure he does,” he said warmly, “and I hope he is not the worse for it? He gives me the impression of being a man who enjoys his work.”

“I think he is,” she admitted. “Indeed, I am sure that it interests him very much, generally. Just now, perhaps——”

The Commissioner stared at the cigar he held, and flicked away the ash.

“You were saying—just now?”

“I think he is bothered.”

“Ah! Has Delhi been troublesome?”

“Perhaps. I don’t know. How should I?” Then she remembered the talk with her brother on the Burn bastion, and the colour again flew into her face. But she looked very straight into Sir Robert’s eyes. “I had forgotten. Egbert did tell me one day that a native whose name I can’t recollect, was giving him a good deal of trouble. Of course you know all about it? He asked me if by any chance I’d been pocketing a bribe.” She smiled.

“Yes,” said Sir Robert, replacing his cigar, and stretching himself with easy contentment. “That’s about it. You don’t remember the name?”

Molly shook her head.

"Abúl Haidar." He was looking at her. "Does it seem familiar?"

"Not in the least."

"You have not heard it from anyone else?"

"No. How should I?" she answered indifferently.

"It wouldn't be likely, but for one reason. Mrs. Musgrave is your friend, isn't she?"

"Yes."

"Well, we fancy she knows the man."

Molly sat upright, and stared at him in blank and speechless and sudden amazement. He went on—

"I see it surprises you, and I am quite sure you are to be absolutely trusted, so I had better tell you at once what it is that we want to trace. It is a very valuable white sapphire, in or out of an odd little inlaid box."

She drew a deep breath, and did not at once answer him.

"Of course," he added, "a bribe is a serious matter, and you will understand what worries your brother."

"Of course," she returned impatiently. "It isn't that. You mentioned Mrs. Musgrave. What has she to do with Abúl Haidar?"

"Probably nothing at all, or at any rate something which a word would explain." And now he avoided looking at her. "You see, in an affair like this, we can't afford to disregard the smallest clue. Very likely it was merely a coincidence——"

"Go on, please."

"Your brother said she spoke of wishing to go to this man's zenana."

"She did," Molly said slowly, and stopped. For in that moment his words "an odd little inlaid box," had brought something with a rush into her mind, something which she had herself taken up and fingered. She looked out into the deep soft darkness of the compound, across which now and then a white figure flitted noiselessly, and her face, as Sir Robert, still watching closely, noted, was greatly stirred. He waited with patience until she chose to speak. But though she turned frankly to him, she only repeated her words, "Yes, she did."

"Perhaps you could remember what it was, she said?" he suggested, finding that she again hesitated.

"I remember perfectly. I could repeat it, and I am certain that she would be quite willing for you to know. Why not? But I would very much rather, if there is anything to tell, that she should tell you herself. It is puzzling, but it may be absolutely nothing at all, and you would only be wasting your time by thinking about it."

There was a certain disappointment in his answer—

"As to that you won't let me judge?"

"No," said the girl gravely. "Half truths are mischievous."

"Perhaps. But where am I to get the whole truth?"

"Oh, from Mrs. Musgrave, of course. I can't say how much she will care to tell you: but, however much or little, it will be true. As to that you need not have the least doubt."

She spoke with an assurance and confidence, which almost in spite of himself, impressed him. In the moonlight, her white and silver dress caught the beams,

her earnest face, softly shadowed and still a little thin, touched him by a certain sweetness and strength which he had not hitherto observed. Up to this time, indeed, he had scarcely noticed her, although he had been careful to watch for such changes of expression as might help in the task he had set himself. Mrs. Musgrave had been in his mind altogether. But now he momentarily forgot the object for which he had drawn Molly to the verandah, when he said abruptly—

“You are a very good friend.”

She called back her thoughts, and laughed happily.

“Why not? Sometimes I think men believe they hold a monopoly of friendship, and it isn’t in the least true. I have excellent friends, and I hope to have a great many more in my life.”

“I believe you will,” he said, and he spoke with more earnestness than the subject seemed to demand.

She stood up and held back the chick, so as to look into the room.

“Here is Egbert. Good night.”

“One moment, please. You advise me, then, to apply directly to Mrs. Musgrave?”

“That is the simplest way, if you want any information which she can give.”

“Very well. But I’m a bad hand at extracting information.”

“You have only to ask. She will tell you or will not tell you what you wish to know. If she declines, there’s an end of it.”

Sir Robert seemed to be rather in a mood for foreseeing difficulties. He detained Molly to inquire—

“How am I to set to work?”

"How?" She laughed. "Go to the hotel to-morrow, or, if you prefer it, she has promised to come here after tiffin. Will that do?"

"Admirably. Provided that I can see her alone."

"That can be managed quite easily. I will undertake that you and she shall be quite undisturbed here, in the verandah. Good night."

## CHAPTER XVIII.

BY THE JUMNA FORD.

AFTER all, Molly's excellent arrangements failed. At the time when Mrs. Musgrave was expected, her ayah arrived alone, the bearer of a message. The child was not quite well; his mother did not care to leave him, but if he were better, she would come the next day at the same hour. Molly had an idea that this would end it all, for she knew that Sir Robert proposed to be far on his way to camp by that time. Apparently, however, he laid sufficient stress on the interview to put off his departure with philosophy. In the afternoon he went down to Mike's quarters.

"Going to the Institute? I'll cart you there," suggested Mike.

"Presently, my son. Meanwhile, I want a little open-air conversation. Suppose we drive across the railway bridge, and smoke the pipe of peace with the Jumna ford in front of us? Time enough afterwards for tennis."

"Right you are!"



Trains and traffic lead a see-saw life on the long ugly bridge, where, at either end, carriages are barred a passage until it is signalled safe. The men said little to each other before they reached the opposite side, when they jumped out, gave the syce his orders, sat down on the river's bank—at this point high and steep—and, with a full sense of lazy enjoyment, began to smoke. Although they faced the city, little could be seen of its buildings, blocked, as they were, by the long black bridge with its monstrous girders. Directly opposite to them was massed the dense growth of the Kudsia Bágh, with the accusing finger of the Memorial seen just above. Straight in front lay a long flat of brownish sandy shore, where, although there was little or no wind, the sand, stirred by the passing of the country folk towards the ford, would suddenly whirl into a dense cloud, and hide the trees beyond. The great river, shrunken and shallow by the long drought, circled round a spit of low bushes, and curved, with slow oily movement, until, ever deepening as it came, it flowed beneath their very feet, and slipped through the arches of the bridge. Midway between its vanishing and its first appearance, the ford cut the pale waters with a bright and shifting band of colour. Little oxen passed, harnessed to gay carts, or driven singly; herds of sheep and goats crossed more or less reluctantly; great wallowing buffaloes stood in the stream, blissfully regardless of blows and cries from the wading gesticulating masters who had knotted their clothes round their loins, or heaped them on their many-coloured turbans. The soft whiteness of the sky, the tender veiling of the distant trees—all was peaceful and restful, and on the near side of the ford no creature was

visible, except one brown figure engaged in fishing, squatting at the foot of the bank where the two Englishmen were sitting, and motionless as if he were moulded in bronze.

It was some time before Sir Robert spoke.

"Not a bad place, this."

"Awfully good. I don't think I was ever just here before."

"You should show it to your wife."

"Think so? Wonder if she'd like it," said Mike doubtfully. He smoked in silence again before he broke out, "You see, Bob, it's no news to you that there's been a bit of a break between us."

Sir Robert nodded.

"Her going away in that high-handed manner riled me, and then she must come back in the same sort of wilful way——"

"She *has* come back," interrupted the Commissioner, laying a stress on his words.

"When I asked her not."

"My dear fellow, what on earth possessed you to ask that?"

Mike rolled a small pebble down the bank.

"Because I did not consider that she had behaved well." His tone was dogged.

Sir Robert sat up and began to speak, goaded thereto by a remembrance of what Patty had said the evening before.

"I haven't let out to you about it until now, Mike; but as you've opened the subject yourself, I should like to repeat what Elizabeth—my sister, you know—has written. I wonder how much Mrs. Hamilton ever said

of the time when Elizabeth was ill? Has she said anything?"

"Mentioned it in her letters," returned the other, prodding at another pebble with his knife.

"She went to her, nursed her splendidly, and, Elizabeth thinks, very materially helped her recovery. You see what a debt of gratitude she's laid me under. One I can never repay. But that's not what I chiefly wanted to say. Elizabeth has excellent judgment, and I always find I may safely trust her opinion. She thinks the separation made your wife very unhappy, that her heart was here."

"Then why did she go?"

"Of course, my dear fellow, it was a rank mistake, and nobody's dreaming of excusing it. Only it strikes me you might find some excuse yourself. She'd hardly ever left home before, for one thing, and when she came away with you, with her mind naturally full of them all, I gather you didn't particularly care to listen?"

Mike sat mute.

"Add to this a curious hereditary fear of the country, such as we can't fathom. That wanted handling. It isn't easy to explain; but I've seen it before, and I know it's a nasty thing to get a grip on anyone. For another thing I doubt whether at that time she'd come to her heart." He stopped suddenly, but, as no reply followed, went on—"Unless I'm greatly mistaken, she's come to it now. Good God, man! what are we, to be hard on a girl? Haven't you and I our own shortcomings to answer for?"

Mike looked in his face.

"Yes," he said quietly. "Come to that, I was pretty near slipping up myself."

Silence held them again. Sir Robert could not be sure that he had done any good, he had, however, spoken as much as he dared, and more than he intended. Now, for good or for ill, he must leave it. But he had still something further to say, and was quite unconscious that this something was in any way mixed up with Mike's latest remark.

"Last night," he began, "Holmes told me that you knew of this business with Abúl Haidar and his white sapphire."

And again Mike looked round sharply.

"What of that?"

"I want to get to the bottom of it, and I should like to know if you agree with him that Mrs. Musgrave has somehow to do with it?"

"To do with it? What do you mean? How? You'd better speak out plainly."

"I'd give something if I could," returned Sir Robert, with a good-humoured laugh. "But you must understand what I mean. How otherwise does she know anything about our friend? What took her to his garden?"

What, more than all, Mike reflected, was meant by the white sapphire lying in her palm, that day in the verandah?

"Ask her," he replied curtly.

"I will. But I'm asking you, beforehand, because I like to know the value of a witness. Miss Holmes is very strong. She assures me that Mrs. Musgrave's word may be absolutely relied upon. I should have thought

so too, but—I know her, after all, very little. What would you say about it?”

Mike was silent. A week or two ago he would have sworn the same. Now his belief seemed a miserable delusion.

“Well?” said the Commissioner more sharply.

“I can’t tell you; or I can tell you this much. She does know something—a good deal. Of that I’m certain. But what, how, or why, I can’t say. Perhaps she’ll open to you, perhaps she’ll deny everything.”

“That means you don’t believe in her.”

“No, it doesn’t,” said Mike desperately. “But as for explaining the twistings of a woman’s mind, God forbid that I should attempt it!”

Sir Robert was looking at him closely. He had been quite unprepared for such evident disturbance. Possibly it threw a light on what Mike had let fall a few minutes before. Anyway, it had the effect of sealing his lips against further questioning, while it left him with a vague sense of uneasiness.

“I’ll ask her, certainly,” he replied slowly. “As you say, that’s the only straightforward thing to do. The whole business has been hard on Holmes, who isn’t over fond of responsibility, and had no right to be badgered by this. So that before I go, I’ll do my best to get it off his shoulders.”

“Holmes is a good sort,” remarked Mike, taking advantage of a side issue as a means of escape.

“Excellent,” the other agreed. “With a staunch little sister, too.”

"So it seems."

More than this he could not at present bring himself to say for any woman, and his companion smiled.

"There goes the last sheep," he murmured, his eyes fixed on the stragglers of a refractory flock which had devoted its energies to baffling its driver at the ford. "If we start at once we can get across before the next train."

The two men rose and shook themselves. The brown fisherman on the bank, still motionless, did not so much as lift his eyes. The whirling sand on the opposite shore had effectually veiled the Kudsia Bágh trees in a soft dull haze. A little higher up the river lay the deserted garden of Metcalfe's house, to their left the black and ugly iron railway arches spanned the stream where once had floated the bridge of boats.

And as he looked and thought of the past, Sir Robert said, quite inconsequently—

"One has to remember that, after all, Abúl Haidar and his like count for little. The worst they can do is to throw a little mud."

The Commissioner enjoyed his evening. Holmes had dutifully demanded whether anyone else should be invited, and was told it was unnecessary. Molly, with great contentment, dressed herself in her everyday plain white dress, which was not so pretty as the silver stuff, but much more comfortable. Her brother made a face when they met before dinner in the drawing-room.

"Where's your swell frock?" he demanded.

"In its drawer. Beautifully folded away in sheets of blue paper, and ready for the next function."

He shook his head disapprovingly.

"Aunt Mary would say you should have worn it to-night."

She laughed in his face, and in further defiance of distant authority, proceeded to whistle.

"Molly!"

"Can you whistle?"

In spite of herself she became red, as Sir Robert, whom she believed to be in his room, appeared suddenly from the verandah. It was Holmes's turn to laugh.

"You hear," he said. "That's all I get when I remonstrate."

"You know very well, Egbert, that if I didn't, I should have no 'cello accompaniment. Besides—why shouldn't I?" said Molly indignantly.

"Why not, indeed?" agreed Sir Robert. "My sister Elizabeth was so keen to learn that I did my best to teach her, but it ended in dismal failure."

He fell into talk about Elizabeth, how all their lives it had been a joint dream that they should live together, and how the dream had fallen through owing to a fever which she picked up in the first district to which he was appointed. After dinner, when the three sat again in the verandah, Molly, who liked what he said, managed to turn back the talk to the same subject. He was very willing.

"You will understand," he said, "how good it was to hear of her first hand from Mrs. Hamilton. She was able to tell me a great deal, for she and Elizabeth became fast friends."

"Mrs. Hamilton!"

The girl could not keep the surprise out of her voice; and he laughed.

"Poor Mrs. Hamilton! Why not? You are not going to be one of those who will allow nothing to be said in her favour?"

"I think she was very wrong to leave her husband and go home," returned Molly the inexorable.

"But she has come back," he urged, as he had that day urged upon Mike. She was silent, and he went on with a change of voice: "I hope you will not persistently remember one unwise step against her. So far as I am concerned, I shall always owe her a great deal for what she did for Elizabeth. And surely now that she is here, the best course for her and for her husband would be to make her welcome."

"That's what Pleasance says," said Molly, feeling a little ashamed of herself. If she had to yield, at least Pleasance should have the credit. She glanced at the Commissioner with a doubtful smile.

"They are friends, I know," he said hesitatingly, and seemed about to say more when Holmes broke in with a question.

"Do you propose to go into camp to-morrow?"

"I do."

"And when shall we see you here again?"

Holmes did not know even as much as his sister, or that Sir Robert's delay was owing to his wish personally to speak to Mrs. Musgrave. He did not care to ask questions, but he would have been very glad to feel assured that the Abúl Haidar complication was not likely to trouble them any more.

"That depends," Sir Robert answered. "Probably very soon. When I do come, I'm booked to the General's, but if I must tell the truth, I've got to own up to a



prospect of two days' tiger shooting next week, down Ulwar way."

"And you'll take them?"

"If I can get through what I came about while I'm here, I shall."

"I expect you want a holiday," said Holmes heartily.

"I don't know as to that, but you may take it that on the whole I'm a steady-going official enough when temptation doesn't cross me in the form of big game."

Molly slept the sound sleep of happy youth that night, for the stir which had entered into her life was as yet no more than a gentle flutter. It did not even disturb her thoughts. She only reflected that the evening had been very pleasant, and if she found herself pondering over Sir Robert's words, it was because they happened to be interesting. She hoped they might often see him again. What wonder, when he was a man of such varied experience? And he had been quite easy, quite informal, his manner absolutely free from so much as a hint of what she would have instantly resented as patronage, his appreciation of Egbert such as to satisfy even her sisterly insistence. He had talked on a variety of subjects, of natives he had known and liked, of the future of India, of the famine, its horrors, its fine endurance.

"I haven't been in the worst of it myself," he said; "but we lent some men to a southern district, first-rate fellows they were too. I saw them when they came back—what was left of them. It was piteous hearing. Cattle feebly wandering over the country where not so much as a blade of green stuff was visible, except

where it was dotted all over with the low bushes of the *ak*. D'you know that, Miss Holmes? It has a big beautiful flower, but the thing itself is poisonous to every creature except the goat. The beasts used to be brought into the towns and sent to the hospital farms. The streets of Ahmedabad were sometimes packed with poor staggering brutes, all skin and ribs. Of course, as you know, a lot was done, more than was ever attempted before, but—well, even up here, the rains meant more than most people guessed."

Then Molly played her 'cello, whistling her accompaniment, and perhaps putting into the music something of what she had been hearing, its pathos and its steadfastness. Somehow, that night at least, though neither was aware, the two natures were touching, reacting upon each other. For him it might be no more than the result of a momentary pause, a refreshing interlude in the hurry and stress of life. He scarcely thanked her, yet she was sure that he liked it, for, unconsciously, her pleasant irregular young face turned to the shadows in which he sat with the conviction that he understood, and when, without words, we know what others feel, it is because they and we have grown nearer. But as she was going, and he rose to wish her good night, his question brought back something which she had forgotten.

"Will you tell me," he said, "if you can, at what time to-morrow you expect Mrs. Musgrave to be here?"

"About one."

"And you will be kind enough to allow me to see her alone?"

"Certainly you shall. I am particularly anxious that you should see her, if there is anything to be cleared up."

Molly's frank eyes were on his. Holmes had gone into the drawing-room, and was waiting. Sir Robert turned away and came back, speaking, as it seemed, almost unwillingly.

"It is only fair that I should warn you that I may be obliged to ask your friend some searching questions."

She smiled.

"I am not at all afraid."

She was not. The remembrance of the little old inlaid box was puzzling, but her loyalty was content to put it on one side, and her certainty that Pleasance could explain whatever was doubtful never once wavered. She was a dauntless partisan. The two who most cared for Pleasance showed a wide divergence from the first in their treatment of her difficulties, for Mike, when he believed that she was in some manner mixed up with the white sapphire and a discreditable bribe, immediately felt the need of giving her warning; while Molly, confronted with the fact, would not have condescended to such a step. To her it would have seemed to breathe unfriendly doubt, instead of a calm security that whenever Pleasance chose to speak, she could speak without fear of entanglement.

It followed naturally that, when Mrs. Musgrave arrived, Molly talked to her of many indifferent subjects before telling her that Sir Robert Chester would be greatly obliged if she would see him for a few minutes alone.

Pleasance understood in a flash, and the colour died out of her cheeks. She had hoped that he had gone. She had dreamed that the thing she had done was at an end, over, dead; but she knew now that it was still horribly alive, still threatening, and still to be faced. She sat down suddenly, for of late she had felt curiously shaken, and her beautiful dark eyes had a hunted look as she realised the dangers of the coming interview.

Nevertheless, so strong was her self-control, that in a moment she had forced herself to remember that, after all, the stone was restored to its owner's hands, and that it was always possible to take refuge in silence. Having started, she could certainly go on, whatever hot ploughshares her feet might be called upon to press, and she answered Molly's question by quickly standing up again, as well as by her words.

"I will see him, of course. Where?"

But Molly had noticed her disturbance.

"Dear," she said, "tell me truly. Would you rather not?"

Pleasance forced a laugh.

"What is there against it?" she asked in a voice which, in spite of herself, sounded choked.

"You have gone through so much, and this may mean something more." And Molly, as she spoke, put her hands on her friend's shoulders.

There was a momentary pause before Pleasance looked up.

"I will see him," she said.

"Perhaps you are right," said the girl quietly. "I think you are. Then, even if it hurts, it will be over."

And Pleasance did not ask why Molly thought the interview might hurt. But, as she was going out of the room, she turned and kissed her, and looked into her honest grey eyes.

"You are wonderful, Molly," she said wistfully. "Can you really trust me in spite of everything?"

"Through everything."

"Even though I am bound to admit that I told a lie?"

"If you did, I know no one it will have pained so much as yourself," said the girl, bravely. "And, Pleasance——"

The other did not answer, but stood listening, with her hand on the door.

"If you are able to tell Sir Robert, I believe that he will understand."

## CHAPTER XIX.

## A GALLANT SOUL.

THE Chief Commissioner rarely found himself in a situation which he admitted to be disconcerting, but when Mrs. Musgrave came through the bamboo chick into the verandah where he was sitting, he had never in his life felt more uncomfortable. She, on the contrary, though even unusually pale, had recovered her composure. There were dark lines under her eyes, but she faced him steadily, and was the first to speak.

"Molly tells me," she said quietly, "that there is something you wish to say to me?"

"If you will allow me, there is," he returned. "It is a matter of importance, or, believe me, I should not have ventured to intrude upon you at a time which must be full of sadness. Will you take this chair?"

But she shook her head.

"I can't do that," she said, "for I must get back with as little delay as possible. If you did not mind walking with me, you could tell me as we went."

She watched as he put his letters into a despatch box, locked, and handed it over to a chuprassi. So great was the tension of her nerves that she felt as if even these small actions had lasted for hours. But as she was not of those who show outward disturbance, she stood quite still while she waited, and only prayed he might come to the point quickly. Sir Robert him-

self had no desire to prolong his awkward moments, and as soon as they found themselves in the dusty road he began.

"You will excuse me for speaking freely?"

She made a sign of assent.

"Would you object to telling me what you know of Abúl Haidar?"

With scarcely a pause, she answered—

"I know very little. I have, however, had something to do with him."

There was no unsteadiness in her voice, though in her own ears it sounded as if it came from far away.

"You have!" he exclaimed in astonishment; for he had not expected such a prompt admission, and waited, hoping that she would follow it up, and spare him the painfulness of farther questioning.

She remained, however, silent, and he went on—

"Perhaps I ought to explain that the man has given us a good deal of annoyance of late. He has managed to let loose a swarm of rumours, horribly intangible and illusive, as such things always are, and they all hark back to a gift, or"—he hesitated—"if one is to use the plain word, a bribe, of one of his famous white sapphires. I needn't tell you this is the kind of matter the Government hates, and it would be a great satisfaction to me if I could scotch the rumour. Why he is allowing it to sift out at this moment I can't say, unless"—he hesitated again—"unless something has disappointed him of the equivalent he expected. Anyway, it is my business to try to clear it up."

He stopped, and there was silence—a silence which

chilled his heart, so significant was it. He dared not look at her; but, as she remained dumb, presently he forced himself to put a question which, word it as he would, could not sound otherwise than offensive.

"You say you have had something to do with him?"

She moved her head slightly.

"Then do you know anything of this white sapphire?"

His voice had grown stern. None the less, in spite of increasing suspicion, her answer, when it came, sounded incredible.

"Yes. I had it."

"You, Mrs. Musgrave!"

She forgot the part she should have played, the shame she should have simulated; unconscious of the mistaken attitude of her bearing, she flung back her head like the proud woman that she was, and looked at him with unflinching eyes.

"I had it," she repeated. "And I returned it."

"Returned it?" he echoed.

"Returned it. I had done so on the day when Captain Hamilton no doubt told you that he saw me coming out of the garden."

Here indeed was a new development, and relief and pain were pretty evenly balanced in the Commissioner's mind. But things were not yet clear.

"My dear lady, this is very perplexing, and you must be prepared to give me further particulars. Are you certain he received it?"

"Certain. I placed it in his hands myself."



"If he denies it, can you prove this? You had no witness."

"Yes. Miss Richardson, of the Medical Mission, was with me. I showed her the stone, and she saw me give it. You have only to ask her if you doubt."

"I don't for one moment doubt, and what you have told me is a great relief," said Sir Robert in a low voice. There was, indeed, no question that, by this time, relief should have gained the day, and yet, in honest truth, the other feeling of pain was the strongest. Every word which she spoke, every movement as she spoke, betrayed that she was passing through some strain of mental agony. What was it? He could not understand, and she did not help him, for her answers were bare of one unnecessary word. They were only extracted at all by the direct questions which he felt to be ruthless. Yet ruthless he must be. He had a duty to carry through. "I am afraid I must ask," he said, "how the stone came into your possession?"

Now only her head went down.

"It was given to me."

"By whom?"

Silence.

"By whom?"

"I refuse to answer," she said in a very low voice. "The stone was mine, mine only. I found it might have brought me into trouble to keep it, and I returned it. Women do such things, do they not?"

"Some women. Not such as you."

She was silent again. Had he been watching, he would have noticed that her step became a little un-

steady. But he was reflecting. And he said slowly at last—

“I don’t think you have been quite open with me, but I realise that it might have been difficult. Will you answer another question?”

“No,” she said hastily; and this time there was a touch of fear in her voice. “No. I refuse.”

“I wish to know,” he went on, disregarding her words, “whether you received the stone direct from Abúl, or through the medium of a third person?”

“And I repeat that I will not answer. I have told you all that is necessary. I had the stone. I took it back. I know what it means to you and to others, and I accept the disgrace.”

“Then, Mrs. Musgrave,” he replied quietly, “I have nothing for it but to tell you that I do not believe you.”

There was no thankfulness, no relief, in the look she flung upon him. Rather it was that of a hunted and desperate animal, trapped in a corner.

“And,” he went on, “first or last, you may as well realise that there is a witness against you, whose evidence can’t be gainsayed.”

She remained mute.

“The witness of your own life. You are not the woman to have accepted a bribe from that man.”

She shivered, and it seemed to him that she tried to speak, and at first failed. When at length words came, they were faltering, but they conceded nothing.

“I have told you.”

“Yes,” he continued inexorably, “you have told me,

several times over, and it has not shaken my opinion in the very least. I was certain before I spoke to you; I am doubly certain now. And it is a pity that you will not face the inevitable, for what you have tried to accomplish is beyond your powers."

He stopped, perhaps hoping that she would consent to speak. A man with a high white turban piled above his arrogant face, strode along the road towards them. Behind him two women in dull rose-red sarees walked beside a laden donkey; one carried her boy on her hip, and the silver armlets flashed out as they passed. Pleasance noticed them, noticed also two or three stunted babul-trees as impersonally as we notice things in a dream. Finding that she said nothing, he added—

"Other women might have found the task more practicable, but you have failed. Take my advice. Don't try to carry it on. It is costing you too much. I can prove to you, if you like, that it is useless."

His words pressed hard, but his tone was pitiful. She stared at him miserably, and put up her hands with the action of one who tries to ward off a blow. He understood that she was making an appeal, and he ignored it.

"I will tell you why. It is better for you. If I don't go on now, we shall separate, and all your life will be haunted by dread of my knowledge, and doubt of my silence. That will be worse for you than anything. So whether rightly or wrongly, I shall speak, speak perhaps brutally. We are at the point where no good can come to you by half measures."

Yet it was difficult for him, so that again he paused for a minute or two, hoping that she would say some-

thing. The dusty road with its untidy edges, its stunted babúl-trees, ran crookedly before them, the new raw-looking hotel compound was just in sight. Pleasance fixed her hot eyes upon it, she was trying with such force of desperation to keep her self-control, that words were an impossibility.

He went on—

“Unfortunately your husband came across this Abúl, and, for some purpose or other—it is useless to pretend that there was not a purpose—the sapphire changed hands. There’s the thing put nakedly. I wish you to know that I am under no delusion. Whatever is done has to be done without reserve between us two. Hitherto you’ve tried vainly to bear the burden yourself, and you’ve also tried to undo a wrong—always impracticable.”

He had spoken with such relentless certainty that she felt the hopelessness of gainsaying him, but at this point he hesitated and looked at her, for he had touched a puzzle. Women, he very well knew, could on occasion reach great heights of self-sacrifice for men they loved. But he was certain that Pleasance Musgrave had not so loved her husband, and he found it difficult to fathom what other motive could have been at work. As for her, his last words were ringing in her ears, and she said suddenly—

“It *is* undone.”

He shook his head.

“Not it. So long as Abúl believed that the affair rested between you and him alone, so long he would have made mischief out of it. Now that I know certainly that the thing has been returned, I hope to suc-

ceed in putting an end to his attempts. But as yet it is impossible to speak with certainty." The wonder was audible in his voice as he went on, "What I cannot understand is, why you should have thought it necessary to take the blame on your own shoulders?"

At that she cried out—

"You forget that I have a child."

"Well?"

"He carries his father's name. Was he to be branded all his life, as the son of a man who took a bribe?"

Sir Robert turned to her quickly with understanding in his face. He had been thinking only of the wife, he had forgotten the mother.

"I see," he said. "You did it for the child?"

"It would not have been so resented by the regiment. They would not have felt so much injured by anything I did. It seems that such a thing is thought more pardonable in a woman." She spoke with difficulty, with pauses between the sentences, and when she stopped he saw she had not said all. "Besides——" she added.

"Yes?"

"Try to forgive him. I am certain that he was sorry. Before he died he made me promise that I would take it back, and not allow his name to come out. You understand?"

"I understand," said the Commissioner gently. But he had hard work to keep the indignation out of his voice. The major knew his wife's character and had played upon it. She went on more eagerly.

"Besides, I am certain he thought very much of the boy. He cared for him. Now——"

"As to the now, we must consider," returned Sir Robert in a grave voice.

"Consider? What? You will not speak?"

"I am not sure. It is not right that you should rest under this imputation."

Pleasance laid her hand on his arm impulsively.

"But I wish it," she said, "above all things." And as he remained silent she went on, "Is anything to be gained by your speaking?"

"Yes," he said. "Your honour. Remember that neither Holmes nor Hamilton can make it out. They saw you that day. They even believe you were alone," he repeated. "That is not right."

"What does it matter?" she cried. "I can't help it. He must be left to believe it." She said he, not they, a slip which Sir Robert did not notice, and she added, "I went further than you know, for I let him think I had never so much as heard of Abúl Haidar."

They had reached the entrance to the compound, and the Commissioner stood still.

"I don't like it," he urged gloomily. "You don't know what you are taking on yourself."

She turned her face to him, and the passionate entreaty of her splendid eyes startled him.

"I know all," she said. "You must let me be the judge. So long as no more is heard about the matter——"

"That much I believe I can undertake. Now that you have told me how the stone went back, I have little fear that we shall any of us hear further on the subject

from Abúl. He is shrewd enough to be aware how far he can go in the way of making himself unpleasant, and to pull up sharp when no more is to be got out of it."

"Then it is at an end," she said, standing erect and pale, with her eyes still fixed on his.

He answered very reluctantly.

"If I really mayn't speak——"

"No," she interrupted, "you must not speak."

"You must be prepared for much that may be painful; for I am very much afraid that I can't put you right without explanation."

"I know, I know," she agreed feverishly. "How could you? Besides, no explanation can get over the fact that I told a lie. It's that which has come back upon me. I lied. How can I complain if I suffer for being found out?"

"I feel a brute," he said. But he ceased to urge her, and her eyes softened.

"I think you understand," she said, and that alone makes it much more easy for me. I am very thankful to you."

Her voice sank so low as she said these last words that they hardly reached his ears. And before he could answer, she put out her hand with a certain sweet dignity, and turned quickly away.

Walking homewards, many things which she had uttered repeated themselves. He wished he had said more to combat them, but he acknowledged that some strong quality of determination had been present in all she said. She was no feeble woman who had not counted the cost, and would cry out when she realised

to what it would amount. Yet he had seen something of what it would be to her, how heavily it already weighed. And he knew his world well enough to be aware that his mere declaration of opinion would have little enough effect on the other side. Their convictions would pluck at them and give her no mercy. It was inevitable. He felt very greatly for her, and very resentfully towards the dead husband who had so shackled her. Only in this entangled life we never know all. The major, too, had something on his side, she had married him as a means of escape, it was not altogether unjust that she should be left his scapegoat. Sir Robert, pitying her, did not dream that out of all this trouble, her worst pang came from the lowering of herself in the eyes of the man she loved. He had told her that she had been trying to compass the impossibility of undoing a wrong. He was not aware that his words cut double. The last thing that would have occurred to him was that while he pondered whether there was any way of setting her clear with Holmes and Mike, she was wildly pacing her room, telling herself that she ought to be the more glad for what she had done, because it was very certain now that no memories would be left to trouble Mike, and that in the future all would be as it should be between him and Patty. Who will blame her if the thought of her own degradation in his sight, cut deep? The wounds were the wounds of victory.

Of this, as has been said, Sir Robert was ignorant. He kept his mind set upon the simple issues, and gradually, as the thought of Pleasance faded, a certain satisfaction took its place. He had got to the bottom of a troublesome affair. It would now all be easy



enough. Holmes should be put in possession of the facts, and, armed with them, Abúl would be forced to understand that they were aware the sapphire had been returned, as also that bazar tongues must cease to wag. In default, one or two unpleasant consequences would be held over his head. But he had no fear of being driven so much as to threaten these. The man was astute enough to perceive when things were taken seriously, and cautious enough to avoid going too far. The interregnum had naturally produced slackness, but with the Commissioner himself, Abúl was not likely to risk a fall.

Sir Robert, however, had a curious desire—curious, considering that it was quite unnecessary—to let Molly Holmes know that he shared to the full her opinion of Mrs. Musgrave. All his arrangements having been made for leaving Delhi immediately after tiffin, Molly having an inconvenient habit of vanishing, and Holmes of requiring the most minute directions, it was not easy to find his opportunity. He seized it the more promptly when he caught a glimpse of her in the garden, talking to the mali about a sick jasmine bush, whereupon he dashed out and spoke.

“I was anxious to see you before I left, and to see you alone. You will guess what it was about?”

“Yes; and I am glad,” said Molly frankly. “I don’t wish to seem inquisitive, but I wanted dreadfully to know whether you had put things straight, or whether Pleasance did not feel that it was right to speak. I think from your face she has spoken, and that it is all right.”

She said these words so gaily and confidently that he smiled,

"I'm half afraid you won't think it right," he said. "So far as I am concerned I am perfectly satisfied. But I am bound over to keep the explanation to myself. There's your brother, for instance. I very much fear that her refusal to allow me to speak, will leave her under a cloud with him and with others."

Molly's face became troubled. From some words Egbert had let drop, she felt this was likely enough.

"I am sorry," she said slowly. "But you, yourself, you are satisfied? That is one good thing. For the others, I suppose one must wait."

"And you?" he asked, still smiling. "You want no explanations?"

"I? No. I never doubted. But as you did not know her so well, you could not be expected to be so certain."

The smile died out of his face, and he met her eyes with gravity in his.

"I know her better now—much," he said. "And I think her a very noble woman. She has a gallant soul. I am glad to feel that she is your friend."

And something in his voice, some compelling note, gave the girl an odd startled sensation, tremulous, and yet inexpressibly happy. The next moment he was wishing her good-bye, and thanking her for having taken him in, and she had recovered herself in a flash.

"Egbert and I thought it very kind of you to come," she said, as her hand was in his. "I have even got used to the chuprassis."

And she laughed.

"Yes; please get used to the chuprassis, for I hope you will soon see them again. I haven't yet half gathered up the ropes."

He was gone, and Molly was left with flushed cheeks, and an indignant remembrance of her momentary embarrassment. She had never known anything like it before. Why had it come to her? What folly had caused it? She recalled his words, went over them again and again, so that she might prove to herself that it had been folly. Weighed in this manner they were quite simple and straightforward. It was natural enough that he should praise Pleasance, and he could not have left their house without a word of thanks. Therefore he had praised Pleasance, and therefore he had thanked her. As for a turn of voice, a look—with a swift movement of repudiation the girl flung out her hands, and called back her ordinary self. She did not know that her call was vain, that, once touched by the diviner flame, life can never be the same again; that, in the swift moment she intended to forget, she had flung open the door of her heart to a bewildering crowd of invaders—pain, and unrest, and delicious troubles, and immortal happiness. They might keep quiet for awhile, so that she should not find them out, but they were there.

The patient mali had hazarded two suggestions, and boldly begun to carry out the last, before his mistress came out of her thoughts and into her usual energy.

Later in the afternoon she drove to the hotel. But Pleasance's ayah was on guard outside the door, and shook her head.

"Mayn't I go in?" asked Molly incredulously.

"Not missee nor nobody. She bid me not let in nobody. She not well."

The girl reflected.

"Tell her, then, that I shall come to-morrow morning," she said with decision.

She went away unwillingly, and disposed to blame the Commissioner. Blame is often a weapon of defence. In all probability the interview had been more trying to Pleasance than he guessed, particularly if he had looked at the matter from the point of view at which he had hinted. That might have been a revelation, and a most painful revelation to her, one which had evidently plagued her beyond endurance. Poor Pleasance! Stupid Sir Robert!

Nevertheless, the disappointment of not seeing her, lay chiefly in not being able to repeat to her what he had said.

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## CHAPTER XX.

## THREE LETTERS.

EARLY in the following week the Hamiltons moved into their bungalow, and Patty had newly matted the verandah, and spread dhurris, and invested in basket chairs, and gone through the earlier experiences of drawers that would not open, and doors that would not shut, with an equanimity which had been wanting at Peshawar. She had become more alive to comparative values. And she was very glad to find herself once more in a house with her husband, and to have done with the solitary experiences which had been both unexpected and distasteful. She yielded herself at once to the pleasure.

Also Mike's mood was changing towards her, perhaps had changed, and was not now much more than the outcome of an inherent stubbornness, averse from giving in. For it was inevitable that in his mind the fall of Pleasance from her high estate should remove a fruitful source of comparison between her and his wife. The comparisons which he at this time permitted himself to make were of another sort; they leaned in Patty's favour, and had the advantage of being weighted with a sense of virtue. Then Sir Robert's appeal gained force every day. More than all, frankly and fairly, it was Patty whom he had really loved.

So that if Elizabeth Chester could have seen for her-

self, it is very certain that her uneasiness would have been greatly lightened. As, however, she could not see, she wrote. And the mail day after Sir Robert's departure brought Patty Hamilton three letters.

The familiar post-mark made her open her mother's first.

“MY DEAREST PATTY,

“I am so upset that I really hardly know how to write, and yet I feel as if I *must* speak to someone, I always have that sort of feeling when anything happens. What do you think it is now? Just what I expected. Dear Marmaduke wants to marry Cissy, and she only laughs and declares she should not think of such a thing; that he is just Toddy, and not a bit different from Jack. I *do* feel so angry with the first person who called him Toddy, unless, of course, it was dear Marmaduke himself when he was a baby, and naturally couldn't look forward to the hindrance he would find it later on. I should not mind half so much if I were not sure that she liked him, but I always must feel very sorry for the poor boy, with his home so dismal and dreary ever since his dear brother's death. His mother was ready, he told your father, to leave the place at once, and it would have been *so* delightful to have had dear Cissy settled close at hand, and I thought it almost providential that in Mrs. Martin's last letter she asked if I knew anyone who wanted a cook, a really good cook. Was it not an extraordinary coincidence! I don't think such a thing as to hear of a cook wanting a place has happened for *years*, and now she will be wasted. It does seem *such* a pity! But of course, however vexed one felt, one

would not think of pressing dear Cissy on that account, particularly as your father thinks she is very young to be married at all; and perhaps she is, but you were very young, too, and I do think that, in his way, dear Marmaduke is as nice as dear Mike, and *so* much improved in looks. And if they had been living so near, I could have helped Cissy, and put her in the way as to servants, for I am sure *no* one can have had so much experience as I. I suppose it is all for the best, but I shall always think it comes from that foolish habit of calling him Toddy—such a sad drawback for him, poor fellow!”

The letter prattled on through many village topics, and a growing consciousness that the life there was necessarily shut in and somewhat narrow, had not taken away any of Patty's interest in the details. The change in her was owing to a broadening of sympathy, a widening of her horizons; it shut out nothing that she had loved, though it embraced more. Already she looked back in wonder to the apathy of her first days in India.

But when she took up the second letter she saw, somewhat to her surprise, that it was from her father, who was an infrequent correspondent, and seldom wrote by the same mail as his wife.

“MY DEAREST CHILD,

“Your mother will have told you that Toddy Gibson has tried his fate with Cissy and failed. I learn that the step was generally anticipated, and doubtless only my own lack of observation led to the surprise with

which I heard of it. I am afraid that Cissy's decision has caused your mother much disappointment. She has so kindly a heart that she delights in planning the happiness of those about her, and arranging the smallest details for their comfort. Also I am sometimes inclined to think that fears for her own health, which I earnestly trust may not be well-founded, dispose her to be somewhat over-anxious for the settlement of her daughters. But I am trying to impress upon her that Cissy is young in years, as also, I think, in mind; and, moreover, I may confide to you what I do not venture for fear of disappointment to say to her, that, unless I am greatly mistaken, the delay is not likely to be of long duration. Toddy, although not brilliant, is a good fellow. From what he said to me, I gather that he is greatly attached to Cissy, and I think that by-and-by—which, under the circumstances, appears to me quite soon enough—she will find out that he has her heart. Meanwhile I shall do my utmost to make sure that the child is not hurried, and I have already given the disconsolate Toddy a word of comfort and a word of warning. Patience is, I believe, an underrated virtue, and in these days runs the risk of becoming bracketed with resignation."

The letter lay in Patty's lap, while her eyes were fixed upon this last sentence, for it came upon her that her father, thinking of her, had believed that she, too, might be in need of patience. If Mike would only take some interest in her home people; if, above all, he would open his heart to appreciate her father! She sat and thought, then, with a quick shake of her



head, took up the third letter. It was from Elizabeth Chester.

“MY DEAR,

“If I have not written sooner, it has not been for want of thinking about you. No, indeed, I think so much that I seem to be living quite as closely with you out there as with myself here at home, and of the two companions I assure you you are the more interesting. I think of you, I talk to you, I see your eyes brighten, I hear you laugh, and then it is such a dull come down to begin a letter! Letters are unsatisfactory one-sided things at the best. One asks a question, and has to wait six weeks for the answer. One is called upon to project oneself too violently. There is no present, only past and future. So, though Robert and I faithfully keep up the farce of telling each other everything that happens, he feels, and I feel, that five minutes' talk would be worth a bushel of letters. By this time I am sure that you will have seen, and have told him all that you can remember, and more; for, unless I am mistaken, he has pelted you, poor thing, with the questions which, as I have already said, it is of so little use to ask by post. All the same, I have a dozen or so ready for you. Is he well? Is he cheery? Does he like his new post? Will you often see him at Delhi? Tell me everything, let me have even the little crumbs which seem to you quite stale and worthless, and put in as much of everything as you possibly can, remembering that not a word will be wasted. I wish I had anything half as interesting to offer in return, but the weather has been wild, and I have not seen any of your people since you left,

worse luck! for it would be real refreshment to have a talk with your delightful father. And when you have told me all about Robert—you see how frankly I put him first—go on to tell me all about yourself. By this time I am picturing you as fairly settled in, and expect no compassion from me if you dare to grumble that your furniture will hardly hang together, and that lizards flatten themselves against the walls. They are quite harmless. Once, to my joy, one climbed on my lap. That you are under the Indian sky, the clear delicate winter blue, which I so well remember; that you can ride for miles—do ride again, Patty—as undisturbed as if you were on this lonely moor; that, to sum it up, unlike me, you do not need to fight the haunting Call of the East—all this fills me with black envy. Heretic, are you growing at last to understand it, the attraction of the ages, and the vastness, and the mystery, yes, and the sacredness of all the blood we have spilt there? I do not know, but neither do I despair. I have heathenish convictions, which I hardly dare to breathe, as to the ring Robert found for you, the ring of the woman of Jaipur. You will laugh and declare that my mind runs on moonstones and the mysterious Three who follow to England, and like sleuth hounds set themselves on the trail of the doomed man, who has stolen a gem from an idol's forehead. No, no, no! Yours is only a nice kind little bit of innocent magic, and I have no fear of your being interfered with by any sensational Three. Only wear it, wear it, I implore of you.

“Well, and now, is there anything to tell you about myself? Not much. I have begun a bed-spread with the loveliest pattern in pink tulips you ever saw, and I

couldn't use any but Morris's silks, and they cost a fortune; and if I go into the workhouse, I only hope they will let me take my quilt with me to cover my pauper bed. Hibernation has not yet altogether set in, so that, when the weather is fairly good, I can still get out on the moor, and revel in the colours of the dying bracken and the shadow flung by the flying clouds. I have also been able to reach church, where last Sunday the Rector gave us a sermon like nothing so much as the rattling of dry peas in a tin canister. Margaret Forbes took me to task for my uncharitableness. She declares that two women in the parish are so bent upon marrying the poor man that he dare not venture upon anything of an emotional nature even in his sermons, because one or the other would immediately construe it into a proposal. Even his texts require the most careful supervision. I am sincerely sorry for him, but I cannot help wishing he would quickly marry one of the two, and allow his emotions, if he has any, to expand.

"Patty, my dear, I can't quite bring my letter to an end without a word about yourself. We had so much talk over the vexed question of your return that I don't think you will put me down as intrusive when I ask you to tell me what you comfortably can. Indeed, I shall be very well content if you can only say that you are glad to have gone."

When she had reached this point, Patty laid down Elizabeth's letter. It was all very well to be only called upon to answer a simple question with a mere yes or no, but yes or no is often not so simple an

answer as it sounds; it was not really yet determined in her own heart, where, all through these long weeks, yes and no had played at see-saw. There had been moments of disappointment, moments of ardour. Emotions flicked her as they passed, sent her first on one side, then on the other, left her no middle-ground security. She dared not take refuge in a confident yes, yet she could hardly bring herself to face the possibility that the word she must write to Elizabeth should be no.

Still——

With the letter on her lap she was sitting, when a visitor was announced—the colonel's wife.

"I have come," she announced in her most penetrating tones—"I have come because I consider it nothing less than an absolute duty to express my satisfaction that you and Captain Hamilton should at length be reunited."

"You are very good," said Patty smilingly.

"It was time."

"So we felt. One is so cramped for room in a hotel."

"*That* I should imagine to be the least undesirable part of the position."

The colonel's wife was one of those who, even if they do not use depreciatory adjectives, imply them. Patty could have sworn that the word "disgraceful" preceded "position," and she began to get angry.

"Do you really think so?" she asked, slightly lifting her chin. "Perhaps you have been more accustomed than I to uncomfortable quarters? I remember that you were rather unfortunate at Peshawar."

The colonel's wife stared. Could this presumptuous young woman be venturing to question her arrangements?

"You mistake. It was not to material comfort that I alluded," she said loftily. "I am thankful to say that whatever contents my husband satisfies me. But I think, Mrs. Hamilton——"

"Yes?"

Patty's clear young eyes were upon her, and perhaps she was not quite at her ease, for she hesitated. Only, however, for a moment.

"I think you must by this time be aware that your departure left Captain Hamilton to shift for himself at a very loose end."

"Did it?" said Patty. "I never quite know what that expression means."

She felt as if torture were at hand, and every instinct was on guard. But she kept her ease of manner, and the smile which curved her pretty mouth irritated her visitor into a more direct attack.

"It means that he was cut off from the pleasures and restraints of home. That has an inevitably deteriorating effect upon a man. Inevitably. It leads him to seek relaxation elsewhere."

"Yes? I always hoped he wouldn't be too dismal," remarked Patty innocently.

The colonel's wife glanced round her.

"You need not have feared," she said. "He certainly was not dismal. He amused himself very well. I should say that he was out a great deal, especially in this house."

She had struck home now, for the blood leapt into

the young wife's face. But she had plenty of courage, and faced her tormentor unflinchingly.

"That was with the Musgraves, of course?" she returned. "Ah, naturally. We always saw a good deal of Mrs. Musgrave; more, I believe, than of anyone else. I admire her so very much."

"There, at least, you and your husband seem to stand on common ground," said the other significantly. "I am quite aware that you and she were friends. I was merely wondering whether you still looked upon her in the same light."

For an instant it seemed as if an answer might suffocate her. Then she called all her strength to her aid.

"Indeed I do," she said steadily. "More than ever."

Rather an awkward silence followed. Her visitor rose heavily to her feet, and Patty, young, slim, tall, stood looking down upon her. She had triumphed, for her championship had been unfaltering, and there was nothing more to be said. Even the colonel's wife was forced to recognise that much, and to drop the subject, though afterwards, when she repeated the conversation to her horror-struck husband, she credited herself with several more effective little speeches. As it was, she swept out of the room with what dignity she could muster, and Patty, turning back from the door with tight-set lips, found herself face to face with her husband.

"Mike," she cried, "do you mean that you have been lying low in the verandah?"

He nodded.

"If I had only known! Then you heard that woman?"

"I heard you, Patty," he said, in a low voice; and as she looked at him, he added—"You were a brick."

She answered him slightly incoherently, and, as she spoke, involuntarily twisted her ring.

"Why does she try to hurt me? I never harmed her. Why does she say horrid things like that?"

"She's a beast. All she let out was a lie. I hardly ever came here. Mrs. Musgrave didn't like it, for one thing."

He spoke angrily, rapidly, and, still looking at him, his wife gave a shiver. The rude touch of the colonel's wife had broken down her self-control, so that she could not sufficiently command herself for words.

He watched her uneasily. For several days he had wanted to speak, but he had not intended that speech, and speech which now must be self-defence, should be forced upon him. He would have set to work deliberately, and advanced carefully, step by step. He believed that, until this moment, she had not dreamed of his admiration for Pleasance. He was growing more and more ashamed of the remembrance, and it was extremely annoying that it should have been put before Patty in a manner which would certainly stir her resentment. He went on, almost aggressively—

"Of course, if you liked to cut up rough about it, the world—so much of the world as that woman represents—would vow you'd some excuse. After what she's said you'd better hear it from first to last." She

put her hand to her throat, and he said hastily, "Won't you sit down? You may as well."

But, with a quick gesture, she refused. She remained standing, leaning against the end of a sofa, and, with her hands behind her, held it, and so steadied herself.

He found it very difficult to begin.

"When you went away from Peshawar you said some awfully hard things. Perhaps you've forgotten them, but they weren't the things a man can very well forget. I could tell you every word now. They cut deep, and they stuck. And your going wasn't fair. So much I have a right to say."

He looked at her as if he were asking her to admit it, and though her eyes were on the ground, she nodded gently. She knew that he was right. She understood now that she had not in the least understood then, and it was her own heart which had opened her eyes. But she could not speak.

"Then," he said with more hesitation, "I am not sure—perhaps you never heard that in old days, before she or I married, Mrs. Musgrave and I saw a good deal of each other?"

This time she found the words. So low, however, was her voice, that it scarcely rose above a whisper.

"Yes," she said. "I knew. She told me."

Pleasance had spoken!

Mike was startled. For a moment he hesitated, then went on—

"I ran up against her pretty often, and found her pleasant to talk to; and when the regiment moved down here, he grew a worse cad than ever. One couldn't



help admiring the plucky way in which she stuck to him, and you were a long way off, Patty!"

He stopped, and she lifted her eyes to his.

"Go on," she said.

But it was not easy.

"That's all," he said. "I daresay I was a fool, and said things I'd better have left unsaid, but—hang it all, I can't repeat every word!"

"You have not told me about her," she replied, still looking at him.

"There is nothing to tell. She never would hear a word if she could help it. She talked about you, vowed you'd come back. You mustn't blame her, for to you she was straight all through."

"I never have blamed her," she said quickly—"never! Not even when I hated her."

"Hated her!" Astonishment left him staring stupidly. "What had she done to you? I thought you were friends? Why on earth should you have hated her?"

"Because she was in your letters, in your mind—always! Did you suppose that I was so blind that I couldn't read between the lines, or didn't you think about it at all? Why, it was all there. You told me as much as you have told now!"

Her words fell over each other with passionate vehemence, and she covered her face with her hands.

He came close to her, breathing heavily.

"Patty! Did you care? What a fool I was!"

She put up her hand to keep him back.

"If I hadn't cared, should I have come?"

"Patty!"

His arms were round her; she did not shrink from

his kisses. Every now and then a little broken murmur, scarcely intelligible, passed between them. Husband and wife had found each other again. But she pushed him from her the next minute.

"Mike," she said, "there is something more I want to know. You have changed towards Pleasance. Why?"

He turned away, walked to the window, and came back.

"I believe, to tell the truth, it was always more anger with you than liking for her. You returned."

She was smiling. It was life to hear him say so. But she shook her head.

"That only made you more angry."

"Did it? I don't know." A queer expression stole into his eyes. "However, you are right in supposing that something changed my opinion of Mrs. Musgrave."

"Go on," she urged. "Tell me all."

"I can't." And as her eyes questioned his, he added, "But, if you like, I can give you my word it had nothing whatever to do with me or with you; it was altogether an outside matter which came to my ears. A remark she made one day made me fancy she might have got mixed up with it, and I asked her. She flatly denied. Afterwards Holmes and I found she must have known all about it all the time. If you recollect, I said something to you a week or two ago?"

"Yes, you told me about a stone and a bribe. Do you really mean that you condemned her for that?"

"It has never been cleared up."

She looked at him in amazement. It seemed preposterous to her to doubt Pleasance's word in this thing when she had been true in a far greater matter.

"Indeed, you are making some great mistake. She couldn't be false; it isn't in her. Mike, you are as bad as the colonel's wife."

But his thoughts refused to dwell on Pleasance. Patty filled them, the wife he had regained.

"The colonel's wife didn't really do us any harm."

"No." Patty admitted softly.

"And it's going to be straight sailing between us again?"

He caught her hands, and though she was smiling, he was ready to swear there were tears in her eyes.

"Well, I shan't go home again until you send me."

"Nor tell me that I bore you?"

"Mike, that is unfair. I don't believe I ever said anything so horrid."

"Nor throw away your ring?"

"Mike!"

He laughed. She had given herself freely, asking for no protestations from him, for it would have seemed to her pitiably mean to have required them. And he offered none, being quite ready to forget that they could ever have been needed.

## CHAPTER XXI.

## IN A VERANDAH.

So, from one cause and another, it fell out that at this moment, some of those persons whose lives had, however lightly, however unconsciously, touched each other's, were very well pleased with themselves. Mike and Patty, perhaps, particularly so, and that night Patty thought tenderly of the woman of Jaipur, and kissed her ring, without being able to give a good reason for doing so. It was yes—yes, blissful, yes, triumphant—which would fill her letter to Elizabeth Chester with its happy glow. The colonel's wife told her husband that she was extremely glad to have spoken her word of warning to that foolish Mrs. Hamilton, who was far too young and too silly ever to have been allowed to marry. Holmes had got over his interview with Abúl, and—the strength of the Commissioner at his back, and the particulars of the return at his fingers' ends—had been assured that he must be labouring under some misapprehension. Such rumours as he spoke of were nothing, bazar dirt only such as he—Abúl—himself often suffered from. They sprang beyond a doubt from a bad wish to do him harm with his friends of the English Government. But he would speak, oh yes, he would certainly speak, and the worthless ones should learn that the huzoors must not be trifled with. The Commissioner-sahib might

safely leave the matter in his hands. Holmes went away well pleased, assured that no more would be heard of the white sapphire, and with the feeling of a burden rolled off. He did not understand that it still lay heavy on Pleasance Musgrave; and if the thought had come to him, he would have said she deserved to suffer.

For, with all this satisfaction abroad, there was—as there inevitably must be—a reverse side. Abúl's feelings may be left alone. But the colonel was a gentleman, though a weak husband, and it was some time before he could so much as look at Mike without shame. And, kind as Sir Robert had been, his kindness could scarcely soften the humiliation which had taken hold of Pleasance's life. All her own high ideals had crashed around her. She sat forlorn, a tragic figure in the ruin. Except when Molly boldly stormed her solitude she would see no one. Mrs. Denton came and failed, and went back to scold her husband for not forcing his way in.

"She's ill, I know she is, poor dear, and if ye were half a man, ye'd get her to see you, Dennis. It's all very well to shake your head and look like an owl. That's a fine way of helping a poor friendless young thing like her. Why she should be miserable for the loss of a husband that hadn't an ounce of good in his whole body, is more than I or anyone can say, but women are unconscionable creatures, and there it is, and one of these fine days it's sorry and sick you'll be!"

As for Molly, she could not be said to belong to either the contented or the dissatisfied. She could not, indeed, have told you herself, having a wholesome antipathy to the mind digging and delvings in which some women delight. But she was aware of a stir, and

she was bewildered, bewildered and irritated by the persistence with which her thoughts returned into the same groove. It was stupid to go over and over words and looks which had no relation to her life, stupid to wonder why one had not said something different, stupid exceedingly to think beforehand of what one might say next time. To begin with, it was improbable that there ever would be a next time at all, and if there were, it surely might be left to take care of itself. She schooled and rated herself unmercifully, driving away intrusive thoughts with lash of scorn, yet, no sooner was she convinced that she had routed them, than they were back again in force.

On one point, and one point only, she made up her mind satisfactorily. If she were a fool, neither Egbert nor anyone else should ever know it.

She was on her little Marwari one morning, whistling to herself, and waiting for her brother, who had agreed to ride with her, but had been delayed. He came at last with an apology and a grave face, which she noticed without questioning him, and they were well on their way towards the tomb of Humayûn before he explained.

"I've been kept by a bit of bad news. D'you remember the Commissioner telling us that he was going for a day or two near Ulwar?"

"Yes." She looked at him.

"Well, he's met with an accident. Hallo! Look out!"

For she had jerked her little horse so sharply that he swerved against Holmes's big waler.

"A piece of glass in the road, she explained with an

odd catch in her voice. "An accident, did you say? What?"

"Mauled by a tiger. I'm afraid it may be bad."

"At Ulwar?"

She had turned her face away, for she felt the colour leave it.

"Somewhere in that direction. I wonder who there is, and whether he'll be properly looked after?"

"Of course you must go yourself."

"I? They don't want me. I packed off the doctor at once."

"What of that? Go and see, and if you're not wanted you can come away." She had already checked and turned her horse, and Holmes stared at her speechlessly. "I can't think how you have wasted all this time; but perhaps you can still catch the train."

"Gently, gently! My dear Molly, we must consider——"

"We'll consider as we ride back."

And she touched her horse smartly, so that her brother was obliged to ride after her; nor would she speak another word until they reached home, and she had jumped off. Holmes was uncertain, and a little ruffled.

"It's all very well for you to say go," he said in a vexed tone. "I hate poking myself in where I'm not wanted, and there'll be others."

By this time Molly had herself well in hand.

"They telegraphed to you," she urged, "and, of course, they expect you. The doctor will want arrangements made. If Sir Robert can be moved, you might bring him here."

"Here!"

"Why not?"

"Impossible!"

"I don't see why," she said stoutly. "At least let them have the option. We could get in a nurse from the Mission. Can you catch this train?"

"No. And I don't half like it."

But she got him off at last. She made the rooms ready, went to the Mission, saw Miss Richardson, and bespoke the services of a nurse who should come off at once if sent for. Then, having put everything in train, she went back to sit in the verandah, and to face the hardest part of all, the waiting.

While she was preparing, she had not dared allow herself to think, but now fears came rushing, with the more force that up to now they had been held back with a determined hand. For to be mauled was always serious, sometimes more, and Miss Richardson, professionally interested at once, had hinted at blood-poisoning, and possibilities of loss of limb. Molly frowned, shut her eyes, and pictured the scene. Had he followed a wounded animal on foot? Had he been seized? Dragged? If she could only have gone with her brother!

For such time and such fears tear away the flimsy veils which women manage to interpose between their brains and their hearts. She knew now that when she had pretended not to understand, it had been only pretence. She had thought such shame of herself for her fluttering fancies that she had scarcely dared peep at them, now she cared not one jot, but dragged them out and hugged and gloried in them. She had known him



only these few days, and yet she loved him, and was proud to love a man so worthy of her love, proud, whatever came of it. Her dream that something of the same kind had been conveyed to her by him, might be a dream indeed, a foolish dream, but the other was no dream. She would no longer try to deceive herself, when once she had faced the truth, her nature was too simple, too straightforward not to accept the thing which had come to her. Indeed, it would have made her present fear almost unendurable if she had attempted to stifle it.

One relief she had. No one came near her, no one obliged her to discuss the little she knew, or suggested horrible possibilities. She did not think that Egbert would telegraph, not even, and she shuddered, if worse came to the worst. It was pretty certain that he would stay the night. From point to point her vagrant thoughts wandered, touching here and touching there, and fighting with fears.

She waited up, however, and well after midnight he drove into the compound. He was a little surprised and not a little touched, to find Molly waiting in the verandah, but there was nothing out of the way in her greeting. Since the hot season her white face had been unusually colourless, and when he had been absent for the day, she was apt to meet him in the verandah. By this time, too, his going to Ulwar had turned out so entirely what had been expected from him that he had forgotten his own reluctance and her urging, and it was only the usual impulse to share his interests with her, which led him to shout a cheery—"Doing well!"

She was standing with one hand on a verandah upright, and she did not answer. Nor did she move. She waited for him there—under the stars.

“It was a near squeak,” he remarked; “but he’s all right, so far. Philips is quite satisfied. Only they think it very desirable he should be brought in, so they’ve wired for a stretcher, and hope to get him here tomorrow.”

“Here?”

“Yes. You don’t mind, do you? There was talk of the hospital; but Philips would rather have him out of the city, and I felt sure you’d manage somehow.”

“Oh, certainly.”

“And we’ll get a nurse. It needn’t bother you.”

His tone was anxious.

“Yes, we’ll get a nurse,” she agreed demurely. Her eyes were dancing. “How did it happen?”

“Give me something to eat, and I’ll tell you,” he said, stretching himself and yawning.

She asked no more questions, for it was easy enough now to wait, and indeed Holmes was soon ready to talk, and greatly pleased with himself for having done the right thing. He told her the particulars presently. It had not been a tiger, after all, but a panther, a grey panther, which, wounded and furious, had bolted up the tree where was the machân, and clawed Sir Robert’s leg at the moment that he sent a bullet into its brain. If the bullet had not gone home, things might have turned out badly; as it was, the doctor hoped that, with care, no serious results would follow. Relating all this Holmes thought Molly more silent than usual, and that she was probably tired with waiting for him. She caught at the

excuse, for she shrank from remembering the hours she had passed, face to face with her own heart, and a vague alarm made her catch at such defences as came to hand. So she allowed Egbert to make suggestions for the comfort of their guest, agreeing meekly to this or that, without a word that all had been already thought out. Only when he went to his room she suffered herself to linger for a few minutes, watching the sheet lightning flickering softly in the south, and remembering that to-morrow had already become to-day.

Holmes was nervously anxious—weighted with his responsibilities to Aunt Mary—that Molly should remain discreetly in the background when Sir Robert was brought in. He pointed out insistently that, with himself, and the doctor, and the nurse, and the numberless attendants, anyone more would be in the way. And Molly, with a happy laugh, submitted quite unexpectedly to be set on one side. She stood inside the drawing-room door, and smiled as she heard a very cheery voice uplifted in the passage. There were, however, limits to her self-effacement which she had no intention of ignoring, and she announced that she must speak to Dr. Philips when he came out of his patient's room.

“Oh, he'll do well enough,” said the doctor, “excellently well, so long as we can keep off fever. Your brother has made capital arrangements, capital, couldn't be better. Good nurse, good room. I don't see any cause for anxiety. We'll have him on the sofa to-morrow. Lots of soda-water in the house? That's right.”

“And the move hasn't hurt him?”

“No. I can't honestly say it's done him any harm.

I'd have kept him in camp another day, but he was set upon coming in. Good-bye, Miss Holmes. I'll look in again the last thing."

He had wished to come in. Molly's eyes were soft. Nor did she object when at dinner her brother laid down some anxious propositions.

"Look here," he said, "in a few days they'll want to get him into the verandah, and then you'll have to see him." He looked at her doubtfully. "Don't you think you could get Mrs. Musgrave to come over for a bit?"

"I wish I could," said Molly, with such warmth that his face cleared.

"You'd like it? Well, try. Send over to-night."

"I'll send; but we shan't get her. She won't leave little Harry. Besides, she is so changed. She will hardly see me. I wish I knew who has made her so unhappy."

Holmes made no sign and held on to his subject.

"If she can't come, isn't there someone else?"

"Can you think of anyone?" demanded Molly demurely. "Shall we try the colonel's wife?"

"It's all very well to joke about it," he said irritably; "but you know what a place this is for tittle-tattle. When he was here before, out and about all day, it didn't seem to matter so much; but it's a very different thing if he's tied to his sofa——"

Obviously Holmes was growing uneasy, and there was a mischievous twinkle in the girl's eye when she looked at him.

"I don't believe I ought to have let him come," he went on.

"But he's here, isn't he? I don't know what to suggest. Is there anything you would like me to do?"

Her meekness was phenomenal. He looked suspiciously at her.

"Well, you might go away."

"I?" She shrugged her shoulders. "My dear Egbert, what sort of food do you suppose you would get, if I left you to wrestle with the khansamah? If Sir Robert is here—you brought him, you know—he must have nourishing things. His doctor will certainly not wish him to starve. No. It won't do for me to go away. We must think of something else. Shall I shut myself up in my own room? Shall we wire for Aunt Mary?"

He was obliged to laugh, and having relieved his soul by a protest, there was nothing better than to make the best of the situation. After all, he reflected that he need not worry himself at once, as it was not probable Sir Robert would be let out of his room for some days. In which he reckoned without his guest, for the next day but one, the Commissioner cajoled and bullied doctor and nurse into allowing him to be moved to the verandah. There, it is true, the nurse established herself within reach of her patient, but there also hovered Molly, a fresh and happy-looking Molly.

"Here I am, you see," he announced gaily. "It was awfully good of your brother to take me in. I only hope you weren't very much shocked when you heard of his rash offer?"

She smiled.

"I should have been very much shocked if he hadn't made it."

"Well, it seems a shame to turn your house topsy-turvy like this, and to have us, chuprassis and all, quartered on you again. If I'm no good, mind you make them useful."

Evidently his spirits had not been affected by his accident.

"Won't you sit down?" he said.

And Molly sat down.

"Is there anything I can do?"

"You can talk," he laughed. "Yes, and there is something else."

"Yes?"

"Will you write a letter for me—a letter to my sister Elizabeth? If I could manage it, I'd a good deal sooner she heard nothing at all about this silly scratch; but she has the *Pioneer* sent, and someone might stick it in for want of better stuff. Besides, to-morrow's mail day, and if she doesn't get a letter she'll wonder. I can make shift to address it and to write a few lines, and I thought, perhaps, you wouldn't mind going on? She mustn't be frightened."

"No," Molly agreed; "she mustn't be frightened. But she will be if she sees it finished by a strange hand."

"What's to be done? I can't write more, lying on the flat of my back."

They looked at each other and laughed. It took so little to make them laugh.

"I'll tell you," said Molly. "I've thought it out. Say what you wish said, and I'll take it to Mrs. Hamil-

ton to copy. She writes to Miss Chester. Her writing will not be strange, and so there will be no shock."

"Good. You are a woman of resource, Miss Holmes."

She brought paper and ink and sat down before him.

"Just there, please," he said. "Yes, that will do. Are you ready?"

But she had something to say.

"Remember that you must tell her everything. You mustn't shirk details. She will want to know about the tree, and the machân, and who first wounded the panther, and how you got down, and all about it. All the little things as well as the big."

"How do you know?" he asked staring; and she felt the colour fly into her face. But she answered directly—

"I should, if it were Egbert, and I were thousands of miles away. I shall ask Mrs. Hamilton to come and see you before she closes the letter to-morrow, so that she can say something first hand. Begin, please."

The dictation lasted some time, for Molly was strict and stern in permitting no details to be slurred over, while Sir Robert was inclined to make light of the accident, and to expatiate on the bravery of one of the shikaries. Then, upon her remonstrances, he teased her by bare-faced inventions, gravely offered, and, to his great delight, once or twice as gravely accepted. The letter which, in spite of their precautions, poor Elizabeth would read with a heart-panic, was written with much

merriment. But it was brought to an end at last, and Molly stood up.

"You are going?" he said with dismay.

"Yes. It is finished."

"I shall think of something more to say."

"Then you can tell Mrs. Hamilton to-morrow. I am going now to try to find her, either at her own house or at the Institute. I shall ask her to write it out, and to see you for these last words. You will be in your room when I come back, so good night!"

The nurse thought Sir Robert slightly over-tired, for he became very silent when he was left with her alone, and she had no difficulty in inducing him to return to his room.

Molly effectually carried out her own suggestions, and Patty hurried to the verandah the next day, eagerly desirous to do anything which should save Elizabeth a pang. It may have been because she had been led to expect something so different, that she was surprised to find the patient alone and obviously bored.

"But where is Miss Holmes?" she asked.

"How should I know?" returned Sir Robert irritably. "I hardly see her. One would suppose she had more on her hands than all the rest of us put together. Don't you find it annoying to see people busy when you're down like a log yourself. But, I beg your pardon. I daresay you never were tried in that way."

"No," said Patty smiling; "but I can imagine how it feels, and I am sure you must find it dismal. I'll tell Mike to look in."

"Thank you." The tone did not betray a great yearning for his friend's company. "Don't bother him."



He was in last night. I shall get along, and it's exceedingly good of you to take so much trouble about this letter. If you could induce Miss Holmes to come she'd explain it in two words."

He shut his eyes.

She looked at him with some anxiety. But the nurse did not appear alarmed.

"Oh, indeed, I understand, it wants no explanation," exclaimed Patty, desirous beyond all things of sparing him. "Miss Holmes told me all about it yesterday. Please do not be afraid, for I will be very careful. Only I do wish——" She stopped suddenly, lest the impulse to tell him how much she wished he were stronger should be disturbing. Since she had seen for herself, she could not but think that Molly had over-rated his cheerfulness, and she determined to point out to her that it was evident he ought not to be left alone. It was very well for Dr. Philips to assert that he was doing well. He could hardly be aware of the depression which had come in a cloud. Nor, though she sat for some time, and racked her brains for cheerful subjects, could she feel that she had been an effective visitor. But as she was going away, he made an effort to rouse himself.

"I haven't said much," he admitted; "but, believe me, I'm grateful. So you've stuck to your ring?"

"Yes," she answered smiling. "I've done what you told me."

He looked pleased.

"I wish I could pick up another like it."

"Do you! For Elizabeth?"

"Elizabeth! No. She doesn't want the thing."

Patty looked at him, half provoked, half amused.

"You might tell me now, I think, what the thing does?"

"Never. I am the last person to encourage superstition."

"Answer this, then," she said curiously. "If it is supposed to have a spell—a charm—do you believe it has worked?"

"Oh, certainly."

"How do you know?"

He laughed.

"My dear lady, easily. From your face."

He had effectually stopped her questions.

She grew red and said no more. Meeting Holmes as she went away, Patty remarked that she had found the Commissioner rather unduly depressed. Perhaps it was not to be wondered at, when his usual active habits were taken into account, still—it was a pity. Holmes listened uneasily. The opinion of other people always carried weight with him.

"What's one to do?" he asked. "Philips says he's on no account to be bothered by work."

"I should think not! He struck me as wanting to be amused and taken out of himself."

"I go in when I can. Of course I can't be hanging about all day," said Holmes in a slightly injured tone.

"Oh no!" returned Patty hastily. "I'll tell Mike to come. And perhaps Miss Holmes—when she can spare the time?"

He hesitated awkwardly—then broke out—

"To tell the truth, it's by my wish that she keeps

out of the way. You know, don't you, the sort of stupid babble that gets running about a station? Well, I don't want Molly to be touched by it. I can see already that lots of people are ready to say I needn't have had the Commissioner brought here at all, and whether they're right or wrong, I won't have Molly's name dragged in. She's got no one out here but me. You see?"

Patty was a little amused, but more touched. She said very kindly—

"I am sure you need not be uneasy. Only the most ill-natured people would be likely to find fault, and it's impossible to guard against them. I should let her judge for herself."

He was evidently relieved, and after a moment's thought went on—

"Perhaps I'd better. I know so little of what girls should and shouldn't do, and she only laughs. But I'm determined she shan't get herself talked about," and his voice softened. "I'm glad to have spoken to you, Mrs. Hamilton. I'll tell Molly to look in when she isn't busy."

Patty was smiling as she went on her way. It was impossible not to respect Holmes and his brotherly scruples, but from what she had seen of Molly, she thought her very unlikely to be in danger of losing her heart to the Commissioner, for she did not strike her as at all impressionable, and she passed from a summing up of her qualities to an easy verdict of too much commonsense to require caution. As for Sir Robert—her smile broadened. Elizabeth and Mike had both assured her they did not believe he would ever marry.

He was only thirty-six, to be sure, but he appeared thoroughly proof against the many fascinations he had encountered, and here—well, Molly Holmes was a sensible downright girl, but the word fascination was the last to apply to her. She could not resist imparting Holmes's small dilemma to Mike, and Mike laughed loud.

"If they knew old Bob as well as I know him, they wouldn't waste their breath," he said. "Miss Molly's a first-rate sort, but it would take something different to captivate Bob."

"I think he's bored to death," returned Patty.

"Poor old chap! I shouldn't wonder if he was down in his luck. I say, Patty, couldn't they move him over here? You'd look after him, and I should be in and out all day. I'll go over there by-and-by and see."

"Do."

Primed with this idea, it was a disappointment when the Commissioner received it with a groan.

"Move? Heavens, man, if you owned a gate-post instead of a leg, you'd have more sense! Move? Not I. Here I am, and here I stick. You needn't worry about me. Quiet's the best chance for me. Philips as good as told me that if I got fever I might lose my leg!"

And he groaned again. Mike was genuinely startled.

"My dear chap! Lose your leg!"

"If I see too many people, of course," said Sir Robert hastily and mendaciously.

"Hadn't you better have another opinion?"

He waited, and only got a third groan. An uninterested listener might have imagined a want of spontaneity in the sound; but Mike's face showed his anxiety.

"You lie here and conjure up horrors," he said. "You'd better come to us."

"I can't, my dear fellow, I can't. Oh, I do very well. Nurse Margaret is in and out, and Holmes; and Miss Molly takes pity upon me now and then. Not often, you know; but I suppose one can't expect a girl to give up her amusements and be bored by an unfortunate cripple."

It seemed unnecessary for the Commissioner to raise his voice as he made these virtuous remarks. Mike, somewhat relieved, took to balancing a biscuit on the nose of Holmes's terrier, and was unconscious of a slight rustle in the drawing-room. If he had looked at Sir Robert, he might have detected a smile which he would have found difficult to connect with groans.

## CHAPTER XXII.

## HOW THE DEAD SPEAK.

APPARENTLY Holmes's permission, which he gave that evening, did not influence his sister so much as might have been expected, for she showed no inclination to spend more of her time in the verandah. Now and then she came, as before, but, however much Sir Robert exerted himself to entertain her, and at these times there was no trace of the depression his friends had dreaded, she would get up and go away before she had listened long.

"You are so difficult to keep quiet," he grumbled one day, when signs of departure began to make themselves manifest. "You come, pitch like a bird, and the next minute are gone. There is nothing of repose about you. And I have something here which I have waited for days to give you, something which I picked up at Ulwar."

Her face was turned away, and he did not see the doubtful look which crept into her eyes.

"Is it another ring?" she asked lightly. But his answer rang with a quite unexpected earnestness.

"I only wish it were!"

"Why?" she asked with surprise. "What is there about Mrs. Hamilton's ring?"

"I think it works wonders. You would have to ask the woman of Jaipur what they are. I often wish I

could see her again. No. What I have now is much more commonplace. I heard you say you would like an Indian rosary"—he drew one from under his pillows—"and here you are. There's nothing valuable or particularly interesting about it, but it's a fair specimen, a hundred and eight smooth Tulsé beads."

She took it and looked at him thoughtfully.

"Thank you," she said; "I have always wanted one."

"And as I happened to have it in my pocket the other day," he laughed, "the beaters were morally certain I got off owing to an interposition of Râm. *Râm, Râm, Sita Râm*, is the correct invocation, if you want to know."

"Thank you," she said again. But she got up to go.

"Neither to be bribed nor cajoled," he said, with such unmistakable vexation in his voice that she laughed gaily.

"You're going to have Mrs. Musgrave to-day," she said. "Make much of her, please, for she is hard to get."

It had, indeed, cost her much pleading before Pleasance would be persuaded to come. She said she was tired, and quite unfit to attempt to amuse anyone. It was rather a sudden weariness of opposition, a sense of futility, an indifference to either the for or against, which made her yield to Molly's entreaties. It was the more strange that when the morning came, when she found herself on the road, she became conscious of a strange light-heartedness, as if a burden had been rolled from her. She dreaded no one, nothing. The change was so evident that when she came out of the house and stood by Sir Robert's sofa, he was startled. She

was haggard, her beauty blurred, but it did not require an eye so keen as his to read a new happiness in her face.

"Are you well?" he asked tentatively. "Miss Holmes has been uneasy about you."

"No," she said smiling. "I do not suppose that I am well, and I have been very anxious to get away from India. But—I can hardly hope that it can last—I am feeling now as if I could not ever be anxious again. I daresay that seems strange to you. It is. But it is more strange that to me it seems quite natural. I fancied I could not be happy any more."

"And you are?"

"I am."

And she spoke in a tone of conviction; looking out beyond him with tranquil eyes. He lay wondering, and presently her eyes dropped on his.

"There is something which has been troubling me," she said, "and though it does not seem important now, it may very well become so again. May I ask you?" And as he made a sign of assent, she added, "Do you remember what we spoke about the other day? Well, is that matter ended?"

"Quite."

"No more harm can spring from it?"

"I believe not a scrap."

"And nothing has come out? Harry's name is safe?"

"I believe, absolutely. Has it been worrying you? I take shame to myself that I did not send you word."

"I know now," she said simply, "and I am very glad."

And apparently this would have ended the matter



with her, but that the Commissioner would not lose his opportunity.

"Will you let me say something which is heavy on my mind?" he began. "What you told me the other day makes me respect and honour you the more, the more I think of it. But I should never have allowed you to bind me with a promise."

For the first time she showed distress.

"Why? What do you mean?" she said.

"Let me pass on your secret to two others, who, I will answer for it, will be as silent as myself."

Obviously his suggestion increased her dismay.

"No, no!" she exclaimed breathlessly, "Oh no, that would be to undo all I have tried to do! Remember, I have your promise."

"You have. Without your permission I can't speak. But I should rejoice if you'd give me that permission."

"No," she said more calmly; "I refuse."

"There must be a certain stigma," he urged; "and, say what you like, you will find it intolerable."

"If you had said so to me a day or two ago," Pleasance answered, looking at him thoughtfully, "I should not have consented, but I could not have denied. To-day it is different. Why, I know no more than you, only it has grown impersonal, indifferent. I seem as if I were looking at someone else from a distance, and I am not troubled any more. I suppose the sensation will pass, but while it lasts the relief is almost unspeakable. And if this does not convince you, and I do not expect that it should, recollect that there are one or two who believe in me in the face of everything."

He smiled.

"You are thinking of Miss Holmes."

"Ah, you guess! Has she spoken to you?"

"She hasn't said much, but she is convincing when she speaks. If ever I were at a low ebb in the world's opinion, I should like to have Miss Holmes on my side."

And something in his voice made Pleasance glance swiftly at him. Her dark eyes grew very soft.

"It is quite true," she said quietly. "And I like to know that you have found it out, too. But you cannot know it so well as I, because you must be doubted yourself before you can understand what a hold-fast there is in Molly's faith. Through all these dark days, which, for some reason which I can't explain, seem to me to have gone quite away, I have felt it so. She has never once failed me. I have been dreadfully perplexed. I am sure that I made a great mistake, but perhaps if one didn't make such mistakes one wouldn't see the mercy quite so plainly. It was Molly who brought it home to me. I don't think I shall forget it any more. What you think a burden doesn't seem so to me. It has shrunk into nothing. I am happier than I have been for a long, long time."

As he listened indeed he could not doubt that it was so. She spoke with a quiet conviction which carried the same conviction to him. And as she went away, no reaction came to her. The smile with which she had parted from him lingered happily on her lips, and more than once she drew a long breath as if a weight had been lifted. Perhaps she had never been so gay with Harry as she was that day.

If Sir Robert had known why Molly came so seldom

into the verandah, he might have been a less impatient patient, for the reason had to do only with him and her own heart. Fears as to station gossip would not have weighed with her one jot, if only she had not been aware that she had given her love while it was unasked and unsought. This made her hot with the fear that in some unintentional way she might betray herself. For the knowledge those waiting hours had brought she had no sort of shame. She made no attempt to shut away the truth that she loved him, from the heart that was his. Often, indeed, she gloried in admitting it, since here was something which no one could take from her. Nor was she certain that he was not stirred by the same feelings. It might be so, and then she was beyond doubt a happy woman. But, also, the idea might come from no more than her own ignorance of the world, and if that were so, it would have to be locked away from everyone, from him more than all. Women before now have made shipwreck of their lives, by carrying this fear of self-betrayal too proudly, but, at any rate, they are not the worst women. If Molly ever were to be won, it was very certain she would have to be wooed.

Of all this Sir Robert was ignorant, and perhaps—who knows?—if he had been about as usual, with active work filling his mind, those kindly fancies and attractions which had crept into his heart might have been choked for want of room. But in the barren days when work was forbidden, they had time to settle and take root. So that he tormented himself with many questionings as to why he so seldom and so uncertainly saw his hostess. He could not believe that she was too busy to come. He lay and smoked, and presently sat up and smoked,

and heard the booming of the 'cello in the distance, and daily grew more discontented. But it made him resolve to have it out with her.

And then the very morning after he had seen Pleasance, just as he was established in his long chair, he heard a flying step, the chick parted, and Molly, pale, and with a greatly troubled face, stood holding it back. He saw directly that the trouble was serious, and waited. But for a moment she only looked at him, speechless.

"A man has come," she said at last, "with this."

And she held out a note.

In it were a few lines from an English lady at Pleasance's hotel, telling them that Mrs. Musgrave had been found that morning dead in her bed.

"Dead, you see!" cried Molly piteously. "There is no possible hope. I am going there, of course, at once."

Sir Robert stirred uneasily.

"I would give a great deal to be able to go too," he answered. But the girl shook her head.

"No one can do her any good now," she said in the same dull tone. "It is too late." She stretched out her hand for the note of evil tidings, but drew it back. "Mrs. Hamilton should know, shouldn't she? Will you send it to her?" She was going when he stopped her.

"Try to remember," he said, "that she was feeling very happy yesterday."

"Happy?"

"Happy. She told me so, and I could see it for myself."

She pondered the strangeness of it, as she drove

quickly to the hotel. Her brother was before her, and she met him and Dr. Denton coming out of the door.

"A sad business, sad, sad!" said the kindly little doctor. "At least that's what we all feel bound to say when a young thing like this is taken away suddenly. But by the time you've seen as much of life and death as I have, Miss Molly, you'll be getting to think that it's not so bad after all, just to lay yourself down, and go quietly to sleep, and never wake up again in this world."

"What was it?" asked Molly under her breath.

"Oh, heart, heart. I'm not surprised. See what a life she led. She's been looking cruelly changed of late, and I wasn't easy about her. But she kept things to herself, poor soul! That good English lady has taken the child for the present. You're going in, I suppose? Holmes, I should be glad of another word or two."

Except for the ayah, who crouched at the foot of the bed, with a wail of which Molly could only catch the word *mur-gya, mur-gya!* the room was empty. But even this was too much for the girl. She must be alone before she could draw back the face-covering, and see for herself, and she put her hand firmly on the ayah's thin shoulder.

"Go," she said. "Go to the child."

The woman, whimpering, obeyed, for there was something compelling in her voice and the look in her eyes. Then Molly walked to the side of the bed. "Oh, my dear, my dear," she cried, and softly lifted the covering, with its few little bits of jasmine, pale flower of death, laid on it.

Was this death?

All the dark beauty those last months had so ravaged had come back, and with it that strange unutterable triumphant peace which is the last gift the dead leave to those they love. As Molly looked through her tears, she forgot how much pain had racked the poor heart, she felt as if now, indeed, sorrow and sighing had flown away for ever. Her tears had no bitterness, scarcely regret, and when her brother came at last to seek her, she could kiss the curved lips, and cover the face once more, and go away comforted.

Pleasance had few friends, but one man there was who saw her, and, like Molly, saw her alone. For the Commissioner's messenger, meeting Captain Hamilton at the gate of his garden, handed him the letter, and Mike, thinking some answer might be wanted, opened it. The words struck home. In his new-found happiness he had thrust Pleasance from his mind, and it had been an excuse for past days to draw a line across them, to try to blot them out and to blame her. In good truth, his feeling had never reached the height of love; it had been strong attraction, strong admiration, ashes which she might soon have fanned into a flame. Then came hasty resentment.

And she was dead.

His face was grim as he turned his horse and rode to the hotel. Many things were at war in his mind, many words came back, strangely intermingled, but all dominated by the sentence in the paper the peon had just handed to him—she was dead!

As he went in at the door an English lady, who was passing with flowers in her hands, and who heard his inquiry, hesitated and came back.

"You knew Mrs. Musgrave?"

He was thankful that the question took this form, that she did not ask if he had been her friend. She looked at him and went on——

"I am going to her now. Will you come?"

And she turned away at once, taking for granted that he would follow. He had not thought of this ordeal; he shrank from it intensely, and, if an opportunity had offered itself, would have escaped. No such opportunity was available. Mrs. Anstey was a quiet matter-of-fact person, on her way up country to join her husband. She had hardly even spoken to Pleasance, except a few words the night before, and it was a relief to her that more real friends should appear. It lightened her sense of tragic responsibility. And, taking it as a matter of course that he should desire once more to look upon a face which haunted her by its rare beauty, she went before him without a question. Without a question, too, she did as Molly had done, lifted the covering and let him look.

He was silent so long that she glanced at him in surprise, and as quickly glanced away, realising that in this moment she had touched deep waters. She laid her flowers softly down, and turned with a sense of intrusion, from which she hurried, murmuring something about the child.

But Mike did not hear her. All that he knew was that he was left alone with the dead, and with memories which nothing now could ever change for her or for him. How harshly he had judged her! How readily his faith had failed! In sight of that calm face suspicion was incredible. How quick he had been to believe evil! Why

had he not known that she could clear herself? How small and unworthy his resentment looked before the dead!

So he stood there, as before his judge, his elbow resting on one hand, his chin sunk in the other. He did not move, and his senses were curiously dulled, so that he neither heard the door open, nor saw his wife come in. She hesitated, then moved to his side, and put her hands on his arm. But she did not see the change in him; she, too, was held by the face, which, in her eyes, smiled.

They stood there long; but, naturally, she was the first to recover herself, and to perceive with a sharp pang that her husband was very greatly shaken and troubled. Her heart ached as she saw it. Of what he was repenting she knew nothing. She had been to blame herself, and if, in that forsaken year, he had turned towards Pleasance, she must not be hard on him now. He had come back. There was no longer a barrier between them. But where the barrier had fallen, its spikes and splinters might yet wound their feet.

Perhaps she had never been so near him as in that moment, when, believing he had again left her, she knew that she would cling to him always, and atone, if she could, for the desertion of the past. She kept her hands on his arm, and was silent. Presently, without moving his head, he laid his hand on hers.

At last he spoke.

"She went through great trouble," he said slowly, "and loneliness."

"It does not matter now, though, does it?" returned Patty.



She bent over and touched a little curling lock on the white forehead.

"Not to her. But some of us, who should have known her better, failed her. I think it will matter to me all my life. You were juster."

She was puzzled. Womanlike, she was thinking of love, and he spoke of justice.

"I? What did I do?"

"You believed in her when things looked black,—the other day."

She looked at him in wonder. Such a trifling matter took a very secondary place in her thoughts. Pleasance had been nobly true to her where her life happiness had been at stake; it was that on which Patty dwelt. She knew that it might have been otherwise, and she understood, as perhaps she had never understood before, what alienation might have come between her and Mike had her friend been disloyal. Was it likely that, true in this, she had been false in other things? She pressed closer to her husband.

"Mike," she said gently, "she was a very good friend. We owe her a great deal."

There was that in the mind of each which the other did not know, would never know. For Patty remembered the passionate words in which Pleasance had told her of her old love for Mike, and Mike thought with shame of the day when, in Holmes's verandah, she had steadily kept Patty before him, so steadily that he had never doubted her own indifference. His wife's words surprised him slightly, and he looked at her.

"It is too late now," he said.

"Is it? I think there is something we might do."

She spoke eagerly.

"What?"

"Couldn't we take the boy?"

He bent down suddenly.

"Do you mean it, Patty?"

"Yes, I do. I am sure it troubled her to think of his future. Let us take him—at any rate, for the present. I believe she would have liked it."

And she put out her hand very gently again and touched the dark hair.

As for him, he drew his wife's head on his shoulder.

"God knows," he said brokenly.

Yes. God knew, and He had given her peace.

Molly and her brother and the Commissioner sat talking late that night, and Mike came in to hear the last arrangements, and to say that the boy and his ayah were with Patty. Molly said very little; her chair was in the shadow, and Sir Robert could only dimly see her white face. He knew that she was better left silent, and he quietly took care that she was not called upon to speak. But he himself had something to say.

"Even now," he began, "I am fettered. I can't speak out. I owe it to her memory to respect her wishes, and yet we all owe her memory another debt. You know that something passed not long ago in which she was mixed up. Circumstances made it appear that she had acted perhaps indiscreetly, perhaps not quite truly——"

They were silent, and he went on—

"Only Miss Molly, here, trusted her——"

"And my wife," broke in Mike, looking up.

His voice was hoarse, and it struck Sir Robert that

he wanted to say more. But his head sank again without his carrying out the intention.

"There were two, then," the Commissioner continued quietly. "And they were right, altogether right. I must ask you to accept my word for it. I am aware of all that passed; I know that a denial was wrung from her, which afterwards she bitterly regretted, and I most emphatically assert that she acted nobly. I take shame to myself that I ever doubted her. To my dying day I shall always be proud to have known her."

Still no one answered. Mike's face was hidden. He had felt all day as if nothing that came could add to his burden, but he knew now that it weighed yet more heavily. Speech was very hard for him, yet he was the first to speak, still staring at the ground. What he said it was, perhaps, only possible for him to say in the darkness.

"I have known her longer than any of you. I ought to have known her best. Instead, I was the first to distrust her. I can never tell her this, but I can tell you. The Commissioner has said that he will always be proud—to my dying day I think I shall always be ashamed."

Again no one replied directly. A little stir among them—that was all. Then Molly got up softly and slipped away. She felt as if another had been there, listening; as if she, too, passed out by her side—passed out satisfied.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

“IF EARTH HATH A BOWER OF BLISS.”

ONCE well started on the road to recovery, the Commissioner's wound quickly healed. With the help of a stick, he began to hobble about the house; a room was made over to him for his private business; the chuprassis came and went; telegrams flew about; patient brown petitioners, with muslin turbans and bare legs, and here and there a red-dyed beard from the north, squatted round the door for hours, consoling themselves with betel nut and the hope of a word from the Heaven-born. Brilliant lights and shadows flashed and fell, and, set against the clearness of the sky, each little group became a picture, of which Molly, at least, felt the charm. Holmes was aware that Sir Robert's presence gave weight to his own authority, and was glad to have him there. It very markedly diminished his personal responsibility, and, to a man of Holmes's nature, that was much. Yet it surprised him not a little. He had anticipated a speedy departure as soon as the Commissioner was in a condition to move, and not only had this not taken place, but he had received no hint that it was imminent. As to Molly, however, he had ceased to be troubled with misgivings, had, indeed, almost forgotten that they had ever visited him. She had felt her friend's death very deeply, had moved quietly about the house, and given as much time as she could to little Harry. He could

not make out that she had lost interest in her usual occupations, and he was quite certain that she seldom encountered Sir Robert. Surely Aunt Mary herself could not fail to be satisfied with the girl's conduct. Molly was a trump. To tell the truth, he had hardly expected her to be so amenable.

And what of Molly herself? She made no attempt to blind her own eyes, for she was too frankly honest to call deception to her aid. But neither would she allow herself to sit and dream. She was tempted to do so. For here and there in the past two or three weeks there had been a word, a look, on which her thoughts would gladly have fastened themselves, returning again and again, and finding fresh meanings. But it was very seldom that she let them have their way. Nor would she allow herself to fling forward regrets to the days when he would be gone. She resolutely kept on her usual course. And she was the more determined because she could not but be aware of a certain change in him, and because it pointed definitely in one direction. What else, when he no longer tried to capture, no longer reproached her for efforts to escape, no longer seemed so quick to understand what she felt? Change there was, and, as she often told herself, it was exactly what might have been foretold. She had been a part of his crippled days, perhaps had fitted pleasantly into them, but now that the old life, the old activities, claimed him again, she must stand aside, no longer wanted. She was not made of that inadequate stuff which at the first rough touch is crumpled out of use. His liking she had, of that she was sure, and she could conceive that some day it might prove more satisfying than at present.

Things there were which she would have found difficult; it would, for instance, have been almost impossible to have whistled a 'cello accompaniment, and since Pleasance's death this had not been asked for. One sorrow often provides a screen for another.

But in these lonely hours she felt as if she had lived a long while.

On a certain afternoon, when, from this cause or that, she had seen no one since breakfast, the ayah and little Harry brought a note from Patty. It contained nothing of importance, but it gave her an idea. The day was clear and sunlit, and she determined to take the child where he could play in the little garden of the palace, which lies between it and the Pearl mosque. She had often been there with Pleasance, and she was very desirous not to shrink from those associations. So she ordered the dog-cart, and drove to the Lahore gate. There they got down, and passed through the long bazar into the square of the great Audience Hall with its red sandstone pillars, and on to that wonder of sun-kissed marble, the radiant twilight of Shah Jehan's Diwan-i-khas. No one was in sight as, leaving the ayah and her charge in the garden, Molly went up the steps and crossed the white marble platform until she leaned where she remembered Pleasance had leaned, against the low railing of the river front, and looked with unseeing eyes on the perfect loveliness of the building before her. Unseeing—yet she saw what was not there, Pleasance, and the months which had passed, and the foolishness of dreams, and the burden of life. These she saw, but she had a brave spirit, and she looked at them steadily. Because life brought something to endure,

was it therefore to be called unendurable? Because at this moment it stretched drearily grey, she would not suffer herself to determine that henceforth there would be for her neither joys nor blessings. Because her young heart had expected happiness, she was not going to insist that happiness was her due. A couple of years ago what she had now had been the limit of her desires, and she would not heap upon it the dust and ashes of unthankfulness. She was with Egbert, dear old Egbert, and she owned the friendship—yes, the friendship—of others. There lay good provision for the years to come. And Molly set her lips tightly.

Counting her blessings, and the mellow marble growing somehow a little dim, she turned her eyes towards the curving silver river, so that she heard nothing until Sir Robert was actually at her elbow. Then she promptly came out of her dreams into amazement.

"Well," she said with a laugh, "if you meant to surprise me, you have succeeded. But is it wise? Ought you to have walked so far?"

"You've neglected me so much of late, that you haven't kept pace with my heroic efforts," he said, joining in her laugh. "But I believe they're used up now. Let us sit down somewhere."

Molly's eyes were wide open. She said reproachfully—

"I'm sure you should not have come alone."

"I saw the cart waiting, and thought you'd take charge. Here, won't this do? If you get bored with listening to me you can always look at the pierced screen. Heavens, what a lovely entanglement it is! D'you see the scales?"

Yes. She saw. She saw, and she knew in the same moment that all the world had changed—for her. But Sir Robert had not the same conviction. He was uncertain what he was going to find, and it behoved him to walk warily. He meant to take his time, but he also meant to know in the end.

“You often come here?” he said.

“Not very often now.”

“But you think it beautiful?”

“Almost too beautiful,” she returned with a laugh. “One isn’t always in the mood for this sort of beauty. It is different from nature. This makes one’s mind ache with trying to take it in.”

He was silent for a moment, and, if he had but known it, silence was what most effectually shook Molly’s self-composure. For she could hear the beating of her racing heart, and it frightened her.

Then he spoke deliberately—

“Molly!”

Silence.

“I am in great perplexity.”

He leaned forward to try to look into her face, but it was turned away. The silence seemed overmastering, for he was waiting for a word from her, and no other sound reached his ears. Outside the sun struck golden on the marble, and the white cupolas, poised lightly at the corners of the great hall, stood clear against the divine blue of the sky. But where they two sat, all was in delicate shadow. A little spread of water at their feet—remembrance and no more of what had been—stained the marble beneath, and reflected the amazing intricacies of the screen. The whiteness of it all was



not what we call white, had in it no chill of coldness, but rather the infinite tenderness of pure colour, rose, saffron, and veins of blue.

"Molly," he said, once more, "only you can help me, only you can answer my question, because only you have anything to do with it. I wonder if you know in the very least how dearly I love you? Will you marry me?"

Again she did not answer in words, but she turned towards him, and her happy eyes were on his face.

"Dear!" he pleaded.

She slipped her hand into his.

"I thought you did not care," she said with a sob.

THE END.

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Lady Audley's Secret 2 v. — Aurora Floyd 2 v. — Eleanor's Victory 2 v. — John Marchmont's Legacy 2 v. — Henry Dunbar 2 v. — The Doctor's Wife 2 v. — Only a Clod 2 v. — Sir Jasper's Tenant 2 v. — The Lady's Mile 2 v. — Rupert Godwin 2 v. — Dead-Sea Fruit 2 v. — Run to Earth 2 v. — Fenton's Quest 2 v. — The Lovels of Arden 2 v. — Strangers and Pilgrims 2 v. — Lucius Davoren 3 v. — Taken at the Flood 3 v. — Lost for Love 2 v. — A Strange World 2 v. — Hostages to Fortune 2 v. — Dead Men's Shoes 2 v. — Joshua Haggard's Daughter 2 v. — Weavers and Weft 1 v. — In Great Waters, and other Tales 1 v. — An Open Verdict 3 v. — Vixen 3 v. — The Cloven Foot 3 v. — The Story of Barbara 2 v. — Just as I am 2 v. — Asphodel 3 v. — Mount Royal 2 v. — The Golden Calf 2 v. — Flower and Weed 1 v. — Phantom Fortune 3 v. — Under the Red Flag 1 v. — Ishmael 3 v. — Wylard's Weird 3 v. — One Thing Needful 2 v. — Cut by the County 1 v. — Like and Unlike 2 v. — The Fatal Three 2 v. — The Day will come 2 v. — One Life, One Love 2 v. — Gerard 2 v. — The Venetians 2 v. — All along the River 2 v. — Thou art the Man 2 v. — The Christmas Hirelings, etc. 1 v. — Sons of Fire 2 v. — London Pride 2 v. — Rough Justice 2 v. — In High Places 2 v. — His Darling Sin 1 v. — The Infidel 2 v. — The Conflict 2 v.

Drassey, Lady, † 1887.

A Voyage in the "Sunbeam" 2 v. — Sunshine and Storm in the East 2 v. — In the Trades, the Tropics and the Roaring Forties 2 v.

"Bread-Winners, the," Author of (Am.).

The Bread-Winners 1 v.

Bret Harte: *vide* Harte.

Brock, Rev. William, † 1875.

Sir Henry Havelock, K. C. B. 1 v.

Brontë, Charlotte: *vide* Currer Bell.

Brontë, Emily & Anne: *vide* Ellis & Acton Bell.

Brooks, Shirley, † 1874.

The Silver Cord 3 v. — Sooner or Later 3 v.

Broome, Lady: *vide* Lady Barker.

Broughton, Rhoda.

Cometh up as a Flower 1 v. — Not wisely, but too well 2 v. — Red as a Rose is She 2 v. — Tales for Christmas Eve 1 v. — Nancy 2 v. — Joan 2 v. — Second Thoughts 2 v. — Belinda 2 v. — Doctor Cupid 2 v. — Alas! 2 v. — Mrs. Bligh 1 v. — A Beginner 1 v. — Scylla or Charybdis? 1 v. — Dear Faustina 1 v. — The Game and the Candle 1 v. — Foes in Law 1 v. — Lavinia 1 v.

Broughton, Rhoda, & Elizabeth Bisland.

A Widower Indeed 1 v.

Brown, John, † 1882.

Rab and his Friends, and other Papers 1 v.

Browning, Elizabeth Barrett, † 1861.

A Selection from her Poetry (with Portrait) 1 v. — Aurora Leigh 1 v.

Browning, Robert, † 1889.

Poetical Works (with Portrait) 4 v.

Bullen, Frank T.

The Cruise of the "Cachalot" 2 v.

Bulwer, Edward, Lord Lytton,  
† 1873.

Pelham (with Portrait) 1 v. — Eugene Aram 1 v. — Paul Clifford 1 v. — Zanoni 1 v. — The Last Days of Pompeii 1 v. — The Disowned 1 v. — Ernest Maltravers 1 v. — Alice 1 v. — Eva, and The Pilgrims of the Rhine 1 v. — Devereux 1 v. — Godolphin and Falkland 1 v. — Rienzi 1 v. — Night and Morning 1 v. — The Last of the Barons 2 v. — Athens 2 v. — The Poems and Ballads of Schiller 1 v. — Lucretia 2 v. — Harold 2 v. — King Arthur 2 v. — The New Timon, and St. Stephen's 1 v. — The Caxtons 2 v. — My Novel 4 v. — What will he do with it? 4 v. — Dramatic Works 2 v. — A Strange Story 2 v. — Caxtoniana 2 v. — The Lost Tales of Milestus 1 v. — Miscellaneous Prose Works 4 v. — Odes and Epodes of Horace 2 v. — Kenelm Chillingly 4 v. — The Coming Race 1 v. — The Parisians 4 v. — Pausanias, the Spartan 1 v.

Bulwer, Henry Lytton (Lord  
Dalling), † 1872.

Historical Characters 2 v. — The Life of Viscount Palmerston 3 v.

Bunyan, John, † 1688.

The Pilgrim's Progress 1 v.

"Buried Alone," Author of  
(Charles Wood).

Buried Alone 1 v.

Burnett, Mrs. Frances Hodg-  
son (Am.).

Through one Administration 2 v. — Little Lord Fauntleroy 1 v. — Sara Crewe, and Editha's Burglar 1 v. — The Pretty Sister of José 1 v. — A Lady of Quality 2 v. — His Grace of Osmonde 2 v.

Burney, Miss (Madame D'Ar-  
blay), † 1840.

Evelina 1 v.

Burns, Robert, † 1796.

Poetical Works (with Portrait) 1 v.

Burton, Richard F., † 1890.

A Pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina 3 v.

Bury, Baroness de: *vide* "All  
for Greed."

Butler, A. J.

Bismarck. His Reflections and Reminiscences. Translated from the great German edition, under the supervision of A. J. Butler. With two Portraits. 3 v.

Buxton, Mrs. B. H., † 1881.

Jennie of "The Prince's," 2 v. — Won 2 v. — Great Grenfell Gardens 2 v. — Nell—on and off the Stage 2 v. — From the Wings 2 v.

Byron, Lord, † 1824.

Poetical Works (with Portrait) 5 v.

Caffyn, Mrs. Mannington (Iota)

A Yellow Aster 1 v. — Children of Circumstance 2 v. — Anne Mauleverer 2 v.

Caine, Hall.

The Bondman 2 v. — The Manxman 2 v. — The Christian 2 v. — The Eternal City 3 v.

Cameron, Verney Lovett.

Across Africa 2 v.

Campbell Praed, Mrs.: *vide*  
Praed.

Carey, Rosa Nouchette.

Not Like other Girls 2 v. — "But Men must Work" 1 v. — Sir Godfrey's Granddaughters 2 v. — The Old, Old Story 2 v. — Herb of Grace 2 v. — The Highway of Fate 2 v. — A Passage Perilous 2 v. — At the Moorings 2 v.

Carlyle, Thomas, † 1881.

The French Revolution 3 v. — Frederick the Great 13 v. — Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches 4 v. — The Life of Schiller 1 v.

Carr, Alaric.

Treherne's Temptation 2 v.

Castle, Agnes & Egerton.

The Star Dreamer 2 v. — Incomparable Bellairs 1 v.

Castle, Egerton.

Consequences 2 v. — "La Bella," and Others 1 v.



- Charles, Mrs. Elizabeth Rundle,  
† 1896: *vide* Author of "Chronicles of the Schönberg-Cotta Family."
- Charlesworth, Maria Louisa,  
† 1880.  
Oliver of the Mill 1 v.
- Cholmondeley, Mary.  
Diana Tempest 2 v. — Red Pottage 2 v.  
— Moth and Rust 1 v.
- Christian, Princess: *vide* Alice,  
Grand Duchess of Hesse.
- "Chronicles of the Schönberg-Cotta Family," Author of (Mrs. E. Rundle Charles), † 1896.  
Chronicles of the Schönberg-Cotta Family 2 v. — The Draytons and the Davenants 2 v. — On Both Sides of the Sea 2 v. — Winifred Bertram 1 v. — Diary of Mrs. Kitty Trevelyan 1 v. — The Victory of the Vanquished 1 v. — The Cottage by the Cathedral and other Parables 1 v. — Against the Stream 2 v. — The Bertram Family 2 v. — Conquering and to Conquer 1 v. — Lapsed, but not Lost 1 v.
- Clark, Alfred.  
The Finding of Lot's Wife 1 v.
- Clemens, Samuel L.: *v.* Twain.
- Clifford, Mrs. W. K.  
Love-Letters of a Worldly Woman 1 v. — Aunt Anne 2 v. — The Last Touches, and other Stories 1 v. — Mrs. Keith's Crime 1 v. — A Wild Proxy 1 v. — A Flash of Summer 1 v. — A Woman Alone 1 v. — Woodside Farm 1 v.
- Clive, Mrs. Caroline, † 1873:  
*vide* Author of "Paul Ferroll."
- Cobbe, Frances Power, † 1904.  
Re-Echoes 1 v.
- Coleridge, C. R.  
An English Squire 2 v.
- Coleridge, M. E.  
The King with two Faces 2 v.
- Coleridge, Samuel Taylor,  
† 1834.  
Poems 1 v.
- Collins, Charles Allston, † 1873.  
A Cruise upon Wheels 2 v.
- Collins, Mortimer, † 1876.  
Sweet and Twenty 2 v. — A Fight with Fortune 2 v.
- Collins, Wilkie, † 1889.  
After Dark 1 v. — Hide and Seek 2 v. — A Plot in Private Life, etc. 1 v. — The Woman in White 2 v. — Basil 1 v. — No Name 3 v. — The Dead Secret, and other Tales 2 v. — Antonina 2 v. — Armadale 3 v. — The Moonstone 2 v. — Man and Wife 3 v. — Poor Miss Finch 2 v. — Miss or Mrs.? 1 v. — The New Magdalen 2 v. — The Frozen Deep 1 v. — The Law and the Lady 2 v. — The Two Destinies 1 v. — My Lady's Money, and Percy and the Prophet 1 v. — The Haunted Hotel 1 v. — The Fallen Leaves 2 v. — Jezebel's Daughter 2 v. — The Black Robe 2 v. — Heart and Science 2 v. — "I say No," 2 v. — The Evil Genius 2 v. — The Guilty River, and The Ghost's Touch 1 v. — The Legacy of Cain 2 v. — Blind Love 2 v.
- "Cometh up as a Flower," Author of: *vide* Rhoda Broughton.
- Conrad, Joseph.  
An Outcast of the Islands 2 v. — Tales of Unrest 1 v.
- Conway, Hugh (F. J. Fergus),  
† 1885.  
Called Back 1 v. — Bound Together 2 v. — Dark Days 1 v. — A Family Affair 2 v. — Living or Dead 2 v.
- Cooper, James Fenimore (Am.),  
† 1851.  
The Spy (with Portrait) 1 v. — The Two Admirals 1 v. — The Jack O'Lantern 1 v.
- Cooper, Mrs.: *vide* Katharine Saunders.

## Corelli, Marie.

Vendetta! 2 v. — Thelma 2 v. — A Romance of Two Worlds 2 v. — "Ardath" 3 v. — Wormwood. A Drama of Paris 2 v. — The Hired Baby, with other Stories and Social Sketches 1 v. — Barabbas; A Dream of the World's Tragedy 2 v. — The Sorrows of Satan 2 v. — The Mighty Atom 1 v. — The Murder of Delicia 1 v. — Ziska 1 v. — Boy. A Sketch. 2 v. — The Master-Christian 2 v. — "Temporal Power" 2 v. — God's Good Man 2 v.

## Cotes, Mrs. Everard.

Those Delightful Americans 1 v.

## "County, the," Author of.

The County 1 v.

## Craik, George Lillie, † 1866.

A Manual of English Literature and of the History of the English Language 2 v.

## Craik, Mrs. (Miss Dinah M. Mulock), † 1887.

John Halifax, Gentleman 2 v. — The Head of the Family 2 v. — A Life for a Life 2 v. — A Woman's Thoughts about Women 1 v. — Agatha's Husband 1 v. — Romantic Tales 1 v. — Domestic Stories 1 v. — Mistress and Maid 1 v. — The Ogilvies 1 v. — Lord Eristoun 1 v. — Christian's Mistake 1 v. — Bread upon the Waters 1 v. — A Noble Life 1 v. — Olive 2 v. — Two Marriages 1 v. — Studies from Life 1 v. — Poems 1 v. — The Woman's Kingdom 2 v. — The Unkind Word, and other Stories 2 v. — A Brave Lady 2 v. — Hannah 2 v. — Fair France 1 v. — My Mother and I 1 v. — The Little Lame Prince 1 v. — Sermons out of Church 1 v. — The Laurel-Bush; Two little Tinkers 1 v. — A Legacy 2 v. — Young Mrs. Jardine 2 v. — His Little Mother, and other Tales and Sketches 1 v. — Plain Speaking 1 v. — Miss Tommy 1 v. — King Arthur 1 v.

## Craik, Georgiana M. (Mrs. May).

Lost and Won 1 v. — Faith Unwin's Ordeal 1 v. — Leslie Tyrrell 1 v. — Winifred's Wooing, etc. 1 v. — Mildred 1 v. — Esther Hill's Secret 2 v. — Hero Trevelyan 1 v. — Without Kith or Kin 2 v. — Only a Butterfly 1 v. — Sylvia's Choice; Theresa 2 v. — Anne Warwick 1 v. — Dorcas 2 v. — Two Women 2 v.

## Craik, Georgiana M., &amp; M. C. Stirling.

Two Tales of Married Life (Hard to Bear, by Miss Craik; A True Man, by M. C. Stirling) 2 v.

Craven, Mrs. Augustus: *vide* Lady Fullerton.

## Crawford, F. Marion (Am.).

Mr. Isaacs 1 v. — Doctor Claudius 1 v. — To Leeward 1 v. — A Roman Singer 1 v. — An American Politician 1 v. — Zoroaster 1 v. — A Tale of a Lonely Parish 2 v. — Saracinesca 2 v. — Marzio's Crucifix 1 v. — Paul Patoff 2 v. — With the Immortals 1 v. — Greifenstein 2 v. — Sant' Ilario 2 v. — A Cigarette-Maker's Romance 1 v. — Khaled 1 v. — The Witch of Prague 2 v. — The Three Fates 2 v. — Don Orsino 2 v. — The Children of the King 1 v. — Pietro Ghisleri 2 v. — Marion Darche 1 v. — Katharine Lauderdale 2 v. — The Ralstons 2 v. — Casa Braccio 2 v. — Adam Johnstone's Son 1 v. — Taquisara 2 v. — A Rose of Yesterday 1 v. — Corleone 2 v. — Via Crucis 2 v. — In the Palace of the King 2 v. — Marietta, a Maid of Venice 2 v. — Cecilia 2 v. — The Heart of Rome 2 v. — Whosoever Shall Offend... 2 v.

## Crockett, S. R.

The Raiders 2 v. — Cleg Kelly 2 v. — The Grey Man 2 v. — Love Idylls 1 v. — The Dark o' the Moon 2 v.

## Croker, B. M.

Peggy of the Bartons 2 v.

Cross, J. W.: *vide* George Eliot's Life.Cudlip, Mrs. Pender: *vide* A. Thomas.

## Cummins, Miss (Am.), † 1866.

The Lamplighter 1 v. — Mabel Vaughan 1 v. — El Fureidis 1 v. — Haunted Hearts 1 v.

## Cushing, Paul.

The Blacksmith of Voe 2 v.

## "Daily News."

War Correspondence, 1877, by Archibald Forbes and others 3 v.

## "Dark," Author of.

Dark 1 v.

Davis, Richard Harding (Am.).  
Gallegher, etc. 1 v. — Van Bibber and  
Others 1 v. — Ranson's Folly 1 v.

De Foe, Daniel, † 1731.  
Robinson Crusoe 1 v.

Deland, Margaret (Am.).  
John Ward, Preacher 1 v.

"Democracy," Author of (Am.).  
Democracy 1 v.

"Demos," Author of: *vide* George  
Gissing.

"Diary and Notes," Author  
of: *vide* Author of "Horace  
Templeton."

Dickens, Charles, † 1870.  
The Pickwick Club (with Portrait) 2 v. —  
American Notes 1 v. — Oliver Twist 1 v. —  
Nicholas Nickleby 2 v. — Sketches 1 v. —  
Martin Chuzzlewit 2 v. — A Christmas  
Carol; The Chimes; The Cricket on the  
Hearth 1 v. — Master Humphrey's Clock  
(Old Curiosity Shop; Barnaby Rudge, etc.)  
3 v. — Pictures from Italy 1 v. — Dombey  
and Son 3 v. — David Copperfield 3 v. —  
Bleak House 4 v. — A Child's History of  
England (2 v. 8<sup>o</sup> M. 2,70.) — Hard Times  
1 v. — Little Dorrit (with Illustrations) 4 v.  
— The Battle of Life; The Haunted Man  
1 v. — A Tale of two Cities 2 v. — Hunted  
Down; The Uncommercial Traveller 1 v.  
— Great Expectations 2 v. — Christmas  
Stories, etc. 1 v. — Our Mutual Friend  
(with Illustrations) 4 v. — Somebody's  
Luggage; Mrs. Lirriper's Lodgings; Mrs.  
Lirriper's Legacy 1 v. — Doctor Marigold's  
Prescriptions; Mugby Junction 1 v.  
— The Mystery of Edwin Drood (with  
Illustrations) 2 v. — The Mudfog Papers,  
1 v. — The Letters of Charles Dickens, ed.  
by his Sister-in-law and his eldest Daughter  
4 v. — *Vide* also Household Words, Novels  
and Tales, and John Forster.

Dickens, Charles, & Wilkie  
Collins.  
No Thoroughfare; The Late Miss Hol-  
lingford 1 v.

Disraeli, Benjamin, Lord Bea-  
consfield, † 1881.

Coningsby 1 v. — Sybil 1 v. — Contarini  
Fleming (with Portrait) 1 v. — Alroy 1 v. —  
Tancred 2 v. — Venetia 2 v. — Vivian  
Grey 2 v. — Henrietta Temple 1 v. —  
Lothair 2 v. — Endymion 2 v.

Dixon, Ella Hepworth.  
The Story of a Modern Woman 1 v. — One  
Doubtful Hour 1 v.

Dixon, W. Hepworth, † 1879.  
Personal History of Lord Bacon 1 v. —  
The Holy Land 2 v. — New America 2 v. —  
Spiritual Wives 2 v. — Her Majesty's  
Tower 4 v. — Free Russia 2 v. — History  
of two Queens 6 v. — White Conquest  
2 v. — Diana, Lady Lyle 2 v.

Dixon, Jr., Thomas, (Am.).  
The Leopard's Spots 2 v.

Dougall, L. (Am.).  
Beggars All 2 v.

Dowie, M<sup>é</sup>nie Muriel.  
A Girl in the Karpathians 1 v.

Doyle, Sir A. Conan.  
The Sign of Four 1 v. — Micah Clarke  
2 v. — The Captain of the Pole-Star, and  
other Tales 1 v. — The White Company  
2 v. — A Study in Scarlet 1 v. — The  
Great Shadow, and Beyond the City 1 v. —  
The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes 2 v.  
— The Refugees 2 v. — The Firm of  
Girdlestone 2 v. — The Memoirs of Sher-  
lock Holmes 2 v. — Round the Red Lamp  
1 v. — The Stark Munro Letters 1 v. —  
The Exploits of Brigadier Gerard 1 v. —  
Rodney Stone 2 v. — Uncle Bernac 1 v. —  
The Tragedy of the Korosko 1 v. — A  
Duet 1 v. — The Green Flag 1 v. — The  
Great Boer War 2 v. — The War in South  
Africa 1 v. — The Hound of the Basker-  
villes 1 v. — Adventures of Gerard 1 v.

Drummond, Professor Henry,  
† 1897.  
The Greatest Thing in the World; Pax  
Vobiscum; The Changed Life 1 v.

Dufferin, the Earl of.  
Letters from High Latitudes 1 v.

Duncan, Sara Jeannette: *vide*  
Mrs. Cotes.

- Dunton: *vide* Th. Watts-Dunton.
- Earl, the, and the Doctor.  
South Sea Bubbles 1 v.
- Eastwick, Edward B., † 1883.  
Autobiography of Lutfullah 1 v.
- Edgeworth, Maria, *vide* Series for the Young, p. 29.
- Edwardes, Mrs. Annie.  
Archie Lovell 2 v. — Steven Lawrence, Yeoman 2 v. — Ought we to visit her? 2 v. — A Vagabond Heroine 1 v. — Leah: A Woman of Fashion 2 v. — A Blue-Stocking 1 v. — Jet: Her Face or Her Fortune? 1 v. — Vivian the Beauty 1 v. — A Ball-room Repentance 2 v. — A Girton Girl 2 v. — A Playwright's Daughter, and Bertie Griffiths 1 v. — Pearl-Powder 1 v. — The Adventuress 1 v.
- Edwards, Amelia B., † 1892.  
Barbara's History 2 v. — Miss Carew 2 v. — Hand and Glove 1 v. — Half a Million of Money 2 v. — Debenham's Vow 2 v. — In the Days of my Youth 2 v. — Untrodden Peaks and Unfrequented Valleys 1 v. — Monsieur Maurice 1 v. — A Night on the Borders of the Black Forest 1 v. — A Poetry-Book of Elder Poets 1 v. — A Thousand Miles up the Nile 2 v. — A Poetry-Book of Modern Poets 1 v. — Lord Brackenbury 2 v.
- Edwards, M. Betham: *vide* Betham.
- Edward, Eggleston (Am.).  
The Faith Doctor 2 v.
- Elbon, Barbara (Am.).  
Bethesda 2 v.
- Eliot, George (Miss Evans—Mrs. Cross), † 1880.  
Scenes of Clerical Life 2 v. — Adam Bede 2 v. — The Mill on the Floss 2 v. — Silas Marner 1 v. — Romola 2 v. — Felix Holt 2 v. — Daniel Deronda 4 v. — The Lifted Veil, and Brother Jacob 1 v. — Impressions of Theophrastus Such 1 v. — Essays and Leaves from a Note-Book 1 v. — George Eliot's Life, edited by her Husband, J. W. Cross 4 v.
- "Elizabeth and her German Garden," Author of.  
Elizabeth and her German Garden 1 v. — The Solitary Summer 1 v. — The Benefactress 2 v.
- Elliot, Mrs. Frances, † 1898.  
Diary of an Idle Woman in Italy 2 v. — Old Court Life in France 2 v. — The Italians 2 v. — The Diary of an Idle Woman in Sicily 1 v. — Pictures of Old Rome 1 v. — The Diary of an Idle Woman in Spain 2 v. — The Red Cardinal 1 v. — The Story of Sophia 1 v. — Diary of an Idle Woman in Constantinople 1 v. — Old Court Life in Spain 2 v. — Roman Gossip 1 v.
- "Englishwoman's Love-Letters, an," Author of.  
An Englishwoman's Love-Letters 1 v.
- Erroll, Henry.  
An Ugly Duckling 1 v.
- Esler, E. Rentoul.  
The Way they loved at Grimpat 1 v.
- "Essays and Reviews," the Authors of.  
Essays and Reviews. By various Authors 1 v.
- "Estelle Russell," Author of.  
Estelle Russell 2 v.
- Esterre-Keeling, Elsa D'.  
Three Sisters 1 v. — A Laughing Philosopher 1 v. — The Professor's Wooing 1 v. — In Thoughtland and in Dreamland 1 v. — Orchardscroft 1 v. — Appassionata 1 v. — Old Maids and Young 2 v. — The Queen's Serf 1 v.
- "Euthanasia," Author of.  
Euthanasia 1 v.
- Ewing, Juliana Horatia, † 1885.  
Jackanapes; The Story of a Short Life; Daddy Darwin's Dovecot 1 v. — A Flat Iron for a Farthing 1 v. — The Brownies, and other Tales 1 v.
- "Expiated," Author of.  
Expiated 2 v.

- Fargus, F. J.: *vide* Hugh Conway.
- Farrar, F. W. (Dean), † 1903.  
Darkness and Dawn 3 v.
- "Fate of Fenella, the," Authors of.  
The Fate of Fenella, by 24 Authors 1 v.
- Felkin, Mrs.: *vide* Ellen T. Fowler.
- Fendall, Percy: *vide* F. C. Philips.
- Fenn, George Manville.  
The Parson o' Dumford 2 v. — The Clerk of Portwick 2 v.
- Fielding, Henry, † 1754.  
Tom Jones 2 v.
- Five Centuries  
of the English Language and Literature:  
John Wycliffe. — Geoffrey Chaucer. —  
Stephen Hawes. — Sir Thomas More. —  
Edmund Spenser. — Ben Jonson. — John  
Locke. — Thomas Gray (vol. 500, published  
1860) 1 v.
- Fleming, George (Am.).  
Kismet 1 v. — Andromeda 2 v.
- Forbes, Archibald, † 1900.  
My Experiences of the War between  
France and Germany 2 v. — Soldiering  
and Scribbling 1 v. — Memories and  
Studies of War and Peace 2 v. — *Vide* also  
"Daily News," War Correspondence.
- Forrest, R. E.  
Eight Days 2 v.
- Forrester, Mrs.  
Viva 2 v. — Rhona 2 v. — Roy and Viola  
2 v. — My Lord and My Lady 2 v. — I  
have Lived and Loved 2 v. — June 2 v. —  
Omnia Vanitas 1 v. — Although he was a  
Lord, and other Tales 1 v. — Corisande,  
and other Tales 1 v. — Once Again 2 v. —  
Of the World, Worldly 1 v. — Dearest  
2 v. — The Light of other Days 1 v. —  
Too Late Repented 1 v.
- Forster, John, † 1876.  
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trations and Portraits) 6 v. — Life and  
Times of Oliver Goldsmith 2 v.
- Fothergill, Jessie.  
The First Violin 2 v. — Probation 2 v. —  
Made or Marred, and "One of Three"  
1 v. — Kith and Kin 2 v. — Peril 2 v. —  
Borderland 2 v.
- "Found Dead," Author of: *vide*  
James Payn.
- Fowler, Ellen Thorneycroft  
(Mrs. Alfred Laurence Felkin).  
A Double Thread 2 v. — The Farring-  
dons 2 v. — Fuel of Fire 1 v. — Place and  
Power 2 v.
- Fox, Caroline, † 1871.  
Memories of Old Friends from her Jour-  
nals and Letters, edited by Horace N.  
Pym 2 v.
- "Frank Fairlegh," Author of  
(F. E. Smedley), † 1864.  
Frank Fairlegh 2 v.
- Francis, M. E.  
The Duenna of a Genius 1 v.
- Frederic, Harold (Am.), † 1893.  
Illumination 2 v. — March Hares 1 v.
- Freeman, Edward A., † 1892.  
The Growth of the English Constitution  
1 v. — Select Historical Essays 1 v. —  
Sketches from French Travel 1 v.
- Froude, James Anthony, † 1894.  
Oceana 1 v. — The Spanish Story of the  
Armada, and other Essays 1 v.
- Fullerton, Lady Georgiana,  
† 1885.  
Ellen Middleton 1 v. — Grantley Manor  
2 v. — Lady Bird 2 v. — Too Strange not  
to be True 2 v. — Constance Sherwood  
2 v. — A Stormy Life 2 v. — Mrs. Gerald's  
Niece 2 v. — The Notary's Daughter 1 v. —  
The Lilies of the Valley, and The House of  
Penarvan 1 v. — The Countess de Bonneval  
1 v. — Rose Leblanc 1 v. — Seven Stories  
1 v. — The Life of Luisa de Carvajal 1 v.  
— A Will and a Way, and The Hand-

kerchief at the Window 2 v. — Eliane 2 v. (by Mrs. Augustus Craven, translated by Lady Fullerton). — Laurentia 1 v.

Gardiner, Marguerite: *vide*  
Lady Blessington.

Gaskell, Mrs., † 1865.

Mary Barton 1 v. — Ruth 2 v. — North and South 1 v. — Lizzie Leigh, and other Tales 1 v. — The Life of Charlotte Brontë 2 v. — Lois the Witch, etc. 1 v. — Sylvia's Lovers 2 v. — A Dark Night's Work 1 v. — Wives and Daughters 3 v. — Cranford 1 v. — Cousin Phillis, and other Tales 1 v.

"Geraldine Hawthorne," Author  
of: *vide* Author of "Miss  
Molly."

Gerard, Dorothea (Madame Longard de Longgarde).

Lady Baby 2 v. — Recha 1 v. — Orthodox 1 v. — The Wrong Man 1 v. — A Spotless Reputation 1 v. — A Forgotten Sin 1 v. — One Year 1 v. — The Supreme Crime 1 v. — The Blood-Tax 1 v. — Holy Matrimony 1 v. — The Eternal Woman 1 v. — Made of Money 1 v. — The Bridge of Life 1 v.

Gerard, E. (Emily de Łaszowska).  
A Secret Mission 1 v. — A Foreigner 2 v. — The Extermination of Love 2 v.

Giberne, Agnes.

The Curate's Home 1 v.

Gissing, George, † 1903.

Demos. A Story of English Socialism 2 v. — New Grub Street 2 v.

Gladstone, Rt. Hon. W. E.,  
† 1898.

Rome and the Newest Fashions in Religion 1 v. — Bulgarian Horrors, and Russia in Turkistan, with other Tracts 1 v. — The Hellenic Factor in the Eastern Problem, with other Tracts 1 v.

Glyn, Elinor.

The Visits of Elizabeth 1 v. — The Reflections of Ambrosine 1 v.

Godfrey, Hal (Charlotte O'Conor-Eccles).

The Rejuvenation of Miss Semaphore 1 v.

Goldsmith, Oliver, † 1774.  
Select Works (with Portrait) 1 v.

Goodman, Edward J.  
Too Curious 1 v.

Gordon, Julien (Am.).  
A Diplomat's Diary 1 v.

Gordon, Major-Gen. C. G.,  
† 1885.

His Journals at Kartoum. Introduction and Notes by A. E. Hake (with eighteen Illustrations) 2 v.

Gore, Mrs., † 1861.  
Castles in the Air 1 v. — The Dean's Daughter 2 v. — Progress and Prejudice 2 v. — Mammon 2 v. — A Life's Lessons 2 v. — The Two Aristocracies 2 v. — Heckington 2 v.

Grand, Sarah.  
Our Manifold Nature 1 v. — Babs the Impossible 2 v.

Grant, Miss.  
Victor Lescar 2 v. — The Sun-Maid 2 v. — My Heart's in the Highlands 2 v. — Artiste 2 v. — Prince Hugo 2 v. — Cara Roma 2 v.

Gray, Maxwell.  
The Silence of Dean Maitland 2 v. — The Reproach of Annesley 2 v.

Grenville: Murray, E. C. (Trois-Etoiles), † 1881.

The Member for Paris 2 v. — Young Brown 2 v. — The Boudoir Cabal 3 v. — French Pictures in English Chalk (*First Series*) 2 v. — The Russians of To-day 1 v. — French Pictures in English Chalk (*Second Series*) 2 v. — Strange Tales 1 v. — That Artful Vicar 2 v. — Six Months in the Ranks 1 v. — People I have met 1 v.

Grimwood, Ethel St. Clair.  
My Three Years in Manipur (with Portrait) 1 v.

Grohman, W. A. Baillie.  
Tyrol and the Tyrolese 1 v.

Gunter, Archibald Clavering (Am.).  
Mr. Barnes of New York 1 v.

Guthrie, F. Anstey: *vide* Anstey.

"Guy Livingstone," Author of  
(George Alfred Laurence),  
† 1876.

Guy Livingstone 1 v. — Sword and Gown 1 v. — Barren Honour 1 v. — Border and Bastille v. — Maurice Dering 1 v. — Sans Merci 2 v. — Breaking a Butterfly 2 v. — Anteros 2 v. — Hagarine 2 v.

Habberton, John (Am.).

Helen's Babies & Other People's Children 1 v. — The Bowsham Puzzle 1 v. — One Tramp; Mrs. Mayburn's Twins 1 v.

Haggard, H. Rider.

King Solomon's Mines 1 v. — She 2 v. — Jess 2 v. — Allan Quatermain 2 v. — The Witch's Head 2 v. — Maiwi's Revenge 1 v. — Mr. Meeson's Will 1 v. — Colonel Quaritch, V. C. 2 v. — Cleopatra 2 v. — Allan's Wife 1 v. — Beatrice 2 v. — Dawn 2 v. — Montezuma's Daughter 2 v. — The People of the Mist 2 v. — Joan Haste 2 v. — Heart of the World 2 v. — The Wizard 1 v. — Doctor Therne 1 v. — Swallow 2 v. — Black Heart and White Heart, and Elissa 1 v. — Lysbeth 2 v. — A Winter Pilgrimage 2 v. — Pearl-Maiden 2 v. — Stella Fregelius 2 v. — The Brethren 2 v.

Haggard, H. Rider, & Andrew Lang.

The World's Desire 2 v.

Hake, A. E.: *vide* Gen. Gordon.

Hall, Mrs. S. C., † 1881.

Can Wrong be Right? 1 v. — Marian 2 v.

Hamerton, Philip Gilbert,  
† 1894.

Marmorne 1 v. — French and English 2 v.

Hardy, Miss Iza: *vide* Author of  
"Not Easily Jealous."

Hardy, Thomas.

The Hand of Ethelberta 2 v. — Far from the Madding Crowd 2 v. — The Return of the Native 2 v. — The Trumpet-Major 2 v. — A Laodicean 2 v. — Two on a Tower 2 v. — A Pair of Blue Eyes 2 v. — A Group of Noble Dames 1 v. — Tess of the D'Urbervilles 2 v. — Life's Little Ironies 1 v. — Jude the Obscure 2 v.

Harland, Henry.

The Cardinal's Snuff-Box 1 v. — The Lady Paramount 1 v. — My Friend Prospero 1 v.

Harraden, Beatrice.

Ships that pass in the Night 1 v. — In Varying Moods 1 v. — Hilda Strafford, and The Remittance Man 1 v. — The Fowler 2 v. — Katharine Frensham 2 v.

Harrison, Agnes.

Martin's Vineyard 1 v.

Harte, Bret (Am.), † 1902.

Prose and Poetry (Tales of the Argonauts: — The Luck of Roaring Camp; The Outcasts of Poker Flat, etc. — Spanish and American Legends; Condensed Novels; Civic and Character Sketches; Poems) 2 v. — Idyls of the Foothills 1 v. — Gabriel Conroy 2 v. — Two Men of Sandy Bar 1 v. — Thankful Blossom, and other Tales 1 v. — The Story of a Mine 1 v. — Drift from Two Shores 1 v. — An Heiress of Red Dog, and other Sketches 1 v. — The Twins of Table Mountain, and other Tales 1 v. — Jeff Briggs's Love Story, and other Tales 1 v. — Flip, and other Stories 1 v. — On the Frontier 1 v. — By Shore and Sedge 1 v. — Maruja 1 v. — Snow-bound at Eagle's, and Devil's Ford 1 v. — The Crusade of the "Excelsior" 1 v. — A Millionaire of Rough-and-Ready, and other Tales 1 v. — Captain Jim's Friend, and the Argonauts of North Liberty 1 v. — Cressy 1 v. — The Heritage of Dedlow Marsh, and other Tales 1 v. — A Waif of the Plains 1 v. — A Ward of the Golden Gate 1 v. — A Sappho of Green Springs, and other Tales 1 v. — A First Family of Tasajara 1 v. — Colonel Starbottle's Client, and some other People 1 v. — Susy 1 v. — Sally Dows, etc. 1 v. — A Protégée of Jack Hamlin's, etc. 1 v. — The Bell-Ringer of Angel's, etc. 1 v. — Clarence 1 v. — In a Hollow of the Hills, and The Devotion of Enriquez 1 v. — The Ancestors of Peter Atherly, etc. 1 v. — Three Partners 1 v. — Tales of Trail and Town 1 v. — Stories in Light and Shadow 1 v. — Mr. Jack Hamlin's Mediation, and other Stories 1 v. — From Sand-Hill to Pine 1 v. — Under the Redwoods 1 v. — On the Old Trail 1 v. — Trent's Trust 1 v.

Havelock, Sir Henry: *vide* Rev.  
W. Brock.

- Hawthorne, Nathaniel (Am.),**  
† 1864.  
The Scarlet Letter 1 v. — Transformation (The Marble Faun) 2 v. — Passages from the English Note-Books of Nathaniel Hawthorne 2 v.
- Hector, Mrs.: vide Mrs. Alexander.**
- "Heir of Redclyffe, the,"** Author of: *vide* Charlotte M. Yonge.
- Helps, Sir Arthur** † 1875.  
Friends in Council 2 v. — Ivan de Biron 2 v.
- Hemans, Mrs. Felicia,** † 1835.  
Select Poetical Works 1 v.
- Hewlett, Maurice.**  
The Forest Lovers 1 v. — Little Novels of Italy 1 v. — The Life and Death of Richard Yea-and-Nay 2 v. — New Canterbury Tales 1 v. — The Queen's Quair; or, The Six Years' Tragedy 2 v.
- Hichens, Robert.**  
Flames 2 v. — The Slave 2 v. — Felix 2 v. — The Woman with the Fan 2 v. — The Garden of Allah 2 v.
- Hobart Pasha, Admiral,** † 1886.  
Sketches from my Life 1 v.
- Hobbes, John Oliver.**  
The Gods, Some Mortals and Lord Wickenham 1 v. — The Serious Wooing 1 v.
- Hoey, Mrs. Cashel.**  
A Golden Sorrow 2 v. — Out of Court 2 v.
- Holdsworth, Annie E.**  
The Years that the Locust hath Eaten 1 v. — The Gods Arrive 1 v. — The Valley of the Great Shadow 1 v. — Great Lowlands 1 v. — A Garden of Spinsters 1 v.
- Holme Lee: vide** Harriet Parr.
- Holmes, Oliver Wendell (Am.),**  
† 1894.  
The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table 1 v. — The Professor at the Breakfast-Table 1 v. — The Poet at the Breakfast-Table 1 v. — Over the Teacups 1 v.
- Hope, Anthony (Hawkins).**  
Mr. Witt's Widow 1 v. — A Change of Air 1 v. — Half a Hero 1 v. — The Indiscretion of the Duchess 1 v. — The God in the Car 1 v. — The Chronicles of Count Antonio 1 v. — Comedies of Courtship 1 v. — The Heart of Princess Osra 1 v. — Phroso 2 v. — Simon Dale 2 v. — Rupert of Hentzau 1 v. — The King's Mirror 2 v. — Quisanté 1 v. — Tristram of Blent 2 v. — The Intrusions of Peggy 2 v. — Double Harness 2 v.
- Hopkins, Tighe.**  
An Idler in Old France 1 v. — The Man in the Iron Mask 1 v. — The Dungeons of Old Paris 1 v. — The Silent Gate 1 v.
- "Horace Templeton,"** Author of.  
Diary and Notes 1 v.
- Hornung, Ernest William.**  
A Bride from the Bush 1 v. — Under Two Skies 1 v. — Tiny Luttrell 1 v. — The Boss of Taroomba 1 v. — My Lord Duke 1 v. — Young Blood 1 v. — Some Persons Unknown 1 v. — The Amateur Cracksman 1 v. — The Rogue's March 1 v. — The Belle of Toorak 1 v. — Peccavi 1 v. — The Black Mask 1 v. — The Shadow of the Rope 1 v. — No Hero 1 v. — Denis Dent 1 v. — Irralie's Bushranger and The Unbidden Guest 1 v.
- "Household Words."**  
Conducted by Charles Dickens. 1851-56. 36 v. — NOVELS and TALES reprinted from Household Words by Charles Dickens. 1856-59. 11 v.
- Houstoun, Mrs.: vide** "Recommended to Mercy."
- "How to be Happy though Married,"** Author of.  
How to be Happy though Married 1 v.
- Howard, Blanche Willis (Am.),**  
† 1899.  
One Summer 1 v. — Aunt Serena 1 v. — Guenn 2 v. — Tony, the Maid, etc. 1 v. — The Open Door 2 v.
- Howard, Blanche Willis,**  
† 1899, & William Sharp.  
A Fellowe and His Wife 1 v.
- Howells, William Dean (Am.).**  
A Foregone Conclusion 1 v. — The Lady of the Aroostook 1 v. — A Modern



Instance 2 v. — The Undiscovered Country 1 v. — Venetian Life (with Portrait) 1 v. — Italian Journeys 1 v. — A Chance Acquaintance 1 v. — Their Wedding Journey 1 v. — A Fearful Responsibility, and Torelli's Marriage 1 v. — A Woman's Reason 2 v. — Dr. Breen's Practice 1 v. — The Rise of Silas Lapham 2 v. — A Pair of Patient Lovers 1 v.

Hughes, Thomas, † 1898.

Tom Brown's School-Days 1 v.

Hungerford, Mrs. (Mrs. Argles),

† 1897.

Molly Bawn 2 v. — Mrs. Geoffrey 2 v. — Faith and Unfaith 2 v. — Portia 2 v. — Loys, Lord Berresford, and other Tales 1 v. — Her First Appearance, and other Tales 1 v. — Phyllis 2 v. — Rossmoyne 2 v. — Doris 2 v. — A Maiden all Forlorn, etc. 1 v. — A Passive Crime, and other Stories 1 v. — Green Pleasure and Grey Grief 2 v. — A Mental Struggle 2 v. — Her Week's Amusement, and Ugly Barrington 1 v. — Lady Brankmere 2 v. — Lady Valworth's Diamonds 1 v. — A Modern Circe 2 v. — Marvel 2 v. — The Hon. Mrs. Vereker 1 v. — Under-Curcents 2 v. — In Durance Vile, etc. 1 v. — A Troublesome Girl, and other Stories 1 v. — A Life's Remorse 2 v. — A Born Coquette 2 v. — The Duchess 1 v. — Lady Verner's Flight 1 v. — A Conquering Heroine, and "When in Doubt" 1 v. — Nora Creina 2 v. — A Mad Prank, and other Stories 1 v. — The Hoyden 2 v. — The Red House Mystery 1 v. — An Unsatisfactory Lover 1 v. — Peter's Wife 2 v. — The Three Graces 1 v. — A Tug of War 1 v. — The Professor's Experiment 2 v. — A Point of Conscience 2 v. — A Lonely Girl 1 v. — Lovice 1 v. — The Coming of Chloe 1 v.

Hunt, Mrs.: *vide* Averil Beaumont.

Hunt, Violet.

The Human Interest 1 v.

Ingelow, Jean, † 1897.

Off the Skelligs 3 v. — Poems 2 v. — Fated to be Free 2 v. — Sarah de Berenger 2 v. — Don John 2 v.

Inglis, the Hon. Lady.

The Siege of Lucknow 1 v.

Ingram, John H.: *vide* E. A. Poe.

Iota: *vide* Mrs. Mannington Caffyn.

Irving, Washington (Am.),  
† 1859.

The Sketch Book (with Portrait) 1 v. — The Life of Mahomet 1 v. — Lives of the Successors of Mahomet 1 v. — Oliver Goldsmith 1 v. — Chronicles of Wolfert's Roost 1 v. — Life of George Washington 5 v.

Jackson, Mrs. Helen (H. H.)  
(Am.), † 1885.

Ramona 2 v.

Jacobs, W. W.

Many Cargoes 1 v. — The Skipper's Wooing, and The Brown Man's Servant 1 v. — Sea Urchins 1 v. — A Master of Craft 1 v. — Light Freights 1 v. — At Sun-wich Port 1 v. — The Lady of the Barge 1 v. — Odd Craft 1 v.

James, Charles T. C.

Holy Wedlock 1 v.

James, G. P. R., † 1860.

Morley Ernstein (with Portrait) 1 v. — Forest Days 1 v. — The False Heir 1 v. — Arabella Stuart 1 v. — Rose d'Albret 1 v. — Arrah Neil 1 v. — Agincourt 1 v. — The Smuggler 1 v. — The Step-Mother 2 v. — Beauchamp 1 v. — Heidelberg 1 v. — The Gipsy 1 v. — The Castle of Ehrenstein 1 v. — Darnley 1 v. — Russell 2 v. — The Convict 2 v. — Sir Theodore Broughton 2 v.

James, Henry (Am.).

The American 2 v. — The Europeans 1 v. — Daisy Miller; An International Episode; Four Meetings 1 v. — Roderick Hudson 2 v. — The Madonna of the Future, etc. 1 v. — Eugene Pickering, etc. 1 v. — Confidence 1 v. — Washington Square, etc. 2 v. — The Portrait of a Lady 3 v. — Foreign Parts 1 v. — French Poets and Novelists 1 v. — The Siege of London: The Point of View; A Passionate Pilgrim 1 v. — Portraits of Places 1 v. — A Little Tour in France 1 v.

Jeaffreson, J. Cordy.

A Book about Doctors 2 v. — A Woman in spite of Herself 2 v. — The Real Lord Byron 3 v.

Jenkin, Mrs. Charles, † 1885.  
 "Who Breaks—Pays" 1 v. — Skirmishing 1 v. — Once and Again 2 v. — Two French Marriages 2 v. — Within an Ace 1 v. — Jupiter's Daughters 1 v.

Jenkins, Edward.  
 Ginx's Baby, his Birth and other Misfortunes; Lord Bantam 2 v.

"Jennie of 'The Prince's,'"  
 Author of: *vide* B. H. Buxton.

Jerome, K. Jerome.  
 The Idle Thoughts of an Idle Fellow 1 v. — Diary of a Pilgrimage, and Six Essays 1 v. — Novel Notes 1 v. — Sketches in Lavender, Blue and Green 1 v. — The Second Thoughts of an Idle Fellow 1 v. — Three Men on the Bummel 1 v. — Paul Kelper 2 v. — Tea-Table Talk 1 v. — Tommy and Co. 1 v.

Jerrold, Douglas, † 1857.  
 History of St. Giles and St. James 2 v. — Men of Character 2 v.

"John Halifax, Gentleman,"  
 Author of: *vide* Mrs. Craik.

Johnny Ludlow: *vide* Mrs. Henry Wood.

Johnson, Samuel, † 1784.  
 Lives of the English Poets 2 v.

Jolly, Emily.  
 Colonel Dacre 2 v.

"Joshua Davidson," Author of:  
*vide* Mrs. E. Lynn Linton.

Kavanagh, Miss Julia, † 1877.  
 Nathalie 2 v. — Daisy Burns 2 v. — Grace Lee 2 v. — Rachel Gray 1 v. — Adèle 3 v. — A Summer and Winter in the Two Sicilies 2 v. — Seven Years, and other Tales 2 v. — French Women of Letters 1 v. — English Women of Letters 1 v. — Queen Mab 2 v. — Beatrice 2 v. — Sybil's Second Love 2 v. — Dora 2 v. — Silvia 2 v. — Bessie 2 v. — John Dorrien 3 v. — Two Lilies 2 v. — Forget-me-nots 2 v. — *Vide* also Series for the Young, p. 29.

Keary, Annie, † 1879.  
 Oldbury 2 v. — Castle Daly 2 v.

Keeling, D'Esterre-: *vide* Esterre.

Kempis, Thomas a.  
 The Imitation of Christ. Translated from the Latin by W. Benham, B.D. 1 v.

Kimball, Richard B. (Am.), †  
 Saint Leger 1 v. — Romance of Student Life Abroad 1 v. — Undercurrents 1 v. — Was he Successful? 1 v. — To-Day in New York 1 v.

Kinglake, Alexander William,  
 † 1891.  
 Eothen 1 v. — The Invasion of the Crimea 14 v.

Kingsley, Charles, † 1875.  
 Yeast 1 v. — Westward ho! 2 v. — Two Years ago 2 v. — Hypatia 2 v. — Alton Locke 1 v. — Hereward the Wake 2 v. — At Last 2 v. — His Letters and Memories of his Life, edited by his Wife 2 v.

Kingsley, Henry, † 1876.  
 Ravenshoe 2 v. — Austin Elliot 1 v. — Geoffry Hamlyn 2 v. — The Hillyars and the Burtons 2 v. — Leighton Court 1 v. — Valentin 1 v. — Oakshott Castle 1 v. — Reginald Hetheridge 2 v. — The Grange Garden 2 v.

Kinross, Albert.  
 An Opera and Lady Grasmere 1 v.

Kipling, Rudyard.  
 Plain Tales from the Hills 1 v. — The Second Jungle Book 1 v. — The Seven Seas 1 v. — "Captains Courageous" 1 v. — The Day's Work 1 v. — A Fleet in Being 1 v. — Stalky & Co. 1 v. — From Sea to Sea 2 v. — The City of Dreadful Night 1 v. — Kim 1 v. — Just So Stories 1 v. — The Five Nations 1 v. — Traffics and Discoveries 1 v.

Laffan, May.  
 Flitters, Tatters, and the Counsellor, etc. 1 v.

Lamb, Charles, † 1834.  
 The Essays of Elia and Eliana 1 v.

Lang, Andrew: *vide* H. Rider Haggard.

Langdon, Mary (Am.).  
 Ida May 1 v.

- "Last of the Cavaliers, the,"  
Author of (Miss Piddington).  
The Last of the Cavaliers 2 v. — The  
Gain of a Loss 2 v.
- Łaszowska, Mme de: *vide* E.  
Gerard.
- Laurence, George Alfred,  
Author of: *vide* "Guy Living-  
stone."
- Lawless, the Hon. Emily.  
Hurrish 1 v.
- "Leaves from the Journal of  
our Life in the Highlands:"  
*vide* Victoria R. I.
- Lee, Holme, † 1900: *vide* Harriet  
Parr.
- Le Fanu, J. S., † 1873.  
Uncle Silas 2 v. — Guy Deverell 2 v.
- Lemon, Mark, † 1870.  
Wait for the End 2 v. — Loved at Last  
2 v. — Falkner Lyle 2 v. — Leyton Hall,  
and other Tales 2 v. — Golden Fetters  
2 v.
- "Letters of Her Mother to  
Elizabeth, the," Author of:  
*vide* W. R. H. Trowbridge.
- Lever, Charles, † 1872.  
The O'Donoghue 1 v. — The Knight of  
Gwynne 3 v. — Arthur O'Leary 2 v. —  
Harry Lorrequer 2 v. — Charles O'Mal-  
ley 3 v. — Tom Burke of "Ours" 3 v. —  
Jack Hinton 2 v. — The Daltons 4 v. —  
The Dodd Family Abroad 3 v. — The  
Fortunes of Cro' Martin 3 v. — The  
Fortunes of Glencore 2 v. — Roland Cashel  
3 v. — Davenport Dunn 3 v. — Confessions  
of Con Cregan 2 v. — One of Them 2 v. —  
Maurice Tiernay 2 v. — Sir Jasper Carew  
2 v. — Barrington 2 v. — A Day's Ride  
2 v. — Luttrell of Arran 2 v. — Tony Butler  
2 v. — Sir Brook Fossbrooke 2 v. — The  
Bramleighs of Bishop's Folly 2 v. — A  
Rent in a Cloud 1 v. — That Boy of Nor-  
cott's 1 v. — St. Patrick's Eve; Paul  
Gosslett's Confessions 1 v. — Lord Kil-  
gobbin 2 v.
- Levett-Yeats, S.  
The Honour of Savelli 1 v. — The  
Chevalier d'Auriac 1 v. — The Traitor's  
Way 1 v. — The Lord Protector 1 v.
- Lewes, G. H., † 1878.  
Rantherpe 1 v. — The Physiology of  
Common Life 2 v. — On Actors and the  
Art of Acting 1 v.
- Linton, Mrs. E. Lynn, † 1898.  
The true History of Joshua Davidson  
1 v. — Patricia Kemball 2 v. — The  
Atonement of Leam Dundas 2 v. — The  
World well Lost 2 v. — Under which  
Lord? 2 v. — With a Silken Thread, and  
other Stories 1 v. — Todhunters' at Loan-  
in' Head, and other Stories 1 v. — "My  
Love!" 2 v. — The Girl of the Period,  
and other Social Essays 1 v. — Lone 2 v.
- Lockhart, Laurence W. M.,  
† 1882.  
Mine is Thine 2 v.
- Loftus, Lord Augustus.  
Diplomatic Reminiscences 1837-1862  
(with Portrait) 2 v.
- Longard, Mme de: *vide* D.  
Gerard.
- Longfellow, Henry Wads-  
worth (Am.), † 1882.  
Poetical Works (with Portrait) 3 v. —  
The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri  
3 v. — The New-England Tragedies 1 v. —  
The Divine Tragedy 1 v. — Flower-de-  
Luce, and Three Books of Song 1 v. —  
The Masque of Pandora, and other Poems  
1 v.
- Lonsdale, Margaret.  
Sister Dora (with a Portrait of Sister  
Dora) 1 v.
- Lorimer, George Horace (Am.).  
Letters from a Self-Made Merchant to his  
Son 1 v.
- "Lost Battle, a," Author of.  
A Lost Battle 2 v.
- Lubbock, Sir John (Lord Ave-  
bury).  
The Pleasures of Life 1 v. — The Beau-  
ties of Nature (with Illustrations) 1 v. —  
The Use of Life 1 v. — Scenery of Switzer-  
land (with Illustrations) 2 v. — Essays and  
Addresses 1900-1903 1 v.

"Lutfullah": *vide* Eastwick.

Lyall, Edna, † 1903.

We Two 2 v. — Donovan 2 v. — In the Golden Days 2 v. — Knight-Errent 2 v. — Won by Waiting 2 v. — Wayfaring Men 2 v. — Hope the Hermit 2 v. — Doreen 2 v. — In Spite of All 2 v. — The Hinderers 1 v.

Lytton, Lord: *vide* E. Bulwer.

Lytton, Robert Lord (Owen Meredith), † 1891.

Poems 2 v. — Fables in Song 2 v.

Maartens, Maarten.

The Sin of Joost Avelingh 1 v. — An Old Maid's Love 2 v. — God's Fool 2 v. — The Greater Glory 2 v. — My Lady Nobody 2 v. — Her Memory 1 v. — Some Women I have known 1 v. — My Poor Relations 2 v. — Dorothea 2 v.

Macaulay, Lord, Thomas Babington, † 1859.

History of England (with Portrait) 10 v. — Critical and Historical Essays 5 v. — Lays of Ancient Rome 1 v. — Speeches 2 v. — Biographical Essays 1 v. — William Pitt, Atterbury 1 v. — (See also Trevelyan).

McC Carthy, Justin.

The Waterdale Neighbours 2 v. — Dear Lady Disdain 2 v. — Miss Misanthrope 2 v. — A History of our own Times 5 v. — Donna Quixote 2 v. — A short History of our own Times 2 v. — A History of the Four Georges vols. 1 & 2. — A History of our own Times vols. 6 & 7 (supplemental). — A History of the Four Georges and of William IV. Vols. 3, 4 & 5 (supplemental).

Mac Donald, George.

Alec Forbes of Howglen 2 v. — Annals of a Quiet Neighbourhood 2 v. — David Elginbrod 2 v. — The Vicar's Daughter 2 v. — Malcolm 2 v. — St. George and St. Michael 2 v. — The Marquis of Lossie 2 v. — Sir Gibbie 2 v. — Mary Marston 2 v. — The Gifts of the Child Christ, and other Tales 1 v. — The Princess and Curdie 1 v.

Mackarness, Mrs., † 1881.

Sunbeam Stories 1 v. — A Peerless Wife 2 v. — A Mingled Yarn 2 v.

Mackay, Eric, † 1898.

Love Letters of a Violinist, and other Poems 1 v.

McC Knight, Charles (Am.).

Old Fort Duquesne 2 v.

Maclaren, Ian.

Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush 1 v. — The Days of Auld Langsyne 1 v. — His Majesty Baby 1 v.

Macleod, Fiona.

Wind and Wave 1 v.

Macleod, Norman, † 1872.

The Old Lieutenant and his Son 1 v.

Macpherson, James, † 1796: *vide* Ossian.

Macquoid, Mrs.

Patty 2 v. — Miriam's Marriage 2 v. — Pictures across the Channel 2 v. — Too Soon 1 v. — My Story 2 v. — Diane 2 v. — Beside the River 2 v. — A Faithful Lover 2 v.

"Mademoiselle Mori," Author of (Miss Roberts).

Mademoiselle Mori 2 v. — Denise 1 v. — Madame Fontenoy 1 v. — On the Edge of the Storm 1 v. — The Atelier du Lys 2 v. — In the Olden Time 2 v.

Mahon, Lord: *vide* Stanhope.

Maine, E. S.

Scarscliff Rocks 2 v.

Malet, Sir Edward, G.C.B., G.C.M.G.

Shifting Scenes 1 v.

Malet, Lucas.

Colonel Enderby's Wife 2 v. — The History of Sir Richard Calmady 3 v.

Malmesbury, the Earl of, G.C.B.

Memoirs of an Ex-Minister 3 v.

Mann, Mary E.

A Winter's Tale 1 v. — The Cedar Star 1 v.

Mansfield, Robert Blachford

The Log of the Water Lily 1 v.

Mark Twain: *vide* Twain.

"Marmorne," Author of: *vide*  
P. G. Hamerton.

Marryat, Capt., † 1848.

Jacob Faithful (with Portrait) 1 v. — Percival Keene 1 v. — Peter Simple 1 v. — Japhet in Search of a Father 1 v. — Monsieur Violet 1 v. — The Settlers in Canada 1 v. — The Mission 1 v. — The Privateer's-Man 1 v. — The Children of the New-Forest 1 v. — Valerie 1 v. — Mr. Midshipman Easy 1 v. — The King's Own 1 v.

Marryat, Florence, † 1899.

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2 v. — Digby Grand 1 v. — Good for No-  
thing 2 v. — The Queen's Maries 2 v. —  
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Bridlemere 2 v. — Cerise 2 v. — The  
Interpreter 2 v. — The White Rose 2 v. —  
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Lord Lytton.
- Merrick, Leonard.  
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Stage of Fools 1 v. — Cynthia 1 v. — One  
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Kedar's Tents 1 v. — Roden's Corner  
1 v. — The Isle of Unrest 1 v. — The Velvet  
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- Merriman, H. S., & S. G. Tallen-  
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- Milne, James.  
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- Milton, John, † 1674.  
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Geraldine Hawthorne 1 v.
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Mrs. Hungerford.
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1 v. — Seaforth 2 v. — The Blue Veil  
1 v. — Transformed 1 v. — The Fisher-  
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Norton 2 v. — Prejudged 1 v. — An Un-  
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2 v. — They Call it Love 2 v. — The  
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— Cunning Murrell 1 v. — The Hole in the  
Wall 1 v.
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- Murray, David Christie.  
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- Newby, Mrs. C. J.  
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- Newman, Dr. J. H. (Cardinal  
 Newman), † 1890.  
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- Nicholls, Mrs.: *vide* Currer Bell.
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 1 v. — The Dancer in Yellow 1 v. —  
 Clarissa Furiosa 2 v. — Marietta's Mar-  
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 1 v. — The Widower 1 v. — Giles Ingilby 1 v.  
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 Family 1 v. — Salem Chapel 2 v. — The  
 Perpetual Curate 2 v. — Miss Marjori-  
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 Count de Montalembert 2 v. — May 2 v. —  
 Innocent 2 v. — For Love and Life 2 v. —  
 A Rose in June 1 v. — The Story of  
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 ladies 2 v. — The Curate in Charge 1 v. —  
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 Carità 2 v. — Young Musgrave 2 v. —  
 The Primrose Path 2 v. — Within the  
 Precincts 3 v. — The Greatest Heiress in  
 England 2 v. — He that will not when he  
 may 2 v. — Harry Joscelyn 2 v. — In  
 Trust 2 v. — It was a Lover and his Lass  
 3 v. — The Ladies Lindores 3 v. — Hester  
 3 v. — The Wizard's Son 3 v. — A  
 Country Gentleman and his Family 2 v. —  
 Neighbours on the Green 1 v. — The Duke's  
 Daughter 1 v. — The Fugitives 1 v. —  
 Kirsteen 2 v. — Life of Laurence Oliphant  
 and of Alice Oliphant, his Wife 2 v. — The  
 Little Pilgrim in the Unseen 1 v. — The  
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 2 v. — The Sorceress 2 v. — Sir Robert's  
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*vide* George W. E. Russell.
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 James Macpherson 1 v.
- Ouida.  
 Idalia 2 v. — Tricotrin 2 v. — Puck 2 v. —  
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 two Flags 2 v. — Folle-Farine 2 v. — A  
 Leaf in the Storm; A Dog of Flanders;  
 A Branch of Lilac; A Provence Rose  
 1 v. — Cecil Castlemaine's Gage, and other  
 Novelettes 1 v. — Madame la Marquise,  
 and other Novelettes 1 v. — Pascarel 2 v.  
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 Wooden Shoes 1 v. — Signa (with Portrait)  
 3 v. — In a Winter City 1 v. — Ariadne 2 v. —

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† 1900.

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Parr, Mrs.

Dorothy Fox 1 v. — The Prescotts of Pamphillon 2 v. — The Gosau Smithy, etc. 1 v. — Robin 2 v. — Loyalty George 2 v.

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## Phillipotts, Eden.

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Piddington, Miss: *vide* Author of  
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## Poynter, Miss E. Frances.

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## Praed, Mrs. Campbell.

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Pym, Hor. N.: *v.* Caroline Fox.

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## Quiller-Couch, A. T. (Q.)

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- Riddell, Mrs. (F. G. Trafford).  
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2 v. — Far above Rubies 2 v. — The Earl's  
Pierney 2 v. — Mortomley's Estate 2 v.
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- Robertson, Rev. Frederick W.,  
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- Robins, Miss: *vide* Raimond.
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- Ross, Charles H.  
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Romance 2 v.
- Ross, Martin: *vide* Somerville.
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- Russell, W. Clark.  
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- Saunders, John.  
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Devereux of the Mariquita 2 v. — Checked  
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Khaminavatka 2 v. — In the House of His  
Friends 2 v. — The Mystery of a Shipyard 2 v.  
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- Schreiner, Olive.  
Trooper Peter Halket of Mashona-  
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- Scott, Sir Walter, † 1832.  
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Mortality 1 v. — Guy Mannering 1 v. —  
Rob Roy 1 v. — The Pirate 1 v. — The  
Fortunes of Nigel 1 v. — The Black Dwarf;  
A Legend of Montrose 1 v. — The Bride  
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Falaise 1 v.

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two Maps in Colours) 3 v.

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Clinker 1 v. — Peregrine Pickle 2 v.

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Ross.  
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Irish Shore 1 v.

"Spanish Brothers, the," Author  
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Stanhope, Earl (Lord Mahon),  
† 1875.  
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Steel, Flora Annie.  
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Stevens, G. W., † 1900.  
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Sterne, Laurence, † 1768.  
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Stevenson, Robert Louis, † 1894.  
Treasure Island 1 v. — Dr. Jekyll and  
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Taylor, Col. Meadows, † 1876.  
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Templeton: *vide* Author of  
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Tennyson, Alfred (Lord), † 1892.  
Poetical Works 8 v. — Queen Mary

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Thackeray, William Makepeace, † 1863.

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Trollope, Anthony, † 1882.

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Trowbridge, W. R. H.

The Letters of Her Mother to Elizabeth 1 v. — A Girl of the Multitude 1 v.

Twain, Mark (Samuel L. Clemens) (Am.).

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Warren, Samuel, † 1877. Diary of a late Physician 2 v. — Ten Thousand a-Year 3 v. — Now and Then 1 v. — The Lily and the Bee 1 v.

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Wetherell, Elizabeth (Susan Warner) (Am.), † 1885.

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Weyman, Stanley J. The House of the Wolf 1 v. — The Story of Francis Cludde 2 v. — A Gentleman of France 2 v. — The Man in Black 1 v. — Under the Red Robe 1 v. — My Lady Rotha 2 v. — From the Memoirs of a Minister of France 1 v. — The Red Cockade 2 v. — Shrewsbury 2 v. — The Castle Inn 2 v. — Sophia 2 v. — Count Hannibal 2 v. — In Kings' Byways 1 v. — The Long Night 2 v. — The Abbess of Vlaye 2 v.

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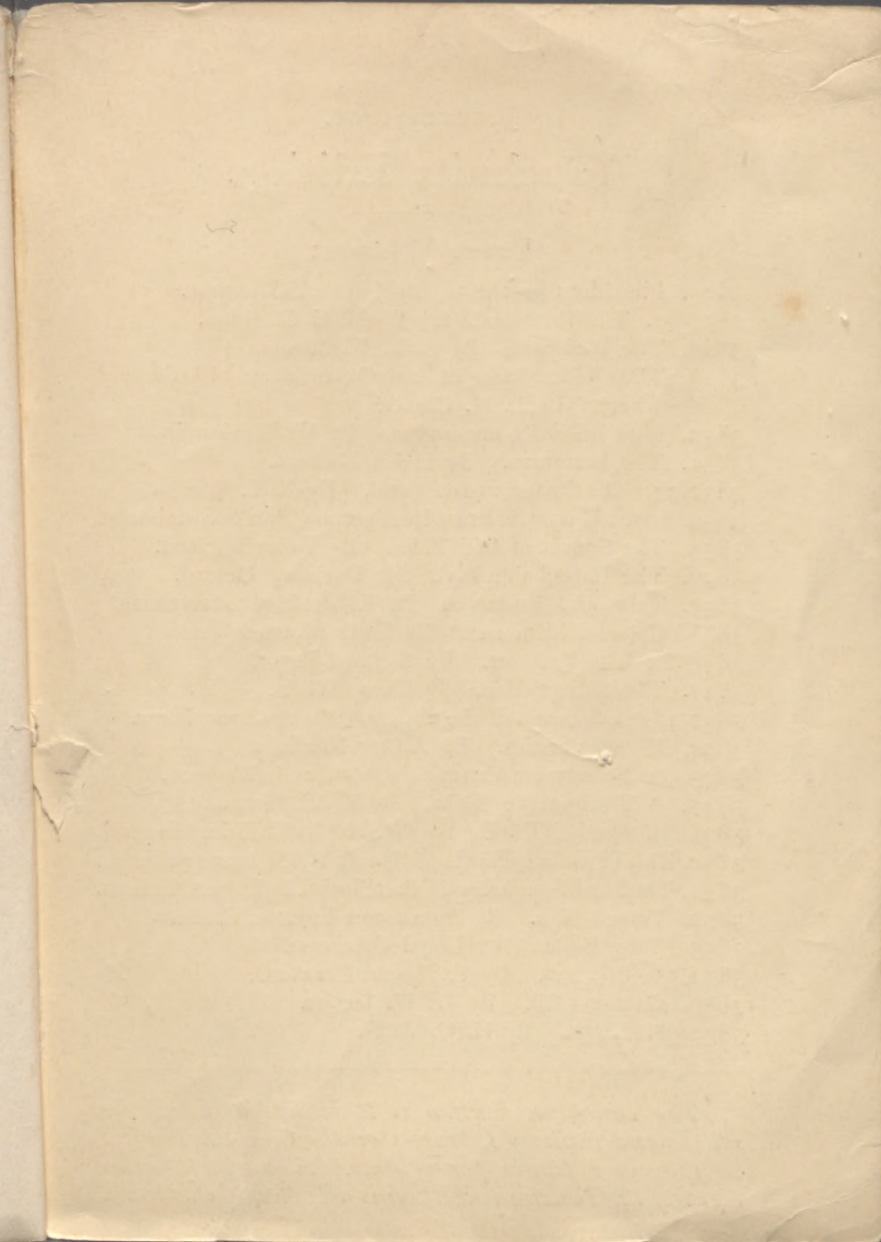
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