The White Hope

by

W. R. H. Trowbridge

TAUCHNITZ EDITION

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Feb. 1917.

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THE WHITE HOPE BY W. R. H. TROWBRIDGE

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THE WHITE HOPE

BY

W. R. H. TROWBRIDGE

AUTHOR OF "A DAZZLING REPROBATE," ETC.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1913

"A prince can mak' a belted knight,
A marquis, duke, and a' that;
But an honest man's aboon his might,
. . . . .
For a' that, and a' that."

TO

THE PEERLESS

DONNA

VITTORIA EGERIA DI SANT' IGNOTO.

THE WHITE HOPE.

CHAPTER I.

"A PRIZE-FIGHTER! Really, Durward!"

Old Lady Marion and Mauve looked protestingly round the dinner-table at which she was presiding, and placing a shrivelled hand on a gold-stoppered crystal smelling-bottle beside her plate proceeded to sniff the contents.

It was the opinion of her friends that her smelling-bottle, which she was never seen without, was as eloquent as a fan, in the days when fans were fashionable. But if a smelling-bottle could talk in Lady Marion and Mauve's hand it had only learnt to utter a reproof or a reproach. On the present occasion it plainly said "Disgust," with an emphasis which neither the words her ladyship had herself pronounced nor the look that

accompanied them, indicative of disapproval though they were, could alone have expressed.

"Yes, grandmother, a prize-fighter, or perhaps the psychology of the prize-ring would be more correct. I find the study of it absorbingly interesting. There are phenomena connected with it that have revealed to me utterly unsuspected possibilities in human nature." And Durward Carisbrooke's handsome mouth twitched at the corners as he glanced round the table and noticed with an amused twinkle of the eye the sudden frigidity his words produced.

It was a small party—six in all, including himself. Opposite him at the head of the table sat Lady Marion and Mauve, gaunt, erect, and stately, reminding one of some old masterful *grande dame* in the novels of Thackeray and Balzac. She had been a great beauty in her youth, and wrought havoc in many a bosom. It was rumoured that the peace of mind of no less a person than Queen Victoria had been temporarily upset by her coquetry; certain it is in her late Majesty's reign Lady Marion and Mauve had been seldom seen at Court. But that was very long ago as memory counts, and whatever scandal had attached to her name was now as dead as the fame of her beauty. At seventy-five, however, she still preserved her health, thanks to an iron constitution. "Iron" indeed, might be said to sum her up generally. It was characteristic of her hard

mocking mouth, of the glint in her bright malicious eyes, of the alert intelligence of her wits, and the inflexibility of her indomitable will.

The seat on Lady Marion and Mauve's right was graced by the young Duchess of Derwentwater, while Millington Crowther, M.P., a passionate Radical who regarded a vote as a prayer, fussed on the left.

The duchess was a willowy, Burne-Jones type of woman with large haggard eyes, sensual painted lips, and a livid complexion. On the strength of some indiscriminate rummaging among books on philosophy, theosophy, and the occult, and an equally artificially cultivated taste for the music of Strauss and Rimsky-Korsakoff, she fancied she was what she termed an "intellectual." The pose, however, which her naturally decadent appearance had suggested to her vanity was, save in so far as she dressed up to it, a failure, owing to the superficiality of her mind and an innate respect for the conventions she sought to override. On the present occasion she was garbed æsthetically in some cloudy, clinging fabric of a Liberty shade of magenta, and for ornaments wore long pendants of jade in her ears.

Miss Carisbrooke, a beautiful boyish-looking woman of twenty-five with a bored disdainful air, and Lord Malvern, a young Liberal peer who was popularly supposed to possess talents he had never displayed, but

the promise of which made at Oxford he was conscientiously trying to fulfil, made up the party.

"The only thing they have in common," was Carisbrooke's mental survey, "is an unreasoned prejudice against pugilism based on the Victorian conception of its brutality. To attempt to dispel it, or even shake it, is futile. Preconceived notions have the force of convictions. Still I feel like airing my superior knowledge. One gets so much satisfaction out of illumining the ignorance of others."

The gods had been good to Durward Carisbrooke —too good thought those whose prejudices and stupidity had goaded his cynicism to combats in which his rapier wit had fleshed them. They had given him health, wealth, good looks, agreeable manners, and position; and as he was still considerably under forty what more can a man desire to make life delectable? Love? The friends, and they were not a few, to whom he entrusted the key to the cupboard in which he kept the memory of his amours were of the opinion that his experience in affairs of the heart was wide and varied enough to constitute him an authority on the tender passion were he inclined to pose as such. His inconstancy, however, which such a statement implies, was to be attributed not so much to the fickleness of his nature as to his keen susceptibility to the current influences of daily existence. It was by no means confined to his relations with the fair sex, but extended to anything capable of arresting his attention. Once his interest was aroused he was, while it lasted, completely absorbed. This incapacity to check the impetuosity of an impulsive temperament caused him to be taken less seriously than he deserved, but it was not altogether without its advantages. What he lost in illusions, by the steady and sober cultivation of which others manage more or less successfully to adapt themselves to the mossy grooves of convention, whereby the ambition, happiness, purpose, what you will, of the vast majority of mortals of inconspicuous talent is realisable, he had gained in a sympathetic understanding of human nature and a broadness of vision.

His interest in prize-fighting, or the psychology of the ring as he termed it, was the latest caprice of his versatile mind. It had been aroused during a voyage home from the Far East, from whence he had but lately arrived, and the questionable fact was now being elicited from him by the inquisitiveness of Lady Marion and Mauve.

The frank shamelessness with which he spoke provoked her, as he meant it to.

"I always knew you were eccentric, Durward," she said, "but your previous hobbies have at least had the merit of refinement."

Her smelling-bottle added a couple of degrees more of frost to the sarcasm.

"You forget that I once had the hobby to run for Parliament," he replied with a smile. "Surely you do not call politics particularly refining? On the contrary, it was because I found the influence of political life positively coarsening that I gave it up. Believe me, there is more sincerity in the prize-ring than in that other ring known as Parliament."

Lord Malvern's green eyes were of a decidedly acid hue as his heavy intellect slowly prepared a crushing rejoinder. Millington Crowther cleared his throat and tapped the table with the blade of a knife as if to obtain silence for the venting of his own indignation. But Lady Marion and Mauve did not give them time to open their mouths.

"You are the last to talk of political sincerity, my dear Durward," she interposed impatiently. "If my memory does not deceive me you were chosen as the Conservative candidate for somewhere or other, and resigned in the middle of the campaign because, as you declared, you found yourself more in sympathy with the other side, whereby you deliberately deprived your party of a safe seat."

"There is such a thing as the honour of one's convictions, grandmother," he retorted. "When I entered

politics I had none, that was my misfortune. When I found them they made me think, that was the party's."

"There is also such a thing as the honour of one's party," said Millington Crowther, M.P., rebukingly. "When you sat in Parliament as a Liberal you lectured us as if you were a Tory. One could never tell in which lobby you would be found on a division."

"It is the only way a man has in the House of Commons of defending his convictions," replied Carisbrooke. "On becoming a Liberal it was left me to discover that Liberalism is frequently very different in office from what it is out."

"Pro-anything in, and Anti-everything out," observed Lady Marion and Mauve.

Crowther looked at her reproachfully. He wondered if she had read his letter in the *Times* that morning in which he advocated a censorship of cinematograph films.

"At any rate," he said, addressing Carisbrooke, "the vacillation of your own conduct can hardly be said to impress one with the stability of the convictions of the honour of which you appear so jealous."

"It is true my political experiences disillusioned me. But the loss of one's illusions does not necessarily imply instability of principle. In Parliament I was a free-lance."

"It is not a party of any weight in England," re-

marked Lord Malvern, who had been waiting for the chance to say something effective. "Only the caucus counts under our system. If one wishes to serve one's country one must obey one's party without question. Like Nelson, it expects every man to do his duty."

"*Mais revenons à nos moutons,*" said the duchess, in a toneless voice. "What has politics got to do with prize-fighting?" And fixing her haggard eyes on Carisbrooke with a sort of listless appeal she added, "How did you become interested in this brute?"

She would much rather had talked about magic or music, but politics!—well, even prize-fighting is preferable to an "intellectual" who regards life as an art and art as an emotion.

"Brute!" exclaimed Carisbrooke. "My dear duchess, I wonder what you would call him if you saw him."

"I am sure I should be frightened out of my wits. I feel quite creepy as it is. The mere thought of a prize-fighter suggests convicts and burglars and all sorts of horrible people."

"My *protégé* would be much more afraid of you than you would be of him, I assure you. I believe he would run a mile sooner than talk to a woman. He is as shy as he is beautiful."

"Beautiful?" she drawled doubtingly. "How very odd."

"Picture the body of a Discobolus with the head of an Antinous."

"Ah, he is an athlete, then. I have heard or read somewhere that these Greek survivals have the artistic temperament. Is he fond of art?"

The interest she had feigned suddenly acquired reality.

"I doubt if he has ever heard of it," replied Carisbrooke. "He is exceedingly elemental, like all his class."

"How clever of him," said the duchess. "Elemental people should always be decorative. It is their only means of exciting interest. You must bring him to one of my Wednesdays."

Carisbrooke burst into a laugh as he recalled the incense, the violet lights, and the neurotic music that were the conspicuous features of the Duchess of Derwentwater's Wednesdays.

"Vandal!" he exclaimed. "To take the picture out of the frame would be to rob it of half its charm. It is only in training quarters or in the prize-ring that one can properly admire it."

"Doubtless," remarked Lady Marion and Mauve, mockingly, "I don't approve of your taste in pictures, Durward, and I certainly trust you will have the good sense to refrain from exhibiting them."

"All the same," said the duchess, "I want to see this masterpiece."

"You will be horribly disappointed if you do," re-

marked Millington Crowther, M.P., heavily. "I remember once in my magisterial capacity trying two prize-fighters for a breach of the peace. It was the only time I have ever been brought into contact with such undesirable citizens. Their manners and appearance positively shocked me."

The duchess looked appealingly at Carisbrooke, who was ready enough to douche the intolerant Radical's righteous indignation with ridicule.

"On your own showing, Crowther," he said severely, "you are too prejudiced to be a just judge. To suffer you to try those unfortunate prize-fighters was a gross miscarriage of justice. You had condemned them before you heard them. I don't wonder they shocked you. They had the courage of their convictions, which is more than can be said for most people before a magistrate. The manners of my particular *protégé* would surprise you as much as his appearance. A sense of chivalry, let me inform you, is one of the conspicuous characteristics of the prize-ring."

"'A very parfait gentle knight,'" quoted the duchess. "What a *trouvaille,* Mr. Carisbrooke! But I don't think I want to meet him now. I imagine him talking in hexameters, and it would be such a disillusion to hear him drop his 'h's.' Men of his class are always so ungrammatical. Is he English?"

"No, he is an American."

The duchess made a little *moue* and placed the tips of her fingers against her ears.

"From the South, duchess," continued Carisbrooke, looking at her with a cynical smile. "A Southern accent is rather fascinating, you know."

"I suppose you will tell us next that your paragon is educated?" observed Lord Malvern, in a tone of detraction.

He didn't care in the least whether the fellow was or wasn't what Durward Carisbrooke claimed, but he did object to the manner in which he was championed. Between Carisbrooke and his prize-fighter the superior attainments of a Lord Malvern were quite thrown into the shade.

"He has certainly not taken a double first in the classics," replied Carisbrooke, "and as I have not examined him in the things one is supposed to learn at Oxford I am unable to say if he knows a little of the knowledge contained in books as the ordinary undergraduate or not. At any rate, like most Americans, he is very intelligent; and as he is fighting his way round the world from a desire to see it, I have no doubt his mind is well equipped with some very useful information."

Millington Crowther, M.P., sat back in his chair and laughed in that patronising manner age has of defending itself against youth.

"Well, well," he said, "I compliment you on your skill at making black appear white. Inimitably done as you do it, it is an amusing *jeu d'esprit*. But seriously 'white-washing,' whether it be an historical villain or pugilism, is not convincing. One *knows* that prize-fighting is a bestial and degrading pastime."

"Certainly," said Lady Marion and Mauve, "and it is preposterous, Durward, to argue the contrary. It is a thing that nine out of ten people take for granted."

"Because nine out of ten people are too busy, too bored, or too prejudiced to study the subject," retorted Carisbrooke, with the air of one who is determined to stick to his guns. "Their opinions are based on what they have been told and not on what they know. You are all opposed to pugilism on the strength of what you have heard of its brutality. Most people imagine prize-fighters look, as the duchess said just now, like 'convicts or burglars' which is to beg the question. What do you think convicts look like, any way? Surely, duchess, you are not so elemental as to believe that men sentenced to penal-servitude must necessarily look like an actor who dresses for the *rôle* on the stage? It is in the theatre it strikes me that the popular conception of a convict was originally formed. It is just as absurd to imagine that a prize-fighter must necessarily resemble the brute he has so often been depicted in novels because one occasionally sees men of a low type of

physical development in the ring, whereas anybody who knows anything of the subject at all will tell you that they are and always have been the exception. That fact, no doubt, emphasised them, and woven into Victorian prejudices formed the tradition on which the present aversion to the ring is based. The average pugilist is a magnificent-looking creature, and the modern rules and the improved economic and social conditions of the people have produced some splendid specimens. Intellectually, if one can apply such a term to the strata of society to which they belong, the average American pugilist, thanks to the spirit of independence and sense of political equality native to his countrymen, is as superior to his English confrère as the present style of fighting in the ring is superior to that of the past."

He spoke with the confident assurance of a man who knows what he is talking about, but its effect was quite wasted on his hearers. Lady Marion and Mauve contemptuously left it to her smelling-bottle to express her opinion, which it did very eloquently. Millington Crowther, M.P., whose knowledge of the subject was extremely superficial, as that of prejudiced people always is, discreetly entrenched himself behind the patronising sceptical air he had assumed, under cover of which he sniped a remark to the effect that God forbid he should have any desire to pose as an authority on prize-fight-

ing, but he failed to see how the handsome looks of a pugilist could make pugilism any less degrading.

"On the contrary," retorted Carisbrooke, "on your own showing the fact that good looks are the rule and not the exception in the modern ring is a powerful argument in my favour. Surely if pugilism was really as bestial and degrading as you claim, the effect should be at once apparent in the face of the fighter. Before you hyper-sensitive humanitarians set out to preach a crusade against pugilism you would do well to obtain your impression of its iniquity first-hand."

"And are all these people like your *protégé*, Mr. Carisbrooke?" asked the duchess, sympathetically.

She really did not care in the least about the ethics of pugilism; she only required to be assured that it was æsthetic for her previous prejudice to vanish.

"All is a pretty tall order, duchess," he laughed, "but for looks I'll back the ring to hold its own against any other caste in our social system. If it is mainly beauty you are looking for, nowhere will you find finer types—certainly not in professional or artistic circles."

"All the same," put in Lord Malvern, with the gravity on which his reputation for ability rested, "good looks do not necessarily imply that their possessor is humane. I regard pugilism as inhuman, cruel, and demoralising. The prize-fighter at his best is only a survival from a coarser society and a less civilised age

than our own. You spoke just now, Carisbrooke, of the superiority of the modern style of fighting to that of the last century as if it were an argument against the charge of brutality. Well, like Crowther, I do not pretend to pose as an authority on pugilism, but I have always understood from what I have read and heard that the famous Queensberry Rules on which the modern system you laud so highly is based, have actually *increased* the brutality of pugilism instead of the contrary." And Lord Malvern looked across at Millington Crowther, M. P. as much as to say, "I think we've got him there."

But Durward Carisbrooke was not to be cornered.

"Prejudice, my dear fellow, prejudice," he exclaimed. "The authorities you quote belong to that class of ethical busy-bodies so common in England who cannot tolerate the existence of anything they happen to disapprove of, and justify their conduct on the ground that what they disapprove of must be wrong. In their anxiety to suppress pugilism, which they cordially disapprove of, these people knowing that a return to the old system is impossible would fain have the public believe that the Queensberry Rules, which were popularly supposed to have made pugilism more humane by introducing the wearing of padded gloves, have in reality increased the brutality of the sport. Surely before accepting their opinion that the punish-

ment of a blow from a gloved hand is worse than that from the bare knuckles it might be as well, one would think, to get the opinion of the fighter himself on the subject."

"I have," said Lord Malvern. "I recollect reading in a newspaper only a few days ago that a pugilist, giving evidence at the inquest of a man who had died in the ring, stated it was more painful to be hit by a gloved hand than by a bare fist."

He spoke cautiously in a manner suggestive of a bather who in entering the water fears lest at any moment he may find himself out of his depth.

"My dear Malvern," returned Carisbrooke, with a laugh. "Where is your sense of humour? The idea of a prize-fighter at a coroner's inquest is delicious. I can picture the state of nerves he must have been in. Unless he was some inexperienced novice he no doubt meant just the opposite of what he said."

"You ridicule everything," said Malvern, huffily, feeling that he *had* got out of his depth. "Pray, what sort of evidence will satisfy you?"

"The report of what may still be regarded as the most celebrated prize-fight of modern times—the contest between Tom Sayers and Heenan which took place in 1860, six years before the Queensberry Rules were even thought of. It was the last fight under the old system which it brought into such disrepute as to

finish it and very nearly finish pugilism along with it. Heenan was an American Hercules. Sayers was English and much smaller and lighter. The difference of nationality and the disparity in the size and weight of the two men aroused immense interest which the attempts of the magistrates to prohibit the fight only increased. At last, after being chased out of eight counties, the men managed to meet at Farnborough in the presence of a large crowd in which there were so many notabilities as to give rise to the report that Parliament had been emptied to patronise a prize-fight. The contest, which was of the most sensational character, ended in a draw, Heenan failing to win as he should have done according to all accounts because his hands, not being properly hardened, swelled so that his blows, please note, *were no more effective than if he had worn boxing-gloves.*"

Having fired this shot, Carisbrooke stopped for a moment to observe its effect, and perceiving that all was confusion in the enemies' camp he ruthlessly proceeded to take advantage of it.

"I do not assert that the conduct of a modern prize-fight is above reproach, but I do maintain that it is a vast improvement on the old style of fighting. That was brutal and cruel if you like. Under the old system, to avoid being arrested for a breach of the peace, the combatants met by stealth in some secluded

spot. They fought without gloves, and in addition to the blows they received from the bare fist they were liable to be gashed and crippled by the spikes they wore in their shoes, or to have their ribs crushed by the processes known as 'the cross-buttock' and 'the back-heel,' which enabled an adversary to throw you on the ground and then fall on you."

"Really, Durward," protested Lady Marion and Mauve, "you make me positively faint. Your horrible new hobby is convicted out of your own mouth."

But Carisbrooke's interest in the subject was fully aroused, and once mounted on a favourite horse he rode it for all it was worth. Moreover, only old Lady Marion and Mauve and her smelling-bottle made any attempt to check him. As for the others, they listened as people always did when he talked, for though they might disagree with him he had the faculty of holding their attention.

"The spectators too," he continued regardless of his grandmother's interruption, "who now unfortunately as then are the most objectionable feature of a prize-fight, frequently struck the adversaries. There were rules, of course, but it was more often a matter of mob-law and dodging the police. A fair fight was the exception, the man on whom the most money was staked being assured of the protection requisite to make the contest a win, tie, or no decision which invariably

ended in a free fight. The Queensberry Rules have changed all that. Nowadays, the men meet in padded rings in the presence of properly behaved people who have paid high for their places. Of course, hard blows are exchanged, but those who receive them are supposed to be inured to them, otherwise they have no business there. Prize-fighters are the gladiators of modern times, and they are, or should be, perfectly trained. If they are in the pink of condition their flesh should be almost bruise proof. Under the style of fighting at present in vogue the 'bruiser,' as he was called in the past, whose mutilated features gave rise to the popular notion of a pugilist resembling a convict as the duchess put it, has practically disappeared from the ring. As evidence that prize-fighting no longer involves permanent facial disfigurement one has only to look at the pictures of the latest champions. The features of John L. Sullivan, James J. Corbett, Bob Fitzsimmons, and Jeffries, to name a few familiar names, show neither scar nor blemish. Like the old-time 'bruiser,' broken noses, blackened eyes, and swollen ears are seldom seen nowadays—even the teeth remain in the mouth. A wet sponge will generally remove all traces of conflict, and if there is the prospect of a bout becoming one-sided it is the duty of the referee to call a halt and render a decision. That is what he is for."

Slightly flushed by the interest he took in the subject, Carisbrooke glanced eagerly round the table as if seeking further objections to demolish. Lady Marion and Mauve manifested a willingness to oblige him, but in a manner designed to exterminate the subject altogether.

"Words, Durward, mere words," she snapped mockingly. "You may talk all night but you will never convince me that prize-fighting is anything but brutal, old style or new."

"It is impossible to argue with a woman," he replied with a shrug. "She never reasons, she ridicules."

"A woman judges by her instinct," returned Lady Marion and Mauve. "It seldom deceives her."

"Because it only expresses her prejudices. Women and humanitarians are never open to conviction. Dare you deny it, Crowther?"

Thus addressed, Millington Crowther, M.P., who held, poised midway between his mouth and the table, a glass of champagne which he was contemplating reflectively, set it down and replied cautiously, "My dear fellow, your knowledge of the topic we were discussing is so much greater than mine that you have me at a complete disadvantage"; adding with a Parthian shot as he retreated behind a bland smile, "To strip pugilism of its more repulsive features does not necessarily endow it with virtue."

"That it possessed from the start," exclaimed Carisbrooke eagerly, and having found the objection he sought he proceeded to annihilate it. "Such a man as Lord Chesterfield with the superior refinement of his intellect, the grace and polish of his manner, does more real injury to morality than the public exhibitions of boxing have ever done. The spectacle of a prize-fight only brutalises those who are already brutal. It has its spiritual side too——"

"Prize-fighting spiritual! What next, Durward?" scoffed Lady Marion and Mauve.

"Yes, in the spectacle of the utmost limit of human endurance and courage. To observe that blackguards have been found in the ring is no argument against prize-fighting, nor to object that it encourages gambling. The same charge can be brought against every sport, every profession. The ring is the school of virtue, *par excellence*. It teaches men to admire true courage, acquire notions of honour and generosity, to bear hardship without a murmur and display fortitude in adversity. Above all, it awakens and develops the spirit of chivalry, the noblest of all the virtues. For it teaches the winner of a fight to show humanity and not to trample on a fallen foe. It also stimulates patriotism."

"And debases all it teaches by instilling the lust of money and subordinating everything to profit," said

Lord Malvern, with the vehemence of a sudden inspiration. "The prize for which he fights prostitutes the pugilist. It is there that the real degradation and bestiality of the ring lies."

The grossness of the immorality the words suggested was like a sudden exposure of imposture which placed the subject beyond the pale of argument.

"I knew there was something to justify my instinct," said Lady Marion and Mauve, triumphantly.

Millington Crowther, M.P., discarded his defensive attitude of bland tolerance and assumed his habitual air of righteous indignation.

"And is the prize-fighter alone to be denied the reward of achievement permitted to others?" remarked Carisbrooke, disdainfully. "Poets, painters, admirals, generals, aye and statesmen, are all actuated by one powerful stimulus—the prize. I contend that as the love of fame and the sweets of reward elevate them, so they elevate the successful boxer. The purse he wins contains honour as well as money. With fortune he gains fame and friends."

"Yet for all the virtues with which you credit them they are pariahs," insisted Malvern, who felt the ground under his feet again. "Who ever heard of a prize-fighter with the ambition or ability to improve his station in life? The prize-ring leads either to a public-house or a prison."

"Or Parliament," added Carisbrooke, quietly. "You forget John Gully the butcher's boy, who after retiring from the ring represented Pontefract in the House of Commons."

"Pshaw! that is a classical exception. A single instance proves nothing."

"There is also the case of John Morrissey who was elected to the United States Congress."

"But the rest open public-houses and drink themselves to death. If the influence of the ring was what you claim, its effect should be so apparent as to require no defence."

Millington Crowther, M.P., who was talking in an undertone to Lady Marion and Mauve, emboldened by Malvern's last remark, which he had overheard, emphasised it with a vehement "Hear, hear!"

"As long as society persists in regarding the ring as anti-social its influence will always appear vicious," replied Carisbrooke, warmly. "Give the pugilist a chance to prove his worth and with his emotional, impulsive temperament he will make the most of it. A man who has been trained to despise cowardice, not to harbour resentment, to discountenance treachery, and to decide impartially has the making in him of an ideal citizen. If the prize-fighter is a pariah it is entirely the fault of society."

"Rubbish, Durward, be serious if you can!" exclaimed Lady Marion and Mauve.

"I was never more so, grandmother."

"If you mean to suggest that we should receive prize-fighters into our homes, treat them as ourselves, and marry them, well, I say you are mad!"

Carisbrooke laughed maliciously.

"All the same, society opens its doors very wide nowadays, and as for marrying—is there such a thing as a *mésalliance* any more, grandmother?"

"Alas!" she exclaimed, "there is a certain truth in what you say. I was looking through Burke the other day and was astonished to find how few of the peers of late years have pedigrees."

"They have at least possessed ability of some sort, worthy of respect," said Lord Malvern. "Brains count in these days."

He spoke rather huffily. As the son of a rich manufacturer whose barony, which he was the second to hold, was due to his money and a taste for philanthropy and politics cultivated late in life, Lord Malvern resented recalling what everybody else had forgotten.

"And why not physical perfection too?" demanded Carisbrooke. "Is that priceless gift of the gods to count for nothing? The average of intellect among the Greeks and Romans was quite as high as with us, and the standard of taste considerably higher. They were

wont to erect statues to athletes. Had Jack Delane lived when Greece was in her glory, Pheidias would have immortalised him in marble, and his mutilated torso or head would be regarded as the gem of whatever Museum was fortunate enough to possess them. But seriously, I fail to see why we should not regard prize-fighters as charitably as we have come to regard actors. There was a time, you know, when the actor was considered a pariah too."

"The thing is impossible," said Malvern, impatiently, "why even in antiquity a boxer had no social status."

"Because a thing has never been done is no reason why it should not be done," retorted Carisbrooke. "The age in which we live is busy doing things that have never been done before."

"The things that have never been done are the only things worth doing," murmured the duchess.

Miss Carisbrooke, who had hitherto refrained from expressing any opinion on the subject under discussion, suddenly broke the silence she had observed to ask her brother how he had become interested in his latest hobby. She was really quite indifferent as to the information she demanded. Her question was merely an involuntary protest against the continuance of a conversation that bored her between people who bored her still more.

"Yes," exclaimed the duchess, whose conception of

the prize-ring as a human *abbatoir* had completely changed on learning that prize-fighters on entering it were metamorphosed from butchers into demi-gods. "Do tell us about your Discobolus with the head of Antinous."

Durward Carisbrooke smiled curiously at the interest the duchess manifested, and turning to his sister said in reply to her question—

"It was on the voyage home from Colombo, Claudia. I had rather a bad touch of fever in Ceylon. It left me as weak as a kitten and very depressed. At first I was too sorry for myself to take an interest in anything, and ungraciously repulsed the efforts of such of my fellow-passengers as sought, out of pity for me, to arouse it. My indifference was such that I never even noticed the occupants of the chairs on either side of mine till going on deck one morning in the Red Sea I found a volume of Tennyson in my seat. I sat down and dipped into the book in a listless sort of fashion. Suddenly it was claimed by a voice at my side, and I at once surrendered it with a frigid apology, designed to discourage any attempt at further conversation. Something, however—I think it was the peculiarly winning voice in which I had been addressed—caused me to observe the speaker rather more closely than I should otherwise have done. I perceived that he was an extraordinarily handsome young man of about four or five-

and-twenty, who looked as if he might be a tea-planter, or engineer, or something of that sort. His hands in particular claimed my attention. There was something brutal in their shape, in their suggestion of muscular strength, and in the discoloration of the skin which was bruised and swollen as if from some severe blow given or received. The sight of a volume of Tennyson in such hands struck me as so incongruous that my curiosity was aroused. The appearance of a rough-looking fellow, evidently his friend, who sat on the other side of him and was engrossed in some vulgar journal printed on pink paper and profusely illustrated only served to make the incongruity of his taste for poetry the more pronounced. Kipling I could have understood, but Tennyson! . . .

"After a time he got up and walked up and down the deck. The ease and grace with which he carried himself were superb. His every movement was instinct with perfect health and strength. The impression of immense and unconscious physical force which he made upon me seemed to intensify the consciousness of my own debility. Nothing excites envy like the indifference in another to the possession of what one lacks in oneself. Watching him as he passed and repassed me I would have given anything to have changed places with him. In my weak state it seemed as if all I possessed in the way of intellect, education, and social advantages was

of no consequence compared to his splendid physique. When he resumed his seat and his Tennyson his presence affected me like a powerful stimulant, as if the vigour of his person impregnated the air around him with boldness, confidence, and force. To my surprise I found myself talking to him. At first he appeared diffident and embarrassed, but I persisted, invigorated by the spell his splendid health and strength had cast upon me. Besides there was a curious gentleness in his eyes, a peculiar softness in his voice that attracted me. From that day I began to mend, the interest he had aroused in me diverted my thoughts from myself. He was intelligent too, but somehow our intercourse never seemed to get beyond the exchange of commonplaces. He was not communicative; at the end of a week all I knew of him was that he was an American from the Southern States and was travelling round the world; of his profession or occupation I learnt nothing, of his tastes only a fondness for poetry, particularly Tennyson.

"Imagine, then, my surprise when the ship's doctor informed me casually one day that he was a professional prize-fighter, Jack Delane by name, the hero of two hundred and fifty battles, in the last of which he had lately won the middle-weight championship of Australia from Joe Shannon—the reader of the illustrated pink paper—who was accompanying him to England. You

should have seen his confusion when I laughingly upbraided him for keeping such an interesting piece of news from me. His modesty in refraining from any mention of his success in the ring astonished me. It seemed incredible that a prize-fighter of all people should be silent where others who have acquired fame are only too ready to boast of their achievements. The contrast between the quiet, unassuming demeanour of the fellow and the aggressive nature of his occupation fired my curiosity with the result, to cut a long story short, that I have become, as you see, an enthusiast on the ring. *Voilà!*"

"And pray," remarked Lady Marion and Mauve, sarcastically, "may I ask to what extent your enthusiasm has led you? Do you contemplate becoming a pugilist yourself?"

Carisbrooke held up his hands protestingly. "My dear grandmother," he said with an exasperating smile. "The very question convicts you of a profound ignorance of the subject. Pugilists, like poets, are born, not made. Now, can you in the mildest flight of your imagination picture me contending with such a ruffian as you conceive a pugilist to be? What chance do you think I should have of leaving the ring alive?"

Lady Marion and Mauve judiciously left the answer to her smelling-bottle, while the duchess fixed her

haggard eyes on Carisbrooke and exclaimed impatiently—

"What a thrilling adventure! But you have not told us the end. I am dying to know what has become of your fascinating *protégé*."

"Oh," laughed Durward, "the end of the story is soon told. On leaving the boat I told him to let me know if I could be of use to him at any time. He took me at my word, and the other day he wrote to tell me he was matched to meet Sam Crowfoot, the middleweight champion of the world, and to ask me if I could recommend him a quiet healthy place to train in. As I happened to have a cottage vacant at Asbury I offered it to him. He jumped at it, and yesterday he went down to take possession with his trainer and sparring partner."

"At Asbury!" said Lady Marion and Mauve, shrill with indignation. "Do you mean to tell me that you have actually installed these—these—people within a stone's throw of your sister? My poor Claudia!"

She regarded her granddaughter with an air of commiseration which seemed to demand some expression of mutual agreement from that young lady. But Miss Carisbrooke, who had appeared to take as little interest in her brother's account of his meeting with the pugilist as she had shown in the discussion on pugilism that preceded it, maintained an attitude of bored indifference.

A smile of disdain was the only sign she gave that she was not entirely inattentive to the conversation, when her brother retorted lightly—

"Oh, never fear, grandmother, Claudia won't be in the way at Asbury. She won't be allowed to get so much as a glimpse of Delane. His trainer will see to that. When a pugilist is in training, he is most carefully watched, and the greatest care is taken to keep women out of the way."

"*C'est trop,* Durward!" exclaimed Lady Marion and Mauve, now thoroughly scandalised. "I am sure you might at least allow us to take the morals of your Apaches for granted."

And perceiving that a footman had just entered the room with coffee she seized the opportunity to put a stop to further discussion by catching the eye of the duchess, who responded as reluctantly to her signal to withdraw as Miss Carisbrooke seemed eager to welcome it.

CHAPTER II.

One drowsy afternoon in June, some four or five weeks later, Claudia Carisbrooke sat on the terrace at Asbury Court, her brother's place in Surrey. Asbury, by the way, was reputed to be the finest specimen of Tudor architecture in England—a distinction that was claimed by numerous other similar structures in various parts of the kingdom. At her feet dozed a venerable collie, and near her, under an enormous blue and yellow Japanese umbrella, whose shade was rendered superfluous by the shadow which the stately mansion cast over the terrace, reposed in a luxurious wicker chair a young and fashionably dressed woman with straw-coloured hair and a conch-like complexion. Claudia was herself most becomingly clad in a frock of shaded chiffon, of a style best described as a "creation" or a "dream." In her hand, whose fingers were richly caparisoned with gems, she held a yellow-covered French novel. She had evidently found it dull, for the book drooped towards her lap, and the lids of her violet eyes were closed.

Suddenly the clock in the great rose-red tower above struck three, and a white peacock which had been preening itself at the end of the terrace flapped with a screech into the old-world pleasaunce below.

At the sound the collie fidgeted at Claudia's feet, and the voice of the lady under the gaudy umbrella sleepily enquired—

"What's that?"

"Only a peacock startled by the bell in the tower. It has just struck three."

"Three! Isn't that the hour the post is due?"

In expectation of some evidently important communication, Mrs. Appleby roused herself from her recumbent position.

"No, the post generally arrives with the tea."

"Ah, then, I shall have time for another forty winks. You won't mind, will you, Claudia? I'm so drowsy."

Miss Carisbrooke smiled rather contemptuously.

"I daresay the terrace will compensate me for the lack of conversation. It is the one place I never tire of. The view, you know——"

But Mrs. Appleby had already relapsed into the arms of Morpheus, and Claudia was left to contemplate the view from the terrace in silence.

The prospect on which she gazed was one of the glories of Asbury, and had been frequently celebrated

by poets and painters. Indeed, apart from the view it commanded, the terrace itself with its ornamental balustrade covered with lichen and the moss clustering in green and russet patches between the flags with which it was paved, was the most notable feature of the ancestral home of the Carisbrookes. It was here that the ghost of Lady de Carisbrooke, murdered by the hand of her husband, the wicked Sir Durward, had walked for three centuries. Time had established the legend too firmly for its authenticity to be open to question. In the course of her interminable nocturnal peregrinations the former chatelaine had been seen and heard too often for anyone down in Asbury village at all events to doubt her presence. At the Carisbrooke Arms, where the "ghost" up at the Court was the stock topic of conversation at closing-time, it was reported that the present lord of the manor and his sister had been heard to flout the tradition which gave so romantic a lustre to their ancient lineage. But the report only served to stiffen the faith of the villagers in "the walking lady," as they called her — for it was the common talk of the village that the squire believed in nothing at all, while his sister was indifferent to everything.

It was, however, certainly not of her ancestress's ghost that Claudia Carisbrooke was thinking as she sat on the haunted terrace at Asbury and gazed musingly

out over flowering pleasaunce and wooded park upon the wide expanse of the verdant Surrey hills basking in the distance, in the hazy, slumberous air. If, as she had said, the view afforded her compensation for the drowsiness which deprived her of Mrs. Appleby's conversation, the fact was not apparent from the expression of her face. She regarded the scene with the same disdainful indifference she had displayed throughout the dinner at her grandmother's. This attitude, indeed, she observed on most occasions. It was the hall-mark of her manners, her actions, and her thoughts, but not of her temperament. It was a habit she had acquired rather than the expression of her real nature; a mask she wore, so cleverly contrived as to deceive the casual beholder into mistaking it for the face it covered. As it is by their masks that most people are recognised, so it is by the character of their masks that they are judged. Claudia Carisbrooke was thought to be cold and contemptuous. In reality she was passionate and sympathetic. Her manner, by which she conveyed the contrary impression, was a common symptom of the vague disease of which she sickened, like Lady Clara Vere de Vere in the poem —the disease of those who "know so ill to bear with time."

An insupportable *ennui* cankered her whole existence. One may die from a surfeit as well as from

starvation. At the banquet of life to which destiny had bidden her there had been a plethora of good things. Gorged with a lofty and independent position, the *pièce de resistance* of the *menu,* she had lost all appetite for the other courses. The power to gratify every wish was a ragout too rich for her taste, beauty a sweet that cloyed the palate, admiration a savoury devoid of relish. The very profusion of the graces and gifts that fortune had so generously lavished on her dimmed the perception of their worth. The small amount of pleasure she derived from them caused her to doubt and depreciate their value. In the sphere to which she belonged rank was a matter of course. She never gave it a thought. It was no more to her than one of those simple necessities of life, which one has to lack before their importance is realised. The possession of a private fortune enabled her to regulate her life as she pleased, but her independence had its disadvantages and entailed responsibilities she had no wish to incur. Her intelligence too, sharpened and polished by a good education, only made her impatient of ignorance and stupidity in others. She could not refrain from treating Society, which she found vain and vapid, with disdain. But in Society much is forgiven those to whom much has been given, and when Miss Carisbrooke of Asbury smote it on one cheek it meekly turned to her the other.

Disdaining it, as she did, one might have thought she would drop out of it altogether. She would, indeed, have done so willingly enough, had the alternative been sufficiently alluring, but the occupations of those of her class who had foresworn the pomps and vanities of the world made no appeal to her. Besides, Society, after all, was her native element, and as such as necessary to her as water to a fish. As for her beauty, the possession of which might at least be supposed to afford her satisfaction, she understood the transitory nature of good looks too well to indulge any vanity on that score. Taught by the experience of others that the slightest wrinkle may become the grave of the greatest love, she was utterly indifferent to a gift that might be taken from her to-morrow. *Blasée* by flattery, which she detested, it bored her as much to reject an offer as to receive it. Under such circumstances it is not surprising that far from taking any pleasure in her beauty she regarded it as a burden.

To escape the *ennui* that devoured her she had tried to create hobbies like her brother; but she lacked his enthusiasm, and the interest she manifested in them was perfunctory and artificial. The ease with which she did whatever she attempted soon robbed them of all fascination. If she hunted, her horse was always in at the death. If she fished, she was sure to land the biggest salmon or the shyest trout. She had climbed

the most difficult mountains hoping to find a thrill in the danger only to learn to despise it. She had gone round the world in quest of novelty and returned satiated with adventures. In a word, her luxurious existence had no *revers de médaille*. To her emotional nature a life so smooth and uneventful was galling. And so secretly pining for the realisation of some vague idea of happiness that was denied her she "wearied of the rolling hours."

To-day they wearied her rather more than usual. As she sat on the terrace at Asbury in the shade of its rose-red turrets she was bored, very bored. She gazed on the view which poets and painters had celebrated without perceiving it, so to speak, like one reading automatically in a fit of abstraction.

Fortune, so fickle to others, and so faithful to her, had just given her another embarrassing proof of its devotion. In other words, the Duke of Dorking, one of the greatest all-round catches in England, after timidly pursuing her all the season had finally plucked up the courage to beard the lion of her disdain and ask her to marry him.

Now, contemptuous though she was of the roses and perfumes with which her path through life had been strewn and sprinkled to so little purpose, she was not insensible to the splendour of the offer she had received. It is not all women who care to wear a ducal coronet,

but there are none who have the opportunity of refusing the honour so indifferent as not to pride themselves secretly on it afterwards. In the observance of every Lent there are always certain things we deny ourselves that we regard as of greater importance than others. So Miss Carisbrooke, to whom to reject or to receive a proposal had always been equally tiresome, unwilling to say "Yes" and unable to say "No" found the unusual dilemma in which she was placed still more boring.

The duke having spoken, in spite of her efforts to prevent him, had pressed for a definite answer.

"I know you do not love me," he had said, "but that makes no difference at all. I will support the deficiency somehow, and trust to luck. One of these days, perhaps, you may grow to care for me."

"But I am accustomed to do as I like. Since I came of age, I have been the absolute mistress of my actions. My brother has never attempted to curtail my freedom in any way, I have my own flat in town, as you know, and I come and go between it and Asbury as I please. To lose my independence, to be tied in any way, particularly to a man I did not love, would be intolerable. Such a marriage would end in disaster."

The duke flouted the suggestion.

"I want you for my wife," he pleaded, "not for my chattel. Far from losing your independence you will

gain more. If Miss Carisbrooke is free to do what she likes, can you doubt that any limit can be set to the liberty of action of the Duchess of Dorking?"

There was no denying the force of the comparison. Certainly as Duchess of Dorking there was no length to which she could not go in expressing disdain of people and things that bored her.

"Well," she said, "I must have time to think it over."

To the lover such hesitation is fraught with hope.

"Take a year and a day," he laughed exultantly.

"Oh, a week will be enough. You shall have an answer, yes or no, at the reception at the American Embassy."

He had accepted the condition eagerly, and she had come down to Asbury to "think it over," accompanied by Mrs. Appleby, one of those convenient people worth cultivating when they can be found, ready to go anywhere with one at a moment's notice, from running down to Brighton for a week-end or out to Biarritz or to Bucharest for a week. She had a husband, a still more convenient person, who let her do what she pleased, gave her the money to do it with, and never asked questions, nor answered them for that matter, a characteristic that, not being in the least inquisitive about *his* conduct, did not disturb her at all. Fashionable and frivolous, Mrs. Appleby was also good-natured and

entertaining. She and Claudia had known one another since childhood, and were supposed by everybody, including Mrs. Appleby herself, to be intimate friends. But Claudia Carisbrooke was not the person to make a confidante of any woman, and her friendship for Mildred Appleby, whom she regarded as a flighty but companionable person, was limited to receiving and keeping her secrets.

They had arrived at Asbury the previous night by motor without sending word of their coming. Claudia liked to arrive in this way, it made her feel that her brother's place which she loved, though she preferred the independence of her own establishment in town, was still her home. Durward, who from the death of their parents, when she was a child of twelve and he scarcely ten years older, till her twenty-first birthday, had been her guardian, and spoilt her outrageously, never dreamt of questioning anything she did.

"As you please," he said, when she informed him that she had taken a flat in London but intended to come back whenever she felt inclined, "you are the mistress of Asbury as long as I remain unmarried."

So its mistress she continued, coming and going as she pleased like her brother, the servants being instructed to have the house always ready for their reception.

It was the very smoothness of this luxurious exis-

tence that made the Duke of Dorking's proposal so tiresome to consider. It offered her very few advantages she did not already possess, and actually deprived her of one. If she said "Yes" she would but chain herself the tighter to her splendid shallow existence and extinguish the hope of ever escaping its *ennui*. If she said "No" the chain would not be appreciably looser while the hope would remain, though apparently there was no probability of its ever being realised. The worst of it was, the Duke of Dorking was an extremely good-looking, agreeable, and sensible man, calculated quite apart from the temptation of his rank, to appeal to the imagination of any woman less *blasée* than herself. Try as she would, however, she could not persuade herself that he was capable of making her happy. To expect to get the happiness she demanded of life by marrying was preposterous. Yet to refuse him seemed equally so. Though she had hitherto refrained from marrying, she had no intention of remaining single all her life. Knowing she could marry when she pleased she had put off doing so in the hope of meeting someone she could love; but as the years passed and he came not, it might be foolish to delay any longer. Besides, if it was her destiny to marry a man she did not love, Dorking would suit her better than most. Personally his society was not uncongenial to her, and he only bored her when he behaved as he did now and

compelled her to decide whether she would have him or not.

Anyhow, "thinking it over" in the soporific air of the terrace, was very provoking and tiresome. Had an answer been demanded of her then and there, she would have said no for a certainty. The glare made her eyes blink; she glanced at the book in her lap, but after turning a page or two her lids drooped heavily, and in another second she would have been fast asleep like Mrs. Appleby when the sound of a footstep on the terrace caused her to open her eyes with a start.

"Well, Charles?" she asked fretfully, as a loutish youth, who had recently been promoted from the stables to the butler's pantry, approached.

"Please, my lady," he stammered, addressing her after the fashion of the folk in the village, who regarded her as much too grand to be without a title, "the man wot's at Park Cottage would like a word o' ye."

"Haven't you been told by Clarke or Mrs. Budgeon that I never see anyone on business between lunch and tea?"

Charles, who was feeling very awkward in his new livery, flushed to the roots of his tow-coloured hair. The fear that he had been guilty of some enormity for which he would be sent back to the stables, deprived him of speech, and he could only look at his mistress stupidly. But his confusion amused her and gave him

a claim to sympathy in her eyes which a perfectly trained footman would have lacked.

"Who is this person?" she asked more gently. "What does he want?"

"'E be Jack Delane, my lady, stuttered the churl, thus encouraged, "wot be training at Park Cottage for the fight."

"The fight?" exclaimed Claudia, in a tone of perplexity. "Now, Charles, what *do* you mean?"

"The great prize-fight, my lady, with Sam Crowfoot for the middle-weight championship of the world. Squire give 'e Park Cottage to train in."

For an instant the words conveyed nothing to Claudia. She had entirely forgotten the dinner-party at her grandmother's at which she had been so bored.

"Prize-fight," she murmured to herself, repeating the word as if trying to recall the connection in which its purport was vaguely familiar to her. Suddenly the recollection of her brother's interest in the exponents of the "noble art" flashed upon her. She remembered the discussion to which it had given rise; though seemingly abstracted at the time she had heard every word, and it all came back to her now. In particular she recalled Lady Marion and Mauve's dread lest she should meet her brother's brutal *protégé*, and Durward's rejoinder that she would not be permitted to get so much as a

glimpse of him. And now here was the man himself actually asking for an interview with her!

"Have you any idea what he wants to see me about, Charles?" she asked, with no little curiosity.

"No, my lady."

"Something to do with Durward, I suppose," she said to herself. "Well, there was no reason why she should refuse to see him; it could not be more boring to hear what he had to say than to think over the Duke of Dorking's offer. Besides, she had never seen a prize-fighter, and everything considered she was rather curious to get the glimpse of this one that should have been denied her.

"Well, I will see what he wants," she said aloud, rising as she spoke.

Mrs. Appleby, who had been awakened by the sound of voices, put out a detaining hand.

"See the fellow here, Claudia," she pleaded. "I am simply dying to look at him."

But the *frisson* she desired was not vouchsafed her.

"If he is presentable I'll ask him to tea," was as far as Miss Carisbrooke would condescend to oblige her, as with a disdainful smile she followed the footman into the house.

CHAPTER III.

He was waiting in the great hall in which Queen Elizabeth had once tripped a measure with Essex, and where beneath the time-blackened oaken hammer-beams that supported its magnificent Gothic roof banners and standards that had once floated in the breeze at Edgehill and Naseby and Marston Moor hung in tatters. Underneath these trophies, that some Cavalier ancestor had rescued from dishonour in the rout of the royal armies, and above the tapestries with which the lower portion of the stone walls were covered, Carisbrookes of both sexes, all ages and various periods looked forth from among the armour and arquebuses in the midst of which they hung.

Dingy with age and badly painted by inferior artists, these ancestral portraits, apart from a purely family interest, were devoid of any claim to consideration, with the single exception of a picture by Lely of La Belle Carisbrooke, as Bellona. Artistically encircled with spear-heads and illumined by the light from a great mullioned window, on whose heavily leaded panes the arms of the

Carisbrookes, blazoned in gold and vert on shields of azure barred with silver and sable, glittered against the sky, the portrait of this celebrated light o' love at the court of the Merry Monarch occupied a conspicuous position above the fireplace in which an ox might have been roasted whole. Here, in this splendid seclusion the beauty was accustomed to receive almost as much admiration as she had formerly kindled at Whitehall and Windsor. No one entered the hall without observing her, few without pausing a moment or longer to look at her.

Upon the prize-fighter, who beheld her now for the first time with a sunbeam dancing on her golden curls and flushing as if with life the delicate flesh tints of her exquisite face whose blue eyes languishingly returned his gaze, she appeared to have made a particularly deep impression. Absorbed in contemplation of the picture he was not aware of Claudia's presence till he heard her saying behind him in a tone of interrogation——

"You wished to see me, I believe?"

At the sound of her voice he started. For an instant he half fancied that the words had been uttered by the smiling lips of the beauty who seemed to breathe on the canvas before him.

"I am the sister of Mr. Durward Carisbrooke," she added by way of explanation.

He turned abruptly, and stared at her in wonder-

ment, as if he were under the illusion that she had stepped out of the canvas and was standing beside him.

"I could have told that at a glance," he said, collecting himself hurriedly and adding, as if in apology for his abstraction, "I would have recognised you from your portrait."

The undisguised admiration with which his eyes wandered from her face to that of the beauty over the fireplace and back again was somewhat disconcerting.

"Oh," she laughed, "many people have professed to see a resemblance, but I confess I have never been able to detect it myself."

She tried to speak carelessly but she could not prevent herself from flushing under his ardent gaze.

"But it is your portrait, surely," he exclaimed; "in fancy dress, of course; that is easy to tell."

"Oh, dear no, that portrait was painted by Sir Peter Lely over two hundred years ago. She was a rather celebrated beauty in her day."

"What, not really you!" he gasped incredulously.

If Claudia had had any fear that the brutality she, like most other people unfamiliar with the ring, associated with his profession would be expressed in some rather repulsive fashion in his face, it was dispelled by the blank amazement with which he looked at her. As she had expected a *frisson* of some sort from receiving so unusual a visitor as a prize-fighter, she observed him

more closely than she would otherwise have done. Recalling what she had previously heard of pugilists, she had a vague idea on entering the hall that she would find either a brute or a demi-god, and it was with a feeling akin to disappointment that she failed to discover anything suggestive of either in his appearance. Even his physique, which at least might have been expected to indicate the great strength he was supposed to possess, did not impress her as being in any way remarkable. Indeed, his figure, which was of medium height, clothed in a loosely fitting suit of blue serge, that concealed its symmetrical lines and iron muscles, appeared to her inexperienced eye much too slender and slight to be capable of endurance.

She noticed, however, that he carried himself well, and had a profile as clear cut as a cameo. The brow was low and wide, the chin round, the nose straight and sensitive, and the ears small and set close to a well-shaped head, which was covered with thick dark hair cut short and parted low on one side. Like his mouth, which was emotional and rather sensual, his expressive eyes of a liquid brown betokened an ardent, primitive, and high-strung nature. The whole face, which was clean shaven and of a clear, pale complexion, was almost feminine in its delicacy.

"If not a demi-god," Claudia said to herself, "he is at any rate decidedly decorative."

Bored to death as she was, his unaffected assumption of equality in addressing her gave her a curious pleasure. It never occurred to her to consider whether he was a gentleman or not. She was too true an aristocrat to have any middle-class prejudices on *that* score. It was sufficient that he was "presentable," and she made up her mind at once to gratify Mrs. Appleby as well as herself by asking him to tea at the end of the interview.

"It was about my brother you wished to see me?" she asked, motioning him to be seated. "You are his guest at Park Cottage—Mr. Delane, are you not?"

Her manner, without losing its grand air, was frankly cordial. It made him feel perfectly at ease as she intended.

"Yes," he said, taking the chair she indicated, and looking as if he were only half persuaded that she was not the original of the portrait he had been admiring. "I hear he has gone away to Russia, and I have come to enquire if he has left any message or letter for me."

"No," she replied, "he did not speak of you to me at all. Of course," she hastened to add, noticing the keen disappointment his face betrayed, "he mentioned some time ago that you were staying at Park Cottage." She did not explain, however, that she had completely forgotten the fact till his call reminded her of it.

"It seems very strange," he mused, "that he should go away like that. Why, only yesterday afternoon he

came as usual to see me train. He never said a word about going away, though he must have known it, for in the evening I heard he had left."

"That is characteristic of him. He acts on sudden impulses. I found him leaving the house as I entered it. He merely told me he was going to Russia."

"That's a long journey to take suddenly. It will prevent him from seeing the fight. And he was as keen as mustard to see it too. I don't understand it."

He looked quite crestfallen. Claudia thought she had never seen a face that mirrored the mental state so plainly. It indicated a very elemental mind, which to one like herself accustomed to the complex characters of our latter-day civilisation had all the charm of novelty. In the great world of fashion, that nursery of primitive passions, the elemental mind is as extinct as the dodo. There is a great deal of subtlety about the simplicity of "natural" people.

"You don't know my brother as I do," she said with a light laugh. "He has always got some hobby of absorbing interest. His hobbies are veritable passions, but I am afraid they are not very deep. He is apt to be on with the new love before he is off with the old."

"So that accounts for his interest in me. The prize-fighter was only a hobby and I flattered myself he liked me for what I was worth as a man! It seems, then, *I* didn't matter at all to him, and now even the

prize-fighter is discarded for a new hobby in Russia. I don't think I like it," he added, after a slight pause.

The tone of dejection in which he spoke was free from bitterness. His feelings were wounded, not his vanity. To Claudia it seemed incredible that he was a prize-fighter, a man who lived by knocking down people, a something scarcely removed from an Apache.

"Oh," she said vivaciously, feeling in a vague way that it was incumbent upon her to be cheerful, "I am sure my brother has not forgotten you by any means. He would be quite distressed that you should think it. In going off as he has done without a word to anyone about you he has taken it for granted that things will go on as if he were here. As his guest at Park Cottage you must let me know if you need anything. I will see that it is supplied you at once. When my brother is absent I am supposed to fill his place and to see to everything for him."

He was visibly touched by her frank, cordial manner. Impulsive by nature he had liked her before he saw her, for the sake of her brother whose sympathetic interest in him had won his heart. Now he liked her for her own sake—the more so, perhaps, that her beauty had fascinated him from the start.

"You are very kind," he said simply. "I have all I need for my training, and I'll take your word for it

that your brother has not lost his interest in me and my fight."

As her words, gracious though they were, seemed to deprive him of any further motive for remaining, he made as if to rise. But he did not wish to go. He liked being there in that great hall with its souvenirs of the historic past talking to this beautiful and sympathetic woman. Nor did Claudia wish him to go. The curiosity which had caused her to receive him was by no means satisfied. It was not enough for her to know what a prize-fighter *looked* like, she wished to know what he *was*. The modesty of his manner, the softness of his voice, to which the slight drawl peculiar to Americans of the Southern States gave a sort of exotic charm, the suggestion of elementality which, like a hall-mark, stamped his whole demeanour, the delicacy of his features almost feminine in their classic beauty—everything, in fine, that made up an *ensemble* so deceptive of his prodigious strength appealed to her senses, jaded with commonplace impressions, with all the force of a new and unexpected emotion.

Her curiosity, confused, so to speak, by the various factors that had aroused it, was suddenly focussed by a glimpse of his hands, which she had failed to notice till he placed them on the arms of his chair in the act of rising. Permitted unconsciously to emerge from the sleeves of his coat in which he had as if ashamed of

them sought to conceal them, they were to him what the cloven hoof is popularly supposed to be to the devil —an unmistakable sign of identity. By them for the first time she recognised the prize-fighter in the otherwise docile and decorative man. Hitherto, her interest in him was compounded with her habitual disdain, now it was tinged with respect. Though the discoloration of the skin, blue from blows given and received in many a fight, rendered them unsightly they were not coarse or clumsy.

To Claudia they seemed like the hands of a baresark rather than of a brute. It was with such hands she fancied that Fingal might have slain Swaran, or Aldo caressed Lorma. There was something masterful and dominating about them that made the woman in her quail and vibrate in response to some instinct of sex by which she sub-consciously realised and accepted the primordial superiority of the male to the female. For a moment she felt embarrassed. It was a novel sensation to her.

He noticed the little thrill they gave her, and took it for disgust. To him his hands, the single blemish in a perfect figure, were a constant source of mortification. Conscious of his good looks and the strength and beauty of the body his clothes concealed, in the possession of which he took a natural and healthy pride, he was ashamed of the disfigurement of his hands as of some

conspicuous birth-mark. To be reminded of them now was particularly humiliating. He suddenly realised who and what he was, and how wide the gulf that separated him from this glorious patrician of whom for a few fascinating minutes he had dared to dream he was the equal. If the expression of his face was not exactly a literal transcript of his thoughts, the scarlet flush that swept over his cheeks and the manner in which he shoved his hands into his pockets at least informed Claudia what her notice of his eloquent extremities made him feel.

His embarrassment dissipated hers.

"And this is a prize-fighter," she thought as she saw him redden under her gaze, "a man with the strength of Samson! I suppose there is scarcely anything he cannot do with those iron fists of his. Yet, I believe, I am really stronger than he!"

The idea fascinated her, as if she saw in it an exhibition of the power of the pen over the sword, a triumph of mind over matter. Most certainly, she thought, he must remain to tea. But she did not invite him to stay—it was not yet time for tea; she merely pretended not to notice that he had risen to go.

"You are a great traveller, Mr. Delane, are you not?" she said with a sort of languid insolence. "I think I heard my brother say you were what he termed fighting your way round the world. You met one another some-

where in the East I believe. You must think me very inquisitive but the idea of 'fighting one's way round the world' sounds extremely original to me."

Had she ordered him in plain words to remain and talk to her, he could not have understood her better.

"It was the only means I had of seeing the world," he said, resuming his seat almost unconsciously.

"Do most prize-fighters travel like that?" she asked. "You see I am very ignorant about your profession."

"Those of any repute do. They go wherever they can get matched."

"Travel is a great educator. One cannot see so much of the world without deriving a great deal of benefit."

A smile hovered at the corners of her mouth. It amused her to see how easily she was "drawing" him.

"One gets a living out of it, at least," he said simply.

"I meant intellectual benefit—culture, information, that sort of thing—not money."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know so much about that," he said, "I've met prize-fighters who have been round the world and couldn't tell you, for instance, what or where the British Museum is. Most of them, I guess, think only of the fights they are going to have and the money they'll make out of them. In training and out they are blind

to the world. The only sights they can recall when they get home are the rings they've fought in, the bars they've stood drinks in, and sometimes the gaols they've slept in."

Claudia appeared astonished.

"You don't seem to have a very high opinion of your profession," she remarked.

"Oh, the profession's right enough," he replied, "and so are the fellows who follow it. If we are common and ignorant, the world won't let us be anything else. It is fond enough of cracking us up in the papers and talking about our victories and defeats, but it despises us all the same."

He spoke without any bitterness—as if he were merely stating a fact rather than expressing an opinion.

"But that surely is an exaggeration," rejoined Claudia, who was beginning to take an interest in pugilism apart from the pugilist in spite of herself. "I thought immense crowds went to see a prize-fight. At one the other day in America I remember reading that thousands of people attended it, and that many of them even travelled thousands of miles to do so."

"You mean the Johnson-Jeffries fight at Reno?" he asked.

She didn't in the least know whether she meant it or not, but she nodded her head all the same in assent.

"Yes, that drew, no mistake. It was the biggest crowd of bums I ever saw."

"That, I suppose, is an American expression," she said, "I never heard it before."

There was a slight *hauteur* in her voice, affected with the idea of protecting her dignity from the outrage of some vaguely dreaded *grossièreté;* but the smile that accompanied her words robbed them of any suspicion of offence.

"Oh, you've got plenty in this country too, never fear," he rejoined carelessly, too conscious of the splendid frame, so to speak, in which he found himself to let it be injured by so much as a scratch. "You call them rotters or wasters or bounders or cads. In America we call them bums. It means any one of them, or the whole lot rolled into one. They are the sort of people on whose money we prize-fighters live, and whose patronage degrades us. I guess you never heard anybody in your world say a good word for us but your brother, did you?"

She thought of the opinions she had heard expressed at Lady Marion and Mauve's dinner-table, and evaded a direct reply.

"But to you, if not to others, the cities and places you have visited in going round the world have not been sealed books," she remarked in a tone of insistence designed to lure the conversation back to the subject

from whence it had drifted. "*You,* at all events, remember what you have seen?"

"Yes, I remember," he said with a sigh, casting a glance of admiration round the Gothic hall; "but then I fight to go round the world, others go round the world to fight. I am realising the dream of my life."

The words suddenly reminded her of her own longings and aspirations—that intense contempt she had for the gilded sham of her lot in life and the desire for the interests, the joys and griefs, the passions even, that make existence a reality.

"The dream of your life!" she echoed, leaning forward in her chair with a curious earnestness. "Have you too felt that dissatisfaction which cankers and poisons one's whole being, that need of something bigger and fuller than the commonplace humdrum of a groove?"

He looked at her in amazement, only vaguely comprehending the drift of her words.

"I often seem to myself like a child peering into a shop-window filled with tempting toys and sweetmeats I can never have," she went on without waiting for a reply. "I suppose it must be some adventurous strain in my blood, some old instinct of unrest I have inherited. One of my ancestors was the companion of Drake and Frobisher. That one up there, Sir Malin-

court Carisbrooke, the navigator. He went in search of El Dorado like Sir Walter Raleigh."

She indicated his portrait among those that lined the walls. It was that of a gaunt, rough-visaged man who looked very uncomfortable in his Elizabethan frill as he peered out with alert eyes from the frame in which he hung.

Delane regarded the old ruffian with an air of respectful interest.

"What became of him? Did he find it?" he asked.

"No," she replied, amused at his gravity, "he never found it. At least, if he did he never came back to tell of it. I fancy he was killed and cooked by the Caribs, or his ship sunk by the buccaneers."

"I don't think you resemble him in any way," he remarked, as if his inspection of the portrait had convinced him of the fact.

"I should hope not indeed," she laughed. "He is a fright. What I meant was that I sometimes feel as if I should like to imitate him, and go on some voyage of discovery—to realise my dream, as you say. Have you found going round the world what you expected it would be?"

"Yes and no," he said, hesitating a moment before replying. "I've seen and learnt a lot certainly. It's been a fine experience, but there are times when I get homesick. Not for my home, for I haven't got what

you would call a home, but just for a sight of old familiar places and for the good old American life."

"Homesick!" she exclaimed, incredulously.

"I told you the world despised us. Why, even you find it hard to believe a prize-fighter capable of feeling like other people."

There was something pathetic in his manner that touched her.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," she said, softly, "I spoke from ignorance not prejudice, believe me. But the dream of your life, how did you manage to realise it?"

She was too absorbed in curiosity to learn the story of his life, from the interest she took in his novel personality to study how she gratified it. If she wondered at all how she, of all persons, came to put so direct a question to a stranger, she was satisfied that he was too unsophisticated to give it a thought, nor did he. Such *nuances* in conversation were totally undreamt of by him. He was accustomed to plain questions, and flattered by her eagerness was willing enough to give her the information she desired.

"By beating Battling Dorum in New Orleans," he replied. "You never heard of him, did you?"

She shook her head.

"Well, he was a great husky Swede who had held the middle-weight championship in America for years and was prepared to defend it against all comers. It

was my first big victory and made me famous. After that I got matched with Joe Shannon, the Australian champion who had come to the States to fight Dorum. That was the hardest fight of my life, but I knocked him out in the tenth round. It was only my desire to go round the world that made me win. I made enough money by that victory to go to Australia with him. I won some more fights there, and so got the money to come to England and bring Shannon with me. He's a good fellow and the best pal I ever had."

It was easy to see that he was very proud of his triumphs, but the manner in which he spoke was devoid of any appearance of conceit, and never deviated from the unaffected and modest air that had impressed Claudia from the first.

"You had dreamt of this trip round the world then a long time, I suppose," she remarked.

"Since I was a kid. The idea came to me from reading a book called 'Eighty Days Round the World,' by Jules Verne. A pedlar who came to our farm one summer gave it to me for taking his horse to a blacksmith's to be shod."

"And did this book also give you the idea of becoming a prize-fighter?" continued Claudia, encouraged to ask these personal questions by his readiness to answer them.

"No," he replied, "I guess that was born in me.

My mother used to say that I was fond of using my fists even in the cradle. As a boy, if another boy went for me, he got more than he bargained for."

"Evidently, you are very bellicose," she observed, with a smile.

"Oh, I was never the aggressor, but if I was attacked I was ready to defend myself. My mother was very religious, she wanted me to become a clergyman."

They both laughed, as if struck by the humour of the idea. It gave each a peculiar feeling of intimacy.

"How did you escape that fate?" asked Claudia, with easy familiarity of which she was quite unconscious.

"By running away," he said.

Claudia laughed again—a delicious provocative laugh, that seemed to him to return his confidences.

"It was no laughing matter, I can tell you," he protested. "I guess it was by luck that things turned out all right. It was touch and go with me."

"I have heard of boys who ran away to be soldiers or sailors, but this is the first time I ever heard of one running away to be a prize-fighter," said Claudia, in a tone that was frankly curious.

As he did not take the hint, she added, apologetically, "I am sure it is an interesting story. You don't object to tell it, do you?"

"Object!" he exclaimed, in a tone of surprise. "Why

it's the first question newspaper reporters ask me. A man once travelled all the way from New York to Chicago to get information about my career for a book he was writing called 'The Kings of the Ring.' It's the best book on pugilism I've ever read."

His indifference to her interest gave Claudia a little stab of chagrin. She had expected him to be flattered by it, instead it seemed as of little consequence as a newspaper reporter's inquisitiveness. In this, however, she misjudged him. He would have regarded the comparison as a compliment not a slight. The curiosity of the press was to him as to most people, whose doings it deems worth chronicling, the most seductive form of flattery.

"After all, there isn't much to tell," he went on, "there was a darky on our farm in Virginia who had been a boxer in his day. He used to spar with me and was for ever talking of Jim Corbett. He used to go to the village on Saturdays and come back at night drunk. Once he came back sober, which so astonished me that I asked him the reason. He told me it was because Jim Corbett had lost the championship of the world to Bob Fitzsimmons. He gave me a paper with an account of the battle. It was stirring reading, and from that day the big Cornishman became as great a hero to me as Jim had been to the darky. I wanted to be a prize-fighter like him, and when my mother

proposed to send me to Richmond to educate me for the ministry I just bolted."

"But how did you expect to live?" asked Claudia. "I suppose you were a mere boy without any money."

"I was fifteen, but a well-grown youngster for my age," he replied, "I had no plans and no money. But I guess anybody who is willing to work in America can always get a job. Perhaps I was luckier than most. I went to Baltimore and got one right away in Mike Rafferty's saloon. Mike had been a prize-fighter once himself, and was one of the best fellows that ever lived. When he died the papers said a straighter man and a fairer fighter had never stepped in the ring. It didn't take him long to find out that I had the making of a fighter in me and he undertook to train me. It's to him I owe all my success. It was he who arranged the match for me with Battling Dorum in New Orleans. I pocketed $10,000 by that victory. I offered to go halves with him, but he wouldn't take a cent. He said he was satisfied I'd done him credit. I guess that's about all there is to tell."

As he uttered the last words, the clang of the bell in the clock tower could be heard, and from some recess behind him a cuckoo chirped four times. At the sound Delane rose hurriedly from his seat, with his hands in his pockets.

"I had no idea it was so late," he said. "I ought

to be skipping ropes and punching balls at Park Cottage. My trainer will give me what for when I get back."

He tried to speak carelessly, but the dread of drawing attention to his hands by some act of forgetfulness made him appear nervous.

Claudia rose reluctantly. She did not like this abrupt termination of the conversation. Her curiosity was by no means satisfied, there was still much she wanted to know about him. She changed her mind, however, about asking him to tea. The idea of making him unconsciously provide idle entertainment for herself and Mrs. Appleby, as she had originally intended, seemed now like taking a mean advantage of him.

"It has been very kind of you to tell me so much about your profession, Mr. Delane," she said, "and hearing about your career has been most interesting, too. I must read that book you spoke of—'Kings of the Ring,' I think you called it? I am sure you haven't told me half the thrilling things you've done. You must come back and tell me some more."

It seemed to her as if a sudden mist clouded his eyes for a second.

"I don't suppose you would care to see how a pugilist trains for a contest, would you?" he said diffidently. "If you come," he hastened to add, as if to override her objection, "you shall have the place quite to yourself. You may trust me to see to that."

"It would be delightful," she replied eagerly. "When may I come?"

"To-morrow afternoon about this hour, if it would suit you?"

"I'll make a point of being there. May I bring a friend with me?"

"As many as you like," he said.

She thanked him with a charming smile and held out her hand. The action embarrassed him. He drew his own from the pockets of his coat gingerly. "They are not fit to offer a lady," he said blushing with mortification.

"I should be proud of them if I were you," she said softly, "they have served you well."

At this he took her hand in his very carefully, as if he were afraid of hurting it, and then with an awkward bow left her.

"To think I have actually shaken hands with a prize-fighter!" she said to herself when he had gone, and with a curious gleam in her eyes she went back to the terrace.

"What an age you have been, Claudia," drawled Mrs. Appleby, when she appeared. "What was your prize-fighter like?"

"The sort of person who goes out to a new country and grows up with it," she replied disdainfully. "Your curiosity will be gratified to-morrow. As we have no-

thing better to do. I asked him to let us watch him training. I am going to pick some roses," she added moving away languidly, "When Hubbard brings out the tea tell him I am in the pleasaunce."

CHAPTER IV.

JACK DELANE'S training establishment at Park Cottage consisted of a trainer, a sparring partner, and two seconds. All had fought in the ring. "Dad" Royce, the trainer, hailed from California, the cradle of the "noble art" in America. He had in his day enjoyed a considerable reputation as a heavy-weight, and though his aspiration to championship honours had never been realised, the experience he had acquired was of scarcely less value to him. He claimed to have met some of the best men of his class and to have trained more champions than any man living, and if the latter boast was not strictly warranted it was generally conceded that the men he prepared for a contest were always formidable adversaries. He happened to be in England when the match between Delane and the negro Sam Crowfoot was arranged, and Jack, who was fully aware of his value, had been quick to secure his services.

His nickname "Dad" had been conferred upon him by a generation that had sprung up since he had retired from the ring. He could recall the days of bare knuckles, tangible evidence of which he bore in a flattened nose and enlarged ears. In his early days he had been noted for the statuesque mould of his form, all trace of which the disfiguring corpulency to which so many pugilists are prone as they advance in years had long since removed. His features were those of the typical "bruiser," but though he was not pleasant to look at he was good-natured, tactful—a quality without which no trainer is worthy of the name—and universally liked by his associates.

Joe Shannon, the sparring partner, who had accompanied Delane to England, was an Australian of Irish parentage. Having beaten all who took him on in his native land he had gone to the States to fight Battling Dorum for the middle-weight championship of America, and encountered instead Delane to whom this title had passed. Beaten in his turn he had succumbed to the fascination that his conqueror exercised over his mind, like many other pugilists on whom the "knock-out" when fairly and squarely administered, not infrequently acts as a sort of magical caress. Nor was Delane indifferent to the admiration he excited. He regarded Shannon much as Shannon regarded him. For singular as it may seem, no two people understand one another more thoroughly than two pugilists who have fought together. In some strange way, that they themselves would prob-

ably be the last to explain, they seem to learn all about one another from the blows they exchange, and become henceforth according to the knowledge thus obtained, which is seldom, if ever, at fault, bitter enemies or staunch friends.

In the present instance the intimacy was the closer, perhaps, for the many points of similarity in the two. They were of the same age, weight, height, and temperament. Of the two Shannon *looked* the stronger, but his body had neither the suppleness nor the grace of Delane's. For the rest he had a broken nose and several teeth missing, but these blemishes were not so disfiguring to him as they sound. Indeed, far from exciting any repulsion in the beholder Shannon's appearance was rather attractive than otherwise.

The two seconds, "Kid" Rafferty and "Docker" Velvet, were youngsters with their spurs yet to win in the ring. The Kid was an intelligent fellow with a knack of making himself generally useful in an unobtrusive way. He was a clever feather-weight boxer, and had come to England from America with Royce in search of a match when Delane, who had known him since his childhood, had engaged him as one of his seconds.

Velvet, who owed his sobriquet to the London docks round which he had been born and bred, had the making in him of a first-rate heavy-weight prize-fighter. He was a pal of the Kid's, to whose interest he owed his

present position, which he valued as only one who has the honour of seconding a famous pugilist in the greatest battle of his life can.

A more efficient and devoted set of men Delane could not have selected. In the choice of his training quarters, however, he had shown himself less practical.

Park Cottage, like Asbury Court, whose rose-red towers and turrets were visible from its mullioned casements, dated from Tudor times, something of the glamour of which it retained in spite of the numerous alterations within and without.

Situated in a spot where the beeches and oaks of the great park from which it derived its name were thickest, with its brick walls peeping in scarlet patches through the ivy that clambered over them; with its roof of new thatch gleaming in the sun; its little garden a tangle and blaze of all sorts of old-world flowers, in the midst of which it was not unlike some huge flower itself; with a pool in which the gold-fish flashed to and fro under the leaves of the water-lilies, with a quaint old well and a moss-covered sun-dial, and its encircling hedge of laurels and rhododendrons, it reminded one of a cottage in a water-colour or a scene-painter's conception of rural felicity.

On the upper of its two storeys were three rooms, each with a mullioned casement that opened upon the sweet-scented garden below. They were occupied by

Delane, his trainer and his sparring partner—the two seconds, who completed the establishment, being lodged at the Carisbrooke Arms a quarter of a mile away in the village of Asbury. The ground floor consisted of a single room. Used by the ordinary tenant as a kitchen and sitting-room in one, it had been converted by Delane and his companions, who took their meals at the Arms, into a sort of gymnasium equipped with the various appliances employed by pugilists in training. It, too, like the rooms above, had mullioned windows with leaded panes opening upon the garden. It was panelled with oak, black with age, but while sufficiently long and wide for the purpose for which it was now employed it seemed barely high enough.

The whole training establishment had disapproved of the place from the start. Dad Royce had begged Delane in vain to remove to the Carisbrooke Arms as being better suited and more convenient in every way to train in. But Jack's fancy, which was of a decidedly romantic turn, had been struck by the cottage from the moment he saw it, and as Durward Carisbrooke had impulsively offered to fit up a shower bath in one of the out-houses, Royce and his assistants had been invited "to lump it or quit." As the language in which this invitation was couched made the acceptance of one or other of these alternatives imperative, they wisely chose to "lump it."

Pugilists themselves, they knew by instinct that the pugilist in common with all artists possesses what is termed a "temperament," which is never more capricious and excitable than in the course of training for a fight when body and brain alike are under the severest strain. It is then, when for weeks he is obliged to conform mechanically to a certain rigid programme, that his suppressed individuality, striving to assert itself by manifesting all sorts of fancies, is most sensitive to criticism. But if this period is trying for the principal it is scarcely less so for those who are preparing him for the contest on which his fame depends, and which they are no less eager than himself to see him win. Obliged to "lump" as gracefully as possible the caprices of Delane as well as the cottage, it was no easy matter for his training staff, with tempers keyed up to the snapping-point, to keep bottled up in his presence the objections to which they gave vent behind his back.

The announcement that Miss Carisbrooke and a friend were coming to the cottage to see him train had been received in stony silence, which became stonier still when Delane added with excitement he tried hard to conceal—

"I say, fellows, I promised her that she should have the place to herself, so see that none of the scum that hangs about the Carisbrooke Arms is allowed to drift in here to-morrow. And get the whole place cleaned

up. I want it to look spruce when she arrives. We'll have some flowers about, women like that sort of thing, and the garden's full of them. She'll want tea, too, I guess. So have it to-morrow, Dad; tea and cake, the best that's to be had."

At this Shannon had looked volumes at Royce, but that gentleman had pretended not to notice them, and even appeared pleased to execute the commission. For Dad was crafty as becomes a good trainer. He was contemplating a change in the training, a change to which he feared Delane might object, and he had no desire to get his back up beforehand. Nevertheless he didn't want women about the training-quarters any more than Shannon. He knew the nature of his principal too well to relish this sudden interest in the fair sex. He had known more fights lost through that sort of thing than any other.

"No," he said to himself as Delane, embarrassed by the silence with which his news was received, blushed and changed the subject, "I've got you in finer condition, my beauty, than you've ever been, and if you begin gallivanting after the ladies, curse their pretty faces, you'll be beaten, sure as eggs is eggs. No, I'll be damned if I'll lump that little game."

It was, therefore, in anything but a spirit of hospitality that preparations were made at the cottage to receive Claudia and Mrs. Appleby. Shortly before

they were due Royce came in from the garden with his hands full of flowers which Delane had sent him to pick.

"Well, what's he doing now, Joe?" he asked peevishly as he looked round the room without seeing the pugilist. "Up to any fresh nonsense?"

Shannon tossed aside a boxing-glove he had been examining and cast a contemptuous glance at the ceiling.

"Oh, he's upstairs prettying up," he said, "I've never seen him in such a state before. You'd think it was the Queen coming to see him. He's got the Kid to shave him for fear he'll cut himself, and the Docker's just been sent to the village to get cream for her tea." The last words were uttered with a bitterness that suggested he regarded the attention as a personal slight.

Royce grunted by way of testifying his disapproval, and regarding the flowers he held in his hands exclaimed with ineffable contempt, "And me, as has trained and had the honour of being beaten by better men than himself, sent to pick roses! What's come over him anyhow? I don't like the symptoms. Roses!" And carefully depositing the flowers on a table the irate trainer looked about for something to put them in.

"No, I'll be damned if you have," muttered Shannon. "Here, this'll hold 'em."

"Have what?" said Royce, taking the jug that the other offered him.

"Trained a better man than Jack."

Royce reflected a moment before replying.

"What about Con Muldoon, or Ikey Marx, or——?"

"One was a heavy-weight and the other a bantam," retorted Shannon. "You've never trained such another middle-weight as Jack Delane. But I wasn't thinking about his class. No better fellow than Jack of any weight ever stepped into the ring."

"Oh, he's straight enough as a pal, I reckon," said Royce, regarding with a certain satisfaction the jug into which he had put the roses he had professed to despise. "His heart's as big as all out-doors. But he is the very devil to train. You never know where you are with him. He's as full of whims as a pregnant woman. If you cross him he gets his back up at once. It makes me all of a tremble to see him skip with the rope, fear he'll dash his head against the ceiling. I say, Joe," he added suddenly in a confidential tone, "what does he see in this place anyhow? You ought to know."

Shannon scowled at him in a queer, shy way as if he suspected a trap was being set for him.

"Who do you think to chivy, Dad Royce?" he said sullenly.

"No offence meant," grunted the trainer apologetically. "But you and Jack are so thick, I thought——"

"Yes, Jack's my pal right enough," Shannon flared in, "but being thick doesn't signify everything." Then as if he feared he might stumble into the trap unawares, he went on mildly, "I don't like this place any more than you do, but that's nothing to Jack. He seemed to take a fancy to the cottage the first moment he saw it. He told Mr. Carisbrooke it reminded him of a poem. He repeated the lines, I can't remember them, but they're in this book he's so fond of reading."

Shannon indicated a volume of the collected works of Tennyson which, judging from the shabby appearance of its cover, had evidently been frequently consulted.

"Moony ass!" exclaimed Royce, with contempt.

"You're a pretty one to complain," retorted the other. "You've a taste for that sort of thing yourself. I wouldn't like to have to count the number of times I've heard you repeat the poetry as you wrote when you beat Pat Dempsey.

Royce straightened himself up, swelled out his chest and with a flourish of the arm began to spout the piece in question.

"Oh, chuck it, Dad, chuck it!" shouted Shannon, before he could finish the first line. "Who's moony now?"

"You needn't get so shirty," said Royce, huffily. "I guess you've felt like singing yourself when you've won a battle. Most of us do. It's only natural. But I tell you it's a bad sign when a boxer takes *to reading* poetry instead of *writing* it."

Shannon's mobile face suddenly clouded.

"We ain't all built alike," he said, depressed in spite of himself by Royce's presentiment. "Some of us likes the sporting papers, Jack he likes poetry. He'd sit and read it by the hour coming from Australia. I've tried to read it too, just to see what he found in it. But I didn't go to a private school like him when I was a boy and I'll be blest if I can understand it. Here where it's marked," he added, picking up the Tennyson in which some strips of paper had been placed, "are what he calls his favourites."

Royce took the book from Shannon and opened it at the places indicated.

"'A Dream of Fair Women,' he read out, 'Maud,' 'Lady Clara Vere de Vere,' 'The May Queen.' Why, it's all about women!" he exclaimed with disgust.

"Why, so it is," said Shannon, in a tone of blank astonishment as if the idea had never occurred to him before, and clenching his fists he muttered savagely, "Damn them!"

"I might have guessed *that* was at the bottom of it all," said Royce. "We're going to have trouble with

him if we're not careful. I don't like women hanging round training-quarters."

"It's the first time I've known Jack speak to a woman," Shannon groaned. "In Frisco after he beat me you should have seen how the girls ran after him, and he wouldn't so much as look at 'em. There were plenty of fine ladies too in the boat coming from Sydney; they'd have kissed his boots if he had asked 'em. 'I always fight shy of women and wine, Joe,' he says to me. 'That's what knocks out champions.' And now all of a sudden he's changed. It's like as if a spell was on him. I say, Dad, do you think *she's* a witch?"

Something very much like tears dimmed Shannon's blue eyes as he put the question. But before Royce could reply, Docker Velvet, the second who had been sent for the cream, rushed into the gymnasium, almost spilling the contents of the jug he carried in his excitement.

"They're coming, Jack," he shouted at the top of his voice. "Passed 'em in the lane."

A moment later Delane made his appearance. His attire consisted of white flannel trousers, a white woollen sweater, and white canvas boots without heels and laced over the ankles. He had evidently paid considerable attention to his toilet, for there was a peculiar freshness and fragrance about him suggestive of a hot bath and

massage. His hair was brushed and brilliantined with a sleekness that showed the perfect contour of his head, and there was a slight flush on his usually pale face which the Kid had shaved as smooth as a woman's.

"Fellows," he said as he entered, in a tone half beseeching, half threatening, "Remember she is Mr. Carisbrooke's sister, and you all know what we owe him." And perceiving through the open door that his visitors had entered the garden he went out to welcome them.

CHAPTER V.

"BEHOLD our host," murmured Claudia, *sotto voce,* as he approached.

"Never!" returned Mrs. Appleby. "He is not a bit like a pugilist."

Her surprise reminded Claudia of her own first impressions.

"And what else, pray, did you expect him to look like?" she asked.

"I don't know," replied Mrs. Appleby, "but certainly not like the stroke of a 'Varsity Crew."

At this moment Delane joined them.

"Proud to see, Miss Carisbrooke," he exclaimed, eagerly offering her his hand with a glance that gave

her to understand that after her handshake of yesterday he was no longer ashamed of it.

"I hope we are not late," she said, as she took it.

"You're to the minute," he replied, holding her hand in his a little longer than was necessary.

Claudia flushed in spite of herself, and introducing him to Mrs. Appleby moved on towards the cottage.

On the training staff whom curiosity had drawn to the windows, the nonchalance of her bearing created a deep impression. At the sight of her, clad in all the elegance of the latest summer fashion, they seemed to realise in some subtle way how vast was the distance in the social scale between Jack Delane the pugilist and herself. To regard her any longer in the light of a menace to his success was preposterous; she was altogether too fine a plaything for such a man as he. Shannon alone, recalling the admiration his pal had excited in ladies as fine on the steamer coming from India, continued to have any misgivings on that score.

As the visitors entered the cottage Royce, with the air of a man who knows the proper thing to do, stepped forward from among his visibly embarrassed companions and gallantly offered them chairs.

"This is my trainer, Dad Royce, one of the best," said Delane, seizing the opportunity to introduce him to the ladies

"And do you fight too?" asked Claudia, in her

most gracious manner, while Mrs. Appleby took the chair offered her and glanced round the room curiously.

"Does he fight?" exclaimed Delane, boisterously, unable to repress his excitement. "Why, Dad's the man who beat Pat Dempsey. That must be all of twenty years ago, but Dad don't let us forget it, do you, Dad?"

The trainer's ugly face flushed a deep purple, but he evidently liked the chaff.

"I and Pat met——" he began.

"What did I tell you?" burst in Delane, with a loud laugh, and turning towards his sparring partner and seconds, who looked as if they were glued to the floor at the other end of the room, he cried, "Here fellows, come and take your medicine. The sight of you," he added to Claudia in a whisper, "has made 'em so shy that you could knock 'em out with a feather."

In response to this invitation the Kid and the Docker came forward sheepishly.

"This child," said Delane, playfully putting his hand on the Kid's curly head and pressing it forward by way of a bow, "is the son of my old friend and patron Mike Rafferty——"

"The man who protected you and taught you to box?" interposed Claudia, recalling as she looked at the blushing lad Pope Gregory's famous *mot: "Non Angli sed angeli."*

"The same," replied Delane, "and if the Kid will only keep as cool a head in the ring as his father, I predict it will be a long day before he becomes a back number."

"What, you don't mean to say he fights too?" exclaimed both ladies in the same breath.

"Take off your sweater, Kid, and show them your muscle," laughed Delane.

The lad did as he was bid. Underneath the sweater he wore a sleeveless singlet, thin and scant enough to permit one to form a very good idea of his muscular development. Struck by the contrast between the visible signs of his strength, and the almost childish purity of his handsome face the two women burst into ejaculations of astonishment and admiration. The Kid, greatly pleased, drew back on a sign from Delane, to make room for the Docker, who, having puffed out his big chest and gratified Mrs. Appleby's curiosity to see how hard the muscles of his arms were by suffering her to press them with the tips of her fingers, gave place in his turn to Shannon, who had kept in the background in the hope of being overlooked.

In response to Delane's invitation to come and be presented to the ladies he shuffled up sullenly. The jealousy and suspicion, to which he rightly attributed the Australian's ungracious bearing, exasperated Delane and momentarily dashed his exuberant spirits. He

darted at Shannon a glance full of anger, but warned by the uncompromising manner in which it was received, he checked the oath that was on the tip of his tongue in time to avoid a scene. The dread of being lowered in the eyes of his guests was so strong on him that after presenting Shannon as his sparring partner, he added in a tone that was almost pleading—"and my pal."

"What," said Claudia, endeavouring to appear interested in the man in spite of the antipathy she had instinctively taken to him, "the friend who followed you to England from Australia?"

It was an unlucky speech. Shannon's face, which had brightened perceptibly after Delane's attempt to conciliate him, clouded again. The words, with their suggestion of a previous conversation in which he had been discussed, confirmed his suspicions and mistrust of the feminine influence to which his friend was being subjected.

"Yes," he said, defiantly, "the pal as he owes his biggest victory to. It's by beating *me* that his reputation's what it is to-day." And he turned away with a nervous air as if he repented the boldness of his retort.

"That's true, Joe," exclaimed Delane, heartily, developing a certain subtlety in his anxiety to preserve the dignity of the occasion. Later he would have it

out with Shannon, but now he meant at all costs to create a favourable impression on his guests.

In Claudia's eyes at all events he scored. To her his geniality and self-possession did more than contrast favourably with the brusque and sullen manner of Shannon; it raised him above the level of his crude companions in general to what she felt with satisfaction was an equality with herself.

Mrs. Appleby, on the other hand, though scarcely less charitable in her opinion of her host, was more critical in her observations of the unusual surroundings in which she found herself. The looks that had passed between Delane and his "pal" had not escaped her. It was not with Delane but with Royce and the seconds that she mentally contrasted Shannon. There was something about him that fired her curiosity, and it was on him that she shrewdly decided to focus the greater part of her attention.

The introductions having served to break the ice, so to speak, Delane gave his guests tea, and while they partook of this refreshment proceeded to explain to them, with the aid of his staff, the use of the various apparatus with which his training quarters were furnished. They were first given an exhibition of "punching the ball" by the burly Docker, during which their host described its use as an "eye drill," and how, by enabling the pugilist to acquire speed and accuracy in

hitting, it taught him to "time his punch," one of the most valuable points in boxing. Then Royce explained how the "pulleys" were used for developing the muscles of the arms, the shoulders, and the back, and how the "wrist-machine" strengthened the hands and wrists. After this the Kid gave an illustration of "shadow-fighting, which consisted in dancing about—now dodging, now side-stepping—with two dumb-bells gripped in his hands and making passes at an imaginary foe, whilst Delane pointed out how it accustomed the arms and hands to sustained action in the ring. Then he himself skipped with the rope like a school-girl, an exercise which he claimed made him agile and steady on his legs.

"Every pugilist," he said, "has his special hobby. Mine is rope-skipping. Others go in for "stationary running," or riding a bicycle, or tossing the "medicine ball," or working a pair of oars from the sliding seat of a rowing machine. For in training what is an agreeable exercise to one man is irksome to another, and what is beneficial to one is harmful to another. The chief advantage of training is, of course, that it gets a fellow into form. Out of training even the best man goes off. We all have our "fighting weight," that is, the weight at which we are best able to use our strength to the best advantage, and the first thing to do is to train so as to reduce or build up to this weight. As

Dad will tell you, there are as many ways of training as there are styles of boxing. It is only the faddist, who is always by the way an amateur and a mediocrity, that would have us all train alike. Isn't that so, Dad?"

Thus appealed to, Royce—who considered that his reputation as trainer lent a special importance to his opinion, which, not being easily embarrassed like the Kid or the Docker, he was only too ready to express—proceeded to give the ladies the benefit of his experience.

"There is training and training," he said, with a volubility that was the wonder and despair of the big unlettered Docker, who, inarticulate himself, respected the trainer for his fluency of speech even more than for his professional ability, "it's changed a mighty lot too since my time, just as boxing has. I can remember, ma'am, the old prize-ring days when men fought with naked fists. Why, when I trained for my big fight with Pat Dempsey my trainer made me run miles every day holding on to the back of a trap that was driven as fast as the horse could go. And my, he could move some, no mistake! When I dropped from exhaustion the training was over for that day. I was then picked up more dead than alive and driven back to my quarters, where I was soused in cold water and rubbed and scrubbed and fed on raw beef and stale bread and ale."

"How horrible!" exclaimed Claudia, feeling somewhat upset by the appearance as well as the description of the trainer.

"Oh, dear, no, ma'am," he returned, blissfully unconscious of the unpleasant impression he had created, "I'd never have beaten Dempsey any other way, I'll be bound."

Disgust, intensified by his insistence, caused Claudia to put the little scented confection of lace, which served her as a handkerchief, to her nostrils.

"Oh," said Delane, comprehending the protest her action signified, "Dad only means that the methods of training to-day would have been utterly unsuitable to the rougher conditions that prevailed in the ring in days gone by."

"Yes," said Royce—feeling, as he explained to Shannon afterwards, "as if he had put his foot into it, but didn't know how"—"when I fought Dempsey it was on the bare ground in an open field with the rain falling, such luxuries as valets and sparring partners and padded rings weren't thought of in my time. But now pugilists to-day don't train as diligently and consciously as of old. Boxing's a deal more scientific than it used to be. Things, I guess, have changed all round."

"I am glad to hear there is so much improvement," said Claudia. "I am sure the old days you speak of must have been too dreadful."

"H'm," said Royce, doubtfully, "I am a man as prides himself on moving with the times. But I tell you, ma'am, I'd rather have the job of training a man such as used to fight in my time in the ring than the kind you get nowadays. They're so touchy and independent that a trainer never knows where he is with 'em."

"That's a dig at me, I guess," laughed Delane, good-naturedly. "He thinks I'm the most difficult man he ever trained."

"Why?" asked Claudia, in surprise, "I should have thought you would be just the man to obey rules you know are intended for your good."

"So I do," returned Delane, his mobile face manifesting the pleasure he took in the compliment her words implied. "It is only against interference in what I know is *not* for my good that I kick. The modern pugilist is inclined to have fads; why, I don't know, but so it is, and Dad can't understand. That's his one fault as a trainer. Jim Corbett's fad was handball. He never trained that he didn't insist on having a handball court attached to his quarters. Bob Fitzsimmons used to go about like a swell with a lion cub, and he'd spend hours, I've been told, at the nearest blacksmith's forge making lucky horseshoes for his pals. As for Jim Jeffries, if you hadn't known he was the champion of the world, you'd have taken his training quarters for

a hunter's cabin. Cartridges and rifles were stacked everywhere. He was a dead shot with a gun, and could break in a broncho or drive a coach with the best."

Royce, perceiving that the presence of ladies afforded him an unrivalled opportunity of "getting his own back," as he would have termed it, was quick to take advantage of it.

"Well, those are fads I *can* understand," he broke in impetuously, "They're exercise. But I'll be blest if I know what fads you've got, Jack Delane. Fancies, I call 'em."

"Prize-fighters are very much like politicians in that respect," observed Claudia, with an amused smile, "I know a Member of Parliament who spends his time in the House of Commons knitting stockings. And I dare-say you have heard how Gladstone use to chop wood before breakfast, and devote his idle moments to writing poems in Greek."

"Now, did he though!" exclaimed Delane, looking at her in wonderment. "That last fad is what I call a fair knock-out."

Mrs. Appleby, who without losing a word of the conversation, had been scanning the training quarters in the hope of discovering some of those subtle signs of taste or character which occupation is supposed to impress on a room, suddenly noticed the well-worn volume

of Tennyson, and flourishing it with a little exclamation of delight, asked—

"Is this *your* fad, Mr. Delane?"

The blush that blazed in his cheeks answered her in the affirmative.

"It's Tennyson, Claudia," she went on, in a tone that expressed amusement as well as amazement, "Tennyson, worn threadbare and filled with markers!"

Her air of mockery seemed to Delane a sort of jibe at his profession.

"What's there so strange about that?" he asked bluntly, piqued out of his confusion. "It seems to knock out anybody to find a pugilist like other people. Now, if you hadn't known what I was, I'll bet you'd never have guessed, would you?"

"Never," said Mrs. Appleby, with conviction, somewhat abashed by so direct and unexpected a rebuff.

"Well, because I fight with my fists for a living I don't see why it should seem strange for me to like poetry. I fight fair, and that's more than can be said of a lot of millionaires and statesmen that the world thinks such a lot of. I've often and often seen poets and painters at prize-fights, so I don't see why a prize-fighter shouldn't like poetry and pictures. I do, at any rate. Pugilism's an art, same as the others, for all some people may say. It's known as the 'noble art,' and do you know why? Because it's the art that develops the

body, and I guess without the body the brain wouldn't be of any account."

The crude simplicity with which he championed his profession dulled the edge of Mrs. Appleby's sarcasm.

"I'm utterly knocked out—isn't that the term you use?" she said, with a plaintive air. "I haven't a word to say." And opening at random the volume in her hand, she murmured in a sing-song voice as she turned the leaves, "'For I'm to be Queen o' the May, mother, I'm to be Queen o' the May.'"

"And do you write poetry as well as read it, Mr. Delane?" asked Claudia, wondering as she looked at him how many more surprising traits so elemental an individual might possess.

"I wish I could," he said, in his unaffected way. "I've often felt like it after a big victory. Poetry is a sort of singing, at least it seems so to me, and a fellow feels like singing when he's won a battle on which his reputation depends. But somehow I can never get the words to come right. I guess it isn't in me. Now, Dad here can make verses by the yard."

Mrs. Appleby put down the Tennyson and looked at the trainer with undisguised astonishment. The idea of attributing a poetical instinct to such a creature fairly took her breath away. Never, she thought, had she seen a human being of a lower or more brutal type.

To Royce, whose vanity, which slept, so to speak,

with one eye open, had been pricked by Delane's reference to his poetical talent, the amazement depicted on Mrs. Appleby's face was the most seductive flattery.

"Shall I give 'em the lines I wrote when I beat Pat Dempsey, Jack?" he asked eagerly, and without ado he proceeded to spout the following doggerel:—

"Into the lines of the mighty, into the realms of fame,
The *Frisco News* in big black type has kindly put my name,
For I've swept the floor with Dempsey, and before one round at that,
Both peepers close and out he goes—you can all paste that in your hat,
And the girls up north in Oakland are made to ponder and muse,
On Royce's slaughter of Dempsey as told in the *Frisco News.*"

This effusion, which once had excited the admiration of the entire training establishment—who understood though they couldn't have explained the Homeric impulse that inspired it—familiarity had brought into such contempt that Royce had but to mention Pat Dempsey to be inundated with a torrent of ridicule and banter as riotous as it was good-natured. In the restraint which the presence of the ladies had imposed on his comrades the crafty old trainer, whom pride of authorship had infected with the itch of self-advertisement, had seen an unrivalled opportunity to gratify his vanity. But the sight of him standing there with squared shoulders and chest puffed out proudly spout-

ing his hackneyed pæan was too much a strain on the risible muscles of the Kid and the Docker.

The efforts they made to suppress their mirth, which exploded in a splutter of giggles and guffaws, convulsed the ladies and created an atmosphere of hilarity that evoked a laugh even from Shannon.

"What's the joke?" huffily enquired Royce, disconcerted by the unexpected ridicule to which he was so unceremoniously subjected. But his discomfort only excited a fresh outburst, and realising the futility of further remonstrance the ex-"bruiser," who was noted for his good nature, accepted the advice which was freely offered him to "chuck it," and joined in the laugh against himself.

"Guess Tennyson couldn't have done it better," said Delane, with a wink to Claudia.

"Just wait till you beat Sam Crowfoot, my boy," returned the trainer, "I'll bet you'll write poetry then instead of wasting your time reading it. But I say, ain't you going to show the ladies a bit of sparring? I guess that's what the visitors as come to training quarters like to see most."

Delane had not forgotten this item of the programme, which of all forms of indoor exercise comes nearest to the real thing in the ring, and it was only his dread of spoiling the pleasing impression he wished his guests to take away with them that had made him

hesitate to give an exhibition with his partner. It was a proof not so much of the innate refinement of his own nature as evidence that the influence of the prize-ring on a man does *not,* as its enemies claim, tend to brutalise but to civilise him. He was too accustomed to see women among the spectators at glove contests to question the propriety or impropriety of their presence at such entertainments. "If they wish to come why shouldn't they?" he would have said if his opinion had been asked.

To him there was nothing degrading about pugilism. Fights in which men displayed animosity and fought with a ferocity inspired by hatred were very rare. In most cases, if not friends, the adversaries regarded one another with a kindly feeling that to them at least divested the terrible blows they exchanged of offence. They shook hands before the battle, often before the last round which is the fiercest, and always at the finish, sometimes even kissing one another as a mark of mutual friendliness. They frequently smiled too when they received blows which were due to their own errors, and when they slipped accidentally, or plunged headlong through the ropes in some wild rush that failed, they good-naturedly helped one another to their feet. And last but not least when they stood over a prostrate foe and watched his useless despairing attempts to rise and continue the struggle a curious pity mingled with

their triumph. To win, not to hurt, was the thought ever uppermost in the minds of all pugilists.

In his devotion to his profession he could not understand why it was constantly being assailed from pulpits and platforms by censors of morals and self-appointed keepers of other peoples' consciences. He believed their crusade was to be attributed to the brutality, which he was ready enough to concede, of the class of people on whom pugilism depended mainly for its patronage. He knew well enough that the women who attended a prize-fight were of an exceptional type, a type in which his instinct told him Claudia Carisbrooke was not to be classed, and from the moment he had first set eyes on her he had understood in some vague way that there were reasons more justifiable than prejudice why the sight of two men fighting might excite repugnance.

Anxious as he was, therefore, to avoid anything calculated to mar the favourable impression he was trying to produce, it was with considerable apprehension that he asked Claudia's consent before complying with Royce's suggestion.

"Do you think I will like it?" she asked.

"I can't tell," he replied, doubtfully. "I don't see why you shouldn't. If you don't you've just got to say the word and I'll stop in a minute."

"I don't think I could stand it if it is very rough," she objected.

"Rough!" exclaimed Royce, "Lord bless me, ma'am, sparring isn't real fighting. It's not to teach a man how to hit, but how to avoid being hit. You don't suppose I'm going to run the risk of his smashing his knuckles? I guess there ain't going to be a bruise or a blemish on him when he meets Crowfoot, or I'll know the reason why."

"We should love to see you spar," said Mrs. Appleby, coaxingly.

Delane glanced at Claudia before complying.

"As you please," she said, with indifference.

Calling Shannon to "peel" he proceeded at once to follow suit. The next moment he stood facing his guests naked to the waist while the Kid fastened the boxing-gloves on his hands.

At the sight both women experienced a *frisson* they had not anticipated. To Claudia the torso thus suddenly revealed to her seemed the most beautiful thing out of marble she had ever beheld. If she had thought Delane "decorative" before, she could find no adjective to describe him now. She had never dreamt that such a body could be possessed by anyone. It dazzled her. Her own skin was not whiter or smoother. It was like marble flushed with that rosy hue of life, which has given rise to the expression "the pink of condition." And from it there emanated a sort of fragrant cleanliness that was like some faint, subtle perfume. The

body itself was the perfection of grace and development. To Claudia's untrained eye it seemed incredible that brute force lurked in such symmetry. In its delicacy of line there was the same suggestion of softness. It was only an expert who would have told at a glance that the muscles which at every movement of his body puffed and undulated under the satin flesh like serpents, were of iron, and that the shoulders and arms a woman might have envied, were a veritable power-house in which the energy and vigour of destruction were generated.

Compared with his sparring partner, who had likewise stripped to the waist, the apparent fragility of his physique was the more pronounced. Shannon too had a torso that might have served as a model for Pheidias. Like so many pugilists of the bruiser type, the beauty of his form redeemed the brutality of his features. Stripped, one forgot his broken nose and missing teeth. Shapely but less graceful than Delane he looked the personification of brute strength. It was not till the two men began to spar that Claudia perceived that the figure of "the white hope," which had seemed to her as fragile as porcelain, was in reality as hard as bronze. Try as he might Shannon could not break through his adversary's guard.

"That," said Royce, delightedly, as Delane by a twist of the neck managed to convert what was meant

for a damaging blow into a glancing one of little consequence, "'was timing the punch' to a nicety. Did you notice, ma'am, how his head moved in the same direction as the blow, like a Mexican broncho-buster shying with his horse?"

But the trainer's attempts to explain the various points of the contest were wasted on the ladies. Whether the men clinched or wrestled or rushed, aimed at the heart or the chin or the solar plexus it was all the same to them. They were only aware of the blows by the sound, and of the dazzling gleam of the bodies locked in a fierce embrace which they seemed ever seeking and ever trying to avoid.

Suddenly they heard the Kid shout excitedly, "Oh, you, Jack! That was a dandy!" The same instant Shannon was seen to measure his length on the floor.

At the sight both women rose to their feet with a gasp of horror.

"Golly," exclaimed Royce, "guess that hook'll do the trick, Jack, if you try it on the nigger."

"Is he hurt?" asked Mrs. Appleby, anxiously, while Claudia turned away unable to look at the stricken man who was bleeding slightly from a cut over the right eye.

"Bah!" replied Royce contemptuously, as Shannon assisted by Delane rose to his feet groggily.

Though considerably shaken admiration at the

science his opponent had displayed outweighed every other consideration.

"That's a winner, Jack," he said. "You must practice it till you get it pat, and then keep it up your sleeve."

But Delane was too obsessed with the thought that Claudia was upset to heed the compliments of his training staff.

"Go and wash your face, Joe," he whispered. "For God's sake don't let her see you bleed."

Shannon looked at him in amazement. He had quite forgotten Claudia in the pleasure and pride he took in the brilliant tactics that had floored him. This sudden reminder of Delane's interest in her angered him. An oath sprang to his lips, but he checked it before it left them, and with a scowl that gave his blood-stained face an expression of ferocity he shuffled out of the room.

"I am sure he is hurt," said Mrs. Appleby, who had noticed the sudden darkening of his countenance.

"Not a bit of it," laughed Delane, and perceiving that Claudia had risen as if to leave he said apologetically, "I'm sorry that happened, but it was too good a chance to miss, and that blow just seemed to slip off my hand before I could stop it."

"I expect you ought to be proud of it," she returned with a smile.

"Not if it's going to make you go," he said dis-

consolately as he observed her glance at a tiny watch that sparkled on her wrist.

"I am afraid we must. It's nearly six," she replied.

Something in her manner troubled him and he inwardly cursed himself for the brilliant hook by which he had sent Shannon to the ground. In the simplicity of his artless nature it never occurred to him that her peculiar air of constraint might be due not to repugnance but to the fascination which the proximity of his wonderful form was exercising over her senses.

"I don't suppose you will ever want to come here again. You're disgusted," he complained.

"I am not disgusted," she said with a quiet emphasis that reassured him, "you forget this is my first experience of boxing."

"Then you'll come again?" he asked eagerly as she turned from him to say good-bye to Royce and the seconds.

"We should like to, but I am afraid it is rather too stimulating for us," she smiled.

The non-committal character of the reply tantalised him. To suffer her to depart like this without knowing whether he was to see her again was impossible.

"I'll see you as far as the gate," he said, and tearing off his gloves he shouted to the Kid to give him his sweater.

"No, you don't, Jack Delane," exclaimed Royce,

beseechingly. "You just stay here and get rubbed down."

"I am sure it is quite unnecessary," remarked Claudia.

"Guess I'm going to see you to the gate," he said stubbornly; "to hear Dad you'd think I was that puny the least thing would crock me up." And casting a furious glance at his trainer, who let him pass with a shrug wisely reserving the explosion of a well-stocked vocabulary of expletives till he was out of hearing, he preceded his departing guests into the garden.

At the gate, which it seemed to him they reached in a stride, Claudia gave him her hand and thanked him for what she termed an "instructive" afternoon.

"I feel I have learnt a great deal about boxing," she said.

In a torment between anxiety to know whether he was to see her again and his diffidence about asking, her words gave to him the loop-hole he was seeking.

"Pardon me," he stammered, "but you haven't learnt the lot you think. Why, you just couldn't in *one* visit. I should like you to have a good opinion of pugilism. If you'd come again I'll do my level best to prevent anything upsetting you."

It was not difficult to surmise his meaning; the expression of his face revealed it even more plainly than his words. If Claudia had any lingering doubts as to

the spell she had without effort or intention cast over him they were dispelled by the palpable anxiety with which he waited for her reply. The imprudence of fostering hopes that could never be realised, of encouraging attentions only to ignore them, by continuing to see him did not occur to her. If it did, she dismissed the idea at once as absurd. The novelty of her conquest amused her. She could not bring herself to treat the admiration of such a man—a pugilist—seriously.

"I think," she said with a tantalising smile, "we had better not come again. I am sure your trainer would rather we didn't. But we shall be delighted if you will come to tea with us."

"I never take tea," he said gloomily, "it's not good for me."

"I won't offer you tea, then," she persisted, "but the view from the terrace is worth coming to see. It is famous in these parts. And the terrace is said to be haunted, which many consider an additional attraction."

"You simply must come," said Mrs. Appleby, with a flattering insistence. "We shall expect you to-morrow between half-past four and five." And she passed through the gate into the park.

"Perhaps the hour is inconvenient," remarked Claudia, following her with an air of proud indifference.

"Not the least," replied Delane, emphatically. "I'll come with pleasure." And rushing back to the cottage

he shouted excitedly as he entered it. "I say, Dad, I want to practise that punch that'll send Sam Crowfoot to sleep."

CHAPTER VI.

After the attempt she had made on her arrival at Asbury to "think over" the Duke of Dorking's proposal, Claudia never gave the subject another thought. In reality she had from the first, unconsciously perhaps, made up her mind to accept it. "Thinking it" over was to her merely a means of obtaining a sort of temporary reprieve from an inevitable and inopportune fate. So completely indeed did she succeed in banishing the ducal offer from her thoughts, that the period of grace she had demanded of the duke would have passed without her being aware of it, had she not chanced to read in the *Morning Post,* as she sat at breakfast in a pergola in the Italian garden where she liked to eat when the weather permitted, that the reception at the American Embassy at which she had promised to give the duke his answer was to take place that night.

She heaved a little fretful sigh as she read the announcement which reminded her of the tiresome task she had to perform, and tossed the paper aside petulantly. But the annoyance she manifested was due

less to her unready-readiness to keep her promise to the duke than to the thought of the effect her conduct would produce on her neighbour at Park Cottage.

A great deal of water had flowed under the bridge since her visit to his training quarters. That was only four days ago, but time is not essential to a good understanding when one is interested in another. In such cases a day counts as a thousand years. For the seed of acquaintanceship, planted in the fertile soil of attraction, may sprout in a single night, like Jonah's gourd, and blossom into intimacy. A single suggestion was all that was necessary to give Claudia's chance acquaintance with Delane the impetus that had brought it to the point which it now annoyed her to contemplate.

"Well, Mildred," she had said, as she and Mrs. Appleby returned to Asbury after leaving Park Cottage, "what do you think of the pugilist now?"

She spoke in an amused, dispassionate manner, as if the question were scarcely worth the effort of putting into words.

"I think you have knocked him out, to put it pugilistically," replied her friend carelessly. "He is head over ears in love with you."

The remark elicited a disdainful request to be serious, uttered with a sudden peculiar frigidity that aroused Mrs. Appleby's curiosity, which was exceedingly alert and sensitive to impressions.

"I am quite serious, Claudia," she retorted with a sharp, suspicious glance. "The man is in love with you, and if I had any doubts about it the conduct of his sparring partner would remove them. He is jealous of you."

"That man jealous of me!" exclaimed Claudia, in a tone of unfeigned surprise and flushing in a way that indicated a sense of embarrassment rather than anger. "Really, Mildred, you are anything but complimentary. To hear you talk one would infer that I was on a level with a camp-follower."

"Rubbish," said Mrs. Appleby, "you ought to be flattered. I wonder what it would be like to have a flirtation with a pugilist."

She spoke with the most frivolous intention, but Claudia took her words with a seriousness that surprised even herself when she recalled it afterwards.

"You must be mad, Mildred, if you think I would stoop to flirt with a prize-fighter," she said very coldly. "The idea would make me angry if it wasn't so absurd."

Mrs. Appleby shrugged her pretty shoulders and changed the conversation. But the fat was in the fire. Though Claudia knew perfectly well that Delane admired her, it had never occurred to her to encourage him. Mrs. Appleby's inference that she was "flirting" with him had shocked her profoundly, because it was the last thing she had dreamt of. But in reality it was

not altogether disgust she had felt. The thought of the spell she had cast upon this man, between whom and herself there was so wide a gulf, obsessed her. She could not get him out of her mind, and the more she thought of him the more mesmeric did Mrs. Appleby's suggestion become. She had declared that it was absurd to suppose she was capable of a flirtation with a prize-fighter, but the very absurdity of the idea gave it a coquettish interest in which at last she discovered something exotic and provocative that appealed to her.

The next morning destiny, which is often but another name for the devil, sent Mrs. Appleby a telegram that compelled her to return to town immediately. Left alone at Asbury Claudia's thoughts, which were fluttering moth-like round temptation, tumbled into its flame. Given secrecy and Samson all women become Delilahs.

When Delane arrived that afternoon, to his astonishment it was a new Claudia who welcomed him. She had never shown him the disdainful, cynical mask without which she would not have been recognised in Society, but it would have seemed scarcely stranger to him than the face she turned him now. Freed from the restraint that Mildred Appleby's presence had imposed upon her, she greeted him with a cordiality suggestive of intimacy, so frank and natural did it appear.

On previous occasions, in the great hall on the day of their first meeting and at his training quarters, though she had been very gracious and considerate, there had been something impenetrable and aloof about her manner that chilled him. She reminded him of a statue. In her beautiful eyes there had seemed a sort of marble vagueness, in the witchery of her smile a sort of sculptured challenge. But now the Galatea had come to life and dismounted from her pedestal. It was most assuredly no statue but a wonderful vibrant being of flesh and blood who showed him over Asbury Court that afternoon, pointing out its treasures and reciting the romantic tale of its glories, while he followed a-tingle at her side, gaping in wonderment at all he beheld, and stowing away in his memory all he heard; and finally carrying away with him as a souvenir, more dearly prized than his trophies of the ring, a rose which she had plucked with her own hands and given him as they strolled through the old-world pleasaunce.

Since then she had suffered him to see her daily. An excuse for meeting was easily found. In the library she had discovered several works on pugilism which could not fail to interest an intelligent member of the profession. What more natural than for him to borrow the "Boxiana" of Pierce Egan and to return it the following afternoon after training to fetch Naughton's

"Kings of the Queensberry Realm"? Or that she should discover that one of his modes of out-of-door exercise was to run or walk through the park in the mornings, and to be found sketching when he passed, looking so lovely to his ravished eyes, in a simple muslin gown open at the throat, and a flat broad-brimmed Leghorn straw on her head, bound with a long green ribbon which streamed to the ground behind her, that he could not but halt for a few minutes to talk to her while his exasperated attendants grumbled their objections at a distance.

This fugitive, almost surreptitious intercourse, based as it was on mutual inclination, quickly became intimate. A barrier, however, gossamer-like yet impassable, continued to separate them. Both were conscious of it, though it was no longer, as she imagined, his sense of her vast superiority to him in birth and breeding, but the instinctive timidity of his love to declare itself.

To maintain this barrier intact against Delane's hesitating efforts to demolish it was to Claudia the supreme charm of adventure. By the interest she displayed in all that concerned his career and profession, she contrived to keep the conversation under her control. It was safe ground, and one on which he felt at home. He had, indeed, little else to talk about, and he was too conscious of his intellectual limitations to venture on topics with which he was not conversant.

Of life, as he had known it, he could talk easily and even eloquently, and he required little encouragement to pour into a sympathetic ear the simple tale of his hopes, his tastes, and his experiences.

On the subject of his boyhood in Virginia alone was he inclined to be reticent. Its memory was evidently distasteful to him, and it was only by questioning him that Claudia learnt he had a brother and sister, neither of whom he had seen since he ran away to be a pugilist, and of whose whereabouts he was uncertain. The former he believed had "gone West," after their mother's death, when the mortgage on the farm was fore-closed; while the latter, he was told, had married a missionary, and was living "somewhere in China."

It was with his career in the ring that he was chiefly concerned. Apart from it there seemed to be nothing worth remembering. He spoke of his early struggles, which luck had made lighter for him than for most pugilists; of his various battles; of the purses he had won, of the men he had fought; of the "toughs," whose patronage of pugilism had made it a by-word for corruption and brutality, and compared with whom the "backers," who arranged the contests by which pugilists earned their living, were angels of light. He let her into all the secrets of the profession, and showed her its bad side as well as its good. She learnt how the issue

of a fight was often "faked" by a previous understanding between the "backers," and how "crooks" to win battles would bathe their hands in a solution of plaster of Paris which adhered to the bandages and made them as hard as iron; or how they would have recourse to other devices less illegal but equally effective, such as oiling their bodies which made them slip when clinched and caused the gloves to glance in striking, whereby the force of the blows they received was weakened; or perfuming their hair with powerful scents which inhaled by an adversary in the heat of a clinch stupefied his senses.

Against this background of dishonesty, how brightly shone the virtues of pugilism! It seemed to Claudia that she had never before realised how attractive and powerful virtue really was. She marvelled at the manner in which it performed its miracles. Straightness in the ring, she was told, invariably created a corresponding straightness in the audience. The atmosphere around the ring was never so polluted that the chivalry and generosity of the men within could not purify it with a feeling of sympathy and honour. Nor, in descanting on the traditions on which pugilism based its claim to be considered as "the noble art," did Delane fail to speak of the devoted friendships that were formed in the ring, to which even the very "crooks" themselves were prone.

But there was one aspect of the ring which made

a deeper impression on Claudia than any other. That was its pathos. Behind the hero who resisted the temptations which success brought in its train, there ever stalked defeat, a ghostly shape that sooner or later was destined to overtake the champion of the world. A dozen years at the most was as long as the best of them could hope to avert the disaster which in the end stripped them of their popularity, their fame, and often, if they had been improvident, of their very means of subsistence. The case of the immortal Bob Fitzsimmons, who, after he had been in the lists for years, took a new lease of life at an age when most men have lost a great deal, if not all, of their athletic snap, won the championship of the world and retained it long after the career of the ordinary pugilist has closed, is the one classical exception. For the ring is no respecter of age, and ruthlessly breaks its idols when they begin to lose their freshness.

"If I beat Crowfoot and have luck," said Delane, "you'll find my name in the papers, if you look for it in the right place, for the next ten years. It is between twenty-five and thirty-five that a pugilist is at his best, and I am just twenty-five."

"And if the luck goes against you," asked Claudia, "what then?"

His emotional face clouded for a moment.

"That is something I'd rather not think of," he

replied. "Still for me to be up against it won't be as hard as for some men. I've been pretty careful. I've got ten thousand dollars in the bank. I guess that'll keep me some. Besides, I might start a Boxing Academy or keep a saloon, what you call a public-house in this country."

And as he went on to explain to her why pride in his case would prevent him from remaining in the ring —where, subjected to all sorts of humiliations and beset by all sorts of temptations, he might earn an increasingly precarious living by fighting inferior men for paltry purses till having become utterly and completely discredited he was flung out on humanity's dust heap— Claudia felt as if she herself had tasted the bitterness of defeat. She realised the tragedy of the "has been," to so many of whom defeat meant poverty and physical as well as spiritual degradation—a condition to which the struggle to "come back" added a fresh poignancy.

She learnt too, that even the elation of winning a battle may have its *revers de médaille*. In describing his emotions in the hour of victory, he told her how sometimes the triumph had been spoilt by a terrible fear that he had killed his adversary, or by contempt if the man he had beaten was a "crook" and had not fought "square"; or by pity as he pictured himself at some future date lying unconscious in his turn on the floor of the ring.

"The worst thing I ever suffered," he said, "was knocking out Mike Rafferty, the man who taught me all I know. Mike was a 'has been,' and was trying to come back, and to be knocked out by a kid, as I was at the time, nearly broke his heart. I know it nearly broke mine, I'd have given anything in the world to have had him knock me out instead." And the tears glistened in his eyes at the memory.

Claudia deceived herself, however, in believing that the resistance of the barrier she wished to maintain between herself and Delane was proof against these pugilistic confidences. From the understanding she acquired of his character, which revealed itself unconsciously in all he said, she fancied he was an open book to her. He was. But there was one page she had not read, one leaf she had not turned. She fancied, too, because her conquest was so complete and so easy, that it had cost her nothing, that in taking his heart from him, she had given him nothing in exchange. She was mistaken. Looking at the ring through his eyes she had come to look at him through the ring, which reflected back on him the glamour his personality cast over it, whereby she unconsciously lost all her perconceived prejudices against pugilism. She thought of it as merely another name for Delane. He was, as it were, pugilism incarnate, pugilism purified and restored to the pedestal on which the Greeks had set it by his unaffected simplicity and

innate nobility. In a word Delane had won her respect.

It was the sudden perception of this which made the announcement in the *Morning Post* so unpalatable to her. As she fretfully tossed aside the paper, which reminded her so unseasonably of her obligation to the Duke of Dorking, she was startled by the thought of the consequences in which her flirtation with Delane had entangled her. In amusing herself at his expense she had never dreamt of consequences, or if she did they had appeared too trivial to cause her the least anxiety. At the most he would experience no more than a temporary regret. A moment's reflection would suffice to convince him of the folly of cherishing hopes that could never be realised. As for herself, the spirit of coquetry, of wanton amusement, in which she had entered upon the flirtation gave her too keen a sense of security to admit of any misgiving. She never doubted that she could end the flirtation at any moment as easily and carelessly as she had begun it.

To realise, therefore, as she did now, that the termination of the affair was not the light, irresponsible act she imagined was irritating. Her pride, the pride of a woman accustomed to have her own way, rebelled against this sudden obstacle to her convenience.

"How is it possible," she asked herself petulantly,

"that I of all people have become in four days so intimate with a man separated from me intellectually and socially by so wide a gulf that I should concern myself as to the effect my actions may have on him?"

But the very fact of asking herself such a question proved that the gulf was bridged. In the light of her knowledge of his character, the idea of his intellectual and social inferiority was preposterous. Beneath the husk of convention she recognised him as her equal. What was rank, what was intellect compared to character, and such character? And what, whispered the voice of sex within her, were her advantages worth in the currency of reality and nature compared to the beauty of a form such as his? By its accent she recognised it as the same voice which had lured her into the flirtation. The blush that swept over her face at the thought made her tingle with shame. The sensation was not disagreeable, but she hated herself for it. There was something demoralising in its effect that alarmed her.

She shrank from the thoughts it stirred in her as from the brink of a dizzy and dangerous abyss into which she had peered. But try as she might, it was impossible to get away from them. Under various disguises the same thoughts continued to pursue her and call to her in the same voice.

Of one thing at all events she was in no doubt:

her flirtation with Delane was at an end. The paragraph in the *Morning Post* had settled that definitely. Sometime in the afternoon she would motor up to London, and fulfil her obligation to the Duke of Dorking as she had promised. This decision, however, failed to restore her equanimity. She was painfully aware that her sudden departure from Asbury would be anything but a matter of indifference to Delane. He would want to know why she was leaving; to tell him would involve explaining why she had come, and then, what a crash of white marble there would be in him!

The idea brought her back again within sound of that demoralising sex-voice from which she had fled. She remembered that Delane, in citing Joe Shannon's devotion to him as an instance of the friendships that are formed in the ring, had incidentally alluded, as a sort of apology of his sparring partner's evident dislike of her, to the distrust that the sight of women in the vicinity of a pugilist's training quarters produced in the minds of his staff. From the way he spoke she had inferred that she was regarded by his friends at Park Cottage as a sort of Circe, the effects of whose fascination could not but be baneful. It had pleased her at the time to think she possessed such influence over him, but now it seemed to her as if it debased her to the level of a harlot. She suddenly realised the

lasciviousness of the impulse that had prompted her to trifle with his affections. Her pride reeled at the thought. She felt soiled, stained, lowered in her own esteem.

To despise herself was mortifying enough, but to feel that she had given him the right to despise her, to regard her, *grande dame* that she was, and conscious of the fact, of being no better than a vulgar wanton Lady Clara Vere de Vere was an unthinkable humiliation. For a moment she meditated going away without seeing him again or explaining the reason of her departure, but she dismissed the idea instantly. The cowardice of such conduct would only make her appear more odious both to herself and him. No, there was but one thing for her to do—to see him once more for the last, and in bidding him farewell save, if possible, the marble image that he had made of her in his heart from being broken.

The thought raised her dignity out of its abasement. She was aware of the difficulty of sustaining it, but she felt able to overcome it. She had too great faith in the spell she had cast over him to fail in such a task—a task which the artless simplicity of his nature rendered the easier. Yet the thought of her ability to take advantage of his belief in her gave her but little satisfaction. She had no taste for tactics so mean, for a *rôle* so foreign to her nature.

The consequence of folly is a burden one never willingly assumes as long as there is the least chance of strapping it onto the shoulders of anybody else. Claudia was in the mood for a scape-goat, and to recover her self-esteem she would have had no hesitation in making Delane himself serve this purpose, if the Duke and Mrs. Appleby had not been conveniently at hand to take his place. But for the former, she told herself, she would never have come to Asbury in the height of the London season to think over his tiresome proposal, and consequently never have met Delane at all. It was still more consoling to think that, but for Mildred Appleby, she would never have dreamt of "wondering what it would be like to flirt with a pugilist."

Having succeeded in soothing her conscience by such reasoning and reflecting, Claudia proceeded to shoot the last arrow in her quiver. This time the target at which she aimed was no longer the heart of Jack Delane, but the flirtation in which she had snared it. To give it back to him free and whole was now the sole object of her thoughts, the immediate purpose of her life.

To make a resolution gives one an air of *sang-froid*. After cogitating over the position in which she so unexpectedly found herself, she left the pergola in which she had breakfasted and sauntered about the Italian

garden, pausing to throw the crumbs of a roll she had brought with her to the carp in the fountain, or to pluck a rose, or prune a plant of some over-blown flower or dead leaf, as calmly as if nothing had occurred to upset her. Now and then she glanced at the watch that sparkled on her wrist, saying to herself as she did so, "He will come after his morning's training to bring back the 'Rodney Stone' he borrowed yesterday." When the hour at which she expected him to arrive approached, she went to the pleasaunce to intercept him. It was by way of the pleasaunce that he was wont to come and go on his visits to Asbury, and its seclusion suggested it to her as the place for the *tête-à-tête* she had in mind. But he was not there, nor did he come, though she waited over an hour on a bench in the hornbeam bower by which he would pass.

At last feeling cross and fidgety she went into the house, where she gave the necessary instructions as to her departure, which she decided to postpone till after tea, and despatched two telegrams; one to the housekeeper of her flat in town to notify her impending return, the other to Lady Marion and Mauve whom she offered to call for on her way to the American Embassy.

"Grandmamma has always been so keen about my marrying Dorking," she mused, "that she will consider herself slighted if she isn't the first to be told that I have finally decided to do so."

These measures made her feel as if she had begun to cross the Rubicon to which her farewell of Delane led. A thought suggested by a sudden glimpse of herself in her mirror caused her to proceed still deeper into the stream. She remembered that Delane, in an attempt to break through the barrier that divided them, had once ventured to express his preference for the dress she was now wearing above any other in which he had seen her. It was merely a simple muslin frock, devoid of any suggestion of smartness or value. In such attire she had no doubt seemed more approachable, more on the same social level as himself. Impressed by the thought of the difficulties the effect of such a dress might create for her, she went at once to change it for a very costly and ultra-fashionable French *toilette*.

Clad in this costume, in which she trusted Delane would be chilled by a subtle sense of the vast difference in station between a Mayfair beauty and heiress and a professional pugilist, she descended to the terrace where she sat and wondered if he would come before lunch. This meal found her still wondering. She took a French novel to distract her thoughts while she sat through half-a-dozen courses for which she had no appetite. But she could neither read nor eat. The afternoon passed and still he did not appear. Tea found her irritated, torn with suspense. Never before had he let so long a time elapse without seeing her.

Could he have met with an accident, she wondered? Ridiculous, he was too carefully watched by his training staff. Could it be that something had occurred to make the thought of her a secondary consideration? A rush of angry blood flushed her cheeks. She would let him understand when he arrived that she was not a person to be treated in any such fashion.

At five, as she had ordered, the motor drew up at the door. But Claudia was too accustomed to regard time as if it were not of the least importance to pay any attention to it now. After all, Asbury was only thirty miles from town—a mere nothing in a good car—and she had no intention of flattering the duke by arriving early at the rendezvous.

It suddenly occurred to her that her purpose could be accomplished quite as well by letter as by word of mouth. She went into the drawing-room, where, in the embrasure of a window that faced the driveway, was a table furnished with writing-materials, at which she sat down to indite her epistle. But it was not so easy as she thought to write what she had to say. After tearing up several sheets of note-paper, on which she had been unable to inscribe anything beyond, "Dear Mr. Delane," she came to the conclusion that it was not a matter of such vital importance as she had fancied. She could easily motor down to Asbury the next day and send for him, if necessary. It would certainly be easier than

to write to him, and much more effective. Besides, piqued at having waited in vain for him, it pleased her to picture his disappointment when he arrived, as she had no doubt he would, after she had gone.

She rose from her seat, as eager now to go away as she had been previously loath to leave. As she entered the motor which was still waiting for her, Delane appeared in the drive-way. Under his arm was the book he had taken away the day before.

"It's a fine story," he said, taking off his hat as he approached, "but I'd have liked it more if it had been about the modern prize-ring, instead of the old one. I guess there are more Rodney Stones in the ring to-day than there have ever been, and it would do the people who condemn pugilism without understanding it a lot of good to know it. I don't want to blow my own trumpet, so to speak, but I'll back the average prize-fighter to 'play the game,' as you say in England, against the average person or politician." Then, as if suddenly struck by the amount of luggage which the chauffeur, with the aid of the footman, was engaged in strapping to the back of the car, he added abruptly, "Is all that yours?"

Had he foreseen her departure and surmised all the circumstances connected with it, he could not have chosen a more psychological moment to appear. After the suspense of waiting so long for him in vain, Claudia

was in a state of mind not unlike that of a nervous pugilist, whose adversary to fluster him purposely keeps him waiting in the ring before appearing there himself.

"I am going up to London," she said, awkwardly, "I have a very important engagement to-night."

Her evident embarrassment gave an emphasis to her words that filled him with apprehension.

"You mean you are going away—for good?" he stammered. "I——"

But Claudia did not suffer him to proceed. The idea of being compromised in the eyes of her servants by a man whom she knew they regarded as little better than themselves and whose manner betokened an intimacy calculated to arouse their suspicions, was too humiliating to contemplate. Conscious that the interview, which she dreaded now as much as she had desired it, had assumed a character not unlike that of a pugilistic contest, she was determined that it at least should have no witnesses.

"Yes," she cut in icily, "I am leaving Asbury. You have caught me just in the nick of time, but I can still spare you a few minutes. Won't you come in?" And descending from the car, in which she had not yet taken her seat, she added to the chauffeur, "You can wait, William."

Followed by Delane, whose mobile and expressive face reflected the thoughts and fears aroused by her

manner, which was to him entirely new and unaccountable, she entered the house. The contest, to hold to the metaphor, took place in the library. Intended for a chapel, and formerly used as such, it was a dreary room with a Gothic window at one end that faced a dark interior court. With its vaulted oak ceiling, black with age, its walls laden with old books in sombre bindings, and its massive mid-Victorian furniture, it seemed more suited for a tribunal than a *tête-à-tête*. Delane felt chilled and disheartened as he entered it. On Claudia, however, who had chosen it because of the privacy it afforded, its effect was quite different.

She had barely crossed its threshold when, carried away by a sudden gust of passion, she turned on him, exclaiming in a voice that shook with rage—

"How dare you humiliate me before my servants? Have you no sense of propriety, no thought for appearances, or are you hopelessly stupid? Do you think because those creatures look as if they were made of wood that they have no eyes or ears or tongues?"

The suddenness of the attack bewildered him. She might have spoken in a foreign language for all he seemed to understand her. He merely looked at her with frightened eyes.

But Claudia did not expect or desire him to reply. Unstrung by the explosion of feelings she could not control, she sank exhausted upon a black leather sofa

and burst into tears. The sight of them was more than Delane could endure. They spoke to him at least in a language he understood. They blotted out the insults she had showered on him, explained and excused them, and flinging himself on his knees beside her he murmured tenderly, consolingly—

"Claudia, Claudia, what is it? what has happened? Oh, Claudia, I love you, let me help you."

The worst she had feared had happened. The barrier was down.

Confident though she had hitherto been of her ability to preserve it, she had recognised the possibility of its destruction, and provided against this contingency in advance with a complacent sense of being equal to the occasion. But now the unexpected had happened, as it always does, and she could only sit and look at him helplessly through a mist of tears.

Encouraged by her silence, which he regarded as a tacit acceptance of his sympathy, Delane boldly threw off all restraint and gave his passion a free rein.

"I loved you, dear," he continued caressingly, "ever since I saw you first. It was love at first sight with me. I never dared tell you till now: it seemed so presumptuous, so unheard of, for a fellow like me to love a girl so good and so beautiful as you with any chance of winning her. But you understand me, don't you? I am not good at love-making; I've never had any experience, and I can't find the words I want easily, like some men; but it's my heart I am offering you, and if you'll take it I swear you shall never regret it. I'll fight to make myself worthy of you, as I am going to fight Crowfoot for the championship of the world. Will you give me the right to dry your beautiful eyes, to protect you and make you happy? Ah, Claudia, let me love you."

There was something mesmeric in the melodious sing-song of his soft southern voice that allured and subdued her. Listening to him as he offered her on his knees at the other end of the diameter of rank, wealth, and education, the one thing in the world she had never possessed and the one thing above all others she had craved, she suddenly realised the full importance of the opportunity that fate was giving her.

Men had told her before that they loved her, but never before had the declaration been made so spontaneously, and so unaffectedly. And never before had she felt so convinced of its truth. Of the lives and characters of the others who had aspired to her hand and heart, she had known nothing—perhaps because she had cared nothing. When they had told her they loved her she had only their word as security. This one she had known scarcely a week in all, but it was long enough to make her feel sure of him. There was nothing in his life worth the knowing he had not told

her, and that she had not by her instinct and perception tested the truth of. And what a white life it was! White in its abnegation of the flesh, unspotted by the temptations to which pugilists with their impulsive temperaments are more prone than most men, and to which he in particular with his exceptional physical attraction had been constantly exposed. White in its devotion to the art on which his career depended, and the redemption of which from the degradation in which it was held was at once his ideal and his despair. Straight and square like his manner of fighting, white life of a "white hope"—worthy setting to the white nature that gleamed in it like a jewel of the first water.

"Yet," whispered Common Sense, "he is but a prize-fighter after all, one whom your world regards as a brute, a human mongrel, a thing beyond the pale of society, beyond the right to the charity of serious consideration.

She made an effort to collect and control herself. Even now she might yet save the image he had formed of her from destruction. It would be little short of a miracle if she succeeded, but she would try. Gathering her strength she raised her head to look at him, only to let it fall again, dazzled and disturbed by the love-light in his eyes. A change seemed to have taken place in him—or was it in herself? The man whom she had regarded merely as a fascinating specimen of human

strength and beauty, while the barrier still separated them, now that they faced one another soul to soul, as it were, appeared transformed.

He noticed her reluctance to meet his eyes, and bending over her pleaded softly, "Claudia, won't you let me love you, won't you tell me that you love me?"

The male in him called to the female in her; it called in the manly tenderness of his voice, in his hot breath on her cheek, in his strong arms outstretched and tingling to clasp her, in every fibre and pulse of his being. She felt its mastery, and knew she had neither the strength nor the courage, aye, nor the will to resist it. What mattered what he was? Whether pugilist or prince was but an accident of birth. Whatever his station, nature had made him a man—a fact beside which convention and prejudice vanished like the terrors of a dream.

"Yes," she answered, suddenly raising her head and meeting his gaze fearlessly, "I love you."

Instantly his arms were around her, she felt the muscles stiffen as they touched her. But even in this moment of ecstasy he was conscious of his strength, and embraced her very gently as if he were afraid of hurting her. It was only upon his lips as they met hers that he was unable to impose any check.

CHAPTER VII.

LATER when Delane returned to Park Cottage he found his sparring partner alone in the gymnasium practising the exercise known as "punching the ball." Bubbling over with excitement, the secret of which he had many reasons for concealing from his staff, he was careful before entering the cottage to compose his features lest they should betray him.

But Shannon, whose ear as well as eye was trained to a nicety to note the slightest change in the manner or appearance of the "white hope," in whom his professional interest was intensified by personal attachment, instantly detected the blissfulness of his mood by the buoyancy of his tread. As he knew by experience that the quickest and surest way to gratify his curiosity was to feign indifference, he went on punching the ball and waited for Delane to unburden himself, apparently oblivious of the excitement he was endeavouring to hide. He did not have to wait long. Delane was naturally expansive and the temptation to confide in his sparring

partner, whose devotion he was aware would ensure his silence, was one he could not resist.

"Where are the others, Joe?" he began cautiously, ready to restrain himself if they were about the place.

"In the village," Shannon jerked out between punches.

"What, are you quite alone?"

Shannon nodded his head in assent without desisting from his exercise.

After moving about restlessly Delane suddenly called out from the other end of the room.

"I say, Joe, can you keep a secret?"

"Guess so," puffed Shannon, dodging and smiting the ball at the same time.

His indifference annoyed Delane. He picked up a boxing-glove and hurled it at Shannon's head. It struck him full in the face.

"What the hell do you mean?" he cried, in well-feigned anger.

"Stop punching that damned ball and come here. I've got something to tell you," replied Delane.

Shannon obeyed sulkily.

"Look here, Joe," said Delane, insinuatingly placing a hand on his shoulder. "You're the only real pal I've got, and I know you won't tell Dad and the others. I don't want them to know just yet at any rate."

Shannon took the hand from his shoulder and clasped it.

"I don't blab, Jack; you know that," he said, quietly.

"Yes, Joe, I know," said Delane. "Well, I've been and gone and done it."

"Done what?"

"Told her I love her. I'm going to marry her after I have beaten Crowfoot. It's almost too good to be true!"

Shannon knew who *her* was without asking. He had perceived the impression Miss Carisbrooke had made upon Delane, and he resented it from the start. The misgivings it occasioned Royce—who, knowing from long experience that the rigid celibacy to which a pugilist was compelled to adhere in training rendered him peculiarly susceptible to the appeal of sex, considered the mere sight of a woman at such a time as a temptation—were intensified in Shannon by jealousy. Bound to Delane by the closest ties of affection and interest he looked upon his friendship as his special prerogative which he dreaded to share with anyone, least of all a woman. Delane's growing infatuation had filled him with dismay. His whole nature had risen in arms against this new interest from which he was excluded and in which he was ignored and condemned to solitary repining. Unable to contend against Claudia's influence over his friend he had tried to console himself with the thought that her exalted station in life

would in the end effect the disillusionment he desired. He believed she was playing with Delane and when tired of him would cast him aside as lightly as she had picked him up. It was then that Shannon counted upon regaining the undivided affection of the only being in the world he cared for. The idea that Claudia would ever marry Delane seemed to him so incredible that he refused to accept the confidence just imparted to him literally. It could only mean one thing, Royce's worst fears were justified.

"Well, you've done for yourself, Jack Delane!" he exclaimed, turning pale. "You won't last two rounds against the nigger. What's come over you? If Dad knew, he'd wash his hands of you right now!"

Delane's face flushed and he instinctively clenched his fists. But the desire to unburden himself got the better of his resentment.

"Rot!" he retorted, tingling at the recollection of the kisses he had given and received, and giving his pent up feelings full rein. "What I have told you'll do for Crowfoot more than anything could. She's my mate. I felt certain of it the minute I saw her. It was love at first sight with me, and with her too, though she didn't know it. Why, she was even going to marry another fellow, a duke, one of the biggest bugs in the country. But I've won her, Joe! She's clean knocked out, said so herself. Love's got a punch

like death's. There ain't any guard it can't break through. When it hits out you just go down and stay down. Guess I could write poetry now if I tried!"

But his jubilant confidence only increased Shannon's jealousy without weakening his conviction that Delane had obtained favours which he deluded himself into regarding as a pledge of matrimony.

"You're a greater fool than I thought, Jack," he said, contemptuously. "If you think it likely that a sister of a gentleman like Mr. Carisbrooke is going to marry you, you've got a bee in your bonnet! Who ever heard of a grand lady like her marrying a prize-fighter? That's what you and me are, Jack, chaps as fight with our fists for a living. And a fine sort of living it is too, isn't it? We don't know anybody but millionaires and lords, do we? We travel for pleasure, don't we, as if we'd more money in the bank than we've got any use for? And fine ladies, and ladies as isn't fine, don't pester us with their attentions, do they? Oh, we're not the strongest and the best made men in the world for nothing, are we? You're a pretty chap, when you're stripped for a fight, Jack, and women know it, but we prize-fighters can't go about naked and——"

"Stop!" shouted Delane, clenching his fists again, but restrained by a sense of the truth in Shannon's rude eloquence from striking him. "It's a lie! My

looks have got nothing to do with it, this time. 'Good looks attract at first,' she said, 'but one soon gets so accustomed to them as to forget them. It's personality that counts in the long run.' Those were her very words."

"All the same, personality or no personality," persisted Shannon, "you're a prize-fighter, and you never heard of any woman as rich and high up in the world as Miss Carisbrooke as has ever stepped down to marry one. Why, it's against nature. You ought to be the first to know that."

The contempt with which he pointed his incredulity began to annoy Delane.

"I know she's promised to marry me," he said, stiffly. "My being a prize-fighter doesn't make any difference with her. I told her if she wanted I'd give up the ring right now. But she wouldn't hear of it. 'No,' she said, 'you go ahead and win the fight you're training for. Fighting's your profession, and I shall never ask you to give it up. You've convinced me that it's an art, and the noblest of all.'"

"That's what she tells you now," scoffed Shannon. "But women don't like to see their husbands bashed about in the ring. They're always nagging them to chuck it."

"Well, she's different. You can't compare her with others. I tell you she's proud of my being a prize-

fighter." And offended by the persistency with which Shannon flouted all he said, Delane turned from him irritably.

But Shannon was not satisfied with having cast a damper on his friend's exuberant spirits. He longed to innoculate him with the bitterness of his own jealousy.

"If she's so proud of you as all that, what's the use of making a secret about it?" he asked, tauntingly.

Delane swung round and faced him threateningly.

"That's my affair. You'd better keep a civil tongue in your head, do you hear?"

Shannon laughed contemptuously. His blood was up, and reckless of the effect of his words he retorted—

"You can't bluff me. It's because she's ashamed to have her fine friends know how she's been carrying on with a prize-fighter."

"Damn you!" cried Delane, and in the same breath he shot out with his right hand swiftly and savagely.

The blow, the full force of which Shannon received on the chin, dropped him. But though stunned he did not lose consciousness. After a second he raised himself slowly to his feet. Resentment had been knocked clean out of him. The punishment he had invited, like that which a woman receives in quarrelling with the man she loves, made him remorseful. He was in the mood for a reconciliation. Perceiving that Delane was examining his hand as if it hurt him, he enquired anxiously if it was injured.

"One of the knuckles feels a bit sore," was the reply. "I hope it ain't going to swell."

Delane manifested not the least trace of rancour. The blow he had given had relieved his feelings as fully as its recipient's. He treated his sparring partner's solicitude as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

"Let's have a look at your hand," said Shannon, who knew by instinct that his overture had been accepted in the spirit in which it was intended. "Does that hurt?" he asked, pressing very gently with his fingers the bruised knuckle which Delane indicated as he submitted his hand for inspection.

"H'm, not much. Guess you'd better rub it."

"I'll get the Elliman," replied Shannon.

At the same moment the sound of feet crunching the gravel caused both to start.

"It's Dad," exclaimed Delane, catching a glimpse of his trainer through the window. "He'll raise hell."

"Not unless you're fool enough to tell him," returned Shannon, with conviction. "Come upstairs, Jack, and let me rub your hand. I've got a bottle of Elliman in my room."

And the two men having made their peace in this way left the gymnasium before Royce, whom they succeeded in keeping in happy ignorance of their quarrel, entered it.

CHAPTER VIII.

It was just as well, perhaps, for Delane's peace of mind that he was not permitted to attend the reception at the American Embassy that night, or in the humility of his great love the doubts which Shannon had tried to excite might have taken root in him.

It was something more than the ordinary "brilliant function" of the Society reporter. The desire to behold at close quarters one of America's most eminent citizens in whose honour it was held, and to whose presence in England rumour attributed a special political significance, had caused it to be regarded in advance as an outstanding event of the London season. In consequence the company that had assembled in the stately saloons of the Embassy was a very large and distinguished one. The knowledge that the King and Queen would attend in state naturally heightened the importance of the occasion, and as the fact had been duly announced in the papers a considerable crowd had collected in the immediate vicinity of the mansion to witness the arrival of the monarch and his consort, and beguiled the

tedium of waiting with feasting their eyes and commenting on the occupants of each motor or carriage as it passed.

The car which brought Claudia Carisbrooke and her grandmother, being lighted within, attracted particular attention, and as its progress was somewhat impeded by the number of earlier arrivals, it afforded the crowd an excellent opportunity of feeding and gratifying its curiosity at the same time. Opinions were freely and loudly launched as to the identity of the ladies; their relationship, if any; the value of their jewels; and the amiability of their tempers as expressed by their features, which under this fusillade of criticism remained as impassive and impenetrable as if carved out of stone.

To old Lady Marion and Mauve it mattered not in the least whether the people on the kerb thought her a harridan, a hag, an old squaw, or an "aristocrat," as one voice put it in a tone that was evidently intended to be complimentary, "of a type almost extinct as the dodo." Only once or twice when the car halted rather longer than usual and in their curiosity people pressed close round it, did she sniff her smelling-bottle to get the *parfum de canaille,* as she would have expressed it, out of her nostrils.

Her granddaughter, whose beauty elicited nothing but admiration, manifested even greater indifference. If Lady Marion and Mauve was neither offended nor

flattered by what she heard, Claudia was too absorbed in thinking of Delane to hear any of the comments of the crowd at all. But supremely happy though she felt, she was careful not to show it by word or gesture. To have done so, indeed, would have cost her a much greater effort, habituated as she was by breeding and temperament to disguise her feelings, than the restraint she imposed on herself demanded. Her elation merely expressed itself in a heightened colour and a rather softer demeanour than usual, which gave her a peculiarly radiant, almost triumphant, air.

At the Embassy her appearance provided all who beheld her with a subject of conversation. In the opinion of the *salon,* which was but the echo of the verdict of the street, Miss Carisbrooke of Asbury had never looked lovelier.

She was dressed entirely in white of some soft and shimmering material which clung to her tall and willowy figure and accentuated its nonchalant grace. It was one of those picturesque creations that defy fashion, and which only an Englishwoman, whose type of beauty it suits, can wear without appearing ridiculous. As she ascended the broad marble stairs, which had been converted into a fairy forest, behind old Lady Marion and Mauve clutching her smelling-bottle and bending over her gold-headed cane, she looked like some princess in a fairy-story being led into an enchanted palace by a witch.

A young American who had just come to England for the first time, and from a coign of vantage was eagerly awaiting the arrival of the King and Queen, went into raptures over her.

"My, what a clinker!" he exclaimed to a compatriot beside him to whom the scene on which they gazed was familiar. "I always thought that no women in the world could come up to ours, but I guess we can't breed that kind."

"No," replied the other, "that kind is the result of generations of aristocratic horticulture. In this sort of soil," waving his hand, "it is common enough, but you won't find a more perfect specimen of it than Miss Carisbrooke."

"She's a queen!" said the young American, with fervour, watching her disappear into the splendid mob.

"Guess she'd like to be," drawled his compatriot. "They say she's hard to please. It's common talk that she could marry the Duke of Dorking who is about the greatest catch in London. Personally, I don't believe he has ever given her the chance. She wouldn't be such a fool as to refuse him. But look, the King and Queen have come!"

A band concealed in a bower of American beauty roses, that had been playing a popular rag-time air with much spirit, suddenly ceased in the middle of a bar. Immediately, as if by magic, the decorous din of the

distinguished company was hushed, and through the open windows the cheering of the crowd and the clatter and jingle of the royal escort could be heard. A moment later the magnificent crescendo of the national anthem announced to the expectant assembly that their Majesties had entered the Embassy.

To escape the pressure of the throng that fell back respectfully on both sides of the sovereigns as they were conducted by their hosts to the dais prepared for them, Claudia sought refuge in the embrasure of a window. She was standing there idly fanning herself with some immense white feathers tipped with diamonds—one of those costly and beautiful conceits that bear the hall-mark of the Rue de la Paix—when she observed the Duke of Dorking edging his way with difficulty towards her through the crowd.

As she watched him, she instinctively contrasted him with Delane. He was not bad looking and his court suit, which became him, gave him an air of distinction. But in comparison with the prize-fighter's Greek head and athletic figure which he carried with such easy grace he seemed to Claudia commonplace and insignificant. Yet how he eclipsed the other! He was coming to offer her one of the most enviable positions in Europe, a position that women like herself seem specially created to fill, and which she felt better fitted to adorn than most. It was not only his ducal title and vast wealth

that he asked her to share; but the political privileges he meant to win by his brains. Brilliant and ambitious, he was already a man to reckon with in the clash of factions striving for power disguised under the democratic shibboleths of "national welfare," "the good of the people," and the like. In the event of the political pendulum swinging his party into office there was practically nothing that the Duke of Dorking might not obtain short of the premier place in the cabinet. And even that Claudia knew he meant to have, and believed he would get too, some day in spite of the present popular prejudice against coroneted Prime Ministers. For everything passes in this world, even popular prejudices, and it is just as likely as not that a duke, given ability, ambition, and opportunity, may once again govern the country. Democracies are volatile, and in an age of transition anything is possible.

The difference, moreover, between the advantages of such a position and Delane's devotion and good looks —which was all he had to offer her—was so great as to render any comparison scandalous. In the opinion of the world her choice, as she well knew, would admit of only one explanation. Who would believe that her love was not lust, or that of her lover the most sordid greed of gain? In short, by preferring Delane to the duke she not only degraded herself, but deprived the prize-fighter of his most precious attribute—his honour.

The idea of injustice at once so glaring and so irremediable filled her with deep indignation.

The bitterness of her resentment scratched the lacquer of life, so to speak. She realised, as she had never done before, the cynicism of the war civilisation wages against nature and the irony of its victories.

She resented the accident of birth which had made the duke what he was, as if it were a trick by which Delane had been cheated of his just rights.

"Dorking is a fraud," she thought scornfully, as she watched him coming toward her. "There is nothing ducal about him but his privileges, strip him of them and any crossing-sweeper might as justly call himself a duke!"

The duke's advantages, to the value of which she had hitherto been so indifferent, suddenly appeared of immense importance to her. That he should possess them awoke in her a feeling of jealousy. She coveted them for Delane. It was *he* who should have been born a duke; he would at least have *looked* the part.

As Delane would have expressed it, she was "up against it." To such a favourite of fortune as Miss Carisbrooke of Asbury, the sensation was as novel as it was exasperating. Unable to give Delane the birthright that she considered he was entitled to by every law of nature, she burned to avenge him.

The duke unwittingly provided her with the means.

"At last!" he exclaimed when he succeeded in reaching her.

From his manner it was evident that he regarded her presence as a tacit acceptance of his offer.

To Claudia such an assumption was too preposterous to be worth resenting. She contented herself by retaliating with a smile that would have been a danger-signal to most men. But the Duke of Dorking was too well aware of the value set upon him in the marriage market to interpret it correctly.

"I have been searching for you everywhere," he went on with unshaken confidence, "till I almost began to think you had forgotten your promise."

The unconscious manner in which he was preparing his own humiliation afforded Claudia a sardonic satisfaction.

"So I had—till this morning," she replied with an ambiguous smile, purposely lengthening the rope, so to speak, with which he was hanging himself. "The temptation to break my promise was very strong. In the country I always forget London, and at Asbury never regret it. I hated to come away."

The duke looked at her for a moment narrowly. But if he mistrusted the quality of the compliment, the fact of her presence reassured him.

"I followed your example," he remarked meaningly. "London seemed such a desert without you that I went

down to Maloraine for the week. It is just the sort of frame for you. You will be superb in it."

"On the contrary, it is much too grand. I shall be quite content with a very simple one."

The duke smiled indulgently.

"No frame could be too grand for you," he persisted in his proprietary way. "It gives me such pleasure to think you will reign in the halls in which my dear mother queened it for so many years. All the Duchesses of Dorking have been beautiful, stately women. It is one of the traditions of my family I am particularly anxious to maintain."

"I am afraid you have misunderstood my meaning," said Claudia, suddenly tightening the rope with a jerk, "I have not changed my mind."

Her victim looked the picture of perplexity.

"I do not quite follow you," he said coldly.

Claudia took a malicious pleasure in his discomfiture. She had no pity for him. Pity for a man who had so many advantages to compensate him for the only pearl in the cornucopia of fortune that was denied him? The idea was ridiculous.

"I should have thought my meaning was clear from the first," she rejoined carelessly.

"You mean you decline my offer?" he asked, slightly colouring as the truth suddenly dawned upon him.

Claudia bent her head in assent.

But the Duke of Dorking had too high an opinion of himself to be easily disconcerted. Her callous indifference tantalised rather than mortified him.

"May I ask why you refuse a position you are so fitted to adorn?" he enquired sarcastically.

"Why force me to wound your *amour propre* with a plain answer?"

"You have done that already. What does a stab more or less matter? At least, you will grant that to be the Duchess of Dorking has its compensations, that it is no empty honour you refuse?"

Claudia smiled scornfully. Such superb condescension struck her as even more absurd than his proprietary air.

"My dear duke," she said, "I am quite aware of the great honour you would confer on me. But no position, however high, could satisfy me of itself. I demand something much more from the man I marry than that."

"You are unjust," he murmured reproachfully, "I offered you love and you refused it. My position is all I have left to tempt you with. I love you, Claudia," he added dropping his voice to a whisper, "you must perceive that."

His voice shook, but its tremor was more like the pang of wounded pride than that of a wounded heart.

Claudia instinctively contrasted his formal and restrained manner with the passionate tenderness of Delane's avowal. The prize-fighter's "I love you, Claudia!" had leapt from his lips like a flame. The words had come from a heart on fire. Her pulses quickened as she recalled them now set to the music, so to speak, of the *extase d'amour* with which the violins and 'cellos were throbbing. For an instant so vivid was their recollection it seemed as if she were back again in the library at Asbury with Delane on his knees beside her.

She felt his sweet hot breath on her cheeks, and the indescribable thrill of his touch. How beautiful he had looked with that wonderful love-light in his eyes. How beautiful and how strong! The thought of his physical perfection set the blood rioting in her veins. It was to her imagination like a spur in the flanks of a horse. Pariah, forsooth! Why, he was to be envied not pitied. There was a splendour in his presence compared with which that of a Duke of Dorking was as the outer darkness. It was no frozen passion he offered her but something real, tangible, vital, something that her nature, stuffed like a Strasburg goose with fortune's favours, craved and demanded.

For a second the laces quivered on her billowy bosom like foam on a wave; and the wonderful conceit of feathers and diamonds which oscillated languidly in

her hand paused in its monotonous exercise. In the voluptuous ecstasy of her senses she unconsciously dropped her mask of disdainful indifference. Never had she seemed so beautiful, so desirable to the duke.

"I love you," he repeated in a hoarse whisper, glancing around nervously as if he feared being overheard.

The words snapped the spell that the recollection of Delane's avowal had cast on Claudia.

"Love! *You?*" she echoed, shaking her head incredulously. "It is impossible. Why, you do not even know its alphabet."

"That is a hard statement," he protested, chilled by some vague sense of its truth. "You have me at a disadvantage. I can hardly disprove it here."

He gazed gloomily round the crowded room.

"You could not anywhere, duke," returned Claudia, not unsympathetically. "You do not love me at all, believe me, and you can give me nothing I do not already possess. Fortune has been too kind to both of us, we are like spoilt children crying for the moon. Your moon is not so far out of reach as mine. You are crying for a Duchess of Dorking who like her predecessors, will be a credit to your line, a *dame de salon* to queen it at Maloraine, and by her wit and beauty help you realise your political dreams. Such a moon, I assure you, will not be hard to obtain. But my

moon is very different. I am crying for a twin-soul, and I am prepared to sacrifice everything for it. To give up all this," she added, glancing with ineffable scorn round the room which she indicated with a wave of her fan, "to pick it out of the gutter, if perchance it lies there."

She spoke with a frankness, an intensity of feeling she had never displayed before. The manner in which she uttered the last words made them seem almost like a confession.

The duke looked at her in amazement.

"Now I have shocked you," she said. "You never dreamt me capable of sentiments so plebeian, so primitive."

"I thought I understood you," he said, equivocally.

"And you find you never have. You were taken in by my mask like the rest of the world. Ah, duke, *love* doesn't make such a mistake."

She looked at him with an air of mock-reproach.

"Oh, don't apologise," she continued, "instead, you should thank me for undeceiving you. Just think what a catastrophe it would have been for you if I had accepted your offer. To grasp my moon I should not have stopped to think of your position."

He winced under her rebuke. It was humiliating to think he should have been so deceived. It was a

blow to his *amour propre,* a reflection on his powers of perception.

"You have an original way of refusing an offer," he said, sarcastically.

She laughed lightly.

"We Carisbrookes are a bit mad as the world counts. I am very much like my brother, and you know how free and fearless he is. But our madness is the kind that the world envies while it condemns. It is the madness that with the wish gives one the will to be oneself. It is only those to whom fortune has given everything, or denied everything, who dare to be free. Only aristocrats and anarchists, who are much more alike than the world supposes, are mad in that way. The actions of both are inspired by the same motives, though they express them so differently. *'J'ai tant de gloire, o mon roi, que j'aspire au fumier,'* as Racine or someone says. How true that is! You ought to understand the longing for absolute liberty, duke, fortune has been so very kind to you."

She had succeeded in disillusioning him only too thoroughly. The haughty, nonchalant, disdainful beauty whom he had thought of as an ideal Duchess of Dorking had vanished. In her place stood a creature of flesh and blood, by her own confession voluptuous, romantic, passionate and unconventional. The revelation filled him with a great disgust. He believed she

was contemplating a *mésalliance* and was endeavouring to justify it. He no longer desired to marry her, but he was curious to know who had supplanted him.

"Still," he said, "a woman does not refuse an offer like mine, without having found compensation. You have no doubt got your moon. Am I right?"

The condescension with which he tried to heal his wounded vanity would have offended her, had it not appeared so ludicrous. She smiled as she pictured his face when he learnt for whom he was rejected. The temptation to complete his humiliation was very strong, but she prudently resisted it.

Before she had time to reply, Mrs. Appleby chanced to drift past. At the sight of Claudia she stopped and greeted her effusively.

"And your 'white hope'?" she exclaimed, after sighing her regret at being obliged to leave Asbury so suddenly. "Did you see him again after I left? What a splendid looking fellow he was, and so gentlemanly."

"White hope," muttered the duke, looking suspiciously at Claudia, who outwardly serene was inwardly wishing Mildred Appleby in Jericho or Jerusalem.

But that lady, quite unconscious of the mischief she was doing by her ill-timed reference to Delane, rattled on airily—

"Johnnie Oughtred says he hasn't a ghost of a chance of winning. Too bad, isn't it? Still, I am

simply dying to see him fight. You've promised to take me, haven't you, Johnnie?"

She turned with a wheedling smile to a middle-aged, flashy-looking man who was following in her wake, well known as a noble patron of the turf and the ring. It was a *rôle* for which Nature had evidently intended him, to judge by his round, closely-cropped, bullet-like head, with its small, keen eyes, and large out-standing ears, one of which was swollen—the result of some old adventure with the gloves.

"I'll take you with the greatest pleasure," he replied in a refined, agreeable voice which contrasted strangely with his rather brutal appearance.

"What fight is it?" asked the duke, suddenly obsessed with the idea that in the "white hope" referred to he had found the clue he wanted.

"They mean the one in which my brother's *protégé* hopes to win the middle-weight championship of the world," put in Claudia, quickly. "He is training at Asbury for it."

Looking at her at that moment it would have been impossible to imagine that she could refuse a duke for a prize-fighter. She had once more assumed her mask of disdainful indifference. But the Duke of Dorking was no longer to be taken in by it.

"You look shocked, duke," laughed Mrs. Appleby,

maliciously. "Don't you approve of women going to prize-fights?"

"Merely surprised, my dear lady," he said. "One is never shocked at anything any more. That is so, is it not, Miss Carisbrooke?"

She left it to her fan to answer for her, which like Lady Marion and Mauve's smelling-bottle it did very eloquently. She did not even deign to smile; it was a matter of utter indifference to her whether he was shocked or not.

"Come, now, Dorking," interposed Lord Oughtred, "don't crab it, women do go to these shows you know. There were crowds of them at the Carpentier-Sullivan fight in Monte Carlo, including even Royal Princesses. In Paris, I've seen as many tiaras round the ring as you'd see at a gala night at the Opera."

"Well, I shall hold you to your promise, Johnnie," said Mrs. Appleby. "I have never seen a prize-fight, besides I am most anxious to see Delane in the ring. It was quite fascinating to watch him spar, as he called it, that day at Asbury, wasn't it, Claudia? Why don't you come too? Johnnie will chaperone us. Oh, there is Margaret Derwentwater. What a wonderful frock she's wearing. I must speak to her." And she drifted on again into the human sea as light as a cork to where the Duchess of Derwentwater, looking more decadent than ever, in copper-coloured silk and black

opals, was astonishing a distinguished German *savant* with her views on what she termed "the future of the sexes under Socialism."

"You rather astonish me, Lord Oughtred," said Claudia, purposely detaining him, "I thought men objected to women taking an interest in pugilism."

"On the contrary, I have always advocated it. I believe if women could be induced to patronise it, it would tend to eliminate rowdyism which is the secret of the prejudice against the sport. I should be only too glad to take you to this fight if you'll go?"

"I am afraid it would be too exciting."

"Oh, it is hardly likely to be that," said the duke, sarcastically. "Delane won't last two rounds in my opinion."

"What do you know about pugilism," she said with a scornful stress on the pronoun.

Lord Oughtred burst out laughing.

"What's he know about pugilism? Why, Dorking is one of our crack amateur boxers."

"You!" exclaimed Claudia, looking at the duke in amazement. He was the last man in the world she would have expected to be interested in pugilism.

"Oughtred flatters me," he replied quietly. "I used to box a bit at Oxford. I have given it up long ago, but I still take a considerable interest in the ring."

Claudia was for once thoroughly disconcerted. The

weight his opinion had suddenly acquired troubled her strangely. Till now the idea that Delane could be beaten had never entered her head. He had always been so confident of victory himself, his staff seemed so proud of him, and he *looked* so unconquerable. To picture him defeated was like a sort of treachery. Since she had known him she had learnt to understand what defeat means to a champion, what it would mean to him. And she knew what it meant to him it would mean to her, bound as she was to him. Already the opinion of these men who in their superior knowledge and experience of things pugilistic predicted his defeat filled her with a foreboding of shame and humiliation.

"Why don't you believe in—in—in—my brother's *protégé?*" she asked, vainly striving to conceal the anxiety she felt.

The duke no longer doubted that Delane was the "moon" she had declared she was ready "to seek in the gutter." To be rejected was galling enough to him, but to be rejected for a prize-fighter was to add insult to injury. He was offended rather than humiliated, deeply offended. His resentment craved retaliation, and as opportunity provided him with the means of obtaining it he availed himself of them.

"I haven't much faith in 'white hopes,'" he said discouragingly. "They seem only to be discovered to be beaten."

"I am sure Durward—my brother—doesn't agree with you," protested Claudia, impelled to defend her lover and conscious that her antagonist was better armed than herself. "He has the greatest confidence in—in Delane's chances, and you must admit he knows a great deal about pugilism, as he does about everything that interests him."

She turned to Lord Oughtred for support. But he was even more discouraging than the duke.

"My dear lady," he said, shaking his head, "Durward ain't a judge of a pugilist. He's had no experience. He's taken an interest in Jack Delane the man, not the prize-fighter, and he's going to lose his money. You can take that from me."

"I might if you would explain it," persisted Claudia, doubtfully. "Have you ever seen my brother's *protégé?*"

Against the disparagement of such an authority as Lord Oughtred she felt unable to contend. But the mere statement of his opinion did not convince her; she required his reasons as well.

"Oh yes, I know him," he replied. "When he first arrived in this country some of his friends tried to induce me to back him. But, as I told him, I ain't a philanthropist. I want a run for my money, and it's not Jack Delane who is likely to give it to me. He's got no heart."

"No heart!" exclaimed Claudia, unable to control her emotion.

"I mean that 'devil' which is one of a pugilist's chief assets," he explained. "He is too highly strung, too sensitive. The public wouldn't believe you if you told them that a prize-fighter could be that. But it's true all the same. It is very seldom you find one who is nothing but a brute. Most of them are simple, good-natured, big-hearted fellows who wouldn't hurt a fly. To one bully and braggart you'll find a hundred who are unassuming, modest, and painfully shy. Now, these qualities are very fine, and most of the best boxers possess them. But you can have too much of a good thing. Jack Delane is a case in point. The type to which he belongs seldom produces a champion, although when it does it produces some of the greatest heroes the ring—or for that matter, the world—has ever seen."

To Claudia his praise of Delane the man, grateful to him though she was for it, was even more disturbing than his disparagement of Delane the pugilist. The manner in which he expressed himself indicated a perception of the value of character and the ability to appreciate it that gave his words a peculiar force.

"But if he is all that you say," she faltered, "how did he ever get to his present position? Why was he not defeated by the men he fought?"

"Ah, my dear lady," cynically smiled the duke, who had been closely watching the effect on Claudia of Lord Oughtred's opinion, "now you raise the question of the morality of prize-fighting. Unfortunately, to the shame of pugilism, it is not an unusual thing for boxers or their backers to arrange the result of a contest between themselves beforehand."

The slur, as he intended, piqued Claudia into a compromising retort.

"That is ungenerous," she said, indignantly. On top of all his advantages to disparage Delane was more than she could endure. "I am sure he would never consent to such a thing. He is perfectly straight at all events, whatever others may be."

The duke secretly delighted at the success of his ruse, protested that she had misunderstood him, and proceeded to "draw" her still further by apologising for wounding her feelings on the ground that he was quite unaware that she "took such an interest in the fellow." She cut him short disdainfully, and appealed to Lord Oughtred to confirm what she had said in defence of Delane. He good-naturedly obliged her, and, thinking to please her, even admitted that it was just possible that her "favourite," as he expressed it, might win after all.

"The ring is full of surprises," he said. "Delane has beaten good men before, though none of them have

been in the same class as Sam Crowfoot. He has height and reach in his favour, and understands the science of boxing. If he is able to keep Crowfoot at a distance for the majority of rounds he may beat him on points. He has a most useful and accurate long left, which may give the negro a lot of trouble. Crowfoot's chief fault, in my opinion, is over-confidence. If he fancies he has an easy job on hand, and goes in to get it over quickly, it may easily spell disaster for him."

But Lord Oughtred's good-natured attempt to allay Claudia's anxiety as to the result of the battle between the white man and his black rival only seemed to increase it. If it dashed her hopes to be assured, as she had been at first, that Delane would be beaten, it all but extinguished them to be told afterwards by the same judge that he had only a ghost of a chance. It placed Delane in the position of the princess in the fairy-tale, whose escape from a horrible fate depended on her ability to count the grains in a sack of sand between sunset and dawn. If Lord Oughtred was right, only a miracle could save him from defeat. Her heart and her pride alike protested against the possibility.

"How discouraging you are," she said, resentfully. "I am sure you don't believe he will win, and what's more I don't believe you desire him to."

"Come now, Oughtred," laughed the duke, maliciously, "what have you got on Crowfoot?"

"A thousand," he replied, carelessly. "I was at his quarters to-day. He is in the pink of condition."

Claudia looked at him contemptuously. The admission, after what he had just said, was tantamount to a reflection on her intelligence.

To discuss Delane's prospects with these men who were so contemptuous of them seemed like treachery. She felt as debased as if she had visited Sam Crowfoot's training quarters herself.

Lord Oughtred saw that he had put his foot into it, and made the nod of a passing acquaintance an excuse to avoid a useless explanation.

"At any rate, Miss Carisbrooke," he said, unconsciously making a bad situation worse as he went off, "I'll take you to the fight if you want to go. You ought to see it, you know, as you are so interested in the 'white hope.'"

She blushed in spite of herself as she thanked him. To feel that the eyes of the duke were upon her did not diminish her embarrassment. She wondered what construction he put upon it. To betray herself to *him* would be humiliating indeed! There was something in his manner towards her that depressed and alarmed her—a sort of threat or prediction of misfortune. His persistency in remaining at her side after her definite refusal of his offer made her nervous. What more could he have to say to her? She resented his presence as

an unjustifiable persecution, which she determined to free herself from once and for all.

"Now that we understand one another, duke," she said, affecting a composure she was far from feeling, "there is really nothing more to explain. *À propos* of the moon I trust it will not be long before you find yours."

As she spoke she stepped forth from the embrasure of the window in which she had been standing. The duke made no attempt to detain her, but he had not yet done with her. In her inadvertent jest he found the opportunity to revenge himself he desired, and he was quick to take advantage of it.

"Thanks," he smiled, as he made way for her to pass, "and if it is not too presumptuous may I congratulate you on finding yours—even in the gutter?"

So he had guessed her secret! Well, it was of little consequence after all. Being a gentleman, it was not likely that he would communicate it to others; and to take offence at what he said was out of the question—his manner was courtesy itself.

"I did not say I had found it in the gutter," she said, with an indifference that baffled him. "You forget the moon hangs in the sky."

"Of course," he replied, "that is where *I* should look for it." He shot a glance at her to observe the effect of his words, adding pointedly, as he did so,

"But one may mistake its reflection in the gutter for it."

"That I could never do," she said, confidently, sailing past him, as she spoke, into the glittering human sea.

She steered her course serenely between its tossing cross-currents like some stately ship under full sail. Her head was erect, there was a proud light in her beautiful eyes, and a mocking smile on her beautiful lips. But her heart was filled with anxiety and foreboding. The duke's taunts, though sugar-coated, had been very bitter. Above all, behind the horseman of her new-found happiness rode the depressing probability of Delane's defeat.

CHAPTER IX.

In desiring to keep her betrothal to Delane a secret, Claudia was actuated by a very definite purpose. Fully alive to the consequences of the momentous step she had taken, she resolved to get the whip-hand of them, so to speak, from the start.

The problem was one that appealed to her nature. Like all proud women who live in the lap of luxury she was fond of power, two of the chief attributes of which she possessed in a marked degree—a spirit of independence and a clear and masterful intelligence. To take the initiative was natural to her; the disdain or indifference with which she treated Society gave her an air of authority; she looked as she acted—like one who has the right to lead. A great capacity for intrigue was latent in her; it was undeveloped because the opportunity to exercise it had been lacking. In a less exalted station she would have "done" something—something difficult and daring, that required imagination to conceive and brains to execute. The gilded cage in which she had been born and reared, like some beautiful

bird of paradise, was too spacious for her to feel restrained by its bars. She had languished behind them idly. Her discontent was of the senses rather than of the mind. The present situation was the first to offer her an incentive to action, or to give her cunning a chance of displaying itself.

To persuade Delane to let her pull the strings was easy. He had not the capacity himself and he knew it. His love was a passionate chaos out of which her superior understanding would create order. He was not so elemental as not to comprehend that a marriage between a man in his position and a woman in hers is everybody's affair. The thought of what the world would say, of the jests and jealousies in his sphere, and the sneers and slurs in hers, had obtruded itself in the very act of declaring his love. He dreaded lest she should regard his proposal as a degradation. Even when his lips touched hers he had been conscious of a sort of vague alarm. The very magnitude of his conquest was ominous. Such happiness seemed too great, too good to be true. The future was to him, as it were, the *revers de médaille* of the intoxicating present. To blend the two was beyond him, but it was comforting to feel that Claudia could. It gave him a sense of subjection and protection similar on the mental plane to that which she experienced on the physical.

Both thought of the sensation their marriage would

cause as an injury the one inflicted on the other. To Claudia it was like a pillory in which Delane would be exposed to the jibes and reproaches of her world. That she would be in the pillory with him did not trouble her in the least. Like the true aristocrat, she felt herself above public opinion. What *they* said mattered nothing to her. Like the old Earls Marischal of Scotland, she might have taken for her motto: *They say. What do they say? Let them say.*

Yet indifferent though she was to convention she knew its power, and had no desire to provoke its hostility needlessly. For Delane's sake it was necessary to proceed with caution. When public opinion cannot be defied with impunity it may be, and very often is, outwitted.

To avoid unnecessary notoriety was the first step in this direction. Delane, as he had told Shannon, had offered to abandon his fight with Crowfoot and retire altogether from the ring. But Claudia would not hear of the proposal. Such a renunciation would give Society something to catch at; it suggested that there was something to be ashamed of. She intended the world to understand that she considered the prize-fighter conferred an honour on her by marrying her, and that it must learn to respect him as she had done. There was no stigma on his character, and she would suffer no slur, no slight, to be cast upon him.

"Retire from the ring after your battle if you like," she had said to him, "though I shall not influence you in the matter. All I know of the ring is what I have learnt from you. You tell me it has made you what you are. I believe you, and for that reason I am proud of your profession. Perhaps by remaining in it you can best honour and elevate it. It is for you to decide. But whatever you do, do not retire *before* the battle. That is to invite most undesirable notoriety; and to publish the reason on top of that is to furnish the world with needless gossip at our expense."

He had said he would win, and she had taken it as a matter of course. His victory would not make Society more inclined to accept him as a man worthy of esteem. On the contrary, as her prospective husband the prominence he would acquire by victory would be more prejudicial to him than a defeat. All the same she wished him to win; it pleased her to think of him as "The champion of the world." The title seemed in some way to increase her conception of his wonderful physical force.

She had told him, too, in the library at Asbury, before returning to London, that to ensure secrecy it would be better for them not to meet again till after the battle. Astonished that she should make such a proposal at such a moment, he had protested vehemently against it. But if she had lost her heart she

still retained her commonsense. She easily overruled him, and he had yielded to her wishes, though not without misgiving.

"It is barely a fortnight before the contest," she said soothingly. "That is nothing. It will pass quickly. Immediately after your victory you shall claim me. In the meantime you shall hear from me every day; I will write you, and what's more talk to you. I have a telephone in my flat in London. I will ring you up every day at Asbury. You can come here in the afternoons after your training and talk to me over the telephone. In any case, I have to return to London. I could not cancel my engagement and stay here without comment, and that is what we want to avoid. Besides, to continue to see me now would interfere with your training. You know what Royce thinks of your coming here daily as it is. Be reasonable, be guided by me in this matter. It is for the best. Remember we shall write and talk to one another every day. And after the battle . . . cannot you wait till then?"

"But I can never exist till then, never seeing you, no one to confide in, and my heart so full!"

"Confide in the friend who is so devoted to you. He is to be trusted."

It was destined to be a momentous concession in more ways than one. To both at that moment it

seemed very trifling, but it was all Claudia would consent to make.

By thus concealing her intentions she counted on lessening the effect they would produce when transformed into action. A thing that is done is more easily forgotten than a thing that is contemplated. Publicity now would create not only a sensation but opposition. To marry first and let people talk afterwards would at least eliminate the latter. A *fait accompli* is a hard nut to crack.

By this means, too, Claudia hoped to turn the resentment of her family and friends into active support. She knew that her relations would think twice before giving her the cold shoulder. Their pride, if not her consequence, would prevent them from cutting her. They were rich, numerous, influential, and accustomed to lead and command. Lady Marion and Mauve, her grandmother, alone was a tower of strength in herself. She had but to give the signal and half the peerage would rally round her standard. A reception, a dinner, or a ball to which she issued the invitations would convert Miss Carisbrooke of Asbury into Mrs. Jack Delane in the opinion of the world as naturally as the holder of a courtesy title is converted by death into that to which he is the heir, and niche the prize-fighter in the pages of Burke and Debrett with less hostile

criticism than it takes to erect a monument in Westminster Abbey.

It was a cunning scheme devised on the spur of the moment to meet the exigencies of the situation, and only required secrecy to render it effective. Unfortunately, the machinery got out of gear as soon as it was put in motion.

To be told by such a judge as Lord Oughtred that Delane had no chance of beating the negro was a shock from which Claudia did not easily recover. Though she appeared outwardly calm and indifferent, the apprehension she felt on Delane's account betrayed itself in a certain air of abstraction which did not escape the penetrating eyes of her grandmother.

When Lady Marion and Mauve's curiosity was aroused, nothing escaped her notice, and she was very inquisitive where her granddaughter was concerned. Claudia was her special favourite, the apple of her eye, dearer to her than her own children, who had lived in awe of her till marriage forced them from her control and then ignored her. Lady Marion and Mauve was not demonstrative. Kissing and caressing were not in her line, as she was wont to say whenever conversation chanced to drift on to the affections. Tenderness was a weakness she was incapable of. Claudia appealed to her pride, which was very great, rather than to her heart, which was adamant. Owing to a certain family

resemblance of the features she was in the habit of saying—and she firmly believed it—that Claudia was the double of what she had been at the same age. But their resemblance, such as it was, ended there. In reality they had nothing in common; their tastes, natures, and point of view were totally different.

The attachment, however, was not altogether one-sided. Though Claudia had not been brought up exactly under her grandmother's wing, the connection between them had been very close. She understood her, or thought she did, and liked her; partly because she was flattered by the interest she had aroused in one so hard and exacting, partly because she admired the cleverness and cunning with which, in spite of her masterful and exacting nature, the old peeress had made herself a power in Society. The terms on which they lived were none the less happy for being agitated by differences of opinion, in defence of which Lady Marion and Mauve was very spiteful and Claudia very aggravating. Each was too proud to offer the other an olive branch, but they always met after a quarrel as if nothing had ever happened.

"Some day," Durward Carisbrooke had once said jestingly, after one of these tacit agreements to forgive and forget, "there will be a *real* rupture between you, and then 'all the King's horses and all the

King's men, will never put Humpty Dumpty together again.'"

Perhaps in the bottom of her heart Lady Marion and Mauve agreed with him, for, as if she feared such a rupture, there was a limit to her recriminations that, however much she was tried, she never overstepped. Claudia's independence was the cause of all the friction. Lady Marion and Mauve had never approved of the freedom that Durward allowed his sister. She was jealous of his influence which was stronger than hers, and lived in dread lest Claudia, whose opinions perplexed and alarmed her, should emancipate herself altogether like her erratic brother, whose dilettantism expressed itself in ways that were at variance with all the accepted conventions which were as the Law and the Prophets to her.

When Claudia came of age and suddenly announced her intention of having her own flat in London, Lady Marion and Mauve had received a scare from the effects of which she had never completely recovered. It was useless to protest, as she did, vehemently. Claudia was determined to have her way in the matter. Durward consented and approved. Lady Marion and Mauve was obliged to give in, and in the end had even become reconciled to the proposition which had so horrified her. For Claudia's independent mode of life, coming and going between her flat and Asbury as lightly as if

she had the shelter of a husband's name to protect her, did not shock Society, which, itself in a state of transition, is rapidly becoming accustomed to the liberty of action that people of both sexes in all spheres have begun to demand and obtain. Claudia, moreover, as Lady Marion and Mauve was quick to realise, was not the sort of woman people "talk" of. The proud, disdainful dignity in which she wrapped herself as in an impenetrable armour was not a target at which the most evil-minded cared to aim. There was something irreproachable about her. The men she attracted were men like the Duke of Dorking, whose intentions were an additional protection against scandal.

Still Lady Marion and Mauve was anxious and vigilant. In her opinion marriage would alone prevent the follies she was ever fearing Claudia's spirit of independence would tempt her to commit. By marriage, Lady Marion and Mauve understood a grand match.

"I will find you a Serene Highness if you will only select him," she had exclaimed once in desperation.

But with her independent fortune and independent ideas, marriage was the last thing Claudia appeared willing to contemplate. She merely shrugged her lovely shoulders, and declared she would marry in her own good time.

Thus the years passed, and at twenty-five Miss

Carisbrooke of Asbury was still single. It is true maturity only seemed to ripen her charms, and age was no barrier to the sort of match that Lady Marion and Mauve desired her to make.

"She wants power," she said consolingly to herself; "fortunately it is no brainless, dissipated boy whatever his rank and fortune that will content her."

Lady Marion and Mauve's thoughts ran on Viceroys, Cabinet Ministers, Pro-consuls—what she termed "men of substance." She had witnessed the apparition of the Duke of Dorking with delight. Here was a man after her own heart; as Duchess of Dorking her idol would be one of the greatest ladies in Europe. And Claudia had encouraged her hopes in her cold way. She had rejected so many, and yet she let the duke dangle on. It was a good sign. She was evidently thinking seriously of him. Moreover, Claudia, who was anything but communicative, had even consented to discuss the duke and his chances. Before going to Asbury she had spoken as if she might accept him. So Lady Marion and Mauve had built her hopes very high.

Throughout the evening at the American Embassy she was in a state of great excitement. She had closely watched the duke and Claudia. Something definite she thought must result from their prolonged *tête-à-tête*. So confident did she feel that the result

was what she desired that she had been on the point of congratulating Claudia when she left the embrasure of the window in which she had given the duke her answer. She was only prevented by the peculiar abstraction she detected in Claudia's manner. She had never observed anything like it in her before. It caused her a vague anxiety, and fired her curiosity to fever-point. When they got into the motor on leaving the Embassy she gave vent to her feelings in an agitated—

"Well?"

To misinterpret the purport of the interrogation was impossible, and for answer Claudia sighed peevishly.

She was in no mood to argue with her grandmother, to reply to her "whys" and reproaches. But Lady Marion and Mauve was not to be silenced. Her fingers tightened mechanically round her smelling-bottle, and with an asperity that indicated she already surmised the answer to her question, she put it again more directly—

"Do you mean that you have refused the Duke of Dorking?"

"Yes."

"Yes?" snapped Lady Marion and Mauve, sharply, unable to conceal her disappointment.

Claudia made no attempt to disguise the irritation the subject caused her.

"Please, please, grandmamma," she said, querulously, "don't discuss it now."

Lady Marion and Mauve was furious. To have the hopes she had built so high dashed in this unceremonious way and be chided into the bargain was intolerable. At any other time she would have given vent to her exasperation, but now instinct warned her to curb her temper. Claudia's manner was very peculiar, it was so unlike her to be nervous and irritable. Something very serious and unexpected must have occurred to make her reject the duke after practically intimating that she intended to marry him —something that she was anxious to conceal. A sense of mystification excited Lady Marion and Mauve's curiosity afresh. Surprise got the better of her anger, and her cunning of both. When she was curious she was wont to resort to strategy, in the art of which she was a past-mistress. And she was very curious now.

After a little pause, during which she meditated on the best means of resuming the attack, she said in dulcet tones—

"But why, darling? A week ago you gave me to understand that you had all but consented to accept him."

Claudia sighed again heavily; but she, too, decided to put a curb on her temper. To quarrel with her

grandmother, whose influence she wished to exploit in Delane's behalf, was the last thing she desired.

"There are a hundred whys," she replied, resigning herself to humouring her to a certain point.

"One will satisfy me," said Lady Marion and Mauve.

"Well, I want to be loved by as well as to love the man I marry. The Duke of Dorking will never love anyone but himself."

"Then why on earth does he want to marry you? You will never make me believe that he is after your money. His father left him three hundred thousand a year. He lives very quietly. He must have greatly increased his fortune in spite of the death and succession duties and the ever-mounting taxes. It is only small incomes that feel the pinch of the shoe of Socialism. If Dorking has any secret vices, or indulged in extravagant *menus plaisirs* that make such holes in a bank account I should have heard of it. Nothing, you know, escapes me."

Lady Marion and Mauve emphasised the last words in a way that made them sound almost like a threat.

"Money!" exclaimed Claudia, half taken in by the seeming importance her grandmother attached to the suggestion. "Of course it is not money he wants in a wife. It is a beautiful doll who will deceive everybody who looks at her into believing she is flesh and blood:

an automaton who will sit with her hands folded in her lap whenever he talks. To marry a man one doesn't love is bad enough, but to be taken for a stick of that sort. . . . Well, I told him pretty plainly what I thought of him. He wouldn't marry me now if I was the last woman in the world."

She spoke with infinite scorn.

"Odious brute!" said Lady Marion and Mauve, feigning sympathy she was far from feeling. "Of course, if that's the sort of man he is I don't blame you for refusing him. Men who think of women as furniture, whether it be Sheraton or Chippendale, are impossible as husbands. Well," she added with a little sigh, "we shall have to begin all over again. Really, Claudia, I believe you will be an old maid after all."

Claudia laughed curiously.

"Oh no," she said, "rest assured I shall never be that, I mean to marry."

The enigmatic tone in which she spoke startled Lady Marion and Mauve.

"Well, I trust it will be a man I can approve of," she rejoined anxiously. "With your views, one never knows what to expect of you, Claudia."

"It would be more to the point if *I* approve of him, don't you think?" said Claudia, coldly.

Lady Marion and Mauve ignored the reproach.

"Then there *is* someone," she insisted.

"I didn't say so," said Claudia.

"But there is, I am sure of it," retorted Lady Marion and Mauve, impatiently. "If you are trying to tantalise me by making a mystery of it, you are very tiresome."

"Dear grandmamma," protested Claudia, wearily, "what conclusions you jump to!"

"I suppose it is Igor Borodino," went on Lady Marion and Mauve, without heeding her. "Well, you might do worse. His income from the company that floated his quicksilver mines in Siberia is enormous and he is a personal favourite of the Czar's. He will probably be the next Ambassador here. I hear he wants the post."

The derisive laugh with which Claudia received this suggestion convinced Lady Marion and Mauve that she was on the wrong scent. But though baffled she was not discouraged. Having failed in one quarter, she determined to renew the attack in another. In all campaigns of the wits in which she engaged she invariably employed guerrilla tactics. They were well adapted to the exercise of her rather truculent cunning and rendered the prospect of obtaining booty, if not victory, greater. Indeed, though seldom victorious, she never failed to carry off something from the enemy's camp, if only a suspicion that lacked confirmation, as now.

"If I am ambitious for you," she began again, plaintively, after a short pause, "it is because I am fond of you. Your happiness has been my chief object, you must admit that at any rate."

The shot was not without effect.

"I am not ungrateful, grandmamma, believe me," returned Claudia, softening. "But I can never make out whether you would sacrifice your ambition, if it chanced to conflict with my happiness."

"My darling, how can you say such a thing?"

"Then if I told you I wished to marry someone who was my social inferior, but who could alone make me happy, what would you say?"

To Lady Marion and Mauve the question sounded like the prelude to some startling confession.

"Child," she faltered, vainly struggling to calm her agitation, "what a mood you are in to-night."

Claudia's lips curled contemptuously.

"I thought so," she said, "your pretended devotion reminds me of the stone that the man in the Bible received when he asked for bread. What you term your fondness for me is only pride, and pride that demands sacrifices at that."

"But my dearest Claudia, there are limits. Even you must acknowledge that."

"Limits!" echoed Claudia. "Limits to happiness!"

"Yes, limits," replied Lady Marion and Mauve

vehemently, irritated by the consciousness of her inability to confine her granddaughter within them. "There are such things as duty, propriety, example, as well as happiness."

"Just so; but happiness is the most important. It is the mother of all the virtues."

"Pshaw! There are limits to everything, even to your contempt of convention."

"Well, I recognise no limits where my happiness is concerned," said Claudia, impatiently; and, yielding to a sudden impulse, she added defiantly, "In such a matter, the feelings of Mrs. Grundy are the last thing I should dream of considering. Fortunately, I not only have the courage of my convictions, but the money to back it. I shall marry a prize-fighter, if I see fit."

"Prize-fighter!" gasped Lady Marion and Mauve, falling back in her seat as if she had been struck. At the same time the bottle of smelling-salts at which she had been sniffing dropped from her hand, and eloquently emphasised her feelings by spilling its pungent perfume in her lap.

Like all women, she reasoned by instinct. The word which so upset her had suddenly reminded her of the conversation on the prize-ring which had taken place at her dinner-table. She remembered that Durward was interested in a prize-fighter and had given him a cottage at Asbury. That Claudia should have

spent a week there without meeting her brother's *protégé* was highly improbable. Durward had described the fellow as a sort of demi-god. It was no doubt of him that she was thinking when she had said so enigmatically, "Rest assured I shall not be an old maid. I mean to marry." With Lady Marion and Mauve suspicions were convictions. If Claudia could think of such a thing as marrying a prize-fighter she intended to do it. With her contempt of convention and independent mode of life, she was capable of anything.

"Prize-fighter!" she repeated in a choking voice, as the truth flashed upon her, "Claudia, you horrify me!"

But her horror was due less to any actual repulsion than to indignation. If Claudia had frankly confessed to a weakness for biceps, she would have been surprised but scarcely shocked. Such a weakness she could understand and condone. Allowances were to be made for the woman who *loved* beneath her; it was a vice, perhaps, but at least it was a natural one. It was only the woman who *married* beneath her to whom no mercy was to be shown. Lady Marion and Mauve regarded such women as *détraquées*, creatures to be punished under the Criminal Offences Act.

Claudia, though far from suspecting the interpretation her grandmother had given to her words, perceived

from the effect they produced that she had gone too far, and attempted, not without a certain irritation, to mollify her.

"We were talking of limits, grandmamma," she said, apologetically. "What better instance of a limit could there be than a prize-fighter?"

Her sarcasm was exasperating, but Lady Marion and Mauve refrained from replying. To argue, to plead, to protest, she knew would be worse than useless. She had no intention, however, of meekly submitting to the humiliation which she believed Claudia proposed to inflict on her family. To avert it would require the greatest cunning; and she began at once, under cover of the silence into which she had huffily retreated, to devise some means of preventing this monstrous marriage.

"It shall never take place," she said to herself with grim determination. "Never! A prize-fighter! It is the last straw!"

CHAPTER X.

LADY MARION AND MAUVE did not let the grass grow under her feet. The following afternoon, unknown to Claudia, who had not the least suspicion of her intentions, she motored down to Asbury to buy off Delane. Whatever the nature of the attraction he possessed for Claudia, she took it as a matter of course that his for her must be mercenary. Such a man must have a price, and doubtless it was a high one. Perhaps the fact might cause the scales of infatuation to fall from Claudia's eyes; but in the last resort she was prepared to make any sacrifice to prevent the scandal of such a marriage.

Beyond this she had formed no plan. Her course of action was to be determined entirely by circumstances. Indeed, she was so vague as to the manner of opening the negotiations that she did not even know the name of the person she proposed to buy. She had thought of Delane merely as "the prize-fighter." It was not till the car was entering the village of Asbury that it occurred to her he must have a name and that it

would be as well to ascertain it. She accordingly asked her chauffeur if he could enlighten her; but pugilism was not a subject in which he was interested. He had never seen a boxing-match, and never read the accounts of them in the papers. Till that moment he was ignorant of the very existence of Delane. Being a well-trained servant, however, who knew that it was business to please his mistress, he slowed down on passing the Carisbrooke Arms and suggested that the information she desired might very likely be obtained within.

"Very well, Robert," she said, "you may go in and enquire. At the same time discover where the fellow is to be found. I understand that Mr. Durward has lent him one of the cottages on the estate."

A few minutes later Robert came out of the inn accompanied by the Docker.

"This man can tell you what you want to know, my lady," he said.

The desire to present a smart appearance out of the ring is common to all pugilists, though its realisation is unhappily only too often beyond the means of the lesser lights. The poverty to which the majority are condemned is an effectual barrier to the fitting adornment of the bodies of which they take such care. But if, as frequently happens, it is the fate of Hercules or Antinous to walk the streets meanly and shabbily clad, one may be sure that the forms thus apparelled

are clean and sweet under the disfiguring rags. Soap and water are at least within the range of all. The successful pugilist is a well-groomed animal. Many are veritable dandies, and very seldom, strange to relate, does the gratification of this passion for smartness err on the side of vulgarity. Jack Delane took an especial pride in dressing well, and the example he set begot a similar pride in his staff. In his training quarters neatness was observed as an unwritten law.

To the poor, uneducated Docker, whose vocabulary, when an extra glass of beer loosened his tongue, consisted of less than a hundred words, and who to his secret shame had been condemned to corduroy and hob-nails till Delane had engaged him as second and supplementary sparring partner, the white flannel trousers and jersey he now wore were a source of infinite delight. He had had his photograph taken in them to give to his girl; and felt that it was to them even more than to his position on the staff of the celebrated Jack Delane that he owed the flattering respect with which he was regarded by the habitués of the bar at the Carisbrooke Arms. But in spite of the great pains he took to appear neat, it was only when he was seen stripped that it was possible to admire him. With his broken nose, enlarged ears, and shock of tow-coloured hair, he seemed to Lady Marion and Mauve's prejudiced eyes like the bully and brute she imagined him to be.

"I am Mr. Durward Carisbrooke's grandmother," she said by way of introducing herself.

Thus addressed, the battered features of the embarrassed Docker flushed, and impelled by some instinct of courtesy, he snatched his cap from his head, and stared at her sheepishly, while she questioned him. From the manner in which he stammered his monosyllabic replies, she thought him a fool as well as a bully.

Having obtained the information she desired, she produced a visiting-card from her bag and requested him to give it to Delane.

"Tell him," she said, that I shall be at Asbury Court the whole afternoon and I hope he will come and see me. I want particularly to meet him. Don't forget to tell him that it is Mr. Durward Carisbrooke's grandmother who sends the message."

And signalling to Robert to go on, she proceeded on her way to Asbury, leaving the Docker gazing open-mouthed at the bit of pasteboard in his hand. It was the first time he had ever conversed with a lady of title and the suddenness with which she had dashed across his path bewildered him.

On arriving at Park Cottage he found Delane sparring with Shannon, to the immense delight of a score or more of spectators, consisting of some gentlemen of the neighbourhood, villagers, and servants from Asbury Court, on whom Royce had conferred the freedom of

the gymnasium. Doltish though he appeared, the burly Docker was not such a fool as he looked. He felt instinctively that Lady Marion and Mauve's message was connected in some way with Claudia, and as such was not to be made public. Delane's intimacy with the beautiful chatelaine of Asbury had not escaped his notice, and though, being a man of few words and slow of speech, he had never discussed the subject with his companions, the construction he placed upon it was similar to theirs. He knew that Royce disapproved of it, and why; and he knew that the trainer was right from the professional point of view. But he worshipped Delane with a dog-like devotion and winked at his errors in training, though he did so with a heavy heart. So before delivering the card and the message entrusted to him, he waited with a cunning patience till the sparring was over and Royce should order Delane to be bathed and rubbed by his seconds, which was always done in privacy.

Delane's eyes sparkled as he read the name inscribed on the card. He had never heard it before, and the title had little or no significance for him. It was the fact of the close relationship to Claudia that it implied which impressed him. Lady Marion and Mauve! It seemed very natural that she should wish to meet him, Claudia had probably told her—otherwise why should she wish to know him? Of course he would go

and see her. Her invitation touched and flattered him profoundly; it tightened the bond that united him to Claudia. He was too simple, too open, too generous to question its sincerity, to suspect it to be what it was—the invitation of the craftiest of spiders, from whose web no fly once entangled in its meshes could escape.

He dressed himself with his usual care, and boldly set out across the park for Asbury, regardless of the comments of his staff.

"What's he gone up there for?" asked Royce, irritably. "*She* left last night, I hear. I was hoping at last to be able to train him in peace."

"I don't know, I am sure, what he's up to," replied Shannon, anxiously. "Yes, she went away yesterday. He told me so himself. Perhaps Mr. Carisbrooke has come back."

He glanced questioningly at the seconds, but the Docker, who alone could have enlightened him, kept his peace.

On arriving at Asbury Court, Delane was shown into the great hall where he had first met Claudia. How long ago it seemed, yet it was but a week. As he crossed the threshold and remembered that she was no longer there, he felt as if an iron weight had suddenly been strapped upon his chest. Happiness seemed to have gone out of the house with her. The beautiful eyes of La Belle Carisbrooke met his as before, but

something dimmed their brightness; the canvas no longer breathed. In spite of the warmth and brilliancy of the sunlight that streamed through the Gothic window, where the blazoned arms of Carisbrooke flashed like jewels, the hall seemed to him cold and dreary.

Lady Marion and Mauve's bright malicious eyes shot a sharp, penetrating glance at him, as he came towards her. Being prejudiced against pugilism, of which, like the majority, she knew absolutely nothing, she had pictured him to herself vaguely as a bully. But to her surprise on beholding him it was a feeling of admiration, not repugnance that he stirred in her. Impressed by his handsome face, well-groomed appearance and the modesty, amounting almost to timidity, of his bearing, she was obliged to admit in spite of herself that there was some excuse for Claudia.

"If she would only draw the line at marrying him!" was her involuntary mental ejaculation.

Lady Marion and Mauve was a woman of the world, and she had been taught by experience that the heart is a labyrinth in which one may easily lose oneself. In her first season when visiting a girl friend at Aldershot she had secretly adored a young soldier with the head of a Greek god and the carriage of a king. She had never spoken or written to him; there had been no surreptitious meeting, nothing had ever passed between them but glances, glances that say more than words and

reveal the soul in a look, but so deep was the impression they had made upon her that for years after she had never seen a scarlet coat without a thrill. She could understand, therefore, how it was that ladies sometimes loved lackeys and other inferiors. Such affairs, no doubt, were very foolish, but they were only unforgivable when passion scoffed at prudence and discarded discretion. To go to the altar in such intrigues was social damnation; the only *amende honorable* was secrecy. *On peut se débaucher, mais on doit se débaucher avec de l'esprit.*

In other words, Lady Marion and Mauve was an opportunist in morals. Morality was to her merely a facile means of determining the conventions, those laws, variable as the fashions or the weather, by which the conduct of society is governed. No one observed these laws more scrupulously than she. Her respect for convention was such, that in the Restoration or the Regency she would have been as lax as she stickled for propriety under the régime of Mrs. Grundy.

Durward Carisbrooke had described her once as "a pagan with an early-Victorian conscience." It was one of those witticisms in which truth is subordinated to cleverness. It would have been more accurate to have said that she was a woman without a temperament. She was not troubled with a conscience, early-Victorian or otherwise; and her nature was too metallic to be

either pagan or Christian. She belonged to the tribe of women of whom Thackeray's Lady Kew and Balzac's Princesse de Blamont-Chauvry are the most consummate types. Blessed with a constitution of iron and a very vigorous and alert mind, she preserved at seventy-five the energy of a woman of thirty. Inability to move with the times was the one sign she gave of old age. But to cling as she did to the conventions of yesterday in a period like the present, when standards are breaking down, betokened also the determination and inflexibility of a will that age was powerless to bend.

Nothing binds like fear. It was the basis of her unwavering devotion to Mrs. Grundy. Capable of outstaring the Gorgon, Lady Marion and Mauve was terribly afraid of scandal. It was the ghost that haunted the castle of convention in which she lived.

Fifty years before she had received a shock from the effect of which she had never recovered. In that far-off and forgotten period of her life she had treated the conventions with as much contempt as she now manifested respect for them. Married at eighteen to an elderly peer, who was bewitched by her beauty and denied her nothing, her head had been turned by excess of freedom and admiration. Naturally high-spirited, she had pursued pleasure with the recklessness of youth, till one day a too lengthy *tête-à-tête* at a Court ball with the Prince Consort excited the jealousy of his august

spouse, and Buckingham Palace and Windsor knew her no more.

There was no scandal, she was simply not seen any more at drawing-rooms. Fortunately, the anger of the Queen did not extend to her son. Shut out from Windsor, the too attractive and thoughtless young woman became a *persona grata* at Marlborough House. Her position and reputation were thus saved and secured, though not without considerable humiliation. For years the pity of Society, that verbal charity we neither ask for nor wish, but which our enemies insist on our receiving, was freely bestowed on "poor" Lady Marion and Mauve, as the innocent victim of royal jealousy.

But time, which in the end silences calumny as surely as everything else, gave her her revenge. Taught by experience the value of the things she had held so lightly, Lady Marion and Mauve began to court Mrs. Grundy as assiduously as she had formerly flouted her, and grown old in the service of that censorious and uncharitable despot meted out tenfold to all who attempted to imitate her own early follies the ridicule and reproaches she had herself received.

Like Mrs. Grundy's, however, her opinions were often regulated by circumstances. On the principle of the tutor of one of the Dauphins, who believed that "God must think twice before damning a person of such consequence," she would on occasion benevolently shut her

eyes to sin and find excuses for the most hardened sinner. Indulgent to immorality—when it was properly veiled, *bien entendu*—she was utterly merciless to a *mésalliance*. To Lady Marion and Mauve it was the unpardonable sin. The recollection of it now steeled her heart against the appeal that Delane's modesty and good looks made to her senses which were still susceptible to the attraction of physical beauty. Her resolution to "buy him off" did not falter for an instant. It gave to her features, which were naturally hard, an expression of malevolence that made them positively repellant. At the sight of her, as she sat gaunt, rigid and alert, in a high-backed chair of black oak, richly carved and upholstered in russet leather, a vague dread fell upon Delane. He tried to throw it off, but it clung to him like those vines in tropical forests which twine themselves round the tallest trees and finally squeeze them to death.

Lady Marion and Mauve observed his embarrassment, and attributing it to a feeling of awe inspired by the superiority her age and rank gave her, was quick to turn it to account. With an air of gracious condescension, designed to confuse him still further, while seemingly intended to put him at his ease, she invited him to be seated, indicating a chair opposite her own that would place him in a position in which she could train on him at will all the artillery of her magnetism and malice.

He took it nervously, unaware of the danger to which it exposed him.

"I am sure it is very considerate of you, Mr. Delane," she began, "to come to call on an old woman like me. I have heard so much about you from my grandchildren, that I could not come to Asbury without desiring to make your acquaintance."

"So—so—Claudia has told you?" he stammered, in a tone of interrogation that betokened astonishment.

If Lady Marion and Mauve had any latent doubts as to the nature and extent of his intimacy with her granddaughter, the freedom with which he referred to her dispelled them.

"Oh, Claudia," she said, laying stress on the name, "can keep nothing from me. We are inseparable. She is dearer to me than my own children. I know her better than anyone. To see her happily married and settled, is the one object of my life. She is very hard to please. You should feel flattered, Mr. Delane, at the conquest you have made."

"I am," he said, simply.

"You are the only man, I imagine, who can boast he has cut out the Duke of Dorking. You know he wished to marry Claudia?"

"Yes, I know," said Delane, "but I don't plume myself on that. In my country one man is as good as another."

Lady Marion and Mauve smiled sarcastically.

"Unless he is richer, am I not right?"

"I suppose a multi-millionaire in my country is about the same thing as a duke over here," he admitted.

"His grace is both a duke and a millionaire," said Lady Marion and Mauve. "Would you have much of a chance against such a suitor to the hand of a beautiful and well-born girl in your country, Mr. Delane?"

The manner in which she regarded him seemed to acquit her of any intention to offend. He reddened, nevertheless, as if resenting the comparison.

"I am only a pugilist, it is true," he replied, "just a man who earns his living by his fists, but to cut out the Duke of Dorking doesn't puff me up. What makes me proud though is to feel that *I* should win the love of such a woman as Claudia, that she should trust *me* to make her happy. I can scarcely believe it!"

The proud, defiant humility with which he spoke convinced Lady Marion and Mauve that he was not to be bought with money. She was a gentlewoman by instinct as well as birth, and the idea of having to employ such means to accomplish her end had increased the repulsion with which she had regarded him. To feel that it was no longer necessary to bargain and barter was a great relief. Accustomed to juggle with niceties of speech and subtleties of suggestion, such

tactics were not in her line. She knew the value of a sneer or a smile, and could accomplish more by a look, or an inflection of the voice than by jingling coins on a table.

Perceiving that argument was the only bribe to which Delane was likely to prove susceptible, she resolved to persuade him through his love to renounce Claudia of his own accord. To a less consummately crafty woman such a task would have seemed impossible, but Lady Marion and Mauve was too skilled a hand to recoil from any undertaking because of its difficulty. The sense of having to deal with a man on whom she could practise her Machiavellian arts, inspired her with confidence and sharpened her faculties.

"I daresay it seems strange to you," she said, shaking her head doubtfully, and sniffing her smelling-bottle, "Claudia is so impulsive and reckless. It is a characteristic of the Carisbrookes. As you are about to enter the family it is only fair to tell you there is a terrible taint in it—the taint of insanity. I often tremble for Claudia and her brother. They do things that verge on madness. Act first and think afterwards might be their motto. They spend half their time regretting what they have done. I have constantly to extricate them from the consequences of their impulsive follies. Claudia is as exacting as her brother is capricious. The man who undertakes to make her happy will have his hands

full. By the way, how do you propose to do it? What are your qualifications?"

Deceived by the crafty manner in which she invited his confidence, while seeming to take him into her own, Delane did not perceive the web she was spinning round him.

"I love her," he replied, and his face shone with the faith that removes mountains.

"Ah, love, what a power it is!" exclaimed Lady Marion and Mauve, fixing her brilliant and malevolent eyes upon him in a manner that gave an ominous emphasis to her words. "Love and youth! My dear young man, nothing in the world is at once so powerful and so weak. Yes, you may make her happy—for a time. You are handsome and strong and chivalrous. One has but to look at you to be certain of that. There is magic in such qualities that is capable of raising a prize-fighter to the level of a prince. Under the enchantment of youth love works miracles, breaks through barriers, tramples upon customs, obliterates prejudices, equalises the inequalities of life. They say that love dies. I do not believe it. But youth is not immortal. Time withers it like any flower of the fields; and its romance dies with it. Dead, the spell it cast is broken. There is nothing so terrible as disillusion, the disillusion of awaking from the dream of love and youth, of coming back from the world of romance to the world of reality.

You say you wish to make Claudia happy. I believe you. But what will you do when the wonderful youth with which you have fascinated her is gone, when your day of power and triumph is over, when the demi-god has departed and only the man, the prize-fighter, remains?"

The gentle, almost apologetic tone in which the words were uttered, troubled Delane. It seemed to him that, underlying their flattery, like the claws concealed in the velvet paws of a cat, there lurked something disagreeable and mysterious.

"I should still love her," he said, stubbornly.

Lady Marion and Mauve heaved a deep sigh.

"Ah, that is so like youth," she murmured. "Ever impulsive and generous and regardless of cost! You remind me of the day when I too was young and beloved by one beneath me. Fie upon you for setting my old heart beating!" And smiling upon him indulgently, she continued to cense him with her poisoned flattery.

"It is only you people of the lower classes that really know how to love. I suppose it is the way Nature compensates you for the privations she inflicts upon you. With us love is merely a friendly understanding, an expression of good fellowship. We do not know what love is, we upper classes. We only play at love. What passes for love with us is at the best only a sort of spiritualised lust. Claudia is so different

from the rest of her class. What she loves in you is the beauty of a perfect form, the charm of a handsome face."

The air of conviction with which she spoke, emphasised as usual by her smelling-bottle, chilled Delane. Shannon, he remembered, had spoken in much the same way.

"Do you mean that she does not really love me?" he faltered, feeling once again as if something terrible was being kept from him that he had a right to know.

"Did it ever occur to you," she said, evading a direct reply, "that apart from his looks a prize-fighter possesses little if anything to appeal to a woman so far removed from his social sphere as Claudia? What else *can* you have in common but physical attraction? What else have you to hold her by?"

"I have my personality," he said, proudly, stung by the callousness of the question. "Looks are only bait, it's the soul behind the body that matters. She said so herself."

Lady Marion and Mauve smiled compassionately, and perceiving that he was as vibrant to her touch as an Æolian harp to the wind, she proceeded to play upon him her fugue of renunciation.

"For two souls to be in unison," she said, "there must be a companionship of tastes and interests. If any

such sympathy seems to unite you now, how real, how genuine do you think it is?"

"She told me she loved me," he replied, gazing at his tormentor as if he guessed the reason of their singular *tête-à-tête*. "I don't believe she lied to me."

"Nor I," smiled Lady Marion and Mauve. "But you are a novelty. I only trust for the sake of both of you that the charm will last out your youth."

A sudden ray of hope lit up his face.

"That will be a long time, then," he said. "Pugilists, like me, who take great care of themselves, keep young for years."

Lady Marion and Mauve shrugged her shoulders, sniffed her smelling-bottle, and recited the following lines:—

"Though one were strong as seven,
He too with death shall dwell,
Nor wake with wings in heaven,
Nor weep for pains in hell;
Though one were fair as roses,
His beauty clouds and closes,
And well though love reposes,
In the end it is not well."

She repeated the last line twice in a solemn voice, and after a little pause that deepened the impression she desired to create, she went on smilingly, stoking the

fire of suspicion she had lit, till it burst into a blaze of self-sacrifice.

"My dear young man," she began, "I can see that you understand me, and I confess that it astonishes me not a little. I will be quite candid with you. Before we met I was prejudiced against you. When you entered the room, I expected to see a pickpocket or cut-throat, I wondered if the butler had locked up the spoons, and whether I should not be murdered as well as robbed. I was not brought up to have a high opinion of prize-fighters. In my young days they were a synonym for all that was violent and repulsive. I suppose that times must have changed in the prize-ring as everywhere else. You look and behave like a gentleman. From your speech I can tell that you are not uneducated. In fine, your looks and your manners have so impressed me that I am as prepossessed in your favour as I was prepared to abhor you. If wishes were coronets you should be a duke. Alas! we no longer live in the times of the fairies. The present is matter-of-fact, dull, Pharasaical, calculating, uncharitable. Hypocrisy and self-interest are the key-notes of the age, which calls itself emancipated in order to enjoy the license of which it would deprive the past.

"I know nothing more maligned than the morals of the old régime. One constantly hears the eighteenth century and its predecessor denounced as the brothels

of history. Do not believe it. It is the modern historians who only write tiresome historical novels, the cheap-jack biographers of famous, or infamous, villains and courtesans of the past now so much in vogue, the politicians and the puritans who rant from every platform and every pulpit, the demagogues who flourish in every party and every creed, the fanatics, the moralists, the censors, and the whole tribe of self-advertising would-be reformers who pester us in the press that have brought the days of Pepys and the Pompadour into such disrepute. Being an American, I take it for granted you are well up in history. It is by Americans, I am told, that the so-called historical biographies and novels are chiefly read. I am right, am I not? As one thoroughly conversant with the history of the old régime, you grasp my meaning?

"In marriage, in love, in honour, in chivalry," she continued without waiting for a reply, "the present with its presumptuous assumption of superiority is daily put to the blush by the past. Gretna Green was quite as moral as a registrar's office and much more romantic. Show me the would-be Brummell, who you may see any day lounging about the Park or Piccadilly that would dream of rushing off to Dover at a moment's notice, like the brothers of La Belle Hamilton, to save the honour of a sister. What actress or chorus girl on the modern stage would dream of refusing a peer's son for

the sake of his family like Adrienne Lecouvreur? There was more love and fidelity in Mademoiselle Aïssé's little finger than in all the lackeys and nobodies that would fain degrade the ladies they covet by adding the injury of a marriage to the insult of a flirtation. To-day the tables are completely turned. Self-gratification has taken the place of self-sacrifice. Men and women, high and low alike, flout propriety, and for the pleasure of a moment care not how they mortgage the future. Of less worth than the riff-raff of other times the upstarts of to-day think much more of themselves. A woman of the old régime did not demand that she should be led to the altar before suffering a man to put his arm around her waist. The Duchess of Cleveland would have boxed your ears had you reproached her for not marrying Jacob Hall, the rope-dancer. It was not till she was in her dotage that she married Beau Fielding and put herself into the pillory of ignominy and mortification in which she ended her days. It is the belauded nineteenth century and Queen Victoria that are responsible for all the unhappy marriages which seek oblivion in the latrines of the Divorce Court."

Delane looked at her in a sort of stupid wonderment, bewildered by language of which he with difficulty followed the drift. The consciousness of his ignorance of the names and allusions that tripped so familiarly from her tongue humiliated him. At every word she

uttered he felt his inferiority. Instinctively he realised that she belonged to another class and caste to the one in which he had been born, or with which he was familiar. Race was stamped like a hall-mark on her every feature, every gesture. The proud self-confidence of high birth was manifest in the scimitar-like curve of her long slender nose, in the drawling inflection of her high-pitched voice, in the curl of her lips, and the poise of her head. Even her hands withered with age and streaked with veins like autumn leaves still retained a certain aristocratic appearance. And she was Claudia's grandmother, the mother of her mother! Unlike in every way there was yet in the elder something subtly suggestive of the younger. He could not forget the relationship, it obsessed him till it became, as it were, a sort of hippogriff on which the woman he loved was being borne to some misty and inaccessible peak.

Encouraged by his expression of bewilderment, Lady Marion and Mauve proceeded to press home the attack and come to the point.

"From what I have said," she continued, "you have no doubt inferred that I agree with those—the majority, alas!—who regard the union of two people of different stations, as something to be deplored. On the contrary, I am not so narrow-minded. If anything is to be deplored, it is the folly of society in setting up standards of conduct that hang like mill-stones round our necks.

Nevertheless, I am compelled to recognise *facts*. Equality may be a right of mankind, but no power on earth can confirm it. What is termed a *mésalliance* is the mother of misunderstanding, which has poisoned more lives than Messalina or Brinvilliers. A lady's maid or an actress may marry the man of her choice, but an heiress is not so free. A great fortune entails great responsibility. Not that Claudia's is as large as you have been led to suppose. Asbury, you know, is not hers; it belongs to her brother."

Delane flushed to the roots of his hair. The injustice of the insinuation smote him like a blow received in the ring that shakes a man from head to foot.

"Her money is nothing to me," he faltered. "I believe it is the duty of a husband to support his wife, not to be supported by her."

But Lady Marion and Mauve was too bent on winning the victory in this strange psychological contest to have any qualms as to how she obtained it.

"I am sure the sentiment does you great credit," she rejoined. "Pugilists, I have heard, earn immense sums." And perceiving that she had "drawn blood," she proceeded to flick the wound with an utter disregard of the pain she caused.

"Your ability to maintain her, however, in the luxury to which she is accustomed is beside the mark. Money is not always everything. In this case it is less

than nothing. It is by your face, your form, your strength that you have won Claudia's heart. Her senses have cast a spell over her reason. She has been too engrossed in looking at the picture to notice the frame, which is to a picture what environment is to character. Your world, your means of livelihood are your frame. What you have to do is to prevent her from ever realising that the picture she admires has a frame, and that seems to me well-nigh impossible. For if you and Claudia are resolved to marry—and I know from experience that unless you are both locked up, and that is impossible nowadays, you will do as you please—the world will insist on dragging her down to your level. You will take from her more than you can ever give her. We have not yet arrived at the time when a woman may give her name and her rank along with her fortune to her husband. Claudia has a great future before her. That is not a thing to be thrown lightly out of the window, is it?"

The appeal was like the flash of a search-light which enabled him to recognise the truth of her words. It revealed, too, the meaning and motive of the brilliant cynicism with which she had sought to impress him with his inferiority to Claudia. He glanced round the room with a hunted air, but the consolation he desired was denied him. The beautiful vaulted ceiling, the tattered historic banners, the stately Gothic window with

its proud heraldic blazonry, the ancestral portraits, even the bewitching La Belle Carisbrooke herself with her likeness to Claudia, all seemed to return his gaze in haughty and pitiless silence as if they resented his presence. How different the room had looked the day he first entered it! Then he had been fascinated by the sheer beauty of it all, now he was oppressed and chilled by its grandeur. And overcome by the thought of what was expected of him, he buried his face in his hands with a sob.

At the sight of his despair Lady Marion and Mauve's eyes flashed triumphantly.

"My dear young man," she said with a mocking leer, "I should like to have spared your illusions, but there must be an end to illusion now. Let us look facts in the face. When the scales fall from Claudia's eyes, as fall they surely will, she will upbraid you, and some fine day to escape from a man whose presence perpetually reminds her of what she has lost, she will leave you. If she is capable of marrying you, she is capable of leaving you. Reproach is never separated from her twin-sister regret. To the complaints of your wife will be added the contempt of your children, who, as they grow up will blame their parents for thinking only of themselves and denying them, for the sake of a selfish scruple, the inestimable privilege, so easy to bestow upon them, of calling a duke instead of a prize-fighter their father."

Delane rose to his feet with a spring.

"In heaven's name," he exclaimed, "do not slander her!"

The heart of the wily old peeress quailed within her. For a moment she feared she had gone too far. She kept her countenance, however, and, valiantly sticking to her guns, ventured to point the moral of her long tirade.

"Remember," she said calmly sniffing her smelling-bottle, "I am not asking you to give her up. If you would keep her love, and you may, if my experience of life is worth anything, don't begin by demanding a sacrifice of her, however willing she may be to grant it in the heat of passion. The love that exacts sacrifices as a proof of sincerity is selfish and spurious. You understand me?"

Yes, he understood her at last only too well. Outpointed in this terrible battle of the intellect, in which from the first he had felt himself overmatched, she might have spared him the humiliation of knocking him out at the finish. The callousness of her cynicism was revolting. It was as if his dream of happiness had turned into a nightmare in which his love became a monstrous spell to change Claudia into a troll.

"Stop!" he burst out wildly, "Say no more. You are right. I give her up."

Without another word he rushed from the room as if it were plague-stricken.

"He will keep his word," said Lady Marion and Mauve to herself.

It was the highest compliment she could have paid him had she but known it. She was not given to compliments, but exhilarated by the victory she had won she was inclined to be generous, even lavish in her praise.

"As fine looking a young man as I have seen these many years," she mused as Delane fled from her, "What a pity he is only a prize-fighter! If I were a witch I would make him and Dorking change places."

CHAPTER XI.

When Delane returned to Park Cottage he found his whole staff assembled in the gymnasium, where during his absence they had been speculating as usual on the nature of his relation to the chatelaine of Asbury—Shannon, who alone knew, refraining from enlightening them. His face was livid, even his lips were white. All the blood in his body seemed to be in his eyes. They were red and swollen as if from weeping.

He entered, however, humming a popular air, and said with forced gaiety,

"I've a pleasant surprise for you, Dad. You're always cursing this place; well, I am going to oblige you and quit it. I have come to the conclusion the air here don't suit me."

The trainer and the two seconds stared at him open-mouthed. Shannon, who was engaged in mending an old boxing-glove, though equally astonished, opened only his ears. He continued to keep his attention fixed on what he was doing as if there was nothing out of the common in his friend's appearance and words.

"Oh, we might as well make the best of it now we are here," said Royce, trying to appear unconcerned.

Delane's lip curled contemptuously.

"Do you want to see me win this championship or lose it?"

"I want to see you win it, of course," whimpered the trainer. "You'll be the death of me, Jack Delane, with your fancies. I never see'd anyone like you. What bee have you got in your bonnet now?"

"I tell you the air don't agree with me here. I know myself better than you do, I guess. You've trained me up to the notch. I sha'n't ever be in a better condition than I am now. You've got your work cut out to keep me up to the mark, and you know it. Every day I stay here now I shall go off. I want a change, and I mean to have it."

Royce eyed his charge curiously. There was one question he would have liked to ask, but he dared not put it for the life of him.

"Well," he said with a shrug, "perhaps you are right. There's two weeks between now and the fight. It's a devil of an anxious time for the lot of us. 'The Grey-Hound' at Highgate is just the place, I wanted you to go there from the first. There's every facility for training there: plenty of room, privacy, bracing air. I'll go to London to-morrow, Jack, and see about it."

Delane pulled his watch from his pocket.

"You've got just ten minutes to catch the 5.30 to London," he said slowly. "You'd better look alive. Whatever you have to do has got to be done to-night. I leave this place the first thing in the morning bag and baggage."

"But—what——" stammered the trainer aghast.

"I mean what I say, Dad Royce," flared Delane, and without another word he strode out of the room. A moment later they heard the sound of a door being slammed and locked on the floor above.

"What the hell's come over him now, I wonder!" exclaimed Royce, wringing his hands.

"Best catch that train, Dad, and wonder afterwards," observed Shannon, dryly. "Here's your hat."

The harassed trainer caught the hat and the hint, and inviting the Kid to accompanying him departed with many imprecations.

In the meantime, Delane shut up in his room was sitting at a table with a pen in his hand staring blankly at a sheet of note-paper, on which he had hastily written the following lines:

"I have been thinking things over, and I have come to the conclusion that we have made a big mistake. The difference in our stations is too great. Under the circumstances we had better not meet again."

The words were an exact transcript of the idea he wished to convey. They expressed what he thought

but not what he felt. *That* was beyond him. He was fully conscious of the difference, and the disadvantage of possessing a mind that was both by nature and training incapable of subtlety only served to intensify his despair. What he had written seemed outrageous in its tense brutality. He longed to soften the harshness of the lines by some expression of affection, some indication of what he suffered. To begin "My darling Claudia," would only make parting from her the harder by prolonging it. Such a mode of address would obscure his meaning, and give rise to further letters and explanations. He could not think of her by any less impassioned epithet. "My dear Miss Carisbrooke," after what had passed between them, was inconceivable. A satisfactory termination was even more difficult than the beginning. To sign himself "Yours sincerely," or "Yours truly,"—which struck him as the most formal mode of ending a letter—would be to act the hypocrite. It was bad enough to plunge a knife into the heart of the woman he loved, without professing to be sincere in his devotion at the same time.

In the school of the ring in which he had been trained there was no middle course. Compromise meant crookedness. A man was either a fair fighter or a foul one, a braggart and a bully or courteous and chivalrous. Jack Delane had never read "The Ballad of Reading Gaol," in which the poet insists that "each man kills

the thing he loves." He would probably have ridiculed such a sweeping assertion; but given a specific instance he would never have dreamt of denying that

> "The coward does it with a kiss,
> The brave man with a sword."

He was killing something now he loved, and there was but one way in which the deed could be done. The stab must be to the heart; swift, sure, fatal. To strangle slowly with the cord of hypocrisy and treachery were cruelty indeed! Accordingly, after vainly tormenting himself, he rounded off the note as he had begun, abruptly.

The sight of his signature appended to what he had written frightened him, and he made haste to hide it in an envelope which he stamped and addressed. Thus concealed the note became as it were, a sheathed sword that posting would draw from its scabbard. He turned it round in his hands as if it were a blade whose point he was examining. He thought of the wound it would inflict, and wondered if death—the death of her love—would be instantaneous. Suddenly pierced by some heart-breaking thought, he stretched his arms with a gesture of despair across the table and bowing his head upon them wept convulsively, as a child might weep.

At length, startled by the sound of someone knock-

ing at the door he pulled himself together, and enquired querulously "Who is there?"

"It's me," replied Shannon, quietly. "Your dinner's ready."

"All right."

Shannon waited for a moment before withdrawing as if he expected to be admitted.

"All right," repeated Delane, savagely, determined not to gratify him, and he proceeded to bathe his face, scrubbing it well in cold water and ammonia to obliterate if possible all trace of the tears that disfigured it.

After dinner, which he ate with Shannon and the Docker in sullen silence, he went out and posted his letter. This done, he heaved a sigh of relief, but peace of mind was denied him. On the return of Royce that night with the news that "The Greyhound" at Highgate was prepared to receive him on the morrow, he was seized with a fit of home-sickness. The idea of leaving Park Cottage suddenly filled him with regret. He had a morbid desire to remain in the place in which he had known the greatest happiness and the greatest sorrow.

The process of moving however, to "The Greyhound" gave a momentary fillip to his spirits. Settled in his new quarters, which were spacious, well equipped, airy, and cheerful, he determined to train as he had never trained before. He would beat the negro champion and redeem the honour of his race, or die. Die!

He scorned the idea as something disgraceful. His pride and pluck would make defeat impossible. Exhilarated by the thought of triumph, he pictured to himself his adversary prostrate at his feet, whilst the spectators, delirious with excitement, acclaimed him the victor, and the newspaper reporters rushed off to flash his name round the world. He longed for the fight like a war horse that has scented a battle. His chest heaved, his muscles contracted, his nostrils dilated as if the air of the ring was in them. Yes, there *were* other things besides love in the world—victory, fame, the Ring! Women had never counted for anything in his life. Women, a woman, Claudia! Everything seemed to begin and end with her, she was the pivot round which all his thoughts revolved, the pedigree, as it were, of every emotion.

On the day after his removal to "The Greyhound" he received several letters which had been addressed to Park Cottage. When the Docker brought them to him he immediately wondered if there was one from *her* among them. As it chanced, there was one—a brief bright note written the day after her departure from Asbury, before *his* had reached her. In it she told him that she had rejected the Duke of Dorking, and assured him that she regarded his love as a rock on which her present and future happiness was based. As he read the tender trifle, scented with the vague per-

fume she affected, it was as if she stood before him evoked by the intensity of his desire. It was not her letter, but herself that he gazed on, heard, touched, breathed. The vision lasted but the twinkling of an eye, but ere it vanished her presence was so real that he felt as if he had never before realised the magnitude of his sacrifice. The thought of the manner in which he had repaid her trust filled him with remorse. What he had done was like a blow below the belt. In the face of her confidence in him it turned his chivalry into treachery.

A thing that seems easy to do under the influence of a powerful emotion, becomes difficult if not altogether impossible when the emotion is dead. Heroism is not a permanent state of mind but an impulse. The effort required to perform an heroic action is slight in comparison with the effort required to live up to it. The sublime is exhausting. Had Delane been called upon to renounce Claudia now, he would have refused. Instead of deriving consolation from having done what was right, he cursed himself for a fool. His ideals had betrayed him, and the iron entered his soul—the iron of a wasted self-sacrifice, of a cherished virtue that is valueless, of self-deception and disillusion.

It takes the mind that has suffered to understand the seamy side of life and human nature. In the wildness of regret he comprehended as he had never done

before how men are induced to fake fights. He could make allowances for "crooks" and sympathise with them. He realised that the most upright may become base of necessity; that happiness and honour are not so much a question of ethics as economics. But this sudden glimpse of his soul into the innermost depths of truth where *tout comprendre,* as the French express it, is *tout pardonner,* rendered, as perhaps it always does, the spirit of sympathy it evoked selfish and morbid. Like the renunciation to which it was due it was a form of hysteria. He found excuses for others in order to find excuses for himself.

"If she really loves me truly," he said to himself, "she will understand and forgive me."

He found a feverish consolation in assuring himself that she would repudiate his sacrifice. The morrow *must* bring a letter from her to that effect. But he waited in vain; she did not write again. Her silence informed him only too well that she had received his letter and resented it. At first, however, in the intensity of his craving for the word that never came he sought to find excuses for her. Perhaps she had been obliged to leave town unexpectedly, and his letter had not been forwarded. He searched the papers in the hope of finding news of her. The columns devoted to the doings of the Court and Society would he thought be sure to contain some mention of their most brilliant

ornament. On the fourth day he got wind of her. She *was* in London, after all. Among the names of the guests at a fashionable gathering he discovered that of Miss Carisbrooke of Asbury.

So she was amusing herself, while he was pining for her! For an instant he saw red. In his fury he could have struck her to the ground as a wanton who had played fast and loose with him. She was on par with all the other women who had tried to bewitch him. Her love was nothing but lust. And he had loved her truly for the sake of "the soul behind the body," as she had phrased it!

"And still love her!" whispered his heart.

At the thought his anger vanished, and despair swooped down on him like a vulture on carrion. His pride was humbled, his spirit crushed. Lady Marion and Mauve was right. Union with him would bring not happiness but disgrace to one so far above him. Wealth and position were not things to be lightly thrown out of the window. In accepting his sacrifice she had done wisely, and, no doubt, in the brilliant world of Claudia Carisbrooke such as he would be speedily forgotten. Yet it was very hard, very unjust. A cloud of black melancholy enveloped him. It was as though a millstone had been hung round his neck, and he experienced the poignant loneliness of the misunderstood.

As may be imagined Delane's depression did not escape the watchful eyes of Royce and his assistants. Naturally cheerful, light-hearted, and loquacious he became sullen, suspicious, and silent. He spoke little and laughed not at all. When addressed he started guiltily like one detected in some questionable act, and churlishly resented the harmless chaff with which his friends sought to revive his spirits. Even his whims which had so annoyed Royce, if they still existed, lost all power of articulation. He made no attempt to conceal the fact of his melancholy. A general lassitude seemed to have taken possession of him. He went through his training perfunctorily, as if he had ceased to take an interest in the great fight on which his reputation and future depended, and passed his hours of relaxation shut up alone in his room.

It was not long before the vulture that was preying upon his mind and tearing at his heart dug its beak into his body as well. One day on being weighed as usual after training he failed to tip the scales at his customary weight. The shrinkage, it is true, was at first but fractional, and Royce pretended to make light of it, though he did not fail to make such changes in diet and training as were calculated to prevent a further decrease. But all his efforts were without effect. As fast as he put weight on his charge, grief pulled it off again.

Royce whimpered and cursed by turns—any whim was preferable to this. However, the crafty old trainer did not throw up the sponge. Past-master in the art of training pugilists, he knew too much of the ring and human nature—pugilists' human nature—to back anyone or anything blindly. He was inclined to be sceptical of everything but Chance. He had seen brute force vanquished by science, and science succumb to brute force. With him it was a case of while there's a man there's a fight. Not that he was a trainer merely for the money he earned. Pugilism was to him an art, and he loved it with the true artist's instinct. He regarded the men he trained as works of art that he had created. A sculptor was not more particular in selecting the marble for a statue than he was in the choice of his material. They might consider themselves flattered on whom, when ready for exhibition in the ring, "Dad Royce fecit" might have been inscribed. The fact that others might turn out as fine or better masterpieces did not lessen the value he attached to his.

"The men I train," he would say in the fullness of his faith in Chance, "are never beaten till they are down and out."

Grumbling and fidgety in small matters, when he was "up against a stiff proposition," as he phrased it, he faced it with cool, almost cynical indifference. The lamentations of his subordinates, who were greatly dejected by the change in Delane, left him quite unmoved.

"I guess he'll beat that damned nigger yet, if he'll buck up and pull himself together," he remarked cheerily three nights before the fight, as he sipped his "night-cap" in the gymnasium, while Shannon and the seconds bewailed Delane's defeat as if it had already taken place.

"Not now," sighed Shannon, "he's giving away too much weight. He can't afford it. He needs every ounce he's lost to withstand the pressure of Sam's rushes and clinches."

"He won't be such a fool as to meet them. He'll be another man when he finds himself in the ring, or my name's not Dad Royce. It *does* make a difference, *you* ought to know it well enough, Joe. Unless he *wants* to be beaten he'll know enough to side-step the rushes and avoid mixing. Besides Jack's wind is as sound as a bell and he's got a punch up his sleeve that'll make Crowfoot look nine ways for Sunday."

"I believe he's homesick," observed the Kid, "when I was rubbing his legs to-day I asked him what he intended to do when the fight was over. 'Go back to America by the first boat,' he said. 'Once I get home wild horses couldn't drag me away again.' There were tears in his eyes too."

"Homesick, hell!" snorted Royce, contemptuously,

"Jack ain't got no home, nor ever had one since he was knee-high to a grasshopper. If I thought he was homesick I wouldn't let him meet Crowfoot at all. That *would* settle his hash, no mistake. Jerry Bryce was homesick. He was the finest light-weight I ever saw. I trained him in New York when he came over from England to fight Jimmy Buckle. He won too, and after that had things all his own way. Challenges just rained on him; easy victories, big money and his name in the papers. But the thought of a little shop he had over in England worried him. Finally he got so homesick there was no doing anything with him, and I had to advise him to go back home. He lost $30,000 by it. Guess I know homesickness when I see it!"

Suddenly the sound of feet pacing to and fro restlessly on the floor above was heard.

"What's up now, I wonder," exclaimed Shannon, glancing anxiously at the ceiling; "when I went upstairs an hour ago to see if he wanted anything he had gone to bed."

"Guess he's sleep-walking," observed Royce, nonchalantly, looking at his watch.

"Jack's just asking for trouble," said the Kid, irritably; "I believe, as you say, Dad, he could win if he wanted to, it's hard lines on us, that's what it is, to go and leave us in the lurch."

"How much you got on him, Kid?" Royce asked good-naturedly.

"One hundred dollars, Docker's got five pounds."

"Take my advice and double your money."

"What for I'd like to know, I can't afford to lose it."

"For the credit of the firm. I tell you, Jack can win if he wants to, and see if he don't yet."

"Well, then, wot's hup with 'im anyhow," asked the burly Docker, "'e used to be as chirpy as a canary bird, 'e did."

"Wot's hup with 'im?" repeated Royce, trying to mimic the Docker's cockney accent in his nasal Yankee twang. "Woman, old boy, that's wot's hup with 'im. Take my warning, Docker," he continued, dryly, "you can't box and flirt. I said from the first there'd be ructions when Jack started gallivantying round that woman at Asbury Court. Talk about prize-fighters ruining their constitutions with drink. Why, drink ain't in it with a woman. I never see a man knocked out but I says to myself: 'Churchy lah fam.' This one's a bad 'un, I reckon. As if a great lady like her could have but one thing in common with a prize-fighter! She's had her fun and chucked him, and he's just hankering for her. If I could only persuade him that she was coming to see him fight, I'll be damned if he won't buck up and knock the stuffing out of that nigger! How can we do it, Joe? How can we pull

his leg?" And the trainer carried away by the idea which had suddenly struck him, jumped to his feet and began, like his charge above, to pace up and down excitedly.

"Do you really mean it, Dad?" asked Shannon, anxiously. "I want Jack to win even more than you. He's my pal," he added, simply.

"Mean it!" echoed Royce. "It's his *only* chance, Joe Shannon. Go upstairs right now and tell him she's coming to see him fight. You're his pal and he'll believe you. Besides, you're a first-rate liar, Joe." And without more ado the crafty trainer seized the sparring partner by the arm and shoved him out of the room.

"Remember," he whispered, as Shannon slowly mounted the stairs, "it's his only chance, and all depends on you."

CHAPTER XII.

To Shannon the task that Royce had set him was anything but congenial.

He guessed all was at an end between his friend and the woman who had bewitched him the moment Delane had announced his intention of leaving Park Cottage. Miss Carisbrooke, as he had suspected all along, had merely been amusing herself; she had had her fun and that was the end of it. He was only surprised that the dénouement had come so soon.

At first he was as delighted as a woman who has won back her lover from a rival. The friendship that meant so much to him would now be re-established on the old footing. But he waited in vain for the sign he had anticipated. Delane had completely changed. The woman whose memory still enthralled him had snapped the chain that formerly bound him to his friend. Out of his life she seemed to separate him from his sparring partner even further than when in it. And Shannon hated her more than ever for the double havoc she had

wrought in Delane the prize-fighter and Delane the friend.

It was, accordingly, with no little embarrassment that Shannon mounted the stairs. His position created in him a feeling of diffidence as well as repugnance. Not only was the idea of any mention of Miss Carisbrooke distasteful to him, but he felt in view of Delane's evident disinclination to confide in him, as if he were "butting in," as he expressed it, where he was not wanted.

He paused for a moment on the landing to collect himself. The sound of restless pacing to and fro in Delane's room which had so troubled his staff below had ceased. All was still within; but a gleam of light that filtered through the keyhole informed him that Delane had not yet retired. Shannon took a deep breath and knocked on the door. At the same time he called softly—

"Jack, let me in, I want to speak to you."

There was no response. Shannon was not surprised; it was not the first time he had been refused admittance. On previous occasions, after waiting a moment, he had gone away without more ado. But now the sense of the responsibility that had been thrust upon him made him try the door. He did so mechanically, fully expecting to find it locked; but to his surprise the door opened when he turned the knob. The

sight that met his eyes caused a lump to rise in his throat. Delane, with his face hidden in the fold of an arm, was leaning over a table beside which he sat—the picture of despair. He did not stir; if he had heard the door open, he seemed not to care. Impelled by some fine instinct Shannon made as if to withdraw, but his sympathy got the better of him; and plucking up his courage, he entered the room boldly, shutting and locking the door behind him. Still Delane did not stir. Careless of the consequence, Shannon went up to him and placing his hand upon his friend's shoulder pressed it silently. Delane vibrated at the touch and started to his feet with a cry that began in a key of joy and finished in one of despair.

"I thought it was *her!*" he groaned, pacing the room in a state of great agitation. "I could have sworn it was *her!*"

As he lifted his face from his arm an open book hidden by his bowed head became visible. Shannon recognised it as the well-worn copy of Tennyson. Less from curiosity than inability to find the right word to say at the moment, he picked it up. The page on which Delane's face had rested was moist with his tears. One verse in particular, the print of which was blurred, attracted Shannon's eye. It ran as follows:—

"They say he's dying all for love, but that can never be,
They say his heart is breaking, mother—what is that to me?

There's many a bolder lad'll woo me any summer day,
And I'm to be Queen o' the May, mother, I'm to be Queen o' the May."

Though Shannon's power of comprehension, like that of the majority of his class, was devoid of subtlety and undeveloped by education, he was no fool. He understood by instinct the purport of what he read.

"Look here, Jack," he pleaded, replacing the Tennyson on the table as he spoke, "don't kick me out. We've been too good pals for that. I haven't come here to spy on you or preach."

At such a moment—the psychological moment as it chanced—his crudely expressed but none the less genuine sympathy was as balm to Delane's spirits, broken and chastened by the grief that was consuming him.

"I know you're my friend, Joe," he said, grasping the hand that Shannon held out; "and I want a friend mighty bad just now. I'm done up, scrapped!" And with a dry sob he bowed his head hysterically on his sparring partner's shoulder.

A fierce, triumphant joy blazed in Shannon's eyes. He felt that he had won his pal back at last from the woman who had come between them.

"Scrapped be damned!" he exclaimed cheerily. "Dad says as the man he trains ain't ever beaten till

he's down and out. You've only got to buck up and you'll be as right as rain."

With an effort Delane pulled himself together.

"Forgive me, Joe," he said, huskily, averting his face as he spoke, "I don't know what's come over me since I gave her up."

"Since *you* gave *her* up?" echoed Shannon, looking at him, as if he thought he had taken leave of his senses.

Delane nodded.

"Well, I'll be damned!" exclaimed Shannon.

"I feel as if I was," said Delane, with a groan. "I did it the day after I had that scrap with you," he added, after a pause, unable any longer to keep the secret of his trouble to himself. "Her grandmother came to Asbury Court and sent for me to come and see her. She was a mighty proud old woman, an out and out grandee aristocrat, the sort that makes you feel like dirt under her feet. She could talk the top off a teapot, too. There was no arguing with her, she had it all her own way. When she finished I was clean knocked out. Like you she said a prize-fighter can't marry a fine lady without degrading her; only she put it in a way that made me feel as if I had already degraded her granddaughter just by loving her. It was more than I could bear so I wrote and gave her up before things had gone any further. That's why I left

Park Cottage. I meant it for the best, but somehow I didn't think she'd take me at my word. She's let me go without so much as a line."

Once more he paced the room in great agitation.

Shannon whistled softly to himself. That Delane should have been persuaded to renounce the woman he loved—and that too within twenty-four hours of having won her—was past his comprehension. His own attempt to disillusion Delane had seemed to him at the time merely a waste of breath, a whistling to the wind. He had never dreamt that the wind would stop to listen.

But though astonished at the manner in which his wishes had been realised, he was none the less secretly pleased.

"Come, Jack," he said, cheerily, "don't take it to heart so. She ain't worth it. A woman as'll let the man she professes to love go like that don't know what love is."

"But I love her still, Joe, I love her more'n ever," protested Delane.

He sat down on the edge of his bed and looked at Shannon sadly.

The confession fired Shannon's jealousy. "She's given you the go-bye," he said, huffily, "and there's an end of it." Then fearing to lose the advantage he had

gained, he added with a laugh, "I guess there's as good fish in the sea as ever came out, though folks do say they take a good deal of catching."

Delane shook his head despondently.

"It's no use," he sighed, "I'd better chuck it, Joe."

"Chuck what?" said the other, suspiciously. "Guess I know the feeling, but you'll get over it. You ain't the man to chuck anything."

"I tell you it's no use," repeated Delane. "Feeling as I do I won't last the first round, and I ain't going into the ring to be beaten by a nigger. Let someone else tackle Crowfoot; I climb down."

To Shannon such a moral collapse was gall and wormwood. He realised that he had won his friend only to lose him again. And never had the friendship he craved seemed more desirable than now when Delane's hysterical dependence on his sympathy convinced him that another than he occupied the first place in his thoughts. He was not the man, however, to sink under the weight of crushed hopes. In his devotion to Delane there was nothing morbid; it was the natural affection of a man of strong, primitive, healthy impulses. He had been drawn to Delane by a mutual sympathy and understanding, which their common interests and habits had strengthened. Less emotional, less impressionable than Delane, when stirred he was stirred to the depths of his

nature. He had demanded more from his friend than he was able to give him. In great friendships as in great loves equal sympathy is the exception and not the rule; there is always one who gives more than he receives in return.

The fact that he knew Delane's nature was capable of giving what he demanded of it had been the fly in the ointment of their friendship. He had succeeded, however, in gaining the complete confidence of his friend, and he had so long been the sole possessor of it that he had grown to look upon it as a right. So jealously did he treasure it that to be obliged to share it with another, least of all with a woman, was to deprive him of it altogether. He disliked and feared women; they were to him subtle, crafty creatures with whom a man was at a disadvantage. The influence that even the memory of Claudia Carisbrooke exercised over Delane convinced him that he had no chance against her; and accustomed as a pugilist to accept defeat with a good grace he was prepared now to acknowledge himself beaten.

But Shannon's pride was involved in this friendship quite as much as his heart. Delane's reputation appealed to him no less than his personality. It flattered his vanity to be the chosen and particular friend of the celebrated pugilist on whom the eyes and hopes of the world to which he belonged were fixed. It was as if

the glory he had lost was reflected back on him. His belief in Delane was too great to permit him to contemplate the possibility of his defeat. At the bare idea of abandoning the fight, as his hero proposed, he reddened with shame.

"I'll see you damned first!" he exclaimed, crossing the room at a stride and gripping Delane by the shoulders. "You're going to fight and you're going to win. Don't be a fool, Jack."

Delane shook his head wearily.

"I'd like to oblige you, Joe," he sighed, "you're a pal worth having. But it's no good urging me, I ain't got a punch in me. I feel as if I had lost all my spunk."

His resistance pricked Shannon's pride, it no longer required any incentive from Royce to quicken it.

"But she'll be there," he pleaded. "Don't that make a difference?"

"What's the use, Joe," replied Delane, sullenly, annoyed at the futility of the suggestion. "After what I've just told you you know she won't come to the fight."

"But if she was to," insisted Shannon in desperation, "say, wouldn't that make a difference?"

Delane sprang to his feet excitedly, and in a voice that shook with passion exclaimed—

"By God, yes! I'd fight the nigger just to show her I didn't care. I'd beat him too, if I was to die in the ring!" And snatching up the Tennyson lying open on the table he flung it contemptuously across the room.

Shannon regarded the action as a good sign. The spirit of defiance that prompted it gave a spur to his imagination.

"Say, Jack," he said abruptly as if a new idea had suddenly occurred to him, "I guess you've been had. Miss Carisbrooke never changed her mind in twenty-four hours. If she had, she'd have told you so herself. She ain't the kind as sends others to do their dirty work. You've been made a fool of; I don't wonder she's got the hump."

The confident tone in which he spoke gave a peculiar force to his words. Delane clutched at them, so to speak, like a drowning man at a straw.

"What are you driving at?" he gasped, vaguely grasping Shannon's meaning. "The old lady was dead against me I know. I felt it the moment I saw her."

"Of course she was. You don't suppose she wants her granddaughter to marry a prize-fighter, do you? I'll bet if Miss Carisbrooke knew the truth she'd make it up with you. See here, Jack, you've just got to sit down right now and drop her a line explaining how it all happened and beg her pardon."

A wild hope flamed in Delane's eyes only to be quenched again instantly.

"I can't," he said despondently. "I've behaved like a cur, she'll never forgive me. Besides, why did she tell her grandmother after being so dead set on keeping everything secret."

"Perhaps she confided in the old woman same as you confided in me, or perhaps the old woman smelt a rat same as Dad and all of us did," replied Shannon, impatiently. "But perhapsing ain't going to mend matters. If you won't write her that letter, I will."

"What, you?"

"Yes, me! I'll write this very night and let her know the truth."

The hope that was struggling with despair in Delane's bosom fought its last battle and triumphed.

"Oh, you Joe!" he exclaimed eagerly.

Interpreting the exclamation as an earnest of Delane's intention to pull himself together, Shannon moved towards the door.

"Now, just you go to bed at once and get some sleep," he said, "you need it. I'm going to write to Miss Carisbrooke."

"And you really think she'll make it up?" asked Delane, in a voice that rendered the question superfluous.

"I'll bet she'll not miss seeing you fight," replied Shannon, discreetly evading a direct reply. And perceiving that Delane in accordance with his advice was preparing to go to bed, he left the room without more ado.

CHAPTER XIII.

When Shannon returned to the gymnasium he found Royce waiting for him in a frenzy of anxiety. The strain of the past fortnight had begun to tell on his nerves. He had sent the seconds to bed, and was striding up and down, like an animal in a cage, mumbling to himself and biting his nails.

"Well?" he exclaimed, anxiously.

"He's got the hump bad," replied Shannon. "Says he's lost his spunk and hasn't a punch in him. He wanted to chuck up the fight, and let Crowfoot keep the title."

"Blast him!" blubbered the trainer. "What's to be done now? He can't abandon the contest like that."

"He won't if she'll come to see him fight," said Shannon, coolly.

"But that's what you went to tell him," whined Royce, half-reassured.

Shannon looked at him contemptuously.

"Jack ain't a fool," he sneered. "You can't kid him. He's got to *know* she's coming."

"Well, it's up to you to convince him of it somehow," said Royce, with an oath. "I told you everything depended on you."

"Well, you needn't get shirty over it," retorted Shannon, "I guess I know how to deal with him better 'n you. I promised to write her and explain things for him." And going over to a large table, littered with odds and ends of all sorts, he proceeded, whilst fumbling about for the writing materials he needed, to give Royce the gist of the conversation that had passed between Delane and himself.

The trainer manifested disgust rather than astonishment at what he heard. Love or lust, it was all the same to him; he regarded a pugilist as a machine, not a man.

"If I had known I was going to be let in for this sort of thing," he complained, "I'll be damned if I'd have crossed the Atlantic for double what I'm getting out of it. It's the most thankless job I've ever tackled, and I've tackled some pretty tough ones in my time. What the hell's come over the ring anyhow? In my day a man as called himself a pugilist *was* a man. Nowadays, I'll be blamed if you can tell what he is. Strikes me half of them are women with their 'nerves' and their 'temperaments.' Tantrums, I call it, I guess it's all due to this 'over-civilisation' as you read about in the papers, which makes folks drivel so about the

cruelty of this, and the barbarity of that, and the degeneracy of t'other. These new-fangled ideas ain't got any guts. There's too much cotton-wool about. Coddling's all the fashion nowadays. Human natur' runs to seed soon as the law starts a-tinkering it. You can't tap your opponent's claret without running a risk of having the police stop the contest on the ground of its brutality. Boxing's getting as tame as tennis. No wonder there are so many cissys in the ring."

"Oh, chuck it, Dad, and go to bed," exclaimed Shannon, impatiently. "A fellow can't write with you making such a racket."

He had found what he had been looking for, and seated at the table on which he had cleared a space sufficient to write upon he was gazing vacantly, pen in hand, at a blank sheet of note-paper.

Royce muttered something unintelligible, shrugged his big shoulders, and prepared to leave the gymnasium. At the door he turned for a moment and good-naturedly regarded the sparring partner, with whose attitude he was fain to content himself as a gage of Delane's presence in the ring on the appointed night.

"I say, Joe," he observed, craftily, "here's luck to your letter, but when it comes to explaining things a letter ain't in it with a straight, square talk."

Shannon made no reply, and continued to stare intently at the sheet of paper in front of him. But

Royce's parting shaft had hit the mark at which it was aimed. Shannon found his self-appointed task beyond him. Baffled by the difficulties of the art of composition he finally threw down his pen and rose from the table.

"I guess I've bitten off more'n I can chew," he muttered to himself. "Dad's right, I'll go and call on her to-morrow instead."

Being naturally cautious and uncommunicative, he kept his intention to himself. The following morning after sparring as usual with Delane, who submitted to the ordeal from habit rather than from inclination, he dressed himself in his best clothes, merely stating that he was going into London on a private matter.

"I say, Jack," he observed casually, suddenly recollecting before departing that he had no idea where Claudia lived, "I wish I had asked you for Miss Carisbrooke's London address. I put Asbury Court on that letter."

"You should have sent it to Berkeley Court, Park Street, Mayfair," replied Delane, falling into the trap without knowing it. "I wish you hadn't posted it," he added, dejectedly; "what's done can't be undone."

"Well, it's too late now to change your mind again. The letter is sure to be forwarded to her. You'll have to wait and see how she takes it." And Shannon proud of his cunning in obtaining the information he

desired, set out jubilantly in search of Berkeley Court, Mayfair.

On arriving at the door, however, his courage began to desert him and vanished altogether when the footman who answered his ring informed him that Miss Carisbrooke was out of town.

"Good God!" he ejaculated.

Puzzled by his strange manner and appearance the footman regarded him with suspicion.

"What's your business?" he asked roughly. "If you have come to beg she won't see you at any time. I tell you that straight."

"I ain't a beggar," Shannon protested meekly, too depressed to take offence. "My name's Joe Shannon. I'm Jack Delane's sparring partner. He's to fight Sam Crowfoot to-morrow night for the middle-weight championship of the world. I guess you've heard of him, the papers are full of him. My business is private and most important."

At the mention of Delane the footman's manner underwent a complete change. The name was very familiar to him as that of the pugilist who had been training at Asbury, whose contest with the black champion had been advertised for the past four weeks in the press, and prominently billed on every hoarding in London. Fond of boxing himself he intended to wit-

ness the fight, and had even backed Delane to win for a small sum.

"Miss Carisbrooke is expected back to-morrow afternoon," he said, treating Shannon with marked difference. "I'll let her know you called as soon as she arrives." And he proceeded to question him as to what he thought of the "white hope's" chance.

But Shannon was too upset to discuss the problem. He hastily withdrew, leaving his interlocutor agape with astonishment and curiosity. On his return to "The Greyhound" he was so disheartened by the failure of his mission that he unburdened himself to Royce. The trainer who, though very "jumpy," as he expressed it, where Delane was concerned, clung tenaciously to the opinion that his charge would fight and win if he could be induced to enter the ring, was prepared to adopt any strategy conducive to that end.

"Tell him straight," he said, "that you've been to see her, and that she's promised to come to the fight. That'll explain why she don't reply to the letter he thinks you've written her. What we've got to do is to get him to the ring, once in it I bet he'll not jib. He's a born pugilist, fighting's in his blood same as it is in a gamecock's."

Unable to suggest a better scheme Shannon consented to adopt Royce's, and in his determination to bring Delane within the ropes he even decided, as a

precautionary measure, to write the letter he had failed to compose the previous night. Necessity, venerable mother of invention, acted as a spur to his imagination and enabled him to indite the following:—

"The Greyhound,
"Highgate,
"14th July.

"Dear Madam,

"Maybe you don't know as Jack Delane was put up to jilt you by your grandmother the day after you left Asbury Court. She got at him to give you up for your good, and now he's breaking his heart. He's that down he don't stand much chance of winning his fight, but he says if he knew you was watching him he'd buck up. The fight's at Gloveland, Lambeth Road, to-morrow night, the 15th. It begins at 8 o'clock, and'll be a fine one if you'll only oblige and come. Two tickets with the respects of Dad Royce the trainer enclosed.

"Your truly,
"Joe Shannon,
"The sparring partner."

On the envelope he wrote *urgent,* and underlined it.

"If that don't fetch her," he observed with no little satisfaction as he read the letter to Royce before posting it, "nothing will."

Claudia, in the meantime, had become what her grandmother mentally designated as "snappy." "Snappishness" is not an attractive quality; in a beautiful and unmarried woman nearing thirty, it is to her personality what crows-feet are to her face—an indication of the waning of her power to charm and the consciousness of disappointment and disillusion it entails. But Lady Marion and Mauve did not complain of the change, the brunt of which from close and constant intercourse with Claudia she had to bear; on the contrary, she supported it with stoical fortitude, as proof that her interview with Delane had borne the fruit she desired.

"It's but natural that she should resent being jilted by a prize-fighter. It is enough to put any woman in a bad temper, she'll forget him all the quicker." And Lady Marion and Mauve chuckled inwardly.

She was, however, only partially right. Though Claudia secretly and bitterly resented the manner in which she had been treated by Delane, she did not forget him, try as she might.

At first she tried hard. His letter of renunciation, utterly unexpected and cruelly crude, was too stunning a blow to be easily forgotten. Aimed at her love, which was paralysed by the shock, it smote her pride with the effect of a gratuitous insult. Pride was her Achilles' heel. In her bewilderment and indignation

she accused him of having played with her, as she was conscious of having played with him till his passionate declaration had wrung a reciprocal response from her. To be jilted within twenty-four hours of being won could admit of no other explanation. If he had loved her as he professed no power on earth could have made him throw her over like that. She felt she had been completely taken in. His simplicity marked a deep and crafty nature, there was nothing sincere or chivalrous about him. He was merely a common, artful prize-fighter, brutal like his profession, base like his class.

"I ought to be grateful to him," she said to herself with a shudder, "it might have been much worse. I have had a narrow escape."

That such a man should have the power to humiliate her was the more exasperating in that she felt she had but got what she deserved for treating him as an equal. She was too angry and mortified to demand any explanation of his conduct; there was only one way to reply to his letter, and that was by silent contempt. He had come into her life without hail, he should go without farewell, suddenly as he had come. It was at least some consolation to feel that she had kept her secret and that no one would know of her humiliation. If he boasted of it, her world was too far removed from his for any echo to reach it. But was

it, after all? Lord Oughtred was a pugilist, and mixed with pugilists; the Duke of Dorking himself was a patron of the ring; and Durward, her brother——! She felt she hated Delane more than she had ever loved him. In the first flush of her indignation she was quite sure of it.

But as the heat of her anger cooled, curiosity mingled with her resentment. She told herself that something must have occurred to induce Delane to jilt her in that cavalier fashion, something deep and secret. Granted that he had only been flirting with her, if he were the cur and cad she deemed him it was all the more reason why he should have kept up the farce at least until he had made her his wife. Such a man would have everything to gain by marrying an heiress. No, she was certain it was from no idle whim that he had jilted her.

The more she reflected on his conduct the less was she inclined to believe in his duplicity. She recalled a hundred little things he could not possibly have feigned, things that bore the indelible stamp of sincerity. As her curiosity deepened she began to make allowances for him. Fascinated though she had been by his personality she had never regarded it as strong and masterful. He was too emotional, too impressionable not to be easily influenced. His love of his profession was at least above suspicion; till she had arrived on the scene

it had been his mistress. It was there she told herself that he would be vulnerable. And who would know this better than Shannon, whose devotion to him and jealousy of herself had been so apparent? Knowing Delane's character as he did it would be easy for such a man, once she was out of the way, to fan the old love into a flame that should devour the new.

The thought of Shannon's influence exasperated without satisfying her. It supposed a greater weakness of character in Delane than she cared to credit him with. Having acquitted him of perfidy she proceeded to find an excuse for his weakness. By the time she had reached this stage her resentment had entirely cooled, and she easily persuaded herself that Delane's conduct had been actuated by some chivalrous impulse.

To forget him had now become impossible. She searched the daily papers for news of him, and with the same object subscribed to all that were specially devoted to pugilism. Apart, however, from the accounts of the great interest that was being taken by the public in the Delane-Crowfoot fight—which certain busybodies, who objected to boxing in general, and to a contest between a white and a black man in particular, were vainly trying to prevent—Claudia gleaned little of a personal nature. She merely learnt that Delane had left his old quarters at Park Cottage, was training at "The Greyhound" in Highgate, and the contradictory

reports, such as are always circulated on the eve of a great battle, of his condition and the chance of his probable victory or defeat.

The lack of any definite news concerning him only made her the more eager for it. As the date of his contest approached her curiosity became morbid. Obsessed by the idea that he had given her up from a belief that he was unworthy of her, she wondered if he was pining for her, and pictured the effect such a state of mind would have on his physical condition. If he were beaten — and his defeat from what she read seemed certain—she shuddered to think what would become of him. She remembered the pity he had expressed for the men who fought their way to the front only to drop back into obscurity in humiliation and despair. She supposed he would return to America, and with his savings buy a farm, or a "saloon," or run a "boxing academy"; in any case it was not likely she would ever hear of him again—emotional, and slightly neurotic, he was not the type of pugilist who "comes back."

What wonder that she became "snappy," and that the scornful indifference with which she treated Society was tinged with bitterness? In her heart she knew she loved him more than ever. Her body and her soul alike told her she wanted him. She had but to shut her eyes and she saw him again as he had appeared

that day at Park Cottage naked to the waist sparring with Shannon. The spell of his novel personality was unbroken. His tender love-words were ever ringing in her ears, his passionate kisses ever burning on her lips.

In this mood she received Shannon's letter. Its effect was electric. For an instant she floated on a single thought, as on the crest of a wave—he loved her still! Then the wave broke on the rocks of a mighty indignation, on which all respect for her grandmother perished.

"How dared she!" she exclaimed aloud in her fury. "How dared she!"

The temptation to rush off and overwhelm Lady Marion and Mauve with her rage was very great. But the consciousness of Delane's unhappiness and all that it entailed restrained her. In three hours his contest for the championship of the world would take place. From Shannon's letter she realised with a sinking heart how slight was his chance of winning it, and that that chance depended on her presence. To fail him in such a crisis was impossible. There was no time to be lost. The settlement of her account with Lady Marion and Mauve could wait; she would certainly not forget it.

The knowledge that every moment was precious made her cool. The first thing to be done was to

reassure Delane. This she did by telegram; and to make sure that her message should reach him in time she sent it in duplicate, addressing one form to "The Greyhound" and the other to Gloveland. As a precautionary measure she likewise wired Shannon a message to the same effect and despatched it in similar fashion.

To be present at the contest, however, was easier to promise than to perform. Clearly she could not go alone. She thought of Lord Oughtred. He would take her willingly; but where at the eleventh hour was she likely to find him? As for the Duke of Dorking, to appeal to him was out of the question. There were many others, no doubt, who would gladly act as her escort, but she refused to entertain the idea as derogatory to her dignity. Lord Oughtred was the only man she knew of whom she would care to ask such a favour, and the only one who, without being asked, could be trusted not to use it to her disadvantage afterwards. The consciousness that the chivalry with which she credited him was due to his own connection with the ring, raised him in her esteem. She regarded it with satisfaction as a flattering proof of the good influence of pugilism on character.

Apparently, the only other alternative was to hire someone to accompany her. But this idea, too, she was obliged to abandon. It was too late. The big

stores and agencies, which would be likely to procure her a paid escort, had closed. Suddenly it occurred to her that one of her servants would serve her purpose equally well, and with a sigh of relief she was about to ring for her footman when to her amazement her brother entered the room.

"Oh, Durward!" she cried, staggered by his unexpected apparition. "Where on earth have you sprung from?"

Her surprise at seeing him banished for a moment all thought of the contest.

"From 'The Greyhound' at Highgate," he replied, with a laugh, embracing her affectionately as he spoke.

"But I thought you were in Russia," she faltered.

Her knees trembled. Did he suspect? Would he forbid?

"I returned yesterday," he said, "I came back on purpose to see the White Hope win the championship of the world. The contest is to-night. I want you to come with me. You have never seen a prize-fight; it is anything but the unpleasant spectacle you have been led to believe. It will be very exciting, but it is only a very sensitive stomach that will be upset by the sight of two splendid specimens of humanity contending for supremacy in a scientific trial of strength and skill." And as Claudia swayed in his arms he added softly,

"Ah, little woman, what have you been up to in my absence?"

She recovered herself instantly. After all, what had she to fear? She was her own mistress and accountable to nobody for her actions.

"What have you heard?" she said, coldly, freeing herself from his embrace.

Her brother shrugged his shoulders, and proceeded dispassionately to relate what she already knew, what Royce and Shannon had told him of the havoc she had, unintentionally he implied, wrought in his *protégé*.

"If he wins it will be little short of a miracle," he said, studiously avoiding all semblance of reproach. "He is giving away weight, and that, with such an adversary as Crowfoot, he can ill afford. But worst of all he appears to have lost confidence in himself, and has no heart for the fight. When he saw me, he broke down and wept like a child. As his trainer expressed it, 'his nerves are groggy.' That's the worst, and perhaps the best too, of these high-strung pugilists. If they lose their 'devil' easily they recover it as quickly. Quite a little thing, a mere emotion, is capable of rousing them to unheard-of efforts. He has been told you are coming to the fight, but he won't believe it till he sees you there. The effect on him would be magical —at least, that is what his trainer hopes. Will you

come and work this miracle? I ask it for my sake as much as his."

Touched by his manner, from which she judged that he would condone, if not approve of, her conduct, Claudia determined to tell him the truth.

"I want him to win even more than you do," she said, unable to restrain her tears. "I love him, Durward. It is grandmamma who has made all the trouble between us."

"Poor little woman," he murmured soothingly, putting his arms round her again, "Poor little Claudia!"

"What a brother you have always been to me," she sighed, smiling at him through her tears.

He gave her a brotherly hug.

"I am so glad you don't mind;" she went on, adding with a touch of defiance, "not that it would have made any difference. I shall marry him in spite of you all."

"Mind!" he echoed reproachfully.

"But to marry a prize-fighter, I who could marry a duke? is it not the conduct of a degenerate, as grandmamma would say?"

Durward Carisbrooke turned from her with a gesture of impatience, vexed to think she should so question his affection.

"What is a prize-fighter or a duke in comparison with an honest man?" he said with a shrug. "That's the only title I value.

'A prince, can mak' a belted knight,
A marquis, duke, and a' that,
But an honest man's aboon his might,
. . . . .
For a' that, and a' that.'

"You know the lines? well, Jack Delane is an honest man. That is sufficient for me, and should be for you. It will be your fault, not his, if you are unhappy with him. But you won't if you love him as you say you do. As for what the world may say, a fig for the world and its opinion. It will say just what you wish it to. With his good looks, good manners, and good qualities, his profession will be a *sauce piquante*. With such a background as Asbury the world will kiss his boots if he desires. But, snobbishness apart, the old shibboleths of rank and career and class are dead or dying. We live in the dawn of a new, freer, and more honest social era, an era in which shams will cease to be chains. The call of Nature is the only call worth listening to. You have heard it, answer it fearlessly, it will not deceive you. Only those deserve happiness who have the will to be happy." And abruptly opening the door for her to pass he bade her go and get ready for the contest.

CHAPTER XIV.

THERE could be no greater proof—if proof were needed—of the popularity of pugilism than its "drawing" capacity. Though the box-office receipts are often, no doubt, comparatively small, the crowd assembled round the ring is seldom insignificant. A championship contest, however, pays as well as draws. On such occasions, which are red-letter events in the pugilistic world, the value of the "gate" corresponds to its size. The public is generally made to pay through its nose, which it does cheerfully, from the collarless masses, who swarm round the walls and manage to stump up somehow or other the trebled or quadrupled price of admission, to the dress-coated patrons of the "noble art" who disburse practically any sum the promoters care to ask for the privilege of sitting in the reserved seats round the ring.

The promoters, however, are not alone to be blamed for the extortionate manner in which the popular interest in prize-fighting is thus exploited. The pugilists themselves are naturally "not in it for their health," as

they would be the first to admit. Fortunately for them they have at last got to know their worth. A world-champion not only draws a bigger crowd than a popular preacher, and moves it more easily, but his earning capacity is superior to that of a popular actor. In the articles signed by Delane and Crowfoot, the money to be divided between them amounted to about £25,000. The winner was to receive a purse of £6,000 and a side-stake of £2,000: the loser a purse of £4,000 and a side-stake of £1,000. Each also was to receive twenty-five per cent of the "gate," and a similar royalty on the "moving picture" proceeds. While the winner could count for a certainty on earning from £200 to £300 a week for the next couple of years by touring the world as a "music-hall turn."

The contest, in which the public interest would have been great under any circumstances, had been well advertised in advance. The promoters had billed it on every hoarding in Great Britain, where Delane and Crowfoot were depicted naked to the waist in attitudes calculated to strike the popular imagination, in which they succeed only beyond their wildest expectations. For certain officious busybodies, horrified by the difference in colour between the two combatants, had sought to make it a pretext for preaching one of those moral crusades that are more frequent and futile in England than anywhere else. Public meetings of protest, organised by Watch Committees and Purity Leagues, and backed by Dissenting ministers and Anglican bishops with a seventeenth century conscience and a love of notoriety, had been held all over the country. A petition, praying for the suppression of pugilism in general and the Delane-Crowfoot contest in particular, had been sent to the Home Secretary. While one of the "sheep," who are occasionally permitted to bleat on the back benches of the House of Commons as compensation for the tractability they show in following their Party, as if it were some old bell-wether, into the lobbies, had actually brought in a bill to the same effect. The other side, however, had not been silent. The entire boxing world had been moved to its depths, and powerfully backed by a large public, which, without knowing anything, and caring less, about pugilism, was exasperated by the intolerant and interfering spirit displayed by its opponents, was loud in its defence of the "noble art."

From the wrangle that ensued, in which the press, ever ready to make the most of anything calculated to awaken or sustain public interest, had likewise engaged, the Delane-Crowfoot contest had emerged triumphant. The Anti-Pugilists had been completely vanquished. Their meetings had been broken up; their petition had been pigeon-holed or thrown into a waste-paper basket at the Home Office; and their bill for the suppression of pugilism had not even been read in Parliament.

While to render their humiliation complete the promoters of the contest, certain of a record "gate," had boldly raised the price of seats all round.

When Durward Carisbrooke and his sister arrived at Gloveland, the scene without was not unlike that at the opera on the gala night. At the main entrance, flooded with electric light, motors and taxi-cabs drew up one after the other in a seemingly endless line, from which members of both Houses of Parliament, and notabilities of all sorts interested in pugilism as a sport, alighted along with an undistinguished horde drawn only by curiosity. Nearly all were in evening-dress—save the women of whom there were not a few. The roadway was clear, the police, who had been so clamourously invited by the opponents of pugilism to prohibit the contest, having arrived in force to preserve order. But on the pavement opposite, and at the sides of the building, a large crowd had congregated, which, save for an occasional cheer as some well-known patron of this ring was recognised, was silent and well-behaved. Only in the rear, in a back street, where a seething mass of men and boys with the price of admission clasped tightly in their hands were violently sucked in one by one through a half-opened door guarded by a burly ex-"bruiser," was there any confusion. After a time this too subsided. The door was closed and a stentorian voice announced that the house was full,

whereupon the disappointed crowd gradually and quietly dispersed.

The scene within was one of great animation. The building, which consisted of a vast octagonal hall encircled by two deep galleries, was packed to its utmost capacity. It had originally been the tabernacle of some Dissenting sect, but whatever religious character it had once possessed had long since disappeared. The Deity, it is true, still continued to be invoked within its walls, but it was to damn someone or something, not to save. On the present occasion, brilliantly illuminated and festooned with flags of all nations, the hall resembled one intended for a political meeting rather than a prize-fight.

In the centre a square-shaped platform, fourteen feet long by fourteen broad had been erected, the surface of which was on a level with the faces of the occupants of the seats around it. It was carpeted with canvas, and enclosed by two ropes, three feet apart, attached to a padded post in each of the four corners. Suspended above it from the ceiling were four arc lights.

"That is the ring," said Durward to his sister. "The two little stools in the corner diagonally opposite each other are for the combatants during the interval between the rounds."

He had scarcely spoken when two lads of eighteen

or twenty with straight, slim bodies and frank English faces climbed in between the ropes. They were followed by a couple of ring attendants carrying boxing-gloves and a man in evening-dress with a large paste diamond flashing on his shirt-front. The latter stepped to the centre of the ring, and extending an arm first in the direction of one and then of the other of the two lads, who had seated themselves on the stools and were gazing curiously at the crowd around them whilst the attendants fastened the gloves to their wrists, shouted something in a loud voice which was drowned in the general hubbub.

"Why don't they keep still?" asked Claudia, with some impatience. "What's he trying to say?"

"He is telling us," replied her brother, whose ears assisted by a glance at the programme had caught the names of the boys, "that there will be a three-round contest, two minutes each round, between Bob Blane of Bermondsey on his right, and Sid Thorne of Hoxton on his left. It's the curtain raiser," he added, "that's why the audience is so indifferent. The lads are only novices."

"Maybe," remarked a man who had overheard him, "but if they're game you'll get a run for your money. Some of the liveliest fights I've ever seen have been between novices. They mayn't have much boxing science, but they've generally got plenty of devil."

"They certainly look like it," said Durward, as the youngsters without waiting till the ring was clear sprang briskly to their feet, and having shaken hands proceeded to pommel one another in as healthy and lively a fashion as the most captious could desire.

It was hitting of the primitive kind, for neither had as yet acquired any ring-craft. Each was intent on landing his gloves on his opponent's face or body, neither had time or thought for foot-work. But what they lacked in science, they made up in pluck. The pace was fast and furious. They went for one another like two rivals out to settle the ownership of a lady. Equally matched both got severely punished. Each blow told, and each lad went down several times; but it would have taken half the spectators to hold them to the floor. They were quick to rise—too quick perhaps—but the spirit that prompted it was magnificent. Each was out to win, but they never lost their tempers. There was no foul hitting, no mean attempt to gain an unfair advantage. When one slipped the other invariably helped him to his feet. Such chivalry and gameness quickened the interest of the spectators, who had at first been so indifferent, to fever heat, and they rocked and roared with excitement as they waited for the knock-out which was momentarily expected and which would alone determine the victor.

It came suddenly in the last round. Hit in the

solar plexus by accident rather than design, the Bermondsey boy dropped to the boards where he writhed and squirmed, while the hall yelled itself hoarse, and the attendant in his corner shouted to him to rise. The lad from Hoxton, on whose face a sort of pity mingled with the surprise and triumph it expressed, immediately stepped back to the ropes, against which he leaned panting heavily. At the tenth stroke of the gong, whose strident clang made itself heard above the din of the hall, as the boy on the floor did not rise, the attendants clambered into the ring, and, picking him up, placed him on his stool. As soon as he had regained consciousness his conqueror, all smiles, came over to him and held out his hand. The boy from Bermondsey clasped it cordially, whereupon the other moved by a sudden impulse, kissed him on the cheek. The salute was received in the same fine spirit in which it was offered, and amid the plaudits of the spectators the two lads left the ring.

To whet the appetite of the spectators for the event of the evening, the promoters had arranged two preliminary bouts. As the novices quitted the ring two others entered it, men these of some repute, for they were instantly recognised and noisily greeted. One was fair, the other dark. The fair one wore a purple bath-robe, tied round the waist with a green cord. He was a handsome fellow, with blue eyes, a ruddy complexion,

and thick wavy blonde hair, which he had evidently combed and brushed with great care. The expression of his face was intelligent, and his whole appearance was one of refinement. His opponent presented a striking contrast. He was dark and hideously ugly. As he stepped into the ring wearing a long flashily cut and very shabby overcoat, with the collar turned up round the neck, he looked positively repellent. His features were of the brutal, bruiser type.

"How horrible!" exclaimed Claudia, with a shudder. "He looks like a beast. I don't think I ever saw a more dreadful-looking creature."

"Just wait till he peels," snickered someone behind her.

"A beast!" remarked the man next her brother, who had expressed his opinion of novices. "Why, Alf Repton is one of the mildest-mannered fellows who ever put on gloves. He's got a wife and a couple of kids he just dotes on. His body is as hard as nails, but he's got a heart like putty. He's no good in the ring if there's anything wrong at home. They call him the Saint, because he's very religious. I'll bet he said his prayers before he left the dressing-room. Why, I'll be blest if he isn't telling his beads now!"

As he spoke, the boxer was seen to cross himself, and dropping on one knee, tucked a little rosary he

had been holding into his sock. The next moment he rose to his feet, and throwing off his overcoat, revealed to Claudia's amazement a form of matchless beauty. In the supple, sinewy grace of its lines, and the dazzling brilliancy of the skin, it seemed actually to redeem his face of its brutality. Seen thus, he was hauntingly handsome and seductive.

"Special ten round contest, three minutes each round," shouted the dress-coated master of ceremonies from the centre of the ring. "On my right Alf Repton, Battersea, on my left Curly Pixley, Aldgate." He extended an arm towards each as he named him.

The Aldgate Apollo, who had now discarded his bath-robe, was like a dog on the leash. He was much the same build and size as his dark opponent. The moment the ring was clear the two men, having shaken hands, stepped back and then rushed at one another as if they had been shot from a gun. The first three rounds, they went at it in hurricane fashion without doing any damage. Thud, thud, thwack! A few sharp short smacks like the sound of mighty wings beating the air, and their bodies were locked together in a sterile embrace.

"Break!" shouted the referee, and the combatants were on the wing again.

The fourth round was full of thrills. The hawks had become a pair of panthers. Stealthily, warily, they

pranced round the ring. Suddenly the paw of the dark panther darted at the jaw of the other. The fair one winced, recoiled, and leapt forward. Once more the paw of the dark panther darted out and smote the jaw of his adversary like the crack of a whip. The fair one went down, but he was on his feet again instantly, as game as ever. When the gong sounded, each went back to his corner smiling. In the fifth round they were a couple of desperate men; both received terrific blows, both went to the boards and at the finish both looked groggy.

During the interval that followed, the air buzzed with speculation. "Pixley won't last the next round." "That's just when he'll wake up." "One of them will be out before the tenth."

With these prophesies buzzing in her ears, Claudia, in a fever of excitement, watched the men in the labyrinth of flapping towels that half hid them in their corners. Her interest was centred in Repton, whose personality accentuated by the magic of his beautiful form, had, from the moment he threw off his overcoat, flung itself over the ropes. He was the favourite and was plainly the better man of the two. But he had met a hero worthy of him in the Aldgate demi-god, who, conscious that he was beaten on points, fought on with undaunted courage, trusting to chance to win with a knock-out.

The end came in the ninth round. It was as sensational as one could wish to see. Repton, who during each interval had dipped down into his sock where he had put his rosary, sprang out from his corner at the sound of the gong, and hurriedly making the sign of the cross shot his left suddenly to the point of Pixley's jaw. It struck home with terrific force, and the Aldgate Apollo fell on his back hopelessly beaten. Repton waited a moment with his eye on the referee, who shouted something that could not be heard in the uproar that ensued. Then Repton was seen to leap in the air, a second afterwards he dropped on his knee, and taking the rosary from his sock raised it reverently to his lips. It was a spectacle sufficient to awaken respect in the most thoughtless. A momentary hush fell upon the vast audience, during which the victor flung his disfiguring overcoat over his shoulders, and jumped out of the ring. Claudia lay back in her seat breathless, with tears in her eyes.

With his disappearance pandemonium reigned in the hall. Hats and caps were thrown into the air and men shouted themselves hoarse. Repton's name was on everybody's lips. Unheeded and unpitied by the crowd Curly Pixley was picked up by his seconds and placed on his stool. To restore him to consciousness they twisted his ears and slapped his heart. After awhile he rose to his feet, but sank back again instantly.

His head with the thick fair hair matted on his brows fell forward on his breast. On his livid face was an expression of agony. Claudia thought it due to physical suffering and shut her eyes with a shudder. It was in reality the agony of defeat; he was conscious only of that.

Perceiving that he had not the strength to move, his seconds proceeded to carry him from the ring. As he was lifted down, Durward Carisbrooke moved by morbid admiration exclaimed—

"He is like a dead Christ! It is a veritable descent from the Cross!"

"Is he really dead?" faltered Claudia, and suddenly remembering the contest yet to come, she placed a trembling hand on her brother's arm and murmured, "Oh, Durward, I cannot bear it!"

"Nonsense," he replied, roughly, "pull yourself together, remember you have a duty to perform;" then taking her hand in his he added reassuringly, "Of course he isn't dead, he'll come round in the dressing-room. It's losing the battle that's troubling him. I'm sorry for the lad, he fought like ten devils, but he was outpointed from the start. Hello, Oughtred." And he turned to greet that patron of the ring, who having perceived them in the crowd came up during the interval before the next event for a chat.

"So you had the courage to come after all?" he

said to Claudia. "Mildred funked it in the end, more fool she. Well, what do you think of prize-fighting now? That last bout was pretty fine, wasn't it?"

"Wonderful! I had no idea pugilism was so dramatic."

Lord Oughtred's eyes glistened with pleasure. A boxing enthusiast, it was the dream of his life to see pugilism on a level in the public esteem with football and cricket or any other sport, and not, as it was, degraded by prejudice to the brutal pastime of vicious and ignorant people.

"Dramatic!" he exclaimed. "Why, the stage isn't in it with the ring for thrills. They're the real thing here. You never saw a more dramatic curtain on the stage than the finish of that last fight."

"It was certainly most impressing," replied Claudia; "that ugly little man kissing the rosary is the most curious spectacle I have ever seen. The next time I hear prize-fighting run down I shall cite him as an argument in its favour."

"Repton's the sort of man I like to take my hat off to," said Durward Carisbrooke, enthusiastically.

"Oh, the ring is full of men like him," said Lord Oughtred; "he only differs from his fellows in details."

As he spoke three men—pugilists in mufti, so to speak—accompanied by the master of ceremonies, climbed into the empty ring and were introduced to the

spectators. They represented England, France, and America. The Englishman, whose features were evidently familiar, was greeted by name coupled with much good-natured banter which seemed to embarrass him. Nervously twitching his hat, which he held in one hand at his side, he stood gazing sheepishly round the hall as if he longed for the ring to open beneath his feet and engulf him.

"Poor fellow, how terribly uncomfortable he looks," remarked Claudia, as the master of ceremonies announced that he would, at a date to be made public later, fight the Frenchman for £100 a side at any weight up to 9 stone 2 lbs.

"That's a 'has been' who wants to 'come back,'" explained Lord Oughtred, speaking in the vernacular of the ring. "He has announced his retirement more than once, but boxers like singers have a *penchant* for final appearances. I suppose he has got tired of sampling knock-outs and grovelling on the boards twice a day in a boxing sketch on the halls and wants to revisit the scenes of his past glory."

"His reception should encourage him," said Claudia. "An actor would be intoxicated by it."

"No doubt. But pugilists are built differently. Most of them take more pleasure in reading their names in the papers than standing in the limelight."

"Tom Corcoran," shouted the master of ceremonies,

holding the American by the arm and addressing the spectators.

The rest of his speech was lost in a babel of cheers and hand-clapping. The American bowed his acknowledgment stiffly. He looked pleased, but as if he were out of his element.

"What is that man saying?" asked Claudia, who was deeply interested in all that took place in the ring.

"He says that Tom Corcoran whom he is introducing, is prepared to challenge the winner of the next contest for the middle-weight championship of the world," replied her brother.

"And in my opinion he'll win it too," said Lord Oughtred, regarding the fellow with the eye of a connoisseur, "Just look at his shoulders," he exclaimed enthusiastically. "If ever a man was born for the ring he was. Before he took to boxing he was a track athlete and made a name for himself as a heavy weight thrower in some mining camp in the Rockies. Last year he was in a gold-seeking expedition to the Klondyke, being chosen for his fine physique. Till a couple of months ago he was packing one hundred pound loads across Alaskan glaciers and chopping his way through virgin forests. Such experiences have toughened his naturally hard constitution. He is always in perfect condition. He is only twenty-two, is heavier and has a longer reach than Crowfoot."

"From the interest you take in him," said Durward Carisbrooke, "I imagine you are behind his challenge."

"Yes, if any white man can beat Sam Crowfoot, it is Tom Corcoran."

"Then, you still believe that—that my brother's *protégé* will be beaten?" questioned Claudia, unable to conceal her anxiety.

"I have still got a thousand on the negro," replied Lord Oughtred, laconically, and taking the sudden spluttering of the cinematograph apparatus as a signal that the great fight was about to commence he went back to his seat round the ring.

A few minutes later Kid Rafferty and the Docker, on whose sweaters a blue "D" proclaimed to which camp they belonged, crawled through the ropes carrying buckets, bottles, sponges, and towels. At these signs of preparation, the spectators, a-tip-toe with expectation, craned their necks in the direction of the dressing-rooms, the approach to which was being cleared by the attendants, whose stentorian, "Order, please! Order! Order!!" throbbed like a pulse through the hall.

Suddenly, along this gangway, Claudia, whose seat in the front row of the first gallery, had been specially selected by Shannon as enabling her to be seen as well as to see, perceived Delane accompanied by his trainer and sparring partner, advancing towards the

ring. He had seen her even before she recognised him, and as their eyes met he smiled.

"You see she has kept her word," muttered Shannon, who was watching him like a lynx, "it's up to you now."

"Never fear," replied Delane, with a curious glitter in his eyes.

As his figure, enveloped from head to foot in a white bath-robe, slipped between the ropes, the pent-up excitement of the spectators thundered through the hall like the roar of an avalanche. He treated the ovation with apparent indifference, merely bowing once in the direction of Claudia, who, infected by the general enthusiasm was standing up and waving her handkerchief. He then went to his corner to await the arrival of Crowfoot, who was craftily lingering in his dressing-room, to fluster his adversary with suspense.

Fully alive to the trick, Delane tried to ignore it; but despite an obviously tremendous effort at self-control he could not help betraying his nervousness. Though he chatted calmly enough to his seconds he was perpetually shooting hurried glances round the hall, and fidgeting his feet on the floor.

"Damn that nigger," muttered Royce, savagely, aside to Shannon, "does he think we were born yesterday?"

When the champion, clad in a purple dressing-gown,

finally condescended to appear he too received an ovation. There was no suggestion of nervousness about him whatever. Neither the crowd nor the occasion made the least appeal to his imagination, which was incapable of fine shades of emotion. He was frankly flattered by the applause with which he was greeted, but it did not strike any subtle chord in him. He was a human fighting-machine—nothing more. He had come there to defend his title to the championship of the world, the crowd had come to see him defend it, and that was all there was about it. Having grinned his acknowledgments to the cheering house, he went to his corner where he sat chewing, chatting, and grinning while his bandages were inspected.

Delane, having undergone a similar inspection and donned his gloves, sprang to his feet. At the same moment the Kid stripped his bath-robe from him, and he stepped forth to the centre of the ring, as if impatient for the battle to begin, naked, save for his white-laced canvas boots and a narrow hip-cloth of white. The sight of his beautiful nakedness tore a cry of admiration from the vast crowd, a cry that brought the colour to his cheeks and confidence to his heart.

Claudia was deeply moved. As if dazzled by the splendid vision her eyes dropped, but she raised them again instantly and let them feast freely on her beautiful lover. "He is mine, mine, mine!" she cried to herself.

It was the thought uppermost in her mind as the blood leapt in her veins and the sex-cry vibrated through every fibre of her being. He was hers body and soul —a pearl beyond price, a treasure compared with which all the glory and the grandeur of the world were as dross. She had never been able to think of him as a fighter. He was too gentle, too modest, too refined. His body, as she had seen it that day at Park Cottage when he sparred with Shannon, had appeared to her inexperienced eye too fragile and delicate in its perfect symmetry, something to be handled gingerly, that a blow would shatter to fragments. As she beheld him now he was to her like an angel of annunciation.

The cry of admiration that greeted his rival spurred the champion to his feet. The "Tar Baby," as Sam Crowfoot was affectionately nicknamed by his numerous admirers, also had a fine body and he loved admiration. As he rose from his stool he threw aside his dressing-gown and stepped out in black-laced fighting boots and black hip-cloth to receive the cheers of the spectators. He was a full-blooded negro with a skin as black as ebony and as smooth and shiny as satin. The frequent display of two rows of ivory gave his face a good-natured expression, which his disposition did not belie. His features were African, but more softened and regular than most of his race. The head, which had been shaved, was supported on a powerful neck that rose like

a pyramid from the broad shoulders. Every line of his figure was clean cut and graceful, and the whole gave a striking impression of lithe activity and superb strength.

Of the two men, Delane had a doubtful advantage in height, being a couple of inches taller than Crowfoot, and a decided advantage in reach. But Crowfoot was heavier and sturdier, the ideal middle-weight pugilist—of medium height, short-necked, thick-set, rugged. He was reputed to be able to stand any amount of punishment, and to possess a punch "like the kick of a horse." He appeared in perfect condition and full of confidence —too confident perhaps.

It had leaked out somehow or other that there was something wrong with Delane, an impression which his air of refinement and slighter physique, when contrasted with Crowfoot's, seemed to confirm. Round the ring the betting was in the champion's favour. But in a contest between two men of different race, the popularity of a pugilist is based chiefly on sentiment, and with the great majority of the spectators the "white hope" was the favourite.

In the general excitement the individual in the dress-suit and the paste diamond stud forgot to announce the combatants. But the omission was not noticed; everybody knew the names of the two prize-fighters, and that the battle was limited to twenty rounds

for the middle-weight championship of the world. When they were gloved and ready a word from the referee cleared the ring.

At once there was a temporary lull in the excitement. As the two men advanced for the perfunctory handshake, the splutter of the cinematograph apparatus was the only sound heard in the hall.

Delane, conscious of the cunning of his adversary, began warily, feinting, parrying, retreating. But Crowfoot, who believed he had a mug to deal with, and intended, as he tauntingly expressed it, "to settle the white beauty's hash for her" in the first round, followed him like a panther on the spring and laughed his science to scorn. Suddenly both changed their tactics and rushed at one another in hurricane fashion, raining blows so fast that the spectators could not tell where they hit. They only heard the sound of the gloves as they struck the bodies, like the cracking of stones thrown at a wall. At the end of the round each man went back to his corner unscathed.

The second round ended more sensationally. Having masked a passage with his left, Crowfoot hit out his right and caught Jack on the throat just below the chin. The blow left its mark in the shape of a red patch on Jack's white skin. It was a favourite stroke of the champion, and it staggered Delane. He reeled like a drunken man against the ropes, his hands hanging

limply at this side. Thrilled and tumultuous with excitement the crowd waited for the champion to despatch him, which he was about to do when the gong sounded.

Neither Claudia nor her brother said a word. They dared not even look at one another. Both had abandoned hope. It seemed impossible that Delane could recover.

"The next round will be the last," said the man next to Durward Carisbrooke.

"White Hope be damned!" yelled another, who had backed Delane to win, "Lump of filth!" And he cursed him foully and freely.

Many, taking the result of the next round for granted, even got up and went away.

In the meantime Crowfoot sat on his stool, grinning and chatting to the people in the seats near him, while his seconds massaged the muscles of his legs, sponged and fanned him from force of habit rather than from any idea of necessity.

Only in Delane's corner was the hope of his victory still alive. The moment the gong had sounded, Royce and Shannon leapt into the ring and carried him to his stool where his whole staff worked upon him with frantic zeal. He looked very white and worn as he sat trembling heavily with closed eyes and head resting against the post, while the Kid, squatting between his out-

stretched legs, pinched and rubbed the muscles of his thighs and stomach; and Shannon and the Docker pounded the air into his lungs with towels; and Royce, forcing the neck of a bottle between his lips and sponging him at the same time, whispered in his ear—

"Don't mix it, Jack. Box him at long range. Take no chances and keep your head. Sam's too cock-sure, you can give him hell yet if you'll only keep cool."

At the stroke of the gong he advanced to meet his antagonist with all the appearance of a fresh man entering the ring. To Claudia, and others, who had no conception of the extraordinary recuperative powers of a well-trained pugilist, his recovery seemed marvellous.

"I'll finish him this time, sure," said the champion to his trainer, as he left his corner. And rushing at his opponent he attempted to beat down his guard by sheer force of his blows.

By a rapid side-step Delane evaded him, and Crowfoot amidst the laughter and jeers of the spectators sprawled into the ropes. He straightened himself instantly, turned and rushed again, only to receive Jack's left under the chin. The force of the impact knocked him off his feet. A curious calm suddenly pervaded the air. Few can see a champion go down unmoved, and the spectators were impressed with what was happening. As the negro visited the boards, the voice of the

referee counting the seconds could be plainly heard in every part of the hall.

But Sam was not hurt. Gathering himself together he squatted on his haunches, negro-fashion, and grinned till every tooth in his head could be seen. He was coolly resting, and at the ninth stroke of the gong he was once more on his feet. There was a dangerous gleam in his eyes as he resumed the fight, but Delane's blood was up; he had taken the measure of the champion and it gave him confidence in himself.

Crowfoot manœuvred stealthily for an opening, the muscles in his back and chest rippling at every turn and the great corded bands of the shoulders and neck swelling in strength. Once he thought he had found it. In evading him Delane slipped, and at the same moment received Crowfoot's right on the jaw. To many it seemed as if the champion had struck him *after* he had fallen. A fierce cry of "Foul! Foul!" went round the ring. Delane jumped to his feet instantly. "No, no!" he cried, casting an imploring look at the referee, "It's all right!" The idea of winning on a foul was abhorrent to him; there must be no doubt as to his superiority.

The referee accepted his view of the situation, and the fight went on. Both men were now at their highest tension. They glared at each other like lions preparing to spring. Both fought desperately to win. First one, then the other took the offensive. They tried every trick

with their feet. They boxed and slogged and rushed into clinches. They strained and hugged, and gripping closely together swayed to and fro round the ring, now one, now the other, seeming to have the advantage.

So the fight went on, round by round. Gradually the impression that the negro champion was not having it all his own way turned to a conviction that he was doomed. In their eagerness to see the knock-out blow the spectators became delirious with excitement. For delaying to deliver it Delane was cursed as freely as Crowfoot. Advice to "Hit him in the stomach!" "Give it to him downstairs, Jack!" "Let him have it with the left!" coupled with oaths, was showered upon him from all over the hall. Enthusiasm had become fanaticism, and many actually wept.

Claudia was keyed to the snapping-point; breathless and mute, she sat like a dazed creature with her eyes glued on Delane. As she looked down into the ring and beheld him desperately resisting the onrush of the negro or laced into a clinch by his black arms, she seemed to lose all sense of reality. With a strange thrill she suddenly remembered some lines of Swinburne she had once read—

> "There the gladiator pale for thy pleasure
> Drew bitter and perilous breath,
> There torments laid hold on the treasure
> Of limbs too delicious for death."

For an instant she felt as if she were living over again some scene in a previous existence, when she had burnt as now with a fierce desire for slaughter. From time to time as the contest continued, convinced like the others that Delane was winning, she cast an impatient glance round the hall, as if unconsciously seeking an imperial box whence the signal was to come that was to cause her lover to send his rival to the boards.

The end came at last in the fifteenth round. Sam looked winded when he walked to the centre, and tried to rush into a clinch, but Jack kept him at long range and boxed him into his corner. Left, right, left, right, fell on the champion's face, his gloves dropped to his sides, and reeling to the ropes he sprawled his legs to brace himself. There was no respite for him, however. Delane, in whose nostrils was the scent of victory, fought on like a fiend. The thud of his blows on the negro's head sounded like the rattle of a horse's hoofs in a fast gallop. But still the Tar Baby did not fall. Indeed, somehow he even managed to break away from his tormentor and though dazed and groggy resumed the offensive.

"Look out for him, Jack, he's faking," cautioned Royce. "He's not so weak as he looks."

It was the last tribute paid his former greatness.

The effort to get away from the milling at the ropes

had exhausted all Crowfoot's remaining strength. Delane had only to bring into play the punch he had up his sleeve. It missed the point at which it was aimed and landed on the neck, but a glance was sufficient to tell that it had "done the trick." The negro's knees sagged and he lurched forward, shooting out his left as if by instinct. A brace of right-handers on the jaw finished him. He struck the floor on his side and rolled over on his face.

Delane gave him one glance—half-pitiful, half-contemptuous—and then coolly turning on his heel retired to his own corner. Crowfoot lay within easy reach of his seconds, who were frantically urging him to rise, while the referee stooped over him and shouted the seconds into his ear. But they might all have spared their efforts. Sam Crowfoot, face down on the boards, with the sand of the ring showing in patches on his black skin, was out to the world. Nevertheless the will to continue remained. Like all pugilists of any class, he possessed that inner sense which impels a fallen man, though oblivious of his surroundings, to rise and fight on. At the count of nine his limbs twitched and his head rose an inch from the boards. But the effort was entirely subconscious and muscular; he fell back again instantly and lay like one dead. The middle-weight championship of the world had passed to Jack Delane.

A wild roar went up from the crowd. The entire hall rose to its feet waving hats and handkerchiefs, cheering and shouting. Royce and Shannon, followed by the Kid and the Docker, clambered through the ropes and embraced their "white hope" wildly. It was the signal for a general rush to the ring. Spectators scrambled between the ropes. Delane was pulled from side to side and borne shoulder high round the ring. He was the hero of the hour. Souvenir hunters swarmed in the ring. They captured buckets and sponges and dipped the lemon rinds out of the water he had used. Later his boxing-gloves and shoes, and the hip-cloth he had worn during the contest were purloined from his dressing-room. There was only one cool person present, and that was Jack Delane himself.

He was fully conscious of his victory; his face was wreathed in smiles, and he repeatedly twisted his hand above his head in acknowledgment of the deafening applause. His chief thought, however, was of Claudia. From the moment he had bowed to her on first entering the ring he had never once glanced in her direction. During the battle it was sufficient to him that she was present. But as he stood in his corner, while Crowfoot took the count on the floor, he again looked towards her and saw her as before standing beside her brother waving her handkerchief at him. It was then that the full consciousness of his victory was borne in upon him.

He smiled back at her and bowed, and wondered dreamily how they would meet. When he was being borne round the ring in triumph his eyes again sought hers, and he noticed that she was alternately waving her handkerchief and wiping her eyes with it. For a second he forgot his victory and the shouting crowd around him. He saw only the woman he loved, and knew that she loved him.

It was far otherwise in Crowfoot's corner. The negro's seconds had lifted their defeated champion from the boards, and were trying to bring back his vanished senses. They worked for fully five minutes before he was able to stand up of his own accord. Even then he made an effort to push them aside as if to renew the contest. His dim consciousness appeared only to realise that he had been sent to the boards, and to be incapable of realising that he had been actually knocked out.

When the dismal fact was brought home to him he sank his head between his gloved hands. Looking up for a moment, he saw the triumphal procession that was making the tour of the ring. Then only did he seem to grasp what had happened. It was enough. Unsteadily he made an effort to rise and depart from the scene of his bitter humiliation. Delane had been watching him. Guessing what was passing in the unhappy man's mind, he broke quickly from the throng of worshippers who surrounded him, and came forward with an air of sincere sympathy, almost of regret, to offer his hand. The ex-champion took it mechanically, and turned away sadly.

The crowd was not inclined to be generous. Crowfoot's colour was against him and his reputation as a bruiser and foul-fighter made his defeat appear just and well merited. Delane's fine example, however, was not thrown away. For a moment as the negro left the ring the crowd sank its applause into respectful silence, and opening out made a pathway for him through which he passed humbly to his dressing-room—to be henceforth scarce a memory to the world, where his name had once been a household word.

"Sic transit gloria mundi," said Durward Carisbrooke, as Crowfoot disappeared.

"No one understands it better than Jack," replied Claudia, with a sigh. "A champion, he told me once, lives perpetually on the brink of defeat."

At the same moment Delane prepared in his turn to leave the ring. As he slipped between the ropes he looked up once more to where Claudia and Durward Carisbrooke were standing, and waving his hand in token of farewell, he whispered something into the Kid's ear.

The boy nodded good-humouredly, and plunging

into the crowd made his way with difficulty towards them.

"Please, ma'am," he panted as he came up flushed with excitement, and beaming with pleasure to Claudia, "Jack sends to say he got your wire and thanks you for coming to-night, and he want's to know when and where he's to see you."

Claudia turned to her brother.

"To-night?" she suggested.

"No," he replied, "to-night is out of the question. It is late, and after what he has just gone through he needs a thorough rest. You must wait until to-morrow."

"Then it shall be at Asbury," she said, as if moved by a sudden inspiration.

"I will bring him down myself," said Durward. And having placed his sister in a taxi, he hastened to Delane's dressing-room along with the Kid, whom he detained to show him the way, in order to give the champion the information he desired in person.

CHAPTER XV.

THREE days later Jack Delane and Claudia Carisbrooke were quietly married before a registrar in London.

Such an event coming as it did while the world was still talking of the White Hope's victory over the negro, was not, as may be supposed, likely to be caviare to the general. The same day the press, which has the stomach of an ostrich and the instinct of a ferret, made it public with the usual embellishment characteristic of modern journalism. Biographical sketches of the pair, conceived in a style calculated to render the contrast as sensational as possible, appeared in all the evening papers. The portrait of the beautiful heiress, idealised by a fashionable photographer, was reproduced alongside of a popular picture post-card of the famous pugilist with only a hip-cloth about his loins. While the placards in the streets endeavoured to whet the curiosity of all who passed by announcing in the startling fashion—

"SOCIETY'S GREATEST CATCH
WEDS FAMOUS PUGILIST."

To say that the news was the chief topic of conversation in London that night is scarcely an exaggeration. In Whitechapel, where Delane was the idol of the hour, his marriage to a great lady in the West End was discussed with as much zest as his famous battle with Sam Crowfoot had been. Round the bar of a certain public-house in that quarter of the town, much frequented by ring folk and their satellites, the Docker, who had chanced to drop in, was induced, with the exhilarating aid of numerous glasses of the national beverage, to relate what he knew of the affair.

"You don't catch any registrar marrying me," he said, with emphasis. "I want a run for my money, I do. Don't seem like a proper wedding when there ain't no church and no parson. It was all over in six shakes of a pig's tail. But as Dad says there's more'n one way of tying a knot. After the ceremony the 'appy pair came back to 'The Greyhound' and 'ad lunch before going on their 'oneymoon. We all drank the 'ealth of Jack and 'is blushing bride, and wished 'em long life and 'appiness. Then Jack he gets on 'is 'ind legs and makes a speech. And when 'e'd finished the bride gets up too. She said she'd be very sorry to think as Jack's marrying 'er should ever make a difference between 'im and 'is friends, and she 'oped as 'ow we'd all look on 'er as a friend too and treat 'er the same as if she were one of hus. Then she gives Joe Shannon 'er 'and and

says, 'You've been a true pal to Jack and we sha'n't ever forget you.'"

The burly Docker paused for a moment to brush the back of his hand across his eyes, and having drained his glass to keep down the lump in his throat, he ordered drinks again all round.

"'Ere's 'ow, Docker, old chap! 'Ere's looking at you!" cried the men around him.

"No," said the Docker, "let's drink to the bride." And raising his glass he shouted, "'Ere's to Mrs. Delane and may there be more like 'er!"

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"And why not?" Mrs. Appleby was saying at the same time at a fashionable dinner-party in Mayfair. "Why shouldn't she marry a pugilist? Judging from what I saw of Durward Carisbrooke's *protégé* and his companions at Asbury, we might all take lessons from them in manners."

"And in morals too," added Lord Oughtred. "As a class their morals compare favourably with those of any other in the kingdom."

"But think of the man's station and profession," objected a lady. "How can one associate with such people? I consider the whole affair disgraceful, and I am sure most people will agree with me. Poor dear

Lady Marion and Mauve! I understand the first intimation she had of it was hearing a newsboy crying it in the street. The shock is enough to kill her."

Mrs. Appleby scoffed in her flippant fashion at the blow Lady Marion and Mauve had received.

"Psha!" she said. "To object to a man on the score of his birth is absurd nowadays. If we begin to do that sort of thing again the Lord knows where we shall end. Pedigrees are out of date, none of the new peers have them."

"But his profession," insisted the objecting lady—"prize-fighting. That surely one cannot overlook or condone."

"People used to say the same thing not so very long ago of Adrienne Lecouvreur's and Peg Woffington's," retorted Mrs. Appleby. "If we could swallow the stage, we can stomach the ring. Society has the digestion of an ostrich."

"Still a line must be drawn somewhere, and——"

"You believe in drawing it at prize-fighters," broke in Lord Oughtred, "from personal knowledge of the class?"

"No," replied the objector, "but from instinct. And I am not ashamed of it," she added stoutly, as Mrs. Appleby laughed mockingly.

"Instinct is generally only another word for prejudice," observed someone.

"And that is a snake to be scotched," declared Mrs. Appleby, impatiently. "The times are not kindly disposed to prejudice. Nobody cares a fig for Mrs. Grundy any more, save the Victorian survivals, who will soon be as extinct as the dodo. We are constantly being told by our playwrights and our politicians—who are for once in agreement and right—that the nineteenth century is as dead as Queen Anne. To refrain from burying it, as the Duc de Mazarin did his wife, is to invite ridicule. Nowadays it matters less and less what people *do* for a living and more and more what they *are*."

"Man is a replica of what he does," rejoined the relic of Victorian prejudice. "One cannot escape the influence of one's environment."

"Apply that to pugilism," remarked Lord Oughtred, with disconcerting logic, "and the profession would become the most honoured of any."

"Then that will not be long if it continues to produce such men as Jack Delane," said Mrs. Appleby, in a tone that left nothing more to be said on the subject.

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Meanwhile on the terrace at Asbury the happy

couple were building plans for the future utterly indifferent to the sensation their conduct had caused. In the distance the Surrey hills shimmered like molten silver in the summer moonlight.

"Now that I have won the championship," said Delane, "I mean to resign the title. Tom Corcoran and Crowfoot can fight for it, and let the best man win. I've made enough to live on without sponging on you. I can afford to retire from the ring."

"Do you really want to?" asked Claudia, gravely.

"N—no," he replied. "I don't know what else I'm good for."

"Then why should you retire?"

"Why, I didn't suppose you'd care to have me fight any more. Boxers' wives, as a rule, don't like seeing their husbands bashed about."

Claudia looked at him proudly.

"I'll stand it, if you can—for your sake."

"For my sake!" he echoed, wonderingly.

"Has it never occurred to you that you owe a debt to your profession that can only be discharged by sticking to it?"

"How so?" he asked. "It won't stick to me when I am beaten, as all champions are sooner or later."

"Nevertheless the example of your character and

career will remain," said Claudia. "You can be something more than a world's champion. A sculptor once remarked that the statue he had just finished was in the block of marble all the time, and he had simply chipped from around it the spare material. The ring is like that block of marble. It is awaiting a sculptor to chip off the ill repute and the prejudice that conceal its virtues—in other words, to raise the tone of pugilism. You can be that sculptor, if you will—a White Hope in a deeper and nobler sense."

Delane's face glowed with enthusiasm.

"That would be splendid!" he murmured in a quavering voice.

His arm which encircled his wife's waist stiffened into a bar like iron. It hurt, but she did not try to remove it. The pain it caused gave her a primitive sense of subjection and protection that acted as an anodyne.

"Let us make it the mission of our lives," she said, dreamily.

"It will be hard work, I guess," sighed Delane.

"If we work together it will be a labour of love," she replied with a radiant smile.

"Suppose you should some day regret having married me?" he asked.

"Regret!" she exclaimed. "Never utter that word again, Jack."

And taking both his strong, unsightly hands in hers, Claudia kissed them tenderly.

THE END.

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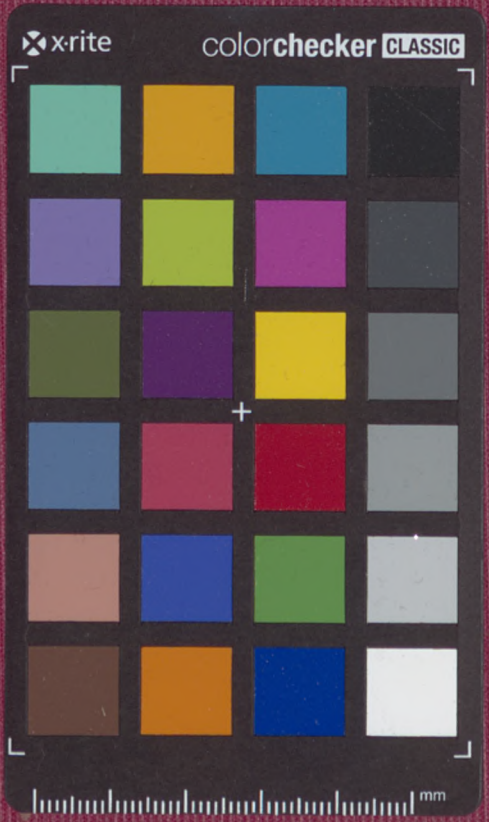
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