The Unworthy Pact

by

D. Gerard

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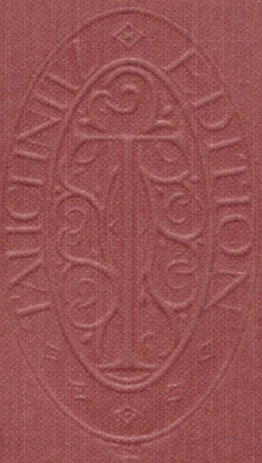

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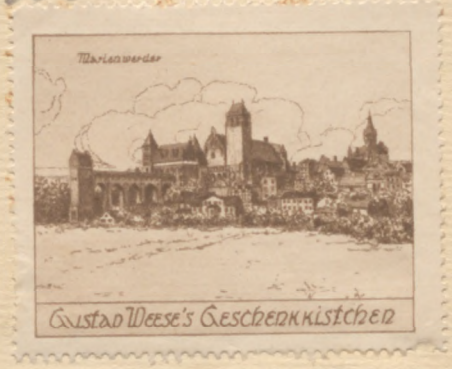
Readable but too much like a girl, with Romanson



yawning like Friday, for my taste.

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THE UNWORTHY PACT

BY

DOROTHEA GERARD

(MADAME LONGARD DE LONGGARDE)

AUTHOR OF "LADY BABY," "ONE YEAR," "ITINERANT DAUGHTERS," "THE CITY OF ENTICEMENT," "EXOTIC MARTHA," ETC.

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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

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CONTENTS.

PART I.

PART II.

PART III.

THE UNWORTHY PACT.

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

HIDE AND SEEK.

"No, I will not tell her," said Adrian Belmont to himself, as he gazed out of the window of the smoking-compartment which was bearing him towards Folwood at the rate of sixty miles an hour. "To bind her in any way, or even only to trouble her, would be shabby, under the circumstances."

The circumstances referred to were those distressingly common and everyday ones which have to do with money, or, more properly speaking, the want of it. There were other difficulties too, such as a difference of religion; but these only came in second line, and—considering Mr. Colston's liberality of views—did not appear insurmountable. It was the money question alone that mattered. Still that was no reason for not saying goodbye to her. To leave for India, whither his regiment was about to sail within the week, without having held Lucy

Colston's hand once more between his own, without taking one more look into those candid eyes, which, ever since the first time of all had seemed to him so different from all other eyes, was beyond human nature, or, at any rate, beyond Adrian Belmont's nature.

He had not been conscious of anything in the shape of a *coup de foudre,* only of something both penetrating and soothing which suffused his whole being; and yet that first meeting had been decisive. After a pleasant and outwardly quite unexciting afternoon spent in her society, he had known for certain that if it was not Lucy it would be no other. Why, he could not well have said. Not because she was beautiful. In point of fact he could not really say whether she was beautiful or not. Once or twice he had tried to describe her to a friend, and had lamentably failed; had not even been sure about the colour of her eyes, aware only that they were the right colour—also that she was the right height. Even to the elementary question: "Dark or fair?" he could give no very definite answer. Each time he went to Folwood he had resolved to analyse her coolly, and make mental notes of her features; yet, once in her presence, he regularly forgot to do so.

But to-day coolness was the first requisite. He had looked at the matter from all points of view, and could see no alternative to renunciation. Even though Lucy herself should be ready to take all risks—and she had given him no right whatever to suppose that she would—her father would certainly never consent to her running them. Considering the universal and not quite explicable attraction of her person, Mr. Colston could scarcely be blamed for his paternal ambitions. Rivals in the field simply swarmed; and one of these days *The Times of*

India would bring him the name of the victor—presumably that impertinently good-looking baronet with the castle in Wales, or that nincompoop Harblethwaite, whose inferiority of looks and manners would presumably be outweighed by the superiority of the handle to his name. Both these, and others, were in the happy position of being able to choose after their own hearts unhampered by money considerations.

Money!

With a gesture of nervous vehemence Adrian jerked the stump of his cigar out by the open window. What a nuisance the thing was, to be sure—when you had not got it! How senselessly Fate or whoever it was who did it—engineered these things! Lord Harblethwaite, who looked like one of his own farmers, throning in a palace fit for a prince, master of half a county; and he, Adrian Belmont, reduced to a subaltern's pay, and to having his coats turned!

"Put me in his place for but one week and I'll show them the way the thing is done!" he muttered to himself, still staring out of the window at the flying landscape, where the newly green hedges dividing the freshly ploughed fields seemed like the unrolling of endless yards of ribbon trimming, and where a foolish little stream meandering through a meadow, had gone to the extravagance of having itself set in gold. There was a fold between his black eyebrows as he mused. It was apt to come when he dwelt upon what he considered to be his false position in life. Though no fault was to be found with the proportions of his youthful frame, the angles of his thin face with the sharp-clipped, dark moustache, were somewhat too harsh for his age. About the deep-cut nostrils and narrow-lipped, somewhat supercilious mouth

—a mouth which matched eyes accustomed to look down upon people, rather than up to them—*race* was distinctly visible, and perhaps also temper. As now from out of a bower of "immemorial elms," the roofs and chimneys of a typically English country-house were for a moment disclosed, to be swallowed in the next back into distance, the fold between his brows deepened. It was always thus that he looked at the homes of the rich—as at something that, by rights was his due, and of which he had been wrongfully defrauded. For money itself he had a supreme and quite illogical contempt; but for some of the things that money can procure—such things as power, position, influence—a somewhat inordinate appetite. Ah, if the Scotch estate had still been in the running—there indeed he would have been in his proper place—and then indeed he would not need to be saying good-bye to Lucy Colston. But Mulcaskie was a lost paradise, at whose closed gates it was useless even to glance.

* * * * *

"Ah, here's Mr. Belmont! That means another opinion. Come here this moment Mr. Belmont, and let us have yours!"

"My opinion upon what?" asked Adrian, standing still upon the threshold of the Rectory drawing-room, which somebody had once described as "all chintz and comfort," and to which the flash of silver and the scent of cut flowers added a note of discreet elegance.

"Your opinion upon whether long engagements or short engagements are best. We've just been fighting about it."

"Engagements?" repeated Adrian, a trifle vacantly, and with a stab of terror at his heart; for among the group assembled around the heavily laden tea-table he

had recognised a pair of flat, china-blue eyes whose sight was to-day peculiarly unwelcome. To have to go through his leave-taking within range of the monocle, with which one of those eyes was armed, anything but met his wishes.

"Yes, you see"—it was a younger sister of Lucy's who was speaking, one of a pair of golden-haired romps of respectively fourteen and sixteen years of age—"the rain drove us in—we were trying the new tennis-ground, you know—and so we are consoling ourselves with bread-and-butter and fighting."

"But why about engagements?" asked Adrian, still mistrustfully eyeing the florid young man whose cup Lucy was at that very moment carefully replenishing, and with a suspiciously heightened colour too. It rose by another shade as she now said a trifle impatiently:

"Because Vic is a goose, and always on principle drags in subjects by the hairs of their heads."

"Say rather because I have got a controversial turn of mind, and am naturally on the look-out for opportunities for exercising it. Besides there was no need to drag anything. We were talking about Edith Bampton, who was engaged for only a fortnight, and they were all screaming at her rashness; while I say that I like that brisk way of doing things."

"So do I—very much," agreed a bloodless looking youth who was balancing his tea-cup precariously upon a pair of attenuated knees, and was altogether so narrowly built as, with the help of his pallid, clean-shaven face, to suggest an ivory paper-cutter.

"Ah, an academical discussion, then?"

Adrian fetched a breath of relief, and abruptly became able to take stock of the company. Familiar faces

all of them, of which, for the matter of that, there were only three besides the sisters, one of these being Lord Harblethwaite, the owner of the monocle, and also of a pair of intensely manicured hands, with which he was accustomed to make an extraordinary amount of play. It was impossible to avoid the impression that both they and the monocle were being used as a corrective to the all too bucolic appearance produced by a head of hair as yellow as ripe corn, and cheeks almost as red as the poppies that ought not to grow among that corn, and yet usually do. Upon that face the shining round of glass made one irresistibly think of a chimney-pot upon a savage.

Lord Harblethwaite and the pallid youth, whom Adrian knew to be a cousin of the house, were the only members of his own sex momentarily present. Of women not belonging to the family, there was only Mrs. Brinsley—a sharp-featured young matron with a tight-looking mouth which she seemed to find some difficulty in opening.

Lucy's sisters, having been mentioned, this would undoubtedly be the moment for describing Lucy herself, were she susceptible to description. But neither about her appearance nor her manner was there anything which could really be put into words. To people who, unlike Adrian Belmont, kept their heads in her presence, she revealed herself as being of middle height, with a mass of light brown hair, eyes which some people thought grey and others blue, some defined as serious and others as merry—no particular features to speak of, and a complexion which testified to the excellence of her digestion. Thus, truthfully catalogued, was Lucy Colston. But that was not nearly all of her, as people with keen perceptions instantly, if dimly, guessed. Hers was one of those faces

in which the glance far more than the eyes, the smile, far more than the lips, count. The features themselves appeared purely accidental. Adrian had from the first darkly felt this.

"I have the feeling that she would be just as lovely if her eyes were small and green and her figure short and stumpy," he had said, while floundering in the quagmire of one of his unsuccessful descriptions.

Lucy's temperament was at least as difficult to label correctly as was her appearance. Certainly she was not "violently lively," like her sisters, and far better calculated than they, to "steal on your spirits like a May-day breaking." Also she was free of that fatiguing "smartness" which, by dint of being universal, has become so much duller than dullness itself. Yet no one who had heard her laugh or caught the spark of fun in her eyes had ever complained of her being too quiet. There was something about her as unanalysable as the perfume of a flower.

Attempts at analysis were nevertheless made, all more or less unsuccessful. Thus some people attributed her charm to the fact of her having no nerves, others again to her low-toned voice, which, as we know, is a "most excellent thing in woman." Some even declared that Lucy attracted simply because she was *good;* but that is manifestly absurd, seeing the number of excellent women who are a mere weariness to the flesh. On the whole the most successful attempt was made by a person who declared that it all came because of Lucy Colston being what he termed "miraculously unhampered by her *ego.*" The result being a refreshing absence of the canker of self-consciousness.

"Have you ever reflected," said this person, who was

rather given to dissecting his fellow-creatures—"how rare a thing is a *natural* human being? Far rarer than the most artificial product of civilisation. It means not standing on a stage, not playing to the galleries—it means not thinking continually of oneself and therefore *being oneself.* Lots of people whose society is barely endurable, would become delightful companions if only they would be themselves, instead of pretending all the time to be quite different persons than those Nature cast them for. Once in a generation somebody is born with this moral equivalent to the silver spoon in the mouth;—Lucy is one of these; that is why we all succumb."

But this was said later on, when things had happened which had revealed much of what lay behind the unremarkable girlish face. For the present, for all its charm, it lacked the seal of life. Both it and her mind were "clean slates," waiting for a history to be written upon them. Probably to make of her a perfect woman it would require to be written with the pencil of pain. Meanwhile, to all appearances, Lucy Colston was what not very perceptive people defined as "just a girl."

"Your opinion!" imperiously demanded Vic. "Long or short engagements? Which do you vote for? Lucy votes for the long ones, because she says that otherwise you might be buying a pig in a poke, and Lord Harblethwaite votes for the short ones, because he says it's no use taking two bites at a cherry."

"I really don't think I mentioned the pig," protested Lucy, "though"—with a flash of laughter in her eyes—"it is possible that I thought of him."

"Long or short engagements?" proceeded Vic unheeding. "Freddie, too, is for the short ones, because——"

"Because he can't imagine anyone being fool enough to defer his happiness of his own free will," completed the anæmic youth, gazing with obviously love-sick eyes at his cousin, whose robustly budding beauty seemed like the natural antidote to his own bloodless condition.

"I'm for the long engagements," decided Adrian, quite as much for the sake of disagreeing with Lord Harblethwaite, as for that of agreeing with Lucy.

"And I too," pronounced the juvenile Polly, whose mouth had hitherto been too full of bread-and-butter to allow of her taking part in the conversation with any decency.

"Nobody asked you, my dear; and everybody knows that you have no opinion of your own, but only a second-hand edition of Lucy's."

"Why not, since she's always right?" stoutly declared Polly.

"I don't see how there can be two opinions in the matter," argued Adrian, warming to the subject. "It's so easy to make a mistake at first; and surely it's better to find it out in time."

He was thinking of the loophole of hope which an engagement of Lucy's to Harblethwaite might leave, if only it lasted long enough to give her time to convince her of its really being a pig which she was about to buy in a poke.

"One doesn't make mistakes of that sort," said Lord Harblethwaite with heavy decision, and with his monocle turned upon Lucy in a fashion that caused the blood to boil in Adrian's veins quite as hotly as was doing the water in the silver tea-kettle.

"For my part," said a new voice, which caused all heads to turn—for it was Mrs. Brinsley who had opened

her mouth, an operation which somehow suggested the turning of a rusty key in a lock—"I don't think it makes the smallest difference whether one is engaged for years or only for days, since you never know a man really until you have married him. You may be engaged to him for ten years and see him every day, and yet find that you have married a stranger."

With the last word her mouth shut up again tight; and simultaneously silence fell upon the company, who all knew that the Brinsley marriage was not considered a happy one.

It was a relief to the general embarrassment when a dogcart drew up before the door.

"There's father! And as wet as a sponge, of course!"

Lucy was on her feet already, and presently, in the lobby, could be heard gently scolding her parent for being out in the rain. His cheery assurances that it really had not been so very bad, and that he could not have disappointed poor Mrs. Hold, who was evidently failing fast —were equally audible, as well as the operation of peeling the Rector out of his mackintosh, which was then carefully hung up.

"And now for your tea! You have certainly earned it; and we have kept the buttered toast warm," Lucy was saying as she led in her captive parent.

Mr. Colston was a large man of somewhat imposing girth, whose features, when dug out of the encumbering layers of flesh in which, little by little, they had become embedded, revealed themselves as handsome and high-bred. The impression produced by this pastor of souls was eminently reassuring. You took him on credit, at first sight, instinctively convinced that he would never do anything unbecoming to an English gentleman. He

preached beautiful sermons on the ideals of Christian life, which he composed in a room full of dark-green leather easy-chairs and valuably bound books, and he showed no false pride in what was universally admired as his abnormally conscientious fulfilment of duties, and was far too frank to make any secret of enjoying his dinner. Altogether a shining example of how easy it is to combine material and spiritual interests—a living argument as to there surely being some mistake about the supposed difficulty in serving two masters.

At sight of Lord Harblethwaite the Rector's handsome, fleshy face visibly lighted up; which, considering that he had three daughters to marry, was only natural, while at sight of Adrian a shade of displeasure darkened the paternal eyes—which was equally natural, seeing that Adrian, whether viewed from a religious or a financial point of view, was in no ways eligible.

"Quite absurd the fuss these girls make about me," he smiled genially to the company in general, ensconced meanwhile in the deepest of the chintz-covered armchairs, and supplied with his favourite tea-cakes by Vic, and with hot-buttered toast by Polly. "As though I were a lump of sugar, to melt under a drop of rain!"

"Well, you would not melt quickly. I agree there," grinned Vic.; "there's too much of you for that."

"Oh, father! and your gout?" said Lucy reprovingly. "You know you had a twinge last night."

"Just a twinge, yes, I admit it; but not enough to justify me in shirking a duty. And besides I had my mackintosh."

"Which you would not have taken if I hadn't reminded you. You really should be more careful."

"I suppose I should," said Mr. Colston reflectively.

"It may come to my having to give up port for a time. I am seriously thinking of it."

"Raining still?" enquired Lord Harblethwaite. "Hope so, I'm sure. Just what we want for the wheat."

"The wheat be—— No, don't look alarmed, father," exploded Vic. "I'm not going to use bad language *this* time. But the rain is simply rotten. It's dished the tennis. What shall we do instead? Freddie, suggest something!"

"I'm quite satisfied as I am," declared Freddie, whose chair touched Vic's.

"Perhaps Miss Lucy will give us a song," ventured Adrian with an imploring look towards the elder sister, occupied just then with pouring cream into her father's second cup.

"Hear! hear!" agreed Lord Harblethwaite, waving a manicured hand in approval. "What song?"

"Tosti's 'Good-bye,'" said Adrian, without hesitation.

"No—I can't sing to-day," said Lucy precipitately. At which there was a general stare of astonishment. Neither the tone nor the words seemed to belong to Lucy. As a rule, when called upon to sing, she complied as readily and unaffectedly as when called upon to pass the sugar. But to-day, although she could give no reason, neither pretended to be hoarse, nor out of practice, nothing could move her from her refusal—to Adrian's intense disappointment. Among the treasures of his memory he had hoped to carry away the echo of that exquisite mezzo-soprano voice, whose low-toned sweetness had helped to enthrall his senses. It was chiefly when she sang that Lucy betrayed herself as something beyond her present self.

Baffled, the company returned to suggestions.

"Animal Grab!" voted Polly.

"Too quiet! I'm stiff with sitting still. Let's play hide-and-seek!"

It was hide-and-seek that carried the day, not entirely to the displeasure of Adrian, to whom a shifting of present positions could not but be welcome. The rules were simplicity itself. Each person in turn was to be given five minutes to hide, and to be considered victorious if within ten further minutes he or she remained undiscoverable. Even Mrs. Brinsley, starved of pleasure as she was, rose quickly to the occasion; and as for Lucy, she became for the moment, and very emphatically, "just a girl," whose dancing eyes and laughing lips proclaimed nothing more exalted than the spirit of fun. The Rector, pressed to take part in the game, laughed indulgently at this youthful thoughtlessness. What did they suppose would become of his sermon if he began to gad about? Had they overlooked the fact that to-morrow was Sunday? And having promised solemnly to each of his three daughters in turn not to work too hard, the hero of Duty retired to his study, and to its so tastefully sober dark-green armchairs and oaken bookcases, where, greatly refreshed by his tea, he proceeded to apply his mind to the spiritual strengthening of feeble Christians.

Along the passages and upon the staircases of the house, steps began to sound, sometimes surreptitious, like those of a thief in the night, at others swift and noisy, with an occasional burst of laughter; but, owing to a judiciously padded door, all noises arrived muffled to the rectorial sanctuary.

* * * * *

The hide-and-seek began by disappointing Adrian. When his turn came, it was Polly who ferreted him out

from behind the screen in the dining-room and not Lucy, as he had hoped; and, on the other hand, it was Lucy who discovered Lord Harblethwaite in so unlikely a place as the scullery, and reappeared, leading him triumphantly in tow. Was it likely that she would have found him if she had not *wanted* to find him? Adrian asked himself with jealous rage at his heart. When Lucy's own turn came for hiding, he mistrustfully kept his rival in view, and when he saw him run out of the house right into the rain, followed him at a safe distance, persuaded that some secret understanding existed.

The Rectory garden was full of tall bushes that impeded the view. The summer-house lay to the right; and when Harblethwaite took that turn, Adrian, afire with a painful curiosity, was on the point of following him; but just then caught the flutter of a light dress under the tool-shed at the far end of the left-hand walk, and swiftly turned in that direction.

The rain was still falling, but softly, almost silently, exactly as one imagines blessings to fall. It hung in big drops upon the bushes that jostled each other on each side of the path, busily unpacking all the pink and yellow and waxen-white treasures that had lain for so long carefully furled within their buds, and waving them in the face of the passer-by as importunately as any market-woman her wares. More than one wet twig brushed Adrian's face as he ran, more than one moist hand seemed to lay itself detainingly upon his shoulder.

Breathless he reached the tool-house, appearing in the door-way so suddenly as to surprise the start which Lucy gave. It seemed to be a start of fright, and from it he argued badly.

"I know I am not the right man," he bitterly said; "but is it my fault if the right one is blind?"

Another person would perhaps have said, "What do you mean?" or "I don't understand"; but Lucy did understand, and, true to herself, said nothing, but looked at him with a little trouble and what seemed like reproach in her eyes, from which the laughter of a little while back had vanished.

"Do you know why I wanted you to sing 'Good-bye'?" asked Adrian abruptly. Then, without giving her time to answer—"It is because I have come to say it. Our orders are out. We sail within the week."

Lucy had stopped looking at him, and was gazing past him at the glistening bushes. He could no longer see her eyes, and the big drops shining upon her hair as impartially as upon the branches outside, could tell him nothing of how she was taking the news.

"Won't you at least pretend to be sorry?" he asked, perplexed by her silence. "No, I know you can't pretend anything, that is why you mercifully hold your tongue; but you will give me your hand, one last time, will you not? Remember you are not going to be troubled by my sight any longer. When I read the announcement in the papers there will be leagues of ocean between us."

"Which announcement?" asked Lucy, still looking out into the rain.

"The announcement of your engagement, of course. A *short* engagement it will be too, I presume, considering the absence of obstacles."

The words were dictated by the rage which had been devouring him for the best part of the afternoon. He was closely studying her profile the while, intent upon graving its lines into his memory. But he was not nearly done

with it when it became a full-face, and for one moment he could look into her eyes and ascertain that they were wet, far wetter than her hair.

His heart gave one insane leap; and then stood still, in order to review the new situation and take counsel with his head. With a rush of joy that almost choked him, he recognised that only one way now stood open. If five minutes ago it had seemed shabby to speak, it would be infinitely shabbier to hold his tongue in the face of this mute confession. The clearness of the issue gave him back his self-control. He was almost master of himself as he bent towards her to ask, very low:

"Have I been a fool all along, Lucy? *Am* I the right man, after all?"

She glanced up at him quickly, just the time for him to see that the fun had come back to her eyes, and was struggling with her tears—swimming for its life, as it were, right through the salt flood.

"If being a fool means not comprehending a thing that is as plain as a pike-staff, then it wouldn't be reasonable to contradict you."

"Does that mean that I may actually *kiss* you?" asked Adrian, after an awe-struck pause and in an awe-struck whisper. In Lucy's presence he was not the same person as out of it. Her mere neighbourhood caused the suggestion of arrogance, which generally hung about him, to drop like a cloak, leaving him as diffident as any boy.

At this she half burst out laughing, though he more divined than saw that she was trembling.

"Doesn't that strike you as a slightly embarrassing question?"

At which, in its turn, Adrian's diffidence dropped from him.

* * * * *

"You know this really is moonshine madness," Lucy was saying presently, while they sat upon a low seat at the back of the shed, very close together because of the encumbering flower-pots and tools; "at least I'm afraid that father will think so."

"He won't think so when I come back with a fine, fat money-bag, as I shall have to do some day."

"Come back from where? India?"

"More likely America, Canada, Australia—what do I care from where! I'm not a born hustler, as you know—but for you I can hustle, and I *will* hustle, since it's the only way to gain you. To-morrow I lay down my commission and begin to look about me. Mother has a stepbrother in business. I daresay he can help me to something."

Lucy only pressed a little closer to his side. To protest against the sacrifice of his career, to declare herself unable to accept it, did not even occur to her. It seemed to her so perfectly natural that if they belonged to each other such things could not count.

"Yes, you will work and I will wait," she said simply. "Even if you had not spoken I would have waited—on the chance."

"What a shocking ass I have been," was Adrian's comment, as he carried her hand to his lips. "But, dearest, when I come back with that money-bag, do you think that your father will not jib at other things?—at the religious question, in fact?"

"Not if the bag is big enough," said Lucy, with a distinct twinkle in her eye. "You see," she found it advisable to explain, "it would go against his conscience to

sanction an improvident marriage; he has seen so much harm come that way."

"Then we won't disturb his conscience meanwhile. Let us keep the matter to ourselves until we have something to go upon. Of course one could not expect him to approve of me at present. And yet if matters had stood differently, I might have been a quite acceptable son-in-law."

"If what matters had stood differently?"

"If my father had not changed his faith. Humanly speaking, it is certain that if that had not happened the Scotch estate would have come to me. It is my Uncle James who has it now, my father's elder brother; but he is a staunch Episcopalian, and the change of religion caused a breach which has never been mended. Since the place is not entailed this of course means that it will go over my head to my cousin, Philip Warden, the next of kin."

Adrian spoke with a touch of aggrievement which betrayed some strong and hidden hankering. Softly Lucy's hand stroked his.

"Don't worry about estates—to-day. Can you imagine that we could feel happier than we do now? I can't."

"All I can imagine is that the consummation of our happiness might be closer, quite close in fact,—if Mulcaskie were to be mine. And I can imagine you there—so appropriately! It's true that I haven't seen the place since I was six years old—that was the last summer we spent there. Before the next came round, first my mother and then my father had become Catholics, but it lives in my memory like a dream of stately beauty, all grey stone and clipped yew-hedges, and wide terraces, with here and there a peacock strutting; and with busts of Roman em-

perors looking out of niches. Even fox-hound puppies, with pink noses have a place in my memories. And the sea in the distance—visible only on clear days. I can *see* you on one of those terraces, Lucy; and yet you will never walk there."

"What does it matter where I walk, so long as my arm lies within yours, Adrian?"

She spoke the name with as little false coyness as though she were saying it for the hundredth instead of for the first time.

Again he raised her hand to his lips.

"Then you bear my parents no grudge for their change of faith and for the consequences entailed?"

Lucy drew her arm from his in order the better to look into his face.

"Can you ask that seriously? How should I reproach them with following their convictions, since I follow my own? And what would convictions be worth if one were not prepared to take the consequences?"

For a long moment he looked at her so hard and with something so peculiar in his eyes that she began vaguely to fear his next words. But all he said was:

"My mother might have said that. She will love you."

"Tell me about her! I want a mother—rather badly sometimes."

"It sounds *banal* to say she is a saint; and yet nothing more appropriate occurs to me at the moment."

"Then she will bear with me for having my own beliefs. It is only saints that are really tolerant. After all, it does not seem to me to matter so much what one's convictions are, so long as they *are* one's convictions, and that one is true to them. Do you not think so?"

"No doubt you are right," said Adrian slowly, "so long as they *are* one's convictions."

"We're discovered! There's Vic!" exclaimed Lucy.

Whereupon Adrian, with admirable presence of mind, knocked over a few flower-pots, and they both became very busy with collecting the fragments.

A little later, when Lucy was again asked to sing, she no longer refused; but it was not Tosti's "Good-bye" that she sang, but one of Schubert's love-songs, full of jubilant tones, which took wing, like so many birds, to fly through the open window, out into the dusk of the spring evening.

She was singing as no woman, however happy, ever sings more than once in a life-time.

CHAPTER II.

OBITUARY.

THERE was nothing more to see out of the window of the train which, well after nightfall, bore Adrian back to town; but he had no need to look outside. In his heart there was a picture which outshone all the spring landscape; and there were so many things to think about.

In outline his plan stood firm; yet none of the details had taken shape. Into the process of shaping them the thought of Mulcaskie still insisted on obtruding itself, perhaps because of the revived image evoked by his own words to Lucy. For Mulcaskie—as is the way with unattainable things—had actually become to him the dream to which he had likened it—something like a fairyland from which he had been expelled, and whose memory, all redolent with the glamour of childhood, lived in a

shrine in his heart, unsuspected by all, even by his mother. Hitherto the regret of its loss had been preponderatingly sentimental; its stone figures and ivy-grown niches, the flights of open-air stairs whose balustrades were smothered in roses, its rows of stately apartments with the wide sea-ward view—all these, looming greater than themselves through the mists of memory, had possessed his imagination. Just now, however, when the founding of a home had suddenly become imperative, it was impossible that the financial consideration should not demand notice. Of course Lucy was right in what she had said about convictions; in theory he quite agreed with her; yet in practice it was hard to suffer because of a belief he was finding it daily more difficult to take seriously. The *Mater,* of course, was beyond criticism, and the dear old *Pater,* though dead for barely a year, had belonged to another age, had been altogether a delightfully, simple-minded person, with the true soldier's "all-of-a-piece" sort of mind. But this was the age of Science with a big S., and of general enlightenment—an enlightenment which had spread even to the mess-room, where a very much up-to-date Captain, having successfully muddled his brains with Huxley and Haeckel, had taken it as his task—in the sacred name of Truth—to muddle those of green subalterns. To many of the greenest among these the irreconciliability of revelation with the facts of natural history—and the consequent release from ancient, hampering prejudices was becoming most agreeably plain. In Adrian's case the seed had not fallen on unlikely ground, since, despite a strictly catholic education, he had, since his entry into the army, led a religiously isolated life. Thrown back upon his own resources in this line he had discovered that they were,

after all, not very great, not great enough, at any rate, to make head against the atmosphere of religious indifference in which he found himself moving. Without convincing him, Captain Mellish's arguments had troubled him, and had further stealthily relaxed his hold upon his faith. If he still followed outward practices it was chiefly out of regard to his mother. A Catholic in name he would, of course, always remain, since to desert one's colours is distinctly bad form; but it was some time now since he had become aware of possessing only the husk of his faith, within which the kernel had shrunk almost to vanishing point.

This afternoon, when Lucy had spoken about convictions, he had been on the point of confessing himself to her—would perhaps have done so, if Vic had not appeared just then. But he was glad now that he had not spoken. She seemed to feel strongly on this subject; and why trouble her with his personal difficulties?

In the midst of his reflections Adrian sharply raised his head at the sound of his own name.

Two grey-haired men at the further end of the compartment—his only two fellow-passengers—had been exchanging comments over their evening papers; and now one had said to the other:

"So Belmont is gone, too!"

The stoppage of the train at a siding just then had caused the words to become abruptly audible.

"You don't say so? What of? I didn't know he was ill."

"He wasn't ill, apparently. Just a stroke. The sort of thing that happens to you on the wrong side of seventy."

"Dear, dear! and what will become of Mulcaskie now? There's a Belmont nephew, isn't there, kicking about somewhere in the army?"

"Yes, but he's out of the running. Family differences, because of somebody having turned Papist. No entail, you know, so it will go over his head to whoever is next of kin, presumably."

"Dear, dear!" said the second old gentleman again, who seemed to be of a sentimental turn.

Then after a moment he added reflectively:

"Wonder if the new man won't want guns to get his covers into order."

"Dead sure to. Not likely to be two hermits running at one place. And in that case——"

The rest of the speech was submerged by the start of the train, but seemed to be balancing the chances of shooting invitations.

Adrian had turned his face towards the dark window pane, behind which lay the invisible landscape. Though the grey-headed talkers were entirely oblivious of him, he had the feeling that surely they must be able to read his agitation upon his features. His Uncle James was dead; but that was not the fact that agitated him. In the Mulcaskie memories he was perhaps the dimmest figure of all—far dimmer than the foxhound puppies. Even to pretend to feel grief for his loss would have been rank hypocrisy. But this news meant that the place was changing hands, it meant that this might have been the moment which set him free to marry Lucy Colston, and was instead the moment which in all probability would set Philip Warden free to follow his imbecile taste for pointless extravagance. If Uncle James had known more about Philip he might have hesitated to confide Mulcaskie to him; but living the life of a recluse as he had done, the rumour of Philip's follies might very well never have reached his ears. Moreover it was said that the cousin

who was Philip's mother had been the romance of Uncle James's life—the cause in fact of his becoming a recluse. Of course this might weigh against Philip's chances as much as for them—yet on the whole they seemed good, especially as there was absolutely nobody within reasonable limits to fall back upon. Nothing for it therefore, but to get used to the thought of Philip as the master of Mulcaskie. But it was hard; and harder still for coming to-day of all other days when the future had gained an importance never before possessed.

Then for a brief space he threw the reins to his fancy. Supposing—just supposing—that his father had not changed his faith, then at this moment he, Adrian Belmont, instead of a penniless lieutenant, would be an important landowner with quite eight thousand a year—probably more, with the accumulations—and an exquisitely beautiful house to live in. Besides claiming Lucy at once, he would begin to be "somebody," instead of the nobody as which he bitterly knew himself. There would probably be no difficulty about standing for Parliament. Here he moved restlessly in his seat, pulling at his short moustache. For this was one of the sorest points of all. To shine in public life had always been his ambition, and, aware as he was of his abilities in this direction, to renounce had been harder than even his best friends divined. Philip, of course, would never do anything useful—would probably squander all Uncle James's economies upon tailors and bootmakers' bills. The picture of his empty-headed cousin strutting about on the Mulcaskie terraces, as vain as any peacock, pursued Adrian for the rest of the journey, and disembarked with him at Aldershot, coming ever and again between his mind's eye and that other picture which he had carried away with

him from the Rectory tool-house, and in which two wet eyes had told him so much more than any lips had ever done.

* * * * *

"If you are happy, my boy, then surely it stands to reason that I am happy too."

It was Mrs. Belmont who was speaking, some days after the excursion to Folwood—which days had been employed by Adrian in taking the preliminary steps for the resigning of his commission. Although to let his mother into the secret had—considering his plans, been unavoidable, he had delayed the moment, preferring to place her before a *fait accompli.* Even thus he dreaded to see a cloud rise in the serenity of her eyes; for his mother had become to him very precious during the year, not quite a year since he had regained her after a separation which had practically lasted from the day he had first gone to school. It was barely a year ago that General Belmont had come home invalided, just in time to die on English ground, and in time simultaneously to renew acquaintance and take leave of the son, separated from him for so long by the calls of his profession.

His widow was a little old woman who, according to all rules, ought to have been ugly, and yet somehow contrived to be very nearly beautiful. She had a face that was too large for her small and bowed body, a mouth that was too wide even for that face, all the current marks of premature age as well as of ill health about her sunken and discoloured features, but she had also a pair of large, strangely *happy* looking brown eyes, which in some inexplicable manner made up for everything else. What there was to be happy about was indeed not at once evident. Thus, on some dull and chilly March even-

ing, a bird can sometimes be heard pouring out its heart in song, as lustily as though it were bursting with happiness, while, shivering and cross, we wonder what on earth the feathered idiot can discover worth singing about in muddy roads and cutting winds. It can only be that the songster feels in his veins the coming spring, of whose advent we know as well as he does, but do not believe in until we see it. It was just possible that this little old woman in the invalid's chair also felt in her veins the coming of some spring that still lay behind the horizon.

"I wonder you don't look more surprised, mother!"

"Surprised, when I have seen it coming for so long?" Adrian almost gaped.

"Seen it coming? How could you have seen anything from here? Why, you have not so much as set eyes upon Lucy."

"But I have heard her name—from your lips—rather oftener perhaps than you are aware. And I am not bad at distinguishing accents, you know; witness the rapidity with which I picked up the Hindustani idioms. And then there is arithmetic to fall back upon."

"Arithmetic?"

"Yes, I confess to having counted up your trips to Folwood; and—well, there is a process known as putting two and two together; and when one has to idle away so many hours, one gets into the way of it."

Adrian, who had thought himself impenetrable, sat still for a moment, surprised into silence.

"Then that is why you bear it so well," he presently remarked.

"*Bear* it, Adrian?"

"I mean about the religion. Do you very much mind my marrying a Protestant, Mother?"

He said it with a touch of embarrassment. The consciousness of his own inward vacillations always made him feel awkward when touching upon the religious question in his mother's presence.

"Not if she is the right woman for you. I shall know that the moment I see her. In fact I think I know it already."

"Of course she is the right woman. But how do you know? Really, mother, one could get to think that your armchair isn't an armchair at all, but a sort of look-out arrangement, commanding the world in general."

"How do I know? By your eyes and by your happiness. You *are* happy. Adrian, are you not?—happy without a regret?"

He bent forward quickly to kiss her small, withered hand, and thus hide the look which had shot across his face. How could he say that he was happy "without regret," while the mirage of the lost Mulcaskie lived persistently in the background of his mind!

Long before he had reached Aldershot the other night he had with his own eyes, read in a freshly printed column the corroboration of the news heard. Uncle James really was dead; and Philip had started for the funeral, and would, no doubt, enter into possession on the spot. This, in fact, was the very day of the funeral, and the presumable dawn of Philip's reign. It was this that made it so difficult to meet his mother's eyes just now. Must she not be feeling a little troubled, a little guilty, thinking of all that he had missed—through her?—since it was her initiative which had wrought the change. The *Pater* had only followed suit. He would not like to push her to anything like an apology, nor let her see the soreness he was conscious of. And yet the soreness was there.

Mrs. Belmont meanwhile was watching him out of her brown eyes that were as shrewd as they were serene.

"You are thinking of Mulcaskie, are you not?" she asked quietly, but not in the least guiltily.

Adrian, being still young enough to colour, did so now and answered a little impatiently:

"Well, I can't help thinking of Mulcaskie sometimes —and just now!"

"No, I suppose that can't be helped. It's so natural, after all. I know, of course, that you cannot really bear me a grudge for what may look—from the outside only —like a wrong done to you; but perhaps you had hoped that Uncle James would relent, and therefore still cherished a hope. But that is buried now, I suppose. Let it rest in its grave, Adrian, together with poor Uncle James; and be sure—try to be sure—that if I had not done what I did it would have been a greater wrong to you."

There she stopped short; not because she had nothing more to say, but because it was difficult to say it without referring to certain things which are supposed (by some people) to be cheaply purchased by the sacrifice of all one's goods, even of a hand or an eye, which would have come dangerously near to giving out a text—a proceeding not in Mrs. Belmont's line.

Adrian, strongly moved, kissed her hand again—again dumbly. It was the first time that this critical subject had ever been touched upon between them; and he was chiefly surprised at the simplicity of the explanation, and the ease with which she spoke. He had not answered her original question, but neither was the answer insisted upon. Instead she now said in a quite untroubled voice:

"Of course I should have preferred a Catholic; but God knows best."

It was the same thing she had said each time that one of the children that had been given to her in the early years of her marriage, only to be snatched back again, had been laid in its tiny coffin—all but Adrian, the latest born and sole surviver. It was also what she had said when her life-long companion had reached home only to die, and when the London specialist had certified that her own heart was incurably diseased. Humanly speaking Adrian was the only life-asset that remained to her; nor was she quite sure that he actually did so remain; in the sense that for her counted even beyond the usual relationship of mother and son. Within this year which had brought them together once more, and in the absence of all controversy, her mother's eye, keen with the additional keenness of the forcibly concentrated invalid, had noted small signs which might point to a fatally big issue. Far too judicious to force herself upon her son's confidence, and scrupulously respecting his masculine independence, she had nevertheless gathered enough from his talk to tremble for his faith. For months past she had been watching him with an attention not devoid of anxiety, yet dominated with that strange, seemingly illogical confidence which comes with the gift of prayer. Now that he was going to marry a heretic the anxiety ought by rights to be increased, yet showed no signs of this, not only because "God knows best," but also because she had adopted the very human means of gaining through a mutual friend some information about Lucy Colston. The result had strengthened her in the belief that Lucy —whatever her form of faith—was "the right woman." It only remained to see her, and thus put the seal to her certainty.

As she now listened to Adrian's eager exposure of his

plans, into which, shaking off his momentary depression, he had plunged, Mrs. Belmont felt more than ever sure of her conclusion. Nothing but a true and noble love to a true and noble woman could have so transformed her boy. Often had even her maternal indulgence been inclined to blame his attitude towards life—his evident discontent, the touch of bitterness in his remarks, the inclination of superciliousness towards the drudgery of mere work. There was rather too much of the *Grand Seigneur* about him to make of him a very useful member of society. But to-day this was changed; all the natural eagerness of his years, all its seasonable thirst for action, its fiery determination to conquer obdurate fortune, made itself apparent. She preferred him this way, greatly. It was a new side of his character that was revealing itself—the character of a man, no longer of a boy.

"That youngster is only in the making," the same person had said whose remarks upon Lucy Colston have already been quoted, and who was the stepbrother of Mrs. Belmont, and the very man of business on whose help Adrian now relied. "He may turn out several different ways, and it is rather a toss up which; for there is a choice of possibilities about him."

Mrs. Belmont liked what she saw of the possibilities to-day revealing themselves. They might easily turn out to be very much better than those which the possession of Mulcaskie would have developed.

* * * * *

It was late when Adrian got back to Aldershot—for the last time, since there only remained to speed the departing regiment and to pack up—for London, meanwhile, and after that, most likely for Argentina. After his visit to his mother, he had had an interview with

Mr. Spedding, his stepuncle, and it was towards Argentina that probabilities seemed to point, as the spot of earth on which the fat money-bag showed the greater chances of being filled within a reasonable time.

There were two letters on the mantelpiece, one an official looking envelope, which, torn open, revealed the grant of furlough, the first step towards complete freedom. That part of the matter was therefore as good as settled.

The second envelope Adrian opened far more leisurely, perhaps because it bore a fatal resemblance to a bill. But it was not a bill, though it showed the printed name of a firm—of a firm of attorneys, as he perceived at a closer glance. "Cauldie & Begg," what were they to him? He had never so much as heard the name. Impatiently he unfolded the stiff paper.

April 5th, 19—

"DEAR SIR.—On the strength of our long connection with our late client, Mr. James Belmont, we take leave to inform you that, in consequence of Mr. Belmont having died intestate, you—in quality of next of kin—appear as heir of the estate of Mulcaskie, which, pending the necessary steps for the legal taking of possession, is being held at your disposal.

In order to hasten proceedings your immediate presence is desirable.

Your obedient servants,
CAULDIE & BEGG.

Long before Adrian had done reading he had clutched first at the mantelpiece, as though in danger of falling, and then at his head. With the last word he let the paper sink, in order to stare round at the bare walls of

the room—stripped already of their few ornaments—with eyes which scarcely seemed to belong to an intelligent human being.

Neither could his next action, strictly speaking, be described as intelligent, for it was to open his arms wide, as though to clasp some invisible form, towards which he started forwards.

"Lucy!" he cried, and under the weight of his great good-fortune, sank onto the nearest chair, almost like a man broken. "Oh, Lucy! Lucy!"

CHAPTER III.

TAKING POSSESSION.

"ANYTHING from Mulcaskie?"

Adrian's voice, despite his efforts at calmness—even at unconcern—shook a little as he put the question to the ancient-looking station-master, who to him appeared a total stranger, but who, after staring hard into his face for a moment and having made a rapid review of probabilities *plus* family likeness, exploded into:

"God bless my soul! Master Adrian!"

Then, as Adrian stared back at the rotund little man, whose obese frame was not very unlike a monster egg perched upon two bits of stick which, at first sight, appeared utterly inadequate to the task assigned to them, something stirred within the mists of memory, and he had to check himself on the verge of a counter-exclamation:

"God bless my soul! Humpty-Dumpty!"

For those far off days had stood in the sign of "Alice" —both in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass—

which inevitably led to a wholesale distribution of characters. Even eighteen years ago Mr. Perkins had been so egg-like in figure that it was morally impossible to call him anything but Humpty-Dumpty. The egg had by this time swelled almost into a balloon, but the chief difference was that the face which surmounted it was crimson instead of merely brick-red, and the hair peeping out from under the gold-braided cap white instead of brown.

With scarcely a trace of condescension Adrian put out his hand. It did him good to be called "Master Adrian." This was indeed like "coming home" in earnest.

Of course there was "something" from Mulcaskie; something stately, though far from up-to-date—a real traditional family coach, with another character out of "Alice" upon the box, though not so easily identified as Humpty-Dumpty. Adrian began by noting a long, narrow and venerable, almost ecclesiastical-looking personage sitting very upright behind the horses and watching him with unmistakable, though severely restrained interest. It was his legs alone, or rather the gaiters upon them, which betrayed his "horsey" calling, and they being at present wrapped in an india-rubber apron could not for the moment affect his likeness to a Sabbath preacher, taking severe stock of his congregation from the vantage-ground of the pulpit. It was subsequently only that Adrian recalled him as the Caterpillar upon the mushroom which had so delighted his six-year-old fancy.

There followed the drive through the boisterous April morning, with the wide views over rolling downs and wind-swept sky, with the salt air blowing in by the lowered window, like a message from the invisible yet

ever present sea. There were bare-legged children upon the steps of grim-looking, grey stone cottages, and loose stone walls where he would have expected to see hedges, while upon the newly-turned fields the gulls were following the plough as assiduously as do the crows elsewhere. Those twenty minutes between the little wayside station and the gates of Mulcaskie were perhaps the crowning intoxication of a row of hours which had been a series of intoxications.

Despite the urgency of Messrs. Cauldie and Begg's summons, it had not been for Scotland that Adrian had started next morning, but for Folwood. His impatience to see Mulcaskie was great, but a greater impatience dominated it—that of breaking the news to Lucy and openly claiming her as his future wife. Vanished into air were all those plans which he had been so eagerly expounding only a few hours earlier, strewn to the winds, as useless chaff, the promises of Argentina. Those long years of waiting had sunk to the level of a nightmare which a few lines from a small firm of attorneys had sufficed to dispel. Years? Why, he would scarcely need to wait months now before bringing Lucy in triumph to a home almost worthy of even her; only as many weeks as she would require to get the indispensable clothes, and he perhaps to rig out the old place fit for her reception. It could only be a question of money; and money there must needs be in plenty. Money! Just think of it! Money practically unlimited for him. Adrian Belmont, to whom the days preceding pay-days had always been unpleasantly "tight," and for whom the existence of a thirty-first day in the month had sometimes been a gravely inconvenient circumstance! It was scarcely to be conceived.

Like a bolt from the blue he had descended upon the Rectory, and, having stormed the sanctuary within which Mr. Colston was hesitating between two effective conclusions to his Sunday sermon, had produced Messrs. Cauldie and Begg's letter, and upon the strength of that document, point-blank demanded Lucy's hand in marriage.

"I don't mind telling you *now*, that we have been engaged since last Saturday at about 6.15," said Adrian in joyful defiance; "but we didn't mean to disturb you about it until I had made a fortune. Well, I haven't *made* one, but I have got one, as you see, which comes to the same thing, doesn't it?"

"I—I—well, in a certain sense it does," said the Rector, who, chiefly with a view to collecting his thoughts, had taken a long time to read the attorney's letter. "This certainly is very surprising. I had no notion at all that you—or rather"—his sense of veracity compelled him to correct himself—"I had indeed noticed a certain amount of—ah—interest on your side, but had no reason to suppose or even to wish that Lucy—— But of course this alters matters considerably."

Here, perceiving that he was beginning to think aloud, he pulled himself up sharply.

"You give her to me, don't you?" asked Adrian trying not to grin indecorously.

Then Mr. Colston, who had risen at Adrian's impetuous entrance, sat down deliberately in one of the green leather armchairs and attempted to reflect. He happened to have heard something of the Mulcaskie estate and of the accumulated fortune; it was not likely to be anything like Lord Harblethwaite's pile, and, of course, no coronet; but what was the good of either pile or coronet if Lucy would not have them? Engaged since

Saturday! Young people certainly were surprising. Under the circumstances to surrender handsomely seemed on the whole the wisest course, and perhaps not too risky.

"Since you have settled it between you, I don't see what choice is left me," he now said, while a genial smile overspread his massive features; "especially as I have always esteemed you highly, Mr. Belmont." Here he pulled himself up again, in order to add with resumed gravity: "Despite the divergence of our religious views, which, as you will readily understand, creates for me certain difficulties. By rights it ought to make me very carefully weigh the question of my consent."

"What for—since you are sure to give it in the end, dear Mr. Colston?" said the audacious Adrian. "With your liberality of views!"

Mr. Colston put up a solid white hand in modest deprecation.

"Where should liberality of views come in, if not towards our sister-church of Rome? And even though she herself disclaims the sisterhood?"

Adrian, who was aware that Mr. Colston followed the "branch theory" of the Christian churches, but to whom this fervour of family affection was entirely new, thought it wiser to hold his tongue.

"Every broad-minded man is liberal in his views nowadays, and I hope I do not fall behind my contemporaries in this respect; but there are certain conditions demanded by your Church, and about which I do not know what my daughter's ideas——"

"Supposing we ask her?" broke in Adrian at the end of his short tether of patience. "I think I know what she will say."

Lucy, being fetched, grew almost as dizzy as Adrian

himself when told of the turn of Fortune's wheel; and the luncheon ordered uninspired by presentiment, and consisting chiefly of mutton-chops and sago pudding, turned into a regular betrothal feast, watered by a bottle of the Rector's favourite Burgundy, produced only on birthdays or when the composition of some particularly obstreperous sermon, called for mental stimulus.

Quite at the end Mr. Colston discovered a scruple—not concerning the "conditions," but with regard to the absolute sureness of Adrian's claim.

"You will understand, of course, that my consent remains conditional on your finding matters in Scotland to stand as represented in that letter," he had said to Adrian at parting. "If a will should meanwhile have been discovered—though I grant that is not likely—and your position return to what it was last Saturday, I could not really feel justified——"

"In giving your consent—of course not!" finished Adrian cheerfully, brimming over with confidence both in himself and in fate.

On the wings of impatience and with Lucy's last kiss glowing on his lips he had flown back to London; and, reaching his mother's presence, had by a violent effort succeeded in bringing out his news in instalments, instead of in the bomb-like fashion to which he had treated the Rector, and which—considering the state of his mother's heart—might easily prove fatal, since joy can kill as effectually as grief. To his agreeable surprise she took it very quietly, with none of that dreadful gasping for breath which he had witnessed occasionally and secretly feared. There was indeed joy in her eyes, but it seemed chiefly a reflection of his own, and she seemed more to

be rejoicing in that which rejoiced him, than in the cause itself.

"So it has come back to you, after all," was all she said at once.

It was only a moment later that she stretched out her slight hands:

"And now you are quite happy, Adrian? Happy without a regret!"

For half an hour he had sat by her, pouring out his over-full heart even more unreservedly than yesterday, making plans once more, but not the plans of yesterday. He would work, of course, but in a different sense—not to build up a fortune, but to develop the one he had, would play the part of a landowner as it ought to be played, by improving the place and dispensing hospitality on the princely scale which the very look of Mulcaskie demanded. And at last he had found the required field for his talents. He began to calculate the presumable time till the next elections; he *knew* he could address a constituency, and Lucy was exactly the right person for canvassing. Ah, yes, the world would hear of him soon —or England would, which came to the same thing.

Mrs. Belmont must surely have been a very unreasonable old woman if while listening to his castle-building, she was aware of a faint, hardly acknowledged twinge of regret, which presently resolved itself into a preference for the plans made yesterday. No doubt there remained a large field of action; but no more need to face Life with that grim determination whose signs she had so gladly welcomed. Her boy was no longer the determined wrestler with Fortune—*could* no longer be that—but again the born *Grand Seigneur,* this time in fact and not only by inclination and desire. Despite all her palpitating

maternal sympathy, Mrs. Belmont could not help wondering whether the yesterday's Adrian had not held an advantage over to-day's.

* * * * *

Yes, that was the turn he remembered—in at the wide open gates, past an ivy-draped lodge with an old woman curtseying at the door. With fast-beating heart Adrian spied about him for landmarks out of the past. The avenue was narrower than he remembered it, and even shorter, but it was *his* avenue, and there were daffodils in the grass, and lambs disporting themselves in the fields behind the wire fences. How not feel a little drunk, considering all circumstances, of which Lucy remained the foremost? True, there still hung about it all a sense of unreality which prevented his getting at the full taste of it; but this dreamlike feeling was in itself an enjoyment.

Ah—the house! Yes, that was Mulcaskie, a little shrunk indeed, like the avenue, but unmistakably Mulcaskie, with a lot of remembered features welcoming him as it were, with nods and beckonings, and a lot of unremembered ones popping suddenly out of their graves. How straight and how dark were the yew hedges enclosing the stately square, in whose background stood the house, and which had always seemed to him like black walls. Ah, and that glimpse caught through the open doorway of the house, out onto the first terrace and to the wind-swept horizon beyond—he remembered that too, and knew now that he had never really forgotten it.

Neither was the goggle-eyed butler who received him on the steps quite unfamiliar, although eighteen years ago he had not been a butler but the "fish-footman" out of "Alice." The atmosphere of Mulcaskie seemed eminently

favourable to the preservation of relics. Adrian now remembered that there had also been a "Pig and Pepper" Duchess, in the shape of a very terrifying housekeeper, but subsequently learned that she had long since ceased from troubling, her mouth being effectually stopped by the sod of the "kirk-yard." Once a family retainer had found a firm footing at Mulcaskie, it rarely happened that he or she left it in anything but a hearse.

No bath had ever felt so delicious as the one in which Adrian washed off the dust of the night journey; no breakfast ever tasted so good as that waiting for him in the big dining-room, panelled with oak, just as a proper dining-room should be. There followed a first superficial round of the house. Stately apartments, and plenty of them, though with a deserted and slightly dilapidated look about them, and with that hitherto unseen presence — the sea — discoverable from their windows. Adrian hurried from one to the other—the inside of the house had played no such part in his past as the outside—lingering only in the room which had been Uncle James's "study," almost the only room that looked "lived in." Here too the family portraits were concentrated; not Belmont portraits, though, since the estate had descended through a Scotch branch-line, Uncle James's father having been the first Belmont who lived here. But it was not the portraits which interested Adrian, it was the furniture —ponderous furniture, of an obsolete shape, and fashioned of some exotic-looking wood whose yellow tint and minutely-mottled appearance had made the Adrian of eighteen years ago think longingly of plum-pudding. There were book-cases, tables, chairs, besides a huge writing-table, all of the same wood; and in the shadow of the writing-table there was a something with a lid, in-

tended perhaps as a coal-box, but actually used as a paper-basket, which held a particularly vivid place in his memory. In the games of long ago it had alternately been a ship and a cave, sometimes a giant's soup-tureen. Also for hide-and-seek it had been extremely useful. With a smile of reminiscence on his lips, Adrian lifted the lid. To think that he had ever fitted into this! There were a few bits of paper at the bottom, just enough to show that it had remained a paper-basket.

From the study he hurried onto the terrace, from which, on clear days, the sea was visible. It was now that the real voyage of exploration began. Down the first flight of steps, in search of the "Emprers," which he vaguely remembered looming out of niches. Why "Emprers" should consist only of head and shoulders had been one of the mysteries of the past. Much later on he had discovered this legless condition not to be an Imperial peculiarity. There they were, to be sure—the fat one, the thin one, the one with the leaves round his head, easily named now, but anonymous in the days when Roman history had been an undiscovered country; not one of them missing—holding guard along the buttressed wall which formed the drop between two terraces, and staring out to sea with their empty stone eyes. True, they seemed miniature editions of themselves, and there were no peacocks strutting about; but minor disappointments of this sort could not hold good in face of the glories of the Mulcaskie gardens. Uncle James had always been a gardening maniac; and to judge from the blaze of hyacinths in the beds, the sheets of crocuses in the borders, he had remained so to the end. A hermit he may have been, but one who made his hermitage blossom like a rose. No doubt a garden with so much framework about

it in the shape of stone balustrades and figures, and with such sheltered nooks between the buttresses, could not help being an inspiration.

Up and down the steps Adrian now went in search of another old haunt—a semi-circular bench backed by a semi-circular yew hedge, which he remembered at least as well as the paper-basket. Presently he found it, and together with it a round-shouldered individual with drooping grey whiskers, busy just now with digging up a bed, and who speedily turned into another old friend. Of course this could only be Macpherson, Uncle James's head gardener and confidant, with whom there used to be such long and earnest consultations concerning the arrangement of borders and the planting out of shrubs, and with whom he, Adrian, had begun by living on a footing of chronic warfare, caused by flowers pulled and by footsteps upon beds, until peace had been obtained by means of a bed of his own upon which to let loose his energies. He could even remember that there had been some hesitation as to which character to assign to Macpherson. Being a gardener, it seemed unavoidable to make of him that Seven of Spades who had painted the white roses red, but whose want of physiognomy could not satisfy Adrian's fancy. It was the drooping whiskers which had decided for the Walrus.

The "Walrus" having always been a privileged person, was far less restrained in his recognition than had been either the coachman or the butler.

"I mind ye when ye were no higher nor a Japanese anemone, and now I see ye fit to measure yersel wi my finest hollyhocks, and no more call to fear for my newly-raked beds; such holes as ye used to tread in them, to be sure! And talkin' o' that subject, sir," continued

Macpherson, with a large foot resting upon his spade, and light blue eyes severely fixed upon Adrian's face. "I've a question to put: Have ye a gairdenin' mind?"

"A how much, Macpherson?"

"A gairdenin' mind. By which I understand the proper likin' for flowers."

"Oh yes; I like flowers well enough, even when I don't know their names."

"Have ye ideas of yer own concairnin' herbashus borders?"

"I'm afraid I don't quite know what a herbacious border is."

Macpherson shook a gaunt and disapproving head.

"This is worse nor what I feared. Maybe ye have not so much as heard of the new Sweet Pea crossings, nor of the double flowering Briar?"

Almost humbly Adrian admitted his ignorance.

"But ye *do* ken a rose from a dandelion?" asked the "Walrus," with a gathering of scorn which shook even his drooping whiskers.

"Yes, but not one rose from another, I fear. You will have to teach me, Macpherson."

This produced a softening effect. It was in a more conciliating tone that Macpherson asked:

"May I tak' it that the gairdens are to be kept up the same as noo? Or are ye for cuttin' doon the gairdenin' budget? It's a wee bit big, I grant ye. The maister was frugal in most things, but where the gairdens were concairned he was lairge."

"No, no; I am not going to cut down the budget," said Adrian soothingly.

He had sat down upon the stone bench, in a spot of sunshine slipped out between two clouds, and, shel-

tered by the yew hedge, was enjoying the momentary warmth.

"Quite the contrary, Macpherson; I want the garden to be particularly resplendent this summer, since I am going to bring home a bride."

"You're thinkin' o' gettin' married?" asked Macpherson, with a new light leaping into his eyes. "It's ower long since we've had a leddy at Mulcaskie; and maybe *she* will be havin' a gairdenin' mind? Ladies mostly do. And ye're but a young man, after all; and it's not till he gets on in years that a *man* understands what a gairden is; but to the women-folk it comes natural."

"I think you ought to be glad that I don't garden myself; for my opinion mightn't agree with yours, you know, and that might lead to disputes. Did you never dispute with my uncle, Macpherson?"

"We had our differences," said Macpherson with dignity; "but we mostly agreed in the end. I mind givin' warnin' once when Maister would have double dahlias in the borders, and I would have single; and whiles there were disagreeables concairnin' the beddin' out; but it aye ended in his givin' way; bein' sensible enow' to ken how far he could go. A man does not like bein' fussed after in a gairden, and them private fykes are whiles most tryin'; but an intailligent interest is another thing, and that's what one looks for. Maybe your young missus will be able to give me that; and no doubt she'll be good at the cataloogs."

"The catalogues?"

"The seed cataloogs, to be sure, and the lists of them nursery folk. I'm allays willin' to tak' assistance there, seein' as how the circumstainces of my upbringing did not allow of my visitin' school."

"You mean that you can't read," blurted out Adrian, in his astonishment staring at the "Walrus" as at some newly-discovered curiosity. As such, in fact, he was regarded by the country-side at large, though Adrian was not aware of it then.

"Such is my meanin'," assented Macpherson, with an, if possible, further access of dignity. "I was too busy diggin', ever since I could stand, to bother about the books."

"I see. Oh, yes, you certainly can count upon Lu—upon my future wife—to manage the catalogues for you."

Over the handle of his spade Macpherson gave Adrian one look, in which curiosity distinctly gleamed, then turned to drive the instrument deep into the earth.

"If it's no too great a liberty to tak'," he observed, after a moment, "be she of your faith? Ye're a Papist, are ye not?"

"Yes, I'm a Catholic. But the lady I am going to marry belongs to the Church of England."

There was a subdued grunt from Macpherson, who went on digging with a vigour which clearly said that between "Papists" and "Ainglicans" there wasn't much more than a pin to choose.

Presently, turning up a particularly big clod, he uttered a short laugh.

"A real good fortune that the Donniebridge Faither has'nt got his wits about him, else he'd be chuckling, fit to mak' the Maister turrn right round in his grave."

"Who is the Donniebridge Father? And why should he chuckle?"

Once more Macpherson's foot rested upon the spade.

"It's true—ye can't be knowin'. It's just the Romish preest at Donniebridge, the one single Papist that set foot

in Mulcaskie so long as maister was above ground; and that came about only becose of their havin' been to school together—or to college, maybe ye wud call it. Leastways that's what I gathered from their talks. But it was only for the sake o' arguin' that the preest came here. Many's the time they've sat here on this very bench ye're on, pitchin' into each other with words as hard as flint-stones, and as shairp too. I couldn't help hearin' them, bein' whiles just on the other side of yon hedge, maybe buddin' a rose, or prunin' a bush. To hear maister shoutin' aboot the Scarlett Wumman and the Popish Anti-Christ, wud do my heart good; but the Donniebridge Father was no for holdin' his tongue either, and wud shout back aboot stolen Church goods and the huntin' doon o' preests. They argued far worse nor ever maister and me argued aboot the plantin' out; and many's the time the Faither would stamp off, vowin' that he wud never put another foot within the place. But he aye turned up again, and the quarrel began all over again—mostly on this seat, bein' sheltered. And now to think that, after all, it's to be a follower o' the Scarlett Wumman that is to step into maister's shoes! Aye, but the ways of Providence be dark!"

With a vast shake of the head Macpherson fell once more a-digging. Adrian sat still, thinking. So it was on this very spot that the religious controversies had taken place. None better adapted for eaves-dropping. He himself, as a child, had sometimes practised it on the other side of the yew screen, as he now remembered. This old friendship with the priest was new to him. It might help to explain some things. The arguments had no doubt been attempts at conversion, which, of course, had miserably failed, and yet perhaps had left mark

enough to cause Uncle James to relent towards his Catholic nephew. Too obdurate to say so on paper, he had chosen the course of dying intestate, knowing well that he, Adrian, would thus become his heir. Yes, this might very well be the explanation, in which case his debt of gratitude to that unknown priest was not small.

"What was that you said about the Donniebridge Father?" he asked aloud; "that he would have chuckled, but cannot? Is he no longer alive?"

"He's alive, as ye may say, and he isn't alive. It wud seem that, for all the hard wurrds, he had a liking for maister, for the news of his bein' taken so suddenly struck him foolish. He just lies like a heap, and is fed with a spoon, same as a child. Personally," added Macpherson with the frown of an avenging angel, "I tak' it to be a judgment on his wicked ways in tryin' to turrn maister's mind from his own faith."

Paralysed? reflected Adrian. That was rather a pity. A talk with Uncle James's controversial friend would not have been without its interest.

* * * * *

The interview beside the circular bench was by no means the last which took place before night. In fact, this long, wonderful day seemed to consist chiefly of interviews, business interviews most of them; and foremost amongst these the interview with Mr. Cauldie, the white-haired, rosy-cheeked representative of the firm of Cauldie & Begg, from whose lips Adrian gathered a few explanatory details of the news contained in the letter. He learnt now of the many times the family solicitor had urged his client to assure the fulfilment of his last wishes, of the careful but fruitless search made in every likely receptacle, and in which Philip Warden had taken an active part.

Poor disappointed Philip, who had been soothing his creditors with the prospect of the heritage, and had seen himself forced to depart empty-handed, flying before the face of his fortunate supplanter. "I must see what I can do for him," thought Adrian, too happy not to feel some real pity for the supplanted.

The result of this interview was to give Adrian the first grip of reality, right through the dreamlike feeling. It was from this moment on that he began to realise the practical fact of his possession, which the further interviews with gamekeepers and overseers helped to consolidate.

But the most surprising of these interviews happened towards evening, when Adrian was told that a visitor awaited him in the study, and found there a young man in clerical garb, occupied in picking something small and apparently sticky off his trousers. He was not at first sight a prepossessing young man, his hair being of the most orthodox "carrot" imaginable, and his complexion richly freckled, in as characteristic a style. Also his eyes were small, and—to judge by the spectacles—weak, and he was very badly shaved; nor could Adrian be immediately sure that he was very well washed. At any rate he was extremely dusty, and apparently rather cross—or possibly only tired. As Adrian's eyes fell upon his visitor's boots he could not forbear a shudder, being fastidious in these matters. They were almost the worst boots he had seen within a drawing-room, and it scarcely made matters better that the possessor should be dusting them with a handkerchief which—as handkerchiefs go—was quite as awful of its kind.

"To what do I owe the pleasure?" he began rather frigidly.

The visitor peered at him through his spectacles, before replying with a breadth of accent which satisfactorily settled the side of the Tweed on which his cradle had stood.

"To begin with it don't seem to be a pleasure; and yet I thought you might be glad to see me," he said in a slightly aggrieved tone. "I suppose you are extra busy to-day, and I ought to have waited till to-morrow; but I just felt pushed to shake hands with the first Catholic landlord that has ever come to Mulcaskie. I'm the priest from Donniebridge, you know, the new one, that was put in after Father Greyson failed. My own name is Kinghorn. But if I'd remembered about your being so busy, I'd have put it off. It was all I could do to find the time, as it is, and the road far too dusty for the season."

To Adrian's horror he passed the handkerchief over his face which, despite the anything but oppressive temperature, was bathed in perspiration. Decidedly the man was tired.

"Won't you sit down?" said Adrian remorsefully. "Have you actually walked out all the way from Donniebridge? It's six miles, is it not?"

"Somewhere about that. But I don't mind telling you that I had a lift for a bit of the way, in a fish-cart," he added confidentially, and with a bright smile sweeping the freckled face clear of the clouds of ill-humour. "That's where the scales come from."

And he picked another off his left knee.

"And the smell too," reflected Adrian, disapprovingly sniffing the air, and yet half disarmed already by so much *naïveté*. He had just discovered that the priest's "Roman" collar was of india-rubber, which was almost as great a shock as the first sight of the boots had been. Slipping

back into old habits, he next caught himself wondering whether the red-haired, somewhat distracted-looking priest would figure best as the Mad Hatter or the March Hare.

"Won't you have a cup of tea?" he asked, abruptly remembering his duties as host. "You must be hungry after your walk."

"Tea?" repeated Father Kinghorn, in an accent of surprise.

"Yes, afternoon tea. Don't you go in for it?"

The priest gave a little bit of a laugh.

"Oh, yes, I go in for it, when it comes my way, but the truth is that it doesn't do so often. You see, those paper-mills at Donniebridge have brought over a lot of Irish workers, and they need a deal of looking after; and poor Father Greyson wants attending to as well (they've allowed me to keep him in the house). So between it all one's meals are apt to become somewhat elastic."

He laughed again, quite boyishly this time.

"When do you dine, for instance?"

"I could answer easier if you asked me at which hour of the day or night, I have *not* dined. They all have their turn."

"Have you dined to-day?" asked Adrian, watching him curiously.

Father Kinghorn seemed to find it necessary to reflect.

"To be sure I have dined—for I remember there was a suet-pudding which I nearly choked over, from being in such a hurry to get off. Now that I come to think of it I begin to suspect that it was not only my wish to welcome a Catholic laird, that was pushing me on, but also a little curiosity to see the inside of the place. It's been forbidden ground to me ever since I came here, you see."

"But not to your predecessor. I learned to-day to my surprise that Father Greyson used to visit my late uncle rather frequently."

"Ah, yes, *he* was an exception, tolerated because of a college friendship, and perhaps also for the sake of being able to abuse our faith to one of its own followers. But for Mr. Belmont dying intestate, it is not likely that another priest's foot would ever have crossed this threshold. You'll understand how we all—I mean we Catholics—rejoiced at this turn. My congregation are on the tip-toe of expectation to see the new Catholic laird. They'll have that treat on Sunday, won't they? We're by far the nearest church, and though of course there's no Mulcaskie pew, I'll have a bit of carpet put over a bench (if you don't mind it's being darned), and perhaps a cushion or two?"

"I shall see if I can come," said Adrian growing constrained again. This was a new prospect—that of having to play the Catholic so conspicuously—and not by any means attractive. Still appearances would have to be kept up.

Father Kinghorn was picking at his trousers again, although by this time they were quite innocent of scales.

"Then there's a small matter about the chapel roof," he said tentatively. "I've been expecting the rain to come through from one day to the other. Maybe I'm rather precipitate in mentioning it; but, you see, there are positively nothing but poor people in the parish, and coppers *do* take such a time to grow into twenty pounds; it's about that I should need to make the roof water-tight. There are the Haughnessies, to be sure, but they've been very generous already, seeing how hard up they usually are. They once sold a hunter in order to provide a

baptismal font; but I haven't the face to ask them to sell another for the roof. So it occurred to me that perhaps you——"

He stopped, disconcerted, for Adrian had burst out laughing.

"I begin to understand why you nearly choked over your pudding, Father Kinghorn. Did you not see the notice on the gate, referring to beggars? I was thinking of having it taken down; but in face of this bare-faced assault I shall reconsider my resolve."

Father Kinghorn first looked foolish and then joined in the laugh.

"Well, you see, when you require money and haven't got any, there's nothing like asking for it. I don't believe in too much discretion."

"Quite so, Father; your practical sense argues you a genuine Scotsman."

"Not as practical as I might be, Mr. Belmont. I'm sure I was cross when I arrived, and that wasn't diplomatic, besides being wrong and giving a bad example. But I suppose I was a bit done-up, so perhaps you will forgive me."

"Don't mention it, Father! You're quite an experience."

Adrian, in high good humour, ended by writing a cheque for twenty pounds, and felt very much the *Grand Seigneur* in doing so. This was exactly the sort of thing congenial to his disposition, yet never tasted before to-day.

Father Kinghorn's eyes—once the cheque written—began to shine behind his spectacles in so strange a way while he aired his gratitude and talked of the "fascinations" of his work at Donniebridge, that if Adrian had

not positively known that he had touched nothing but tea since his arrival he would almost have suspected him of being slightly tipsy. The subject of the family pew having come up again, he considered it advisable to damp his ardour by informing him of his impending marriage with a Protestant. This had the desired effect—for a space. But before departure Father Kinghorn appeared to have cheered up again, for he turned on the threshold to say:

"But you'll need the pew, all the same, since the babies will have to sit in it, you see!"

Whereupon he fled, with the cheque in his pocket.

CHAPTER IV.

EXPECTATION.

"FOLWOOD RECTORY,
"*April 22nd.*

"DEAREST ADRIAN,—I had better make a clean breast of it at once: I have been to see your mother.

"I know you talked of taking me to her yourself; but I just could not bear to think of her as a stranger for one day longer than necessary. And the funny thing is that the moment I saw her I knew somehow that she never *had* been a stranger; and she seemed to think the same about me. If I was a theosophist I suppose I should believe in some previous incarnation, in which we had met, for, positively, we seemed to *recognise* each other. I can't express it otherwise. I did not dare to stop long—barely half an hour—and yet within that half hour, we became friends for life—we really did. When I remarked this to her, she smiled so radiantly and said:

"'Oh no, that would be much too short. We must be friends for good and all,' I did not know whether to laugh or cry about it, for a friendship measured by *her* length of life might indeed prove short, as you have yourself told me, and as I can, alas, see for myself. I am so glad I am approved of. I was afraid she might be troubled by the religious question; but when I tried to talk of it, she just stopped my mouth, and said she knew that it would be all right, since, of course, God knew best. It is such a comfort to find her so *broad*, and not worrying about dogmas and things of that sort. I know you won't mind my saying that breadth is not the usual characteristic of your Church.

"She was lying in her bedroom that day, being more tired than usual; and I suppose I must have looked rather curiously at the picture hanging above her bed, for she said quite unexpectedly: 'We call that the *Mater Dolorosa*. She is very useful to mothers.' And then, Adrian, she told me about the children she had lost. I never knew that you had had brothers and sisters, and it gave me so strange a sense of personal bereavement. While your mother spoke—only a few words—her face seemed to grow furrowed and stricken, like the face of the picture on the wall, and almost as beautiful. I was obliged to kiss her; and then I went away, for fear of being obliged to cry."

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"35, MAPLE STREET,
"*April 22nd.*

"MY DEAR BOY,—*She* came to me yesterday, and I know now what I have really known all along: that she is the right person. I wonder if it is too vulgar to say that we took to each other like ducks to the water."

* * * * *

For a few moments longer, Adrian sat still beside the breakfast-table, with a letter in each hand, smiling at them alternately, though longest at that in his right, then rose to move quickly towards the study. Before plunging into the manifold business of the day he must despatch his daily message of love and yearning. And his mother too must have a line. Did she not deserve it for so rightly appreciating Lucy?

Opening the door of the study, Adrian was met by the sight of a long back bent assiduously over something at the far end of the room, presently to reveal itself as belonging to Macpherson, the gardener. It was the monumental paper-basket beside the writing-table which was occupying his attention, and in which he had been calmly foraging.

"Macpherson!" exclaimed Adrian, with a note of indignation in his voice; for although within these last few days he had had ample opportunity for observing that the "Walrus" was a privileged individual, this intrusion into his privacy seemed to transcend bounds. "What on earth are you doing here?"

"What it has aye bin my habit to do," said Macpherson, as, leisurely, he straightened himself; "lookin' for proper bits o' paper, to be sure. But I ha'ent fund any worrth the takin'," he added disapprovingly. "Ye shouldn't crumple up them ainvelopes that way, but smooth them out fine, same as maister used to do."

"And did he give you the run of the paper-basket?" asked Adrian, indignation melting into amusement.

"I shud raither think he did. Whom else shud he give it to? Them indoor sairvants had to look elsewhere for the lightin' o' their fires, for they had strict orders ne'er to lay fingers on this here."

"But what on earth do you want paper for in the garden?"

From out of the corners of his pale-blue eyes Macpherson cast upon his master a look of pity, tempered by indulgence.

"Well it is to be kenned that ye have not the gairdenin' mind, else ye cud ne'er hae put that question. As though a right-minded gairdener cud ever hae too much o' paper! What do ye suppose I lay upon the tool-house shelves? And what do ye fancy I do up the young shoots wi'? And wherre shud I put all the floo'er seeds in but them ainvelopes when thei're properly treated? Wud ye hae me buy paper sacks for them all? I'm no for stingin' in the gairdenin' budget, as ye ken, but I'm for bein' frugal in them small things."

"I see," said Adrian, grave as a judge.

"I'd forgotten to ask ye to put the newspapers in here instead of leavin' them aboot; there's plenty of room, as ye see. They're good for the shelves; and the cataloog pages do nicely for the shoots—the last year's cataloogs, mind ye—I've got a fine store at the cottage. And I'll trouble ye to mind aboot the ainvelopes."

"All right," said Adrian quite meekly.

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It has been said that expectation is the best part of life—or the worst; that nothing proves as delightful as we picture it in advance, nor anything as awful as our fears paint it. The flower never keeps all the promise of the bud, nor does the storm fulfil the threat of the lowering clouds. If this be true, then in the months that now followed, Adrian was tasting the quintessence of existence. They were all one long preparation for Lucy, one great getting ready for what could surely not fail to be a life

of unalloyed happiness. Trips to England, whence he brought back new fuel of impatience, and a quickened eagerness to fulfil even the smallest of her wishes divined, were the only diversions. Whether he wandered through the rooms, watching the paper-hangers or upholsterers at work, or whether he scoured the park or paced the terraces, on the track of "improvements," it was always in the mental company of Lucy, always spying for her approval, and watching the picture she would make in the framework of the new surroundings.

Thus passed May and June and July as well. Despite his impatience, it had taken as long as that to fit the casket for the treasure. No August had ever been so long in arriving as this one that was to make of Adrian the most fortunate of men.

Within its first week, there came a day which dawned as fairly as most days lately had done—a day not materially different in its arrangements from any of its busy predecessors, to all appearances as harmlessly industrious, bearing upon it no special marks—nothing to betray to Adrian that within the folds of its hours, it bore mysteriously that which was to prove the turning-point of his life. The work both in and out of doors, was approaching completion, as indeed it would need to, considering that this day week was the wedding-day. In Adrian's veins a gentle, delicious fever was beginning to stir, growing hour by hour less gentle, but not for that less delicious. Over and over again was every room visited, every innovation critically inspected. The afternoon was advancing when the garden got its turn. He loved to feast his eyes daily upon the harmonious blaze of colours which ran along the terraces and flashed out of stone niches, like many-tinted bonfires, lit in honour of

the queen, whose advent was looked for. Macpherson was the only person to whom he had not dared to give explicit orders, though he had ventured to make some suggestions—or rather to cause him to suppose that he had made them himself. Amongst these was grafting crimson roses upon the mixed group opposite to the circular stone bench. It had not been hard to find out that this was Lucy's preferred colour for roses, and to act upon the discovery was of course a joy.

Towards the circular bench, then, Adrian now turned his steps, since there he would probably find Macpherson, who had yesterday announced that the conditions for budding roses were "just pairfect." He had something to say to him—not about roses, to-day, but about peacocks, which subject had already become a bone of contention. For it was Macpherson who was responsible for the disappearance of those ornamental, but trying birds, with whom he had lived in warfare for the same reasons that he had done so with the Adrian of long ago. It was after they had scratched up a bed of costly Dutch bulbs that he had obtained their banishment. But Adrian was determined to have peacocks. They belonged to his childish dream, and he had described them to Lucy. They must be here for her reception—part of the necessary decoration. In fact they would be here to-morrow, already, having been surreptitiously ordered. It was to break the news to Macpherson that Adrian had sought him out.

There he was, to be sure, hard at work on the roses, and in his chronic condition of shirt-sleeves, for the "Walrus" was an anything but typical head-gardener, deeply mistrustful of any work but his own, and having indignantly refused Adrian's offer of engaging an "under"

in order to supplement the two lads at present at his disposal.

"Noa, noa, none o' ye're under gairdners for me," he had said on that occasion. "I ken that sort; either they don't worrk, and that means good money thrown awa, or else they have ideas of their ain, and that means that they don't stop *under*. Just leave me them boys; them at least I can whack, and I'll tak a day o' old Nance, noo and then, when the weeds get over pushin."

Macpherson must have been in his most urbane humour to-day—perhaps owing to the favourable conditions for budding—for he received the announcement concerning the peacocks with noble resignation, and without so much as mentioning poison, as he had done on previous occasions.

"I *hae* heard o' peacocks bein' carried off by foxes," was all he pensively observed, as he fastened a sheet of paper over the graft he had just accomplished.

"What are you doing that for?" asked Adrian, thankful for having got off so cheap, and glad of a change of subject. "These bushes look as though they grew paper, instead of roses."

They did indeed. As Adrian glanced about him he could see the rose-branches bristling with paper hoods.

Decidedly Macpherson was in a lenient humour to-day, for instead of making cutting references to the want of the "gairdenin' mind," he proceeded patiently to explain that newly made grafts required to be sheltered from the sun, for fear of shrivelling up.

"Like ladies wearing sun-bonnets, for their complexions," laughed Adrian in the lightness of his heart.

"Ye might say so. I told ye that a deal o' paper goes to the gairden. Ye can never hae too much of it."

"Well, you've got a good store, anyway," said Adrian, with a look towards the tidy heap of both written and printed sheets which Macpherson had deposited upon the stone seat, and which was but a small part of the piles he had seen in the gardener's cottage. Between this day and the one in which he had surprised him in the study he had learned that the "Walrus" was as greedy of paper as some of his compatriots are of whisky.

"All I hope is that the sun-bonnets will be gone before I bring my bride home. They are not particularly ornamental, you know."

"But the roses that are bound to floo'er here next summer will be ornamaintel enoo'," said Macpherson severely.

"Next summer!"

It wanted no more than that to cause Adrian to relax into day-dreams, the readier as the summer afternoon seemed made for dreaming. It was one of those rare moments at which the perennial sea-breeze had lain itself down to rest; and when flowers and foliage, so used to being buffeted, had begun by mistrusting the truce, and ended by drowsing off themselves, to the sound of humming insects. For once the smack of the salt seemed out of the air, smothered in warm flower-scents. For those whose tastes had not been warped by foreign climes the pale Scottish sunshine seemed almost golden, and the tender Scottish sky almost blue.

Still dreamingly Adrian's eyes passed from Macpherson's knotted and yet so deft fingers which he had been abstractedly watching at work, to the blooming beds, one after the other, to return at last, in the appointed moment, to the heap of paper on the seat beside him. On the topmost sheet he saw writing which he

recognised as his uncle's, with which during the last months, and much ordering of papers he had grown familiar. To see it here surprised him for a moment; but only until he remembered Macpherson's habits. Doubtless this had come out of the old stores. This here was a sheet of foolscap apparently intact, only slightly crumpled, and showing signs of having been carefully smoothed out. Mechanically Adrian put out his hand towards it, and mechanically began to read, not conscious of any special interest or curiosity—just because it seemed a natural thing to do.

"This is my last Will and Testament."

There, with a sudden stiffening of all his attitude, physical as well as mental, Adrian stopped short. For the fragment of a moment it seemed as though his breath had stopped too. As soon as he had recovered it he went on reading; but this time there was a noise in his head, distinct from the hum of the insects, and which grew with each word. In time—it seemed an absurdly long time—he came to the signature: "James Belmont." Next his perplexed eye floundered onto the date: "May 16th 19—." That was almost two years before Uncle James's death.

When he had done, he remained for a moment, stiffly immovable, aware of feeling almost physically sick.

"Where did you get this?" he presently asked, sharply and precipitately, of Macpherson.

The tone was so peculiar that the old man turned round in surprise.

"Surr?" he enquired, having first to remove from between his lips the length of twine he was holding in readiness.

"This paper, where did you find it? How do you come by it?"

"Yon paper ye're holding? Same as the others—from oot o' the paper-box. Ye mind that maister——"

"Have you read it?" asked Adrian, still precipitately, not yet quite in possession of his senses.

Across the top of a rose-bush Macpherson gave him one of his loftiest looks.

"I thocht I had explained to ye that the circumstainces of my upbringin'——"

"To be sure. I had forgotten."

Then after a moment:

"Since when have you had this in your possession?"

A grim smile dug two perpendicular lines in the shadow of the drooping whiskers.

"Even granted I had bin to school, do ye suppose I wud mak' a list of the different days on which I picked up the different bits? Maybe this is one I had oot at the last clearin', after maister was took bad; I mind thinkin' it as well to mak' sure o' what was in the paper-box afore any new folk got into the hoose; or maybe I've had it for a year or more. It's not the date I go by in choosin' them pieces, but the qualitie; and to-day I've picked oot the sheets that seemed likely to mak' guid hoods."

"I see," said Adrian vaguely, and got up with the sheet still in his hand; and, without further remark, walked away, leaving Macpherson shaking his head after him, chiefly in regret at the good "hood" that was being thus wilfully wasted.

CHAPTER V.

WASTE PAPER?

"THIS is my last Will and Testament, by which I declare, that, being of sound mind and in possession of bodily health, I choose to dispose of my property as follows:

"The estate of Mulcaskie, including its entire outfit and furniture, together with all my invested property, I bequeath herewith to my nephew, Adrian Belmont, to have and to hold at his pleasure, and subject only to the following condition:

"That he solemnly foreswear the pernicious errors of the Roman Church into whose nets my brother Ernest—to my sorrow and scandal of the soul—allowed himself to be drawn through the medium of his unhappy wife, fallen into the hands of crafty priests—and return forthwith to the fold of the Established Church.

"In the case of the young man in question being blind enough to his interests both in this world and the next, to refuse this condition, I direct that the estate, as named above, and all other property go over his head to Philip Warden, the only son of my late cousin, Helen Warden."

* * * * *

Such was the main purport of the document which

Adrian, having reached his study and shut himself in there, sat down at the writing-table deliberately to reperuse.

When he had done reading, he looked hard at the opposite wall and remarked aloud, as though to get a better hold upon the fact:

"Waste paper, of course!"

After a short pause he repeated the words a little more defiantly, and with a touch of irritation which surely was uncalled for, seeing that the wall had attempted no contradiction. How should it? This thing had, avowedly, come out of the paper-basket, which meant, of course, that it had been condemned to destruction. To be sure it was not actually destroyed, scarcely even creased, and showing not a single tear. To put it into the fire would have been much more effectual. This was an oddly off-hand way of disposing of a document—even a disqualified one; but then Uncle James had been an oddity. He knew that Macpherson could not read; and, gardening maniac that he was, he may have seen in the sheet of foolscap a desirable "hood" quite as plainly as Macpherson himself. Or was it possible—just barely possible—that the gardener had exceeded his licence, that the sheet had never been in the paper-box at all, but purloined from the adjoining writing-table? From what he had already seen of the audacity of Macpherson's methods it seemed almost conceivable to Adrian. This might mean that the will was no waste paper, but actually valid. But, if so, surely Uncle James would have missed it, if necessary replaced it?

* * * * *

Legal aspect? Yes, of course there must be a legal aspect of the case. Leaning back in his chair and with his hand sweeping nervously over his forehead, Adrian

attempted to puzzle out the matter. He had never studied law, and could only form guesses as to how the thing would strike a lawyer. Could a will found among waste paper be acted upon? In order to lay the spectre which this suggestion raised—he was sure it could be no more than a spectre—he would have to produce the will. And that stone once set a-rolling, where would it stop?

* * * * *

Perhaps, after all, it was wiser to face the bare possibility of the validity, and get quite clear as to what that might imply. In first line the loss of Mulcaskie, which included the greater loss of Lucy—at any rate for years to come; the return to the conditions which had existed on the day he had discovered her in the Rectory tool-shed. And Philip Warden in his place!

Pushing back his chair with an impatient movement Adrian walked to the open window, almost gasping for breath. Over the distant glimpse of sea visible beyond the thin line of wood which bound the grass-land, the sun was preparing to set. The streak of water which all day long had been of a faint, uniform blue, was beginning to glow with as manifold colours as a painter's palette, while the great lighthouse rock which stood out to sea, was turning from grey granite to what appeared to be rose-coloured marble. The very beauty of the sight helped to make the spectre of renunciation loom more terrifyingly.

"No, I cannot give it up—and Lucy far less,"—he said again aloud.

* * * * *

Once more he was at the writing-table, once more reading through the problematical will. No, he was not dispossessed. On the contrary, he was put into full

possession—conditionally. All this time he had been taking for granted that the condition was unfulfillable. Hence the sick feeling which had overcome him in the garden. Now quite suddenly it had struck him that he held his fate in his own hands, that all depended upon himself. Looked at soberly and closely the impossibility showed signs of melting.

* * * * *

A change of Faith!

It had a tremendous sound, even to his ears. But was it really much more than just a sound? Lucy had said that all depended on one's being "true to one's convictions." But he had answered: "So long as they *are* convictions."

He knew that for him they were no longer so; had known it for some time. The consciousness had troubled him, had given him a homeless feeling, a feeling of being adrift in the moral world; but in this moment it brought relief. There could be no disloyalty in abandoning a faith which he could no longer honestly hold. He began to feel vividly, almost feverishly grateful to Captain Mellish, the eloquent speaker of the mess-table, and the original cause of his religious collapse, just as one might feel grateful to the accident which has loosened a bad tooth, and thus rendered its extraction almost painless.

* * * * *

What an enormous simplification of his position in every way, if he could share Lucy's faith—no, not her faith exactly, since that would mean accepting the Christian Revelation—but if he could at least outwardly conform to the demands of her Church, which, thank heavens, were so conveniently facile, so much less narrow, than the puerile restrictions of his own. And the outward label

could not matter, from the moment he had decided to become an Agnostic,—not an Atheist. Even now Atheism seemed unreachable. Agnosticism, which affirms nothing and denies nothing, was really the only attitude of mind for a reasonable being.

* * * * *

The opinion of the world? He need not trouble about that. And, besides, considering that he was marrying a Protestant—people were not likely to be greatly surprised at his change—he shrank from the word "apostasy."

And Lucy herself? Surely she would rejoice. But he would not like her to know the immediate cause. She might misunderstand; for she took these things so seriously, —"God bless her!" said the budding agnostic, with genuine tears in his eyes.

* * * * *

Yes, the matter was quite simple, except for one thing—his mother. There stood an obstacle not to be overcome. To break her heart by his—change—was a thing which could not come within the range of practical politics. So long as she remained above ground his project must hang in abeyance; but that probably meant no more than a delay of a few months—alas!

* * * * *

It had not been in an hour, nor yet in two that Adrian had reached this point in his reasonings. With only the break of a solitary and hasty dinner, he had spent first the evening and then the night within the walls of the study, fighting the first pitched battle of his life, of which the battlefield was his own soul. Besides the thought of his mother there was something else troubling him: the memory of his father, and in particular of the last words he had heard from him.

"Whatever happens, always do the straight thing, my boy!" the grey-haired colonel had, with his last labouring breath, said to the son who had become almost a stranger to him. "It's sure to come right in the end."

To produce the will and leave the rest to Providence would probably be what his father would call the "straight thing"—what he would have done himself under the circumstances. But that was all very well for people who believed in Providence. In his own case it would be illogical, and might lead to endless complications—might very likely place him between the dreadful alternatives of virtually killing his mother with grief, or of renouncing Lucy. And one appeared exactly as impossible as the other. Fancy the anguished look in the eyes of his stricken mother! Fancy having to wait for years for that which he almost held within his grasp, which he would hold within his grasp before a week was passed!

* * * * *

Since, then, he was determined not to produce the will, what else should he do with it? Lock it away? With what earthly object? And wherefore take the risk? However carefully he concealed it there was no counting with accidents. It might fall into Lucy's hands, for instance; and exactly Lucy ought never to know of this. Though the case was clear to his own mind he had an uncomfortable suspicion that she would not approve, that her ideas concerning "straight things" would prove identical with those of his father. No, the only sensible—and safe—thing to do would be to destroy this piece of paper, just as in all probability Uncle James had intended to destroy it. Even though it was not proved to be waste paper, he was doing no wrong—not in any way defrauding Philip Warden—since by this time he was quite resolved to

make everything safe by fulfilling the condition. It was only a question of time. The pact made with conscience appeared perfect at all points.

* * * * *

Yes; the mists of doubt had rolled off, but the heaven of his happiness was no longer as spotless as it had been until yesterday. How blithely, how lightheartedly he had left this same room only a few hours ago, in search of Macpherson, and—with nothing worse than the question of the peacocks weighing on his mind! And now he was already beginning to hate the walls between which he had been waging the struggle!

"Of course it was too perfect to last!" he groaned in spirit. "Something *had* to happen!"

And to think that if he had reached the circular seat only ten minutes later the fatal piece of paper would already have been converted into a "hood," and been rendered illegible by the next shower of rain! What a diabolical thing was chance, to be sure!—or were those people right who declared that no such thing as chance existed?

* * * * *

Macpherson's greed of paper! How harmless and how entertaining it had seemed to him! Now he knew it to be but part of a big plot for his own entanglement.

He was walking up and down the room just then, and stopped beside the massive paper-box, to frown down at it vindictively. It was out of there that the sheet of foolscap had come.

"I always said that it looked like a coffin!" he muttered to himself. To his eyes it looked like the coffin, if not of his happiness, yet of his peace of mind.

* * * * *

The matches—where were they? Why should his hand shake as he struck one? Was he not carrying out his uncle's intentions?

With his arm upon the mantelpiece and his forehead against it, he watched the paper curl up like a live thing, before falling into ashes. Then his hard-set teeth relaxed, and, walking to the window, he pulled up the blind.

Already the sky was growing transparent with the reflected light of dawn. The night was ended, and so was the battle, in which love, ambition, every earthly passion, had fought on one side, while on the other, the only troops fit to grapple with such forces had not been called in to succour.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TURNING-POINT.

"ADRIAN?"

"Yes, dearest?"

"Do you think it can be *right* to be as happy as I am feeling—and you too, I hope?" with a glance to match the spirit of the question.

"You little Puritan!" was all Adrian said; while what he did was to lift Lucy's slender fingers to his lips, foreign fashion, picked up perhaps during their brief continental trip.

It was on a fair September evening that he was bringing home his bride—an evening mercifully favourable to the stability of the flower-arches and to the display of the fire-works which for a week past had been exercising the minds of local organisers. True, the former were a trifle towzled by late encounters with equinoctial gales, which

—barely in time—had ceased from buffeting; but, for all that, they made a brave appearance. Nor did the wide sweeps of grass-land and of pale-blue sky, with the scarlet of ripening berries studding the hedges, and the gold of withering ferns fretting the banks, cut too poor a figure even beside the memory of Swiss lake and mountain, among which the honeymoon had been spent.

To Adrian those weeks had been one long rapture. From their first hour to their last he had been intensely, almost feverishly happy. The one thing that, in fleeting moments of reflection, astonished him was, that this happiness should be conscious, inasmuch as he was aware of a determination to hold it fast. A quite superfluous resolve, surely; since how could he be otherwise than supremely happy? Lucy in daily intimacy was all and more than fancy had painted her; and this intimacy was to be life-long. Whence then this sub-conscious anxiety to make the most of the present time?—this equally sub-conscious resolve to keep at bay every thought which could ruffle ever so slightly the ocean of his present bliss?

Yet he had kept it at bay successfully all through the honeymoon weeks, and through the days spent in London for the sake of his mother. It was only as they turned into the gates of Mulcaskie that that threatening something cast its first shadow upon him. But the sudden silence he had fallen into could not last. Beside him Lucy, eager as a child, was asking questions and uttering exclamations in a voice whose mere sound sufficed to chase off the cloud; for Lucy belonged to that rare class of people who are not afraid of looking too pleased at things obviously intended to please them. It was impossible not to smile at her delight in the arches and the cheering tenants. But at the same time it was strange

that Adrian's own delight in this display should not be greater. He remembered looking forward to this moment as to the apex of his good-fortune; yet now he actually caught himself wishing that it was well over, and he relieved of the necessity of bowing and smiling. How much better Lucy did that sort of thing! She did not seem in the least to mind being stared at, whereas some of the eyes touched him as rude and the cheering a trifle too loud.

He was almost glad to reach the shelter of the house, and to be taking Lucy round the regenerated rooms. This was another moment which he had dreamt of, and this one came up to his expectations—very nearly—if not quite. Lucy's face, as she went from room to room, discovering in almost each some wish of her own fulfilled, some suggestion acted upon, was in itself so great an incentive to happiness, that if anything was awanting to Adrian's perfect bliss it could only be from the fact already noted that nothing in this world ever does come up to expectations.

"And now for the garden, Adrian! I could not possibly sleep without having seen the terraces and been introduced to the Roman Emperors."

He led her out, smiling, onto the topmost terrace, and immediately she clapped her hands at the sight of two peacocks.

"Ah! you have forgotten nothing! I was wondering whether there were peacocks now. And where is the circular bench with the circular hedge behind it which you wrote to me about? I've got a picture of it in my mind, and I want to compare it with the original."

"Oh, that is down on the lowest terrace, and it's getting rather late. Let's leave it for to-morrow."

"Are you determined to spoil my sleep?" asked Lucy,

charmingly obdurate. "I tell you that my mind wants putting at rest."

"This way, then!" said Adrian, conscious of a queer reluctance to visiting the spot, and conscious at the same time of its absurdity.

"Ah, crimson roses! Another of my fads!" exclaimed Lucy as they turned the corner of the walk. "What a splendid show! But what has happened to the other bushes?"

"They were not crimson, and so I abandoned them to Macpherson's knife, since unluckily he has not learned the secret of painting white roses red, as the Queen of Heart's gardeners do. Next summer they will all be crimson."

"Adrian, you are spoiling me. And—yes, the picture in my mind was almost right—except for the roses, which I could not know about."

While they sat upon the stone seat Lucy looked about her.

"So it was here the old priest you told me about, used to argue with your uncle! I am sure you are right in saying that we owe him a debt of gratitude. What a pity we can't thank him! Is he really quite out of his mind?"

"So I believe. Softening of the brain, so far as I understand. But it is getting cool, Lucy. You should not sit longer on this cold seat, and without a wrap!"

"Just one moment, Adrian! It's such a delicious spot. You must gather me one of those crimson roses for my belt, and another for your buttonhole. Let them be the badge of this day!"

Somewhat hastily Adrian rose, and a moment later jerked his handkerchief out of his pocket, for in his hurry to be gone from the spot, he had pricked his finger rather badly upon a thorn.

"What is it, Adrian?"

"Oh, nothing whatever!"

"No, of course a thorn-prick is nothing, and every proper rose has got its thorns; but why are you trying to hide it from me? It's my business now to attend to your wounds, sir! And you have no right to deprive me of it. Besides my handkerchief will make a far better bandage than yours."

Having deftly wrapped the thin cambric around the bleeding finger and fastened the rose in his buttonhole, Lucy, suddenly grave, lifted her face to his.

"Kiss me, Adrian! This seems to me the *real* beginning, more even than our wedding-day. I want you to promise me that you will never hide anything from me —not the tiniest scratch, not the tiniest sorrow—but let me share it all with you!"

Adrian felt himself start, and wondered that it should escape her.

"What makes you talk of hiding, Lucy?"

"I don't know. That stupid thorn, perhaps. But promise me!"

"Anything you like, of course I promise anything you like!" said Adrian, stopping to close her mouth with a rather precipitate kiss.

Some hours later—it was after the dainty *tête-à-tête* dinner, during which Adrian's spirits had risen to their highest honeymoon heights, and after a rapturous evening spent in re-examining the drawing-rooms, whose walls for the first time echoed to Lucy's sweet-toned mezzo-soprano —the young wife had a surprise, quite a small surprise, but one which, looked back upon in the light of later events, seemed like a turning-point.

Adrian had gone to the study to fetch a book, as he

said, for taking upstairs with him; and Lucy, who had a fancy for mounting the broad staircase upon his arm, had waited, first five minutes and then ten, and then, growing impatient, had crossed the hall. Softly she opened the study door, and with a tenderly shy smile upon her lips, peeped in—then stood disconcerted. The room was unlighted, save for one gas-jet beside the fireplace, and, fully visible in this spot of light, stood Adrian, with his arm against the mantelpiece and his forehead on it; staring hard into the dying embers of the grate, as though in search of something. But it was the look on his face which puzzled her, so strangely preoccupied, so completely different from the face she had seen at dinner. As in a flash she now remembered that once or twice during the honeymoon a shadow of some sort had seemed to flit through his love-stricken eyes, so slight and gone so quickly that, but for seeing it again to-day, darker and more unmistakable, she might not even have remembered it. Evidently he was unhappy about his mother. It could only be that, since he had no reason whatever to be unhappy about anything else. No doubt she had looked very frail when they had left her yesterday, and she had noticed that Adrian was extraordinarily moved while taking leave of her.

Should she enter the room? Was it not her right to comfort him, quite as truly as to bind up his wounded finger?

For a moment longer, Lucy hesitated at the open door; then, drawing back, closed it noiselessly. One of those intuitions which are more reliable than reason had told her that at this moment even her presence would be an intrusion.

CHAPTER VII.

MADONNAS.

"SHOULD we not be beginning to return calls?" asked Lucy, some two weeks or so after the establishment at Mulcaskie.

"The very suggestion I have been daily dreading!" laughed Adrian.

Upon which lists were made and combinations discussed, in which the ecclesiastical looking coachman, as an expert in distances and localities, was granted the casting vote.

That same afternoon there commenced a pilgrimage which was to fill up the best part of a fortnight, for Mulcaskie was rich in "neighbourhoods," and the neighbours themselves had been far too thankful to have acquired a normal young couple, instead of a recluse, useless for all social purposes, to have delayed the preliminary inspection by even one unnecessary day. For many afternoons past the goggle-eyed butler had been forced to interrupt his *siesta* in the pantry in order to attend to the door, a thing—of late years—without precedent.

"I only trust that I shall not make a hash of them," said Lucy as they set forth. "The names I've got down all right, and I've a tolerable memory for faces, but I can't guarantee always fitting them rightly together. There

was a lady in a white hat who had just bought a motor-car, and another in a brown bonnet whose daughter had just had her first baby. They will both expect enquiries, of course; and, without their bonnets, I am not quite sure of knowing them apart. Just fancy, if I asked whether she was doing well, and got an answer: "Oh, thank you, about sixty miles an hour!"

Neither that day nor the next brought any sensational discoveries in the social line. However picturesque the outside features, the country-house interiors showed a despairing family likeness, down to the very consistency of the buttered scones at tea. There were old ladies and young ladies, stout ladies and thin ladies, well-dressed and badly dressed ones (these latter an overwhelming majority) sitting in drawing-rooms of various degrees of luxury, whose windows looked out on parks of various degrees of splendour, and who, seconded by well-intentioned but mostly sheepish husbands and sons, valiantly attempted to make small-talk with the new-comers. Mulcaskie was *such* a sweet place, was it not? and so *very* Scotch. Mrs. Belmont must see a great difference between this and England. The climate a little rough perhaps, but *so* healthy. Had she noticed the smell of tar? You never seemed to get away from it, somehow. And that terraced garden was so particularly favourable for the laying out of beds. Was Mrs. Belmont fond of gardening? Where did she get her seeds from? Perhaps she would care to take a look at the hot-houses? Or would she have another cup of tea first?

During which time Adrian was occupied in exchanging with the head of the house equally intellectual remarks concerning the prospects, either of covert shooting or of the current parliamentary bill.

After three afternoons modelled on this pattern, even Lucy, though generally immune from boredom, began to look downcast, while Adrian talked openly of striking work.

But there was compensation coming.

The fourth day of the pilgrimage which was fast becoming a penance brought the much-wanted variety.

The Haughnessies had been amongst those visitors whom the Belmonts had missed; represented so far only by various pieces of cardboard bearing three female and one male name—a father and three daughters, as it appeared. From Father Kinghorn Adrian knew further that they were catholics and generally "hard up," the very people in fact who had sold a hunter in order to provide a baptismal font, which seemed to argue a certain unconventionality in their methods. This also might be gathered from the suggestive smile which in the course of the pilgrimage, had invariably accompanied the mention of the name of Haughnessy. In time this smile came to be very fully explained; for the household was one which, according to taste, might be described as forming either a dark or a bright exception to the typical country-house of this somewhat oppressively respectable neighbourhood. The Irish origin of the Haughnessies of course explained a good deal, including the exuberance of the family spirits, the length of the girls' eyelashes, and the slightly dilapidated look of the large and fine estate. Time had been when behind Colonel Haughnessie's name the magic M. F. H. had stood; but the flood of mortgages closing over his head had washed these away, without however, being able to extinguish the sparkle of his light-grey eye or sensibly diminishing his exercise of horsemanship. Life without hunting was not a thing he had ever taken

into consideration; and despite the decline of the family fortunes, his three large, high-coloured and handsome daughters all hunted with him, and had done so ever since they could sit a pony. It was in the family's favour that they could get their horses cheap, being able to stick onto anything with four legs and a mane, whether saddled or unsaddled. It was assured that Colonel Haughnessy had on one occasion purchased three sound horses for thirty pounds, for the simple reason that no one else could ride them; while to be smiled at serenely from the backs of kicking and bucking ponies, was a quite common experience of the Miss Haughnessies's acquaintances.

None of this Lucy knew; and yet looked round her with interest as they drove along the weedgrown avenue.

"Do you know, Adrian," she observed, pointing to a broken fence. "I am afraid I must be deteriorating, for this almost does me good. All the other places have been so fearfully prosperous. I have a presentiment that I sha'n't be asked here whether I like sea-views and gardening."

The wait at the door was somewhat abnormally long; and ended with the appearance of a dishevelled maid hailing apparently straight from the washtub. In the course of time, Lucy learnt not to be astonished at the appearance of any individual who might answer the door, or even at its not being answered at all, since eras of absolute servantlessness were not unknown at Lippenross Hall.

As unconventional as the reception at the door, was that in the drawing-room, in which the family collected with magical rapidity, and in a pleasing variety of costume, ranging from the shortest of tweed skirts to a long-trained silk gown, slightly frayed at the seams, and which Miss

Haughnessie explained she had been trying on with a view to having her portrait painted by an impecunious artist whom they had lately been patronising. The eldest of the sisters was at once the largest, and would have been the handsomest, but for a disfiguring scar on her upper-lip, the result of a bad hunting fall over a stone wall.

"You don't need to introduce yourself—I know who you are!" was her greeting to Lucy, whose hand she was wringing with excruciating vigour. "And I may tell you at once that you have got a riding-whip for me in your pocket."

"A riding-whip?" repeated Lucy, slightly startled.

"Yes, or the gage for one, anyway. You see, I made a wager with Kitty—for a riding-whip—that you would come to-day. Kitty was beginning to lose hope, for we've been sitting at home for four afternoons, you must know, for fear of missing you; and the horses kicking their feet to pieces in the stables."

"I'm afraid that means that you have been—not blessing us."

"Well, not exclusively. But curiosity was eating us up. You see, you are the first new person who has come to the neighbourhood for centuries; and most of the others are so—so *stodgy*."

"Perhaps you will find me stodgy too?"

Before answering, Mara Haughnessie looked Lucy all over from out of her long-lashed eyes. All three sisters had eyes of a peculiarly luminous grey, fringed by lashes "like brooms," as they themselves described them, and which when cast down—which however, they rarely were, threw a distinct shadow on the richly tinted cheeks.

"I fancy not. What do you think, girls? Shall we find Mrs. Belmont stodgy?"

"The other way round," decided Nelly, who was comparatively the plainest and quietest of the three sisters, although in any other society she would have been remarked as both good-looking and lively.

"*I* think we're going to be no end of friends," pronounced the seventeen year old Kitty, whose eyelashes were perhaps the longest of the family's.

"Clever girl! exactly the conclusion I have come to myself. Ring for the tea, will you, or no, to be sure, you'll have to call for it; there's something wrong with that bell. At last we won't have to eat up all the tea-cakes ourselves," explained Miss Haughnessie to Lucy. I was really beginning to fear for Kitty's digestion, for, you see, we've been having double rations prepared ever since Monday. Ah, here is papa! Papa, come here this minute and talk to Mr. Belmont, for we want Mrs. Belmont all to ourselves."

The pink-and-silver-headed Colonel, who had been having a critical look at the Mulcaskie horses, arrived, smiling his approval at Adrian's good taste in sticking to the old mode of locomotion instead of going in for those stupid motor-cars, whose only object seemed to be to frighten nervous hunters. Close upon his heels came the girl who had opened the door, her dishevelled hair partly hidden under a hastily pinned-on cap, and a tray laden with eatables. Subsequently Lucy got to know that these were not always to be counted on, since Lippenross, like ancient Egypt, had its "fat" and its "thin" times. There might be mountains of food to demolish, or there might, just as likely, not be a piece of bread and butter all round, for things here were apt to move in extremes.

One of the results of not being hampered with an *Ego* is that of having a good deal of attention over for

one's fellow-creatures, and consequently being a good listener. If Lucy listened well it was because what she heard either interested or amused her, because she actually thrilled at the account of the latest equestrian accident, and was genuinely amused at the latest trick of some favourite dog, or by some ingenious toilet contrivance confided to her ear, since long before the mountains of tea-cakes had been levelled, intimacy had ripened to this point.

"And now, what will you see first," demanded Mara. "The stables or our rooms?"

"The stables, of course!" decided Kitty, unable to conceive of any proper-minded person willing to postpone such delectation.

In the stables Lucy's ignorance concerning the "points" of hunters was somewhat crudely unveiled, yet failed to discredit her in the eyes of her new friends.

"It's only want of opportunity," leniently explained Mara; "you'll soon pick it up. And now for our rooms! We've each got our own; it's the only way of keeping our things from getting mixed up. And if we are to be friends you should know what our rooms are like, so as to be able to fancy us in them."

The rooms astonished Lucy in more ways than one. In Mara's she noticed that the jug was badly chipped, and in Kitty's that the wall-paper was positively shouting for renovation, while stray articles of clothing strewn over the furniture were common to them all. Besides this picturesque disorder there was another common feature: in one of the corners a picture or figure of the Madonna, with flowers disposed before it and strings of beads fastened around it. "I suppose that is what they call 'rosaries,'" thought Lucy, staring at the red and brown

and white beads a little shyly, as at some unknown and possibly poisonous sort of fruit. It struck her too that the Madonnas all differed from each other. In Mara's room there was the representation of a grave and sweet Virgin with hands outstretched, whom Miss Haughnessie explained as "Our Lady of good Counsel." "And you can't imagine what good advice she gives me—even about the housekeeping!"

In a niche in Kitty's room stood a figure in white garments, belted with a blue scarf, and eyes raised to Heaven.

"That is the Lourdes Madonna," said Kitty. "I like her best because she has been kind to so many poor devils. If I ever break my leg out hunting I shall expect her to heal it."

The Virgin in Nelly's room sat on a high-backed chair between a lily and a spinning-wheel, with her hands folded in her lap.

"What do you call that one?" asked Lucy a little diffidently.

"The *Mater Admirabilis*. She is my special favourite, because she looks as if she had nothing to do but to listen to my prayers. You see she is done with her spinning."

Lucy held her tongue, disconcerted. Surely this was Mariolatry in full bloom! She felt both shocked and perplexed, shocked at these evidences of something that so closely brushed idolatry, and perplexed by the familiarity of the tone, which yet could not be called irreverent.

"We have Madonnas of all kinds, you see," explained Mara airily, "suitable to all tastes. But we sometimes go to each other's Madonnas, when they seem more appropriate at the moment; and sometimes when we are un-

happy we go to Mummy's own Madonna. She has got one in her room, same as we have."

"In her room? But I understood that your mother——"

"Yes, she has been dead for two years; but we haven't touched a thing in her room, and we only go in there to change the flowers. It was after she left us that we put up these pictures here. One can't do without a Mummy of some sort, can one?"

And Mara smiled confidentially at Lucy, who answered slowly and still perplexed:

"No, I suppose one cannot."

"Shall we show you Mummy's room? But perhaps you would rather not. I'm forgetting that you are not one of us."

"Yes, I should like to see your mother's room," said Lucy after a moment's hesitation.

Within the darkened space, where in a corner a small lamp burned upon an amateurish-looking sort of altar, the group of girls stood still with bent heads and hands that instinctively clasped. It did not require Mara's whisper to tell Lucy the name of the picture above the altar; for as soon as her eyes had got used to the half-light she had recognised the divinely stricken, sublimely anguished face of that *Mater Dolorosa,* whom Mrs. Belmont had described as "useful to mothers."

Outside the room Mara gave further explanations.

"Mummy would never have any other Madonna in her room. I expect it was because of Michael, who died. And also I daresay because of our being rather a handful to manage. You see, strange to say, Mummy didn't ride—in fact she was terrified of horses—and I imagine she had rather bad times of it while we were scouring the country. It was something of a case of a hen with

ducklings. And so I suppose she liked to have another unhappy mother to talk to."

"But how can one talk to a picture or pray to it?" asked Lucy with a flash of indignation.

"Not to the picture, of course, but to the person behind it," eagerly put in Kitty. "You should get Father Kinghorn to explain it to you. Have you not met Father Kinghorn yet?"

"Kitty, you are forgetting!" admonished the elder sister, with a significant frown of her fine black eyebrows. "You know that it was Father Kinghorn himself who said——"

"But there can't be any harm in asking Mrs. Belmont whether she knows him," pouted Kitty; "after all, he's her husband's priest."

"No, I don't know him," said Lucy, unable to gather the drift of the present argument. "He hasn't called."

"Of course he hasn't. He will be shy of doing that now, since, of course, he would be suspected of wanting to convert you. But I'm sure he's burning to come."

"Kitty!" said Mara again, in the same tone and with a yet severer frown, which produced, however, no conspicuous result.

* * * * *

That same evening, out of the innocence of her heart, Lucy made a suggestion to her husband.

"Adrian, ought we not to ask Father Kinghorn to dinner? I fancy he has scruples about calling; and, after all, he is *your* priest."

Adrian had been deep in the evening paper at the moment; he now dropped it with a rustle, and stared across at Lucy with eyes whose startled expression astonished her not a little.

"Father Kinghorn? What an idea! I'm sure he never dines out. He is far too busy. And besides——"

"Besides what?"

"He is scarcely presentable. His boots are simply indescribable, and he wears India-rubber collars."

"Well, of course, that's bad; but I fancy I could train myself to it, if it's the only objection."

"But it isn't. You haven't seen the man. I'm sure he would think us mad if we asked him to dinner. I don't believe he even has a dinner every day; and I know that he hasn't got a dinner-hour—he told me so himself."

"No dinner-hour!"

Lucy repeated the words in a slightly bewildered tone. Her mind was by no means narrow, but some of the ideas which custom had grafted upon it were almost necessarily so. In this moment she was aware of feeling somewhat scandalised. It was difficult to imagine any respectable establishment without a fixed dinner-hour. At Folwood Rectory it had been held almost sacred. A dinner-hour seemed the very foundation-stone of social decency. Decidedly this was far worse than the India-rubber collar.

And at the same time, while one part of Lucy's mind was undergoing this moral shock, another part was wondering at the tone in which Adrian spoke. She had always imagined that Catholics revered their priests so deeply. But there was no reverence in Adrian's tone; rather something like mockery.

"Who has been speaking to you of Father Kinghorn?" he enquired now with a touch of irritation.

"The Haughnessie girls. They said he was shy of coming here."

"I should think so. That speaks for his discrimina-

tion. Was it the Haughnessies who suggested your asking him to dinner?"

"No; that was my own idea. They merely asked whether I knew him."

"Those girls are awful bigots, from what I hear," said Adrian abruptly.

Lucy looked at him with renewed surprise. It was after a moment that she said:

"They seem to be very sincere in their beliefs, at any rate. They showed me the different Madonnas in their rooms, and they all had fresh flowers before them. I could not help being touched; especially by the one in their 'Mummy's' room. Do you know, Adrian, that it is the same picture that your mother—that *our* mother has above her bed."

Adrian moved restlessly in his chair, and again rustled his paper.

"That sort of thing is very easily overdone. I don't care for that picture-cult."

"It is a thing quite beyond me, of course. But I suppose if you have been brought up to it——. I wish you would explain the matter to me a little. I shouldn't like to have to think of you as an idolater, you know," added Lucy with a tenderly malicious smile.

Within the same moment the smile died away, for Adrian's answer came with uncalled for vehemence.

"I am no good at explanations. Let us drop the subject!"

It was only on meeting her astonished gaze that he appeared to recollect himself.

"I'm out of sorts, Lucy. What can you expect of me after four days of afternoon calls. We can talk of this some other time; but meanwhile what I require is a rattling strong cigar."

He left the room with a smile on his lips, but it was not a natural smile, and Lucy almost guessed that it changed to a grimace behind the door.

For a space she sat gazing at that door, her eyes full of a wonder that was touched with pain. In the Adrian of the last few minutes she had scarcely recognised the one who had wooed her. Had he some special cause of irritation, or was this one of the inevitable surprises—the discoveries of matrimony? What was that Mrs. Brinsley had said when long and short engagements had been discussed? "You never know a man really until you have married him."

In this moment it almost seemed to Lucy as if Mrs. Brinsley was right, and that she had actually married a stranger.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

FATHER GREYSON.

In a dreadful little sitting-room, whose dreary stretches of horse-hair—that imperishable favourite of Scotch "frugality"—of drab-coloured walls and badly starched curtains, were relieved only by a few glaring oleographs of exclusively sacred character, and by one plaster figure in a red cloak and with a realistically bleeding heart exposed, two men were talking earnestly one fair August morning. One of them was Father Kinghorn, still in his *soutane* and hastily swallowing his breakfast—a cup of tea which, to judge from its complexion, might have been an infusion of new-mown hay, and an egg, which, having opened, he sniffed at enquiringly, and then attempted to shove behind the tea-pot, unobserved. But nothing ever escaped Dr. Pollett's notice.

"Stinks, of course? I can smell it from here. Why don't you ring for another?"

Father Kinghorn blinked his weak eyes behind his spectacles.

"I'm not quite sure that there is another in the house; and if there is, and if it happens to be fresh, we'll need it for Father Greyson."

In reply Dr. Pollett rose from his slippery chair and rang the bell beside the mantelpiece.

"Mrs. Williams," he said to the hag whose bony profile presently appeared in the door-chink, heralded by a great dragging of slippers, "this egg is bad. Will you please to boil another with the least possible delay, and likewise to remove this one, which is infecting the air."

Then when the door had closed again upon an obviously amazed old woman:

"That's the way to treat 'em; and that's the way to treat *you*. The only rational method with people who seem to have set their minds on running their bodies down—for the sake of a problematical soul, forsooth! And so damnably short-sighted too! How do you expect to get through your work without putting fuel into the engine?"

"What else am I doing but putting in fuel?" grinned Father Kinghorn, while he munched his dry bread. "And, besides, a full stomach isn't at all a good thing to work upon. But, look here, doctor—don't let's bother about me. *I'm* not your patient, though Father Greyson is. Do go on telling me about that new treatment. Do you really think there is a hope for him there?"

Instantly the severity vanished from the doctor's face, making way for lively interest. It was an eminently ugly, but by no means unsympathetic face, which with its lumpy nose and chin, its bulging cheeks and forehead, resembled nothing so much as a clump of potatoes, or other bulbous growths; its heaviness enlivened only by a pair of small but remarkably wide-awake eyes, as dark and shiny and mobile as might have been two intensely black beetles disporting themselves among the bulbs. At

the priest's last words they had immediately begun to bestir themselves.

"Impossible to say for certain yet; but I consider the thing worth pursuing. You know that from the first I never gave up the case as hopeless. The heart action is too good for that. Personally I have not yet seen a complete recovery from this form of paralysis, but I know of them, and tell you frankly that I would give a year of my life to witness one. There are so many forms of paralysis, you see. But it's no use explaining things to a rhapsodist like you, who cares only for the invisible part of people, and spend your time in sermonising old women and babies."

"As well as old men and the youth of both sexes," mildly interpolated Father Kinghorn.

But Dr. Pollett only waved off the interruption.

"That is why I am determined to leave no stone unturned, no experiment untried which my professional conscience approves of. I am doing what I can to interest some of the big people in the case—have just been writing another letter to the 'Red Lamp.' If I could lure a London specialist down to Donniebridge, that would be a proud day in my life, though not the proudest, I hope. Meanwhile, I must do my little best. I am not quite convinced yet that the *massage* of the spine has been wasted pains. These results are very often posthumous, so to say."

"Do you know," said Father Kinghorn, a little hesitatingly, "it may be an idea of my own, but it has lately almost seemed to me as though he had been looking at his crucifix; looking, I mean, as though he understood what it was."

The doctor glanced mistrustfully at the priest.

"That is exactly the sort of idea *you* would be bound to have. Still, there's no saying. I shall continue the *massage;* but I count more on electricity. The instrument is ordered—to be paid off in rates; and I have subscribed to a new medical paper, whose note is modern among the moderns. There is no saying where we may pick up a hint. A complete cure is perhaps too much to expect, but a certain measure of brain-power may prove retrievable, so long as the centres are not irremediably deteriorated."

"And of speech?" eagerly enquired Father Kinghorn.

"Speech would presumably follow; but all depends upon the exact seat of the evil."

"What a blessing that would be!"

The doctor's bulbous face twitched expressively.

"I'm not quite of your opinion there. For a man of seventy-three to be brought back to life and possibly to bodily pain—not to speak of the terror of death—is not much of a blessing, that I can see. Just now he is practically dead; has therefore nothing more to fear, and nothing to disturb his one remaining enjoyment—that is his meals, since the sense of taste has, obviously, not been destroyed. He is therefore as unconsciously happy as an infant at the breast. I am quite aware that I am setting out to rout this happiness; but I have no scruples in doing so, since it happens in the interest of Science."

"And of his soul. Just think of the mercy of his being able to confess himself before he dies!"

"There you're at it again! Souls aren't my business."

"But they're mine," said Father Kinghorn with such engaging simplicity that this time the doctor's face refrained from twitching.

"Let's have a look at him! But not till you've eaten

that egg. Is it ever coming? Shocking discipline you keep in this household!"

When after another onslaught upon the bell, the egg had been brought, and Father Kinghorn had gulped it down to the tune of severe reprimands touching this unhygienic mode of eating, the priest led the way across a narrow passage and softly opened a door.

This room was larger than the other, but quite as unbeautiful, though not quite so dreary, owing to the fact that most of the furniture of the house had apparently been here concentrated. Tables, foot-stools, and quite superfluous chairs, among them the one shabby but comfortable armchair of the establishment—jostled each other in the obvious effort of creating a homelike atmosphere. There were shelves with books, and even one with such innocuous ornaments as shells and picked specimens of seaweed; while on a massive and long-disused writing-table there stood a jug with a big bunch of fresh flowers. The walls, too, had been made as gay as circumstances permitted; for here Father Kinghorn, at some personal sacrifice, had collected all the most glaring oleographs in his possession, parting even from such favourites as that "Flight into Egypt," in which the lemon-coloured pyramids in the background excited his admiration scarcely less than the portentous length of the sheep's fleece in "The Good Shepherd," by whose side it now hung. Conspicuous by its plainness in the midst of this feast of colour, a large black crucifix hung straight opposite to the bed.

On this bed lay something which could not exactly be described as a man, although it had the form of one; for the empty eyes were enough to tell that no man's soul dwelt there, or if anywhere present within this shell,

had withdrawn to some inner fastness. Neither could they be likened to the eyes of a child, since no normal child gazes with this fixed dullness, nor to those of an animal, since an animal's eyes harmonise with itself, while want of sense in human eyes always strikes with a kind of terror.

But the helplessness was that of a child, dependant for everything upon others—at this moment for its food, which a brisk, brown-faced sister of Charity was administering with a spoon. With the automatic action of a bird's beak the old sunken mouth opened obediently; and although the eyes betrayed nothing, some feeble movement made by the tongue when a drop of boiled milk threatened to escape, seemed to indicate something approaching to relish.

As the two men entered, the dull glance rested on them, only to pass on indifferently, without a spark of recognition.

"Appetite all right, it seems," said Dr. Pollett approvingly. "Eating his breakfast like a good child? Like a better child I wager, than this reverend person here, to whom I recommend you to extend a watchful eye, Sister Monica, as to a suspected suicide candidate."

The brown, wrinkled face between the two white wings took on a look of displeasure.

"Don't talk to me of Father Kinghorn! It's a mere waste of words admonishing him. If I hadn't sent Mrs. Williams after him he'd have gone off without his umbrella yesterday, and a thunderstorm staring him in the face. I'd much rather look after a dozen Father Greysons than one Father Kinghorn, thank you!"

"Umbrellas are no good in a storm," protested Father Kinghorn in self-justification.

"No; particularly when they have holes in them large enough for my fist to go through."

The doctor's features gave an irrepressible twitch.

"You seem in a temper, Sister. Won't you have to mention this in confession?"

Sister Monica's brown face grew dusky, while her large mouth closed decisively.

"Well, well, it's no business of mine; while your patient is. Anything new here? Father Kinghorn pretends that he has been looking at his Crucifix."

Sister Monica put aside the plate and wiped the poor old mouth before replying.

"I had the same idea myself, but I won't trust the impression. He has got to look at something, you know, and the Crucifix is straight opposite; but I don't believe he knows what it means."

"Not yet, perhaps; but in time—who knows? Let me get a bit nearer!"

When pulse and heart had been tested—and various technical questions answered, Dr. Pollett turned once more to Father Kinghorn.

"All as satisfactory as can be expected. Quite in a fit condition for the new treatment. But we must keep up his strength by every means,—in first line by suitable nourishment. Have you a chicken in the house?"

"Not that I know of."

"A grouse would be better still. They have begun to shoot the moors at Mulcaskie. Considering that Mr. Belmont is your parishioner, you shouldn't be in want of grouse; though to be sure, the latest event is likely to stop the driving for a day or two."

"The latest event? Do you mean that——"

"Yes—that's exactly what I mean. Came off last

night, all right. A splendid boy. And she's a splendid mother too, for the matter of that. Positively declined chloroform. Declared it wouldn't feel *real* the other way. So you hadn't heard yet? You're bound to hear from there soon, though, since I hear the brat is to be made a papist,—more's the pity! I've done my part of the business; your turn now to do yours."

"Ah, that's good!" said Father Kinghorn, drawing a deep breath, while he exchanged a look with Sister Monica, whose wrinkled face had abruptly expanded.

"Oh, I see you!" said the doctor with a glance across his shoulder—"grinning at each other at the thought of another soul to be fussed over. And I won't deny that you've scored a point, since to have the catholic succession secured at Mulcaskie must suit your books marvellously. And if I judge the mother right, she'll be loyal to agreements, and not try to lure him over to her side. A trump altogether, don't you agree?"

"I don't know her," said Father Kinghorn, suddenly downcast.

"Don't know her? How's that? Don't you go to Mulcaskie?"

"I have been there—yes—once or twice last year while Mr. Belmont was alone—before his marriage. He was even very generous about the chapel-roof; but since Mrs. Belmont came I—I haven't repeated my visits."

"Excess of discretion"—diagnosed the doctor. "Quite so. Still I wonder Mr. Belmont hasn't encouraged you. Or is he an anti-clerical? I'm told the breed exists even within the fold."

The lumpy face gave another of its expressive twitches. "He doesn't strike one, somehow, as being eaten up with religious zeal."

Father Kinghorn looking distinctly unhappy, stammered something about the distance, and about the obligation of hearing Sunday mass not being binding over a distance of three miles.

"Not even when you have two pairs of carriage-horses at your disposal, and might have a motor if you chose?"

"You can't make rules for all cases" — murmured Father Kinghorn.

"Apparently not. Well, anti-clerical or not, he will have to tolerate you within the walls of Mulcaskie now. What will be the late Mr. Belmont's feelings, I wonder, supposing him to be in the position to witness the ceremony! Eh—what's that, Sister?"

For at that moment, feeling himself gently plucked by the sleeve, Doctor Pollett turned to see Sister Monica beside him, pointing significantly towards the bed. Following her glance he caught his breath sharply. The face upon the pillow had not moved, but it had changed. The eyes fixed upon the doctor's face were no longer vacant; in some mysterious way their emptiness had been filled. The features too, so unresponsive a few minutes ago—showed a sudden strain, an almost painful tension, as though intent upon something fugitive and uncertain.

Upon the doctor's own face the sight produced a corresponding transformation. The whole clump of bulbs twitched as violently as though shaken by an earthquake, while the shining beetles grew obstreperously lively.

"Do you see that?" he asked, gripping Father Kinghorn by the arm. "That's the beginning! Or perhaps the beginning was before. You may have been right after all about the Crucifix. There's brains in those eyes, I tell you—only just stirring, but no longer inert."

"But what has done it?" enquired the bewildered priest.

"Something we said, perhaps. What were we talking about? Ah, Mulcaskie, to be sure! Maybe that name would touch a chord,—none more likely; Mulcaskie and Belmont. One of his chief interests. Let's see whether I am right."

Bending over the bed he asked with laborious distinctness:

"You remember Mr. Belmont, don't you, Father Greyson? Mr. Belmont of Mulcaskie?"

In the wide-open eyes the light flickered up; the sunken mouth worked, the strain of the features grew intenser, then—as the doctor repeated his question, gradually relaxed. By the dullness creeping into the eyes as the mist creeps over the sun, it was clear that the climax of the effort had been reached and passed.

"It is gone!" pronounced Dr. Pollett as he straightened his heavy frame, "but it has been there; and that is enough for me. What has been can come again. If the *massage* has done this what may electricity not do? We shall start next week. Meanwhile keep up his strength well, Sister! We'll win him back yet, I tell you! We'll win him back!"

CHAPTER II.

A REVELATION.

"Ego te baptismo, in nomine Patris, et Filii et Spiritus Sancti. Amen."

From the armchair in which she had been solicitously established, Lucy Belmont, with tremulous interest fol-

lowed the rite which was making a Christian of her first-born. A Christian! Tremendous word, wherein for her lay all the essence of the act she witnessed. Although mother and son might worship in different churches, they would be worshipping the same God. In this thought she took comfort. Let him but hold as loyally to his faith as she trusted always to hold to hers, and all would be well. As she watched the lively little bundle in the arms of Colonel Haughnessie, who was acting as god-father, and, rich in paternal experience, handled it as dexterously as he had ever done a restive hunter, Lucy's eyes shone softly. Then sought Adrian's but could not succeed in meeting them. As she watched him, the smile on her lips died slowly out. Why was he not as happy as she was—not as unmixedly happy, that is to say? Whence this point of preoccupation which in unguarded moments, pierced through the pride of the newly-made father? Not that he was depressed, but that there was in his joy an element of fever which she could not explain. Had his mother noted it? Of course she had. One glance in the direction of the frail figure in the second armchair was enough to tell her this. In the troubled serenity of the large brown eyes hanging upon the face of the one son that had been spared to her out of four children, Lucy read the same question which was passing through her own mind.

The mere fact of having his mother at Mulcaskie ought surely to have furnished happiness enough, apart from the joyous occasion. The unexpected improvement in her condition which had made it possible to move Mrs. Belmont in small stages to Scotland, in order to give her the happiness of holding her grandchild in her arms, was cause for such deep thankfulness that Adrian's original

opposition to the plan could not but astonish Lucy, only that so much, during this past year, had astonished her in Adrian. That impression of having married a stranger, dating from the evening of their first call at Lippenross, had not vanished, but rather increased, under the touch of many small, every-day occurrences. Not that he was less of the lover. She felt as sure of his affection to-day as she had done on the day when they had stood together in the Folwood tool-house, but he was no longer the same man. Was it the preoccupation of riches which had taken the buoyancy out of him? She had heard of the deteriorating effects of sudden turns of fortune. Could this be the cause of his unequal mood? For undoubtedly he had become what is called "moody." And, above all, he had become reticent, to a degree which conflicted sadly with her idea of that full and perfect confidence which should reign between husband and wife. One or two efforts she had made to break down the intangible but unmistakable barrier which she felt growing up between them, but each one had been a failure.

When the possibility of his mother assisting at the baptism had first been mooted it was alarm which Adrian showed, far more than delight.

"It would be madness," he had declared. "She could never stand the journey."

"But Adrian, you see what the doctor says, that, with proper care, the change may even be beneficial. And there is the moral atmosphere to be considered, as well. Just think how she must have prayed for a grandchild, and what happiness it would be to her to see it baptised; not to speak of the happiness to yourself. I am sure you had not dared to hope to welcome your mother to Mulcaskie."

"No, never," said Adrian quickly; "and if it were not for the risk——"

"I think you are exaggerating that. I shall write to the London doctor myself."

In face of the London doctor's reply Adrian had dropped his opposition; but the worried look on his face, instead of vanishing, seemed rather to increase. At the moment of his mother's arrival it was covered up by an almost boisterous but not quite convincing gaiety; and on the morrow already an incident had slightly checked the happiness of this unexpected reunion.

For the morrow was Sunday; and Mrs. Belmont, without asking any questions, seemed to take for granted that Adrian had driven in to Donniebridge for Mass.

"Send him to me when he returns," she had said to Lucy who, late in the forenoon, had been allowed to visit her mother-in-law.

"I can send him to you at once. He is at home."

"Already? I thought Mass was at eleven o'clock."

"So it is; but Adrian has not been into Donniebridge to-day."

Lucy said it with a touch of embarrassment.

"That is out of regard for the coachman, no doubt," remarked Mrs. Belmont after a tiny pause and with a faint smile. But Lucy responded neither to the smile nor to the words; for this was a subject which touched her close. It was not by any means the first time that Adrian's laxity in religious matters had both puzzled and pained her. She would have liked to see him as regular in his attendance at Donniebridge as she herself was in her appearance at the village church, which she attended punctually, although, considering how very different its bare walls looked from the Church in which her ritualis-

tically-inclined father officiated, it was somewhat difficult to feel quite at home.

That Mrs. Belmont read the silence aright could be gathered from the momentary darkening of her eyes. She passed at once to some other remark; and whatever further words were spoken on this subject were presumably spoken in her innermost heart and addressed to quite another person than Lucy. If any difference was visible in her bearing towards her daughter-in-law it lay in an increase of tenderness, perhaps in order to convince her that *she* was not suspected of any sinister influence. Every look and every word addressed to Lucy breathed not only affection, but also a growing confidence which Lucy herself could not explain. At moments, during these days, she would find her mother-in-law's eyes fixed upon her with a prayer in them; and to her fancy it seemed as though it were her son she pleaded for—he that she hoped to get back—at Lucy's hands. And Lucy's heart would contract. How could she give back to the mother that which she was no longer sure of quite possessing?

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Lucy had been rather curious to see Father Kinghorn; of whom she had only had passing glimpses when driving through Donniebridge—glimpses which disclosed him as a not very prepossessing individual in a chronic state of hurry. To-day for the first time she had seen him close enough to take a critical look at his "Roman" collar, which however, in honour of the occasion, was not of india-rubber but of unimpeachable linen. As she watched him now, in his surplice, pronouncing the fateful words, what chiefly astonished her was that the insignificant, red-haired man in spectacles should so successfully escape

the danger of absurdity. Before the ceremony, during the introductions, he had looked triumphant but nervous; from the moment he had donned his surplice he looked only triumphant.

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It was during the luncheon which followed upon the ceremony that the strangeness of Adrian's mood showed itself in a manner which astonished others besides Lucy.

A *partie carrée* sat round the table, all exclusively male; since Adrian, afraid as he said of overfatigue for Lucy, had not included the Haughnessie girls in the invitation to their father, and since both Mrs. Belmont and Lucy had retired, the former, somewhat exhausted, to her room, the latter to her sofa in the boudoir alongside, where, through the open door, she could hear all the louder parts of the conversation. After the servants had left the room it grew unusually loud. Up to then the talk had confined itself chiefly to remarks upon the appearance and future career of the new-born heir—jocular on the part of Colonel Haughnessie, technical on that of Doctor Pollett, exuberant on that of Father Kinghorn—complimentary on the part of all three. But just now the doctor, possibly for the sake of damping the too obviously beaming priest, threw out a remark which was clearly intended as a challenge.

"Oh yes—you've made a Papist of him now," he observed, as he vigorously stowed away neat little squares of Chester cheese; "but you can't keep him that against his will. By the time he is grown up, who knows whether the Vatican will still be standing. Things move so fast nowadays."

Considering that he was the only non-Catholic present,

the doctor's speech might be termed rash, if nothing more; but he always was audacious in his methods, whether of treatment or of argument, besides being universally recognised as a privileged person.

"The Vatican not standing!" exclaimed Colonel Haughnessie, his fork arrested half-way to his mouth, and staring in unfeigned surprise; "I never heard that it was in such bad want of repair!"

Even Father Kinghorn laughed at that, but quickly recovered himself.

"Neither is it in want of repair," he said earnestly. "You're quite right, Colonel. And whatever repair it may need it will get from within."

"Then do you Catholics actually imagine that the world is going to stand still for ever at your bidding?"

"I never said I imagined that," said Adrian suddenly.

The other three looked at him in astonishment, not merely at his words, but likewise at the grimness of the look with which he was spiking preserved ginger upon his fork.

"What do you mean?" blurted out Father Kinghorn.

"I mean that the time must be coming when the Church recognises that she alone is not exempt from the law of Evolution; when she sees the necessity of adapting herself to the age."

"Take care," laughed Doctor Pollett. "If you are a modernist in disguise you had better draw the veil closer, else Father Kinghorn here will be excommunicating you."

"And if he does," said Adrian, with a shrug of his shoulders. There was a pause, during which Colonel Haughnessie, who did not clearly know what a modernist was—only that he was pretty sure that it was not any

new breed of horse—stared bewildered, and at the end of which Father Kinghorn said with an uncertain smile:

"Mr. Belmont means of course that *my* excommunication would be invalid, since I am not the Pope."

"Oh, I mean other things besides," said Adrian with a glance across the table which was clearly provocative, while the flush on his face mounted higher; "for instance that the time is coming when outward forms will be discredited, and when no rational person will be asked to believe that it makes any difference to an Almighty Being —supposing there to be an Almighty Being—in what manner he is worshipped."

"But that is as much as saying that one religion is as good as another!" ejaculated Colonel Haughnessie in tones of horror.

"It looks like it, doesn't it?" laughed Adrian as he tossed off another glass of the champagne in which the hero of the day was being toasted.

Across the table, through his spectacles, Father Kinghorn blinked his eyes at his host, then looked around him, as though for succour. But there was no one there but Colonel Haughnessie, who could indeed be counted upon for loyalty, but not for argument. A revolt in the citadel itself! The freckled-faced priest felt dismayed to the bottom of his soul, which, however was not that of a coward. Although he had no great confidence in his own powers of debate, he had confidence in other things, so hurled himself blindly into the argument.

"It is also as much as saying that revolution was superfluous."

Adrian muttered something which, through the door, Lucy could not catch.

Father Kinghorn continued to speak rather at random, perhaps in order to cover that mutter.

"If the Almighty did not want to be worshipped in a particular way, why should He have sent us so many messages—through Moses, through the Prophets, through His Son? Why should the Apostles have been given any power? And if every form of belief was right, why should Christ have prayed for the Oneness of the Church? Can we really suppose that His prayer has remained unanswered?"

There was another pause, during which Adrian went on eating in sullen silence, while Doctor Pollett's face twitched significantly, and Father Kinghorn, flurried but determined, leaned back in his chair to mop his hot face with his pocket-handkerchief. The presence of the doctor as well as the vicinity of young Mrs. Belmont, which he had not forgotten—although, apparently, her husband had—made this unlooked-for attack all the more distressing.

"If I remember right," said Adrian, after a minute, with a jerk in his voice, "Christ also prayed that His disciples should be kept from evil. Has that prayer been answered? Even without going back to history I think the daily papers settle that point. Have you been following the trial of those Polish monks who robbed the convent treasury and murdered a person or two in the process? That's the newest thing in ecclesiastical scandals that I've heard of; and you know as well as I that it's no isolated fact."

In the glance which he shot towards the priest there was something so vindictive, something so like hatred as to be incomprehensible to the witnesses.

Father Kinghorn grew redder and more flurried.

"I never denied the scandals; of course there have been scandals in the past—and will continue to be, so long as we are human. But—but you must consider that when a Christian—when a priest goes wrong, it is not the fault of the Church's teaching, but exactly because he has stopped following that teaching."

"For the matter of that, wasn't there a Judas among the Apostles?" threw in Doctor Pollett, coming unexpectedly to the rescue, perhaps remorseful for the predicament into which he had got the priest. He was rewarded by a glance of astonished gratitude from Father Kinghorn, so very aware of being apt to forget the right answers in the heat of an argument.

"Don't you think we've had enough theology?" remarked Colonel Haughnessie in a slightly scared voice. "There are so many things to talk of besides my godson's religion. His future seat on horseback, for instance, and on which birthday he ought to get his first pony."

A saving burst of laughter swept "theology" from the air.

All this—or almost all of it—Lucy, through the half-open door, had heard and listened to breathlessly. Much of it seemed to her a revelation. Within these few minutes she had got a glimpse of Adrian's state of mind which told her far more than she had guessed at, though she had guessed something. This revolt against his own form of religion—yes, it bore the character of a revolt—explained that laxity in the observance of his religious duties, which had so troubled her. But there was more than this. One interpolated remark had revealed it to her: "supposing there to be an Almighty Being." Could that mean that he was in doubt as to its existence? It was almost implied. So it was not only his own form of

faith that he was uncertain about, but actually the foundation of all faith. Was this perhaps the reason of the change in him—of his preoccupation? He was struggling with religious doubt. But how could it have been born so suddenly—between his last visit to Folwood and their marriage?—for she felt sure now that, even during the honeymoon, the change had begun.

"Oh, if only he would speak to me openly!" thought Lucy. "Perhaps I could help him."

A moment later she clasped her hands.

"But I am glad his mother did not hear him!"

CHAPTER III.

ANOTHER VIGIL.

ALONE awake in the house, Adrian sat in the study, reviewing the events of the day, to the accompaniment of a well-seasoned cigar. He looked more tired than these events seemed to be quite responsible for. The day itself could scarcely be called fatiguing, and yet had been one long strain. He had dreaded its advent; and now that it was gone, could not look back upon it with any satisfaction.

The pact made within these same four walls, almost a year ago, during another vigil, still stood upright, grimly held to. It's fulfilment was only a question of time. Whether the destroyed Will had or had not a claim to validity, he would make everything safe by formally adopting his wife's faith. That sounded simple enough; and at the time had seemed imminent—a matter of a few months, at most. But there was no denying that

his mother's unexpected rally had complicated the position, by making it necessary to have his son baptised into the very Church which he had determined to abandon. Her unlooked-for preservation, perhaps for years—what unmixed joy it would under other circumstances have been! It was joy now, but no longer unmixed, poisoned by the thought of the false position in which it virtually forced him to remain. Already the feeling of its falseness had given more than one shake to his own intimate self-esteem. Nothing that is conditional can ever fully satisfy; and Adrian had been aware for a year past of living in a conditional state. Thus he had not been able to enjoy his good fortune fully, blithely, without afterthought; without, for instance, thinking of his cousin Philip Warden, with whom he had never been much in touch, but regarding whom scraps of information nevertheless reached him, all showing Philip as beating about in the quagmire of his chronic money-straits. It was impossible not to remember that if Uncle James's Will had been discovered by anyone but himself, Philip could have placed him before the alternative of abandoning his inheritance or of breaking his mother's heart; of which one course was as unthinkable as the other. At moments he was aware of enjoying the goods of fortune over-greedily, almost recklessly, not with the reasonable measure of one whose right stands beyond dispute. At other moments the taste seemed to have gone out of things. He had always yearned after place and power; and now felt irritated against himself for not revelling in what he had attained. Nor could he understand what had become of his political ambition. To stand for Parliament had been one of his dreams; and now, more than once, he caught himself feeling positively glad that no opportunity was

likely to offer for some years. Certainly for many reasons it would be better postponed until after his formal change of religion. Then only would his own position be regularised in his own eyes.

Meanwhile it held him fast—by a thousand chains, among which the merely material ones were not the lightest. The comforts, the ease of his present position, no less than the "salutations in the market-place," the lifting of that continual worry about money which had cramped all his early youth—all these did their part in the forging of those chains. The born *Grand Seigneur* that he was, had at last come to his rights, and could not lightly forego them.

The change contemplated must not appear too abrupt, he told himself; and he had done what he could to prepare the way by being as unconspicuous as possible as a Catholic. For this the first condition was to keep Father Kinghorn at arm's length, which, during the past year, he had successfully done. Inclination alone would have prompted this course; for there was about the red-haired priest something which annoyed him, possibly the sight of what he considered to be his "fussy" kind of zeal. It was impossible to go into Donniebridge without coming upon traces of it, either by meeting Father Kinghorn hurrying to some sick-call, or catching a glimpse of him surrounded by a troup of ragged children, the progeny of the Irish "mill-hands," or else by hearing his voice through the open window of the Catholic school-house, enthusiastically expounding the catechism. Once Adrian had met the priest in a particularly dirty by-way, munching a slice of bread as he trotted through the mud; which seemed to argue that he had not had time to finish the meal which he called his dinner. Another

time he had had with him a passage of arms—the first and the last—on the subject of religious duties.

It had been at Easter that Father Kinghorn, much distressed at the remissness of the new parishioner on whom he had built such extravagant hopes, had ventured somewhat quakingly, yet resolutely, to remind him of the obligations of the season. He had no wish to be indiscreet, he explained, and of course, Mr. Belmont was at liberty to fulfil his Easter duties in the Church of his preference; still he could not help hoping that he would select Donniebridge, if only for the sake of the example given. To which Adrian had freezingly replied that he was obliged for Father Kinghorn's solicitude, but that he preferred to settle his affairs of conscience in his own way —an answer whose ambiguity left Father Kinghorn as wise as he had been before.

Dating from that moment his secret resentment towards the priest had steadily swelled. It was this not quite articulate yet ever-gnawing grudge which had put so much bitterness into his words, and something so like hatred into his glance during the argument at luncheon.

Another thing which vaguely annoyed him was Lucy's growing intimacy with the Haughnessie girls, an intimacy which tended to class him with the open professors of Catholicism. Considering how certain they were to be scandalised by his coming change (even in his own mind he avoided the word "apostasy") it seemed senseless to cultivate a friendship which was bound to go to pieces over it. The choice of Colonel Haughnessie as a godfather had been aggravating, yet under the circumstances, unavoidable, and had helped to heighten the nervous strain culminating in the outbreak at luncheon.

That outbreak had been the mere fruit of irritation,

anything but a calculated move, since at the moment he had forgotten Lucy's vicinity. Yet when he remembered it later he felt no regret. Might not what she had heard help to pave the way? Ere this he had made attempts to prepare her mind for what was coming, unsuccessfully, as he was forced to recognise.

It had been on the occasion of her confiding to him the secret of her motherhood—which she did in her own inimitably natural way, without any touch of that half coquettish coyness, which usually accompanies such avowals —that he had made his first attempt. It had seemed to him eminently the occasion for it.

"It is true, Adrian!" she had said to him radiantly; "I am sure now that it is true. *Our* child is on its way to us!"

Then, when with irresistibly leaping heart, and with a sudden circumspection of movement which made her laugh right through her happy tears, he had embraced her, she had continued, her head upon his breast:

"In one way 'It' will belong to you almost more than to me, since 'It' is to profess your faith; but you will not curtail my part, in all that lies outside this line. I know you will not; and more especially if 'It' was a girl——"

Adrian stooped to kiss her finger-tips carefully, almost reverently.

"Whether boy or girl, Lucy, your part shall not be curtailed. And as for the form of its faith—who knows," there was a tiny pause, during which he reviewed the situation, "who knows whether your creed need separate you."

"You mean when 'It' is grown up, that it may incline to my side? Of course, that is possible."

"Must it necessarily wait till it is grown up? The

more I think of it the more cruel it appears to me to separate mother and child in this matter—to send them to worship in different churches."

"Then you mean——"

"That supposing you insisted on taking 'It' to your own place of worship on Sundays, I would not prove inexorable," said Adrian, smiling a little nervously as he watched her expression. It changed almost in the way he had expected. Her widened eyes betrayed amazement, far more than joy.

"But Adrian, you have *promised!*" she said in accents of such childlike yet grave reproof that he could not but stand rebuked. "You are saying this only to please me, I know; you cannot really mean to break a solemn engagement taken, I know you cannot. And it does not really please me. When our child is grown up it will be free to choose between our two creeds, and if its choice falls on mine I shall of course rejoice, but meanwhile we shall both keep to our engagements, you to yours, and I to mine; else how could we respect ourselves? Oh, I know you did not really mean it!"

Quick to see his mistake, Adrian soothed her with vague assurances. Clearly she was more shocked than rejoiced. He might have known what to expect from her almost excessive sense of loyalty.

From the moment of that talk he had remained increasingly aware of the difficulties of putting his motives before her in an acceptable light. At the mere thought of playing the convinced Protestant his natural sincerity revolted. It was bad enough to have to conceal anything from Lucy, but to play comedy to this extent lay far beyond his powers. The only alternative was to tell her frankly that he had lost all religious belief, but

that for the sake of their son he must profess some form of religion — hers, by preference, which would do away with many practical difficulties. Of course, she would be grieved at discovering him an Agnostic; but again, could she help rejoicing at being able to bring up her child in her own faith, since, once aware of his state of mind, she could no longer hold him bound by the engagement undertaken? Perhaps she would dream of "converting" him.

Let her try! There was no terror in the thought. Never would a more willing convert have bowed his neck.

But meanwhile she must be convinced that his scepticism was quite honest and sincere, which made it seem desirable to strengthen its sincerity. He must have arguments ready wherewith to answer the objections she was sure to make. As yet he had not gone very deeply into the merits of the case; had been content to take them on credit, so to say. The brilliancy and plausibility of the propositions heard had so struck him as to make any delving to their roots seem superfluous. That had done very well so long as he had been a mere *amateur,* so to say, in Agnosticism; but now that he aspired to becoming a professional, he must take what steps were necessary to strengthen his position.

Dr. Pollett, for instance, seemed a person worth cultivating. Evidently a fellow-sceptic. That much Adrian had gathered from the tone of his remarks at luncheon, the first occasion on which he had heard him talk on any but medical subjects. He must try and draw him out, when opportunity offered. Just now he felt a strong desire for society of a particular stamp—of men of his own way of thinking; and an equal disinclination to that of "believers." He was even painfully aware that the

presence of his mother weighed upon him. The question in her great brown eyes asked for no answer, yet oppressed him. Her whole frail form seemed like a monument of reproach. If, for one mad moment, before her coming, he had contemplated the possibility of making the "change" still in her life-time, having seen her again, he knew that he could not do it. The sight of her was at once a delight and a torture. There was not a moment in which he could not have encircled her with his arms, tenderly and protectingly; and yet he was aware that he would not breathe freely until he was delivered from her pathetic presence.

And upon that there followed an unavoidable—a horrible thought:

Would it not only be after having stood beside her grave that he would be able to breathe entirely freely?

He got up, impetuously, as though to shake off the detestable thought, as one might shake off some loathsome reptile. A turn round the big room helped to calm him. In its course he passed beside the massive paper-box, and mechanically stood still. Ah, if only that moot point regarding "waste paper" were satisfactorily settled, how easy everything would be! Very probably that which tormented him was no more than a vain scruple. Was there really no possibility of obtaining certitude on the subject?

It was with this question uppermost in his mind that his latest vigil ended.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BARRIER.

"You are sure you have everything you want, mother?"

"Well, if not everything I *want,* certainly all that you are able to give me—at present."

There was yearning, but not a shadow of bitterness in the faint smile playing around the bloodless lips.

Adrian stooped to resettle the rug in which he had carefully wrapped his mother's legs. All about them the air was being rent by the shrieks of engines, the hiss of boilers, the rattle of luggage-trucks; it was therefore quite permissable to miss a remark, and Adrian preferred to miss the last one.

"Kiss Lucy for me!" she whispered to him, amid the final banging of doors; and as for one moment her frail fingers touched his forehead with a gesture as of benediction, Adrian felt that they were trembling.

A minute later he stood upon the platform of the Caledonian station, gazing after the monster vomiting black smoke which was bearing his mother back to London. But he did not see the monster. What he saw was that last look which had rested on him through the carriage window, and which he was vainly trying to analyse. Pain and anxiety were in it, but dominated by that perennial confidence which he found so hard to explain. This same

confidence had breathed out of her words of farewell on quitting Mulcaskie.

"Take care of him!" she had said to Lucy as she embraced her. "Mind, I leave him to *your* care!"

The emphasis on the pronoun had puzzled him. It seemed almost as though she expected something from Lucy beyond the normal wifely support. But what? Even though her motherly instinct should have divined the fact of his inner trouble, how strange that she should put all her hope on a heretic!

Standing there on the railway platform, Adrian felt queerly oppressed by his mother's confidence. How quickly it would vanish if she knew all! And, oh, what a mercy it would be not to be forced to betray it. But that was only thinkable if——

"Room there!" came the busy cry; and he stepped aside hastily to make way for a luggage-truck.

Shaking off troublesome thoughts, he left the station. He had some business to transact before the evening train which was to take him home. Princes Street lay before him, melting into an opal haze, through which the castle loomed down almost as unreal-looking as a veritable air-castle. Since his establishment in Scotland he had got to love grey, grim, enchanting Edinburgh; but of late Edinburgh's stern beauty—like other things—had ceased to enchant him.

His business transacted, he still found himself with some leisure on his hands; and, presently, walking aimlessly through the streets, came suddenly to a stand-still. This was one of those oppressively respectable Edinburgh streets in which the air seems to be positively thick with undiluted Scottish rectitude, consisting of grey houses, as solid as tombs and about as cheerful of aspect, with

terrifically strong area railings, uncompromising wire blinds, and doors so massive that the hope of seeing one open seems, at first sight, absurdly sanguine. It was upon one of these doors that Adrian's eye had been caught by a dazzlingly furbished brass plate, bearing the inscription:

"MESSRS. CAYLIE & CO.
ATTORNEYS."

At sight of it a resolve was born in Adrian's brain; or rather, a resolve, which had been living there subconsciously for some time past, rose abruptly above the line of consciousness. He knew nothing whatever about Messrs. Caylie & Co.; but exactly for this reason they suited his purpose better than anyone intimately acquainted with his circumstances could have done. Upon an impulse which seemed irresistable he mounted the monumental steps and pulled the bell beside the forbidding door.

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"Mr. Adrian Belmont," read Mr. Caylie senior from off the card which a clerk had brought into the inner office. "Don't know the name. Has he been here before?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"A new client, then. Looks all right, eh?"

"Very much so," said the clerk with emphasis.

"Show him in, by all means."

And Mr. Caylie, who was spare and grey-haired, and quite as respectable and depressing-looking as his habitation, settled himself in his chair in the proper attitude for the occasion.

"Belmont! Belmont!" he repeated, "let me see, a

country family, of course"—(the practice of Caylie & Co. being chiefly a town practice).

The new client was certainly "all right," as Mr. Caylie's experienced eye at once told him—though somewhat constrained in manner. As he took stock of Adrian's attire his attitude instinctively relaxed. To judge from the quality of the clothes this might easily disclose itself as a "big affair."

But disappointment was to follow close.

After a brief but envolved preamble the supposed new client explained with an awkward attempt at lightness that all he wanted was a point of law settled; a purely fictitious case about which there had lately been a dispute among his friends—merely academical, of course—and about which he had a fancy to get the right solution. The question turned upon the validity of a will; and the whole point was whether a will found in a paper-basket could, according to the law of the land, be considered a valid document and be acted on accordingly.

"A purely fictitious case!" repeated Mr. Caylie, whose jaw during this address had shown signs of falling.

"Of course; I have told you so," said Adrian, with a touch of impatience. "It's just to settle the dispute."

Mindful of professional dignity, Mr. Caylie had recovered himself.

"Allow me to ask: are you perhaps a novelist? I have been consulted ere this by writers conscientious enough to wish to avoid mistakes in their stories."

"Well, there is no saying whether I may not use it for a story," said Adrian with a nervous laugh, anxious only to hurry matters. "Would such a will be valid—yes or no?"

Mr. Caylie leaned back in his chair, and, with elbows

firmly planted upon its arms, finger-tips as firmly joined, bent his brows in consideration.

"That is not a question that can be answered with yes or no, my dear sir; in fact—when it comes to the Law—very few questions can so be answered.

"A will, found in a paper-basket, you say? We must begin by distinguishing, in the first place, as to its condition. Is this will supposed to have been found entire, or in fragments?"

"Not in fragments."

"Entire, then. Badly crumpled, perhaps?"

"N-no—only very little crumpled."

"Entire and very little crumpled," summed up the attorney. "Bearing an ancient or a recent date?"

"Dated from about two years before the testator's death."

"And no other testament forthcoming?"

"Nothing else was found."

"In the case you are supposing—I understand."

Mr. Caylie paused for a moment, staring hard at the carpet; then, fetching a breath, began to talk of the intricacies of the Law in tones of deep reverence, but expressions in themselves so intricate that Adrian soon gave up following him. But the conclusion itself was clear enough—unpleasantly clear. Considering that the Will was supposed to have been found entire, and to be the only document of its kind extant, the Law would have no choice but to accept it as valid.

"I can't believe that!" said Adrian almost vehemently. "Surely the Law must take *intention* into account; and what else can the presence in the paper-basket demonstrate but the intention of destroying it?"

"Intentions are things which can only be guessed at,

my dear sir, while a written testament is a hard fact. It would have first to be proved that the document in question had not got into the paper-basket by mistake. Such a thing is quite conceivable."

Adrian sat silent, gnawing his moustache. He had just remembered that this vivacity of manner was not quite reconcilable to the supposed fictitious nature of the case.

"Of course this conclusion might possibly be modified by other considerations," continued Mr. Caylie with exasperating equanimity. "If, for instance, the testator was known to have been of eccentric habits."

"That he was," said Adrian quickly, and with a renewal of hope.

"I beg your pardon? Ah, I see, you are presupposing the eccentricity. Well, as I say, granting the eccentricity, and granting that the contents of the Will run counter to what can be surmised as his probable intentions, it is just possible that its validity might be successfully contested. But, of course, nothing but the production of the document could settle that point."

"Thank you," said Adrian abruptly, rising as he spoke. "I think that is all I require to know."

Standing once more upon the monumental steps outside the massive door, he felt half inclined to shake his fist at it. What had possessed him to go in there! Ten minutes ago he had still been at liberty to imagine that that which tormented him was a mere scruple, a phantom of his over-anxious imagination; but within these ten minutes the phantom had taken a body and became a thing which required to be grappled with. Produce the document, indeed! How could he produce what no longer existed? And was it even thinkable that he should

confess to its destruction and thereby, by his own act, incriminate himself? If that was the "straight thing" demanded of him, then he could only confess that it surpassed his powers.

So, if that creature of parchment spoke true, and in default of the production of the Will, his position must remain irregular until the moment of his change of faith, which now, of course, had become unavoidable. Evidently there was nothing for it but to set his teeth and stiffen his backbone, in order to reach the state of mind which alone could make the irregularity of his position bearable. Not for a moment must he take his eyes off the resolve in his mind. And meanwhile he must be content to know himself a usurper, though only a provisional one. The situation was not likely to last for very long, despite the amelioration in his mother's condition. He had it from the London doctor himself that a recovery was out of the question, and a pushing out of the end all that could be hoped for. Here Adrian pulled himself up short, at once overwhelmed with shame and stabbed with pain. Once more he had been visited by the horrible thought that his mother's death would be not only a desolation but also a deliverance.

It was in this stubborn frame of mind that the return journey was absolved and Mulcaskie reached, late at night. Nor was his humour in any way improved by finding that Lucy had sat up for him. Of all people in the world she was the one whom he felt least inclined to face until he had had time to master his new trouble.

"You up still, Lucy! What on earth is the sense of this?" he asked almost sharply, as she met him in the hall. Then, precipitately: "Baby all right, surely?"

Ever and always, whether he had been away from the

house for a day or for an hour, this question: "Baby all right?" was the first he asked of the first person he met.

"Yes, all right. But I thought I should sleep better if I heard how mother got off. It isn't so very late, you know. Come in here!" and she led the way into the dining-room, where cold dishes stood prepared.

"It's far later than Doctor Pollett would approve of, you know that as well as I do. You shouldn't stay up a moment longer. Mother got off all right, if that's all you wanted to know."

"It's not nearly all. Mayn't I stop and look on while you are eating?"

"Certainly not," said Adrian irritably. "I couldn't talk, even if you stayed. I'm feeling a bit fagged to-day. Do go to bed, Lucy!"

She had sat down, but rose again, aware that her presence was, for some reason or other, unwelcome.

"Good night, Adrian," she said with an attempt at a smile, but with tears of mortification rising to her eyes.

"That's right!" he replied in a somewhat milder tone, touched by her readiness, and stooping for the good night kiss.

It was then that Lucy, looking up into his face and reading there the fresh signs of worry, felt her heart swept by a flood of pity which would not be gainsaid. Clasping her hands about his neck she pressed close against him.

"Adrian," she whispered, breathless, "tell me—what is it? There is something troubling you. Why don't you tell me? Perhaps I can help. Have you no confidence at all? What has come between us? I have felt it for long, but never like to-day. Tell me all, Adrian! Am I not part of yourself?"

There passed a brief moment, during which Adrian stood immovable, looking down into the heavenly pure, heavenly candid eyes, lifted towards him, and during which he got one brief glimpse of the unspeakable relief it would be to do as she bid him and pour his heart into hers. But, swiftly, on the heels of the vision, came the thought of what would follow, must necessarily follow, unless he completely misread Lucy's nature. Was not her favourite motto, "Fais ce que dois—advienne que voudra!" which meant that once more he would see himself urged to do that "straight thing" which circumstances completely ruled out, and of which the first effect would spell material ruin for himself, and consequently for his wife and child, compelling him, moreover, to avow that he had never had the right to marry her. And the next effect would be bitterer still—the loss of her esteem. No, it was not to be thought of.

Once more the teeth were set and the backbone stiffened, as with a lightness of tone whose glaring falsity clanged in her ears, he assured her that her imagination was playing her tricks, that there was nothing weighing on his mind except a rather urgent need for food, and nothing standing between them, unless it were this tiresome footstool over which he had all but stumbled. It had been a long day, and he was feeling rather done up —that was positively all. And now he insisted on his little girl putting fancies out of her head and getting tucked up in bed. The very vivacity of these fancies showed that she had been overdoing herself.

Then Lucy went, without another word—not because she was convinced, but because she understood the uselessness—probably the harmfulness of further efforts. The tears were still upon her cheeks as she closed the door

behind her. She had not succeeded in overthrowing the intangible barrier, but she felt more than ever certain of its existence; for had she not hurt herself against it?

CHAPTER V.

"IN A TOMB OF FLESH."

By next morning Adrian's thoughts had begun to get arranged. Undoubtedly the time had come for getting that firmer hold upon Agnosticism which he had already contemplated, and which would help to make of the projected change a mere business affair. Probably a course of reading would be the most advisable step. But for this it was of paramount importance to get hold of the right books. Whom could he ask? Would it be any good writing to Captain Mellish, whom he had always regarded as his first initiator into modern ideas, and whom, since the discovery of the Will, he had looked upon as his special benefactor?

With these thoughts, and others related, in his mind, Adrian, driving down the main street of Donniebridge that same afternoon, heard himself vociferously accosted.

"Mr. Belmont! Mr. Belmont! Hi—just a moment, Mr. Belmont!"

Adrian, who was driving himself, pulled up the dog-cart and spied about impatiently for the interpolator. In another moment he appeared breathless, in the person of Doctor Pollett, his bulbous nose and cheeks shaking visibly from the pace at which he had run, but his small eyes as alive as ever.

"Wheugh! that ought to take off half a pound of flesh,

at the smallest computation! You were all but escaping me. I hope you're not in a hurry, Mr. Belmont?"

Adrian, not in the best of humours, replied that he was rather in a hurry.

"What is it? Can I give you a lift?"

"No, that's not it at all. It's not a lift I want—it's you. Have you positively not a spare five minutes about you?"

"It depends what for, Doctor Pollett."

"For a small experiment—quite a painless one; no more than an introduction to one of my patients, upon whom I have an idea that your sight may produce a certain effect—a beneficial one, of course."

"This is more than Greek to me, doctor; it is Sanscrit. I have never before been used as a medicine, and I venture to doubt my own efficacy."

"That's my affair. All I ask of you is to follow me for five minutes to the sick-room."

"And where is this mysterious sick-room?"

"Not far off—at the Catholic Presbytery. Wait a moment!" added the doctor, seeing Adrian's lips about to open; "It's not Father Kinghorn who is my patient, it's Father Greyson, his predecessor. I guarantee a clear coast, since your—what shall I call him?—spiritual superior is safe at three streets distance, seeing what he can do for the soul of an unfortunate mill-hand, who got mixed up with the machinery this morning, and for whose body I am not able to do anything whatever. I know you don't exactly dote on Father Kinghorn, though I confess I rather do. A trifle mad, perhaps—but a good sort. Are you coming with me, Mr. Belmont? Ah, I was forgetting to explain that I have lately been putting Father Greyson through an electric treatment which is showing distinct

results. He has not recovered speech, and only very little movement, but his wits are coming back—no doubt of it, though spasmodically, so to say. As yet they respond only to strong stimulants; and the name of Belmont is one of them. It was this name, which, mentioned in his presence, produced the first tangible result. Do you understand now what I mean by proposing to use you as a medicine?"

"Really, Doctor Pollett," Adrian was beginning, meaning to get out of this extraordinary request at all costs—or at any rate to postpone what could not help being an ordeal—when another thought struck him, arresting the refusal on his lips. He had remembered having, quite lately, formed the resolution of cultivating Doctor Pollett's society, as a means of developing his somewhat cloudy agnostic creed, and had simultaneously recognised a good opportunity of obliging him, and thus getting on to the more intimate footing desired.

"All right!" he said abruptly. "One should make oneself useful, I suppose. Use me as a blister, or a poultice, or whatever you like. Jump up, doctor, and I'll drive you to the Presbytery!"

On the way to the Presbytery Adrian got a good deal to hear about the new electric treatment and the different stages of recovery from paralysis, to which he listened with but half an ear, his thoughts running meanwhile on a convenient opening for the subject he had at heart. All that quite penetrated to his brain was that Doctor Pollett had already mentioned him and his accession to Mulcaskie to the patient, who, to judge from his expression, had understood what was being said and even taken in it a fleeting interest.

It was not quite the first time that Adrian had crossed

the threshold of the grimy-looking little appendix to the very ugly chapel which could best be described as a miniature stone barn; for during the months that preceded his marriage some faint show of intercourse had been kept up between the Presbytery and Mulcaskie. The hag in the slippers who opened the door, as well as the oleographs in the sitting-room, where he waited while Doctor Pollett reconnoitered, therefore failed to make him shudder. He had got over the shock long ago.

Within a very few minutes he was piloted across the passage and into the strenuously gay sick-room. A huge bunch of crimson roses standing upon the disused writing-table among medicine bottles and jars, first caught his attention. Vaguely he wondered whether they had come from Mulcaskie; they were just the colour of those on the lowest terrace. A sister of charity with a brown withered face, sat stitching in the window, the wings of her cap shining like those of some white bird which had fluttered in by the open pane.

Sunk like a wretched little heap in the depth of the easy-chair, Father Greyson sat and brooded.

"I have brought you a visitor, Father Greyson," said the doctor, stepping close up to him, with a decision of movement calculated to attract his attention, and speaking loud and rather suddenly. "It is Mr. Belmont—the young Mr. Belmont, you know—the one I was speaking about the other day, and who now lives at Mulcaskie."

He signed to Adrian to step forward.

The dull eyes which, during the doctor's speech, had been lifted heavily to his face now wandered on to that of the visitor, yet without showing any signs of understanding. It was not until the doctor had said again, more emphatically, "*Young* Mr. Belmont, you know—the

nephew of your old friend, James Belmont," that a spark was lit within them. For a moment they hung eagerly on Adrian, to return with a question in them to Doctor Pollett.

"He has grasped you," said the doctor in an aside to Adrian. "Speak to him now; ask him about your uncle!"

Adrian bent forward.

"I am glad to make your acquaintance, Father Greyson. I know you were at school with my uncle. I daresay you even knew me when I was here as a child. I am Adrian Belmont, you know."

The wide eyes hung upon his face with a look of trouble—almost of fear—which troubled Adrian himself. The ray of intellect struggling through the clouds of disablement seemed almost like a tangible thing—sometimes on the point of breaking through, at others swallowed up by the mists of a sick brain. Under the stress of the mental effort the pale lips dropped apart and the withered hands trembled—a painful sight altogether. Adrian shot a look toward the doctor, as though asking whether this were not enough—a question which was read aright. With a view to further experiments it was advisable not to try the instrument too severely.

"That will do for to-day. We are going now, Father. Mr. Belmont and I are going. But he will come back again—won't you, Mr. Belmont? and bring us news of Mulcaskie. And when you are quite well again you will go to see him there. That will be a pleasure, won't it? A Catholic laird at Mulcaskie—just fancy that!"

The sunken features worked faintly, for a moment longer, the troubled eyes hung on Adrian's face, then gently closed, while the head sank back against the cushions, as though exhausted.

"He'll go to sleep now straight off," whispered the doctor; "that's always the end. Let's leave him to Sister Monica!"

Stepping softly, they left the sick-room.

"You've done beautifully as a stimulant," said Doctor Pollett to Adrian in the passage. "I do believe he's coming back, mentally if not physically. It's an extraordinary condition. If he really recovers his wits without recovering speech and movement it will be the case of a prisoner shut up in a tomb of flesh, and with only his eyes and his ears wherewith to communicate with the outer world. You noticed the strain in the eyes, did you not? That comes from the excess of work thrown upon them. Thanks enormously, Mr. Belmont. You've rendered me a real service. Your trap is here all right. I haven't kept you long, have I? Off home now, I suppose?"

"Exactly. And you, doctor?"

It appeared that the doctor had another call to make; upon which Adrian offered to drive him there, having discovered that he was, after all, not in such a hurry as he had supposed.

The net-work of bye-streets which had to be threaded, almost exclusively inhabited by the Irish "mill-hands," formed something like a town of its own, with all the unbeautiful features of a manufacturing district: smoking furnaces, mountains of coal refuse, mean-looking dwellings which were obviously not so much homes as mere shelters, lived in by people who had no time either to grow a flower in a pot or keep their window-panes clean—not to mention the doorstep. It was in the heart of this *partie honteuse* of Donniebridge that the grimy little Presbytery stood, close beside the gaunt stone barn in which a lamp burned night and day before a tabernacle, like the one

ray of hope among so much that was hopeless, the one spot of beauty among so much that was ugly. And it was amid these surroundings that lay Father Kinghorn's daily work, which Adrian had heard him refer to as "fascinating"! Truly there was no accounting for tastes.

As they rattled over the uneven pavement, Doctor Pollett talked on steadily about the triumphs of electricity, until Adrian said abruptly:

"What did you mean just now when you spoke of a prisoner within a tomb of flesh? Surely *you* know that we aren't anything *but* flesh."

The doctor looked at him sideways, obviously surprised, but not taking long to collect his thoughts. His features gave the customary twitch before he spoke:

"What makes you suppose me so well-informed?"

"Because you're a doctor, to be sure! You have been down to the root of things, and must long ago have cast off sentimental traditions. And, besides, I have heard you talk in that sense."

"In the sense of having cast off sentimental traditions? I flatter myself that you have. But, what has that got to do with being 'all flesh,' as you put it?"

Adrian flicked up the horse impatiently, Doctor Pollett seemed to him rather slow to-day.

"What has it got to do with it? Why, everything! Isn't the existence of a 'soul' part of the tradition? To hear your remark of a minute ago one would almost believe that you still cling to it; and yet I am certain, quite certain that you are as convinced as I am that it is our brain tissues that do our thinking, and that what we call soul is but one of the manifestations of matter."

For a moment the doctor sat silent, looking straight in front of him.

"You seem to know more about my opinions than I do myself."

"Come, doctor, you can't pretend that in face of the triumphant march of science trampling down mildewed superstitions" (it was to Captain Mellish that Adrian owed this phrase), "you still preserve any faith in the so-called supernatural? Haven't I often enough heard you pouring whole cups of scorn upon the heads of those who do?"

"Aye, doubtless, and will hear me again. It's a way one gets into, dabbling for ever in 'flesh,' as you call it. But even then there come moments—usually beside death-beds—which sort of upset your ideas. We're infidels, most of us, no doubt, but infidels who feel a sort of sneaking gratitude towards religion, even looked at only as an anodyne. If you had seen some of the exits I have, you would understand what I mean. And occasionally one can't help being visited by the question whether so infallible an anodyne can really be an anodyne alone. The march of science is all very well, you know, but besides mildewed superstitions it's terribly apt to trample down the very nerves of life in its triumphant progress. Here we are! Many thanks for the lift, Mr. Belmont! Quite ready to pursue the subject at any other convenient time. Good afternoon, meanwhile!"

"Good afternoon!" said Adrian shortly, as he turned his horse.

He was feeling vaguely dissatisfied.

If Doctor Pollett had disappointed Adrian, Adrian had puzzled Doctor Pollett. As he looked after the dogcart he was shaking his massive head, while inwardly he soliloquised:

"Something not quite in order either about that young

man's liver, or his—let's say mind. Pity it isn't possible to Röntgenise his *ego,* or inner consciousness, or whatever the right expression is. Shouldn't be a bit astonished if I discovered some obstruction there which wants removing."

CHAPTER VI.

RASPBERRIES AND STRAWBERRIES.

"TALLY-HO!" shouted Mara Haughnessie at the top of her clear, bell-like voice, from the lowest terrace of Mulcaskie gardens. "This way, girls! Tally-ho!"

Whereupon first one and then another figure in very businesslike riding-habits emerged into sight, their impetuous advance scaring off the peacocks which were complacently sunning themselves.

"What is it, Mara? Roses?"

"No, late raspberries, lots of them; and Lucy says we can have as many as we like. Don't you, Lucy? You see," explained Mara, while continuing execution upon the bushes alongside; "raspberries come in *so* useful—and gooseberries too, in their season—they prevent one being too hungry at dinner. 'Girls,' I often say to them, when I happen to know that the rations are short, 'let's lay a foundation!' And we have a go at the gooseberry bushes, just before the dressing-gong."

It was the first time since Lucy's confinement that the sisters had ridden over. Though for weeks past burning to inspect their father's godson, Adrian's hints as to the undesirability of visits as long as his mother was in the house had been too broad to be disregarded. This very morning the old lady had departed, in the company of

her son, so there was really no further reason for exercising patience. The nursery had necessarily been the first station, where to a three-tongued chorus of admiration, Lucy, perplexed and somewhat alarmed, saw a tiny silver medal on a tiny blue ribbon fastened around the neck of her infant son.

"You don't mind, do you?" Mara had said, with her winning smile. "Every Catholic baby should have a medal about it."

"And what good is it to do him?" asked Lucy a little suspiciously.

Mara opened her fine eyes in amazement.

"But it's blessed! Of course, it can't help doing him good. Oh, I know what you are thinking," she added as Lucy was silent, "and of course, if it wasn't true it would all be sheer idiocy—but then, you see, it *is* true."

Lucy said nothing more at the moment, but later on she examined the medal, and found upon it a very miniature Madonna. So here again was that universal "Mummie," who played so great a part in Catholic lives, and yet the same person whom she had heard her own father refer to as "just a respectable Jewish girl."

After the nursery had come the garden, where just now the second raspberry crop was being severely visited under the disapproving gaze of Macpherson who, at a respectful distance, had taken up a point of observation, in an attitude which in itself was a silent reproach.

"I had no idea you were so fond of fruit," said Lucy as she wonderingly looked on. "When you were here in July, I remember that you took no interest at all in the strawberry beds."

"Ah, strawberries are a special case," said Nelly with

a peculiar intonation; and the three sisters exchanged a glance of apparently mutual understanding.

"You don't care for them? An idiosyncrasy, perhaps?"

"Oh, yes, we *care* for them," asserted Mara, looking as nearly embarrassed as it was possible for her to do; "but we are not going in for them at present; though we mean to do so again some day, don't we, girls?"

"That we do!" answered Kitty fervently, though with her mouth full; "by next season, *I hope!* Thank Heavens that this one is passed!"

"Well, you are too mysterious for me to-day," laughed Lucy, "nor can I form a guess about what you are thanking Heaven for."

"You'll know some day," spluttered Kitty, "in fact it depends——"

"Kitty!" said Mara, severely.

Whereupon they all laughed, with becomingly heightened colour.

"I wish I knew why Kitty is blushing so indecently. I suppose she is in love again. Out with it, Kitty! Who is it this time, and has he forbidden you to eat strawberries?"

At this there was a fresh outburst of laughter from the two elders, while Kitty heaved a woebegone sigh.

"Don't press her. She's not quite made up her mind yet whether she's *still* in love with Mr. Hayward, the painter, or *already* in love with Jack Buckton, the latest medical student," explained Mara dispassionately. "All she does know is that she is love-sick, poor girl; just as one may know that one isn't feeling well, without being quite sure what has disagreed with one. It really will be interesting to see what happens when she is married. I've

never known her 'passions' to last for more than three months."

"I shall never marry," said Kitty with a sudden gravity upon her exquisite child's face.

"For goodness sake, Kitty, don't say that!" protested Nelly. "Mara can scramble for herself, but so long as you are on the market, poor I haven't got a dog's chance."

"Oh yes, you'll get your chance," said Kitty, still without a smile.

"Make a bargain with Kitty," suggested Lucy. "Prenumerate yourself for the next good-looking *protégé,* against a promise not to interfere with present conquests."

Lucy knew well that the objects of Kitty's temporary infatuations were usually chosen among the miscellaneous *protégés*—mostly impecunious artists or students, of whom an almost unbroken succession enjoyed the hospitality of Lippenross. It was rarely that Colonel Haughnessie returned from a trip to Edinburgh without bringing with him, either the son of some old friend, or else some newly discovered genius, whom, with magnificent imprudence, he handed over to the charge of his three daughters. Strange to say, so far nothing worse had resulted than a few heartaches on the part of the elders, and a series of "passions" on that of the inflammable Kitty.

"Oh, we've made bargains before," said Mara in answer to Lucy, "but we never keep them. What's the use of saying: 'leave me the poet for a flirt, and I'll leave you the sculptor,' when both poet and sculptor want to flirt not with Nelly or me, but with Kitty? If I hadn't this decoration on my lip I daresay I could vie with the child; but this way——" A quick kiss deposited upon the "child's" handy cheek completed the sentence. "And besides, you see, I'm the chaperon, by rights, so I'm

bound, in a sort of way. If mummie had been alive it would, of course, have been different."

"You must miss her," said Lucy softly. "You, I fancy, more than the others."

"Maybe. But we haven't really lost her, you know. She's close to us all the time. We felt that yesterday—didn't we, girls? It was her birthday, you see, and we did up her room with flowers, and put candles before the Mater Dolorosa, and then we drove into Donniebridge for the mortuary mass; and in spite of the black vestments we didn't feel sad, no, not a bit, for we knew she was with us."

There was a moment's silence. Lucy was feeling disconcerted, as always when she got out of her depth in religious questions. Intercession for the dead was something so repugnant to her own creed, as to startle her afresh each time. And yet, this sense of unity, of not losing touch—could it be called anything but a gain?

"Do you know what I am thinking," said Nelly suddenly, breaking a rather prolonged pause, "that if we've had enough raspberries, and if Lucy agrees, we might be gathering some for Father Greyson. He's so fond of fruit, and poor Father Kinghorn is at his wit's ends where to procure it. And flowers too; he loves to keep the sick-room bright. Might we have some of these roses, Lucy?"

"As many as you like," said Lucy, eagerly, glad of an opportunity of obliging Father Kinghorn towards whom she could not help feeling that Adrian was not quite as complaisant as he might have been.

"How do you like him?" asked Kitty. "He ain't quite as dreadful as people make him out—in appearance, I mean."

"I find him more quaint than dreadful; and I was

disappointed in his collars. I had been prepared for india-rubber."

"Oh, he's got linen ones too—for occasions. And he even brushes his nails, whenever——"

"Kitty!" admonished Mara. "What is Lucy to think of you!"

"Nothing bad, either of me or of Father Kinghorn, I am sure. I am not saying anything of him that mightn't have been said of the Apostles. Do you suppose that *they* had time to manicure?"

"True enough," agreed Mara reflectively. "And very likely they smelt of fish. At least I'm sure St. Peter and St. James did."

"Good gracious!" thought Lucy, almost frightened, and then wondered at her own alarm. This was not by any means the first shock she had received from the affectionate familiarity of tone in which Catholics were apt to discuss their religion.

Long after the three Haughnessie girls had disappeared round the bend of the avenue at a break-neck pace, bearing with them a basket of raspberries tied to a saddle, as well as a huge bunch of red roses (the same which Adrian saw in the sick-room next day), Lucy sat beside the cot in the nursery, watching the glint of the tiny silver medal rising and falling on the breast of her child, and going over the talk of the afternoon. What a strangely *every-day* religion that of the Haughnessies' was, to be sure! How inextricably mixed up with every common act. She had often tried to decide whether this thought pleased or displeased her, as smacking of irreverence, but had never come to a conclusion. In her own father's house the gulf separating week-days from Sundays had been almost un-

bridgable, even in thought; and the Sunday bonnet and the Sunday prayer-book inseparably related; while here——

"You daren't use your religion every day for fear of its wearing out," Mara had once said to her with laughing outspokenness: "ours, you see, is specially constructed for rough usage, like the serge they make for sailors."

It was on the evening of this day that Adrian came back from Edinburgh, and that Lucy made the useless attempt to overthrow the intangible barrier.

During the weeks that followed many baskets of hothouse grapes and flowers found their way to Donniebridge Presbytery. Although taking no precautions for secrecy, Lucy had not found it necessary to mention this fact to Adrian, whom the mention of Father Kinghorn was apt to irritate. Ever since the Edinburgh trip the gloom on his face had been increasing. Parcels of books arrived for him, and were left ostentatiously lying about. Picking up one of them one day Lucy was surprised to see the name of Haeckel on the title-page. Turning the pages she came upon sentences which startled and shocked her. It was easy here to trace the development of that state of mind of which she had got the first glimpse on the day of the baptism.

Then, unexpectedly, Adrian announced his intention of going up to London—on business. The nature of the business remained cloudy to Lucy; since, of course, Adrian could not explain to her that, having got small satisfaction out of the books, he had decided to consult Captain Mellish in person.

* * * * *

"Baby all right?" Adrian was asking some days later, as once more Lucy met him in the hall, this time in the early morning, for he had returned from London by the

same train which had brought him here on the occasion of his accession. It was November by this time, and he was looking both chilled and tired by his night's journey —far more tired than he had been by that first, triumphant journey.

The answer to the stereotyped question varied for the first time.

"Well, not quite perfectly all right. He has been a little restless these last days. Nothing to speak of," added Lucy, seeing the look of alarm on his face. "To make quite sure I had Doctor Pollett here yesterday, and he sees no cause at all for uneasiness; thinks that perhaps my milk is a trifle too rich for its little inside. He declares in fact that it's all cream."

"Is he coming again to-day?" asked Adrian blankly.

"Not unless he is sent for; but there seems no reason, so far. No—don't go up to the nursery now, he's asleep, and your breakfast is waiting."

While she was pouring out the coffee Lucy asked:

"And mother? How is she? Does the improvement continue?"

"I wasn't able to get to her, after all," said Adrian hurriedly. "Time awfully short. Caught my train by the skin of my teeth, as it was."

"Oh, what a pity!"

"Yes, but it couldn't be helped. Better not mention at all that I've been in town. You haven't mentioned my journey, have you?"

"No, I haven't, but——"

"And how have you spent your time?" broke in Adrian, anxious to change the subject. "Not been sticking in the nursery the whole time, I suppose?"

"Oh, dear no! I have even been at Donniebridge,

but that was Doctor Pollett's doing. When he was here yesterday, he first put my mind at rest about baby, and then positively booked me for the afternoon; that is, he made me promise to go with him to Father Greyson; he says it's good for him to see people."

"And you went?"

"Yes. How could I refuse? He seemed so keen about it; and it was such a small thing to do."

"He played the same trick on me; used me as a stimulant, as he called it; but he might have spared you. It was positively tactless."

"Was it? But it was interesting too, though rather painful. The dear old man almost seems to be getting back his wits. At least he stared very hard when Doctor Pollett explained to him who I was. The doctor declares that the name of Belmont never fails of its effect."

"Oh, that's just one of his fixed ideas," said Adrian contemptuously. "The Belmont name is his latest experiment. He's always starting new ones; and I suppose we do as well as radium or electricity."

"But not quite as well as a crucifix, apparently," smiled Lucy, "that is, according to Father Kinghorn."

"Was Father Kinghorn there?"

"Yes, and he seems to be doing experiments on his own account—with crucifixes and rosaries. Between them, Doctor Pollett and he seem quite confident of a result; and sister Monica too. Do you know, Adrian, that Sister Monica is the first of her kind I have seen close?"

"Really?" said Adrian drily, as he continued to eat his breakfast.

Lucy changed the subject. She would have liked to speak of her impressions of yesterday—to have told him that curiosity had had no small part in taking her to the

Presbytery. But the days of perfect mutual confidence were long passed; and it seemed wiser to keep her observations to herself. She had been much bewildered by the look of the clerical household, her inborn instincts outraged by its random sort of arrangements. Besides the memory of the neat, white-capped Rectory parlour-maid, the slatternly hag who answered the door, could not possibly strike her as respectable. It is probable that Lucy had never heard speak of the "folly of the Cross," else perhaps she might, occasionally, when in Father Kinghorn's society, have had a sort of feeling of recognition. But she was acquainted with a text which spoke of the foxes having holes and the birds of the air nests; and when thinking back of the solid green leather arm-chairs in the paternal sanctuary, she could not help wondering whether the "Son of Man," would elect to rest his head against one of these, or not rather lay it upon the hard cushions of Father Kinghorn's horsehair sofa.

CHAPTER VII.

THE "JUDGMENT."

WHAT did I go to London for? Adrian was asking himself late that afternoon, as over the ploughed fields he tramped home in the November dusk. He had been to a distant farm, and had hoped that the long walk would freshen him up after the wearisome night journey, during which, although alone in the compartment, he had not been able to obtain sleep. For—as he could not conceal from himself—the visit to Captain Mellish had been a failure. At the mess-table he had throned like an oracle, whose magnificently sweeping assertions had

been greedily absorbed by Adrian's youthful mind. But since then Adrian had grown much older than a year and a half need have made him, and the assertions, when closely analysed, no longer appeared so magnificent. Failing to extract comfort from them, it seemed wise to go to the man himself, as to a prophet. But the man himself had changed, or else the eyes that looked upon him and the ears that hearkened to him. Brought to plain issues—with his back against the wall, so to speak —he had not nearly so much to say for himself as at the mess-table. Surely science had clearly proved the utter untenability of revelation, he somewhat haughtily assured Adrian.

"But *where* does it prove this?" asked Adrian. "I only find it asserted—never proved."

In hundreds of cases, the Captain assured him; and reeled off a list of books, most of which Adrian had already studied in vain. It was long ago agreed among all really cultured minds that revelation and "all that sort of thing" was exploded illusion.

"I'm quite agreeable," Adrian had retorted, "so long as you explode it visibly before my eyes. But none of the people you name do this. They seem to me all to be talking round and round the subject, and always to land you in a *cul-de-sac,* in face of a closed door. As to what lies behind the door, you are left to your own devices."

Then the Captain began to talk of the dignity of the human intellect, and of the sanctity of the right to exercise it, in a manner to convince Adrian that bluster was far more his case than argument. Finally he went from the presence of his quondam oracle rather sick at heart, but not a whit less determined to gain the certitude he

required. The process was not quite so simple as anticipated. Curiously enough, from the moment he had determined to give up his faith all the forgotten arguments in its favour began to reassert themselves in the most provoking manner. No doubt this was owing to that natural spirit of contradiction inherent in most human beings.

"It can't be anything but that," Adrian was saying to himself now, as he tramped back across the fields. "It's always that way when you have to give up a thing: it puts on its most amiable face, just in order to tantalise you. But I'll get over it—I'll get over it!"

Did it not stand to reason that what satisfied such great minds as Spencer's and Huxley's ought to satisfy his own? "If those men were able to live without a personal God, then so can I!" he said aloud, as though to fire his own courage.

With these thoughts in his mind he turned the corner of the shrubbery, and through the falling dusk became aware of a carriage standing before the entrance. It looked like Doctor Pollett's trap. Aye, yes—the baby! But surely Lucy had said that she would not send for the doctor unless of some new necessity. A sudden tremor passed over Adrian. The harsh cry of a peacock, reaching his ears just then, seemed to him to have a sinister sound. He felt obliged to stand still for a moment, mustering his moral strength, before entering the house.

The big hall was not yet lighted. An open doorway to the left appeared almost blocked by a massive figure, whose outline he knew. As he appeared it moved forwards.

"Doctor Pollett!"

He was near enough now to see the lumpy face, and to note how subdued were the beetle-like eyes.

"What is it?" asked Adrian, with a catch in his voice. "You are waiting for me?"

"Yes; I am waiting for you. I thought it better to tell you before you go upstairs."

"Tell me what?"

The doctor had him by the arm now, and drew him into the room gently but firmly.

"Be strong, Mr. Belmont, because of your wife. She needs it, for she has only got you now. She has lost her boy."

Adrian said nothing, and was not even aware of feeling anything, except that he was glad of the darkness, since he could not imagine what was happening to his face. A cold wind seemed to be blowing upon it, under whose touch he could feel his flesh shivering.

"It was frightfully sudden. Convulsions. All was over by the time I came. We sent out messengers for you; but evidently they missed you."

"You mean to say that the baby is *dead?*" Adrian heard his own voice asking.

"That is what I mean. It is better that your wife should not have to tell you. She is upstairs in the nursery. Will you not come to her now? She needs you, Mr. Belmont!"

To this Adrian made no answer; but having stood for a moment longer, staring hard into the doctor's face, astonished him by exclaiming aloud:

"Of course! I knew it!"

* * * * *

"I knew it!"

This remained the predominant thought in Adrian's

mind during the whole of the dark, heartrending days that followed. Now that the blow had fallen, it seemed to him that he had been expecting it all along. This unacknowledged expectation had probably lain at the back of that stereotyped question of his: "Baby all right?" dictated by the dim consciousness that the happiness of its possession was not his by rights—that by his predetermined apostasy, which included that of his son, he had somehow forfeited his right of fathership.

In such moments there is no choice beyond either bowing under the visitation, recognised as heaven-sent, or else standing up against it. Men who are not broken by these blows are invariably hardened. Adrian was hardened. That fancy concerning a visitation could only be a remnant of old prejudices, which must be vigorously shaken off.

"There can't be a God if such things happen!"

Beside his wild grief a sort of wild gratitude to fate found room. His budding agnosticism, which had suffered so sorely from the interview with Captain Mellish, found new strength in the latest event. Was it not madness to talk of Providence, of the care of a loving and Almighty Father, who struck down innocent babes, and broke the hearts of fathers and mothers?

Lucy's attitude was a marvel to Adrian. Though her tears flowed freely (how he envied her those tears!), there was no anger in her grief. The look on her face seemed like an echo of that: "God knows best!" with which his mother had received the news of the loss.

"Perhaps we did not deserve him, Adrian," she said to him once through her sobs; and could not know why he almost pushed her from him, pierced by the hidden truth in her words.

But it was on the day of the funeral that a moment came in which he was visited by a new and passing terror.

On such an occasion it had been impossible to keep the Haughnessie girls out of the house. Brimming over with sympathy, they had hurried to Lucy's side, literally to mingle their tears with hers. It was while she was taking her last look at the tiny waxen face, framed in flowers, and about to be hidden away for ever, that Adrian had seen Mara whispering to the young mother, and had caught something about an angel in heaven hovering ever close to her.

"He is quite as near you really as Mummie is to us!" Mara had urged. "Oh, if I could only get you to realise——"

A strange wistful look had come into Lucy's wet eyes as she listened; and it was then that Adrian had been touched by that new terror.

No more than touched, for it passed as quickly as it had come.

"Thanks, Mara dear," she had said, with a touch almost of coldness, as though the more effectually to surmount that momentary weakness; "but I have my own consolations. I am content to know that this lies in God's will."

Adrian breathed again. How foolish of him to have doubted her, even for the fragment of a second! Was not loyalty the very key-note of her character? *That* danger, at any rate, was not to be feared. Of course Lucy would always remain true to her convictions.

PART III.

CHAPTER I.

PHILIP.

"Look here, old man, you're not likely to get well in *this* place," said Frank Taylor to his friend and comrade, Philip Warden, just now reclining—wrapped in his dressing-gown—in a rather uneasy "easy-chair," which, owing to the fact of one leg being shorter than the other three, never could be quite at rest itself, nor consequently allow its occupant to be so. There were other defects, too, about its constitution, which a profuse display of moderately clean antimacassars did their best to disguise.

"You simply can't stop in this hole," continued Frank, casting a vindictive look round the apartment, the rest of whose appointments were perfectly in keeping with the easy-chair. "The only question is: Where do you mean to go to?"

"To the dickens, in all likelihood," responded Philip, sweetly and serenely.

Philip always was sweet and serene, regardless of circumstances, which some people attributed to his want of brains and others to his want of feelings. This somewhat elongated young man, with the — at present — almost emaciated face and with the foppish air even of his dressing-gown, had the happy irresponsibility of a child or a

bird, for whom the terrors of the future do not exist. For these fortunate individuals the evil of the day is eminently sufficient, and is, in fact, usually mistaken for something good.

"But the doctor prescribed country air"—objected his sturdy and matter-of-fact friend, who knew by sad experience how much looking after Philip required.

"Yes, and he also prescribed Madeira wine and high feeding. Can you suggest any means of procuring these? I only know of money as an instrument; but, unluckily, I haven't got any, nor do I know of anybody dying to lend me some. In fact, I am living in terror of my creditors discovering my presence in London. So long as they think me in India I'm pretty safe; but the moment they ferret me out they'll become inconveniently anxious about my health."

"That's another reason for getting out of London. And you can't remain undiscovered for long. These people read papers, don't they? Some of them are bound to have read of the frontier affair, and of your having been invalided home. Seriously, Philip—if you can be serious—can't you get yourself invited somewhere? That would procure the high feeding as well as the air, since they can't let you starve."

"If only I knew who 'they' were!" sighed Philip in mock depression.

"How about that cousin in Scotland? The one who got the estate that you ought to have had. Surely he owes you a good turn."

"You don't see me claiming it?" asked Philip, as serenely as ever.

"No; I can't say I do. That confounded stuck-upness of yours is the only serious thing about you, I do believe.

But I can almost see him offering it, if he is at all a decent sort of chap. He reads the papers, too, I presume, and must be able to make a guess at the state of your finances. Besides, people are always ready to welcome a wounded warrior and to share the glory of his laurels."

"What charming rot you do talk, Frank," said Philip, with a particularly sweet smile. He was very vain of his ties and of the cut of his riding-breeches, but it had not yet occurred to him to feel vain of the somewhat reckless bravery which had earned him that very nasty cut during the frontier skirmish as well as the near prospect of the D.S.O.

"It's enraging to think," growled Frank, as he vehemently paced the worn carpet, "that if only that uncle of yours had had the sense to make a will you would now have a country-house of your own to recruit in, instead of having to go a-begging for hospitality."

"But I haven't got the smallest intention of going a-begging, my dearest Frank. And, besides, you forget that if I had Mulcaskie I would never have gone to India; and so wouldn't have got this scratch, and so wouldn't need recruiting—which puts your premises all wrong. I wonder, by the way, how I should have managed to kill time at Mulcaskie, had it fallen to my lot? It isn't much of a hunting country, and there's a limit to potting rabbits. It might have been amusing to arrange shooting-parties, but it would have been anything but amusing to interview farmers. I've a notion that agricultural occupations would develop melancholia in me. Cheer up, Frank, my boy—since that danger is escaped anyway!"

"How dreadfully easily you take things," said Frank,

having gazed for a moment rather desperately at his friend.

"Better than taking them dreadfully seriously, surely," smiled Philip.

If Frank here dropped the subject under discussion it was not because he was done with it. On the contrary, it was only now that it began seriously to occupy him. Without any tie of relationship between them, or any claim to satisfy, Frank Taylor had long since, quite spontaneously, constituted himself a sort of natural guardian of the feather-headed Philip Warden. It was partly a case of complementary natures dovetailing into each other, partly of superfluous energies on the look-out for exercise. In physical as well as mental attributes Frank was the exact antithesis of Philip, being short, sturdy, matter-of-fact and eminently practical. Almost from the moment that he had set eyes upon his amiable but 'feckless' comrade, as helpless as a babe unborn in all matters but that of matching ties and selecting tweeds, Frank had recognised in him the safety-valve which the overflow of his own powers required, and had thrown himself upon Philip as upon his natural prey. By this time he had come to regard himself as virtually responsible for Philip's moral and physical welfare; so much so that he had actually taken a furlough home for the sole sake of looking after him on the journey and seeing that he was properly looked after upon English soil. It would almost seem as though nature who produces so many incompetent individuals, likewise turns out a corresponding number of competent ones, destined to take charge of them, the misfortune only being that these subjects do not always meet, but wander up and down the world in unconscious search of each other.

Without wasting any further words about it, and having scraped together in his mind all that he knew regarding Philip's relations, Frank that same afternoon, having consulted a P.O. directory, got himself ushered into the presence of Mr. Spedding, Mrs. Belmont's stepbrother—the same man who had once offered to smoothe Adrian's path to fortune, and the same person who, in the intervals of business, was addicted to analysing his fellow-creatures and then storing them away, duly docketed into mental pigeon-holes. He was a shrewd-looking person with sleek hair, so white and brushed so flat as to suggest a bandaged head, and with a wide, thin-lipped and sensitive mouth, which had a kindly look about it. The sharp eyes were the eyes of a business man, but the mouth was that of a philanthropist.

While Frank was telling him the story of the frontier skirmish, not exactly "cooked," yet put into the most becoming light, the large mouth worked gently but unceasingly, as though following the movements of the mind within; and when the speaker paused, the shrewd eyes looked at him with understanding and approval.

"And?" he asked with an extremely knowing smile.

"And?" repeated Frank, disconcerted for a moment.

"If I understand aright this is only a preliminary. It is quite an interesting story; but where is the point?"

"The point," said Frank, recovering his native bluntness —"is that I want you to procure him an invitation to that place in Scotland. Get the cousin to invite him; it's the least he can do, considering the way the place was snapped away from under Warden's very nose. He absolutely requires recruiting, and he's got no money to recruit with. To refuse him hospitality now would in my opinion be manslaughter."

"I see," said Mr. Spedding with evident relish.

"But it's got to be done without Warden suspecting. He's got some absurdly stuck-up ideas. The invitation must come from the Belmonts themselves, and must appear spontaneous. Under the circumstances it can be given quite a natural look. Warden is as guileless as a child, and very easily duped. Do you think you can manage it?"

"If I understand aright this is a plot which you are proposing to me?"

"Call it what you like, but tell me only whether you can do it."

"I shall consider the matter," said Mr. Spedding and then began counting up something upon his fingers:

"December—January—February."

"What's that about?" asked Frank.

"I'm calculating the age of the twins. Perhaps you don't happen to know that Mrs. Adrian Belmont had twins lately. A great cause of rejoicing, after the loss of their first child, more than a year ago. But I find that the twins are quite three months old by this time, so there is nothing prohibitive about their existence, as regards visitors. Yes—I shall see what I can do."

"That young man belongs either to the race of Quixotes or of Jonathans," mused Mr. Spedding when the visitor had departed. "In other words it's either a case of sheer unblushing altruism, or else of devoted friendship—one thing as rare as the other. Rather a curiosity in his way."

Having indulged in this bit of analysis, and decided for the "Jonathan" label, Mr. Spedding first wound up the accounts he had been busy with when interrupted, and then proceeded to pay a visit to his stepsister, Mrs. Belmont, before whom he laid the case.

"It certainly would seem a decent thing to do, all circumstances considered," he pronounced.

"A decent thing? My dear Tom—it's the only possible thing," said Mrs. Belmont decisively. "I shall write to Adrian at once about it."

Then, after a pause:

"No. I think I shall write to Lucy."

"And while you're about it, don't you think you might put in a word too for that queer friend of his? I'm quite sure that he wasn't fishing for an invitation for himself, but I am equally certain that his presence would simplify matters enormously. I gather that he has come home solely for the purpose of shepherding Warden; and there is no lack of bedrooms at Mulcaskie, nor of knives and forks, either; while to the youngster the thing is sure to be a treat, and I think he deserves one."

Mrs. Belmont smiled radiantly at her brother. "That is you, all over, Tom! Yes, I shall write in that sense."

* * * * *

"Adrian," said Lucy, looking up from the letter in her hand. "Here is something that we must do."

"Really?" he replied inattentively, being deep in the morning papers. "What's up next?"

"This, that mother writes. Read it yourself and you will see."

Across the breakfast-table she handed him the letter, and watched him eagerly while he read it. Her face was a little narrower than it had been a year ago: for the birth of the twins had been a severe strain upon her constitution; and even before that she had lost a little of that vitality which takes its spring from perfect happiness. The death of her eldest-born had given her a shock from which it had not been easy to recover, but was not alone

responsible for the just perceptible change in the once so buoyant girl. To have lost her son was grief enough; but a greater grief yet was this haunting fear of having actually lost her husband, or at any rate her hold upon him—and this in some curious, intangible way which somehow did not entail the loss of his affection. During several days that she had been in danger, it had been impossible to misread the anguish in his eyes, nor to remain unaware of the tender solicitude surrounding her, as with protecting arms. And yet, the danger passed, she had felt the invisible barrier growing up again between them, and to its former height. Even Adrian's love for his children—the two little girls that had come to replace the lost boy—had in it an element which eluded analysis. They were frail little things, and the delicacy of the tiny faces pierced Lucy's heart with a never-dying fear. If that robust boy had so quickly succumbed, how not tremble for these mites? Adrian seemed afraid even to look at them, appeared bent even on ignoring their presence. That question: "Baby all right?" so habitual last year, was never heard now, maybe because in the father's own ears it had a sound of evil augur. But his eyes asked a thousand questions each time Lucy entered the room. Yet when she, strengthening her own courage, attempted to cheer him by saying: "God will leave us these, Adrian, I am sure he will, if only we pray hard enough!" he did not seem comforted by the words, which rather seemed to increase the chronic terror of bereavement under which he appeared to be living.

As she watched his face now across the table she became aware of a change upon it, quite as marked as that upon her own. Within this year his features had hardened, his mouth taken a more stubborn set. Also

the lines about the eyes had multiplied, and though he was barely twenty-seven there was a sprinkling of grey about the temples.

Presently, while he read, another and acuter transformation came over his face. He had taken the letter indifferently; but soon a quick flush mounted to his cheeks, while his black eyebrows settled into a heavy frown. Without reading to the end of the page he flung it down upon the table.

"Out of the question! This is impossible!"

"Impossible, Adrian? but why?" asked Lucy, startled by this unlooked for vehemence. "What makes it impossible to have your cousin here? Have we not room to put up ten cousins, if need be?"

"But not Philip," said Adrian impulsively. "Anyone but Philip." He had risen as though inconvenienced by her direct gaze, and had crossed over to the fireplace, where upon this chilly March morning the flames were leaping brightly.

"But Adrian!" protested Lucy, frankly amazed. "What on earth has poor Philip done to be so inhospitably treated? I should have thought that just he had a special claim upon us, because of the disappointment about Mulcaskie. If he had not been in India all this time I should long ago have suggested inviting him. Besides, is his being wounded and ill not claim enough?"

Adrian, bending over the fire which he was vigorously though superfluously poking, made no immediate answer.

"Really," continued Lucy, "I don't see how we could get out of it decently, even if we wanted to. It seems to me a call upon elementary Christian fellow-feeling. What possible excuse could we give for not asking him? But I am sure you don't really want to get out of it. You

just imagine that it will be a bore, and perhaps think that it will tire me to have an invalid in the house. But I don't mind that at all. I'm quite fit again now, and I'm an excellent sick-nurse."

"You don't imagine, surely, that I should allow you to nurse him?" asked Adrian, veering round from the fireplace.

"No—of course not literally. There will be that friend of his to do that—we must certainly ask him, too. Mother is quite right there; I only mean that I can superintend things and look after him generally. I'm sure the poor fellow requires a little mothering."

Lucy spoke with animation, kindling at the thought of this fresh task; for she belonged to the race of those "world-mothers," whose heart is too wide to be filled even by the children of their own flesh and blood.

"And considering the credit he has brought upon the family," continued Lucy, "I do think he deserves being just a little petted. It is not every day that one has an incipient D.S.O. to look after. You see, mother says that he is on the list. I really cannot imagine what your objection to Philip is. You will think of it, Adrian, will you not?" she pleaded as, rather abruptly, he moved towards the door. "I should not like it to be said of you that you were wanting in family feeling."

"Yes—I will think of it," said Adrian, as he went out.

He thought of it most of the day, struggling fiercely with himself. Of Philip's coming home he had known before from the papers; and had been bothered by the account of the frontier skirmish in which his cousin had distinguished himself, as he was apt to be bothered by everything that reminded him of Philip's existence. He had even considered how natural it would have been—

under ordinary circumstances—to invite Philip to Mulcaskie. Had he not himself in the first cloudless days of his accession, dreamt of playing benefactor to his impecunious cousin? But matters were changed. Would it not be sheer madness to torture himself by the sight of the very man best calculated to disturb that sullen quiet into which, since his boy's death, he had been gradually settling down?

And yet what Lucy said was true—so true that he had already been saying it to himself. Now that a direct appeal had been made to him it would be almost impossible to get out of the matter with decency—and, above all, without arousing Lucy's own suspicions. Of course she could not imagine what his objection to Philip was—must not be given the opportunity of imagining it. For ever and always this remained the crucial point—the preservation of her esteem, intact and unshadowed.

For many hours, both in and out of doors, Adrian ruminated these things, then, at luncheon, abruptly announced to Lucy that he had thought over the matter, and that he supposed they had better have Philip here after all.

Whereupon Lucy kissed him with grateful tenderness, and said that of course she had known that he could only decide that way. And by that same afternoon's post the invitation went off.

CHAPTER II.

"DER WANDERER."

PHILIP reached Mulcaskie on one of those boisterous March evenings, which, with stormily working brooms in action, seem bent upon a gigantic spring cleaning. Care-

fully engineered though the journey had been by Frank, it had nevertheless considerably exhausted the invalid. As leaning upon his friend's arm he made his way towards the waiting carriage, the ecclesiastical-looking coachman, as ever upright on his box as the Caterpillar upon the mushroom, took stock of the stricken warrior with a mixture of pity and of awe. The coachman knew him by sight, from the visit he had paid on the morrow of his uncle's death, when everybody—including Philip himself—had looked upon him as the future laird. For the average menial mind it was impossible not to feel a little contempt for his failure on the path of fortune, as well as a little admiration for his success on that of honour—the report of the impending distinction having long since reached the servant's hall.

"How are you feeling?" asked Frank rather grimly, as, the rugs being settled about Philip's knees, and followed by the curious gaze of "Humpty Dumpty"—whose sensations were identical with those of the "Caterpillar"—they turned the corner of the station-road.

"A bit queer, to tell the truth."

"I well believe it. Last time you got out at this station you believed you were coming to your future home. If I could have thought of any other place to stow you away in I should have gone for it—but there seemed no choice."

"Oh! I wasn't meaning that," said Philip in a placid though feeble voice; "it's only physically queer that I'm feeling. That train jolted so; and this vehicle seems to have taken up the game. Can't imagine why Adrian doesn't keep a motor. I'd have had a half a dozen of them, in his place, if only for the sake of getting away

as often as I wanted. But Adrian always was a hopeless Conservative."

"You're feeling bad?" asked Frank, fastening upon the one point in the sentence which interested him. "Has the pain come back?"

"It's trying to; but I daresay it will hold off until I'm under cover. Do you think they will let me go to bed at once, Frank? Or shall I have to be polite first? I somehow feel a personal affection for my pillow."

"Do you imagine I shall ask them?" almost snorted Frank. "I should like to see them trying to prevent me from putting you to bed whenever I think fit! I hope, for her own sake, that Mrs. Belmont is a sensible woman, else she has stormy times ahead of her. You have never met her, have you?"

"Never. Not even seen her photo. I was off before the wedding; and even if I hadn't been, I doubt whether Adrian would have had me at it. We never were particularly thick, you know. That's why I find it so decent of him to have me here now. Not at all what I should have expected of him."

Frank began to look out of the window rather assiduously.

"It seems a fine country, though bare. I've never been in this part of Scotland before. Is it much of a drive?"

"It didn't appear so last time; but I had no darning needles in my inside on that occasion—and that is apt to affect distances."

Frank glanced at him anxiously, and resettled one of the cushions which had come in the carriage, and whose presence alone was calculated to throw a favourable light upon Mrs. Belmont, as a woman of foresight and practical sense.

As they swept in by the open gates it was Frank who looked about him curiously, while Philip, limp and indifferent, reposed in his corner. Mulcaskie had never been to him what it had been to Adrian—no more than a mine from which he could delve either cash or credit wherewith to satisfy troublesome tradesmen. He had no sentimental, only a financial liking for the place. To Frank, too, it was this financial side of the matter which appealed. Marking the wide sweeps of grass, the quality of the wire fences and the look of prosperity on all sides, he could not quite suppress a feeling of grudge against Mr. Belmont for being in the place of this grown-up babe at his side, who would have required a settled home so badly. He was, in fact, feeling aggrieved, by proxy, as it were.

The sensations with which he descended from the carriage, in order to respond to the greetings of his host, were, accordingly, of a mixed nature; but scarcely more so than those with which Adrian stood upon his own threshold, with all his nerves braced taut for the welcome of the most unwelcome Philip. It was in truth a frigid greeting, and would have been more frigid still, had not Philip's momentary condition, by appealing direct to ordinary compassion, made short work of conventionality. The goggle-eyed butler and Frank between them had their work cut out for them in lifting him out of the carriage, and, despite his feeble protests, bearing him up the house steps. In face of this obvious collapse, when that which had to be done appeared so urgent, there remained no room for weighing words or gestures. In this way it came about that Mulcaskie was taken by assault, as it were.

To Philip himself the memory of his arrival always remained a little blurred by the mists of weakness, yet—

perhaps exactly because of those mists—retained an almost ecstatic character. After the dreadful London lodgings and the long, exhausting journey, to find himself lying in a luxurious bed, between sheets of the finest make, with cheerful chintz curtains tempering the light, and soft carpets hushing each step, seemed very like entering paradise. And, like a proper paradise, it had its angels—one angel, at any rate, whose sweet face, shadowed with solicitude, had shone out upon him through the gathering mists, as through clouds, and whose soft hands had helped to smoothe his pillows. Weak although his poor, jolted brain felt, he still retained enough intelligence to grasp the fact that this was probably Adrian's wife, and to recognise that his cousin was an even more fortunate man than he had supposed him. "Lucky dog!" he subsequently remembered having muttered to himself.

The collapse held on for a day or two; but, according to Doctor Pollett, who was promptly fetched, was not likely seriously to interfere with the process of recovery.

"It's a set-back for the moment," he pronounced, having examined the patient; "but we shall get back our capital at compound interest, all the same—so long, that is to say, as we make no further borrowings. We must not move him again until he is really fit—nor need we, I suppose—since, I take it, that this visit is of elastic duration?"

"Of course," said Lucy readily; while Adrian's silence seemed to acquiesce.

"I'm glad of that. It may mean everything. It has been a nasty cut—a very narrow shave, in fact. A quarter of an inch deeper, and the left lung would have been dished—it's scotched, as it is. What London

authorities were consulted, Mr. Taylor? And was not that what they said?"

Frank gave the necessary information briefly, adding with emphasis that country air and good feeding had been recommended even beyond medicines.

"Quite my opinion. But the medicines—or rather the remedies—are not to be despised either. If I succeed in luring Sir Hiram Oke down here, as I hope to do within the month, I should recommend his having a look at Mr. Warden. He is great at the mending up of damaged warriors; it is quite possible that he may be able to point out a short-cut to perfect health."

"Sir Hiram Oke?" repeated Frank, opening his eyes rather wide. "I thought he never moved under a thousand pounds?"

"Or in the interests of science. For abnormal cases he's to be had *gratis;* and I have got an abnormal case that is absolutely screaming for him. Our friends here know all about it," continued Doctor Pollett, moving a massive hand towards Lucy and Adrian, who were standing by, resigned, well aware of what was coming; "a most peculiar case of paralysis which is going into its third year now. It started coupled with complete imbecility; but the improvement began about eighteen months ago, and has been going on steadily, though within limits. The gleams of intelligence grow more frequent and more prolonged, month by month; yet neither speech, nor anything but the rudiments of movements have been regained. I can see that he is beginning to suffer from his physical helplessness; there is a look in his eyes that tells me so, and his efforts at speech are obvious. All my ambition now is to enable him to reach it. That is why I am in correspondence with Sir Hiram Oke. He has been doing

wonders with radium lately—perfect miracles, in fact; and I do not see why Donniebridge should not be the scene of one of these miracles. He has almost promised to come. I assure you that I am feeling quite excited about it—almost as excited as Father Kinghorn is feeling about that Jesuit preacher whom he is trying to induce to give a mission here before the end of Lent."

To Frank, whom the possible advent of the great London doctor interested only in its bearings upon Philip's health, all this was only moderately interesting. He was therefore not sorry when Doctor Pollett departed, and he was able to return, with a considerably lightened heart, to his friend's bedside. For a moment he had been afraid that he had risked too much by the journey; but it would seem now that it had been the right move, after all. The only thing which troubled him at all was the invitation to himself, which had almost taken him aback, but which suited his purposes too well to be refused. Neither did he lose any time about making matters clear to Lucy.

"You see, Mrs. Belmont," he said on that first evening, "this isn't at all what I had meant. When I concocted that plot—you know about the plot, I suppose?—I aimed at procuring a good time for Philip, and not for myself. I'm sure you will believe that."

"Yes; I believe it implicitly," said Lucy, returning his direct gaze with as direct a one.

"But, since you've offered it me, I take it, not for my own sake, but for Philip's—for whom I somehow feel responsible, though I can't exactly say why. Will you believe this too?"

"I will, Mr. Taylor."

"Just now I heard you talking about a sick-nurse. Please understand that I don't want one. I greatly prefer

doing things for Philip myself; and this way at least I shall not feel a mere encumbrance. I know you won't grudge me my bread and butter, but I prefer to earn it, if you please."

"All right!" said Lucy giving him her hand. And from that moment on those two were friends, as two perfectly natural people can't well escape being. Frank had perceived that Mrs. Adrian Belmont was exactly the person she appeared at first sight, and Lucy had understood that Frank Taylor was one of those people who produce kindness for the benefit of their less capable neighbours as automatically as a caterpillar produces thread for its cocoon.

Philip had been almost a week under the Mulcaskie roof before he was able to come downstairs, or rather to be conveyed thither in an armchair slung upon poles. During this week the impression of having reached paradise had in no way diminished. The angel who had flitted in and out of his well-tended sick-room had by this time become "Cousin Lucy," and was far from having sunk to the level of ordinary womankind. Even the view from the window, with the band of sea beyond the band of wood, and the great rock standing out boldly against the sky and changing its colour—almost it would seem its form—with every change of atmosphere—did not seem quite like ordinary seascape features.

The occasion of Philip's first descent to the Mulcaskie drawing-room was also the occasion on which he first heard Lucy's voice in a new sense. It was she herself who offered to sing—not because she suspected Philip of being musical, but simply as an alternative to conversation, of which Frank evidently considered that the patient had had enough. It was when she had caught various

anxious glances from the self-constituted watchdog that, quite spontaneously, she went to the piano.

She began by some harmless English songs of the "drawing-room" order, quite unexciting and excellently suitable as anodynes. Philip listened immovable, but did not appear entirely satisfied.

"Do you sing nothing but things of this sort?" he asked, at the end, with the nearest approach to animation that he had shown since his arrival. "I like German music best."

"So do I," said Lucy, agreeably surprised. "But I didn't suppose that you——"

"Knew the difference? Oh yes—I actually do. Can you sing the 'Erlkönig'?"

"I'm afraid I can't manage the accompaniment."

"In a week I daresay I'll be able to manage it for you, if you'll let me. I'm afraid my fingers are still too closely related to jelly-fish just now."

"Oh, you play?"

"Philip is a first-class hand at the piano," put in Frank, visibly swelling with pride, though personally unable to distinguish between Rule Britannia and a Sunday Hymn.

"Oh, this is a real surprise!" said Lucy, rejoiced. "Adrian never mentioned this. Adrian, why did you not tell me that you had a musical cousin?"

"I'm not sure that I remembered the circumstance myself," said Adrian with elaborate indifference.

"Let's have a German song, please," pleaded Philip. "Any Schubert or Schumann you like. I give you *'carte blanche.'* "

Then Lucy, having turned the pages of the Schubert album for another minute, settled down to "Der Wanderer," which Philip, though he knew the song well,

seemed to be listening to for the first time. Often though he had heard it—and from stars of the singing profession—he had never heard it presented in quite this fashion—not as an opportunity for bringing out fine notes or displaying a carefully graduated emotion, but as a simple cry of the lonely human heart. Lucy was no "star" as a singer, but she had what many stars lack: a voice which really was a voice, instead of a well-trained instrument—a voice which came straight from the heart and therefore went straight to it. As he harkened to its rich, low tones, Philip felt a quite new sort of emotion stealing over him. At the back of his feather-head there existed a strain of sentimentality, which, of all factors, music was the most apt to awake.

* * * * *

"Ich wandle still, bin wenig froh,
Und immer fragt der Seufzer: Wo?
Immer wo?"

* * * * *

"Die Sonne dünkt mich hier so kalt,
Die Blüte welk, das Leben alt;
Und was sie reden leerer Schall;
Ich bin ein Fremdling überall!
Wo bist Du, wo bist Du, mein geliebtes Land?
Gesuchet, geahnet and nie gekannt!
O Land, O Land, so hoffnungsgrün,
Das Land wo meine Rosen blüh'n,
Wo meine Freunde wandelnd geh'n,
Wo meine Toten aufersteh'n,
Das Land, das meine Sprache spricht,
O Land, wo bist Du?"

("I wander in silence and know little joy; and ever comes the sigh; 'Where?'—ever: 'where?'—The sunshine is cold here to me, the blossom faded, life itself seems old. And the words they speak have an empty sound; I am a stranger

ever and everywhere! Where are thou, where art thou, beloved land? Searched for, guessed at, yet never known. Oh land, oh land, so green with hope! The land wherein my roses bloom, where my friends walk on the roads—where my dead rise again—Oh land, where art thou?")

Philip seemed scarcely to be breathing, as, unable to take his eyes off the figure at the piano, upon whose brown hair the candle light was laying gleams of gold, he hung upon each note, and each word. He had never before identified himself with the "Wanderer," of the song, but for some reason or other he did so now. Had he not always been a waif of life, as homeless as this man who was asking: "Where?" For the first time it seemed to him that he knew the answer to that question. The accepted inmate of Mulcaskie could no longer be described as a stranger, ever and everywhere; No—the sunshine was not cold here—in this the two wanderers disagreed—nor life old; never, on the contrary, had it appeared to him so new, so fresh, so strong. In point of fact he had only suffered intermittently from the want of a home, but under the influence of the music, for the moment he nearly believed that he was quite as much to be pitied as the hero of the song; Yet that seemed over now. Was it actually possible that he had found the land where his friends dwelt—where his roses bloomed?

* * * * *

"'Im Geisterhauch tönt's mir zurück:
Dort wo Du nicht bist, dort ist das Glück!'
(With spectral breath the answer sounds:
There where thou art not, there is thy happiness!)"

No, that was another mistake of the "Wanderer." It seemed to Philip far truer that happiness was here, exactly on the spot on which he found himself.

Frank, carefully watching the flush on Philip's face, scarcely waited for the last note before interfering.

"Thank you, Mrs. Belmont," he said in a voice so matter-of-fact as instantly to disperse the spell in the air; "but I think that will do for to-day, it's high time for Philip to be back in bed."

"That is what strikes me too," agreed Adrian rather emphatically. "I'm not at all sure that Doctor Pollett would approve of the way we have spent the evening. You are nearest to the bell, Mr. Taylor: would you kindly touch it."

* * * * *

A few days later—Philip having made good progress, the party of four were sitting around the tea-table, to all appearance in perfect harmony with each other. From the first Lucy had treated the invalid more as a brother than as a cousin; while Adrian, although rather too punctiliously polite, seemed bent only on preserving appearances.

Philip, whose foppishness had revived with his strength, was looking alternately at Lucy's profile and at his own embroidered silk socks, advantageously displayed,—Lucy herself being occupied with the stitching of a tiny, lace-trimmed cap. Her bent head and busy hands seemed to give the crowning touch to the home-like picture.

Presently the afternoon post was brought in and with it the evening papers.

"So they've finished up that frontier business, without your help," remarked Adrian, scanning the news column. There was a just perceptible note of mockery in his voice, as always when addressing Philip.

"Have they?" said Philip indifferently. Things out of

sight with him were generally out of mind as well, and his interest in the frontier had long since evaporated.

"They've taken long enough over it," remarked Frank. "It's quite three months now since the start, and almost that time since the engagement in which Philip got his kink."

"How did you get it exactly, Philip?" asked Lucy looking up from her work. "I've always been wanting to ask. The papers really give no details at all."

"Oh, just by walking up a hill," said Philip a little crossly. Talk about his achievement always bothered him. His ambition was to shine as a glass of fashion, not to pose as a hero, as which he was conscious of looking the part so little as easily to become ridiculous.

"Does one get the D.S.O. for walking up a hill?"

Here Frank interposed by taking up the tale of the night-march which was to have led to a surprise attack, but which, owing to the difficulties of the road had landed the troop at the foot of the fortified hillock, with the dawn already breaking.

"It was a question of giving it up for that day or risking an open charge," explained Frank, with obvious relish: "And while the heads were consulting, this young man here came out with a proposal. The fort itself was still obviously asleep. There was just one chance of surprising it even yet, and that was by silencing the outpost, established under a shelter, half-way up the slope. It was Philip who offered to do this, and did it too by creeping through the brushwood at the back, and having him by the throat before he had time to fire an alarm-shot, but not before he had time to use his knife—as that cut shows, unluckily. The fort was taken within twenty minutes after that—thanks to Philip."

"If it hadn't been thanks to me it would have been thanks to someone else," objected Philip, positively blushing with discomfort. "The others were just as keen to go as I; and they only picked me out because I was the longest and the thinnest, and most likely to look like a snake in the grass. Besides the fellow was half asleep when I got him. It didn't feel even quite fair play."

"Then I suppose he used his knife in his sleep," smiled Frank, well satisfied with the effect produced.

Adrian had listened with strained attention, interested in spite of himself, yet irritated. Anything that tended to enhance Philip's importance was unwelcome. After hearing the details of this story it would be impossible to think of him as a merely ridiculous figure. Instinctively Adrian glanced towards Lucy, and perceived that neither upon her had the narrative missed its impression. Her raised head, the hands lying idle in her lap testified to this.

"I understand now about the D.S.O." was all she said as she resumed her stitching.

"A splendid opportunity for getting it, anyway," Adrian felt moved to say, in a tone which implied that no one but a duffer could have missed such a chance.

"And splendidly taken," responded Frank as much in reply to his thoughts as to his words.

CHAPTER III.

A FAILURE.

To feel jealous of Philip seemed too imbecile for words; and yet, after another week of continued intercourse, Adrian surprised himself in a movement which seemed, at any rate, akin to jealousy. Going down to the

root of the feeling, he discovered there an acknowledgment not so much of Philip having gained, as of himself having lost in worth. Under normal circumstances he would have laughed at the idea of that coxcomb as a rival, or of, for one instant supposing that Lucy even noticed the variety of his wonderfully assorted ties, of which he daily sported a new specimen; but handicapped as he was by the consciousness of his false position, it seemed to him almost conceivable that Lucy should prefer the man who had done at least one gallant act to him who had shirked a moral obligation. He too could have disarmed that outpost, he felt sure of that; but it was small comfort to know himself physically brave after having proved himself a moral coward. So strong was at times the sense of humiliation that there came moments at which he wondered whether—had the will still been in existence—he would not have produced it, regardless of consequences. But in burning that piece of paper he had burnt his own ships. There was no will to be produced; and the publication of its quondam existence would entail the confession of its destruction. Would Lucy's esteem stand the test? He dared not hope so. And therefore, whichever way he looked, there appeared no escape from fulfilling to the letter that pact with conscience, made one August night, but which he had long since recognised as unworthy of himself.

His fears had now concentrated upon the danger of being found out—by her. So acute were these that they raised spectres. And one of these spectres was Macpherson. A quite harmless remark of the old gardener's, concerning the different way things had been done formerly, succeeded in giving Adrian what is popularly understood as a "turn."

He had come upon Macpherson, with his foot upon his spade, favouring the two garden lads with his impressions of Edinburgh, to which city a flower-show had lured him, after an interval of twenty years or so.

"It was just awfu', I tell ye, lads; sicca noise, and sicca crowd, and the folk in the streets; na, I couldna' do wi' yon;—sicca folk all pushin—na, na, I couldna' do wi' yon."

At sight of Adrian the audience had fled; but the lecturer, nothing discomfited, turned the flood of his eloquence upon the new-comer.

"The flowers were well enoo', to be sure," he condescendingly conceded; "though it wurr a sateesfaction to see that the Madohna leelies didna come up to oors."

It was now that Macpherson, pensively turning his spade in the ground, added the remark into which Adrian's uneasy mind read a special significance.

"As for that, I'm wonderin' what the maister wud ha said aboot it. As leetle wud he ha' looked to see Madohna leelies on the second terrace, in place o' peeonies as he wud be looking to see a Roman at Mulcaiskie. Aye, but things tak queer turrns, to be sure!"

"What do you mean?" asked Adrian quickly.

"Only that he cud not abide them flowers, because of their Romish name, savin' you're presence."

"Well, but how should my uncle be surprised to see me here?" insisted Adrian. "Am I not his heir?"

"Oh, aye, so it wud seem, so it wud seem," grumbled Macpherson; "but that's no sayin' that he wanted to have ye here, seein' as how it all cam aboot for want o' a bit o' paper."

Adrian, cold all over, down to the soles of his feet and up to the crown of his head, stared for a moment in

numb silence at the old man, in the shadow of whose walrus-like whiskers he thought to discern something like a sardonic grin.

"Why should he not want to have me here?" he asked at last in a colourless voice.

"Because for you're not havin' the gairdnin' mind, for one thing. I had put hopes in th' Missus," continued Macpherson gloomily; "at the outset she did seem to be promisin' well; and I'm no for denyin' that she's good at the caterloogs; but ever since there's a nussry to look after she's kind o' lost her hold on the gairdin! Those Madohna leelies are aboot the one thing she's been keen aboot lately; and even those were put into her head by the young ladies from Lippenross, who pretend they're good flowers for puttin' on altars. I was on one side o' the hedge while they were talkin' aboot it on the other, ye see."

Adrian, scarcely listening to the close of the speech, walked off without further remark, his mind completely occupied with a new alarm. The will had been in Macpherson's possession for months, he could not forget this. Supposing that, after all, the old gardener could read, and was therefore fully acquainted with the facts of the case? Might that not mean that he was only biding his time for making the most of his secret, and that to-day's strange speech—audacious beyond even the average of his remarks—was to serve as the first hint of coming pressure?

To Adrian this appeared so probable that during several consecutive days he applied his ingenuity to laying traps for Macpherson; and it was not until the gardener had failed to distinguish between an advertisement of whisky and one of autumn bulbs that his employer's

nerves settled down again. In face of this triumphant proof of illiteracy Adrian caught a horrified glimpse of his own state of mind. So mean a suspicion was in truth foreign to his nature, just as the whole position was antipathetic. That straight way recommended by his father was the same along which his own instincts pointed, while the crooked paths he found himself condemned to tread were hateful to his inmost soul. Hence the loss of moral balance which was working havoc in his soul.

What tended to complicate matters was that ever since the birth of the twins he had become regretfully aware that his so carefully cherished agnosticism was collapsing. During those dark days of Lucy's danger it had become imperatively necessary to have recourse to some Power higher than the medical profession; and to what other should he call in the anguish of his heart but to the One to which he had been used to appeal since childhood? So long as the crisis itself lasted he had done so spontaneously—without afterthought; but that once over, he had taken fright at himself. Had he not —passing the open door of the Donniebridge chapel one day while benediction was going on, and catching a glimpse of lighted candles and a whiff of incense—felt absolutely "choky"?

Clearly this could not go on. True, he had now learnt that Huxley and Spencer despite all their goodwill, could not, between them, succeed in making life tolerable. And as for Captain Mellish (who had lost his wife lately) the last report had it that he had been seen coming out of a church. A supernatural element of some sort was necessary, it would appear. But it need not take just *this* form. The comfort he required, why should

he not find it where Lucy found the strength which had upheld her in her loss?

The infidel books now made room for everything in the way of "antipopish" literature on which he could conveniently lay hands. These he read zealously, brought up at times by some statement which he regretfully identified as a calumny, but so determined to find the one convincing word which would make of the proposed change not an apostasy but a conversion, that he ruthlessly cleared all obstacles. In volumes with such promising titles as "Plain Reasons for not joining the Church of Rome," it surely was not conceivable that that word should not be found. Some of these books, too, fell into Lucy's hands—not entirely by accident, and obviously surprised her, though she asked no questions. It was a comfort to see her perusing them almost as assiduously as he himself. No more wholesome course of reading could be conceived, surely, nor better calculated to clear away any foolish thoughts she might have picked up by the way.

In the midst of his newest quest had come the appeal concerning Philip, which made short work of the inner calm he was struggling to reach. The dreaded ordeal had proved even worse than expected. His will Adrian had been able to harden, but not his heart, and as a natural result pity for Philip's physical weakness had found an entrance. But pity was now superseded by this new feeling, which he would not condescend to call jealousy, but which was, at any rate, a chronic annoyance, apt to grow acute in Lucy's presence.

And, further, there was this bond of musical sympathy, with which he had not calculated. That Philip should accompany Lucy at the piano was as natural as it

was aggravating. It was as impossible to make any reasonable objection to the arrangement as to prevent them discussing Grieg, and Robert Franz, and many other people of whom he had never even heard, but which to both of them evidently stood for mutual friends.

It was when the D.S.O. arrived, accompanied by an official document from the War Office, that Adrian first identified the nature of his annoyance.

Tea-time had once more brought the afternoon post. This time they were not alone, the two elder Haughnessie girls having ridden over, while Kitty was reported as in Edinburgh—buying "finery."

"She had scruples about buying it in Lent," explained Mara; "but she is going to salve her conscience by locking it away, and not looking at it again till Easter."

And just then the post was brought in.

It was Frank who reddened joyfully when the nature of the packet addressed to Philip became manifest. Amid awe-struck glances and smothered exclamations the leather case was freed from its tissue-paper wrappings. As, a moment later, the cross lay exposed, all crowded around to look at it, with the exception of Adrian and of Philip himself, who was pulling his moustache and looking supremely foolish.

"Grand!" pronounced Mara. "I'm glad we came in for this. And now, who is to decorate the warrior? For of course it must be solemnly bestowed. Strictly speaking he ought to kneel on a cushion, and one of us should graciously incline herself, to pin this thing onto his breast. Which of us will you have, Mr. Warden? Three ladies present. You pays your money and you takes your choice."

"Perhaps my hostess will do me that honour?" said Philip, suddenly audacious, and looking across the tea-table expectantly. "Cousin Lucy—will you?"

"Of course I will!" came Lucy's ready answer, as without any shadow of a "fuss" she rose. "But never mind about the kneeling; we'll let you off that."

"Indeed we won't!" protested Mara. "We want the whole show; don't we, Nelly? And I don't believe Mr. Warden himself wants to be let off. Do you, Mr. Warden?"

"No, no; by no means," said Philip rather eagerly.

"Well done! Here's a footstool—and here's a safety-pin" (producing one which had been strenuously holding together a rent in her riding-skirt).

A moment later Philip, kneeling on a hassock, rather confused, yet more excited, received the D.S.O. from the hands of Lucy, who laughed softly as she bent over him, caught by the spirit of Mara's fun. She had a low, eminently comfortable sounding laugh which seemed closely related to a chuckle, and which for Philip helped to enhance the homelike feeling in the atmosphere.

It was at this moment that Adrian, looking on from the background, acknowledged to himself the real nature of his annoyance with Philip.

But there were more trials coming; for—the mock ceremony ended—both Mara and Nelly insisted on having the details of the skirmish; and once more Adrian had to listen to that story of the surprise at dawn of which he was already so dead-sick. Mara broke in now and then; while Nelly, too rapt even to exclaim, hung upon each word of Frank's with bated breath. So obvious was her sympathy that Frank ended by talking *at* her, as the best disposed of the audience.

At the conclusion she gave a little shiver of excitement.

"Really, Mr. Taylor," she said fervently, "I am no longer astonished at your being proud of your friend."

Frank seemed almost taken aback.

"How do you know that I am proud of him?"

The majority of the company burst out laughing at this.

"You could not paint the scene as you do, if you were not," said Nelly, smiling through the tears of emotion which rise so easily to Irish eyes. These same Irish, long-fringed eyes were looking approvingly at the eloquent speaker, whose own insignificant orbs looked back with equal approval. Appreciation of Philip always was the straightest road to Frank's sympathy; nor was he subtle enough to grasp the fact that it was the loyal friend and recorder of the exploit who was being appreciated even more than the hero himself.

In the background Adrian pressed one hand hard within the other. Not that he cared one jot about what the Haughnessies thought of Philip, but because he had been watching Lucy's face, which seemed to him to show far more attention than a thrice-told tale called for.

Next day Adrian did a strange thing, with which his emotions of this afternoon may or may not have stood in some obscure connection.

The same post which had brought the D.S.O. had also brought several envelopes with names of London firms upon them, and addressed to Philip. Not the first of their kind, by any means. Adrian had noted their advent, nor found it hard to construe their frequency. Their appearance was another of the things that bothered him, by reminding him that Philip was in positive money

straits. This was a fact which—so long as his own position was not regularised—could not leave him indifferent. Once or twice he had contemplated the possibility of helping his cousin out of these straits, if only to be rid of this tiresome feeling of obligation; but had not quite known how to set about it. On the day after the arrival of the D.S.O. he suddenly found the way. Hitherto he had hesitated, from a genuine feeling of delicacy, unwilling, in spite of all, to hurt Philip's feelings. All at once he now perceived that Philip's feelings were really of no particular consequence, and that to the "hero" fussed over by every woman who approached him, a touch of humiliation could only be beneficial—even supposing so shallow a nature would perceive the humiliation.

Upon this he determined to take the first opportunity —and took it too.

It was in the afternoon that it offered, when Lucy, having discovered some urgent need of the nursery, suggested to Frank that he should accompany her to Donniebridge.

"You haven't practically been out since you came," she urged; "not outside the grounds, at any rate; and Philip is quite well enough to do without your supervision for a couple of hours. We must start sharp at half-past two, as I have a *rendezvous* with the Haughnessie girls. They are to bring me that parcel of knitting-wool which they forgot yesterday."

"Are those the same young ladies who were here yesterday?" enquired Frank.

Having received an affirmative answer, Frank, upon reflection, acknowledged that what Mrs. Belmont said was

true, and that Philip could very well spare him for part of the afternoon.

"We'll shut him into the morning-room with the piano," Lucy suggested. "He'll be happy there and out of mischief. I'll give Jenkins strict orders that he is only to look in if he hears the piano stop."

Adrian, listening to this talk, at once made up his mind to postpone the projected visit to an outlying farm, and rather to spend the afternoon indoors.

An hour later, having left the door of the study open, in order the better to catch sounds, he heard the fantastic *pot-pourri* to which he had been impatiently listening, ripple away into silence. Immediately he rose, and taking an envelope from the table, advanced towards the morning-room, just in time to intercept Jenkins, whose goggle-eyes had been progressively protruding under the influence of the music, and who was now, in strict obedience to orders, advancing towards the door.

"Never mind about that," said Adrian impatiently. "I'll see whether Mr. Warden requires anything. You needn't stop here any longer."

Opening the door of the morning-room, Adrian was a little disconcerted to see Philip sitting with his head in his hands, so deeply plunged in his own thoughts as not to be aware of his host's approach. Close to the piano already, Adrian found it necessary audibly to clear his throat.

"Look here," he said, holding out the envelope in his hand, "this got into my letters this morning and I opened it by mistake" (which happened to be conveniently true). "It's a bill of Saunderson's, I see—a pretty stiff one, too. I don't want to be indiscreet, of course, but unless I'm mistaken you've been getting a good many of these documents lately."

Philip, still half submerged by the waves of music, looked up with dazed eyes. To return to reality evidently required an effort.

"What is that you are saying?"

"About this bill, which I opened by mistake."

Philip looked at it vaguely as he took it. It was a boot-maker's bill. Having glanced over the long list of drawing-room "pumps" and tennis shoes, he sighed audibly.

"I thought so," said Adrian, unable to repress a smile. "Not quite convenient to square him just now—is that it?"

"Of course that's it."

"Have you many more of the sort outstanding?"

"Sands of the sea," said Philip, allowing the bill to flutter to the ground, while irresistibly his long, thin fingers stole back to the keys.

"Stop that noise," said Adrian almost roughly. "I want to talk business. How much would you require to square all your creditors?"

"Don't ask me," sighed Philip, "ask Frank. He's got a splendid head for figures."

"Would five hundred pounds do it?"

Philip shrugged his shoulders, still caressing the keys with his finger-tips.

"A thousand, at any rate, would be sure to cover it, I suppose?"

"So do I; only that I can't at all suppose where it is to come from."

"From me. I'll write the cheque at once, if you agree."

Philip's hands dropped definitely from the piano.

"You—you are proposing to give me money?"

"To lend it you," corrected Adrian. "Although of course I am in no hurry to be refunded," he rather haughtily added.

"Which is only another name for giving."

Philip leaned back in his chair staring at the outside of the Grieg album which stood upon the stand. When he looked up at Adrian the vagueness had gone out of his eyes.

"I give you full credit for not wanting to insult me," he said in the most serious voice Adrian had ever heard from him; "but, of course, I can't take your money."

"Why not?"

"Because I haven't got the shadow of a claim upon you. It's bad enough having to be the poor relation, and being taken in as to a charity hospital; but one must draw the line somewhere, and I draw it at money gifts."

"Stuff and nonsense!" said Adrian, with sudden vehemence. "Am I not the head of the family? Your only relation? and if it doesn't suit me to have a cousin dunned by tradesmen, haven't I the right, as well as the duty to put an end to the situation? You *must* take the cheque, Philip!"

The other had risen, looking rather whiter than he had lately been doing.

"*Your* money, Adrian? No—I could never take your money. I'm not a very useful member of Society, to be sure, but I'm not quite a cur, thank you."

As Adrian stared back at him he felt the flood of suspicion steadily rising in his mind; but even as he looked, the tension in Philip's face relaxed. He burst into a weak laugh.

"Oh, let's drop heroics!" he exclaimed in his usual

voice. "It's awfully good of you, of course; but I'd rather not, Adrian—really not. My debt to you is big enough, as it is. Never mind those cheeky tradesmen. I'll scramble through somehow. 'Weeds don't spoil,' you know—according to the German proverb."

Without another word Adrian turned on his heel—a new rage at his heart. The attempt had been far more of a failure than any he had contemplated as possible. Not only had his offer been refused, but refused in a way which once more, against his own will, forced Philip up in his estimation. He had meant to carry through the thing with a high hand—even a little brutally if necessary; and yet against Philip's smiling opposition the high hand had proved powerless. Anger against his cousin now predominated. If it suited him to ease his conscience by the gift of a thousand pounds, it ought to suit Philip to take it. And instead he was met by this new aspect of the man, almost this touch of dignity in the laughable fop. The disappointment was bitter. Yet there were bitterer things behind it.

"I cannot take *your* money," Philip had said.

The emphasis laid upon the pronoun was at once construed by Adrian's suspicious mind to his own disadvantage. Of course if Philip was in love with Lucy, and not quite a cur, as he protested, he could not take her husband's money. And that Philip was in love he now no longer doubted. There remained only the question of whether Lucy was at all touched—or at least troubled—by this so spontaneously developed passion.

How gain certainty on this point?

CHAPTER IV.

THE STONE THAT WAS TO KILL TWO BIRDS.

"I FANCY he'll make us all sit up," said Mara, casting a glance round the table, at the head of which sat Lucy, with, to her right, a narrow-shouldered, sallow-visaged person in clerical black, who was eating his luncheon with an expression which suggested that it did not taste good. It was upon this somewhat forbidding figure that Mara's eyes, sparkling with some inner source of laughter, rested longest.

"I'm dreadfully frightened of him," sighed Kitty. "Just supposing that, as a penance, he forbids me to ride for a month!"

"Don't talk nonsense, Kitty!" protested Nelly, interrupting an interesting discussion with Frank Taylor touching Indian garrisons, in order to snub her younger sister.

But Kitty was having what was known in the family as one of her "unsnubbable" days. Ever since her appearance she had been in a somewhat fractious mood, and, perhaps because no other convenient target was at hand—both Mr. Taylor and Mr. Warden's attention being occupied—seemed inclined to aim the shafts of her raillery at the sour-faced person on Lucy's right.

"I'm not talking nonsense; only weighing probabilities. Jesuits are supposed to be lenient, I know—'supple' is

the right word, I think,—but on occasions like this they are apt to arm themselves with flaming swords. I fancy that my quarter of an hour before entering the confessional will be a particularly bad one this time. It always feels like a dentist's waiting-room, as it is."

"She is only talking of Father Kessidy, who is to preach a mission at Donniebridge next week," explained Nelly to the somewhat bewildered Frank.

The person on Lucy's right must have got hold of a particularly bad morsel, to judge from the face he made, while uneasily moving his long, black figure. With the exception of his face and his hands, there was absolutely nothing about him that was not black; and even the face, owing to an obstinate growth of stubble, had dusky shades about it.

It was very much under protest that Mr. Macalister was here at all. But for the moral pressure of an energetic wife, divided between social ambitions and maternal anxieties, it is doubtful whether he would now have been gracing the Malcaskie luncheon-table. To cross the threshold of a Popish house revolted his inmost and extremely honest soul, even although the mistress of that house did mercifully not share those pernicious errors. And yet, just lately, he had somewhat frequently crossed that threshold—not by his own initiative, rather by that of the Papist himself. For long Mr. Macalister had fought shy of the invitations which grew ever more pressing, turning a deaf ear to the persuasions of Mrs. Macalister, who argued that with nine children to provide for it was imperatively necessary to be on good terms with the resident laird. It was not until she started the idea that Mr. Belmont's urgency might possibly mean that he was inclining "our way" that Mr. Macalister yielded—upon

grounds of conscience. To encourage any such leaning was of course his duty, though not a sympathetic one. He had himself noticed Mr. Belmont's inclination to draw him into argument, his attempt at getting information concerning Protestant articles of faith. They had embarrassed him not a little, these things not being at all in his line. Since the day of his ordination he had conscientiously fulfilled all his duties, day by day, and hour by hour, like a true, if somewhat mechanical "servant of the altar"; but obligations beyond this had never appealed to him. Proselytising and tricks of that sort he gladly left to the Romish priests. And yet, overcome by Mrs. Macalister's arguments, he had ceased evading the invitations.

To-day was proving particularly trying. These virulently Catholic girls with their unbridled tongues, were distinctly upsetting. Mr. Macalister's whole attitude was a protest against their harum-scarum talk. No wonder he ate his luncheon as though it tasted bad. The gloom upon his dusky face, laid into folds as uncompromising as though they had been hewn out of Aberdeenshire granite, seemed deepening with every moment. The gloom itself was chronic. Religion had always seemed to him a dreadfully serious thing; and what between the cares of this world and of the next, the father of nine children and the pastor of a whisky-bibbing flock found so little cause for rejoicing that even the professional words of comfort were difficult of utterance. Poor Lucy had experienced this when, after her boy's death, she had gone to Mr. Macalister for comfort, and had been met chiefly by sighs and headshakes.

"You mustn't shock Mr. Macalister too much, Kitty," admonished Mara, still with that sparkle of laughter in

her own eyes. "Jesuits and confessionals are things not generally mentioned in public. Tell the truth, Mr. Macalister—you are shocked, are you not?"

Mr. Macalister's sallow face grew brown, which was his manner of blushing.

"There are other things besides these which we're not used to hear publicly discussed," he observed, supremely uncomfortable, yet far too honest to tell a lie.

"That's only because we're on a better footing with the other world than you are. When you come to think of it, you others haven't really got more than a bowing acquaintance with the supernatural."

"How do you make that out?" laughed Lucy, anxious to turn attention off the troubled clergyman.

"By your attitude in church. We run in and out of ours at all hours of the day, and without minding particularly whether one misses the beginning of something —because we feel at home; while you go there only in your best clothes, and think yourself disgraced if you have to outrage etiquette by walking up the aisle after everybody is in their place. Can there be a doubt as to which of us is a child of the house, and which a paying—I beg your pardon—a *praying* guest? Can there, Lucy?"

"Mara!" came Nelly's warning voice from across the table. A quick glance, it seemed a glance of understanding, was exchanged between the sisters, whereupon Mara unexpectedly asked:

"What did you say Macpherson was planting in the beds in front of the house?"

At the foot of the table Adrian was squeezing bread pellets between his fingers. The Haughnessie girls always acted upon him as an irritant; and their presence to-day was particularly unwelcome. It was unfortunate in the

extreme that they should have collided with Mr. Macalister, whose society he had lately been cultivating as carefully as erstwhile that of Huxley and Spencer. Considering impending events he could not help becoming in the future a rather important person; and there was no saying whether he might not pick up from his lips that convincing word which, despite diligent search, he had not yet discovered in the pages of the books consulted. But the difficulty was to get any word at all out of Mr. Macalister, whose obdurate taciturnity baffled the most ardent spirit of enquiry. Neither thorny propositions nor searching questions seemed capable of rousing him out of his stony quiet. At first Adrian had clung to the belief that exactly because he spoke so little he probably thought all the more; but lately another question had obtruded itself: was it possible that Mr. Macalister said nothing, because he had nothing to say?

This was all the more disappointing as Adrian's secret determination was growing daily more stubborn. Ever since his newest aggrievement against Philip had taken shape, the hardening process had set in once more with redoubled force. The thought of having to yield up Mulcaskie—and all that hung upon Mulcaskie—to his cousin, had seized upon him again with a new sense of repulsion. Yes, the change was inevitable; but he would prefer to make it with conviction rather than without. It was therefore most annoying that Mr. Macalister, instead of crushing Mara with some well-chosen argument, should simply hold his tongue and look uncomfortable.

* * * * *

"You're not angry with us, Lucy, are you?" Mara was asking a little later in the drawing-room, where Lucy, a flounced white bundle on each arm, her motherly pride

tempered by yearning tenderness, bent over the delicate baby faces. "I know Kitty behaved shamefully; but really it's almost impossible to resist shocking the 'Pillar of the Cloud.'"

"The *what,* Mara?"

"We call him the 'Pillar of the Cloud'—he's narrow and black enough for one—in contradistinction to Father Kinghorn, who is the 'Pillar of Fire,' and not only because his hair is red. You don't mind, do you?"

"I've given up minding things from you," laughed Lucy, in spite of herself. "But I do wish you would tell me what is the secret between you. I've caught you ever so often exchanging glances; and what made you change the subject so quickly at luncheon?"

A further glance was exchanged.

"Shall we tell her?" Mara put it to the company.

"For goodness sake, yes!" decided Kitty. "I can't hold my tongue for ever."

"It's only this—that Father Kinghorn strictly forbade us to talk to you about religion. He said that so long as a person was quite firm in his own faith it was wrong to unsettle his mind. We've tried so hard to obey him; but sometimes one forgets; and then we suddenly remember and pull up. See?"

"Did Father Kinghorn really say that about not unsettling one's mind?" asked Lucy, bending a little lower over her vaguely-staring babes.

"Yes, he did. We were never to argue. Only if you —I mean if anybody asked questions themselves, then we might speak. Do you see?"

"Yes, I see; and I think it very sensible of Father Kinghorn."

There was a moment's silence, during which Lucy

still bent over her children, while three pairs of dark-fringed eyes watched her expectantly.

Then Lucy said:

"I do think that Vi is getting a little more colour, is she not?"

Mara suppressed a sigh of disappointment before saying heartily:

"I'm sure she is!—only that I'm not quite sure which is Vi. Tell the truth, Lucy: would you know which is which, without the blue and pink ribbons?"

"Of course, I should!" protested Lucy, afire in a moment with maternal indignation. "Di has ever so much darker eyes and quite another shape of nose."

"Of button, don't you mean?" put in the grinning Kitty.

"And quite other opinions regarding social arrangements," completed Mara. "Oh, you mothers! how like as peas you all are! Now, if at this moment I was told to gather either a violet or a daisy, I positively shouldn't know whether to put out my hand to the right or to the left. That comes from being an old maid."

The floral temptation had, unavoidably, lain near when it came to the naming of twin girls, "Rose" and "Lily" having been condemned as somehow too stately for the two frail mites; there had remained only the humbler "Violet" and "Daisy," and even these had automatically shrunk into "Vi" and "Di."

"I'm not an *old* maid!" protested Kitty; "and yet I feel just as helpless as you."

It was just then that Adrian, coming in by a distant door, became aware of the group at the end of the drawing-room, and drew his black eyebrows into a heavy frown. No sight could be more unwelcome than that of the

Haughnessie girls fussing over his children, with an air of possession which spoke volumes. Must this irksome intimacy be borne for ever? No, of course, only until the great change was accomplished. But it had become too irksome, and—who knows—perhaps also too dangerous to be borne even so long. Some way of putting an end to it must be found; some way of estranging Lucy from these officious friends. Often before had Adrian pondered over the problem, without being able to hit upon the solution. In this moment he seemed to have found it, quite suddenly. Perhaps it was the sight of Mara's face, seen at a particularly becoming angle—the rich tint of her complexion triumphantly bearing the ordeal of the full light—which brought the inspiration. She was undoubtedly handsome—saving that scar; quite the sort of woman whom another woman might be supposed to be jealous of. Was Lucy immune against jealousy? That might depend upon the degree in which her mind was occupied by Philip. Ah, and here flashed a second inspiration, for by appearing to occupy himself with Mara, might he not succeed not only in severing the band between Mulcaskie and Lippenross, but also in finding out whether Lucy was at all touched by Philip's obvious devotion? Could any neater way of killing two birds with one stone be conceived?

All this flashed through his mind, while slowly he approached the group at the other end of the drawing-room. The better part of him recognised the plan as slightly diabolical, but without succeeding in repudiating it on that account. And the opportunity for setting it agoing seemed to offer of itself. At luncheon already there had been a talk of a *rendezvous* for next day, a drive to St. Gillans' beach, followed by tea at a farm-house, all under pretext

of giving Philip—whose convalescence was making huge strides—a glimpse of some of the show-bits of the coast.

"Caves and jelly-fish and seaweed!" Nelly had explained to Mr. Taylor. "I'm sure those things will do your patient more good than all Doctor Pollett's pills and powders.

Frank was of opinion that decidedly they would; while Philip, having assured himself that Lucy would be of the party, positively craved for jelly-fish, and would not be satisfied until he got them.

Adrian had begun by throwing cold water on the scheme (for which Philip's craving was responsible); but now his tactics were abruptly altered. During the final discussion in the drawing-room he showed himself as keen for St. Gillan's beach as Frank or Philip, or the Haughnessie girls themselves.

"It does seem a sin to waste this weather," he pronounced. "It's miraculous, as it is, and miracles don't endure."

"Well done, Mr. Belmont!" approved Kitty, clapping her hands like a child. "We'll catch shrimps and play at hide-and-seek in the caves, won't we, Mr. Taylor?"

"Shrimps are not in season, and the caves will be too wet," objected Nelly. "Besides I'm sure Mr. Warden is not yet able to play hide-and-seek."

"That's for Mr. Taylor to decide; you're the sick-nurse, aren't you, Mr. Taylor?"

The laughing eyes looked for an answer, but, owing to Frank's attention being otherwise engaged, got none.

Kitty's small white teeth dug themselves rather deep into her underlip as she turned away. To look for an answer in vain was not a thing to which she was used.

CHAPTER V.

ST. GILLAN'S BEACH.

THE sea, which as a rule was no more than a "presence" at Mulcaskie—in the sense that the sky is one——had to-day become something close and intimate. Every wrinkle in its face, seen usually as in a vision, was clearly discernible, every murmur of that voice which only on the wildest of wild nights could carry so far inland, plainly audible. The sea had not come to Mulcaskie, but Mulcaskie had come to the sea.

Adrian had said scarcely too much when he called this April weather a miracle. The calm which had fallen after the equinoctial gales—a relative calm, of course—might truly be termed blessed. No longer to see the branches of elm and beech lashing the stormy sky, the boughs of flowering sloe waving in distress like white women's arms beckoning for succour, was in itself restful; just as the weary ear gladly missed the never-ending wail of the tempest which had pursued it even into dreams.

Already during the drive it had been rejoiceful to sniff the primrose-laden air and note the yellow patches under the bushes; to watch the gambols of other patches —dazzlingly white, these, and fourfooted—upon the young, green grass and around the proud but anxious sheep-mammas, a trifle overwhelmed by the exuberance of their fluffy sons and daughters. And now it was almost more

rejoiceful to taste the salt air and mark the footprints of spring upon St. Gillan's beach.

The show-spot was having a show-day—no doubt of that. To the right and to the left the cliffs, honeycombed with caves, swept along with something of the grandeur of ruined battlements, a fringe of new green dropping over their jagged edge, and other tufts of green and sometimes of pink—waving like plumes from the crevices between the dark, stratified stone. At its foot the sands—yellow in the sunlight—spread like a carefully laid carpet, up to the very mouths of big and little caverns, with every tiny shell, worked like a shining bead into its texture, visible in the clear light. Even the pools which were so apt to look like fragments of dirty glass, were blue to-day, with the reflection of an actually blue sky, or what at any rate passes for a blue sky, North of the Tweed; while out at sea the sails of a fishing-boat turned from white to grey and from grey to white again, in measure as it curtseyed in and out of the sunlight.

* * * * *

"Do you happen to collect anything?" asked Nelly of Frank Taylor—"Shells or seaweed, I mean. If so this is your chance. Or have you a weakness for sea-urchins?"

"I was promised caves," said Frank, looking in the direction of the mock-battlements. I am told these have an historical interest, and that somebody or other hid in them once."

"Yes, they are very interesting in their way," admitted Nelly.

Frank took a rapid look round. Where was Philip? Ah, over there, beside Mrs. Belmont, and therefore in safe hands.

"Let's have a look at the caves," he pleaded, his

watch-dog conscience at rest. "I somehow feel more inclined for exploration than for natural history."

"Well, if you are anxious for it. It's a good day, to be sure, since the sands are pretty dry. But we must be careful not to get lost; the passages are a perfect labyrinth."

"Oh, we will be very careful, of course," said Frank gravely.

* * * * *

"I like the look of those rocks," Philip was saying almost at the same moment to Lucy. "I'm sure they're awfully interesting inside."

"Interesting, but damp," pronounced Lucy.

"Not on a day like this, surely. Do let's have a go at them, Cousin Lucy! You told me yourself that they're the chief show of the place, and I was brought here to see shows, wasn't I?"

"Well, you must be content to look at them from the outside. I'm sure Mr. Taylor wouldn't approve of your risking a chill."

"Frank? Why, he has just gone in there himself!"

"That is just the reason," began Lucy and then checked herself to add mentally: "How slow men are, to be sure!"

Aloud she only remarked:

"Mr. Taylor isn't a convalescent; and he consigned you to my care; and I herewith decide that it is far better for you to walk in the sunshine along this nice, dry sand than to poke about in caves. So just come along, Philip, and tell me more about that new Norwegian composer whom you say you have discovered."

Lucy walked on so briskly that Philip had no choice but to follow her, which he did with a certain reluctance.

To walk with Cousin Lucy in the sunshine was charming, of course, but to wander with her among the caves would have been still more delightful. Not that under the protection of their shadows he would have dared to take even the liberty of pressing her hand—since it was as a distant star that he worshipped her—but only for the sake of the sentimental satisfaction of feeling himself alone with her for a brief space, with the rest of the world shut out by the black rock. Caves have about them a note of intimacy which the most delightful beach perforce lacks; and *tête-à-têtes* were growing more precious in proportion as their end loomed in view. It was notable that with the rise of his physical strength the droop of Philip's spirits kept exact pace. For him the return of health meant not joy, but banishment. For how much longer could he continue to abuse Adrian's hospitality, more especially in the absence of any real cordiality on Adrian's own part? Soon the rudderless ship of his life would have to quit this home-like haven, the wanderer to resume his aimless wandering. Was he very much to be blamed if, with this dread upon him, he sought rather to disguise than to display the progress made—at moments spoke more languidly or walked more feebly than circumstances rendered absolutely necessary?

"Come on, Philip, I'm sure a brisk walk will do you good," Lucy was saying just now, anxious to take his attention off the caves—and this not only in the interest of his health but also of Nelly Haughnessie, who had lately confided to her that Mr. Taylor was quite the nicest man she had ever known. Even without this confidence it is probable that Lucy, being a normal woman, and therefore an instinctive matchmaker, would have sought to draw Philip away just as she was seeking to absorb his

attention by plunging into an arduous discussion concerning the new Norwegian composer.

* * * * *

"Which of these leads shall we follow?" asked Mara of Adrian, who was carrying her wrap and had been making himself far more agreeable than she had ever known him to do before. "Do you vote for the caves or for the beach?"

"Need we follow any lead?" asked Adrian with a sudden laugh, bringing back his eyes from the couple pacing so rapidly along the sands—as rapidly as though they wanted to be out of sight—and obviously absorbed in what must be very interesting talk. "Why should we not start one of our own?"

"By catching crabs, perhaps, or chasing seagulls?"

"Why not? Or by going for a sail in that boat over there. I'm quite good at an oar, you know. Will you risk it?"

"Splendid!" said Mara, her adventurous spirit caught in a moment. "It's quite a big boat too; shall I call the others?"

"If you do, then I withdraw my offer. I don't want a crowd of people."

"But we might take Kitty, mightn't we? She seems rather at a loose end."

Which was strictly true; for ever since the company had, automatically, fallen into couples, Kitty had found herself in the position usually defined as a fifth wheel to a cart. At this moment she was poking about rather listlessly in a pool with the point of her sunshade.

"She is picking up shells," said Adrian decisively, "it would be a pity to disturb her. Come along, Miss Haughnessie!"

"A *tête-à-tête* then?" laughed Mara, a little astonished, but quite unsuspicious.

"Yes, a *tête-à-tête* row. You're not afraid, are you?"

"Afraid!" she asked scornfully. It was a word which always acted upon her like a whip. "Here goes! Fetch the boat, Mr. Belmont! Let's row out to that group of rocks with the red tufts upon them; I want to see whether it's seaweed or flowers."

Gleefully and without the shadow of an after-thought Mara took place in the boat which Adrian had espied moored to a rock. It was a funny idea of Mr. Belmont's, and Mr. Belmont was altogether funny to-day; but she could see no reason for discouraging this new-born amiability, and on the contrary, many reasons for encouraging it. No doubt he wanted to make up for past remissness; and high time, too!

"Shall I take the second oar?"

"No, better take the tiller; and give me the direction."

"That's not it, anyway, in which you are looking now," for Adrian was straining his eyes along the shore.

"All right!" he said, in answer to his own thought, rather than to her. "I'm going ahead."

The couple on the shore had turned at last, and were coming back slowly—very slowly—in this direction. It was to this circumstance that Adrian's "All right!" applied. For what he was doing was of no use at all unless it was seen, and seen by Lucy. It was the sight of her apparent absorption in the talk with Philip which had exasperated him to the present point. Merely to say amiable things to Mara—after offering her the box-seat in the drag—was evidently not enough. It was necessary to do something conspicuous, something which could not be overlooked. From this point of view the boat had seemed a

heaven-send. Once having lured Mara into it, it stood open to him to prolong the situation—or to develop it—according to circumstances, and in a way which could not fail to arouse Lucy's attention, and perhaps her wifely alarm.

As it happened, the circumstances were even more than normally favourable. For the group of rocks proved, on nearer view, to be more difficult of approach than had appeared at a distance, and far too slippery to be scaled without very active assistance, which Adrian, having made fast the boat, gave with an exuberance of gesture calculated for the gallery, in this case represented by the shore. When Mara stood at last, breathless, upon the top of the largest rock, the demands of equilibrium left her no choice but to hold on to Adrian's willing arm, though to say the truth, any other support would have been more welcome, certain misgivings having during the row out begun to stir in her mind. Not that these sufficed to blind her to the fascination of this wild spot. Despite the (comparative) calm, the waves were playing a lively game around this archipelago of mostly flat-shaped rocks, over which the water was spreading itself like crystal table-cloths, to trickle down the side in fringes of silver and opal.

"I'm afraid we have wasted our pains—it is only seaweed, after all," said Mara, aware of a suggestive pressure of the arm to which she clung, and suddenly anxious to put an end to the situation. "And there is Lucy waving to us. I'm sure they want to adjourn for tea. Perhaps Mr. Warden is tired."

"He can sit down if he is," said Adrian with an obstinate look, casting a glance in the direction of the beach, where beside Lucy and Philip, the somewhat forlorn figure of Kitty was visible, in an attitude which seemed to say

that she too had had enough of the present situation. "What puts you into such a hurry, Miss Haughnessie? You aren't afraid of me, are you?"

Afraid!

Mara would have liked to answer as before, but meeting Adrian's audacious glance, the word refused to cross her lips. She really was beginning to be a little afraid of Mr. Belmont, who in this new mood appeared to her almost like a stranger. There was a recklessness about his talk, a feverishness about his eye which she had never before noted. If she had not known for certain that Lucy alone occupied his heart, she could almost have supposed——

"What an idea!" was all she could find to say, and she said it with burning cheeks.

"Please help me to the boat," she added decidedly. "We really must be going."

"Cruel behest, but I obey it!" said Adrian still in that tone of new-born levity which sat so ill upon him.

His hand did not seem to her quite steady as she grasped it to make her first step downwards, and perhaps for this reason the step itself was a failure. There was a wrench of smarting muscles, a moment's sickening sense of swirling water down below, a wild clutch at the only thing to clutch at—Adrian's sleeve—and a moment later the returning sense of security as she felt herself deposited upon the seat of the gently rocking boat. Although actually not aware of having been lifted off her feet, she knew that she could only have reached her present safe position by the medium of Adrian's strong arms.

"Thank you!" she said in a burst of spontaneous gratitude. "It was stupid of me to slip."

"On the contrary; I think it was very clever of you,"

said Adrian in so peculiar a voice that she turned her head sharply, in order to take a better look at him. She was just in time to catch the direction of his glance, following which she saw Lucy and Philip on the shore, and the former just settling a plaid around the latter's shoulders.

And all at once Mara understood. The mystery of the afternoon lay bare before her, unveiled by her woman's wit. The peculiarity of Adrian's tone had been in its note of triumph. He was exulting about something; and she now knew about what. So she had been used as an instrument! Very flattering, indeed!

"Please row fast, Mr. Belmont," she said with unwonted sharpness. "I too am getting hungry for my tea."

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It was while she was presently drinking her tea in the farmhouse parlour, whose mantelpiece showed a happy combination of sea-shells and Bible texts worked in cross-stitch, and whose ginger-coloured sofa was surmounted by a family group showing four generations of the McCulloch family, that Mara, having overcome the first flurry of her recent discovery, came to an understanding with herself, or rather to a resolution. On the other side of the massive mahogany table Lucy and Philip, Nelly and Frank, sitting in the order named, were doing full justice to the excellent tea-cakes and substantial scones issued from the tea-basket which had preceded the party to the farmhouse, since, despite the spring sunshine, to spread the feast upon the rocks—though advocated by Philip—would have been a tempting of Providence. It was these two couples who bore the burden of conversation, seconded, or rather led on by Kitty, whose ill-humour of a time ago had turned into somewhat reckless live-

liness. Just now she was pelting the company with bread pellets, to the distress of Mrs. McCulloch, who, in Sabbatarian silk and the sweat of her brow was superintending arrangements, and in whom respect for the "gentry" could not quite extinguish anxiety for her carpet.

"Oh, I beg your pardon!" cried Kitty in mock distress, as one of her pellets landed in Frank's eye. "I haven't blinded you, have I? Though I rather think you were blind before."

"I blind, Miss Kitty?"

"Well, if you weren't blind you wouldn't have lost your way in the caves, would you? Oh, yes, I can't help ranging you among the blind," smiled Kitty in her most bewitching manner, while making a good deal of play with her long-fringed grey eyes.

"Really, Kitty, you should be more careful," said Nelly, annoyed, while Frank still rubbed the injured eye. "You have hurt Mr. Taylor."

"Have I? Well, I'm quite ready to mend the hurt again. Will you have my handkerchief, Mr. Taylor? I'm sure it's softer than your own."

"That's a beautiful shell, Mrs. McCulloch," broke in Lucy, scenting storm in the air. "But it doesn't come from this coast, does it? I've never seen one of that sort before."

"No, Ma'am, to be sure; that's one that my sailor-boy Geordie sent us last Christmas, from over the seas—one of those republican places in America, it was, where they haven't so much as a kirk; but such birds in the trees to be sure—leastways, to judge from the pair of wings which he sent me along o' the shells; not a colour o' the rainbow amissin' in them, I should say. I've put them on my Sunday bonnet."

"Let's see the Sunday bonnet!" voted Nelly, with an eloquent twinkle in her eye. "Perhaps we might get a wrinkle from it—oughtn't we, girls?"

But Mara sat abstracted, while Kitty answered sharply:

"I'm quite satisfied with my Sunday bonnet, thank you. But then I have no particular reason for beautifying myself."

Nelly, flushing hotly, stared almost in consternation. This was not at all Kitty's usual way.

"And along with the shells and the wings Geordie sent me one of those monkey things they have out there —in place of squirrels, I suppose," Mrs. McCulloch was saying to Lucy. "And that's a question, Ma'am, upon which I should be right glad to have your opinion, if I may be so bold as to ask it, to be sure. David is for my puttin' it under glass, here in the parlour. He says it would be the makin' of the apairtment; and there's small doubt it would give the place a certain sort o'—*stamp*. But I'm no' quite easy about it in my mind, not feelin' assured that that monkey is a rightful adornment for a Christian parlour, so like the Evil One as he is in feature, to be sure!"

"Well, we would have to inspect him, in order to decide," said Lucy, with carefully preserved gravity. "Where is the beast?"

"In the wardrobe upstairs. I could fetch him down, only that David is not at home and the stand hard to lift."

"Don't bother. We shall examine him upstairs—at least I will. Who else is coming? We may have to take votes, you know."

"I!" said Philip, unhesitatingly.

"I'm not sure that I care about monkeys," said Nelly doubtfully.

"Maybe the young ladies would sooner tak' a look at the new pig," suggested Mrs. McCulloch. "David bought him at the Donniebridge fair, and he's a real beauty."

"Yes, I think I prefer a live pig to a dead monkey," acquiesced Nelly.

"Mara—Kitty—which do you vote for?"

"I vote for finishing my tea," said Mara decisively; while Kitty jumped up, exclaiming:

"All I vote for is fresh air; it's suffocating in here!"

In another minute they were all trooping through the door—all but Mara, who deliberately helped herself to another tea-cake, and Adrian, who, having asked leave to smoke a cigarette—accorded by Mrs. McCulloch with a bleeding heart—had spent the last five minutes conveniently withdrawn behind its floating veils of smoke and entrenched in taciturnity.

The cigarette was not finished yet; but having realised the general movement, he threw it into the grate and rose in his turn. Certain features of the homeward row in the boat had made him undesirous of further *tête-à-têtes* with Mara.

He had made but one step towards the door when he heard her voice.

"Mr. Belmont!"

"Yes?"

"Never mind the pig and the monkey. You know you don't care twopence about either of them. And please sit down again."

"Sit down again?"

"Yes. You aren't afraid, are you?" asked Mara with a curl of her scarred lip, as she put the same question he had put to her such a short time back.

With a twitch of his eyebrows Adrian resumed his place.

"What do you want?"

"I want to give you something."

"Really! And what is that?"

"A piece of my mind."

He glanced at her sharply across the table.

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say. I'm going to give you a piece of my mind; and not a very tasteful piece either. Do you know what you have been doing all this blessed afternoon?"

"Enjoying myself, of course!" said Adrian with a bitter sounding laugh.

"Demeaning yourself, say rather, and doing your best to demean me. I didn't understand at first; but now I do. You are doing your cousin the honour of being jealous of him—quite groundlessly, as you must know as well as I;—and because I came handy as an instrument, you have been using me, in the hopes of awakening counter-jealousy. Anyone else would have done as well for an afternoon's flirt, of course. It was a mere toss-up whether you hit upon Kitty or me. Is that so or not?"

Adrian, plucking nervously at his moustache, kept silent.

"I dare you to say it was not so!"

"How did you guess?" asked Adrian, bewildered.

Mara laughed, quite heartily.

"By being a woman and having eyes in my head. And it's also because I'm a woman that I can't rest until I have told you that you have acted most unfairly—in fact shabbily—both towards Lucy and towards me."

"Towards you?"

"Yes," said Mara, looking at him steadily across the table, "towards me."

"But what harm——"

"Could a little skirmish of that sort, do me? That

is what you wanted to say, is it not? No doubt you consider me an old hand at it—and so I am, in a way. But you mustn't forget that I'm not so very ancient, after all—just twenty-six—and that we Irish haven't got water in our veins. Oh—don't be alarmed! I'm not in love with you yet; but who knows what might have happened if you had gone on taking me about in boats and lifting me down from rocks. Can't you see that you have been playing with fire?—that, in fact, you have acted atrociously?"

In words Adrian did not confess that he had, but his shamefaced silence said so for him. It was again that feeling of humiliation which had overcome him after the offer of money to Philip.

The remorse on his face disarmed Mara on the instant.

"Mr. Belmont, don't look like that. I will forgive you—on one condition: that this be the last experiment of the kind—which, by the way, was most clumsily made, far too glaringly *outré*. I won't have Lucy either suspected or tormented. Do you promise?"

"Yes," said Adrian rather low and hurriedly, for the wooden staircase creaked already audibly under returning steps.

In another moment he learned that the monkey's reputation was saved, and it's stuffed effigy pronounced perfectly fit to stand even the neighbourhood of Scripture texts.

During the drive home Adrian spoke little, but thought a good deal. Would it not seem that he was growing unworthy of Lucy? And Mara had only guessed half the truth, espied only one of his motives. If she knew of that other and far more despicable thought which underlay the deliberate flirtation, how much more would she despise him!

So that too had been a failure!

CHAPTER VI.

ADRIAN GETS A FRIGHT.

"ADRIAN," said Lucy next morning, as he was preparing to start for Donniebridge, "you won't mind dropping this basket at the Presbytery, will you? It is flowers for Father Kinghorn. He begged for some. The mission opens to-morrow, you know, and he needs them for the altar. It won't bother you, will it?"

Lucy asked it a little diffidently, aware that Adrian, for some reason or other, disapproved of her small complaisances towards Father Kinghorn.

But all Adrian said was:

"Very well; I'll hand them in."

He was still smarting too sharply under yesterday's lesson to feel equal to the smallest opposition. Besides, on what ostensible grounds could he refuse so simple and natural a request since in the eyes of the world the red-haired priest still figured as his spiritual superior?

The shortest road to his attorney's office, where business took him, led through the *partie honteuse* of Donniebridge, and past the grim little Presbytery; he would get rid of the flowers at once, and thus acquit himself of his errand.

The haunts of the "mill-hands" were enjoying the *largesse* of the April sunshine almost as much as were the fields and lanes, as the many open windows testified.

The offences unveiled by the sunlight of heaven seemed at the same time to be gilded over by its mercy. The linen hung out to dry shone spotless in the sunlight, and even the heaps of coal refuse had sparkles about it to-day.

"Ring the bell and hand in the basket," said Adrian to the groom, as they drew up before the Presbytery. "With Mrs. Belmont's compliments; that's all you've got to say."

There was rather a long pause before the bell was answered, and as he sat there upon the box, impatiently looking towards the door, Adrian became aware of being watched from out of a window just beyond the entrance. This too stood open, and in its embrasure was visible the head and shoulders of an old man, carefully wrapped in a plaid, and sunning himself in the precious sunshine. During a moment Adrian was puzzled; but quickly remembered that of course this was Father Greyson, whom he had not seen for over a year,—not since the day when Doctor Pollett had used him as a "stimulant." More than once had the indefatigable doctor shown an inclination to repeat the experiment, which, as he assured Adrian, had been far from unsuccessful; but until now Adrian had always found means of evading the ordeal.

If he had not known that this swaddled figure in the armchair could only be Father Greyson, Adrian would scarcely have recognised him. He had indeed grown visibly older during this year; but it was not this that made the difference. That time there had been no more than a flicker of understanding in the depths of the eyes, while to-day, through those same eyes now resting upon him there looked an intelligent human soul. And they were watching him intently, those eyes, and it would seem anxiously, while the pale forehead gathered itself into a

questioning frown. For some reason which Adrian could not account for, the look touched him unpleasantly.

"Is that door not answered yet?" he said sharply to the groom. "Ring again!"

The sound of approaching slippers being dragged along the passage seemed quite agreeable to his impatience.

"With Mrs. Belmont's compliments!" said the groom automatically, as he pushed the basket into the hands of the slattern at the door.

The head in the window embrasure was craned forward, as though to hear better, then turned with a restless movement back towards the room, in whose depth the wings of a white headdress might be seen flitting to and fro.

Touching up his horse, Adrian drove off at a sharp pace. The neighbourhood of the Presbytery always was unsympathetic to him.

He was deep in a business talk with his attorney when a note was handed in to him—the queerest note he had ever seen, written in a childishly round hand upon a sheet of paper that appeared to have been the flyleaf of a book—perhaps a prayer-book—and signed "Sister Monica."

"Who brought this?" he asked in surprise, having glanced over its contents.

"An Irish lad, it appeared, one of the mill-hands' children, who, having hunted the dogcart all over the town, had finally run it to earth before the attorney's door.

Adrian looked again at the jagged paper.

"Will Mr. Belmont be so kind as to step into the Presbytery on his way back, his presence being urgently required. He will be doing a good work.

"SISTER MONICA."

That was all. And what could it possibly mean? Sister Monica he knew by name as the nurse of Father Greyson, had even had a glimpse of her that time last year. What was she wanting of him now? Was she, too, going in for experiments off her own bat? Really the thing was becoming just a trifle too absurd!

For a moment he stood hesitating, with the paper in his hand. It would be so simple to say No. If he did not say it, it was partly because of that still enduring feeling of humiliation. He could not in the least say why he should be afraid of going to the Presbytery, and yet he had the conviction that, besides being discourteous—it would be pusillanimous not to go.

"All right. Tell Sister Monica that I shall look in," was the word he sent through the messenger.

This time the door of the Presbytery stood open, and in the lobby stood Sister Monica, apologetic and voluble.

"I hope you'll forgive me, Mr. Belmont," she eagerly greeted him, the wrinkles on her brown face playing into all sorts of patterns under the breadth of her smile; "but I positively don't know what to do with him. Ever since he saw you on the dogcart he's been one big fidget. I can't think what's come over him. All I can make out is that the sight of you excited him; and he's been making signs which I take to mean that he wants to see you again. That's why I took the liberty of sending that note, Father Kinghorn not being at home. Maybe the sight of you will quiet him."

"So it's as a sedative that I'm to be used this time," said Adrian to himself, while aloud he asked stiffly:

"Are you speaking of Father Greyson?"

"Of course; there's no one else to talk of, surely. You'll come in to him for a moment, won't you?"

"If you wish it; but I can't conceive in what way this should help you."

"That I can't conceive either; but it's the only thing I can think of. You will find a great change since you saw him last. Speech has not returned, and very little movement; but the intelligent intervals are growing longer and longer."

In the midst of a flood of golden sunshine which impartially illuminated the lemon-coloured pyramids of the "Flight into Egypt" and the black crucifix opposite the bed, the silver-haired old man in the armchair sat and waited eagerly, his sunken eyes turned towards the door.

"This is Mr. Belmont, Father," said Sister Monica, shepherding forward the reluctant Adrian. "I fancy you wanted to see him, did you not? Yes—I see you wanted to," for a swift change had come over the expectant face.

"Here I am, Father Greyson," said Adrian awkwardly. "Anything you want to say to me?—I mean—anything I can do for you?" he hurriedly corrected himself, aware of the fearful irony of such a question when addressed to a man deprived of speech.

The sunken, pale-blue eyes fastened themselves more intensely, and with what looked like a growing anguish, upon Adrian's face, while first the pale lips and then the feeble hands moved helplessly and ineffectively.

"You might take his hand," whispered Sister Monica. "He wants to give it you, but he hasn't got enough power over it yet."

Adrian bent forward lightly to press the long, attenuated fingers. Almost it seemed to him as though they were making an effort to retain his own. But if the intention was there, the limp muscles could not answer to it. All too easily he freed himself from their hold.

"Glad to see you so much better than last year," said Adrian with an effort.

To make conversation with a speechless and almost immovable man was a tax upon nerves as well as intelligence. Adrian glanced wrathfully at Sister Monica. It was her he had to thank for feeling, and probably looking, like a fool.

But Sister Monica had eyes only for her patient.

"He's doing all he can to speak. I've seen him like this before, but never so much as this. "You're pleased to see Mr. Belmont, aren't you, Father?" she asked in a louder tone.

The white head nodded.

"He reminds you of his uncle, maybe; your old schoolfellow, was he not?"

Another vague nod, and an intensifying of the anguish in the eyes.

"It's a regular fix, to be sure," muttered Sister Monica; "so much will to speak and not an atom of power."

"In a tomb of flesh!" the words used by Doctor Pollett on a former occasion, came back to Adrian as he looked down at the helpless old man, whose communication with the outer world was confined to his eyes and his ears.

"I've been wondering," began Sister Monica, after that pause.

"What?"

"Whether he hasn't got something on his mind, something that he wants to say, and to you in particular. I've never seen him quite like this before."

"That's not likely, surely! What on earth could he have to say to me?"

"I don't know; some message from your uncle, perhaps. They were such a lot together."

"What an idea!" said Adrian hastily, instinctively averse to the mere thought of such a thing, though not taking time to analyse the reason of this aversion.

"That's it, Father, is it not?" Sister Monica, full of her new idea, was asking of her patient. "You have some message which you would like to give Mr. Belmont?"

The movement of the head grew more emphatic, the twitching of the lips more apparent, while the fleshless fingers opened vaguely, as though seeking to grasp the air.

"Poor soul!" sighed Sister Monica, below her breath; "and no way of helping him! What is that he is looking at now?"

For the sunken eyes had left Adrian's face and had strayed towards the massive writing-table in the corner, where the inkstand which had once reigned there supreme had long since disappeared behind a regiment of bottles and jars.

"He is looking at the writing-table; I have seen him do that before. Is it a piece of paper he wants? His fingers are moving. Does he imagine he could write?"

She flew to the table and started a search, but the blotting-book too was a thing of the past, and nothing but pill-boxes and rolled up bandages met her hands. With an air of resolution she turned to her book of offices and ruthlessly tore out the remaining fly-leaf; then, having produced the stump of a pencil from somewhere about her person, she returned quickly to the window.

"Here, Father—here's a pencil; just try whether you cannot hold it! Who knows! I'll keep the paper steady for you—here upon this book! Just try, Father, just try!"

He tried—with an effort which caused his lips to squeeze themselves into a thin line, and the veins to

swell on his forehead. Slowly and tentatively the skin-and-bone fingers closed upon the pencil.

"He has got it!" came Sister Monica's triumphant whisper; "but will he be able to use it?"

There was a breathless moment, during which the old man in the chair, breathing hard, bent over the bit of paper on his knee, while Sister Monica supporting the uncertain hand, as a child's hand is supported during a lesson of caligraphy—uttered encouraging exclamations.

"It's so difficult to help him, without knowing which way he wants to go," she said to Adrian in an aside. And even as she said it the pencil dropped from the inert fingers, having traced no more than a wavering line.

Sinking back into his chair, Father Greyson lay there, panting, as much evidently from some inner perturbation as from the physical effort.

"Surely I had better be going," said Adrian abruptly. "The sight of me doesn't seem to quiet him a bit—quite the contrary."

"It almost seems so," agreed Sister Monica with a sigh. "You will find your way out, will you not? I must stay beside him."

In the passage outside Adrian stood still for a moment, as though to review the situation, and at least provisionally collect his thoughts. Without any mirror to aid him he knew that his features were disturbed, and he wished to compose them before facing the street.

A message from his uncle! That idea of Sister Monica's had struck him like a jet of cold water. What could that message be about except about one thing?

"That old man knows about the will!"

The thought had flashed up in his own brain, like an answering signal to the Sister of Charity's suggestion.

At first sight it had indeed appeared to be wildly far-fetched; but the closer he looked at it the faster were the probabilities growing. His uncle and the priest had undoubtedly been friends—in a way. In that strange sort of belligerent intimacy which had existed between them, many confidences might have passed. One of these confidences could quite conceivably have embraced the conditions of the testament. Would it not be exactly the sort of thing which his uncle would like to do, if only for the sake of annoying his antagonist? Father Greyson, when in his right senses, must therefore know that he, Adrian, was in unrightful possession of Mulcaskie; and being honest—presumably—he would feel bound in conscience to put an end to an irregular position. Thence those pathetic efforts at speech. What a hidden mercy in those paralysed muscles! In that powerless tongue! But for these he might have been at the mercy of this old priest. Ah, what a narrow shave, to be sure!

Presently Adrian became aware that he was passing his handkerchief over his forehead—which meant that it felt damp. He shook himself and smiled, abruptly reassured by the very extravagance of his own alarm. Whether this wild surmise of his was well-grounded or not—and, after all, it was but a surmise—there was no danger to be feared from that side. Father Greyson, for all practical purposes, was as good as dead; and dead men tell no tales.

As he hurried from the house he almost ran against Father Kinghorn and Doctor Pollett, both beaming, and both talking at the tops of their voices.

"Mr. Belmont—he is coming!" bubbled the priest, while warmly wringing Adrian's hand.

"Who is coming?"

"Father Kessidy, of course—the great Jesuit preacher. Until yesterday I did not know whether he would be able to come in person, or have to delegate another. But the wire came last night. Here is the programme with the hours of the sermons. I *hope* you will attend at least a few of them—for the sake of the example, you know,"—and he pressed a printed sheet into Adrian's passive hand.

His other had meanwhile been seized by Doctor Pollett.

"He is coming, Mr. Belmont! Congratulate me!"

"Who?"

"Sir Hiram Oke, of course—the authority I told you of, and whom I've been angling for all the winter."

"Oh," said Adrian with vague politeness, "I'm glad to hear it!"

And extricating himself from the detaining hands, he sprang up the step of the dogcart, leaving the two fellow-fanatics standing upon the doorstep and smiling broadly in the sunshine, each plunged in blissful and prophetic visions of his own.

CHAPTER VII.

"THE THUNDERER."

DURING the days that followed, some, though not all of those visions came true, of those seen by the red-haired priest, that is to say—for the doctor's chance was not yet. It was about Easter that Sir Hiram Oke hoped to make a dash for Scotland, in the interests of Science.

Among the Irish mill-hands commotion ran high. Joyful commotion, despite the prospect dinned into their ears by Father Kinghorn ever since the beginning of Lent,

of having their sins held up to them as they had never before been held up, and of the horrors of Hell—dulled perchance by forgetfulness—receiving a new coat of paint, under their shuddering eyes, and all this with the cavern of an open confessional yawning in the background. No matter! It would be a "rale good time," all the same—which meant a time filled up with those emotions without which an Irish heart must starve. Whether pleasant emotions or the reverse did not so much matter, so long as both heart and imagination were properly stirred up—and ending in the culminating emotion of a regular clearing out of the lumber room of the soul.

And what a transformation from an atmosphere of wheels and cogs, to get into one of candles and flowers! —to sniff incense in place of machine oil! To hear talk of Angel and Saints and the Blessed Mother of God, by way of a change from your neighbours' failings! The early and the late hours, entailed by the difficulty of fitting the sermons into the factory work, would indeed be a tax on endurance; and yet scarcely a man, woman or child considered the price too high to pay for the spiritual treat in view. Was not the "Faythe r" about to descend upon them known as "The Thunderer?" ("Same as he were one o' His Maijesty's sheeps"—someone had remarked.) Well, then, they wanted to be thundered at. It would at least be a difference from being either sworn or nagged at.

"Are you not going to attend any of the sermons?" Lucy asked of Adrian on the second day of the Mission, having noted that he had not been to Donniebridge, and speaking with the diffidence which had come over her since she had begun to doubt his attitude in religious

questions. "That Jesuit is said to be such a magnificent preacher."

But Adrian answered impatiently that he had heard sermons enough in his day, and that addresses calculated for the ears of Irish mill-hands were not likely to commend themselves to other people.

"I never had a taste for blood and thunder," he added.

Lucy dropped the subject; but when alone again took out of her pocket a crumpled bit of paper which she had found dropped to the floor beside the paper-basket. It was the programme which Father Kinghorn had pressed into Adrian's hand—in vain, so far as he was concerned. Lucy looked at it now with a certain fascination, made up in almost equal parts of curiosity and repulsion. The Haughnessie girls had told her so much about this Jesuit preacher, and a really eloquent sermon was quite as much an intellectual treat as any lecture or speech. She knew that many Protestants went to Catholic Churches for the sake of this treat. Her own Church did not forbid it. And yet that which held her back was a conscientious motive, though cloudy. She put the paper away for the moment, but she did not think it necessary to destroy it.

Next day—Saturday—she took it out again. She knew without consulting it that this was the final day of the Mission, it's crucial and culminating point. The "Thunderer" would be thundering for the last time to-day, since to-morrow's brief address before the general Communion would consist, no doubt, of words of conciliation. The thought left her no peace. As the chances of satisfying it diminished her curiosity grew. If Adrian had attended only one sermon it would have been easy to accompany him; but she shrank from the thought of making his absence more conspicuous by her presence.

Somewhat late she decided to drive into Donniebridge in any case. There were always plenty of small purchases to be made—and for the rest, she would be guided by circumstances.

Adrian, who had not heard the carriage ordered, seemed surprised to meet her in the hall, ready dressed.

"Isn't it rather late for Donniebridge?" he asked. "You can't well be back in time for tea."

"Well, even if I am late, tea is not everything, after all," said Lucy with a touch of unusual embarrassment.

For a moment she feared that he would offer to accompany her; but he said nothing more, only looked at her rather keenly as she took her place in the brougham.

Even having reached Donniebridge she was not quite sure yet of what she was going to do. The conscientious objection pulled hard in one direction, and so did curiosity in another. Having absolved the small purchases, she ordered the carriage to meet her at a certain point. She had remembered that by going there on foot she could easily pass before the Catholic Chapel, and even to see what a "Mission" looked like from outside would be interesting.

It looked like a mob—so it seemed to her, as she turned the corner. The miniature stone barn—a tight fit at all times—seemed utterly incapable of holding Father Kessidy's hearers. Around its door a crowd of men and women pressed, hushed and almost immovable, with craned necks and rigidly attentive faces, intent on not losing a tone of that mighty voice, whose clarion-like notes rang out over their heads and into the deserted street.

At the sight, Lucy shrank back instinctively. Then suddenly went forward. Was not a crowd the very thing she required? Who would notice her amid these closed

ranks? She knew now what she was going to do. Pulling closer the thick veil over her face, she boldly approached this fringe of the congregation, and—trusting to Irish courtesy—deftly began edging her way forward. Nor had she trusted in vain. At sight of a lady—even without recognising her—rough workmen readily made way. Ever more clearly did the voice of the preacher ring in her ear—ever more surely did the contagion of emotion lying in the air lay hold of Lucy. And now she stood within, touching elbows with threadbare men and tattered women, all with their faces turned towards the pulpit and holding their breath as they hearkened. From where Lucy stood, close behind a column, she could not see the preacher. To her he was no more than a voice, but one not easy to forget.

She had come very late; she became aware of that at once—the sermon was nearing its end. "Contrition" had been its subject—so she gathered—and the "Passion" was being pointed at as its most powerful motive.

"At Gethsemane, beneath the olives, we see Him on His knees, sweating blood, all but succumbing to his agony, and, knowing Him Almighty God, we ask amazed: 'Wherefore, Lord?' And to each one of us—to each single one of us—the answer comes: 'For thy immortal soul!'

"And further on the road of His Passion we follow Him and see Him scourged with ropes, crowned with thorns, mocked by the soldiery; and again we ask: 'Lord, wherefore?' 'For thy immortal soul!'

"And at last, treading in His bloody footsteps, we stand upon Calvary, and gaze up trembling, to the awful tree, on which, between heaven and earth, hangs He who made heaven and earth, while, weeping we cry out: 'Lord,

oh Lord—tell me wherefore!' And once more the answer comes back: 'For thy immortal soul!'"

Around Lucy more than one sob, more than one groan resounded. She herself was aware of a rush of feeling that was almost painful. Was this the voice of the redoubted "Thunderer"? Never before had she heard words which reached down so far, with so sure a grip, to the very bottom of the human heart, not even in those sermons so carefully prepared in the pastoral sanctuary and a green leather armchair. In some inexplicable way she felt herself one with the men and women around her. They were in error, of course—but how sincere an error!

The preacher was closing his sermon with words borrowed from one greater than himself.

"Time is short, eternity is long. Put not from you what you have here found; . . . set not out resolved to refuse it. . . . Wrap not yourself round in the associations of years past; nor determine that to be the truth which you wish to be so. . . . Time is short, eternity is long."

The voice from the pulpit ceased. The candles on the altar were lit. A movement ran through the crowd, relaxing the rigidity of attention. Priests wearing purple stoles—the same purple which muffled the crosses on all sides—frayed their way to the beleaguered confessionals. Lucy had a glimpse of Father Kinghorn's face, shining with a light which looked like triumph.

Surely she ought to be going. Yet unsatisfied curiosity, almost as much as the difficulty of reaching the entrance, held her fast. It was her first experience of a Catholic service; and the repulsion she had expected to feel had merged into a paradoxical sense of participation. The reality of it all had caught hold of her. Almost it seemed to her that she could hear the throbbing of these

hundreds of human hearts around her, of which so many "laboured" and were weary. A new scent filled her nostrils. This must be that incense of evil repute, of which she had heard so much. Then there came the moment when all around her knelt with bent head—and she perforce with them—and when from out of the clouds about the altar there was the flash as of golden lightning, to which the poor little organ in the loft did its best to supply the thunder.

As Lucy threaded her way out she came upon something which abruptly arrested her steps. In a retired nook, with hands clasped on breast and face lifted to the Madonna upon a small side-altar, a woman's figure knelt. Long, dark lashes swept upwards. Kitty Haughnessie! It was almost with a shock that Lucy recognised her. Never had she seen Kitty look like this before—her childish face wet with tears, and in the upraised eyes something unspeakable.

For a moment only Lucy looked, then passed on quickly, reddening at what she herself felt to be an indiscretion.

* * * * *

"You are dreadfully late," said Adrian, on the doorstep. "Would the horses not go?"

Lucy hesitated for a moment, then said bravely:

"It was not the horses' fault, Adrian, it was mine. I saw such a crowd around the Catholic chapel that I grew curious and went in. It was that that made me late."

"You stopped for the sermon?"

"Only for a scrap of it. I had heard so much about that preacher, you know."

"What an extraordinary idea!" was all Adrian said, but in a tone which said a great deal more.

She hoped he would put some question which would enable her to air a little of the emotion which still possessed her almost oppressively. But Adrian only remarked that tea had been kept for her.

"Mara had raised my expectations, but I wasn't disappointed," said Lucy at last, unable to rest without saying something.

To which Adrian made no comment.

Not in words, that is to say; though in his own mind the subject of Lucy's visit to the Chapel continued to occupy him till bed-time. Here was another proof of the Haughnessies' influence—that influence which he had tried in vain to break—which would never be really broken until the great step was taken. Pending that, his firmest hope was planted in Lucy's innate loyalty—that deep-rooted conservatism which made it almost unthinkable that she should ever fall away from her own creed. In moments of alarm he had always found comfort in the recollection of what she had said on the day of their betrothal, when the difference of religion was touched upon: "After all, it doesn't seem to me to matter so much what one's convictions are, so long as they are one's convictions."

Reassuring sentiments, doubtless. How was it that to-day he all at once so vividly remembered how he himself had repeated:

"So long as they *are* one's convictions."

And the thought was liable to be spun out yet further. Even in a political revolution, does there not come a moment when loyalty to the old authority becomes treachery to the new? Such suggestions had visited him before, only to be shaken off. He shook them off now, not quite so easily as formerly. A change of convictions in Lucy would bring about complications too awful to be con-

templated. Although he did not really believe in the danger—chiefly because he did not want to believe in it —the need for hurry was upon him; had been pursuing him more acutely since his last sight of Father Greyson. In all probability the crucial moment was now approaching. The last news from London had reported Mrs. Belmont as steadily failing. That horrid sense of impatience, dulled for two years—stirred once more within Adrian. It was quite certain now that his mother would never again move from London. Might it not be possible to make the change at once, without further delay, and without her knowledge?

This was a matter to consider.

* * * * *

"We've got to dine at Lippenross to-morrow night, are you aware of that, Adrian?" asked Lucy at breakfast next morning, looking up from a note just received.

"No, I am not," said Adrian from behind his paper.

"Oh, yes, you are! It was all settled last week already; you must have forgotten. This is only a reminder."

"Can't we get out of it?"

"But I don't want to get out of it. It is likely to turn out a very interesting dinner. Ask Mr. Taylor!"

Lucy glanced across at Frank, with a smile in the corners of her eyes.

"Interesting for me," he said sheepishly but sturdily; "but I don't know about other people."

"Clear up the mystery, please!" urged Adrian with a touch of irritation which had become habitual.

It took but a few words to do so. As long ago as the day of the excursion Lucy had guessed that an understanding had been come to within the caves of St. Gillan's

Beach; but had promised discretion until the closing of the Mission, during which Nelly had pronounced herself impervious to worldly thoughts. This very morning, with the end of the Mission, Lucy's tongue had been untied, and to-morrow Frank was to be compensated for past deprivations.

"A betrothal dinner, then," said Adrian with a wry smile. "No, I suppose there's no getting out of that. Of course I wish you all possible joy, Taylor!—but couldn't you have got betrothed at luncheon? It's a deuce of a drive after dark."

But it was scarcely dark next evening when the party started for Lippenross, for the clear weather still held on, and the moon was even then getting ready to light them on their return. Even Philip, who had loudly lamented at the prospect of being left behind, was included. The idea of Frank getting betrothed without his presence seemed as preposterous to himself as it did to Frank.

"I only stipulate that you don't wear the D.S.O.," Frank had said, having grown almost playful in his new character; "else Nelly might be dazzled into changing her mind at the last moment."

Adrian had understood that on the part of the Haughnessies it was to be a strictly family party. All the more aggravating was it, on entering the Lippenross drawing-room, to perceive two black *soutanes,* one belonging to Father Kinghorn, the other to a tall, gaunt and somewhat bent old man, who was introduced to him as Father Kessidy. It was all he could do to suppress a movement of annoyance. It had not occurred to him that the Jesuit preacher might still be in the neighbourhood. His presence diffused a clerical atmosphere which Adrian knew he would find hard to breathe in.

"We've been taking a bath of holiness," was Mara's greeting. "Don't you perceive the halos around our heads?"

"I can't say I do," laughed Lucy; "not even around Nelly's head, though she has chosen the darkest corner. And where is Kitty?"

"Kitty will be here in a moment," said Mara, with a lowering of the voice that seemed uncalled for. "I wonder whether you are at all prepared for the surprise that is coming?"

"Oh, it's no surprise to me," replied Lucy, glancing towards the corner where Nelly and Frank were whispering in happy forgetfulness of their fellow-creatures. "I've been in both their confidence, almost from the first."

"Oh, I don't mean that."

"Another surprise? This is overwhelming, Mara. Is it Kitty? or perhaps yourself? But I don't see any—any second 'happy man'"?

"You will hear presently," said Mara with sudden seriousness.

It was just as the latest thing in parlour-maids, newly captured and still imperfectly trained, had breathlessly informed the company that dinner was "sairved" (not more than twenty minutes behind time) that, behind her, Kitty slipped into the room. Lucy was conscious of looking at her with a new interest, unable to forget that last sight of the exquisite childish face wet with tears and upraised towards the altar. There were no tears on it now, rather the reflection of some light to which Lucy had no clue, and in the long-fringed eyes a look of peace which struck her even more than the simplicity of the attire; for Kitty wore a white dress, whose *décolletée* had been filled up with folds of gauze, pinned in anyhow (*that* was the

old Kitty, at any rate!) and not so much as an ornament at her neck. Certainly this was not quite the Kitty of the Chapel, but still less was it the Kitty of St. Gillan's Beach, with darkened eyes and sullenly pouting lips. As she stood aside to make way for the foremost couples, Lucy, glancing back over her shoulder, saw how Nelly in passing, furtively snatched a kiss from her younger sister's cheek.

"It must be Kitty!" she told herself as, on Colonel Haughnessie's arm, she headed the procession to the dining-room. "But where is the man?"

CHAPTER VIII.

TABLE-TALK.

It was not until she was seated at table that Lucy was able to take precise stock of the old priest, whose voice she had heard in the chapel two days ago, without seeing his face. She sat at the far end of the table, in the place of honour, to Mara's right, and this time there was no column, but only a bridally white arrangement of flowers to obstruct her view. Thus by leaning forward a little she could see that his hair was white, his face large and sallow, with bright black eyes and a pair of black eyebrows meeting at the root of the nose and notched in a way which suggested the figure of a bird taking flight. Despite those mighty eyebrows he was not looking like a "Thunderer" just now, but like a rather tired old man, eating his soup with an air of abstraction, and a hastiness of gesture which spoke of habitual hurry.

Straight opposite to Lucy sat Father Kinghorn, wearing something of the same look of which Lucy had had a glimpse in the chapel.

"You have only to look at Father Kinghorn's face, in order to see whether the mission has been a success," Mara had said to Lucy before dinner. And now she looked down the length of the table to ask:

"The haul was bigger than you reckoned on, wasn't it, Father? Didn't your arms ache a little from the pulling in of the nets?"

"Father Kessedy's may, not mine," beamed the red-haired priest. "I did nothing but count the fishes."

"Do you hear what he says?" asked Mara of the Jesuit.

He had not heard, perhaps because his thoughts had hurried on to the next "haul"—were, in fact, making preparations for it at that moment—a surmise which seemed supported by the fact that already Mara had twice had to stop him from putting sugar into his soup, instead of salt. His silence rather disappointed Lucy. She would have liked to hear his voice in conversation, and compare it to that in the pulpit.

"The worst of these missions," continued Mara, "is that they make you feel so dreadfully good—for a time—that you become unfit for daily life. Just look how they hamper conversation! What is one to talk about if one daren't abuse one's neighbour, even ever so little?"

"There are always servants, and the weather," drily suggested Adrian, who sat on Mara's left, beside Kitty whom he had taken in. His personal grudge against Mara—dating from the lecture in the farmhouse—made him by no means anxious to help her to a topic. But Mara was content with those suggested.

"So there are! And this reminds me to warn you to prepare for accidents. It would be almost a miracle if Susie did not spill something since she is waiting for the

first time to-day, which by-the-bye, would be a grand opportunity for the practice of some of those virtues Father Kelly has been trying to inculcate. Only I hope it won't be I who have to practise them, since my frock is new. I think it had far better be Kitty."

Across Adrian the sisters exchanged a smile and a look which caught no one but Lucy's attention.

"And, by the way, Father, you won't be shocked, will you, if I go in for second helpings to-day? You see you left us so little time for meals during the mission that we have arrears to make up."

Despite Mara's lively tongue, the dinner seemed to Lucy to drag a little; for neither Nelly nor Kitty took much part in the general talk; the former having much too much to say to Frank, and the latter apparently too little to say to Adrian to keep the ball agoing. Lucy found herself reduced almost entirely to Philip, since Colonel Haughnessie too seemed anything but talkative. His grey hair was brushed very tight to his head, with quite unwonted neatness, and Lucy noted that his wine-glass was replenished far less frequently than usual. Fruits of the mission, no doubt; but was it the mission too that was making him look so almost solemn?

Dessert was long of coming, owing to this being one of Lippenross's "fat" days, on which in honour of the occasion the supply of food seemed absolutely inexhaustible; yet it came at last, and with it came a change in the conversational atmosphere.

"After what you said about pampering the flesh, I had some scruples about ordering champagne," Mara announced, "but considering the occasion. Papa, I think this is the psychological moment!"

The Colonel was on his feet already, glass in hand,

in order to announce a piece of news which was no news to anyone present, while Nelly, beautified by happiness, grew rosier and rosier, and Frank, soldier-like, squared his shoulders for the ordeal.

It was mercifully brief. In the midst of expressing his hopes for Nelly's future happiness the speaker sat down as abruptly as though he feared to collapse.

"How moved he is!" thought Lucy. "Is it, perhaps, because she is not marrying a Catholic?"

In the next moment she heard something of her own thought put into words.

"We'll let Frank off the answer," decided Mara, when the glasses had touched all round. "We *know,* without his telling us that he will make Nelly happy—don't we, Kitty? What narrow-minded person was saying the other day that mixed marriages never turn out well? As though we had not before our eyes a shining example of the contrary!"

She smiled across at Lucy as she said it, having spoken with a purpose. Ever since the experience of St. Gillan's beach, Mara had been exercising her mind over ways and means for readjusting what evidently required readjusting in the Belmont household. To assume that everything was in perfect order appeared to her on the whole, the surest means of bringing it into order.

She noted, as she spoke, that Adrian leaned back somewhat sharply in his chair, as though ostentatiously to keep out of the talk.

"Mixed marriages!"

Father Kessidy, awaking as though from a trance, looked up from the plate on which, between his bony fingers, he was crushing some empty almond-shells. "I've scarcely known a mixed marriage which did not unmix

itself in time—in the right direction, given goodwill, of course."

"Hear that, Frank?" laughed Mara. "Better be on your guard against a dreadful casting of nets."

Lucy leaned forward suddenly, so as to see the Jesuit's face, unobstructed by the white flowers.

"Oh, surely, that is too sweeping an assertion!" she said with a challenging laugh. "I'm an example of the contrary myself."

Until she had spoken she did not know that she had meant to. It had been an unthinking impulse, sprung perhaps from the wish to draw out this taciturn old man, with the extraordinary eyebrows, whose voice, heard from the pulpit, had vibrated so deep down in her soul.

A moment's silence followed—a silence of general surprise. Father Kessidy was looking at Lucy down the length of the table, and appeared gradually to be remembering something. His bent figure slowly straightened, and simultaneously the black eyes kindled.

"How long have you been married?" he courteously enquired.

"Almost three years."

The old priest smiled—into himself, so to say.

"I daresay that seems to you a long time. Wait till your children grow up! For, of course, you mean to be loyal to the pledges."

"Of course I do, or I would not have given them. Tolerance for beliefs of others has been impressed upon me since childhood. You can say what you like of the Anglican Church, Father, but you cannot say that she is not *broad.*"

This time the note of challenge was unmistakable, while on each of her cheeks there burnt a spot of colour.

"I have not been saying anything of her," said Father Kessidy mildly; "but I am prepared to concede even more than you claim. *Broad* seems to me too feeble an adjective for the Anglican Church's tolerance; *elastic* strikes me as far nearer the mark; the best quality of patent elastic, warranted to stretch obligingly in all directions."

"And would not *rigid* be the right adjective for your Church?"

"Undoubtedly it would, since in the nature of things a rock is more rigid than an elastic band. But if a man be in search of a foothold in the midst of a general quagmire, do you not think that he would prefer the rock to the elastic band?"

"Not if the rock has been used to build the walls of a prison."

"To you it seems a prison, because you stand outside. We, who are within, know it to be a fortress. Many things look different from outside, you know. Have you ever looked at a stained glass window from without? Ugly and confused, is it not? But with the first step across the threshold the pattern arranges itself, the colours grow harmonious; the riddle is solved, the maze disentangled."

"That's a metaphor, not an argument," said Lucy, taking another sip of champagne, perhaps in order to fire her courage.

She was rather surprised at finding herself plunged into this discussion, which, so far, was a duel between herself and Father Kessidy. She was not even quite sure how it had begun—she knew only that it *had* to begin. And the others were almost equally surprised—and even a little shocked—for to drag religion into table-talk was

not at all Lucy's way. All other conversation had dropped, and all eyes were upon the two speakers, even those of the betrothed couple. Adrian alone sat well back in his chair, plucking nervously at his short moustache. He was listening with mixed sensations; for though the opening of the discussion had touched him unpleasantly, Lucy's attitude brought an immense relief. But why that vibration in her voice, that spot of colour on her usually so cool cheek?

"Whether you call it a fortress or a prison the fact remains that you can't move to the right or to the left without knocking against something."

"And can you do that upon any walk of life, starting from the multiplication-table? Try and prove that twice two makes five, and you'll knock up against something at once. In a sense truth must always be narrow, just as a path along a precipice is narrow. One step over the edge, and you fall headlong into the abyss of error."

"What *your* Church calls error, but which may be truth to each soul subjectively. Why should not the Father of All have provided as many different forms of religion as the needs of His children are different?"

Into Lucy's voice there had come a tone that almost pleaded.

"Which would mean that the Father of All authorises lies, and even teaches them through the mouth of His Son. One question, Mrs. Belmont: How do you know that God has spoken through Christ?"

Lucy thought for a moment.

"By my inner experience," she said slowly.

"Just so. But your neighbour to your right has another inner experience, and your neighbour to your left yet another. And you yourself may have a different ex-

perience at six o'clock and at twelve o'clock—on days of joy and on days of grief—and many of these experiences contradict each other, yet all are supposed to bring conviction. Can they all be true? There you have the *impasse* of subjective truth in a nutshell."

As Lucy once more put out her hand for her glass Philip noticed that it shook a little. He had a vague idea that she was in a "tight place" and felt pushed to come to her aid, without quite knowing how to set about it, the subject under discussion not being much in his line. Personally he had a sneaking liking for the Catholic Church because of her music, but those sympathies must now be dumb.

Blindly he plunged into the controversy.

"But, look here, Father. I don't know much about it, but those Papal decrees, you know, they're a little too stiff to swallow. And the Pope does do such extraordinary things—like forbidding priests to go to theatres and so on."

The bright, black eyes passed from Lucy to Philip.

"Since the priests don't complain, why should you?" asked the Jesuit, with a smile pulling at the corners of his wide mouth.

But Lucy had recovered herself and taken her cue.

"Yes, that is another thing. How is it possible to believe in the divine authority of a man who shows so little human wisdom? The decrees may be all right in themselves, but just see how inopportune they are!"

"You have answered your own objection by speaking of human wisdom. We lay no claim to that; and even that can only be decided when things take on their right proportions in the perspective of history. Do you not think that some of the things that Moses and the Patriarchs did must have appeared highly inopportune to their

contemporaries? Was it humanly wise to lead the multitudes of Israel into the desert? Was it humanly reasonable of Abraham to make all preparations for sacrificing his son?"

"But look at the opposition aroused! At the falling away of whole nations!"

The priest put up his white head.

"It is a heavy price to pay; but it has to be paid. Better, a thousand times better that nine-tenths of the world should fall away than that the Church should be untrue to one single item of her mission—should allow opportunism to quench that sacred fire which *He* came to cast upon the earth, which *He* has committed to her care —and to hers alone. Let the weak-kneed depart! So long as that fire is not lost, nothing is lost, since one spark of it is enough to set the whole world aflame once more, as it surely will be set aflame—in God's good time!"

This was the voice of the "Thunderer" at last, ringing in the ears of the hearers as they could imagine it ringing from the pulpit. The Jesuit's shoulders were no longer bent; upright he sat, vigorously though unconsciously crushing the almond-shells between his fingers, while from under the mighty eyebrows whose sweep was so like the sweep of a bird's wing, his black eyes darted from face to face. "The Church Militant in person," thought more than one of his hearers.

Several deep breaths were drawn; but not even Mara dared to speak, while the beam of Father Kinghorn's spectacles was but a reflection of his inner delight. He was thinking of a former occasion, on which he had had to fight single-handed, and was thanking his patron saint for having committed the cause to such a champion as this.

"Let me tell you a story, Mrs. Belmont." It was the champion who was still speaking:

"Only a few weeks ago I was called into the parlour at Farm Street, and found there a total stranger, a man newly returned from the colonies and not having kept pace with the 'progress' of the age. Since his return he had been trying to catch up arrears. He was fresh from a course of meetings, socialist, scientific, philosophic —anything you want; and the result had been bewilderment. He had grasped only the fact that his life-long principles were no longer current coin, that the foundations of everything were rocking. In terror he had looked round him for something—anything—that stood firm amid the general upheaval, and he had found only that rock which you denounce as 'rigid.' He had never spoken to a Catholic priest before—scarcely even to a Catholic—but he had come straight off, flying to us in a moral panic, though I won't deny," he added, "that ringing the bell at number thirty-one felt very like knocking at the lion's den! That instance seems to me symbolic. What that individual did, Society will do some day; when Atheism has been tried and found wanting. It will look round for a fixed point in the social chaos, and it will find nothing but the Catholic Church. The very ill will evolve its own remedy. That is why the convulsion of the world does not so utterly bewilder us as it bewilders you."

Lucy frowned down into her plate. Perhaps she was figuring to herself that man who had come to Farm Street. Then she raised her head—almost with an effort.

"Yes, that sounds restful; but you forget the price to pay. Look at the effects of blind faith upon the masses! Have they not become sheep indeed—passive, unreflecting."

"Priest-ridden," put in Philip boldly.

"Priest-ridden! That's it!" almost gleefully echoed Father Kessidy. "I've been waiting for the word all along. It's always played out like a trump-card, and not without reason. I do believe that word has frightened off more credulous souls from the threshold of the Church than any other in the English language. And what does it come to, after all? That we take Christ's words for what they are worth. Surely He must have meant *something* when He said: 'He who hears you hears me!' Delve down to the root of the matter, and you will find that what shocks you in religious submission is that you have no real faith in other people's faith. Aye, there's the rub! You don't really believe not only *what* they believe but also *that* they believe. If you did, you would have to acknowledge that they act in the only way they can logically act. 'Priest-ridden,' of course! I knew it was coming. And we ride for our own pleasure, don't we, Father Kinghorn? It's such an agreeable pastime, and so restful!"

A smile ran round the table, as most eyes went to Father Kinghorn, who himself was smiling rather foolishly, conscious of very imperfectly representing the clerical tyrant and constrainer of consciences.

But Lucy did not smile; she was looking about her with a somewhat distracted gaze, as though in search of further arguments, no matter where she snatched them.

"At least, Father, you cannot deny that our Church is more spiritual than yours, less dependent upon exterior forms. It is the materialism of your conception that repels me. God is a pure spirit, you know, 'and they who worship Him should worship Him in Spirit.'"

"But *we* are not pure spirits, Mrs. Belmont. That is the very beauty of our service that both the spiritual and

the material side of our nature comes to its due. Why should not the body have its part in worship; the eyes be enchanted by beautiful pictures; the ears rejoiced by beautiful music? If it be a sign of materialism to devote all our best gifts, all our highest talents to the service of Him who bestowed them, then we are Materialists, but not otherwise. And, mind, if we are Materialists we must produce materialism: 'By their fruits you shall know them.' Does that seem to you to tally? Whence come the mystics among us if the root be material? Has your so-called spiritual worship produced a Thomas à Kempis, a Theresa? Is it a material view of life that has peopled the cloisters? Those men who daily renounce the world, in order to gain souls; those young girls who give up their homes and the hopes of human happiness in order to consecrate their purity to God alone—are those the fruits of materialism? Ask that young girl over there what has moved her to her sacrifice."

The black eyes shot across the table towards the place where Kitty sat, then moved over to the master of the house.

"I am betraying secrets, it seems. Colonel, I think it is time to leave the word to you. I know you have something to tell us."

Amid the general movement Lucy endeavoured to see Kitty's face, half screened by the intervening Philip, but could catch only an encouraging smile and a bright glance, both addressed to her father. Then Lucy, too, with the others, looked expectantly towards the foot of the table.

Colonel Haughnessie had cleared his throat uncertainly, and was now speaking in a slightly husky voice:

"Yes, it is true, there is something else to say; I would like all my friends to know—about Kitty. She has made up her mind, and I—I can't say no."

Having paused for a moment, he concluded with a rush:

"The fact is that she is going to enter St. Katherine's Convent at Edinburgh, soon after Easter."

Then he leaned back in his chair and used his napkin as vigorously as though he would have liked to hide his face in it.

It was to the guests alone that the announcement was a surprise. The sisters' eyes showed only emotion, and something of pride, while right across Adrian, Mara pressed the glowing Kitty's hand.

Of those who heard, it was Lucy who was most deeply struck.

"Kitty!" was all she could say, in accents of amazement. "Kitty!" And again she tried to get a good view of the girl's face.

In the drawing-room at last she got it.

"Kitty, really—did I understand aright?" she asked, drawing her into a corner. "You are going to become a nun?"

"You heard quite aright," said the radiant Kitty.

"It's the Mission that has done this, of course?"

"Oh, the Mission only finished it up; I've had it in my head for months, but I was fighting against it—and now I've stopped fighting—that's all."

"But *you,* Kitty!"

"Just I. Look here, Lucy; you're under a delusion about me; I'm really a wicked girl, and I know I should grow wickeder as time went on. When I found that Nelly had got ahead of me with Frank I felt just horrid. I did everything I could to get him away from her, not because I wanted him myself, but because my vanity was hurt. It was that which gave me the final fright about myself. I shall never feel safe outside of a convent."

"But, Kitty, you are so young, and—and so lovely!"

Kitty put up her head rather proudly.

"So much the better! Would you have me wait until I am old and ugly before making a present of myself to God?"

Lucy stood silent. What argument could she oppose to this rapture of Faith? For a moment something like a burning jealousy of Kitty filled her soul. Oh, to be able to believe like that!

She was remembering some things, and understanding others—remembering how Kitty, when twitted with her conquests, had said that she would never marry—understanding the new bearing of the elder sisters towards the younger—that mixture of tenderness and almost of reverence—that blending of smiles and of tears.

"But I'm glad I shall still spend Holy Week at home," added Kitty. "It's a treasure of a week!"

In the dining-room, meanwhile, Colonel Haughnessie still in that husky voice, was saying to his table-neighbours:

"I've never funked a jump before, and I'm not going to funk this one—but it is a big one—God knows—the biggest I've ever taken!"

At the farther end of the table Father Kessidy, with bent shoulders and looking straight in front of him, was still playing with the almond-shells. He had become once more the abstracted, rather tired old man.

The drive back to Mulcaskie was, on the whole, a silent one. Just at starting Adrian, with a touch of false gaiety, had said to Lucy:

"I never knew you were such a controversialist, Lucy. Father Kessidy had his work cut out for him in finding answers to your arguments."

"Do you think so?" said Lucy abstractedly. She was

not thinking of Father Kessidy just now, but of Kitty, and of the little picture which Kitty had slipped into her hand at parting.

"A remembrance of the Mission," she had whispered. "It can't do you any harm."

Adrian relapsed into silence. His remark had been tentative. He would have liked to find out what had been Lucy's final impression of the controversy at table. He had an uncomfortable feeling that some of Father Kessidy's arguments might not have failed their effect—he only wished they had—upon himself. But Lucy was evidently not inclined to talk; and besides they were not alone.

The long and silent drive was, however, not to conclude the doings of this day.

"Jenkins is not asleep, that's one good thing," remarked Adrian, as the lights of the hall streamed out onto the gravel.

So far from being asleep the goggle-eyed butler stood upon the doorstep, holding in his hand an orange-coloured envelope, in the exact attitude of the fish-footman in Alice's dream.

Adrian, somewhat sleepy, opened it under the lamp, then suddenly grew rigid.

"Tell Grant to keep the horses in," he said, turning quickly. "He will have to drive me to the station."

Then, without further word he handed the telegram to the startled Lucy. It was an urgent summons to the bedside of his dying mother.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SPECTRE.

By daybreak Adrian—doing his best not to think—was well on his way to London. If only he could keep his brain from working, then what awaited him there might be weathered. He had the sensation of facing a mountain, on the other side of which lay the plain of liberty. The mountain could only be stormed, not carefully climbed; and for an assault of this sort reflection was not needed, only impetus. That was why he instinctively refrained from the former, for fear of undermining the latter.

At the last moment Philip had said something about leaving Mulcaskie next day; of course he could not stop when Adrian was gone, he had observed a little plaintively. But Adrian, with polite indifference, had denied any such necessity. As suddenly as it had flared up, his dread of Philip had died down, extinguished perhaps by Mara's vigorous reproaches. It had been but an episode in the history of his inner conflicts. Philip was the least of his anxieties just now. There were so many other troubling things close ahead. But meanwhile he must not think. That would be the only fatal thing.

* * * * *

Almost at the same hour at which the first orange-coloured envelope had been delivered at Mulcaskie, Jen-

kins brought in a second one on a salver. It was to tell Lucy that Adrian had arrived too late to see his mother alive.

She had feared this, yet felt shaken as only once before she had felt shaken—on the day of her boy's death.

Again Philip (who had been careful to put on a black tie to-day) made a somewhat half-hearted offer to depart.

"It doesn't seem quite decent, Cousin Lucy, does it? to keep hanging on in a house of mourning. Of course if I could hope that I—I mean that music could comfort you in any way——"

He was looking at her with humbly pleading eyes; but Lucy's answer, though more amiable than Adrian's had been, was as indifferent. There was no reason at all why Philip should go, she assured him, with eyes that scarcely seemed to see him; and, of course, the piano would always be at his disposal, but he must not count on her for the present. It was almost worse than a dismissal, Philip felt; and yet refrained from packing his things.

Lucy had spoken like an automaton, present only in body, her thoughts having flown to that death-bed with the *Mater Dolorosa* hanging above it, beside which she figured to herself Adrian kneeling. That strong personal attraction for his mother which she had felt since the moment of their first meeting, seemed to have increased rather than dwindled under the sense of physical loss. In some intangible way she had always felt that they belonged together. There had been something in common between them which was not in common between Adrian and herself—something beyond their mere womanhood. Lucy herself did not know what it was; but Mrs. Belmont had known it from the first. For just as there are in-

stinctively artistic or instinctively scientific minds, so are there instinctively religious ones—and in Lucy she had recognised this at first sight. Such minds are mostly eminently conservative, accepting whatever form of religion they are born in, as much as a matter of course as they accept their mother's milk. This had been Lucy's experience until lately; for hers was a much less complex nature than Adrian's, but likewise a richer. In her girlhood these riches had been locked up. The key of Pain had been wanted to unlock them, but now the door stood open.

After her boy's death she had felt the necessity of resisting the consolations of Catholicism, and for the first time that of looking into the credentials of her own faith. Hence the perusal of the Anglican books.

Quite lately she had been conscious of losing hold of something; and because Faith was a necessity to her, she tightened her grasp upon it. She could not lessen this hold without having another within reach, and it was not yet within reach—not quite yet. Had Adrian known that during the controversy at Lippenross Lucy had been shooting off almost the last arrows in her quiver, he would not have rejoiced as he had done at the tone of her arguments.

But the way was still far from clear, her steps still entangled in a net of prejudices, which clogged her advance. "Wrap not yourself round in the associations of years past." Since that day in the Donniebridge Chapel those words had established themselves in a corner of her mind, whence at odd moments they sent out a whisper—soft, but persistent.

Ah, yes, but for a mind as conservative as Lucy's, it was exactly the "associations of years past" which forged the strongest fetters.

Since that day there had been developing in her a wish to open her heart to her mother-in-law, a wish more latent than active. She herself only became fully aware of it when the message of death from London cut off all prospect of fulfilment. So that could not be. Never more! The thought redoubled the poignancy of the blow.

But small time for introspection was to be left to Lucy. By next day she was torn out of the intimacy of her thoughts by tidings of terror.

And, of all the people in the world, it was Frank who brought them.

Lucy was sitting in her boudoir, writing to Adrian, when there came a knock at the door, followed without pause by the entrance of Frank, looking even squarer and more resolute than usual.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Belmont," he began without preliminary, "but I must ask you to let us have the carriage for the four o'clock train. Philip and I are leaving."

"So suddenly!" exclaimed Lucy, surprised out of her apathy; "but what for, Mr. Taylor? I told Philip yesterday that of course he could stay on as long as he liked. There really is no reason."

"I am sorry to say there is a reason."

"Has Philip had bad news? But who——"

"Philip has not had any news; but he is going off, all the same."

"Which means that you are carrying him off. I don't think it is quite kind to leave me alone. It looks as though you were running away."

"We are running away, Mrs. Belmont — that's the truth."

"From the house of mourning? Well, of course, we sha'n't be very cheerful company for a time."

"It's not that."

"Then, what is it?" asked Lucy in sudden alarm, not so much at Frank's words as at his face. "What is it?" she repeated more urgently, as he stood silent, laying down her pen and probing his face with her anxious eyes. "Surely I have a right to know! What are you running away from, Mr. Taylor!"

Frank hesitated for only one moment longer, squaring his shoulders by another degree.

"From diphtheria, Mrs. Belmont. Yes—I suppose you have a right to know; and you will know, in any case."

"Diphtheria!"

Under the lash of that word fraught with terror in all mothers' ears, Lucy had risen to her feet.

"Where is there diphtheria?"

"In the village. Three cases already. I heard it just now when I went to fetch my birds-eye tobacco. Perhaps you'll believe that I'm not frightened about myself, but I can't have Philip catching it, and grown-ups are not immune. Besides he's so much of a baby that he's sure to take it. Even if they pulled him through, it would undo all the good he has gained here. That is why I came to ask you about the carriage. Can we have it?"

"Diphtheria!" repeated Lucy, with her hand to her forehead. "But surely Doctor Pollett would have warned me!"

"No doubt he will, though perhaps not personally, for fear of bringing in the infection. He's in the Macallum house now. It was only to-day that they fetched him, and that the thing got its right name. But about the carriage—we can have it, can't we?"

"Of course—of course!" said Lucy with the indifference of impatience.

The moment she was alone she flew up to the nursery, in order to bend palpitating over her babes, sleeping, side by side. She strained her eyes to make out the little faces in the half-shadow of the lace curtain, she bent her ear to the sound of their breathing—lightly, with the tips of her fingers, she touched the tiny hands lying clenched upon the cover. All as it should be! No sign of restlessness — no unusual temperature — all cool and peaceful. But, ah, how delicate these tiny human blossoms! How frail the stem which held them to the earth! How little able to weather the storm of disease —should it approach.

"Oh, my God, spare them!" prayed Lucy, clasping her hands over her beating heart.

With reasonable precautions the danger ought surely to be averted, she told herself, but even in the telling, remembered with terror that Betsy Macallum—the nursery-maid's sister—had been in the house yesterday. And Frank had mentioned the Macallum's house as infected.

"Oh, my God, spare them!"

Doctor Pollett's warning came in the afternoon, together with a list of precautions to be taken, and the strict injunction that on the smallest rise of temperature he was to be sent for.

For two nights Lucy went to bed, trembling, to lie awake most of the dark hours, with her ears attuned to the summons she dreaded. On the first night she fell asleep exhausted at daybreak. On the second she was about to do the same, when the sound she had been waiting for, wrenched her out of the first mists of unconsciousness.

In a moment she sat upright. Had that been a dream, or one of those many phantom knocks which for

two nights had been mocking her? Or—or was it *real?* With her heart hammering against her ribs, almost audibly, it was difficult to be sure.

Then it came again—unmistakably real.

"Come in!" cried Lucy shrilly, and with the sensation that with those two words she was inviting a dreaded guest to enter.

Meanwhile this guest took the shape of a nursery-maid *en négligée,* who brought word that Miss Di seemed rather restless, and that Mrs. Hobbins thought that perhaps——

"I'm coming!"

Lucy was in her dressing-gown already, without stopping to hear more.

Ten minutes later the rise of temperature had been verified and an order sent to the stables.

Although Doctor Pollett came even quicker than Lucy had dared to hope, it was broad daylight by this time, so that the disturbance on her face was plainly discernible. His own twitched with sympathy.

"It is—it is *that,* is it not?" she asked, with white lips and haggard eyes. She could not bring herself to pronounce the spectre's name.

Doctor Pollett dared not deny that it was *that;* but, true to the traditions of his caste, he began to talk of the spectre with that contemptuous familiarity,—almost jollity —which experience pointed out as the most merciful, and also the most practical course. Serum had turned diphtheria almost into a joke, he assured Lucy. All depended on taking it in time, and here none of that commodity had been lost.

"If you mean to nurse her yourself," he added, "you must say good-bye to that second little morsel for the present."

"Of course I mean to nurse her myself," said Lucy with all the scorn due to masculine denseness. "But surely you don't think that Vi——"

Her eyes were desperately pleading for at least this one hope. "I had her taken to another room at once."

"Fiddlesticks!" said Doctor Pollett stoutly.

"Make your mind easy about Vi. She's the strongest of the two, at any rate; and she'll have a splendid time of it with Mrs. Hobbins, even though she may be a bit dull without her sister's society."

"Shall I wire to my husband?" asked Lucy as steadily as she could.

"When do you expect him back?"

"To-morrow night, I fancy; the funeral is to be to-day."

"Then don't bother to wire; it would only disturb him. To-morrow night isn't far off."

"But he ought to be prepared, ought he not? Would you perhaps meet him at the station and—tell him?"

She could not look at the doctor as she said it. Her own request had torn open the door of memory. The words were so very like those with which she had asked him to prepare Adrian—that other time. What might there not be to announce by to-morrow night? Was it possible that Adrian would be coming from one funeral to another?

Doctor Pollett himself was making it quite easy for her to avoid his eyes—perhaps because he too remembered.

"Of course! Of course!" he said with ostentatious cheeriness, while bending busily over the cradle. "I'll tell him all about it at the station. It wouldn't be good for either him or you if he pitched in here, unprepared."

* * * * *

Adrian, staring out of a window of the Scotch express, was conscious of a sense of exhaustion—not physical exhaustion, but mental. The mountain had been stormed; but all his resources had gone to it—and that even though the worst had been spared him.

Yes—he was glad he had arrived too late. To have looked into his mother's failing eyes—to have answered her solicitous questions with a lie in his heart, might have surpassed the measure of his strength. Even this way his will had been strained to breaking-point, in order to keep his resolve upright. Even the dead face had spoken too loudly for his peace. That was why he had hastened the funeral and hastened his own departure. In the empty bedroom the presence of her who had suffered here for so long was almost as real to him as her living presence had been. To him the room was not empty. Fortunately there was nothing to detain him—the winding up of Mrs. Belmont's small affairs being too simple to require his presence. Leaving everything in the hands of Mr. Spedding, his half-uncle, Adrian, with a sore heart and a letter addressed to Lucy in his pocket—took refuge in the Scotch express. He had found the letter by his mother's bedside, and had in the first moment wondered why there was nothing for himself; but in the next had found it natural, since, no doubt, his mother had counted on saying whatever she had to say to him by word of mouth.

And now he was free. That moment of unhampered action upon which for three years his eyes had been fixed stood close before him. Nothing now prevented him fulfilling the conditions of his uncle's will, and thus becoming the rightful possessor of Mulcaskie. He began to make calculations as to how soon he could take the de-

cisive step. Immediately after his mother's death—before she was cold in her grave, so to say—might scarcely appear decent, so he feared. But in no case could he wait long. That sense of hurry which had pursued him lately was upon him again. No time must be lost, both on account of Lucy and of that other wild surmise of his concerning Father Greyson's knowledge of the will. As yet Lucy was safe—did not her arguments of the other day prove that? But for how much longer would she be safe?

No—there must be no delay. Why not act at once, since there was nothing more to prevent him.

Nothing?

Adrian moved impatiently, crushing the stump of his cigarette into the ash-holder.

Again that vision of the dead face, so unbeautiful in feature, so beautiful in expression, with its ineffable peace and that strange look of confidence which it had always worn, but which only now bore the seal of eternity. What was she so confident of? There was to him something alarming in that trustfulness, something that made him doubt of his own liberty of action. He had been regarding himself as escaped at last from that maternal solicitude which had become so irksome, and, behold, it still wrapped him round. She whom he would never again look upon with bodily eyes, seemed almost nearer to him than she had ever been before. He had the sense of being watched. In the curls of cigarette smoke, upon the landscape outside he could see his mother's face. Occasionally she seemed to be smiling at something—perhaps at his fruitless efforts to reach conclusions that fitted his needs. Just now, in pure weariness of spirit, he had given up these efforts. It had not wanted Father Kessidy's words

to make him feel the hopelessness of the Anglican position—the writings of Anglican divines had quite sufficed for that purpose. With every page that he turned he had grown more intimately convinced that in the broad issue before him, that honourable creation of the British Constitution—the state-made Church—could find no place. The choice lay between the Catholic Church or nothing; viz., that wide borderland of agnosticism which sounds so easy to live in, and is so dreary a wilderness, without landmarks, without pinnacles, without foothold, full of shaking and ever shifting quagmires, and with every path that promises to lead out of its uncertainties, marked—in the name of science: "No thoroughfare!"

But that again was one of those things which he had made up his mind not to think about.

* * * * *

"Doctor Pollett!"

There was no reason that he knew of why the sight of Doctor Pollett on the platform should startle him, and yet Adrian was conscious of having uttered the name with a note of alarm.

"What an ass I am!" he muttered to himself. "About time I looked to my nerves. Of course he's after business of his own."

Just then he noted that Doctor Pollett was bearing straight down upon him. In order to reach him he had to pass under one of the station lamps, and as the light showed up the lumpy features plainly, Adrian stood still and waited. For the face he had seen was the same face which the doctor had worn on the day when he had waited for him in the hall in order to tell him of his boy's death.

"What is it?" he asked almost roughly and without

waiting for the doctor to speak. Then, driving the nails into the palm of his own hand:

"Is it Lucy?"

"No, no, Mr. Belmont; it is not so bad as that. Mrs. Belmont is as well as can be expected."

Then, without further ceremony, taking him by the arm, he led Adrian into the deserted waiting-room. It was to a scenario of time-tables and soap-advertisements that Adrian heard of the new shadow which had fallen upon his home, double shadow by this time, since Vi had developed the disease only a few hours after her sister. The latter patient Doctor Pollett hoped to save.

"Which means that you cannot save Di?" asked Adrian in a tone almost of mockery.

Doctor Pollett's silence answered for him.

"And how about that wretched serum you make such a fuss about?" queried Adrian savagely, fixing the doctor with that vindictive glance which the bringer of ill news so often earns for his pains.

"Serum was applied, of course; but its action makes certain calls on the constitution; and these children——"

"I know, I know," interrupted Adrian. "Of course it had to be."

He was still too stunned to know exactly what he was saying. Without a further word to the doctor, he walked out of the station and towards the waiting carriage, conscious of having to make a certain effort in order to walk straight. Of grief, on the other hand, he was not conscious at all. His teeth were set and his backbone stiffened, and within his breast his heart seemed to have turned to stone.

CHAPTER X.

MATER DOLOROSA.

It was very still in the nursery, and very dim—one of those noiseless, half-lighted battlefields upon which the most ancient of all antagonists are so fond of fighting out their battles. The usual illumination for such a battlefield—a night-light, the only sounds hushed footsteps, and at intervals a rush of wind over the tree-tops outside, where the young leaves have just got tongue enough to whisper.

Lucy, in her white dressing-gown, and with her hair loosely knotted about her head, might in this half-light have passed for a phantom. It would have required a closer look into the face, with its new line of anguish about the mouth, its dark circles of fatigue around the eyes, to show how humanly real was this mother watching beside the sick-bed of her child.

In the room alongside the nurse was resting. Lucy knew herself alone with an invisible presence, the very shadow of whose wings she saw in those cast by the flickering night-light, and which to her excited fancy seemed to be circling nearer and nearer to the cradle within which lay softly moaning the one child that remained her. For one of the tiny, frail flowers had already been gathered by the hand of the Angel of Death. Adrian had only arrived in time to see the last twitches of the

baby face; and already the other drooped upon its fragile stem.

For days already—she could not have said how many—Lucy had watched it droop, had with her tender hands been upholding it, been hoping against hope. The issue would probably be for to-night, so Doctor Pollett had warned her. With every minute that passed the crisis was drawing nearer.

During these last dreadful days she had seen Adrian only at moments when, with a curiously set expression of face, he had looked in, in order to make some stereotyped enquiry, after *her* health, in first line. Little Vi's condition seemed to interest him far less. Upon that point he appeared to have come to his own conclusions. Was it the death of his mother or of Di which had so turned him to stone? Lucy had no leisure in which to consider the question.

She herself had, for a week now, been living the life of a prisoner, not having been beyond the head of the nursery stairs, to which, on the day of the funeral, she had accompanied Di's tiny coffin. Never had she been so thankful for the wide outlook of these upper windows as during this week. Sometimes for whole minutes, she would stand gazing seawards, to where she could watch the lighthouse rock appearing and disappearing behind the gathering mists, at moments seeming to float upon the waters, at others to tower into the clouds, or in clearer weather note how the waves leaped about it, like white maned sea-monsters, bent on tearing it down. Since the controversy with Father Kessidy she could not look at that rock, unshaken by the fury of the waters, undimmed by the mists from whose smothering embrace it ever again victoriously emerged, without thinking of that other rock

of which he had spoken. She was thinking of it now, as she caught the glimmer of the lighthouse beacon, shining like a star in the heart of the night shadows. But the subject seemed far off and almost indifferent. And far off too appeared all religious comfort; never so far off as now when most she needed it. For even into her patient heart the rejection of that prayer uttered with so submissive a faith, had let fall a drop of bitterness. When her boy had been taken, had she not bowed her head without a murmur? Had it really been too much to ask of God that He should leave her little girls? Might He not at the very least spare this last little one? To take even this, would be cruel, surely. Yet it seemed that God was going to be cruel. The flushed face, the choking breath, those soft moans, like those of a small animal in pain—all told the same tale. Before morning, no doubt, this cradle would be as empty as was the other one. Ah, it was hard! The contest between an Almighty Power and a mere human heart was too unequal. Who had said that God was merciful? He was not so to mothers, at any rate. Even His own human mother had not been spared.

Lucy, who had been bending over the cradle, straightened herself suddenly, as though remembering something. Then softly moved towards a table in the corner, of which an improvised writing-table had been made. Here she opened a book and took from between its leaves a small picture, an uncoloured engraving, which she carried to the night-light, in order more closely to examine it. It was the memorial card of the Mission which Kitty Haughnessie had pressed into her hand at parting, and in which, when she looked at it at home, Lucy had been almost startled to recognise that same

Mater Dolorosa, whose face was familiar to her both from the picture above her mother-in-law's bed and from the one in "Mummie's" room at Lippenross. "Very useful to mothers," Mrs. Belmont had called her.

With hungry eyes Lucy now scanned the pathetic features, graven so deeply with lines of pain, the same pain that she was feeling, harrowed with the self-same anguish that was tearing her own heart.

"She—ah yes, *she* would have had pity!"

Over Lucy's white lips the murmur had found way.

She whose heart had been pierced by a sevenfold sword, could she fail to turn eyes of compassion upon this poor earthly mother, whom each one of those moans from yonder cradle was torturing beyond endurance? She, who had stood "beneath that awful tree, upon which hung He who made heaven and earth," but to her was the same human son over whose crib she had bent, could she be deaf to the cries of a mother pleading for the one child that remained to her? And this day that was almost passed was the very one on which was commemorated that other awful one. Lucy remembered it quite suddenly.

"A treasure of a week," Kitty had called Holy Week. But of these treasures Lucy had had nothing. Under the pressure of events she had hardly remembered the season. It had required the sight of the Mater Dolorosa to let her realise that it was Good Friday that was hastening to its end, that this night was the first which that Blessed Mother had passed bereft of her Son, bowed in grief indeed, but not in grief alone, since her will and His could never be in conflict.

"Oh, Mother! Mother!"

A sob caught Lucy at the throat. A hand seemed to lay itself upon her shoulder, pressing her down, gently,

gently, until she knelt upon the spot on which she had just been standing, with the little picture held up in front of her, but so many tears in her eyes that she could scarcely see it.

"Oh, Mother! the words wrung themselves out of her aching heart. "Be merciful, preserve my child to me! and I shall be your child for ever!"

* * * * *

This night, so long to Lucy, was even longer to Adrian. He spent most of it in the study, smoking sullenly before the fire, since sleep was not to be thought of. Not that he was conscious of any suspense regarding the issue of the next hours, although he had heard what Doctor Pollett had said about the approach of the crisis. He did not need Doctor Pollett to tell him what that issue would be. Of course Vi was going to die, just as Di had died—and the boy. It would only be consistent with what superstitious people would call a "judgment." Perhaps it was a judgment. He did not care to enquire. He was not going to be bullied into anything against his will, even by a so-called Higher Power. A God who allowed these things to happen could only be a spirit of evil. It was almost the same thing he had said to himself when his boy died. And, just as then, the blow had not broken, but hardened his resistance, exactly as molten iron is hardened by the stroke of the hammer. No wonder his face looked like stone, since his heart was as cold and as heavy as one. Even towards Lucy he felt cold and hard. She was not really to be pitied, since she had her God to pray to. Almost he grudged her that comfort.

If he sat here in the study, it was only because he preferred not to be roused out of his sleep with the fatal news, the unavoidable news from the nursery. It would

be easier to take it standing, so to say. When that was over he would lie down and have a good sleep, which would at least mean forgetting everything for a few hours. Even now he looked forward to that moment. During the whole of the evening he had been careful not to go near the nursery. He did not want to see those last twitches over again. Once was quite enough.

* * * * *

With a start Adrian opened his eyes, and realised that he had been asleep. The fire was out, and through the unshuttered windows the early morning light looked in, shy and wan beside the flare of the still burning gas. Under the meeting of the two lights the heavy mottled furniture took on strange shades of amber and of onyx.

Had nothing happened yet? Apparently not.

Adrian got out of the armchair, stretching his arms above his head. Having hesitated for a moment, he went to the door, and opening it, lent an ear to the sounds in the house. Nothing yet astir. Another moment of hesitation, and he stood at the foot of the staircase, looking keenly upwards. His hand was on the banister, his foot moved as though to ascend the first step; then was sharply drawn back. What for? He would get the news soon enough, in any case. He had often heard it said that most people die at daybreak.

Turning abruptly away he took down a cap from the rack. A desire for fresh air, for movement had come upon him quite suddenly. Softly he unbarred the door and went out into the spring morning.

A sharp breeze met him full, like a slap in the face. He shivered under its touch, yet drank it in greedily. After the smoke-laden atmosphere of the study its taste was like medicine. The grey sky had been torn by the

wind into countless flakes, whose pearly rims widened and brightened towards that spot in the East where the sun was preparing to rise. Upon the lawn the birds were busy already, and a couple of rabbits, disturbed by Adrian's appearance, scampered panic-stricken into the bushes. From the terrace beyond the house came a peacock's cry, harshly rending the air. Adrian shivered again and walked on faster. Ever since the death of his boy he had hated those peacock voices.

The pace at which he was going down the avenue looked almost like a flight. To be out of the house, away from it, even only for a short space would be an infinite relief. Yes, the news would find him soon enough, even so.

He had almost reached the lodge where he saw the gates opening to admit a dogcart. Doctor Pollett's trap. Ah, yes, to be sure; he had promised to look in the first thing in the morning. That he should come at sunrise spoke volumes in itself.

"Any news?" he called out on perceiving Adrian, scanning his face as he bent from his seat.

"None," was the curt reply.

"And the night?"

"I don't know. I haven't been near the nursery."

The doctor looked at him again.

"Won't you get in?" he suggested.

It was the last thing Adrian wanted to do, and yet in the next moment he had done it. His flight had been stopped—by fate, apparently. Why resist further? Silently he got in and took his place beside the doctor.

"This is relatively good," said the latter, touching up the horse. "I mean the night having been passed."

"Then you did not expect it?"

"Honestly, no. And even now, Mr. Belmont, I dare

not give you much hope. The action of the heart was very weak yesterday."

"I have got no hopes," said Adrian coldly. "Please don't trouble to explain."

Doctor Pollett glanced once more at the white, strained face and saw that it was high time to change the subject. And what subject should he change it to but the one which for so many months—nay years—engrossed all his spare thoughts?

"This is a great day for me, Mr. Belmont. Sir Hiram Oke is coming by the two-twenty train."

"Who is Sir Hiram Oke?"

Doctor Pollett very nearly exploded, but, remembering the moral condition of the man beside him, restrained himself in time.

"The great London authority, whom I have at last succeeded in getting down," he patiently explained. "His new method of Electro-Radium treatment is one of the scientific wonders of the age."

Then, as Adrian remained plunged in indifference:

"And, by the way, Mr. Belmont—if Sir Hiram is successful, something interesting for you may come out of it. For, do you know, Sister Monica has quite brought me round to her theory."

"What theory?"

"About Father Greyson having something on his mind which he wants to impart to you. This seems evident from the agitation which comes over him whenever your name is mentioned. We have experimented in the matter, and have no practical doubt remaining; Sister Monica thinks it must be some message of your late uncle's; and I should not be surprised if she were right; though it is hard to imagine what that could be."

Adrian said nothing; but sat staring stolidly in front of him at the diminishing distance between the dogcart and that house that he had wanted to run away from. He had not quite grasped what Doctor Pollett was saying, or at any rate not its import.

"The prospect of the dear old man being able to deliver his message and thus relieve his mind adds of course greatly to the interest of the experiment."

Here Adrian roused himself at last. Something had penetrated to the seat of his consciousness.

"Then you actually think that he will recover his speech?"

"It would be too much to say that I expect it, but it certainly lies within the bounds of possibility. Sir Hiram's experiments have done wonders as great as that. All depends upon whether the centres of speech are destroyed or only paralysed. And even if this should fail, there is a very strong hope of the hand recovering enough power to guide a pen. In either case Father Greyson would be able to get rid of the burden on his mind."

"And Sir Hiram is coming to-day, you say?"

"At ten-twenty. Who knows what wonders we may see before night! You can't imagine how I am looking forward to the moment. It is *my* turn now; Father Kinghorn has had his."

The house was reached by this time, and without further exchange of words, the two men alighted.

As Doctor Pollett crossed the hall to reach the staircase, he looked back over his shoulder, enquiringly. But Adrian avoiding the glance, went straight towards the study.

CHAPTER XI.

THE ANGEL OF THE RESURRECTION.

HAVING shut the door, Adrian, hands in pockets, began to pace the floor. His whole aspect was changed. The strained pallor of a few minutes back had given way to a dark flush—the emptiness in his eyes to a bellicose light. He was not thinking of what might be happening in the nursery upstairs, but of that which had happened in another sick-room at Donniebridge. The alarm which had visited him then had returned upon him with redoubled—with tenfold force. The surmise that that old priest knew of the will, perhaps even possessed a copy of it—had become a certainty now, strengthened as it was by the suggestions of other, disinterested people. Those people had no reason to be haunted by a phantom; therefore that which haunted him was no phantom.

So Father Greyson knew him to be in unrightful possession, that much stood firm. And, according to Doctor Pollett, he might be able to disclose whatever he knew in a few days, perhaps a few hours. Was that to mean that all the crooked paths had been trodden in vain? On no, that should never be! He would not yield up the prize he had worked for—plotted for—sold his own soul for. Nobody should cheat him of it—no doctor and no priest.

Standing still in his walk he took his two hands out

of his pockets, in order first slowly to open his fingers, and then slowly to close them again, as though upon some tangible object. The gesture was but the outward expression of what was going on in his soul, where stifled grief itself was helping to concentrate every energy upon the holding fast of that booty which had cost so dear. He might have lost everything else—his children, Lucy's esteem—the peace of his soul—but Mulcaskie at least should remain to him, whatever that old priest might know. He was not going to surrender to Philip; that ignominy should be spared him. Before the conditions of his uncle's will became known they should be fulfilled. Not a day should be lost, not an hour. No petty considerations should hold him back any longer. Lucy need not be troubled just yet in the matter; he would wait until after—*that* was over—so he told himself with a sudden jerk of his head towards the upper regions of the house, before telling her of the step. But the step itself should be taken at once.

It was a pity that the danger of infection (for a family of nine!) made it impossible for him to go straight to Mr. Macalister and make him witness of his solemn abjuration of the Catholic faith and formal submission to the Established Church. But even this need not entail delay. An abjuration could be done as well by writing as by word of mouth, as he had taken care to inform himself, having even been at the pains to procure the necessary formula and studied it until he knew it well nigh by heart. Not a moment need therefore be lost.

With an almost elastic step he went to the writing-table, unlocked the drawer in which the formula had lain ready for many months now, and having selected a suitable sheet of paper, set to copying it carefully.

Bent upon making the meaning of each word unmistakable, as conscientiously as though it had been a caligraphic task, he wrote on, too engrossed to be aware of the approach of a step along the passage. It was only when the door opened that he raised his head, and then sat transfixed, staring as though at an apparition. For in the doorway stood Lucy in her white dressing-gown, her brown hair loosened by her hasty descent, flowing over her shoulders, her face almost as white as her gown, but shining with a light which surely could not be the reflection of that same prosaic light which looked in by the window. Where was it that he had seen something like that before? Adrian tried to remember, but could not.

For a moment she stood, searching for him with her eyes; then ran forwards, with outstretched arms.

"Adrian! Adrian! She is safe! Doctor Pollett says that she will live!"

Like a cry of victory the words rang through the room; and already she was kneeling, with her arms about Adrian, her radiant face uplifted to his.

With unbelieving eyes Adrian stared back at her. What she said lay too many miles distant from the conclusions he had come to, to be in one moment accepted as a fact. Automatically he attempted to free himself from the encircling arms, and discovered, by his failure, that he was trembling.

Lucy, feeling him move, clasped him all the closer.

"Adrian—wait! This is not all; I have something else to tell you. The crisis is past; Vi will live; but I too am going to begin a new life. I am going to become a catholic. I almost think I have been a catholic for long, in my heart; but this night it all got clear."

"I—don't quite understand," said Adrian with a tongue of lead. "You pretend that Vi is going to live?"

"Yes. Doctor Pollett says that, humanly speaking, all danger is passed. The turn he has taken surpasses his most sanguine hopes."

"And you want to become a catholic?"

"I do. This night I promised the Mater Dolorosa that if she preserved my child I should become her child. And I always keep my promises. Tell me Adrian—are you very much astonished? And are you—glad?"

This time, with an almost desperate gesture, Adrian freed himself. Having laid his arms upon the table before him, his face went down upon them.

Startled, Lucy rose to her feet, and gently tried to raise his head, then desisted, as the sound of a heavy, strangling sob resounded through the room. Another and another. By the convulsions of his shoulders she could guess at that of his face, and stood awestruck and silent beside him. What tempest of the soul was this? What things of the past were here being uprooted? What prisons shattered, what bonds broken? And what—oh, what, must have gone before?

"Adrian, what is it?" she dared at last to ask, when the worst of the storm had swept by, and softly touched his hand with hers. "Why are you crying? Have I not brought you good news?"

Then at last he raised his head; and she could see his face, wet with the first tears she had ever known upon them—those difficult men's tears which are so much harder to shed than blood.

"Lucy," he said in a voice exhausted almost of sound; "it is no use. I can't fight any longer—I surrender. You shall know all. Read this!"

He took the sheet of paper from the writing-table and held it towards her.

"This?" asked Lucy perplexed.

"Yes. Read it quickly. If you are to know all, you must know this too. I was just about to sign it when you came in."

In amazement Lucy took the paper and glanced over it. It was so clearly written that even a glance made its sense apparent. She had seen such formulas in her father's sanctuary. It was a solemn abjuration of the Catholic Faith. With a face as white as marble now she leaned one hand against the table, and raised great, startled eyes upon Adrian.

Meeting their question, Adrian tried to smile, reassuringly, but had not yet regained control of his features. Instead he took the paper from her hand and tore it into small pieces; then going over to the fireplace—the same fireplace in which he had burnt the will—dropped the bits among the ashes.

"You—you meant to abjure your faith?"

"I meant, but no longer mean to. Don't say anything more, Lucy. I beg of you; not another word until I have told you everything; and then perhaps you will not want to say another word to me. Oh, you don't know what a wretch you have married!"

Taking her by the hand, he led her to the same chair in which he had held his vigil. Half turned from her—for he did not want to see her face—he stood beside the mantelpiece nervously playing with one of the ornaments upon it.

* * * * *

After Adrian had ceased speaking there was silence for a long minute. He had kept nothing back, nor

"nought extenuated." Other grounds apart, the relief of a complete avowal had been too great to be resisted. Lucy now knew the history of the will, from the moment of its discovery among "Macpherson's stores" to its destruction in the fireplace beside which she sat. She knew of the projected apostasy; had been able to follow in mind the revival of a Faith which had risen from its deathbed only to be strangled of a set purpose; while step by step, before her eyes was detailed the descent into the abyss of moral ignominy to which those crooked paths had been the approach. Not one of the pretty sophisms, of the craven alarms, of the unworthy suspicions remained hidden from her. His soul lay naked before her eyes.

"If she spurns me now I shall kill myself!" it passed through Adrian's mind. "And how should she not spurn me!"

With one hand he had grasped the mantelpiece, the other he had laid over his eyes, in order not to see the look of contempt which must surely now be bent upon him.

Then, before the long minute was passed, he was conscious of a presence beside him—of another hand upon his hand, drawing it softly aside. Perforce he had to look into Lucy's face now, since it was close to his, the eyes seeking his, but full of tears, instead of the scornful contempt he had feared.

"Adrian! My poor Adrian! What must you have suffered! And to think that I stood alongside and was not able to help you!"

He looked at her incredulously, as though still waiting for something.

"But, Lucy—have you understood?"

"Yes; better than yourself, I think."

"And you do not despise me?"

Through her tears she laughed—actually laughed. "*I* despise you, when I was at least half the motive! for if you hadn't been too fond of me, and too afraid to lose me, you would have given up Mulcaskie much more easily—at least I am vain enough to suppose so. Despise a man who has the strength to make such an avowal as you have just made—who has the courage to call himself a coward! You must take me for an idiot, Adrian! I can imagine many men—given the circumstances—acting like that; but I can imagine very few daring to say that they have so acted. And ah, how happy we are going to be now with nothing more to stand between us." The jubilant tones ran on: "Mulcaskie may be gone, but the wall is gone too, Adrian—that dreadful wall which I knocked against without seeing it; at last it is gone for ever!"

As she stretched her arms towards him Adrian remembered all at once what it was that she had reminded him of while she stood in the doorway; the Angel of the Resurrection, of course—he who rolled back the heavy stone from the sepulchre and sat upon it. From his heart too a stone had been lifted, under which it had been stifling for years. The unworthy pact which had made of himself a thing unworthy had been torn into shreds, together with that paper just dropped into the grate.

Without a word he sank down at her feet, as men might sink at the feet of a heavenly messenger, the bearer of good tidings.

* * * * *

After emotions, practical considerations necessarily had their turn.

That Mulcaskie must be handed over to Philip was clear to them both. On this subject there was not so much as a discussion. But the *how* was by no means quite so simple. There was no will in existence. Would it be necessary to swear to its having been in existence, and, consequently, to its wilful destruction? In other words, to publish Adrian's committal of a criminal act?

"You must decide that point," he said to Lucy. "I have thought so much about this matter that I am no longer capable of thinking rationally. I shall do even this if you think it necessary. I make you the keeper of my conscience."

Lucy, always strong in commonsense, bent her mind to the problem.

"I can't say at once. If we can avoid an *esclandre,* of course we shall, if only for Vi's sake. Oh, Adrian, to think that we *have* a Vi to consider! Perhaps the estate could be transferred to Philip by a deed of gift. *He,* of course, would have to know the truth, or he would not take it; but perhaps for the world at large some pretext could be found. I think we shall have to consult a lawyer, in confidence, of course."

"Yes, Philip must know. Had I not better write to him at once?"

"Rather wait till you have spoken to the lawyer. It is better to come out with a final plan of action."

"And other plans of action? Those concerning our future, I mean; we shall have to think of them too, Lucy."

"I am beginning to think of them already. The matter is really quite simple. We are back again where we were when you decided to go to Argentina; only that now I can go with you—and Vi, too. Oh, no, we are not back again where we were—we are at a much better place."

Adrian took her hand, looking deep into her eyes.

"And are you not afraid of what may be coming, Lucy? There may be years of struggle ahead."

Lucy laughed again—her low, comfortable laugh that was related to a chuckle.

"I am afraid of nothing at all, now that the wall is gone!"

CHAPTER XII.

FATHER GREYSON'S WRITING-TABLE.

To both Lucy and Adrian this was a strange and wonderful day, divided between visits to the nursery (which Adrian was no longer afraid of entering) snatches of discussion regarding the future, and other snatches of very necessary rest. In view of the hourly improvement in Vi's condition, and by the force of reaction from the emotions of the morning, their spirits rose to almost childish heights. Already their imaginations were busily painting pictures of that Argentinian home in which their recovered little one was to grow up.

"It will be called a *hacienda,*" explained Lucy, looking up from an encyclopædia volume over which Adrian, during one of his visits to the nursery, found her bent; "and will consist chiefly of verandas; and you will be able to smoke everywhere, since windows are only shut during storms, and cigars are dirt-cheap.

And another time she joyfully announced that Vi would be able to learn riding as early as she liked, since horses were almost as cheap as cigars.

But the most wonderful moment for Lucy was the one when, just before parting—since this one night was still to be spent in the nursery—Adrian said to her:

"Don't be alarmed if I'm missing in the morning. I am going into Donniebridge early."

"But surely not before breakfast?"

"Yes, before breakfast."

He drew her towards him to say a little lower:

"The fact is, Lucy, that I hope to go to communion to-morrow morning, if Father Kinghorn will give me absolution, that is to say."

Lucy leaned against him in an almost alarmed silence.

"You are going to confession?" she asked at last uncertainly.

"Yes."

"But Adrian—to Father Kinghorn! You know you never could bear him. Had you not better wait."

"Of course I could not bear him as long as I was resisting—that which he stood for; but now——. And besides, once in the confessional, he isn't Father Kinghorn at all. But of course you can't understand this—all at once."

There was a smile upon Adrian's lips, almost a smile of indulgence. It astonished himself to see how little the old Catholic feeling was dead within him, how quickly, in face of a novice's perplexity, it stirred again.

"And as for waiting—what better day could I choose? Don't you know that to-morrow is Easter Sunday?"

* * * * *

It was before eight o'clock next morning that Adrian drew up before the Presbytery. The street along which the stream of church-goers for the Holy Saturday service had not yet begun to flow, was almost deserted. During the few minutes that passed before the bell was answered he had time to note that the window at which on the occasion of his last visit he had seen Father Greyson

sitting, stood wide open, though with closely drawn curtains. When at last the door opened, it was not the slatternly hag's features that appeared in the entrance, but Sister Monica's wide, wing-like head-dress. Her round eyes grew rounder with surprise as they fell on Adrian.

"*You,* Mr. Belmont!"

Then, before he had spoken, she added quickly:

"You have heard of the misfortune, have you not? That is why you have come?"

"Which misfortune? I have heard nothing."

"Poor Father Greyson. He died yesterday—quite suddenly."

"Before the arrival of the London Doctor?" asked Adrian, startled.

Sister Monica was twisting her fingers vehemently through the rosary at her side.

"No, not before his arrival," she said; and shut up her mouth tight upon the last word, much as though to prevent the issue of those pressing after it.

"This must be a great shock to Father Kinghorn."

"And a greater to Doctor Pollett."

"Then the experiment was not made, I suppose?"

"Oh, wasn't it!" uttered Sister Monica with unmistakable scorn.

"You surely don't mean to say——"

"Oh, I mean to say nothing at all, except that the Almighty goes His own ways, in spite of all the Sir Hiram Okes in the world."

Adrian sat thinking. What a deliverance this news would have appeared to him only one day back, and now as how almost irrelevant it struck him!

"Is Father Kinghorn in the house, Sister, or in the chapel?"

"In the house still. He has been busy half the night sorting Father Greyson's papers, so as to find out whether he has any relations living. We really know so little about him."

"Would you ask him—as soon as he is ready—to come to the Chapel—and to the confessional?"

For a moment Sister Monica's eyes became round again, but she quickly controlled herself.

"I will tell him, of course—at once."

As Adrian entered the Chapel he looked slowly about him, as at a place long unseen, yet not forgotten. It was almost empty as yet, but all stood ready for the triumphant moment to come. Beside the flower-decked altar loomed the Paschal candle, waiting for the kindling match; the best altar-front had been brought out, all the modest riches of the Donniebridge Sacristy unpacked in honour of the day; while up in the loft the poor little organ was giving out tentative sounds, much as though it were clearing its throat for the first "Hallelujah!" No light burned as yet beyond the one eternal one before the tabernacle. That too he had not forgotten, so he found. Yes, this was very like coming home.

With a deep-drawn breath, he knelt down within the nearest row of seats, and with somewhat accelerated heart-beats went over the examination to which the best part of the night had been devoted.

He had not long to wait before the sacristy door opened to admit a black figure with a violet stole about its shoulders. As the light from the window he had to pass fell upon the flaming hair of the "Pillar of Fire," clearly showing up both his spectacles and his freckles, Adrian seemed to have a sudden revelation of the sublimity of faith. "It is because you don't believe in the

other's belief that submission seems to you ignoble," Father Kelly had said during the argument at dinner. Adrian abruptly remembered the words, while recognising that for one man to put his soul into the hands of another was an act of faith far beyond that wanted for the working of miracles. With something like amazement he became aware that he was capable of this act.

* * * * *

The avowal—as complete as the one made to Lucy yesterday—was closed. Adrian's chief wonder was that it had been so easy, so much easier than many previous, far more trivial confessions, which had not been upborne by this wave of emotion. Like yesterday's avowal it was followed by a moment of silence. With a feeling of sudden weariness Adrian closed his eyes, in expectation of the inevitable exhortations, which even now seemed the hardest part of the matter. As no sound came from beyond the grating, he opened them again. He could just make out the priests face, shining with some of that radiancy which he had seen upon Lucy's and with a gaze apparently lost in the distance.

"Father," he said impulsively, "have you forgotten me? What are you thinking of?"

"Of the unsearchable ways of God; perhaps even more so than we yet know. Tell me one thing more: Have you written to your cousin?"

"Not yet. I have to consult a lawyer first."

"That is good. When you leave the chapel, please come to the presbytery for a moment. I can just spare time. I have something to give you; something which I found among Father Greyson's papers. It may be of importance."

"A copy of the will, no doubt. Yes, that would simplify

matters considerably. It is the non-existence of a will which is the difficulty now."

"The contents are described as a will, but I have not opened the envelope."

* * * * *

A few minutes later Adrian knelt once more before the tabernacle, with the load he had dragged about with him for so long replaced by a sensation of buoyancy that was almost physical. The exhortations had been chiefly conspicuous by their absence. Whatever might be Father Kinghorn's limitations, he had long since learnt to refrain from battering in open doors.

And again after awhile, Adrian stood in the ugly parlour with the horse-hair sofa, and the plaster statue whose realistically bleeding heart used formerly to offend his sight, but failed to do so to-day. In his hand he held the envelope which Father Kinghorn had found in the old writing-table, whose top had for so long served as a sort of chemist's store. It had always been the old priest's private writing-table, quite distinct from his official one; for which reason his successor had not considered himself justified in unlocking it in his lifetime.

"Last testament of James Belmont," the envelope was endorsed.

In Father Kinghorn's presence Adrian, without any especial curiosity, took a paper from it. He felt pretty sure of what was coming. But as he read, his expression changed first to perplexity, then to amazement. Without a word he handed the paper to the priest, and going to the window stared out into the street, breathing rather fast.

"This is my last will and testament," read Father Kinghorn adjusting his spectacles, then, after the usual introduction:

"Inasmuch as my old friend—*recte* enemy—the Popish priest known as Father Greyson—has lately been making my life a burden to me because of a certain restriction I have laid upon my heir, Adrian Belmont, touching a change of religion, and in order to be rid of his most obdurate persecutions, I herewith solemnly cancel this condition, and make my brother's son welcome to go to the devil in any way he likes best, so long only as he is careful to see that the Mulcaskie gardens do not do the same. Likewise I declare all former testaments of mine to be null and void.

"My persecutor further insists on my handing over this document to his keeping, for fear, as he says of my destroying it; and even in this I will humour him, if only to prove my superior tolerance."

There followed the customary wind-up and below the signature: "James Belmont," and a date preceding his death by only a few months.

Adrian, staring out of the window, was still too full of the other happiness which he had brought with him from the Chapel, to have room immediately for this new one, fallen upon him with this almost dizzy abruptness. But slowly he was beginning to realise. For a moment he seemed to hear his father's voice in his ear: "Always do the straight thing, my boy; it is sure to come right in the end." So it had come right, and would have come right had he done the straight thing from the beginning.

Then he felt a touch upon his sleeve, and turned to find Father Kinghorn beaming at his elbow.

"Did I not say that His ways are unsearchable?"

* * * * *

Under the first brunt of the announcement, Lucy strange to say—was almost disappointed. It was a feeling

related to that which Adrian's mother had experienced when his projected emigration had become unnecessary. The young wife had been so eager to show by her devotion that all that had been ugly in the past was, for her, blotted out, so proud to be able to prove that she was equal to living a difficult life; and now life was going to be easy, after all. Beside the modest charms of the *hacienda* even Mulcaskie's splendours looked pale for a moment. But only for a moment. To Lucy's heart too the relief that was but human, crept back without much delay. How should she grudge to Vi this brighter, safer future? And as for the dreams she had begun to weave of a purifying activity for Adrian, they might come true yet—in another way. There was plenty of work to be done at Mulcaskie, work to which he would only now be able to put his hand full-heartedly. Nor was his political ambition dead. It had only been numbed, and would stir again now at the first invitation.

But before all this happened there was another great thing to be thought of and for which preparations must be begun without delay, in time at least to allow her first communion to be a Paschal one.

"What would *she* have said, I wonder?" mused Lucy as they sat together that evening. To specify what "she" was meant, was unnecessary, since they both knew. "Would she have been much surprised?"

In reply Adrian rose to his feet, slapping his forehead with his hand.

"What a blunderer I am, to be sure! Fancy requiring a reminder!"

He left the room and came back a minute later holding in his hand the letter which he had found at his mother's bedside, and whose very existence he had for-

gotten, in the stress of the agitations of his home-coming.

Together they read the message from beyond the grave.

"My Sweet Daughter!"

"By the time you read this I shall have gained the right to speak as I never ventured to speak when in my mortal body. Lucy—into *your* hands I commit not only my son's worldly welfare, but also that of his soul. Do not wonder that I should speak so to a so-called heretic. You are only a 'so-called,' Lucy. I have seen for long that you are far more Catholic than Adrian, whose religious convictions have bent under the assaults of infidelity; and in time you yourself will recognise this. You are too intrinsically true not to be drawn, as with a lodestone, towards Truth; and in so drawing, you will draw him. So to you, under God, I commit him—in full confidence. For, with the Bishop who comforted Augustine's mother, I cannot believe that the child of so many tears should be lost for ever."

"No, she would not have been surprised," said Lucy, as soon as her voice was steady enough to be used.

* * * * *

Certain other people too were not surprised.

The good tidings had not been long in reaching Lippenross, producing an avalanche-like appearance of the entire family, and a storming of the place, in flat defiance of hygienic laws.

"We knew it was coming! We knew it!" they declared in three voices, but in one breath. "Your argument with Father Kessidy didn't take us in a bit. But you might have hurried up a little!"

"It's been a narrow shave for me," explained Kitty,

who was already busy packing for Edinburgh, a proceeding accompanied by a wholesale distribution between her sisters of the now useless "finery"; I should never have forgiven you if I had been reduced to congratulating by letter."

"And how providential that it should have happened before the strawberry season!" exulted Mara.

"The strawberry season?" repeated the somewhat dazed Lucy, extricating herself from three pairs of arms.

"Yes. We were beginning to lay bets whether it would come off in time to let us loose upon the strawberry beds. Just look at her face, girls? Shall we tell her?"

An explanation being tumultuously voted for, Mara proceeded to tell Lucy that from the moment of her appearance at Mulcaskie the foremost wish of their hearts had been to win her over. But Father Kinghorn ("who really is wonderfully restrained for a 'Pillar of Fire'" explained Mara), had been stern about proselytising ("though, of course, he was burning all the time to get at you,") so that they had found themselves reduced to praying.

"Then Kitty had the brilliant idea of our making some sacrifice, in order to obtain your conversion, and we discussed matters and decided for strawberries. We settled not to eat a single strawberry until you were within the fold. So just imagine what you would have condemned us to if you had persevered in your obduracy!"

Between laughing and crying Lucy promised them a strawberry feast, "Only that Kitty won't be there!" she finished with a little sob, not exactly of grief.

Both the elder sisters flew at Kitty.

"Darling! We shall have to eat your share!" they uttered amid a shower of kisses.

"I hope not!" laughed Lucy, "else Doctor Pollett might come into requisition."

"Poor Doctor Pollett!" sighed the sympathising Nelly, "He is dreadfully down in the mouth. It certainly was very provoking of Father Greyson to die just when Sir Hiram Oke came."

"My private impression," declared Mara, "is that Sir Hiram Oke killed him—not on purpose, of course. In fact I put the question to Doctor Pollett; but he waved it off indignantly—in the interests of Science, of course!"

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