2

The Baileys, under whose auspices I met Margaret again, were in the sharpest contrast with the narrow industrialism of the Staffordshire world. They were indeed at the other extreme of the scale, two active self-centred people, excessively devoted to the public service. It was natural I should gravitate to them, for they seemed to stand for the maturer, more disciplined, better informed expression of all I was then urgent to attempt to do. The bulk of their friends were politicians or public officials, they described themselves as publicists—a vague yet sufficiently significant term. They lived and worked in a hard little house in Chambers Street, Westminster, and made a centre for quite an astonishing amount of political and social activity.

Willersley took me there one evening. The place was almost pretentiously matter-of-fact and unassuming. The narrow passage-hall, papered with some ancient yellowish paper, grained to imitate wood, was choked with hats and cloaks and an occasional feminine wrap. Motioned rather than announced by a tall Scotch servant woman, the only domestic I ever remember seeing there, we made our way up a narrow staircase past the open door of a small study packed with blue-books, to discover Altiora Bailey receiving before the fireplace in her drawing-room. She was a tall commanding figure, splendid but a little untidy in black silk and red beads, with dark eyes that had no depths, with a clear hard voice that had an almost visible prominence, aquiline features and straight black hair that was apt to get astray, that was now astray like the head feathers of an eagle in a gale. She stood with her hands behind her back, and talked in a high tenor of a projected Town Planning Bill with Blupp, who was practically in those days the secretary of the local Government Board. A very short broad man with thick ears and fat white hands writhing intertwined behind him, stood with his back to us, eager to bark interruptions into Altiora's discourse. A slender girl in pale blue, manifestly a young political wife, stood with one foot on the fender listening with an expression of entirely puzzled propitiation. A tall sandy-bearded bishop with the expression of a man in a trance completed this central group.

The room was one of those long apartments once divided by folding doors, and reaching from back to front, that are common upon the first floors of London houses. Its walls were hung with two or three indifferent water colours, there was scarcely any furniture but a sofa or so and a chair, and the floor, severely carpeted with matting, was crowded with a curious medley of people, men predominating. Several were in evening dress, but most had the morning garb of the politician; the women were either severely rational or radiantly magnificent. Willersley pointed out to me the wife of the Secretary of State for War, and I recognised the Duchess of Clynes, who at that time cultivated intellectuality. I looked round, identifying a face here or there, and stepping back trod on some one's toe, and turned to find it belonged to the Right Hon. G. B. Mottisham, dear to the PUNCH caricaturists. He received my apology with that intentional charm that is one of his most delightful traits, and resumed his discussion. Beside him was Esmeer of Trinity, whom I had not seen since my Cambridge days....

Willersley found an ex-member of the School Board for whom he had affinities, and left me to exchange experiences and comments upon the company with Esmeer. Esmeer was still a don; but he was nibbling, he said, at certain negotiations with the TIMES that might bring him down to London. He wanted to come to London. “We peep at things from Cambridge,” he said.

“This sort of thing,” I said, “makes London necessary. It's the oddest gathering.”

“Every one comes here,” said Esmeer. “Mostly we hate them like poison—jealousy—and little irritations—Altiora can be a horror at times—but we HAVE to come.”

“Things are being done?”

“Oh!—no doubt of it. It's one of the parts of the British machinery—that doesn't show.... But nobody else could do it.

“Two people,” said Esmeer, “who've planned to be a power—in an original way. And by Jove! they've done it!”

I did not for some time pick out Oscar Bailey, and then Esmeer showed him to me in elaborately confidential talk in a corner with a distinguished-looking stranger wearing a ribbon. Oscar had none of the fine appearance of his wife; he was a short sturdy figure with a rounded protruding abdomen and a curious broad, flattened, clean-shaven face that seemed nearly all forehead. He was of Anglo-Hungarian extraction, and I have always fancied something Mongolian in his type. He peered up with reddish swollen-looking eyes over gilt-edged glasses that were divided horizontally into portions of different refractive power, and he talking in an ingratiating undertone, with busy thin lips, an eager lisp and nervous movements of the hand.

People say that thirty years before at Oxford he was almost exactly the same eager, clever little man he was when I first met him. He had come up to Balliol bristling with extraordinary degrees and prizes captured in provincial and Irish and Scotch universities—and had made a name for himself as the most formidable dealer in exact fact the rhetoricians of the Union had ever had to encounter. From Oxford he had gone on to a position in the Higher Division of the Civil Service, I think in the War Office, and had speedily made a place for himself as a political journalist. He was a particularly neat controversialist, and very full of political and sociological ideas. He had a quite astounding memory for facts and a mastery of detailed analysis, and the time afforded scope for these gifts. The later eighties were full of politico-social discussion, and he became a prominent name upon the contents list of the NINETEENTH CENTURY, the FORTNIGHTLY and CONTEMPORARY chiefly as a half sympathetic but frequently very damaging critic of the socialism of that period. He won the immense respect of every one specially interested in social and political questions, he soon achieved the limited distinction that is awarded such capacity, and at that I think he would have remained for the rest of his life if he had not encountered Altiora.

But Altiora Macvitie was an altogether exceptional woman, an extraordinary mixture of qualities, the one woman in the world who could make something more out of Bailey than that. She had much of the vigour and handsomeness of a slender impudent young man, and an unscrupulousness altogether feminine. She was one of those women who are waiting in—what is the word?—muliebrity. She had courage and initiative and a philosophical way of handling questions, and she could be bored by regular work like a man. She was entirely unfitted for her sex's sphere. She was neither uncertain, coy nor hard to please, and altogether too stimulating and aggressive for any gentleman's hours of ease. Her cookery would have been about as sketchy as her handwriting, which was generally quite illegible, and she would have made, I feel sure, a shocking bad nurse. Yet you mustn't imagine she was an inelegant or unbeautiful woman, and she is inconceivable to me in high collars or any sort of masculine garment. But her soul was bony, and at the base of her was a vanity gaunt and greedy! When she wasn't in a state of personal untidiness that was partly a protest against the waste of hours exacted by the toilet and partly a natural disinclination, she had a gypsy splendour of black and red and silver all her own. And somewhen in the early nineties she met and married Bailey.

I know very little about her early years. She was the only daughter of Sir Deighton Macvitie, who applied the iodoform process to cotton, and only his subsequent unfortunate attempts to become a Cotton King prevented her being a very rich woman. As it was she had a tolerable independence. She came into prominence as one of the more able of the little shoal of young women who were led into politico-philanthropic activities by the influence of the earlier novels of Mrs. Humphry Ward—the Marcella crop. She went “slumming” with distinguished vigour, which was quite usual in those days—and returned from her experiences as an amateur flower girl with clear and original views about the problem—which is and always had been unusual. She had not married, I suppose because her standards were high, and men are cowards and with an instinctive appetite for muliebrity. She had kept house for her father by speaking occasionally to the housekeeper, butler and cook her mother had left her, and gathering the most interesting dinner parties she could, and had married off four orphan nieces in a harsh and successful manner. After her father's smash and death she came out as a writer upon social questions and a scathing critic of the Charity Organisation Society, and she was three and thirty and a little at loose ends when she met Oscar Bailey, so to speak, in the CONTEMPORARY REVIEW. The lurking woman in her nature was fascinated by the ease and precision with which the little man rolled over all sorts of important and authoritative people, she was the first to discover a sort of imaginative bigness in his still growing mind, the forehead perhaps carried him off physically, and she took occasion to meet and subjugate him, and, so soon as he had sufficiently recovered from his abject humility and a certain panic at her attentions, marry him.

This had opened a new phase in the lives of Bailey and herself. The two supplemented each other to an extraordinary extent. Their subsequent career was, I think, almost entirely her invention. She was aggressive, imaginative, and had a great capacity for ideas, while he was almost destitute of initiative, and could do nothing with ideas except remember and discuss them. She was, if not exact, at least indolent, with a strong disposition to save energy by sketching—even her handwriting showed that—while he was inexhaustibly industrious with a relentless invariable calligraphy that grew larger and clearer as the years passed by. She had a considerable power of charming; she could be just as nice to people—and incidentally just as nasty—as she wanted to be. He was always just the same, a little confidential and SOTTO VOCE, artlessly rude and egoistic in an undignified way. She had considerable social experience, good social connections, and considerable social ambition, while he had none of these things. She saw in a flash her opportunity to redeem his defects, use his powers, and do large, novel, rather startling things. She ran him. Her marriage, which shocked her friends and relations beyond measure—for a time they would only speak of Bailey as “that gnome”—was a stroke of genius, and forthwith they proceeded to make themselves the most formidable and distinguished couple conceivable. P. B. P., she boasted, was engraved inside their wedding rings, Pro Bono Publico, and she meant it to be no idle threat. She had discovered very early that the last thing influential people will do is to work. Everything in their lives tends to make them dependent upon a supply of confidently administered detail. Their business is with the window and not the stock behind, and in the end they are dependent upon the stock behind for what goes into the window. She linked with that the fact that Bailey had a mind as orderly as a museum, and an invincible power over detail. She saw that if two people took the necessary pains to know the facts of government and administration with precision, to gather together knowledge that was dispersed and confused, to be able to say precisely what had to be done and what avoided in this eventuality or that, they would necessarily become a centre of reference for all sorts of legislative proposals and political expedients, and she went unhesitatingly upon that.

Bailey, under her vigorous direction, threw up his post in the Civil Service and abandoned sporadic controversies, and they devoted themselves to the elaboration and realisation of this centre of public information she had conceived as their role. They set out to study the methods and organisation and realities of government in the most elaborate manner. They did the work as no one had ever hitherto dreamt of doing it. They planned the research on a thoroughly satisfying scale, and arranged their lives almost entirely for it. They took that house in Chambers Street and furnished it with severe economy, they discovered that Scotch domestic who is destined to be the guardian and tyrant of their declining years, and they set to work. Their first book, "The Permanent Official," fills three plump volumes, and took them and their two secretaries upwards of four years to do. It is an amazingly good book, an enduring achievement. In a hundred directions the history and the administrative treatment of the public service was clarified for all time....

They worked regularly every morning from nine to twelve, they lunched lightly but severely, in the afternoon they "took exercise" or Bailey attended meetings of the London School Board, on which he served, he said, for the purposes of study—he also became a railway director for the same end. In the late afternoon Altiora was at home to various callers, and in the evening came dinner or a reception or both.

Her dinners and gatherings were a very important feature in their scheme. She got together all sorts of interesting people in or about the public service, she mixed the obscurely efficient with the ill-instructed famous and the rudderless rich, got together in one room more of the factors in our strange jumble of a public life than had ever met easily before. She fed them with a shameless austerity that kept the conversation brilliant, on a soup, a plain fish, and mutton or boiled fowl and milk pudding, with nothing to drink but whisky and soda, and hot and cold water, and milk and lemonade. Everybody was soon very glad indeed to come to that. She boasted how little her housekeeping cost her, and sought constantly for fresh economies that would enable her, she said, to sustain an additional private secretary. Secretaries were the Baileys' one extravagance, they loved to think of searches going on in the British Museum, and letters being cleared up and precis made overhead, while they sat in the little study and worked together, Bailey with a clockwork industry, and Altiora in splendid flashes between intervals of cigarettes and meditation. "All efficient public careers," said Altiora, "consist in the proper direction of secretaries."

“If everything goes well I shall have another secretary next year,” Altiora told me. “I wish I could refuse people dinner napkins. Imagine what it means in washing! I dare most things.... But as it is, they stand a lot of hardship here.”

“There's something of the miser in both these people,” said Esmeer, and the thing was perfectly true. For, after all, the miser is nothing more than a man who either through want of imagination or want of suggestion misapplies to a base use a natural power of concentration upon one end. The concentration itself is neither good nor evil, but a power that can be used in either way. And the Baileys gathered and reinvested usuriously not money, but knowledge of the utmost value in human affairs. They produced an effect of having found themselves—completely. One envied them at times extraordinarily. I was attracted, I was dazzled—and at the same time there was something about Bailey's big wrinkled forehead, his lisping broad mouth, the gestures of his hands and an uncivil preoccupation I could not endure....

3

Their effect upon me was from the outset very considerable.

Both of them found occasion on that first visit of mine to talk to me about my published writings and particularly about my then just published book THE NEW RULER, which had interested them very much. It fell in indeed so closely with their own way of thinking that I doubt if they ever understood how independently I had arrived at my conclusions. It was their weakness to claim excessively. That irritation, however, came later. We discovered each other immensely; for a time it produced a tremendous sense of kindred and co-operation.

Altiora, I remember, maintained that there existed a great army of such constructive-minded people as ourselves—as yet undiscovered by one another.

“It's like boring a tunnel through a mountain,” said Oscar, “and presently hearing the tapping of the workers from the other end.”

“If you didn't know of them beforehand,” I said, “it might be a rather badly joined tunnel.”

“Exactly,” said Altiora with a high note, “and that's why we all want to find out each other....”

They didn't talk like that on our first encounter, but they urged me to lunch with them next day, and then it was we went into things. A woman Factory Inspector and the Educational Minister for New Banksland and his wife were also there, but I don't remember they made any contribution to the conversation. The Baileys saw to that. They kept on at me in an urgent litigious way.

“We have read your book,” each began—as though it had been a joint function. “And we consider—”

“Yes,” I protested, “I think—”

That was a secondary matter.

“They did not consider,” said Altiora, raising her voice and going right over me, “that I had allowed sufficiently for the inevitable development of an official administrative class in the modern state.”

“Nor of its importance,” echoed Oscar.

That, they explained in a sort of chorus, was the cardinal idea of their lives, what they were up to, what they stood for. “We want to suggest to you,” they said—and I found this was a stock opening of theirs—“that from the mere necessities of convenience elected bodies MUST avail themselves more and more of the services of expert officials. We have that very much in mind. The more complicated and technical affairs become, the less confidence will the elected official have in himself. We want to suggest that these expert officials must necessarily develop into a new class and a very powerful class in the community. We want to organise that. It may be THE power of the future. They will necessarily have to have very much of a common training. We consider ourselves as amateur unpaid precursors of such a class.”...

The vision they displayed for my consideration as the aim of public-spirited endeavour, seemed like a harder, narrower, more specialised version of the idea of a trained and disciplined state that Willersley and I had worked out in the Alps. They wanted things more organised, more correlated with government and a collective purpose, just as we did, but they saw it not in terms of a growing collective understanding, but in terms of functionaries, legislative change, and methods of administration....

It wasn't clear at first how we differed. The Baileys were very anxious to win me to co-operation, and I was quite prepared at first to identify their distinctive expressions with phrases of my own, and so we came very readily into an alliance that was to last some years, and break at last very painfully. Altiora manifestly liked me, I was soon discussing with her the perplexity I found in placing myself efficiently in the world, the problem of how to take hold of things that occupied my thoughts, and she was sketching out careers for my consideration, very much as an architect on his first visit sketches houses, considers requirements, and puts before you this example and that of the more or less similar thing already done....

4

It is easy to see how much in common there was between the Baileys and me, and how natural it was that I should become a constant visitor at their house and an ally of theirs in many enterprises. It is not nearly so easy to define the profound antagonism of spirit that also held between us. There was a difference in texture, a difference in quality. How can I express it? The shapes of our thoughts were the same, but the substance quite different. It was as if they had made in china or cast iron what I had made in transparent living matter. (The comparison is manifestly from my point of view.) Certain things never seemed to show through their ideas that were visible, refracted perhaps and distorted, but visible always through mine.

I thought for a time the essential difference lay in our relation to beauty. With me beauty is quite primary in life; I like truth, order and goodness, wholly because they are beautiful or lead straight to beautiful consequences. The Baileys either hadn't got that or they didn't see it. They seemed at times to prefer things harsh and ugly. That puzzled me extremely. The esthetic quality of many of their proposals, the “manners” of their work, so to speak, were at times as dreadful as—well, War Office barrack architecture. A caricature by its exaggerated statements will sometimes serve to point a truth by antagonising falsity and falsity. I remember talking to a prominent museum official in need of more public funds for the work he had in hand. I mentioned the possibility of enlisting Bailey's influence.

“Oh, we don't want Philistines like that infernal Bottle-Imp running us,” he said hastily, and would hear of no concerted action for the end he had in view. “I'd rather not have the extension.

“You see,” he went on to explain, “Bailey's wanting in the essentials.”

“What essentials?” said I.

“Oh! he'd be like a nasty oily efficient little machine for some merely subordinate necessity among all my delicate stuff. He'd do all we wanted no doubt in the way of money and powers—and he'd do it wrong and mess the place for ever. Hands all black, you know. He's just a means. Just a very aggressive and unmanageable means. This isn't a plumber's job....”

I stuck to my argument.

“I don't LIKE him,” said the official conclusively, and it seemed to me at the time he was just blind prejudice speaking....

I came nearer the truth of the matter as I came to realise that our philosophies differed profoundly. That isn't a very curable difference,—once people have grown up. Theirs was a philosophy devoid of FINESSE. Temperamentally the Baileys were specialised, concentrated, accurate, while I am urged either by some Inner force or some entirely assimilated influence in my training, always to round off and shadow my outlines. I hate them hard. I would sacrifice detail to modelling always, and the Baileys, it seemed to me, loved a world as flat and metallic as Sidney Cooper's cows. If they had the universe in hand I know they would take down all the trees and put up stamped tin green shades and sunlight accumulators. Altiora thought trees hopelessly irregular and sea cliffs a great mistake.... I got things clearer as time went on. Though it was an Hegelian mess of which I had partaken at Codger's table by way of a philosophical training, my sympathies have always been Pragmatist. I belong almost by nature to that school of Pragmatism that, following the medieval Nominalists, bases itself upon a denial of the reality of classes, and of the validity of general laws. The Baileys classified everything. They were, in the scholastic sense—which so oddly contradicts the modern use of the word “Realists.” They believed classes were REAL and independent of their individuals. This is the common habit of all so-called educated people who have no metaphysical aptitude and no metaphysical training. It leads them to a progressive misunderstanding of the world. It was a favourite trick of Altiora's to speak of everybody as a “type”; she saw men as samples moving; her dining-room became a chamber of representatives. It gave a tremendously scientific air to many of their generalisations, using “scientific” in its nineteenth-century uncritical Herbert Spencer sense, an air that only began to disappear when you thought them over again in terms of actuality and the people one knew....

At the Baileys' one always seemed to be getting one's hands on the very strings that guided the world. You heard legislation projected to affect this “type” and that; statistics marched by you with sin and shame and injustice and misery reduced to quite manageable percentages, you found men who were to frame or amend bills in grave and intimate exchange with Bailey's omniscience, you heard Altiora canvassing approaching resignations and possible appointments that might make or mar a revolution in administrative methods, and doing it with a vigorous directness that manifestly swayed the decision; and you felt you were in a sort of signal box with levers all about you, and the world outside there, albeit a little dark and mysterious beyond the window, running on its lines in ready obedience to these unhesitating lights, true and steady to trim termini.

And then with all this administrative fizzle, this pseudo-scientific administrative chatter, dying away in your head, out you went into the limitless grimy chaos of London streets and squares, roads and avenues lined with teeming houses, each larger than the Chambers Street house and at least equally alive, you saw the chaotic clamour of hoardings, the jumble of traffic, the coming and going of mysterious myriads, you heard the rumble of traffic like the noise of a torrent; a vague incessant murmur of cries and voices, wanton crimes and accidents bawled at you from the placards; imperative unaccountable fashions swaggered triumphant in dazzling windows of the shops; and you found yourself swaying back to the opposite conviction that the huge formless spirit of the world it was that held the strings and danced the puppets on the Bailey stage....

Under the lamps you were jostled by people like my Staffordshire uncle out for a spree, you saw shy youths conversing with prostitutes, you passed young lovers pairing with an entire disregard of the social suitability of the “types” they might blend or create, you saw men leaning drunken against lamp-posts whom you knew for the “type” that will charge with fixed bayonets into the face of death, and you found yourself unable to imagine little Bailey achieving either drunkenness or the careless defiance of annihilation. You realised that quite a lot of types were underrepresented in Chambers Street, that feral and obscure and altogether monstrous forces must be at work, as yet altogether unassimilated by those neat administrative reorganisations.

5

Altiora, I remember, preluded Margaret's reappearance by announcing her as a “new type.”

I was accustomed to go early to the Baileys' dinners in those days, for a preliminary gossip with Altiora in front of her drawing-room fire. One got her alone, and that early arrival was a little sign of appreciation she valued. She had every woman's need of followers and servants.

“I'm going to send you down to-night,” she said, “with a very interesting type indeed—one of the new generation of serious gals. Middle-class origin—and quite well off. Rich in fact. Her step-father was a solicitor and something of an ENTREPRENEUR towards the end, I fancy—in the Black Country. There was a little brother died, and she's lost her mother quite recently. Quite on her own, so to speak. She's never been out into society very much, and doesn't seem really very anxious to go.... Not exactly an intellectual person, you know, but quiet, and great force of character. Came up to London on her own and came to us—someone had told her we were the sort of people to advise her—to ask what to do. I'm sure she'll interest you.”

“What CAN people of that sort do?” I asked. “Is she capable of investigation?”

Altiora compressed her lips and shook her head. She always did shake her head when you asked that of anyone.

“Of course what she ought to do,” said Altiora, with her silk dress pulled back from her knee before the fire, and with a lift of her voice towards a chuckle at her daring way of putting things, “is to marry a member of Parliament and see he does his work.... Perhaps she will. It's a very exceptional gal who can do anything by herself—quite exceptional. The more serious they are—without being exceptional—the more we want them to marry.”

Her exposition was truncated by the entry of the type in question.

“Well!” cried Altiora turning, and with a high note of welcome, “HERE you are!”

Margaret had gained in dignity and prettiness by the lapse of five years, and she was now very beautifully and richly and simply dressed. Her fair hair had been done in some way that made it seem softer and more abundant than it was in my memory, and a gleam of purple velvet-set diamonds showed amidst its mist of little golden and brown lines. Her dress was of white and violet, the last trace of mourning for her mother, and confessed the gracious droop of her tall and slender body. She did not suggest Staffordshire at all, and I was puzzled for a moment to think where I had met her. Her sweetly shaped mouth with the slight obliquity of the lip and the little kink in her brow were extraordinarily familiar to me. But she had either been prepared by Altiora or she remembered my name. “We met,” she said, “while my step-father was alive—at Misterton. You came to see us”; and instantly I recalled the sunshine between the apple blossom and a slender pale blue girlish shape among the daffodils, like something that had sprung from a bulb itself. I recalled at once that I had found her very interesting, though I did not clearly remember how it was she had interested me.

Other guests arrived—it was one of Altiora's boldly blended mixtures of people with ideas and people with influence or money who might perhaps be expected to resonate to them. Bailey came down late with an air of hurry, and was introduced to Margaret and said absolutely nothing to her—there being no information either to receive or impart and nothing to do—but stood snatching his left cheek until I rescued him and her, and left him free to congratulate the new Lady Snape on her husband's K. C. B.

I took Margaret down. We achieved no feats of mutual expression, except that it was abundantly clear we were both very pleased and interested to meet again, and that we had both kept memories of each other. We made that Misterton tea-party and the subsequent marriages of my cousins and the world of Burslem generally, matter for quite an agreeable conversation until at last Altiora, following her invariable custom, called me by name imperatively out of our duologue. “Mr. Remington,” she said, “we want your opinion—” in her entirely characteristic effort to get all the threads of conversation into her own hands for the climax that always wound up her dinners. How the other women used to hate those concluding raids of hers! I forget most of the other people at that dinner, nor can I recall what the crowning rally was about. It didn't in any way join on to my impression of Margaret.

In the drawing-room of the matting floor I rejoined her, with Altiora's manifest connivance, and in the interval I had been thinking of our former meeting.

“Do you find London,” I asked, “give you more opportunity for doing things and learning things than Burslem?”

She showed at once she appreciated my allusion to her former confidences. “I was very discontented then,” she said and paused. “I've really only been in London for a few months. It's so different. In Burslem, life seems all business and getting—without any reason. One went on and it didn't seem to mean anything. At least anything that mattered.... London seems to be so full of meanings—all mixed up together.”

She knitted her brows over her words and smiled appealingly at the end as if for consideration for her inadequate expression, appealingly and almost humorously.

I looked understandingly at her. “We have all,” I agreed, “to come to London.”

“One sees so much distress,” she added, as if she felt she had completely omitted something, and needed a codicil.

“What are you doing in London?”

“I'm thinking of studying. Some social question. I thought perhaps I might go and study social conditions as Mrs. Bailey did, go perhaps as a work-girl or see the reality of living in, but Mrs. Bailey thought perhaps it wasn't quite my work.”

“Are you studying?”

“I'm going to a good many lectures, and perhaps I shall take up a regular course at the Westminster School of Politics and Sociology. But Mrs. Bailey doesn't seem to believe very much in that either.”

Her faintly whimsical smile returned. “I seem rather indefinite,” she apologised, “but one does not want to get entangled in things one can't do. One—one has so many advantages, one's life seems to be such a trust and such a responsibility—”

She stopped.

“A man gets driven into work,” I said.

“It must be splendid to be Mrs. Bailey,” she replied with a glance of envious admiration across the room.

“SHE has no doubts, anyhow,” I remarked.

“She HAD,” said Margaret with the pride of one who has received great confidences.

6

“You've met before?” said Altiora, a day or so later.

I explained when.

“You find her interesting?”

I saw in a flash that Altiora meant to marry me to Margaret.

Her intention became much clearer as the year developed. Altiora was systematic even in matters that evade system. I was to marry Margaret, and freed from the need of making an income I was to come into politics—as an exponent of Baileyism. She put it down with the other excellent and advantageous things that should occupy her summer holiday. It was her pride and glory to put things down and plan them out in detail beforehand, and I'm not quite sure that she did not even mark off the day upon which the engagement was to be declared. If she did, I disappointed her. We didn't come to an engagement, in spite of the broadest hints and the glaring obviousness of everything, that summer.

Every summer the Baileys went out of London to some house they hired or borrowed, leaving their secretaries toiling behind, and they went on working hard in the mornings and evenings and taking exercise in the open air in the afternoon. They cycled assiduously and went for long walks at a trot, and raided and studied (and incidentally explained themselves to) any social “types” that lived in the neighbourhood. One invaded type, resentful under research, described them with a dreadful aptness as

Donna Quixote and Sancho Panza—and himself as a harmless windmill, hurting no one and signifying nothing. She did rather tilt at things. This particular summer they were at a pleasant farmhouse in level country near Pangbourne, belonging to the Hon. Wilfrid Winchester, and they asked me to come down to rooms in the neighbourhood—Altiora took them for a month for me in August—and board with them upon extremely reasonable terms; and when I got there I found Margaret sitting in a hammock at Altiora's feet. Lots of people, I gathered, were coming and going in the neighbourhood, the Ponts were in a villa on the river, and the Rickhams' houseboat was to moor for some days; but these irruptions did not impede a great deal of duologue between Margaret and myself.

Altiora was efficient rather than artistic in her match-making. She sent us off for long walks together—Margaret was a fairly good walker—she exhumed some defective croquet things and incited us to croquet, not understanding that detestable game is the worst stimulant for lovers in the world. And Margaret and I were always getting left about, and finding ourselves for odd half-hours in the kitchen-garden with nothing to do except talk, or we were told with a wave of the hand to run away and amuse each other.

Altiora even tried a picnic in canoes, knowing from fiction rather than imagination or experience the conclusive nature of such excursions. But there she fumbled at the last moment, and elected at the river's brink to share a canoe with me. Bailey showed so much zeal and so little skill—his hat fell off and he became miraculously nothing but paddle-clutching hands and a vast wrinkled brow—that at last he had to be paddled ignominiously by Margaret, while Altiora, after a phase of rigid discretion, as nearly as possible drowned herself—and me no doubt into the bargain—with a sudden lateral gesture of the arm to emphasise the high note with which she dismissed the efficiency of the Charity Organisation Society. We shipped about an inch of water and sat in it for the rest of the time, an inconvenience she disregarded heroically. We had difficulties in landing Oscar from his frail craft upon the ait of our feasting,—he didn't balance sideways and was much alarmed, and afterwards, as Margaret had a pain in her back, I took him in my canoe, let him hide his shame with an ineffectual but not positively harmful paddle, and towed the other by means of the joined painters. Still it was the fault of the inadequate information supplied in the books and not of Altiora that that was not the date of my betrothal.

I find it not a little difficult to state what kept me back from proposing marriage to Margaret that summer, and what urged me forward at last to marry her. It is so much easier to remember one's resolutions than to remember the moods and suggestions that produced them.

Marrying and getting married was, I think, a pretty simple affair to Altiora; it was something that happened to the adolescent and unmarried when you threw them together under the circumstances of health, warmth and leisure. It happened with the kindly and approving smiles of the more experienced elders who had organised these proximities. The young people married, settled down, children ensued, and father and mother turned their minds, now decently and properly disillusioned, to other things. That to Altiora was the normal sexual life, and she believed it to be the quality of the great bulk of the life about her.

One of the great barriers to human understanding is the wide temperamental difference one finds in the values of things relating to sex. It is the issue upon which people most need training in charity and imaginative sympathy. Here are no universal standards at all, and indeed for no single man nor woman does there seem to be any fixed standard, so much do the accidents of circumstances and one's physical phases affect one's interpretations. There is nothing in the whole range of sexual fact that may not seem supremely beautiful or humanly jolly or magnificently wicked or disgusting or trivial or utterly insignificant, according to the eye that sees or the mood that colours. Here is something that may fill the skies and every waking hour or be almost completely banished from a life. It may be everything on Monday and less than nothing on Saturday. And we make our laws and rules as though in these matters all men and women were commensurable one with another, with an equal steadfast passion and an equal constant duty....

I don't know what dreams Altiora may have had in her schoolroom days, I always suspected her of suppressed and forgotten phases, but certainly her general effect now was of an entirely passionless worldliness in these matters. Indeed so far as I could get at her, she regarded sexual passion as being hardly more legitimate in a civilised person than—let us say—homicidal mania. She must have forgotten—and Bailey too. I suspect she forgot before she married him. I don't suppose either of them had the slightest intimation of the dimensions sexual love can take in the thoughts of the great majority of people with whom they come in contact. They loved in their way—an intellectual way it was and a fond way—but it had no relation to beauty and physical sensation—except that there seemed a decree of exile against these things. They got their glow in high moments of altruistic ambition—and in moments of vivid worldly success. They sat at opposite ends of their dinner table with so and so "captured," and so and so, flushed with a mutual approval. They saw people in love forgetful and distraught about them, and just put it down to forgetfulness and distraction. At any rate Altiora manifestly viewed my situation and Margaret's with an abnormal and entirely misleading simplicity. There was the girl, rich, with an acceptable claim to be beautiful, shiningly virtuous, quite capable of political interests, and there was I, talented, ambitious and full of political and social passion, in need of just the money, devotion and regularisation Margaret could provide. We were both unmarried—white sheets of uninscribed paper. Was there ever a simpler situation? What more could we possibly want?

She was even a little offended at the inconclusiveness that did not settle things at Pangbourne. I seemed to her, I suspect, to reflect upon her judgment and good intentions.

7

I didn't see things with Altiora's simplicity.

I admired Margaret very much, I was fully aware of all that she and I might give each other; indeed so far as Altiora went we were quite in agreement. But what seemed solid ground to Altiora and the ultimate footing of her emasculated world, was to me just the superficial covering of a gulf—oh! abysses of vague and dim, and yet stupendously significant things.

I couldn't dismiss the interests and the passion of sex as Altiora did. Work, I agreed, was important; career and success; but deep unanalysable instincts told me this preoccupation was a thing quite as important; dangerous, interfering, destructive indeed, but none the less a dominating interest in life. I have told how flittingly and uninvited it came like a moth from the outer twilight into my life, how it grew in me with my manhood, how it found its way to speech and grew daring, and led me at last to experience. After that adventure at Locarno sex and the interests and desires of sex never left me for long at peace. I went on with my work and my career, and all the time it was like—like someone talking ever and again in a room while one tries to write.

There were times when I could have wished the world a world all of men, so greatly did this unassimilated series of motives and curiosities hamper me; and times when I could have wished the world all of women. I seemed always to be seeking something in women, in girls, and I was never clear what it was I was seeking. But never—even at my coarsest—was I moved by physical desire alone. Was I seeking help and fellowship? Was I seeking some intimacy with beauty? It was a thing too formless to state, that I seemed always desiring to attain and never attaining. Waves of gross sensuousness arose out of this preoccupation, carried me to a crisis of gratification or disappointment that was clearly not the needed thing; they passed and left my mind free again for a time to get on with the permanent pursuits of my life. And then presently this solicitude would have me again, an irrelevance as it seemed, and yet a constantly recurring demand.

I don't want particularly to dwell upon things that are disagreeable for others to read, but I cannot leave them out of my story and get the right proportions of the forces I am balancing. I was no abnormal man, and that world of order we desire to make must be built of such stuff as I was and am and can beget. You cannot have a world of Baileys; it would end in one orderly generation. Humanity is begotten in Desire, lives by Desire.

“Love which is lust, is the Lamp in the Tomb;

Love which is lust, is the Call from the Gloom.”

I echo Henley.

I suppose the life of celibacy which the active, well-fed, well-exercised and imaginatively stirred young man of the educated classes is supposed to lead from the age of nineteen or twenty, when Nature certainly meant him to marry, to thirty or more, when civilisation permits him to do so, is the most impossible thing in the world. We deal here with facts that are kept secret and obscure, but I doubt for my own part if more than one man out of five in our class satisfies that ideal demand. The rest are even as I was, and Hatherleigh and Esmeer and all the men I knew. I draw no lessons and offer no panacea; I have to tell the quality of life, and this is how it is. This is how it will remain until men and women have the courage to face the facts of life.

I was no systematic libertine, you must understand; things happened to me and desire drove me. Any young man would have served for that Locarno adventure, and after that what had been a mystic and wonderful thing passed rapidly into a gross, manifestly misdirected and complicating one. I can count a meagre tale of five illicit loves in the days of my youth, to include that first experience, and of them all only two were sustained relationships. Besides these five “affairs,” on one or two occasions I dipped so low as the inky dismal sensuality of the streets, and made one of those pairs of correlated figures, the woman in her squalid finery sailing homeward, the man modestly aloof and behind, that every night in the London year flit by the score of thousands across the sight of the observant....

How ugly it is to recall; ugly and shameful now without qualification! Yet at the time there was surely something not altogether ugly in it—something that has vanished, some fine thing mortally ailing.

One such occasion I recall as if it were a vision deep down in a pit, as if it had happened in another state of existence to someone else. And yet it is the sort of thing that has happened, once or twice at least, to half the men in London who have been in a position to make it possible. Let me try and give you its peculiar effect. Man or woman, you ought to know of it.

Figure to yourself a dingy room, somewhere in that network of streets that lies about Tottenham Court Road, a dingy bedroom lit by a solitary candle and carpeted with scraps and patches, with curtains of cretonne closing the window, and a tawdry ornament of paper in the grate. I sit on a bed beside a weary-eyed, fair-haired, sturdy young woman, half undressed, who is telling me in broken German something that my knowledge of German is at first inadequate to understand....

I thought she was boasting about her family, and then slowly the meaning came to me. She was a Lett from near Libau in Courland, and she was telling me—just as one tells something too strange for comment or emotion—how her father had been shot and her sister outraged and murdered before her eyes.

It was as if one had dipped into something primordial and stupendous beneath the smooth and trivial surfaces of life. There was I, you know, the promising young don from Cambridge, who wrote quite brilliantly about politics and might presently get into Parliament, with my collar and tie in my hand, and a certain sense of shameful adventure fading out of my mind.

“Ach Gott!” she sighed by way of comment, and mused deeply for a moment before she turned her face to me, as to something forgotten and remembered, and assumed the half-hearted meretricious smile.

“Bin ich eine hubsche?” she asked like one who repeats a lesson.

I was moved to crave her pardon and come away.

“Bin ich eine hubsche?” she asked a little anxiously, laying a detaining hand upon me, and evidently not understanding a word of what I was striving to say.

8

I find it extraordinarily difficult to recall the phases by which I passed from my first admiration of Margaret's earnestness and unconscious daintiness to an intimate acquaintance. The earlier encounters stand out clear and hard, but then the impressions become crowded and mingle not only with each other but with all the subsequent developments of relationship, the enormous evolutions of interpretation and comprehension between husband and wife. Dipping into my memories is like dipping into a ragbag, one brings out this memory or that, with no intimation of how they came in time or what led to them and joined them together. And they are all mixed up with subsequent associations, with sympathies and discords, habits of intercourse, surprises and disappointments and discovered misunderstandings. I know only that always my feelings for Margaret were complicated feelings, woven of many and various strands.

It is one of the curious neglected aspects of life how at the same time and in relation to the same reality we can have in our minds streams of thought at quite different levels. We can be at the same time idealising a person and seeing and criticising that person quite coldly and clearly, and we slip unconsciously from level to level and produce all sorts of inconsistent acts. In a sense I had no illusions about Margaret; in a sense my conception of Margaret was entirely poetic illusion. I don't think I was ever blind to certain defects of hers, and quite as certainly they didn't seem to matter in the slightest degree. Her mind had a curious want of vigour, “flatness” is the only word; she never seemed to escape from her phrase; her way of thinking, her way of doing was indecisive; she remained in her attitude, it did not flow out to easy, confirmatory action.

I saw this quite clearly, and when we walked and talked together I seemed always trying for animation in her and never finding it. I would state my ideas. “I know,” she would say, “I know.”

I talked about myself and she listened wonderfully, but she made no answering revelations. I talked politics, and she remarked with her blue eyes wide and earnest: “Every WORD you say seems so just.”

I admired her appearance tremendously but—I can only express it by saying I didn't want to touch her. Her fair hair was always delectably done. It flowed beautifully over her pretty small ears, and she would tie its fair coilings with fillets of black or blue velvet that carried pretty buckles of silver and paste. The light, the faint down on her brow and cheek was delightful. And it was clear to me that I made her happy.

My sense of her deficiencies didn't stand in the way of my falling at last very deeply in love with her. Her very shortcomings seemed to offer me something....

She stood in my mind for goodness—and for things from which it seemed to me my hold was slipping.

She seemed to promise a way of escape from the deepening opposition in me between physical passions and the constructive career, the career of wide aims and human service, upon which I had embarked. All the time that I was seeing her as a beautiful, fragile, rather ineffective girl, I was also seeing her just as consciously as a shining slender figure, a radiant reconciliation, coming into my darkling disorders of lust and impulse. I could understand clearly that she was incapable of the most necessary subtleties of political thought, and yet I could contemplate praying to her and putting all the intricate troubles of my life at her feet.

Before the reappearance of Margaret in my world at all an unwonted disgust with the consequences and quality of my passions had arisen in my mind. Among other things that moment with the Lettish girl haunted me persistently. I would see myself again and again sitting amidst those sluttish surroundings, collar and tie in hand, while her heavy German words grouped themselves to a slowly apprehended meaning. I would feel again with a fresh stab of remorse, that this was not a flash of adventure, this was not seeing life in any permissible sense, but a dip into tragedy, dishonour, hideous degradation, and the pitiless cruelty of a world as yet uncontrolled by any ordered will.

“Good God!” I put it to myself, “that I should finish the work those Cossacks had begun! I who want order and justice before everything! There's no way out of it, no decent excuse! If I didn't think, I ought to have thought!”...

“How did I get to it?”... I would ransack the phases of my development from the first shy unveiling of a hidden wonder to the last extremity as a man will go through muddled account books to find some disorganising error....

I was also involved at that time—I find it hard to place these things in the exact order of their dates because they were so disconnected with the regular progress of my work and life—in an intrigue, a clumsy, sensuous, pretentious, artificially stimulated intrigue, with a Mrs. Larrimer, a woman living separated from her husband. I will not go into particulars of that episode, nor how we quarrelled and chafed one another. She was at once unfaithful and jealous and full of whims about our meetings; she was careless of our secret, and vulgarised our relationship by intolerable interpretations; except for some glowing moments of gratification, except for the recurrent and essentially vicious desire that drew us back to each other again, we both fretted at a vexatious and unexpectedly binding intimacy. The interim was full of the quality of work delayed, of time and energy wasted, of insecure precautions against scandal and exposure. Disappointment is almost inherent in illicit love. I had, and perhaps it was part of her recurrent irritation also, a feeling as though one had followed something fine and beautiful into a net—into bird lime! These furtive scuffles, this sneaking into shabby houses of assignation, was what we had made out of the suggestion of pagan beauty; this was the reality of our vision of nymphs and satyrs dancing for the joy of life amidst incessant sunshine. We had laid hands upon the wonder and glory of bodily love and wasted them....

It was the sense of waste, of finely beautiful possibilities getting entangled and marred for ever that oppressed me. I had missed, I had lost. I did not turn from these things after the fashion of the Baileys, as one turns from something low and embarrassing. I felt that these great organic forces were still to be wrought into a harmony with my constructive passion. I felt too that I was not doing it. I had not understood the forces in this struggle nor its nature, and as I learnt I failed. I had been started wrong, I had gone on wrong, in a world that was muddled and confused, full of false counsel and erratic shames and twisted temptations. I learnt to see it so by failures that were perhaps destroying any chance of profit in my lessons. Moods of clear keen industry alternated with moods of relapse and indulgence and moods of dubiety and remorse. I was not going on as the Baileys thought I was going on. There were times when the blindness of the Baileys irritated me intensely. Beneath the ostensible success of those years, between twenty-three and twenty-eight, this rottenness, known to scarcely any one but myself, grew and spread. My sense of the probability of a collapse intensified. I knew indeed now, even as Willersley had prophesied five years before, that I was entangling myself in something that might smother all my uses in the world. Down there among those incommunicable difficulties, I was puzzled and blundering. I was losing my hold upon things; the chaotic and adventurous element in life was spreading upward and getting the better of me, over-mastering me and all my will to rule and make.... And the strength, the drugging urgency of the passion!

Margaret shone at times in my imagination like a radiant angel in a world of mire and disorder, in a world of cravings, hot and dull red like scars inflamed....

I suppose it was because I had so great a need of such help as her whiteness proffered, that I could ascribe impossible perfections to her, a power of intellect, a moral power and patience to which she, poor fellow mortal, had indeed no claim. If only a few of us WERE angels and freed from the tangle of effort, how easy life might be! I wanted her so badly, so very badly, to be what I needed. I wanted a woman to save me. I forced myself to see her as I wished to see her. Her tepidities became infinite delicacies, her mental vagueness an atmospheric realism. The harsh precisions of the Baileys and Altiora's blunt directness threw up her fineness into relief and made a grace of every weakness.

Mixed up with the memory of times when I talked with Margaret as one talks politely to those who are hopelessly inferior in mental quality, explaining with a false lucidity, welcoming and encouraging the feeblest response, when possible moulding and directing, are times when I did indeed, as the old phrase goes, worship the ground she trod on. I was equally honest and unconscious of inconsistency at each extreme. But in neither phase could I find it easy to make love to Margaret. For in the first I did not want to, though I talked abundantly to her of marriage and so forth, and was a little puzzled at myself for not going on to some personal application, and in the second she seemed inaccessible, I felt I must make confessions and put things before her that would be the grossest outrage upon the noble purity I attributed to her.

9

I went to Margaret at last to ask her to marry me, wrought up to the mood of one who stakes his life on a cast. Separated from her, and with the resonance of an evening of angry recriminations with Mrs. Larrimer echoing in my mind, I discovered myself to be quite passionately in love with Margaret. Last shreds of doubt vanished. It has always been a feature of our relationship that Margaret absent means more to me than Margaret present; her memory distils from its dross and purifies in me. All my criticisms and qualifications of her vanished into some dark corner of my mind. She was the lady of my salvation; I must win my way to her or perish.

I went to her at last, for all that I knew she loved me, in passionate self-abasement, white and a-tremble. She was staying with the Rockleys at Woking, for Shena Rockley had been at Bennett Hall with her and they had resumed a close intimacy; and I went down to her on an impulse, unheralded. I was kept waiting for some minutes, I remember, in a little room upon which a conservatory opened, a conservatory full of pots of large mauve-edged, white cyclamens in flower. And there was a big lacquer cabinet, a Chinese thing, I suppose, of black and gold against the red-toned wall. To this day the thought of Margaret is inseparably bound up with the sight of a cyclamen's back-turned petals.

She came in, looking pale and drooping rather more than usual. I suddenly realised that Altiora's hint of a disappointment leading to positive illness was something more than a vindictive comment. She closed the door and came across to me and took and dropped my hand and stood still. “What is it you want with me?” she asked.

The speech I had been turning over and over in my mind on the way vanished at the sight of her.

“I want to talk to you,” I answered lamely.

For some seconds neither of us said a word.

“I want to tell you things about my life,” I began.

She answered with a scarcely audible “yes.”

“I almost asked you to marry me at Pangbourne,” I plunged. “I didn't. I didn't because—because you had too much to give me.”

“Too much!” she echoed, “to give you!” She had lifted her eyes to my face and the colour was coming into her cheeks.

“Don't misunderstand me,” I said hastily. “I want to tell you things, things you don't know. Don't answer me. I want to tell you.”

She stood before the fireplace with her ultimate answer shining through the quiet of her face. “Go on,” she said, very softly. It was so pitilessly manifest she was resolved to idealise the situation whatever I might say. I began walking up and down the room between those cyclamens and the cabinet. There were little gold fishermen on the cabinet fishing from little islands that each had a pagoda and a tree, and there were also men in boats or something, I couldn't determine what, and some obscure sub-office in my mind concerned itself with that quite intently. Yet I seem to have been striving with all my being to get words for the truth of things. “You see,” I emerged, “you make everything possible to me. You can give me help and sympathy, support, understanding. You know my political ambitions. You know all that I might do in the world. I do so intensely want to do constructive things, big things perhaps, in this wild jumble.... Only you don't know a bit what I am. I want to tell you what I am. I'm complex.... I'm streaked.”

I glanced at her, and she was regarding me with an expression of blissful disregard for any meaning I was seeking to convey.

“You see,” I said, “I'm a bad man.”

She sounded a note of valiant incredulity.

Everything seemed to be slipping away from me. I pushed on to the ugly facts that remained over from the wreck of my interpretation. “What has held me back,” I said, “is the thought that you could not possibly understand certain things in my life. Men are not pure as women are. I have had love affairs. I mean I have had affairs. Passion—desire. You see, I have had a mistress, I have been entangled—”

She seemed about to speak, but I interrupted. “I'm not telling you,” I said, “what I meant to tell you. I want you to know clearly that there is another side to my life, a dirty side. Deliberately I say, dirty. It didn't seem so at first—”

I stopped blankly. “Dirty,” I thought, was the most idiotic choice of words to have made.

I had never in any tolerable sense of the word been dirty.

“I drifted into this—as men do,” I said after a little pause and stopped again.

She was looking at me with her wide blue eyes.

“Did you imagine,” she began, “that I thought you—that I expected—”

“But how can you know?”

“I know. I do know.”

“But—” I began.

“I know,” she persisted, dropping her eyelids. “Of course I know,” and nothing could have convinced me more completely that she did not know.

“All men—” she generalised. “A woman does not understand these temptations.”

I was astonished beyond measure at her way of taking my confession. ...

“Of course,” she said, hesitating a little over a transparent difficulty, “it is all over and past.”

“It's all over and past,” I answered.

There was a little pause.

“I don't want to know,” she said. “None of that seems to matter now in the slightest degree.”

She looked up and smiled as though we had exchanged some acceptable commonplaces. “Poor dear!” she said, dismissing everything, and put out her arms, and it seemed to me that I could hear the Lettish girl in the background—doomed safety valve of purity in this intolerable world—telling something in indistinguishable German—I know not what nor why....

I took Margaret in my arms and kissed her. Her eyes were wet with tears. She clung to me and was near, I felt, to sobbing.

“I have loved you,” she whispered presently, “Oh! ever since we met in Misterton—six years and more ago.”

CHAPTER THE THIRD ~~ MARGARET IN VENICE

1

There comes into my mind a confused memory of conversations with Margaret; we must have had dozens altogether, and they mix in now for the most part inextricably not only with one another, but with later talks and with things we discussed at Pangbourne. We had the immensest anticipations of the years and opportunities that lay before us. I was now very deeply in love with her indeed. I felt not that I had cleaned up my life but that she had. We called each other “confederate” I remember, and made during our brief engagement a series of visits to the various legislative bodies in London, the County Council, the House of Commons, where we dined with Villiers, and the St. Pancras Vestry, where we heard Shaw speaking. I was full of plans and so was she of the way in which we were to live and work. We were to pay back in public service whatever excess of wealth beyond his merits old Seddon's economic advantage had won for him from the toiling people in the potteries. The end of the Boer War was so recent that that blessed word “efficiency” echoed still in people's minds and thoughts. Lord Roseberry in a memorable oration had put it into the heads of the big outer public, but the Baileys with a certain show of justice claimed to have set it going in the channels that took it to him—if as a matter of fact it was taken to him. But then it was their habit to make claims of that sort. They certainly did their share to keep “efficient” going. Altiora's highest praise was “thoroughly efficient.” We were to be a “thoroughly efficient” political couple of the “new type.” She explained us to herself and Oscar, she explained us to ourselves, she explained us to the people who came to her dinners and afternoons until the world was highly charged with explanation and expectation, and the proposal that I should be the Liberal candidate for the Kinghamstead Division seemed the most natural development in the world.

I was full of the ideal of hard restrained living and relentless activity, and throughout a beautiful November at Venice, where chiefly we spent our honeymoon, we turned over and over again and discussed in every aspect our conception of a life tremendously focussed upon the ideal of social service.

Most clearly there stands out a picture of ourselves talking in a gondola on our way to Torcella. Far away behind us the smoke of Murano forms a black stain upon an immense shining prospect of smooth water, water as unruffled and luminous as the sky above, a mirror on which rows of posts and distant black high-stemmed, swannecked boats with their minutely clear swinging gondoliers, float aerially. Remote and low before us rises the little tower of our destination. Our men swing together and their oars swirl leisurely through the water, hump back in the rowlocks, splash sharply and go swishing back again. Margaret lies back on cushions, with her face shaded by a holland parasol, and I sit up beside her.

“You see,” I say, and in spite of Margaret's note of perfect acquiescence I feel myself reasoning against an indefinable antagonism, “it is so easy to fall into a slack way with life. There may seem to be something priggish in a meticulous discipline, but otherwise it is so easy to slip into indolent habits—and to be distracted from one's purpose. The country, the world, wants men to serve its constructive needs, to work out and carry out plans. For a man who has to make a living the enemy is immediate necessity; for people like ourselves it's—it's the constant small opportunity of agreeable things.”

“Frittering away,” she says, “time and strength.”

“That is what I feel. It's so pleasant to pretend one is simply modest, it looks so foolish at times to take one's self too seriously. We've GOT to take ourselves seriously.”

She endorses my words with her eyes.

“I feel I can do great things with life.”

“I KNOW you can.”

“But that's only to be done by concentrating one's life upon one main end. We have to plan our days, to make everything subserve our scheme.”

“I feel,” she answers softly, “we ought to give—every hour.”

Her face becomes dreamy. “I WANT to give every hour,” she adds.

2

That holiday in Venice is set in my memory like a little artificial lake in uneven confused country, as something very bright and skylike, and discontinuous with all about it. The faded quality of the very sunshine of that season, the mellow discoloured palaces and places, the huge, time-ripened paintings of departed splendours, the whispering, nearly noiseless passage of hearse-black gondolas, for the horrible steam launch had not yet ruined Venice, the stilled magnificences of the depopulated lagoons, the universal autumn, made me feel altogether in recess from the teeming uproars of reality. There was not a dozen people all told, no Americans and scarcely any English, to dine in the big cavern of a dining-room, with its vistas of separate tables, its distempered walls and its swathed chandeliers. We went about seeing beautiful things, accepting beauty on every hand, and taking it for granted that all was well with ourselves and the world. It was ten days or a fortnight before I became fretful and anxious for action; a long tranquillity for such a temperament as mine.

Our pleasures were curiously impersonal, a succession of shared aesthetic appreciation threads all that time. Our honeymoon was no exultant coming together, no mutual shout of “YOU!” We were almost shy with one another, and felt the relief of even a picture to help us out. It was entirely in my conception of things that I should be very watchful not to shock or distress Margaret or press the sensuous note. Our love-making had much of the tepid smoothness of the lagoons. We talked in delicate innuendo of what should be glorious freedoms. Margaret had missed Verona and Venice in her previous Italian journey—fear of the mosquito had driven her mother across Italy to the westward route—and now she could fill up her gaps and see the Titians and Paul Veroneses she already knew in colourless photographs, the Carpaccios, (the St. George series delighted her beyond measure,) the Basaitis and that great statue of Bartolomeo Colleoni that Ruskin praised.

But since I am not a man to look at pictures and architectural effects day after day, I did watch Margaret very closely and store a thousand memories of her. I can see her now, her long body drooping a little forward, her sweet face upraised to some discovered familiar masterpiece and shining with a delicate enthusiasm. I can hear again the soft cadences of her voice murmuring commonplace comments, for she had no gift of expressing the shapeless satisfaction these things gave her.

Margaret, I perceived, was a cultivated person, the first cultivated person with whom I had ever come into close contact. She was cultivated and moral, and I, I now realise, was never either of these things. She was passive, and I am active. She did not simply and naturally look for beauty but she had been incited to look for it at school, and took perhaps a keener interest in books and lectures and all the organisation of beautiful things than she did in beauty itself; she found much of her delight in being guided to it. Now a thing ceases to be beautiful to me when some finger points me out its merits. Beauty is the salt of life, but I take my beauty as a wild beast gets its salt, as a constituent of the meal....

And besides, there was that between us that should have seemed more beautiful than any picture....

So we went about Venice tracking down pictures and spiral staircases and such-like things, and my brains were busy all the time with such things as a comparison of

Venice and its nearest modern equivalent, New York, with the elaboration of schemes of action when we returned to London, with the development of a theory of Margaret.

Our marriage had done this much at least, that it had fused and destroyed those two independent ways of thinking about her that had gone on in my mind hitherto. Suddenly she had become very near to me, and a very big thing, a sort of comprehensive generalisation behind a thousand questions, like the sky or England. The judgments and understandings that had worked when she was, so to speak, miles away from my life, had now to be altogether revised. Trifling things began to matter enormously, that she had a weak and easily fatigued back, for example, or that when she knitted her brows and stammered a little in talking, it didn't really mean that an exquisite significance struggled for utterance.

We visited pictures in the mornings chiefly. In the afternoon, unless we were making a day-long excursion in a gondola, Margaret would rest for an hour while I prowled about in search of English newspapers, and then we would go to tea in the Piazza San Marco and watch the drift of people feeding the pigeons and going into the little doors beneath the sunlit arches and domes of Saint Mark's. Then perhaps we would stroll on the Piazzetta, or go out into the sunset in a gondola. Margaret became very interested in the shops that abound under the colonnades and decided at last to make an extensive purchase of table glass. “These things,” she said, “are quite beautiful, and far cheaper than anything but the most ordinary looking English ware.” I was interested in her idea, and a good deal charmed by the delightful qualities of tinted shape, slender handle and twisted stem. I suggested we should get not simply tumblers and wineglasses but bedroom waterbottles, fruit- and sweet-dishes, water-jugs, and in the end we made quite a business-like afternoon of it.

I was beginning now to long quite definitely for events. Energy was accumulating in me, and worrying me for an outlet. I found the TIMES and the DAILY TELEGRAPH and the other papers I managed to get hold of, more and more stimulating. I nearly wrote to the former paper one day in answer to a letter by Lord Grimthorpe—I forget now upon what point. I chafed secretly against this life of tranquil appreciations more and more. I found my attitudes of restrained and delicate affection for Margaret increasingly difficult to sustain. I surprised myself and her by little gusts of irritability, gusts like the catspaws before a gale. I was alarmed at these symptoms.

One night when Margaret had gone up to her room, I put on a light overcoat, went out into the night and prowled for a long time through the narrow streets, smoking and thinking. I returned and went and sat on the edge of her bed to talk to her.

“Look here, Margaret,” I said; “this is all very well, but I'm restless.”

“Restless!” she said with a faint surprise in her voice.

“Yes. I think I want exercise. I've got a sort of feeling—I've never had it before—as though I was getting fat.”

“My dear!” she cried.

“I want to do things;—ride horses, climb mountains, take the devil out of myself.”

She watched me thoughtfully.

“Couldn't we DO something?” she said.

Do what?

“I don't know. Couldn't we perhaps go away from here soon—and walk in the mountains—on our way home.”

I thought. “There seems to be no exercise at all in this place.”

“Isn't there some walk?”

“I wonder,” I answered. “We might walk to Chioggia perhaps, along the Lido.” And we tried that, but the long stretch of beach fatigued Margaret's back, and gave her blisters, and we never got beyond Malamocco....

A day or so after we went out to those pleasant black-robed, bearded Armenians in their monastery at Saint Lazzaro, and returned towards sundown. We fell into silence. “PIU LENTO,” said Margaret to the gondolier, and released my accumulated resolution.

“Let us go back to London,” I said abruptly.

Margaret looked at me with surprised blue eyes.

“This is beautiful beyond measure, you know,” I said, sticking to my point, “but I have work to do.”

She was silent for some seconds. “I had forgotten,” she said.

“So had I,” I sympathised, and took her hand. “Suddenly I have remembered.”

She remained quite still. “There is so much to be done,” I said, almost apologetically.

She looked long away from me across the lagoon and at last sighed, like one who has drunk deeply, and turned to me.

“I suppose one ought not to be so happy,” she said. “Everything has been so beautiful and so simple and splendid. And clean. It has been just With You—the time of my life. It's a pity such things must end. But the world is calling you, dear.... I ought not to have forgotten it. I thought you were resting—and thinking. But if you are rested.—Would you like us to start to-morrow?”

She looked at once so fragile and so devoted that on the spur of the moment I relented, and we stayed in Venice four more days.

CHAPTER THE FOURTH ~~ THE HOUSE IN WESTMINSTER

1

Margaret had already taken a little house in Radnor Square, Westminster, before our marriage, a house that seemed particularly adaptable to our needs as public-spirited efficients; it had been very pleasantly painted and papered under Margaret's instructions, white paint and clean open purples and green predominating, and now we set to work at once upon the interesting business of arranging and—with our Venetian glass as a beginning—furnishing it. We had been fairly fortunate with our wedding presents, and for the most part it was open to us to choose just exactly what we would have and just precisely where we would put it.

Margaret had a sense of form and colour altogether superior to mine, and so quite apart from the fact that it was her money equipped us, I stood aside from all these matters and obeyed her summons to a consultation only to endorse her judgment very readily. Until everything was settled I went every day to my old rooms in Vincent Square and worked at a series of papers that were originally intended for the FORTNIGHTLY REVIEW, the papers that afterwards became my fourth book, “New Aspects of Liberalism.”

I still remember as delightful most of the circumstances of getting into 79, Radnor Square. The thin flavour of indecision about Margaret disappeared altogether in a shop; she had the precisest ideas of what she wanted, and the devices of the salesman did not sway her. It was very pleasant to find her taking things out of my hands with a certain masterfulness, and showing the distinctest determination to make a house in which I should be able to work in that great project of “doing something for the world.”

“And I do want to make things pretty about us,” she said. “You don't think it wrong to have things pretty?”

“I want them so.”

“Altiora has things hard.”

“Altiora,” I answered, “takes a pride in standing ugly and uncomfortable things. But I don't see that they help her. Anyhow they won't help me.”

So Margaret went to the best shops and got everything very simple and very good. She bought some pictures very well indeed; there was a little Sussex landscape, full of wind and sunshine, by Nicholson, for my study, that hit my taste far better than if I had gone out to get some such expression for myself.

“We will buy a picture just now and then,” she said, “sometimes—when we see one.”

I would come back through the January mire or fog from Vincent Square to the door of 79, and reach it at last with a quite childish appreciation of the fact that its solid Georgian proportions and its fine brass furnishings belonged to MY home; I would use my latchkey and discover Margaret in the warm-lit, spacious hall with a partially opened packing-case, fatigued but happy, or go up to have tea with her out of the right tea things, “come at last,” or be told to notice what was fresh there. It wasn't simply that I had never had a house before, but I had really never been, except in the most transitory way, in any house that was nearly so delightful as mine promised to be. Everything was fresh and bright, and softly and harmoniously toned. Downstairs we had a green dining-room with gleaming silver, dark oak, and English colour-prints; above was a large drawing-room that could be made still larger by throwing open folding doors, and it was all carefully done in greys and blues, for the most part with real Sheraton supplemented by Sheraton so skilfully imitated by an expert Margaret had discovered as to be indistinguishable except to a minute scrutiny. And for me, above this and next to my bedroom, there was a roomy study, with specially thick stair-carpet outside and thick carpets in the bedroom overhead and a big old desk for me to sit at and work between fire and window, and another desk specially made for me by that expert if I chose to stand and write, and open bookshelves and bookcases and every sort of convenient fitting. There were electric heaters beside the open fire, and everything was put for me to make tea at any time—electric kettle, infuser, biscuits and fresh butter, so that I could get up and work at any hour of the day or night. I could do no work in this apartment for a long time, I was so interested in the perfection of its arrangements. And when I brought in my books and papers from

Vincent Square, Margaret seized upon all the really shabby volumes and had them re-bound in a fine official-looking leather.

I can remember sitting down at that desk and looking round me and feeling with a queer effect of surprise that after all even a place in the Cabinet, though infinitely remote, was nevertheless in the same large world with these fine and quietly expensive things.

On the same floor Margaret had a “den,” a very neat and pretty den with good colour-prints of Botticellis and Carpaccios, and there was a third apartment for sectarial purposes should the necessity for them arise, with a severe-looking desk equipped with patent files. And Margaret would come flitting into the room to me, or appear noiselessly standing, a tall gracefully drooping form, in the wide open doorway. “Is everything right, dear?” she would ask.

“Come in,” I would say, “I'm sorting out papers.”

She would come to the hearthrug.

“I mustn't disturb you,” she would remark.

“I'm not busy yet.”

“Things are getting into order. Then we must make out a time-table as the Baileys do, and BEGIN!”

Altiora came in to see us once or twice, and a number of serious young wives known to Altiora called and were shown over the house, and discussed its arrangements with Margaret. They were all tremendously keen on efficient arrangements.

“A little pretty,” said Altiora, with the faintest disapproval, “still—”

It was clear she thought we should grow out of that. From the day of our return we found other people's houses open to us and eager for us. We went out of London for week-ends and dined out, and began discussing our projects for reciprocating these hospitalities. As a single man unattached, I had had a wide and miscellaneous social range, but now I found myself falling into place in a set. For a time I acquiesced in this. I went very little to my clubs, the Climax and the National Liberal, and participated in no bachelor dinners at all. For a time, too, I dropped out of the garrulous literary and journalistic circles I had frequented. I put up for the Reform, not so much for the use of the club as a sign of serious and substantial political standing. I didn't go up to Cambridge, I remember, for nearly a year, so occupied was I with my new adjustments.

The people we found ourselves among at this time were people, to put it roughly, of the Parliamentary candidate class, or people already actually placed in the political world. They ranged between very considerable wealth and such a hard, bare independence as old Willersley and the sister who kept house for him possessed. There were quite a number of young couples like ourselves, a little younger and more artless, or a little older and more established. Among the younger men I had a sort of distinction because of my Cambridge reputation and my writing, and because, unlike them, I was an adventurer and had won and married my way into their circles instead of being naturally there. They couldn't quite reckon upon what I should do; they felt I had reserves of experience and incalculable traditions. Close to us were the Cramptons, Willie Crampton, who has since been Postmaster-General, rich and very important in Rockshire, and his younger brother Edward, who has specialised in history and become one of those unimaginative men of letters who are the glory of latter-day England. Then there was Lewis, further towards Kensington, where his cousins the Solomons and the Hartsteins lived, a brilliant representative of his race, able, industrious and invariably uninspired, with a wife a little in revolt against the racial tradition of feminine servitude and inclined to the suffragette point of view, and Bunting Harblow, an old blue, and with an erratic disposition well under the control of the able little cousin he had married. I had known all these men, but now (with Altiora floating angelically in benediction) they opened their hearts to me and took me into their order. They were all like myself, prospective Liberal candidates, with a feeling that the period of wandering in the wilderness of opposition was drawing near its close. They were all tremendously keen upon social and political service, and all greatly under the sway of the ideal of a simple, strenuous life, a life finding its satisfactions in political achievements and distinctions. The young wives were as keen about it as the young husbands, Margaret most of all, and I—whatever elements in me didn't march with the attitudes and habits of this set were very much in the background during that time.

We would give little dinners and have evening gatherings at which everything was very simple and very good, with a slight but perceptible austerity, and there was more good fruit and flowers and less perhaps in the way of savouries, patties and entrees than was customary. Sherry we banished, and Marsala and liqueurs, and there was always good home-made lemonade available. No men waited, but very expert parlourmaids. Our meat was usually Welsh mutton—I don't know why, unless that mountains have ever been the last refuge of the severer virtues. And we talked politics and books and ideas and Bernard Shaw (who was a department by himself and supposed in those days to be ethically sound at bottom), and mingled with the intellectuals—I myself was, as it were, a promoted intellectual.

The Cramptons had a tendency to read good things aloud on their less frequented receptions, but I have never been able to participate submissively in this hyper-digestion of written matter, and generally managed to provoke a disruptive debate. We were all very earnest to make the most of ourselves and to be and do, and I wonder still at times, with an unassuaged perplexity, how it is that in that phase of utmost earnestness I have always seemed to myself to be most remote from reality.

2

I look back now across the detaching intervention of sixteen crowded years, critically and I fancy almost impartially, to those beginnings of my married life. I try to recall something near to their proper order the developing phases of relationship. I am struck most of all by the immense unpremeditated, generous-spirited insincerities upon which Margaret and I were building.

It seems to me that here I have to tell perhaps the commonest experience of all among married educated people, the deliberate, shy, complex effort to fill the yawning gaps in temperament as they appear, the sustained, failing attempt to bridge abysses, level barriers, evade violent pressures. I have come these latter years of my life to believe that it is possible for a man and woman to be absolutely real with one another, to stand naked souled to each other, unashamed and unafraid, because of the natural all-glorifying love between them. It is possible to love and be loved untroubling, as a bird flies through the air. But it is a rare and intricate chance that brings two people within sight of that essential union, and for the majority marriage must adjust itself on other terms. Most coupled people never really look at one another. They look a little away to preconceived ideas. And each from the first days of love-making HIDES from the other, is afraid of disappointing, afraid of offending, afraid of discoveries in either sense. They build not solidly upon the rock of truth, but upon arches and pillars and queer provisional supports that are needed to make a common foundation, and below in the imprisoned darknesses, below the fine fabric they sustain together begins for each of them a cavernous hidden life. Down there things may be prowling that scarce ever peep out to consciousness except in the grey half-light of sleepless nights, passions that flash out for an instant in an angry glance and are seen no more, starved victims and beautiful dreams bricked up to die. For the most of us there is no jail delivery of those inner depths, and the life above goes on to its honourable end.

I have told how I loved Margaret and how I came to marry her. Perhaps already unintentionally I have indicated the quality of the injustice our marriage did us both.

There was no kindred between us and no understanding. We were drawn to one another by the unlikeness of our quality, by the things we misunderstood in each other. I know a score of couples who have married in that fashion.

Modern conditions and modern ideas, and in particular the intenser and subtler perceptions of modern life, press more and more heavily upon a marriage tie whose fashion comes from an earlier and less discriminating time. When the wife was her husband's subordinate, meeting him simply and uncritically for simple ends, when marriage was a purely domestic relationship, leaving thought and the vivid things of life almost entirely to the unencumbered man, mental and temperamental incompatibilities mattered comparatively little. But now the wife, and particularly the loving childless wife, unpremeditatedly makes a relentless demand for a complete association, and the husband exacts unthought of delicacies of understanding and co-operation. These are stupendous demands. People not only think more fully and elaborately about life than they ever did before, but marriage obliges us to make that ever more accidented progress a three-legged race of carelessly assorted couples....

Our very mental texture was different. I was rough-minded, to use the phrase of William James, primary and intuitive and illogical; she was tender-minded, logical, refined and secondary. She was loyal to pledge and persons, sentimental and faithful; I am loyal to ideas and instincts, emotional and scheming. My imagination moves in broad gestures; her's was delicate with a real dread of extravagance. My quality is sensuous and ruled by warm impulses; hers was discriminating and essentially inhibitory. I like the facts of the case and to mention everything; I like naked bodies and the jolly smells of things. She abounded in reservations, in circumlocutions and evasions, in keenly appreciated secondary points. Perhaps the reader knows that Tintoretto in the National Gallery, the Origin of the Milky Way. It is an admirable test of temperamental quality. In spite of my early training I have come to regard that picture as altogether delightful; to Margaret it has always been “needlessly offensive.” In that you have our fundamental breach. She had a habit, by no means rare, of damning what she did not like or find sympathetic in me on the score that it was not my “true self,” and she did not so much accept the universe as select from it and do her best to ignore the rest. And also I had far more initiative than had she. This is no catalogue of rights and wrongs, or superiorities and inferiorities; it is a catalogue of differences between two people linked in a relationship that constantly becomes more intolerant of differences.

This is how we stood to each other, and none of it was clear to either of us at the outset. To begin with, I found myself reserving myself from her, then slowly apprehending a jarring between our minds and what seemed to me at first a queer little habit of misunderstanding in her....

It did not hinder my being very fond of her....

Where our system of reservation became at once most usual and most astounding was in our personal relations. It is not too much to say that in that regard we never for a moment achieved sincerity with one another during the first six years of our life together. It goes even deeper than that, for in my effort to realise the ideal of my marriage I ceased even to attempt to be sincere with myself. I would not admit my own perceptions and interpretations. I tried to fit myself to her thinner and finer determinations. There are people who will say with a note of approval that I was learning to conquer myself. I record that much without any note of approval....

For some years I never deceived Margaret about any concrete fact nor, except for the silence about my earlier life that she had almost forced upon me, did I hide any concrete fact that seemed to affect her, but from the outset I was guilty of immense spiritual concealments, my very marriage was based, I see now, on a spiritual subterfuge; I hid moods from her, pretended feelings....

3

The interest and excitement of setting-up a house, of walking about it from room to room and from floor to floor, or sitting at one's own dinner table and watching one's wife control conversation with a pretty, timid resolution, of taking a place among the secure and free people of our world, passed almost insensibly into the interest and excitement of my Parliamentary candidature for the Kinghamstead Division, that shapeless chunk of agricultural midland between the Great Western and the North Western railways. I was going to “take hold” at last, the Kinghamstead Division was my appointed handle. I was to find my place in the rather indistinctly sketched constructions that were implicit in the minds of all our circle. The precise place I had to fill and the precise functions I had to discharge were not as yet very clear, but all that, we felt sure, would become plain as things developed.

A few brief months of vague activities of “nursing” gave place to the excitements of the contest that followed the return of Mr. Camphell-Bannerman to power in 1905. So far as the Kinghamstead Division was concerned it was a depressed and tepid battle. I went about the constituency making three speeches that were soon threadbare, and an odd little collection of people worked for me; two solicitors, a cheap photographer, a democratic parson, a number of dissenting ministers, the Mayor of Kinghamstead, a Mrs. Bulger, the widow of an old Chartist who had grown rich through electric traction patents, Sir Roderick Newton, a Jew who had bought Calersham Castle, and old Sir Graham Rivers, that sturdy old soldier, were among my chief supporters. We had headquarters in each town and village, mostly there were empty shops we leased temporarily, and there at least a sort of fuss and a coming and going were maintained. The rest of the population stared in a state of suspended judgment as we went about the business. The country was supposed to be in a state of intellectual conflict and deliberate decision, in history it will no doubt figure as a momentous conflict. Yet except for an occasional flare of bill-sticking or a bill in a window or a placard-plastered motor-car or an argumentative group of people outside a public-house or a sluggish movement towards the schoolroom or village hall, there was scarcely a sign that a great empire was revising its destinies. Now and then one saw a canvasser on a doorstep. For the most part people went about their business with an entirely irresponsible confidence in the stability of the universe. At times one felt a little absurd with one's flutter of colours and one's air of saving the country.

My opponent was a quite undistinguished Major-General who relied upon his advocacy of Protection, and was particularly anxious we should avoid “personalities” and fight the constituency in a gentlemanly spirit. He was always writing me notes, apologising for excesses on the part of his supporters, or pointing out the undesirability of some course taken by mine.

My speeches had been planned upon broad lines, but they lost touch with these as the polling approached. To begin with I made a real attempt to put what was in my mind before the people I was to supply with a political voice. I spoke of the greatness of our empire and its destinies, of the splendid projects and possibilities of life and order that lay before the world, of all that a resolute and constructive effort might do at the present time. “We are building a state,” I said, “secure and splendid, we are in the dawn of the great age of mankind.” Sometimes that would get a solitary “'Ear! 'ear!” Then having created, as I imagined, a fine atmosphere, I turned upon the history of the last Conservative administration and brought it into contrast with the wide occasions of the age; discussed its failure to control the grasping financiers in South Africa, its failure to release public education from sectarian squabbles, its misconduct of the Boer War, its waste of the world's resources....

It soon became manifest that my opening and my general spaciousness of method bored my audiences a good deal. The richer and wider my phrases the thinner sounded my voice in these non-resonating gatherings. Even the platform supporters grew restive unconsciously, and stirred and coughed. They did not recognise themselves as mankind. Building an empire, preparing a fresh stage in the history of humanity, had no appeal for them. They were mostly everyday, toiling people, full of small personal solicitudes, and they came to my meetings, I think, very largely as a relaxation. This stuff was not relaxing. They did not think politics was a great constructive process, they thought it was a kind of dog-fight. They wanted fun, they wanted spice, they wanted hits, they wanted also a chance to say “'Ear', 'ear!” in an intelligent and honourable manner and clap their hands and drum with their feet. The great constructive process in history gives so little scope for clapping and drumming and saying “'Ear, 'ear!” One might as well think of hounding on the solar system.

So after one or two attempts to lift my audiences to the level of the issues involved, I began to adapt myself to them. I cut down my review of our imperial outlook and destinies more and more, and developed a series of hits and anecdotes and—what shall I call them?—“crudifications” of the issue. My helper's congratulated me on the rapid improvement of my platform style. I ceased to speak of the late Prime Minister with the respect I bore him, and began to fall in with the popular caricature of him as an artful rabbit-witted person intent only on keeping his leadership, in spite of the vigorous attempts of Mr. Joseph Chamberlain to oust him therefrom. I ceased to qualify my statement that Protection would make food dearer for the agricultural labourer. I began to speak of Mr. Alfred Lyttelton as an influence at once insane and diabolical, as a man inspired by a passionate desire to substitute manacled but still criminal Chinese for honest British labourers throughout the world. And when it came to the mention of our own kindly leader, of Mr. John Burns or any one else of any prominence at all on our side I fell more and more into the intonation of one who mentions the high gods. And I had my reward in brighter meetings and readier and readier applause.

One goes on from phase to phase in these things.

“After all,” I told myself, “if one wants to get to Westminster one must follow the road that leads there,” but I found the road nevertheless rather unexpectedly distasteful. “When one gets there,” I said, “then it is one begins.”

But I would lie awake at nights with that sore throat and headache and fatigue which come from speaking in ill-ventilated rooms, and wondering how far it was possible to educate a whole people to great political ideals. Why should political work always rot down to personalities and personal appeals in this way? Life is, I suppose, to begin with and end with a matter of personalities, from personalities all our broader interests arise and to personalities they return. All our social and political effort, all of it, is like trying to make a crowd of people fall into formation. The broader lines appear, but then come a rush and excitement and irrelevancy, and forthwith the incipient order has vanished and the marshals must begin the work over again!

My memory of all that time is essentially confusion. There was a frightful lot of tiresome locomotion in it; for the Kinghamstead Division is extensive, abounding in ill-graded and badly metalled cross-roads and vicious little hills, and singularly unpleasing to the eye in a muddy winter. It is sufficiently near to London to have undergone the same process of ill-regulated expansion that made Bromstead the place it is. Several of its overgrown villages have developed strings of factories and sidings along the railway lines, and there is an abundance of petty villas. There seemed to be no place at which one could take hold of more than this or that element of the population. Now we met in a meeting-house, now in a Masonic Hall or Drill Hall; I also did a certain amount of open-air speaking in the dinner hour outside gas-works and groups of factories. Some special sort of people was, as it were, secreted in response to each special appeal. One said things carefully adjusted to the distinctive limitations of each gathering. Jokes of an incredible silliness and shallowness drifted about us. Our advisers made us declare that if we were elected we would live in the district, and one hasty agent had bills printed, “If Mr. Remington is elected he will live here.” The enemy obtained a number of these bills and stuck them on outhouses, pigstyes, dog-kennels; you cannot imagine how irksome the repetition of that jest became. The vast drifting indifference in between my meetings impressed me more and more. I realised the vagueness of my own plans as I had never done before I brought them to the test of this experience. I was perplexed by the riddle of just how far I was, in any sense of the word, taking hold at all, how far I wasn't myself flowing into an accepted groove.

Margaret was troubled by no such doubts. She was clear I had to go into Parliament on the side of Liberalism and the light, as against the late Government and darkness. Essential to the memory of my first contest, is the memory of her clear bright face, very resolute and grave, helping me consciously, steadfastly, with all her strength. Her quiet confidence, while I was so dissatisfied, worked curiously towards the alienation of my sympathies. I felt she had no business to be so sure of me. I had moments of vivid resentment at being thus marched towards Parliament.

I seemed now always to be discovering alien forces of character in her. Her way of taking life diverged from me more and more. She sounded amazing, independent notes. She bought some particularly costly furs for the campaign that roused enthusiasm whenever she appeared. She also made me a birthday present in November of a heavily fur-trimmed coat and this she would make me remove as I went on to the platform, and hold over her arm until I was ready to resume it. It was fearfully heavy for her and she liked it to be heavy for her. That act of servitude was in essence a towering self-assertion. I would glance sideways while some chairman floundered through his introduction and see the clear blue eye with which she regarded the audience, which existed so far as she was concerned merely to return me to Parliament. It was a friendly eye, provided they were not silly or troublesome. But it kindled a little at the hint of a hostile question. After we had come so far and taken so much trouble!

She constituted herself the dragoman of our political travels. In hotels she was serenely resolute for the quietest and the best, she rejected all their proposals for meals and substituted a severely nourishing dietary of her own, and even in private houses she astonished me by her tranquil insistence upon special comforts and sustenance. I can see her face now as it would confront a hostess, a little intent, but sweetly resolute and assured.

Since our marriage she had read a number of political memoirs, and she had been particularly impressed by the career of Mrs. Gladstone. I don't think it occurred to her to compare and contrast my quality with that of Mrs. Gladstone's husband. I suspect her of a deliberate intention of achieving parallel results by parallel methods. I was to be Gladstonised. Gladstone it appeared used to lubricate his speeches with a mixture—if my memory serves me right—of egg beaten up in sherry, and Margaret was very anxious I should take a leaf from that celebrated book. She wanted, I know, to hold the glass in her hand while I was speaking.

But here I was firm. “No,” I said, very decisively, “simply I won't stand that. It's a matter of conscience. I shouldn't feel—democratic. I'll take my chance of the common water in the carafe on the chairman's table.”

“I DO wish you wouldn't,” she said, distressed.

It was absurd to feel irritated; it was so admirable of her, a little childish, infinitely womanly and devoted and fine—and I see now how pathetic. But I could not afford to succumb to her. I wanted to follow my own leading, to see things clearly, and this reassuring pose of a high destiny, of an almost terribly efficient pursuit of a fixed end when as a matter of fact I had a very doubtful end and an aim as yet by no means fixed, was all too seductive for dalliance....

4

And into all these things with the manner of a trifling and casual incident comes the figure of Isabel Rivers. My first impressions of her were of a rather ugly and ungainly, extraordinarily interesting schoolgirl with a beautiful quick flush under her warm brown skin, who said and did amusing and surprising things. When first I saw her she was riding a very old bicycle downhill with her feet on the fork of the frame—it seemed to me to the public danger, but afterwards I came to understand the quality of her nerve better—and on the third occasion she was for her own private satisfaction climbing a tree. On the intervening occasion we had what seems now to have been a long sustained conversation about the political situation and the books and papers I had written.

I wonder if it was.

What a delightful mixture of child and grave woman she was at that time, and how little I reckoned on the part she would play in my life! And since she has played that part, how impossible it is to tell now of those early days! Since I wrote that opening paragraph to this section my idle pen has been, as it were, playing by itself and sketching faces on the blotting pad—one impish wizened visage is oddly like little Bailey—and I have been thinking cheek on fist amidst a limitless wealth of memories. She sits below me on the low wall under the olive trees with our little child in her arms. She is now the central fact in my life. It still seems a little incredible that that should be so. She has destroyed me as a politician, brought me to this belated rebeginning of life. When I sit down and try to make her a girl again, I feel like the Arabian fisherman who tried to put the genius back into the pot from which it had spread gigantic across the skies....

I have a very clear vision of her rush downhill past our labouring ascendant car—my colours fluttered from handle-bar and shoulder-knot—and her waving hand and the sharp note of her voice. She cried out something, I don't know what, some greeting.

“What a pretty girl!” said Margaret.

Parvill, the cheap photographer, that industrious organiser for whom by way of repayment I got those magic letters, that knighthood of the underlings, “J. P.” was in the car with us and explained her to us. “One of the best workers you have,” he said....

And then after a toilsome troubled morning we came, rather cross from the strain of sustained amiability, to Sir Graham Rivers' house. It seemed all softness and quiet—I recall dead white panelling and oval mirrors horizontally set and a marble fireplace between white marble-blind Homer and marble-blind Virgil, very grave and fine—and how Isabel came in to lunch in a shapeless thing like a blue smock that made her bright quick-changing face seem yellow under her cloud of black hair. Her step-sister was there, Miss Gamer, to whom the house was to descend, a well-dressed lady of thirty, amiably disavowing responsibility for Isabel in every phrase and gesture. And there was a very pleasant doctor, an Oxford man, who seemed on excellent terms with every one. It was manifest that he was in the habit of sparring with the girl, but on this occasion she wasn't sparring and refused to be teased into a display in spite of the taunts of either him or her father. She was, they discovered with rising eyebrows, shy. It seemed an opportunity too rare for them to miss. They proclaimed her enthusiasm for me in a way that brought a flush to her cheek and a look into her eye between appeal and defiance. They declared she had read my books, which I thought at the time was exaggeration, their dry political quality was so distinctly not what one was accustomed to regard as schoolgirl reading. Miss Gamer protested to protect her, "When once in a blue moon Isabel is well-behaved....!"

Except for these attacks I do not remember much of the conversation at table; it was, I know, discursive and concerned with the sort of topographical and social and electioneering fact natural to such a visit. Old Rivers struck me as a delightful person, modestly unconscious of his doubly-earned V. C. and the plucky defence of Kardin-Bergat that won his baronetcy. He was that excellent type, the soldier radical, and we began that day a friendship that was only ended by his death in the hunting-field three years later. He interested Margaret into a disregard of my plate and the fact that I had secured the illegal indulgence of Moselle. After lunch we went for coffee into another low room, this time brown panelled and looking through French windows on a red-walled garden, graceful even in its winter desolation. And there the conversation suddenly picked up and became good. It had fallen to a pause, and the doctor, with an air of definitely throwing off a mask and wrecking an established tranquillity, remarked: "Very probably you Liberals will come in, though I'm not sure you'll come in so mightily as you think, but what you do when you do come in passes my comprehension."

"There's good work sometimes," said Sir Graham, "in undoing."

"You can't govern a great empire by amending and repealing the Acts of your predecessors," said the doctor.

There came that kind of pause that happens when a subject is broached too big and difficult for the gathering. Margaret's blue eyes regarded the speaker with quiet disapproval for a moment, and then came to me in the not too confident hope that I would snub him out of existence with some prompt rhetorical stroke. A voice spoke out of the big armchair.

"We'll do things," said Isabel.

The doctor's eye lit with the joy of the fisherman who strikes his fish at last. "What will you do?" he asked her.

"Every one knows we're a mixed lot," said Isabel.

“Poor old chaps like me!” interjected the general.

“But that's not a programme,” said the doctor.

“But Mr. Remington has published a programme,” said Isabel.

The doctor cocked half an eye at me.

“In some review,” the girl went on. “After all, we're not going to elect the whole Liberal party in the Kinghamstead Division. I'm a Remington-ite!”

“But the programme,” said the doctor, “the programme—”

“In front of Mr. Remington!”

“Scandal always comes home at last,” said the doctor. “Let him hear the worst.”

“I'd like to hear,” I said. “Electioneering shatters convictions and enfeebles the mind.”

“Not mine,” said Isabel stoutly. “I mean—Well, anyhow I take it Mr. Remington stands for constructing a civilised state out of this muddle.”

“THIS muddle,” protested the doctor with an appeal of the eye to the beautiful long room and the ordered garden outside the bright clean windows.

“Well, THAT muddle, if you like! There's a slum within a mile of us already. The dust and blacks get worse and worse, Sissie?”

“They do,” agreed Miss Gamer.

“Mr. Remington stands for construction, order, education, discipline.”

“And you?” said the doctor.

“I'm a good Remington-ite.”

“Discipline!” said the doctor.

“Oh!” said Isabel. “At times one has to be—Napoleonic. They want to libel me, Mr. Remington. A political worker can't always be in time for meals, can she? At times one has to make—splendid cuts.”

Miss Gamer said something indistinctly.

“Order, education, discipline,” said Sir Graham. “Excellent things! But I've a sort of memory—in my young days—we talked about something called liberty.”

“Liberty under the law,” I said, with an unexpected approving murmur from Margaret, and took up the defence. “The old Liberal definition of liberty was a trifle uncritical.

Privilege and legal restrictions are not the only enemies of liberty. An uneducated, underbred, and underfed propertyless man is a man who has lost the possibility of liberty. There's no liberty worth a rap for him. A man who is swimming hopelessly for life wants nothing but the liberty to get out of the water; he'll give every other liberty for it—until he gets out."

Sir Graham took me up and we fell into a discussion of the changing qualities of Liberalism. It was a good give-and-take talk, extraordinarily refreshing after the nonsense and crowding secondary issues of the electioneering outside. We all contributed more or less except Miss Gamer; Margaret followed with knitted brows and occasional interjections. "People won't SEE that," for example, and "It all seems so plain to me." The doctor showed himself clever but unsubstantial and inconsistent. Isabel sat back with her black mop of hair buried deep in the chair looking quickly from face to face. Her colour came and went with her vivid intellectual excitement; occasionally she would dart a word, usually a very apt word, like a lizard's tongue into the discussion. I remember chiefly that a chance illustration betrayed that she had read Bishop Burnet....

After that it was not surprising that Isabel should ask for a lift in our car as far as the Lurky Committee Room, and that she should offer me quite sound advice EN ROUTE upon the intellectual temperament of the Lurky gasworkers.

On the third occasion that I saw Isabel she was, as I have said, climbing a tree—and a very creditable tree—for her own private satisfaction. It was a lapse from the high seriousness of politics, and I perceived she felt that I might regard it as such and attach too much importance to it. I had some difficulty in reassuring her. And it's odd to note now—it has never occurred to me before—that from that day to this I do not think I have ever reminded Isabel of that encounter.

And after that memory she seems to be flickering about always in the election, an inextinguishable flame; now she flew by on her bicycle, now she dashed into committee rooms, now she appeared on doorsteps in animated conversation with dubious voters; I took every chance I could to talk to her—I had never met anything like her before in the world, and she interested me immensely—and before the polling day she and I had become, in the frankest simplicity, fast friends....

That, I think, sets out very fairly the facts of our early relationship. But it is hard to get it true, either in form or texture, because of the bright, translucent, coloured, and refracting memories that come between. One forgets not only the tint and quality of thoughts and impressions through that intervening haze, one forgets them altogether. I don't remember now that I ever thought in those days of passionate love or the possibility of such love between us. I may have done so again and again. But I doubt it very strongly. I don't think I ever thought of such aspects. I had no more sense of any danger between us, seeing the years and things that separated us, than I could have had if she had been an intelligent bright-eyed bird. Isabel came into my life as a new sort of thing; she didn't join on at all to my previous experiences of womanhood. They were not, as I have laboured to explain, either very wide or very penetrating experiences, on the whole, “strangled dinginess” expresses them, but I do not believe they were narrower or shallower than those of many other men of my class. I thought of women as pretty things and beautiful things, pretty rather than beautiful, attractive and at times disconcertingly attractive, often bright and witty, but, because of the vast reservations that hid them from me, wanting, subtly and inevitably wanting, in understanding. My idealisation of Margaret had evaporated insensibly after our marriage. The shrine I had made for her in my private thoughts stood at last undisguisedly empty. But Isabel did not for a moment admit of either idealisation or interested contempt. She opened a new sphere of womanhood to me. With her steady amber-brown eyes, her unaffected interest in impersonal things, her upstanding waistless blue body, her energy, decision and courage, she seemed rather some new and infinitely finer form of boyhood than a feminine creature, as I had come to measure femininity. She was my perfect friend. Could I have foreseen, had my world been more wisely planned, to this day we might have been such friends.

She seemed at that time unconscious of sex, though she has told me since how full she was of protesting curiosities and restrained emotions. She spoke, as indeed she has always spoken, simply, clearly, and vividly; schoolgirl slang mingled with words that marked ample voracious reading, and she moved quickly with the free directness of some graceful young animal. She took many of the easy freedoms a man or a sister might have done with me. She would touch my arm, lay a hand on my shoulder as I sat, adjust the lapel of a breast-pocket as she talked to me. She says now she loved me always from the beginning. I doubt if there was a suspicion of that in her mind those days. I used to find her regarding me with the clearest, steadiest gaze in the world, exactly like the gaze of some nice healthy innocent animal in a forest, interested, inquiring, speculative, but singularly untroubled....

5

Polling day came after a last hoarse and dingy crescendo. The excitement was not of the sort that makes one forget one is tired out. The waiting for the end of the count has left a long blank mark on my memory, and then everyone was shaking my hand and repeating: “Nine hundred and seventy-six.”

My success had been a foregone conclusion since the afternoon, but we all behaved as though we had not been anticipating this result for hours, as though any other figures but nine hundred and seventy-six would have meant something entirely different. “Nine hundred and seventy-six!” said Margaret. “They didn't expect three hundred.”

“Nine hundred and seventy-six,” said a little short man with a paper. “It means a big turnover. Two dozen short of a thousand, you know.”

A tremendous hullaboo began outside, and a lot of fresh people came into the room.

Isabel, flushed but not out of breath, Heaven knows where she had sprung from at that time of night! was running her hand down my sleeve almost caressingly, with the innocent bold affection of a girl. “Got you in!” she said. “It's been no end of a lark.”

“And now,” said I, “I must go and be constructive.”

“Now you must go and be constructive,” she said.

“You've got to live here,” she added.

“By Jove! yes,” I said. “We'll have to house hunt.”

“I shall read all your speeches.”

She hesitated.

“I wish I was you,” she said, and said it as though it was not exactly the thing she was meaning to say.

“They want you to speak,” said Margaret, with something unsaid in her face.

“You must come out with me,” I answered, putting my arm through hers, and felt someone urging me to the French windows that gave on the balcony.

“If you think—” she said, yielding gladly

“Oh, RATHER!” said I.

The Mayor of Kinghamstead, a managing little man with no great belief in my oratorical powers, was sticking his face up to mine.

“It's all over,” he said, “and you've won. Say all the nice things you can and say them plainly.”

I turned and handed Margaret out through the window and stood looking over the Market-place, which was more than half filled with swaying people. The crowd set up a roar of approval at the sight of us, tempered by a little booing. Down in one corner of the square a fight was going on for a flag, a fight that even the prospect of a speech could not instantly check. “Speech!” cried voices, “Speech!” and then a brief “boo-oo-oo” that was drowned in a cascade of shouts and cheers. The conflict round the flag culminated in the smashing of a pane of glass in the chemist's window and instantly sank to peace.

“Gentlemen voters of the Kinghamstead Division,” I began.

“Votes for Women!” yelled a voice, amidst laughter—the first time I remember hearing that memorable war-cry.

“Three cheers for Mrs. Remington!”

“Mrs. Remington asks me to thank you,” I said, amidst further uproar and reiterated cries of “Speech!”

Then silence came with a startling swiftness.

Isabel was still in my mind, I suppose. “I shall go to Westminster,” I began. I sought for some compelling phrase and could not find one. “To do my share,” I went on, “in building up a great and splendid civilisation.”

I paused, and there was a weak gust of cheering, and then a renewal of booing.

“This election,” I said, “has been the end and the beginning of much. New ideas are abroad—”

“Chinese labour,” yelled a voice, and across the square swept a wildfire of booting and bawling.

It is one of the few occasions when I quite lost my hold on a speech. I glanced sideways and saw the Mayor of Kinghamstead speaking behind his hand to Parvill. By a happy chance Parvill caught my eye.

“What do they want?” I asked.

“Eh?”

“What do they want?”

“Say something about general fairness—the other side,” prompted Parvill, flattered but a little surprised by my appeal. I pulled myself hastily into a more popular strain with a gross eulogy of my opponent's good taste.

“Chinese labour!” cried the voice again.

“You've given that notice to quit,” I answered.

The Market-place roared delight, but whether that delight expressed hostility to Chinamen or hostility to their practical enslavement no student of the General Election of 1906 has ever been able to determine. Certainly one of the most effective posters on our side displayed a hideous yellow face, just that and nothing more. There was not even a legend to it. How it impressed the electorate we did not know, but that it impressed the electorate profoundly there can be no disputing.

6

Kinghamstead was one of the earliest constituencies fought, and we came back—it must have been Saturday—triumphant but very tired, to our house in Radnor Square. In the train we read the first intimations that the victory of our party was likely to be a sweeping one.

Then came a period when one was going about receiving and giving congratulations and watching the other men arrive, very like a boy who has returned to school with the first batch after the holidays. The London world reeked with the General Election; it had invaded the nurseries. All the children of one's friends had got big maps of England cut up into squares to represent constituencies and were busy sticking gummed blue labels over the conquered red of Unionism that had hitherto submerged the country. And there were also orange labels, if I remember rightly, to represent the new Labour party, and green for the Irish. I engaged myself to speak at one or two London meetings, and lunched at the Reform, which was fairly tepid, and dined and spent one or two tumultuous evenings at the National Liberal Club, which was in active eruption. The National Liberal became feverishly congested towards midnight as the results of the counting came dropping in. A big green-baize screen had been fixed up at one end of the large smoking-room with the names of the constituencies that were voting that day, and directly the figures came to hand, up they went, amidst cheers that at last lost their energy through sheer repetition, whenever there was record of a Liberal gain. I don't remember what happened when there was a Liberal loss; I don't think that any were announced while I was there.

How packed and noisy the place was, and what a reek of tobacco and whisky fumes we made! Everybody was excited and talking, making waves of harsh confused sound that beat upon one's ears, and every now and then hoarse voices would shout for someone to speak. Our little set was much in evidence. Both the Cramptons were in, Lewis, Bunting Harblow. We gave brief addresses attuned to this excitement and the late hour, amidst much enthusiasm.

“Now we can DO things!” I said amidst a rapture of applause. Men I did not know from Adam held up glasses and nodded to me in solemn fuddled approval as I came down past them into the crowd again.

Men were betting whether the Unionists would lose more or less than two hundred seats.

“I wonder just what we shall do with it all,” I heard one sceptic speculating....

After these orgies I would get home very tired and excited, and find it difficult to get to sleep. I would lie and speculate about what it was we WERE going to do. One hadn't anticipated quite such a tremendous accession to power for one's party. Liberalism was swirling in like a flood....

I found the next few weeks very unsatisfactory and distressing. I don't clearly remember what it was I had expected; I suppose the fuss and strain of the General Election had built up a feeling that my return would in some way put power into my hands, and instead I found myself a mere undistinguished unit in a vast but rather vague majority. There were moments when I felt very distinctly that a majority could be too big a crowd altogether. I had all my work still before me, I had achieved nothing as yet but opportunity, and a very crowded opportunity it was at that. Everyone about me was chatting Parliament and appointments; one breathed distracting and irritating speculations as to what would be done and who would be asked to do it. I was chiefly impressed by what was unlikely to be done and by the absence of any general plan of legislation to hold us all together. I found the talk about Parliamentary procedure and etiquette particularly trying. We dined with the elder Cramptons one evening, and old Sir Edward was lengthily sage about what the House liked, what it didn't like, what made a good impression and what a bad one. “A man shouldn't speak more than twice in his first session, and not at first on too contentious a topic,” said Sir Edward. “No.”

“Very much depends on manner. The House hates a lecturer. There's a sort of airy earnestness—”

He waved his cigar to eke out his words.

“Little peculiarities of costume count for a great deal. I could name one man who spent three years living down a pair of spatterdashers. On the other hand—a thing like that—if it catches the eye of the PUNCH man, for example, may be your making.”

He went off into a lengthy speculation of why the House had come to like an originally unpopular Irishman named Biggar....

The opening of Parliament gave me some peculiar moods. I began to feel more and more like a branded sheep. We were sworn in in batches, dozens and scores of fresh men, trying not to look too fresh under the inspection of policemen and messengers, all of us carrying new silk hats and wearing magisterial coats. It is one of my vivid memories from this period, the sudden outbreak of silk hats in the smoking-room of the National Liberal Club. At first I thought there must have been a funeral. Familiar faces that one had grown to know under soft felt hats, under bowlers, under liberal-minded wide brims, and above artistic ties and tweed jackets, suddenly met one, staring with the stern gaze of self-consciousness, from under silk hats of incredible glossiness. There was a disposition to wear the hat much too forward, I thought, for a good Parliamentary style.

There was much play with the hats all through; a tremendous competition to get in first and put hats on coveted seats. A memory hangs about me of the House in the early afternoon, an inhumane desolation inhabited almost entirely by silk hats. The current use of cards to secure seats came later. There were yards and yards of empty green benches with hats and hats and hats distributed along them, resolute-looking top hats, lax top hats with a kind of shadowy grin under them, sensible top bats brim upward, and one scandalous incontinent that had rolled from the front Opposition bench right to the middle of the floor. A headless hat is surely the most soulless thing in the world, far worse even than a skull....

At last, in a leisurely muddled manner we got to the Address; and I found myself packed in a dense elbowing crowd to the right of the Speaker's chair; while the attenuated Opposition, nearly leaderless after the massacre, tilted its brim to its nose and sprawled at its ease amidst its empty benches.

There was a tremendous hullaboo about something, and I craned to see over the shoulder of the man in front. “Order, order, order!”

“What's it about?” I asked.

The man in front of me was clearly no better informed, and then I gathered from a slightly contemptuous Scotchman beside me that it was Chris Robinson had walked between the honourable member in possession of the house and the Speaker. I caught a glimpse of him blushingly whispering about his misadventure to a colleague. He was just that same little figure I had once assisted to entertain at Cambridge, but grey-haired now, and still it seemed with the same knitted muffler he had discarded for a reckless half-hour while he talked to us in Hatherleigh's rooms.

It dawned upon me that I wasn't particularly wanted in the House, and that I should get all I needed of the opening speeches next day from the TIMES.

I made my way out and was presently walking rather aimlessly through the outer lobby.

I caught myself regarding the shadow that spread itself out before me, multiplied itself in blue tints of various intensity, shuffled itself like a pack of cards under the many lights, the square shoulders, the silk hat, already worn with a parliamentary tilt backward; I found I was surveying this statesmanlike outline with a weak approval. “A MEMBER!” I felt the little cluster of people that were scattered about the lobby must be saying.

“Good God!” I said in hot reaction, “what am I doing here?”

It was one of those moments infinitely trivial in themselves, that yet are cardinal in a man's life. It came to me with extreme vividness that it wasn't so much that I had got hold of something as that something had got hold of me. I distinctly recall the rebound of my mind. Whatever happened in this Parliament, I at least would attempt something. “By God!” I said, “I won't be overwhelmed. I am here to do something, and do something I will!”

But I felt that for the moment I could not remain in the House.

I went out by myself with my thoughts into the night. It was a chilling night, and rare spots of rain were falling. I glanced over my shoulder at the lit windows of the Lords. I walked, I remember, westward, and presently came to the Grosvenar Embankment and followed it, watching the glittering black rush of the river and the dark, dimly lit barges round which the water swirled. Across the river was the hunched sky-line of Doulton's potteries, and a kiln flared redly. Dimly luminous trams were gliding amidst a dotted line of lamps, and two little trains crawled into Waterloo station. Mysterious black figures came by me and were suddenly changed to the commonplace at the touch of the nearer lamps. It was a big confused world, I felt, for a man to lay his hands upon.

I remember I crossed Vauxhall Bridge and stood for a time watching the huge black shapes in the darkness under the gas-works. A shoal of coal barges lay indistinctly on the darkly shining mud and water below, and a colossal crane was perpetually hauling up coal into mysterious blacknesses above, and dropping the empty clutch back to the barges. Just one or two minute black featureless figures of men toiled amidst these monster shapes. They did not seem to be controlling them but only moving about among them. These gas-works have a big chimney that belches a lurid flame into the night, a livid shivering bluish flame, shot with strange crimson streaks....

On the other side of Lambeth Bridge broad stairs go down to the lapping water of the river; the lower steps are luminous under the lamps and one treads unwarned into thick soft Thames mud. They seem to be purely architectural steps, they lead nowhere, they have an air of absolute indifference to mortal ends.

Those shapes and large inhuman places—for all of mankind that one sees at night about Lambeth is minute and pitiful beside the industrial monsters that snort and toil there—mix up inextricably with my memories of my first days as a legislator. Black figures drift by me, heavy vans clatter, a newspaper rough tears by on a motor bicycle, and presently, on the Albert Embankment, every seat has its one or two outcasts huddled together and slumbering.

“These things come, these things go,” a whispering voice urged upon me, “as once those vast unmeaning Saurians whose bones encumber museums came and went rejoicing noisily in fruitless lives.”...

Fruitless lives!—was that the truth of it all?...

Later I stood within sight of the Houses of Parliament in front of the colonnades of St Thomas's Hospital. I leant on the parapet close by a lamp-stand of twisted dolphins—and I prayed!

I remember the swirl of the tide upon the water, and how a string of barges presently came swinging and bumping round as high-water turned to ebb. That sudden change of position and my brief perplexity at it, sticks like a paper pin through the substance of my thoughts. It was then I was moved to prayer. I prayed that night that life might not be in vain, that in particular I might not live in vain. I prayed for strength and faith, that the monstrous blundering forces in life might not overwhelm me, might not beat me back to futility and a meaningless acquiescence in existent things. I knew myself for the weakling I was, I knew that nevertheless it was set for me to make such order as I could out of these disorders, and my task cowed me, gave me at the thought of it a sense of yielding feebleness.

“Break me, O God,” I prayed at last, “disgrace me, torment me, destroy me as you will, but save me from self-complacency and little interests and little successes and the life that passes like the shadow of a dream.”

BOOK THE THIRD: THE HEART OF POLITICS

CHAPTER THE FIRST ~~ THE RIDDLE FOR THE STATESMAN

1

I have been planning and replanning, writing and rewriting, this next portion of my book for many days. I perceive I must leave it raw edged and ill joined. I have learnt something of the impossibility of History. For all I have had to tell is the story of one man's convictions and aims and how they reacted upon his life; and I find it too subtle and involved and intricate for the doing. I find it taxes all my powers to convey even the main forms and forces in that development. It is like looking through moving media of changing hue and variable refraction at something vitally unstable. Broad theories and generalisations are mingled with personal influences, with prevalent prejudices; and not only coloured but altered by phases of hopefulness and moods of depression. The web is made up of the most diverse elements, beyond treatment multitudinous.... For a week or so I desisted altogether, and walked over the mountains and returned to sit through the warm soft mornings among the shaded rocks above this little perched-up house of ours, discussing my difficulties with Isabel and I think on the whole complicating them further in the effort to simplify them to manageable and stateable elements.

Let me, nevertheless, attempt a rough preliminary analysis of this confused process. A main strand is quite easily traceable. This main strand is the story of my obvious life, my life as it must have looked to most of my acquaintances. It presents you with a young couple, bright, hopeful, and energetic, starting out under Altiora's auspices to make a career. You figure us well dressed and active, running about in motor-cars, visiting in great people's houses, dining amidst brilliant companies, going to the theatre, meeting in the lobby. Margaret wore hundreds of beautiful dresses. We must have had an air of succeeding meritoriously during that time.

We did very continually and faithfully serve our joint career. I thought about it a great deal, and did and refrained from doing ten thousand things for the sake of it. I kept up a solicitude for it, as it were by inertia, long after things had happened and changes occurred in me that rendered its completion impossible. Under certain very artless pretences, we wanted steadfastly to make a handsome position in the world, achieve respect, SUCCEED. Enormous unseen changes had been in progress for years in my mind and the realities of my life, before our general circle could have had any inkling of their existence, or suspected the appearances of our life. Then suddenly our proceedings began to be deflected, our outward unanimity visibly strained and marred by the insurgence of these so long-hidden developments.

That career had its own hidden side, of course; but when I write of these unseen factors I do not mean that but something altogether broader. I do not mean the everyday pettinesses which gave the cynical observer scope and told of a narrower, baser aspect of the fair but limited ambitions of my ostensible self. This “sub-careerist” element noted little things that affected the career, made me suspicious of the rivalry of so-and-so, propitiatory to so-and-so, whom, as a matter of fact, I didn't respect or feel in the least sympathetic towards; guarded with that man, who for all his charm and interest wasn't helpful, and a little touchy at the appearance of neglect from that. No, I mean something greater and not something smaller when I write of a hidden life.

In the ostensible self who glowed under the approbation of Altiora Bailey, and was envied and discussed, praised and depreciated, in the House and in smoking-room gossip, you really have as much of a man as usually figures in a novel or an obituary notice. But I am tremendously impressed now in the retrospect by the realisation of how little that frontage represented me, and just how little such frontages do represent the complexities of the intelligent contemporary. Behind it, yet struggling to disorganise and alter it, altogether, was a far more essential reality, a self less personal, less individualised, and broader in its references. Its aims were never simply to get on; it had an altogether different system of demands and satisfactions. It was critical, curious, more than a little unfeeling—and relentlessly illuminating.

It is just the existence and development of this more generalised self-behind-the-frontage that is making modern life so much more subtle and intricate to render, and so much more hopeful in its relations to the perplexities of the universe. I see this mental and spiritual hinterland vary enormously in the people about me, from a type which seems to keep, as people say, all its goods in the window, to others who, like myself, come to regard the ostensible existence more and more as a mere experimental feeder and agent for that greater personality behind. And this back-self has its history of phases, its crises and happy accidents and irrevocable conclusions, more or less distinct from the adventures and achievements of the ostensible self. It meets persons and phrases, it assimilates the spirit of a book, it is startled into new realisations by some accident that seems altogether irrelevant to the general tenor of one's life. Its increasing independence of the ostensible career makes it the organ of corrective criticism; it accumulates disturbing energy. Then it breaks our overt promises and repudiates our pledges, coming down at last like an overbearing mentor upon the small engagements of the pupil.

In the life of the individual it takes the role that the growth of philosophy, science, and creative literature may play in the development of mankind.

2

It is curious to recall how Britten helped shatter that obvious, lucidly explicable presentation of myself upon which I had embarked with Margaret. He returned to revive a memory of adolescent dreams and a habit of adolescent frankness; he reached through my shallow frontage as no one else seemed capable of doing, and dragged that back-self into relation with it.

I remember very distinctly a dinner and a subsequent walk with him which presents itself now as altogether typical of the quality of his influence.

I had come upon him one day while lunching with Somers and Sutton at the Playwrights' Club, and had asked him to dinner on the spur of the moment. He was oddly the same curly-headed, red-faced ventriloquist, and oddly different, rather seedy as well as untidy, and at first a little inclined to make comparisons with my sleek successfulness. But that disposition presently evaporated, and his talk was good and fresh and provocative. And something that had long been straining at its checks in my mind flapped over, and he and I found ourselves of one accord.

Altiora wasn't at this dinner. When she came matters were apt to become confusedly strenuous. There was always a slight and ineffectual struggle at the end on the part of Margaret to anticipate Altiora's overpowering tendency to a rally and the establishment of some entirely unjustifiable conclusion by a COUP-DE-MAIN. When, however, Altiora was absent, the quieter influence of the Cramptons prevailed; temperance and information for its own sake prevailed excessively over dinner and the play of thought.... Good Lord! what bores the Cramptons were! I wonder I endured them as I did. They had all of them the trick of lying in wait conversationally; they had no sense of the self-exposures, the gallant experiments in statement that are necessary for good conversation. They would watch one talking with an expression exactly like peeping through bushes. Then they would, as it were, dash out, dissent succinctly, contradict some secondary fact, and back to cover. They gave one twilight nerves. Their wives were easier but still difficult at a stretch; they talked a good deal about children and servants, but with an air caught from Altiora of making observations upon sociological types. Lewis gossiped about the House in an entirely finite manner. He never raised a discussion; nobody ever raised a discussion. He would ask what we thought of Evesham's question that afternoon, and Edward would say it was good, and Mrs. Willie, who had been behind the grille, would think it was very good, and then Willie, parting the branches, would say rather conclusively that he didn't think it was very much good, and I would deny hearing the question in order to evade a profitless statement of views in that vacuum, and then we would cast about in our minds for some other topic of equal interest....

On this occasion Altiora was absent, and to qualify our Young Liberal bleakness we had Mrs. Millingham, with her white hair and her fresh mind and complexion, and Esmeer. Willie Crampton was with us, but not his wife, who was having her third baby on principle; his brother Edward was present, and the Lewises, and of course the Bunting Harblows. There was also some other lady. I remember her as pale blue, but for the life of me I cannot remember her name.

Quite early there was a little breeze between Edward Crampton and Esmeer, who had ventured an opinion about the partition of Poland. Edward was at work then upon the seventh volume of his monumental Life of Kosciusko, and a little impatient with views perhaps not altogether false but betraying a lamentable ignorance of accessible literature. At any rate, his correction of Esmeer was magisterial. After that there was a distinct and not altogether delightful pause, and then some one, it may have been the pale-blue lady, asked Mrs. Lewis whether her aunt Lady Carmixter had returned from her rest-and-sun-cure in Italy. That led to a rather anxiously sustained talk about regimen, and Willie told us how he had profited by the no-breakfast system. It had increased his power of work enormously. He could get through ten hours a day now without inconvenience.

“What do you do?” said Esmeer abruptly.

“Oh! no end of work. There's all the estate and looking after things.”

“But publicly?”

“I asked three questions yesterday. And for one of them I had to consult nine books!”

We were drifting, I could see, towards Doctor Haig's system of dietary, and whether the exclusion or inclusion of fish and chicken were most conducive to high efficiency, when Britten, who had refused lemonade and claret and demanded Burgundy, broke out, and was discovered to be demanding in his throat just what we Young Liberals thought we were up to?

“I want,” said Britten, repeating his challenge a little louder, “to hear just exactly what you think you are doing in Parliament?”

Lewis laughed nervously, and thought we were “Seeking the Good of the Community.”

“HOW?”

“Beneficient Legislation,” said Lewis.

“Beneficient in what direction?” insisted Britten. “I want to know where you think you are going.”

“Amelioration of Social Conditions,” said Lewis.

“That's only a phrase!”

“You wouldn't have me sketch bills at dinner?”

“I'd like you to indicate directions,” said Britten, and waited.

“Upward and On,” said Lewis with conscious neatness, and turned to ask Mrs. Bunting Harblow about her little boy's French.

For a time talk frothed over Britten's head, but the natural mischief in Mrs. Millingham had been stirred, and she was presently echoing his demand in lisping, quasi-confidential undertones. “What ARE we Liberals doing?” Then Esmeer fell in with the revolutionaries.

To begin with, I was a little shocked by this clamour for fundamentals—and a little disconcerted. I had the experience that I suppose comes to every one at times of discovering oneself together with two different sets of people with whom one has maintained two different sets of attitudes. It had always been, I perceived, an instinctive suppression in our circle that we shouldn't be more than vague about our political ideals. It had almost become part of my morality to respect this convention. It was understood we were all working hard, and keeping ourselves fit, tremendously fit, under Altiora's inspiration, Pro Bono Publico. Bunting Harblow had his under-secretaryship, and Lewis was on the verge of the Cabinet, and these things we considered to be in the nature of confirmations.... It added to the discomfort of the situation that these plunging enquiries were being made in the presence of our wives.

The rebel section of our party forced the talk.

Edward Crampton was presently declaring—I forget in what relation: “The country is with us.”

My long-controlled hatred of the Cramptons' stereotyped phrases about the Country and the House got the better of me. I showed my cloven hoof to my friends for the first time.

“We don't respect the Country as we used to do,” I said. “We haven't the same belief we used to have in the will of the people. It's no good, Crampton, trying to keep that up. We Liberals know as a matter of fact—nowadays every one knows—that the monster that brought us into power has, among other deficiencies, no head. We've got to give it one—if possible with brains and a will. That lies in the future. For the present if the country is with us, it means merely that we happen to have hold of its tether.”

Lewis was shocked. A “mandate” from the Country was sacred to his system of pretences.

Britten wasn't subdued by his first rebuff; presently he was at us again. There were several attempts to check his outbreak of interrogation; I remember the Cramptons asked questions about the welfare of various cousins of Lewis who were unknown to the rest of us, and Margaret tried to engage Britten in a sympathetic discussion of the Arts and Crafts exhibition. But Britten and Esmeer were persistent, Mrs. Millingham was mischievous, and in the end our rising hopes of Young Liberalism took to their thickets for good, while we talked all over them of the prevalent vacuity of political intentions. Margaret was perplexed by me. It is only now I perceive just how perplexing I must have been. “Of course, she said with that faint stress of apprehension in her eyes, one must have aims.” And, “it isn't always easy to put everything into phrases.” “Don't be long,” said Mrs. Edward Crampton to her husband as the wives trooped out. And afterwards when we went upstairs I had an indefinable persuasion that the ladies had been criticising Britten's share in our talk in an altogether unfavourable spirit. Mrs. Edward evidently thought him aggressive and impertinent, and Margaret with a quiet firmness that brooked no resistance, took him at once into a corner and showed him Italian photographs by Coburn. We dispersed early.

I walked with Britten along the Chelsea back streets towards Battersea Bridge—he lodged on the south side.

“Mrs. Millingham's a dear,” he began.

“She's a dear.”

“I liked her demand for a hansom because a four-wheeler was too safe.”

“She was worked up,” I said. “She's a woman of faultless character, but her instincts, as Altiora would say, are anarchistic—when she gives them a chance.”

“So she takes it out in hansom cabs.”

“Hansom cabs.”

“She's wise,” said Britten....

“I hope, Remington,” he went on after a pause, “I didn't rag your other guests too much. I've a sort of feeling at moments—Remington, those chaps are so infernally not—not bloody. It's part of a man's duty sometimes at least to eat red beef and get drunk. How is he to understand government if he doesn't? It scares me to think of your lot—by a sort of misapprehension—being in power. A kind of neuralgia in the head, by way of government. I don't understand where YOU come in. Those others—they've no lusts. Their ideal is anaemia. You and I, we had at least a lust to take hold of life and make something of it. They—they want to take hold of life and make nothing of it. They want to cut out all the stimulants. Just as though life was anything else but a reaction to stimulation!”...

He began to talk of his own life. He had had ill-fortune through most of it. He was poor and unsuccessful, and a girl he had been very fond of had been attacked and killed by a horse in a field in a very horrible manner. These things had wounded and tortured him, but they hadn't broken him. They had, it seemed to me, made a kind of crippled and ugly demigod of him. He was, I began to perceive, so much better than I had any right to expect. At first I had been rather struck by his unkempt look, and it made my reaction all the stronger. There was about him something, a kind of raw and bleeding faith in the deep things of life, that stirred me profoundly as he showed it. My set of people had irritated him and disappointed him. I discovered at his touch how they irritated him. He reproached me boldly. He made me feel ashamed of my easy acquiescences as I walked in my sleek tall neatness beside his rather old coat, his rather battered hat, his sturdier shorter shape, and listened to his denunciations of our self-satisfied New Liberalism and Progressivism.

“It has the same relation to progress—the reality of progress—that the things they paint on door panels in the suburbs have to art and beauty. There's a sort of filiation.... Your Altiora's just the political equivalent of the ladies who sell traced cloth for embroidery; she's a dealer in Refined Social Reform for the Parlour. The real progress, Remington, is a graver thing and a painfuller thing and a slower thing altogether. Look! THAT”—and he pointed to where under a boarding in the light of a gas lamp a dingy prostitute stood lurking—“was in Babylon and Nineveh. Your little lot make believe there won't be anything of the sort after this Parliament! They're going to vanish at a few top notes from Altiora Bailey! Remington!—it's foolery. It's prigs at play. It's make-believe, make-believe! Your people there haven't got hold of things, aren't beginning to get hold of things, don't know anything of life at all, shirk life, avoid life, get in little bright clean rooms and talk big over your bumpers of lemonade while the Night goes by outside—untouched. Those Crampton fools slink by all this,"—he waved at the woman again—"pretend it doesn't exist, or is going to be banished root and branch by an Act to keep children in the wet outside public-houses. Do you think they really care, Remington? I don't. It's make-believe. What they want to do, what Lewis wants to do, what Mrs. Bunting Harblow wants her husband to do, is to sit and feel very grave and necessary and respected on the Government benches. They think of putting their feet out like statesmen, and tilting shiny hats with becoming brims down over their successful noses. Presentation portrait to a club at fifty. That's their Reality. That's their scope. They don't, it's manifest, WANT to think beyond that. The things there ARE, Remington, they'll never face! the wonder and the depth of life,—lust, and the night-sky,—pain."

"But the good intention," I pleaded, "the Good Will!"

"Sentimentality," said Britten. "No Good Will is anything but dishonesty unless it frets and burns and hurts and destroys a man. That lot of yours have nothing but a good will to think they have good will. Do you think they lie awake of nights searching their hearts as we do? Lewis? Crampton? Or those neat, admiring, satisfied little wives? See how they shrank from the probe!"

"We all," I said, "shrink from the probe."

"God help us!" said Britten....

"We are but vermin at the best, Remington," he broke out, "and the greatest saint only a worm that has lifted its head for a moment from the dust. We are damned, we are meant to be damned, coral animalculae building upward, upward in a sea of damnation. But of all the damned things that ever were damned, your damned shirking, temperate, sham-efficient, self-satisfied, respectable, make-believe, Fabian-spirited Young Liberal is the utterly damnedest." He paused for a moment, and resumed in an entirely different note: "Which is why I was so surprised, Remington, to find YOU in this set!"

"You're just the old plunger you used to be, Britten," I said. "You're going too far with all your might for the sake of the damns. Like a donkey that drags its cart up a bank to get thistles. There's depths in Liberalism—"

"We were talking about Liberals."

"Liberty!"

“Liberty! What do YOOR little lot know of liberty?”

“What does any little lot know of liberty?”

“It waits outside, too big for our understanding. Like the night and the stars. And lust, Remington! lust and bitterness! Don't I know them? with all the sweetness and hope of life bitten and trampled, the dear eyes and the brain that loved and understood—and my poor mumble of a life going on! I'm within sight of being a drunkard, Remington! I'm a failure by most standards! Life has cut me to the bone. But I'm not afraid of it any more. I've paid something of the price, I've seen something of the meaning.”

He flew off at a tangent. “I'd rather die in Delirium Tremens,” he cried, “than be a Crampton or a Lewis....”

“Make-believe. Make-believe.” The phrase and Britten's squat gestures haunted me as I walked homeward alone. I went to my room and stood before my desk and surveyed papers and files and Margaret's admirable equipment of me.

I perceived in the lurid light of Britten's suggestions that so it was Mr. George Alexander would have mounted a statesman's private room....

3

I was never at any stage a loyal party man. I doubt if party will ever again be the force it was during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Men are becoming increasingly constructive and selective, less patient under tradition and the bondage of initial circumstances. As education becomes more universal and liberating, men will sort themselves more and more by their intellectual temperaments and less and less by their accidental associations. The past will rule them less; the future more. It is not simply party but school and college and county and country that lose their glamour. One does not hear nearly as much as our forefathers did of the “old Harrovian,” “old Arvonian,” “old Etonian” claim to this or that unfair advantage or unearnt sympathy. Even the Scotch and the Devonians weaken a little in their clannishness. A widening sense of fair play destroys such things. They follow freemasonry down—freemasonry of which one is chiefly reminded nowadays in England by propitiatory symbols outside shady public-houses....

There is, of course, a type of man which clings very obstinately to party ties. These are the men with strong reproductive imaginations and no imaginative initiative, such men as Cladingbowl, for example, or Dayton. They are the scholars-at-large in life. For them the fact that the party system has been essential in the history of England for two hundred years gives it an overwhelming glamour. They have read histories and memoirs, they see the great grey pile of Westminster not so much for what it is as for what it was, rich with dramatic memories, populous with glorious ghosts, phrasing itself inevitably in anecdotes and quotations. It seems almost scandalous that new things should continue to happen, swamping with strange qualities the savour of these old associations.

That Mr. Ramsay Macdonald should walk through Westminster Hall, thrust himself, it may be, through the very piece of space that once held Charles the Martyr pleading for his life, seems horrible profanation to Dayton, a last posthumous outrage; and he would, I think, like to have the front benches left empty now for ever, or at most adorned with laureated ivory tablets: “Here Dizzy sat,” and “On this Spot William Ewart Gladstone made his First Budget Speech.” Failing this, he demands, if only as signs of modesty and respect on the part of the survivors, meticulous imitation. “Mr. G.,” he murmurs, “would not have done that,” and laments a vanished subtlety even while Mr. Evesham is speaking. He is always gloomily disposed to lapse into wonderings about what things are coming to, wonderings that have no grain of curiosity. His conception of perfect conduct is industrious persistence along the worn-down, well-marked grooves of the great recorded days. So infinitely more important to him is the documented, respected thing than the elusive present.

Cladingbowl and Dayton do not shine in the House, though Cladingbowl is a sound man on a committee, and Dayton keeps the OLD COUNTRY GAZETTE, the most gentlemanly paper in London. They prevail, however, in their clubs at lunch time. There, with the pleasant consciousness of a morning's work free from either zeal or shirking, they mingle with permanent officials, prominent lawyers, even a few of the soberer type of business men, and relax their minds in the discussion of the morning paper, of the architecture of the West End, and of the latest public appointments, of golf, of holiday resorts, of the last judicial witticisms and forensic “crushers.” The New Year and Birthday honours lists are always very sagely and exhaustively considered, and anecdotes are popular and keenly judged. They do not talk of the things that are really active in their minds, but in the formal and habitual manner they suppose to be proper to intelligent but still honourable men. Socialism, individual money matters, and religion are forbidden topics, and sex and women only in so far as they appear in the law courts. It is to me the strangest of conventions, this assumption of unreal loyalties and traditional respects, this repudiation and concealment of passionate interests. It is like wearing gloves in summer fields, or bathing in a gown, or falling in love with the heroine of a novel, or writing under a pseudonym, or becoming a masked Tuareg....

It is not, I think, that men of my species are insensitive to the great past that is embodied in Westminster and its traditions; we are not so much wanting in the historical sense as alive to the greatness of our present opportunities and the still vaster future that is possible to us. London is the most interesting, beautiful, and wonderful city in the world to me, delicate in her incidental and multitudinous littleness, and stupendous in her pregnant totality; I cannot bring myself to use her as a museum or an old bookshop. When I think of Whitehall that little affair on the scaffold outside the Banqueting Hall seems trivial and remote in comparison with the possibilities that offer themselves to my imagination within the great grey Government buildings close at hand.

It gives me a qualm of nostalgia even to name those places now. I think of St. Stephen's tower streaming upwards into the misty London night and the great wet quadrangle of New Palace Yard, from which the hansom cabs of my first experiences were ousted more and more by taxicabs as the second Parliament of King Edward the Seventh aged; I think of the Admiralty and War office with their tall Marconi masts sending out invisible threads of direction to the armies in the camps, to great fleets about the world. The crowded, darkly shining river goes flooding through my memory once again, on to those narrow seas that part us from our rival nations; I see quadrangles and corridors of spacious grey-toned offices in which undistinguished little men and little files of papers link us to islands in the tropics, to frozen wildernesses gashed for gold, to vast temple-studded plains, to forest worlds and mountain worlds, to ports and fortresses and lighthouses and watch-towers and grazing lands and corn lands all about the globe. Once more I traverse Victoria Street, grimy and dark, where the Agents of the Empire jostle one another, pass the big embassies in the West End with their flags and scutcheons, follow the broad avenue that leads to Buckingham Palace, witness the coming and going of troops and officials and guests along it from every land on earth.... Interwoven in the texture of it all, mocking, perplexing, stimulating beyond measure, is the gleaming consciousness, the challenging knowledge: “You and your kind might still, if you could but grasp it here, mould all the destiny of Man!”

4

My first three years in Parliament were years of active discontent. The little group of younger Liberals to which I belonged was very ignorant of the traditions and qualities of our older leaders, and quite out of touch with the mass of the party. For a time Parliament was enormously taken up with moribund issues and old quarrels. The early Educational legislation was sectarian and unenterprising, and the Licensing Bill went little further than the attempted rectification of a Conservative mistake. I was altogether for the nationalisation of the public-houses, and of this end the Bill gave no intimations. It was just beer-baiting. I was recalcitrant almost from the beginning, and spoke against the Government so early as the second reading of the first Education Bill, the one the Lords rejected in 1906. I went a little beyond my intention in the heat of speaking,—it is a way with inexperienced man. I called the Bill timid, narrow, a mere sop to the jealousies of sects and little-minded people. I contrasted its aim and methods with the manifest needs of the time.

I am not a particularly good speaker; after the manner of a writer I worry to find my meaning too much; but this was one of my successes. I spoke after dinner and to a fairly full House, for people were already a little curious about me because of my writings. Several of the Conservative leaders were present and stayed, and Mr. Evesham, I remember, came ostentatiously to hear me, with that engaging friendliness of his, and gave me at the first chance an approving “Hear, Hear!” I can still recall quite distinctly my two futile attempts to catch the Speaker's eye before I was able to begin, the nervous quiver of my rather too prepared opening, the effect of hearing my own voice and my subconscious wonder as to what I could possibly be talking about, the realisation that I was getting on fairly well, the immense satisfaction afterwards of having on the whole brought it off, and the absurd gratitude I felt for that encouraging cheer.

Addressing the House of Commons is like no other public speaking in the world. Its semi-colloquial methods give it an air of being easy, but its shifting audience, the comings and goings and hesitations of members behind the chair—not mere audience units, but men who matter—the desolating emptiness that spreads itself round the man who fails to interest, the little compact, disciplined crowd in the strangers' gallery, the light, elusive, flickering movements high up behind the grill, the wigged, attentive, weary Speaker, the table and the mace and the chapel-like Gothic background with its sombre shadows, conspire together, produce a confused, uncertain feeling in me, as though I was walking upon a pavement full of trap-doors and patches of uncovered morass. A misplaced, well-meant “Hear, Hear!” is apt to be extraordinarily disconcerting, and under no other circumstances have I had to speak with quite the same sideways twist that the arrangement of the House imposes. One does not recognise one's own voice threading out into the stirring brown. Unless I was excited or speaking to the mind of some particular person in the house, I was apt to lose my feeling of an auditor. I had no sense of whither my sentences were going, such as one has with a public meeting well under one's eye. And to lose one's sense of an auditor is for a man of my temperament to lose one's sense of the immediate, and to become prolix and vague with qualifications.