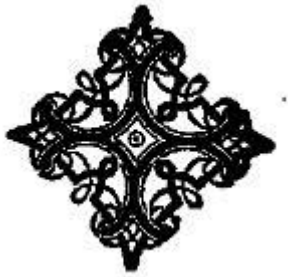
THE PASSIONATE FRIENDS

By H. G. WELLS

Author of "Marriage."



WITH FRONTISPIECE

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TO
L. E. N. S.

"OUR KISSES WERE KISSES OF MOONLIGHT" **[See p. 85**

CONTENTS

[Pg 1]

THE
PASSIONATE FRIENDS

CHAPTER THE FIRST

Mr. Stratton to his Son

§ 1

I want very much to set down my thoughts and my experiences of life. I want to do so now that I have come to middle age and now that my attitudes are all defined and my personal drama worked out I feel that the toil of writing and reconsideration may help to clear and fix many things that remain a little uncertain in my thoughts because they have never been fully stated, and I want to discover any lurking inconsistencies and unsuspected gaps. And I have a story. I have lived through things that have searched me. I want to tell that story as well as I can while I am still a clear-headed and active man, and while many details that may presently become blurred and altered are still rawly fresh in my mind. And to one person in particular do I wish to think I am writing, and that is to you, my only son. I want to write my story not indeed to the child you are now, but to the man you are going to be. You are half[Pg 2] my blood and temperamentally altogether mine. A day will come when you will realize this, and want to know how life has gone with me, and then it may be altogether too late for me to answer your enquiries. I may have become inaccessible as old people are sometimes inaccessible. And so I think of leaving this book for you—at any rate, I shall write it as if I meant to leave it for you. Afterwards I can consider whether I will indeed leave it....

The idea of writing such a book as this came to me first as I sat by the dead body of your grandfather—my father. It was because I wanted so greatly such a book from him

that I am now writing this. He died, you must know, only a few months ago, and I went to his house to bury him and settle all his affairs.

At one time he had been my greatest friend. He had never indeed talked to me about himself or his youth, but he had always showed an extraordinary sympathy and helpfulness for me in all the confusion and perplexities into which I fell. This did not last to the end of his life. I was the child of his middle years, and suddenly, in a year or less, the curtains of age and infirmity fell between us. There came an illness, an operation, and he rose from it ailing, suffering, dwarfed and altogether changed. Of all the dark shadows upon life I think that change through illness and organic decay in the thoughts and spirits of those who are dear and close to us is the most evil and distressing and inexplicable. Suddenly he was a changeling, a being querulous and pitiful, needing indulgence and sacrifices.

In a little while a new state of affairs was established. I ceased to consider him as a man to whom one told[Pg 3] things, of whom one could expect help or advice. We all ceased to consider him at all in that way. We humored him, put pleasant things before him, concealed whatever was disagreeable. A poor old man he was indeed in those concluding years, weakly rebellious against the firm kindliness of my cousin, his housekeeper and nurse. He who had once been so alert was now at times astonishingly apathetic. At times an impish malice I had never known in him before gleamed in little acts and speeches. His talk rambled, and for the most part was concerned with small, long-forgotten contentions. It was indistinct and difficult to follow because of a recent loss of teeth, and he craved for brandy, to restore even for a moment the sense of strength and well-being that ebbed and ebbed away from him. So that when I came to look at his dead face at last, it was with something like amazement I perceived him grave and beautiful—more grave and beautiful than he had been even in the fullness of life.

All the estrangement of the final years was wiped in an instant from my mind as I looked upon his face. There came back a rush of memories, of kind, strong, patient, human aspects of his fatherhood. And I remembered as every son must remember—even you, my dear, will some day remember because it is in the very nature of sonship—insubordinations, struggles, ingratitudes, great benefits taken unthankfully, slights and disregards. It was not remorse I felt, nor repentance, but a tremendous regret that so things had happened and that life should be so. Why is it, I thought, that when a son has come to manhood he cannot take his father for a friend? I had a curious sense of [Pg 4]unprecedented communion as I stood beside him now. I felt that he understood my thoughts; his face seemed to answer with an expression of still and sympathetic patience.

I was sensible of amazing gaps. We had never talked together of love, never of religion.

All sorts of things that a man of twenty-eight would not dream of hiding from a coeval he had hidden from me. For some days I had to remain in his house, I had to go through his papers, handle all those intimate personal things that accumulate around a human being year by year—letters, yellowing scraps of newspaper, tokens, relics kept, accidental vestiges, significant litter. I learnt many things I had never dreamt of. At times I doubted whether I was not prying, whether I ought not to risk the loss of those necessary legal facts I sought, and burn these papers unread. There were love letters, and many such touching things.

My memories of him did not change because of these new lights, but they became wonderfully illuminated. I realized him as a young man, I began to see him as a boy. I found a little half-bound botanical book with stencil-tinted illustrations, a good-conduct prize my father had won at his preparatory school; a rolled-up sheet of paper, carbonized and dry and brittle, revealed itself as a piece of specimen writing, stiff with boyish effort, decorated in ambitious and faltering flourishes and still betraying the pencil rulings his rubber should have erased. Already your writing is better than that. And I found a daguerreotype portrait of him in knickerbockers against a photographer's stile. His face then was not unlike yours. I stood with that in my hand at the little bureau in his bedroom, and looked at his dead face.

[Pg 5]

The flatly painted portrait of his father, my grandfather, hanging there in the stillness above the coffin, looking out on the world he had left with steady, humorous blue eyes that followed one about the room,—that, too, was revivified, touched into reality and participation by this and that, became a living presence at a conference of lives. Things of his were there also in that life's accumulation....

There we were, three Strattons together, and down in the dining-room were steel engravings to take us back two generations further, and we had all lived full lives, suffered, attempted, signified. I had a glimpse of the long successions of mankind. What a huge inaccessible lumber-room of thought and experience we amounted to, I thought; how much we are, how little we transmit. Each one of us was but a variation, an experiment upon the Stratton theme. All that I had now under my hands was but the merest hints and vestiges, moving and surprising indeed, but casual and fragmentary, of those obliterated repetitions. Man is a creature becoming articulate, and why should those men have left so much of the tale untold—to be lost and forgotten? Why must we all repeat things done, and come again very bitterly to wisdom our fathers have achieved before us? My grandfather there should have left

me something better than the still enigma of his watching face. All my life so far has gone in learning very painfully what many men have learnt before me; I have spent the greater part of forty years in finding a sort of purpose for the uncertain and declining decades that remain. Is it not time the generations drew together and helped one another? Cannot we begin now to make a better use of the [Pg 6]experiences of life so that our sons may not waste themselves so much, cannot we gather into books that men may read in an hour or so the gist of these confused and multitudinous realities of the individual career? Surely the time is coming for that, when a new private literature will exist, and fathers and mothers behind their rôles of rulers, protectors, and supporters, will prepare frank and intimate records of their thought and their feeling, told as one tells things to equals, without authority or reserves or discretions, so that, they being dead, their children may rediscover them as contemporaries and friends.

That desire for self-expression is indeed already almost an instinct with many of us. Man is disposed to create a traditional wisdom. For me this book I contemplate is a need. I am just a year and a half from a bitter tragedy and the loss of a friend as dear as life to me. It is very constantly in my mind. She opened her mind to me as few people open their minds to anyone. In a way, little Stephen, she died for you. And I am so placed that I have no one to talk to quite freely about her. The one other person to whom I talk, I cannot talk to about her; it is strange, seeing how we love and trust one another, but so it is; you will understand that the better as this story unfolds. For eight long years before the crisis that culminated in her tragic death I never saw her; yet, quite apart from the shock and distresses of that time, it has left me extraordinarily lonely and desolate.

And there was a kind of dreadful splendor in that last act of hers, which has taken a great hold upon my imagination; it has interwoven with everything else in my mind, it bears now upon every question. I cannot get away from it, while it is thus pent from utterance.... Perhaps[Pg 7] having written this to you I may never show it you or leave it for you to see. But yet I must write it. Of all conceivable persons you, when you have grown to manhood, are the most likely to understand.

§ 2

You did not come to see your dead grandfather, nor did you know very much about the funeral. Nowadays we do not bring the sweet egotisms, the vivid beautiful personal intensities of childhood, into the cold, vast presence of death. I would as soon, my dear, have sent your busy little limbs toiling up the Matterhorn. I have put by a

photograph of my father for you as he lay in that last stillness of his, that you will see at a properer time.

Your mother and I wore black only at his funeral and came back colored again into your colored world, and in a very little while your interest in this event that had taken us away for a time turned to other, more assimilable things. But there happened a little incident that laid hold upon me; you forgot it, perhaps, in a week or less, but I shall never forget it; and this incident it was that gathered up the fruits of those moments beside my father's body and set me to write this book. It had the effect of a little bright light held up against the vague dark immensities of thought and feeling that filled my mind because of my father's death.

Now that I come to set it down I see that it is altogether trivial, and I cannot explain how it is that it is to me so piercingly significant. I had to whip you. Your respect[Pg 8] for the admirable and patient Mademoiselle Potin, the protectress and companion of your public expeditions, did in some slight crisis suddenly fail you. In the extreme publicity of Kensington Gardens, in the presence of your two little sisters, before a startled world, you expressed an opinion of her, in two languages and a loud voice, that was not only very unjust, but extremely offensive and improper. It reflected upon her intelligence and goodness; it impeached her personal appearance; it was the kind of outcry no little gentleman should ever permit himself, however deeply he may be aggrieved. You then, so far as I was able to disentangle the evidence, assaulted her violently, hurled a stone at her, and fled her company. You came home alone by a route chosen by yourself, flushed and wrathful, braving the dangers of Kensington High Street. This, after my stern and deliberate edict that, upon pain of corporal punishment, respect and obedience must be paid to Mademoiselle Potin. The logic of the position was relentless.

But where your behavior was remarkable, where the affair begins to touch my imagination, was that you yourself presently put the whole business before me. Alone in the schoolroom, you seem to have come to some realization of the extraordinary dreadfulness of your behavior. Such moments happen in the lives of all small boys; they happened to me times enough, to my dead father, to that grandfather of the portrait which is now in my study, to his father and his, and so on through long series of Strattons, back to inarticulate, shock-haired little sinners slinking fearfully away from the awful wrath, the bellowings and limitless violence of the hairy Old Man of the herd. The bottom goes out of your[Pg 9] heart then, you are full of a conviction of sin. So far you did but carry on the experience of the race. But to ask audience of me, to come and look me in the eye, to say you wanted my advice on a pressing matter, that I think marks almost a new phase in the long developing history of father and son. And

your account of the fracas struck me as quite reasonably frank and honest. "I didn't seem able," you observed, "not to go on being badder and badder."

We discussed the difficulties of our situation, and you passed sentence upon yourself. I saw to it that the outraged dignity of Mademoiselle Potin was mocked by no mere formality of infliction. You did your best to be stoical, I remember, but at last you yelped and wept. Then, justice being done, you rearranged your costume. The situation was a little difficult until you, still sobbing and buttoning—you are really a shocking bad hand at buttons—and looking a very small, tender, ruffled, rueful thing indeed, strolled towards my study window. "The pear tree is out next door," you remarked, without a trace of animosity, and sobbing as one might hiccough.

I suppose there are moments in the lives of all grown men when they come near to weeping aloud. In some secret place within myself I must have been a wild river of tears. I answered, however, with the same admirable detachment from the smarting past that you had achieved, that my study window was particularly adapted to the appreciation of our neighbor's pear tree, because of its height from the ground. We fell into a conversation about blossom and the setting of fruit, kneeling together upon my window-seat and looking up into the pear tree against the sky, and then down through its black branches[Pg 10] into the gardens all quickening with spring. We were on so friendly a footing when presently Mademoiselle Potin returned and placed her dignity or her resignation in my hands, that I doubt if she believed a word of all my assurances until the unmistakable confirmation of your evening bath. Then, as I understood it, she was extremely remorseful to you and indignant against my violence....

But when I knelt with you, little urchin, upon my window-seat, it came to me as a thing almost intolerably desirable that some day you should become my real and understanding friend. I loved you profoundly. I wanted to stretch forward into time and speak to you, man myself to the man you are yet to be. It seemed to me that between us there must needs be peculiar subtleties of sympathy. And I remembered that by the time you were a man fully grown and emerging from the passionately tumultuous openings of manhood, capable of forgiving me all my blundering parentage, capable of perceiving all the justifying fine intention of my ill-conceived disciplines and misdirections, I might be either an old man, shriveling again to an inexplicable egotism, or dead. I saw myself as I had seen my father—first enfeebled and then inaccessibly tranquil. When presently you had gone from my study, I went to my writing-desk and drew a paper pad towards me, and sat thinking and making idle marks upon it with my pen. I wanted to exceed the limits of those frozen silences that must come at last between us, write a book that should lie in your world like a seed, and at last, as your own being ripened, flower into living understanding by your side.

This book, which before had been only an idea for a book, competing against many other ideas and the [Pg 11]demands of that toilsome work for peace and understanding to which I have devoted the daily energies of my life, had become, I felt, an imperative necessity between us.

§ 3

And then there happened one of those crises of dread and apprehension and pain that are like a ploughing of the heart. It was brought home to me that you might die even before the first pages of this book of yours were written. You became feverish, complained of that queer pain you had felt twice before, and for the third time you were ill with appendicitis. Your mother and I came and regarded your touzled head and flushed little face on the pillow as you slept uneasily, and decided that we must take no more risks with you. So soon as your temperature had fallen again we set about the business of an operation.

We told each other that nowadays these operations were as safe as going to sleep in your bed, but we knew better. Our own doctor had lost his son. "That," we said, "was different." But we knew well enough in our hearts that you were going very near to the edge of death, nearer than you had ever been since first you came clucking into the world.

The operation was done at home. A capable, fair-complexioned nurse took possession of us; and my study, because it has the best light, was transfigured into an admirable operating-room. All its furnishings were sent away, every cloth and curtain, and the walls and floor were covered with white sterilized sheets. The high little mechanical table they erected before the window[Pg 12] seemed to me like an altar on which I had to offer up my son. There were basins of disinfectants and towels conveniently about, the operator came, took out his array of scalpels and forceps and little sponges from the black bag he carried, put them ready for his hand, and then covered them from your sight with a white cloth, and I brought you down in my arms, wrapped in a blanket, from your bedroom to the anæsthetist. You were beautifully trustful and submissive and unafraid. I stood by you until the chloroform had done its work, and then left you there, lest my presence should in the slightest degree embarrass the surgeon. The anæsthetic had taken all the color out of your face, and you looked pinched and shrunken and greenish and very small and pitiful. I went into the drawing-room and stood there with your mother and made conversation. I cannot recall what we said, I think it was about the moorland to which we were going for your convalescence. Indeed, we were but the ghosts of ourselves; all our substance seemed listening, listening to the little sounds that came to us from the study.

Then after long ages there was a going to and fro of feet, a bump, the opening of a door, and our own doctor came into the room rubbing his hands together and doing nothing to conceal his profound relief. "Admirable," he said, "altogether successful." I went up to you and saw a tumbled little person in the bed, still heavily insensible and moaning slightly. By the table were bloody towels, and in a shallow glass tray was a small object like a damaged piece of earthworm. "Not a bit too soon," said the surgeon, holding this up in his forceps for my inspection. "It's on the very verge of perforation." I affected a detached and scientific interest, but the prevailing[Pg 13] impression in my mind was that this was a fragment from very nearly the centre of your being.

He took it away with him, I know not whither. Perhaps it is now in spirits in a specimen jar, an example to all medical students of what to avoid in an appendix; perhaps it was stained and frozen, and microtomized into transparent sections as they do such things, and mounted on glass slips and distributed about the world for curious histologists to wreak their eyes upon. For a time you lay uneasily still and then woke up to pain. Even then you got a fresh purchase on my heart. It has always been our custom to discourage weeping and outcries, and you did not forget your training. "I shan't mind so much, dadda," you remarked to me, "if I may yelp." So for a day, by special concession, you yelped, and then the sting of those fresh wounds departed.

Within a fortnight, so quickly does an aseptic wound heal up again, you were running about in the sun, and I had come back, as one comes back to a thing forgotten, to the first beginnings of this chapter on my desk. But for a time I could not go on working at it because of the fear I had felt, and it is only now in June, in this house in France to which we have come for the summer, with you more flagrantly healthy than I have ever known you before, that my heart creeps out of its hole again, and I can go on with my story.

[Pg 14]

CHAPTER THE SECOND

Boyhood

§ 1

I was a Harbury boy as my father and grandfather were before me and as you are presently to be. I went to Harbury at the age of fourteen. Until then I was educated at home, first by a governess and then by my father's curate, Mr. Siddons, who went from

us to St. Philip's in Hampstead, and, succeeding marvellously there, is now Bishop of Exminster. My father became rector of Burnmore when I was nine; my mother had been dead four years, and my second cousin, Jane Stratton, was already his housekeeper. My father held the living until his resignation when I was nearly thirty. So that all the most impressionable years of my life centre upon the Burnmore rectory and the easy spaciousness of Burnmore Park. My boyhood and adolescence alternated between the ivied red-brick and ancient traditions of Harbury (and afterwards Christ-church) and that still untroubled countryside.

I was never a town dweller until I married and we took our present house in Holland Park. I went into London at last as one goes into an arena. It cramps me and wearies me and at times nearly overwhelms me,[Pg 15] but there it is that the life of men centres and my work lies. But every summer we do as we have done this year and go to some house in the country, near to forests or moorland or suchlike open and uncultivated country, where one may have the refreshment of freedom among natural and unhurried things. This year we are in a walled garden upon the Seine, about four miles above Château Galliard, and with the forest reaching up to the paddock beyond the orchard close....

You will understand better when I have told you my story why I saw Burnmore for the last time when I was one-and-twenty and why my memories of it shine so crystalline clear. I have a thousand vivid miniatures of it in my mind and all of them are beautiful to me, so that I could quite easily write a whole book of landscapes from the Park alone. I can still recall quite vividly the warm beauty-soaked sensation of going out into the morning sunshine of the Park, with my lunch in a little green Swiss tin under my arm and the vast interminable day all before me, the gigantic, divinely unconditional day that only boyhood knows, and the Park so great and various that it was more than two hours' going for me to reach its eastern fences. I was only a little older then than you are now. Sometimes I went right up through the woods to the house to companion with Philip and Guy Christian and their sister—I loved her then, and one day I was to love her with all my heart—but in those boyish times I liked most to go alone.

My memories of the Park are all under blue sky and sunshine, with just a thunderstorm or so; on wet days and cold days I was kept to closer limits; and it seems to me now rather an intellectual conviction than a positive[Pg 16] memory that save for a few pine-clad patches in the extreme south-east, its soil was all thick clay. That meant for me only beautiful green marshes, a number of vividly interesting meres upon the course of its stream, and a wealth of gigantic oaks. The meres lay at various levels, and the hand of Lady Ladislaw had assisted nature in their enrichment with

lilies and water plants. There were places of sedge and scented rush, amidst which were sapphire mists of forget-me-not for long stretches, skirmishing commandoes of yellow iris and wide wastes of floating water-lilies. The gardens passed insensibly into the Park, and beyond the house were broad stretches of grass, sun-lit, barred with the deep-green shadows of great trees, and animated with groups and lines of fallow deer. Near the house was an Italianate garden, with balustradings and statuary, and a great wealth of roses and flowering shrubs.

Then there were bracken wildernesses in which the does lurked with the young fawns, and a hollow, shallow and wide, with the turf greatly attacked by rabbits, and exceptionally threadbare, where a stricken oak, lightning-stripped, spread out its ghastly arms above contorted rotting branches and the mysterious skeletons of I should think five several deer. In the evening-time the woods behind this place of bones—they were woods of straight-growing, rather crowded trees and standing as it were a little aloof—became even under the warmest sunset grey and cold—and as if they waited....

And in the distant corner where the sand was, rose suddenly a steep little hill, surmounted by a wild and splendid group of pines, through which one looked across a vale of cornfields at an ancient town that became[Pg 17] strange and magical as the sun went down, so that I was held gazing at it, and afterwards had to flee the twilight across the windy spaces and under the dim and darkling trees. It is only now in the distant retrospect that I identify that far-off city of wonder, and luminous mist with the commonplace little town, through whose narrow streets we drove to the railway station. But, of course, that is what it must have been.

There are persons to be found mixed up in those childish memories,—Lady Ladislaw, tall and gracious, in dresses of floating blue or grey, or thin, subtly folding, flowering stuffs, Philip and his sister, Guy, the old butler, a multitude of fainter figures long become nameless and featureless; they are far less vivid in my memory than the fine solitudes of the Park itself—and the dreams I had there.

I wonder if you dream as I dreamt. I wonder whether indeed I dreamt as now I think I did. Have I, in these latter years, given form and substance and a name to things as vague in themselves as the urgencies of instinct? Did I really go into those woods and waving green places as one keeps a tryst, expectant of a fellowship more free and delicate and delightful than any I knew. Did I know in those days of nymphs and dryads and fauns and all those happy soulless beings with which the desire of man's heart has animated the wilderness. Once certainly I crawled slowly through the tall bracken and at last lay still for an interminable while, convinced that so I should see

those shadows populous with fairies, with green little people. How patiently I lay! But the stems creaked and stirred, and my heart would keep on beating like a drum in my throat.

It is incredible that once a furry whispering half-human[Pg 18] creature with bright brown eyes came and for a time played with me near where the tall ferns foam in a broad torrent from between the big chestnuts down to the upper mere. That must have been real dreaming, and yet now, with all my sanities and scepticisms, I could half believe it real.

§ 2

You become reserved. Perhaps not exceptionally so, but as all children become reserved. Already you understand that your heart is very preciously your own. You keep it from me and everyone, so much so, so justifiably so, that when by virtue of our kindred and all that we have in common I get sudden glimpses right into your depths, there mixes with the swift spasm of love I feel, a dread—lest you should catch me, as it were, spying into you and that one of us, I know not which, should feel ashamed.

Every child passes into this secret stage; it closes in from its first frankness; it carries off the growing jewel of its consciousness to hide from all mankind.... I think I can see why this should be so, but I cannot tell why in so many cases no jewel is given back again at last, alight, ripened, wonderful, glowing with the deep fires of experience. I think that is what ought to happen; it is what does happen now with true poets and true artists. Someday I think it will be the life of all normal human souls. But usually it does not seem to happen at all. Children pass out of a stage—open, beautiful, exquisitely simple—into silences and discretions beneath an imposed and artificial life. And they are lost. Out of the finished,[Pg 19] careful, watchful, restrained and limited man or woman, no child emerges again....

I remember very distinctly how I myself came by imperceptible increments of reservation to withdraw those early delicacies of judgments, those original and personal standards and appreciations, from sight and expression. I can recall specific moments when I perceive now that my little childish figure stood, as it were, obstinately and with a sense of novelty in a doorway denying the self within.

It was partly, I think, a simple instinct that drew that curtain of silences and concealments, it was much more a realization that I had no power of lucidity to save the words and deeds I sought to make expressive from complete misunderstanding. But most of all it was the perception that I was under training and compulsion for ends that were all askew and irrelevant to the trend of my imaginations, the quality of my

dreams. There was around me something unfriendly to this inner world—something very ready to pass from unfriendliness to acute hostility; and if, indeed, I succeeded in giving anything of my inner self to others, it was only, as people put it, to give myself away.

My nurses, my governess, my tutor, my father, the servants about me, seemed all bent upon imposing an artificial personality upon me. Only in a very limited sense did they want me. What they wanted was something that could be made out of me by extensive suppressions and additions. They ignored the fact that I had been born with a shape of my own; they were resolved I should be pressed into a mould and cast.

It was not that they wanted outer conformity to [Pg 20]certain needs and standards—that, I think, would be a reasonable thing enough to demand—but they wanted me to subdue my most private thoughts to their ideals. My nurses and my governesses would rate me for my very feelings, would clamor for gratitude and reproach me bitterly for betraying that I did not at some particular moment—love.

(Only yesterday I heard Mademoiselle Potin doing that very same thing to you. "It is that you do not care, Master Steve. It is that you do not care. You do not want to care.")

They went too far in that invasion of my personal life, but I perceive quite clearly the present need for most of the process of moulding and subjugation that children must undergo. Human society is a new thing upon the earth, an invention of the last ten thousand years. Man is a creature as yet not freely and instinctively gregarious; in his more primordial state he must have been an animal of very small groups and limited associations, an animal rather self-centred and fierce, and he is still but imperfectly adapted either morally or physically to the wider social life his crowding interactions force upon him. He still learns speech and computation and civility and all the devices of this artificially extended and continually broadening tribal life with an extreme reluctance. He has to be shaped in the interests of the species, I admit, to the newer conditions; the growing social order must be protected from the keen edge of his still savage individuality, and he must be trained in his own interests to save himself from the destruction of impossible revolts. But how clumsily is the thing done! How we are caught and jammed and pressed and crippled[Pg 21] into citizenship! How excessive and crushing is the suppression, and how inadequate!

Every child feels that, even if every child does not clearly know it. Every child presently begins to hide itself from the confused tyrannies of the social process, from the searching inspections and injunctions and interferences of parent and priest and teacher.

"I have got to be *so*," we all say deep down in ourselves and more or less distinctly according to the lucidities of our minds; "but in my heart I am *this*."

And in the outcome we all try to seem at least to be *so*, while an ineffectual rebel struggles passionately, like a beast caught in a trap, for ends altogether more deep and dangerous, for the rose and the star and the wildfire,—for beauty and beautiful things. These, we all know in our darkly vital recesses, are the real needs of life, the obediences imposed upon us by our crude necessities and jostling proximities, mere incidentals on our way to those profounder purposes....

And when I write thus of our selves I mean our bodies quite as much as our imaginations; the two sides of us are covered up alike and put alike into disguises and unnatural shapes, we are taught and forced to hide them for the same reasons, from a fear of ourselves and a fear of the people about us. The sense of beauty, the sense of one's body, the freedom of thought and of desire and the wonder of life, are all interwoven strands. I remember that in the Park of Burnmore one great craving I had was to take off my clothes there altogether, and bathe in a clear place among loosestrife and meadowsweet, and afterwards lie wet and naked upon the soft green turf with the sun shining upon me. But I thought also that that was a very[Pg 22] wicked and shameful craving to have, and I never dared give way to it.

§ 3

As I think of myself and all these glowing secrecies and hidden fancies within, walking along beside old Siddons, and half listening to his instructive discourse, I see myself as though I was an image of all humanity under tuition for the social life.

I write "old Siddons," for so he seemed to me then. In truth he was scarcely a dozen years older than I, and the other day when I exchanged salutations with his gaitered presence in the Haymarket, on his way I suppose to the Athenæum, it struck me that he it is who is now the younger man. But at Burnmore he was eighteen inches or more above my head and all the way of school and university beyond me; full of the world they had fitted him for and eager to impart its doctrines. He went along in his tweeds that were studiously untidy, a Norfolk jacket of one clerically-greyish stuff and trousers of another somewhat lighter pattern, in thick boots, the collar of his calling, and a broad-minded hat, bearing his face heavenward as he talked, and not so much aware of me as appreciating the things he was saying. And sometimes he was manifestly talking to himself and airing his outlook. He carried a walking-stick, a manly, homely, knobby, donnish walking-stick.

He forced the pace a little, for his legs were long and he had acquired the habit of strenuous pedestrianism at Oxford with all the other things; he obliged me to go at a kind of skipping trot, and he preferred the high roads[Pg 23] towards Wickenham for our walks, because they were flatter and there was little traffic upon them in those days before the motor car, and we could keep abreast and go on talking uninterruptedly. That is to say, he could.

What talk it was!

Of all the virtues that the young should have. He spoke of courage and how splendid it was to accustom oneself not even to feel fear; of truth, and difficult cases when one might conceivably injure others by telling the truth and so perhaps, perhaps qualify the rigor of one's integrity, but how one should never hesitate to injure one's own self in that matter. Then in another phase he talked of belief—and the disagreeableness of dissenters. But here, I remember, there was a discussion. I have forgotten how I put the thing, but in some boyish phrasing or other I must have thrown out the idea that thought is free and beliefs uncontrollable. What of conformity, if the truth was that you doubted? "Not if you make an effort," I remember him saying, "not if you make an effort. I have had my struggles. But if you say firmly to yourself, the Church teaches this. If you dismiss mere carping and say that."

"But suppose you can't," I must have urged.

"You can if you will," he said with a note near enthusiasm. "I have been through all that. I did it. I dismissed doubts. I wouldn't listen. I felt, *This won't do. All this leads nowhere*."

And he it was told me the classic story of that presumptuous schoolboy who went to his Head Master and declared himself an atheist. There were no dialectics but a prompt horse-whipping. "In after life," said Mr. Siddons, with unctuous gratification, "he came to[Pg 24] recognize that thrashing as the very best thing that had ever happened to him. The kindest thing."

"Yes," urged the obstinate rebel within me, "but—the Truth, that fearless insistence on the Truth!"

I could, however, find nothing effective to say aloud, and Siddons prevailed over me. That story made my blood boil, it filled me with an anticipatory hatred of and hostility to Head Masters, and at the same time there was something in it, brutally truer to the conditions of human association than any argument.

I do not remember the various steps by which I came to be discussing doubts so early in my life. I could not have been much more than thirteen when that conversation occurred. I am I think perhaps exceptionally unconscious about myself. I find I can recall the sayings and even the gestures of other people far more distinctly than the things I said and did myself. Even my dreams and imaginings are more active than my positive thoughts and proceedings. But I was no doubt very much stimulated by the literature lying about my home and the gleans and echoes of controversies that played like summer lightning round and about the horizons of my world. Over my head and after I had gone to bed, my father and Siddons were talking, my cousin was listening with strained apprehensions, there was a new spirit in my father's sermons; it was the storm of Huxley-Darwin controversies that had at last reached Burnmore. I was an intelligent little listener, an eager reader of anything that came to hand, Mr. Siddons had a disposition to fight his battles over again in his monologues to me; and after all at thirteen one isn't a baby. The small boy of the lower classes used in those days to start life for himself long before then.

[Pg 25]

How dramatic a phase it was in the history of the human mind when science suddenly came into the vicarages, into all the studies and quiet places that had been the fastnesses of conviction and our ideals, and denied, with all the power of evidence it had been accumulating for so long, and so obscurely and inaggressively, with fossils and strata, with embryology and comparative anatomy, the doctrine of the historical Fall and all the current scheme of orthodoxy that was based on that! What a quickening shock it must have been in countless thousands of educated lives! And my father after a toughly honest resistance was won over to Darwinism, the idea of Evolution got hold of him, the idea that life itself was intolerant of vain repetitions; and he had had to "consider his position" in the church. To him as to innumerable other honest, middle-aged and comfortable men, Darwinism came as a dreadful invitation to go out into the wilderness. Over my head and just out of range of my ears he was debating that issue with Siddons as a foil and my cousin as a horrified antagonist. Slowly he was developing his conception of compromise. And meanwhile he wasn't going out into the wilderness at all, but punctually to and fro, along the edge of the lawn by the bed of hollyhocks and through the little green door in the garden wall, and across the corner of the churchyard to the vestry and the perennial services and sacraments of the church.

But he never talked to me privately of religion. He left that for my cousin and Mr. Siddons to do or not to do as they felt disposed, and in those silences of his I may have found another confirmation of my growing feeling that religion was from one

point of view a thing[Pg 26] somehow remote and unreal, claiming unjustifiable interventions in the detailed conduct of my life, and from another a peculiar concern of my father's and Mr. Siddons', to which they went—through the vestry, changing into strange garments on the way.

§ 4

I do not want to leave the impression which my last section may have conveyed that at the age of thirteen or thereabouts I walked about with Mr. Siddons discussing doubt in a candid and intelligent manner and maintaining theological positions. That particular conversation, you must imagine with Mr. Siddons somewhat monologuing, addressing himself not only to my present self, but with an unaccustomed valiance to my absent father. What I may have said or not said, whether I did indeed dispute or merely and by a kind of accident implied objections, I have altogether forgotten long ago.

A boy far more than a man is mentally a discontinuous being. The drifting chaos of his mind makes its experimental beginnings at a hundred different points and in a hundred different spirits and directions; here he flashes into a concrete realization, here into a conviction unconsciously incompatible; here is something originally conceived, here something uncritically accepted. I know that I criticized Mr. Siddons quite acutely, and disbelieved in him. I know also that I accepted all sorts of suggestions from him quite unhesitatingly and that I did my utmost to satisfy his standards and realize his ideals of me.

[Pg 27]

Like an outer casing to that primordial creature of senses and dreams which came to the surface in the solitudes of the Park was my Siddonsesque self, a high-minded and clean and brave English boy, conscientiously loyal to queen and country, athletic and a good sportsman and acutely alive to good and bad "form." Mr. Siddons made me aware of my clothed self as a visible object, I surveyed my garmented being in mirrors and was trained to feel the "awfulness" of various other small boys who appeared transitorily in the smaller Park when Lady Ladislaw extended her wide hospitality to certain benevolent London associations. Their ill-fitting clothing, their undisciplined outcries, their slouching, their bad throwing and defective aspirates were made matters for detestation in my plastic mind. Those things, I was assured, placed them outside the pale of any common humanity.

"Very unfortunate and all that," said Mr. Siddons, "and uncommonly good of Lady Ladislaw to have them down. But dirty little cads, Stephen, dirty little cads; so don't go near 'em if you can help it."

They played an indecent sort of cricket with coats instead of a wicket!

Mr. Siddons was very grave about games and the strict ritual and proper apparatus for games. He believed that Waterloo was won by the indirect influence of public school cricket—disregarding many other contributory factors. We did not play very much, but we "practised" sedulously at a net in the paddock with the gardener and the doctor's almost grown-up sons. I thought missing a possible catch was an impropriety. I studiously maintained the correct attitude, alert and[Pg 28] elastic, while I was fielding. Moreover I had a shameful secret, that I did not really know where a ball ought to pitch. I wasn't clear about it and I did not dare to ask. Also until I was nearly thirteen I couldn't bowl overarm. Such is the enduring force of early suggestion, my dear son, that I feel a faint twinge of shame as I set this down for your humiliated eyes. But so it was. May you be more precocious!

Then I was induced to believe that I really liked hunting and killing things. In the depths of my being I was a gentle and primitive savage towards animals; I believed they were as subtle and wise as myself and full of a magic of their own, but Mr. Siddons nevertheless got me out into the south Warren, where I had often watched the rabbits setting their silly cock-eared sentinels and lolloping out to feed about sundown, and beguiled me into shooting a furry little fellow-creature—I can still see its eyelid quiver as it died—and carrying it home in triumph. On another occasion I remember I was worked up into a ferocious excitement about the rats in the old barn. We went ratting, just as though I was Tom Brown or Harry East or any other of the beastly little models of cant and cruelty we English boys were trained to imitate. It was great sport. It was a tremendous spree. The distracted movements, the scampering and pawing of the little pink forefeet of one squawking little fugitive, that I hit with a stick and then beat to a shapeless bag of fur, haunted my dreams for years, and then I saw the bowels of another still living victim that had been torn open by one of the terriers, and abruptly I fled out into the yard and was violently sick; the best of the fun was over so far as I was concerned.

[Pg 29]

My cousin saved me from the uttermost shame of my failure by saying that I had been excited too soon after my dinner....

And also I collected stamps and birds' eggs.

Mr. Siddons hypnotized me into believing that I really wanted these things; he gave me an egg-cabinet for a birthday present and told me exemplary stories of the wonderful collections other boys had made. My own natural disposition to watch nests and

establish heaven knows what friendly intimacy with the birds—perhaps I dreamt their mother might let me help to feed the young ones—gave place to a feverish artful hunting, a clutch, and then, detestable process, the blowing of the egg. Of course we were very humane; we never took the nest, but just frightened off the sitting bird and grabbed a warm egg or so. And the poor perforated, rather damaged little egg-shells accumulated in the drawers, against the wished-for but never actually realized day of glory when we should meet another collector who wouldn't have—something that we had. So far as it was for anything and not mere imbecile imitativeness, it was for that.

And writing thus of eggs reminds me that I got into a row with Mr. Siddons for cruelty.

I discovered there was the nest of a little tit in a hole between two stones in the rock bank that bordered the lawn. I found it out when I was sitting on the garden seat near by, learning Latin irregular verbs. I saw the minute preposterous round birds going and coming, and I found something so absurdly amiable and confiding about them—they sat balancing and oscillating on a standard rose and cheeped at me to go and then dived nestward and gave away their secret out of sheer [Pg 30]impatience—that I could not bring myself to explore further, and kept the matter altogether secret from the enthusiasm of Mr. Siddons. And in a few days there were no more eggs and I could hear the hungry little nestlings making the minutest of fairy hullabaloos, the very finest spun silk of sound; a tremendous traffic in victual began and I was the trusted friend of the family.

Then one morning I was filled with amazement and anguish. There was a rock torn down and lying in the path; a paw had gone up to that little warm place. Across the gravel, shreds of the nest and a wisp or so of down were scattered. I could imagine the brief horrors of that night attack. I started off, picking up stones as I went, to murder that sandy devil, the stable cat. I got her once—alas! that I am still glad to think of it—and just missed her as she flashed, a ginger streak, through the gate into the paddock.

"*Now* Steve! Now!" came Mr. Siddons' voice behind me....

How can one explain things of that sort to a man like Siddons? I took my lecture on the Utter Caddishness of Wanton Cruelty in a black rebellious silence. The affair and my own emotions were not only far beyond my powers of explanation, but far beyond my power of understanding. Just then my soul was in shapeless and aimless revolt against something greater and higher and deeper and darker than Siddons, and his reproaches were no more than the chattering of a squirrel while a storm uproots great trees. I wanted to kill the cat. I wanted to kill whatever had made that cat.

[Pg 31]

§ 5

Mr. Siddons it was who first planted the conception of Life as a Career in my mind.

In those talks that did so much towards shaping me into the likeness of a modest, reserved, sporting, seemly, clean and brave, patriotic and decently slangy young Englishman, he was constantly reverting to that view of existence. He spoke of failures and successes, talked of statesmen and administrators, peerages and Westminster Abbey. "Nelson," he said, "was once a clergyman's son like you."

"England has been made by the sons of the clergy."

He talked of the things that led to failure and the things that had made men prominent and famous.

"Discursiveness ruins a man," I remember him saying. "Choose your goal and press to it."

"Never do anything needlessly odd. It's a sort of impertinence to all the endless leaders of the past who created our traditions. Do not commit yourself hastily to opinions, but once you have done so, stick to them. The world would far rather have a firm man wrong, than a weak man hesitatingly right. Stick to them."

"One has to remember," I recall him meditating, far over my head with his face upturned, "that Institutions are more important than Views. Very often one adopts a View only to express one's belief in an Institution.... Men can do with almost all sorts of Views, but only with certain Institutions. All this Doubt doesn't touch a truth like that. One does not refuse to live in a house because of the old symbols one finds upon the door.... If they *are* old symbols...."

[Pg 32]

Out of such private contemplations he would descend suddenly upon me.

"What are *you* going to do with your life, Steve?" he would ask.

"There is no happiness in life without some form of service. Where do you mean to serve? With your bent for science and natural history, it wouldn't be difficult for you to get into the I.C.S. I doubt if you'd do anything at the law; it's a rough game, Steve, though the prizes are big. Big prizes the lawyers get. I've known a man in the Privy Council under forty—and that without anything much in the way of a family.... But always one must concentrate. The one thing England will not stand is a loafer, a wool-gatherer, a man who goes about musing and half-awake. It's our energy. We're western. It's that has made us all we are."

I knew whither that pointed. Never so far as I can remember did Mr. Siddons criticize either myself or my father directly, but I understood with the utmost clearness that he found my father indolent and hesitating, and myself more than a little bit of a mollycoddle, and in urgent need of pulling together.

§ 6

Harbury went on with that process of suppressing, encrusting, hardening, and bracing-up which Mr. Siddons had begun. For a time I pulled myself together very thoroughly. I am not ungrateful nor unfaithful to Harbury; in your turn you will go there, you will have to live your life in this British world of ours and you must learn its language and manners, acquire its reserves and[Pg 33] develop the approved toughness and patterning of cuticle. Afterwards if you please you may quarrel with it. But don't when the time comes quarrel with the present conditions of human association and think it is only with Harbury you quarrel. What man has become and may become beneath the masks and impositions of civilization, in his intimate texture and in the depths of his being, I begin now in my middle age to appreciate. No longer is he an instinctive savage but a creature of almost incredible variability and wonderful new possibilities. Marvels undreamt of, power still inconceivable, an empire beyond the uttermost stars; such is man's inheritance. But for the present, until we get a mastery of those vague and mighty intimations at once so perplexing and so reassuring, if we are to live at all in the multitudinousness of human society we must submit to some scheme of clumsy compromises and conventions or other,—and for us Strattons the Harbury system is the most convenient. You will have to go to the old school.

I went to Rendle's. I just missed getting into college; I was two places below the lowest successful boy. I was Maxton's fag to begin with, and my chief chum was Raymond, who is your friend also, and who comes so often to this house. I preferred water to land, boats to cricket, because of that difficulty about pitch I have already mentioned. But I was no great sportsman. Raymond and I shared a boat, and spent most of the time we gave to it under the big trees near Dartpool Lock, reading or talking. We would pull up to Sandy Hall perhaps once a week. I never rowed in any of the eights, though I was urged to do so. I swam fairly well, and got my colors on the strength of my diving.

[Pg 34]

On the whole I found Harbury a satisfactory and amusing place, I was neither bullied nor do I think I greatly bullied, and of all that furtive and puerile lasciviousness of which one hears so many hints nowadays—excitable people talk of it as though it was the most monstrous and singular of vices instead of a slightly debasing but almost

unavoidable and very obvious result of heaping boys together under the inefficient control of a timid pretentious class of men—of such uncleanness as I say, scarcely more than a glimpse and a whisper and a vague tentative talk or so reached me. Little more will reach you, for that kind of thing, like the hells of Swedenborg, finds its own.

I had already developed my growing instinct for observance to a very considerable extent under Siddons, and at Harbury I remember myself, and people remember me, as an almost stiffly correct youth. I was pretty good at most of the work, and exceptionally so at history, geology, and the biological side of natural science. I had to restrain my interest in these latter subjects lest I should appear to be a "swat," and a modern-side swat at that. I was early in the sixth, and rather a favorite with old Latimer. He incited me to exercise what he called a wholesome influence on the younger boys, and I succeeded in doing this fairly well without any gross interventions. I implied rather than professed soundly orthodox views about things in general, and I was extremely careful to tilt my straw hat forward over my nose so as just not to expose the crown of my head behind, and to turn up my trousers with exactly that width of margin which the judgment of my fellow-creatures had decided was correct. My socks were spirited without [Pg 35]being vulgar, and the ties I wore were tied with a studious avoidance of either slovenliness or priggish neatness. I wrote two articles in the Harburonian, became something of a debater in the Literacy and Political, conducted many long conversations with my senior contemporaries upon religion, politics, sport and social life, and concealed my inmost thoughts from every human being. Indeed, so effective had been the training of Harbury and Mr. Siddons, that I think at that time I came very near concealing them from myself. I could suppress wonder, I could pass by beauty as if I did not see it, almost I think I did not see it for a time, and yet I remember it in those years too—a hundred beautiful things.

Harbury itself is a very beautiful place. The country about it has all the charm of river scenery in a settled and ancient land, and the great castle and piled town of Wetmore, cliffs of battlemented grey wall rising above a dense cluster of red roofs, form the background to innumerable gracious prospects of great stream-fed trees, level meadows of buttercups, sweeping curves of osier and rush-rimmed river, the playing fields and the sedgy, lily-spangled levels of Avonlea. The college itself is mostly late Tudor and Stuart brickwork, very ripe and mellow now, but the great grey chapel with its glorious east window floats over the whole like a voice singing in the evening. And the evening cloudscapes of Harbury are a perpetual succession of glorious effects, now serene, now mysteriously threatening and profound, now towering to incredible heights, now revealing undreamt-of distances of luminous color. Assuredly I must have delighted in all those aspects, or why should I remember them so well? But I

recall, I mean, no confessed recognition of[Pg 36] them; no deliberate going-out of my spirit, open and unashamed, to such things.

I suppose one's early adolescence is necessarily the period of maximum shyness in one's life. Even to Raymond I attempted no extremities of confidence. Even to myself I tried to be the thing that was expected of me. I professed a modest desire for temperate and tolerable achievement in life, though deep in my lost depths I wanted passionately to excel; I worked hard, much harder than I allowed to appear, and I said I did it for the credit of the school; I affected a dignified loyalty to queen and country and church; I pretended a stoical disdain for appetites and delights and all the arts, though now and then a chance fragment of poetry would light me like a fire, or a lovely picture stir unwonted urgencies, though visions of delight haunted the shadows of my imagination and did not always fly when I regarded them. But on the other hand I affected an interest in games that I was far from feeling. Of some boys I was violently jealous, and this also I masked beneath a generous appreciation. Certain popularities I applauded while I doubted. Whatever my intimate motives I became less and less disposed to obey them until I had translated them into a plausible rendering of the accepted code. If I could not so translate them I found it wise to control them. When I wanted urgently one summer to wander by night over the hills towards Kestering and lie upon heather and look up at the stars and wonder about them, I cast about and at last hit upon the well-known and approved sport of treacling for moths, as a cloak for so strange an indulgence.

I must have known even then what a mask and front[Pg 37] I was, because I knew quite well how things were with other people. I listened politely and respected and understood the admirable explanations of my friends. When some fellow got a scholarship unexpectedly and declared it was rotten bad luck on the other chap, seeing the papers he had done, and doubted whether he shouldn't resign, I had an intuitive knowledge that he wouldn't resign, and I do not remember any time in my career as the respectful listener to Mr. Siddons' aspirations for service and devotion, when I did not perceive quite clearly his undeviating eye upon a bishopric. He thought of gaiters though he talked of wings.

How firmly the bonds of an old relationship can hold one! I remember when a few years ago he reached that toiled-for goal, I wrote in a tone of gratified surprise that in this blatant age, such disinterested effort as his should receive even so belated a recognition. Yet what else was there for me to write? We all have our Siddonses, with whom there are no alternatives but insincerity or a disproportionate destructiveness. I am still largely Siddonsized, little son, and so, I fear, you will have to be.

§ 7

The clue to all the perplexities of law and custom lies in this, that human association is an artificiality. We do not run together naturally and easily as grazing deer do or feeding starlings or a shoal of fish. We are a sort of creature which is only resuming association after a long heredity of extreme separation. We are beings strongly individualized, we are dominated by that passion which is[Pg 38] no more and no less than individuality in action,—jealousy. Jealousy is a fierce insistence on ourselves, an instinctive intolerance of our fellow-creatures, ranging between an insatiable aggression as its buoyant phase and a savage defensiveness when it is touched by fear. In our expansive moments we want to dominate and control everyone and destroy every unlikeness to ourselves; in our recessive phases our homes are our castles and we want to be let alone.

Now all law, all social order, all custom, is a patch-up and a concession to this separating passion of self-insistence. It is an evasion of conflict and social death. Human society is as yet only a truce and not an alliance.

When you understand that, you will begin to understand a thousand perplexing things in legislation and social life. You will understand the necessity of all those restrictions that are called "conventionality," and the inevitableness of the general hostility to singularity. To be exceptional is to assert a difference, to disregard the banked-up forces of jealousy and break the essential conditions of the social contract. It invites either resentment or aggression. So we all wear much the same clothing, affect modesty, use the same phrases, respect one another's "rights," and pretend a greater disinterestedness than we feel....

You have to face this reality as you must face all reality. This is the reality of laws and government; this is the reality of customs and institutions; *a convention between jealousies*. This is reality, just as the cat's way with the nestlings was reality, and the squealing rat one smashed in a paroxysm of cruelty and disgust in the barn.

[Pg 39]

But it isn't the only reality. Equally real is the passionate revolt of my heart against cruelty, and the deep fluctuating impulse not to pretend, to set aside fear and jealousy, to come nakedly out of the compromises and secretive methods of every-day living into the light, into a wide impersonal love, into a new way of living for mankind....

[Pg 40]

CHAPTER THE THIRD

Intentions and the Lady Mary Christian

§ 1

I know that before the end of my Harbury days I was already dreaming of a Career, of some great and conspicuous usefulness in the world. That has always haunted my mind and haunts it now. I may be cured perhaps of the large and showy anticipations of youth, I may have learnt to drop the "great and conspicuous," but still I find it necessary to believe that I matter, that I play a part no one else can play in a progress, in a universal scheme moving towards triumphant ends.

Almost wholly I think I was dreaming of public service in those days. The Harbury tradition pointed steadfastly towards the state, and all my world was bare of allurements to any other type of ambition. Success in art or literature did not appeal to us, and a Harbury boy would as soon think of being a great tinker as a great philosopher. Science we called "stinks"; our three science masters were *ex officio* ridiculous and the practical laboratory a refuge for oddities. But a good half of our fathers at least were peers or members of parliament, and our sense of politics was close and keen. History, and particularly history as it came up through the [Pg 41]eighteenth century to our own times, supplied us with a gallery of intimate models, our great uncles and grandfathers and ancestors at large figured abundantly in the story and furnished the pattern to which we cut our anticipations of life. It was a season of Imperialism, the picturesque Imperialism of the earlier Kipling phase, and we were all of us enthusiasts for the Empire. It was the empire of the White Man's Burthen in those days; the sordid anti-climax of the Tariff Reform Movement was still some years ahead of us. It was easier for us at Harbury to believe then than it has become since, in our own racial and national and class supremacy. We were the Anglo-Saxons, the elect of the earth, leading the world in social organization, in science and economic method. In India and the east more particularly we were the apostles of even-handed justice, relentless veracity, personal cleanliness, and modern efficiency. In a spirit of adventurous benevolence we were spreading those blessings over a reluctant and occasionally recalcitrant world of people for the most part "colored." Our success in this had aroused the bitter envy and rivalry of various continental nations, and particularly of France, Russia, and Germany. But France had been diverted to North Africa, Russia to Eastern Asia, and Germany was already the most considered antagonist in our path towards an empire over the world.

This was the spacious and by no means ignoble project of the later nineties. Most of us Harbury boys, trained as I had been trained to be uncritical, saw the national outlook in those terms. We knew little or nothing, until the fierce wranglings of the Free Traders and Tariff Reformers a few years later brought it home to us, of the [Pg 42]commercial, financial and squalid side of our relations with the vast congeries of exploited new territories and subordinated and subjugated populations. We knew nothing of the social conditions of the mass of people in our own country. We were blankly ignorant of economics. We knew nothing of that process of expropriation and the exploitation of labor which is giving the world the Servile State. The very phrase was twenty years ahead of us. We believed that an Englishman was a better thing in every way than any other sort of man, that English literature, science and philosophy were a shining and unapproachable light to all other peoples, that our soldiers were better than all other soldiers and our sailors than all other sailors. Such civilization and enterprise as existed in Germany for instance we regarded as a shadow, an envious shadow, following our own; it was still generally believed in those days that German trade was concerned entirely with the dishonest imitation of our unapproachable English goods. And as for the United States, well, the United States though blessed with a strain of English blood, were nevertheless "out of it," marooned in a continent of their own and—we had to admit it—corrupt.

Given such ignorance, you know, it wasn't by any means ignoble to be patriotic, to dream of this propagandist Empire of ours spreading its great peace and culture, its virtue and its amazing and unprecedented honesty,—its honesty!—round the world.

§ 2

When I look and try to recover those early intentions of mine I am astonished at the way in which I[Pg 43] took them ready-made from the world immediately about me. In some way I seem to have stopped looking—if ever I had begun looking—at the heights and depths above and below that immediate life. I seem to have regarded these profounder realities no more during this phase of concentration than a cow in a field regards the sky. My father's vestments, the Burnmore altar, the Harbury pulpit and Mr. Siddons, stood between me and the idea of God, so that it needed years and much bitter disillusionment before I discovered my need of it. And I was as wanting in subtlety as in depth. We did no logic nor philosophy at Harbury, and at Oxford it was not so much thought we came to deal with as a mistranslation and vulgarization of ancient and alien exercises in thinking. There is no such effective serum against philosophy as the scholarly decoction of a dead philosopher. The philosophical teaching of Oxford at the end of the last century was not so much teaching as a protective inoculation. The stuff was administered with a mysterious gilding of Greek

and reverence, old Hegel's monstrous web was the ultimate modernity, and Plato, that intellectual journalist-artist, that bright, restless experimentalist in ideas, was as it were the God of Wisdom, only a little less omniscient (and on the whole more of a scholar and a gentleman) than the God of fact....

So I fell back upon the empire in my first attempts to unify my life. I would serve the empire. That should be my total significance. There was a Roman touch, I perceive, in this devotion. Just how or where I should serve the empire I had not as yet determined. At times I thought of the civil service, in my more ambitious moments I turned my thoughts to politics. But[Pg 44] it was doubtful whether my private expectations made the last a reasonable possibility.

I would serve the empire.

§ 3

And all the while that the first attempts to consolidate, to gather one's life together into a purpose and a plan of campaign, are going on upon the field of the young man's life, there come and go and come again in the sky above him the threatening clouds, the ethereal cirrus, the red dawns and glowing afternoons of that passion of love which is the source and renewal of being. There are times when that solicitude matters no more than a spring-time sky to a runner who wins towards the post, there are times when its passionate urgency dominates every fact in his world.

§ 4

One must have children and love them passionately before one realizes the deep indignity of accident in life. It is not that I mind so much when unexpected and disconcerting things happen to you or your sisters, but that I mind before they happen. My dreams and anticipations of your lives are all marred by my sense of the huge importance mere chance encounters and incalculable necessities will play in them. And in friendship and still more here, in this central business of love, accident rules it seems to me almost altogether. What personalities you will encounter in life, and have for a chief interest in life, is nearly as much a matter of chance as the drift of a grain[Pg 45] of pollen in the pine forest. And once the light hazard has blown it has blown, never to drive again. In other schoolrooms and nurseries, in slum living-rooms perhaps or workhouse wards or palaces, round the other side of the earth, in Canada or Russia or China, other little creatures are trying their small limbs, clutching at things about them with infantile hands, who someday will come into your life with a power and magic monstrous and irrational and irresistible. They will break the limits of your concentrating self, call you out to the service of beauty and the service of the

race, sound you to your highest and your lowest, give you your chance to be godlike or filthy, divine or utterly ignoble, react together with you upon the very core and essence of your being. These unknowns are the substance of your fate. You will in extreme intimacy love them, hate them, serve them, struggle with them, and in that interaction the vital force in you and the substance of your days will be spent.

And who they may chance to be and their peculiar quality and effect is haphazard, utterly beyond designing.

Law and custom conspire with the natural circumstances of man to exaggerate every consequence of this accumulating accident, and make it definite and fatal....

I find it quite impossible now to recall the steps and stages by which this power of sex invaded my life. It seems to me now that it began very much as a gale begins, in catspaws upon the water and little rustlings among the leaves, and then stillness and then a distant soughing again and a pause, and then a wider and longer disturbance and so more and more, with a gathering continuity, until at last the stars were hidden, the heavens were hidden; all the heights and depths of life were obscured by stormy[Pg 46] impulses and passionate desires. I suppose that quite at the first there were simple curiosities; no doubt they were vivid at the time but they have left scarcely a trace; there were vague first intimations of a peculiar excitement. I do remember more distinctly phases when there was a going-out from myself towards these things, these interests, and then a reaction of shame and concealment.

And these memories were mixed up with others not sexual at all, and particularly with the perception of beauty in things inanimate, with lights seen at twilight and the tender mysteriousness of the dusk and the confused disturbing scents of flowers in the evening and the enigmatical serene animation of stars in the summer sky....

I think perhaps that my boyhood was exceptionally free from vulgarizing influences in this direction. There were few novels in my father's house and I neither saw nor read any plays until I was near manhood, so that I thought naturally about love and not rather artificially round and about love as so many imaginative young people are trained to do. I fell in love once or twice while I was still quite a boy. These earliest experiences rarely got beyond a sort of dumb awe, a vague, vast, ineffectual desire for self-immolation. For a time I remember I worshipped Lady Ladislaw with all my being. Then I talked to a girl in a train—I forget upon what journey—but I remember very vividly her quick color and a certain roguish smile. I spread my adoration at her feet, fresh and frank. I wanted to write to her. Indeed I wanted to devote all my being to her. I begged hard, but there was someone called Auntie who had to be considered, an Atropos for that thread of romance.

Then there was a photograph in my father's study of[Pg 47] the Delphic Sibyl from the Sistine Chapel, that for a time held my heart, and—Yes, there was a girl in a tobacconist's shop in the Harbury High Street. Drawn by an irresistible impulse I used to go and buy cigarettes—and sometimes converse about the weather. But afterwards in solitude I would meditate tremendous conversations and encounters with her. The cigarettes increased the natural melancholy of my state and led to a reproof from old Henson. Almost always I suppose there is that girl in the tobacconist's shop....

I believe if I made an effort I could disinter some dozens of such memories, more and more faded until the marginal ones would be featureless and all but altogether effaced. As I look back at it now I am struck by an absurd image; it is as if a fish nibbled at this bait and then at that.

Given but the slightest aid from accidental circumstances and any of those slight attractions might have become a power to deflect all my life.

The day of decision arrived when, the Lady Mary Christian came smiling out of the sunshine to me into the pavilion at Burnmore. With that the phase of stirrings and intimations was over for ever in my life. All those other impressions went then to the dusty lumber room from which I now so slightingly disinter them.

§ 5

We five had all been playmates together. There were Lord Maxton, who was killed at Paardeberg while I was in Ladysmith, he was my senior by nearly a year, Philip, who is now Earl Ladislaw and who was about[Pg 48] eighteen months younger than I, Mary, my contemporary within eight days, and Guy, whom we regarded as a baby and who was called, apparently on account of some early linguistic efforts, "Brugglesmith." He did his best to avenge his juniority as time passed on by an enormous length of limb. I had more imagination than Maxton and was a good deal better read, so that Mary and I dominated most of the games of Indians and warfare and exploration in which we passed our long days together. When the Christians were at Burnmore, and they usually spent three or four months in the year there, I had a kind of standing invitation to be with them. Sometimes there would also be two Christian cousins to swell our party, and sometimes there would be a raid of the Fawney children with a detestable governess who was perpetually vociferating reproaches, but these latter were absent-minded, lax young persons, and we did not greatly love them.

It is curious how little I remember of Mary's childhood. All that has happened between us since lies between that and my present self like some luminous impenetrable mist. I know we liked each other, that I was taller than she was and thought her legs

unreasonably thin, and that once when I knelt by accident on a dead stick she had brought into an Indian camp we had made near the end of the west shrubbery, she flew at me in a sudden fury, smacked my face, scratched me and had to be suppressed, and was suppressed with extreme difficulty by the united manhood of us three elder boys. Then it was I noted first the blazing blueness of her eyes. She was light and very plucky, so that none of us cared to climb against her, and she was as difficult to hold as an[Pg 49] eel. But all these traits and characteristics vanished when she was transformed.

For what seems now a long space of time I had not seen her or any of the family except Philip; it was certainly a year or more, probably two; Maxton was at a crammer's and I think the others must have been in Canada with Lord Ladislaw. Then came some sort of estrangement between him and his wife, and she returned with Mary and Guy to Burnmore and stayed there all through the summer.

I was in a state of transition between the infinitely great and the infinitely little. I had just ceased to be that noble and potent being, that almost statesmanlike personage, a sixth form boy at Harbury, and I was going to be an Oxford undergraduate. Philip and I came down together by the same train from Harbury, I shared the Burnmore dog-cart and luggage cart, and he dropped me at the rectory. I was a long-limbed youngster of seventeen, as tall as I am now, and fair, so fair that I was still boyish-faced while most of my contemporaries and Philip (who favored his father) were at least smudgy with moustaches. With the head-master's valediction and the grave elder-brotherliness of old Henson, and the shrill cheers of a little crowd of juniors still echoing in my head, I very naturally came home in a mood of exalted gravity, and I can still remember pacing up and down the oblong lawn behind the rockery and the fig-tree wall with my father, talking of my outlook with all the tremendous *savoir faire* that was natural to my age, and noting with a secret gratification that our shoulders were now on a level. No doubt we were discussing Oxford and all that I was to do at Oxford; I don't remember a word of our speech[Pg 50] though I recall the exact tint of its color and the distinctive feeling of our measured equal paces in the sunshine....

I must have gone up to Burnmore House the following afternoon. I went up alone and I was sent out through the little door at the end of the big gallery into the garden. In those days Lady Ladislaw had made an Indian pavilion under the tall trees at the east end of the house, and here I found her with her cousin Helena Christian entertaining a mixture of people, a carriageful from Hampton End, the two elder Fawneys and a man in brown who had I think ridden over from Chestoxter Castle. Lady Ladislaw welcomed me with ample graciousness—as though I was a personage. "The children" she said were still at tennis, and as she spoke I saw Guy, grown nearly beyond

recognition and then a shining being in white, very straight and graceful, with a big soft hat and overshadowed eyes that smiled, come out from the hurried endearments of the sunflakes under the shadows of the great chestnuts, into the glow of summer light before the pavilion.

"Steve arrived!" she cried, and waved a welcoming racquet.

I do not remember what I said to her or what else she said or what anyone said. But I believe I could paint every detail of her effect. I know that when she came out of the brightness into the shadow of the pavilion it was like a regal condescension, and I know that she was wonderfully self-possessed and helpful with her mother's hospitalities, and that I marvelled I had never before perceived the subtler sweetness in the cadence of her voice. I seem also to remember a severe internal struggle for my self-possession, and that I had to recall my exalted [Pg 51]position in the sixth form to save myself from becoming tongue-tied and abashed and awkward and utterly shamed.

You see she had her hair up and very prettily dressed, and those aggressive lean legs of hers had vanished, and she was sheathed in muslin that showed her the most delicately slender and beautiful of young women. And she seemed so radiantly sure of herself!

After our first greeting I do not think I spoke to her or looked at her again throughout the meal. I took things that she handed me with an appearance of supreme indifference, was politely attentive to the elder Miss Fawney, and engaged with Lady Ladislaw and the horsey little man in brown in a discussion of the possibility of mechanical vehicles upon the high road. That was in the early nineties. We were all of opinion that it was impossible to make a sufficiently light engine for the purpose. Afterwards Mary confessed to me how she had been looking forward to our meeting, and how snubbed I had made her feel....

Then a little later than this meeting in the pavilion, though I am not clear now whether it was the same or some subsequent afternoon, we are walking in the sunken garden, and great clouds of purple clematis and some less lavish heliotrope-colored creeper, foam up against the ruddy stone balustrading. Just in front of us a fountain gushes out of a grotto of artificial stalagmite and bathes the pedestal of an absurd little statuette of the God of Love. We are talking almost easily. She looks sideways at my face, already with the quiet controlled watchfulness of a woman interested in a man, she smiles and she talks of flowers and sunshine, the Canadian winter—and with an abrupt transition, of old times we've had together[Pg 52] in the shrubbery and the wilderness of bracken out beyond. She seems tremendously grown-up and womanly

to me. I am talking my best, and glad, and in a manner scared at the thrill her newly discovered beauty gives me, and keeping up my dignity and coherence with an effort. My attention is constantly being distracted to note how prettily she moves, to wonder why it is I never noticed the sweet fall, the faint delightful whisper of a lisp in her voice before.

We agree about the flowers and the sunshine and the Canadian winter—about everything. "I think so often of those games we used to invent," she declares. "So do I," I say, "so do I." And then with a sudden boldness: "Once I broke a stick of yours, a rotten stick you thought a sound one. Do you remember?"

Then we laugh together and seem to approach across a painful, unnecessary distance that has separated us. It vanishes for ever. "I couldn't now," she says, "smack your face like that, Stephen."

That seems to me a brilliantly daring and delightful thing for her to say, and jolly of her to use my Christian name too! "I believe I scratched," she adds.

"You never scratched," I assert with warm conviction. "Never."

"I did," she insists and I deny. "You couldn't."

"We're growing up," she cries. "That's what has happened to us. We shall never fight again with our hands and feet, never—until death do us part."

"For better, or worse," I say, with a sense of wit and enterprise beyond all human precedent.

"For richer, or poorer," she cries, taking up my challenge with a lifting laugh in her voice.

[Pg 53]

And then to make it all nothing again, she exclaims at the white lilies that rise against masses of sweet bay along the further wall....

How plainly I can recall it all! How plainly and how brightly! As we came up the broad steps at the further end towards the tennis lawn, she turned suddenly upon me and with a novel assurance of command told me to stand still. "*There*," she said with a hand out and seemed to survey me with her chin up and her white neck at the level of my eyes. "Yes. A whole step," she estimated, "and more, taller than I. You will look down on me, Stephen, now, for all the rest of our days."

"I shall always stand," I answered, "a step or so below you."

"No," she said, "come up to the level. A girl should be smaller than a man. You are a man, Stephen—almost.... You must be near six feet.... Here's Guy with the box of balls."

She flitted about the tennis court before me, playing with Philip against Guy and myself. She punished some opening condescensions with a wicked vigor—and presently Guy and I were straining every nerve to save the set. She had a low close serve I remember that seemed perfectly straightforward and simple, and was very difficult to return.

§ 6

All that golden summer on the threshold of my manhood was filled by Mary. I loved her with the love of a boy and a man. Either I was with Mary or I was hoping and planning to be with Mary or I was full of some vivid[Pg 54] new impression of her or some enigmatical speech, some pregnant nothing, some glance or gesture engaged and perplexed my mind. In those days I slept the profound sweet sleep of youth, but whenever that deep flow broke towards the shallows, as I sank into it at night and came out of it at morning, I passed through dreams of Mary to and from a world of waking thought of her.

There must have been days of friendly intercourse when it seemed we talked nothings and wandered and meandered among subjects, but always we had our eyes on one another. And afterwards I would spend long hours in recalling and analyzing those nothings, questioning their nothingness, making out of things too submerged and impalpable for the rough drags of recollection, promises and indications. I would invent ingenious things to say, things pushing out suddenly from nothingness to extreme significance. I rehearsed a hundred declarations.

It was easy for us to be very much together. We were very free that summer and life was all leisure. Lady Ladislaw was busied with her own concerns; she sometimes went away for two or three days leaving no one but an attenuated governess with even the shadow of a claim to interfere with Mary. Moreover she was used to seeing me with her children at Burnmore; we were still in her eyes no more than children.... And also perhaps she did not greatly mind if indeed we did a little fall in love together. To her that may have seemed a very natural and slight and transitory possibility....

One afternoon of warm shadows in the wood near the red-lacquered Chinese bridge, we two were alone together and we fell silent. I was trembling and full of a wild courage. I can feel now the exquisite surmise, the doubt[Pg 55] of that moment. Our eyes met. She looked up at me with an unwonted touch of fear in her expression and I

laid my hands on her. She did not recoil, she stood mute with her lips pressed together, looking at me steadfastly. I can feel that moment now as a tremendous hesitation, blank and yet full of light and life, like a clear sky in the moment before dawn....

She made a little move towards me. Impulsively, with no word said, we kissed.

§ 7

I would like very much to give you a portrait of Mary as she was in those days. Every portrait I ever had of her I burnt in the sincerity of what was to have been our final separation, and now I have nothing of her in my possession. I suppose that in the files of old illustrated weeklies somewhere, a score of portraits must be findable. Yet photographs have a queer quality of falsehood. They have no movement and always there was a little movement about Mary just as there is always a little scent about flowers. She was slender and graceful, so that she seemed taller than she was, she had beautifully shaped arms and a brightness in her face; it seemed to me always that there was light in her face, more than the light that shone upon it. Her fair, very slightly reddish hair—it was warm like Australian gold—flowed with a sort of joyous bravery back from her low broad forehead; the color under her delicate skin was bright and quick, and her mouth always smiled faintly. There was a peculiar charm for me about her mouth, a whimsicality, a sort of humorous resolve in the way in which the upper lip fell[Pg 56] upon the lower and in a faint obliquity that increased with her quickening smile. She spoke with a very clear delicate intonation that made one want to hear her speak again; she often said faintly daring things, and when she did, she had that little catch in the breath—of one who dares. She did not talk hastily; often before she spoke came a brief grave pause. Her eyes were brightly blue except when the spirit of mischief took her and then they became black, and there was something about the upper and lower lids that made them not only the prettiest but the sweetest and kindliest eyes in the world. And she moved with a quiet rapidity, without any needless movements, to do whatever she had a mind to do....

But how impossible it is to convey the personal charm of a human being. I catalogue these things and it is as if she moved about silently behind my stumbling enumeration and smiled at me still, with her eyes a little darkened, mocking me. That phantom will never be gone from my mind. It was all of these things and none of these things that made me hers, as I have never been any other person's....

We grew up together. The girl of nineteen mingles in my memory with the woman of twenty-five.

Always we were equals, or if anything she was the better of us two. I never made love to her in the commoner sense of the word, a sense in which the woman is conceived of as shy, unawakened, younger, more plastic, and the man as tempting, creating responses, persuading and compelling. We made love to each other as youth should, we were friends lit by a passion.... I think that is the best love. If I could wish your future I would have you love someone neither older and stronger nor younger[Pg 57] and weaker than yourself. I would have you have neither a toy nor a devotion, for the one makes the woman contemptible and the other the man. There should be something almost sisterly between you. Love neither a goddess nor a captive woman. But I would wish you a better fate in your love than chanced to me.

Mary was not only naturally far more quick-minded, more swiftly understanding than I, but more widely educated. Mine was the stiff limited education of the English public school and university; I could not speak and read and think French and German as she could for all that I had a pedantic knowledge of the older forms of those tongues; and the classics and mathematics upon which I had spent the substance of my years were indeed of little use to me, have never been of any real use to me, they were ladders too clumsy to carry about and too short to reach anything. My general ideas came from the newspapers and the reviews. She on the other hand had read much, had heard no end of good conversation, the conversation of people who mattered, had thought for herself and had picked the brains of her brothers. Her mother had let her read whatever books she liked, partly because she believed that was the proper thing to do, and partly because it was so much less trouble to be liberal in such things.

We had the gravest conversations.

I do not remember that we talked much of love, though we were very much in love. We kissed; sometimes greatly daring we walked hand in hand; once I took her in my arms and carried her over a swampy place beyond the Killing Wood, and held her closely to me; that was a great event between us; but we were shy of one another,[Pg 58] shy even of very intimate words; and a thousand daring and beautiful things I dreamt of saying to her went unsaid. I do not remember any endearing names from that time. But we jested and shared our humors, shaped our developing ideas in quaint forms to amuse one another and talked—as young men talk together.

We talked of religion; I think she was the first person to thaw the private silences that had kept me bound in these matters even from myself for years. I can still recall her face, a little flushed and coming nearer to mine after avowals and comparisons. "But Stephen," she says; "if none of these things are really true, why do they keep on telling them to us? What is true? What are we for? What is Everything for?"

I remember the awkwardness I felt at these indelicate thrusts into topics I had come to regard as forbidden.

"I suppose there's a sort of truth in them," I said, and then more Siddonsesquely: "endless people wiser than we are——"

"Yes," she said. "But that doesn't matter to us. Endless people wiser than we are have said one thing, and endless people wiser than we are have said exactly the opposite. It's *we* who have to understand—for ourselves.... We don't understand, Stephen."

I was forced to a choice between faith and denial. But I parried with questions. "Don't you," I asked, "feel there is a God?"

She hesitated. "There is something—something very beautiful," she said and stopped as if her breath had gone. "That is all I know, Stephen...."

And I remember too that we talked endlessly about the things I was to do in the world. I do not remember[Pg 59] that we talked about the things she was to do, by some sort of instinct and some sort of dexterity she evaded that, from the very first she had reserves from me, but my career and purpose became as it were the form in which we discussed all the purposes of life. I became Man in her imagination, the protagonist of the world. At first I displayed the modest worthy desire for respectable service that Harbury had taught me, but her clear, sceptical little voice pierced and tore all those pretences to shreds. "Do some decent public work," I said, or some such phrase.

"But is that All you want?" I hear her asking. "Is that All you want?"

I lay prone upon the turf and dug up a root of grass with my penknife. "Before I met you it was," I said.

"And now?"

"I want you."

"I'm nothing to want. I want you to want all the world.... *Why shouldn't you?*"

I think I must have talked of the greatness of serving the empire. "Yes, but splendidly," she insisted. "Not doing little things for other people—who aren't doing anything at all. I want you to conquer people and lead people.... When I see you, Stephen, sometimes—I almost wish I were a man. In order to be able to do all the things that you are going to do."

"For you," I said, "for you."

I stretched out my hand for hers, and my gesture went disregarded.

She sat rather crouched together with her eyes gazing far away across the great spaces of the park.

"That is what women are for," she said. "To make[Pg 60] men see how splendid life can be. To lift them up—out of a sort of timid grubbiness——" She turned upon me suddenly. "Stephen," she said, "promise me. Whatever you become, you promise and swear here and now never to be grey and grubby, never to be humpy and snuffy, never to be respectable and modest and dull and a little fat, like—like everybody. Ever."

"I swear," I said.

"By me."

"By you. No book to kiss! Please, give me your hand."

§ 8

All through that summer we saw much of each other. I was up at the House perhaps every other day; we young people were supposed to be all in a company together down by the tennis lawns, but indeed we dispersed and came and went by a kind of tacit understanding, Guy and Philip each with one of the Fawney girls and I with Mary. I put all sorts of constructions upon the freedom I was given with her, but I perceive now that we still seemed scarcely more than children to Lady Ladislaw, and that the idea of our marriage was as inconceivable to her as if we had been brother and sister. Matrimonially I was as impossible as one of the stable boys. All the money I could hope to earn for years to come would not have sufficed even to buy Mary clothes. But as yet we thought little of matters so remote, glad in our wonderful new discovery of love, and when at last I went off to Oxford, albeit the parting moved us to much tenderness and vows and embraces, I had no suspicion[Pg 61] that never more in all our lives would Mary and I meet freely and gladly without restriction. Yet so it was. From that day came restraints and difficulties; the shadow of furtiveness fell between us; our correspondence had to be concealed.

I went to Oxford as one goes into exile; she to London. I would post to her so that the letters reached Landor House before lunch time when the sun of Lady Ladislaw came over the horizon, but indeed as yet no one was watching her letters. Afterwards as she moved about she gave me other instructions, and for the most part I wrote to her in envelopes addressed for her by one of the Fawney girls, who was under her spell and made no enquiry for what purpose these envelopes were needed.

To me of course Mary wrote without restraint. All her letters to me were destroyed after our crisis, but some of mine to her she kept for many years; at last they came back to

me so that I have them now. And for all their occasional cheapness and crudity, I do not find anything in them to be ashamed of. They reflect, they are chiefly concerned with that search for a career of fine service which was then the chief preoccupation of my mind, the bias is all to a large imperialism, but it is manifest that already the first ripples of a rising tide of criticism against the imperialist movement had reached and were exercising me. In one letter I am explaining that imperialism is not a mere aggressiveness, but the establishment of peace and order throughout half the world. "We may never withdraw," I wrote with all the confidence of a Foreign Secretary, "from all these great territories of ours, but we shall stay only to raise their peoples ultimately to an equal citizenship with ourselves." And[Pg 62] then in the same letter: "and if I do not devote myself to the Empire what else is there that gives anything like the same opportunity of a purpose in life." I find myself in another tolerantly disposed to "accept socialism," but manifestly hostile to "the narrow mental habits of the socialists." The large note of youth! And in another I am clearly very proud and excited and a little mock-modest over the success of my first two speeches in the Union.

On the whole I like the rather boyish, tremendously serious young man of those letters. An egotist, of course, but what youth was ever anything else? I may write that much freely now, for by this time he is almost as much outside my personality as you or my father. He is the young Stratton, one of a line. I like his gravity; if youth is not grave with all the great spectacle of life opening at its feet, then surely no age need be grave. I love and envy his simplicity and honesty. His sham modesty and so forth are so translucent as scarcely to matter. It is clear I was opening my heart to myself as I opened it to Mary. I wasn't acting to her. I meant what I said. And as I remember her answers she took much the same high tone with me, though her style of writing was far lighter than mine, more easy and witty and less continuous. She flashed and flickered. As for confessed love-making there is very little,—I find at the end of one of my notes after the signature, "I love you, I love you." And she was even more restrained. Such little phrases as "Dear Stevenage"—that was one of her odd names for me—"I wish you were here," or "Dear, *dear* Stevenage," were epistolary events, and I would re-read the blessed wonderful outbreak a hundred times....

[Pg 63]

Our separation lengthened. There was a queer detached unexpected meeting in London in December, for some afternoon gathering. I was shy and the more disconcerted because she was in winter town clothes that made her seem strange and changed. Then came the devastating intimation that all through the next summer the Ladislaws were to be in Scotland.

I did my boyish utmost to get to Scotland. They were at Lankart near Invermoriston, and the nearest thing I could contrive was to join a reading party in Skye, a reading party of older men who manifestly had no great desire for me. For more than a year we never met at all, and all sorts of new things happened to us both. I perceived they happened to me, but I did not think they happened to her. Of course we changed. Of course in a measure and relatively we forgot. Of course there were weeks when we never thought of each other at all. Then would come phases of hunger. I remember a little note of hers. "Oh Stevenage," it was scrawled, "perhaps next Easter!" Next Easter was an aching desolation. The blinds of Burnmore House remained drawn; the place was empty except for three old servants on board-wages. The Christians went instead to the Canary Isles, following some occult impulse of Lady Ladislaw's. Lord Ladislaw spent the winter in Italy.

What an empty useless beauty the great Park possessed during those seasons of intermission! There were a score of places in it we had made our own....

Her letters to Oxford would cease for weeks, and suddenly revive and become frequent. Now and then would come a love-letter that seemed to shine like stars as I read it; for the most part they were low-pitched,[Pg 64] friendly or humorous letters in a roundish girlish writing that was maturing into a squarely characteristic hand. My letters to her too I suppose varied as greatly. We began to be used to living so apart. There were weeks of silence....

Yet always when I thought of my life as a whole, Mary ruled it. With her alone I had talked of my possible work and purpose; to her alone had I confessed to ambitions beyond such modest worthiness as a public school drills us to affect....

Then the whole sky of my life lit up again with a strange light of excitement and hope. I had a note, glad and serenely friendly, to say they were to spend all the summer at Burnmore.

I remember how I handled and scrutinized that letter, seeking for some intimation that our former intimacy was still alive. We were to meet. How should we meet? How would she look at me? What would she think of me?

§ 9

Of course it was all different. Our first encounter in this new phase had a quality of extreme disillusionment. The warm living creature, who would whisper, who would kiss with wonderful lips, who would say strange daring things, who had soft hair one might touch with a thrilling and worshipful hand, who changed one at a word or a look into a God of pride, became as if she had been no more than a dream. A self-

possessed young aristocrat in white and brown glanced at me from amidst a group of brilliant people on the terrace, nodded as it seemed quite carelessly[Pg 65] in acknowledgment of my salutation, and resumed her confident conversation with a tall stooping man, no less a person than Evesham, the Prime Minister. He was lunching at Burnmore on his way across country to the Rileys. I heard that dear laugh of hers, as ready and easy as when she laughed with me. I had not heard it for nearly three years—nor any sound that had its sweetness. "But Mr. Evesham," she was saying, "nowadays we don't believe that sort of thing——"

"There are a lot of things still for you to believe," says Mr. Evesham beaming. "A lot of things! One's capacity increases. It grows with exercise. Justin will bear me out."

Beyond her stood an undersized, brown-clad middle-aged man with a big head, a dark face and expressive brown eyes fixed now in unrestrained admiration on Mary's laughing face. This then was Justin, the incredibly rich and powerful, whose comprehensive operations could make and break a thousand fortunes in a day. He answered Evesham carelessly, with his gaze still on Mary, and in a voice too low for my straining ears. There was some woman in the group also, but she has left nothing upon my mind whatever except an effect of black and a very decorative green sunshade. She greeted Justin's remark, I remember, with the little yelp of laughter that characterized that set. I think too there was someone else in the group; but I cannot clearly recall who....

Presently as I and Philip made unreal conversation together I saw Mary disengage herself and come towards us. It was as if a princess came towards a beggar. Absurd are the changes of phase between women and[Pg 66] men. A year or so ago and all of us had been but "the children" together; now here were I and Philip mere youths still, nobodies, echoes and aspirations, crude promises at the best, and here was Mary in full flower, as glorious and central as the Hampton Court azaleas in spring.

"And this is Stephen," she said, aglow with happy confidence.

I made no memorable reply, and there was a little pause thick with mute questionings.

"After lunch," she said with her eye on mine, "I am going to measure against you on the steps. I'd hoped—when you weren't looking—I might creep up——"

"I've taken no advantage," I said.

"You've kept your lead."

Justin had followed her towards us, and now held out a hand to Philip. "Well, Philip my boy," he said, and defined our places. Philip made some introductory gesture with a

word or so towards me. Justin glanced at me as one might glance at someone's new dog, gave an expressionless nod to my stiff movement of recognition, and addressed himself at once to Mary.

"Lady Mary," he said, "I've wanted to tell you——"

I caught her quick eye for a moment and knew she had more to say to me, but neither she nor I had the skill and alacrity to get that said.

"I wanted to tell you," said Justin, "I've found a little Japanese who's done exactly what you wanted with that group of dwarf maples."

She clearly didn't understand.

"But what did I want, Mr. Justin?" she asked.

"Don't say that you forget?" cried Justin. "Oh don't[Pg 67] tell me you forget! You wanted a little exact copy of a Japanese house—— I've had it done. Beneath the trees...."

"And so you're back in Burnmore, Mr. Stratton," said Lady Ladislaw intervening between me and their duologue. And I never knew how pleased Mary was with this faithful realization of her passing and forgotten fancy. My hostess greeted me warmly and pressed my hand, smiled mechanically and looked over my shoulder all the while to Mr. Evesham and her company generally, and then came the deep uproar of a gong from the house and we were all moving in groups and couples luncheonward.

Justin walked with Lady Mary, and she was I saw an inch taller than his squat solidity. A tall lady in rose-pink had taken possession of Guy, Evesham and Lady Ladislaw made the two centres of a straggling group who were bandying recondite political allusions. Then came one or two couples and trios with nothing very much to say and active ears. Philip and I brought up the rear silently and in all humility. Even young Guy had gone over our heads. I was too full of a stupendous realization for any words. Of course, during those years, she had been doing—no end of things! And while I had been just drudging with lectures and books and theorizing about the Empire and what I could do with it, and taking exercise, she had learnt, it seemed—the World.

§ 10

Lunch was in the great dining-room. There was a big table and two smaller ones; we sat down anyhow, but the first comers had grouped themselves about Lady[Pg 68] Ladislaw and Evesham and Justin and Mary in a central orb, and I had to drift perforce to one of the satellites. I secured a seat whence I could get a glimpse ever

and again over Justin's assiduous shoulders of a delicate profile, and I found myself immediately engaged in answering the innumerable impossible questions of Lady Viping, the widow of terrible old Sir Joshua, that devastating divorce court judge who didn't believe in divorces. His domestic confidences had I think corrupted her mind altogether. She cared for nothing but evidence. She was a rustling, incessant, sandy, peering woman with a lorgnette and rapid, confidential lisping undertones, and she wanted to know who everybody was and how they were related. This kept us turning towards the other tables—and when my information failed she would call upon Sir Godfrey Klavier, who was explaining, rather testily on account of her interruptions, to Philip Christian and a little lady in black and the elder Fawney girl just why he didn't believe Lady Ladislaw's new golf course would succeed. There were two or three other casual people at our table; one of the Roden girls, a young guardsman and, I think, some other man whom I don't clearly remember.

"And so that's the great Mr. Justin," rustled Lady Viping and stared across me.

(I saw Evesham, leaning rather over the table to point some remark at Mary, and noted her lips part to reply.)

"What *is* the word?" insisted Lady Viping like a fly in my ear.

I turned on her guiltily.

"Whether it's brachy," said Lady Viping, "or whether it's dolly—*I* can never remember?"

[Pg 69]

I guessed she was talking of Justin's head. "Oh!—brachycephalic," I said.

I had lost Mary's answer.

"They say he's a woman hater," said Lady Viping. "It hardly looks like it now, does it?"

"Who?" I asked. "What?—oh!—Justin."

"The great financial cannibal. Suppose she turned him into a philanthropist! Stranger things have happened. Look!—now. The man's face is positively tender."

I hated looking, and I could not help but look. It was as if this detestable old woman was dragging me down and down, down far below all dignity to her own level of a peeping observer. Justin was saying something to Mary in an undertone, something that made her glance up swiftly and at me before she answered, and there I was with my head side by side with those quivering dyed curls, that flighty black bonnet, that

remorseless observant lorgnette. I could have sworn aloud at the hopeless indignity of my pose.

I saw Mary color quickly before I looked away.

"Charming, isn't she?" said Lady Viping, and I discovered those infernal glasses were for a moment honoring me. They shut with a click. "Ham," said Lady Viping. "I told him no ham—and now I remember—I like ham. Or rather I like spinach. I forgot the spinach. One has the ham for the spinach,—don't you think? Yes,—tell him. She's a perfect Dresden ornament, Mr. Stratton. She's adorable ... (lorgnette and search for fresh topics). Who is the dark lady with the slight moustache—sitting there next to Guy? Sir Godfrey, who is the dark lady? No, I don't mean Mary[Pg 70] Fitton. Over there! Mrs. Roperstone. Ooh. *The* Mrs. Roperstone. (Renewed lorgnette and click.) Yes—ham. With spinach. A lot of spinach. There's Mr. Evesham laughing again. He's greatly amused. Unusual for him to laugh twice. At least, aloud. (Rustle and adjustment of lorgnette.) Mr. Stratton, don't you think?—exactly like a little shepherdess. Only I can't say I think Mr. Justin is like a shepherd. On the whole, more like a large cloisonné jar. Now Guy would do. As a pair they're beautiful. Pity they're brother and sister. Curious how that boy manages to be big and yet delicate. H'm. Mixed mantel ornaments. Sir Godfrey, how old *is* Mrs. Roperstone?... You never know on principle. I think I shall make Mr. Stratton guess. What do you think, Mr. Stratton?... You never guess on principle! Well, we're all very high principled. (Fresh exploratory movements of the lorgnette.) Mr. Stratton, tell me; is that little peaked man near Lady Ladislaw Mr. Roperstone? I thought as much!"

All this chatter is mixed up in my mind with an unusual sense of hovering attentive menservants, who seemed all of them to my heated imagination to be watching me (and particularly one clean-shaven, reddish-haired, full-faced young man) lest I looked too much at the Lady Mary Christian. Of course they were merely watching our plates and glasses, but my nerves and temper were now in such a state that if my man went off to the buffet to get Sir Godfrey the pickled walnuts, I fancied he went to report the progress of my infatuation, and if a strange face appeared with the cider cup, that this was a new observer come to mark the revelation of my behavior. My food embarrassed me. I found hidden meanings in[Pg 71] the talk of the Roden girl and her guardsman, and an ironical discovery in Sir Godfrey's eye....

I felt indignant with Mary. I felt she disowned me and deserted me and repudiated me, that she ought in some manner to have recognized me. I gave her no credit for her speech to me before the lunch, or her promise to measure against me again. I blinded

myself to all her frank friendliness. I felt she ought not to notice Justin, ought not to answer him....

Clearly she liked those men to flatter her, she liked it....

I remember too, so that I must have noted it and felt it then as a thing perceived for the first time, the large dignity of the room, the tall windows and splendid rich curtains, the darkened Hoppners upon the walls. I noted too the quality and abundance of the table things, and there were grapes and peaches, strawberries, cherries and green almonds, piled lavishly above the waiting dessert plates with the golden knives and forks, upon a table in the sunshine of the great bay. The very sunshine filtered through the tall narrow panes from the great chestnut trees without, seemed of a different quality from the common light of day....

I felt like a poor relation. I sympathized with Anarchists. We had come out of the Park now finally, both Mary and I—into this....

"Mr. Stratton I am sure agrees with me."

For a time I had been marooned conversationally, and Lady Viping had engaged Sir Godfrey. Evidently he was refractory and she was back at me.

"Look at it now in profile," she said, and directed me once more to that unendurable grouping. Justin again!

[Pg 72]

"It's a heavy face," I said.

"It's a powerful face. I wouldn't care anyhow to be up against it—as people say." And the lorgnette shut with a click. "What is this? Peaches!—Yes, and give me some cream." ...

I hovered long for that measuring I had been promised on the steps, but either Mary had forgotten or she deemed it wiser to forget.

§ 11

I took my leave of Lady Ladislaw when the departure of Evesham broke the party into dispersing fragments. I started down the drive towards the rectory and then vaulted the railings by the paddock and struck across beyond the mere. I could not go home with the immense burthen of thought and new ideas and emotions that had come upon me. I felt confused and shattered to incoherence by the new quality of Mary's atmosphere. I turned my steps towards the wilder, lonelier part of the park beyond the

Killing Wood, and lay down in a wide space of grass between two divergent thickets of bracken, and remained there for a very long time.

There it was in the park that for the first time I pitted myself against life upon a definite issue, and prepared my first experience of defeat. "I *will* have her," I said, hammering at the turf with my fist. "I will. I do not care if I give all my life...."

Then I lay still and bit the sweetness out of joints of grass, and presently thought and planned.

[Pg 73]

CHAPTER THE FOURTH

The Marriage of the Lady Mary Christian

§ 1

For three or four days I could get no word with Mary. I could not now come and go as I had been able to do in the days when we were still "the children." I could not work, I could not rest, I prowled as near as I could to Burnmore House hoping for some glimpse of her, waiting for the moment when I could decently present myself again at the house.

When at last I called, Justin had gone and things had some flavor of the ancient time. Lady Ladislaw received me with an airy intimacy, all the careful responsibility of her luncheon party manner thrown aside. "And how goes Cambridge?" she sang, sailing through the great saloon towards me, and I thought that for the occasion Cambridge instead of Oxford would serve sufficiently well. "You'll find them all at tennis," said Lady Ladislaw, and waved me on to the gardens. There I found all four of them and had to wait until their set was finished.

"Mary," I said at the first chance, "are we never to talk again?"

"It's all different," she said.

[Pg 74]

"I am dying to talk to you—as we used to talk."

"And I—Stevenage. But—— You see?"

"Next time I come," I said, "I shall bring you a letter. There is so much——"

"No," she said. "Can't you get up in the morning? Very early—five or six. No one is up until ever so late."

"I'd stay up all night."

"Serve!" said Maxton, who was playing the two of us and had stopped I think to tighten a shoe.

Things conspired against any more intimacy for a time. But we got our moment on the way to tea. She glanced back at Philip, who was loosening the net, and then forward to estimate the distance of Maxton and Guy. "They're all three going," she said, "after Tuesday. Then—before six."

"Wednesday?"

"Yes."

"Suppose after all," she threw out, "I can't come."

"Fortunes of war."

"If I can't come one morning I may come another," she spoke hastily, and I perceived that Guy and Maxton had turned and were waiting for us.

"You know the old Ice House?"

"Towards the gardens?"

"Yes. On the further side. Don't come by the road, come across by the end of the mere. Lie in the bracken until you see me coming.... I've not played tennis a dozen times this year. Not half a dozen."

This last was for the boys.

"You've played twenty times at least since you've been here," said Guy, with the simple bluntness of a brother. "I'm certain."

[Pg 75]

§ 2

To this day a dewy morning in late August brings back the thought of Mary and those stolen meetings. I have the minutest recollection of the misty bloom upon the turf, and the ragged, filmy carpet of gossamer on either hand, of the warm wetness of every little blade and blossom and of the little scraps and seeds of grass upon my soaking and discolored boots. Our footsteps were dark green upon the dew-grey grass. And I

feel the same hungry freshness again at the thought of those stolen meetings. Presently came the sunrise, blinding, warming, dew-dispelling arrows of gold smiting through the tree stems, a flood of light foaming over the bracken and gilding the under sides of the branches. Everything is different and distinctive in those opening hours; everything has a different value from what it has by day. All the little things upon the ground, fallen branches, tussocks, wood-piles, have a peculiar intensity and importance, seem magnified, because of the length of their shadows in the slanting rays, and all the great trees seem lifted above the light and merged with the sky. And at last, a cool grey outline against the blaze and with a glancing iridescent halo about her, comes Mary, flitting, adventurous, friendly, wonderful.

"Oh Stevenage!" she cries, "to see you again!"

We each hold out both our hands and clasp and hesitate and rather shyly kiss.

"Come!" she says, "we can talk for an hour. It's still not six. And there is a fallen branch where we can[Pg 76] sit and put our feet out of the wet. Oh! it's so good to be out of things again—clean out of things—with you. Look! there is a stag watching us."

"You're glad to be with me?" I ask, jealous of the very sunrise.

"I am always glad," she says, "to be with you. Why don't we always get up at dawn, Stevenage, every day of our lives?"

We go rustling through the grass to the prostrate timber she has chosen. (I can remember even the thin bracelet on the wrist of the hand that lifted her skirt.) I help her to clamber into a comfortable fork from which her feet can swing....

Such fragments as this are as bright, as undimmed, as if we had met this morning. But then comes our conversation, and that I find vague and irregularly obliterated. But I think I must have urged her to say she loved me, and beat about the bush of that declaration, too fearful to put my heart's wish to the issue, that she would promise to wait three years for me—until I could prove it was not madness for her to marry me. "I have been thinking of it all night and every night since I have been here," I said. "Somehow I will do something. In some way—I will get hold of things. Believe me!—with all my strength."

I was standing between the forking boughs, and she was looking down upon me.

"Stephen dear," she said, "dear, dear Boy; I have never wanted to kiss you so much in all my life. Dear, come close to me."

She bent her fresh young face down to mine, her fingers were in my hair.

[Pg 77]

"My Knight," she whispered close to me. "My beautiful young Knight."

I whispered back and touched her dew fresh lips....

"And tell me what you would do to conquer the world for me?" she asked.

I cannot remember now a word of all the vague threatenings against the sundering universe with which I replied. Her hand was on my shoulder as she listened....

But I do know that even on this first morning she left me with a sense of beautiful unreality, of having dipped for some precious moments into heroic gossamer. All my world subjugation seemed already as evanescent as the morning haze and the vanishing dews as I stood, a little hidden in the shadows of the Killing Wood and ready to plunge back at the first hint of an observer, and watched her slender whiteness flit circumspectly towards the house.

§ 3

Our next three or four meetings are not so clearly defined. We did not meet every morning for fear that her early rising should seem too punctual to be no more than a chance impulse, nor did we go to the same place. But there stands out very clearly a conversation in a different mood. We had met at the sham ruins at the far end of the great shrubbery, a huge shattered Corinthian portico of rather damaged stucco giving wide views of the hills towards Alfridsham between its three erect pillars, and affording a dry seat upon its fallen ones. It was an overcast morning, I remember probably the hour was earlier; a kind of twilight clearness made the world seem strange[Pg 78] and the bushes and trees between us and the house very heavy and still and dark. And we were at cross purpose, for now it was becoming clear to me that Mary did not mean to marry me, that she dreaded making any promise to me for the future, that all the heroic common cause I wanted with her, was quite alien to her dreams.

"But Mary," I said looking at her colorless delicate face, "don't you love me? Don't you want me?"

"You know I love you, Stevenage," she said. "You know."

"But if two people love one another, they want to be always together, they want to belong to each other."

She looked at me with her face very intent upon her meaning. "Stevenage," she said after one of those steadfast pauses of hers, "I want to belong to myself."

"Naturally," I said with an air of disposing of an argument, and then paused.

"Why should one have to tie oneself always to one other human being?" she asked. "Why must it be like that?"

I do not remember how I tried to meet this extraordinary idea. "One loves," I may have said. The subtle scepticisms of her mind went altogether beyond my habits of thinking; it had never occurred to me that there was any other way of living except in these voluntary and involuntary mutual servitudes in which men and women live and die. "If you love me," I urged, "if you love me—— I want nothing better in all my life but to love and serve and keep you and make you happy."

She surveyed me and weighed my words against her own.

"I love meeting you," she said. "I love your going[Pg 79] because it means that afterwards you will come again. I love this—this slipping out to you. But up there, there is a room in the house that is *my* place—me—my own. Nobody follows me there. I want to go on living, Stevenage, just as I am living now. I don't want to become someone's certain possession, to be just usual and familiar to anyone. No, not even to you."

"But if you love," I cried.

"To you least of all. Don't you see?—I want to be wonderful to you, Stevenage, more than to anyone. I want—I want always to make your heart beat faster. I want always to be coming to you with my own heart beating faster. Always and always I want it to be like that. Just as it has been on these mornings. It has been beautiful—altogether beautiful."

"Yes," I said, rather helplessly, and struggled with great issues I had never faced before.

"It isn't," I said, "how people live."

"It is how I want to live," said Mary.

"It isn't the way life goes."

"I want it to be. Why shouldn't it be? Why at any rate shouldn't it be for me?"

§ 4

I made some desperate schemes to grow suddenly rich and powerful, and I learnt for the first time my true economic value. Already my father and I had been discussing my prospects in life and he had been finding me vague and difficult. I was full of large

political intentions, but so far I had made no definite plans for a[Pg 80] living that would render my political ambitions possible. It was becoming apparent to me that for a poor man in England, the only possible route to political distinction is the bar, and I was doing my best to reconcile myself to the years of waiting and practice that would have to precede my political début.

My father disliked the law. And I do not think it reconciled him to the idea of my being a barrister that afterwards I hoped to become a politician. "It isn't in our temperament, Stephen," he said. "It's a pushing, bullying, cramming, base life. I don't see you succeeding there, and I don't see myself rejoicing even if you do succeed. You have to shout, and Strattons don't shout; you have to be smart and tricky and there's never been a smart and tricky Stratton yet; you have to snatch opportunities and get the better of the people and misrepresent the realities of every case you touch. You're a paid misrepresenter. They say you'll get a fellowship, Stephen. Why not stay up, and do some thinking for a year or so. There'll be enough to keep you. Write a little."

"The bar," I said, "is only a means to an end."

"If you succeed."

"If I succeed. One has to take the chances of life everywhere."

"And what is the end?"

"Constructive statesmanship."

"Not in that way," said my father, pouring himself a second glass of port, and turned over my high-sounding phrase with a faint hint of distaste; "Constructive Statesmanship. No. Once a barrister always a barrister. You'll only be a party politician.... Vulgar men.... Vulgar.... If you succeed that is...."

[Pg 81]

He criticized me but he did not oppose me, and already in the beginning of the summer we had settled that I should be called to the bar.

Now suddenly I wanted to go back upon all these determinations. I began to demand in the intellectual slang of the time "more actuality," and to amaze my father with talk about empire makers and the greatness of Lord Strathcona and Cecil Rhodes. Why, I asked, shouldn't I travel for a year in search of opportunity? At Oxford I had made acquaintance with a son of Pramley's, the big Mexican and Borneo man, and to him I wrote, apropos of a half-forgotten midnight talk in the rooms of some common friend. He wrote back with the suggestion that I should go and talk to his father, and I tore

myself away from Mary and went up to see that great exploiter of undeveloped possibilities and have one of the most illuminating and humiliating conversations in the world. He was, I remember, a little pale-complexioned, slow-speaking man with a humorous blue eye, a faint, just perceptible northern accent and a trick of keeping silent for a moment after you had finished speaking, and he talked to me as one might talk to a child of eight who wanted to know how one could become a commander-in-chief. His son had evidently emphasized my Union reputation, and he would have been quite willing, I perceived, to give me employment if I had displayed the slightest intelligence or ability in any utilizable direction. But quite dreadfully he sounded my equipment with me and showed me the emptiness of my stores.

"You want some way that gives you a chance of growing rich rapidly," he said. "Aye. It's not a bad idea.[Pg 82] But there's others, you know, have tried that game before ye.

"You don't want riches just for riches but for an end. Aye! Aye! It's the spending attracts ye. You'd not have me think you'd the sin of avarice. I'm clear on that about ye.

"Well," he explained, "it's all one of three things we do, you know—prospecting and forestalling and—just stealing, and the only respectable way is prospecting. You'd prefer the respectable way, I suppose?... I knew ye would. Well, let's see what chances ye have."

And he began to probe my practical knowledge. It was like an unfit man stripping for a medical inspection. Did I know anything of oil, of rubber, of sugar, of substances generally, had I studied mineralogy or geology, had I any ideas of industrial processes, of technical chemistry, of rare minerals, of labor problems and the handling of alien labor, of the economics of railway management or of camping out in dry, thinly populated countries, or again could I maybe speak Spanish or Italian or Russian? The little dons who career about Oxford afoot and awheel, wearing old gowns and mortarboards, giggling over Spooner's latest, and being tremendous "characters" in the intervals of concocting the ruling-class mind, had turned my mind away from such matters altogether. I had left that sort of thing to Germans and east-end Jews and young men from the upper-grade board schools of Sheffield and Birmingham. I was made to realize appalling wildernesses of ignorance....

"You see," said old Pramley, "you don't seem to know anything whatever. It's a deeficulty. It'll stand in[Pg 83] your way a little now, though no doubt you'd be quick at the uptake—after all the education they've given ye.... But it stands in your way, if ye think of setting out to do something large and effective, just immediately...."

Moreover it came out, I forget now how, that I hadn't clearly grasped the difference between cumulative and non-cumulative preference shares....

I remember too how I dined alone that evening in a mood between frantic exasperation and utter abasement in the window of the Mediated Universities Club, of which I was a junior member under the undergraduate rule. And I lay awake all night in one of the austere club bedrooms, saying to old Pramley a number of extremely able and penetrating things that had unhappily not occurred to me during the progress of our interview. I didn't go back to Burnmore for several days. I had set my heart on achieving something, on returning with some earnest of the great attack I was to make upon the separating great world between myself and Mary. I am far enough off now from that angry and passionate youngster to smile at the thought that my subjugation of things in general and high finance in particular took at last the form of proposing to go into the office of Bean, Medhurst, Stockton, and Schnadhorst upon half commission terms. I was awaiting my father's reply to this startling new suggestion when I got a telegram from Mary. "We are going to Scotland unexpectedly. Come down and see me." I went home instantly, and told my father I had come to talk things over with him. A note from Mary lay upon the hall-table as I came in and encountered my father. "I thought it better to come down to you," I[Pg 84] said with my glance roving to find that, and then I met his eye. It wasn't altogether an unkindly eye, but I winced dishonestly.

"Talking is better for all sorts of things," said my father, and wanted to know if the weather had been as hot in London as it had been in Burnmore.

Mary's note was in pencil, scribbled hastily. I was to wait after eleven that night near the great rose bushes behind the pavilion. Long before eleven I was there, on a seat in a thick shadow looking across great lakes of moonlight towards the phantom statuary of the Italianate garden and the dark laurels that partly masked the house. I waited nearly an hour, an hour of stillness and small creepings and cheepings and goings to and fro among the branches.

In the bushes near by me a little green glow-worm shared my vigil.

And then, wrapped about in a dark velvet cloak, still in her white dinner dress, with shining, gleaming, glancing stones about her dear throat, warm and wonderful and glowing and daring, Mary came flitting out of the shadows to me.

"My dear," she whispered, panting and withdrawing a little from our first passionate embrace, "Oh my dear!... How did I come? Twice before, when I was a girl, I got out this way. By the corner of the conservatory and down the laundry wall. You can't see

from here, but it's easy—easy. There's a tree that helps. And now I have come that way to you. *You!*...

"Oh! love me, my Stephen, love me, dear. Love me as if we were never to love again. Am I beautiful, my dear? Am I beautiful in the moonlight? Tell me!...

[Pg 85]

"Perhaps this is the night of our lives, dear! Perhaps never again will you and I be happy!...

"But the wonder, dear, the beauty! Isn't it still? It's as if nothing really stood solid and dry. As if everything floated....

"Everyone in all the world has gone to sleep to-night and left the world to us. Come! Come this way and peep at the house, there. Stoop—under the branches. See, not a light is left! And all its blinds are drawn and its eyes shut. One window is open, *my* little window, Stephen! but that is in the shadow where that creeper makes everything black.

"Along here a little further is night-stock. Now—Now! Sniff, Stephen! Sniff! The scent of it! It lies—like a bank of scented air.... And Stephen, there! Look!... A star—a star without a sound, falling out of the blue! It's gone!"

There was her dear face close to mine, soft under the soft moonlight, and the breath of her sweet speech mingled with the scent of the night-stock....

That was indeed the most beautiful night of my life, a night of moonlight and cool fragrance and adventurous excitement. We were transported out of this old world of dusty limitations; it was as if for those hours the curse of man was lifted from our lives. No one discovered us, no evil thing came near us. For a long time we lay close in one another's arms upon a bank of thyme. Our heads were close together; her eyelashes swept my cheek, we spoke rarely and in soft whispers, and our hearts were beating, beating. We were as solemn as great mountains and as innocent as sleeping children. Our kisses were kisses of moonlight. And it seemed to me that nothing[Pg 86] that had ever happened or could happen afterwards, mattered against that happiness....

It was nearly three when at last I came back into my father's garden. No one had missed me from my room and the house was all asleep, but I could not get in because I had closed a latch behind me, and so I stayed in the little arbor until day, watching the day break upon long beaches of pale cloud over the hills towards Alfridsham. I slept at last with my head upon my arms upon the stone table, until the noise of

shooting bolts and doors being unlocked roused me to watch my chance and slip back again into the house, and up the shuttered darkened staircase to my tranquil, undisturbed bedroom.

§ 5

It was in the vein of something evasive in Mary's character that she let me hear first of her engagement to Justin through the *Times*. Away there in Scotland she got I suppose new perspectives, new ideas; the glow of our immediate passion faded. The thing must have been drawing in upon her for some time. Perhaps she had meant to tell me of it all that night when she had summoned me to Burnmore. Looking back now I am the more persuaded that she did. But the thing came to me in London with the effect of an immense treachery. Within a day or so of the newspaper's announcement she had written me a long letter answering some argument of mine, and saying nothing whatever of the people about her. Even then Justin must have been asking her to marry him. Her mind must have been full of that[Pg 87] question. Then came a storm of disappointment, humiliation and anger with this realization. I can still feel myself writing and destroying letters to her, letters of satire, of protest. Oddly enough I cannot recall the letter that at last I sent her, but it is eloquent of the weak boyishness of my position that I sent it in our usual furtive manner, accepted every precaution that confessed the impossibility of our relationship. "No," she scribbled back, "you do not understand. I cannot write. I must talk to you."

We had a secret meeting.

With Beatrice Normandy's connivance she managed to get away for the better part of the day, and we spent a long morning in argument in the Botanical Gardens—that obvious solitude—and afterwards we lunched upon ham and ginger beer at a little open-air restaurant near the Broad Walk and talked on until nearly four. We were so young that I think we both felt, beneath our very real and vivid emotions, a gratifying sense of romantic resourcefulness in this prolonged discussion. There is something ridiculously petty and imitative about youth, something too, naïvely noble and adventurous. I can never determine if older people are less generous and imaginative or merely less absurd. I still recall the autumnal melancholy of that queer, neglected-looking place, in which I had never been before, and which I have never revisited—a memory of walking along narrow garden paths beside queer leaf-choked artificial channels of water under yellow-tinted trees, of rustic bridges going nowhere in particular, and of a kind of brickwork ruined castle, greatly decayed and ivy-grown, in which we sat for a long time looking out upon a lawn and a wide[Pg 88] gravel path leading to a colossal frontage of conservatory.

I must have been resentful and bitter in the beginning of that talk. I do not remember that I had any command of the situation or did anything but protest throughout that day. I was too full of the egotism of the young lover to mark Mary's moods and feelings. It was only afterwards that I came to understand that she was not wilfully and deliberately following the course that was to separate us, that she was taking it with hesitations and regrets. Yet she spoke plainly enough, she spoke with a manifest sincerity of feeling. And while I had neither the grasp nor the subtlety to get behind her mind I perceive now as I think things out that Lady Ladislaw had both watched and acted, had determined her daughter's ideas, sown her mind with suggestions, imposed upon her a conception of her situation that now dominated all her thoughts.

"Dear Stephen," reiterated Mary, "I love you. I do, clearly, definitely, deliberately love you. Haven't I told you that? Haven't I made that plain to you?"

"But you are going to marry Justin!"

"Stephen dear, can I possibly marry you? Can I?"

"Why not? Why not make the adventure of life with me? Dare!"

She looked down on me. She was sitting upon a parapet of the brickwork and I was below her. She seemed to be weighing possibilities.

"Why not?" I cried. "Even now. Why not run away with me, throw our two lives together? Do as lovers have dared to do since the beginning of things! Let us go somewhere together——"

[Pg 89]

"But Stephen," she asked softly, "*where*?"

"Anywhere!"

She spoke as an elder might do to a child. "No! tell me where—exactly. Where would it be? Where should we go? How should we live? Tell me. Make me see it, Stephen."

"You are too cruel to me, Mary," I said. "How can I—on the spur of the moment—arrange——?"

"But dear, suppose it was somewhere very grimy and narrow! Something—like some of those back streets I came through to get here. Suppose it was some dreadful place. And you had no money. And we were both worried and miserable. One gets ill in such places. If I loved you, Stephen—I mean if you and I—if you and I were to be together, I

should want it to be in sunshine, I should want it to be among beautiful forests and mountains. Somewhere very beautiful...."

"Why not?"

"Because—to-day I know. There are no such places in the world for us. Stephen, they are dreams."

"For three years now," I said, "I have dreamed such dreams.

"Oh!" I cried out, stung by my own words, "but this is cowardice! Why should we submit to this old world! Why should we give up—things you have dreamed as well as I! You said once—to hear my voice—calling in the morning.... Let us take each other, Mary, now. *Now!* Let us take each other, and"—I still remember my impotent phrase—"afterwards count the cost!"

"If I were a queen," said Mary. "But you see I am not a queen." ...

So we talked in fragments and snatches of argument,[Pg 90] and all she said made me see more clearly the large hopelessness of my desire. "At least," I urged, "do not marry Justin now. Give me a chance. Give me three years, Mary, three short years, to work, to do something!"

She knew so clearly now the quality of her own intentions.

"Dear Stephen," she explained, "if I were to come away with you and marry you, in just a little time I should cease to be your lover, I should be your squaw. I should have to share your worries and make your coffee—and disappoint you, disappoint you and fail you in a hundred ways. Think! Should I be any good as a squaw? How can one love when one knows the coffee isn't what it should be, and one is giving one's lover indigestion? And I don't *want* to be your squaw. I don't want that at all. It isn't how I feel for you. I don't *want* to be your servant and your possession."

"But you will be Justin's—squaw, you are going to marry him!"

"That is all different, Stevenage. Between him and me there will be space, air, dignity, endless servants——"

"But," I choked. "You! He! He will make love to you, Mary."

"You don't understand, Stephen."

"He will make love to you, Mary. Mary! don't you understand? These things—— We've never talked of them.... You will bear him children!"

"No," she said.

"But——"

"No. He promises. Stephen,—I am to own myself."

"But—He marries you!"

[Pg 91]

"Yes. Because he—he admires me. He cannot live without me. He loves my company. He loves to be seen with me. He wants me with him to enjoy all the things he has. Can't you understand, Stephen?"

"But do you mean——?"

Our eyes met.

"Stephen," she said, "I swear."

"But—— He hopes."

"I don't care. He has promised. I have his promise. I shall be free. Oh! I shall be free—free! He is a different man from you, Stephen. He isn't so fierce; he isn't so greedy."

"But it parts us!"

"Only from impossible things."

"It parts us."

"It does not even part us, Stevenage. We shall see one another! we shall talk to one another."

"I shall lose you."

"I shall keep you."

"But I—do you expect me to be content with *this*?"

"I will make you content. Oh! Stephen dear, can't there be love—love without this clutching, this gripping, this carrying off?"

"You will be carried altogether out of my world."

"If I thought that, Stephen, indeed I would not marry him."

But I insisted we should be parted, and parted in the end for ever, and there I was the wiser of the two. I knew the insatiable urgency within myself. I knew that if I continued to meet Mary I should continue to desire her until I possessed her altogether.

[Pg 92]

§ 6

I cannot reproduce with any greater exactness than this the quality and gist of our day-long conversation. Between us was a deep affection, and instinctive attraction, and our mental temperaments and our fundamental ideas were profoundly incompatible. We were both still very young in quality, we had scarcely begun to think ourselves out, we were greatly swayed by the suggestion of our circumstances, complex, incoherent and formless emotions confused our minds. But I see now that in us there struggled vast creative forces, forces that through a long future, in forms as yet undreamt of, must needs mould the destiny of our race. Far more than Mary I was accepting the conventions of our time. It seemed to me not merely reasonable but necessary that because she loved me she should place her life in my youthful and inexpert keeping, share my struggles and the real hardships they would have meant for her, devote herself to my happiness, bear me children, be my inspiration in imaginative moments, my squaw, helper and possession through the whole twenty-four hours of every day, and incidentally somehow rear whatever family we happened to produce, and I was still amazed in the depths of my being that she did not reciprocate this simple and comprehensive intention. I was ready enough I thought for equivalent sacrifices. I was prepared to give my whole life, subordinate all my ambitions, to the effort to maintain our home. If only I could have her, have her for my own, I was ready to pledge every hour I had still to live to that service. It seemed mere perversity[Pg 93] to me then that she should turn even such vows as that against me.

"But I don't want it, Stevenage," she said. "I don't want it. I want you to go on to the service of the empire, I want to see you do great things, do all the things we've talked about and written about. Don't you see how much better that is for you and for me—and for the world and our lives? I don't want you to become a horrible little specialist in feeding and keeping me."

"Then—then *wait* for me!" I cried.

"But—I want to live myself! I don't want to wait. I want a great house, I want a great position, I want space and freedom. I want to have clothes—and be as splendid as your career is going to be. I want to be a great and shining lady in your life. I can't always live as I do now, dependent on my mother, whirled about by her movements,

living in her light. Why should I be just a hard-up Vestal Virgin, Stephen, in your honor? You will not be able to marry me for years and years and years—unless you neglect your work, unless you throw away everything that is worth having between us in order just to get me."

"But I want *you*, Mary," I cried, drumming at the little green table with my fist. "I want you. I want nothing else in all the world unless it has to do with you."

"You've got me—as much as anyone will ever have me. You'll always have me. Always I will write to you, talk to you, watch you. Why are you so greedy, Stephen? Why are you so ignoble? If I were to come now and marry you, it wouldn't help you. It would turn you into—a wife-keeper, into the sort of uninteresting [Pg 94]preoccupied man one sees running after and gloating over the woman he's bought—at the price of his money and his dignity—and everything.... It's not proper for a man to live so for a woman and her children. It's dwarfish. It's enslaving. It's—it's indecent. Stephen! I'd hate you so."
...

§ 7

We parted at last at a cab-rank near a bridge over the Canal at the western end of Park Village. I remember that I made a last appeal to her as we walked towards it, and that we loitered on the bridge, careless of who might see us there, in a final conflict of our wills. "Before it is too late, Mary, dear," I said.

She shook her head, her white lips pressed together.

"But after the things that have happened. That night—the moonlight!"

"It's not fair," she said, "for you to talk of that. It isn't fair."

"But Mary. This is parting. This indeed is parting."

She answered never a word.

"Then at least talk to me again for one time more."

"Afterwards," she said. "Afterwards I will talk to you. Don't make things too hard for me, Stephen."

"If I could I would make this impossible. It's—it's hateful."

She turned to the kerb, and for a second or so we stood there without speaking. Then I beckoned to a hansom.

She told me Beatrice Normandy's address.

I helped her into the cab. "Good-bye," I said with a[Pg 95] weak affectation of an everyday separation, and I turned to the cabman with her instructions.

Then again we looked at one another. The cabman waited. "All right, sir?" he asked.

"Go ahead!" I said, and lifted my hat to the little white face within.

I watched the cab until it vanished round the curve of the road. Then I turned about to a world that had become very large and empty and meaningless.

§ 8

I struggled feebly to arrest the course of events. I wrote Mary some violent and bitter letters. I treated her as though she alone were responsible for my life and hers; I said she had diverted my energies, betrayed me, ruined my life. I hinted she was cold-blooded, mercenary, shameless. Someday you, with that quick temper of yours and your power of expression, will understand that impulse to write, to pour out a passionately unjust interpretation of some nearly intolerable situation, and it is not the least of all the things I owe to Mary that she understood my passion and forgave those letters and forgot them. I tried twice to go and see her. But I do not think I need tell you, little son, of these self-inflicted humiliations and degradations. An angry man is none the less a pitiful man because he is injurious. The hope that had held together all the project of my life was gone, and all my thoughts and emotions lay scattered in confusion....

You see, my little son, there are two sorts of love;[Pg 96] we use one name for very different things. The love that a father bears his children, that a mother feels, that comes sometimes, a strange brightness and tenderness that is half pain, at the revelation of some touching aspect of one long known to one, at the sight of a wife bent with fatigue and unsuspicious of one's presence, at the wretchedness and perplexity of some wrong-doing brother, or at an old servant's unanticipated tears, that is love—like the love God must bear us. That is the love we must spread from those of our marrow until it reaches out to all mankind, that will some day reach out to all mankind. But the love of a young man for a woman takes this quality only in rare moments of illumination and complete assurance. My love for Mary was a demand, it was a wanton claim I scored the more deeply against her for every moment of happiness she gave me. I see now that as I emerged from the first abjection of my admiration and began to feel assured of her affection, I meant nothing by her but to possess her, I did not want her to be happy as I want you to be happy even at the price of my life; I wanted her. I wanted her as barbarians want a hunted enemy, alive or

dead. It was a flaming jealousy to have her mine. That granted, then I was prepared for all devotions....

This is how men love women. Almost as exclusively and fiercely I think do women love men. And the deepest question before humanity is just how far this jealous greed may be subdued to a more generous passion. The fierce jealousy of men for women and women for men is the very heart of all our social jealousies, the underlying tension of this crowded modern life that has grown out of the ampler, simpler, ancient life of men. That is why[Pg 97] we compete against one another so bitterly, refuse association and generous co-operations, keep the struggle for existence hard and bitter, hamper and subordinate the women as they in their turn would if they could hamper and subordinate the men—because each must thoroughly have his own.

And I knew my own heart too well to have any faith in Justin and his word. He was taking what he could, and his mind would never rest until some day he had all. I had seen him only once, but the heavy and resolute profile above his bent back and slender shoulders stuck in my memory.

If he was cruel to Mary, I told her, or broke his least promise to her, I should kill him.

§ 9

My distress grew rather than diminished in the days immediately before her marriage, and that day itself stands out by itself in my memory, a day of wandering and passionate unrest. My imagination tormented me with thoughts of Justin as a perpetual privileged wooer.

Well, well,—I will not tell you, I will not write the ugly mockeries my imagination conjured up. I was constantly on the verge of talking and cursing aloud to myself, or striking aimlessly at nothing with clenched fists. I was too stupid to leave London, too disturbed for work or any distraction of my mind. I wandered about the streets of London all day. In the morning I came near going to the church and making some preposterous interruptions.[Pg 98] And I remember discovering three or four carriages adorned with white favors and a little waiting crowd outside that extinguisher-spired place at the top of Regent Street, and wondering for a moment or so at their common preoccupation, and then understanding. Of course, another marriage! Of all devilish institutions!

What was I to do with my life now? What was to become of my life? I can still recall the sense of blank unanswerableness with which these questions dominated my mind, and associated with it is an effect of myself as a small human being, singular and apart, wandering through a number of London landscapes. At one time I was in a great

grey smoke-rimmed autumnal space of park, much cut up by railings and worn by cricket pitches, far away from any idea of the Thames, and in the distance over the tops of trees I discovered perplexingly the clustering masts and spars of ships. I have never seen that place since. Then the Angel at Islington is absurdly mixed up with the distresses of this day. I attempted some great detour thence, and found myself with a dumb irritation returning to the place from another direction. I remember too a wide street over which passes a thundering railway bridge borne upon colossal rounded pillars of iron, and carrying in white and blue some big advertisement, I think of the *Daily Telegraph*. Near there I thought a crowd was gathered about the victim of some accident, and thrusting myself among the people with a vague idea of help, discovered a man selling a remedy for corns. And somewhere about this north region I discovered I was faint with hunger, and got some bread and cheese and beer in a gaudily decorated saloon bar with a[Pg 99] sanded floor. I resisted a monstrous impulse to stay in that place and drink myself into inactivity and stupefaction with beer.

Then for a long time I sat upon an iron seat near some flower beds in a kind of garden that had the headstones of graves arranged in a row against a yellow brick wall. The place was flooded with the amber sunshine of a September afternoon. I shared the seat with a nursemaid in charge of a perambulator and several scuffling uneasy children, and I kept repeating to myself: "By now it is all over. The thing is done."

My sense of the enormity of London increased with the twilight, and began to prevail a little against my intense personal wretchedness. I remember wastes of building enterprise, interminable vistas of wide dark streets, with passing trams, and here and there at strategic corners coruscating groups of shops. And somewhere I came along a narrow street suddenly upon the distant prospect of a great monstrous absurd place on a steep hill against the last brightness of the evening sky, a burlesque block of building with huge truncated pyramids at either corner, that I have since learnt was the Alexandra Palace. It was so queer and bulky that it arrested and held my attention, struck on my memory with an almost dreamlike quality, so that years afterwards I went to Muswell Hill to see if indeed there really was such a place on earth, or whether I had had a waking nightmare during my wanderings....

I wandered far that night, very far. Some girl accosted me, a thin-faced ruined child younger by a year or so than myself. I remembered how I talked to her, foolish rambling talk. "If you loved a man, and he was poor, you'd[Pg 100] wait," I said, "you'd stick to him. You'd not leave him just to get married to a richer man."

We prowled talking for a time, and sat upon a seat somewhere near the Regent's Park canal. I rather think I planned to rescue her from a fallen life, but somehow we dropped that topic. I know she kissed me. I have a queer impression that it came into my head to marry her. I put all my loose money in her hands at last and went away extraordinarily comforted by her, I know not how, leaving her no doubt wondering greatly.

I did not go to bed that night at all, nor to the office next morning. I never showed myself in the office again. Instead I went straight down to my father, and told him I wanted to go to the war forthwith. I had an indistinct memory of a promise I had made Mary to stay in England, but I felt it was altogether unendurable that I should ever meet her again. My father sat at table over the remains of his lunch, and regarded me with astonishment, with the beginnings of protest.

"I want to get away," I said, and to my own amazement and shame I burst into tears.

"My boy!" he gasped, astonished and terrified. "You've—you've not done—some foolish thing?"

"No," I said, already wiping the tears from my face, "nothing.... But I want to go away."

"You shall do as you please," he said, and sat for a moment regarding his only son with unfathomable eyes.

Then he got up with a manner altogether matter-of-fact, came half-way round the table and mixed me a whisky and soda. "It won't be much of a war, I'm told," he said with the syphon in his hands, breaking a silence. "I sometimes wish—I had seen a bit of[Pg 101] soldiering. And this seems to be an almost unavoidable war. Now, at any rate, it's unavoidable.... Drink this and have a biscuit."

He turned to the mantelshelf, and filled his pipe with his broad back to me. "Yes," he said, "you—— You'll be interested in the war. I hope—— I hope you'll have a good time there...."

[Pg 102]

CHAPTER THE FIFTH

The War in South Africa

§ 1

Mary and I did not meet again for five years, and for nearly all that time I remained in South Africa. I went from England a boy; I came back seasoned into manhood. They had been years of crowded experience, rapid yet complicated growth, disillusionment and thought. Responsibility had come to me. I had seen death, I had seen suffering, and held the lives of men in my hands.

Of course one does not become a soldier on active service at once for the wishing, and there was not at first that ready disposition on the part of the home military authorities which arose later, to send out young enthusiasts. I could ride and shoot fairly well, and accordingly I decided to go on my own account to Durban—for it was manifest that things would begin in Natal—and there attach myself to some of the local volunteer corps that would certainly be raised. This took me out of England at once, a thing that fell in very well with my mood. I would, I was resolved, begin life afresh. I would force myself to think of nothing but the war. I would never if I could help it think of Mary again.

The war had already begun when I reached Durban. The town was seething with the news of a great British[Pg 103] victory at Dundee. We came into the port through rain and rough weather and passed a big white liner loaded up feverishly from steam tenders with wealthy refugees going England-ward. From two troopships against the wharves there was a great business of landing horses—the horses of the dragoons and hussars from India. I spent the best part of my first night in South Africa in the streets looking in vain for a bedroom, and was helped at last by a kindly rickshaw Zulu to a shanty where I slept upon three chairs. I remember I felt singularly unwanted.

The next day I set about my volunteering. By midday I had opened communications with that extremely untried and problematical body, the Imperial Light Horse, and in three days more I was in the company of a mixed batch of men, mostly Australian volunteers, on my way to a place I had never heard of before called Ladysmith, through a country of increasing picturesqueness and along a curious curving little line whose down traffic seemed always waiting in sidings, and consisted of crowded little trains full of pitiful fugitives, white, brown, and black, stifled and starving. They were all clamoring to buy food and drink—and none seemed forthcoming. We shunted once to allow a southbound train to pass, a peculiar train that sent everyone on to the line to see—prisoners of war! There they were, real live enemies, rather glum, looking out at us with faces very like our own—but rather more unshaven. They had come from the battle of Elandslaagte....

I had never been out of England before except for a little mountaineering in the French Alps and one walking excursion in the Black Forest, and the scenery[Pg 104] of lower

Natal amazed me. I had expected nothing nearly so tropical, so rich and vivid. There were little Mozambique monkeys chattering in the thick-set trees beside the line and a quantity of unfamiliar birds and gaudy flowers amidst the abundant deep greenery. There were aloe and cactus hedges, patches of unfamiliar cultivation upon the hills; bunchy, frondy growths that I learnt were bananas and plantains, and there were barbaric insanitary-looking Kaffir kraals which I supposed had vanished before our civilization. There seemed an enormous quantity of Kaffirs all along the line—and all of them, men, women, and children, were staring at the train. The scenery grew finer and bolder, and more bare and mountainous, until at last we came out into the great basin in which lay this Ladysmith. It seemed a poor unimportant, dusty little street of huts as we approached it, but the great crests beyond struck me as very beautiful in the morning light....

I forgot the beauty of those hills as we drew into the station. It was the morning after the surrender of Nicholson's Nek. I had come to join an army already tremendously astonished and shattered. The sunny prospect of a triumphal procession to Pretoria which had been still in men's minds at Durban had vanished altogether. In rather less than a fortnight of stubborn fighting we had displayed a strategy that was flighty rather than brilliant, and lost a whole battery of guns and nearly twelve hundred prisoners. We had had compensations, our common soldiers were good stuff at any rate, but the fact was clear that we were fighting an army not only very much bigger than ours but better equipped, with bigger guns, better information, and it seemed[Pg 105] superior strategy. We were being shoved back into this Ladysmith and encircled. This confused, disconcerted, and thoroughly bad-tempered army, whose mules and bullocks cumbered the central street of the place, was all that was left of the British Empire in Natal. Behind it was an unprotected country and the line to Pietermaritzburg, Durban, and the sea.

You cannot imagine how amazed I felt at it. I had been prepared for a sort of Kentucky quality in the enemy, illiteracy, pluck, guile and good shooting, but to find them with more modern arms than our own, more modern methods! Weren't we there, after all, to teach *them*! Weren't we the Twentieth and they the Eighteenth Century? The town had been shelled the day before from those very hills I had admired; at any time it might be shelled again. The nose of a big gun was pointed out to me by a blasphemous little private in the Devons. It was a tremendous, a profoundly impressive, black snout. His opinions of the directing wisdom at home were unquotable. The platform was a wild confusion of women and children and colored people,—there was even an invalid lady on a stretcher. Every non-combatant who could be got out of Ladysmith was being hustled out that day. Everyone was smarting

with the sense of defeat in progress, everyone was disappointed and worried; one got short answers to one's questions. For a time I couldn't even find out where I had to go....

§ 2

I fired my first shot at a fellow-creature within four days of my arrival. We rode out down the road to the[Pg 106] south to search some hills, and found the Boers in fair strength away to the east of us. We were dismounted and pushed up on foot through a wood to a grassy crest. There for the first time I saw the enemy, little respectable-looking unsoldierlike figures, mostly in black, dodging about upon a ridge perhaps a mile away. I took a shot at one of these figures just before it vanished into a gully. One or two bullets came overhead, and I tried to remember what I had picked up about cover. They made a sound, *whiff-er-whiff*, a kind of tearing whistle, and there was nothing but a distant crackling to give one a hint of their direction until they took effect. I remember the peculiar smell of the grass amidst which I crouched, my sudden disgust to realize I was lying, and had to lie now for an indefinite time, in the open sunlight and far from any shade, and how I wondered whether after all I had wanted to come to this war.

We lay shooting intermittently until the afternoon, I couldn't understand why; we went forward a little, and at last retired upon Ladysmith. On the way down to the horses, I came upon my first dead man. He was lying in a crumpled heap not fifty yards from where I had been shooting. There he lay, the shattered mirror of a world. One side of his skull over the ear had been knocked away by a nearly spent bullet, and he was crumpled up and face upward as though he had struggled to his feet and fallen back. He looked rather horrible, with blue eyes wide open and glassily amazed, and the black flies clustering upon his clotted wound and round his open mouth....

I halted for a moment at the sight, and found the keen scrutiny of a fellow trooper upon me. "No good[Pg 107] waiting for him," I said with an affectation of indifference. But all through the night I saw him again, and marvelled at the stupendous absurdity of such a death. I was a little feverish, I remember, and engaged in an interminable theological argument with myself, why when a man is dead he should leave so queer and irrelevant a thing as a body to decay....

I was already very far away from London and Burnmore Park. I doubt if I thought of Mary at all for many days.

§ 3

It isn't my business to write here any consecutive story of my war experiences. Luck and some latent quality in my composition made me a fairly successful soldier. Among other things I have an exceptionally good sense of direction, and that was very useful to me, and in Burnmore Park I suppose I had picked up many of the qualities of a scout. I did some fair outpost work during the Ladysmith siege, I could report as well as crawl and watch, and I was already a sergeant when we made a night attack and captured and blew up Long Tom. There, after the fight, while we were covering the engineers, I got a queer steel ball about the size of a pea in my arm, a bicycle bearings ball it was, and had my first experience of an army surgeon's knife next day. It was much less painful than I had expected. I was also hit during the big assault on the sixth of January in the left shoulder, but so very slightly that I wasn't technically disabled. They were the only wounds I got in the war, but I went under with dysentery before the relief; and[Pg 108] though I was by no means a bad case I was a very yellow-faced, broken-looking convalescent when at last the Boer hosts rolled northward again and Buller's men came riding across the flats....

I had seen some stimulating things during those four months of actual warfare, a hundred intense impressions of death, wounds, anger, patience, brutality, courage, generosity and wasteful destruction—above all, wasteful destruction—to correct the easy optimistic patriotism of my university days. There is a depression in the opening stages of fever and a feebleness in a convalescence on a starvation diet that leads men to broad and sober views. (Heavens! how I hated the horse extract—'chevril' we called it—that served us for beef tea.) When I came down from Ladysmith to the sea to pick up my strength I had not an illusion left about the serene, divinely appointed empire of the English. But if I had less national conceit, I had certainly more patriotic determination. That grew with every day of returning health. The reality of this war had got hold of my imagination, as indeed for a time it got hold of the English imagination altogether, and I was now almost fiercely keen to learn and do. At the first chance I returned to active service, and now I was no longer a disconsolate lover taking war for a cure, but an earnest, and I think reasonably able, young officer, very alert for chances.

I got those chances soon enough. I rejoined our men beyond Kimberley, on the way to Mafeking,—we were the extreme British left in the advance upon Pretoria—and I rode with Mahon and was ambushed with him in a little affair beyond Koodoosrand. It was a sudden brisk encounter. We got fired into at close quarters, but we[Pg 109] knew our work by that time, and charged home and brought in a handful of prisoners to make up for the men we had lost. A few days later we came into the flattened ruins of the quaintest siege in history....

Three days after we relieved Mafeking I had the luck to catch one of Snyman's retreating guns rather easily, the only big gun that was taken at Mafeking. I came upon it unexpectedly with about twenty men, spotted a clump of brush four hundred yards ahead, galloped into it before the Boers realized the boldness of our game, shot all the draught oxen while they hesitated, and held them up until Chambers arrived on the scene. The incident got perhaps a disproportionate share of attention in the papers at home, because of the way in which Mafeking had been kept in focus. I was mentioned twice again in despatches before we rode across to join Roberts in Pretoria and see what we believed to be the end of the war. We were too late to go on up to Komatipoort, and had some rather blank and troublesome work on the north side of the town. That was indeed the end of the great war; the rest was a struggle with guerillas.

Everyone thought things were altogether over. I wrote to my father discussing the probable date of my return. But there were great chances still to come for an active young officer; the guerilla war was to prolong the struggle yet for a whole laborious, eventful year, and I was to make the most of those later opportunities....

Those years in South Africa are stuck into my mind like—like those pink colored pages about something else one finds at times in a railway *Indicateur*. Chance had put this work in my way, and started me upon it[Pg 110] with a reputation that wasn't altogether deserved, and I found I could only live up to it and get things done well by a fixed and extreme concentration of my attention. But the whole business was so interesting that I found it possible to make that concentration. Essentially warfare is a game of elaborate but witty problems in precaution and anticipation, with amazing scope for invention. You so saturate your mind with the facts and possibilities of the situation that intuitions emerge. It did not do to think of anything beyond those facts and possibilities and dodges and counterdodges, for to do so was to let in irrelevant and distracting lights. During all that concluding year of service I was not so much myself as a forced and artificial thing I made out of myself to meet the special needs of the time. I became a Boer-outwitting animal. When I was tired of this specialized thinking, then the best relief, I found, was some quite trivial occupation—playing poker, yelling in the chorus of some interminable song one of the men would sing, or coining South African Limericks or playing burlesque *bouts-rimés* with Fred Maxim, who was then my second in command....

Yet occasionally thought overtook me. I remember lying one night out upon a huge dark hillside, in a melancholy wilderness of rock-ribbed hills, waiting for one of the flying commandoes that were breaking northward from Cape Colony towards the Orange River in front of Colonel Eustace. We had been riding all day, I was taking risks

in what I was doing, and there is something very cheerless in a fireless bivouac. My mind became uncontrollably active.

It was a clear, still night. The young moon set early in a glow of white that threw the jagged contours of a hill[Pg 111] to the south-east into strange, weird prominence. The patches of moonshine evaporated from the summits of the nearer hills, and left them hard and dark. Then there was nothing but a great soft black darkness below that jagged edge and above it the stars very large and bright. Somewhere under that enormous serenity to the south of us the hunted Boers must be halting to snatch an hour or so of rest, and beyond them again extended the long thin net of the pursuing British. It all seemed infinitely small and remote, there was no sound of it, no hint of it, no searchlight at work, no faintest streamer of smoke nor the reflection of a solitary fire in the sky....

All this business that had held my mind so long was reduced to insignificance between the blackness of the hills and the greatness of the sky; a little trouble, it seemed of no importance under the Southern Cross. And I fell wondering, as I had not wondered for long, at the forces that had brought me to this occupation and the strangeness of this game of war which had filled the minds and tempered the spirit of a quarter of a million of men for two hard-living years.

I fell thinking of the dead.

No soldier in a proper state of mind ever thinks of the dead. At times of course one suspects, one catches a man glancing at the pair of boots sticking out stiffly from under a blanket, but at once he speaks of other things. Nevertheless some suppressed part of my being had been stirring up ugly and monstrous memories, of distortion, disfigurement, torment and decay, of dead men in stained and ragged clothes, with their sole-worn boots drawn up under them, of the blood trail of a dying man who had crawled up to a dead comrade rather than die alone,[Pg 112] of Kaffirs heaping limp, pitiful bodies together for burial, of the voices of inaccessible wounded in the rain on Waggon Hill crying in the night, of a heap of men we found in a donga three days dead, of the dumb agony of shell-torn horses, and the vast distressful litter and heavy brooding stench, the cans and cartridge-cases and filth and bloody rags of a shelled and captured laager. I will confess I have never lost my horror of dead bodies; they are dreadful to me—dreadful. I dread their stiff attitudes, their terrible intent inattention. To this day such memories haunt me. That night they nearly overwhelmed me.... I thought of the grim silence of the surgeon's tent, the miseries and disordered ravings of the fever hospital, of the midnight burial of a journalist at Ladysmith with the distant searchlight on Bulwana flicking suddenly upon our faces

and making the coffin shine silver white. What a vast trail of destruction South Africa had become! I thought of the black scorched stones of burnt and abandoned farms, of wretched natives we had found shot like dogs and flung aside, rottenly amazed, decaying in infinite indignity; of stories of treachery and fierce revenges sweeping along in the trail of the greater fighting. I knew too well of certain atrocities,—one had to believe them incredibly stupid to escape the conviction that they were incredibly evil.

For a time my mind could make no headway against its monstrous assemblage of horror. There was something in that jagged black hill against the moonshine and the gigantic basin of darkness out of which it rose that seemed to gather all these gaunt and grisly effects into one appalling heap of agonizing futility. That rock rose up and crouched like something that broods and watches.

[Pg 113]

I remember I sat up in the darkness staring at it.

I found myself murmuring: "Get the proportions of things, get the proportions of things!" I had an absurd impression of a duel between myself and the cavernous antagonism of the huge black spaces below me. I argued that all this pain and waste was no more than the selvedge of a proportionately limitless fabric of sane, interested, impassioned and joyous living. These stiff still memories seemed to refute me. But why us? they seemed to insist. In some way it's essential,—this margin. I stopped at that.

"If all this pain, waste, violence, anguish is essential to life, why does my spirit rise against it? What is wrong with me?" I got from that into a corner of self-examination. Did I respond overmuch to these painful aspects in life? When I was a boy I had never had the spirit even to kill rats. Siddons came into the meditation, Siddons, the essential Englishman, a little scornful, throwing out contemptuous phrases. Soft! Was I a soft? What was a soft? Something not rough, not hearty and bloody! I felt I had to own to the word—after years of resistance. A dreadful thing it is when a great empire has to rely upon soft soldiers.

Was civilization breeding a type of human being too tender to go on living? I stuck for a time as one does on these nocturnal occasions at the word "hypersensitive," going round it and about it....

I do not know now how it was that I passed from a mood so darkened and sunless to one of exceptional exaltation, but I recall very clearly that I did. I believe that I made a crowning effort against this despair and horror that had found me out in the darkness

and [Pg 114]overcome. I cried in my heart for help, as a lost child cries, to God. I seem to remember a rush of impassioned prayer, not only for myself, not chiefly for myself, but for all those smashed and soiled and spoilt and battered residues of men whose memories tormented me. I prayed to God that they had not lived in vain, that particularly those poor Kaffir scouts might not have lived in vain. "They are like children," I said. "It was a murder of children.... *By children!*"

My horror passed insensibly. I have to feel the dreadfulness of these things, I told myself, because it is good for such a creature as I to feel them dreadful, but if one understood it would all be simple. Not dreadful at all. I clung to that and repeated it,—"it would all be perfectly simple." It would come out no more horrible than the things that used to frighten me as a child,—the shadow on the stairs, the white moonrise reflected on a barked and withered tree, a peculiar dream of moving geometrical forms, an ugly illustration in the "Arabian Nights." ...

I do not know how long I wrestled with God and prayed that night, but abruptly the shadows broke; and very suddenly and swiftly my spirit seemed to flame up into space like some white beacon that is set alight. Everything became light and clear and confident. I was assured that all was well with us, with us who lived and fought and with the dead who rotted now in fifty thousand hasty graves....

For a long time it seemed I was repeating again and again with soundless lips and finding the deepest comfort in my words:—"And out of our agonies comes victory, out of our agonies comes victory! Have pity on us, God our Father!"

[Pg 115]

I think that mood passed quite insensibly from waking to a kind of clear dreaming. I have an impression that I fell asleep and was aroused by a gun. Yet I was certainly still sitting up when I heard that gun.

I was astonished to find things darkly visible about me. I had not noted that the stars were growing pale until the sound of this gun very far away called my mind back to the grooves in which it was now accustomed to move. I started into absolute wakefulness. A gun?...

I found myself trying to see my watch.

I heard a slipping and clatter of pebbles near me, and discovered Fred Maxim at my side. "Look!" he said, hoarse with excitement. "Already!" He pointed to a string of dim little figures galloping helter-skelter over the neck and down the gap in the hills towards us.

They came up against the pale western sky, little nodding swaying black dots, and flashed over and were lost in the misty purple groove towards us. They must have been riding through the night—the British following. To them we were invisible. Behind us was the shining east, we were in a shadow still too dark to betray us.

In a moment I was afoot and called out to the men, my philosophy, my deep questionings, all torn out of my mind like a page of scribbled poetry plucked out of a business note-book. Khaki figures were up all about me passing the word and hurrying to their places. All the dispositions I had made overnight came back clear and sharp into my mind. We hadn't long for preparations....

It seems now there were only a few busy moments before the fighting began. It must have been much longer in reality. By that time we had seen their gun come over and a train of carts. They were blundering right[Pg 116] into us. Every moment it was getting lighter, and the moment of contact nearer. Then "Crack!" from down below among the rocks, and there was a sudden stoppage of the trail of dark shapes upon the hillside. "Crack!" came a shot from our extreme left. I damned the impatient men who had shot away the secret of our presence. But we had to keep them at a shooting distance. Would the Boers have the wit to charge through us before the daylight came, or should we hold them? I had a swift, disturbing idea. Would they try a bolt across our front to the left? Had we extended far enough across the deep valley to our left? But they'd hesitate on account of their gun. The gun couldn't go that way because of the gullies and thickets.... But suppose they tried it! I hung between momentous decisions....

Then all up the dim hillside I could make out the Boers halting and riding back. One rifle across there flashed.

We held them!...

We had begun the fight of Pieters Nek which ended before midday with the surrender of Simon Botha and over seven hundred men. It was the crown of all my soldiering.

§ 4

I came back to England at last when I was twenty-six. After the peace of Vereeniging I worked under the Repatriation Commission which controlled the distribution of returning prisoners and concentrated population to their homes; for the most part I was distributing stock and grain, and presently manœuvring a sort of ploughing[Pg 117] flying column that the dearth of horses and oxen made necessary, work that was certainly as hard as if far less exciting than war. That particular work of replanting the desolated country with human beings took hold of my imagination, and for a time at

least seemed quite straightforward and understandable. The comfort of ceasing to destroy!

No one has written anything that really conveys the quality of that repatriation process; the queer business of bringing these suspicious, illiterate, despondent people back to their desolated homes, reuniting swarthy fathers and stockish mothers, witnessing their touchingly inexpressive encounters, doing what one could to put heart into their resumption. Memories come back to me of great littered heaps of luggage, bundles, blankets, rough boxes, piled newly purchased stores, ready-made doors, window sashes heaped ready for the waggons, slow-moving, apathetic figures sitting and eating, an infernal squawking of parrots, sometimes a wailing of babies. Repatriation went on to a parrot obligato, and I never hear a parrot squawk without a flash of South Africa across my mind. All the prisoners, I believe, brought back parrots—some two or three. I had to spread these people out, over a country still grassless, with teams of war-worn oxen, mules and horses that died by the dozen on my hands. The end of each individual instance was a handshake, and one went lumbering on, leaving the children one had deposited behind one already playing with old ration-tins or hunting about for cartridge-cases, while adults stared at the work they had to do.

There was something elementary in all that redistribution. I felt at times like a child playing in a nursery and[Pg 118] putting out its bricks and soldiers on the floor. There was a kind of greatness too about the process, a quality of atonement. And the people I was taking back, the men anyhow, were for the most part charming and wonderful people, very simple and emotional, so that once a big bearded man, when I wanted him in the face of an overflowing waggon to abandon about half-a-dozen great angular colored West Indian shells he had lugged with him from Bermuda, burst into tears of disappointment. I let him take them, and at the end I saw them placed with joy and reverence in a little parlor, to become the war heirlooms no doubt of a long and bearded family. As we shook hands after our parting coffee he glanced at them with something between gratitude and triumph in his eyes.

Yes, that was a great work, more especially for a ripening youngster such as I was at that time. The memory of long rides and tramps over that limitless veld returns to me, lonely in spite of the creaking, lumbering waggons and transport riders and Kaffirs that followed behind. South Africa is a country not only of immense spaces but of an immense spaciousness. Everything is far apart; even the grass blades are far apart. Sometimes one crossed wide stony wastes, sometimes came great stretches of tall, yellow-green grass, wheel-high, sometimes a little green patch of returning cultivation drew nearer for an hour or so, sometimes the blundering, toilsome passage of a

torrent interrupted our slow onward march. And constantly one saw long lines of torn and twisted barbed wire stretching away and away, and here and there one found archipelagoes as it were in this dry ocean of the skeletons of cattle, and there were places[Pg 119] where troops had halted and their scattered ration-tins shone like diamonds in the sunshine. Occasionally I struck talk, some returning prisoner, some group of discharged British soldiers become carpenters or bricklayers again and making their pound a day by the work of rebuilding; always everyone was ready to expatiate upon the situation. Usually, however, I was alone, thinking over this immense now vanished tornado of a war and this equally astonishing work of healing that was following it.

I became keenly interested in all this great business, and thought at first of remaining indefinitely in Africa. Repatriation was presently done and finished. I had won Milner's good opinion, and he was anxious for me to go on working in relation to the labor difficulty that rose now more and more into prominence behind the agricultural re-settlement. But when I faced that I found myself in the middle of a tangle infinitely less simple than putting back an agricultural population upon its land.

§ 5

For the first time in my life I was really looking at the social fundamental of Labor.

There is something astonishingly naïve in the unconsciousness with which people of our class float over the great economic realities. All my life I had been hearing of the Working Classes, of Industrialism, of Labor Problems and the Organization of Labor; but it was only now in South Africa, in this chaotic, crude illuminating period of putting a smashed and desolated social order together again, that I perceived these familiar phrases represented[Pg 120] something—something stupendously real. There were, I began to recognize, two sides to civilization; one traditional, immemorial, universal, the side of the homestead, the side I had been seeing and restoring; and there was another, ancient, too, but never universal, as old at least as the mines of Syracuse and the building of the pyramids, the side that came into view when I emerged from the dusty station and sighted the squat shanties and slender chimneys of Johannesburg, that uprooted side of social life, that accumulation of toilers divorced from the soil, which is Industrialism and Labor and which carries such people as ourselves, and whatever significance and possibilities we have, as an elephant carries its rider.

Now all Johannesburg and Pretoria were discussing Labor and nothing but Labor. Bloemfontein was in conference thereon. Our work of repatriation which had loomed so large on the southernward veld became here a business at once incidental and remote. One felt that a little sooner or a little later all that would resume and go on, as

the rains would, and the veld-grass. But this was something less kindred to the succession of the seasons and the soil. This was a hitch in the upper fabric. Here in the great ugly mine-scarred basin of the Rand, with its bare hillsides, half the stamps were standing idle, machinery was eating its head off, time and water were running to waste amidst an immense exasperated disputation. Something had given way. The war had spoilt the Kaffir "boy," he was demanding enormous wages, he was away from Johannesburg, and above all, he would no longer "go underground."

Implicit in all the argument and suggestion about me was this profoundly suggestive fact that some people,[Pg 121] quite a lot of people, scores of thousands, had to "go underground." Implicit too always in the discourse was the assumption that the talker or writer in question wasn't for a moment to be expected to go there. Those others, whoever they were, had to do that for us. Before the war it had been the artless Portuguese Kaffir, but he alas! was being diverted to open-air employment at Delagoa Bay. Should we raise wages and go on with the fatal process of "spoiling the workers," should we by imposing a tremendous hut-tax drive the Kaffir into our toils, should we carry the labor hunt across the Zambesi into Central Africa, should we follow the lead of Lord Kitchener and Mr. Creswell and employ the rather dangerous unskilled white labor (with "ideas" about strikes and socialism) that had drifted into Johannesburg, should we do tremendous things with labor-saving machinery, or were we indeed (desperate yet tempting resort!) to bring in the cheap Indian or Chinese coolie?

Steadily things were drifting towards that last tremendous experiment. There was a vigorous opposition in South Africa and in England (growing there to an outcry), but behind that proposal was the one vitalizing conviction in modern initiative:—indisputably it would pay, *it would pay*!...

The human mind has a much more complex and fluctuating process than most of those explanatory people who write about psychology would have us believe. Instead of that simple, direct movement, like the movement of a point, forward and from here to there, one's thoughts advance like an army, sometimes extended over an enormous front, sometimes in échelon, sometimes bunched in a column throwing out skirmishing clouds of[Pg 122] emotion, some flying and soaring, some crawling, some stopping and dying.... In this matter of Labor, for example, I have thought so much, thought over the ground again and again, come into it from this way and from that way, that for the life of me I find it impossible to state at all clearly how much I made of these questions during that Johannesburg time. I cannot get back into those ancient ignorances, revive my old astonishments and discoveries. Certainly I envisaged the whole process much less clearly than I do now, ignored difficulties that have since entangled me, regarded with a tremendous perplexity aspects that have now become

lucidly plain. I came back to England confused, and doing what confused people are apt to do, clinging to an inadequate phrase that seemed at any rate to define a course of action. The word "efficiency" had got hold of me. All our troubles came, one assumed, from being "inefficient." One turned towards politics with a bustling air, and was all for fault-finding and renovation.

I sit here at my desk, pen in hand, and trace figures on the blotting-paper, and wonder how much I understood at that time. I came back to England to work on the side of "efficiency," that is quite certain. A little later I was writing articles and letters about it, so that much is documented. But I think I must have apprehended too by that time some vague outline at least of those wider issues in the sæcular conflict between the new forms of human association and the old, to which contemporary politics and our national fate are no more than transitory eddies and rufflings of the surface waters. It was all so nakedly plain there. On the one hand was the primordial, on the other the rankly new. The farm[Pg 123] on the veld stood on the veld, a thing of the veld, a thing rooted and established there and nowhere else. The dusty, crude, brick-field desolation of the Rand on the other hand did not really belong with any particularity to South Africa at all. It was one with our camps and armies. It was part of something else, something still bigger: a monstrous shadowy arm had thrust out from Europe and torn open this country, erected these chimneys, piled these heaps—and sent the ration-tins and cartridge-cases to follow them. It was gigantic kindred with that ancient predecessor which had built the walls of Zimbabwe. And this hungry, impatient demand for myriads of toilers, this threatening inundation of black or brown or yellow bond-serfs was just the natural voice of this colossal system to which I belonged, which had brought me hither, and which I now perceived I did not even begin to understand....

One day when asking my way to some forgotten destination, I had pointed out to me the Grey and Roberts Deep Mine. Some familiarity in the name set me thinking until I recalled that this was the mine in which I had once heard Lady Ladislaw confess large holdings, this mine in which gangs of indentured Chinamen would presently be sweating to pay the wages of the game-keepers and roadmenders in Burnmore Park....

Yes, this was what I was taking in at that time, but it found me—inexpressive; what I was saying on my return to England gave me no intimation of the broad conceptions growing in my mind. I came back to be one of the many scores of energetic and ambitious young men who were parroting "Efficiency," stirring up people and more particularly stirring up themselves with the[Pg 124] utmost vigor,—and all the time within their secret hearts more than a little at a loss....