THE HOUSE OF DEFENCE

VOLUME 2

E. F. BENSON

Freeditorial

CHAPTER I

MAUD was lying in a long chair on the lawn after lunch the following afternoon, defending Christian Science from the gibes (which were keen) of the mockers, who were many. She had an ally, it is true, in the person of Alice Yardly, who, in her big hat and white dress, with a blue sash, looked like a doubtful Romney, and was smiling, literally with all her might. The more the mockers mocked, the kinder grew her smile, and the more voluble her explanations. Maud, for her part, would sooner have done battle alone, for all that Alice as an ally did was, with great precision and copious directions, to reveal to the enemy all the weak points in the fortifications (of which, it seemed to Maud, there were hundreds) and all the angles where an assault would probably meet with success. Wherever, so it seemed, there was any possible difficulty in "the scheme of things entire," as understood by Christian scientists, there was poor dear Alice, waving a large and cheerful flag to call attention to it.

"No, I am not a Christian Scientist, Thurso," Maud was saying, "because I think a lot of it is too silly—oh, well, never mind. But what I told you at lunch I actually saw with my own eyes. I will say it again. Nurse Miles, who is optimistic, told me that Sandie was dying, and though it was really no use, she wanted Dr. Symes to be sent for. Well, I didn't send for him, but I went upstairs with Mr. Cochrane, and I saw Mr. Cochrane—by means of Christian Science, I must suppose—pull Sandie out of the jaws of death."

"Be fair, Maud," said Thurso. "Tell them what Dr. Symes said when he came next morning."

"I was going to. He said he had known cases where the temperature went suddenly down from high fever to below normal, and it had not meant perforation. It meant simply what it was—the sudden cessation of fever. Of course, such a thing is very rare, and it would be an odd coincidence if——"

Alice Yardly leaned forward, smiled, and interrupted violently and volubly.

"Mortal mind had caused the fever originally," she said, "and it was this that Mr. Cochrane demonstrated over, thus enabling Sandie to throw off the false claim of fever and temperature, for he couldn't really have fever, since fever is evil."

"Is temperature evil, too?" asked Thurso. "And why is a temperature of 104 degrees more evil than a normal temperature?"

Alice did not even shut her mouth, but held it open during Thurso's explanation, so as to go on again the moment he stopped.

"Neither heat nor cold really exist," she said, "any more than fever, since, as I was saying, fever is evil, and Infinite Love cannot send evil to anybody, because it is All-Good. It was the demonstration of this that made his temperature go down and let him get well. It was only with his mortal mind, too, that he could think he had fever, since there is no real sensation in matter, just as it was through mortal mind, and not through All-Love, that he thought he had caught it. But Immortal Mind knows that there is no sensation in matter, and so no disease. As David said, 'Thou shalt not be afraid for any terror by night, nor for the arrow that flieth by day;' and when Sandie, by Mr. Cochrane's demonstration over mortal mind, perceived that—though he need not have been conscious that he perceived it—the false claim of fever left him, so, of course, his temperature went down."

Maud gave a sigh, not of impatience, but of very conscious patience, which is very near akin to it.

"Darling Alice," she said, "you haven't understood a single word from the beginning. Mr. Cochrane didn't make Sandie's temperature go down."

Alice's mouth was still open. She interrupted like lightning.

"No, of course not," she said. "It was not Mr. Cochrane: it was the belief and trust in Immortal Mind that had reached Sandie. It is not the healer who does it: it is Divine Love shining through the healer

that disperses false claims. God is good and is All, and matter is nothing, because Life, God, Immortal Mind——"

Maud sat up in her long chair and clapped her hands close to Alice's face, so that she absolutely could not go on, in spite of the omnipotence of Immortal Mind.

"I will finish one sentence—just one," she said, "whatever you say. You don't understand a single thing. It was the subsidence of high temperature that was the dangerous symptom. Mr. Cochrane came in after Sandie's temperature had suddenly gone down. He had nothing to do with bringing it down. I took him up to Sandie, because Sandie's temperature had gone down. I am sure it is very difficult to understand, especially if you don't believe in temperature; but do draw a long breath and try to grasp that. It wasn't Immortal Good, God, Mind, that brought Sandie's temperature below normal: it was all, as you would say, a frightfully false claim. It was a symptom of dangerous illness, not a symptom of health. I wish you would attend more. You make me feel feverish in explaining like this, darling."

Alice's smile suffered no diminution. She was still quite ready to explain anything.

"As I said, fever cannot be sent by Divine Love," she remarked, "and therefore, since there is nothing really existent in the world except Divine Love, it follows that fever cannot be real, and that the belief in it is a function of mortal mind. No evil or pain or disease can happen to anybody who has uprooted the false claim of mortal mind, and no drug can have any effect, either harmful or beneficial, on anyone who knows the truth. The drug only acts on mortal mind, which is——"

Thurso entered the arena.

"I want to understand, Alice," he said. "Supposing I choose to drink large quantities of prussic acid for breakfast, under the conviction that no poison exists for Immortal Mind, shall I live to take pints more of it at lunch? Doesn't poison exist for mortal body?"

"'If you drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt you,'" quoted Alice.

"Soufflé of nightshade for Alice this evening," said Maud cheerfully.

Theodosia had been keeping up a general chattering noise, to which no one listened. Now she had her chance.

"My!" she said. "You'd better become a Christian Scientist at once, Silas. Silas adores—he just adores—English beer, but he has a false claim that it disagrees with him. Now Mrs. Yardly tells us that there's no such thing as poison. So, Silas, just take tight hold of that, and get a barrel. I may be left a widow, but try—just swill it."

"Theodosia," began Silas; but he was not permitted to get further.

"But intoxicant drinks are in themselves evil things," said Alice, "just as tobacco, which is only fed upon by a loathsome worm, is evil, as you will find in Mrs. Eddy's miscellaneous writings. She has pronounced against them."

"But I thought there was no evil except in the false belief of mortal mind?" said Maud.

"That is just what I have been saying," said Alice profusely. "The only real existence is God, who is cause, source, origin, overlies and underlies and encompasses."

Rudolf Villars joined in.

"And if Mrs. Eddy said that cream-cheese was evil, would that make it so?" he asked politely. "Cannot she have attacks of error and mortal mind? Is it not just possible, as Oliver Cromwell said, that she is occasionally? I should have thought that instances might be found where intoxicants had even saved life in cases of exhaustion or exposure."

Maud broke in again.

"You are all very flippant," she said. "It really does not matter what Mrs. Eddy thinks about tobacco, or whether darling Alice will not answer our questions. But I did see—and I stick to it—a man who was past human power pulled back into life by Mr. Cochrane. How it was done I don't know, but his own explanation was a perfectly simple one. He said it was the direct healing power of God. After all, if we and doctors say that there are healing powers in certain herbs which God made, why shouldn't He heal direct?"

The throb of a motor and the sound of its wheels crunching the gravel was heard, and Thurso got up.

"Well, we must settle something else just now," he said. "Who wants to drive over to Windsor, and who wants to go on the river, and who wants to do nothing?"

This broke up the conference, as it was designed to do, for Thurso felt literally unable to stand much more: he was nervous, irritable, scarcely in his own control. He had slept badly—indeed, he had hardly slept at all—and this stream of balderdash that spouted from Alice was quite intolerable. She, however, with undiminished cheerfulness, expressed a preference for the river, and made it impossible for Villars not to offer his companionship. Ruby and Jim had not been seen since lunch. Theodosia and her husband went with Thurso to Windsor, and Mr. Yardly murmured something about letters, which, rightly interpreted, meant slumber, and hastily betook himself to the house. In consequence, Maud and her sister-in-law, both of whom announced their intention of doing nothing of any description, were before long left in possession of the garden. There had been a certain design about this, though successfully veiled, on Catherine's part. She wanted to have a talk with Maud, and the gentlest promptings had been sufficient to make other people choose other things.

The rest of the party dispersed in their various directions, and it was not till the motor had hooted at the entrance to the main road and the steam launch puffed its way past the opening in the yew-hedge that Catherine spoke again.

"Tell me more about this Mr. Cochrane," she said.

Maud was already half immersed in her book, and had been quite unconscious of Catherine's diplomacy. She started a little when the question was put to her, and closed her book.

"There is really no more to tell," she said. "I think I have told you all. Ah! no; there was one more thing, but they would all have howled so if I had said it. It was this: he told me that he was demonstrating over the whole outbreak of typhoid. Well, it stopped quite suddenly. The cases had been coming in hour after hour till it ceased like a tap being turned off. And after that there were no more deaths. Of course, it sounds incredible, and if you ask me whether I really believe that it was through him that it came to an end like that, I shouldn't say 'Yes.' I don't know."

"I should like to see Mr. Cochrane," remarked Catherine.

"You can if you like. He is coming to town, he told me, some day this month. Oh, Catherine, it is interesting, anyhow! He did cure Sandie; also, he cured Duncan Fraser's wife. I am convinced of that. And then the other fact of the typhoid ceasing like that! Of course, you may say it was a pure coincidence; you may say that those other cures were coincidences too. But when you get a set of coincidences all together like that, you wonder if there is not—well, some law which lies behind them, and accounts for them all."

She paused a moment.

"A lot of apples and other things fell to the ground," she said, "and Newton deduced the law of gravity. It accounted for them all."

Catherine lit a cigarette, and threw the match away with great vigour.

"*What* a fool darling Alice is!" she observed. "I love Alice just as you do—you can't help loving her—but, oh, what a fool! Somehow, if a person talks such abject nonsense as that about anything, one

concludes that the subject is nonsense too. But it doesn't really follow. And Mr. Cochrane doesn't talk nonsense?" she asked.

"No; he isn't the least nonsensical. As I have told you, he goes and cures people when they are ill, instead of gassing about it. He's a very good fisherman, too."

Catherine could not help laughing. Maud mentioned this in a voice of such high approval.

"But isn't that inconsistent?" she said. "I don't think a man whose whole belief was in health and life should go and kill things."

"Oh yes; I think it's inconsistent," said Maud, "and so does he. But did you ever see anybody who wasn't inconsistent? I never did, and I never want to. He would be so extremely dull: you would know all about him at once."

"And you don't know all about Mr. Cochrane?" she asked.

"No; I should like to know more. I think I never met anyone so arresting. You are forced to attend, whether you like it or not."

"And I gather you like it?" asked Catherine.

"Yes, certainly. I like vigour and certainty, and—oh, well, that sort of cleanness. He is like a nice boy at Cambridge, with all this extraordinary strength behind."

Catherine could not help making mental comments on this.

"Ah, that attracts you?" she said. "It attracts me also. I like people to be strong and efficient; but, oh, Maud, how one's heart goes out to them when they are helpless and enmeshed in what is stronger than they!"

This was a clear change of subject. Mr. Cochrane was put aside for a little, and Catherine could not help noticing that Maud seemed relieved.

"Ah, you mean Thurso?" she said quickly, letting her book slide to the ground.

"Yes; and I want to talk to you about him, for I believe you are wise, and I feel helpless. I don't know what to do. Last night, I must tell you, I went straight to his room after leaving you dressing. He had just taken laudanum, not because he had any headache, but because he longed for it."

Maud clasped her hands together and gave a little pitiful sound, half sigh, half moan.

"Ah, the poor fellow!" she said. "Yes?"

"And—and he lied to me," said Catherine, "and said he had not been taking it, and there was the glass smelling of it by his side. Then he was very angry with me for a little, and said I had spoiled everything, but eventually he gave me the bottle and let me pour it away. I did, and I threw the bottle into the shrubbery."

Maud's eye brightened.

"Ah! that's better," she said. "He can still fight it."

Catherine shook her head.

"That's not all," she said, "and the rest is so dreadful, and so pathetic. I couldn't sleep last night, and it must have been about two in the morning when I got out of bed and went to the window and sat there a little. And I saw Thurso come along the path, and he lit a match and found the bottle. Then he took it—it was bright moonlight; I could see quite clearly—and literally sucked it, to see if there was not a drop or two left."

Maud had no reply to this. If it was despicable, it was, as Catherine had said, dreadfully pathetic.

"Advise me, dear Maud," she said at length. "I am horribly troubled about it. The sight of him turning that damned little bottle—no, I'm

not sorry: I meant it—upside down in his mouth showed me how awfully he wanted it. I feel one shouldn't lose a day or a minute. The desire grows like an aloe-flower. But if he won't see a doctor, what is to be done? I shall send for Sir James as soon as I get back to town, and tell him all about it; but I can't force Thurso to see him. Besides——" and she stopped.

"Yes?"

"There is nothing in the world so hard to cure," she said. "It is deadlier than a cancer."

"But he still wants to free himself," said Maud.

"Yes; so does a prisoner."

There was a pause.

"Or do you think I am taking too pessimistic a view?" asked Catherine.

Maud could not help seeing the bright side of things. Sunshine appealed to her more strongly than shadow. It was more real to her.

"Yes; I think you are," she said. "He let you pour the—well, the damned stuff away. You influenced him more strongly than his desire."

"Yes, than his satisfied desire," said Catherine with terrible commonsense. "He had just taken it. Do you suppose he would have let me pour it away if he was just going to take it?"

"I don't know. You are stronger than he, I think."

Maud gave a great sigh, picking up her book.

"I remember Mr. Cochrane practically offered to cure his neuralgia," she said, "but I knew it was perfectly useless to suggest it to Thurso; nor at the time did I believe in Mr. Cochrane. But since then——"

Catherine looked up, and saw in Maud's face what she had suspected.

"Oh, Maud!" she said. "Are you in love with him?"

Maud leaned forward, and her book again dropped face downwards on the gravel. She did not notice it.

"Oh, I haven't the slightest idea," she said. "Catherine, I do like him awfully—I like him most awfully. No one has ever attracted me like that. Good gracious! how indelicate I am! But I don't care one straw. I should like to put all my affairs and all poor Thurso's into his hands. I should do it with the utmost confidence, and I should then just curl round as one does in bed, and feel everything is all right. Is that being in love? I don't know or care. He is so strong, and so windy and so sunny. He is surrounded by sun, and—and it is as if he had just had a cold bath and stepped into the sun. I love that strength and wind. Don't you like it? I want somebody who would go on playing undoubled spades at bridge in the middle of an earthquake. He would—for a shilling a hundred. Am I in love with him? I tell you I don't know. Certainly this sort of thing has never happened to me before, and, again, I certainly have never been in love. So perhaps 'these are the ones.' Oh, do tell me! When Thurso proposed to you, was it like that? Did you feel there wasn't anybody else who *really* mattered? Oh dear! poor Mr. Cochrane, to have all this put upon him! He hasn't shown the slightest sign of doing more than admire my fishing. Lots of people have done that. But about you and Thurso, did you feel that? Is that the one?"

There was a fine irony about this, and Catherine, in spite of the previous discussion on Christian Science, which laid down that all that had any real existence was good, felt disposed to believe in the malice that lurked in chance questions. She evaded the direct answer.

"Oh, there are as many ways of love as there are people in the world," she said. "But, dear, I regard you with suspicion. There are certain symptoms——"

"Oh, don't," said Maud.

"Very well. But I feel with you about strength. It is an adorable quality to women. And it is that which so troubles me about Thurso. I know—the throwing away of the bottle proves it—that he is fighting; but is he strong enough? He was weak when he allowed himself to form a habit that he knew was harmful."

She threw her hands wide.

"Oh, it is so awful!" she said. "One begins by saying, 'I shall do this when I choose,' and so soon. This says, 'You shall do it when I choose.' Personally, I always make it a rule to give anything up before I begin to want it very badly."

There was an irony in this, too. The remembrance of what chiefly kept her awake last night made her know that her rule was not always quite easy to follow. But this was secret from Maud.

"You, who get all you want!" she said, speaking from outside.

Catherine got up, and began walking up and down the small angle of lawn where they sat, bordering the deep flower-bed. All June was in flower there, just as in herself, to the outside view, all June seemed to be flowering. It was no wonder that Maud thought that. But all the emotional baggage which she had consistently thrown away all her life seemed to her to be coming back now in bales, returned to her by some dreadful dead-letter office—at least, she had hoped it was dead—and a sudden bitterness, born of perplexity, invaded her.

"Oh yes; everybody always thinks one is happy," she said, "if one has good digestion and a passable appearance, and heaps of things to do, and the enjoyment in doing them which I have, and as much money as one wants. But all these things only give one pleasure. Do you think I am happy? Do you really think so?"

Maud dropped her eyes. When talk deepens it is well to talk in the dark, or to talk without the distraction of sight.

"No, I don't think you are," she said, "if I look deep down."

"Then you are two people," said Catherine rather fiercely—"the superficial Maud who just now said I had all I wanted, implying happiness, and another Maud, who has to be fished for."

That was less personal, less intricate, and Maud looked up again, smiling.

"Quite true," she said. "But so are you two Catherines; so is everybody who is worth anything. I used to think you an ideally happy person, because, as far as one could see, you got all you wanted. I imagine it was what you call the superficial Maud who thought that; I don't think the deep-down 'you' is happy."

Maud paused a moment, feeling that her sister-in-law was hanging on her words. It did not seem to her that in this claim for unhappiness, so to speak, that Catherine had made she had in her mind the drug-taking: it was something different to that. Only lately, too, had she herself been conscious of this "deeper Maud," which yet did not in the least affect the workings of the more superficial self. The joy of morning and evening, the depression and irritation of east wind, the rapture of catching sea-trout, went on, on the surface, just as keenly as ever, but an interior life had awoke.

"I used to envy you so, Cathy," she said—"at least, I used to envy lots of things about you, when I thought that the 'you' which all the world knew and admired so was all there was. But now I believe that there is a greater 'you' than that, and that a realer 'me' than the ordinary thing perceives it. And since you ask me, I don't think that essential part of you is happy, any more than Thurso is happy."

Catherine sat down again, and thought over this before she answered.

"I would give, or give up, a great deal to make Thurso happy," she said with absolute sincerity. "But I get on his nerves."

Maud looked up, waiting for more—waiting for the completion of the sentence which she had heard not so long ago on Thurso's lips. It came.

"And he bores me," said Catherine.

There was a long silence. Bees buzzed in the flowers, making them bend and sway and nod to their weight; a grasshopper clicked and whirred on the lawn; swifts swooped and chided together in sliding companies; while the splash of oars or churn of a steamer sounded from the river. Then—such is the habit of the world—it struck them both how unlike themselves, unlike the ordinary presentment of themselves, that is to say, they were being, and simultaneously they swam out of the depths that were in reality the much more essential abode of them both. But the return to normal levels was short; they soon went down again; since those who have met or seen each other below always go back there. It is only those who have talked insincerely on deep matters who prefer to splash about on the surface. But a few surface remarks followed.

"Yet it is almost certainly one's own fault if one is bored," said Catherine. "To be bored only shows that a bore is present—probably oneself. Yet, Maud ... if I tell him about the bazaars, and sales, and speeches, and so on, *he* is bored; and they do make up a big part of my life."

"On the surface," said she, "since we are being frank."

"No, not on the surface, since we are contradicting each other. The deepest and most real part of me that I know is sorry for poor devils, and it expresses itself in these ways. And it is exactly that which gets on his nerves. If I get up from lunch because I have got to go somewhere, he is irritated. He thinks I am restless. Well, so I am. I want to be doing things, not eating stupid cutlets. What do you want me to do? What does he want me to do? Eat opium instead?"

Maud gave a long sigh.

“Oh, Cathy, that was a pity!” she said.

Catherine gave a little hopeless gesture.

“Oh yes; it was a pity. Lots of things are. Our attitude towards each other is a pity. But I’m sorry I said that. Oh, do help me! Let’s be practical. Remember, I am at home when I am doing things. And I want to know what to do about a hundred things.”

Catherine got up again. She was, as she said, always practical, and she was always restless. This afternoon in particular, after the inconclusive wakefulness of the night before, she longed to map out plans, rules of conduct, a line to take about all these complications. Yet, since all her life she had been chary of emotion, apt to regard it as useless, if not dangerous, stuff to have on board; now, when it was certainly there, either through her will or in opposition to it, she found herself—she, the ready speaker—destitute of words to deal with it to Maud. And in her silent search for expression again she paced up and down the busy bee-travelled flower-beds. Then there came a crisper note—the sound of crunched gravel—and a dog-cart drew up at the front-door, some fifty yards only from where they sat. There was only one person in it, a young man, who dismounted and rang the bell, and stood at the pony’s head waiting for it to be answered. But apparently the servants were drowsy too, as befitted Sunday afternoon, and after a pause he rang again.

No definite process of reasoning went on through Catherine’s mind, but somehow her heart sank. This was no caller, no one who would need entertainment; but there was something dimly familiar in that cart, and in the tradesman-like young man, that reminded her of medicines, of the time when the children had the measles. Yes; it was a man from the chemist’s ... and next moment she knew why her heart sank.

“I will see who it is,” she said to Maud. “The servants seem to be asleep;” and she went across the grass to the front-door.

She had a word with the man, who gave her a small package, neatly sealed. Then he touched his hat, mounted, and turned his horse. Catherine came back to where Maud was sitting.

"It is directed to Thurso," she said, "and it is from the chemist in Windsor. Maud——"

Maud understood; but she shook her head.

"Oh, you can't open other people's things," she said—"you can't. Oh, Catherine, what are we to do?"

Catherine sat down again, with the bottle—the shape of it was plain—in her hand. Then Maud spoke again.

"But we must," she said. "Open it carefully, so that if it isn't what we think we can do it up again. Oh, I hate it all; it seems mean, but I don't care. I'll open it if you would rather not."

Catherine seemed to think this unnecessary, and carefully broke the seals. There was a bottle of dark blue glass inside, with a red label of "Poison" on it. It was closed with a glass stopper, which she withdrew, and she smelled it. Then, paper and all, she passed it to Maud.

Maud put the stopper back into the bottle, squeezed up the paper and string in which it had been wrapped into a tight ball, and threw it deep into the flower-bed. Then she went to the opening in the yew-hedge and flung the bottle itself into mid-stream.

"So we've both had a hand in it," she said when she returned. "Oh, Cathy, last night only he let you throw the wretched stuff out of the window, and the very next day has to go and order some more. Poor dear old boy! He must have ordered it when he went in with Theodosia after lunch. He must have told them he wanted it quickly. It's death and hell, you know. I didn't stop to think. I had to throw it into the river. What next? Are we to know anything about it or not?"

“Yes; he would find out in any case. The chemist’s man would say he gave it to me. But there is no reason why you should come into it.”

“Oh, give me my share,” said Maud quickly. “I want to help.”

“Of course you can help; but I am quite willing to take the whole responsibility for what we have done,” said Catherine.

“No; I want it to come from both of us,” said Maud, “if that is of any use.”

Catherine considered this.

“It is,” she said. “You have more weight with him than I have, you know.”

There was no trace of any bitterness in her tone. It was plain unemotional speech, but it struck Maud as one of the saddest things she had ever heard said. She had long known, of course, that the married life of her brother and Catherine was not very happy, but this afternoon the tragedy of it was becoming, by these little trivial words, infinitely more real. And the materials for tragedy were being dreadfully augmented. This little bottle she had just thrown into the Thames was like one of those little incidents in the first act of a play, from which disaster will certainly be evolved later. What hideous scene in the last act did the great Playwright of life mean to make out of this?

Then suddenly some memory of things Mr. Cochrane had said to her up in Scotland, some sentences from a book concerning Christian Science which he had lent her, came back to her mind. He had warned her that she would find in it certain things which would seem to her ridiculous, and he had asked her to pass over those. But he had told her that she would also find there certain things which were indisputably true, and, remembering one of them, she told herself now that she was thinking wrongly in anticipating evil like this. If she was to be of any use in the world, or produce any happiness in herself or others, she must turn away from evil, must

deny it, and look at and affirm this great reality of Love and Good. To dwell on sin and error and on their consequences was to invite them, to make them her guests. It was another Guest—a very willing One—that was to be made welcome, but He was autocratic: you had to do His bidding all the time, even in details.

"Yes, let me help," she said. "And we must tell him at once what we have done. Don't let us deceive him, even if we could."

"He will be furious," said Catherine.

"We can't help that. We have certainly got to tell him. Besides, we don't want to conceal what we have done; we don't want to think of some plan for preventing it coming to his knowledge. We are not ashamed of it. Wouldn't you do it again? I would. I would throw all the laudanum bottles in the world into the Thames if I could prevent the stuff reaching him."

People began to gather again after this. Rudolf Villars and his companion came back from the river, he looking fatigued, while Alice was fresher than paint. Her husband came out from the house with considerable alertness, as if letter-writing had been an unconscious recuperative process. A few people from neighbouring houses came, by road or river, to look in at tea-time; and when Thurso, with the two Americans, returned from Windsor, there was a rather numerous company on the lawn. He went into the house before joining the others, and was there some minutes, during which time they heard a bell ring furiously within. Catherine's eyes and Maud's met over this; and when he came out, another piece of silent telegraphy went on between them, and Maud got up and went straight to him before he joined the tea-table group.

Catherine could not go with her, being busy with her entertaining, but between sentences she watched them. They were not far distant when they met, and Thurso's face was towards her. She saw it get suddenly white, and he gave one furious gesticulation, then turned

and went back towards the house again, without joining them. He did not go in, but walked down the shrub-set road that led to the stables.

Maud came back to the tea-table, spoke to friends, and gradually got close to Catherine.

"He is going back to Windsor to get more," she said quietly. "Yes, no sugar, thanks. He would not listen to me. I have never seen him so angry."

Catherine just nodded, and then, since, whatever private tragedy was being played, the public comedy had to go on, she was, with the surface-Catherine, no more than an admirable hostess, charmed to see her guests, eager to interest them. But below, courageous though she was, and little as she regretted what Maud and she had done, though it turned out to be futile, she feared what was coming, for she hated anger, and she hated, also, to think that just now, when, for reasons of which Maud knew nothing, she wanted Thurso's friendship and companionship so much, there should open this fresh breach between them. But it was no good thinking of that: here was Villars at her elbow, and here was Thurso already on his way back to Windsor, for she had heard the motor start by the back way from the stables. And only last night he had let her pour the foul stuff away, and had thanked her for doing it!

Meantime the tinkle of drawing-room philosophy went on round her, and it was a relief, in its way, to join in it. It was so perfectly easy.

"Yes, it is necessary for all of us to have some fad which for the time being is quite the most serious thing in the world," she said to Lady Swindon, who had come down the river from Cookham. "We do the serious things lightly, but we take our fads in deadly earnest. Two years ago, do you remember, we never wore hats in the country. I didn't get as far as wearing none in town, though I remember you did; but in the country I felt that golden hours were wasted if I had a hat on. Then last year there was the simple life. I retain pieces of that still."

Lady Swindon laughed.

"I know you do, darling Catherine, but you are so busy that you find time for everything. I gave it up because it was so very complicated. One had to provide two sorts of lunches and two sorts of dinners every day—one for the simple-life people who ate curried lentils and all the most expensive fruits, and one for the people who ate beef. Swindon always ate both, to show he wasn't bigoted, and so, of course, he had two months at Carlsbad instead of one. The simple life, anyhow, is finished with: it was too difficult. Do tell me what the next fad is going to be. You always are a full fad ahead of the rest of us."

"I wish I knew. I thought it would be spiritualism at one time, but I don't believe now that it will come off. Such confusing things happen. I went to a *séance* the other day, and the most wonderful materialisation occurred, and I recognised the figure at once, and for certain, as being my grandmother. But in the same breath Major Twickenham over there recognised it as being his great-aunt, who was Austrian, and is no more a relation of mine than I am of the Shah's. The medium subsequently explained it as being a spiritual coalition, but personally I felt rather inclined to explain it as being the medium."

Lady Swindon looked thoroughly disappointed.

"Oh, I did hope it was going to be spiritualism," she said. "I do automatic writing every evening, unless I am really tired—because it's no use then, is it?—and sometimes it says *the* most extraordinary things. Haven't you ever tried it? It is quite fascinating, especially if you use a stylograph pen, which seems to go easier. And Swindon and I have heard the most awful raps—like the postman. But if it is not going to be the craze I shall give it up. One has no time for a private hobby: one has to ride the public hobby all the time. Are you sure you are right? Think of the Zigzags. I never can remember their name. And what about Christian Science? I hear it is spreading tremendously. Or deep breathing?"

The smile on Alice Yardly's face widened and deepened as she heard the sacred word. But at this moment she was being talked to, and could not join in with her long and lucid explanations, though the scientific statement of Being—cause, source, origin—was trembling on her lips.

"I have tried deep breathing," said Catherine, "but there really isn't time. You can't do anything else while you are doing it; you can't talk even, because your mouth is closed, and you breathe in through one nostril and breathe out through the other. Perhaps it will be Christian Science, though, do you know, I think some of it is too serious and sensible to be a fad, whereas the other half is too silly. On that side talk to Alice, or read what Mark Twain says. But on the serious side—the side that is sensible—get Maud to tell you about the typhoid up at Achnaleesh and her Mr. Cochrane."

"Her Mr. Cochrane?" asked Lady Swindon, with the alertness of the world.

But the unconsciousness of the world, no less important an equipment, answered her.

"Oh, only 'hers' because she told me about him; no other reason. Thurso and she were up there together."

"And Thurso—isn't he here?"

"Oh yes," said Catherine, "but tea-time isn't his hour. Tea-time is women's hour; it corresponds to men's after-dinner talk when we have gone upstairs."

"But we have women's hour then, too," said Lady Swindon. "I suppose we have got more to say?"

Lady Thurso laughed.

"Oh, I don't think that," she said. "I think we only take longer to say it. Tea, Theodosia?"

Theodosia had truly American ideas about being introduced. It was her custom—and a genial one—to make all her guests formally known to each other by name, and she expected the same formality.

"Kindly introduce me, Catherine," she said.

"Lady Swindon—my cousin, Mrs. Morton."

"Very happy to make your acquaintance, Lady Swindon," said Theodosia; "and don't you think that Catherine's place down here is just the cunningest spot you ever saw? Why, look at that yew-hedge! I guess—expect, I mean—that Noah planted it before the Flood, or, anyhow, soon after, to have made it that height. But, then, all Catherine has is perfect, is it not? I adore her things and her. My! I never saw such a wonderful black pearl as that you've got around your neck. It looks as if it came straight from the Marquis of Anglesea's tie-pin."

"I think not; I inherited it," said Lady Swindon rather icily.

"Well, there you are," said the prompt Theodosia. "That's what comes of being an Englishwoman of the upper classes. You inherit things, and we've got to buy them. Why, this afternoon Lord Thurso and my husband and I drove over to Windsor, and I never saw a spot that looked so inherited as that. You can't buy that look: it's just inheritance. Do you know my husband? Ah! he's talking to Count Villars over there; and what a lovely man he is! And we had the loveliest time to-day! I never saw Windsor before; and fancy inheriting that! But I'm afraid Lord Thurso is sick. He called at a chemist's, and told them to send some medicine out here right away. I guess he pined for that medicine. And he's not here, is he? I shouldn't wonder if he went straight in to take it. I guess he's taking it now. Catherine, I think your husband is the loveliest man! I hope he's not real sick. But he just pined for that medicine."

Tea was no longer in demand, and Catherine got up. The whole situation was beginning to get on her nerves. Theodosia, with her awful American manner, was on her nerves; this dreadful

information about the call at the chemist's was there also, and she felt sure that Lady Swindon, for all her "darling Catherines," was that sort of friend who likes knowing the weak points of others, not necessarily with the object of their malicious use, but as useful things to have in your pocket. Theodosia, as she was aware, when she got up now to get out of immediate range of that rasping voice, was one of her weak points: the mention of Thurso's medicine and his anxiety to get it were others. Theodosia touched them with the unerring instinct of the true and tactless bungler. So Catherine, with the higher courage that wants not to know the worst, if Theodosia was going to throw more sidelights on the subject of this medicine, moved out of earshot.

Lady Swindon justified her position of a true friend to Catherine, and became markedly more cordial to Theodosia. She wanted to know more about this, and proceeded in the spirit of earnest inquiry.

"What a charming afternoon you must have had!" she said. "To see Windsor for the first time is delightful, is it not? and to have Lord Thurso as a companion is delightful at any time. But he is not ill, is he?"

"He seemed just crazy to get to that chemist's," said Theodosia, "and he seemed just crazy to get back home again. They tell me you have a speed-limit for motors over here, but if we didn't exceed it, I don't see that it can be of much service."

Now, Lady Swindon was not really more malicious than most people, in spite of her weakness for her friends' weaknesses, and it was in the main her truly London desire to be always well up in current scandals, and know the details of all that may perhaps soon be beginning to be whispered, that led her to "pump" (if a word that implies effort may be used about so easy a process) Theodosia on this subject. Thurso's long absence in Scotland, to begin with, had seemed to her queer, and to require explanation. It did not seem likely, somehow, that he had gone there after a woman, but, on the other hand, she personally thought it improbable that he had really gone to look after fever-stricken tenants. As a matter of fact, of course he had

done so, but the truth usually escapes these earnest inquirers, especially if it is quite simple and straightforward. But here was a fresh fact: he had been crazy to get to the chemist's and had raced home. She felt she had guessed.

"He used to have dreadful headaches," she observed. "Perhaps he had one this afternoon."

"He didn't seem that way," said Theodosia, "and I know about headaches, because Silas used to have them, arising from faulty digestion, to which he is a martyr. He took opium for them."

"Yes?" said Lady Swindon.

"That always cured him. Why, here's Count Villars. Count Villars, I haven't set eyes on you since lunch, and I feel bad because you are neglecting me. Let me present you to Lady Swindon."

Villars bowed.

"I think we were introduced about twelve years ago," he observed. "How are you, Lady Swindon? You have come down the river from your charming Cookham?"

Lady Swindon got up, turning her back on Theodosia, for whom she had no further use.

"Yes, and I am just going back there. How clever of you to remember where we live! Will you take me to my boat? Let us walk round the garden first. It is charming to see you again."

They strolled a few yards down the path between the two tall herbaceous borders, while she rapidly ran over in her mind what information she wanted from him. It was very quickly done.

"And you are staying here?" she asked. "How do you find Catherine? I am sure you walked together last night after dinner, and joined old memories onto the present."

Lady Swindon was colossal in her impertinence. It struck Villars afresh after his long absence from England how very ill-bred a well-bred Englishwoman can be. But he was more than a match for her.

"Ah, my dear lady," he said, "we found that the two needed no link. We neither of us have that faculty, which, no doubt, is often convenient, of forgetting old friends. As always, I adore her; as always, she receives my adoration from her infinite height. The Madonna still smiles on her worshipper. He asks no more."

It was admirably done, for it told her nothing. She tried again.

"Indeed? I thought you had once asked more," she said. "We all supposed so."

"There is no limit to what people of brilliant and vivid imagination may not suppose," said he.

She could not help smiling at her own defeat. His refusals to give direct answers were so very silken.

"And the truth always exceeds one's imagination, does it not?" she said.

"It is usually different from it," observed he.

This would not do. She tried something else.

"And Thurso?" she said. "How do you think he is?"

Villars looked at her in bland surprise.

"Very well, surely, is he not?" he said. "Why should you think otherwise?"

"Only something I heard about his calling at a chemist's and racing home afterwards."

"Indeed!" said Villars.

Lady Swindon was afraid there was no more to be got there, and he handed her into her launch.

"But I am so glad, so very glad you think he is well," she said. "Do come and spend a Sunday with us some week. I will try to get Catherine to come and meet you."

He murmured gratitude of the non-committal sort, and stood a little while looking after her launch, which sped like an arrow up-stream, raising a two-foot wave in its wake, and nearly upset half a dozen boats in its passage. Then he strolled back to the lawn again. He had not the faintest intention of staying with Lady Swindon, but, on the other hand, he did not at all desire to be on bad terms with her, for, little as he respected her, he had a profound respect for her supreme mischief-making capabilities. She had got hold of something about Thurso, too, and perhaps it was as well she had not seen him. In that case, his own bland assertion that he considered him very well would not have been of much use.

Lady Swindon's departure had acted as a signal for a general move, and when Villars got back, Lady Thurso was just saying good-bye to the last of her guests. On the moment, the butler came out of the house and spoke to her.

"His lordship begs that you and Lady Maud will go to his room for a moment as soon as you are disengaged, my lady," he said.

"Tell his lordship we will come immediately. Ah, Count Villars, we were going on the river, were we not? Could you wait a few minutes? Thurso wants to see me about something."

Maud joined her, and they went together to Thurso's sitting-room at the end of the house. He was sitting at his table in the window, and, with his usual courtesy, got up as they entered. On the table in front of him stood a bottle of dark blue glass. He had just finished unpacking this as they entered, and threw the corrugated paper in which it had been wrapped into the waste-paper basket.

"A cigarette, Catherine?" he said, offering her one. "I want a few minutes' talk with you both."

She took one, and he waited till she had lit it, and sat down.

"Maud tells me," he said, "that you and she undid a package that arrived here this afternoon addressed to me, and threw it away. That is so, I believe?"

She did not answer—it seemed unnecessary—and he raised his voice a little.

"Will you kindly say whether that is so?" he said.

"Yes; quite right," she said.

Again he raised his voice, that shook with suppressed rage.

"And do you make a habit of doing such things, both of you? Do you open my letters, other people's letters?"

"Oh, Thurso, don't be a fool!" said Maud quietly.

His face went very white.

"Maud, I am trying to be courteous," he said, "under a good deal of provocation. You might make an effort to follow my example."

"Is it courteous to ask Catherine and me whether we are in the habit of opening other people's letters?" she asked.

"Your behaviour this afternoon seems to me to warrant my question," he said.

"No, Thurso, it does not," said his wife. "I think you know it, too."

He looked first at the one, then at the other, and his hand moved as if instinctively towards the bottle on the table.

“I don’t want to make a scene with either of you,” he said, “and I don’t want to detain you. I wish to say, however, that I think you behaved quite outrageously. And I require you both to promise never again to act in such a way. You are absolutely unjustified in touching or interfering with my things in this way from whatever motive.”

He took up the bottle.

“You see how little good your interference has done in this instance,” he said, “and it will do as little in any other. You will merely oblige me to adopt methods as underhand as your own.”

“There was nothing underhand,” said Catherine. “We were going to tell you what we had done. Indeed, Maud did tell you.”

“I should have said that stealing was underhand,” said he very evilly, “though perhaps you think differently. As to your telling me, you knew it was inevitable that I should find out.”

“That has nothing to do with it,” said Maud quickly. “Even if you could never have found out otherwise, we should have told you.”

“Ah!” said he.

Maud looked at him in amazement. She had been told by Catherine this afternoon that there were two Mauds, and here indeed was a Thurso whom she would scarcely have known for her brother. His manner was quite quiet and courteous again now, but it seemed as if he was possessed. There was a world of sneering incredulity in that one word.

“You don’t believe what I say?” she asked.

He was silent; he smiled a little, and raised his eyebrows. There was no need for him to speak; he could not have shouted his meaning nearly so clearly.

“Then where is the use of our giving you any promise for the future, if you don’t believe what we say?” she asked.

“I ask for your promise, however,” he said.

“And if we don’t give it you?” said Catherine.

He looked at her closely, and she felt that he hated her at that moment.

“I shall merely have to find some other way of getting things delivered,” he said, “so that you shall not st—intercept them.”

There was silence.

“I ask for your promise,” he repeated.

Maud threw back her head.

“I promise,” she said. “It is no use refusing.”

“And I,” said Catherine, getting up. “Is that all, Thurso?”

Thurso put his hand to his head suddenly, with a wince of pain he could not control.

“Yes, on that point that is all,” he said. “Let us agree to say nothing more about a most unpleasant subject. But I want to tell you this: I am suffering so hideously at the present moment that I hardly know what I am saying. Agitation and anger, for which you two are responsible, have brought on about the worst attack I ever had. Very likely I should not have taken laudanum from that bottle you threw away; in any case, I should have struggled hard not to. I struggled yesterday, with the result that I allowed Catherine to pour away all I had in the house. But I am not going to struggle now, thank you. The pain is intolerable, and I believe it to have been brought on by what you did. Your interference has not done the slightest good; it has only given me an hour of hell.”

Then, quite suddenly, his mood changed. “I have said abominable things to you both,” he said. “My only excuse is that I am in torments. I beg the forgiveness of both of you.”

Here was the real Thurso again, looking out like a soul in prison, trying to burst through the bars, and there was a dreadful, hopeless pathos about him. Catherine laid her hand on his shoulder.

"Ah, Thurso, of course we forgive you," she said. "But for God's sake don't give up. I suppose you must take this now because of your pain, but say you will go on fighting it again. It's—it's damnation, you know."

He looked at her with agonised eyes.

"I will do my best," he said. "Now go, please. Make my excuses to the others if I don't appear at dinner. But I expect I shall; I have two hours yet."

The women went out together, but before the door was closed they heard the clink of glass.

CHAPTER II

IT was a chill November afternoon in the autumn of the same year, and Catherine was seated at the table in her sitting-room at Thurso House, surrounded by a plentiful litter of letters and telegrams, writing busily, fiercely almost, as if to absorb herself in what she was doing to the exclusion of other thoughts. Her secretary, to whom she had just finished dictating a pile of business correspondence and letters less private than those she was occupying herself with, had just left her, and Catherine had begun to tackle this great heap of letters which she felt she had better answer herself—inquiries, mainly, from personal friends. She knew she had given herself more to do than it was really needful that she should, but what to her mind was needful was that she should be occupied in writing, and leave herself no leisure to think. At present there was nothing to be gained by thinking; she could take no step.

Outside the day was utterly dispiriting; there had been a dense yellow fog all morning, and though it had cleared a little about midday, so that from her window she could see the lilac-bushes of the garden that bordered the Green Park, it hovered still overhead, and though the hour was still not yet three in the afternoon, and her table was in the window, she had to light the shaded electric candle that stood on it to enable her to write. A big fire burned in the open hearth, compounded of logs and coal, that hissed and whistled cheerfully as they blazed, and the room was warm and fragrant. But so dense had been the fog this morning that it had penetrated a little through the joinings of the windows, and a haze, visible now that the electric lights were burning, hung in the atmosphere.

The room where she sat was one of her own private suite, which she had fitted up not long ago for occupation in those numerous flying visits she had to pay to town, when she intended to stop only a day or two and do some necessary business. On these occasions it was not worth while to open the whole house, and so she had established herself here on the third-floor, with just the one sitting-room, and a bedroom and bathroom adjoining. Until half-way through November

she had been paying a series of visits at different country houses ever since she came down from Scotland, while Thurso, so she then believed, had been doing the same at other houses. This week they were to have had the first big shoot at their place in Norfolk, but all that had been put off. Ten days ago now she had arrived here for a couple of days' stay before going down to Norfolk, and had found her husband was in the house. He had been there ever since they came down from Scotland, alone with his valet and a couple of maidservants, one to cook and one to clean, having excused himself from the various houses where he had told her he should be staying, in order to live here in the hell-paradise of opium. Catherine had at once telegraphed for Maud, who was of more use than anybody with her brother, and the two had been here now for ten days. It was just better that they should be with him than that he should be alone; he still occasionally felt ashamed of himself if they were there.

Since last June the habit had gained on him with appalling rapidity, though for a few months he had, as she knew, made frantic, agonising efforts to throw it off. He had seen doctors, he had done apparently all that lay in his power to do. But now it seemed that a sort of atrophy of his will had set in; he no longer actively desired to be a free man again, though sometimes a sort of shame and remorse seemed to visit him; and though his will had been so completely dominated and destroyed by the drug, it had left the calculating, scheming part of his brain untouched, and he had a thousand devices for obtaining it after the chemists with whom he habitually dealt had been warned not to give it him. Indeed, it was ten days now since he made what appeared to be the very last effort of will, when, on Catherine's appearance here, he had burned the prescription which enabled him to obtain it. But within twenty-four hours he had himself forged it again, and Lord Thurso, calling suddenly at some big pharmacy with a prescription bearing an eminent doctor's name, was naturally not refused the blue bottle with its red poison label.

Yet busily as Catherine occupied herself with her correspondence, striving, since at the moment she could do nothing for her husband, to engage her mind rather than let it dwell on the hideous realities

that were going on, and so vitally concerning her, she was alert for the interruption she expected. For yesterday afternoon Thurso, undermined and weakened as he was by this habit, had had an attack of syncope, and for an hour or two they thought he could not live. But the doctor had pulled him round out of immediate danger, and he had regained a little strength during the last twenty-four hours. Sir James Sanderson had, in fact, just come back for his afternoon visit, and was with him now. He had promised to make his report to Lady Thurso before he left the house. The news of Thurso's sudden illness had been in the evening papers last night, and had appeared again this morning. She was answering the inquiries of her huge circle of friends.

Her pen went rapidly from the top to the bottom of her sheets, and envelope after envelope was directed and thrown on her pile. Awful as the present moment was, yet, in a sense, now that a crisis like this had come, it was almost more bearable than the hideous growth of the anxieties and torments she had suffered before. For as the habit gained on him, his moral perception, like his will, seemed to wither and vanish. He had conceived wholly baseless suspicions against his wife; he had uttered them to her; he had told her in what relation he believed her to stand towards Villars. Worse even than that, he did not seem to mind it. He had spied on her; he had opened her letters, both those which she received and those which she wrote—in a word, he seemed to hate her, and to delight in his hate. He made long absences, when he was not at his club or in the house, and gave elaborate, palpably false accounts of his movements when he returned. Finally, all sense of decency seemed to have left him, and he had brought to Thurso House, while his wife was in it, a common woman off the street. How it would all end she dared not think. If he lived, it seemed impossible to her that she should go on living with him. What would happen to the children? what would happen to Maud? And the shame, the atrocious shame and publicity that must follow!

But the crisis which had occurred yesterday afternoon, the crisis that concerned life and death, had somewhat mitigated the horror of these things. It had also blunted the acuteness of another question that did not concern her less. Since June last she had known that Villars loved her now just as he had always loved her, and though, since he was a gentleman, to put the matter broadly, he had not traded on her growing disgust at the man who was her husband, it was impossible for her not to know that her lover had moved closer. She had no moral House of Defence to take refuge in—nothing of that nature prevented her letting the man who loved her, the lover whom she was sure now she loved, become in deed what both he and she knew that he was in all else but that. Nothing, except a blind determination, which she often told herself was irrational, that this should not be so, stood in her way. Again and again Thurso had taunted her with a lie; he could not taunt her more if it had been a truth. Indeed, to taunt her, as he had done, with what was not true was more unbearable to her than if it had been. Had Villars been her lover, she almost felt as if she would have hurled that fact in his face. For her actions never ran away with her; she was not in the habit of doing what she was ashamed of afterwards; and certainly if she had taken a step so momentous, so vitally affecting her life, as that of having a lover, she was sure she would not have done so blindly or in any sudden flash of passion. Had she meant to live the double life she would have done so deliberately, and for reasons which seemed to her excellent—namely, that her husband was opium-drenched, and had vilely insulted her; secondly, that she loved Villars; and, thirdly, that she did not think it wicked for her in this position to do so. And yet, though in judging others she had no moral code, she judged herself and made her decision in obedience to some stricter law, though all-unformulated, than she applied to others. She knew she was irrational and inconsistent, but she knew she could not be otherwise.

It is probably difficult for those of high and complex moral organisation to appreciate the workings of a nature which, on analysis, seems so rudimentary as hers, and the most rigid sort of moralist may easily say that after all there was extremely little difference between her and people of no morals whatever. But that is

where the higher moralist would go astoundingly astray. There are plants so sensitive that they seem to have organic life; there are amœbæ so apparently immobile and unsensitive that to a creature so immensely distant from them in point of organisation as man they may seem to be much lower in the scale of life than the highly sensitive plant. But to the trained biologist the amœbæ are so transcendently higher than the other that he despairs of finding a bridge that can ever link up the two. And in the same way, though Catherine could formulate no moral code at all, and would unhesitatingly let any friend of hers lead any life he pleased, and yet not abate one jot of her friendship, provided only he did not do things which were mean; the fact that when "it came to" in her own case she utterly refused to contemplate doing this, made the classification of her with the moral inorganic an abysmal error. She was far stricter with herself than with others, which shows a moral generosity, and she blindly followed the more difficult way, which shows a faith that is perhaps the finer since it is conscious of no leading.

And, poor soul, she knew but too well that her trials in this respect had not really begun; she had only been told to look at the rack where she was soon to be placed. For Rudolf Villars was her real stand-by in these dark passages in her life. Maud was splendid, too: she felt she could not have got through the days without her; but Maud was a woman, and she was a woman, and Villars was a man. Therefore he could help her in a way that Maud could not. For humankind is created male and female, and those of different sex can and must help each other in a manner impossible for those of the same sex. That is the glory of the world and its shame.

Villars had known about this drug habit on the Sunday he had spent with them in June, for he had seen Thurso by chance when the ecstasy of the dose was on him; and since then, day by day, she owed more to him, till the debt was mounting up into huge figures. And though she knew well that to him the debt was non-existent—he never would add it up, that is to say, and present the bill—it was fearfully existent to her. In payment of it she could only give him one

thing—herself; and that she would not. True, he had made no absolutely direct declaration of his love, but in a hundred ways he showed it, and day by day, as she saw, it was getting harder for him to be silent. And what would happen then? She had made her determination. She would have to declare it. That was all ... oh yes, that was all.

For the time, however, the acuteness of these perplexities had lost its sharpness, since Thurso's attack yesterday, and such thoughts, the summary of her inner life for the last two or three months, did not get between her pen and her paper. She had to answer these letters and telegrams inquiring about him, and to regret her unavoidable absence from the various engagements of the next few weeks. She knew, too, that it had become a matter of common knowledge what was the matter with him; she had even talked to certain friends about it, and she had to word her answers carefully. But it was no use any longer to pretend that nothing was wrong; the whole world knew that something was wrong.

But the interruption for which she had been waiting soon came, and Sir James Sanderson was shown in. He looked extraordinarily unlike an eminent doctor, and resembled nothing so much as a captain on some respectable line of steamers. He had a toothbrush of a moustache, a plump, bronzed, and ruddy face, and wore a black frockcoat, with yellow boots and a red tie. He was awkward, cheerful, embarrassed, and nautical, and played golf whenever possible, which was not often, with boyish enthusiasm and remarkable inability. But, incidentally, he had saved more lives and restored more health, which he personally considered of greater importance, than any other two doctors put together.

He shook hands with Catherine, and sat down on a small chair, which broke into fragments beneath his extremely ponderous frame, leaving him couched in splinters on the floor. He said "Damn!" quite distinctly, and struggled to his feet.

"Oh, I am so sorry," said Catherine. "I hope you are not hurt?"

"Not in the least, but the chair is," he said. "Yes, I have been with your husband for the last hour."

He found a more reliable seat.

"Now, be brave," he said.

Then his wonderful skill in dealing with people, whether the sick or the whole, showed itself. There was dreadful news he had to tell to this beautiful woman, but in spite of the obsoleteness of the phrase "breaking the news," news could still be prepared for. It was wise to start like that, to say "Be brave," and then, since he knew he was dealing with a brave woman, to wait for her bracing herself up to it.

"I know I am allowed to smoke a cigarette," he said, thus securing his moment's pause, "though it is most unprofessional."

Catherine's courage had sunk for a moment, like the mercury in a thermometer exposed to zero, but in that pause she recalled it again. It was that he had been waiting for.

"Lord Thurso has lived through twenty-four hours," he said, "and immediate danger is really over. The attack he had was enough to kill most people. It has not killed him, and he will not now die of this attack. He may have others, but I don't see why he should, unless he provokes them himself."

He flicked the charred end of his cigarette.

"That is the bright side," he said. "Now we must talk about the other. He came to me in July, you know, and told me about it. Probably he did not tell me all. You must do that, my dear lady. I guess a good deal from what I have seen to-day. I want to know all. Has he lost the power of will, do you think? There is nothing, I may say, that you can tell me which will be worse than what I conjecture."

Catherine required no further stimulus to enable her to brace herself to this hideous recital, and she began at once, telling Sir James the whole history of the case as far as she knew it. Once only did he

interrupt her, and that early in the tale, when she told him that the original cause of Thurso's taking opium was those frightful attacks of neuralgia to which he was subject. To that Sir James said:

"Quite so. I gave him the authorisation myself."

Then, month by month, she went through the tragic history; she spoke of that week up in Scotland when he began to take it more frequently, when, too, Maud began to suspect that he was taking it not only for relief of pain, but for the effects of it on his nerves and brain. Then came the stealthy dose in the train, then the scenes at Bray. But as she spoke, though he attended very carefully to all she said, he watched her not for that reason alone. It was not so unlikely, he saw, that he might have another patient on his hands, for it was as much as she could do to get through with what she was saying.

Then the tale became harder of telling: from that day he had seemed to have begun to hate her, and with hate there grew and flourished in his mind ignoble suspicions. He had taken to spying on her, to opening her letters; then came the infamous taunts he had levelled at her, and the final insult. And when she had finished there was silence.

She had spoken quite calmly, arranging and reviewing the events of those hideous months in orderly manner, and stopping only when she could not quite command her voice. And without any long pause after she had done, Sir James went on with what had to be told her.

"The opium habit," he said, "even when one begins to treat it quite early, is the most difficult thing in the world to cure. Give me ten drunkards who want to get over the habit, and I will very likely cure eight, but give me ten opium-eaters or laudanum-drinkers—for the two, of course, are exactly the same—who are equally desirous to amend, and I may cure one of them. God knows why it is so, Lady Thurso, but this particular drug, this poppy of the fields, binds body and soul in a way that no other habit binds, not alcohol, nor sensualism, nor anything. And your husband's case has not been

taken early. He is completely undermined by it. It is impossible to imagine a more serious case."

Catherine shifted her chair a little; she was so overwhelmingly tired, now that she had ceased writing, that it was something of an effort to meet the doctor's eye.

"And now you need your bravery again," he said. "He might have died any minute during those first six hours after his attack. And, dear lady, it might have been better if he had. It might have saved God knows what suffering and misery to himself and others. Sometimes I think that we doctors do a cruel kindness in snatching poor folk out of death's jaws. Of course, one cannot, and I do not, say that any case is incurable, because, thank God, miracles still happen. But I cannot see how he can be cured. As he gets stronger from this attack, his craving for the drug will get stronger also; he has already asked for it. Unless you absolutely shut him up he will find means of getting hold of it. He will probably begin with smaller doses, for the poison will have more effect when he is still weak, and he will increase them and increase them until this or something like it happens again. His digestion, too, is in the most feeble condition. I do not suppose he has eaten a pound of nourishing food in the last week.

"No; he has hardly touched it," said she. "He says it gets in the way. But if we could succeed in keeping him away from the drug by—by any means, would there not be hope?"

The kind old doctor gave a long sigh. He hated this part of his business, and the braver people were, the more cruel he seemed to himself.

"No," he said; "I think he would probably go off his head without it. One can't tell, but I should fear that. You see, it is not the time for me to keep anything from you. And you are bearing it splendidly: you are bearing it in the way we are meant to bear these terrors of life. We may get white with pain, as you did just now, we may feel sick with the anguish of it all, but we ought still to be able to clench our teeth

and not cry out. And, do you know, that is such a sound policy. Being brave carries its dividends quicker than any investment I know. For every effort of the sort that we make strengthens us, exactly as gymnastics strengthen our muscles."

Something in this arrested her attention very strongly; for the moment she was led away from the thought of Thurso to another matter that concerned her quite as vitally. She turned round to him again.

"Do you mean that if—if we resist anything our powers of resistance are increased?" she asked. "Resistance seems to tire me, to make me less able to make an effort."

Sir James took this in also; his eye, trained to observe obscurities, saw that for the moment she was not thinking of her husband.

"Temporarily it tires you," he said, "just as exercise does. But you are really the stronger for it. The opposite holds, too, as you and I and poor Lord Thurso know very well; not to resist, to yield, weakens our power of resistance. The body is built up and made strong by effort, and so, I am sure, is the soul."

She thought over that for a space of silence, noting down in her mind how it concerned that of which the doctor knew nothing.

"Tell me all you fear about Thurso," she said. "I want to know what you think the end will be, and when, since I gather that, as far as you know, you regard him as incurable. I want to hear from you, quietly and fully, what I must bring myself to expect, the thoughts which I have got to get used to."

"I have told you the worst," he said, "and I think you understand it. But, more in detail, it will be this: He will be very weak for a few days, and will, of course, be in bed. But I fully expect that his recovery from this attack will be rapid, because he will be properly fed, and not allowed to make the smallest exertion, but chiefly

because opium, which was the direct cause of it, will be cut off. As he gets stronger the craving will get stronger."

"Then, you advise——"

"I advise nothing till I see how he pulls round. What I most fear is that his whole will-power, his very capability to form a resolution, has been atrophied, made ineffective, by this drug. He—I am telling you all my worst fears, of course, because this is not a time to buoy you up with false hopes—he is, I fear, from what you tell me, incapable of resistance. That is the real and fatal danger. Now, is there any motive, any thought, or aim, or desire that was his, which we can make use of, on which, so to speak, we can prop up and train the will-power, which is lying like a creeper that has been torn from its supports? His devotion to you, for example? His love for his children?"

Catherine turned on him a perfectly hopeless look, and shook her head. The waters of Marah were in that gesture.

The doctor spoke again, gently, tenderly.

"Then, who has the most influence over him?" he asked.

"Oh, Maud," said she—"his sister, you know I have no doubt whatever about that. I think," she added quietly—"I think he hates me."

She spoke quite quietly, as if stating the most commonplace of facts, and the very simplicity of the words were intensely pathetic to the kind man. But they were best passed over without comment.

"Then, may I consult with her before I go," he said, "as to anything she can suggest which can appeal to him, support him? He is drowning, he must drown as far as purely medical skill can help him, and we want—do we not?—to throw any sort of life-buoy to him which may keep him afloat."

"Hypnotism? That sort of thing?" she asked.

"I do not think it possible that hypnotism or suggestion can help him," he said. "There must be something to hypnotise, something to suggest to, and that something is will-power. One cannot say it is wholly destroyed, because I suppose that would mean death, but it is in so feeble and impotent a state that I know of nothing which can touch it."

Though Catherine had taken all this very quietly, her quietude was partly that of someone who is stunned, and now her mind recurred, as she recovered herself, to one of those sentences which, so to speak, had dealt the blow.

"You mean that only a miracle can restore him?" she said.

"Yes, but I believe in miracles," said he, "though, unfortunately, you cannot produce a miracle as you can produce a bottle of medicine."

Catherine got up.

"How strange that you should say that!" she said. "Because Maud believes in them, as you do, but she thinks them most accessible. Only she no longer calls them miracles—she calls them Christian Science!"

Sir James could not have looked cynical or sneering if he had tried, and he certainly did not try. But there was an uncommon dryness in his tone.

"The lady in Boston?" he inquired.

"No; a man in Caithness," said Catherine. "I will ring; she shall come and tell you if she is in."

He put up his hand to stop her.

"Ah, one moment, please," he said. "I want to have two words with you about yourself. My dear lady, you are not well: you are very much overwrought. You have had, you know, a terrible and trying time, and if you had finished with it, I should tell you to go to bed for

a week. But you can't do that. Now, it has told on you more than you guess. Do not give yourself more tasks than you need; for instance, are you not over-taxing yourself unnecessarily here?"

He pointed to the crowded writing-table and the pile of answered letters, which she had been working at when he came in.

"You mean I had better sit down and think over all this terrible tragedy," she said, her voice beginning to break a little, "rather than find relief and rest in employment?"

"No; I do not actually say that you must not answer your letters, especially if you find it more bearable to work than to do nothing, but I strongly advise you to rest yourself as much as you can, and to avoid anything agitating beyond that which you must bear. There is plenty that, as your husband's wife, you have got to bear. But if there are other things that worry you, I entreat you to shut the door in their faces. Exercise your will-power over that, and make it strong by resistance. Save yourself from anything harassing or troubling. I speak, of course, quite at random, but I feel sure that there are other things which are trying you most acutely."

Then, without warning, the breaking-point came for her. All these months of ceaseless anxiety about Thurso had been a greater drain on her nerve force than she had known, and of set purpose she had not abated one jot of the numerous activities of her life, and had not allowed herself to consider how tired and drained she was. And simultaneously with that had come this storm and tempest into the secret life of her soul.

She gave a sudden shriek of laughter that did not sound like mirth.

"Oh, you conjurers!" she cried. "You doctors are like X rays! They see right into one's inside. Good heavens! I should think I had enough to try me, and you don't guess the half. If it was only Thurso it would be quite a holiday. Oh, how very funny——"

Sir James got up quickly, placed himself directly in front of her, and clapped his hands violently close to her face.

"Now, none of that!" he cried. "I haven't come here to listen to hysterical ravings. Make an effort; pull yourself together. I'm ashamed of you."

Catherine checked suddenly in the middle of her sentence; two or three tears, the precursors of the hysterical storm that had been on the point of bursting forth, had found their way onto her cheeks, and she wiped them off. The attack was arrested as suddenly as it had begun, and she stood silent a moment, still hearing the reverberation of his clapped hands.

"Yes, quite right," she said. "Thank you very much."

Sir James waited till he felt certain of her. Then he took up one of her hands and kissed it.

"You dear, brave woman!" he said. "But that shows you the truth of what I said. Be kind to your fine nerves and senses. Treat them well."

She was quite quiet again now, and sat down in the chair from which she had jumped up.

"Never mind me," she said. "I can manage my own affairs, and I promise you I will be as sensible as I find it possible. Oh yes, there are other worries. You are perfectly right."

He paused a moment.

"Now about this man in Caithness," he said. "He was there, I suppose, when Lord Thurso and Lady Maud were up during the typhoid. Now, I am not bigoted on the subject; I know quite well that these Christian Scientists have got hold of a big truth, but many of them mix such floods of nonsense up with it that it is quite dissolved. They tell me that if you have a compound fracture, and only say to yourself that compound fractures don't exist, the bones will join.

That, of course, is silly. But where you deal with the will, or the nerves, or the imagination, it is a different sort of thing altogether."

Lady Thurso got up again, quietly this time.

"I will see if Maud is in," she said. "There was very virulent typhoid up there, you know, in the summer, and Mr. Cochrane is believed by her to have cured one or two extremely grave cases—in fact, she believes more than that."

She rang the bell, and in the interval, before it was answered, only a couple of words passed.

"And you will spare yourself?" said Sir James.

Maud had come in half an hour ago, but hearing that her sister-in-law was with the doctor, she had not interrupted them. As she entered now, Catherine shook hands with Sir James.

"Maud, this is Sir James Sanderson," she said. "He wants to talk to you. Good-bye, Sir James. I shall see you, of course, to-morrow morning."

She left the room, and Maud was alone with the doctor. She had no idea what he wanted to talk to her about, and waited, wondering why Catherine had left them.

But he instantly approached the subject.

"Lady Maud," he said, "I want to hear about Caithness and the typhoid and Mr. Cochrane."

Maud was taking off her gloves, but stopped in sheer surprise. There was nothing that she expected less than this.

"What for?" she said.

"For your brother," said he.

He asked but few questions in her story, for it was a plain and simple narrative. She described just what had passed in connection with Duncan's wife; she described all that she had seen with regard to Sandie Mackenzie; she mentioned the curious and complete cessation of the epidemic itself.

"And I think I believe exactly what Mr. Cochrane told me," she said. "Indeed, it seems the simplest explanation to suppose that it was the direct power of God, in whose presence neither sickness, nor disease, nor pain can exist."

"You say you think so only," said he. "You are not sure?"

"No, not quite."

"But Mr. Cochrane is?"

She smiled.

"I should say it was the only thing he was absolutely sure of," she said.

He thought in silence over this for some time, and then spoke as if he had suddenly made his mind up.

"Medical science, as far as I am acquainted with it," he said, "can do nothing for Lord Thurso—at least, I fear not. Therefore, if there was a man outside in the Park there with a barrel-organ and a monkey who said he could cure the opium habit, I should welcome him in. Personally, I don't believe in Christian Science for cases of compound fracture, but it doesn't matter what I believe. It is my duty to try everything I can. Now, you must let me have a consultation with you about it all."

Again he paused. He wanted to put his thoughts clearly, not only to her, but to himself.

"We are situated like this," he said. "I have no notion how to cure your brother, and all that I feel myself able to do is to palliate his

sufferings. But the moment—assuming, that is, which I feel justified in doing, that he gets over this attack—that I begin to make his days painless, I aggravate his disease. You, Lady Maud, I know, believe that there is a chance for him: I do not; but since I cannot professionally suggest any other chance, all I can say is, 'Do what you can, and God be with you.' Now, as regards practical details, what are we to do? Where is this Mr. Cochrane? But I suppose there are plenty of these healers, are there not? If he is not handy, we can get another."

Maud strove for a moment to separate the strands of her two desires, that seemed inextricably intermingled. The one was to see Thurso delivered from this drug-possession, the other to put him in the hands of Mr. Cochrane—him only.

"I have knowledge of only one Christian Scientist whom I really believe in," she said, "and that is Mr. Cochrane. You see, I saw him with my own eyes restore to life a man who was dying. I know there are plenty of others. I could ask Mrs. Yardly."

Sir James laughed suddenly.

"Why that?" asked Maud.

"She came to me a few months ago for a tonic," he said. "She had been suffering from general catarrh. She explained to me why this was not inconsistent, but I failed to follow her."

Maud laughed too.

"Oh, Alice!" she said to herself.

"But Mr. Cochrane, you think, is not like her," said Sir James.

"You can't imagine a more totally different personality," she said. "He gives confidence, anyhow, and he is not silly. I think there is a great deal of what is silly about the whole thing, but I believe that the direct power of God can come and heal people. That is about the biggest thing possible, isn't it?"

Sir James nodded quietly.

"Yes, my dear young lady," he said. "I believe in that possibility, too, and that is why I am consulting you. Oh, but compound fracture," he said suddenly—"what ridiculous nonsense!"

He was silent for a moment after this irrepressible burst of professional indignation.

"And this Mr. Cochrane," he asked—"where is he?"

"In America," said Maud. "I heard from him two days ago. He is in New York."

"I have read some of their literature," said Sir James, "and I have heard about some of their cures. Now, as a doctor, I can't recommend your employing Mr. Cochrane, but you can, if you choose, send him a telegram acquainting him with the state of affairs. You see, I don't think he can hurt your brother, and we doctors can't benefit him."

"Am I to get Mr. Cochrane to come here, then?" asked Maud.

"No; in the first place it is a good deal to ask, and in the second, if only you or Lady Thurso could persuade Lord Thurso to go, I am convinced that a sea-voyage, though it will not in the smallest degree cure him, will be generally beneficial. Now, do you think it is in your power to persuade him to go? You needn't say anything about a Christian Science healer waiting for him at the other end; there will be plenty of time for that when you get him on board ship."

Maud thought over this. There was a suggestion that she felt she had better make, which was rather difficult for her to put to him.

"Yes; I think I might be able to persuade him," she said, "because certainly he used often to listen to me when he would listen to no one else. And would you think it odd if I suggested that he and I went alone, without Lady Thurso?"

“I should have suggested it if you had not,” said the doctor. “But tell me why you did.”

“Ah! poor Thurso is mad,” said she. “He is not in the least himself. But ever since the summer he has been behaving to Catherine as if he hated her.”

The doctor nodded.

“I know; she feels that, too. Now, you cannot see your brother to-day, but to-morrow, if he goes on well, I think you might. We shall see. I shall be back early to-morrow to look at him.”

For a man who had passed through so dangerous an attack, weakened, too, as he was, by months of the opium habit, Thurso showed extraordinary recuperative power, and next day he asked of his own accord whether Maud might come and see him. This Sir James at once allowed.

“I will let her know when I go,” he said. “It will do you good.”

He waited for a moment, but Thurso said nothing about wishing to see Catherine, and shortly after the doctor left him, and told Maud she might pay him a short visit. The nurse was with him when Maud entered, but went to her room next door, leaving brother and sister alone. He was still lying flat, without pillows, but he smiled a welcome at Maud when she came in.

“Come close, Maud,” he said in a minute. “I want to talk to you.”

His voice was still no more than a whisper from weakness, but his words were quite audible.

“I don’t want to see Catherine,” he said, “and you must keep her away from me. I think the sight of her would send me off my head. It’s she who has brought me to this. It was she who ruined my nerves by always rushing and flying about in every direction——”

Maud interrupted him gently.

"Ah! never mind that," she said. "At present all you have to do is to lie quiet, and not worry about anything, and get well."

But Thurso broke in again.

"Oh, don't imagine I don't know how atrociously I have behaved to her," he said; "but she drove me mad. She despised me; I saw that. Well, I gave her something to despise me for."

"Oh, dear Thurso, don't talk like that," she said. "If you don't want to see Catherine, of course you shall not. But your saying that reminds me of a plan you and I might think of when you get better."

"What's that?"

"I've already spoken to Sir James about it, and he approves. You will have to go somewhere to pick up again, so how about you and me going on a voyage together? We both like the sea, so why not go to America on one of those big liners that are so comfortable? We could stay at that house of Catherine's on Long Island for a week or two, if you liked."

"Without Catherine, you mean?" he asked.

"She loathes the sea, you remember. You couldn't expect her to come."

His eye brightened.

"Yes; I should like that," he said. "You and I have had jolly times together by ourselves. But I won't go if she goes."

His voice had risen sharply over this, and he was silent afterwards, breathing rather quickly. Then he looked at Maud as she sat beside the bed, and something in her youth and beauty stirred some chord of vibrating memory in him, and his mind, which, for all the deadly weakness of his body, was quite clear, went back to early days when he and she had been together so much, bound in an intimacy and affection that seldom exists between brother and sister. She had

always been such a good friend to him, such a capital quick-sympathising comrade, and now, he felt, there must for ever stand between them the horror of these last months. For the moment he got outside himself and judged himself, and saw how hideous he had been.

"I've made a pretty good mess of it all," he said.

She laid her hand on his. It was no time to preach: she could only console.

"Yes, dear Thurso," she said. "We've all made mistakes. But, thank God! it is never too late."

Then that moment of regret, that nearly amounted to contrition, passed from him. It had been brief as a sudden ray of sun piercing through some unconjectured rent in blinding storm-clouds.

"But it's Catherine's fault," he said.

But the ray had been there. His soul, though sick to death, still lived. And that was the only piece of consolation that Maud could carry away with her.

CHAPTER III

THURSO'S recovery, though he had had no relapse of any kind, and no hint of a second attack, had been slow, and it was more than three weeks from the time of his collapse when he and Maud were sitting together on the deck of the *Celtic*, Westward-bound, watching the shores of Ireland fade into blurred outlines of grey, as they were fused with the horizon. They had embarked the day before at Liverpool, and though they had been at sea only twenty-four hours, there was already some semblance of colour beginning to come back to his face. But if Maud had met him now after a year's absence, she felt that she would scarcely have known who he was. Those months of indulgence in the drug had altered the whole character of his face: it was not of the same man. It had made him look strangely wan and old, too. The heavy dint of crows' feet was planted on the outer corners of his eyes, and the lids were slack, baggy, and pendulous. His eyes had changed; they looked stale and dead, but it was his mouth, perhaps, that had deteriorated most: all power and force were gone from it; it drooped feebly and weakly at its corners, and the lower lip hung flabby and loose. It was the mouth of a man ruined by self-indulgence. His hair, too, had become very thin, and streaks of grey had appeared in it. And all this was but the shadow of the real wreck within.

Sometimes, when during these last three weeks she had seen him thus, she had felt her courage and hope for the future dwindle almost to the vanishing-point. It was not only his body which had so aged and fallen away: it was his soul that had grown decrepit. He had fits of black despair and depression, when he could bear to see nobody, not even her, and would lock himself up in his room, giving orders that his meals were to be left outside, and that under no circumstances was he to be disturbed. Then, when he emerged from one of these, remorse—but no more than a maudlin, querulous remorse—for the wreck he had made overtook him, and he would ask her to sit with him while he unloaded himself of tons of a washy despair. Half a dozen times he had said that he would not go to America at all. What could a week or two of sea air do for a man in

his case? Yet there was no decision or determination in these refusals; next moment he would be talking of the books he would take with him. Then the pendulum would swing further, and that about which alone he seemed to have retained any force would come into his mind: namely, his bitterness against Catherine, his belief—almost strong enough to be called conviction—that it was she who was morally responsible for his wreck. It was that, indeed, that was the real cause of his having consented to leave England. The day before they sailed he had a fit of the darkest despair, and had altogether refused to think of going. But as that drew off, his own desire was to get away from his wife, to leave her neighbourhood, to be geographically widely separated from her. She was in England, therefore any place was more tolerable to him. And just before they left the house he had asked to see her, for the first time in all these weeks, to say:

"You are responsible for all this."

It was all black enough, and there had been at present but one smoky ray of comfort. He had not taken laudanum again, nor, as far as could be ascertained, had he tried to procure any. But Sir James cautioned Maud against thinking that this ray was the promise of a coming dawn.

"He is still extremely weak," he had said, "and it will not be till his strength really begins to come back that he will crave for the drug. At present he is not strong enough to want anything at all keenly."

Sir James had come down with the brother and sister to Liverpool, to see his safe bestowal on board, for even now he was not allowed to walk upstairs, and their cabin was on the top deck. In ten minutes the shore-going passengers would have to leave the ship, but the doctor had still a few words more to say. Thurso had not yet been told what the ulterior object of his going to America was, for it was thought that if he knew that he might refuse to stir.

"There is a psychological moment for telling him that," he said to Maud, "which has not yet arrived. But it will arrive, I think, and I feel

no doubt that you will recognise it when it does. At present your brother shows no desire for anything, neither for the drug—at least, he has taken us all in if he has—nor for the return to health. He does not even, I think, want to die; he does not want anything. But as he begins to get back his strength he will begin to desire also. He will want the drug; he will want to get well. That is the moment for telling him."

Three days later Maud and he were seated again in the sheltered nook behind the smoking-room on the top deck where they had sat two days before watching the fading of the Irish shores. There was a bright winter's sun overhead and a tumbling sea around them, for all yesterday there had been half a gale from the west, which had stirred the hoary giants of the Atlantic. But the enormous ship was but little conscious of them, and glided without inconvenient movement across this wonderful grey sea, that broke into dazzling white against her burrowing bows. Something of the pale, crystalline blue above was reflected in the great joyous hills and valleys of water that rose and fell round them, and the greyness of the wintry waters was shot with delicate azure and aqueous green, as if, though it was yet barely mid-winter, there was the promise of spring in the air, and a hint of the summer days when these hills and valleys should be level, a shining desert of astounding blue. Above their heads the wind thrummed and whistled in the rigging, and the clean, unbreathed odour of the sea was salt and bracing. In spite of the sun, however, it was chilly to the unprotected, and both Thurso, lying on his long deck-chair, and Maud, seated beside him, wore thick fur-coats, and were tucked in with rugs. They had sat some little time in silence, for speech easily tired him still, and then he turned to her.

"I feel better," he said, "and it is so long since I felt better."

"Oh yes, dear, you are much better," she said. "You have been picking up every day on the sea. Wasn't it a good plan?"

"But there is a difference between being better and feeling better," he said, "and the second means the most to the man who is ill. Now, I

suppose we shall have to talk things out some time, so why not now? I do feel better. I feel as if I could nearly wish to be well again."

Maud felt that the moment of which Sir James had spoken to her, when it would be right to tell Thurso of the real object of their voyage, was very near, but not quite arrived yet. He would give her a better opportunity for what she had to say than that, and she wanted the very best possible.

"But I daresay I am beginning to wish that too late," he said. "How bad have I been exactly? How bad am I?"

"Do you mean your heart attack?" she asked.

"No; the other thing. I may tell you that for weeks before the attack itself I felt perfectly incapable of resistance. I could no more resist than I could resist breathing. Now, what does that mean medically? What chance have I?"

"You were as bad as you could be," she said. "In a way, Sir James told me, that heart attack saved your life. It prevented you wanting the stuff for awhile. It made a break."

"But does Sir James really think that a week or two at sea will cure me?"

"No; but he thinks that it will do your general condition good."

Thurso threw back his head, and drew in a long breath of this cold, pure air. It was extraordinarily invigorating. And at the same moment he suddenly felt his mouth water at a thought that had come into his mind. He was beginning to want again.

"But he has no idea that it will cure me?" he asked, with a certain suspicious persistence.

Then Maud knew her time had come.

"No; he never thought it would cure you, and he doesn't profess to be able to cure you himself. But, Thurso, there is another chance, perhaps. He sanctioned our trying it."

"What chance? Some American doctor? I'll go to anybody—doctor, quack, hypnotist—what you please."

"It isn't a quack I want you to go to. I want you to see if a Christian Science healer cannot do anything for you."

Thurso was silent a moment.

"It has been a plot, then?" he asked, in that dreadful cold tone in which he spoke of his wife.

"Yes, dear; but don't speak like that," said Maud. "You speak as if it was a plot against you instead of a plot for you. I didn't tell you in England, because I was afraid you might refuse to come. That is frank, is it not? I have been responsible for it all."

Suspicion and hate were awaking in Thurso's brain. He felt so much better and stronger to-day, and his brain was working again after weeks of torpidity. He told himself he was becoming wonderfully acute and far-sighted.

"I don't think I quite believe that," he said. "I believe Catherine had a hand in it. Surely it is clear. She wanted to be left alone with Villars."

Maud made a gesture of despair.

"Oh, you are mad," she said. "It isn't you who speak when you say dreadful false things like that: it's the demon that possesses you, Thurso—that horrible drug. It has poisoned your body, and it has poisoned your soul."

Then, with that bewildering rapidity that she knew and dreaded, his mood changed again. But the change, though he was still in the darkness of abysmal despair, was for the better. Anything was better than that vile hate, those incredible suspicions.

"Yes, I am poisoned—I am altogether poisoned," he said quietly.

Maud turned an imploring face to him.

"No, dear, you are not altogether poisoned," she said; "and the fact of your saying that you are shows there is some little sound piece left. If you were altogether poisoned, you wouldn't know it; there would be nothing left to tell you that you were poisoned. But there is: you feel regret still. I saw it in your eyes just now, and though it cuts me to the heart, I love and rejoice to see it there. It is just your regret, your desire to do better, which is the precious soil out of which your salvation must spring."

Her voice died on the last words, and she spoke in a whisper barely audible.

"Oh, Thurso, if you only knew how I cared!" she said.

For that moment he was touched. He looked at her with pity.

"Poor Maud!" he said.

"Ah! but it is not going to be 'poor Maud!'" she said. "You are going to get the poison out of your soul and body. Oh, Thurso, there are going to be many happy days yet."

Once again the genial thrill of convalescence, that inflowing tide of strength and recovery, broke like a ripple a little further up the long dry beach, and once again desire stirred within him. But by an effort he detached himself from that, and turned his mind to her and to his own rescue.

"And do you really believe I *can* be cured?" he said. "Is an appalling young person to come and sit by me and sing doggerel hymns? I read something of the sort in a book I found at home the other day. It was yours, I suppose, or Alice's?"

"Alice's, I expect," said she. "No; we shall have no appalling young person sitting by you. You know the healer I want you to go to, and you like him."

Thurso frowned. He seemed to be able to remember nothing. His memory, he felt, was there, but all that it contained was locked up, and he could not find the key.

"That—that fellow in Scotland?" he asked.

Then for a moment he got a glimpse, a flash, vivid but brief, connected with him.

"I met him in the village street one day," he said, "in Achnaleesh, and he made me feel better. I had an awful headache at the time. I say, that is something gained, you know, because I never have headaches now. What was his name, by the way?"

"Mr. Cochrane," said the girl.

"Of course, yes. And he dined one night, and played hokey-pokey among the typhoid patients. So he and I are going to sing hymns, are we?"

But Maud did not smile now. Thurso was himself in a way that he had not been for weeks. There might only be a minute or two of this, for his mood changed so quickly: it was as if he was not strong enough to remain steady in one attitude for more than a few seconds. And since any moment might see him back again in the hells of despair and hate, she wanted to make the most of this first forward outlook which he had shown. The creeper—his will—was in her hand for a second. She must make some beginning at training it up.

"Ah, Thurso, that is right," she said; "look forward, and make an effort to realise where you stand to-day. Sir James says he is helpless; he says you have no will left which he can touch or strengthen. That may be so medically, but I am sure it is there still, and you are going to get God—not any mortal physician—to lay His hand on you. Try

to believe, if only for a moment, that all power is His, and that He is all love, all health, all life; that evil and illness and everything of that kind cannot exist in His presence. Don't hang back; don't reserve any part of yourself, for you can help or hinder your cure. We have been hindering it, so I believe, by trusting to the power of man to cure you, because we have kept on wondering if man can cure you. But about God there is no doubt whatever. It is quite beyond question."

For one moment, as she spoke, he sat straight up in his chair, looking suddenly awake and revivified. But with that revivification there came far more strongly than before the revivification of desire of another kind. All day a certain power and vitality, born of the huge sea, the golden sun, and the singing breezes, had been throbbing back into him; but, as must always happen, until the will is set and centred on the higher and Immortal Mind, and does not, as through some sieve, strain off all that is of mortal and corruptible thought, this returning tide of vitality made more real and more coveted that on which his mind and his degraded desire had dwelt all these months. And this time it took more definite shape.

How clever he had been, too, about it! He almost giggled aloud to think of it. Little did they suppose that a couple of days before he left England he had got one of the footmen—not his valet, who had probably been warned—to go out with the prescription he had forged, just before his attack, and get a bottle of his drug. He had not wanted it, but he felt the time might come when he should, and there it lay, the bottle of dark-blue glass, with its red poison label, in the private despatch-box in his cabin, of which he alone had the key. But he had determined that that should be his last supply, and having got it, he again threw away the prescription. How wise, too, to have brought that one bottle, for to-day he was beginning to want it again; and though he wanted also to get well, to break this infernal chain that was wound so closely about him, yet that which had been the only real desire of his life for all these months pounced, tiger-like, to-day on the little morsel of added strength that had been thrown within reach. The higher side of him, feebler and all but paralysed, had no chance to reach that morsel before the other seized it.

Cunning began to return, too. There was something to scheme and plan about again. Already he thought over the coming hours of the day and their usual occupations, so as to devise when he should be able with safety from detection to satisfy this growing desire. And even as he turned his mind to this, the desire itself swelled, nightmare-like. It must be soon, it must almost be now. Just a taste was all he wanted—a quarter-dose to satisfy himself that opium still existed, that there was something worth living for, worth getting better for—that warm thrill and vibration spreading from the head down through his neck, and invading every limb with its quivering, serene harmonies! Or ... should he tantalise himself, let himself get thirstier for it, before indulging in it? He wanted it dreadfully, but he was capable of keener want than this, and the more he wanted it, the more ecstatic was the quenching of that infernal thirst. Even the want of it was pleasurable, when he knew that he could satisfy that want when he chose. He felt sure, too, that in moderation it could do him no harm. One had to break with a habit of this kind by degrees. And then he remembered when he had last said that to himself—the day on which Catherine and Maud had thrown his bottle away down at Bray. That had been an unwise thing to do; they had defied him, and he had resented that. Very likely he would not have taken the drug at all that day had they not unwarrantably tried to put it out of his power to do so. You could drive some people: others had to be led.

And all this seemed such logical, reasonable stuff to his poor brain!

But now he had been without it for three weeks, and he had not even desired it. That was an immense gain; it showed any sensible man that he had made great steps towards the breaking himself of the habit and the extinction of the desire. But he wanted it now. That instinctive swallowing movement of the throat and tongue had begun, and that was the signal he always waited for. But he must still be cunning. He must make some reasonable pretext for going to his cabin, and prevent the possibility of suspicion conveying itself to Maud. That, however, was not difficult. It was as easy as lying—just as easy, in fact. There was no difference at all between them. But it was as well to do the thing handsomely, and he looked at her, at her

big violet eyes, just moist with tears, at her mouth just trembling a little with the emotion that had inspired her words, and spoke without hesitation or bungling.

"Yes, I believe that," he said. "I am going to God direct, as you say. I am not a Christian Scientist, but I do believe in the omnipotent power of God, and that nothing evil can exist in His presence. You are quite right, too. I should probably have refused to leave England if I had known why I was being brought here. But I thank you, dear, for bringing me."

He paused a moment, wondering, as a bystander who knew his heart might wonder, at the profanity and wickedness of what he was saying, since all the time he attached no meaning to these solemn things, and wanted only to kill any possible suspicions in her mind which might lead to his being interrupted when he went to his cabin to get at the despatch-box. It really was terrible, deplorable, that he should have to be so deep a hypocrite, but nothing mattered compared to the accomplishment of his craving. But he had said dreadful things, and a quarter of a dose, such as he had planned to take, would not be enough to banish them from his mind ... it was no good taking opium at all if anything scratched and whined at the closed door of conscience. Half a dose, surely, would not hurt him—a liberal half of those very liberal doses which he had prescribed for himself. But he had better say a few words more yet. Incomplete lying was a tactical error of which he must not be guilty.

"Sir James is a very clever doctor, no doubt," he said, "but he certainly made a mistake when he thought my will-power to resist was dead, or something to that effect. I am glad he said that, and I am glad you told me, because that sort of opinion acts as a tonic—an irritant, shall we call it? I will show him if my will-power is dead!"

Then an extraordinarily ingenious perversion occurred to him.

"Did Sir James really suppose I should consent to go to sea for a week without opium, if I did not mean to be cured in spite of him?" he asked.

Thurso almost laughed over the irony of this; he was getting supernaturally cunning. Yet he detected a possible error in those last words; he had protested a little too much. But that was easily rectified.

"I don't quite mean 'in spite of him,'" he said, "because that makes it appear as if I thought that, having given me up, he did not wish me to get well. But, my goodness, how his prescription of sea air is acting already! I was a flabby log, if you imagine such a thing, when I started, and now am I not totally different? And yet I am impatient to get to America to begin the treatment. My recovery, if I am to recover, is in other hands—the best, the only ones. With all the power of will that is in me I elect to leave myself there. And if that is not to be, I want you to know that, though it was too late, I was willing."

Again he wondered at his wickedness, but without regretting it. He hugged it to him, feeling that the mere prospect of opium had so quickened his intelligence, his power of planning. And nothing else was of any importance compared to the one necessity that he must get to his cabin without any further delay, and leave Maud unsuspicious, and giving thanks in her fool's heart. He only wanted to dream dreams and see visions; he wanted to see the sky, as he had seen it one evening up at Achnaleesh, covered with blue acanthus-leaves, with the dewdrops of stars upon them, and the big sun a golden centre of the blue flower. Nor did Maud's words shake his desire, solemn though they were. They just went by him, like a light summer breeze wandering by some square-built house.

"Oh, thank God, thank God, dear Thurso!" she said. "You will get well, I know it, if you feel like that. And now let us dismiss altogether all that lies in the past. It was not you who have done these things: it was an evil possession. But that is driven out now; your words assure me of it."

Bells for times of refreshment were very frequent on this ship, and Maud was thoroughly pleased with their frequency, for she had, when at sea, that huge sense of bodily health that requires much to eat and many hours for sleep. The desire for sleep was shared by

Thurso, and when, just as she finished speaking, the bell for tea tinkled up and down the decks, she went down to the saloon, and he to his cabin, with the expressed intention of reposing till dinner, and not pledging himself to appear even then unless he felt inclined. This desire for sleep, Sir James had said, was one that he should gratify to the full; and when they parted in the vestibule, that led in one direction to his cabin, and downstairs to the saloon in another, it was a possible good night that Maud wished him. His valet would bring his dinner to his cabin if he decided not to move again that evening.

Till that afternoon, when at length Thurso had shown that his will was not dead yet, that his face was still set forwards and upwards, that something of spring, of the power to resist, was in him yet, Maud had not known how near despair she had been, nor how forlorn did she in her inmost self feel that this hope was for which she was bringing him over the sea. Slender and dim as it had been, she had just still clung to it; but now that Thurso responded to it too, and acknowledged its validity, it suddenly became firm and strong. He was willing, eager (he who had felt eagerness for only one thing for so many months), to put himself into the hands of Infinite, Omnipotent Love, which would work for him the miracle which the utmost skill of finite and mortal treatment despaired of accomplishing. In that great upspringing of hope and courage which had come to her that afternoon at Thurso's words the confined walls of the dining-saloon could not hold her long; her instinct urged her to be up on deck again with the huge sea and the huge sky to be her only companions, so as to let her soul go forth, without the distraction of near objects and the proximity of other human beings, that seemed to impede and clog the immortal sense, into the limitless presence of Divine Love. All this autumn she had been realising slowly and haltingly—for when evil and ruin were so close about her it was hard not to believe in the reality of them—that only one power, that of God, had any true existence, and that all else was false. But now that realisation was being poured into her like a flood, the dawn was growing dazzlingly bright, for already the miracle had begun, and hope and the will-power had begun to spring from what the

doctors had declared was soil utterly barren, incapable of bearing fruit.

The top deck was quite empty when she came up again, the sun had already set, and in the darkening skies the stars had begun to blossom like flowers of gold, and she walked forward to the bows of the ship in order to be quite alone. The very rush of air round her, as the great ship hissed forward into the west, where light still lingered, seemed to her typical of what was happening spiritually to her. All round her lay the tossed darkness and evanescent foam of these unquiet seas, but just as this mighty ship went smoothly and evenly through them, so through the waves and fretful tumults of human trouble her soul went tranquilly towards the brightness in the west. She had doubted before, and often and often she had vainly striven to realise what her inmost soul believed, but she had tossed and been buffeted instead of going on tranquilly without fear. Though she had believed, her unbelief still wailed. But now the wailing was hushed.

"Yes, it is so; it cannot be otherwise," she said to herself. "There can be nothing but the real, the infinite."

She stayed there long between the sea and the stars, and at the end walked back along the decks that were beginning to shimmer with dew, unconscious of all else in the wonder and glory of the truth that rained like the filtering starlight round her. Thurso, she expected, was asleep, and she paused outside his cabin window for a moment, as if linking him into the golden chain of her thoughts. And so few feet away he was indeed lying on his berth, not asleep, but very vividly awake, in the full blaze of his hell-paradise.

He looked no longer on the bare white walls of his cabin, for though it was dark a heaven of blue acanthus-leaves covered them, and the stars shone like dewdrops there, and the sun was the golden heart of the marvellous blue flower. No quarter-dose, nor half-dose, had sufficed to enable his brain to paint there that celestial imagery, but it was there now blazing in unearthly glory. One thing only troubled him, and that not very much, for it was only like a very distant echo and no authentic voice; he wished vaguely that it had not been

necessary to say so much to Maud in order to purchase security. He could not remember exactly what his words had been, but they had had a sort of gravity and seriousness about them. That was necessary, however; she might not have thoroughly trusted him otherwise. But the memory of them just detracted from the bliss of his vision; they came between him and it like a little film of grey.

As a rule he slept very well, especially after he had taken the drug. But to-night, when, soon after he had eaten the dinner which his valet brought him, he undressed and went to bed, he felt very wide-awake—not staringly so, but thoroughly so. It was now about eleven, and since the effects of the opium usually wore off after five or six hours, leaving him, as the vividness of its sensation began to fade, very drowsy and languid, he could not account for his inability to sleep. Then his disquiet began to take more definite form; he felt as if Maud was in the cabin looking at him with that bright face of joy which she had turned on him at the end of their interview on deck. Gradually this conviction became so vivid that he spoke to her, calling her by name. There was no answer, and he fumbled for the electric switch, and turned on his light in order to convince himself that she was not there.

He put the light out, and lay down again, but no sooner had he closed his eyes and tried to compose himself to sleep than the same certainty of her presence, definite and conclusive as actual ocular vision, again visited him. She was close to him, and as if actual words had been spoken by her in bodily presence, he knew what filled her brain, what she wanted. It was all about him; she was saying to him again and again: "You are not only feeling better and stronger, but you are better. God is making you better. You are in His presence now, and no evil, drug, or suspicion, or hate can exist there." And together with this came the revivified memory of his own words to her—words which were utterly false, and which he had spoken to make his own private proceedings secure. Now he remembered what he had said; he had used the strongest and most solemn phrases that he could think of in order that he might go to his cabin without fear of interruption, and—do what he had done.

This great travelling hotel of a ship had grown quite quiet during this last hour or two. When he went to bed there had been the sound of music still going on in the saloon, and to that there had succeeded the voices and steps of those going to their cabins; but now there was no sound, except the external hiss and gurgle of the divided waters, and the little chucklings and tappings which at sea are never silent. But in the darkness and quiet he was more than ever conscious of Maud's presence, and of what was going on in her brain, and he began to wonder whether this was not some drug-born hallucination. Whatever it was, its vividness still grew, so also did the memory of what he had said to her, till he could all but hear himself saying those blasphemous things again. Often and often he had said dreadful and intolerable things to Catherine, but never, so far as he knew, had he been quite so mean a liar as he had been this afternoon to Maud. He had lied sacredly to-day in order to secure uninterruption for the enjoyment of that which he had renounced. Now in the darkness and quietude his words came back to him. And all the time Maud was here; her whole soul was filled with thankfulness to hear him speak these despicable falsehoods.

This lying here became intolerable; he was growing more acutely awake every moment, and every moment grew more aware of the reality of Maud's presence. Was it some warning, did some occult sense whisper to him that she was in imminent danger of some kind, and that, as at the hour of death, her soul sought his so vehemently that it produced this confirmed belief in her actual presence? And next moment he had jumped out of bed, and put on a few hasty clothes, in order to go to her cabin and see that she was all right. Yet at the door he hesitated, feeling he could not face her. He would betray himself, his eyes would betray him, so that he could not meet hers; or his mouth would betray him, so that he could give but stuttered answers, and she would guess what he had been doing. But anxiety for her overmastered this, and he went and tapped at her door.

She answered at once, and he went in. Though it was so late, she was still fully dressed, and seated on a chair by her berth, her face radiant with happiness.

"Not in bed yet?" he said.

"No; I was too happy to go to bed."

Then, as she looked at him, she paused.

"What is the matter, Thurso?" she said. "What have you come to me for?"

He could not meet her eye, just as he had feared, but looked away.

"I couldn't sleep," he said. "I kept thinking you were in the room. I came to see if you were all right."

She gave a long sigh, and shook her head.

"Oh, Thurso, you've been taking laudanum again," she said. "But, anyhow, anyhow, you came to tell me, did you not?"

He looked back fiercely at her, knowing that he was going to stammer, and furious at himself.

"I—I haven't," he said. "Wh—what do you mean? I——" And then his voice failed him; his lips stuttered, trying to say something, but no sound came. She seemed not to have heard his denial.

"No wonder you thought I was in your cabin," she said. "All my soul was there. Oh, Thurso, don't despair, there's a good fellow!"

Then something seemed to break within him. He could not go on telling lies to her. Perhaps it was because he was tired, and could not summon up the energy to protest; perhaps it was that for very shame he could not. It was simpler, too, to tell the truth. He cared so little.

"No, it is hopeless," he said. "I am tired of trying and failing. As soon as my strength came back to me a little to-day the craving came back. I brought a bottle of the stuff with me. Oh yes, I told you I hadn't; I lied—I lied gorgeously; you never suspected it. All the time we were talking this afternoon I wanted only one thing—to get away to my cabin. I didn't care what I said to you in order to secure that. Now I suppose you'll want me to give up the rest of the stuff. Well, I can't. I don't want anything in the world except it. And it's no use your thinking that I can ever get better. I have given up all hope. You had better do the same."

For one moment Maud felt that he spoke the truth, that he was beyond power of recall. But the next her whole soul and strength was up in arms, fighting, denying that thought, passionately reversing it. There was nothing in the world that could be compared with the reality of Infinite Love; she had known that so well to-day, and already she was letting error obscure it. Vehemently, vigorously, she fought that error, and then suddenly she wondered what she had been fighting. For there was nothing there; her blows were rained upon emptiness. It was as if she had dreamed she was fighting. And she spoke to Thurso as she might have spoken to a child who was afraid of the dark, while in her hands she carried the Great Light.

"You silly boy!" she said. "What can you mean by such nonsense? How can I give you up? How is it possible for me to give up one whom I love? You can't give up love. You are frightened, you know, and there's nothing in the world to frighten you. You said this afternoon things that made me unutterably happy, and now you come and tell me they were lies, that you didn't mean them. I'm sorry you didn't mean them, but they weren't lies. They were all perfectly true."

That sombre smouldering of despair in his eyes faded.

"Do you mean you can possibly ever trust me again?" he asked. Then he added quickly: "But I can't give you the bottle—I can't."

Maud almost laughed.

"Well, if you can't, you can't," she said. "And now I'm going to see you back to your cabin, and you are going to bed. You've had a dreadful evening, dear, over these nightmare errors. I am so sorry. And if you feel I am in the room with you again, you mustn't be frightened or think there is anything wrong. I can't help being with you."

He said nothing to this, and they went down the creaking white passage to his cabin in silence.

"And you've had dinner?" she asked. "You won't be hungry before morning? It's only a little after one, you know. I could get you something."

"No; nothing, thanks," he said.

He stood irresolute in the middle of his cabin, and Maud watched him with shining eyes, knowing and telling herself that she knew that her desire was going to be given her. Then he took a bunch of keys from his pocket, detached one, and flung it on the ground.

"That's the key," he said. "You will find the bottle in my despatch-box. You may take it if you like."

But Maud made no movement to pick up the key.

"My dear Thurso," she said, "where are your manners? That really is not the proper way to give me a key."

"I won't give it you in any other way," he said.

She longed so to pick it up herself that she could scarcely restrain herself from doing it, but she longed also that, strengthened by this first effort, he should make another, give her the key voluntarily. But what if he picked it up himself, and refused to give it her? No; that could not happen.

"Then, I'm afraid it must stop where it is," she said. "Good night."

He turned with a frown to her.

"Oh, Maud, you fool!" he said. "Why don't you take it while I can just manage to allow you to?"

"Because you must give it me like a pretty gentleman, of course," she said.

Ah! how pleasant and human were the dealings of love! Half an hour ago tragedy, sordid, bitter, and heart-breaking, had been hers, and now not only was comedy here, but sheer farce, mirthful and ridiculous, productive of childish laughter. Thurso laughed, too, as he bent down and picked up the key.

"You are an obstinate woman," he said.

"I know. Thank you, darling. Oh, Thurso, how much better it is than the time I threw the bottle away without your knowing! Now you give it me."

She unlocked the despatch-box.

"Thurso, what a big bottle!" she said; "and half empty. How greedy!"

But the sight of it kindled his desire again, and it flamed up.

"Ah! give it me back!" he cried. "I can't let you have it. I told you I couldn't."

Maud did not feel bound to demonstrate over this, and she simply ran out of the cabin with the bottle. She made not half a dozen steps of it across the deck, and before ten seconds were over a large, half-empty bottle of laudanum was sinking forlornly into the abysmal depths of the Atlantic Ocean.

"That's the end of you," she observed viciously.

But in spite of this piece of gained ground, she knew well that there must be many uphill battles to fight before recovery could be assured. Cochrane had told her that in the letter she had received from him just before she left England. He had answered at once to her cable, merely saying that "he would cure Thurso," and had written fully afterwards. The letter ended thus:

"I know that you believe in the Infinite and Omnipotent Mind, which is the sole and only cause and origin of all the world; and though you are not a member of our Church at present, yet, since you believe the Gospel on which every cure that Christian Science has ever made is based, begin treating him at once yourself. Combat in your mind every sign of error that you see in him, and never allow yourself to be discouraged, because to be discouraged means that for the moment you doubt. Of course, good must triumph, but when error is so firmly rooted in a man it wants some pulling up. It won't come away as a mere shallow-rooted weed will. You may have to face apparent failure again and again, but it is a comfort to know that one is on the winning side."

The days that followed amply illustrated the truth of this, and many were the hours in which Maud was tempted to despair. Every evil, erring mood that had made up Thurso's record for the last six months was condensed into the few days of that voyage. Sometimes his will would flicker in a little dim flame, so that she knew it was not quite quenched; but the flame was so feeble, and so dense was the blackness that surrounded it. One day he secretly went to the ship's doctor, taking with him the prescription that was so familiar, which he had himself written out and signed with Sir James Sanderson's name, asking him to have it made up.

The doctor looked at it. It was all in order.

"Certainly, Lord Thurso," he said. "I will have it sent to your cabin. It is rather a strong solution, you know. You must be careful not to exceed the dose."

Thurso almost smiled at this.

"Oh, I am very careful," he said. "I suffer from terrible neuralgic headaches. Thank you very much."

He left the surgery, his heart beating with exhilarated anticipation, when suddenly the doctor, who was looking at the prescription again, gave a little whistle, and then called him. Thurso had hardly left the room, and came back at once.

"Lord Thurso," he said, "this is rather odd. Sir James Sanderson is not on board, for I saw him leave the ship at Liverpool. Yet the prescription is written on the ship's paper."

Thurso made a furious gesture of impatience.

"Oh, for God's sake give it me!" he said. "I shall go mad without it. It was Sir James's prescription. I—I copied it out. I have taken it many times."

Then a sudden thought struck him, and he could have screamed at his own stupidity in not having thought of it a second sooner.

"I don't know what I am saying," he said. "I didn't copy it out at all. Sir James wrote it for me before he left the ship."

The doctor looked at him in silence. It was sufficiently plain to him what the case was.

"I am very sorry," he said, "but it is quite impossible for me to give you this. I will with pleasure give you a bromide mixture or phenacetin if your head is bad. Of course, the matter shall go no farther."

Thurso merely walked away. There was nothing more to be said. And then suddenly the little flicker of will and of outraged self-respect shot up again, and he saw how mean it all was. He, Thurso, had not only forged this, but his forgery had been detected: that was bitter. He must not do this kind of thing. This powerlessness against his desire was intolerable, degrading; his pride rebelled against the hideous strength of his weakness.

He leaned against the bulwarks of the ship, looking at the hissing wreaths of foam that bubbled forty feet below, in despair at himself; yet, since for the moment he was ashamed, since he wished he was not such a despicable fellow, the despair was not total. Yet would it not be better if he ceased to struggle, ceased to be at all? One moment of bravery, one leap into those huge grey monsters of waves that were making even this leviathan of the seas rock and roll, and it would be all over. But even at the moment of thinking this he knew he had not the courage to do it. No moral quality seemed to be left to him. They had all been eaten up and transformed into one hideous desire, even as a cancer turns the wholesome blood and living tissues of the body into its own putrefying growth. And what if that doctor told somebody? He had said that it should go no further, but there was small blame to him if he could not resist so savoury a bit of scandal. "The Earl of Thurso forges Sir James Sanderson's name in order to get laudanum, to which he is a slave!" That would make an alluring headline, if tastefully arranged, for some New York paper.

Or, again, he would rail at Maud, laying tongue to any bitter falsehood he could invent, telling her, for instance, that she had stolen his bottle of laudanum, and that he was tortured with neuralgia. Or, which hurt her more, he would tell her the truth, and say that he had tried forgery on the ship's doctor, and had been caught, asking her how she liked to have a forger for a brother. Or, hardest of all, he would sit for hours in idle despair, so deep, so abandoned, that it was all she could do not to despair also. She knew it was all error. It was the unreal, the mortal part of him that suffered, but it was very hard to cling to the truth of what she believed, and not let these seas sweep her away.

But after this not very brilliant attempt to get laudanum from the ship's doctor, Thurso made no further efforts in that direction, and now and then there were little rifts in those clouds and storms that were so dark and grey above him. More than once, when for an hour, perhaps, he had sat and been voluble with bitter things in order to wound her, he would cease suddenly and sit in despairing, sorry silence.

"I'm an utter, utter brute!" he would say; "but try to cling to your belief that it isn't me."

Then she would look at him with lips that quivered and eyes that were brimming with unshed tears.

"Oh, Thurso, I know that," she said. "And if I forget it now and then, and feel hurt and wounded, thinking that it is you who have been saying bitter things to me, I know it is not so really."

Throughout the voyage his bodily health and strength were steadily, though slowly, on the mend. He put on a little flesh; there was a little more brightness in his eye and more clearness of skin than when he left England, and this, too, seemed to her a visible sign of the truth of what she believed. With all her heart, too, she set herself to reverse and forget the warning that Sir James had given her, that as his strength began to return so the strength of his craving would grow also. It had, indeed, seemed that this was true on that first evening when he had taken the drug again—or, at least, he had felt and said that it was so—but she set herself to fight that. With heart lifted high in faith and hope, she denied it, affirming that, his health being a good thing, it could not let itself give aid and be a slave to an evil thing, for thus evil would be mastering good—a thing unthinkable. No; the strength that was coming back to him, slowly indeed, represented the efforts against, and the repulses of, that deadly habit which had become so intimate a guest of his soul. Into the house of his soul he had admitted it, a hideous, dwarfish shape, but of terrible strength, blear-eyed, and with trembling hands, clothed in the shroud and cerements of sensuality. But now he was pushing it away again, dragging it out of the home of his spirit. It was hard work—none knew that better than she—for the thing clung as tenaciously as a limpet; but failure was impossible, and well she knew that, when at last they got it to the door of his soul, and got that door open so that the sunshine of Infinite Love poured in, with what cry of joyful amazement would he see that the dreadful figure that in the dark seemed so real was nothing, had no existence apart from his belief in

it. It was cheating him all the time. It was only in the twilight of his soul that what was a shadow seemed to be real.

Now and then, too, the real Thurso—the kindly, courteous gentleman who had been to her so well-loved a brother—came back, and he and Maud would talk about old days before ever this shadow blackened his path. And then in the serene light of memory, which often lends a vividness to that which is remembered that it did not have in life, they would live over again some windy, notable day on the hill when Thurso shot three stags, or some memorable morning by the river when Maud killed four salmon before lunch.

"Oh, Thurso, and I should have killed the fifth, do you remember? but I let the line get round that rock in the Roaring Pool, and he broke me."

"By gad! yes," he said. "And you very nearly cried. Lord, what good days they were! I was awfully happy all that summer. Funny—I had hideous neuralgia, and it spoiled my pleasure a good deal, but it didn't spoil my happiness. What do you make of that?"

"Why, nothing can spoil one's happiness," she said, "if one thinks right. All happiness——"

But he got up suddenly.

"I get the heartache to think of it all," he said.

She rose, too, laying her hand on his shoulder.

"Ah, Thurso, it will come back," she said—"it will come back and be better than it ever was."

He looked at her with a sudden face of gloom.

"And you?" he asked. "And Catherine? How can she forget? It is absurd to say that things can be the same as before. Not God can put the clock back and say it is yesterday."

"No, dear; but the sun will rise on a to-morrow that will be ever so bright. Joy comes in the morning."

The bitter mood was coming over him again.

"Ah! a phrase," he said.

"Yes; but a true one," she answered.

But these hours were short and rare, and it was but seldom that he was able to think even regretfully or longingly of the past. For the most part he was suspicious and bitter, full only of the one deadly desire and the longing for its gratification. Yet as the days went by, and the remainder of their voyage began to be reckoned by the smaller scale of hours, his despair and dispiritedness were sensibly lessened. Maud noticed that, but when—as sometimes he did—he spoke hopefully of the new cure that was going to be tried, his voice rang as false as a cracked bell, and she knew that it was not to the treatment and hope of salvation that he looked forward, but to the escape from this prison of a ship, where his desire was denied him, to the freedom of land, of the towns, where there were chemists, drug-stores. It was that really, so she felt, that animated him.

Yet with his returning strength his craving did not seem to grow proportionately. At times she thought there was some check on it, unanticipated by Sir James. He wanted the drug: his brain, she made no doubt, was often full of the schemes that could be effected on shore. But no madness and raving of desire had appeared, and already they were within Sandy Hook, steaming slowly up to the relentless city.

Thurso and she were standing on the top deck together when they were arriving, on a morning of crystalline brightness. The land was white with snow, but the air was windless, and she felt that even the town which has the credit or discredit of possessing the vilest climate yet discovered in the world had its beautiful days. Higher and higher, as they drew near, rose the abominable, many-storied buildings, and from the pale blue of the winter sky they passed into

the region of grey smoke which overhung the town. From the lonely and splendid places of the untenanted seas they slid into more populous waters. Stately liners were leaving for Eastern ports, and from the beautiful desert of the ocean they passed into the jostling waterways, full of broad-beamed ferry-steamers, and the hootings of innumerable syrens. Yet, somehow, her heart welcomed it all. She felt the stimulus of keen air and the intense throbbing activity which the town exhaled, that atmosphere of continuous, unremitting effort which makes all other places seem dronish and lazy.

But it did not strike Thurso thus.

"It is damnable! it is hell!" he said.

Maud scarcely attended to him.

"Oh, I rather like it," she said.

The huge bulk of their ship, helpless in these narrow waters as some spent whale, sidled up to her berth, towed, as if by microscopical harpooners' boats, by two or three tiny, bustling tugs; and on the quay Maud saw a figure she knew, tall and serene and smiling, with no greatcoat on in spite of the chilliness of the morning, and for that moment she forgot Thurso and his troubles, and her heart leaped lightly to him across the narrowing space of water that separated them.

That was unconscious, unpremeditated, and on the moment conscious thought came back, and she thought, not of herself and him, but only of him and Thurso. He was there, the man who had flicked across the ocean the message that he "would cure him." And she turned to her brother.

"Look! there is Mr. Cochrane," she said, "and he sees us. How kind of him to have come down to meet the ship."

It was yet a long time before they were berthed, and the landing-bridges put in place, and Maud did not know how his heart, too, had leaped when he saw them standing on the deck. To him, also, had come, as to her, that first unpremeditated leap, when it was to her that he leaped. Then with his conscious self he saw her brother, him whom he longed to save from mortal error.

But the flame of human love, in spite of himself, had been the first to blaze.

Then they met, all three.

CHAPTER IV

BERTIE COCHRANE had taken them straight across by ferry to their house in Long Island, near Port Washington, had seen them comfortably installed, and returned in the evening to his flat in town. As regards Thurso, the spiritual conflict of the Divine and Infinite against all that was mortal and mistaken had begun, and of the ultimate issue of that he had no doubts whatever. But there was another conflict before him, more difficult than that—a conflict of things that were all good, but yet seemed to be unreconcilable; and as he sat now, after eating the one dish of vegetables which was his dinner, he felt torn by these fine conflicting forces.

For to-morrow, at the joint request of Thurso and his sister, he was going down to stay with them. That arrangement he could not refuse. Since they were so kind as to ask him, it was better in every way, as regards the cure he was undertaking, to do so. Thus, all day and every day he would see and be with the girl whom he loved with all the intensity of his jubilant and vital soul. Yet, since he would be there only as a healer, and since, except as a healer, he would never have been there, he knew that he must entirely swamp and drown all his private concerns. He must say no word, make no sign. Even that was not enough, he feared. He must school himself to feel no longing. His love itself must be drowned—that strong and beautiful thing—while he was there; for he would be there *only* as one who could bring, and had promised to bring, light to this man who was obscured by error. That would be the sole reason for his presence there, and it was worth not a moment of further debate or argument. And as he sat here now, he wondered if he was strong enough to do what he knew he must do, or whether, even at the eleventh hour, it was better to refuse to go to Long Island at all, but send someone else. On the other hand, he had himself promised to cure Thurso. He and his sister had come from England on that express understanding and under promise. But would it not be better to break that rather than lead himself into the temptation of using for his own ends the opportunity that had been given to him, and accepted by him, of

demonstrating the eternal truth which was more real than any human love?

He knew, too, the hourly difficulties that his position would entail. Lady Maud thirsted for more knowledge about the truth which she already believed, and it would be he, naturally, who would talk to her about it, sitting opposite her, and seeing the glowing light of the knowledge that was being unveiled in her eyes. And yet all the time he must keep his thoughts away from her—see nothing, know nothing, except what he taught her. Not a thought could be spared to anything else; he would be there to heal, and while he healed all that was his belonged to two persons only—his Master and his patient.

He fixed his mind on this till it all acquiesced, and not only all open revolt, but all covert rebellion and dissent ceased. And the moment that was done, even as, without apparent reason, a sudden surge of water in a calm sea sets the weeds waving and submerges rocks, so from the unplumbed abyss of Love a wave swept softly and hugely over his doubts and drynesses, covering them with the message from the infinite sea. What had all his doubt and rebellion been about? He did not know.

The cold outside was intense; it had come on to freeze more sharply than ever at sunset, but he got up and set his window open. The aid that gave him in the work that lay before him now was adventitious only, but he found it easier to detach himself from the myriad distractions of mortal mind if, instead of breathing the close atmosphere of a room that was full of human associations, the taintless air of out of doors, of night and of cold, came in upon him. Very possibly that feeling itself was a claim of mortal mind, but it was better to yield to such a claim when it was clearly innocent, if it told him that the realisation of truth was thereby made more complete to his sense, than to waste energy in fighting it. And then, as he had done before when he went to the bedside of Sandie Mackenzie, he called his thoughts home. Thoughts of the day and the sea, of the sunshine, and the windless frost and the virgin snow, came flocking back, and went to sleep. Other thoughts, a little more

laggard, a little less willing to rest, had to obey also: he had to forget the book he had been reading during his dinner, the swift hour of skating he had enjoyed after he came back to town, the friend he had met and talked with in the street. And another thought more wide-awake yet had to be put to sleep (and, if possible, be strangled as it was sleeping)—namely, his strong physical disgust for a man who, through sheer weakness and self-indulgence, had allowed himself to get into the state in which he had found his patient: that slack lip, that sallow face, that dull, stale eye, the thinning, whitening hair, were like some voluntary and ghastly disfigurement, as if Thurso had striven with his own hands to deface and render hideous his own body, and had succeeded so well that to Cochrane this morning he had been scarcely recognisable. But all this had to sleep; all his disgust had to be done away with. You could not heal a leper by shuddering at his sores.

Slowly and with conscious effort that was done, but there was still one soaring thought abroad, stronger of wing, harder to recall than any. Maud, too, had to be called home (and the irony of the phrase struck him). Her beauty, her incomparable charm, her serene, splendid bravery with her brother, and his love for her, must now be all non-existent for him. She must cease—all thought of her must cease.

Then, like the force that turns the driving-wheel of some great engine that is just beginning to haul its ponderous freight out of the station, the power of the Divine Mind began to press within him. Once and again the wheel spun round, not biting the rail, for the load was very heavy; but soon the driving power began to move him, the engine, and the dead and heavy weight of the trucks weighted with the error and sickness he was to cure. Under the roof of the station it was dark and gloomy, but outside, he knew, was sunshine. There was only one force in the world that could bring him and his trucks out there, but that it should do that his mind had to strain and strive and grip the rail. Sometimes it seemed that the weight behind was immeasurable, sometimes that the force which drove him was so vast that he must burst and be broken under its pressure. But he knew, that little atom

of agonised yet rapturous consciousness, which was all that he could refer to as himself, knew that he and his freight were in control of the one Power that cannot go wrong, that never yet made a mistake. The hands that held him were infinitely tender, even as they were infinitely strong.

It was some four hours later when he got up from his chair. The fire had gone out, and the bitterness of the frost had frozen the surface of the glass of water he had poured out, and he broke the crust of ice on it and drank. Two minutes later he was undressed and asleep, having plunged into bed with a smile that had broadened into the sheer laughter of joy.

Thurso awoke next morning, feeling, so he told himself, the stimulus and exhilaration of this new climate and the bracing effect of this dry, sunny morning of frost. After the narrow berth of his cabin it was a luxury to sleep in a proper bed again, and a luxury when awake to lie at ease in it. What an excellent night he had had, too! He had slept from about half-past eleven the night before till he was called at half-past eight—slept uninterruptedly and dreamlessly, without those incessant wakings from agonised dreams of desire which had so obsessed him during the last week. No doubt this change from the sedentary and cramped life of the ship to the wider activities of the land accounted for that, and he felt that the place and the air both suited him. Yesterday had passed pleasantly, too. He, Maud, and Cochrane had been for a long sleigh-drive in the afternoon, and—there was no use in denying it, though he felt some curious latent hostility to him—Cochrane was a very attractive fellow. He had the tact, the experience, the manner of a cultured and agreeable man, and these gifts were somehow steeped in the effervescence and glow of youth. Never had Thurso seen the two so wonderfully combined. Youth's enchantment was his still, the eager vitality of a boy.

When they returned he had had an hour's talk with him alone, and at Cochrane's request had told him the whole history of his slavery. And, somehow, that recital had been in no way difficult. Once again, as on the occasion of Maud's poaching, Cochrane had made it easy

not to be ashamed. Thurso felt as if he was telling it all to a man who understood him better than he understood himself, who did not in the least condone or seek to find excuses for this wretched story, but to whom these hideous happenings appeared only in the light of a nightmare, as if Thurso had had a terrible dream, and was speaking only of empty imaginings. At the end—the tale was a long one—Cochrane had still been genial.

"Well, now, that is a good start," he said, "for I guess you haven't kept anything back. Sometimes people have a sort of false shame, and won't tell one what is, perhaps, the very worst of all. That must hinder the healer. It must help him, on the other hand, to know just exactly what the trouble is."

"Quite so; that is only reasonable," said Thurso.

But to himself he thought how odd it was that so straightforward and simple a fellow should be such a crank. Not that he was not perfectly willing to let the crank do what he could for him. He would have worn any amulet or charm if anyone seriously thought it could help him. But, again, he was conscious of his latent hostility, and this time he fancied he perceived the cause of it. For Cochrane was here to rob him of the most ecstatic moments of his life. It was the memory of them which made him feel that he was in the presence of a thief, an enemy.

"Well, now, before I go back to town for the night," continued Cochrane, "I want to start you right away with one or two thoughts to keep in your mind. Remember, first of all, that all that you have been suffering from is unreal. It has no true existence, in the sense in which life and joy are true. Try to realise that, for thus you yourself will help in the accomplishment of your healing. A patient can help his medical man by determining to get well, can't he? In the same way you can help me by trying to realise that you have never been ill. Real illness is a contradiction in terms."

"Do you mean that not only are the effects of the drug unreal, but the cravings for it are unreal?" asked Thurso. "Surely one can only judge

of the truth of a thing by one's feelings. One's feelings are the ultimate appeal, and I assure you I know of nothing so real as my craving. If it had been less real I should not have come to America."

"Ah! that's where you make a mistake," said Cochrane. "There may not be an atom of truth in the thing which is the cause of your feeling most strongly. Suppose, for instance, a lot of your friends entered into a conspiracy to play a practical joke on you, had you arrested, got you convicted of murder, and condemned to be hung, with such realism and completeness that you actually believed it was going to happen. You would be terrified, agonised, and your terror and agony would be the realest thing in the world to you. But it would be all founded on a lie—on a thing that didn't exist. And your craving is founded on a lie—such a stupid lie, too, believe me. As if evil has any power compared with good!"

Thurso thought this illustration rather well-chosen, but he was a little tired, a little impatient. Also, the mention of his craving seemed to have stirred it into activity again. He began to wonder if there was any chemist's shop near. They had passed one on their drive—"ride" Cochrane called it—but that was a couple of miles off.... And the thought made him the more impatient.

"Excuse me," he said, "but I am not a Christian Scientist, and the method you employ doesn't interest me, since I do not believe in it. It is right for me to tell you that; I only came here because I felt I owed it to—to others to do anything that was suggested."

Cochrane laughed with serene good-humour, though Thurso's tone had not been very courteous.

"Oh, we'll soon alter all that," he said, "and I am telling you a little about the treatment, in order that you may work with me, give me the help the ordinary patient gives his doctor."

"I suppose I'm pretty bad," he observed.

"I should just think you were. Why, you are all wrapped up in error! Have you ever unwound a rubber-covered golf ball? There are yards and yards of india-rubber string, and you think it's going on for ever. But at the centre there is a core. And there is a core in you too. But we've got to unwind the error in order to get at it."

Thurso got up; he was feeling every moment more fidgety and impatient. He was beginning to want the drug most terribly; his craving was growing with mushroom-like rapidity. Yet while Cochrane was there he felt that his will to get well, his desire to be free, was keen also. And that gave him an impulse of honesty.

"I tell you this, too," he said: "I'm longing for the drug most frightfully now. Ah, help me!" he cried in a sudden wail of appeal, "for I know what I shall do when you are gone."

"Yes, tell me that," said Cochrane; and the wail of the voice told him that true impulse still existed, whatever Thurso's own forecast was.

"Well, I shall go and see where Maud is," he said, "and if she is downstairs I shall tell her that I am going to my room to sleep till it is time to dress, so that I can get away by myself. She trusts me, I think, even after all that has happened. Good heavens! why am I telling you this?" he said suddenly. "You will tell her now, damn you! and spoil it all."

Cochrane interrupted quietly.

"Your damning me doesn't hurt," he said, "and I solemnly promise you not to give your plan away. There's no chemist very near, I'm afraid, but there's one in Port Washington; we passed the place this afternoon."

"Ah, you've warned him," said Thurso.

"I have done nothing of the kind, nor shall I. Pray get on."

The pleasure that the diseased imagination took in the projection of its plans was suggestive of the joy of their realisation. Thurso gulped as he spoke.

"I take it, then, that you won't interfere," he said. "Well, I shall go to my room and forge—yes, forge a prescription. I'm getting a rare hand at that."

He gave a little cackle of delight; the impulse that a couple of minutes ago had prompted the cry for help was half smothered, and he was conscious of one need only. He pointed a warning finger at Cochrane.

"It's understood that you do nothing to hinder me," he said, "nothing tangible, practical, though you can treat me—don't you call it?—till all's blue. Then I shall send to the stable, and tell a man and horse to go down to the chemist's, wait for the prescription to be made up, and bring it back. Lord Thurso, you know! Republicans think a lot of a lord, and they'll hurry, because they've got a fine specimen of one now. And I shall sit gnawing my nails till that bottle comes back. Then—two hours' Paradise before dinner. God! I wonder the whole world doesn't take to laudanum. Paradise made up while you wait. Cheap, too."

"Remarkably cheap," said Cochrane.

"Ah, you are laughing at me. But you don't know, you can't guess——"

Thurso came close up to him and pressed his arm. The latent hostility was all gone; here was a friend who should be told what he was missing. So easy was it to get out of hell into purgatory, and through purgatory past the unbarred gates of a Paradise of rose and gold. No flaming-sworded angel was there; a glass and a bottle were the password for admittance. You had but to draw a stopper, chink a glass, and drink, and the whole world was changed. The thought invaded and encompassed him. He could think of nothing but that.

"Suppose you try it one night," he said to Cochrane, "when you are staying down here, as you will be to-morrow? You just see; there's no need for any healing any more—the thing is health and life. I say, wouldn't it be funny if, after I had come over here to be cured by you, I succeeded in pulling you after me. Just try some night."

Bertie Cochrane nodded at him.

"Well, it may come to that," he said; "there's nothing which you can say is impossible."

Thurso laughed again.

"Maud too, perhaps," he said. "What a good time we might have: 'up to heaven all three,' as it says in that poem by—by—I never can remember names now!"

Cochrane could barely restrain a little shudder of disgust at this, but he checked it.

"Well, you're making an excellent start," he said, "because you're telling me all your plans for the future, just as you have told me all the history of the past. And as for the present, I can figure that up pretty correctly now. Now, do you know what you've been doing for this last ten minutes? You've been almost forcing yourself to do what you say you are going to do by imagining it. Every action begins in the brain. But just before that another action began. You said, 'Ah, help me!' Do you remember that?"

"Yes, but it's useless," said Thurso. "You see for yourself."

"It isn't useless. I never spend my time over useless things. When you said that your will was on the right side. And even now when you are half-crazy for that drink, aren't you ashamed to think of what you have just suggested—that Lady Maud, your sister, should be dragged down with you? Aren't you ashamed? You have been very candid; I want your candid opinion on that."

Thurso frowned.

“I didn’t say that; I’m sure I didn’t say that.”

“But indeed you did. Now come back on the right side again. You’ve been suggesting things to yourself, and imagining them with remarkable vividness. So now, to make it fair, plan another evening for yourself. Come, what would be pleasant? Don’t make a long evening of it; I want you to go to bed before eleven.”

“Why?” asked Thurso.

“Just because it’s a sensible hour. I shall be treating you by then.”

“But Maud tried to treat me once on the steamer,” said he, “and the effect was that I couldn’t get to sleep at all. I thought she was in the room.”

For the moment, anyhow, the edge of his desire was dulled. There was something that compelled attention in this big, strong young man, who was so cheerful and quiet, who looked so superlatively well, and seemed to diffuse sanity and health.

“Why, that was real good of Lady Maud, wasn’t it?” he said, “and that feeling of yours that she was in the room was very likely to happen. I’ll tell you why: like everything else in science, it is so simple. The healer ought quite to sink himself; he shouldn’t be conscious of himself at all. He mustn’t think that he is controlling the working of the power of Divine Love. But that unconsciousness of self only comes with practice. At first the healer finds that his personality obtrudes itself.”

Quite unconsciously Thurso began to be more interested; consciously he knew that he did not want the drug just this moment as devouringly as he had thought. The simplicity of what Cochrane was saying struck him also; it was so exceedingly unlike the torrential inconsequence of Alice Yardly.

“Then why can’t you heal me instantly?” he said. “If error cannot exist in the presence of Divine Love, how is it that time is required for its destruction?”

Cochrane laughed.

“I haven’t the slightest idea,” he said; “but, then, I do not profess to be able to explain everything. Sometimes healing is really instantaneous, sometimes it takes time. But if you ask me why, I confess I can’t tell you. It is so, though.”

He got up.

“Now I must go,” he said, “for though there’s no such thing as time really, it is still possible to miss a train. Now keep on making other pictures of this evening to yourself, and say you will go to bed at eleven.”

Thurso lay back in his big chair after Cochrane had gone, conscious that something else besides laudanum had begun to interest him a little. He felt no leaning or tendency whatever towards Christian Science, and he wanted to find some weak spot in the central theory, some fatal inconsistency, which must invalidate it altogether. There must be one even in the little he had heard about it. At this moment Maud came in.

“I’ve had a long talk to Cochrane,” he said, “and he left only ten minutes ago. Maud, give me a Christian Science book; I’m going to prove that it’s all wrong.”

She laughed.

“Do, dear; it is the business of everybody to expose error. Shall I read it to you?”

“Yes, if you will.”

Then suddenly his craving began to return, sharpening itself instantaneously to hideous acuteness. His mind was like some light

vehicle, from which the driver had been spilled, being galloped away with by the bolting, furious horses of habit. Never before had the stroke fallen upon him with such suddenness. "A fine first-fruit of the value of Christian Science," he said to himself. Yet though its onslaught made him almost dizzy, he retained his presence of mind and the cunning which seemed to have been developed in him since he took to the drug. He mastered his voice completely; he mastered also that watering of the mouth and the automatic swallowing movement of his throat.

"Or shall we read after dinner?" he said. "That sleigh-drive made me so sleepy. I think I should drop asleep at once if you began to read."

Maud looked at him for a moment with a pity that was instinctive; she could not help it. Then she laughed again.

"Oh, Thurso, how transparent!" she said. "You want to go to your bedroom and forge—yes, forge the prescription which you forged with such brilliant success on the steamer, and send it down to the village to get your horrid bottle. It's all very well to forge once or twice, but you really mustn't get in the habit of it; it grows on one dreadfully, I am told."

He came towards her white and shaking.

"That quack Cochrane has been talking to you, has he," he said. "He promised not to interfere."

"He hasn't interfered. You are perfectly free to do what you like. And he is not proved to be a quack yet."

He laid his hand on her arm.

"Maud, just this once," he said—"do let me have it this once. It shall be the last time. You see, the treatment will soon put me right now."

"Why do you want my leave?" said she.

"I don't know. It would make me more comfortable; I should enjoy it more."

"Well, I propose a slightly different plan," she said. "I promise you that I will go and get it for you myself at twelve o'clock to-night if you still really want it. Hold on for six hours—five hours—and then, if you ask me, I will take down the forged prescription myself. Only in the interval you must do your best—your best, mind, not to think about it. And you must go to bed at eleven. That's not much to ask, is it?"

He weighed this in his mind, and soon decided, for there was something rapturous in the waiting, provided he knew he would soon get it.

"Yes, of course I'll wait," he said, "though I can't guess what your point is. You really promise it me at twelve? And you won't tell Cochrane?" he added, with a little spurt of glee, thinking that for some inexplicable reason Maud was going to help him.

"Oh no, I won't tell him; you probably will. Now, if the sleepiness of the sleigh-drive has gone off, I will read to you. It will help to pass the hours till twelve."

It had required all Maud's faith to get through with this, but she had understood and agreed with what Mr. Cochrane had said before he left. He wanted, above all things, that Thurso should make an effort of abstention, though it was only for a few hours, of his own accord, and believed that at present he could hardly do so unless he was bribed, so to speak. He had, in fact, suggested this plan.

"And if he wants it at twelve?" she asked.

"Keep your promise. But he won't. He can't."

All this Thurso thought over as he lay in bed next morning watching his valet put out his clothes. He had gone to bed, as he had promised, before eleven, hugging to himself the thought that midnight was

coming closer every minute. And then he had simply fallen asleep, and when he woke the pale winter sunlight was flooding the room.

Yet, mixed with the exhilaration of this cold, bracing air, the memory of the pleasant day before, the sense of recuperation after his excellent night, there came the feeling as he got up and dressed, turning over these events in his head, that he had been tricked. He had no idea how the trick was done, or how it was that he could have gone to sleep when, if he had but kept awake so short a time, he would have enjoyed, and that with no sense of concealment or surreptitious dealing, the one sensation that turned life into paradise. Certainly it had been extremely neatly done. As a conjurer, Cochrane's sleight of mind, so to speak, was of the most finished sort, for, as has been said, Thurso had had no sense of his presence or intimation of his influence. Cochrane, however, would be here to-day, and perhaps he would explain. But the feeling of having been tricked somehow piqued him, and the pique was not lessened by the fact that he could not guess how the trick was done. Of course, it must have been suggestion or hypnotism in some form; but the odd thing was that neither Maud nor Cochrane had suggested to him at all that he should go to sleep. He had gone to sleep by accident without intending to do anything of the sort, and without any feeling that others were intending it for him.

While he was dressing he heard the sound of sleigh-bells, which probably betokened Cochrane's arrival, and when he got downstairs he found him and Maud already breakfasting.

Cochrane nodded to him.

"Good morning," he said. "Now Lady Maud will tell you that neither she nor I have spoken a word about you this morning. I know nothing of what has happened here since I left last night. I told her, by the way, just before I left, to promise to get your drink for you, if you wanted it, at twelve o'clock midnight. Now let's hear what happened."

“I went to Thurso’s room at twelve and knocked,” said Maud. “There was no answer, so I went in. I called him several times, I even touched him, but he didn’t wake.”

Cochrane laughed.

“I call that pretty good,” he said.

“Oh, this is childish!” broke in Thurso. “Maud, do you swear that that is true?”

“Of course.”

“Well, you or Mr. Cochrane must have hypnotised me or drugged me,” he said.

“I know less about hypnotism than I know of the inhabitants of Mars,” said Cochrane. “Or what do you think we drugged you with?”

“Well, how did you do it, then?” he asked. “I congratulate you, anyhow. It was very neat.”

“I didn’t do it. I had no idea, at least, whether you were asleep or awake at midnight. I only knew that Divine Love was looking after you.”

Something rather like a sneer came into Thurso’s voice.

“Did—ah! did Divine Love tell you so?” he asked.

“Yes, most emphatically. He has promised to look after us all, you know, and do everything that is good for us. My word! you’ve never seen such a beauty of a morning outside. Cold, though.”

Thurso was undeniably in a very bad humour by this time. He felt convinced in his own mind that there had been some hypnotic force or suggestive influence used on him last night; but when a man denies it, and simply attributes all that has happened to the working

of Divine Love, you cannot contradict him. Maud, however, had read to him last night out of some Christian Science book, and he had found, he thought, a hundred inconsistencies in it. Cochrane's last words, too, were utterly inconsistent, simple as they sounded.

"How can you say it is cold," he asked, "when your whole Gospel is rooted, so I understand, in the unreality of all such things—cold, heat, pain, and so on? Or did I misunderstand, do you think, what Maud read to me last night? I certainly gathered that neither cold nor heat had any real existence."

"No; but we think it has," said Cochrane, with his mouth full.

"Then, is it not what the Reverend Mrs. Eddy calls 'voicing error' to allude to the temperature of the morning?"

Cochrane laughed, a great big genial laugh.

"Oh, we don't—at least, I don't—make any claim to be beyond feeling cold or heat when there is no reason for not feeling it."

"I beg your pardon."

Cochrane still looked amused and quite patient.

"Well, if for any cause it was necessary that I, in healing you, should have to stand in a tub of ice-cold water, I don't imagine it would affect me much. There would be a reason for my doing it. But in the ordinary way we say, 'This is cold, this is hot.' They don't hurt. My time is taken up in denying things that do hurt."

"Though nothing hurts."

"False belief hurts, and its consequences."

Maud joined in. Thurso was being tiresome and irritable.

"Dear Thurso, pass the marmalade, please. I have a false claim of wanting some, so don't tell me there isn't any. I propose to indulge

my false claim. Oh, don't be severe with us; it is such a pity, and spoils my pleasure."

"I was merely inquiring into these matters," said Thurso rather acidly, for his mind still chafed at the trick, or so he called it, that had made him go to sleep last night.

Maud's false claim of wanting marmalade was soon satisfied, and she got up.

"Now, Mr. Cochrane has promised to give me instruction for half an hour, Thurso," she said, "and after that I vote we go out. There's a lake, he says, not far off. We might skate."

"And what is to happen to me?" he asked. "Am I to have treatment or laudanum, or to be put to sleep again?"

Bertie Cochrane looked up at him suddenly. For half a second he allowed himself to be stung, affronted, by Thurso's tone. But he recovered immediately.

"Now, honestly, which would you like best?" he asked.

Then, though the moment was, as measured by time, an infinitesimal one, in eternity his soul had thrown itself at the foot of Infinite Love, reminding Him of His promise, like a child, calling Him to help.

The acidity and sneering criticism suddenly died out of Thurso's mind. His moods altered quickly enough and violently; it may have been that only.

"You know I want to be cured," he said.

Cochrane made a little sign to Maud, who left the room, leaving the two men alone.

"Yes, I know you do," he said gently, "and you're going to be cured. But you can help or hinder. All breakfast, you know, you've been hindering. 'Tis such a pity. You've been asking questions, which I

love to be asked, and love answering too, when I can answer them, not because you wanted to know, but because you wanted to catch me out. Why, of course, you can catch me out, because often and often I am bound by error and claims of mortal mind. Also, I don't know absolutely everything—I don't indeed. But when you want to catch me out like that, it means you are adopting a hostile attitude to me and to that which I hope to bring you. That hinders me. It isn't fair."

Cochrane shook his head at him, like some nice boy remonstrating kindly with a friend whom he likes for not "playing the game." Then he went on more seriously.

"Now, what's the trouble?" he said. "Why are you hostile? Is it just because Infinite Love came to your help last night, and sent you to sleep, instead of letting you drink that poisonous stuff? I guess it's that. But to think or suggest that I hypnotised you or drugged you is childish. To doubt that it all happened in any other way than the way it did is error on your part. Why not accept a perfectly simple explanation. Can you seriously offer any other? How often before, when you've been wanting the stuff badly, and have known you would get it in an hour, have you dropped off to sleep instead? Why, never. And what is the first occasion of it happening? When I was treating you, bringing you into the presence of Divine Love—not suggesting things either to Him or you, but just leaving you together. I treated you for some four hours last night, beginning soon after dinner."

"But it's all impos——" began Thurso. "I don't understand it, anyhow."

"That's a different matter," said Cochrane.

"But explain. If you've brought me there, is it all over? Am I cured?"

"No; because you have made a habit of error, and that habit has to be broken. You've got to form a new habit of non-error. You will have to put yourself in the hands of Love often and often before you get rid

of this. At least, I expect that, though we can't tell in what manner He will choose to heal you. But I expect that: from what we know a habit takes longer to cure than an occasional lapse. It is hard to forget a thing we have got by heart. And we've got to ask, to keep on asking."

Again the hostile attitude was smothered, and interest took its place.

"But why?" asked Thurso. "Why, if error is all a mistake, without real existence, does it bind us? How can it?"

"Gracious! I can't tell you," said Cochrane. "But there's no doubt it is so."

"And you can heal people who don't believe?" he asked.

"Why not? But a man who didn't believe couldn't heal. And by the time the cure is complete, as far as I know, the patient nearly always believes."

Thurso was asking questions now in a different spirit to that which had prompted them before. He knew the difference himself.

"You spoke of laudanum as poisonous stuff just now," he said. "But if God made everything, including poppies, how can it be poisonous?"

Cochrane laughed.

"Well, we had better ask Lady Maud to come back," he said. "It was about that very point that I was going to talk to her to-day. Now, if you care to listen to that, since you have asked the question, pray do. But if it bores you, why, if you'll read the paper or occupy yourself for half an hour, we can then all start out skating, or what you please."

"But aren't you going to treat me?" asked Thurso.

"Oh, I was at it this morning for some time," he said. "I've paid you the morning visit, so to speak."

Then again some spirit of antagonism entered into Thurso, and when Maud came back he crossed over to the fire with the paper. But the news was of no importance or interest, since it chiefly concerned American affairs, which meant nothing to him, and by degrees he found himself attending less to the printed page and more to the voice that sounded so cheerful and serene. Sometimes he found himself mentally ridiculing what was said, but yet he listened. It was arresting, somehow, and whether it was only the personality of the speaker that arrested him, or what he said, he found himself, whether approving or disapproving, more and more absorbed in it.

Cochrane spoke first, as he said he was going to do, about the apparently poisonous or sanative effects of drugs. These effects, he maintained, were not inherent in the drugs themselves, but in the belief of those who used them. It was quite certain, for instance, from the purely medical point of view, that an injection of plain water could be made, and that the patient, believing it to be morphia, would sleep under the influence of what had no influence at all. He slept because he believed he had been given something which would make him sleep. But, from the Christian Science point of view, to use drugs for curative purposes was merely to encourage the false belief that they could in themselves cure, while, on the other hand, anyone who knew and fully believed that they could neither be health-giving nor destructive of health might, if he chose, eat deadly poison, and be none the worse for it. But no one who held this belief would do so merely as a demonstration to satisfy the idle curiosity of those who did not believe.

Up till now he had been speaking quietly, as if all that was mere commonplace and superficial. But now intenser conviction vibrated in his voice.

“All this,” he said, “though, of course, it is perfectly true, is only a detail, a little inference that follows from the real and vital proposition. How error originally came in I don’t pretend to say. What we have got to deal with to-day is that error is here in embarrassing quantities, and that one of the commonest forms of it is

to attribute real existence—real, that is to say, in comparison with the reality of Love—to material things. What is truly worth our concern is not to know what does not exist, but to know what does. And one thing only exists, and that is God, in all His manifestations. Originally, as we all know, He made the world, and pronounced what He made to be good; but that seems to have been before error entered. But the Infinite Mind, which is Divine Love, is all that has any real being. And as light, pure white light, can be split up, so that different beams of it appear as of all the colours of the rainbow, so that when you say, "This is blue, this is red," you are only speaking of aspects of light, so when you say, "This is unselfish, this is courageous, this is pure," you are only speaking of one of the colours of God. It is good that we should contemplate any one of these, for each of them is lovely; but we must continually be fusing them all together in our thought, so that they are mingled and made one again. And when that is done, when by the power of the little we know of the Infinite Mind we bring together all we can conceive of love and purity and unselfishness, then it is God we are contemplating. And whenever we contemplate Him like that, there is no existence possible for sin or error or imperfection. They pass into nothingness, not because we will them to do so, or make any longer an assertion of their nothingness, but because their existence is inconceivable."

Thurso had dropped his paper, and was listening, still with occasional antagonism and mental ridicule, but with interest; it was not so dull as the paper. Besides, what if it was true? Then, indeed, his antagonism would be that of some feeble soft-bodied moth fluttering against an express train, and thinking to stop it. And there was something serenely authoritative about these words. It was not as when scribes and Pharisees spoke.

Somehow, also—it was impossible not to feel this—there was the same authority not only in Cochrane's words, but in his life. The things which he said were borne out by what he did, and it seemed as if it was not his temperament that inspired his words, but the belief on which his words were based that produced a completely

happy temperament. Big troubles, big anxieties, he had said, never came near him, but, what to Maud was as remarkable, it appeared that the little frets and inconveniences which she would have said were inseparable from the ordinary life of every day were unable to touch or settle on him. Round him there seemed to be some atmosphere, as of high mountain places, in which the bacilli of worry and anxiety could not live; nothing could fleck or dim the happiness of those childlike eyes. A child's faith, as she had recognised last summer, shone there, and it was supported and proved by the knowledge and experience of a man. Like all faith, it was instinctive, but every hour of his life endorsed the truth of his instinct.

And if either Thurso or Maud could have guessed how passionate and furious was the struggle going on within him, during this first day or two, between the desire of his human love and the absolutely convinced knowledge that he had no right to use this intimacy into which he was thrown with Maud by the call to cure her brother for his own ends, they would have said that a miracle was going on before their eyes. The tempest of desire, the storm of his longing for her, and, more potent than either, the knowledge that he loved her with all the best that was in him, continually beat upon him; but the abiding-place of his soul was absolutely unmoved by the surrounding tumult, and not for a moment was his essential serenity troubled.

It was the third day after his arrival at the house in Long Island, and he and Maud were sitting together by the fire before evening closed in. The weather this morning had suddenly broken, and instead of the windless, sunny frost a south-easterly gale from the sea had set chimneys smoking and ice melting, and drove torrents of volleying rain against the windows of the shuddering house. Maud at this moment was wiping her eyes, which the pungency of the wood-smoke had caused to overflow.

"You were quite right," she said, "when you warned me not to have the fire lit in this easterly room. And what makes it more annoying is that you don't weep also. Is that Christian Science or strong eyes?

Perhaps they are the same thing. But I think we had better move into the other room. I can't stand it."

The other room was the billiard-room, in which they did not often sit. It was free from smoke, however, and the fire prospered. Thurso had gone upstairs half an hour ago to write letters, and had not yet come back.

"He is so much better," she said, as she settled herself into a comfortable chair. "His recovery has been quite steady, too. Do you any longer fear a relapse?"

"Oh, I never feared it," he said, "in the sense that I ever imagined it would baffle me. How could it? Nothing can possibly interfere with truth. But sometimes—sometimes when error has gone very deep, and has been allowed to rest there, you tap a sort of fresh reservoir of it just when you think you are getting to the end of it. In one sense, I suppose, I have feared that. It may not happen, I have no reason to believe that it will, but I have seen very sudden attacks and onslaughts of the most violent kind, even when one thought the cure was practically complete."

"But surely he has made marvellous progress," said Maud. "Think; it is only four days since you began to treat him."

"Yes; no one progress is more marvellous than any other, since all progress is right, but it has been very smooth sailing so far. And—I don't care whether I am being heretical or not, but I think I am—conditions have been very favourable. Weather, climate, all external influences, have a great effect. They have no real power to help or hinder, but when a soul is bound by a material habit material conditions do come in. It is no use to say otherwise. The depression caused by a wet, windy day, such as to-day, is certainly a false claim, but it goes and hobnobs with other false claims, and they sit round the fire and talk.... But, take it as a whole, those who believe are less affected by such things than those who do not. Mental worry is less felt by the Scientist, because he knows it does not really exist. So he

will discount the depressing influences of weather; he won't so much mind a windy or an oppressive day."

"And doesn't weather ever upset you?" asked Maud.

He laughed.

"Oh dear, yes," he said. "I've been having false claims all over me all day, like—like a shower-bath, and all day I've been reversing them till I'm dizzy."

"You have looked serene enough," she said. "I shouldn't have guessed it."

"Well, I hope not, since it is by the serenity that comes from complete conviction of the one Omnipotence that you fight them. If you abandon that, what are you to fight them with?"

He looked at her, smiling; but then his smile faded, for he felt for a moment that, in spite of himself, his love must betray itself by word or gesture. And surely there was some answering struggle going on in her, or was it only sympathy, only gratitude for what he had done, that made that beacon in her eyes? Whatever it was she had it in control also.

"Won't you tell me of them?" she asked. "Sometimes telling a thing, the very putting of it into definite words, shows us how shadowy and indefinite it really is. I—I don't ask from inquisitiveness."

"I am sure of that," he said, "but the thing that has been worrying me most to-day is—at present—absolutely a private affair. Then there is another—I have been letting myself be anxious about your brother, and that is very bad for him as well as me. When I was treating him this morning all sorts of doubts kept coming into my mind. Half the time I was fighting them, instead of giving myself entirely to him."

"Ah, but you never really doubted," she said. "I am sure that you denied them."

“Yes, but I was feeble. I was a muddy, choked channel for the flowing of Divine Love. And I am now. I have to be continually dusting and cleansing myself. I have been having fears.”

“Specific ones? Fear of some definite event?”

“Yes; I’m afraid I have gone as far as that. I have had fears of some violent access of error coming upon him, and I have no reason for fearing. Because if it did occur I should know quite well what to do. There couldn’t be anything to fear really. I guess he’s been getting well so quickly and smoothly that I have allowed myself to wonder whether it could be true, though, of course, I knew it was. But that’s so like feeble mortal mind! The very fact that our needs are answered so abundantly and immediately makes us wonder if it is real!”

Maud got up.

“What would you do if he had a relapse?” she asked.

“I couldn’t say now, and I certainly mustn’t allow myself to contemplate it. But if it came, it would surely be made quite clear to me how to demonstrate over it. We are never left in the lurch like that; it’s only the devil who plays his disciples false, and lets them have fits of remorse just when they want to amuse themselves.”

The flames on the hearth leaped up or died down in response to the great blasts outside which squalled and trumpeted over the house, or paused as if to listen in glee to the riot that they caused. The wind was like a wild creature that, with frightened hands, rattled at the fastenings of the windows as if seeking admittance, till a tattoo of sleet silenced it or drove it away. Then a low, long-drawn whistle of alto note would sound in the chimney, and suddenly rise siren-like to a screech of demoniacal fury, or, like a passage for drums, the rattle of the leafless branches of the tortured trees mixed with the sound of the surf a mile away seemed to portend some deadly disaster. All hell seemed loose in this infernal din of the elements.

Bertie Cochrane drew his chair close to the fire with a little shudder of goose-flesh.

"I was awfully frightened by a storm once when I was a little chap," he said, "and it has left a sort of scar on my mind which is still tender. I always have to demonstrate to myself when there's a gale like this; I don't seem to be able to get used to them. My father died in the middle of that awful storm ten years ago, too. What a confession of feebleness, isn't it? But I don't think you would have guessed how I hated storms if I hadn't told you."

"No, I don't think I should," she said. "But I am so sorry. I am just the opposite. There is nothing I love so much as a gale like this—a maniac. There, listen to that!"

An appalling blast swept by the house, full of shrieks and cries, as if the souls of the lost were being driven along in the pitiless storm, and it seemed as if some window must have burst open, or some door communicating with the night and the tempest have come unlatched, for the thick double curtain which served instead of door between the billiard-room where they sat and the hall outside was lifted a clear foot from the ground, and a flood of cold air, strong as a wind, poured in, making the candles flicker and stream, and stirring the carpet as if a ground swell had passed beneath it. Cochrane jumped up.

"Something must be open," he said. "The wind has come right into the house."

Maud got up with him, but before he had pulled the curtain aside for her to pass, the strange wind ceased as suddenly as it had begun, and the heavy folds fell to the ground again. But by the front-door, with the latch still in his hand, stood Thurso. The rain dripped from his coat; he was deluged, a waterspout. And Maud's heart sank when she saw him.

"Why, Thurso," she said, "what have you been doing? Have you been out in this gale? I thought you were upstairs writing letters."

He looked from one to the other as he took off his dripping overcoat, and spoke in a voice that both knew, a stammering, stuttering voice.

"I—I finished my letters," he said, "and then I went out to—to post them—yes, post them. You couldn't expect a servant to go out in this. Not—not reasonable. And besides, I—I had not been out all day. I—I wanted a breath of fresh air. Sir James told me to be out as much as I could. How did you hear me come in? I thought you were in the drawing-room."

Maud's heart sank—sank.

"We were in the billiard-room," she said.

She looked at Cochrane. All thought of the gale, all trouble of nerves, and whatever else it was that had been obsessing him all day, had passed from him. His eyes were vivid and alight; his face alert again, and full of that huge vitality that was so characteristic of it.

"Why, that was thoughtful of you," he said. "And perhaps a little errand on your own account? Why, man, there's a packet in your coat—no, your breast-pocket. It's bulging. I can see it from here."

Thurso's hand tightened on it.

"Yes; I can't help it," he said. "Besides, I am much better, am I not? I must break myself of it by degrees, you know."

Outside the gale yelled defiance; here inside there was tense silence, but it seemed to Maud as if some conflict mightier than that of the elements was going on.

"Ah, do let me have it just this once!" cried Thurso. "I've been without it for a week, and I swear to you by all I hold sacred——"

"By laudanum?" said Cochrane.

"Yes, by laudanum, that it shall be a fort-night before I take it again. And don't send me to sleep this time. I—I think I should die if I didn't have it."

"Let's have a look at the bottle," said Cochrane.

A look of futile, childish cunning came into Thurso's face.

"Oh, I think not," he said. "You—you might forget to give it me back; one always may forget things. Look here, I—I'm going to take it. That's all about it. I'm awfully grateful to you for all you have done, and to-morrow I will beg your forgiveness, and ask you to go on curing me. But this once you sha'n't stop me. Besides, there's no power either for evil or good in drugs."

"That is blasphemous on your lips," said Cochrane quickly. "I beg your pardon; I shouldn't have said that."

For that moment the light of anger had sprung into his eyes, but it only dulled them, and he stood there in silence a space, while they brightened again with that brilliant serenity and confidence which had been there before. Then he looked at Maud, smiled encouragement to her, and spoke.

"I never stopped you before," he said. "And I'm not going to stop you now. But you laudanum-drinkers are such selfish fellows. You get away by yourselves, and drink by yourselves, and never treat anybody else. I want some of that too. Do you remember saying that perhaps it would end in your converting me? Well, let's make a beginning to-night. Let's have a jolly good drink together. You've got enough for us both, I expect, in that big bottle."

Thurso still looked suspicious, and he kept his hand on his package. But Cochrane's manner was perfectly sincere, and soon he gave a little cackle of delight. His eyes, too, like Cochrane's, were very bright, but they were bright with thirst and desire. His mouth, too, so watered that he could hardly swallow quick enough to keep the saliva down.

“I don’t know what you mean,” he said, “but I’ll do anything if you’ll let me take it, and not stop me. There’s enough for me for to-night and for you for a week. And may I get some more to-morrow?”

“You may do what you choose to-morrow,” said Cochrane, “if you will give me some to-night. I’ve often wanted an opportunity, a proper opportunity, to take it. Why, you might say I had quite a craving for it.”

Maud was looking from one to the other, utterly puzzled. She came close to Cochrane.

“Mr. Cochrane, what are you going to do?” she said. “What are you about? I am frightened.”

He looked at her quickly and radiantly.

“Ah, don’t be frightened,” he said. “You must help and not hinder. I know I am right. Don’t be afraid, and don’t doubt.”

CHAPTER V

THEY went back into the billiard-room again; outside the wild hurly-burly of the storm still screamed and wailed round the house, but Cochrane now was utterly unconscious of it. A clear command, louder than the wind and the tattoo of rain, the "still small voice" which made all else inaudible, had come to his soul. He knew that what he was going to do was right, and had no fear at all of the consequences. Consequences? He gloried in them, and embraced them, for they would be nothing else than a demonstration, convincing and conclusive, as to the truth of all he taught and worked and believed. He had said to Maud half an hour ago that he did not then know what he should do if Thurso had a relapse, but now that the relapse had come he knew. He was perfectly certain that he was doing right.

He rang the bell as soon as he got to the fireplace.

"We want some glasses, I suppose, don't we?" he said. "I beg your pardon, may I ring? Because I have rung."

Thurso looked at him secretly.

"Better for the servants not to know," he said.

"Why not? We're doing nothing to be ashamed of," he said. "I should like everybody to know. Ah! Would you bring a couple of glasses, please?" he said to the man.

Thurso came close to him, and whispered:

"I take a little water and sugar with mine," he said. "Perhaps hot water would be nice; I got so wet."

"Yes, very wise," said Cochrane. "And some hot water and sugar, please," he added.

Then a sudden distrust came into Thurso's mind.

"You are not going to cheat me?" he asked.

Cochrane felt one moment of vast pity for him. Ever since he and Maud had gone out into the hall, and found him stealthily closing the door so that his return should be unheard, he had felt it was a different personality from the Thurso of the last three days whom they had discovered there dripping from his secret errand. It was as if he was possessed; he was furtive and suspicious and bubbling with this one desire; nothing remained of him but Thirst, and the jealous fear that it was not going to be quenched—Thirst for that drug which had already dragged him so near to the precipitous edge of ruin and death, and that expunged from his mind all sense of honour, all the rudimentary moral code by which men are bound, all sense that anything in the world existed except Thirst and the quenching of it.

"You shouldn't have said that," he said quietly, "because I never have cheated you or anybody, and you have no right to suppose that I ever should. Dear me! how long they are bringing our glasses! Did you forge the prescription again?"

Again Thurso gave that dreadful little cackle of cunning laughter. He took such pleasure in his success, such pride as some foolish-natured dog takes in doing its "trick."

"Well, yes, I suppose I did," he said, "and I forged Sir James's name quite beautifully. The one I did on the steamer was a clumsy affair. And I wrote it on a rather crumpled piece of paper, so that it looked to be an old prescription."

"Why, that was real smart of you!" said Cochrane.

The man had brought the sugar and water and glasses, and as soon as he had left the room Thurso produced his package, and tore its coverings off. What was going to happen Maud did not know, but she trusted Cochrane, and she trusted the Power in obedience to which she felt sure he was acting. Thurso trusted him too, it appeared, for after he had poured some half of the bottle into his own glass, he passed it across to Cochrane. Then he dropped a lump of

sugar into his glass, and poured in a little hot water, stirring it up, and stabbing with his spoon at the lump.

"I wouldn't take much if I were you," he said.

"Ah, to leave more for you to-morrow morning," said Cochrane. "Greedy fellow! And look at your ration! Why, you've taken half the bottle!"

Thurso gave that dreadful giggle again.

"I know," he said. "It's a regular bumper this time, isn't it? I'm going to drink to our first merry meeting. Damn the sugar! it melts so slowly."

A moment's doubt and fear swept over Maud like some huge combing breaker.

"Thurso, Thurso!" she cried. "Mr. Cochrane!"

He still held the bottle in his hand.

"Ah, reverse your fear quickly," he said.

But Thurso seemed not to hear her. The sugar was nearly dissolved now, and he was stabbing at the few remaining crystals.

"What a nice fire!" he said. "I shall sit by it all the evening, and not come to dinner, and enjoy four or five hours of Paradise. Time goes so slowly, too, in Paradise; it seems an eternity. I shouldn't take more than a tea-spoonful if I were you," he said to Cochrane, who was just tilting the bottle. "That's what I began with."

"Ah, was it?" said Cochrane. "Then, see here."

He poured the whole of the rest of the bottle into the glass. Then, without troubling about hot water or sugar, he put it to his mouth and drank it off.

“Can’t say I like your brand,” he said, putting the glass down.

The sugar was melted in Thurso’s glass, and he had withdrawn the spoon. The first sip was imminent now, that first sip of so many. Then the struggle began; he longed for that first sip, but as he saw what Cochrane had done his hands trembled; they would not raise the glass to his mouth. But the stammering had gone, and the giggling laugh was dumb.

“Why, it will kill you! it will kill you!” he screamed. “You don’t know what you have done! It’s nearly pure laudanum. You must take an emetic at once. Here, this hot water. Ah, it’s too hot! But go quick. You’ll be dead in a couple of hours. Maud, don’t sit there!” he cried. “Send for a doctor! Send for somebody quick!”

He put his own glass down, and sprang up from his chair with the helpless agitation of a man who has no control of himself. But Maud did not move. Cochrane looked at her once, and she smiled at him, and he seemed satisfied, as if he had been waiting for that, waiting for the assurance of her confidence that the smile gave. Then he turned to Thurso.

“Now, I haven’t cheated you, have I?” he said. “There’s your glass; drink it. I told you I would not interfere with you, and I am not doing so. I have finished the bottle, I am afraid, but you can get some more to-morrow. And while you are drinking—why don’t you drink?—just listen to me a minute. I’m going to talk straight to you now.

“What I have drunk will have no effect at all on me,” he said. “You may sit here, and not have dinner, but I shall have dinner just the same, please. I drank that in order to show you how you have been a slave to a thing that has no real power or effect of any kind. What you have been a slave to is your intention, your false belief, your self-indulgence. And now at last you will see how unreal is the power of that stuff which you love so much compared to the Power which I love so much. It is through error that you have made an unreal thing real to you. It is through truth that I show you how unreal it is. And look what error has made of you! Think for a moment of what you

were a year ago, and what you are to-day. There's a glass: look. You know without it."

Thurso had risen, and was walking up and down the room, waving his hands in the impotent gesticulations of despair. Once or twice he paused by the table where his steaming glass still stood brimming, but he only shuddered at it. Once he tried to go to the curtain that led to the hall, but Cochrane stood in front of it, big, cheerful, but rather determined, blocking his way.

"Aren't you going to drink that?" he asked, pointing to Thurso's untasted glass. "Aren't you going to have four hours of Paradise?"

Thurso shrank from the table where the glass stood.

"Oh, I implore you, I implore you!" he cried, "run to a doctor, take an emetic, and be quick. You have taken a fatal dose: you will be dead in a couple of hours. You are such a good chap: you've been so good to me, so patient, and have helped me so much. And this damnable habit of mine will have killed you. You don't know what you have done: you think drugs have no power. And you've done it to convince me. Oh, if you'll only go before it is too late, I will swear to you never to touch the stuff again. As for that——"

He took his own glass, and flung it, contents and all, into the heart of the fire. There, with a huge puff of steam, a hissing and blackening of the wood logs, and crack of glass, it passed away up the chimney.

"There, will that show you that I am in earnest?" he cried. "Just when I was worked up for it, just when I wanted it as I never wanted it before, you have caused me to do that! Oh, I implore you to go and make yourself sick. Maud! Maud! tell him to do something. If he doesn't I shall have killed him, and he has helped me so, has helped me—damned beast that I am!"

He flung himself down on a sofa in a paroxysm of despair, writhing and sobbing and shuddering. As for Maud, though she dared not speak for fear of giving way to some uncontrollable outburst of

emotion, she thanked God for it, telling herself she was not afraid, and would not be afraid. Here in this room life and death, not the mere life or death of a man, even the man she loved, were fighting their battle: the eternal principle of life, love, health, was asserting its serene supremacy over sin and death and disease. As ever, its work was kind and compassionate, bringing healing with it, and deliverance from error, and nothing could prevail against it. She believed now, in spite of her moment's panic terror when she saw Cochrane toss off that deadly draught, that he had done right. God could not play him false without playing Himself false, while, as for Thurso, poor, trembling, sobbing Thurso, at last he was broken. A thousand times had he fallen and been sorry, and vowed to amend, but it had never been like this. This was the complete abandonment, the absolute break-up, without which there is no real repentance. If, as Cochrane had said, there had still been a reservoir of error, so to speak, within him, she could not doubt now but that its banks were broken; it was coming out from him in torrents.

For a minute or two Cochrane looked with those kind, sorry eyes on Thurso's agony; then, still smiling, still serene, he sat down by him as he writhed on the sofa, and laid his hand on his shoulder.

"I'm awfully sorry for all the anguish you are feeling," he said, "but I had to do it. There was really no other way, as far as I could see, of convincing you. You are not convinced yet, but you will soon see that your fears for me now are just as false, just as mistaken, as was your desire for that stuff that tasted so abominable. But, apart from that, I can't tell you how glad I am to have had this opportunity, for I feel sure you will see now. You've thrown it off for good, I believe. You've been getting better all these days, you know, but somehow I was unable to get deep enough into you. But it's all right now."

"Oh, it's not too late yet!" cried Thurso; "but go at once, before you begin to feel the effects. Go! go!"

"And show you I don't really believe a word of all that I have ever said to you and Lady Maud?" he asked. "You can't seriously invite me to show myself such a hypocrite as that. Why, anyone of the least

spirit would sooner really die, as you still fancy I am going to do, than do that."

Thurso laid an agonised hand on his shoulder.

"Oh, your work is done," he cried, "as regards me. And—and I know you believe you are safe. But make it really safe. Or have you ever done anything of the sort before? For pity's sake tell me that you have, and that it had no result. The minutes are passing, too."

Cochrane laughed.

"Well, no, I haven't," he said, "and this is the opportunity I have long hoped would come my way. Now, when is this bad-tasting stuff supposed to take effect?"

Again Thurso beat the air with his hands.

"Oh, it's my fault, it's all my fault!" he cried. "Maud, can't you persuade him? You are friends."

"No, dear Thurso," she said quietly. "I can't persuade him, and I don't want to."

Thurso sat quivering there a moment longer, then he suddenly got up, dashed through the curtained doorway, and a moment afterwards the curtain again bellied inwards, rising free of the ground, and showing that the gale had got into the house again. Then the front-door banged to, and the wind subsided.

"He has gone out again," said Maud. "Is it safe to leave him?"

"Oh yes. I think he has gone for a doctor, or he may have gone just to despair by himself. Then he will come back and see. He will not harm himself; he won't even catch cold," he added, smiling.

"You are sure?" she asked.

“Yes; so are you. Why, Divine Love is pouring into him on all sides. It has got to break him first, then it builds so tenderly, so gloriously.”

He looked at her for a long moment.

“He is cured, you know,” he said. “It’s over.”

Then in flood there came over him all that he had so resolutely banished all these days. He felt that his visit as healer must come to an end at once. But he would see them again, see her again.

“There is no longer any reason for me to stop here,” he said. “It’s rather a rough night, but if you don’t think it is very rude and abrupt of me, I think I’ll go back to town at once.”

Then Maud’s lip quivered, and her eyes brimmed over.

“Without letting me say ‘God bless you?’” she asked.

“No; thank you for that,” he said gravely.

She took both his hands in hers for a moment, silently thanking him. Then she looked at him once more.

“You mustn’t think of going up to-night, or to-morrow, or, I hope, for a long time,” she said. “You say your work is over, and so I believe. But won’t you stay a little while with your friends when they ask you?”

“As your friend?” he said.

“Yes, mine and Thurso’s.”

They looked at each other, still gravely.

“Thanks, yes,” he said. “It is kind of you.”

But his hour had come.

“Maud, Maud,” he cried, “don’t you know what I have kept back so long? Why, I love you, I love you!

Bertie Cochrane’s conjecture had been right, and half an hour later Thurso came back, drenched with storm, for he had put on neither hat nor coat, with the doctor from Port Washington. A minute later a highly affronted physician left again, wondering if it was some form of aristocratic English humour to drag a man out on a night like this, because a friend in the house had inadvertently taken a huge dose of laudanum, only to find on arrival that the friend in the house, who, if he had really done so, would certainly by now have lost consciousness, looked rather annoyed at the interruption, but otherwise perfectly well.

But a glance at his companion seemed to the doctor to account for his annoyance.

CHAPTER VI

CATHERINE was returning home to Thurso House the next afternoon about four o'clock. She had been lunching out, and a number of people, she was glad to think, were coming to dinner; but she had a good deal to do before that, and she hardly liked to estimate how much to think about. Also, a telegram from Maud, who cabled to her every day, would probably have arrived by the time she got home. That might add considerably to the number of things to be thought about.

Ever since the departure of her husband and sister-in-law to America her hands had been very full, and she had devoted more time than usual to purely social duties. For she knew perfectly well that London had talked a good deal about Thurso's "illness," in that particular tone which means that in public and to her it was referred to as an "illness" in the abstract, but that when two or three only were gathered together it was discussed with far more detail and circumstance. To one of her tact, therefore, and knowledge of life it was clear that the more she was seen about, the more she entertained and was entertained, the less disagreeable and loud would all the talk and scandal about him be. With all its faults and general lack of respect, the world immensely respects pluck and the power of facing things, and certainly Catherine had faced things magnificently. The result already was that the world had begun to think that it was rather a "shame" to talk about Thurso even among intimates when Catherine was so plucky. It would very much have liked to know why she had not gone with him, for the reason that she gave—namely, that she abhorred the sea, and Maud delighted in it—was too straightforward and true to be accepted at all generally. Still, on the whole, it was a "shame" to talk. And since the memory of the world resides in its tongue, it follows that it soon forgets when it ceases to talk. It was understood, however, that Thurso's case was hopeless, though Catherine—brave woman—always said that she hoped the voyage would quite restore him after his nervous breakdown.

Catherine, in herself, believed his case to be hopeless. He had refused to see her on the morning he left, or to say good-bye, but from her window she had seen his face as he got into the carriage which took him and Maud to the station, and it seemed to her that Death had already set his seal upon it, and, as a matter of fact, she had scarcely expected that he would reach America alive. But in spite of the news which might reach her any day, she had, consistently with her declaration that the voyage would probably restore him, acted as if she really thought so, and had been indefatigable in her activities. If he ever was to come back (and as long as he lived that possibility was still there), her part was to minimise the gossip and discussion about him which at the present moment was inevitable.

During that week when he was at sea she had thought about the whole situation more deeply and earnestly than in all probability she had thought of anything before in her very busy but very unemotional life, and with her whole heart she had forgiven him—not by intention only, but in fact, so that she dismissed the matter from her mind—for the suffering and indignities he had brought on her during these last six months. Whether he would ever read her letter or not, she did not know, but some three days after their departure she had written to him, quite shortly, but quite sincerely, telling him never to reproach himself as regards her for what happened in the past, but to dismiss it as absolutely as she had dismissed it, and devote himself to getting well. The letter was not an easy one to write, or rather the attitude of mind which had made it possible to write it had not been attained without effort; for just as she was very slow to take offence, so she was naturally slow to forgive, and the events of the last six months, with their crowning indignity, had bitten very deeply into her. But the effort had been made and the letter written, and she had pledged herself to oblivion and whole-hearted forgiveness. Should he get well, she had given him to understand that the past was blotted out, and that she was willing and eager to join with him in making the best possible out of the future.

But she knew quite well, with that ruthless honesty with which she judged herself, and which was so fine a trait in her character, that she did not expect him to live, and this, she knew, made the letter an easier one to write, and her complete forgiveness less difficult to arrive at, than it would otherwise have been. She thought that it was unlikely that she would ever see him again. But she was absolutely willing, whether he lived or died, to abide by what she had said.

There had been a grim business of telegraphic codes arranged between her and Maud. It was clearly undesirable to telegraph in full such messages as Maud might feel it necessary to send her, and half a dozen cryptic words sent from New York on their arrival had told her that he had broken down once on the voyage, but had subsequently allowed her to throw the rest of the bottle away. His general health, Maud said, was certainly better. Three more telegrams, reporting the events of three more days, had come since then, each recording improvement, and it was news of their fourth day which she was expecting to find now on her return.

But as she drove through the streets, where the shops were gay for Christmas purchasers, her mind was busy over an emotional conflict more intimate than even these things. As was inevitable, matters had come to a crisis between her and Rudolf Villars, and two days ago he had declared to her his steadfast and passionate devotion. But he had refused to continue any longer on this present unbearable footing of friendship. Should she now definitely reject him, he would not see her any more, except as was necessary in the casual meetings when the world brought them together. And she had promised to give him his answer this evening.

She had really no idea at this moment what that answer would be. Months ago she had determined that she would not herself break that moral law, though, as a matter of fact, it meant little to her. But since then much had happened: ruin and degradation had come to her husband; he had offered her the greatest insult that, from the point of view of this moral law, a wife can be offered, and, what was a far more vital and determining factor in her choice, she knew now that

she loved this man with an intensity that she believed equalled his. Could the moral law which tied her to an opium-drenched wreck have any significance compared to the significance of her love?

Then suddenly, and for the first time, she remembered, in connection with her choice, the letter she had written to Thurso. She had told him that the past was utterly blotted out, and she saw how insincere that letter would become if the blotting out of the past meant for her that she was to console herself in the future. Already she knew that the fact that she did not expect him to live had made the writing of it easier. Between the two her letter did not now seem to be worth much. Yet she had meant that letter: the best part of her meant it. But just now that best part seemed to have dwindled to a mere pin's head in her consciousness. Love and life and desire were trumpets and decorations to her, and the little grey battered flag of honour was scarcely visible among the miles of bunting, and the little voice scarcely audible in the blare of the welcome that would be hers if she said but one word to her lover.

Her victoria had already stopped at her door, and the footman had turned back the fur rug that covered her knees to let her get out; but she sat for a moment quite still, for the significance of her letter (or its insignificance) had struck her like a blow. Till she saw it in connection with her decision she had not known how nearly she had decided. She had told her husband, and that with sincerity, that the past was wiped out; all that he had said or done which had been unjust or insulting to her she had cancelled, annihilated, as far as it concerned her. Was she, then, going to make a fresh past, so to speak, on her own account, to give him an opportunity to be as generous as she had been? There was a dreadful ironical fitness about it: the conjunction of these things was brutally apt.

Yet she had forgiven him, and that forgiveness was far more real to her than that which was labelled sin. That did not signify anything very particular to her, but to do this thing behind the screen of her forgiveness seemed mean, and meanness was an impossible quality. She had forgiven Thurso on the big scale, and the very bigness of her

nature, which enabled her to do that, made her hatred of meanness strong also. And as she got out, she asked herself whether, if the letter which she had written to Thurso was still unposted, she would let it go or tear it up. And she knew that, though she might stand with it in her hand for a little, she would still send it. She meant what she had said in it.

There were some half-dozen of letters for her on the table in the hall, and a telegram lay a little apart. As she picked these up, she spoke to the footman.

"I shall be in to anybody till six," she said; "but to nobody after that except Count Villars."

She had half opened the telegram when her eye fell on two little hats and coats hung up on a rack at the end of the hall. She looked at them a moment, feeling that they ought to convey something to her, but she did not know what. Then she remembered that the two eldest boys were home from school to-day for the holidays.

"Lord Raynham and Master Henry have come?" she asked.

"Yes, my lady: they arrived an hour ago."

Again she paused. Whatever she said or did to-day seemed to be laden with significance, trivial though it appeared.

"Let them know I have come in," she said. "They will come and have tea with me in the drawing-room in ten minutes." (What was it children liked with their tea?) "And a boiled egg for them both," she added.

She went slowly up the staircase which last June had been a country lane of wild-flowers at her ball, and looking back to that night she wondered whether, if among her guests then had come the prescience of what the next six months were to hold for her, she would not have chosen to die then and there, so deeply had the iron entered. But the past was dead: she must not forget that; and even to

think of the bitterness of it was to allow it to writhe and struggle again. But there were things in the past—these children, for instance, though she had never found them particularly interesting—whom the death of the past, in the sense that she had promised it to her husband, made more alive. It was the wretchedness and alienation of the whole past, as well as these tragic six months, that she had meant should be dead, and she willed it more surely in caring for all that was truly vital in it, in neglecting no longer those whom she had neglected too much. She did not reproach herself now for the small part that her children had had in her life; but if Thurso lived, the letter she had written to him must be fulfilled here also. She had forgiven him, and she must amend herself so that he should forgive her. Even now she recognised that the children could help in stabbing the estrangement of the past to death. She was their mother, and though for all these years she had overlooked the joy, just as she had forgotten the pains, of maternity, it was potential still. So ... would it not be better if she did not even see Villars? He would understand that as clearly as any words could make him. Yet she rejected that, and knew the cause of her rejection—that, though she told herself her mind was made up, she was still debating what she should say to him.

All this passed like a series of pictures rapidly presented to her as she went up the stairs. Then she paused underneath the electric light at the top, and took out the telegram from the envelope. She looked first at the end of it, as was natural, to see from whom it came, expecting to find it was from Maud. But it was signed "Thurso."

Then she read it.

"I am cured, and I humbly entreat your pardon, though your letter so generously has given it me. Shall I come back, or would you possibly come out here? I will return immediately if you wish.—Thurso."

She read it once, and read it again, in order to be sure of the sense of this incredible thing. Could it be a hoax? If so, who could have played so grim a joke? But she hardly grasped it. Yet it was clear and

in order; the hour at which it was sent off was there, and the hour of English time when it had been received.

"But it is incredible," she said to herself. "It means a miracle."

She passed into the drawing-room, looking round consciously and narrowly at the pictures and the furniture, warming her hands at the fire, and feeling the cold of the marble chimney-piece to convince herself of the reality and normalness of her sensations. She opened a letter or two, and they also were quite ordinary and commonplace; there was an invitation to dinner, a few replies to invitations of her own, all signed with familiar names. A footman was bringing in tea: he had drawn two high chairs up to the table, and had put a plate and an egg-cup opposite each. Everything except this telegram indicated that the world was going on in its normal manner. She had ordered a boiled egg, as a treat, for the two boys. There were the egg-cups.

The boys? Whose? Hers and Thurso's.

Then a sudden wave of cynical amusement, coming in from the ocean of the world in which her life was passed, went over her head for a moment. She felt that she was being unreal, melodramatic, in that she suddenly thought of her children like this, of her husband, of forgiveness, of all the stale old properties and stock solutions of difficulties. It was like some preposterous Adelphi piece, and she was the burglar who was suddenly filled with repentance and remorse because he heard the clock strike twelve, as he remembered to have heard it strike on New Year's night in young and innocent days. As if burglars thought of their childhood when they were engaged in the plate-closet! Or as if people like herself thought of maternal obligations and marriage vows when at last love had really come into their lives! Of course, they forgot everything except that, instead of suddenly remembering all sorts of other things which they had, spontaneously and habitually, forgotten for so long. If all this had been described in a book she read, or acted in a play, she would have thrown the book aside, or have got up from her seat at the play whispering, "How perfectly ridiculous! How absolutely unlike life! I

think we won't stop for the end, as I am sure there is going to be an impossible reconciliation."

Yet what would have seemed to her so unreal in fiction or drama was now extraordinarily real when it actually happened to occur. She wondered whether the life she had led all these years was as unreal as fiction of this sort or drama of this sort would have seemed to her.

Thurso was cured, so he said. He besought her forgiveness. The children were coming down to tea with her. She expected Villars. There was enough there to occupy her mind for the few minutes that would elapse before the children came.

Poor old Mumbo-Jumbo, that fetish called Morality or Duty, which had been to her but a doll with a veil over its face, was showing signs of life, giving sudden, spasmodic movements, twitching at the veil. What its face was like she had really no idea, for in so many things she had practically been untempted. But all these years she had been kind, she had been generous, she had had the instinct for helping those who suffered. Perhaps the face would not be so very ugly.

The message that the two boys were to come down to tea had not been productive, up above, of any notable rapture. Raynham, aged eleven, had said, "Oh, bother!" and Henry had asked if they would have to stop long. Their mother was a radiant but rather terrifying vision to them. She was usually doing something else, and must not be interrupted. That summed up their knowledge of her.

Catherine remembered a pack of ridiculous cards which had once produced shouts of laughter when the children were playing with their father. They concerned Mr. Bones the butcher, and the families of other portentous and legendary personages. She remembered the day, too, a wet afternoon in July, when they had played with them, and went to a cupboard in the drawing-room where cards were kept, and among other packs discovered these joyous presentments. The children were going to have eggs also with their tea. That was a treat, too.

They came in immediately afterwards, rather shy, and very anxious to "behave." But insensibly, with the instinct of children, they soon saw that "behaviour" was not required. The radiant vision begged a spoonful of Henry's egg, and asked Raynham to spare her one corner of the delicious toast he had buttered for himself. He gave her the butteriest corner of all, and Henry parted with precious yolk.

There was news also. Father was away—and some nameless dagger stabbed her as she realised that this was the first they had heard of it—and had been ill. Then there was good news: he was ever so much better, and soon he was coming home, or perhaps mamma was going out to see him—yes, America. Millions of miles off. What ocean? Atlantic, of course. Even Henry knew that.

Soon there was no thought in the minds of the children as to how long it was necessary to stop. The wonderful cards were produced, and they all sat on the hearth-rug, and mamma was too stupid for anything. For she had the whole flesh-eating family of Mr. Bones the butcher in her hand and never declared it; so Henry, having, to his amazement, been passed Mr. Bones himself, bottled Mr. Bones up, although he wasn't collecting him. This was a plan of devilish ingenuity, for had he passed Mr. Bones to Raynham, Raynham might have given him back to mamma, who, perhaps, then would have seen her foolishness.

The game was growing deliriously exciting when an interruption came, and Raynham again said, "Oh, bother!" But mamma did not get up from the hearth-rug, though the children were told to do so.

"Get up, boys," she said, "and shake hands with Count Villars. But don't let me see your cards. I am going to win. How are you, Count Villars? The boys are just home from school. This is Raynham, this is Henry. Do give yourself some tea, and be kind, and let us finish our game."

Catherine again proved herself perfectly idiotic, and Henry threw down his cards with a shriek.

"All the Snips, the tailors!" he cried.

"Oh, bother!" shouted Raynham; "and I have all the Buns but one."

"And I have all the Bones but one!" said their mother. "Now go upstairs, darlings, and take the cards with you, if you like."

"And is father coming home?" asked Raynham.

"Perhaps I am going to him. I don't know yet. Off you go!"

"And are we to shake hands again with him?" asked Henry in a whisper.

"Yes, of course. Always shake hands when you you leave the room."

There was silence for a moment after the boys had gone. Catherine broke it.

"I have just had a telegram from America," she said, "from Thurso himself. He is better. He says he is cured. He asks me if I will go there, or if he shall come back."

She was still sitting on the hearth-rug, where she had been playing with her sons. But here she got up.

"I think I shall go to him," she said quietly. "That will be the best plan for—several reasons."

And then the situation, which she had thought of as being of the nature of Adelphi melodrama, broke down from the melodramatic point of view, and began to play itself on more natural lines. He should have been the villain of the piece, she the gutteral heroine. But he was not a villain any more than she was a heroine.

"I think I have always loved you," she said. "But I can't be mean. He says he is cured. And—he asks my forgiveness, though he had it already. He asks it, you see. That makes a difference. If I stopped

here, if I— — In that case I should be refusing it him. It would amount to that."

Villars put down his cup, and looked at her, but without moving, without speaking.

"Say something," she said.

He got up too, and stood by her.

"I say 'Yes,'" he said.

Two days afterwards Catherine came up towards evening onto the deck of the White Star liner on which she was travelling. The sun had just sunk, but in the east the crescent moon had risen, while in the west, whither she was journeying, there was still the after-glow of sunset. She was leaving the east, where the moon was, but she was moving towards that other light. And she was content that it should be so. She would not have had anything different. The west, too, where she was going, had meant so much to Thurso; it had meant all to him. It was easier to weigh the moon than to weigh the veiled light of the sunken sun. She had renounced, blindly, it might be; but if for her, too, in the west, in the after-glow....