THE ORDEAL OF RICHARD FEVEREL

By

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Freeditorial

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CHAPTER XII

Laying of ghosts is a public duty, and, as the mystery of the apparition that had frightened little Clare was never solved on the stage of events at Raynham, where dread walked the Abbey, let us go behind the scenes a moment. Morally superstitious as the baronet was, the character of his mind was opposed to anything like spiritual agency in the affairs of men, and, when the matter was made clear to him, it shook off a weight of weakness and restored his mental balance; so that from this time he went about more like the man he had once been, grasping more thoroughly the great truth, that This World is well designed. Nay, he could laugh on hearing Adrian, in reminiscence of the ill luck of one of the family members at its first manifestation, call the uneasy spirit, Algernon's Leg.

Mrs. Doria was outraged. She maintained that her child had seen ——. Not to believe in it was almost to rob her of her personal property. After satisfactorily studying his old state of mind in her, Sir Austin, moved by pity, took her aside one day and showed her that her Ghost could write words in the flesh. It was a letter from the unhappy lady who had given Richard birth,—brief cold lines, simply telling him his house would be disturbed by her no more. Cold lines, but penned by what heart-broken abnegation, and underlying them with what anguish of soul! Like most who dealt with him, Lady Feverel thought her husband a man fatally stern and implacable, and she acted as silly creatures will act when they fancy they see a fate against them: she neither petitioned for her right nor claimed it: she tried to ease her heart's yearning by stealth, and, now she renounced all. Mrs. Doria, not wanting in the family tenderness and softness, shuddered at him for accepting the sacrifice so composedly: but he bade her to think how distracting to this boy would be the sight of such relations between mother and father. A few years, and as man he should know, and judge, and love her. "Let this be her penance, not inflicted by me!" Mrs. Doria bowed to the System for another, not opining when it would be her turn to bow for herself.

Further behind the scenes we observe Rizzio and Mary grown older, much disenchanted: she discrowned, dishevelled,—he with gouty fingers on a greasy guitar. The Diaper Sandoe of promise lends his pen for small hires. His fame has sunk; his bodily girth has sensibly increased. What he can do, and will do, is still his theme; meantime the juice of the juniper is in requisition, and it seems that those small hires cannot be performed without it. Returning from her wretched journey to her wretcheder home, the lady had to listen to a mild reproof from easy-going Diaper,—a reproof so mild that he couched it in blank verse: for, seldom writing metrically now, he took to talking it. With a fluent sympathetic tear, he explained to her that she was damaging her interests by these proceedings; nor did he shrink from undertaking to elucidate wherefore. Pluming a smile upon his succulent mouth, he told her that the poverty she lived in was utterly unbefitting her gentle nurture, and that he had reason to believe—could assure her—that an annuity was on the point of being granted her by her husband. And Diaper broke his bud of a smile into full flower as he delivered this information. She learnt that he had applied to her husband for money. It is hard to have one's prop of self-respect cut away just when we are suffering a martyr's agony at the stake. There was a five minutes' tragic colloquy in the recesses behind the scenes,—totally tragic to Diaper, who had fondly hoped to bask in the warm sun of that annuity, and re-emerge from his state of grub. The lady then wrote the letter Sir Austin held

open to his sister. The atmosphere behind the scenes is not wholesome, so, having laid the Ghost, we will return and face the curtain.

That infinitesimal dose of The World which Master Ripton Thompson had furnished to the System with such instantaneous and surprising effect was considered by Sir Austin to have worked well, and to be for the time quite sufficient, so that Ripton did not receive a second invitation to Raynham, and Richard had no special intimate of his own age to rub his excessive vitality against, and wanted none. His hands were full enough with Tom Bakewell. Moreover, his father and he were heart in heart. The boy's mind was opening, and turned to his father affectionately reverent. At this period, when the young savage grows into higher influences, the faculty of worship is foremost in him. At this period Jesuits will stamp the future of their chargeling flocks; and all who bring up youth by a System, and watch it, know that it is the malleable moment. Boys possessing any mental or moral force to give them a tendency, then predestinate their careers; or, if under supervision, take the impress that is given them: not often to cast it off, and seldom to cast it off altogether.

In Sir Austin's Note-book was written: "Between Simple Boyhood and Adolescence—The Blossoming Season—on the threshold of Puberty, there is one Unselfish Hour—say, Spiritual Seed-time."

He took care that good seed should be planted in Richard, and that the most fruitful seed for a youth, namely, Example, should be of a kind to germinate in him the love of every form of nobleness.

"I am only striving to make my son a Christian," he said, answering them who persisted in expostulating with the System. And to these instructions he gave an aim: "First be virtuous," he told his son, "and then serve your country with heart and soul." The youth was instructed to cherish an ambition for statesmanship, and he and his father read history and the speeches of British orators to some purpose; for one day Sir Austin found him leaning cross-legged, and with his hand to his chin, against a pedestal supporting the bust of Chatham, contemplating the hero of our Parliament, his eyes streaming with tears.

People said the baronet carried the principle of Example so far that he only retained his boozing dyspeptic brother Hippias at Raynham in order to exhibit to his son the woeful retribution nature wreaked upon a life of indulgence; poor Hippias having now become a walking complaint. This was unjust, but there is no doubt he made use of every illustration to disgust or encourage his son that his neighbourhood afforded him, and did not spare his brother, for whom Richard entertained a contempt in proportion to his admiration of his father, and was for flying into penitential extremes which Sir Austin had to soften.

The boy prayed with his father morning and night.

"How is it, sir," he said one night, "I can't get Tom Bakewell to pray?"

"Does he refuse?" Sir Austin asked.

"He seems to be ashamed to," Richard replied. "He wants to know what is the good? and I don't know what to tell him."

"I'm afraid it has gone too far with him," said Sir Austin, "and until he has had some deep sorrows he will not find the divine want of Prayer. Strive, my son, when you represent the people, to provide for their education. He feels everything now through a dull impenetrable rind. Culture is half-way to heaven. Tell him, my son, should he ever be brought to ask how he may know the efficacy of Prayer, and that his prayer will be answered, tell him (he quoted The Pilgrim's Scrip):

"'Who rises from Prayer a better man, his prayer is answered.'"

"I will, sir," said Richard, and went to sleep happy.

Happy in his father and in himself, the youth now lived. Conscience was beginning to inhabit him, and he carried some of the freightage known to men; though in so crude a form that it overweighed him, now on this side, now on that.

The wise youth Adrian observed these further progressionary developments in his pupil, soberly cynical. He was under Sir Austin's interdict not to banter him, and eased his acrid humours inspired by the sight of a felonious young rick-burner turning saint, by grave affectations of sympathy and extreme accuracy in marking the not widely-distant dates of his various changes. The Bread-and-water phase lasted a fortnight: the Vegetarian (an imitation of his cousin Austin), little better than a month: the religious, somewhat longer: the religious-propagandist (when he was for converting the heathen of Lobourne and Burnley, and the domestics of the Abbey, including Tom Bakewell), longer still, and hard to bear;—he tried to convert Adrian! All the while Tom was being exercised like a raw recruit. Richard had a drill-sergeant from the nearest barracks down for him, to give him a proper pride in himself, and marched him to and fro with immense satisfaction, and nearly broke his heart trying to get the round-shouldered rustic to take in the rudiments of letters: for the boy had unbounded hopes for Tom, as a hero in grain.

Richard's pride also was cast aside. He affected to be, and really thought he was, humble. Whereupon Adrian, as by accident, imparted to him the fact that men were animals, and he an animal with the rest of them.

"I an animal!" cries Richard in scorn, and for weeks he was as troubled by this rudiment of self-knowledge as Tom by his letters. Sir Austin had him instructed in the wonders of anatomy, to restore his self-respect.

Seed-Time passed thus smoothly, and adolescence came on, and his cousin Clare felt what it was to be of an opposite sex to him. She too was growing, but nobody cared how she grew. Outwardly even her mother seemed absorbed in the sprouting of the green off-shoot of the Feverel tree, and Clare was his handmaiden, little marked by him.

Lady Blandish honestly loved the boy. She would tell him: "If I had been a girl, I would have had you for my husband." And he with the frankness of his years would reply: "And how do you

know I would have had you?" causing her to laugh and call him a silly boy, for had he not heard her say she would have had him? Terrible words, he knew not then the meaning of!

"You don't read your father's Book," she said. Her own copy was bound in purple velvet, gilt-edged, as decorative ladies like to have holier books, and she carried it about with her, and quoted it, and (Adrian remarked to Mrs. Doria) hunted a noble quarry, and deliberately aimed at him therewith, which Mrs. Doria chose to believe, and regretted her brother would not be on his guard.

"See here," said Lady Blandish, pressing an almondy finger-nail to one of the Aphorisms, which instanced how age and adversity must clay-enclose us ere we can effectually resist the magnetism of any human creature in our path. "Can you understand it, child?"

Richard informed her that when she read he could.

"Well, then, my squire," she touched his cheek and ran her fingers through his hair, "learn as quick as you can not to be all hither and yon with a hundred different attractions, as I was before I met a wise man to guide me."

"Is my father very wise?" Richard asked.

"I think so," the lady emphasized her individual judgment.

"Do you—" Richard broke forth, and was stopped by a beating of his heart.

"Do I—what?" she calmly queried.

"I was going to say, do you—I mean, I love him so much."

Lady Blandish smiled and slightly coloured.

They frequently approached this theme, and always retreated from it; always with the same beating of heart to Richard, accompanied by the sense of a growing mystery, which, however, did not as yet generally disturb him.

Life was made very pleasant to him at Raynham, as it was part of Sir Austin's principle of education that his boy should be thoroughly joyous and happy; and whenever Adrian sent in a satisfactory report of his pupil's advancement, which he did pretty liberally, diversions were planned, just as prizes are given to diligent school-boys, and Richard was supposed to have all his desires gratified while he attended to his studies. The System flourished. Tall, strong, bloomingly healthy, he took the lead of his companions on land and water, and had more than one bondsman in his service besides Ripton Thompson—the boy without a Destiny! Perhaps the boy with a Destiny was growing up a trifle too conscious of it. His generosity to his occasional companions was princely, but was exercised something too much in the manner of a prince; and, notwithstanding his contempt for baseness, he would overlook that more easily than an offence to his pride, which demanded an utter servility when it had once been rendered susceptible. If

Richard had his followers he had also his feuds. The Papworths were as subservient as Ripton, but young Ralph Morton, the nephew of Mr. Morton, and a match for Richard in numerous promising qualities, comprising the noble science of fisticuffs, this youth spoke his mind too openly, and moreover would not be snubbed. There was no middle course for Richard's comrades between high friendship or absolute slavery. He was deficient in those cosmopolite habits and feelings which enable boys and men to hold together without caring much for each other; and, like every insulated mortal, he attributed the deficiency, of which he was quite aware, to the fact of his possessing a superior nature. Young Ralph was a lively talker: therefore, argued Richard's vanity, he had no intellect. He was affable: therefore he was frivolous. The women liked him: therefore he was a butterfly. In fine, young Ralph was popular, and our superb prince, denied the privilege of despising, ended by detesting him.

Early in the days of their contention for leadership, Richard saw the absurdity of affecting to scorn his rival. Ralph was an Eton boy, and hence, being robust, a swimmer and a cricketer. A swimmer and a cricketer is nowhere to be scorned in youth's republic. Finding that manoeuvre would not do, Richard was prompted once or twice to entrench himself behind his greater wealth and his position; but he soon abandoned that also, partly because his chilliness to ridicule told him he was exposing himself, and chiefly that his heart was too chivalrous. And so he was dragged into the lists by Ralph, and experienced the luck of champions. For cricket, and for diving, Ralph bore away the belt: Richard's middle-stump tottered before his ball, and he could seldom pick up more than three eggs underwater to Ralph's half-dozen. He was beaten, too, in jumping and running. Why will silly mortals strive to the painful pinnacles of championship? Or why, once having reached them, not have the magnanimity and circumspection to retire into private life immediately? Stung by his defeats, Richard sent one of his dependent Papworths to Poer Hall, with a challenge to Ralph Barthrop Morton; matching himself to swim across the Thames and back, once, trice, or thrice, within a less time than he, Ralph Barthrop Morton, would require for the undertaking. It was accepted, and a reply returned, equally formal in the trumpeting of Christian names, wherein Ralph Barthrop Morton acknowledged the challenge of Richard Doria Feverel, and was his man. The match came off on a midsummer morning, under the direction of Captain Algernon. Sir Austin was a spectator from the cover of a plantation by the river-side, unknown to his son, and, to the scandal of her sex, Lady Blandish accompanied the baronet. He had invited her attendance, and she, obeying her frank nature, and knowing what The Pilgrim's Scrip said about prudes, at once agreed to view the match, pleasing him mightily. For was not here a woman worthy the Golden Ages of the world? one who could look upon man as a creature divinely made, and look with a mind neither tempted, nor taunted, by the Serpent! Such a woman was rare. Sir Austin did not discompose her by uttering his praises. She was conscious of his approval only in an increased gentleness of manner, and something in his voice and communications, as if he were speaking to a familiar, a very high compliment from him. While the lads were standing ready for the signal to plunge from the steep decline of greensward into the shining waters, Sir Austin called upon her to admire their beauty, and she did, and even advanced her head above his shoulder delicately. In so doing, and just as the start was given, a bonnet became visible to Richard. Young Ralph was heels in air before he moved, and then he dropped like lead. He was beaten by several lengths.

The result of the match was unaccountable to all present, and Richard's friends unanimously pressed him to plead a false start. But though the youth, with full confidence in his better style

and equal strength, had backed himself heavily against his rival, and had lost his little river-yacht to Ralph, he would do nothing of the sort. It was the Bonnet had beaten him, not Ralph. The Bonnet, typical of the mystery that caused his heart those violent palpitations, was his dear, detestable enemy.

And now, as he progressed from mood to mood, his ambition turned towards a field where Ralph could not rival him, and where the Bonnet was etherealized, and reigned glorious mistress. A cheek to the pride of a boy will frequently divert him to the path where lie his subtlest powers. Richard gave up his companions, servile or antagonistic: he relinquished the material world to young Ralph, and retired into himself, where he was growing to be lord of kingdoms where Beauty was his handmaid, and History his minister and Time his ancient harper, and sweet Romance his bride; where he walked in a realm vaster and more gorgeous than the great Orient, peopled with the heroes that have been. For there is no princely wealth, and no loftiest heritage, to equal this early one that is made bountifully common to so many, when the ripening blood has put a spark to the imagination, and the earth is seen through rosy mists of a thousand fresh-awakened nameless and aimless desires; panting for bliss and taking it as it comes; making of any sight or sound, perforce of the enchantment they carry with them, a key to infinite, because innocent, pleasure. The passions then are gambolling cubs; not the ravaging gluttons they grow to. They have their teeth and their talons, but they neither tear nor bite. They are in counsel and fellowship with the quickened heart and brain. The whole sweet system moves to music.

Something akin to the indications of a change in the spirit of his son, which were now seen, Sir Austin had marked down to be expected, as due to his plan. The blushes of the youth, his long vigils, his clinging to solitude, his abstraction, and downcast but not melancholy air, were matters for rejoicing to the prescient gentleman. "For it comes," said he to Dr. Clifford of Lobourne, after consulting him medically on the youth's behalf and being assured of his soundness, "it comes of a thoroughly sane condition. The blood is healthy, the mind virtuous: neither instigates the other to evil, and both are perfecting toward the flower of manhood. If he reach that pure—in the untainted fulness and perfection of his natural powers—I am indeed a happy father! But one thing he will owe to me: that at one period of his life he knew paradise, and could read God's handwriting on the earth! Now those abominations whom you call precocious boys—your little pet monsters, doctor!—and who can wonder that the world is what it is? when it is full of them—as they will have no divine time to look back upon in their own lives, how can they believe in innocence and goodness, or be other than sons of selfishness and the Devil? But my boy," and the baronet dropped his voice to a key that was touching to hear, "my boy, if he fall, will fall from an actual region of purity. He dare not be a sceptic as to that. Whatever his darkness, he will have the guiding light of a memory behind him. So much is secure."

To talk nonsense, or poetry, or the dash between the two, in a tone of profound sincerity, and to enunciate solemn discordances with received opinion so seriously as to convey the impression of a spiritual insight, is the peculiar gift by which monomaniacs, having first persuaded themselves, contrive to influence their neighbours, and through them to make conquest of a good half of the world, for good or for ill. Sir Austin had this gift. He spoke as if he saw the truth, and, persisting in it so long, he was accredited by those who did not understand him, and silenced them that did.

"We shall see," was all the argument left to Dr. Clifford, and other unbelievers.

So far certainly the experiment had succeeded. A comelier, bracer, better boy was nowhere to be met. His promise was undeniable. The vessel, too, though it lay now in harbour and had not yet been proved by the buffets of the elements on the great ocean, had made a good trial trip, and got well through stormy weather, as the records of the Bakewell Comedy witnessed to at Raynham. No augury could be hopefuller. The Fates must indeed be hard, the Ordeal severe, the Destiny dark, that could destroy so bright a Spring! But, bright as it was, the baronet relaxed nothing of his vigilant supervision. He said to his intimates: "Every act, every fostered inclination, almost every thought, in this Blossoming Season, bears its seed for the Future. The living Tree now requires incessant watchfulness." And, acting up to his light, Sir Austin did watch. The youth submitted to an examination every night before he sought his bed; professedly to give an account of his studies, but really to recapitulate his moral experiences of the day. He could do so, for he was pure. Any wildness in him that his father noted, any remoteness or richness of fancy in his expressions, was set down as incidental to the Blossoming Season. There is nothing like a theory for binding the wise. Sir Austin, despite his rigid watch and ward, knew less of his son than the servant of his household. And he was deaf, as well as blind. Adrian thought it his duty to tell him that the youth was consuming paper. Lady Blandish likewise hinted at his mooning propensities. Sir Austin from his lofty watch-tower of the System had foreseen it, he said. But when he came to hear that the youth was writing poetry, his wounded heart had its reasons for being much disturbed.

"Surely," said Lady Blandish, "you knew he scribbled?"

"A very different thing from writing poetry," said the baronet. "No Feverel has ever written poetry."

"I don't think it's a sign of degeneracy," the lady remarked. "He rhymes very prettily to me."

A London phrenologist, and a friendly Oxford Professor of poetry, quieted Sir Austin's fears.

The phrenologist said he was totally deficient in the imitative faculty; and the Professor, that he was equally so in the rhythmic, and instanced several consoling false quantities in the few effusions submitted to him. Added to this, Sir Austin told Lady Blandish that Richard had, at his best, done what no poet had ever been known to be capable of doing: he had, with his own hands, and in cold blood, committed his virgin manuscript to the flames: which made Lady Blandish sigh forth, "Poor boy!"

Killing one's darling child is a painful imposition. For a youth in his Blossoming Season, who fancies himself a poet, to be requested to destroy his first-born, without a reason (though to pretend a reason cogent enough to justify the request were a mockery), is a piece of abhorrent despotism, and Richard's blossoms withered under it. A strange man had been introduced to him, who traversed and bisected his skull with sagacious stiff fingers, and crushed his soul while, in an infallible voice, declaring him the animal he was making him feel such an animal! Not only his blossoms withered, his being seemed to draw in its shoots and twigs. And when, coupled thereunto (the strange man having departed, his work done), his father, in his tenderest manner,

stated that it would give him pleasure to see those same precocious, utterly valueless, scribblings among the cinders, the last remaining mental blossoms spontaneously fell away. Richard's spirit stood bare. He protested not. Enough that it could be wished! He would not delay a minute in doing it. Desiring his father to follow him, he went to a drawer in his room, and from a clean-linen recess, never suspected by Sir Austin, the secretive youth drew out bundle after bundle: each neatly tied, named, and numbered: and pitched them into flames. And so Farewell my young Ambition! and with it farewell all true confidence between Father and Son.

CHAPTER XIII

It was now, as Sir Austin had written it down, The Magnetic Age: the Age of violent attractions, when to hear mention of love is dangerous, and to see it, a communication of the disease. People at Raynham were put on their guard by the baronet, and his reputation for wisdom was severely criticized in consequence of the injunctions he thought fit to issue through butler and housekeeper down to the lower household, for the preservation of his son from any visible symptom of the passion. A footman and two housemaids are believed to have been dismissed on the report of heavy Benson that they were in or inclining to the state; upon which an undercook and a dairymaid voluntarily threw up their places, averring that "they did not want no young men, but to have their sex spied after by an old wretch like that," indicating the ponderous butler, "was a little too much for a Christian woman," and then they were ungenerous enough to glance at Benson's well-known marital calamity, hinting that some men met their deserts. So intolerable did heavy Benson's espionage become, that Raynham would have grown depopulated of its womankind had not Adrian interfered, who pointed out to the baronet what a fearful arm his butler was wielding. Sir Austin acknowledged it despondently. "It only shows," said he, with a fine spirit of justice, "how all but impossible it is to legislate where there are women!"

"I do not object," he added; "I hope I am too just to object to the exercise of their natural inclinations. All I ask from them is discreetness."

"Ay," said Adrian, whose discreetness was a marvel.

"No gadding about in couples," continued the baronet, "no kissing in public. Such occurrences no boy should witness. Whenever people of both sexes are thrown together, they will be silly; and where they are high-fed, uneducated, and barely occupied, it must be looked for as a matter of course. Let it be known that I only require discreetness."

Discreetness, therefore, was instructed to reign at the Abbey. Under Adrian's able tuition the fairest of its domestics acquired that virtue.

Discreetness, too, was enjoined to the upper household. Sir Austin, who had not previously appeared to notice the case of Lobourne's hopeless curate, now desired Mrs. Doria to interdict, or at least discourage, his visits, for the appearance of the man was that of an embodied sigh and groan.

"Really, Austin!" said Mrs. Doria, astonished to find her brother more awake than she had supposed, "I have never allowed him to hope."

"Let him see it, then," replied the baronet; "let him see it."

"The man amuses me," said Mrs. Doria. "You know, we have few amusements here, we inferior creatures. I confess I should like a barrel-organ better; that reminds one of town and the opera; and besides, it plays more than one tune. However, since you think my society bad for him, let him stop away."

With the self-devotion of a woman she grew patient and sweet the moment her daughter Clare was spoken of, and the business of her life in view. Mrs. Doria's maternal heart had betrothed the two cousins, Richard and Clare; had already beheld them espoused and fruitful. For this she yielded the pleasures of town; for this she immured herself at Raynham; for this she bore with a thousand follies, exactions, inconveniences, things abhorrent to her, and heaven knows what forms of torture and self-denial, which are smilingly endured by that greatest of voluntary martyrs—a mother with a daughter to marry. Mrs. Doria, an amiable widow, had surely married but for her daughter Clare. The lady's hair no woman could possess without feeling it her pride. It was the daily theme of her lady's-maid,—a natural aureole to her head. She was gay, witty, still physically youthful enough to claim a destiny; and she sacrificed it to accomplish her daughter's! sacrificed, as with heroic scissors, hair, wit, gaiety—let us not attempt to enumerate how much! more than may be said. And she was only one of thousands; thousands who have no portion of the hero's reward; for he may reckon on applause, and condolence, and sympathy, and honour; they, poor slaves! must look for nothing but the opposition of their own sex and the sneers of ours. O, Sir Austin! had you not been so blinded, what an Aphorism might have sprung from this point of observation! Mrs. Doria was coolly told, between sister and brother, that during the Magnetic Age her daughter's presence at Raynham was undesirable. Instead of nursing offence, her sole thought was the mountain of prejudice she had to contend against. She bowed, and said, Clare wanted sea-air—she had never quite recovered the shock of that dreadful night. How long, Mrs. Doria wished to know, might the Peculiar Period be expected to last?

"That," said Sir Austin, "depends. A year, perhaps. He is entering on it. I shall be most grieved to lose you, Helen. Clare is now—how old?"

"Seventeen."

"She is marriageable."

"Marriageable, Austin! at seventeen! don't name such a thing. My child shall not be robbed of her youth."

"Our women marry early, Helen."

"My child shall not!"

The baronet reflected a moment. He did not wish to lose his sister.

"As you are of that opinion, Helen," said he, "perhaps we may still make arrangements to retain you with us. Would you think it advisable to send Clare—she should know discipline—to some establishment for a few months?"

"To an asylum, Austin?" cried Mrs. Doria, controlling her indignation as well as she could.

"To some select superior seminary, Helen. There are such to be found."

"Austin!" Mrs. Doria exclaimed, and had to fight with a moisture in her eyes. "Unjust! absurd!" she murmured. The baronet thought it a natural proposition that Clare should be a bride or a schoolgirl.

"I cannot leave my child." Mrs. Doria trembled. "Where she goes, I go. I am aware that she is only one of our sex, and therefore of no value to the world, but she is my child. I will see, poor dear, that you have no cause to complain of her."

"I thought," Sir Austin remarked, "that you acquiesced in my views with regard to my son."

"Yes—generally," said Mrs. Doria, and felt culpable that she had not before, and could not then, tell her brother that he had set up an Idol in his house—an Idol of flesh! more retributive and abominable than wood or brass or gold. But she had bowed to the Idol too long—she had too entirely bound herself to gain her project by subserviency. She had, and she dimly perceived it, committed a greater fault in tactics, in teaching her daughter to bow to the Idol also. Love of that kind Richard took for tribute. He was indifferent to Clare's soft eyes. The parting kiss he gave her was ready and cold as his father could desire. Sir Austin now grew eloquent to him in laudation of manly pursuits: but Richard thought his eloquence barren, his attempts at companionship awkward, and all manly pursuits and aims, life itself, vain and worthless. To what end? sighed the blossomless youth, and cried aloud, as soon as he was relieved of his father's society, what was the good of anything? Whatever he did—whichever path he selected, led back to Raynham. And whatever he did, however wretched and wayward he showed himself, only confirmed Sir Austin more and more in the truth of his previsions. Tom Bakewell, now the youth's groom, had to give the baronet a report of his young master's proceedings, in common with Adrian, and while there was no harm to tell, Tom spoke out. "He do ride like fire every day to Pig's Snout," naming the highest hill in the neighbourhood, "and stand there and stare, never movin', like a mad 'un. And then hoam agin all slack as if he'd been beaten in a race by somebody."

"There is no woman in that!" mused the baronet. "He would have ridden back as hard as he went," reflected this profound scientific humanist, "had there been a woman in it. He would shun vast expanses, and seek shade, concealment, solitude. The desire for distances betokens

emptiness and undirected hunger: when the heart is possessed by an image we fly to wood and forest, like the guilty."

Adrian's report accused his pupil of an extraordinary access of cynicism.

"Exactly," said the baronet. "As I foresaw. At this period an insatiate appetite is accompanied by a fastidious palate. Nothing but the quintessences of existence, and those in exhaustless supplies, will satisfy this craving, which is not to be satisfied! Hence his bitterness. Life can furnish no food fitting for him. The strength and purity of his energies have reached to an almost divine height, and roam through the Inane. Poetry, love, and such-like, are the drugs earth has to offer to high natures, as she offers to low ones debauchery. 'Tis a sign, this sourness, that he is subject to none of the empiricisms that are afloat. Now to keep him clear of them!"

The Titans had an easier task in storming Olympus. As yet, however, it could not be said that Sir Austin's System had failed. On the contrary, it had reared a youth, handsome, intelligent, well-bred, and, observed the ladies, with acute emphasis, innocent. Where, they asked, was such another young man to be found?

"Oh!" said Lady Blandish to Sir Austin, "if men could give their hands to women unsoiled—how different would many a marriage be! She will be a happy girl who calls Richard husband."

"Happy, indeed!" was the baronet's caustic ejaculation. "But where shall I meet one equal to him, and his match?"

"I was innocent when I was a girl," said the lady.

Sir Austin bowed a reserved opinion.

"Do you think no girls innocent?"

Sir Austin gallantly thought them all so.

"No, that you know they are not," said the lady, stamping. "But they are more innocent than boys, I am sure."

"Because of their education, madam. You see now what a youth can be. Perhaps, when my System is published, or rather—to speak more humbly—when it is practised, the balance may be restored, and we shall have virtuous young men."

"It's too late for poor me to hope for a husband from one of them," said the lady, pouting and laughing.

"It is never too late for beauty to waken love," returned the baronet, and they trifled a little. They were approaching Daphne's Bower, which they entered, and sat there to taste the coolness of a descending midsummer day.

The baronet seemed in a humour for dignified fooling; the lady for serious converse.

"I shall believe again in Arthur's knights," she said. "When I was a girl I dreamed of one."

"And he was in quest of the San Greal?"

"If you like."

"And showed his good taste by turning aside for the more tangible San Blandish?"

"Of course you consider it would have been so," sighed the lady, ruffling.

"I can only judge by our generation," said Sir Austin, with a bend of homage.

The lady gathered her mouth. "Either we are very mighty or you are very weak."

"Both, madam."

"But whatever we are, and if we are bad, bad! we love virtue, and truth, and lofty souls, in men: and, when we meet those qualities in them, we are constant, and would die for them—die for them. Ah! you know men but not women."

"The knights possessing such distinctions must be young, I presume?" said Sir Austin.

"Old, or young!"

"But if old, they are scarce capable of enterprise?"

"They are loved for themselves, not for their deeds."

"Ah!"

"Yes—ah!" said the lady. "Intellect may subdue women—make slaves of them; and they worship beauty perhaps as much as you do. But they only love for ever and are mated when they meet a noble nature."

Sir Austin looked at her wistfully.

"And did you encounter the knight of your dream?"

"Not then." She lowered her eyelids. It was prettily done.

"And how did you bear the disappointment?"

"My dream was in the nursery. The day my frock was lengthened to a gown I stood at the altar. I am not the only girl that has been made a woman in a day, and given to an ogre instead of a true knight."

"Good God!" exclaimed Sir Austin, "women have much to bear."

Here the couple changed characters. The lady became gay as the baronet grew earnest.

"You know it is our lot," she said. "And we are allowed many amusements. If we fulfil our duty in producing children, that, like our virtue, is its own reward. Then, as a widow, I have wonderful privileges."

"To preserve which, you remain a widow?"

"Certainly," she responded. "I have no trouble now in patching and piecing that rag the world calls—a character. I can sit at your feet every day unquestioned. To be sure, others do the same, but they are female eccentrics, and have cast off the rag altogether."

Sir Austin drew nearer to her. "You would have made an admirable mother, madam."

This from Sir Austin was very like positive wooing.

"It is," he continued, "ten thousand pities that you are not one."

"Do you think so?" She spoke with humility.

"I would," he went on, "that heaven had given you a daughter."

"Would you have thought her worthy of Richard?"

"Our blood, madam, should have been one!"

The lady tapped her toe with her parasol. "But I am a mother," she said. "Richard is my son. Yes! Richard is my boy," she reiterated.

Sir Austin most graciously appended, "Call him ours, madam," and held his head as if to catch the word from her lips, which, however, she chose to refuse, or defer. They made the coloured West a common point for their eyes, and then Sir Austin said:

"As you will not say 'ours,' let me. And, as you have therefore an equal claim on the boy, I will confide to you a project I have lately conceived."

The announcement of a project hardly savoured of a coming proposal, but for Sir Austin to confide one to a woman was almost tantamount to a declaration. So Lady Blandish thought, and so said her soft, deep-eyed smile, as she perused the ground while listening to the project. It concerned Richard's nuptials. He was now nearly eighteen. He was to marry when he was five-

and-twenty. Meantime a young lady, some years his junior, was to be sought for in the homes of England, who would be every way fitted by education, instincts, and blood—on each of which qualifications Sir Austin unreservedly enlarged—to espouse so perfect a youth and accept the honourable duty of assisting in the perpetuation of the Feverels. The baronet went on to say that he proposed to set forth immediately, and devote a couple of months, to the first essay in his Coelebite search.

"I fear," said Lady Blandish, when the project had been fully unfolded, "you have laid down for yourself a difficult task. You must not be too exacting."

"I know it." The baronet's shake of the head was piteous.

"Even in England she will be rare. But I confine myself to no class. If I ask for blood it is for untainted, not what you call high blood. I believe many of the middle classes are frequently more careful—more pure-blooded—than our aristocracy. Show me among them a God-fearing family who educate their children—I should prefer a girl without brothers and sisters—as a Christian damsel should be educated—say, on the model of my son, and she may be penniless, I will pledge her to Richard Feverel."

Lady Blandish bit her lip. "And what do you do with Richard while you are absent on this expedition?"

"Oh!" said the baronet, "he accompanies his father."

"Then give it up. His future bride is now pinafored and bread-and-buttery. She romps, she cries, she dreams of play and pudding. How can he care for her? He thinks more at his age of old women like me. He will be certain to kick against her, and destroy your plan, believe me, Sir Austin."

"Ay? ay? do you think that?" said the baronet.

Lady Blandish gave him a multitude of reasons.

"Ay! true," he muttered. "Adrian said the same. He must not see her. How could I think of it! The child is naked woman. He would despise her. Naturally!"

"Naturally!" echoed the lady.

"Then, madam," and the baronet rose, "there is one thing for me to determine upon. I must, for the first time in his life, leave him."

"Will you, indeed?" said the lady.

"It is my duty, having thus brought him up, to see that he is properly mated,—not wrecked upon the quicksands of marriage, as a youth so delicately trained might be; more easily than another!

Betrothed, he will be safe from a thousand snares. I may, I think, leave him for a term. My precautions have saved him from the temptations of his season."

"And under whose charge will you leave him?" Lady Blandish inquired.

She had emerged from the temple, and stood beside Sir Austin on the upper steps, under a clear summer twilight.

"Madam!" he took her hand, and his voice was gallant and tender, "under whose but yours?"

As the baronet said this, he bent above her hand, and raised it to his lips.

Lady Blandish felt that she had been wooed and asked in wedlock. She did not withdraw her hand. The baronet's salute was flatteringly reverent. He deliberated over it, as one going through a grave ceremony. And he, the scorner of women, had chosen her for his homage! Lady Blandish forgot that she had taken some trouble to arrive at it. She received the exquisite compliment in all its unique honey-sweet: for in love we must deserve nothing or the fine bloom of fruition is gone.

The lady's hand was still in durance, and the baronet had not recovered from his profound inclination, when a noise from the neighbouring beechwood startled the two actors in this courtly pantomime. They turned their heads, and beheld the hope of Raynham on horseback surveying the scene. The next moment he had galloped away.

CHAPTER XIV

All night Richard tossed on his bed with his heart in a rapid canter, and his brain bestriding it, traversing the rich untasted world, and the great Realm of Mystery, from which he was now restrained no longer. Months he had wandered about the gates of the Bonnet, wondering, sighing, knocking at them, and getting neither admittance nor answer. He had the key now. His own father had given it to him. His heart was a lightning steed, and bore him on and on over limitless regions bathed in superhuman beauty and strangeness, where cavaliers and ladies leaned whispering upon close green swards, and knights and ladies cast a splendour upon savage forests, and tilts and tourneys were held in golden courts lit to a glorious day by ladies' eyes, one pair of which, dimly visioned, constantly distinguishable, followed him through the boskage and dwelt upon him in the press, beaming while he bent above a hand glittering white and fragrant as the frosted blossom of a May night.

Awhile the heart would pause and flutter to a shock: he was in the act of consummating all earthly bliss by pressing his lips to the small white hand. Only to do that, and die! cried the Magnetic Youth: to fling the Jewel of Life into that one cup and drink it off! He was intoxicated

by anticipation. For that he was born. There was, then, some end in existence, something to live for! to kiss a woman's hand, and die! He would leap from the couch, and rush to pen and paper to relieve his swarming sensations. Scarce was he seated when the pen was dashed aside, the paper sent flying with the exclamation, "Have I not sworn I would never write again?" Sir Austin had shut that safety-valve. The nonsense that was in the youth might have poured harmlessly out, and its urgency for ebullition was so great that he was repeatedly oblivious of his oath, and found himself seated under the lamp in the act of composition before pride could speak a word. Possibly the pride even of Richard Feverel had been swamped if the act of composition were easy at such a time, and a single idea could stand clearly foremost; but myriads were demanding the first place; chaotic hosts, like ranks of stormy billows, pressed impetuously for expression, and despair of reducing them to form, quite as much as pride, to which it pleased him to refer his incapacity, threw down the powerless pen, and sent him panting to his outstretched length and another headlong career through the rosy-girdled land.

Toward morning the madness of the fever abated somewhat, and he went forth into the air. A lamp was still burning in his father's room, and Richard thought, as he looked up, that he saw the ever-vigilant head on the watch. Instantly the lamp was extinguished, the window stood cold against the hues of dawn.

Strong pulling is an excellent medical remedy for certain classes of fever. Richard took to it instinctively. The clear fresh water, burnished with sunrise, sparkled against his arrowy prow; the soft deep shadows curled smiling away from his gliding keel. Overhead solitary morning unfolded itself, from blossom to bud, from bud to flower; still, delicious changes of light and colour, to whose influences he was heedless as he shot under willows and aspens, and across sheets of river-reaches, pure mirrors to the upper glory, himself the sole tenant of the stream. Somewhere at the founts of the world lay the land he was rowing toward; something of its shadowed lights might be discerned here and there. It was not a dream, now he knew. There was a secret abroad. The woods were full of it; the waters rolled with it, and the winds. Oh, why could not one in these days do some high knightly deed which should draw down ladies' eyes from their heaven, as in the days of Arthur! To such a meaning breathed the unconscious sighs of the youth, when he had pulled through his first feverish energy.

He was off Bursley, and had lapsed a little into that musing quietude which follows strenuous exercise, when he heard a hail and his own name called. It was no lady, no fairy, but young Ralph Morton, an irruption of miserable masculine prose. Heartily wishing him abed with the rest of mankind, Richard rowed in and jumped ashore. Ralph immediately seized his arm, saying that he desired earnestly to have a talk with him, and dragged the Magnetic Youth from his water-dreams, up and down the wet mown grass. That he had to say seemed to be difficult of utterance, and Richard, though he barely listened, soon had enough of his old rival's gladness at seeing him, and exhibited signs of impatience; whereat Ralph, as one who branches into matter somewhat foreign to his mind, but of great human interest and importance, put the question to him:

"I say, what woman's name do you like best?"

"I don't know any," quoth Richard, indifferently. "Why are you out so early?"

In answer to this, Ralph suggested that the name of Mary might be considered a pretty name.

Richard agreed that it might be; the housekeeper at Raynham, half the women cooks, and all the housemaids enjoyed that name; the name of Mary was equivalent for women at home.

"Yes, I know," said Ralph. "We have lots of Marys. It's so common. Oh! I don't like Mary best. What do you think?"

Richard thought it just like another.

"Do you know," Ralph continued, throwing off the mask and plunging into the subject, "I'd do anything on earth for some names—one or two. It's not Mary, nor Lucy. Clarinda's pretty, but it's like a novel. Claribel, I like. Names beginning with 'Cl' I prefer. The 'Cl's' are always gentle and lovely girls you would die for! Don't you think so?"

Richard had never been acquainted with any of them to inspire that emotion. Indeed these urgent appeals to his fancy in feminine names at five o'clock in the morning slightly surprised him, though he was but half awake to the outer world. By degrees he perceived that Ralph was changed. Instead of the lusty boisterous boy, his rival in manly sciences, who spoke straightforwardly and acted up to his speech, here was an abashed and blush-persecuted youth, who sued piteously for a friendly ear wherein to pour the one idea possessing him. Gradually, too, Richard apprehended that Ralph likewise was on the frontiers of the Realm of Mystery, perhaps further toward it than he himself was; and then, as by a sympathetic stroke, was revealed to him the wonderful beauty and depth of meaning in feminine names. The theme appeared novel and delicious, fitted to the season and the hour. But the hardship was, that Richard could choose none from the number; all were the same to him; he loved them all.

"Don't you really prefer the 'Cl's'?" said Ralph, persuasively.

"Not better than the names ending in 'a' and 'y,' Richard replied, wishing he could, for Ralph was evidently ahead of him.

"Come under these trees," said Ralph. And under the trees Ralph unbosomed. His name was down for the army: Eton was quitted for ever. In a few months he would have to join his regiment, and before he left he must say goodbye to his friends.... Would Richard tell him Mrs. Forey's address? he had heard she was somewhere by the sea. Richard did not remember the address, but said he would willingly take charge of any letter and forward it.

Ralph dived his hand into his pocket. "Here it is. But don't let anybody see it."

"My aunt's name is not Clare," said Richard, perusing what was composed of the exterior formula. "You've addressed it to Clare herself."

That was plain to see.

"Emmeline Clementina Matilda Laura, Countess Blandish," Richard continued in a low tone, transferring the names, and playing on the musical strings they were to him. Then he said: "Names of ladies! How they sweeten their names!"

He fixed his eyes on Ralph. If he discovered anything further he said nothing, but bade the good fellow good-bye, jumped into his boat, and pulled down the tide. The moment Ralph was hidden by an abutment of the banks, Richard perused the address. For the first time it struck him that his cousin Clare was a very charming creature: he remembered the look of her eyes, and especially the last reproachful glance she gave him at parting. What business had Ralph to write to her? Did she not belong to Richard Feverel? He read the words again and again: Clare Doria Forey. Why, Clare was the name he liked best—nay, he loved it. Doria, too—she shared his own name with him. Away went his heart, not at a canter now, at a gallop, as one who sights the quarry. He felt too weak to pull. Clare Doria Forey—oh, perfect melody! Sliding with the tide, he heard it fluting in the bosom of the hills.

When nature has made us ripe for love, it seldom occurs that the Fates are behindhand in furnishing a temple for the flame.

Above green-flashing plunges of a weir, and shaken by the thunder below, lilies, golden and white, were swaying at anchor among the reeds. Meadow-sweet hung from the banks thick with weed and trailing bramble, and there also hung a daughter of earth. Her face was shaded by a broad straw hat with a flexible brim that left her lips and chin in the sun, and, sometimes nodding, sent forth a light of promising eyes. Across her shoulders, and behind, flowed large loose curls, brown in shadow, almost golden where the ray touched them. She was simply dressed, befitting decency and the season. On a closer inspection you might see that her lips were stained. This blooming young person was regaling on dewberries. They grew between the bank and the water. Apparently she found the fruit abundant, for her hand was making pretty progress to her mouth. Fastidious youth, which revolts at woman plumping her exquisite proportions on bread-and-butter, and would (we must suppose) joyfully have her scraggy to have her poetical, can hardly object to dewberries. Indeed the act of eating them is dainty and induces musing. The dewberry is a sister to the lotus, and an innocent sister. You eat: mouth, eye, and hand are occupied, and the undrugged mind free to roam. And so it was with the damsel who knelt there. The little skylark went up above her, all song, to the smooth southern cloud lying along the blue: from a dewy copse dark over her nodding hat the blackbird fluted, calling to her with thrice mellow note: the kingfisher flashed emerald out of green osiers: a bow-winged heron travelled aloft, seeking solitude a boat slipped toward her, containing a dreamy youth; and still she plucked the fruit, and ate, and mused, as if no fairy prince were invading her territories, and as if she wished not for one, or knew not her wishes. Surrounded by the green shaven meadows, the pastoral summer buzz, the weir-fall's thundering white, amid the breath and beauty of wild flowers, she was a bit of lovely human life in a fair setting; a terrible attraction. The Magnetic Youth leaned round to note his proximity to the weir-piles, and beheld the sweet vision. Stiller and stiller grew nature, as at the meeting of two electric clouds. Her posture was so graceful, that though he was making straight for the weir, he dared not dip a scull. Just then one enticing dewberry caught her eyes. He was floating by unheeded, and saw that her hand stretched low, and could not gather what it sought. A stroke from his right brought him beside her. The damsel glanced up dismayed, and her whole shape trembled over the brink. Richard sprang from his boat

into the water. Pressing a hand beneath her foot, which she had thrust against the crumbling wet sides of the bank to save herself, he enabled her to recover her balance, and gain safe earth, whither he followed her.

CHAPTER XV

He had landed on an island of the still-vexed Bermoothes. The world lay wrecked behind him: Raynham hung in mists, remote, a phantom to the vivid reality of this white hand which had drawn him thither away thousands of leagues in an eye-twinkle. Hark, how Ariel sang overhead! What splendour in the heavens! What marvels of beauty about his enchanted brows! And, O you wonder! Fair Flame! by whose light the glories of being are now first seen....Radiant Miranda! Prince Ferdinand is at your feet.

Or is it Adam, his rib taken from his side in sleep, and thus transformed, to make him behold his Paradise, and lose it?...

The youth looked on her with as glowing an eye. It was the First Woman to him.

And she—mankind was all Caliban to her, saving this one princely youth.

So to each other said their changing eyes in the moment they stood together; he pale, and she blushing.

She was indeed sweetly fair, and would have been held fair among rival damsels. On a magic shore, and to a youth educated by a System, strung like an arrow drawn to the head, he, it might be guessed, could fly fast and far with her. The soft rose in her cheeks, the clearness of her eyes, bore witness to the body's virtue; and health and happy blood were in her bearing. Had she stood before Sir Austin among rival damsels, that Scientific Humanist, for the consummation of his System, would have thrown her the handkerchief for his son. The wide summer-hat, nodding over her forehead to her brows, seemed to flow with the flowing heavy curls, and those fire-threaded mellow curls, only half-curls, waves of hair call them, rippling at the ends, went like a sunny red-veined torrent down her back almost to her waist: a glorious vision to the youth, who embraced it as a flower of beauty, and read not a feature. There were curious features of colour in her face for him to have read. Her brows, thick and brownish against a soft skin showing the action of the blood, met in the bend of a bow, extending to the temples long and level: you saw that she was fashioned to peruse the sights of earth, and by the pliability of her brows that the wonderful creature used her faculty, and was not going to be a statue to the gazer. Under the dark thick brows an arch of lashes shot out, giving a wealth of darkness to the full frank blue eyes, a mystery of meaning—more than brain was ever meant to fathom: richer, henceforth, than all mortal wisdom to Prince Ferdinand. For when nature turns artist, and produces contrasts of

colour on a fair face, where is the Sage, or what the Oracle, shall match the depth of its lightest look?

Prince Ferdinand was also fair. In his slim boating-attire his figure looked heroic. His hair, rising from the parting to the right of his forehead, in what his admiring Lady Blandish called his plume, fell away slanting silkily to the temples across the nearly imperceptible upward curve of his brows there—felt more than seen, so slight it was—and gave to his profile a bold beauty, to which his bashful, breathless air was a flattering charm. An arrow drawn to the head, capable of flying fast and far with her! He leaned a little forward, drinking her in with all his eyes, and young Love has a thousand. Then truly the System triumphed, just ere it was to fall; and could Sir Austin have been content to draw the arrow to the head, and let it fly, when it would fly, he might have pointed to his son again, and said to the world, "Match him!" Such keen bliss as the youth had in the sight of her, an innocent youth alone has powers of soul in him to experience.

"O Women!" says The Pilgrim's Scrip, in one of its solitary outbursts, "Women, who like, and will have for hero, a rake! how soon are you not to learn that you have taken bankrupts to your bosoms, and that the putrescent gold that attracted you is the slime of the Lake of Sin!"

If these two were Ferdinand and Miranda, Sir Austin was not Prospero, and was not present, or their fates might have been different.

So they stood a moment, changing eyes, and then Miranda spoke, and they came down to earth, feeling no less in heaven.

She spoke to thank him for his aid. She used quite common simple words; and used them, no doubt, to express a common simple meaning: but to him she was uttering magic, casting spells, and the effect they had on him was manifested in the incoherence of his replies, which were too foolish to be chronicled.

The couple were again mute. Suddenly Miranda, with an exclamation of anguish, and innumerable lights and shadows playing over her lovely face, clapped her hands, crying aloud, "My book! my book!" and ran to the bank.

Prince Ferdinand was at her side. "What have you lost?" he said.

"My book!" she answered, her delicious curls swinging across her shoulders to the stream. Then turning to him, "Oh, no, no! let me entreat you not to," she said; "I do not so very much mind losing it." And in her eagerness to restrain him she unconsciously laid her gentle hand upon his arm, and took the force of motion out of him.

"Indeed, I do not really care for the silly book," she continued, withdrawing her hand quickly, and reddening. "Pray, do not!"

The young gentleman had kicked off his shoes. No sooner was the spell of contact broken than he jumped in. The water was still troubled and discoloured by his introductory adventure, and, though he ducked his head with the spirit of a dabchick, the book was missing. A scrap of paper

floating from the bramble just above the water, and looking as if fire had caught its edges and it had flown from one adverse element to the other, was all he could lay hold of; and he returned to land disconsolately, to hear Miranda's murmured mixing of thanks and pretty expostulations.

"Let me try again," he said.

"No, indeed!" she replied, and used the awful threat: "I will run away if you do," which effectually restrained him.

Her eye fell on the fire-stained scrap of paper, and brightened, as she cried, "There, there! you have what I want. It is that. I do not care for the book. No, please! You are not to look at it. Give it me."

Before her playfully imperative injunction was fairly spoken, Richard had glanced at the document and discovered a Griffin between two Wheatsheaves: his crest in silver: and below—O wonderment immense! his own handwriting!

He handed it to her. She took it, and put it in her bosom.

Who would have thought, that, where all else perished, Odes, Idyls, Lines, Stanzas, this one Sonnet to the stars should be miraculously reserved for such a starry fate—passing beatitude!

As they walked silently across the meadow, Richard strove to remember the hour and the mood of mind in which he had composed the notable production. The stars were invoked, as seeing and foreseeing all, to tell him where then his love reclined, and so forth; Hesper was complacent enough to do so, and described her in a couplet—

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"Through sunset's amber see me shining fair,
As her blue eyes shine through her golden hair."
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And surely no words could be more prophetic. Here were two blue eyes and golden hair; and by some strange chance, that appeared like the working of a divine finger, she had become the possessor of the prophecy, she that was to fulfil it! The youth was too charged with emotion to speak. Doubtless the damsel had less to think of, or had some trifling burden on her conscience, for she seemed to grow embarrassed. At last she drew up her chin to look at her companion under the nodding brim of her hat (and the action gave her a charmingly freakish air), crying, "But where are you going to? You are wet through. Let me thank you again; and, pray, leave me, and go home and change instantly."

"Wet?" replied the magnetic muser, with a voice of tender interest; "not more than one foot, I hope. I will leave you while you dry your stockings in the sun."

At this she could not withhold a shy laugh.

"Not I, but you. You would try to get that silly book for me, and you are dripping wet. Are you not very uncomfortable?"

In all sincerity he assured her that he was not.

"And you really do not feel that you are wet?"

He really did not: and it was a fact that he spoke truth.

She pursed her dewberry mouth in the most comical way, and her blue eyes lightened laughter out of the half-closed lids.

"I cannot help it," she said, her mouth opening, and sounding harmonious bells of laughter in his ears. "Pardon me, won't you?"

His face took the same soft smiling curves in admiration of her.

"Not to feel that you have been in the water, the very moment after!" she musically interjected, seeing she was excused.

"It's true," he said; and his own gravity then touched him to join a duet with her, which made them no longer feel strangers, and did the work of a month of intimacy. Better than sentiment, laughter opens the breast to love; opens the whole breast to his full quiver, instead of a corner here and there for a solitary arrow. Hail the occasion propitious, O British young! and laugh and treat love as an honest God, and dabble not with the sentimental rouge. These two laughed, and the souls of each cried out to other, "It is I it is I."

They laughed and forgot the cause of their laughter, and the sun dried his light river clothing, and they strolled toward the blackbird's copse, and stood near a stile in sight of the foam of the weir and the many-coloured rings of eddies streaming forth from it.

Richard's boat, meanwhile, had contrived to shoot the weir, and was swinging, bottom upward, broadside with the current down the rapid backwater.

"Will you let it go?" said the damsel, eying it curiously.

"It can't be stopped," he replied, and could have added: "What do I care for it now!"

His old life was whirled away with it, dead, drowned. His new life was with her, alive, divine.

She flapped low the brim of her hat. "You must really not come any farther," she softly said.

"And will you go, and not tell me who you are?" he asked, growing bold as the fears of losing her came across him. "And will you not tell me before you go"—his face burned—"how you came by that—that paper?"

She chose to select the easier question for answer: "You ought to know me; we have been introduced." Sweet was her winning off-hand affability.

"Then who, in heaven's name, are you? Tell me! I never could have forgotten you."

"You have, I think," she said.

"Impossible that we could ever have met, and I forget you!"

She looked up at him.

"Do you remember Belthorpe?"

"Belthorpe! Belthorpe!" quoth Richard, as if he had to touch his brain to recollect there was such a place. "Do you mean old Blaize's farm?"

"Then I am old Blaize's niece." She tripped him a soft curtsey.

The magnetized youth gazed at her. By what magic was it that this divine sweet creature could be allied with that old churl!

"Then what—what is your name?" said his mouth, while his eyes added, "O wonderful creature! How came you to enrich the earth?"

"Have you forgot the Desboroughs of Dorset, too?" she peered at him from a side-bend of the flapping brim.

"The Desboroughs of Dorset?" A light broke in on him. "And have you grown to this? That little girl I saw there!"

He drew close to her to read the nearest features of the vision. She could no more laugh off the piercing fervour of his eyes. Her volubility fluttered under his deeply wistful look, and now neither voice was high, and they were mutually constrained.

"You see," she murmured, "we are old acquaintances."

Richard, with his eyes still intently fixed on her, returned, "You are very beautiful!"

The words slipped out. Perfect simplicity is unconsciously audacious. Her overpowering beauty struck his heart, and, like an instrument that is touched and answers to the touch, he spoke.

Miss Desborough made an effort to trifle with this terrible directness; but his eyes would not be gainsaid, and checked her lips. She turned away from them, her bosom a little rebellious. Praise so passionately spoken, and by one who has been a damsel's first dream, dreamed of nightly many long nights, and clothed in the virgin silver of her thoughts in bud, praise from him is coin the heart cannot reject, if it would. She quickened her steps.

"I have offended you!" said a mortally wounded voice across her shoulder.

That he should think so were too dreadful.

"Oh no, no! you would never offend me." She gave him her whole sweet face.

"Then why—why do you leave me?"

"Because," she hesitated, "I must go."

"No. You must not go. Why must you go? Do not go."

"Indeed I must," she said, pulling at the obnoxious broad brim of her hat; and, interpreting a pause he made for his assent to her rational resolve, shyly looking at him, she held her hand out, and said, "Good-bye," as if it were a natural thing to say.

The hand was pure white—white and fragrant as the frosted blossom of a Maynight. It was the hand whose shadow, cast before, he had last night bent his head reverentially above, and kissed—resigning himself thereupon over to execution for payment of the penalty of such daring—by such bliss well rewarded.

He took the hand, and held it, gazing between her eyes.

"Good-bye," she said again, as frankly as she could, and at the same time slightly compressing her fingers on his in token of adieu. It was a signal for his to close firmly upon hers.

"You will not go?"

"Pray, let me," she pleaded, her sweet brows suing in wrinkles.

"You will not go?" Mechanically he drew the white hand nearer his thumping heart.

"I must," she faltered piteously.

"You will not go?"

"Oh yes! yes!"

"Tell me. Do you wish to go?"

The question was a subtle one. A moment or two she did not answer, and then forswore herself, and said, Yes.

"Do you—you wish to go?" He looked with quivering eyelids under hers.

A fainter Yes responded.

"You wish—wish to leave me?" His breath went with the words.

"Indeed I must."

Her hand became a closer prisoner.

All at once an alarming delicious shudder went through her frame. From him to her it coursed, and back from her to him. Forward and back love's electric messenger rushed from heart to heart, knocking at each, till it surged tumultuously against the bars of its prison, crying out for its mate. They stood trembling in unison, a lovely couple under these fair heavens of the morning.

When he could get his voice it said, "Will you go?"

But she had none to reply with, and could only mutely bend upward her gentle wrist.

"Then, farewell!" he said, and, dropping his lips to the soft fair hand, kissed it, and hung his head, swinging away from her, ready for death.

Strange, that now she was released she should linger by him. Strange, that his audacity, instead of the executioner, brought blushes and timid tenderness to his side, and the sweet words, "You are not angry with me?"

"With you, O Beloved!" cried his soul. "And you forgive me, fair charity!"

"I think it was rude of me to go without thanking you again," she said, and again proffered her hand.

The sweet heaven-bird shivered out his song above him. The gracious glory of heaven fell upon his soul. He touched her hand, not moving his eyes from her, nor speaking, and she, with a soft word of farewell, passed across the stile, and up the pathway through the dewy shades of the copse, and out of the arch of the light, away from his eyes.

And away with her went the wild enchantment. He looked on barren air. But it was no more the world of yesterday. The marvellous splendours had sown seeds in him, ready to spring up and bloom at her gaze; and in his bosom now the vivid conjuration of her tones, her face, her shape, makes them leap and illumine him like fitful summer lightnings ghosts of the vanished sun.

There was nothing to tell him that he had been making love and declaring it with extraordinary rapidity; nor did he know it. Soft flushed cheeks! sweet mouth! strange sweet brows! eyes of softest fire! how could his ripe eyes behold you, and not plead to keep you? Nay, how could he let you go? And he seriously asked himself that question.

To-morrow this place will have a memory—the river and the meadow, and the white falling weir: his heart will build a temple here; and the skylark will be its high-priest, and the old blackbird its glossy-gowned chorister, and there will be a sacred repast of dewberries. To-day the grass is grass: his heart is chased by phantoms and finds rest nowhere. Only when the most tender freshness of his flower comes across him does he taste a moment's calm; and no sooner does it come than it gives place to keen pangs of fear that she may not be his for ever.

Erelong he learns that her name is Lucy. Erelong he meets Ralph, and discovers that in a day he has distanced him by a sphere. He and Ralph and the curate of Lobourne join in their walks, and raise classical discussions on ladies' hair, fingering a thousand delicious locks, from those of Cleopatra to the Borgia's. "Fair! fair! all of them fair!" sighs the melancholy curate, "as are those women formed for our perdition! I think we have in this country what will match the Italian or the Greek." His mind flutters to Mrs. Doria, Richard blushes before the vision of Lucy, and Ralph, whose heroine's hair is a dark luxuriance, dissents, and claims a noble share in the slaughter of men for dark-haired Wonders. They have no mutual confidences, but they are singularly kind to each other, these three children of instinct.

CHAPTER XVI

Lady Blandish, and others who professed an interest in the fortunes and future of the systematized youth, had occasionally mentioned names of families whose alliance according to apparent calculations, would not degrade his blood: and over these names, secretly preserved on an open leaf of the note-book, Sir Austin, as he neared the metropolis, distantly dropped his eye. There were names historic and names mushroomic; names that the Conqueror might have called in his muster-roll; names that had been, clearly, tossed into the upper stratum of civilized lifer by a millwheel or a merchant-stool. Against them the baronet had written M. or Po. or Pr.—signifying, Money, Position, Principles, favouring the latter with special brackets. The wisdom of a worldly man, which he could now and then adopt, determined him, before he commenced his round of visits, to consult and sound his solicitor and his physician thereanent; lawyers and doctors being the rats who know best the merits of a house, and on what sort of foundation it may be standing.

Sir Austin entered the great city with a sad mind. The memory of his misfortune came upon him vividly, as if no years had intervened, and it were but yesterday that he found the letter telling him that he had no wife and his son no mother. He wandered on foot through the streets the first night of his arrival, looking strangely at the shops and shows and bustle of the world from which he had divorced himself; feeling as destitute as the poorest vagrant. He had almost forgotten how to find his way about, and came across his old mansion in his efforts to regain his hotel. The windows were alight—signs of merry life within. He stared at it from the shadow of the opposite side. It seemed to him he was a ghost gazing upon his living past. And then the phantom which had stood there mocking while he felt as other men—the phantom, now flesh and blood reality, seized and convulsed his heart, and filled its unforgiving crevices with bitter ironic venom. He remembered by the time reflection returned to him that it was Algernon, who had the house at his disposal, probably giving a card-party, or something of the sort. In the morning, too, he remembered that he had divorced the world to wed a System, and must be faithful to that exacting Spouse, who, now alone of things on earth, could fortify and recompense him.

Mr. Thompson received his client with the dignity and emotion due to such a rent-roll and the unexpectedness of the honour. He was a thin stately man of law, garbed as one who gave audience to acred bishops, and carrying on his countenance the stamp of paternity to the parchment skins, and of a virtuous attachment to Port wine sufficient to increase his respectability in the eyes of moral Britain. After congratulating Sir Austin on the fortunate issue of two or three suits, and being assured that the baronet's business in town had no concern therewith, Mr. Thompson ventured to hope that the young heir was all his father could desire him to be, and heard with satisfaction that he was a pattern to the youth of the Age.

"A difficult time of life, Sir Austin!" said the old lawyer, shaking his head. "We must keep our eyes on them—keep awake! The mischief is done in a minute."

"We must take care to have seen where we planted, and that the root was sound, or the mischief will do itself in site of, or under the very spectacles of, supervision," said the baronet.

His legal adviser murmured "Exactly," as if that were his own idea, adding, "It is my plan with Ripton, who has had the honour of an introduction to you, and a very pleasant time he spent with my young friend, whom he does not forget. Ripton follows the Law. He is articled to me, and will, I trust, succeed me worthily in your confidence. I bring him into town in the morning; I take him back at night. I think I may say that I am quite content with him."

"Do you think," said Sir Austin, fixing his brows, "that you can trace every act of his to its motive?"

The old lawyer bent forward and humbly requested that this might be repeated.

"Do you"—Sir Austin held the same searching expression—"do you establish yourself in a radiating centre of intuition: do you base your watchfulness on so thorough an acquaintance with his character, so perfect a knowledge of the instrument, that all its movements—even the eccentric ones—are anticipated by you, and provided for?"

The explanation was a little too long for the old lawyer to entreat another repetition. Winking with the painful deprecation of a deaf man, Mr. Thompson smiled urbanely, coughed conciliatingly, and said he was afraid he could not affirm that much, though he was happily enabled to say that Ripton had borne an extremely good character at school.

"I find," Sir Austin remarked, as sardonically he relaxed his inspecting pose and mien, "there are fathers who are content to be simply obeyed. Now I require not only that my son should obey; I would have him guiltless of the impulse to gainsay my wishes—feeling me in him stronger than his undeveloped nature, up to a certain period, where my responsibility ends and his commences. Man is a self-acting machine. He cannot cease to be a machine; but, though self-acting, he may lose the powers of self-guidance, and in a wrong course his very vitalities hurry him to perdition. Young, he is an organism ripening to the set mechanic diurnal round, and while so he needs all the angels to hold watch over him that he grow straight and healthy, and fit for what machinal duties he may have to perform"...

Mr. Thompson agitated his eyebrows dreadfully. He was utterly lost. He respected Sir Austin's estates too much to believe for a moment he was listening to downright folly. Yet how otherwise explain the fact of his excellent client being incomprehensible to him? For a middle-aged gentleman, and one who has been in the habit of advising and managing, will rarely have a notion of accusing his understanding; and Mr. Thompson had not the slightest notion of accusing his. But the baronet's condescension in coming thus to him, and speaking on the subject nearest his heart, might well affect him, and he quickly settled the case in favour of both parties, pronouncing mentally that his honoured client had a meaning, and so deep it was, so subtle, that no wonder he experienced difficulty in giving it fitly significant words.

Sir Austin elaborated his theory of the Organism and the Mechanism, for his lawyer's edification. At a recurrence of the word "healthy" Mr. Thompson caught him up:

"I apprehended you! Oh, I agree with you, Sir Austin! entirely! Allow me to ring for my son Ripton. I think, if you condescend to examine him, you will say that regular habits, and a diet of nothing but law-reading—for other forms of literature I strictly interdict—have made him all that you instance."

Mr. Thompson's hand was on the bell. Sir Austin arrested him.

"Permit me to see the lad at his occupation," said he.

Our old friend Ripton sat in a room apart with the confidential clerk, Mr. Beazley, a veteran of law, now little better than a document, looking already signed and sealed, and shortly to be delivered, who enjoined nothing from his pupil and companion save absolute silence, and sounded his praises to his father at the close of days when it had been rigidly observed—not caring, or considering, the finished dry old document that he was, under what kind of spell a turbulent commonplace youth could be charmed into stillness for six hours of the day. Ripton was supposed to be devoted to the study of Blackstone. A tome of the classic legal commentator lay extended outside his desk, under the partially lifted lid of which nestled the assiduous student's head—law being thus brought into direct contact with his brain-pan. The office-door opened, and he heard not; his name was called, and he remained equally moveless. His method of taking in Blackstone seemed absorbing as it was novel.

"Comparing notes, I daresay," whispered Mr. Thompson to Sir Austin. "I call that study!"

The confidential clerk rose, and bowed obsequious senility.

"Is it like this every day, Beazley?" Mr. Thompson asked with parental pride.

"Ahem!" the old clerk replied, "he is like this every day, sir. I could not ask more of a mouse."

Sir Austin stepped forward to the desk. His proximity roused one of Ripton's senses, which blew a pall to the others. Down went the lid of the desk. Dismay, and the ardours of study, flashed together in Ripton's face. He slouched from his perch with the air of one who means rather to

defend his position than welcome a superior, the right hand in his waistcoat pocket fumbling a key, the left catching at his vacant stool.

Sir Austin put two fingers on the youth's shoulder, and said, leaning his head a little on one side, in a way habitual to him, "I am glad to find my son's old comrade thus profitably occupied. I know what study is myself. But beware of prosecuting it too excitedly! Come! you must not be offended at our interruption; you will soon take up the thread again. Besides, you know, you must get accustomed to the visits of your client."

So condescending and kindly did this speech sound to Mr. Thompson, that, seeing Ripton still preserve his appearance of disorder and sneaking defiance, he thought fit to nod and frown at the youth, and desired him to inform the baronet what particular part of Blackstone he was absorbed in mastering at that moment.

Ripton hesitated an instant, and blundered out, with dubious articulation, "The Law of Gravelkind."

"What Law?" said Sir Austin, perplexed.

"Gravelkind," again rumbled Ripton's voice.

Sir Austin turned to Mr. Thompson for an explanation. The old lawyer was shaking his law-box.

"Singular!" he exclaimed. "He will make that mistake! What law, sir?"

Ripton read his error in the sternly painful expression of his father's face, and corrected himself. "Gavelkind, sir."

"Ah!" said Mr. Thompson, with a sigh of relief. "Gravelkind, indeed! Gavelkind! An old Kentish"—He was going to expound, but Sir Austin assured him he knew it, and a very absurd law it was, adding, "I should like to look at your son's notes, or remarks on the judiciousness of that family arrangement, if he had any."

"You were making notes, or referring to them, as we entered," said Mr. Thompson to the sucking lawyer; "a very good plan, which I have always enjoined on you. Were you not?"

Ripton stammered that he was afraid he hid not any notes to show, worth seeing.

"What were you doing then, sir?"

"Making notes," muttered Ripton, looking incarnate subterfuge.

"Exhibit!"

Ripton glanced at his desk and then at his father; at Sir Austin, and at the confidential clerk. He took out his key. It would not fit the hole.

"Exhibit!" was peremptorily called again.

In his praiseworthy efforts to accommodate the keyhole, Ripton discovered that the desk was already unlocked. Mr. Thompson marched to it, and held the lid aloft. A book was lying open within, which Ripton immediately hustled among a mass of papers and tossed into a dark corner, not before the glimpse of a coloured frontispiece was caught by Sir Austin's eye.

The baronet smiled, and said, "You study Heraldry, too? Are you fond of the science?"

Ripton replied that he was very fond of it—extremely attached, and threw a further pile of papers into the dark corner.

The notes had been less conspicuously placed, and the search for them was tedious and vain. Papers, not legal, or the fruits of study, were found, that made Mr. Thompson more intimate with the condition of his son's exchequer; nothing in the shape of a remark on the Law of Gavelkind.

Mr. Thompson suggested to his son that they might be among those scraps he had thrown carelessly into the dark corner. Ripton, though he consented to inspect them, was positive they were not there.

"What have we here?" said Mr. Thompson, seizing a neatly folded paper addressed to the Editor of a law publication, as Ripton brought them forth, one by one. Forthwith Mr. Thompson fixed his spectacles and read aloud:

"To the Editor of the 'Jurist.'

"Sir,—In your recent observations on the great case of Crim"—

Mr. Thompson hem'd! and stopped short, like a man who comes unexpectedly upon a snake in his path. Mr. Beazley's feet shuffled. Sir Austin changed the position of an arm.

"It's on the other side, I think," gasped Ripton.

Mr. Thompson confidently turned over, and intoned with emphasis.

"To Absalom, the son of David, the little Jew usurer of Bond Court, Whitecross Gutters, for his introduction to Venus, I O U Five pounds, when I can pay.

"Signed: RIPTON THOMPSON."

Underneath this fictitious legal instrument was discreetly appended:

"(Mem. Document not binding.)"

There was a pause: an awful under-breath of sanctified wonderment and reproach passed round the office. Sir Austin assumed an attitude. Mr. Thompson shed a glance of severity on his confidential clerk, who parried by throwing up his hands.

Ripton, now fairly bewildered, stuffed another paper under his father's nose, hoping the outside perhaps would satisfy him: it was marked "Legal Considerations." Mr. Thompson had no idea of sparing or shielding his son. In fact, like many men whose self-love is wounded by their offspring, he felt vindictive, and was ready to sacrifice him up to a certain point, for the good of both. He therefore opened the paper, expecting something worse than what he had hitherto seen, despite its formal heading, and he was not disappointed.

The "Legal Considerations" related to the Case regarding, which Ripton had conceived it imperative upon him to address a letter to the Editor of the "Jurist," and was indeed a great case, and an ancient; revived apparently for the special purpose of displaying the forensic abilities of the Junior Counsel for the Plaintiff, Mr. Ripton Thompson, whose assistance the Attorney-General, in his opening statement, congratulated himself on securing; a rather unusual thing, due probably to the eminence and renown of that youthful gentleman at the Bar of his country. So much was seen from the copy of a report purporting to be extracted from a newspaper, and prefixed to the Junior Counsel's remarks, or Legal Considerations, on the conduct of the Case, the admissibility and non-admissibility of certain evidence, and the ultimate decision of the judges.

Mr. Thompson, senior, lifted the paper high, with the spirit of one prepared to do execution on the criminal, and in the voice of a town-crier, varied by a bitter accentuation and satiric sing-song tone, deliberately read:

"VULCAN v. MARS.

"The Attorney-General, assisted by Mr. Ripton Thompson, appeared on behalf of the Plaintiff. Mr. Serjeant Cupid, Q.C., and Mr. Capital Opportunity, for the Defendant."

"Oh!" snapped Mr. Thompson, senior, peering venom at the unfortunate Ripton over his spectacles, "your notes are on that issue, sir! Thus you employ your time, sir!"

With another side-shot at the confidential clerk, who retired immediately behind a strong entrenchment of shrugs, Mr. Thompson was pushed by the devil of his rancour to continue reading:

"This Case is too well known to require more than a partial summary of particulars"...

"Ahem! we will skip the particulars, however partial," said Mr. Thompson. "Ah!—what do you mean here, sir,—but enough! I think we may be excused your Legal Considerations on such a Case. This is how you employ your law-studies, sir! You put them to this purpose? Mr. Beazley! you will henceforward sit alone. I must have this young man under my own eye. Sir Austin! permit me to apologize to you for subjecting you to a scene so disagreeable. It was a father's duty not to spare him."

Mr. Thompson wiped his forehead, as Brutes might have done after passing judgment on the scion of his house.

"These papers," he went on, fluttering Ripton's precious lucubrations in a waving judicial hand, "I shall retain. The day will come when he will regard them with shame. And it shall be his penance, his punishment, to do so! Stop!" he cried, as Ripton was noiselessly shutting his desk, "have you more of them, sir; of a similar description? Rout them out! Let us know you at your worst. What have you there—in that corner?"

Ripton was understood to say he devoted that corner to old briefs on important cases.

Mr. Thompson thrust his trembling fingers among the old briefs, and turned over the volume Sir Austin had observed, but without much remarking it, for his suspicions had not risen to print.

"A Manual of Heraldry?" the baronet politely, and it may be ironically, inquired, before it could well escape.

"I like it very much," said Ripton, clutching the book in dreadful torment.

"Allow me to see that you have our arms and crest correct." The baronet proffered a hand for the book.

"A Griffin between two Wheatsheaves," cried Ripton, still clutching it nervously.

Mr. Thompson, without any notion of what he was doing, drew the book from Ripton's hold; whereupon the two seniors laid their grey heads together over the title-page. It set forth in attractive characters beside a coloured frontispiece, which embodied the promise displayed there, the entrancing adventures of Miss Random, a strange young lady.

Had there been a Black Hole within the area of those law regions to consign Ripton to there and then, or an Iron Rod handy to mortify his sinful flesh, Mr. Thompson would have used them. As it was, he contented himself by looking Black Holes and Iron Rods at the detected youth, who sat on his perch insensible to what might happen next, collapsed.

Mr. Thompson cast the wicked creature down with a "Pah!" He, however, took her up again, and strode away with her. Sir Austin gave Ripton a forefinger, and kindly touched his head, saying, "Good-bye, boy! At some future date Richard will be happy to see you at Raynham."

Undoubtedly this was a great triumph to the System!

CHAPTER XVII

The conversation between solicitor and client was resumed.

"Is it possible," quoth Mr. Thompson, the moment he had ushered his client into his private room, "that you will consent, Sir Austin, to see him and receive him again?"

"Certainly," the baronet replied. "Why not? This by no means astonishes me. When there is no longer danger to my son he will be welcome as he was before. He is a schoolboy. I knew it. I expected it. The results of your principle, Thompson!"

"One of the very worst books of that abominable class!" exclaimed the old lawyer, opening at the coloured frontispiece, from which brazen Miss Random smiled bewitchingly out, as if she had no doubt of captivating Time and all his veterans on a fair field. "Pah!" he shut her to with the energy he would have given to the office of publicly slapping her face; "from this day I diet him on bread and water—rescind his pocket-money!—How he could have got hold of such a book! How he—! And what ideas! Concealing them from me as he has done so cunningly! He trifles with vice! His mind is in a putrid state! I might have believed—I did believe—I might have gone on believing—my son Ripton to be a moral young man!" The old lawyer interjected on the delusion of fathers, and sat down in a lamentable abstraction.

"The lad has come out!" said Sir Austin. "His adoption of the legal form is amusing. He trifles with vice, true: people newly initiated are as hardy as its intimates, and a young sinner's amusements will resemble those of a confirmed debauchee. The satiated, and the insatiate, appetite alike appeal to extremes. You are astonished at this revelation of your son's condition. I expected it; though assuredly, believe me, not this sudden and indisputable proof of it. But I knew that the seed was in him, and therefore I have not latterly invited him to Raynham. School, and the corruption there, will bear its fruits sooner or later. I could advise you, Thompson, what to do with him: it would be my plan."

Mr. Thompson murmured, like a true courtier, that he should esteem it an honour to be favoured with Sir Austin Feverel's advice: secretly resolute, like a true Briton, to follow his own.

"Let him, then," continued the baronet, "see vice in its nakedness. While he has yet some innocence, nauseate him! Vice, taken little by little, usurps gradually the whole creature. My counsel to you, Thompson, would be, to drag him through the sinks of town."

Mr. Thompson began to blink again.

"Oh, I shall punish him, Sir Austin! Do not fear me, air. I have no tenderness for vice."

"That is not what is wanted, Thompson. You mistake me. He should be dealt with gently. Heavens! do you hope to make him hate vice by making him a martyr for its sake? You must descend from the pedestal of age to become his Mentor: cause him to see how certainly and pitilessly vice itself punishes: accompany him into its haunts"—

"Over town?" broke forth Mr. Thompson.

"Over town," said the baronet.

"And depend upon it," he added, "that, until fathers act thoroughly up to their duty, we shall see the sights we see in great cities, and hear the tales we hear in little villages, with death and calamity in our homes, and a legacy of sorrow and shame to the generations to come. I do aver," he exclaimed, becoming excited, "that, if it were not for the duty to my son, and the hope I cherish in him, I, seeing the accumulation of misery we are handing down to an innocent posterity—to whom, through our sin, the fresh breath of life will be foul—I—yes! I would hide my name! For whither are we tending? What home is pure absolutely? What cannot our doctors and lawyers tell us?"

Mr. Thompson acquiesced significantly.

"And what is to come of this?" Sir Austin continued. "When the sins of the fathers are multiplied by the sons, is not perdition the final sum of things? And is not life, the boon of heaven, growing to be the devil's game utterly? But for my son, I would hide my name. I would not bequeath it to be cursed by them that walk above my grave!"

This was indeed a terrible view of existence. Mr. Thompson felt uneasy. There was a dignity in his client, an impressiveness in his speech, that silenced remonstrating reason and the cry of long years of comfortable respectability. Mr. Thompson went to church regularly; paid his rates and dues without overmuch, or at least more than common, grumbling. On the surface he was a good citizen, fond of his children, faithful to his wife, devoutly marching to a fair seat in heaven on a path paved by something better than a thousand a year. But here was a man sighting him from below the surface, and though it was an unfair, unaccustomed, not to say un-English, method of regarding one's fellow-man, Mr. Thompson was troubled by it. What though his client exaggerated? Facts were at the bottom of what he said. And he was acute—he had unmasked Ripton! Since Ripton's exposure he winced at a personal application in the text his client preached from. Possibly this was the secret source of part of his anger against that peccant youth.

Mr. Thompson shook his head, and, with dolefully puckered visage and a pitiable contraction of his shoulders, rose slowly up from his chair. Apparently he was about to speak, but he straightway turned and went meditatively to a side-recess in the room, whereof he opened a door, drew forth a tray and a decanter labelled Port, filled a glass for his client, deferentially invited him to partake of it; filled another glass for himself, and drank.

That was his reply.

Sir Austin never took wine before dinner. Thompson had looked as if he meant to speak: he waited for Thompson's words.

Mr. Thompson saw that, as his client did not join him in his glass, the eloquence of that Porty reply was lost on his client.

Having slowly ingurgitated and meditated upon this precious draught, and turned its flavour over and over with an aspect of potent Judicial wisdom (one might have thought that he was weighing mankind m the balance), the old lawyer heaved, and said, sharpening his lips over the admirable vintage, "The world is in a very sad state, I fear, Sir Austin!"

His client gazed at him queerly.

"But that," Mr. Thompson added immediately, ill-concealing by his gaze the glowing intestinal congratulations going on within him, "that is, I think you would say, Sir Austin—if I could but prevail upon you—a tolerably good character wine!"

"There's virtue somewhere, I see, Thompson!" Sir Austin murmured, without disturbing his legal adviser's dimples.

The old lawyer sat down to finish his glass, saying, that such a wine was not to be had everywhere.

They were then outwardly silent for a apace. Inwardly one of them was full of riot and jubilant uproar: as if the solemn fields of law were suddenly to be invaded and possessed by troops of Bacchanals: and to preserve a decently wretched physiognomy over it, and keep on terms with his companion, he had to grimace like a melancholy clown in a pantomime.

Mr. Thompson brushed back his hair. The baronet was still expectant. Mr. Thompson sighed deeply, and emptied his glass. He combated the change that had come over him. He tried not to see Ruby. He tried to feel miserable, and it was not in him. He spoke, drawing what appropriate inspirations he could from his client's countenance, to show that they had views in common: "Degenerating sadly, I fear!"

The baronet nodded.

"According to what my wine-merchants say," continued Mr. Thompson, "there can be no doubt about it."

Sir Austin stared.

"It's the grape, or the ground, or something," Mr. Thompson went on. "All I can say is, our youngsters will have a bad look-out! In my opinion Government should be compelled to send out a Commission to inquire into the cause. To Englishmen it would be a public calamity. It surprises me—I hear men sit and talk despondently of this extraordinary disease of the vine, and not one of them seems to think it incumbent on him to act, and do his best to stop it." He fronted his client like a man who accuses an enormous public delinquency. "Nobody makes a stir! The apathy of Englishmen will become proverbial. Pray, try it, Sir Austin! Pray, allow me. Such a wine cannot disagree at any hour. Do! I am allowanced two glasses three hours before dinner. Stomachic. I find it agree with me surprisingly: quite a new man. I suppose it will last our time. It must! What should we do? There's no Law possible without it. Not a lawyer of us could live. Ours is an occupation which dries the blood."

The scene with Ripton had unnerved him, the wine had renovated, and gratitude to the wine inspired his tongue. He thought that his client, of the whimsical mind, though undoubtedly correct moral views, had need of a glass.

"Now that very wine—Sir Austin—I think I do not err in saying, that very wine your respected father, Sir Pylcher Feverel, used to taste whenever he came to consult my father, when I was a boy. And I remember one day being called in, and Sir Pylcher himself poured me out a glass. I wish I could call in Ripton now, and do the same. No! Leniency in such a case as that!—The wine would not hurt him—I doubt if there be much left for him to welcome his guests with. Ha! ha! Now if I could persuade you, Sir Austin, as you do not take wine before dinner, some day to favour me with your company at my little country cottage I have a wine there—the fellow to that—I think you would, I do think you would"—Mr. Thompson meant to say, he thought his client would arrive at something of a similar jocund contemplation of his fellows in their degeneracy that inspirited lawyers after potation, but condensed the sensual promise into "highly approve."

Sir Austin speculated on his legal adviser with a sour mouth comically compressed.

It stood clear to him that Thompson before his Port, and Thompson after, were two different men. To indoctrinate him now was too late: it was perhaps the time to make the positive use of him he wanted.

He pencilled on a handy slip of paper: "Two prongs of a fork; the World stuck between them—Port and the Palate: 'Tis one which fails first—Down goes World;" and again the hieroglyph—"Port-spectacles." He said, "I shall gladly accompany you this evening, Thompson," words that transfigured the delighted lawyer, and ensigned the skeleton of a great Aphorism to his pocket, there to gather flesh and form, with numberless others in a like condition.

"I came to visit my lawyer," he said to himself. "I think I have been dealing with The World in epitome!"

CHAPTER XVIII

The rumour circulated that Sir Austin Feverel, the recluse of Raynham, the rank misogynist, the rich baronet, was in town, looking out a bride for his only son and uncorrupted heir. Doctor Benjamin Bairam was the excellent authority. Doctor Bairam had safely delivered Mrs. Deborah Gossip of this interesting bantling, which was forthwith dandled in dozens of feminine laps. Doctor Bairam could boast the first interview with the famous recluse. He had it from his own lips that the object of the baronet was to look out a bride for his only son and uncorrupted heir; "and," added the doctor, "she'll be lucky who gets him." Which was interpreted to mean, that he would be a catch; the doctor probably intending to allude to certain extraordinary difficulties in the way of a choice.

A demand was made on the publisher of The Pilgrim's Scrip for all his outstanding copies. Conventionalities were defied. A summer-shower of cards fell on the baronet's table.

He had few male friends. He shunned the Clubs as nests of scandal. The cards he contemplated were mostly those of the sex, with the husband, if there was a husband, evidently dragged in for propriety's sake. He perused the cards and smiled. He knew their purpose. What terrible light Thompson and Bairam had thrown on some of them! Heavens! in what a state was the blood of this Empire.

Before commencing his campaign he called on two ancient intimates, Lord Heddon, and his distant cousin Darley Absworthy, both Members of Parliament, useful men, though gouty, who had sown in their time a fine crop of wild oats, and advocated the advantage of doing so, seeing that they did not fancy themselves the worse for it. He found one with an imbecile son and the other with consumptive daughters. "So much," he wrote in the Note-book, "for the Wild Oats theory!"

Darley was proud of his daughters' white and pink skins. "Beautiful complexions," he called them. The eldest was in the market, immensely admired. Sir Austin was introduced to her. She talked fluently and sweetly. A youth not on his guard, a simple school-boy youth, or even a man, might have fallen in love with her, she was so affable and fair. There was something poetic about her. And she was quite well, she said, the baronet frequently questioning her on that point. She intimated that she was robust; but towards the close of their conversation her hand would now and then travel to her side, and she breathed painfully an instant, saying, "Isn't it odd? Dora, Adela, and myself, we all feel the same queer sensation—about the heart, I think it is—after talking much."

Sir Austin nodded and blinked sadly, exclaiming to his soul, "Wild oats! wild oats!"

He did not ask permission to see Dora and Adela.

Lord Heddon vehemently preached wild oats.

"It's all nonsense, Feverel," he said, "about bringing up a lad out of the common way. He's all the better for a little racketing when he's green—feels his bone and muscle learns to know the world. He'll never be a man if he hasn't played at the old game one time in his life, and the earlier the better. I've always found the best fellows were wildish once. I don't care what he does when he's a green-horn; besides, he's got an excuse for it then. You can't expect to have a man, if he doesn't take a man's food. You'll have a milksop. And, depend upon it, when he does break out he'll go to the devil, and nobody pities him. Look what those fellows the grocers, do when they get hold of a young—what d'ye call 'em?—apprentice. They know the scoundrel was born with a sweet tooth. Well! they give him the run of the shop, and in a very short time he soberly deals out the goods, a devilish deal too wise to abstract a morsel even for the pleasure of stealing. I know you have contrary theories. You hold that the young grocer should have a soul above sugar. It won't do! Take my word for it, Feverel, it's a dangerous experiment, that of bringing up flesh and blood in harness. No colt will bear it, or he's a tame beast. And look you: take it on medical grounds.

Early excesses the frame will recover from: late ones break the constitution. There's the case in a nutshell. How's your son?"

"Sound and well!" replied Sir Austin. "And yours?"

"Oh, Lipscombe's always the same!" Lord Heddon sighed peevishly. "He's quiet—that's one good thing; but there's no getting the country to take him, so I must give up hopes of that."

Lord Lipscombe entering the room just then, Sir Austin surveyed him, and was not astonished at the refusal of the country to take him.

"Wild oats!" he thought, as he contemplated the headless, degenerate, weedy issue and result.

Both Darley Absworthy and Lord Heddon spoke of the marriage of their offspring as a matter of course. "And if I were not a coward," Sir Austin confessed to himself, "I should stand forth and forbid the banns! This universal ignorance of the inevitable consequence of sin is frightful! The wild oats plea is a torpedo that seems to have struck the world, and rendered it morally insensible." However, they silenced him. He was obliged to spare their feelings on a subject to him so deeply sacred. The healthful image of his noble boy rose before him, a triumphant living rejoinder to any hostile argument.

He was content to remark to his doctor, that he thought the third generation of wild oats would be a pretty thin crop!

Families against whom neither Thompson lawyer nor Bairam physician could recollect a progenitorial blot, either on the male or female side, were not numerous. "Only," said the doctors "you really must not be too exacting in these days, my dear Sir Austin. It is impossible to contest your principle, and you are doing mankind incalculable service in calling its attention to this the gravest of its duties: but as the stream of civilization progresses we must be a little taken in the lump, as it were. The world is, I can assure you—and I do not look only above the surface, you can believe—the world is awakening to the vital importance of the question."

"Doctor," replied Sir Austin, "if you had a pure-blood Arab barb would you cross him with a screw?"

"Decidedly not," said the doctor.

"Then permit me to say, I shall employ every care to match my son according to his merits," Sir Austin returned. "I trust the world is awakening, as you observe. I have been to my publisher, since my arrival in town, with a manuscript 'Proposal for a New System of Education of our British Youth,' which may come in opportunely. I think I am entitled to speak on that subject."

"Certainly," said the doctor. "You will admit, Sir Austin, that, compared with continental nations—our neighbours, for instance—we shine to advantage, in morals, as in everything else. I hope you admit that?"

"I find no consolation in shining by comparison with a lower standard," said the baronet. "If I compare the enlightenment of your views—for you admit my principle—with the obstinate incredulity of a country doctor's, who sees nothing of the world, you are hardly flattered, I presume?"

Doctor Bairam would hardly be flattered at such a comparison, assuredly, he interjected.

"Besides," added the baronet, "the French make no pretences, and thereby escape one of the main penalties of hypocrisy. Whereas we!—but I am not their advocate, credit me. It is better, perhaps, to pay our homage to virtue. At least it delays the spread of entire corruptness."

Doctor Bairam wished the baronet success, and diligently endeavoured to assist his search for a mate worthy of the pure-blood barb, by putting several mamas, whom he visited, on the alert.

CHAPTER XIX

Away with Systems! Away with a corrupt World! Let us breathe the air of the Enchanted Island.

Golden lie the meadows: golden run the streams; red gold is on the pine-stems. The sun is coming down to earth, and walks the fields and the waters.

The sun is coming down to earth, and the fields and the waters shout to him golden shouts. He comes, and his heralds run before him, and touch the leaves of oaks and planes and beeches lucid green, and the pine-stems redder gold; leaving brightest footprints upon thickly-weeded banks, where the foxglove's last upper-bells incline, and bramble-shoots wander amid moist rich herbage. The plumes of the woodland are alight; and beyond them, over the open, 'tis a race with the long-thrown shadows; a race across the heaths and up the hills, till, at the farthest bourne of mounted eastern cloud, the heralds of the sun lay rosy fingers and rest.

Sweet are the shy recesses of the woodland. The ray treads softly there. A film athwart the pathway quivers many-hued against purple shade fragrant with warm pines, deep moss-beds, feathery ferns. The little brown squirrel drops tail, and leaps; the inmost bird is startled to a chance tuneless note. From silence into silence things move.

Peeps of the revelling splendour above and around enliven the conscious full heart within. The flaming West, the crimson heights, shower their glories through voluminous leafage. But these are bowers where deep bliss dwells, imperial joy, that owes no fealty to yonder glories, in which the young lamb gambols and the spirits of men are glad. Descend, great Radiance! embrace creation with beneficent fire, and pass from us! You and the vice-regal light that succeeds to you, and all heavenly pageants, are the ministers and the slaves of the throbbing content within.

For this is the home of the enchantment. Here, secluded from vexed shores, the prince and princess of the island meet: here like darkling nightingales they sit, and into eyes and ears and hands pour endless ever-fresh treasures of their souls.

Roll on, grinding wheels of the world: cries of ships going down in a calm, groans of a System which will not know its rightful hour of exultation, complain to the universe. You are not heard here.

He calls her by her name, Lucy: and she, blushing at her great boldness, has called him by his, Richard. Those two names are the key-notes of the wonderful harmonies the angels sing aloft.

"Lucy! my beloved!"

"O Richard!"

Out in the world there, on the skirts of the woodland, a sheep-boy pipes to meditative eve on a penny-whistle.

Love's musical instrument is as old, and as poor: it has but two stops; and yet, you see, the cunning musician does thus much with it!

Other speech they have little; light foam playing upon waves of feeling, and of feeling compact, that bursts only when the sweeping volume is too wild, and is no more than their sigh of tenderness spoken.

Perhaps love played his tune so well because their natures had unblunted edges, and were keen for bliss, confiding in it as natural food. To gentlemen and ladies he fine-draws upon the viol, ravishingly; or blows into the mellow bassoon; or rouses the heroic ardours of the trumpet; or, it may be, commands the whole Orchestra for them. And they are pleased. He is still the cunning musician. They languish, and taste ecstasy: but it is, however sonorous, an earthly concert. For them the spheres move not to two notes. They have lost, or forfeited and never known, the first super-sensual spring of the ripe senses into passion; when they carry the soul with them, and have the privileges of spirits to walk disembodied, boundlessly to feel. Or one has it, and the other is a dead body. Ambrosia let them eat, and drink the nectar: here sit a couple to whom Love's simple bread and water is a finer feast.

Pipe, happy sheep-bop, Love! Irradiated angels, unfold your wings and lift your voices!

They have out-flown philosophy. Their instinct has shot beyond the ken of science. They were made for their Eden.

"And this divine gift was in store for me!"

So runs the internal outcry of each, clasping each: it is their recurring refrain to the harmonies. How it illumined the years gone by and suffused the living Future!

"You for me: I for you!"

"We are born for each other!"

They believe that the angels have been busy about them from their cradles. The celestial hosts have worthily striven to bring them together. And, O victory! O wonder! after toil and pain, and difficulties exceeding, the celestial hosts have succeeded!

"Here we two sit who are written above as one!"

Pipe, happy Love! pipe on to these dear innocents!

The tide of colour has ebbed from the upper sky. In the West the sea of sunken fire draws back; and the stars leap forth, and tremble, and retire before the advancing moon, who slips the silver train of cloud from her shoulders, and, with her foot upon the pine-tops, surveys heaven.

"Lucy, did you never dream of meeting me?"

"O Richard! yes; for I remembered you."

"Lucy! and did you pray that we might meet?"

"I did!"

Young as when she looked upon the lovers in Paradise, the fair Immortal journeys onward. Fronting her, it is not night but veiled day. Full half the sky is flushed. Not darkness, not day, but the nuptials of the two.

"My own! my own for ever! You are pledged to me? Whisper!"

He hears the delicious music.

"And you are mine?"

A soft beam travels to the fern-covert under the pinewood where they sit, and for answer he has her eyes turned to him an instant, timidly fluttering over the depths of his, and then downcast; for through her eyes her soul is naked to him.

"Lucy! my bride! my life!"

The night-jar spins his dark monotony on the branch of the pine. The soft beam travels round them, and listens to their hearts. Their lips are locked.

Pipe no more, Love, for a time! Pipe as you will you cannot express their first kiss; nothing of its sweetness, and of the sacredness of it nothing. St. Cecilia up aloft, before the silver organ-pipes

of Paradise, pressing fingers upon all the notes of which Love is but one, from her you may hear it.

So Love is silent. Out in the world there, on the skirts of the woodland, the self-satisfied sheep-boy delivers a last complacent squint down the length of his penny-whistle, and, with a flourish correspondingly awry, he also marches into silence, hailed by supper. The woods are still. There is heard but the night-jar spinning on the pine-branch, circled by moonlight.

CHAPTER XX

Enchanted Islands have not yet rooted out their old brood of dragons. Wherever there is romance, these monsters come by inimical attraction. Because the heavens are certainly propitious to true lovers, the beasts of the abysses are banded to destroy them, stimulated by innumerable sad victories; and every love-tale is an Epic Par of the upper and lower powers. I wish good fairies were a little more active. They seem to be cajoled into security by the happiness of their favourites; whereas the wicked are always alert, and circumspect. They let the little ones shut their eyes to fancy they are not seen, and then commence.

These appointments and meetings, involving a start from the dinner-table at the hour of contemplative digestion and prime claret; the hour when the wise youth Adrian delighted to talk at his ease—to recline in dreamy consciousness that a work of good was going on inside him; these abstractions from his studies, excesses of gaiety, and glumness, heavings of the chest, and other odd signs, but mainly the disgusting behaviour of his pupil at the dinner-table, taught Adrian to understand, though the young gentleman was clever in excuses, that he had somehow learnt there was another half to the divided Apple of Creation, and had embarked upon the great voyage of discovery of the difference between the two halves. With his usual coolness Adrian debated whether he might be in the observatory or the practical stage of the voyage. For himself, as a man and a philosopher, Adrian had no objection to its being either; and he had only to consider which was temporarily most threatening to the ridiculous System he had to support. Richard's absence annoyed him. The youth was vivacious, and his enthusiasm good fun; and besides, when he left table, Adrian had to sit alone with Hippias and the Eighteenth Century, from both of whom he had extracted all the amusement that could be got, and he saw his digestion menaced by the society of two ruined stomachs, who bored him just when he loved himself most. Poor Hippias was now so reduced that he had profoundly to calculate whether a particular dish, or an extra-glass of wine, would have a bitter effect on him and be felt through the remainder of his years. He was in the habit of uttering his calculations half aloud, wherein the prophetic doubts of experience, and the succulent insinuations of appetite, contended hotly. It was horrible to hear him, so let us pardon Adrian for tempting him to a decision in favour of the moment.

"Happy to take wine with you," Adrian would say, and Hippias would regard the decanter with a pained forehead, and put up the doctor.

"Drink, nephew Hippy, and think of the doctor to-morrow!" the Eighteenth Century cheerily ruffles her cap at him, and recommends her own practice.

"It's this literary work!" interjects Hippias, handling his glass of remorse. "I don't know what else it can be. You have no idea how anxious I feel. I have frightful dreams. I'm perpetually anxious."

"No wonder," says Adrian, who enjoys the childish simplicity to which an absorbed study of his sensational existence has brought poor Hippias. "No wonder. Ten years of Fairy Mythology! Could anyone hope to sleep in peace after that? As to your digestion, no one has a digestion who is in the doctor's hands. They prescribe from dogmas, and don't count on the system. They have cut you down from two bottles to two glasses. It's absurd. You can't sleep, because your system is crying out for what it's accustomed to."

Hippias sips his Madeira with a niggerdly confidence, but assures Adrian that he really should not like to venture on a bottle now: it would be rank madness to venture on a bottle now, he thinks. Last night only, after partaking, under protest, of that rich French dish, or was it the duck?—Adrian advised him to throw the blame on that vulgar bird.—Say the duck, then. Last night, he was no sooner stretched in bed, than he seemed to be of an enormous size all his limbs—his nose, his mouth, his toes—were elephantine! An elephant was a pigmy to him. And his hugeousness seemed to increase the instant he shut his eyes. He turned on this side; he turned on that. He lay on his back; he tried putting his face to the pillow; and he continued to swell. He wondered the room could hold him—he thought he must burst it—and absolutely lit a candle, and went to the looking-glass to see whether he was bearable.

By this time Adrian and Richard were laughing uncontrollably. He had, however, a genial auditor in the Eighteenth Century, who declared it to be a new disease, not known in her day, and deserving investigation. She was happy to compare sensations with him, but hers were not of the complex order, and a potion soon righted her. In fact, her system appeared to be a debatable ground for aliment and medicine, on which the battle was fought, and, when over, she was none the worse, as she joyfully told Hippias. Never looked ploughman on prince, or village belle on Court Beauty, with half the envy poor nineteenth-century Hippias expended in his gaze on the Eighteenth. He was too serious to note much the laughter of the young men.

This 'Tragedy of a Cooking-Apparatus,' as Adrian designated the malady of Hippias, was repeated regularly ever evening. It was natural for any youth to escape as quick as he could from such a table of stomachs.

Adrian bore with his conduct considerately, until a letter from the baronet, describing the house and maternal System of a Mrs. Caroline Grandison, and the rough grain of hopefulness in her youngest daughter, spurred him to think of his duties, and see what was going on. He gave Richard half-an-hour's start, and then put on his hat to follow his own keen scent, leaving Hippias and the Eighteenth Century to piquet.

In the lane near Belthorpe he met a maid of the farm not unknown to him, one Molly Davenport by name, a buxom lass, who, on seeing him, invoked her Good Gracious, the generic maid's familiar, and was instructed by reminiscences vivid, if ancient, to giggle.

"Are you looking for your young gentleman?" Molly presently asked.

Adrian glanced about the lane like a cool brigand, to see if the coast was clear, and replied to her, "I am, miss. I want you to tell me about him."

"Dear!" said the buxom lass, "was you coming for me to-night to know?"

Adrian rebuked her: for her bad grammar, apparently.

"'Cause I can't stop out long to-night," Molly explained, taking the rebuke to refer altogether to her bad grammar.

"You may go in when you please, miss. Is that any one coming? Come here in the shade."

"Now, get along!" said Miss Molly.

Adrian spoke with resolution. "Listen to me, Molly Davenport!" He put a coin in her hand, which had a medical effect in calming her to attention. "I want to know whether you have seen him at all?"

"Who? Your young gentleman? I sh'd think I did. I seen him to-night only. Ain't he grooved handsome. He's al'ays about Beltharp now. It ain't to fire no more ricks. He's afire 'unself. Ain't you seen 'em together? He's after the missis"—

Adrian requested Miss Davenport to be respectful, and confine herself to particulars. This buxom lass then told him that her young missis and Adrian's young gentleman were a pretty couple, and met one another every night. The girl swore for their innocence.

"As for Miss Lucy, she haven't a bit of art in her, nor have he."

"They're all nature, I suppose," said Adrian. "How is it I don't see her at church?"

"She's Catholic, or some think," said Molly. "Her father was, and a leftenant. She've a Cross in her bedroom. She don't go to church. I see you there last Sunday a-lookin' so solemn," and Molly stroked her hand down her chin to give it length.

Adrian insisted on her keeping to facts. It was dark, and in the dark he was indifferent to the striking contrasts suggested by the lass, but he wanted to hear facts, and he again bribed her to impart nothing but facts. Upon which she told him further, that her young lady was an innocent artless creature who had been to school upwards of three years with the nuns, and had a little money of her own, and was beautiful enough to be a lord's lady, and had been in love with Master Richard ever since she was a little girl. Molly had got from a friend of hers up at the

Abbey, Mary Garner, the housemaid who cleaned Master Richard's room, a bit of paper once with the young gentleman's handwriting, and had given it to her Miss Lucy, and Miss Lucy had given her a gold sovereign for it—just for his handwriting! Miss Lucy did not seem happy at the farm, because of that young Tom, who was always leering at her, and to be sure she was quite a lady, and could play, and sing, and dress with the best.

"She looks like angels in her nightgown!" Molly wound up.

The next moment she ran up close, and speaking for the first time as if there were a distinction of position between them, petitioned: "Mr. Harley! you won't go for doin' any harm to 'em 'cause of what I said, will you now? Do say you won't now, Mr. Harley! She is good, though she's a Catholic. She was kind to me when I was ill, and I wouldn't have her crossed—I'd rather be showed up myself, I would!"

The wise youth gave no positive promise to Molly, and she had to read his consent in a relaxation of his austerity. The noise of a lumbering foot plodding down the lane caused her to be abruptly dismissed. Molly took to flight, the lumbering foot accelerated its pace, and the pastoral appeal to her flying skirts was heard—"Moll! you theyre! It be I—Bantam!" But the sprightly Silvia would not stop to his wooing, and Adrian turned away laughing at these Arcadians.

Adrian was a lazy dragon. All he did for the present was to hint and tease. "It's the Inevitable!" he said, and asked himself why he should seek to arrest it. He had no faith in the System. Heavy Benson had. Benson of the slow thick-lidded antediluvian eye and loose-crumpled skin; Benson, the Saurian, the woman-hater; Benson was wide awake. A sort of rivalry existed between the wise youth and heavy Benson. The fidelity of the latter dependant had moved the baronet to commit to him a portion of the management of the Raynham estate, and this Adrian did not like. No one who aspires to the honourable office of leading another by the nose can tolerate a party in his ambition. Benson's surly instinct told him he was in the wise youth's way, and he resolved to give his master a striking proof of his superior faithfulness. For some weeks the Saurian eye had been on the two secret creatures. Heavy Benson saw letters come and go in the day, and now the young gentleman was off and out every night, and seemed to be on wings. Benson knew whither he went, and the object he went for. It was a woman—that was enough. The Saurian eye had actually seen the sinful thing lure the hope of Raynham into the shades. He composed several epistles of warning to the baronet of the work that was going on; but before sending one he wished to record a little of their guilty conversation; and for this purpose the faithful fellow trotted over the dews to eavesdrop, and thereby aroused the good fairy, in the person of Tom Bakewell, the sole confidant of Richard's state.

Tom said to his young master, "Do you know what, sir? You be watched!"

Richard, in a fury, bade him name the wretch, and Tom hung his arms, and aped the respectable protrusion of the butler's head.

"It's he, is it?" cried Richard. "He shall rue it, Tom. If I find him near me when we're together he shall never forget it."

"Don't hit too hard, sir," Tom suggested. "You hit mortal hard when you're in earnest, you know."

Richard averred he would forgive anything but that, and told Tom to be within hail to-morrow night—he knew where. By the hour of the appointment it was out of the lover's mind.

Lady Blandish dined that evening at Raynham, by Adrian's pointed invitation. According to custom, Richard started up and off, with few excuses. The lady exhibited no surprise. She and Adrian likewise strolled forth to enjoy the air of the Summer night. They had no intention of spying. Still they may have thought, by meeting Richard and his inamorata, there was a chance of laying a foundation of ridicule to sap the passion. They may have thought so—they were on no spoken understanding.

"I have seen the little girl," said Lady Blandish. "She is pretty—she would be telling if she were well set up. She speaks well. How absurd it is of that class to educate their women above their station! The child is really too good for a farmer. I noticed her before I knew of this; she has enviable hair. I suppose she doesn't paint her eyelids. Just the sort of person to take a young man. I thought there was something wrong. I received, the day before yesterday, an impassioned poem evidently not intended for me. My hair was gold. My meeting him was foretold. My eyes were homes of light fringed with night. I sent it back, correcting the colours."

"Which was death to the rhymes," said Adrian. "I saw her this morning. The boy hasn't bad taste. As you say, she is too good for a farmer. Such a spark would explode any System. She slightly affected mine. The Huron is stark mad about her."

"But we must positively write and tell his father," said Lady Blandish.

The wise youth did not see why they should exaggerate a trifle. The lady said she would have an interview with Richard, and then write, as it was her duty to do. Adrian shrugged, and was for going into the scientific explanation of Richard's conduct, in which the lady had to discourage him.

"Poor boy!" she sighed. "I am really sorry for him. I hope he will not feel it too strongly. They feel strongly, father and son."

"And select wisely," Adrian added.

"That's another thing," said Lady Blandish.

Their talk was then of the dulness of neighbouring county people, about whom, it seemed, there was little or no scandal afloat: of the lady's loss of the season in town, which she professed not to regret, though she complained of her general weariness: of whether Mr. Morton of Poer Hall would propose to Mrs. Doria, and of the probable despair of the hapless curate of Lobourne; and other gossip, partly in French.

They rounded the lake, and got upon the road through the park to Lobourne. The moon had risen. The atmosphere was warm and pleasant.

"Quite a lover's night," said Lady Blandish.

"And I, who have none to love pity me!" The wise youth attempted a sigh.

"And never will have," said Lady Blandish, curtly. "You buy your loves."

Adrian protested. However, he did not plead verbally against the impeachment, though the lady's decisive insight astonished him. He began to respect her, relishing her exquisite contempt, and he reflected that widows could be terrible creatures.

He had hoped to be a little sentimental with Lady Blandish, knowing her romantic. This mixture of the harshest common sense and an air of "I know you men," with romance and refined temperament, subdued the wise youth more than a positive accusation supported by witnesses would have done. He looked at the lady. Her face was raised to the moon. She knew nothing—she had simply spoken from the fulness of her human knowledge, and had forgotten her words. Perhaps, after all, her admiration, or whatever feeling it was, for the baronet, was sincere, and really the longing for a virtuous man. Perhaps she had tried the opposite set pretty much. Adrian shrugged. Whenever the wise youth encountered a mental difficulty he instinctively lifted his shoulders to equal altitudes, to show that he had no doubt there was a balance in the case—plenty to be said on both sides, which was the same to him as a definite solution.

At their tryst in the wood, abutting on Raynham Park, wrapped in themselves, piped to by tireless Love, Richard and Lucy sat, toying with eternal moments. How they seem as if they would never end! What mere sparks they are when they have died out! And how in the distance of time they revive, and extend, and glow, and make us think them full the half, and the best of the fire, of our lives!

With the onward flow of intimacy, the two happy lovers ceased to be so shy of common themes, and their speech did not reject all as dross that was not pure gold of emotion.

Lucy was very inquisitive about everything and everybody at Raynham. Whoever had been about Richard since his birth, she must know the history of, and he for a kiss will do her bidding.

Thus goes the tender duet:

"You should know my cousin Austin, Lucy.—Darling! Beloved!"

"My own! Richard!"

"You should know my cousin Austin. You shall know him. He would take to you best of them all, and you to him. He is in the tropics now, looking out a place—it's a secret—for poor English working-men to emigrate to and found a colony in that part of the world:—my white angel!"

"Dear love!"

"He is such a noble fellow! Nobody here understands him but me. Isn't it strange? Since I met you I love him better! That's because I love all that's good and noble better now—Beautiful! I love—I love you!"

"My Richard!"

"What do you think I've determined, Lucy? If my father—but no! my father does love me.—No! he will not; and we will be happy together here. And I will win my way with you. And whatever I win will be yours; for it will be owing to you. I feel as if I had no strength but yours—none! and you make me—O Lucy!"

His voice ebbs. Presently Lucy murmurs—

"Your father, Richard."

"Yes, my father?"

"Dearest Richard! I feel so afraid of him."

"He loves me, and will love you, Lucy."

"But I am so poor and humble, Richard."

"No one I have ever seen is like you, Lucy."

"You think so, because you"—

"What?"

"Love me," comes the blushing whisper, and the duet gives place to dumb variations, performed equally in concert.

It is resumed.

"You are fond of the knights, Lucy. Austin is as brave as any of them.—My own bride! Oh, how I adore you! When you are gone, I could fall upon the grass you tread upon, and kiss it. My breast feels empty of my heart—Lucy! if we lived in those days, I should have been a knight, and have won honour and glory for you. Oh! one can do nothing now. My lady-love! My lady-love!—A tear?—Lucy?"

"Dearest! Ah, Richard! I am not a lady."

"Who dares say that? Not a lady—the angel I love!"

"Think, Richard, who I am."

"My beautiful! I think that God made you, and has given you to me."

Her eyes fill with tears, and, as she lifts them heavenward to thank her God, the light of heaven strikes on them, and she is so radiant in her pure beauty that the limbs of the young man tremble.

"Lucy! O heavenly spirit! Lucy!"

Tenderly her lips part—"I do not weep for sorrow."

The big bright drops lighten, and roll down, imaged in his soul.

They lean together—shadows of ineffable tenderness playing on their thrilled cheeks and brows.

He lifts her hand, and presses his mouth to it. She has seen little of mankind, but her soul tells her this one is different from others, and at the thought, in her great joy, tears must come fast, or her heart will break—tears of boundless thanksgiving. And he, gazing on those soft, ray-illumined, dark-edged eyes, and the grace of her loose falling tresses, feels a scarce-sufferable holy fire streaming through his members.

It is long ere they speak in open tones.

"O happy day when we met!"

What says the voice of one, the soul of the other echoes.

"O glorious heaven looking down on us!"

Their souls are joined, are made one for evermore beneath that bending benediction.

"O eternity of bliss!"

Then the diviner mood passes, and they drop to earth.

"Lucy! come with me to-night, and look at the place where you are some day to live. Come, and I will row you on the lake. You remember what you said in your letter that you dreamt?—that we were floating over the shadow of the Abbey to the nuns at work by torchlight felling the cypress, and they handed us each a sprig. Why, darling, it was the best omen in the world, their felling the old trees. And you write such lovely letters. So pure and sweet they are. I love the nuns for having taught you."

"Ah, Richard! See! we forget! Ah!" she lifts up her face pleadingly, as to plead against herself, "even if your father forgives my birth, he will not my religion. And, dearest, though I would die for you I cannot change it. It would seem that I was denying God; and—oh! it would make me ashamed of my love."

"Fear nothing!" He winds her about with his arm. "Come! He will love us both, and love you the more for being faithful to your father's creed. You don't know him, Lucy. He seems harsh and stern—he is full of kindness and love. He isn't at all a bigot. And besides, when he hears what the nuns have done for you, won't he thank them, as I do? And—oh! I must speak to him soon, and you must be prepared to see him soon, for I cannot bear your remaining at Belthorpe, like a jewel in a sty. Mind! I'm not saying a word against your uncle. I declare I love everybody and everything that sees you and touches you. Stay! it is a wonder how you could have grown there. But you were not born there, and your father had good blood. Desborough!—here was a Colonel Desborough—never mind! Come!"

She dreads to. She begs not to. She is drawn away.

The woods are silent, and then—

"What think you of that for a pretty pastoral?" says a very different voice.

Adrian reclined against a pine overlooking the fern-covert. Lady Blandish was recumbent upon the brown pine-droppings, gazing through a vista of the lower greenwood which opened out upon the moon-lighted valley, her hands clasped round one knee, her features almost stern in their set hard expression.

They had heard, by involuntarily overhearing about as much as may be heard in such positions, a luminous word or two.

The lady did not answer. A movement among the ferns attracted Adrian, and he stepped down the decline across the pine-roots to behold heavy Benson below; shaking fern-seed and spidery substances off his crumpled skin.

"Is that you, Mr. Hadrian?" called Benson, starting, as he puffed, and exercised his handkerchief.

"Is it you, Benson, who have had the audacity to spy upon these Mysteries?" Adrian called back, and coming close to him, added, "You look as if you had just been well thrashed."

"Isn't it dreadful, sir?" snuffled Benson. "And his father in ignorance, Mr. Hadrian!"

"He shall know, Benson! He shall know how, you have endangered your valuable skin in his service. If Mr. Richard had found you there just now I wouldn't answer for the consequences."

"Ha!" Benson spitefully retorted. "This won't go on; Mr. Hadrian. It shan't, sir. It will be put a stop to tomorrow, sir. I call it corruption of a young gentleman like him, and harlotry, sir, I call it. I'd have every jade flogged that made a young innocent gentleman go on like that, sir."

"Then, why didn't you stop it yourself, Benson? Ah, I see! you waited—what? This is not the first time you have been attendant on Apollo and Miss Dryope? You have written to headquarters?"

"I did my duty, Mr. Hadrian."

The wise youth returned to Lady Blandish, and informed her of Benson's zeal. The lady's eyes flashed. "I hope Richard will treat him as he deserves," she said.

"Shall we home?" Adrian inquired.

"Do me a favour;" the lady replied. "Get my carriage sent round to meet me at the park-gates."

"Won't you?"—

"I want to be alone."

Adrian bowed and left her. She was still sitting with her hands clasped round one knee, gazing towards the dim ray-strewn valley.

"An odd creature!" muttered the wise youth. "She's as odd as any of them. She ought to be a Feverel. I suppose she's graduating for it. Hang that confounded old ass of a Benson! He has had the impudence to steal a march on me!"

The shadow of the cypress was lessening on the lake. The moon was climbing high. As Richard rowed the boat, Lucy, sang to him softly. She sang first a fresh little French song, reminding him of a day when she had been asked to sing to him before, and he did not care to hear. "Did I live?" he thinks. Then she sang to him a bit of one of those majestic old Gregorian chants, that, wherever you may hear them, seem to build up cathedral walls about you. The young man dropped the sculls. The strange solemn notes gave a religions tone to his love, and wafted him into the knightly ages and the reverential heart of chivalry.

Hanging between two heavens on the lake: floating to her voice: the moon stepping over and through white shoal's of soft high clouds above and below: floating to her void—no other breath abroad! His soul went out of his body as he listened.

They must part. He rows her gently shoreward.

"I never was so happy as to-night," she murmurs.

"Look, my Lucy. The lights of the old place are on the lake. Look where you are to live."

"Which is your room, Richard?"

He points it out to her.

"O Richard! that I were one of the women who wait on you! I should ask nothing more. How happy she must be!"

"My darling angel-love. You shall be happy; but all shall wait on you, and I foremost, Lucy."

"Dearest! may I hope for a letter?"

"By eleven to-morrow. And I?"

"Oh! you will have mine, Richard."

"Tom shall wait far it. A long one, mind! Did you like my last song?"

She pats her hand quietly against her bosom, and he knows where it rests. O love! O heaven!

They are aroused by the harsh grating of the bow of the boat against the shingle. He jumps out, and lifts her ashore.

"See!" she says, as the blush of his embrace subsides—"See!" and prettily she mimics awe and feels it a little, "the cypress does point towards us. O Richard! it does!"

And he, looking at her rather than at the cypress, delighting in her arch grave ways—

"Why, there's hardly any shadow at all, Lucy. She mustn't dream, my darling! or dream only of me."

"Dearest! but I do."

"To-morrow, Lucy! The letter in the morning, and you at night. O happy to-morrow!"

"You will be sure to be there, Richard?"

"If I am not dead, Lucy."

"O Richard! pray, pray do not speak of that. I shall not survive you."

"Let us pray, Lucy, to die together, when we are to die. Death or life, with you! Who is it yonder? I see some one—is it Tom? It's Adrian!"

"Is it Mr. Harley?" The fair girl shivered.

"How dares he come here!" cried Richard.

The figure of Adrian, instead of advancing, discreetly circled the lake. They were stealing away when he called. His call was repeated. Lucy entreated Richard to go to him; but the young man preferred to summon his attendant, Tom, from within hail, and send him to know what was wanted.

"Will he have seen me? Will he have known me?" whispered Lucy, tremulously.

"And if he does, love?" said Richard.

"Oh! if he does, dearest—I don't know, but I feel such a presentiment. You have not spoken of him to-night, Richard. Is he good?"

"Good?" Richard clutched her hand for the innocent maiden phrase. "He's very fond of eating; that's all I know of Adrian."

Her hand was at his lips when Tom returned.

"Well, Tom?"

"Mr. Adrian wishes particular to speak to you, sir," said Tom.

"Do go to him, dearest! Do go!" Lucy begs him.

"Oh, how I hate Adrian!" The young man grinds his teeth.

"Do go!" Lucy urges him. "Tom—good Tom—will see me home. To-morrow, dear love! To-morrow!"

"You wish to part from me?"

"Oh, unkind! but you must not come with me now. It may be news of importance, dearest. Think, Richard!"

"Tom! go back!"

At the imperious command the well-drilled Tom strides off a dozen paces, and sees nothing. Then the precious charge is confided to him. A heart is cut in twain.

Richard made his way to Adrian. "What is it you want with me, Adrian?"

"Are we seconds, or principals, O fiery one?" was Adrian's answer. "I want nothing with you, except to know whether you have seen Benson."

"Where should I see Benson? What do I know of Benson's doings?"

"Of course not—such a secret old fist as he is! I want some one to tell him to order Lady Blandish's carriage to be sent round to the park-gates. I thought he might be round your way over there—I came upon him accidentally just now in Abbey-wood. What's the matter, boy?"

"You saw him there?"

"Hunting Diana, I suppose. He thinks she's not so chaste as they say," continued Adrian. "Are you going to knock down that tree?"

Richard had turned to the cypress, and was tugging at the tough wood. He left it and went to an ash.

"You'll spoil that weeper," Adrian cried. "Down she comes! But good-night, Ricky. If you see Benson mind you tell him."

Doomed Benson following his burly shadow hove in sight on the white road while Adrian spoke. The wise youth chuckled and strolled round the lake, glancing over his shoulder every now and then.

It was not long before he heard a bellow for help—the roar of a dragon in his throes. Adrian placidly sat down on the grass, and fixed his eyes on the water. There, as the roar was being repeated amid horrid resounding echoes, the wise youth mused in this wise—

"'The Fates are Jews with us when they delay a punishment,' says The Pilgrim's Scrip, or words to that effect. The heavens evidently love Benson, seeing that he gets his punishment on the spot. Master Ricky is a peppery young man. He gets it from the apt Gruffudh. I rather believe in race. What a noise that old ruffian makes! He'll require poulticing with The Pilgrim's Scrip. We shall have a message to-morrow, and a hubbub, and perhaps all go to town, which won't be bad for one who's been a prey to all the desires born of dulness. Benson howls: there's life in the old dog yet! He bays the moon. Look at her. She doesn't care. It's the same to her whether we coo like turtle-doves or roar like twenty lions. How complacent she looks! And yet she has dust as much sympathy for Benson as for Cupid. She would smile on if both were being birched. Was that a raven or Benson? He howls no more. It sounds guttural: frog-like—something between the brek-kek-kek and the hoarse raven's croak. The fellow'll be killing him. It's time to go to the rescue. A deliverer gets more honour by coming in at the last gasp than if he forestalled catastrophe.—Ho, there, what's the matter?"

So saying, the wise youth rose, and leisurely trotted to the scene of battle, where stood St. George puffing over the prostrate Dragon.

"Holloa, Ricky! is it you?" said Adrian. "What's this? Whom have we here?—Benson, as I live!"

"Make this beast get up," Richard returned, breathing hard, and shaking his great ash-branch.

"He seems incapable, my dear boy. What have you been up to?—Benson! Benson!—I say, Ricky, this looks bad."

"He's shamming!" Richard clamoured like a savage. "Spy upon me, will he? I tell you, he's shamming. He hasn't had half enough. Nothing's too bad for a spy. Let him getup!"

"Insatiate youth! do throw away that enormous weapon."

"He has written to my father," Richard shouted. "The miserable spy! Let him get up!"

"Ooogh? I won't!" huskily groaned Benson. "Mr. Hadrian, you're a witness—he's my back!"—Cavernous noises took up the tale of his maltreatment.

"I daresay you love your back better than any part of your body now," Adrian muttered. "Come, Benson! be a man. Mr. Richard has thrown away the stick. Come, and get off home, and let's see the extent of the damage."

"Ooogh! he's a devil! Mr. Hadrian, sir, he's a devil!" groaned Benson, turning half over in the road to ease his aches.

Adrian caught hold of Benson's collar and lifted him to a sitting posture. He then had a glimpse of what his hopeful pupil's hand could do in wrath. The wretched butler's coat was slit and welted; his hat knocked in; his flabby spirit so broken that he started and trembled if his pitiless executioner stirred a foot. Richard stood over him, grasping his great stick; no dawn of mercy for Benson in any corner of his features.

Benson screwed his neck round to look up at him, and immediately gasped, "I won't get up! I won't! He's ready to murder me again!—Mr. Hadrian! if you stand by and see it, you're liable to the law, sir—I won't get up while he's near." No persuasion could induce Benson to try his legs while his executioner stood by.

Adrian took Richard aside: "You've almost killed the poor devil, Ricky. You must be satisfied with that. Look at his face."

"The coward bobbed while I struck" said Richard. "I marked his back. He ducked. I told him he was getting it worse."

At so civilized piece of savagery, Adrian opened his mouth wide.

"Did you really? I admire that. You told him he was getting it worse?"

Adrian opened his mouth again to shake another roll of laughter out.

"Come," he said, "Excalibur has done his word. Pitch him into the lake. And see—here comes the Blandish. You can't be at it again before a woman. Go and meet her, and tell her the noise was an ox being slaughtered. Or say Argus."

With a whirr that made all Benson's bruises moan and quiver, the great ash-branch shot aloft, and Richard swung off to intercept Lady Blandish.

Adrian got Benson on his feet. The heavy butler was disposed to summon all the commiseration he could feel for his bruised flesh. Every half-step he attempted was like a dislocation. His groans and grunts were frightful.

"How much did that hat cost, Benson?" said Adrian, as he put it on his head.

"A five-and-twenty shilling beaver, Mr. Hadrian!" Benson caressed its injuries.

"The cheapest policy of insurance I remember to have heard of!" said Adrian.

Benson staggered, moaning at intervals to his cruel comforter.

"He's a devil, Mr. Hadrian! He's a devil, sir, I do believe, sir. Ooogh! he's a devil!—I can't move, Mr. Hadrian. I must be fetched. And Dr. Clifford must be sent for, sir. I shall never be fit for work again. I haven't a sound bone in my body, Mr. Hadrian."

"You see, Benson, this comes of your declaring war upon Venus. I hope the maids will nurse you properly. Let me see: you are friends with the housekeeper, aren't you? All depends upon that."

"I'm only a faithful servant, Mr. Hadrian," the miserable butler snarled.

"Then you've got no friend but your bed. Get to it as quick as possible, Benson."

"I can't move." Benson made a resolute halt. "I must be fetched," he whinnied. "It's a shame to ask me to move, Mr. Hadrian."

"You will admit that you are heavy, Benson," said Adrian, "so I can't carry you. However, I see Mr. Richard is very kindly returning to help me."

At these words heavy Benson instantly found his legs, and shambled on.

Lady Blandish met Richard in dismay.

"I have been horribly frightened," she said. "Tell me, what was the meaning of those cries I heard?"

"Only some one doing justice on a spy," said Richard, and the lady smiled, and looked on him fondly, and put her hand through his hair.

"Was that all? I should have done it myself if I had been a man. Kiss me."

END OF VOLUME-2

Freeditorial