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THE HEART OF PENELOPE

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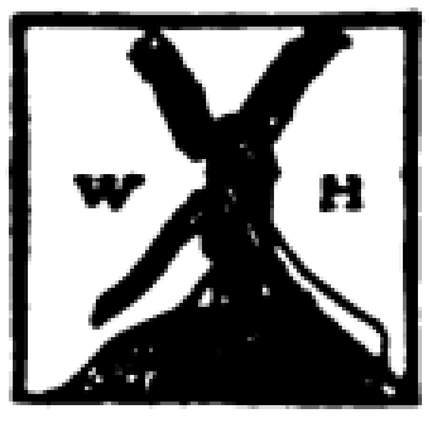
The Heart of Penelope

By

Mrs. Belloc Lowndes

It is worth the labour to consider well of Love, whether it be a god, or a devil, or a passion of the mind, or partly god, partly devil, partly passion.'

PLOTINUS



London
William Heinemann
1904

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CHAPTER I

'London my home is ; though by hard fate sent
Into a long and irksome banishment ;
Yet since call'd back, henceforward let me be,
O native country, repossess'd by thee !'

HERRICK.

SIR GEORGE DOWNING was back in London after an absence of twenty years from England. The circumstances which had led to his leaving his native country had been such that he could not refer to them, even in his own mind, and even after so long an interval, without an inward wincing more poignant than that which could have been brought about by the touching of any material wound.

Born to the good fortune which usually attends the young Englishman of old lineage, a fair competence and a traditional career—in his case the pleasant one of diplomacy—Downing had himself brought all his chances to utter shipwreck. Even now, looking back with the dispassionate judgment automatically produced by the long lapse of time, and greater—ah, how much greater !—knowledge of the world, he decided that fate had used him hardly.

What had really occurred was known to very few people, and these few had kept their own and his counsel to an unusual degree. The world, or rather that kindly and indulgent section of the world where young Downing had been regarded with the liking, and

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even the affection, so easily bestowed on a good-looking and good-natured youngster, said to stand well with his chiefs, took a lenient view of a case of which it knew little. The fact that a lady was closely involved—further, that she was one of those fair strangers who in those days played a far greater part in diplomacy than would now be possible—lent the required touch of romance to the story. 'A Delilah brought to judgment' had been the comment of one grim old woman, mindful that she had been compelled to meet, if not to receive, the stormy petrel whose departure from London had been too hurried to admit of the leaving of P.P.C. cards on the large circle which had entertained, and, in a less material sense, been entertained by, her. As to her victim—only the very unkind ventured to use the word 'tool'—his obliteration had been almost as sudden, almost as complete.

Other men, more blamed, if not more stricken, than he had been, had elected to spend their lives amid the ruins of their broken careers. More than one of his contemporaries had triumphantly lived down the memory of a more shameful record. Perhaps owing to his youth, he had followed his instinct—the natural instinct of a wounded creature which crawls away out of sight of its fellows—and now he had come back, having achieved, not only rehabilitation, but something more—the gratitude, the substantially expressed gratitude, of the most important section of his countrymen, those to whom are confided the destinies of an ever-increasing Empire.

Even in these prosaic days an Englishman living in forced or voluntary exile sometimes achieves greater things for his country than can be so much as contemplated by the men who, though backed by the power and prestige of the Foreign Office, are also tied by its

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official limitations. His efforts thus being unofficial, the failure of them can be so regarded, and diplomacy can shrug its shoulders. But if they should be successful, as Downing's had been, diplomacy, while pocketing the proceeds, is not so mean as to grudge a due reward.

Happy are those to whom substantial recognition comes ere it is too late. 'Persian' Downing, as he had, *pour cause*, come to be called, could now count himself among these fortunate few. Fate had offered him a great opportunity, which he had had the power and the intelligence to seize.

Those at home who still remembered him kindly had been eager to point out that, far from adopting American nationality, as had once been rumoured, he had known how to prove himself an Englishman of the old powerful stock, jealous of his country's honour and capable of making it respected. What was more to the purpose, from a practical point of view, was the fact that he had known how to win the confidence of a potentate little apt to be on confidential terms with the half-feared, half-despised Western.

That Downing had succeeded in maintaining his supremacy at a semi-barbaric Court, where he had first appeared in the not altogether dignified rôle of representative of an Anglo-American financial house, was chiefly due to a side of his nature, unsuspected by those who most benefited by it, which responded to the strange practical idealism of the Oriental. The terrible ordeal through which he had passed had long loosened his hold on life, bestowing upon him that calm fatalism and indifference to merely physical consequence which is ordinarily the most valuable asset of Orientals in their dealings with Western minds.

When he had accepted, or rather suggested, a Persian mission to his partner, an American banker, to whose

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firm an influential English friend had introduced him when he first turned his thoughts towards an American haven of refuge, he had done so in order to escape, if only for a few months, from a state of things brought about by what he was wont to consider the second great misfortune of his life. Downing was one of those men who seemed fated to make mistakes, and then to amaze those about them by the fashion in which they face and overcome the consequences.

Owing, perhaps, to sheer good luck, after having endured a kind of disgrace only comparable to that which may be felt by a soldier who has been proved a traitor to his cause and country, Downing had so acted that in twenty years—a few moments in a nation's diplomatic life—he had received, not only the formal rehabilitation and recognition implied by his G.C.B., but what, to tell truth, he had valued at the moment far more highly: a touching letter from the venerable statesman who had rejected his boyish appeal for mercy.

The old man had asked that he might himself convey to Downing the news of the honour bestowed on him, and he had done so in a letter full of honourable amend, of which one passage ran: 'As I grow older I have become aware of having done many things which I should have left undone; the principal of these, the one I have long most regretted, was my action concerning your case.'

Only one human being, and that a woman whose sympathy was none the less valued because she had scarcely understood all it had meant to her friend, was ever shown the letter which had so moved and softened him. But from the day he received it the thought of going home, back to England, never left him, and he would have accomplished his purpose long before, had it not been that the consequence of his second great mistake still pursued him.

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Attracted by a prim modesty of demeanour and apparent lack of emotion, new to him in women of his own class, and doubtless feeling acutely the terrible loneliness and strangeness attendant on his new life in such a city as was the New York of that time, George Downing had married, within a year of his arrival in America, a girl of good Puritan-Dutch stock and considerable fortune. Prudence Merryquick—her very name had first attracted him — had offered him that agreeable emotional pastime, a platonic friendship. Soon the strange relationship between them piqued and irritated him, and, manlike, he longed to stir, if not to plumb, the seemingly untroubled depths of her still nature. At first she resisted with apparent ease, and this incited him to serious skilful pursuit. Poor Prudence had no chance against a man who, in despite and in a measure because of his youth, had often played a conquering part in the mimic love warfare of an older and more subtle civilization. She surrendered, not ungracefully, and for a while it seemed as if the ex-Foreign Office clerk was like to make a successful American banker.

Their honeymoon lasted a year; then an accident, or, rather, some exigencies of business, caused them to spend a winter in Washington. There Downing's story was of course known; indeed, the newly-appointed British Minister had been a friend of his father, and one of those who had tried ineffectually to save him. This renewal of old ties brought on a terrible nostalgia. To Prudence a longing for England was incomprehensible—England had cast her husband out—indeed, she desired, with a fierceness of feeling which surprised Downing, to see him become a naturalized American, but to this he steadily refused to consent.

As winter gave way to spring they moved even further apart from one another, and, as might have been ex-

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pected, the first serious difference of opinion, too grave to call a quarrel, concerned their future home.

Downing, on the best terms with his partners, had arranged to return permanently to Washington. To his wife, a world composed of European diplomatists and cosmopolitan Americans was utterly odious and incomprehensible. She showed herself passionately intolerant of her husband's friends, especially of those who were his own countrymen and countrywomen, and she looked back with increasing longing to her early married life in New York, and to the days when George Downing had apparently desired no companionship but her own.

Both husband and wife were equally determined, equally convinced as to what was the right course to pursue, and no compromise seemed possible. But one day, quite early in the winter following that which had seen them first installed in Washington, Downing received an urgent recall to New York. With the easy philosophy which had been one of his early charms, he went unsuspectingly, but a few days after he and Prudence had once more settled down in the Dutch homestead inherited by her from Knickerbocker forebears, he came back rather sooner than had been his wont. Prudence met him at the door, for she had returned to this early habit of their married life.

'Tell me,' he said quietly, and while in the act of putting down his hat, 'did you ask Mr. Fetter to arrange for my return here?'

She answered unflinchingly: 'Yes; I knew it would be best.'

He made no comment, but within a month he had gone, leaving her alone in the old house where she had spent her dreary childhood, and where she had experienced the one passionate episode of her life.

Twice he came back—the first time with the honest

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intention of asking Prudence to return with him to the distant land where he had at last found a life that seemed to promise in time rehabilitation, and in any case a closer tie with his own country. Prudence hesitated, then communed with herself and with one or two trusted friends, and finally refused to accompany her husband back to Teheran. Already in her loneliness she had become interested in one of the great religious movements which swept over America at that period of its social history.

The second time that Downing returned to New York it was to make final arrangements for something tantamount to a separation. Of divorce his wife would not hear; her religious principles and theories made such a solution impossible. To his surprise and relief, she accepted the allowance he eagerly offered. 'Not in the spirit it is meant,' he said, half smiling, as they stood opposite to one another in the office of their old and much-distressed friend, Mr. Fetter; 'rather, eh, Prudence, as an offering to the Almighty on my behalf?' And she had answered quite seriously, but with the flicker of an answering smile: 'Yes, George, that is so;' and for years the two had not been so near to one another as at that moment. The arrangement was duly carried out, and in time Downing learnt that the offering foreseen by him had taken the very sensible shape of a young immigrants' home, the upkeep of which absorbed that portion of Mrs. Downing's income contributed by her husband.

Years wore themselves away, communications between the two became more and more rare, and his brief married life grew fainter and fainter in Downing's memory. Indeed, he far more often thought of and remembered trifling episodes which had taken place much earlier, even in his childhood. But the time came

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when this far-distant, half-forgotten woman hurt him unconsciously in his only vulnerable part. He learnt with a feeling of indescribable anger and annoyance that, having become closely connected with a number of English Dissenters, whose tenets she shared, she had made for some time past a yearly sojourn among them. To him the idea that his American wife should live, even for a short space of time each year, among his own countrymen and countrywomen, while he himself lingered on in outer banishment appeared monstrous, and it was one of the reasons why, even after he had already done much to effect his rehabilitation, he preferred to remain away from his own country.

Still, the day came when he was urgently pressed to return home, and it was pointed out to him that his further absence was injurious to those financial interests which concerned others as well as himself. This is how it came to pass that he found himself once more in London, after an absence of twenty years. At first Downing had planned to be in England early in June, and those of his friends whose congratulations on the honour bestowed on him had been most sincere and most welcome had urged him to make a triumphal reappearance at the moment when they would all be in town. Moreover, they had promised him—and some of them were in a position to make their promises come true—such a welcome home from old and new friends as is rarely awarded to those whose victories are won on bloodless fields.

Accordingly, he had started early in May from the distant country where his exile had proved of such signal service to England. Then, to the astonishment and concern of those who considered his early return desirable, he lingered through June and half July on the Continent, ever writing, 'I am coming, I am coming,'

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to the few to whom he owed a real apology for thus disappointing them. To the larger number of business connections who felt aggrieved he vouchsafed no word, and left them to suppose that their great man, frightened by some Parisian specialist, had retired to a French spa for a cure.

In one minor, as in so many a major, matter Downing had been exceptionally fortunate. For many returning to their native country after long years there are none to welcome them. Those among their old friends who have not gone where no living man can hope to reach them are scattered here and there, and only affection, faithful in a sense rarely found, troubles to think of how the actual arrival of the wanderer can be made, if not pleasant, at least tolerable. But Downing found a sincere and, what was more precious, a familiar welcome, from the friend, Mr. Julius Gumberg, who had twenty years before sped him on his way with those valuable business introductions with which he had been able to build up a new career, first in America, and later in Persia.

There had been no regular correspondence between them, but now and again, sometimes after an interval of years, a short note, pregnant with shrewd counsel, and written in the tiny and only apparently clear hand which was the epistolary mode of fifty years since, would form the most welcome portion of Downing's home mail. It was characteristic of Mr. Gumberg that he sent no word of congratulation, when the man whom he still regarded as a youthful protégé received his G.C.B., the great outward mark of rehabilitation. But when he learnt that Downing had actually started for England he wrote him a line, adding by way of postscript, 'Of course you will come to me,' and of course Downing had come to him.

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Mr. Julius Gumberg was one of those happy Londoners whose dwellings lie between the Green Park and that group of tranquil short streets which still remain, havens of stately peace, within a moment's walk of St. James's and Piccadilly. The portion of the house which looked on St. James's Place had that peculiar air of solid respectability which, in houses belonging to a certain period, seems to apologize for the rakish air of their garden-front. By its bow-windows Mr. Gumberg's house was distinguished on the park side from its more stately neighbours, and his pink blinds were so far historic that they had been noted in a guide-book some forty years before.

Small wonder that, as Mr. Gumberg's guest passed through the door into the broad low corridor which led into his old friend's library, he felt for a moment as if he were walking from the present into the past, an impression heightened by his finding everything, and almost everybody, in the house unchanged, from his host, sitting in the pleasant book-lined room where they had last parted, to the man-servant who had met him with a decorous word of welcome at the door. To be sure, both master and man looked older, but Downing felt that, while in their case the interval of time had left scarce any perceptible mark of its passage, he himself had in the same period lived, and showed that he had lived, a time incalculable.

And how did the traveller returning strike Mr. Julius Gumberg? Alas! as being in every sense quite other than the man, young, impulsive, and with a sufficient, not excessive, measure of originality, whom he had sped on his way to fairer fortunes twenty years before. Now, looking at the tall figure, the broad, slightly-bent shoulders, he saw that youth had wholly gone, that impulse had been so long curbed as to leave no trace

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on the rugged secretive face, to which had come, indeed, lines of concentration and purpose which had been lacking in that of the young George Downing. Originality now veered perilously near that eccentricity of outward appearance which is apt to overtake those to whom the cut of clothes, the shearing of the hair, have become of no moment. Mr. Gumberg's shrewd eyes had at once perceived that this no longer familiar friend looked Somebody, indeed, many would say a very great and puissant body; but the old man would have been better pleased to have welcomed home a more commonplace hero.

Mr. Gumberg's sharp ears had heard, just outside his door, quick, low interchange of words between his own faithful man-servant and the newly-arrived guest. 'Valet? No, Jackson, I have brought no man. I gave up such pleasant luxuries twenty years ago!' And Jackson had retreated, disappointed of the company of the travelled gentleman's gentleman with whom he had hoped to spend many pleasant moments.

Partly in deference to his old friend's advice, Downing gave up his first morning in London to seeing those, almost to a man unknown to him, to whom he surely owed some apology for his delay. His own old world, including those faithful few friends of his youth who had wished him to return in time to add to the triumphs of the season, were already scattered, and though he had been warmly asked, even after his defection, to follow them to the downs, the moors, and the sea, he was as yet uncertain what to do. 'Waiting orders,' he had said to himself with a curious thrill of exultation as he sat in his bedroom, table and chair drawn close to the windows from which could be seen the twinkling lights of Piccadilly, and where he had been

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answering briefly the pile of letters he had found waiting for him.

The next morning he devoted himself to the work he had in hand, and early drove to the City in his host's old-fashioned roomy brougham. As he drove he leant back, his hat jammed down over his eyes, unwilling to see the changes which the town's aspect had undergone during his long absence. But there was one pang which was not spared him.

He had been among the last of those Londoners to whom the lion upon the gateway of Northumberland House had been as a Familiar, and in the long low rooms and spacious galleries to which that gateway had given access he had spent many happy hours, a youth on whom all smiled. Of course, he knew the stately palace had gone, but the sight of all that now stood in its place made him realize as nothing else had yet done how long he had been away.

But when once he found himself in the City office whither he was bound, he pushed all thoughts and recollections of the past far back into his mind, and set himself to exercise all his powers of conciliation on the men, for the most part unknown to him personally, who had the right to be annoyed with him for delaying his arrival in London so long. Long, lean, and brown, he stood before them, grimly smiling, and after the first words, 'I fear my delay has caused some of you inconvenience, gentlemen,' he plunged into the multiple complex details of the great financial interests in which he and they were bound, answering questions, dealing with delicate points, and impressing them, as even the most optimistic among them had not hoped to be impressed, by his remarkable personality.

In the afternoon of the same day he made his way

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slowly, almost furtively, into what had once been his familiar haunts. They lay close about the house where he was now staying, and at first he felt relieved, so few were the changes noted by him; but after a while he realized that this first impression was not a true one. Even in St. James's Street there was much that struck him as strange. Where he had left low houses he found huge buildings. His very bootmaker, though still flaunting the proud device, 'Established in 1767,' across his plate-glass window, was, though at the same number as of old, now merged in a row of shops forming the ground-floor of a red-brick edifice which seemed to dwarf the low long mass of St. James's Palace opposite.

In that square quarter-mile, bounded on the one side by Jermyn Street and on the other by Pall Mall, he missed, if not whole streets, at least many houses through whose hospitable doors he had often made his way. Then a chance turn brought him opposite the place where he had spent the last three years of his London life, and, by a curious irony, here alone time seemed to have stood still. He looked consideringly at the old house, up at the narrow windows of the first-floor at which a young and happy George Downing had so often stood full of confidence in a kind world and in himself; then, following a sudden impulse, he walked across the street and rang the bell.

A buxom, powerful-looking woman opened the door; Downing recognised her at once as a certain Mary Crisp, the niece of his old landlord, and as she stood waiting for him to speak he remembered that as a girl she had not been allowed to do much of the waiting on her uncle's 'gentlemen.' There was no glimmer of recognition in her placid face, and, in answer to the request that he might see the rooms where he had once lived

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'for a short time,' she invited him civilly enough to come in, and to follow her upstairs.

'I expect it's the same paper, sir,' she said, as she opened the door of what had been his sitting-room. 'It was put up when uncle first took on the house, and, as it cost half a crown a foot, we always cleans it once every three years with breadcrumbs, and it comes out as good as new.'

How well Downing remembered the paper, with its dark-blue ground thickly sprinkled with gold stars! indeed, before she spoke again, he knew what her next words would be. 'It's the same pattern that the Queen and Prince Albert chose for putting up at Windsor Castle; you don't see such a good paper, nor such a good pattern, nowadays; but, there, I'll just leave you a minute while you take a look round.'

For some moments Downing remained standing just inside the door, as much that he had forgotten, and more that he had tried vainly to forget, came back to him in a turgid flood of recollection. Suddenly something in the walls creaked, and he clenched his hands, half expecting to see figures form themselves out of the shadows. One memory was spared him; the sombre walls, the plain, heavy old furniture, placed much as it had been in his time, evoked no vision of the foreign woman who had brought him to disgrace, for, with a certain boyish chivalry, he had never allowed her to come to his rooms; instead, poor fool that he had been, he had occasionally entertained her in his official quarters, and the fact had been one of those which had most weighed against him with his informal judges.

Instead, the place where he now stood brought to his mind another woman, who had during those same years

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and months played a nobler, but, alas! a far minor, part in his life.

Mrs. Henry Delacour had been one of those beings who, though themselves exquisitely feminine, seem destined to go through life playing the part of confidential and platonic friend, for, in spite of all that is said to the contrary, platonic friendships, sometimes disguised under another name, count for much in our overcivilized world. The second wife of a permanent Government official much older than herself, her thoughts, if not her heart, enjoyed a painful and a dangerous freedom. At a time when sentiment had gone for the moment out of fashion, she lavished much innocent sentiment on those of her husband's younger colleagues who seemed worthy of her interest, and, for she was a kind woman, in need of it. She had first met George Downing after she had attained the age when every charming woman feels herself privileged to behave as though she were no longer on the active list, while yet quite ready, should the occasion offer, to lead a forlorn hope. What that time of life is should surely be left to each conscience, and almost to each nationality. In the case of this lady the age had been thirty-eight, Downing being fifteen years younger—a fact which he forgot, and which she conscientiously strove to remember, whenever he found himself in her soothing, kindly presence.

Their relationship had been for a time full of subtle charm, and had George Downing been as cosmopolitan as his profession should have made him, had he even been an older man, he might have been content with all that she felt able to offer him—all, indeed, that was possible. But there came a time when he found himself absorbed in a more ardent, a more responsive friendship, and when his feet learnt to shun the quiet

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street where Mrs. Delacour dispensed her gracious hospitality; indeed, the moment came when he almost forgot how innocently near they had once been to one another.

Yet now, as he stood inside the door of his old room, Mrs. Delacour triumphantly reasserted herself, for she had come to him on the last evening of his life in London. He advanced further into the room, and slowly the scene reconstituted itself in his mind. It had been one which no man was likely ever wholly to forget, and it came back to Downing, in spite of the lapse of twenty years, with extraordinary vividness.

Having arranged to leave early the next morning, he had given strict orders that none of his friends were to be again admitted. Sick at heart, he had been engaged in sorting the last batch of letters and bills, when the door, opening, had revealed Mrs. Delacour, dressed in the soft, rather shadowy colouring which, though at the time wholly out of fashion, had always seemed to him, the young George Downing, an essential part of her personality. For a moment, as she had hesitated in the doorway, he had noticed that she carried a basket.

With the egotism of youth, as he had taken the kind, trembling little hand and led his visitor into the room, he had uttered the words, 'Now I know without doubt that I am dead!' As he stood there now, in this very room which had witnessed the pitiful scene, he felt a rush of shame, remembering how he had behaved during the hours that followed, for he had sat, sullenly looking on, while she had packed the portmanteaux lying on the floor, tied up packets of letters, and sorted bills. At intervals he had asked her to leave him, begged her to go home, but she had worked on, saying very little,

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looking at him not at all, and showing none of the dreadful tenderness which had been lavished on him by so many of his friends.

Then had come the moment when he had roused himself sufficiently to mutter a few words of thanks, reminding her, not ungently, that her husband would be expecting her back to dinner. 'Is anyone coming?' she had asked, with a tremor in her voice; and on his quick disclaimer the basket had been unpacked, and food and wine put upon the table.

'Henry,' she had said, in the precise, rather anxious voice he recalled so well—'Henry remembered how well you thought of this claret;' and she had sat down, and by her example gradually compelled him to eat the first real meal he had had for days.

When at last the moment came when she had said, sadly enough, 'Now I suppose I must go home,' he was glad to remember that he had tried to bear himself like a man, tried to thank her for her coming. As he had stood, saying good-bye, she had suddenly lifted the hand which grasped hers, and had laid it against her cheek with the words, said bravely, and with a smile, 'You will come back, George—I am *sure* you will come back.'

As Downing stood once more in the street, now gray with twilight, after he had slipped a sovereign in Mary Crisp's hand, she asked him with natural curiosity, 'And what name shall I say, sir, when uncle asks who called? He always likes to hear of his gentlemen coming back.' Downing hesitated, and then gave the name of the man who he knew had had the rooms before him. The woman said nothing, but a look of fear came into her face as she shut the door quickly. As she did so Downing remembered that the man was dead.

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CHAPTER II

'If you enter his house, his drawing-room, his library, you of yourself say, This is not the dwelling of a common mind. There is not a gem, a coin, a book thrown aside on his chimney-piece, his sofa, his table, that does not bespeak an almost fastidious elegance in the possessor.'—*Lord Byron's Journal.*

MR. JULIUS GUMBERG was the last survivor of a type familiar in the English, or rather in the London, society of the middle period of the nineteenth century. In those days reticence, concerning one's own affairs be it understood, was still the rule rather than the exception, but there were a certain number of men, and a few women, to whom everything seems to have been told, and whose advice on the more delicate and difficult affairs of life, if not invariably followed—for that would have been asking too much of human nature—was invariably asked.

It has always been the case that to those who know much shall more be revealed, and Mr. Gumberg had forgotten more scandals than even the most trusted of his contemporaries had ever told or been told. His assistance was even invoked, it was whispered, by the counsellors of very great people, and it was further added that he had been instrumental in averting more than one morganatic alliance. That, like most of those who enjoy power, he had sometimes chosen to exercise his prerogative by upholding and shielding those to whom the rest of the world cried 'Haro!' was felt to be to his credit. He had not only never married, but, so

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far as his acquaintances knew, never even set sail for 'le pays du tendre' with any woman belonging to a circle which had been widening as the years slipped by, and this added to his prestige and gave him authority among those whose paths had diverged so widely from his own.

To all women, especially to those who sought his help when the difficulty in which they found themselves had been caused rather by the softness of their hearts than as the outcome of mere arid indiscretion, he showed an indulgent, and, what was more to the point, a helpful tenderness, which led to repeated confidences. 'The woman who has Mr. Gumberg on her side can afford to postpone repentance,' a dowager who was more feared than trusted was said to have exclaimed; but, like so many bodily as well as moral physicians, he often felt that confidence, when it was reposed in him, had been too long delayed. An intricate problem, a situation to which there seemed no possible issue, was not, he admitted to himself, without its special charm; but as he grew older—indeed, into quite old age—he preferred exercising more subtle arts in connection with the comparatively simpler stories of human life. Unlike the poor French lady whose idle phrase has branded her throughout the ages, Mr. Gumberg delighted in innocent pleasures, while he was willing, notwithstanding, to make any effort and to exhume any skeleton, however grim, from a friend's closet, if by so doing he could prevent a scandal from crystallizing into a 'case.'

Still, it may be repeated that what he really enjoyed, when he could do so conscientiously, and even, indeed, when he found his conscience to be in no sense on the side of the more worldly angels of his acquaintance, was to place all his knowledge of the world at the disposal of two youthful and good-looking lovers. No man, so it was said, knew more ways of melting the heart of an

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obdurate father, or, what is of course far more difficult, of changing the mind of a sensible mother. Of the several sayings of which he was fond of making use, and which he found applicable to almost every case, especially those of purely sentimental interest, submitted to him, his favourite came to be, 'Heaven helps those who help themselves'; but as he preferred to be the sole auxiliary of Heaven, he seldom quoted the phrase to those who might really have profited by it.

As young people sometimes found to their chagrin, Mr. Gumberg could not always be trusted to see what he was fond of calling the syllabub side of life; he occasionally took a parent's part, this especially when the parent happened to be the mother of a young man. Thus, he was impatient of the modern habit of *mésalliance*, and was old enough to remember the days when divorce was the last resort of the wealthy, while yet deploring the time when marriage was in truth an indissoluble bond. Perhaps the only action which caused him ever-recurring astonishment was the frivolity his young friends showed in entering a state of life which, according to his old-fashioned views, should spell finality.

'Heaven,' he would murmur to the afflicted mother of a misguided youth who only asked to be allowed to contract honourable matrimony with the humble object of his choice—'Heaven helps those who help themselves: therefore beware of the virtuous ballet-girl and of the industrious barmaid; rather persuade your Augustus to cultivate more closely the acquaintance of his cousin, a really agreeable widow, for jointures should be induced to remain in the family when this can be done without any serious sacrifice of feeling.'

Mr. Gumberg's enemies—and, of course, like most people who live the life that suits them best, and who

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are surrounded by a phalanx of attached and powerful friends, he had enemies—were able to point to one very serious blemish on his otherwise almost perfect advisory character. With the approach of age he had become garrulous; he talked not only freely, but with extraordinary, amazing freedom to those—and they were many—who cheered him with their constant visits, and on whom he could depend to give him news of the world he loved so well, but which for many years past he had only been able to see poised against the limited background of his fine library, of his cheerful breakfast-room, of his delightful garden.

Perhaps the fact that he was acquainted with so many of their own secrets made him the more trust the discretion of his friends, and even of his acquaintances. They on their side were always ready to urge in exculpation of their valued mentor that the old man never discussed a scandal, or indeed a secret, that was in the making. While always eager to hear any story, or any addition to a story, then amusing the circle with which he kept in close touch, he never added by so much as a word to the swelling tale; on the contrary, the more intimate his knowledge of the details, the less he admitted that he knew, and his garrulity was confined to events which had already become, from the point of view of the younger generation, ancient history. The mere mention of a name—even more, a passing visit from some acquaintance long lost sight of—would let loose on whoever had the good fortune to be present a flood of amusing, if sometimes very muddy, reminiscence. 'My way,' he would say quaintly, and in half-shamed excuse, 'of keeping a diary; and as the circulation is necessarily so very limited, I can note much which it would be scarcely fair to publish abroad.'

Thus it was that Mr. Gumberg was seldom without

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the company of at least one friend old enough to enjoy the real answers to long-forgotten social riddles, while the more thoughtful of his younger acquaintances recognised that some of his old stories were better worth hearing than those which they in their turn came to tell.

When Sir George Downing, after having returned from his excursion into the past, sought out his host in the book-lined octagon room, looking out on the Italian garden, where Mr. Julius Gumberg had established himself for the evening, it was not because he expected to learn much of interest unknown to him before, but because, though he felt half ashamed of it, he longed intensely both to speak and to hear spoken a certain name. With an abruptness which took the old man by surprise, Downing asked him : ' Among your many charming friends, I wonder if you number a certain Mrs. Robinson, the daughter, I believe, of the late Lord Wantley ?'

Mr. Gumberg's reply was not long in coming.

' Perdita,' he said briskly, ' is on the whole the most beautiful young woman I know ; I don't say, mind you, the most beautiful creature I have ever known, but at the present time I cannot call to mind any of my friends with whom I can compare her.' He tucked the rug in which he was muffled up more tightly across his knees, and continued, with manifest enjoyment : ' Doubtless you have noticed, George, even in the short time you have been at home, that nowadays all our women claim to be beauties—and the remarkable thing about it is that they succeed, the hussies !'

He gave a loud, discordant chuckle, and the pause enabled the other to throw in the words :

' Mrs. Robinson's name is, I believe, Penelope.'

He spoke quickly, fearing a full biography of the

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fair stranger by whose beauty Mr. Gumberg set so much store.

'They succeed, and yet they fail,' continued the old man, ignoring the interruption. 'They aim—it's odd they should do so—at being as like one another as peas in a pod. Our beauties don't give each other room. Ah! you should have seen, George, the women of my youth. The plain ones kept their places—and very good places they were, too—but the others! Now scarce a week goes by but some kind lady comes to me with, "Oh, Mr. Gumberg, I'm going to bring you the new beauty. I'm sure you will be charmed!" But I've given up expecting anything out of the common. When I was a young man a new beauty was something to look at: she had hair, teeth, eyes—not always *mind*, I grant you: but she was there to be looked at, not talked at! I'm told that now a pretty woman hasn't a chance unless she's clever. And that's the mischief, for the clever ones can always make us believe that they're the pretty ones, too. Give me the yellow-haired, pink-cheeked kind, out of which one could shake the sawdust, eh? Then he sighed a little ghostly sigh, and added: 'Yes, her name's Penelope, of course—I was just going to tell you so—but she's Perdita, too, obviously.'

'And has there been a Florizel?' Downing's question challenged a reply, and Mr. Gumberg looked at him inquiringly, as well as thoughtfully, as he answered in rather a softer tone:

'God bless my soul, no! That's to say, a dozen, more or less! But I don't see, and I doubt if Perdita sees, a Prince Charming among 'em. As for Robinson, poor fellow!'—Mr. Gumberg hesitated; words sometimes failed him, but never for long—'all I can say is he was the first of those I was the first to dub the

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Sisyphians. I used to feel quite honoured when he came to breakfast. People enjoyed meeting him. I never could see why; but you know how they all—especially the women—run after any man that is extraordinarily ordinary. Melancthon Wesley Robinson—what a handicap, eh? And yet I'm bound to say one felt inclined to forgive him even his name, even his good looks, even his marriage to Penelope Wantley, for he had the supreme and now rare charm of youth. You had it once, George; that was why we were all so fond of you.'

Mr. Gumberg got up from his chair, pushed the rug off his shrunken legs, and slowly walked round the room till he reached one of the two cupboards which filled up the recess on either side of the fireplace. From its depths he brought out a small portfolio. Downing had started up, but his host motioned him back to his seat with a certain irritation, and then, as he made his way again to his own blue leather armchair, he went on:

'Those for whom I invented the name of Sisyphians—there are plenty of 'em about now—well, I divide 'em into two sets, both, I need hardly say, equally distasteful to me. The one kind cultivates platonic friendships with the women'—Mr. Gumberg made a slight grimace. 'Their arguments appeal to feminine sensibility; "Make yourself happier by making others happy," that's the notion, and I understand that they're fairly successful as regards the primary object, but there seems some doubt as to how far they succeed in the other—eh? I should hate to be made happy myself. That sort of fellow is the husband's best friend. Not only does he keep the wife out of mischief, but he will act as special constable on occasion, and when everything else fails he's always there, ready to put his arm round the dear erring creature's

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waist and implore her to remember her duties! The other set undertake a more difficult task, and they don't find it so easy. That sort don't put their arms round even their own wives' waists; their dream is to embrace Humanity. She's a jealous mistress, and, from all I hear, I doubt if she's as grateful as some of 'em make out!'

The old man sat down again. He drew the rug over his knees, and propped up the small portfolio on a sloping mahogany desk which always stood at his elbow. With a certain eagerness he turned over its contents, still talking the while.

'Young Robinson was their founder, their leader. He built the first of the palaces in the slums. I'm told they call the place the Melancthon Settlement. I'm bound to say that he took it—and himself—quite seriously, lived down there, and, what was much more strange, persuaded Penelope to live there, too. Oh, not for long. She would soon have tired of the whole business!' He added in a lower tone, his head bent over the open portfolio: 'I don't find things as easily as I used to do. Yet I know it's here.' Then he cried eagerly, 'I've found it!' and held up triumphantly a rudely-coloured print of which the reverse side was covered with much close writing.

Downing put out his hand with a certain excitement; he knew that what the old man was about to show him had a bearing on the story he was being told.

The print, obviously a caricature, represented a horsewoman sitting a huge roan and clad in the long riding-habit, almost touching the ground, which women wore in the twenties and thirties of last century. A large black hat shaded, and almost entirely concealed, the oval face beneath. In one hand the horsewoman held a hunting crop, with the other she reined in her horse, presenting a dauntless front to some twenty couple of

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yelping and snarling foxhounds. The colour was crude, but the drawing clear, and full of rough power.

Downing suddenly realized that each hound had the face of a man; also that the countenance of the foremost dog was oddly familiar: he seemed to have seen it looking down on him from innumerable engravings, in particular from one which had hung in the hall of his parents' town-house. This dog, almost alone clean-shaven among its companions, held between its paws the baton of a field-marshal. Below the print was engraved in faded gilt letters the words 'The Lady and her Pack.'

'A valuable and very rare family portrait,' said Mr. Gumberg grimly. 'The lady is Penelope's grandmother, Lady Wantley's mother, and the Pack——' He checked himself, surprised at the look which passed over the other's face.

'Her grandmother?' Downing interrupted almost roughly. 'Why, you showed me that print years ago, when I was a boy. I have never forgotten it.' Then, in a more natural tone, he added: 'I suppose it's really unique?'

'As far as I know, absolutely unique, but such odious surprises are nowadays sprung upon collectors! I believe this copy is the only one which has survived the many determined efforts to destroy the whole edition, which was never at any time a large one. I fancy such things were produced speculatively, you understand, doubtless with a view to the pack. These good people'—Mr. Gumberg pointed with his long, lean finger to the human-faced dogs—'were naturally quite ready to buy up all the available copies, and then, later, John Oglethorpe, after he had become the fair huntswoman's husband, also most naturally made it his business to get hold of the few which had found their way into collec-

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tions. I've been told also that Lord Wantley during many years made a point of keeping his eye on one copy, which finally disappeared, no one knows how, just on the eve of its being safely stored in the British Museum! I got mine in Paris quite thirty years ago by an extraordinary bit of good fortune. And so I showed it you, did I? I wonder why. I so seldom show it, unless, of course, there's some special reason why I should do so.'

Mr. Gumberg stopped and thought for a few minutes. 'Let me see,' he added thoughtfully, 'the last person who saw it was old Mrs. Byng. It was the day of Penelope's marriage. It's a good way from Hanover Square, and the old lady never takes a cab—too stingy. I knew how a sight of this picture would revive her, poor old soul! One of my very few remaining contemporaries, George.' Mr. Gumberg sighed a little heavily; then, with a certain regret, 'So you know all about that strange creature, Rosina Bellamont?'

Again he took up the print between his lean fingers. He hated being done out of telling a story, and Downing, well aware of this peculiarity, smiled and said kindly enough: 'When you showed me this thing before, you told me more of the pack than of the lady. In fact, if I remember rightly, it was just after the death——'

Mr. Gumberg again interrupted with returning good-humour: 'Of course I remember: it was just after the death of poor Jack Storks. You came in as I was reading his obituary in the *Times*, and I showed you the print to prove that he had not always been the grave and reverend signior they made him out to have been!'

'And Lady Wantley's mother, what of her?' Downing feared once more that his venerable friend would start off on a reminiscent excursion of more general than particular interest.

'She was a very remarkable woman,' answered Mr.

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Gumberg, 'and I will tell you how and where I first made her acquaintance and that of her daughter.'

'When I was a lad of fifteen,' began the old man, with a marked change of tone and even of manner, 'my uncle, who was, as you are aware, a Russia merchant, the kindest and wisest man I have ever known, and the most delightful of companions, took me a walking tour through the Yorkshire dales. Now, those were the days when all inns were bad and all houses hospitable. We walked miles without meeting a living creature, being the more solitary that my uncle preferred the bridle-paths to the highroads, but he generally contrived that we should find a kind welcome and comfortable quarters at the end of each day.

'One afternoon, when climbing a stiff hillside not far from the place whence five dales can be seen stretching fanstickwise, we came on two figures standing against the skyline, a lady and a young girl, hand in hand, curiously dressed—for those were the days of the crinoline—in long, straight gray gowns and circular cloaks. Their faces, the one pale, the other fresh and rosy, were framed by unbecoming close bonnets, each lined with a frill of stiff white stuff. Even I, foolish boy that I was, and while considering the strange pair most inelegantly dressed, saw that they were in a sense distinguished, utterly unlike the often oddly-gowned country wives and maids we met now and again trudging past us.

'To my surprise, my uncle, when he had become aware of their presence, quickened his steps, and when we had reached the lonely stretch of grass on which they were standing—that is, when we were close to the singular couple, mother and daughter or grandmother and granddaughter; I could not help wondering what relationship existed between them—he bowed, saying:

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"Have I the honour of greeting Mrs. Oglethorpe?" The elder lady's cheek turned as rosy, but only for a moment, as that of the girl by her side, and as she answered, "Yes," the colour receding seemed to leave her cheek even paler than before. "That is my name," she said; and then looking, or so it seemed to me, very pleadingly at my uncle, she added quickly: "This is my young daughter. Adelaide, curtsey to the gentleman." "Your father and I, young lady," said my uncle, again bowing, "have had business dealings together for many years, and I am honoured to meet his daughter."

'Well, George, we followed them, retracing our steps down the dale, and there, hidden in a park surrounded by high walls, we came at last on a fine old house of gray stone. Our approach brought no sign of life or animation. The formal gardens lacked the grace and brilliancy afforded by flowers, and yet were in no sense neglected. Mrs. Oglethorpe turned the handle of the front-door, and we passed into a large hall, where we were greeted with great civility by an elderly man, whom I supposed, rightly, to be our host, though, to be sure, his dress differed in no way from that of those who passed silently backwards and forwards through the hall, and who were apparently his servants.

'Dear me, how strange everything seemed to my young eyes! In particular, I was amazed to notice that a row of what were apparently family portraits were all closely shrouded with some kind of white linen, while below them, painted on the oak panelling, was the following sentence'—Mr. Gumberg turned the print he still held in his hand, and peered closely at the writing with which the back of it was covered—'"*Forsake all, and thou shalt possess all. Relinquish desire, and thou shalt find rest.*" The hall was overlooked by what had evidently been a music-gallery, and, glancing up there,

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I saw that the carved oak railing had been partly covered in with deal boards, on which was written in very large letters another strange saying: "*Esteem and possess naught, and thou shalt enjoy all things.*" I tried, I trust successfully, to imitate my uncle, the most courteous of men, in showing nothing of the astonishment that these things caused me, the more so that Mr. Oglethorpe treated us with the greatest consideration, himself fetching bread, cheese, and beer for our entertainment.

'After we had refreshed ourselves, a pretty young woman, dressed in what appeared to be a modified copy of the curious straight garments worn by our hostess and her daughter, led us to a bedchamber, the walls of which were hung, as I now judge, looking back, with some fine French tapestry. Across the surface of this ran the words, each letter cut out of white linen stitched on to the tapestry: "*Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head.*"'

Mr. Gumberg paused a moment, and then continued his story: 'The dining-room, to which we were bidden by the ringing of a bell, must have been once, from its appearance, the scene of many great banquets; but I noted that it only contained two long tables, composed of unpainted boards set on rough trestles, while the walls, hung with maroon Utrecht velvet, presented to my eyes an extraordinary appearance, each picture—and there were many—being hidden from sight, as were those in the hall, while on a long strip of white cloth, which ran right round the room above the wainscotting, was written: "*Self-denial is the basis of spiritual perfection. He that truly denies himself is arrived at a state of great freedom and safety.*"

'I noticed that the tables were laid for a considerable company, and soon there walked slowly in some forty

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men and women, all dressed in what seemed to me a very peculiar manner. There were many more women than men, and they sat at separate tables, Mrs. Oglethorpe taking the head of the one, while her husband, with my uncle at his right hand, presided over the other. The food was plain, but of good quality; it was eaten in silence, and while we ate the daughter of the house, Adelaide Oglethorpe, sat on a high rostrum and read aloud from a book which I have since ascertained to have been Mr. William Law's "Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life."

'This reading surprised me very much, and, boylike, I wondered anxiously whether the girl was to be deprived of her evening meal; but after we had finished supper she put a mark in the book she had been reading, and, as the others all walked out, took her place at a little table I had before scarcely noticed, and there, waited on most assiduously by her father, she enjoyed a meal rather more dainty in character than that which the rest of us had eaten. Looking back, George,' observed Mr. Gumberg thoughtfully, 'I think I may say that this was the first time in my life that I realized how even the most rigid human beings sometimes fall away, and this almost unconsciously, from their own standards.

'We only stayed at Oglethorpe one night, and perhaps that is why I recollect so well all that took place. Before we left, my uncle, to the evident gratification of our host, advised me to copy the various inscriptions about the house, notably one which had greatly taken his fancy, and which was inscribed above the writing-table where Mrs. Oglethorpe apparently spent many of the earlier hours of each day. This saying ran: "*Charity is the meed of all; familiarity the right of none.*" Our hostess, of whom I stood in

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great awe, bade her little daughter show me the schoolroom, observing that there I should most probably notice texts and inscriptions more suited to my understanding. Miss Oglethorpe's room was strangely different from the others I had seen; and, with a surprise which I was unable to conceal, I saw hanging in a prominent place over the mantelpiece a painting of a beautiful young woman pressing a little child to her bosom, while below the gold frame was written the familiar verse: "*Suffer little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.*" Adelaide Oglethorpe evidently noticed my surprise, for she explained diffidently that this painting represented her father's mother and himself as a child; further, that, this lady having been a most virtuous and excellent wife and mother, Mr. Oglethorpe had not dealt with her portrait as he had done with those of his own and his daughter's less reputable forebears.'

Mr. Gumberg ceased speaking. Downing's eyes were still fixed on the rudely coloured caricature of Rosina Bellamont and her admirers.

'And so this woman,' he said, 'became a mother in Israel? Well, I suppose such things do happen now and then.'

'Rather more often now than then,' Mr. Gumberg declared briskly. 'My uncle used to describe to me, when I had come to a riper age, what a stir the marriage made. Why, they even said the King—William IV., you know—sent for Oglethorpe and remonstrated with him. Of course, a Bellamont can always find a man to make an honest woman of her, but she seldom has the good fortune to bear off such a prize as was John Oglethorpe. That wasn't, however, the most amazing part of the story. Within a few months of her marriage

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Mrs. Oglethorpe fell under the influence of a preacher—a second Fletcher of Madeley. But she was evidently not the woman to rest content with being a mere disciple, and so, with the active help of her husband, she set herself to build up that strange kind of religious phalanstery which I have described to you, and in which the future Lady Wantley was born and bred. Rosina Bellamont was one of those women who are born to good fortune as the sparks fly upward, and her luck did not desert her in the one matter in which she could hardly have counted on it——'

Downing looked up. 'You mean the marriage of her daughter?' he said.

'Of course I do,' returned the old man vigorously. 'In those days peers didn't hold forth at Exeter Hall—in fact, Wantley was the first of that breed; and by great good fortune, chance—I suppose it *was* chance, eh, George?—brought him to Oglethorpe. The odd thing was his going there at all; once there, 'twas natural he should feel attracted.'

'I suppose Lady Wantley is like her daughter?' said Downing.

'God bless my soul, no! Lady Wantley's an Oglethorpe. Penelope's a——' The old man did not finish his sentence, but turned it off with: 'She's quite unlike her mother. Pity she wasn't a boy. The present man's no good to 'em—I mean to Lady Wantley and Penelope. Why should he be? He wasn't fairly treated. Of course he got Marston Lydiate, for that's entailed; but the place in Dorset, Monk's Eype, and all the money, were left away to the girl, although I did my best for him. Wantley spoke to me about it, but I couldn't move him; and then he was hardly cold before Penelope married her millionaire! A marriage, George, a marriage!' Words really failed Mr. Gum-

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berg. For the third time he repeated, 'A marriage'—his old eyes gleamed maliciously—'which was no marriage! You understand, eh? *Mensa non thorus*—that was the notion. Common among the early Christians, I believe. Well, no one can say what the end of it would have been, for nature abhors a vacuum; but the poor monkish creature died, caught small-pox from a foreign sailor, and the bewitching girl was left all the Robinson millions!'

'Then I suppose you advised restitution to young Lord Wantley?'

Mr. Gumberg chuckled. He evidently thought his guest intended a grim joke. 'The sort of thing a trustee would suggest, eh, George?' But Downing was apparently quite serious.

'I don't see why not,' he said. 'Do you mean that Lord Wantley is penniless?'

Mr. Gumberg nodded. 'Something very like it,' he declared. 'Of course, the old man—though he was twenty years younger than I am now when he died—had some show of reason for the unfair thing he did. People always have. When he, and I suppose Lady Wantley, realized that they were not likely to have a son, he gave his heir—his third cousin, I fancy—the family living of Marston Lydiate, and years afterwards the man became a Romanist! Wantley chose to consider himself very much injured. He never saw his cousin again, and for years never took any notice of the boy—in fact, not till the ex-parson was dead.'

'Is young Lord Wantley a Roman Catholic?' asked Downing indifferently.

'No, he's not,' said Mr. Gumberg. 'The other day I heard him described as "a stickit Papist," and I suppose that's about what he is. But where's your

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interest in these people, George?' Mr. Gumberg asked suddenly. 'You don't know 'em, do you?'

Downing hesitated. He was in the mood in which men feel almost compelled to make unexpected and amazing confidences, but the words which were so nearly being said were never uttered. Cutting across his hesitation, his half-formed idea of taking his old friend into his confidence, came the exclamation: 'Why, of course! You've met her! When I heard from you at Pol les Thermes I felt sure there was someone else there that I knew, but I couldn't think who it was at the moment. However, that don't matter now, for it seems you've found each other out. I didn't say too much, George, did I? She *is* a beautiful creature.'

Mr. Gumberg's assertion was not without a note of interrogation. He sometimes felt an uneasy suspicion that his standards, especially in the matter of feminine loveliness, were not always blindly accepted by the generations that had succeeded his own. But Downing's answer reassured him.

'I agree with you absolutely,' he said very gravely. 'I do not remember a more beautiful woman, even in the old days.'

This tribute to his taste sent Mr. Gumberg to bed in high good-humour; and as he made his slow progress along the passage, leaning on Downing's friendly arm, he kept muttering, 'Glad you met her—glad you met her.' So often are we inclined to rejoice at happenings which, if we knew more, we might regard as calamities.

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CHAPTER III

'. . . a queen
By virtue of her brow and breast ;
Not needing to be crowned, I mean.'
BROWNING.

WHEN Penelope Wantley became the mistress of Monk's Eype, she left the villa as she had always known it, for her sense of beauty compelled her to approve the few changes which had been made to the great bare rooms during her father's long tenure of the place. As child and as girl she had found there much that satisfied her craving for the romantic and the exquisite in nature and in art; and long after she was a grown-up woman the flagged terraces, each guarded by a moss-grown balustrade, broken at one end by steep stone steps which led from one rampart to another, commanding all the way down the blue-green and gray bars of moving water below, served as background to the memoried delights of her childhood.

Penelope the woman had but to withdraw herself from what was about her to see once more the child Penelope, watching with fascinated gaze the stone and marble denizens of the gardens and the wood. In the summer twilight, just before little Penelope went up to bed, the graceful water-nymphs sometimes came down from their pedestals on the bowling-green which lay beyond the western wing of the villa, and the malicious, teasing faun, leaving the spot from which he gazed

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over the changing seas, ranged at will through the little pine-wood edging the open down. Even in the daylight the little girl sometimes thought she caught glimpses of gentle green-capped fairies—a whole world of strange, uncanny folk—who played 'touch' and blind-man's buff among the hanging creepers and at the foot of each of the flower-laden bushes which covered the slopes of this enchanted garden.

In these fancies the young friends who occasionally came over to see her, riding their ponies or driving their governess-carts, from distant country-houses, had never any share. More was told to a boy with whom at one time little Penelope had been much thrown. David Winfrith, the son of a neighbouring clergyman, who, when shunned for no actual fault of his own, had seen himself and his only child received very kindly by Lord and Lady Wantley, was older than Penelope by those three or four years which in childhood count so much, and later count so little. He had spent more than one holiday at Monk's Eype, sharing Penelope's play-room, which, partly hollowed out of the cliff, was lifted a few feet above the beach by rude stone pillars. There a large solid table, filling up the whole space in front of the wide window, made a fine 'vantage-ground for the display of the boy's skill as toy-maker and boat-builder.

Penelope, looking back, associated David Winfrith with her earliest memories of Monk's Eype, and for her the villa, especially certain of the great rooms of which the furnishings had been so little disturbed for close on a hundred years, was instinct also with the thought and the vanished figure of her father, who, when wearied and cast down by being brought into contact with the misery he did so much to relieve, found in his western home a great source of consolation and peace.

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Lord Wantley, or rather his wife, had been among the first and most ardent patrons of the group of painters who chose to be known as the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. More than one of these had spent happy days at Monk's Eype, and it had been owing to the advice of the most famous survivor of the early P.R.B. that Penelope had been allowed, and even encouraged, to devote much of her early girlhood to the serious pursuit of art. How far her parents had been right her mother sometimes doubted; but there could be no doubt that the great artist had truly divined in the beautiful girl a touch of exceptional power—some would have called it by a rarer name. It was not his fault if such circumstances as youth, rank, beauty, and ultimately great wealth, had asserted their claims, and turned one who might have been a great woman artist into an amateur.

Therefore it was rather as a lover of beauty and as a woman, fully, if rather disdainfully, conscious of her own feminine supremacy, that Mrs. Robinson had been so far well content to leave the spacious rooms of her own, as it had been her father's, favourite home, in much the same order as when they had been arranged under the eye of her great-uncle Ludovic, known in local story as the Popish Lord Wantley.

There was a side of her nature which made her feel peculiarly at ease among the faded splendours of these Italian-looking rooms. Her tall figure, slenderly stately in its proportions; the small, well-poised head; clear-cut, delicate features; deep, troubled-looking blue eyes; masses of red-brown hair, drawn high above the broad low forehead, in the fashion worn when powdered locks lent charm to the plainest face—in short, her whole presence and individuality made a satisfying harmony with the faded brocades, the ivory inlaid chairs and

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tables, and the massive gilt dower-chests, which had no desecration to fear from their present owner's beautiful hands.

That Penelope could create as well as preserve beauty of surroundings—the one power seems nowadays as rare as the other—was seen in the room, half studio, half library, where, when at Monk's Eype, she chose to spend much of her time.

Situated at the extreme western end of the villa, on which, indeed, it still formed a strange excrescence, the room had been added to the main building at a time when Penelope's parents had been inclined to believe much more than they afterwards came to do in the power of eloquent speech. The substantial brick walls of the hall, as it was still called by some of the older servants, had witnessed curious gatherings, and heard the voices of many a famous lay-preacher dealing with schemes which, whether practical or nebulous, had all the same single purpose—that of leaving the world better than it had been before.

Penelope Wantley, as a little girl, had once been taken, when in Paris, to see a certain old lady, who had in her day played a considerable rôle in the brilliant society of the forties. The room in which the English visitors had been received made a deep impression on the child's imagination. The windows looked out on a fine old garden, along whose shady paths had once walked blind Châteaubriand, led by Madame Récamier; the walls were painted in that soft shade of blue which the turquoise is said to assume when a heart is untrue to its wearer, and which is of all tints that best suited to be a background, whether of human beings or of paintings; and the old lady's furniture had been hidden in what the little Penelope had likened to herself as white dimity overalls. Many years later,

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when Mrs. Robinson was arranging and transforming the one room at Monk's Eype which she felt at liberty to alter and to arrange after her own fancy, she followed, perhaps unconsciously, the scheme of colouring which had so much pleased her childish fancy. But whereas in the French lady's salon there had been no books—indeed, no sign that such a thing as literature existed in the world—books were not lacking at Monk's Eype. Had Penelope followed her own natural instinct, perhaps she would have kept even more closely than she had done to the Frenchwoman's example; but, though she prided herself on being one of the most unconventional of human beings, she was naturally influenced by the atmosphere in which she had always moved and lived.

'By Penelope's books you may know, not Penelope, but Penelope's friends,' her cousin, Lord Wantley, had once observed. He had been tempted to substitute the word 'adorers' for 'friends,' but had checked himself in time, recollecting that the man with whom he was speaking was one to whom the warmer term was notoriously applicable.

As to what the books were—for there was no lack of variety—French novels, Swedish plays printed in the language in which they had been written, much old and modern verse, mock-erudite volumes, and pamphlets of the type that are written a hundredfold round whatever happens to be the fad of the moment, warred here and there with a substantial Blue-Book, or, stranger still, with some volume which contained deep and painful inquiries into the gloomier problems of life. Such were the contents of the small book-shelves, which, by a curious conceit of the present owner of Monk's Eype, framed the tall narrow door connecting her studio with the rest of the building.

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Lord Wantley would also have told you that his brilliant cousin never read. That, however, would have been unjust and untrue. Mrs. Robinson, however deeply absorbed in other things, always found time to glance through the books her friends were good enough to send her. Sometimes, indeed, she felt considerable interest in what she had been bidden to read, and almost always she showed an extraordinary, if passing, insight into the author's meaning; but to tell the truth, and I hope that in so doing I shall not prejudice my readers against my heroine, she was one of those women, a greater number than is in these days suspected, who regard literature much as the modern civilized man of the world regards art. Such a man goes to those exhibitions which have been specially mentioned to him as worthy of notice, but even to the best of these it would never occur to him to go, save with a pleasant companion, a second time; and in buying, it is always the expert on whom he leans, not his own taste and judgment. In the same way Penelope was always willing to read any volume which her world was discussing at the moment, but she would have been a happier woman had she been able sometimes to take up, not necessarily a classic, but at any rate a book of yesterday rather than of to-day.

But if literature was in her room only used in a decorative sense, the water-colours and drawings, the casts, and the bas-reliefs, which were so hung as to form a low dado down the whole length of the studio, were one and all of remarkable quality, for here you touched the quick reality of Penelope's life. In these matters she needed no advice, for, while as an artist she was truly humble, she only cared to measure herself with the best.

There was something pathetic in this beautiful

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woman's desire to discover hidden genius; only certain French painters with whom she herself from time to time still studied could have told how generous and how intelligent was the help she was ever ready to bestow on those of her fellow art-students whose means were more slender than their talent. It was to these, so rich and yet so poor, that her heart really warmed; it was on them that she bestowed the time that she could spare from herself. Sometimes, when she realized the vast sum which had been sunk in the Melancthon Settlement, she would feel a pang at the thought of what so much money would have done, if not for art, at least for those who were studying art.

And yet the room which was specially her own showed very few signs of artistic occupation. True, on a plain table were set out paint-boxes, palettes, sketch-books; but an unobservant visitor might have come and gone without knowing that the woman he had come to see ever took up a pencil or used a brush.

The broad low dado, composed of comparatively small water-colours, drawings, and bas-reliefs, was twice broken, each time by a glazed oil-painting, each time by the portrait of a woman.

To the left of the book-framed door, hung a painting of Penelope's mother, Lady Wantley. At every period of her life she had been one of those women whom artists delight to paint, and the great artist whose work this was had often had the privilege. But perhaps owing to certain peculiar circumstances connected with this portrait, it was the one of them that he himself preferred. The painting had been a commission from the sitter herself; she had wished to give this portrait to her husband on his sixtieth birthday, and together she and the great artist her friend, who had once owed her and Lord Wantley much in the way of sympathy

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and encouragement, had desired to suggest in the composition something which would be symbolic of what had been an almost ideal wedded life.

Then, without warning, when the scheme had been scarcely sketched out, had come Lord Wantley's death, away from home, and the portrait, scarcely begun, had been hastily put away, counted by the artist as among those half-finished things destined to remain tragic in their incompleteness. But some months later his old friend and patroness, clad in no widow's weeds, but in the curious black-and-white flowing draperies, and close Quakerish bonnet, which had become to her friends and acquaintances almost a portion of her identity, had come to see him, and he learnt that she wished her portrait should be finished.

'He always disliked the unfinished, the incomplete,' she had said rather wistfully; and the artist had carried out her wish, finding little to alter, though, perhaps, in the interval between the first and the second sitting the colourless skin of the sitter had lost something of its clearness, the heavy-lidded gray eyes had gained somewhat in dimness, and the hair from dark brown had become almost white. The painter himself substituted, for the lilies which were to have filled in part of the background, a sheaf of rosemary.

The other painting had a less intimate history; and the only two people who ever ventured to criticise Penelope had both, not in any concert with one another, suggested that another place might be found for the kitcat portrait, by Romney, of Mrs. Robinson's famous namesake, than that where it now hung in juxtaposition with that of Lady Wantley.

Beneath this last portrait, holding herself upright on the low white couch, a girl, Cecily Wake, sat waiting.

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She looked round the room with an affectionate appreciation of its special charm—a charm destined to be less apparent when seen as a frame to its brilliant mistress, who had the gift, so often the perquisite of beauty, of making places as well as people seem out of perspective. Cecily herself, all unconsciously, completed the low-toned picture by adding a delicious touch of fragrant youth.

Only Mrs. Robinson in all good faith considered Cecily Wake pretty. True, she had the abundant hair, the clear eyes, the white teeth, which seemed to Mr. Gumberg so essential to feminine loveliness; but beautiful she was not—indeed, none of her friends denied her those qualities which the plain are always being told count so much more than beauty: that is, abundant kindliness, a sterling honesty, and a certain fiery loyalty which both touched and diverted those who knew her.

To be worshipped in the heroic manner—that is, to be the object of hero-worship—is almost always pleasant, especially if the divinity is conscious that he or she has indeed done something to deserve it. Penelope Robinson had rescued her young kinswoman from a mode of living which had been peculiarly trying and unsuitable to one of an active, ardent mind; more, she had provided her with work—something to do which Cecily had felt was worth the doing. As all this had not been achieved without what Penelope considered a great deal of trouble on her part, she did not feel herself wholly undeserving of the deep affection lavished on her by the girl whom she chose to call cousin, though in truth the relationship was a very distant one.

Mrs. Robinson had just now the more reason to be satisfied both with her own conduct and with that of

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her friend. When it had been settled that Cecily should spend a portion of her holiday—for she was one of those happy people who, even when grown up, have holidays—at Monk's Eype, it had not occurred to Penelope to include in her invitation the aunt from whom she had rescued her friend, and she had been utterly surprised when Cecily had refused in a short, rather childishly-worded note. 'Of course, I should like to come to you, and it is very kind of you to ask me, but I cannot leave my aunt. She has been so looking forward to my holiday, and, after all, I shall enjoy being at Brighton, near my old convent.' Such had been Cecily's answer to her dear Penelope's invitation, and, though she had shed bitter tears over it, she had sent off her letter without consulting the old lady, to whom she was sacrificing so great a joy.

Happily for the world, there is a kind of unselfishness which, as a French theologian rather pungently put it, 'fait des petits,' and Mrs. Robinson's answer had been responsive. 'Of course, I meant your aunt to come, too,' she wrote, lying. 'I enclose a note for her. I shall be very glad to see her here.' There she wrote the truth, for only exceptional people object to meet those whom they have vanquished in fair fight.

This was why Cecily Wake, supremely content, was sitting, late in the afternoon of a hot August day, in her cousin's pretty room. The glass doors were wide open, and from the flagged terrace blew in the warm, gentle sea-wind. Cecily was still so young in body and in mind that she really preferred work to play; nevertheless, playtime was very pleasant, especially now that she was beginning to feel a little tired after the long journey from town, and the more fatiguing experience

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of seeing to the unpacking of her aunt's boxes and establishing her in bed.

The elder Miss Wake was one of those women who, perhaps not altogether unfortunately for their friends, enjoy poor health, and make it the excuse for seldom doing anything which either annoys or bores them. Occasionally, however, to her own surprise and disgust, Poor Health the servant became Ill Health the master, and to-day outraged nature had insisted on having the last word. This was why the aunt, really tired, and suffering from a real headache, was lying upstairs, thinking, not ungratefully, that Cecily, in spite of many modern peculiarities and headstrong theories of life, was certainly in time of illness as comforting a presence as might have been that ideal niece the aunt would fain have had her be.

Perhaps the great characteristic of youth is the power of ardently looking forward to the enjoyment of an ideal pleasure. To retain even the power of keen disappointment is to retain youth. Cecily Wake had longed for this visit to Monk's Eype much as a different kind of girl longs for her first ball, but, instead of feeling disappointed at being received with the news that her hostess, after making all kinds of small arrangements for her own and her aunt's comfort, had gone out riding, she had felt relieved that the meeting between her aunt and Mrs. Robinson had been put off till the former had regained her usual tart serenity.

The girl enjoyed these moments of quiet in what was, to one who had had few opportunities of living amid beautiful surroundings, the most charming room she had ever seen. Most of all, she delighted in one exquisite singularity which it owed to the fancy of Lady Wantley. Not long after it had been built, and while it was still being used as a lecture-hall, Lady

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Wantley had had an oblong opening effected in the brickwork just above the plain stone mantelpiece. This opening, filled with clear glass, was ever bringing into the room, as no mere window could have done, a sense of nearness to the breezy stretch of down, studded with gnarled, wind-twisted pine-trees, standing out darkly against the irregular coast-line which stretched itself with many a fantastic turn towards Plymouth.

Cecily had not long to wait. The tall book-framed door suddenly opened, and Mrs. Robinson walked swiftly in. As she came down the room, a smile of real pleasure and welcome lighting up her face, Cecily was almost startled by the look of vigorous grace and vitality with which the figure was instinct, and which was accentuated rather than lessened by the short skirt, the dun-coloured coat, and hard hat, which fashion, for once wedded to sense, has decreed should be the modern riding-dress. Almost involuntarily the girl exclaimed: 'How well you look!'

'Do I?' Penelope sat down close to Cecily; then she leant across and lightly kissed the young girl's round cheek. 'I am so glad to see you, and not sorry the aunt is too tired to come down. I ought to look well after a long ride with David Winfrith. You know, he has just been made Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs in the new Government.'

'Oh, is he here, too?' Cecily spoke disappointedly. She had hoped, rather foolishly, that Penelope would be alone at Monk's Eype.

'No, he's not staying here. His own home is close by. We must go over there some time and see his old father; you would like him, Cecily, better than you do the son.' She hesitated, then continued in the curiously modulated voice which was one of her peculiarities: 'We had such a

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ride—such discussion—such a quarrel—such a reconciliation! Oh yes, I feel much better than I did yesterday.'

'Was it about the Settlement?' Cecily fixed her thoughtful, honest eyes on her friend's face.

'Our discussion? No, no! My dear child, you must forget all about the Settlement while you are here. I want to tell you about the people you are going to meet. First, there's my mother, who in theory will spend a good deal of time with your aunt, though in practice I shall be surprised if they often speak to one another, for they are too utterly unlike even to differ. Then there's my cousin, Lord Wantley. I'm afraid you won't like him very much, for he makes fun of me, and of the Settlement, too. No, it isn't fair to tell you that. I want you to make friends with him. You must spare him some of the pity you are so ready to lavish on poor people who are unhappy or unlucky—Ludovic has been rather unlucky, and he has a perfect genius for making himself unhappy.'

'Lord Wantley is Catholic, is he not?' Cecily spoke with some hesitation. She knew her aunt had told her something, but she could not remember exactly what it was.

Penelope looked up from the task of unbuttoning her gloves. 'No, he's nothing of the kind,' she said decidedly, 'but perhaps he ought to be. Who knows? —Miss Wake may perhaps convert him,' she smiled rather satirically. Cecily looked troubled. She was beginning to realize that her holiday would be very different from what she had hoped and expected it to be. 'Seriously, I want you to interest him in the Settlement. We cannot expect David Winfrith to go on doing as much for us as he has been doing. Besides'—she hesitated, and a shadow crossed the radiant face—'I am thinking of making certain arrangements which will greatly alter his position in the whole affair.'

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'But what would the Settlement do without Mr. Winfrith?' There was utter dismay in the tone.

'Well, we needn't discuss all that now. I only mean that Ludovic is what people used to call a man of parts, and I have never been able to see why he should not do more for me—I mean, of course, in this one matter—than he has done as yet. He has led a very selfish life.' Penelope spoke with much vigour. 'He has never done anything for anybody, not even for himself, and what energy he has had to spare has always been expended in the wrong direction. The only time I have ever known him show any zeal was just after my father's death, when he presented the chapel of the monastery at Beacon Abbas, near here, with a window in memory of *his* father.' A whimsical smile flitted across her face. 'I rather admired his pluck, but of course if my mother had been another kind of woman it would have meant that we should have broken with him. For my father, as indeed all the world knew, had a great prejudice against Roman Catholics, and Ludovic could not have done a thing which would have annoyed him more.'

Cecily did not at all agree, but made no comment. Instead, she observed, diffidently, 'Well, in any case, I will try and interest him in the Settlement. I have brought down the report.'

A delightful dimple came and went on Mrs. Robinson's curved cheek. 'I think your spoken remarks,' she said seriously, 'will impress Ludovic more than the printed report; in fact, he would probably only pretend to read it. Most people only pretend to read reports.'

She got up, and walked to the plain deal table where lay a half-finished sketch of the flagged terrace and the pierced stone parapet, and opened the drawer where she kept various odds and ends connected with her work. 'Tell me,' she said a little hurriedly, her face

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bent over the open drawer as if seeking for something she had mislaid—'tell me, Cecily, have you had any weddings at the Settlement? In my time there was much marrying and giving in marriage.'

'So there is now.' Cecily was eager to prove that the Settlement was not deteriorating. Even to her loyal heart there was something strange and unsatisfactory in Mrs. Robinson's apparent lack of interest in the work to which she devoted so considerable a share of her large income each year. That her friend should shrink from mentioning, more than was necessary, the place which had been so intimately bound up with the tragedy of her husband's early and heroic death was perhaps only natural.

Cecily had never seen Melancthon Robinson, but she had of late been constantly thrown in company with those over whom even his vanished personality exercised an extraordinary influence. The fact that Penelope Wantley had been his chosen coadjutor, that she was now, in spite of any appearance to the contrary, his ever-mourning widow, was never absent from the girl's mind. When the two young women were together this belief added a touch of reverence to the affection with which she regarded her brilliant friend. Therefore she blushed with pleasure even to hear this passing careless word of interest in the place and in the human beings round whom she was now weaving so much innocent and practical romance.

In her eagerness Cecily also got up, and stood the other side of the table, over whose open drawer Penelope was still bending her head. 'Perhaps you remember the Tobutts—the man who got crushed by a barrel? Well, his daughter, who is in my cooking class, is engaged to a very nice drayman. She is such a good girl, and I——'

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Penelope suddenly raised her head. She had at last found what she had been seeking.

Cecily stopped speaking somewhat abruptly. She felt a little mortified, a little injured, as we are all apt to do when we feel that we have been talking to space, for Mrs. Robinson's face was filled with the spirit of withdrawal. It often was so when anything reminded her of that fragment of her past life to which she looked back with a sense of almost angry amazement. And yet she had surely heard what her companion had been saying, for her next words showed it.

'A good girl,' she repeated slowly; then, hurrying over the words as if anxious they should get themselves said and heard: 'I wish you to give to her, or to any other of our girls you really like, and whose young man you think well of, this wedding ring. Don't say it comes from me. And, Cecily, one thing more—you need not tell me to whom you have given it.'

Poor Cecily! perhaps she was slow-witted, but no thought of the true significance of the little incident crossed her mind. Mrs. Robinson was famed among the workers of the Settlement for her odd, intelligent little acts of kindness, accordingly a pretty romance somewhat in this wise thistle-downed itself on the girl's brain: Characters—Penelope and Poor Lady. Poor Lady—stress of poverty—having to part with cherished possessions, has good luck to meet Mrs. Robinson, who buys from her, among other things—of course at a fancy price—her wedding-ring. Remembering that gold wedding-rings are prized heirlooms in the neighbourhood of the Settlement——

'It would greatly add to the value of the gift,' Cecily said shyly, 'if I might say it came from you.'

'No, no, no!' Mrs. Robinson spoke with sharp decision; her blue eyes narrowed and darkened in

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displeasure. 'My dear child, you don't understand. Come!'—she made an effort to speak lightly, even caressingly—'do not let us say anything more about it. Then, looking rather coldly into the other's startled eyes, she added: 'I have never before known you wanting in *la politesse du cœur*. Haven't you heard the expression before? No? Well, it was a famous Frenchman's definition of tact.'

She laid her left hand on the girl's arm, and, as they moved together towards the door, Cecily became aware that the hand lying on her arm was ringless.

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CHAPTER IV

'The inner side of every cloud
Is bright and shining :
I therefore turn my clouds about,
And always wear them inside out,
To show the lining !'

CECILY WAKE had not been brought up by her aunt. Even before the death of her father, which had followed that of her mother at an interval of some years, she had been placed in one of those convent schools which, in certain exceptional circumstances, take quite little children as boarders. Accordingly, till the age of eighteen, the only home she had ever known was the large old-fashioned Georgian manor-house near Brighton, which had been adapted to suit the requirements of the French nuns who had first gone there in 1830.

As time went on that branch of the Order which had settled in England had become cosmopolitan in character. Among those who joined it were many Englishwomen, one of them a sister of Cecily's mother. But the Gallic nationality dies hard, even in those who claim to be citizens of the heavenly kingdom, and Cecily's convent remained French in tradition, in methods of education, and in the importance attached by the nuns to such accomplishments as bed-making, sewing, cooking, and feminine deportment. They also taught the duty of rather indiscriminate charity, holding, with the saint who had been their founder, that it

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is better to give alms to nine impostors rather than risk refusing the tenth just beggar; but this interpretation of a Divine precept was unconsciously abandoned by Cecily after she had become intimately acquainted with the conditions of life which surrounded the Melancthon Settlement. Even there she remained, to the regret of her colleagues, curiously open-handed, and—what was worse, for a principle was involved—she always, during her connection with the Settlement, persisted in saying that she herself, were she in the place of the deserving seeker for help, would rather receive half a crown in specie than five shillings' worth of goods chosen by someone else!

As for education, in the modern sense of the word, Cecily was, and remained, very deficient; many subjects now taught to every school-girl were never even mentioned within the convent walls, and this was specially true of all the 'ologies, including theology. On the other hand, Cecily and her school-fellows were taught to read, write, and talk with accuracy two languages. The daughter of a man who had left his mark on English literature, and whose children had one by one returned to the old fold, taught them English composition, as she herself had been taught it by a good old-fashioned governess. This nun, a curious original person, also introduced the elder girls under her charge to much of the sound early Victorian fiction with which she herself had been familiar in her youth.

The Superioress, who reserved to herself the supervision of all the French classes, was a fine vigorous old woman, the daughter of a Legitimist who had been among the leaders of the Duchesse de Berri's abortive rising. As was natural, she held and taught very strong views concerning the state, past and present, of her beloved native country. To her everything which

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had taken place in France before the Revolution had been more or less well done, while all that had followed it was evil and reprobate. Without going so far as to show Louis XIV. 'étudiant les plans du Général La Vallière et du Colonel Montespan,' she completely hid from her pupils the ugly side of the old régime, and exhibited the Sun King as among the most glorious descendants of St. Louis. To her the romance of French history was all woven in and about Versailles, the town where she had herself spent her girlhood, and on the steps of whose palace her own uncle had fallen in defending the apartments of Marie Antoinette on the historic 5th of October. The many heroic episodes of the revolution and of the Vendean wars were as familiar to this old nun, who had spent more than half her long life in England, as if she had herself taken part in them, and she delighted in stirring her own and her pupils' blood by their recital.

So Cecily's heroes and heroines all wore doublet and hose, or hoops, patches, and powder. Most of them spoke French, though in the spacious chambers of her imagination there was room left for Charles I., his Cavaliers, and their valiant wives and daughters.

Equally real to the girl were the saints and martyrs with whose histories she was naturally as familiar, and it was characteristic of her sunny and kindly nature that she early adopted as her patroness and object of special veneration that child-martyr whose very name is unknown, and to whom was accordingly given by the Fathers that of Theophila—the friend of God. Cecily, knowing very well what it was to be without those ties with which most little girls are blessed, thought it probable that even in heaven St. Theophila must sometimes feel a little lonely, especially when she compared herself with such popular

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saints—from the human point of view—as St. Theresa, St. Catherine, St. Anthony, and St. Francis.

Perhaps some of the nuns, who in the course of long years had grown to regard Cecily Wake as being as integral a part of their community as they were themselves, hoped that she would finally follow their own excellent example. This was specially the wish of the old house-sister who had been appointed the nurse of the motherless little girl whose arrival at the convent had been the source of such interest and amusement to its inmates. But the Mother Superior cherished no such hopes, or, rather, no such illusion. Not long before Cecily left the convent for the 'world'—as all that lies beyond their gates is generally styled by religious—the nuns spent a portion of their recreation in discussing the girl who was in so special a sense their own child, and whose approaching departure caused some among them keen pain. The Mother Superior heard all that was said, and then, speaking in her native tongue, and with the decision that marked her slightest utterances, observed: 'Cette petite fera le bonheur de quelque honnête homme. Elle est faite pour cela.' After a short pause, and with a twinkle in her small brown eyes, she had added: 'Et il ne sera pas à plaindre, celui-là!'

Cecily's first introduction to the world was not of a nature to make her fall in love with its pomps and vanities. The busy, cheerful, conventual household, largely composed of girls of her own age, where each day was lived according to rule, every hour bringing its appointed duty or pleasure, was an unfortunate preparation for life in a small Mayfair lodging, spent in sole company with a nervous elderly woman, who, while capable of making a great sacrifice of comfort in order to do her duty by her great-niece, was yet very unwilling

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to have the even tenor of her life upset more than was absolutely necessary.

The elder Miss Wake, from her own point of view, had not neglected Cecily during the years the girl had been at school. She had made a point of spending each year the Christmas fortnight at Brighton, and of entertaining the child for one week of that fortnight. During those successive eight days the elder lady had always been on her best behaviour, and Cecily easy to amuse. Then, also, the child had many school-fellows in Brighton, and her aunt always took her once each year to the play. Cecily looked back to these brief yearly holidays with pleasure, and when about to leave the convent she looked forward to life in London as to an existence composed of a perpetual round of pleasant meetings with old school-fellows, of evenings at the theatre, varied with visits and benefactions to Arcadian poor, for Cecily, after a sincere childish fashion, was anxious to do her duty to those whom she esteemed to be less fortunate than herself.

The reality had proved, as realities are apt to do, very different from what she had imagined. The elder Miss Wake, like so many of those women born in a day when no career—and it might almost be said no pleasant mode of life—was open to gentlewomen of really straitened means, had learnt to content herself with a way of existence which lacked every source of healthy excitement, interest, and pleasure. Her one amusement, her only anodyne, was novel-reading. For her and her like were written the three-volume love-stories, full of sentiment and mild adventure, for which the modern spinster no longer has a use. When absorbed in one of these romances, she was able to put aside, to push, as it were, into the background of her mind, her most incessant, though never mentioned, subject of thought. This was

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the problem of how to make her small income suffice, not only to her simple wants, but to the upkeep of the consideration she thought due to one of her name and connections. Miss Theresa Wake never forgot that she belonged to a family which, in addition to being almost the oldest in England, would now have been doubtless great and powerful, had it not remained faithful to a creed of which the profession in the past had meant the loss of both property and rank. Settling down in London at the age of forty, after a bitter quarrel with her only remaining brother, a small squire in the North of England, she had taken the ground-floor of a lodging-house of which the landlord and his wife had come from her own native village, and therefore grudged her none of that respect which she looked for from people in their position.

In their more prosperous days the Wakes had married into various great Northern families, and Miss Wake was thus connected with several of her Mayfair neighbours. For a while after her removal to London she had kept in touch with a certain number of people whose names spelled power and consideration in Yorkshire and Cumberland, but as the years went on, and as her income lowered some pounds each year, she gradually broke with most of those whose acquaintanceship with her had only been based, as she well knew, on a good-natured acceptance of the claim of distant kinship. From some few she continued, rather resentfully, to accept such tokens of remembrance as boxes of flowers and presents of game; an ever-narrowing circle left cards at the beginning of the season, and fewer still would now and again come in and spend half an hour in her dreary sitting-room. These last, oddly enough, almost always belonged to the newer generation, the children of those whose parents she had once called

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friends; when a stroke of good fortune had come to these young people, sometimes when a feeling of happy vitality almost oppressed them, a call on Miss Wake took the shape of a small dole to fate.

There had been in the very long ago a marriage between a Wake and an Oglethorpe. Lord and Lady Wantley had made this fact the excuse to be persistently courteous and kind to the peculiar spinster lady, and in this matter Penelope had followed her parents' example. Two or three times a year—in fact, it might almost be said, whenever she was in London—Penelope Robinson shed the radiance of her brilliant presence on the dowdy little lodging, always paying Miss Wake the compliment of coming at the right time, that is, between four and six, and of being beautifully dressed. On one such occasion, when she might surely have been forgiven for cutting short her call, for she was on the way to a royal garden-party, she had actually prolonged her visit nearly forty minutes!

Yet another time she had come in for only a moment, but bringing with her a gift which had deeply moved Miss Wake, for the noble water-colour drawing seemed to bear into the dingy London sitting-room a breath of the rolling hills and limitless dales of that tract of country which lies in Yorkshire on the border of Westmorland, and which the old lady still felt to be home. 'I thought you would like it,' Penelope had exclaimed eagerly. 'I went over to Cargill Force from Oglethorpe, and I chose the place——'

'I know,' had interrupted Miss Wake, her voice trembling a little in spite of herself. 'You must have done it from the mound by the Old Lodge. I recognise the fir-tree, though it must have grown a good deal since I was there last. The hills seem further off than they used to do years ago, and, of course, we do not

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often have such bad weather as that you have shown here. There are often long days without any rain.'

Penelope had driven away a little chilled. 'I wonder if she would have preferred a photograph,' she said to herself. But Miss Wake would not have preferred a photograph. She saw not Nature as her cousin, Mrs. Robinson, saw it, and she by no means wished she could; but she found herself looking more often, and always with increasing conviction of its truth, at the painting which showed the storm-god let loose over the wild expanse of country which formed the background to all her early life and associations. Finally Miss Wake hung the water-colour in the place of honour over her mantelpiece, where she could herself always see it from where she sat nursing both her real and her fancied ailments.

This slight account of the elder Miss Wake will perhaps make it clear how grievous was her perplexity when she decided that it was her duty to take charge of her now grown-up niece. The idea that the girl might, and indeed should, work for her livelihood never presented itself to the aunt's mind, and yet the matter had been one that grimly reduced itself to pounds, shillings, and pence. Cecily's income was the interest on a thousand pounds, and her bare board and bed, to say nothing of clothes, must cost nearly twice that sum. Miss Wake did the only thing possible: she gave up all those necessities which she regarded as luxuries, but sometimes she allowed herself to dwell on the possibility that her niece would either marry, or develop, as would be so convenient, a religious vocation.

The months that followed her arrival in London had the effect of gradually transforming Cecily Wake from an unthinking child into a thoughtful young woman. Her energy and power of action, finding no outlet, flowed

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back and vitalized her mind and nature. For the first time she learnt to think, to observe, and to form her own conclusions. She was only allowed to go out alone to the church close by, and to a curious old circulating library, originally founded solely with a view of providing its subscribers with Roman Catholic literature, but which, as time had gone on, had gradually widened its scope, especially as regarded works of history, memoirs, and biographies. Novels were forbidden to the girl, according to the strict rule which had obtained in Miss Wake's own girlhood, and when Cecily felt the dreary monotony of her life almost intolerable, she would slip off to church for half an hour, and return to her aunt, if not cheerful, at least submissive.

More than once certain of the Jesuit priests, who had long known and respected the elder Miss Wake, had tried to persuade her to allow her niece a little more liberty and natural amusement. But, greatly as the old lady valued the friendship of those whom she considered as both holy and learned, she did not regard herself at all bound to accept their advice as to how she should direct the life of her young charge. Above all, she courteously but firmly declined for her niece any introductions to other young people. 'Later on I shall perhaps be glad to avail myself of your kindness,' she would answer a certain kindly old priest, who had it in his power to open many doors; and he, in spite of a deserved reputation for knowledge of the world and the human heart, never divined Miss Wake's chief reason for declining his help—the fact, simple, bald, unanswerable, that there was no money to buy Cecily even the plainest of what the old lady, to herself, called 'party frocks.'

In time Cecily, growing pale from want of air, heavy-eyed from over-reading, and utterly dispirited from lack

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of something to do, was secretly beginning to evolve a scheme of going back to her beloved convent as pupil-teacher, when, on a most eventful March day, Mrs. Robinson, driving up Park Street on her way back from a wedding, suddenly bethought herself that it was a long time since she had called on her old cousin.

To Cecily Wake, her first meeting with the woman to whom she was to give such faithful affection and long-enduring friendship ever remained vivid. Mrs. Robinson had inherited from her mother, Lady Wantley, the instinct of dress, that gift which enables a woman to achieve distinction of appearance with the simplest as with the most splendid materials and accessories. She rarely wore jewels, but her taste inclined, far more than that of Lady Wantley had ever done, to the magnificent. Herself an artist, she dressed, when it was possible to do so, in a fashion which would have delighted the eyes of the Italian painters of the Renaissance, and it was perhaps fortunate, in these gray modern days, that her taste was checked and kept in bounds by the fact, often only remembered by her when at her dressmaker's, that she was a widow.

To Melancthon Robinson's mother, a stern-faced, plain old woman, to whom the marriage of her revered only son had been a bitter disenchantment, deepening not lessening since his death, Penelope's dress and appearance were an ever-recurring outrage. She would have preferred, on the part of her daughter-in-law, the flaunting of bright colours, the wearing of sparkling gems; the subdued tints, the changes rung on delicate lavender, pale grays and ivory whites, moved the elder woman to greater anger than would have done, the wearing of bright reds and yellows. Too well she knew that her son, if not absolutely forgotten, was

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rarely in Penelope's thoughts, and these outward tributes of respect to his memory were to his mother full of hypocritical irony.

On the day that Mrs. Robinson, calling on Miss Wake, first met Cecily, the wedding to which she had been was the excuse for a white velvet gown of which the brilliancy was softened and attenuated by a cape of silver-gray fur. But the two women she had come to see were in no mood to cavil at their lovely visitor's appearance. To the elder lady the sight of her young kinswoman always recalled—she could not have told you why—the few purple patches which had lightened her rather dull youth. The night after seeing Penelope she would dream of her first ball, again see the great hall of a famous Northern stronghold filled with the graceful forms of early Victorian belles, and the stalwart figures of young men whose brilliant uniforms were soon to be tarnished and blood-stained on Crimean battle-fields.

As for Cecily, the girl's lonely heart was stormed by the first kindly glance of Mrs. Robinson's blue eyes, and it wholly surrendered to the second, emphasized as it was by the words: 'You should have written and told me of this new cousin; I should have come sooner to see you both.'

Then and there, after all due civilities to the aunt had been performed, the young girl had been carried off, taken for an enchanting drive, not only round the dreary, still treeless park, where, every alternate morning, Miss Theresa Wake and Cecily walked for an hour by the clock, but through streets which, even to the convent-bred girl, were peopled with the shades of those who had once dwelt there. Finally, after a long vista of duller, meaner streets, there was a halt before the wide doors of a long, low building, of which the latticed

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windows and white curtains struck a curious note of cleanliness and refinement in the squalid neighbourhood.

'Is this a monastery or convent?' Cecily asked.

Penelope smiled. 'No, but it is a very fair imitation of one. This is the Melancthon Settlement. Perhaps you have heard of it? No? Ah, well, this place was built by my husband.' Penelope's voice became graver in quality. She added, after a short pause: 'I lived here during the whole of my married life, and of course I still come whenever I'm in town and can find time to do so.' Something in the girl's face made her add hastily: 'Not as often as I ought to do.' But to her young companion this added word was but a further sign of the humility, the thinking ill of self, which she had always been taught is one of the clearest marks of sanctity.

Cecily's mind was filled with empty niches, waiting to be filled with those heroes and saints with whom she might have the good fortune to meet in her pilgrimage though life. Straightway, to-day, one of these niches was filled by Penelope Robinson, and though the radiant figure sometimes tottered—indeed, once or twice nearly fell off its pedestal altogether—Cecily's belief in her certainly helped the poor latter-day saint, after her first and worst fit of tottering was over, to live up to the reputation which had come to her unsought.

The large panelled hall sitting-room to which the outside doors of the Settlement gave almost direct access, and of which the sole ornament, if such it could be called, consisted of a fine half-length portrait of a young man whose auburn hair and pale, luminous eyes were those of the typical enthusiast and dreamer, was soon filled with an eager little crowd of men and

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women, who, as if drawn by a magic wand, hastened from every part of the large building to welcome Mrs. Robinson. One slight and very pretty girl, whose short curly hair made her look somewhat like a charming boy, struck Cecily as very oddly dressed, for she wore a long, straight, snuff-coloured gown, and a string of yellow beads in guise of sash. Cecily much preferred the look of an older and quieter-mannered woman, who, after having shaken hands with Mrs. Robinson, disappeared for some moments, coming back laden with a large tea-tray.

'You see,' said the girl in the snuff-coloured gown—'you see, we wait on ourselves.'

'Then there are no servants here?' Cecily spoke rather shyly. She thought the Settlement quite strangely like a convent.

'Oh yes, of course there are; but tea is such an easy meal to get ready. Anyone can make tea.'

Mrs. Robinson had sat down close to the wide fireplace; her face, resting on her two clasped hands, shone whitely against the gray, flickering background formed by the flame and smoke of the log fire, while her fur cape, thrown back, revealed the velvet gown which formed a patch of soft, pure colour in the twilit room.

She listened silently to what first one, and then another, of those round her came forward to say, and Cecily noticed that again and again came the words, 'We asked Mr. Winfrith,' 'Mr. Winfrith considered,' 'Mr. Winfrith says.' Suddenly Mrs. Robinson turned, and, addressing the curly-headed girl, said quickly: 'Daphne, will you show Miss Wake round the Settlement? I think it would interest her, and I have to discuss a little business with Mr. Hammond and Mrs. Pomfret.'

Cecily was disappointed. She would so much rather

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have stayed on in the hall, listening, in the deepening twilight, to talk and discussions which vaguely interested her. But she realized that the girl called Daphne (what a pretty, curious name!—none of the girls at the convent had been called Daphne) felt also disappointed at this banishment from Mrs. Robinson's presence, and she admired the readiness with which the other turned and led the way into the broad stone cloister out of which many of the rooms of the Settlement opened.

As Daphne walked she talked. Sometimes her explanations of the use to which the various rooms through which she led her companion were put might have been addressed to a little child or to a blind person. Such, for instance, her remark in the refectory: 'This is where we eat our breakfast, lunch, and supper —everything but tea, which we take in the hall.'

Now and again she would give Cecily her views on the graver social problems of the moment. Once, while standing in the very pretty and charmingly arranged sitting-room, which was, she proudly said, her very own, she suddenly asked her first question: 'Does not this remind you of a convent cell?' But she did not wait for an answer. 'We aim,' she went on, 'and I think we succeed, in preserving all that was best in the old monastic system, while doing away with all that was corrupt and absurd. Personally, I much regret that we do not wear a distinctive dress; in fact, before I made up my mind to join the Settlement, I designed what I thought to be an appropriate costume.' She looked down complacently. 'This is it. Does it not remind you of the Franciscan habit? You see the idea? The yellow beads round my waist recall the rosary which the monks always wore, and which I suppose they wear now,' she added doubtfully.

'Oh yes,' said Cecily, 'but not round their waists.'

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'I hesitated rather as to which dress would be the most appropriate, and which would look best. But brown, if a trying colour to most people, has always suited me very well, and, though perhaps you do not know it, the Franciscans had at one time quite a close connection with England. I mean of course before the Reformation. Monks had such charming taste. One of my uncles has a delightful country-house which was once a monastery. Now you have seen, I think, almost everything worth seeing about the Settlement. I wonder, though, whether you would care to look into our Founder's room? It is only used by Mr. Hammond when he is doing the accounts, or seeing someone on particular business. I am sure Melancthon Robinson would have liked him to use it always, but he hardly ever goes into it. I can't understand that feeling, can you? I should think it such a privilege to have been the friend of such a man!'

But Cecily hardly heard the words, for she was looking about her with eager interest, trying to reconstitute the personality of the man who had dwelt where she now stood, and who had been Mrs. Robinson's beloved—her husband, her master. Severely simple in all its appointments, two of the walls of the plain square room were lined with oak bookcases, filled to overflowing, one long line of curiously-bound volumes specially attracting the eye.

'Do you know what those are?' asked Daphne; and Cecily, surprised, realized that her companion awaited her answer with some eagerness.

'Do you mean those books?' she said.

The other girl smiled triumphantly. 'Yes. Well, they are Blue-Books. When people talk to me of the Settlement, and criticise the work that is done here, I merely ask them *one* question. I say, "Have you ever

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read a Blue-Book?" Of course they nearly always have to answer, "No," and then I know that their opinion is worth nothing. I must confess,' she added, honestly enough, 'that I myself had never even seen a Blue-Book till I came here. Mr. Winfrith made me read one, and I was *so* surprised. I thought it would be such tremendously hard work, but really it was very easy, for I found it was made up of the remarks of quite commonplace people.'

'And have you read all these right through?' asked Cecily, looking with awe at the long line of tall volumes.

'Oh no! how could I have found time? After I had read the one I did read, I talked it well over with Mr. Winfrith, and he said he didn't think it would be worth while for me ever to read another. Of course I asked him if he thought I ought just to glance through a few more—for I was most anxious to fit myself for the work of the Settlement—but he said, No, it would only be waste of time.'

'It must be very interesting, working among poor people and teaching them things,' said Cecily wistfully. 'I suppose you show them how to sew and mend, and darn and cook?'

Daphne looked at her, surprised. 'Oh no,' she said in her gentle, rather drawling voice; 'I can't sew myself, so how could I teach others to do so? Besides, all poor people know how to do that sort of work. We want to encourage them to think of higher things. They already give up far too much time to their clothes and to their food. I have a singing class and a wood-carving class. Then I make friends with them, and encourage them to tell me about themselves. Mrs. Pomfret thinks that a mistake, but I'm sure I know best. They have such extraordinary ideas about things, especially about love. They seem to flirt quite as

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much as do the girls of our sort. I was most awfully surprised when I realized *that !*'

Cecily and Daphne found Mrs. Robinson in the hall, saying good-bye to those about her. 'Will you come and lunch with me to-morrow?' she said to Daphne. And as the other joyfully accepted, she added: 'We have not had a talk for a long time.'

When they were once more in the carriage, driving through the brilliantly-lighted streets, Mrs. Robinson turned to Cecily, and said: 'Little cousin, I wonder who is your favourite character in history? Joan of Arc? Mary, Queen of Scots? I'll tell you mine: it was the woman—I forget her name—who first said, in answer to a friend's remark, "I hate a fool!" She had plenty of courage of the kind I should like to borrow. The thought of to-morrow's execution makes me sick.' And as Cecily looked at her, bewildered, she added: 'I wonder what you thought of Daphne Purdon? They said very little—I mean Philip Hammond and Mrs. Pomfret—but they simply won't keep her there any longer! She corrupts her class of match-girls, and, what of course is much worse, they are corrupting *her*.' Mrs. Robinson's lips curved into delighted laughter at the recollection of a whispered word which had been uttered, with bated breath, by Mrs. Pomfret.

'How long has Miss Purdon been at the Settlement?' Perhaps Cecily, childish though she was, entered more into her new friend's worries than the other realized.

'Not far from a year, broken, however, by frequent holidays in friends' country-houses, and by a month spent last summer on a yacht. Poor Daphne is a fool, but she's not a bad fool, and, above all, she's a very pretty fool!'

'Oh yes,' said the girl eagerly, 'she is very pretty,

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and I should think very good, even if she is not very sensible.'

'Well, her father, who was an old friend of my father's, died two years ago, leaving practically nothing. At the time Daphne was engaged, and the man threw her over; it was quite a little tragedy, and, as she took it into her head she would like to do some kind of work, I persuaded my people at the Settlement to take her and see what they could do with her. Like most of my "goody" plans, it has failed utterly.'

Cecily's kind, firm little hand, still wearing the cotton gloves of convent days, crept over the carriage rug, and closed for a moment over her new cousin's fingers. Mrs. Robinson went on: 'Philip Hammond is the salt of the earth, and Mrs. Pomfret is an angel, but I never see them without being told something I would rather not hear. Now, David Winfrith, who has so much to do with the many responsibilities connected with the Settlement, never worries me in that way. Perhaps if he did,' she concluded in a lower tone, 'I should see him as seldom as I do the others.'

'And who,' asked Cecily with some eagerness—'who is David Winfrith?'

'Like Daphne's,' answered Mrs. Robinson, 'his is an inherited friendship. His father, who is a clergyman, was one of my father's oldest friends.' Then quickly she added: 'I should not have said that, for David Winfrith is one of my own best friends, the one person to whom I feel I can always turn when I want anything done. What will perhaps interest you more is the fact that he is becoming a really distinguished man. If you read the *Morning Post* as regularly as I know your aunt reads it——'

'She has left off taking in a daily paper,' said Cecily quickly. 'She says it tries her eyes to read too much.'

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But Penelope went on, unheeding: 'You would know a great deal more about Mr. Winfrith and his doings than you seem to do now. Seriously, he is the kind of honest, plodding, earnest fellow whom the British public like to feel is looking after them, and each day he looks after them more than he did the day before. And he will go plodding on till in time—who knows? —he may become the Grand Panjandrum, the Prime Minister himself!'

'Then, he does not live at the Settlement?'

'Oh no! He has sometimes thought of spending a holiday there, but he very properly feels that he owes his free time to his father; but even when resting he works hard, for he is, and always has been, provokingly healthy. As for his connection with the Settlement, it has become his hobby. To please himself'—Mrs. Robinson spoke quickly, as if in self-defence—'no one ever asked him to do so—he looks after the business side of everything connected with the place. I am the Queen, and he is the Prime Minister; that is, he listens very civilly to all I have to say, and then he does exactly what he himself thinks proper! Of course, I get my way sometimes; for instance, he disapproved of Daphne Purdon.'

'I thought they were great friends,' said Cecily, surprised. 'He gave her the first Blue-Book she ever read.'

'Ah!' said Mrs. Robinson, 'did he? That was just like him, trying to make a pig's ear out of a silk purse! Still, even so, he will certainly be delighted to hear of her execution; for he saw from the very first that she was quite unsuited for the life, and, of course, like all of us, he likes to be proved right.'

As she spoke, Mrs. Robinson was watching the girl by her side. Now and again a gleam of bright light

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cast a glow on the serious childish face, showed the curves of the sensible firm mouth, lit up the hazel eyes, so empty of youthful laughter. During the drive to the Settlement Cecily had talked eagerly, had poured out her heart to her new friend, telling far more than she knew she told, both of her past and present life. And Mrs. Robinson's active, intelligent brain was busy evolving a scheme of release for the young creature to whom she had taken one of her unreasoning instinctive likings.

When at last, it seemed all too soon to Cecily, the carriage stopped before old Miss Wake's dingy Mayfair lodging, Mrs. Robinson held the other's hand a moment before saying good-bye. She did not offer to kiss the girl, for Penelope was not given to kissing; but she said very kindly: 'We must meet again soon. I am going to Brighton for a few days next week. Suppose I were to come in to-morrow morning and ask Miss Wake to let you go there with me? We would go out to your convent, and I should make friends with the old French nun of whom you are so fond. She and I might think of something which would make your life here a little less dull, a little more cheerful.' And that night no happier girl lay down to sleep in London than Cecily Wake.

Mrs. Robinson was also in a softened mood, and when she found David Winfrith waiting for her in the library of the old house in Cavendish Square which had been her father's, and which had seen the coming and going of so many famous people, she greeted him with a gaiety, an intimate warmth of manner, which quickened his pulses, and almost caused him to say words he had made up his mind never again to utter.

Soon she was kneeling by the fire warming her hands, talking eagerly, looking up, smiling into the plain,

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clean-shaven face, of which she knew every turn and expression. 'You must forgive and approve me for being late,' she said. 'I have spent my afternoon exactly as you would always have me do. Firstly, I fulfilled my social dooty, as Mr. Gumberg would say, by going to the Walberton wedding'—a slight grimace defaced for a moment her charming eyes and mouth—'enough to put one out of love for ever with matrimony; but, then, my ideal still remains in those matters what it always was.' In answer to a questioning look her eyelids flickered as she said two words, 'Gretna Green!' and an almost imperceptible quiver also passed over Winfrith's face. She went on eagerly, pleased with the betrayal of feeling her words had evoked: 'Then I drove to the Settlement, where I listened patiently while Philip Hammond and Mrs. Pomfret poured their woes into my ears.'

'That I'm sure they did not,' he interrupted good-humouredly.

'Oh yes, they did! They don't keep everything for you. Well, Daphne Purdon is leaving—not, of course, of her own free will. You were right and I was wrong in that matter. But I think I've found just the right person to replace her.'

'H'm,' said he.

'Someone who will be quite ideal, whom even Mrs. Pomfret liked at first sight! But don't let's talk of the Settlement any more. Listen, rather, to my further good deeds. I am going to Brighton, a place I detest, in order to give pleasure to a good, kind little girl who is just now having a very bad time.'

'That,' he said, 'is really meritorious. And when, may I ask, is this work of mercy to take place?'

'Next week; I shall be away for at least four days.'

'Well, perhaps I shall be in Brighton for a night,'

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—Winfrith brushed an invisible speck off his sleeve—'Wednesday night, myself. I do not share your dislike to the place. We can talk over Settlement affairs there, if we meet, as I suppose we shall?'

Penelope hesitated. 'Yes,' she said at last, rather absently. 'We can talk over things there better than here. I expect to go abroad rather earlier this spring.'

'Why that?' He could not keep the dismay out of his voice. 'I thought you were so fond of the spring in London?'

She stood up, and they faced one another, each resting a hand on the high marble mantelpiece. 'I love London at all times of the year,' she said, 'but I am a nomad, a wanderer, by instinct. Perhaps mamma's mother, before she "got religion," was a gipsy. I have always known there was some mystery about her.' She spoke lightly, but Winfrith's lips closed, one of his hands made a sudden arresting movement, and then fell down again by his side, as she went on unheeding, looking, not at him, but down into the fire. 'Why don't you take a holiday, David—even you are entitled to a holiday sometimes—and come with me where I am going—down to the South, west of Marseilles, where ordinary people never, never go?'

'My dear Penelope, how utterly absurd!' But there was a thrill in the quiet, measured voice. She looked up eagerly, moved a little nearer to him. 'Do!' she cried—'please do! Motey would be ample chaperon;' she added unguardedly, 'she is used to that ungrateful rôle.'

'Is she?' he asked sharply. 'Has she often had occasion to chaperon you, and—and—a friend, on a similar excursion?'

Penelope bit her lip. 'I think you are very rude,' she said. 'Why, of course she has! Every man I

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know, half your acquaintances, have had the privilege of travelling with me across the world. When one of your trusted party members goes off on a mysterious holiday, you can always in future say to yourself, "He has paired with Penelope!"'

He looked at her, perplexed, a little suspicious, but utterly disarmed by her next words. 'David'—she spoke softly—'how can you be so foolish? I have never, never, never made such a proposal to anyone but yourself. I once asked Ludovic to escort me from Rome to Siena and back, but he refused. Now that your mind is set at rest, now that you know you will be the unique instance'—she could not keep the laughter out of her voice—'will you consent to honour me with your company? It could all be done in a fortnight.'

'No.' He spoke with an effort, and hesitated perceptibly. But again he said, 'No, I can't get away now—'tis impossible. Perhaps later—at Easter.'

But Mrs. Robinson had turned away. Mechanically she tore a paper spill into small pieces. 'At Easter,' she said, with a complete change of tone, 'I shall be in Paris, and every soul we know will be there, too, and I certainly shall not want *you*.'

'Well, now I must be going.' He spoke rather heavily, and, as she still held her head averted, he added hurriedly, in a low tone, 'You know how gladly I would come if I could.'

'I know,' she said sharply, 'how easily you could come if you would! But never mind, I am quite used to be alone—with Motey.'

In spite of her anger and disappointment, she was loth to let him go. Together they walked through the sombre, old-fashioned hall, of which the walls were hung with engravings of men who had been her father's early contemporaries and friends, and to which she had

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ever been unwilling to make the slightest alteration. Every lozenge of the black and white marble floor recalled her singularly happy, eager childhood, and Mrs. Robinson would have missed the ugliest of the frock-coated philanthropists and statesmen who looked at her so gravely from their tarnished frames.

She went with him through into the small glazed vestibule which gave access to the square. Herself she opened the mahogany door, and looked out, shivering, into the foggy darkness which lay beyond. Then came a murmured word or two, a pause, and Winfrith was gone, shutting the door as he went, leaving her alone.

She turned quickly. But as she was again crossing the hall she suddenly stayed her steps, pushed her hair off her forehead with a gesture familiar to her when perplexed, and pressed her cold hands against her face, now red with one of her rare, painful blushes. She saw, as in a vision, a strange little scene. In her ears echoed fragments of a conversation, so amazing, so unlikely to have taken place, that she wondered whether the words could have been really uttered. A man, whose tall, thick-set, and rather ungainly figure she knew familiarly well, seemed to be standing close to a tall, slight woman, with whose appearance Penelope felt herself to be at once less and more intimate. She doubted her knowledge of the voice which uttered the curious, ill-sounding words: 'You may kiss me if you like, David.' Not doubtful, alas! her recognition of the quick, hoarse accents in which had come the man's answer: 'No, thank you. I would rather not!'

Could such a scene have ever taken place? Could such an invitation have been made—and refused?

Mrs. Robinson walked on slowly. She went again into the library; once more she knelt down before the

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fire, and held out her chill hands to the blaze. That any woman should have said, even to her oldest—ay, even to her dearest friend, 'You may kiss me if you like,' was certainly unconventional, perhaps even a little absurd. But amazing, and almost incredible in such a case, would surely be the answer she still heard, so clearly uttered: 'No, thank you. I would rather not!' Then came the reflection, at once mortifying and consoling, that many would give—what?—well, anything in reason, to have had this same permission extended to themselves.

She tried to place herself outside—wholly outside—the abominable little scene. Supposing a woman—the foolish woman who had acted on so strange an impulse—now came in, and sat down by her, telling her what had occurred, asking her advice, how would she, Penelope, make answer to such a one?

Quick came the words: 'Of course you can only do one of two things—either never see him again, or go on as if nothing had happened.'

She saw, felt, the woman wince.

'As to not seeing him again, that is quite out of the question. Besides, there are circumstances——'

'Oh, well,' she—Penelope—would say severely, 'of course, if you come and ask my advice without telling me everything——'

'No one ever tells everything,' the woman would object, 'but this much I will confide to you. There was a time—I am sure, by all sorts of things, that he remembers it more often than I do—when this man and I were lovers, when he kissed me—ah, how often!'

Penelope flushed. How could the other say this to her? But, even so, she would answer her patiently: 'That may be, but in those days you two loved one another dearly. To such a man that fact makes all the

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difference. He is the type—the rather unusual type—who would far rather have no bread than only half the loaf.'

'But how wrong! how utterly absurd!' the other woman would cry. 'How short-sighted of him! The more so that sometimes, not of course always, the half has been known to include the whole.'

'Yes, but he is not a man to understand that. And if I may say so'—thus would she, the wise mentor, conclude her words of advice and of consolation to this most unwise and impulsive friend—'I think you have really had an escape. The half in this case would certainly have come to include the whole. To-night you are tired and lonely; in the morning you will realize that you are much better off as you are. You already see quite as much of him as you want to do, when in your sober senses.' ('Oh, but I do miss him when he isn't there.') 'What nonsense! You do not miss him when you are abroad, when you—forgive me, dear, the vulgar expression—have other fish to fry. No, no, you have had an escape. Being what he is, he will meet you to-morrow exactly as if nothing had happened, and then you will go abroad and have a delightful time.' ('Yes, alone!') 'Alone? Of course. Seeing beautiful places of which he, if with you, would deny the charm; for, as you have often said to yourself, he has no love, no understanding, of a whole side of life which is everything to you.' ('Yes, but he would have enjoyed being with me.') 'So he would, only more so, in a coal-pit. No, no, you have made the life you lead one which exactly suits you.'

Mrs. Robinson got up. She rang the bell. 'Would you please ask Mrs. Mote to come to me here?'

And when the short, stout little woman, who had been the nurse of her childhood and was now her maid,

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came in answer to the summons, she said hastily: 'Motey, I am going to Brighton next week for a few days. I do not intend to go abroad till later. Mr. Winfrith cannot get away just now. He is too busy.'

'He always was a busy young gentleman,' declared the old woman rather sourly, as she took the cloak, the gloves, and the hat of her mistress, and went silently out of the room.

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CHAPTER V

There was a Door to which I found no Key :
There was a Veil past which I could not see :
Some little talk awhile of ME and THEE
There seem'd—and then no more of THEE and ME.'

OMAR KHAYYÁM.

'Numero Deus impare gaudet.'

VIRGIL.

WHEN the man who remained in local story as the Popish Lord Wantley built Monk's Eype, he planned the arrangements of the lower floor of his villa in a way which was approved by neither his Neapolitan architect nor his English acquaintances. From the broad terrace overhanging the sea, the row of high narrow windows on either side of the shallow stone steps giving access to the central hall, seemed strictly symmetrical.

But there was nothing uniform behind the stately façade. Instead of a suite of reception-rooms opening the one out of the other on either side of the frescoed hall, the whole left side of the villa—excepting the wing, which stretched, as did its fellow, landward, and in which were the servants' quarters—was occupied by one vast apartment.

In this great room the creator of Monk's Eype had gathered together most of his treasures, including many paintings which he had acquired during a long sojourn in Italy. His Victorian successor had added beautiful works of art to the collection. In the Picture Room, as it was called, Penelope's mother always sat when at

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Monk's Eype, sometimes working at delicate embroidery, oftener writing busily at an inlaid ivory table close to one of the windows opening on to the terrace.

On the other side of the circular hall the Italian architect had had his way, and had produced a suite of lofty, well-proportioned rooms opening the one out of the other, though his patron had stipulated that place should be found for a passage to which each apartment should have separate access.

Of the three rooms, the first was the dining-room, of which the painted ceiling harmonized with the panels of old Flemish tapestry added to the treasures of Monk's Eype by Penelope's parents. Then came another spacious room of much the same proportions, which had now been for many years regarded as specially set apart for the use of young Lord Wantley, Mrs. Robinson's cousin and frequent guest. In this pleasant room, Wantley read, painted, and smoked, and there also he would entertain those of Penelope's visitors whose sex made him perforce their host. Still, even his occupancy of what some of Mrs. Robinson's friends considered the most agreeable room in the villa was poisoned by a bitter memory. Not long after the death of the man whom he had been taught to call uncle, he had heard his plea for a billiard-table set aside by the new mistress of Monk's Eype with angry decision, and he had been made to feel that he had unwittingly offered an insult to her father's memory.

Beyond Lord Wantley's special quarters there was a third room, more narrow, less well lighted than the others. There were those, nevertheless, who would have regarded it as the most interesting apartment at Monk's Eype, for there the greatest of Victorian philanthropists had worked, spending long hours of his holiday at the large plain knee-table so placed as both to block

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and to command the one window. Here also hung a portrait which many would have come far to see. If vile as a work of art, it was almost startlingly like the man who had sat for it some twenty years before. And this resemblance was the more striking because of the familiar attitude, the left hand supporting the chin, which had for most of the sitter's fellow-countrymen the ridiculous associations of caricature.

Mrs. Robinson disliked both the room and the portrait. But mingled feelings of respect, of affection, and of fear, had caused her to leave the room as it had been during its late owner's occupancy, and it was only used by her on the rare occasions when she was compelled to have a personal interview with one of her tenants from neighbouring Wyke Regis.

On the evening of the day, a Saturday, when Miss Wake's and her niece's arrival had taken place, Lord Wantley had returned somewhat unexpectedly from a visit paid in the neighbourhood, which had been cut short by the sudden illness of the hostess.

After the cheerful, if commonplace, house and party he had just left, Monk's Eype struck him as strangely quiet and depressing, though, as always, the beauty of the villa impressed him anew as he passed through into the spacious hall, now flooded with the light of the setting sun. 'I wonder who she has got here now,' he said to himself as he noticed a man's hat, roomy travelling-coat, and stick laid across the top of the Italian marriage-chest, the brilliancy of whose armorial ornaments and bright gilding had been dimmed by a hundred years of the salt wind and soft mists of the Dorset coast. Mrs. Robinson was fond of entertaining those of her fellow-painters whose work attracted her fancy or excited her admiration, and Wantley's

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fastidious taste sometimes revolted from the associations into which she thrust him.

The young man's relations to his beautiful cousin were at once singular and natural—best, perhaps, explained by a word said in the frankness of grief during the hours which had immediately followed his predecessor's death. 'You know, Penelope,' the heir had said in all good faith, if a little awkwardly—for at that time nothing was definitely known of the famous philanthropist's will, and none doubted that the new peer would find himself to have been treated fairly, if not generously, by the great Lord Wantley—'you know that now you must consider me as your brother; your father himself told me he hoped it would be so.'

The wilful girl had looked at him in silence for a moment, and then, very deliberately, had answered: 'What nonsense! Did my father ever treat you as a son? No, Ludovic, we will go on as we have always done. But if you like'—and she had smiled satirically—'I will look upon you as a kind and well-meaning stepbrother!' And it was with the eyes of a critical, but not unfriendly, stepbrother that Wantley came in due course to regard her.

Concerning his cousin's—to his apprehension—extraordinary marriage, he had not been in any way consulted. Indeed, at the time the engagement and marriage took place he had been far away from England; but after Melancthon Robinson's tragic death Penelope for a moment had clung to him as if he had indeed been her brother, showing such real feeling, such acute pain, such bitter distress, that he had come to the conclusion that the tie between the oddly-assorted couple had been at any rate one worthy of respect.

When, somewhat later Mrs. Robinson had begged Wantley to help her with the complicated business

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details connected with the Melancthon Settlement, he had drawn back, or rather he had advised her, not unkindly, to hand the work over to one of the great religious organizations already provided with suitable machinery. As he had learnt to expect, his cousin entirely disregarded his advice; instead, she found another to give her the help the head of her family refused her, and this other, as the young man sometimes remembered with an uneasy conscience, was one whom they should both have spared, partly because he was engaged in public affairs which took up what should have been the whole of his working time, partly because he had been the hero of Penelope's first romance, and had indeed been her accepted lover.

Wantley had watched the renewal of the link between the grave young statesman and his old love with a certain cynical interest. Penelope had not cared to hide her annoyance and disappointment at her cousin's somewhat pusillanimous refusal of responsibility, and so he had not been asked to take any part in the conferences which were held between David Winfrith and the widow of the philanthropic millionaire; but weeks, months, and even the first years, of Penelope's widowhood wore themselves away, and to Wantley's astonishment the relations between Mrs. Robinson and her adviser and helper remained unchanged. The Melancthon Settlement went on its way, nominally under the management of its founder's widow, in reality owing everything in it that was practical and worthy of respect to the mind and to the tireless industry of the man who had come to regard this work of supererogation as the principal relaxation of a somewhat austere existence, while not concealing from himself, though, as he believed, concealing from her, the fact that the necessary interviews with his old love were the salt

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of what was otherwise a laborious and abstemious life.

David Winfrith had been more or less successful in hiding his feelings, such as they were, from the world round him. Of course at one time his marriage with Mrs. Robinson had been regarded as a certainty, but, as the years had gone on, the gossips admitted their mistake, and, according to their fancy, declared either the lovely widow or Winfrith disappointed.

Alone, Wantley had arrived very near the truth. He was sure that there had been no renewal of the offer made and accepted so ardently in the days when the two had been boy and girl; but a subtle instinct warned him that Winfrith still regarded Penelope as nearer to himself than had been, or could ever be, any other woman; and of the many things which he envied his cousin, the young peer counted nothing more precious than the chivalrous interest and affection of the man who most realized his own ideal of the public-spirited Englishman who, born to pleasant fortune, is content to work, both for his country and for his countrymen, for what most would consider an inadequate reward.

David Winfrith's existence formed a contrast to his own life of which Wantley was ashamed. He was well aware that had the other been in his place, even burdened with all his own early disadvantages, Winfrith would by now have made for himself a position in every way befitting that of the successor of such a man as had been the great philanthropist.

On the evening of his unexpected return to the villa, an evening long remembered by him, Wantley dressed early and made his way into the Picture Room, expecting there to find an ill-assorted party, for Mrs. Robinson was one of those women whose own personal

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