The Fourth Generation

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THE

FOURTH GENERATION

BY

WALTER BESANT

AUTHOR OF

'ALL SORTS AND CONDITIONS OF MEN,' 'THE ORANGE GIRL'

ETC.

LONDON

CHATTO & WINDUS

1900

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PREFACE

It is perhaps well to explain that this story first appeared as a serial early in 1899: that on revision it was found desirable partly to rewrite certain chapters and to enlarge upon certain points. The structure of the story, the characters, and the situations remain unaltered.

The question with which the story deals is not fully answered. It is one of those questions which can never be answered; from time to time every man must ask himself why the innocent must suffer, and do suffer every day and in every generation, for the follies and the sins of their forefathers. Every man must find his own answer, or must acknowledge sorrowfully that he can find none. I venture to offer in these pages an answer that satisfies myself. It substitutes consequence for punishment, and puts effect that follows cause in place of penalties. And, as I hope is made plain, it seems to me that I have no less an authority for this view

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than the greatest of the Prophets of Israel. The consequences of ancestral and paternal actions may be a blessing and a help: or they may be a curse and a burden for generations; in either case, they are consequences which can only affect the body, or the mind, or the social position of the descendants. They may make ambition impossible: they may make action impossible: they may keep a man down among the rank and file: but they cannot do more. The Prophet defines and limits their power. And the consequences, whatever they are, may be made a ladder for the soul to rise or a weight to drag it down. In the pages which follow they are shown as to some a ladder, but to others a way of descent.

W. B.

UNITED UNIVERSITY CLUB,
August, 1900.

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here and there; over one wing, that of the west, ivy grew, covering the whole of that end of the house.

The gardens were more stately than the house itself. They began with a most noble lawn. On one side grew two cedars of Lebanon, sweeping the bare earth with their drooping branches. On the other side rose three glorious walnut-trees. The space between was a bowling-green, on which no flower-beds had ever been permitted. Beyond the bowling-green, however, were flower-beds in plenty. There were also box-trees cut into the old-fashioned shapes which one only sees in old-fashioned gardens. Beyond these was a narrow plantation of shrubs, mostly evergreen. Then stretched out, in order, the ample kitchen-gardens, the crowded orchard, and the 'glass.' Here, also, were ranged the beehives in a row, for the owners of the house were bee-masters as well as gardeners.

The whole was stately. One was filled with admiration and respect for so noble a house, so richly set, only by walking along the road outside the park and gazing upon the house from a distance. There were, however, certain bounds imposed upon the admiration and respect of the visitor. These were called for, in fact, by the gardens, and the lawns, and the 'glass,' as they must have been in the past. As for the garden of the present, it was difficult even to guess when the hand of man, the spade of the gardener, had last touched any part of the place. Everything was overgrown; weeds covered the ground which had once been beds of asparagus and celery; the strawberry plants fought for

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existence with thistles, and maintained it, by the sacrifice of fruit; couch grass and those thistles, with shepherd's-purse and all the weeds of the field, covered and concealed the flower-beds. The lanes and walks were covered ways, long since rendered impassable by reason of branches that had shot across them; the artificial shapes of the box-trees, formerly so trim and precise, showed cloudy and mysterious through the branches which had grown up outside them; the bowling green was covered with coarse grass never mown from year to year. In the glass houses the doors stood open: the glass was broken; the vines grew wild, pushing their way through the broken panes. There could be no respect possible for a garden in such a condition. Yet, the pity of it! the pity of it! So fine a place as it had been, as it might again become, if gardeners were once more ordered to restore it to its ancient splendours!

If one turned from the garden and walked towards the house, he would notice, first, that the stairs of brick leading to the terrace were a good deal battered and broken; that many bricks had been displaced, that weeds grew between the bricks, that in the balustrade there were places where the square brick pillars were broken away; that if he mounted the stairs, the brick pavement of the terrace showed holes and damaged places here and there; that if he looked at the house itself he would discern there, as well as in the garden, a certain air of neglect and decay. The window-frames wanted painting, the door wanted painting, there were

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no curtains or blinds visible anywhere; one or two panes of glass were broken, and not even patched. Stately, even in decay, were house and gardens; but the spectator shivered, as one shivers at the sight of age and decay and death hovering over what should still be rejoicing in the strength of manhood.

On this morning, when the cold of winter ushered in the deceitful spring, a man was walking to and fro on the brick terrace. He was a man very far advanced in life. Cold as it was, he wore no overcoat; he had no wrapper or handkerchief round his neck; he wore no gloves.

When one looked more closely, he was not only advanced in years: he was full of years — overfull, running over. His great age was apparent in the innumerable lines of his face; not in the loss of his hair, for his abundant white locks fell flowing, uncut and untrimmed, upon his shoulders, while a full white beard lay over his ample chest. His age was shown by the heightening of the cheek-bones and the increased prominence of the nose, in the sunken mouth, and the thin lips, and the deep-set eyes. But though his face had been roughly handled by time, his frame seemed to have escaped any touch. Old as he was, he bore himself upright still; he walked with a firm, if not an elastic, step; he carried a stick, but did not use it. He was still six feet four, or even more, in stature; his shoulders were still broad, his back was not curved, nor was his huge, strong body bowed, nor were his strong legs bent or weakened. Nothing could be more anomalous than

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the difference between the man's face, chipped and lined and covered with curves and diagrams, like an Ordnance Survey map, and his figure, still so strong, so erect, so vigorous.

He walked from one end of the terrace to the other rapidly, and, so to speak, resolutely. Then he turned and walked back. He looked neither to one side nor to the other; he was absorbed in some kind of meditation, for his face was set. It was a stern face naturally; the subject of his thoughts made it, perhaps, still harder and more stern. He wore a kind of shooting-jacket, a broad-brimmed felt hat, stout boots fit for the fields, and leggings, as if he were going to take out his gun, and he carried his stick as if it had been a gun. A masterful man—that was apparent at the outset; aggressive—that was also apparent at the moment; defiant—of what? of whom? Evidently a man built originally as a fighting man, endowed with great courage and enormous strength; probably, also, with a quick temper; retaining still the courage, though some of the strength had gone, and the fighting temperament, though his fighting days were done.

There was no sound about the place—no clatter of servants over their work, no footsteps in the house or outside it, no trampling of horses from the stables, or sight of gardeners working quietly among the forlorn flower-beds: all was silent. And the cold wind whistled, and the old man, without the common protection from the wintry wind, walked methodically and rapidly from east to west and from west to east.

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So he went on all the morning, hour after hour, untiring over this meaningless exercise. He began it at nine, and at half-past twelve he was still marching in this aimless manner, turning neither to the right nor to the left, and preserving unchanged that fixed expression which might have meant patience—a very old man has to be patient—or it might have been, as I have called it, defiance: a man who has known misfortunes sometimes acquires this expression of defiance, as one who bids Fortune do her very worst, and, when she can do no more, still repeats with courage, 'Come what may.'

In the distance, half a mile or so away, was a clock in a church-tower. If one listened from the garden, one might hear the striking of the hours; without waiting for it and expecting it, one would not hear the clock at all. A melodious clock at a distance falls in with the general whisper of the atmosphere. We call it silence, but, indeed, there is no such thing in Nature. Silence would drive us mad. In the country we hear a gentle whisper, tuneful and soothing, and we say it is the sweet silence of the country; but it is not—it is the blend of all the country sounds.

The morning dragged on slowly. The beat of the old man's footstep on the terrace was as regular as the ticking of a clock. Neither in his carriage, nor in his pace, nor in his face was there the least change. He walked like a machine, and his face was as expressionless as any face of idol or of image.

It was about eleven o'clock that another step might have been heard. The step of a man on dry branches

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and among dead leaves. The old man on the terrace paid no attention: he made as if he heard nothing: when the figure of a rustic emerged from the orchard and stood under the walnut-trees, the old man of the terrace made as if he saw nothing.

The rustic was also well advanced in age, though far short of the tale of years which belonged to the other. He was dressed as one who goes afield: he walked as one who has spent his life in the ridges and furrows of the ploughed field: he carried a spade over his shoulder.

Standing under the walnut-trees, he lowered his spade and laid his hands upon the handle as if to support himself. And then he gazed upon the old man of the terrace. He did not, after the wont of some men, pretend to be at work and cast a furtive glance of curiosity. On the contrary, he made no pretence at all: he leaned upon his spade, and he gazed boldly and without any shame. He marked the steady and firm step of the man: his own step was not half so firm or half so steady: he marked the bearing of the man: his own back was bent and his shoulders lowered: he marked the health and strength that still lay in his face: his own cheeks were wrinkled and his eyes were dim. Presently he lifted his spade to his shoulder and he turned away. 'If I go first——' he said.

Whether he came or whether he departed, whether he walked in silence over the coarse grass or snapped the twigs and rustled the dead leaves, the old man of the terrace took no notice. He neither saw nor heard anything.

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Then the east wind continued dry and cold, and the birds chirped in discomfort, and the branches in the orchard fell to grinding each other, and the old man walked on. And the quarters struck from the church-tower somewhere, not far off.

At the open door of the house, at about half-past twelve, there appeared a young man dressed warmly, as was due to the weather. He was tall—over six feet in height; his face resembled that of the old man strikingly; he was certainly some close relation. He stood at the door looking on while that walk, as dismal, as monotonous, as purposeless as that of prisoners in their yard, went on minute after minute, hour after hour. He stood there, not hour after hour, but for a full half-hour, watching and wondering.

'Always and every day—and for all these years!'—to give words to his thoughts. 'Why this tramp day by day every morning; always alone, always silent, seeing and not seeing, dead to outward things, apart from the world, taking no interest in the world? No recluse in a vault could be more lonely. No occupation; nothing to do; nothing to think about. Good heavens! what does he think about? No books, no newspapers to read; no letters to write. Why?'

The young man was the great-grandson of this ancient person: he was not only the great-grandson, but the heir to the house and the estates which belonged to the house: next to this old man he was the head of the family. He therefore, as a mark of respect and a matter of duty, ran down from London

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occasionally to see that his ancestor was properly cared for and in health. He was also in communication with the solicitors who managed the property.

It was a very curious case: from childhood the young man had been told of the strange and eccentric great-grandfather. He lived alone: he had no other servant than a woman with her daughter: he only saw them when they brought his meals: he received no visitors: he never went out of the house except to walk every morning, whatever the weather, for four hours up and down the terrace: he never spoke even to his housekeeper: if anyone spoke to him, he made no reply: he never read anything—neither book nor paper: his affairs were in the hands of a firm of solicitors in the neighbouring market-town: when they wanted his signature to a cheque, they drew it and sent it in to him, when he signed and returned it; when they consulted him concerning business, he received their statements in writing, and replied with the greatest brevity: there was no sign of mental derangement: so far as the solicitors, the only persons who were able to speak on the subject, understood, the man's faculties were perfectly sound and his intellect as clear as ever. Moreover, there was no sign upon him of any hallucination, any melancholia, any mental trouble: if he maintained silence, his face betrayed no perturbation. Day after day he presented to the morning sun a calm and cloudless face: if he smiled not, neither did he sigh.

Now, the most remarkable thing was that this eccentricity, which might have been explained on the theory

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of great age and the loss of all his friends and contemporaries, had been practised for nearly seventy years. As a young man, quite a young man, he began this life, and he had continued it ever since. The reason, his great-grandson had always understood, was the shock caused by the sudden death of his wife. Further than this he neither knew nor did he inquire. If one grows up in presence of a certain strange line of conduct, it becomes accepted without inquiry. The old man had become a solitary when this young man's grandfather was a boy: his grandfather, his father, and he himself had always had before them the knowledge, if not the sight, of this eccentricity. There was no curiosity in his mind at all about the possible cause.

Seventy years! It is the whole life of the average man, and this strange creature had spent the whole time alone, in silence, in solitude, and without occupation. It was not the whole span of the man's own life, for he was now completing his ninety-fourth year.

From the distant church-tower came presently the striking of the quarters, followed by the stroke of one. At that moment an old woman came out; she passed in front of the visitor in the doorway, and stood watching to catch the eye of the master. She said nothing, but waited there until he noticed her presence. Perhaps he was expecting her. He stopped; the old woman retired; her master entered the house, taking no notice whatever of the young man as he passed him; his eyes looked through him with no gleam of recognition or even of intelligence as to his presence. Yet this young

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man, the only one of all his descendants, paid him a visit once a month or so to see if he was still in health.

He walked straight into the room which was the single sitting-room and dining-room and living-room. It had been the library—a large room with a north aspect, lofty, and at all times of the year rather dark and cold. A good fire burned in the broad old-fashioned grate. Before the fire was a small table—it had formerly stood in the window for a reading or writing table; now it served as a table set there for the old man's meals. The cloth was, in fact, spread, and the early dinner laid upon it—a plain dinner of steak, potatoes, and a bottle of port, which is the beverage proper to old age; it warms and comforts; it pleases and exhilarates; it imparts a sense of strength, and when the common forms of food can no longer be taken, this generous drink supplies their place. The walls were lined with shelves which were filled with books. Evidently some former member of the family had been a scholar and a bibliophile. The books were all bound in leather; the gilt of the titles had mostly disappeared. If you took a volume from the shelf, you found that it had parted from the binding; if not, it took advantage of the movement to remove itself from the binding; if you examined the shelves long enough, you would have found that there was not one book in the whole library of a date later than 1829. Of all the thousands upon thousands of books published in the seventy years since that time, not one was in this library. For instance, the *Quarterly* and *Edinburgh Reviews*—they stood here

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bound; they stopped at 1829. The *Annual Register* was here also, bound; it stopped at 1829. And on this great library table there were lying, as if for daily use, scattered volumes and magazines which had been placed there for the reading of the house in 1829. No one had touched the table since some time in that year. A long low leather chair stood beside the fire—the leather was in rags and tatters, worn to shreds; at the table was placed a splendid great wooden chair, which looked like the chair of a hall-porter; the carpet was in rags and tatters, except the part along the front of the shelves; there it was whole, but its colour was faded. In front of the fire was placed a common thick sheep-skin.

The young man followed his ancestor into the library. He took a chair, placed it by the fire, and sat down, his long legs curled, watching and waiting. He had been in the same place before. The silence of the old man, the meaningless look in his eyes, terrified him on the first occasion. He was then unaccustomed to the manner of the man. He had gradually grown accustomed to the sight; it no longer terrified him, and he now sat in his place on the other side of the fire, resolved upon making sure that the old man was properly cared for, properly fed, properly clad, properly looked after in all respects, that his health was good, and that there was no need of seeking advice. He sat down, therefore, by the fire and looked on while the old man took his dinner.

The visitor, I have said, was the great-grandson of

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the recluse. He was also the heir of his house and the future owner of the place and its possessions. As for what he was by calling you shall hear presently. Being the heir-presumptive, he assumed the duty of making these occasional visits, which were received—as has been stated—in silence, and with not the slightest show of recognition.

Without heeding his presence, then, the old man took his seat at the table, lifted the cover, and began his dinner. It consisted every day of the same dish. Perhaps there are not many men at ninety-four who can devour every day a full-sized steak with potatoes and bread, and can drink with it a whole bottle of port. Yet this is what the recluse did. The descendant for his part made it his business that the port should be of the best and that the steak should be 'treated' scientifically, in order to ensure its tenderness and juiciness.

The recluse took his food fast and eagerly. One could perceive that in earlier days he must have enjoyed a great and noble power of putting away beef. He took his steak with fierceness, he devoured an immense quantity of bread, he drank his wine off in goblets as in the old days he had tossed off the great glasses of beer. He did not sip the generous wine, nor did he roll it about in his glass and hold it up to the light; he drank it, as a child drinks water, unconsciously and yet eagerly, regardless of the taste and careless of its qualities.

When the bottle was empty and there was nothing more to eat, he left the wooden chair and cast his great

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length into the long easy chair, where he stretched out his legs towards the fire, and, leaning his head upon his hand and his elbow on the arm of the chair, he gazed into the fire, but with eyes which had in them no kind of expression. 'Evidently,' thought the spectator, 'the old man has two senses left: he likes strong meat and drink; he likes the physical comfort that they provide, and he likes the warmth of a fire.' Then he rose slowly and stood with his back to the fire, looking down upon his ancestor, and began a remonstrance, which he repeated with variations on every visit.

'Sir,' he said, 'I come to see you from time to time, as you know. I come to make sure that you are cared for, and that you are well. I come to see if anything can be done for you. On these occasions you never fail to pretend that you do not see me. You make believe that I am not present. You do see me; you know I am here; you know who I am; you know why I am here. Very well. It is, I suppose, your humour to affect silence and solitude. Nothing that I can say will, I fear, induce you to break this silence.'

There was no sign of recognition, no reply, nor any change of movement.

'Why you have imposed upon yourself this lifelong misery I do not know, nor shall I inquire. Perhaps I shall never know. It seems to me a great mistake, whatever the cause—a sudden bereavement, I have always understood. If it was in consequence of another person's fault, or another person's misfortune, the waste and wreck of your own life would not remove the cause;

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and if it was any fault of your own, such a wreck and waste of life would only be an aggravation of the offence. But if it was bereavement, surely it would be the manlier part to bear it and to go on with the duties of life. However, as I do not know all the circumstances, I have no right to speak on this point. It is too late,' he went on, 'to make up for all the years you have thrown away, but is it too late for a change? Can you not, even now, at this late hour, go back among your fellow-creatures and become human again, if it is only for a year or two? I should say it was harder to continue this life of loneliness and misery than to go back to the life for which you were born.'

There was no answer.

'I have been over the house this morning,' the young man went on pitilessly. 'You have allowed it to fall into a shameful condition. The damp has got into pictures and wall-paper; it will need many thousands to restore the place to a condition proper to a gentleman's house. Don't you think you ought to spend that money and live in it as a gentleman of your position ought to do?'

There was still no answer. But, then, the heir expected none.

The old man lifted his head from his hand and dropped it back on the chair. His eyes closed, his hands dropped, his breathing was soft and regular; he was asleep.

His great-grandson still stood over him. This kind of scene affected him but little, because it occurred on

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every visit. He arrived at eleven or so; he walked across the park; he saw the old man doing his morning tramp as usual; he spent an hour going over the empty, desolate house; he watched the old man taking his walk; he followed him into the library; he watched him taking his food; he stood over him afterwards and addressed his remonstrance. This was always received, as George the Third used to receive the remonstrances of the City of London, in silence discouraging. And always in the midst of the remonstrance the patriarch fell asleep.

The young man waited awhile, watching his great-grandfather of ninety-four. There is very little resemblance between a man of that age and himself at twenty-six. Yet there may be some. And no one could look upon that old man without becoming conscious that in early manhood he must have been of singular and wonderful comeliness—full of strength and vigour, of fine proportions, of noble stature, and of remarkable face and head. All these things the descendant possessed as well, but in less marked degree, with more refinement, perhaps the refinement of scholarship and culture, but with less strength. He had done what he came to do: he had delivered his message; it was a failure; he expected nothing less. He might as well go; there was nothing more to do, or to be obtained, by staying.

But then a very remarkable event happened. He heard for the first time the voice of his great-grandfather. He was to hear it once more, and only once

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more. No one, except himself on this occasion, had heard it for nearly seventy years.

The patriarch moved in his sleep, his fingers twitched, his legs jerked, he rolled his head. Then he sat up and clutched the arms of his chair; his face became twisted and distorted, as if under the possession of some evil spirit. He half rose to his feet, still holding to the arms of the chair, and he spoke. His voice was rough and harsh, as if rusted with long disuse. His eyes remained fixed, yet his attitude was that of one looking at someone whom he saw—with whom he was conversing. What he said was this:

'That will end it.'

Then he sank back. The distortion went out of him. He laid his head upon the chair; calm and peace, as of a child, returned to his face; he was again asleep—if he had been awake.

'A dream,' said the looker-on. But he remembered the words, which came back to him, and remained with him—why, he could not tell.

He looked about the room. He thought of the strange, solitary, meaningless life, the monotonous life, the useless life, that this patriarch had lived for so many years. Seventy long years! This recluse during the whole of that time—for seventy long years—had never got outside the walls of his garden; he had seen none of his old friends; only his great-grandson might from time to time visit the place to ascertain if he were still living. He had done no kind of work during that long time; he had not even put a spade into the ground;

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he had never opened a book or seen a newspaper; he knew nothing that had happened. Why, for him the world was still the world before the Reform Act. There were no railways, there were no telegraph-wires; none of the inventions and improvements and new ideas and new customs were known to him, or suspected by him; he asked for nothing, he cared for nothing, he took interest in nothing: he never spoke. Oh, the wretchedness of it! The folly of it! What excuse could there be—what reason—sufficient for this throwing away of a life in which so much might have been done? What defence could a man have for thus deserting from the Army of Humanity?

As long as this young man remembered anything, he had heard of this old man: it was always the same story; there was a kind of family bogie, who wore always the same clothes, and took the same walk every morning and slept every afternoon. Sometimes his mother would tell him, when he was a boy, scraps of history about the Recluse. Long ago, in the reign of George the Fourth, the gloomy solitary was a handsome, spirited, popular young man; fond of hunting, fond of shooting and fishing and all out-door sports, yet not a boor or a barbarian; one who had passed through the University with credit, and had learning and cultivation. He had a fine library which he used, he enjoyed conversations with scholars, he had travelled on the Continent, a thing which then was rare; he was thinking of entering the House. He had a fine, though not a large, estate, and a lovely house and stately

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gardens. No one in the county had greater reason to be satisfied with his lot, no one had a clearer right to look forward to the future with confidence, than Mr. Algernon Campaigne. The boy remembered all this talk.

He now contemplated the sleeping figure with a curious blend or mixture of emotions. There was pity in the blend, there was contempt in it, there was something of the respect or reverence due to an ancestor. One does not often get the chance of paying respect to so remote an ancestor as a great-grandfather. The ancestor lay back in his chair, his head turned a little on one side; his face, perfectly calm, had something of the transparent waxen look that belongs to the newly dead.

The young man went on thinking of what he had heard of this old man, who was at once the pride and the shame of the family. No one can help being proud of having a recluse, an anchorite, in the family—it is uncommon, like an early Shakespeare; moreover, the recluse was the head of the family, and lived in the place where the family had always lived from time beyond the memory of man.

He remembered his mother, a sad-faced widow, and his grandmother, another sad-faced widow. A certain day came back to him—it was a few weeks after his father's early death, when he was a child of seven—when the two women sat together in sorrow, and wept together, and conversed, in his presence—but the child could not understand—and said things which he recalled at this moment for the first time.

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'My dear,' said the elder lady, 'we are a family of misfortune.'

'But why—why—why?' asked the other. 'What have we done?'

The elder lady shook her head. 'Things are done,' she said, 'that are never suspected. Nobody knows, nobody finds out, but the arm of the Lord is stretched out and vengeance falls, if not upon the guilty, then upon his children and his grandchildren unto the third and fourth generation. It has fallen heavily upon that old man—for the sins of his father, perhaps—and upon us—and upon the children——'

'The helpless, innocent children? Oh! It is cruel!'

'We have Scripture for it.'

These words—this conversation—came back suddenly and unexpectedly to the young man. He had never remembered them before.

'Who did what?' he asked. 'The guilty person cannot be this venerable patriarch, because this affliction has fallen upon him and still abides with him after seventy years. But they spoke of something else. Why do these old words come back to me? Ancestor, sleep on.'

In the hall he saw the old housekeeper, and stopped to ask her after the master.

'He spoke just now,' he said.

'Spoke, sir? Spoke? The master spoke?'

'He sat up in his sleep and spoke.'

'What in the name o' mercy did he say?'

'He said, quite clearly, "That will end it."'

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'Say it again.'

He said it again.

'Sir,' she said, 'I don't know what he means. It's most time to end it. Master Leonard, something dreadful will happen. It is the first time for seventy years that he have spoken one single word.'

'It was in his sleep.'

'The first time for seventy years! Something dreadful, for sure, is going to happen.'

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CHAPTER II

WHAT HE WANTED

In the lightest and sunniest rooms of an unpretending flat forming part of the Bendor Mansions, Westminster, sat a young man of six-and-twenty. You have already seen him when he called upon his irresponsive ancestor at the family seat in the shire of Buckingham. He was now in his study and seated at what used to be called his desk. This simple piece of the scholar's furniture has long since given way to a table as big as the dimensions of the room permit—in this case one of eight feet long and five broad. It did not seem to be any too large for the object of its construction, because it was completely covered with books, papers, Blue-books, French and German journals, as well as Transactions of English learned and scientific societies. There was no confusion. The papers were lying in orderly arrangement; the books stood upright along the back of the table facing the writer. They were all books of political history, political economy, or of reference. A revolving bookcase stood ready at hand filled with other books of reference. These, it might

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have been observed, were principally concerned with statistics of trade—histories of trade, books on subjects connected with trade, Free Trade, Protection, the expansion of trade, and points connected with manufactures, industries, exports, and imports.

Mr. Leonard Campaigne was already in the House. It would be too much to say that he had already arrived at a position of authority, but he was so far advanced that on certain subjects of the more abstruse kind, which he endeavoured to make his own and to speak upon with the manner of a specialist, he was heard with some deference and reported at some length. More than this is not permitted to six-and-twenty.

These subjects were such as demand a clear head, untiring industry, the grasp of figures, and the power of making them attractive. They also required a prodigious memory. All these valuable qualities this young man possessed. At Cambridge, where he went out in mathematics, he tore himself reluctantly away from examiners who gave him all they could, with tears that it could be no more than 'Part II., Division I., Class I.,' and wept that they could not, as all good examiners hope to do before long, carry their examinations on to Part III., divided into three parts and each part into three classes, and then to Part IV., also divided into three divisions and each division into three classes, and so to go on examining their candidates, always decreasing in number, once a year for the rest of their natural lives, ending with a disgraceful pluck at eighty.

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'Part II., Division I., Class I.' No one can do better than that. I believe that only one man in Leonard's year did as well. Therefore he went down having a very good record and a solid reputation for ability to begin with. As to private fortune, he was independent, with an income derived from his mother of about £800 a year, and with those expectations which, as you have seen, were certainties. He also had a Fellowship worth at least five shillings a year, it having gone up recently in consequence of an unexpected looking-up or recovery in the agricultural interest. He came up to London, therefore, thus adequately equipped, entered at the Bar, got called, without any intention of practising, looked out for a borough, nursed it carefully for a twelvemonth, and got in, without a contest, at a by-election, on the Liberal side. So far he had followed the traditions of his family. He was the third, in sequence of father to son, of University distinction. His grandfather, son of the dumb recluse whom you have already seen, had also done well at Cambridge, and had also entered the House, and had also made a highly successful beginning, when he was cut off prematurely at the early age of thirty-two. His father, who in his turn distinguished himself at the University, also in his turn entered the House, and was also in his turn considered a young man of promise, when he, too, was carried off at about the same age. There were moments when Leonard asked himself whether this untoward fate was to be his as well. There were, indeed, special reasons for asking this question, of which he as yet knew nothing.

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Meantime, he asked no questions of the future, nor did he concern himself about the decrees of fate.

The study was pleasantly furnished with two or three easy chairs and the student's wooden chair. Books lined the walls; two or three cups stood on the mantelshelf, showing that the tenant of the room was no pale student, consumer of the midnight oil; above it there was a drawing of a country house, the same house which you have already seen. One observed also, with pleasure, further proofs that the occupant had his hours of relaxation. Tobacco and that vulgar thing the briar-root were conspicuously present. That a young man who hoped to rise by the most severe of all studies should habitually smoke a pipe should be, to any well-regulated mind, a most promising circumstance. The study opened into the dining-room, which was a dining-room only, and a formal, even a funereal place, with a few books and a few pictures—evidently not a room which was inhabited. The tenant took his breakfast in it, and sometimes his luncheon, and that was all. There were two bedrooms; beyond them, the kitchen and the room for the man and wife who 'did' for Mr. Campaigne.

The occupant of the flat presently laid down his pen, and sat up, turning his face to the light. Then he rose and paced the chamber.

He was a young man of somewhat remarkable appearance. In stature, as you have seen, he was much above the average, being at least six feet two and of strong build, though not so massive a man as his great-grand-

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father, the hermit of Campaigne Park. His features were good and strongly marked; his forehead was broad rather than high; his eyes, small rather than large, were keen and bright, the eyebrows were nearly straight. His appearance at this moment was meditative; but, then, he was actually meditating; in conversation and in debate his expression was alert, and even eager. He did not, in fact, belong to that school which admires nothing, desires nothing, and believes in nothing. He believed strongly, for instance, that the general standard of happiness could be raised by wise laws—not necessarily new laws—and by good education—not necessarily that of the School Boards. And he ardently desired to play his part in the improvement of that standard. That is a good solid lump of belief to begin with. For a statesman such a solid lump of belief is invaluable.

Presently he sat down again and renewed the thread of his investigations. After an hour or so he threw aside his pen; he had accomplished what he had proposed to do that morning. If a man is going to succeed, you will generally find that he knows what he means to do and the time that he will take over it, and that he sets to work with directness as well as resolution.

The task was finished, then, and before twelve o'clock Leonard pushed back his chair and sprang to his feet with a sigh of relief. Much as men may love work, it is always a satisfaction to get it done. On the table beside his papers lay a little pile of letters not yet opened. He took up one and opened it. The letter

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was from the editor of a leading magazine, accepting a proposal to contribute a paper on a certain economic theory. Leonard smiled with satisfaction. The *Nineteenth Century* is the ladder of ambition. It is by means of this magazine, and of one or two like unto it, that the ambitious young man is enabled to put himself forward as a student, if not yet an authority, on any subject—a more rapid way of advance than by means of the House.

Leonard had already written on this subject, and with success, as a student; he was now to write upon it with authority. You will understand from all this that Leonard was a young man whose mind was fully occupied, even absorbed, with work which was at once his greatest delight and the ladder for his ambitions; that he occupied a good position in society, and that his work, his thoughts, his relaxations, were those of one who lived and moved habitually on a high level, free from meanness or sordid cares or anxieties of any kind.

On the same staircase and the same floor was a flat exactly corresponding in every particular to his own except that the windows looked out towards the opposite pole. This flat, into which we will not penetrate, was occupied by a young lady, who lived in it, just as Leonard lived in his, with a man and his wife to look after her. People may be neighbours in a 'Mansion' and yet not know each other. It is not likely that Leonard would have made the acquaintance of Miss Constance Ambry but for the fortunate circumstance that he belonged to the same club as well as the same

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collection of flats; that he was introduced to her at the club; that he met her at dinner day after day; that he speedily discovered the fact that they were neighbours; that they became friends; that they often dined together at the club, and that they frequently walked home together.

It will be understood, therefore, that Miss Constance Ambry would have been called, a few years ago, an emancipated young woman. The word has already become belated; in a year or two it will be obsolete. Emancipation has ceased to carry any reproach or to excite any astonishment. Many girls and unmarried women live alone in flats and mansions and similar places; they have their latch-key; they marvel that there could have been formerly a time when the latch-key was withheld from girls; they go where they like; they see what they wish to see; they meet people they wish to meet. The emancipated woman twenty years ago thought it necessary, in order to prove her superiority of intellect, to become at least an atheist. That was part of the situation; other prancings and curvettings there were; now she has settled down, the question of comparative intellect being no longer discussed, and goes on, in many respects, almost as if she were still in the ancient House of Bondage. In this case there were strong reasons, comfortably running into a good many hundreds a year, why Constance Ambry should dare to go her own way and live at her own will. She began her independent career by three years at Girton. During her studentship she distinguished herself espe-

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cially by writing critical essays, in which it was remarked that the passion of Love, as depicted and dwelt upon by poets, was entirely ignored by the critic; not so much, her friends explained, from maidenly reserve, as from a complete inability to sympathize even with the woman's point of view—which, indeed, women who write poetry and love-songs have always done their utmost to conceal, or mendaciously to represent in the same terms and under the same form as the masculine passion. On leaving Girton she accepted a post as Lecturer on English Literature in a women's college. It was a poorly-paid office, and hitherto it had been difficult to find a good lecturer to keep it. Constance could afford not only to take it, but also to make it the sole object of her work and thoughts. One is pleased to add that her ideas of the liberty of women included their liberty to dress as well as they can afford. She presented to her admiring and envious class the constant spectacle of a woman dressed as she should be—not splendidly, but beautifully. The girls regarded their lecturer, clad, like a summer garden, in varied beauty, with far greater awe than they had entertained for her predecessor, who was dumpy, wore her hair short, and appeared habitually in a man's jacket.

The two were friends close and fast. Leonard was not afraid of compromising her by taking tea in her drawing-room, nor was Constance afraid of compromising herself by venturing alone into the opposite flat if she wanted to talk about anything. It is a dangerous position even for a young man whose ambitions absorb

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his thoughts; who has put the question of marriage into the background—to be taken up at some convenient moment not yet arrived. It is dangerous also for a girl even when she is emancipated.

As regards the young man the usual consequences happened. First he perceived that it gave him a peculiar pleasure to sit beside her at dinner and to walk home with her: then he became disappointed if he did not meet her: presently he found himself thinking a great deal about her: he also detected himself in the act of confiding his ambitions to her sympathetic ear—this is one of the worst symptoms possible. He had now arrived at that stage when the image of the girl is always present in a young man's mind: when it sometimes interferes with work: when an explanation becomes absolutely necessary if there is to be any peace or quiet work. The Victorian lover no longer speaks or writes about flames and darts, but he is still possessed and held by the dominant presence in his mind, night and day, of his mistress.

In these matters, there comes a time, the one moment, when words have to be spoken. As with a pear which has half an hour of perfect ripeness, so in love there is a day—an hour—a moment—when the words that mean so much must be spoken. It is a most unfortunate thing if the lover chooses the wrong moment. It is also very unfortunate if the ripeness is on one side only.

Leonard Campaigne made this mistake. Being a self-contained young man, he thought about himself

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a great deal more than he thought of other people: it is not necessarily a sign of selfishness or of obtuseness—not at all: it is a defect with men of strong natures and ambitious aims to think habitually about themselves and their aims. Therefore, while he himself was quite ripe for a declaration, he did not ask himself whether the ripeness was also arrived at by the other person concerned. Unfortunately, it was not. The other person concerned was still in the critical stage: she could consider her friend from the outside: she felt, as yet, no attraction towards the uncritical condition, the absorption of love.

Leonard did not suspect this arrest, so to speak, of development. He assumed that the maiden's heart had advanced *pari passu* with his. He wrote a letter, therefore, a method of wooing which is less embarrassing than that of speech—I believe that girls prefer the latter. Certainly, it is difficult to be glowing in a letter: nor, if there should be any doubt, is a letter so persuasive as the voice, aided by the pressure of the hand and the ardour of the eye.

'My dear Friend,

'I am about to imperil a situation the preservation of which is my greatest happiness. You have allowed me to talk to you freely about my cherished ambitions. You have even done me the honour of consulting me about your own. I would not throw away this position of confidence for any consideration whatever. Let me, however, venture to put before you

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a simple question. I ask you to consider the possibility of a change in this situation. This change—there is only one which we can consider—would not in any way affect this confidence, but should draw it more closely. How it would affect me I will tell you if you allow me.

'Your friend,

'L. C.'

Not a loverlike letter at all, is it? Yet there were possibilities about it. You see, he held out the hope that more would be told. The young lady answered by asking a few days for consideration. She was to send or bring her reply that morning.

Constance knocked at the door. She came in from her rooms without a hat. She took a chair—Leonard's own wooden chair—and sat down, beginning to talk about other things, as if such a matter as a proposal of marriage was of no importance. But that was only her way, which was always feminine.

'I was told last night,' she said, 'at the club—fancy, at the club!—that I have been compromising myself by dining night after night with you and letting you walk home with me. That is their idea of woman's liberty. She is not to form friendships. Don't abuse our members. Pray remember, Leonard, that I do not in the least mind what they say.'

At the first glance at her face, one could understand that this girl was not in the least alarmed as to what women might say of her. It was a proud face. There are many kinds of pride—she might have been proud of

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her family, had she chosen that form; or of her intellect and attainments; or of her beauty—which was remarkable. She was not proud in any such way; she had that intense self-respect which is pride of the highest kind. 'She was a woman, therefore to be wooed,' but the wooer must meet and equal that intense self-respect. This pride made her seem cold. Everybody thought her intensely cold. Leonard was perhaps the only man who knew by a thousand little indications that she was very far from cold. The pose of her head, the lines of the mouth, the intellectual look in her eyes, the clear-cut regularity of her features, proclaimed her pride and seemed to proclaim her coldness.

'I always remember what you say, Constance. And now tell me what you came to say.'

She rose from the chair and remained standing. She began by looking at the things over the mantel as if she was greatly interested in tobacco and cigarettes. Then she turned upon him abruptly, joining her hands. 'What I came to say was this.'

He read the answer in her face, which was frank, hard, and without the least sign of embarrassment, confusion, or weakening. It is not with such a look that a girl gives herself to her lover. However, he pretended not to understand.

'What is it?'

'Well, it is just this. I have thought about it for a whole week, and it won't do. That is my answer. It won't do for either of us. I like you very much. I like our present relations. We dine together at the

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club. I come in here without fuss. You come to my place without fuss. We talk and walk and go about together. I do not suppose that I shall ever receive this kind of invitation from any man whom I regard so much. And yet——'

'"Yet!" Why this obstructive participle? I bring you'—but he spoke with a coldness due to the discouragement in the maiden's face—'the fullest worship of yourself.'

She shook her head and put up her hand. 'Oh no! —no!' she said. 'Worship? I want no worship. What do you mean by worship?'

'I mean the greatest respect—the greatest reverence —the greatest admiration——'

'For what?'

'For Constance Ambry.'

'Thank you, my friend. Some of the respect I accept with gratitude, not all of it. Still, I dare say, at this moment, you mean it all. But consider a little. Do you worship my intellect? Confess, now. You know that it is distinctly inferior to your own. I know it, I say. If you came to me pretending to worship an intellect inferior to your own, I should lose my respect for you, or I should lose my faith in your truthfulness. It cannot be my intellect. Is it, then, worship of my genius? But I have no genius. And that you know very well. Is it worship of my attainments? They are far below most of the scholars of your University and the Fellows of your college. You cannot possibly pretend to worship my attainments——'

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'Let me worship Constance Ambry herself.'

She laughed lightly.

'It would be very foolish of you to do so. For you could not do so without lowering your standards and your character, by pretending what is not the case. For I am no higher than yourself in any of the virtues possible to us both: not a bit higher: I believe that my standards of everything—truth, honour, courage—patience—all—all—everything are like my intellect, distinctly lower than your own. Such is the respect which I entertain for you. Therefore, my friend, do not, pray, think of offering me worship.'

'You wrong yourself, Constance. Your nature is far higher than mine.'

She laughed again. 'If I were to marry you, in a week you would find out your mistake—and then you might fall into the opposite mistake.'

'How am I to make you understand?'

'I do understand. There is something that attracts you. Men are so, I suppose. It is face, or voice, or figure, or manner. No one can tell why a man is attracted.'

'Constance, is it possible that you are not conscious of your beauty?'

She looked him full in the face, and replied slowly: 'I wish I understood things. I see very well that men are more easily moved to love than women. They make the most appalling mistakes: I know of some—mistakes not to be remedied. Do not let us two make a mistake.'

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'It would be no mistake, believe me.'

'I don't know. There is the question of beauty. Women are not fascinated by the beauty of other women. A man is attracted by a face, and straightway attributes to the soul behind that face all the virtues possible. Women can behold a pretty face without believing that it is the stamp of purity and holiness. Besides—a face! Why, in a dozen years what will it be like? And in thirty years—— Oh! Terrible to think of!'

'Never, Constance. You could never be otherwise than wholly beautiful.'

She shook her head again, unconvinced. 'I do not wish to be worshipped,' she repeated. 'Other women may like it. To me it would be a humiliation. I don't want worship; I want rivalry. Let me work among those who truly work, and win my own place. As for my own face, and those so-called feminine attractions, I confess that I am not interested in them. Not in the least.'

'If you will only let me go on admiring——'

'Oh!' she shook that admirable head impatiently, 'as much as you please.'

Leonard sighed. Persuasion, he knew well, was of no use with this young lady; she knew her own mind.

'I will ask no more,' he said. 'Your heart is capable of every emotion—except one. You are deficient in the one passion which, if you had it, would make you divine.'

She laughed scornfully. 'Make me divine?' she repeated. 'Oh, you talk like a man—not a scholar

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and a philosopher, but a mere man.' She left the personal side of the question, and began to treat it generally. 'The whole of poetry is disfigured with the sham divinity, the counterfeit divinity, of the woman. I do not want that kind of ascribed divinity. Therefore I do not regret the absence of this emotion which you so much desire; I can very well do without it.' She spoke with conviction, and she looked the part she played—cold, loveless, without a touch of Venus. 'I was lecturing my class the other day on this very subject. I took Herrick for my text; but, indeed, there are plenty of poets who would do as well. I spoke of this sham divinity. I said that we wanted in poetry, as in human life, a certain sanity, which can only exist in a condition of controlled emotion.'

It was perhaps a proof that neither lover nor maiden really felt the power of the passion called Love that they could thus, at what to some persons would be a supreme moment, drop into a cold philosophic treatment of the subject.

'Perhaps love does not recognise sanity.'

'Then love had better be locked up. I pointed out in my lecture that these conceits and extravagances may be very pretty set to the music of rhythm and rhyme and phrase, but that in the conduct of life they can have no place except in the brains of men who have now ceased to exist.'

'Ceased to exist?'

'I mean that the ages of ungoverned passion have died out. To dwell perpetually on a mere episode in

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life, to magnify its importance, to deify the poet's mistress—that, I told my class, is to present a false view of life and to divert poetry from its proper function.'

'How did your class receive this view?'

'Well—you know—the average girl, I believe, likes to be worshipped. It is very bad for her, because she knows she isn't worth it and that it cannot last. But she seems to like it. My class looked, on the whole, as if they could not agree with me.'

'You would have no love in poetry?'

'Not extravagant love. These extravagances are not found in the nobler poets. They are not in Milton, nor in Pope, nor in Cowper, nor in Wordsworth, nor in Browning. I have not, as you say, experienced the desire for love. In any case, it is only an episode. Poetry should be concerned with the whole life.'

'So should love.'

'Leonard,' she said, the doubt softening her face, 'there may be something deficient in my nature. I sincerely wish that I could understand what you mean by desiring any change.' No, she understood nothing of the sacred passion. 'But there must be no difference in consequence. I could not bear to think that my answer even to such a trifle should make any difference between us.'

'Such a trifle! Constance, you are wonderful.'

'But it seems to me, if the poets are right, that men are always ready to make love: if one woman fails, there are plenty of others.'

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'Would not that make a difference between us?'

'You mean that I should be jealous?'

'I could not possibly use the word "jealous" in connection with you, Constance.'

She considered the point from an outside position. 'I should not be jealous because you were making love to some unseen person, but I should not like another woman standing here between us. I don't think I could stay here.'

'You give me hope, Constance.'

'No. It is only friendship. Because, you see, the whole pleasure of having a friend like yourself—a man friend—is unrestrained and open conversation. I like to feel free with you. And I confess that I could not do this if another woman were with us.'

She was silent awhile. She became a little embarrassed. 'Leonard,' she said, 'I have been thinking about you as well as myself. If I thought that this thing was necessary for you—or best for you—I might, perhaps—though I could not give you what you expect—I mean responsive worship and the rest of it.'

'Necessary?' he repeated.

There was no sign of Love's weakness in her face, which had now assumed the professional manner that is historical, philosophical, and analytical.

'Let us sit down and talk about yourself quite dispassionately, as if you were somebody else.'

She resumed the chair—Leonard's own chair—beside the table; it was a revolving chair, and she turned it half round so that her elbow rested on the blotting-pad, while

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she faced her suitor. Leonard for his part experienced the old feeling of standing up before the Head for a little wholesome criticism. He laughed, however, and obeyed, taking the easy chair at his side of the fire-place.

This gave Constance the slight superiority of talking down to instead of up to him. A tall man very often forgets the advantage of his stature.

'I mean, if companionship were necessary for you. It is, I believe, to weaker and to less fortunate men —to poets, I suppose. Love means, I am sure, a craving for support and sympathy. Some men—weaker men than you—require sympathy as much as women. You do not feel that desire—or need.'

'A terrible charge. But how do you know?'

'I know because I have thought a great deal about you, and because I have conceived so deep a regard for you that, at first, when I received your letter I almost —almost—made a great mistake.'

'Well—but tell me something more. To learn how one is estimated may be very good for one. Self-conceit is an ever-present danger.'

'I think, to begin with, that of all young men that I know you are the most self-reliant and the most confident.'

'Well, these are virtues, are they not?'

'Of course, you have every right to be self-reliant. You are a good scholar, and you have been regarded at the University as one of the coming men. You are actually already one of the men who are looked

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upon as arrived. So far you have justified your self-confidence.'

'So far my vanity is not wounded. But there is more.'

'Yes. You are also the most fortunate of young men. You are miles ahead of your contemporaries, because where they all lack something you lack nothing. One man wants birth—it takes a very strong man to get over a humble origin : another man wants manner : another has an unfortunate face—a harsh voice—a nervous jerkiness : another is deficient in style : another is ground down by poverty. You alone have not one single defect to stand in your way.'

'Let me be grateful, then.'

'You have that very, very rare combination of qualities which makes the successful statesman. You are good-looking : you are even handsome : you look important : you have a good voice and a good manner as well as a good presence : you are a gentleman by birth and training : you have enough to live upon now : and you are the heir to a good estate. Really, Leonard, I do not know what else you could ask of fortune.'

'I have never asked anything of fortune.'

'And you get everything. You are too fortunate, Leonard. There must be something behind—something to come. Nature makes no man perfectly happy.'

'Indeed!' He smiled gravely. 'I want nothing of that kind.'

'In addition to everything else, you are completely healthy, and I believe you are a stranger to the

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dentist; your hair is not getting prematurely thin. Really, Leonard, I do not think that there can be in the whole country any other young man so fortunate.'

'Yet you refuse to join your future with mine.'

'Perhaps, if there were any misfortunes or drawbacks one might not refuse. Family scandals, now—— Many noble houses have whole cupboards filled with skeletons: your cupboards are only filled with blue china. One or two scandals might make you more human.'

'Unfortunately, from your point of view, my people have no scandals.'

'Poor relations again! Many people are much pestered with poor relations. They get into scrapes, and they have to be pulled out at great cost. I have a cousin, for instance, who turns up occasionally. He is very expensive and most disreputable. But you? Oh, fortunate young man!'

'We have had early deaths; but there are no disreputable cousins.'

'That is what I complain of. You are too fortunate. You should throw a ring into the sea—like the too fortunate king, the only person who could be compared with you.'

'I dare say gout or something will come along in time.'

'It isn't good for you,' she went on, half in earnest. 'It makes life too pleasant for you, Leonard. You expect the whole of life to be one long triumphal march. Why, you are so fortunate that you are altogether

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outside humanity. You are out of sympathy with men and women. They have to fight for everything. You have everything tossed into your lap. You have nothing in common with the working world—no humiliations—no disgraces—no shames and no defeats.'

'I hardly understand——' he began, disconcerted at this unexpected array of charges and crimes.

'I mean that you are placed above the actual world, in which men tumble about and are knocked down and are picked up—mostly by the women. You have never been knocked down. You say that I do not understand Love. Perhaps not. Certainly you do not. Love means support on both sides. You and I do not want any kind of support. You are clad in mail armour. You do not—you cannot—even wish to know what Love means.'

He made no reply. This turning of the tables was unexpected. She had been confessing that she felt no need of Love, and now she accused him—the wooer—of a like defect.

'Leonard, if fortune would only provide you with family scandals, some poor relations who would make you feel ashamed, something to make you like other people, vulnerable, you would learn that Love might mean—and then, in that impossible case—I don't know —perhaps——' She left the sentence unfinished and ran out of the room.

Leonard looked after her, his face expressing some pain. 'What does she mean? Humiliation? Degraded relations? Ridiculous!'

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Then, for the second time after many years, he heard the voices of his mother and his grandmother. They spoke of misfortunes falling upon one and another of their family, beginning with the old man of the country house and the terrace. Oh! oh! It was absurd. He sprang to his feet. It was absurd. Humiliations! Disgrace! Family misfortunes! Absurd! Well, Constance had refused him. Perhaps she would come round. Meanwhile his eyes fell upon the table and his papers. He sat down: he took up the pen. Love, who had been looking on sorrowfully from a lofty perch on a bookshelf, vanished with a sigh of despair. The lover heard neither the sigh nor the fluttering of Love's wings. He bent over his papers. A moment, and he was again absorbed—entirely absorbed in the work before him.

In her own room the girl sat before her table and took up her pen. But she threw it down again. 'No,' she said, 'I could not. He is altogether absorbed in himself. He knows nothing and understands nothing—and the world is so full of miseries; and he is all happiness, and men and women suffer—how they suffer!—for their sins and for other people's sins. And he knows nothing. He understands nothing. Oh, if he could be made human by something—by humiliation, by defeat! If he could be made human, like the rest, why, then—then——' She threw away her pen, pushed back the chair, put on her hat and jacket, and went out into the streets among the men and women.

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CHAPTER III

SOMETHING TO COME

If you have the rare power of being able to work at any time, and after any event to concentrate your thoughts on work, this is certainly a good way of receiving disappointments and averting chagrin. Two hours passed. Leonard continued at his table, absorbed in his train of argument, and for the moment wholly forgetful of what had passed. Presently his pen began to move more slowly; he threw it down: he had advanced his position by another earthwork. He sat up; he numbered his pages; he put them together. And he found himself, after the change of mind necessary for his work, able to consider the late conversation without passion, though with a certain surprise. Some men—the weaker brethren—are indignant, humiliated, by such a rejection. That is because their vanity is built upon the sands. Leonard was not the kind of man to be humiliated by any answer to any proposal, even that which concerns the wedding-ring. He had too many excellent and solid foundations for the good opinion which he entertained of himself. It was impossible for

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any woman to refuse him, considering the standards by which women consider and estimate men. Constance had indeed acknowledged that in all things fortune had favoured him, yet owing to some feminine caprice or unexpected perversity he had not been able to touch her heart. Such a man as Leonard cannot be humiliated by anything that may be said or done to him: he is humiliated by his own acts, perhaps, and his own blunders and mistakes, of which most men's lives are so full.

He was able to put aside, as an incident which would perhaps be disavowed in the immediate future, the refusal of that thrice fortunate hand of his. Besides, the refusal was conveyed in words so gracious and so kindly.

But there was this strange attack upon him. He found himself repeating in his own mind her words. Nature, Constance said, makes no man perfectly happy. He himself, she went on, presented the appearance of the one exception to the rule. He was well born, wealthy enough, strong and tall, sound of wind and limb, sufficiently well favoured, with proved abilities, already successful, and without any discoverable drawback. Was there any other man in the whole world like unto him? It would be better for him, this disturbing girl—this oracle—had gone on to prophesy, if something of the common lot—the dash of bitterness—had been thrown in with all these great and glorious gifts of fortune; something would certainly happen: something was coming; there would be disaster: then

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he would be more human; he would understand the world. As soon as he had shared the sorrows and sufferings, the shames and the humiliations, of the world, he would become more in harmony with men and women. For the note of the common life is suffering.

At this point there came back to him again out of the misty glades of childhood the memory of those two women who sat together, widows both, in the garb of mourning, and wept together.

'My dear,' said the elder lady—the words came back to him, and the scene, as plainly as on that day when he watched the old man sleeping in his chair—'my dear, we are a family of misfortune.'

'But why—why—why?' asked the other. 'What have we done?'

'Things,' said the elder lady, 'are done which are never suspected. Nobody knows; nobody finds out: the arm of the Lord is stretched out, and vengeance falls, if not upon the guilty, then upon his children and——'

Leonard drove the memory back—the lawn and the garden: the two women sitting in the verandah: the child playing on the grass: the words—all vanished. Leonard returned to the present. 'Ghosts!' he said. 'Ghosts! Were these superstitious fears ever anything but ghosts?' He refused to think of these things: he put aside the oracle of the wise woman, the admonition that he was too fortunate a youth.

You have seen how he opened the first of a small heap of letters. His eye fell upon the others: he took

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up the first and opened it: the address was that of a fashionable West-End hotel: the writing was not familiar. Yet it began 'My dear nephew.'

'My dear nephew?' he asked; 'who calls me his dear nephew?' He turned over the letter, and read the name at the end, 'Your affectionate uncle, Fred Campaigne.'

Fred Campaigne! Then his memory flew back to another day of childhood, and he saw his mother—that gentle creature—flushing with anger as she repeated that name. There were tears in her eyes—not tears of sorrow, but of wrath—and her cheek was aflame. And that was all he remembered. The name of Frederick Campaigne was never more mentioned.

'I wonder,' said Leonard. Then he went on reading the letter:

'My dear Nephew,

'I arrived here a day or two ago, after many years' wandering. I lose no time, after the transaction of certain necessary business, in communicating with you. At this point, pray turn to my signature.'

'I have done so already,' said Leonard. He put the letter down, and tried to remember more. He could not. There arose before his memory once more the figure of his mother angry for the first and only time that he could remember. 'Why was she angry?' he asked himself. Then he remembered that his uncle Christopher, the distinguished lawyer, had never mentioned Frederick's name. 'Seems as if there was

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a family scandal, after all,' he thought. He turned to the letter again.

'I am the long-lost wanderer. I do not suppose that you can possibly remember me, seeing that when I went away you were no more than four or five years of age. One does not confide family matters to a child of those tender years. When I left my country I was under a cloud—a light cloud, it is true—a sort of nebulous haze, mysteriously glowing in the sunshine. It was no more than the not uncommon mystery of debt, my nephew. I went off. I was shoved off, in fact, by the united cold shoulders of all the relations. Not only were there money debts, but even my modest patrimony was gone. Thus does fond youth foolishly throw good money after bad. I should have kept my patrimony to go abroad with, and spent nothing but my debts. I am now, however, home again. I should have called, but I have important appointments in the City, where, you may be pleased to learn, my name and my voice carry weight. Meantime, I hear that you will be asked to meet me at my brother Christopher's on Wednesday. I shall, therefore, hope to see you then. My City friends claim all my time between this and Wednesday. The magnitude of certain operations renders it necessary to devote myself, for a day or two, entirely to matters of *haute finance*. It was, I believe, customary in former times for the prodigal son to return in rags. We have changed all that. Nowadays the prodigal son returns in broadcloth, with a cheque-

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book in his pocket and credit at his bank. The family will be glad, I am sure, to hear that I am prosperous exceedingly.'

Leonard read this letter with a little uneasiness. He remembered those tears, to begin with. And then there was a certain false ring in the words, an affectation of light-heartedness which did not sound true. There was an ostentation of success which seemed designed to cover the past. 'I had forgotten,' he said, 'that we had a prodigal son in the family. Indeed, I never knew the fact. "Prosperous exceedingly," is he? "Important appointments in the City." Well, we shall see. I can wait very well until Wednesday.'

He read the letter once more. Something jarred in it; the image of the gentle woman for once in her life in wrath real and undisguised did not agree with the nebulous haze spoken of by the writer. Besides, the touch of romance, the Nabob who returns with a pocket full of money, having prospered exceedingly, does not begin by making excuses for the manner of leaving home. Not at all: he comes home exultant, certain to be well received on account of his money-bags. 'After all,' said Leonard, putting down the letter, 'it is an old affair, and my poor mother will shed no more tears over that or anything else, and it may be forgotten.' He put down the letter and took up the next. 'Humph!' he growled. 'Algernon again! I suppose he wants to borrow again. And Constance said that I wanted poor relations.'

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It is true that his cousin Algernon did occasionally borrow money of him: but he was hardly a poor relation, being the only son of Mr. Christopher Campaigne, of Lincoln's Inn, Barrister-at-law, and in the enjoyment of a large and lucrative practice. It is the blessed privilege of the Bar that every large practice is lucrative; now, in the lower branch of the legal profession there are large practices which are not lucrative, just as in the lower branches of the medical profession there are sixpenny practitioners with a very large connection, and in the Church there are vicars with very large parishes.

Algernon, for his part, was studying with a great and ambitious object. He proposed to become the dramatist of the future. He had not yet written any dramas; he haunted the theatres, attended all the first nights, knew a good many actors and a few actresses, belonged to the Playgoers' Club, spoke and posed as one who is on the stage, or at least as one to whom the theatre is his chosen home. Algernon was frequently stone-broke, was generally unable to obtain more than a certain allowance from his father, and was accustomed to make appeals to his cousin, the head of the family.

The letter was, as Leonard expected, an invitation to lend him money:

'Dear Leonard,

'I am sorry to worry you, but things have become tight, and the pater refuses any advances. Why, with his fine practice, he should grudge my small

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expenses I cannot understand. He complains that I am doing no work. This is most unreasonable, as there is no man who works harder at his art than I myself. I go to a theatre nearly every evening; is it my fault that the stalls cost half a guinea? All this means that I want you to lend me a tenner until the paternal pride breaks or bends.

'Yours,

'ALGERNON.'

Leonard read and snorted.

'The fellow will never do anything,' he said. Nevertheless, he sat down, opened his cheque-book, and drew the cheque. 'Take it, confound you!' he said.

And yet Constance had told him that for want of poor relations he was out of harmony with the rest of the world.

There was a third letter—from his aunt:

'DEAR LEONARD,

'Will you look in, if you possibly can, on Wednesday to meet your uncle Fred? He has come home again. Of course, you cannot remember him. He was wild, I believe, in the old days, but he says that is over now. Indeed, it is high time. He seems to be doing well, and is most cheerful. As the acting head of the family, you will, I am sure, give him a welcome, and forget and forgive, if there is anything to forgive. Algernon is, I fear, working too hard. I could not have believed that the art of play-writing required such close attention to the theatres. He is

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making many acquaintances among actors and actresses, who will be able, he says, to help him tremendously. I tell his father, who sometimes grumbles, that when the boy makes up his mind to begin there will be no living dramatist who has more conscientiously studied his art.

'Affectionately yours,

'DOROTHY CAMPAIGNE.'

Leonard wrote a note accepting this invitation, and then endeavoured, but without success, to dismiss the subject of the returned prodigal from his mind. It was a relief to feel that he was at least prosperous and cheerful. Now, had Leonard been a person of wider experience, he would have remembered that cheerfulness in a prodigal is a most suspicious attribute, because cheerfulness is the dominant note of the prodigal under all circumstances, even the most unpromising. His cheerfulness is his principal, sometimes his only, virtue. He is cheerful because it is always more pleasant to be cheerful than to be miserable; it is more comfortable to laugh than to cry. Only when the prodigal becomes successful—which is very, very seldom—does he lose his cheerfulness and assume a responsible and anxious countenance like the steady and plodding elder brother.

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command his brain: it was a rebellious brain: instead of tackling the social question before him, it went off wandering in the direction of Constance and of her refusal and of her words—her uncomfortable, ill-boding words.

Unexpectedly, and without any premonitory sound of steps on the stair, there came a ring at his bell. Now, Leonard was not a nervous man, or a superstitious man, or one who looked at the present or the future with apprehension. But this evening he felt a chill shudder: he knew that something disagreeable was going to happen. He looked at the clock: his man must have gone to bed: he got up and went out to open the door himself.

There stood before him a stranger, a man of tall stature, wrapped in a kind of Inverness cape, with a round felt hat.

'Mr. Leonard Campaigne?' he asked.

'Certainly,' he replied snappishly. 'Who are you? What do you want here at this time of night?'

'I am sorry to be so late. I lost my way. May I have half an hour's talk with you? I am a cousin of yours, though you do not know me.'

'A cousin of mine? What cousin? What is your name?'

'Here is my card. If you will let me come in, I will tell you all about the relationship. A cousin I am, most certainly.'

Leonard looked at the card.

'Mr. Samuel Galley-Campaigne.' In the corner were the words, 'Solicitor, Commercial Road.'

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'I know nothing about you,' said Leonard. 'Perhaps, however—will you come in?'

He led the way into the study, and turned on one or two more lights. Then he looked at his visitor.

The man followed him into the study, threw off his cape and hat, and stood before him—a tall, thin figure, with a face which instantly reminded the spectator of a vulture; the nose was long, thin, and curved; his eyes were bright, set too close together. He was dressed in a frock-coat which had known better days, and wore a black tie. He looked hungry, but not with physical pangs.

'Mr. Samuel Galley-Campaigne,' he repeated. 'My father's name was Galley; my grandmother's maiden name was Campaigne.'

'Oh, your grandmother's name was Campaigne. Your own name, then, is Galley?'

'I added the old woman's name to my own; it looks better for business purposes. Also I took her family crest—she's got a coat of arms—it looks well for business purposes.'

'You can't take your grandmother's family shield.'

'Can't I? Who's to prevent me? It's unusual down our way, and it's good for business.'

'Well, as you please—name and coat of arms and everything. Will you explain the cousinship?'

'In two words. That old man over there'—he indicated something in the direction of the north—'the old man who lives by himself, is my grandmother's father. He's ninety something, and she's seventy something.'

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'Oh! she is my great-aunt, then. Strange that I never heard of her.'

'Not at all strange. Only what one would expect. She went down in the world. You went up—or stayed up—of course they didn't tell you about her.'

'Well—do you tell me about her. Will you sit down? May I offer you anything—a cigarette?'

The visitor looked about the room: there was no indication of whisky. He sighed and declined the cigarette. But he accepted the chair.

'Thank you,' he said. 'It is more friendly sitting down. You've got comfortable quarters. No Mrs. C. as yet, is there? The old woman said that you were a bachelor. Now, then. It's this way: She married my grandfather, Isaac Galley. That was fifty years ago—in 1849. No, 1850. Isaac Galley failed. His failure was remarked upon in the papers on account of the sum—the amount—of his liabilities. The *Times* wanted to know how he managed to owe so much.'

'Pray go on. I am interested. This part of our family history is new to me.'

Leonard continued standing, looking down upon his visitor. He became aware, presently, of a ridiculous likeness to himself, and he found himself hoping that the vulture played a less prominent part in his own expression. All the Campaigne people were taller—much taller—than the average; their features were strongly marked; they were, as a rule, a handsome family. They carried themselves with a certain dignity. This man was tall, his features were strongly marked;

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but he was not handsome, and he did not carry himself with dignity. His shoulders were bent, and he stooped. He was one of the race, apparently, but gone to seed, looking 'common.' No one could possibly mistake him for a gentleman by birth or by breeding. 'Common' was the word to apply to Mr. Galley-Campaigne. 'Common' is a word much used by certain ladies belonging to a certain stage of society about their neighbours' children; it will do to express the appearance of this visitor.

'Pray go on,' Leonard repeated mechanically, while making his observations; 'you are my cousin, clearly. I must apologize for not knowing of your existence.'

'We live at the other end of town. I'm a gentleman, of course, being in the Law—lower branch——'

'Quite so,' said Leonard.

'But the old woman—I mean my grandmother—takes jolly good care that I shall know the difference between you and me. You've had Eton and College to back you up. You've got the House of Commons and a swagger club. That's your world. Mine is different. We've no swells where I live, down the Commercial Road. I'm a solicitor in what you would call a small way. There are no big men our way.'

'It is a learned profession.'

'Yes. I am not a City clerk, like my father.'

'Tell me more about yourself. Your grandfather, you say, was bankrupt. Is he living?'

'No. He went off about ten years ago, boastful to the end of his great smash. His son—that's my father

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—was in the City. He was a clerk all his life to a wine-merchant. He died four or five years ago. He was just able to pay for my articles—a hundred pounds —and the stamp—another eighty—and that pretty well cleared him out, except for a little insurance of a hundred. When he died I was just beginning to get along; and I've been able to live, and to keep my mother and my grandmother—it's a tight fit, though—with what I can screw out of Mary Anne.'

'Who is Mary Anne?'

'My sister, Mary Anne. She's a Board School teacher. But she shoves all the expenses on to me.'

'Oh! I have a whole family of cousins, then, previously unknown. That is interesting. Are there more?'

He remembered certain words spoken only that morning, and he winced. Here were poor relations, after all. Constance would be pleased.

'No more—only me and Mary Anne. That is to say, no more that you would acknowledge as such. There's all father's cousins and their children: and all mother's cousins and brothers and nephews and nieces: but you can't rightly call them your cousins.'

'Hardly, perhaps, much as one would like. . . .'

'Now, Mr. Campaigne, the old woman has been at me a long time to call upon you. I didn't want to call. I don't want to know you, and you don't want to know me. But I came to please her and to let you know that she's alive, and that she would like, above all things, to see you and to talk to you.'

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'Indeed! If that is all, I shall be very pleased to call.'

'You see, she's always been unlucky—born unlucky, so to speak. But she's proud of her own family. They've never done anything for her, whatever they may have to do—have to do, I say.' He became threatening.

'Have to do,' repeated Leonard softly.

'In the future. It may be necessary to prove who we are, and that before many years—or months—or even days—and it might save trouble if you were to understand who she is, and who I am.'

'You wish me to call upon my great-aunt. I will certainly do so.'

'That's what she wants. That's why I came here to-night. Look here, sir: for my own part, I would not intrude upon you. I've not come to beg or to borrow. But for the old woman's sake I've ventured to call and ask you to remember that she is your great-aunt. She's seventy-two years of age, and now and then she frets a bit after a sight of her own people. She hasn't seen any of them since your grandfather committed suicide. And that must have been about the year 1860, before you and I were born.'

Leonard started.

'My grandfather committed suicide? What do you mean? My grandfather died somewhere about 1860. What do you mean by saying that he killed himself?'

'What! Don't you know? Your grandfather, sir,' said the other firmly, 'died of cut-throat fever. Oh yes, whatever they called it, he died of cut-throat fever.

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Very sudden it was. Of that I am quite certain, because my grandmother remembers the business perfectly well.'

'Is it possible? Killed himself? Then, why did I never learn such a thing?'

'I suppose they didn't wish to worry you. Your father was but a child, I suppose, at the time. Perhaps they never told him. All the same, it's perfectly true.'

Committed suicide! He remembered the widow who never smiled—the pale-faced, heavy-eyed widow. He now understood why she went in mourning all the days of her life. He now learned, in this unexpected manner, why she had retired to the quiet little Cornish village.

Committed suicide! Why? It seemed a kind of sacrilege to ask this person. He hesitated; he took up a trifling ornament from the mantelshelf, and played with it. It dropped out of his fingers into the fender, and was broken.

'Pray,' he asked, leaving the other question for the moment, 'how came your grandmother to be separated from her own people?'

'They went away into the country. And her father went silly. She never knew him when he wasn't silly. He went silly when his brother-in-law was murdered.'

'Brother-in-law murdered? Murdered! What is this? Good Lord, man! what do you mean with your murder and your suicide?'

'Why, don't you know? His brother-in-law was murdered on his grounds. And his wife died of the

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shock the same day. What else was it that drove him off his old chump?'

'I—I—I—know nothing'—the vulgarity of the man passed unnoticed in the face of these revelations—'I assure you, nothing of these tragedies. They are all new to me. I have been told nothing.'

'Never told you? Well, of all the—— Why, the old woman over there is never tired of talking about these things. Proud of them she is. And you never to know anything!'

'Nothing. Is there more? And why do you call my great-grandfather mad?'

'He's as much my great-grandfather as yours. Mad? Well, I've seen him over the garden wall half a dozen times, walking up and down his terrace like a Polar bear. I don't know what you call mad. As for me, I'm a man of business, and if I had a client who never opened or answered a letter, never spoke a word to anybody, neglected his children, let his house go to ruin, never went to church, would have no servants about the place—why, I should have that mis'rable creature locked up, that's all.'

Leonard put this point aside.

'But you have not told me about his wife's death. It is strange that I should be asking you these particulars of my own family.'

'Mine as well, if you please,' the East End solicitor objected, with some dignity. 'Well, sir, my grandmother is seventy-two years of age. Therefore it is just seventy-two years since her mother died. For her

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mother died in child-birth, and she died of the shock produced by the news of her own brother's murder. Her brother's name was Langley Holme.'

'Langley? My grandfather's name.'

'Yes, Langley Holme. I think he was found lying dead on a hillside. So our great-grandfather, I say, lost in one day his wife and his brother-in-law, who was the best friend he had in the world. Why, sir, if you ever go down to see him and find him in that state, does it not occur to you to ask how it came about?'

'I confess—he is so old, I thought it eccentricity of age.'

'No!' His cousin shook his head. 'Age alone would not make a man go on like that. I take it, sir, that extreme age makes a man care nothing about other people, not even his own children; but it does not cut him off from money matters.'

'You are perhaps right. Yet—well, I know nothing. So the old man's mind was overthrown by the great shock of a double loss. Strange that they never told me! And his son, my grandfather, committed suicide. And his sister's husband became a bankrupt.'

'Yes; there are misfortunes enough. The old woman is never tired of harping on the family misfortunes. The second son was drowned. He was a sailor, and was drowned. My father was never anything better than a small clerk. I've known myself what it is to want the price of a dinner. If you want to know what misfortune is like, wait till you're hungry.'

'Indeed!' Leonard replied thoughtfully. 'And all

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these troubles are new to me. Strange that they should be told me on this very day!'

'Then there's your own father. He died young, too, and the last case that the old woman talks about is your father's brother. I forget his name; they packed him off to Australia after he had forged your father's name.'

'What?'

'Forged. That's a pretty word to use, isn't it? Yes, sir, there are misfortunes enough.' He got up. 'Well, the point is, will you come and see the old woman?'

'Yes. I will call upon her. When shall I find her at home?'

'She lies down on the sofa beside the fire every afternoon from two to four or half-past four, then wakes up refreshed and able to talk. Come about half-past four. It's the back-parlour; the front is my office, and my clerk—I have only one as yet—works in the room over the kitchen—the gal's bedroom it is, as a rule. It is a most respectable house, with my name on a door-plate, so you can't miss it.'

'I will call, then.'

'There is one thing more, Mr. Campaigne. We have not thrust ourselves forward, or tried to force ourselves on the family, and we shall not, sir, we shall not. We live six miles apart, and we have our own friends, and my friends are not yours. Still, in a business way, there is a question which I should like to ask. It is a business question.'

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The man's face became suddenly foxy. He leaned forward and dropped his voice to a whisper. Leonard was on his guard instinctively.

'If it has to do with the Campaigne estates, I have nothing whatever to say. Would it not be well to go to the lawyers who manage the estate?'

'No. They would not tell me anything. What I want to know is this. He has, I believe, a large estate?'

'He has, I believe. But he has no power to part with any portion of it.'

'The estate produces rents, I suppose?'

'That is no doubt the case.'

'Well, for seventy years the old man has spent nothing. There must be accumulations. In case of no will, these accumulations would be divided equally between your grandfather's heirs and my grandmother. Do you know of any will, if I may be so bold as to ask?'

'I know nothing of any will.'

'It is most unlikely that there should be any will. A man who has been off his head for nearly seventy years can hardly leave a will. If he did, one could easily set it aside. Mr. Campaigne, it is on the cards that there may be enormous accumulations.'

'There may be, as you say, accumulations.'

'In that case, it is possible—I say possible—that my sister and I may become rich, very rich—I hardly dare to put the possibility upon myself—but there must be—there must be—accumulations, and the question

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which I would put to you, sir, is this: Where are those accumulations invested? And can a man find out what they amount to—what they are worth—who draws the dividends—how are they applied—and is there a will? Was it made before or after the old man went off his chump? And if the money is left out of the family, would you, sir, as the head of the family, be ready to take steps to set aside that will? Those are my questions, Mr. Campaigne.' He threw himself back again in the chair, and stuck his thumbs in his waistcoat armholes.

'These are very important questions,' said Leonard. 'As a lawyer, you must be aware that I cannot give you any answer. As to the administration of the property, I believe I have no right to ask the lawyers and agents any questions. We must assume that the owner of the estate is in his right mind. As for disputing a will, we must wait till a will is produced.'

'Sir'—the cousin leaned over his knees and whispered hoarsely—'sir, the accumulations must be a million and a half. I worked it all out myself with an arithmetic book. I learned the rule on purpose. For I never got so far in the book as compound interest. It meant hundreds of sums; I did 'em all, one after the other. I thought I should never get to the end. Mary Anne helped. Hundreds of sums at compound interest, and it tots up to a million and a half—a million and a half! Think of that! A million and a half!'

He got up and put on his overcoat slowly.

'Sir,' he added, with deep emotion and a trembling

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voice, 'this money must not be suffered to go out of the family. It must not. It would be sinful—sinful. We look to you to protect the rights of the family.'

Leonard laughed. 'I fear I have no power to help you in this respect. Good-night. I hope to call upon my great-aunt as she wishes.'

He shut the door upon his visitor. He heard his feet going down the stairs. He returned to his empty room.

It was no longer empty. The man had peopled it with ghosts, all of whom he had brought with him.

There was the old man—young again—staggering under the weight of a double bereavement—wife and best friend in the same day. There was his own grandfather killing himself. Why? The young sailor going out to be drowned; his own father dying young; the returned colonial—the prosperous gentleman who, before going out, had forged his brother's name. Forged! forged! The word rang in his brain. There was the daughter of the House—deserted by the House, married into such a family as Mr. Galley represented. Were not these ghosts enough to bring into a quiet gentleman's flat?

Yes, he had been brought up in ignorance of these things. He knew nothing of the cause of the old man's seclusion; not the reason of his grandfather's early death; not any of those other misfortunes. He had been kept in ignorance of all. And now these things were roughly exploded upon his unsuspecting head.

He sat down before the fire; he worked at the 'Subject' no more that night. And in his brain

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there rang still the strange warnings of Constance—that he wanted something of misfortune, such as harassed the rest of the world, in order to bring him down to a level with the men and women around him.

'I have got that something,' he said. 'Poor relations, family scandals, and humiliations and all. But so far I feel no better.'

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CHAPTER V

A LEARNED PROFESSION

In one of the streets lying east of Chancery Lane is a block of buildings, comparatively new, let out as offices. They generally consist of three rooms, but sometimes there are four, five, or even six. The geographical position of the block indicates the character of the occupants: does not every stone in Chancery Lane and her daughters belong to the Law? Sometimes, however, there are exceptions. A few trading companies are established here, for instance; and occasionally one finds written across the door such an announcement as 'Mr. George Crediton, Agent.' The clerks and people who passed up and down the stairs every day sometimes asked each other what kind of agency was undertaken in this office. But the clerks had their own affairs to think about. Such a mystery as a business conducted in a quiet office to which no clients ever come is a matter of speculation for a while, but soon ceases to excite any attention. Some twenty years and more had passed since that name had first appeared on the door and since the clerks began to wonder.

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'Mr. George Crediton, Agent.' There are many kinds of agents. Land, houses, property of all kinds, may be managed by an agent; there are agents for taking out patents—several of these run offices near the Patent Office; there are literary agents — but Chancery Lane is not Parnassus; there are agents for the creation and the dissolution of partnership; there are theatrical agents—but what has law-land to do with sock and buskin? And what kind of Agent was Mr. George Crediton?

Mr. George Crediton, Agent, sat in his inner office. The room was furnished solidly with a view to work. The large and ponderous table, covered with papers so dear to the solicitor, was not to be seen here; in its place was an ordinary study table. This was turned at an angle to the wall and window. There was a warm and handsome carpet, a sheepskin under the table, a wooden chair for the Agent, and two others for his visitors. A type-writer stood on the table. The walls were covered with books—not law books, but a miscellaneous collection. The agent was apparently a man who revelled in light reading; for, in fact, all the modern humorists were there—those from America as well as those of our own production. There was also a collection of the English poets, and some, but not many, of France and Germany. On a table before him stood half a dozen bound folios with the titles on the back—'Reference A—E,' and so on. In one corner stood an open safe, to which apparently belonged another folio, entitled 'Ledger.'

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The Agent, engaged upon his work, evidently endeavoured to present an appearance of the gravest responsibility. His face was decorated by a pair of small whiskers cut straight over and set back; the chin and lips were smooth-shaven. The model set before himself was the conventional face of the barrister. Unfortunately, the attempt was not successful, for the face was not in the least like that conventional type. It had no severity, it had no keenness; it was not set or grave or dignified. It might have been the face of a light comedian. In figure the man was over six feet high and curiously thin, with a slightly aquiline nose and mobile, sensitive lips.

He began his morning's work by opening his letters; there were only two or three. He referred to his ledger and consulted certain entries; he made a few pencil notes. Then he took down from one shelf Sam Slick, Artemus Ward, and Mark Twain, and from another a collection of Burnand's works and one or two of Frederick Anstey's. He turned over the pages, and began to make brief extracts and more notes. Perhaps, then, a bystander might have thought he was about to write a paper on the comparative characteristics of English and American humour.

Outside, his boy—he had a clerk of fourteen at five shillings a week—sat before the fire reading the heroic jests and achievements of the illustrious Jack Harkaway. He was a nice boy, full of imagination, resolved on becoming another Jack Harkaway when the time should arrive, and for the moment truly grateful to

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fortune for providing him with a situation which demanded no work except to post letters and to sit before the fire reading in a warm and comfortable outer room to which no callers or visitors ever came except his employer and the postman; and if you asked that boy what was the character of the agency, he would not be able to tell you.

When Mr. George Crediton had finished making his extracts, he pinned the papers together methodically, and laid them on one side. Then he opened the last letter.

'He's answered it,' he chuckled. 'Fred's handwriting. I knew it—I knew it. Called himself Barlow, but I knew it directly. Oh, he'll come—he'll come.' He sat down and laughed silently, shaking the room with his chuckling. 'He'll come. Won't he be astonished?'

Presently he heard a step and a voice:

'I want to see Mr. George Crediton.'

'That's Fred,' said the Agent, chuckling again. 'Now for it.'

'There's nobody with him,' the boy replied, not venturing to commit himself, and unaccustomed to the arrival of strangers.

The caller was a tall man of about forty-five, well set up, and strongly built. He was dressed with the appearance of prosperity, therefore he carried a large gold chain. His face bore the marks which we are accustomed to associate with certain indulgences, especially in strong drink. It is needless to dwell upon

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these evidences of frailty; besides, one may easily be mistaken. It was a kind of face which might be met with in a snug bar-parlour with a pipe and a glass of something hot—a handsome face, but not intellectual or refined. Yet it ought to have been both. In spite of broadcloth and white linen the appearance of this gentleman hardly extorted the immediate respect of the beholder.

'Tell Mr. Crediton that Mr. Joseph Barlow is outside.'

'Barlow?' said the boy. 'Why don't you go in, then?' and turned over now to his book of adventures.

Mr. Barlow obeyed, and passed into the inner office. There he stopped short, and cried:

'Christopher, by all that's holy!'

The Agent looked up, sprang to his feet, and held out his hand.

'Fred! Back again, and become a Barlow!'

Fred took the outstretched hand, but doubtfully.

'Come to that, Chris, you're a Crediton.'

'In the way of business, Crediton.'

'Quite so. In the way of business, Barlow.'

Then they looked at each other and burst into laughter.

'I knew your handwriting, Fred. When I got your letter, I knew it was yours, so I sent you a type-written reply. Type-writing never betrays, and can't be found out if you want to be secret.'

'Oh, it's mighty funny, Chris. But I don't understand it. What the devil does it all mean?'

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'The very question in my mind, Fred. What does it mean? New rig-out, gold chain, ring—what does it mean? Why have you never written?'

'The circumstances of my departure—you remember, perhaps.'

The Agent's face darkened.

'Yes, yes,' he replied hastily; 'I remember. The situation was awkward—very.'

'You were much worse than I was, but I got all the blame.'

'Perhaps—perhaps. But it was a long time ago, and—and—well, we have both got on. You are now Barlow—Joseph Barlow.'

'And you are now Crediton—George Crediton.'

'Sit down, Fred; let us have a good talk. And how long have you been back?'

Fred took a chair, and sat down on the opposite side of the table.

'Only a fortnight or so.'

'And why didn't you look me up before?'

'As I told you, there was some doubt—— However, here I am. Barlow is the name of my Firm, a large and influential Firm.'

'In Sydney? or Melbourne?'

'No, up-country—over there.' He pointed over his left shoulder. 'That's why I use the name of Barlow. I am here on the business of the Firm—it brought me to London. It takes me every day into the City—most important transactions. Owing to the magnitude of the operation, my tongue is sealed.'

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'Oh!' There was a little doubt implied by the interjection. 'You a business man? You? Why, you never understood the simplest sum in addition.'

'As regards debts, probably not. As regards assets and property—— But in those days I had none. Prosperity, Chris—prosperity brings out all a man's better qualities. You yourself look respectable.'

'I've been respectable for exactly four-and-twenty years. I am married. I have a son of three-and-twenty and a daughter of one-and-twenty. I live in Pembridge Crescent, Bayswater.'

'And you were by way of being a barrister.'

'I was. But, Fred, to be honest, did you ever catch me reading a Law book?'

'I never did. And now you're an Agent.'

'Say, rather, that I practise in the higher walks of Literature. What can be higher than oratory?'

'Quite so. You supply the world—which certainly makes a terrible mess of its speeches—with discourses and after-dinner oratory.'

'Oratory of all kinds, from the pulpit to the inverted tub: from the Mansion House to the Bar Parlour: from the House of Commons to the political gathering.'

'What does your wife say?'

'My wife? Bless you, my dear boy, she doesn't know anything. She doesn't suspect. At home I'm the prosperous and successful lawyer: they wonder why I don't take silk.'

'What? Don't they know?'

'Nobody knows. Not the landlord of these rooms.

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Not the boy outside. Not any of my clients. Not my wife, nor my son, nor my daughter.'

'Oh! And you are making a good thing out of it?'

'So good that I would not exchange it for a County Court Judgeship.'

'It's wonderful,' said Fred. 'And I always thought you rather a half-baked lump of dough.'

'Not more wonderful than your own success. What a blessing it is, Fred, that you have come home without wanting to borrow any money'—he watched his brother's face: he saw a cloud as of doubt or anxiety pass over it, and he smiled. 'Not that I could lend you any if you did want it—with my expensive establishment. Still, it is a blessing and a happiness, Fred, to be able to think of you as the Head—I believe you said the Head—of the great and prosperous Firm of Barlow and Co.' Fred's face distinctly lengthened. 'I suppose I must not ask a business man about his income?'

'Hardly—hardly. Though, if any man—— But—I have a partner who would not like these private affairs divulged.'

'Well, Fred, I'm glad to see you back again—I am indeed.'

They shook hands once more, and then, for some unknown reason, they were seized with laughter, long and not to be controlled.

'Distinguished lawyer,' murmured Fred, when the laugh had subsided with an intermittent gurgle.

'Influential man of business,' said Christopher. 'Oh! Ho, Lord!' cried he, wiping his eyes, 'it brings back

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the old times when we used to laugh. What a lot we had to laugh at! The creditors and the duns—you remember?'

'I do. And the girls—and the suppers! They were good old times, Chris. You carried on shameful.'

'We did—we did. It's pleasant to remember, though.'

'Chris, I'm thirsty.'

'You always are.'

His brother remembered this agreeable trait after five-and-twenty years. He got up, opened a cupboard, and took out a bottle and glasses and some soda-water. Then they sat opposite each other with the early tumbler and the morning cigar, beaming with fraternal affection.

'Like old times, old man,' said the barrister.

'It is. We'll have many more old times,' said Fred, 'now that I'm home again.'

In the words of the poet, 'Alas! they had been friends in youth,' as well as brothers. And it might have been better had they not been friends in youth. And they had heard the midnight chimes together. And they had together wasted each his slender patrimony. But now they talked friendly over the sympathetic drink that survives the possibility of port and champagne, and even claret.

'Don't they really suspect—any of them?' asked Brother Fred.

'None of them. They call me a distinguished lawyer and the Pride of the Family—next to Leonard, who's in the House.'

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'Isn't there a danger of being found out?'

'Not a bit. The business is conducted by letter. I might as well have no office at all, except for the look of it. No, there's no fear. Nobody ever comes here. How did you find me out?'

'Hotel clerk. He saw my name as a speaker at the dinner to-morrow, and suggested that I should write to you.'

'Good. He gets a commission. I say, you must come and see us, you know. Remember, no allusions to the Complete Speech-maker—eh?'

'Not a word. Though, I say, it beats me how you came to think of it.'

'Genius, my boy—pure genius. When you get your speech you will be proud of me. What's a practice at the Bar compared with a practice at the after-dinner table? And now, Fred, why Barlow?'

'Well, you remember what happened?' His brother nodded, and dropped his eyes. 'Absurd fuss they made.'

'Nobody has heard anything about you for five-and-twenty years.'

'I took another name—a fighting name. Barlow, I called myself—Joseph Barlow. Joe—there's fight in the very name. No sympathy, no weakening about Joe.'

'Yes. For my own part, I took the name of Crediton. Respectability rather than aggressiveness in that name. Confidence was what I wanted.'

'Tell me about the family. Remember that it was in 1874 that I went away—twenty-five years ago.'

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His brother gave him briefly an account of the births and deaths. His mother was dead; his elder brother was dead, leaving an only son.

'As for Algernon's death,' said the speech-merchant, 'it was a great blow. He was really going to distinguish himself. And he died—died at thirty-two. His son is in the House. They say he promises well. He's a scholar, I believe; they say he can speak; and he's more than a bit of a prig.'

'And about the old man—the ancient one—is he living?'

'Yes. He is nearly ninety-five.'

'Ninety-five. He can't last much longer. I came home partly to look after things. Because, although the estate goes to Algernon's son—deuced bad luck for me that Algernon did have a son—there's the accumulations. I remembered them one evening out there, and the thought went through me like a knife that he was probably dead, and the accumulations divided, and my share gone. So I bundled home as fast as I could.'

'No—so far you are all right. For he's hearty and strong, and the accumulations are still rolling up, I suppose. What will become of them no one knows.'

'I see. Well, I must make the acquaintance of Algernon's son.'

'And about this great Firm of yours?'

'Well, it's a—as I said—a great Firm.'

'Quite so. It must be, with Fred Campaigne at the head of it.'

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'Never mind the Firm, but tell me about this astonishing profession of yours.'

The Professor smiled.

'Fortunately,' he said, 'I am alone. Were there any competition I might be ruined. But I don't know: my reputation by this time stands on too firm a basis to be shaken.'

'Your reputation? But people cannot talk about you.'

'They cannot. But they may whisper—whisper to each other. Why, just consider the convenience. Instead of having to rack their brains for compliments and pretty things and not to find them, instead of hunting for anecdotes and quotations, they just send to me. They get in return a speech just as long as they want—from five minutes to an hour—full of good things! In this way they are able to acquire it at a cheap, that is, a reasonable rate, for next to nothing, considering the reputation of wit and epigram and sparkles. Then think of the company at the dinner. Instead of having to listen to a fumbler and a stammerer and a clumsy boggler, they have before them a speaker easy in his mind, because he has learned it all by heart, bright and epigrammatic. He keeps them all alive, and when he sits down there is a sigh to think that his speech was so short.'

'You must give me just such a speech.'

'I will—I will. Fred, you shall start with a name that will make you welcome at every City Company's dinner. It will help you hugely over your enormous

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transactions for the Firm. Rely on me. Because, you see, when a man has once delivered himself of a good speech, he is asked to speak again: he must keep it up; so he sends to me again. Look here'—he laid his hands upon a little pile of letters—'here are yesterday's and to-day's letters.' He took them up and played with them as with a pack of cards. 'This man wants a reply for the Army. This is a return for Literature. This is a reply for the House of Commons. The Ladies, the American Republic, Science, the Colonies—see?'

'And the pay?'

'The pay, Fred, corresponds to the privilege conferred. I make orators. They are grateful. As for yourself, now——'

'Mine is a reply for Australia. The dinner is on Friday at the Hôtel Cecil—Dinner of Colonial Enterprise.'

'Really!' The Agent smiled and rubbed his hands. 'This is indeed gratifying. Because, Fred—of course you are as secret as death—I may tell you that this request of yours completes the toast-list for the evening. The speeches will be all—all my own—all provided by the Agent. But the plums, my brother, the real plums, shall be stuffed in yours. I will make it the speech of the evening. Mr. Barlow—Barlow—Barlow of New South Wales.'

Fred rose. 'Well,' he said, 'I leave you to my speech. Come and dine with me to-night at the Hôtel Métropole—half-past seven. We might have a look round afterwards.'

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They had that dinner together. It was quite the dinner of a rich man. It was also the dinner of one who loved to look upon the winecup.

After dinner Fred looked at his watch. 'Half-past nine. I say, Chris, about this time we used to sally forth. You remember?'

'I believe I do remember. I am now so respectable that I cannot allow myself to remember.'

'There was the Holborn Casino and the Argyll for a little dance: the Judge and Jury, Evans's, and the Coalhole for supper and a sing-song: Caldwell's to take a shop-girl for a quiet dance: Cremorne——'

'My dear Fred, these are old stories. All these things have gone. The Holborn and the Argyll are restaurants, Cremorne is built over, Evans's is dead and gone: the Judge and Jury business wouldn't be tolerated now.'

'What do the boys do now?'

'How should I know? They amuse themselves somehow. But it's no concern of mine, or of yours. You are no longer a boy, Fred.'

'Hang it! What am I to do with myself in the evenings? I suppose I can go and look on if I can't cut in any more?'

'No; you mustn't even look on. Leave the boys to themselves. Join a club and sit by yourself in the smoking-room all the evening. That's the amusement for you.'

'I suppose I can go to the theatre—if that's all.'

'Oh yes! You must put on your evening clothes

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and go to the stalls. We used to go to the pit, you know. There are music-halls and variety shows of sorts —you might go there if you like. But, you know, you've got a character to maintain. Think of your position.'

'Hang my position, man! Get up and take me somewhere. Let us laugh and look on at something.'

'My dear Fred, consider. I am a respectable barrister with a grown-up son. Could I be seen in such a place? The head of the firm of Barlow and Co., allow me to point out, would not improve his chances in the City if he were seen in certain places.'

'Nobody knows me.'

'Remember, my dear brother, that if you mean to get money out of the City you must be the serious and responsible capitalist in the evening as well as in the morning.'

'Then we'll go and have tobacco in the smoking-room. One is apt to forget, Chris, the responsibilities of success.'

'Quite so.' Christopher smiled. 'Quite so. Well put. The responsibilities of success. I will introduce the phrase in your speech. The responsibilities of success.'

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CHAPTER VI

THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL

MRS. CHRISTOPHER CAMPAIGNE was at home. The rooms were filled with people—chiefly young people, friends of her son and daughter. Most of them were endowed with those literary and artistic leanings which made them severe critics, even if they had not yet produced immortal works of their own. The chief attraction of the evening, however, was the newly-returned Australian, said to be a millionaire, who took up a large space in the room, being tall and broad; he also took up a large space in the conversation: he talked loud and laughed loud. He presented successfully the appearance he desired, namely, that of a highly prosperous gentleman, accustomed to the deference due to millions.

Leonard came late.

'I am glad to see you here,' said his hostess. 'Frederick, you can hardly remember your other nephew, son of Algernon.'

Frederick held out a manly grasp. 'When I left

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England,' he said, 'you were a child of four or five; I cannot pretend to remember you, Leonard.'

'Nor can I remember you.' He tried to dismiss from his mind a certain ugly word. 'But you are welcome home once more. This time, I hope, to stay.'

'I think not. Affairs—affairs are sometimes peremptory, particularly large affairs. The City may insist upon my staying a few weeks, or the City may allow me to go back. I am wholly in the hands of the City.'

If you come to think of it, a man must be rich indeed to be in the hands of the City.

The people gazed upon the speaker with increased interest, and even awe. They were not in the hands of the City.

'I confess,' he went on, 'that I should like to remain. Society, when one returns to it after many years, is pleasing. Some people say that it is hollow. Perhaps. The frocks vary'—he looked round critically—'they are not the same as they were five-and-twenty years ago; but the effect remains the same. And the effect is everything. We must not look behind the scenes. The rough old colonist'—yet no one in the room was better groomed—'looks on from the outside and finds it all delightful.'

'Can things unreal ever be delightful?' murmured a lady in the circle with a sigh.

'At all events,' Leonard continued, 'you will not leave us for a time.'

'There, again, I am uncertain. I have a partner in Australia. I have connections to look up in the City.

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But for a few weeks I believe I may reckon on a holiday and a look round, for Colonials have to show the City that all the enterprise is not theirs, nor all the wealth—nor all the wealth. And what,' he asked with condescension, 'what are you doing, Leonard?'

'I am in the House.'

'As your father was—and your grandfather. It is a great career.'

'It may be a great career.'

'True—true. There must be many failures—many failures. Where and when are you most likely to be found?'

Leonard told him.

'Give me a note of it before we go to-night. I dare say I can get round some time.'

The ugly word once more unpleasantly returned to Leonard's mind.

Mr. Frederick Campaigne proceeded with his interrupted discourse, which proved the necessity of the existence of the poor in order to make the condition of the rich possible and enviable. He took the millionaire's point of view, and dwelt not only on the holiness of wealth, but also on the duties of the poor towards their superiors.

Leonard slipped away. He felt uncomfortable. He could not forget what had been told him about this loud and prosperous and self-satisfied person. Besides, he seemed to be overdoing it—acting a part. Why?

In the inner drawing-room he found his two cousins, Algernon and Philippa. The former, a young man of

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three- or four-and-twenty, was possessed of a tall figure, but rather too small a head. He smiled a good deal, and talked with an easy confidence common to his circle of friends. It was a handsome face, but it did not suggest possibilities of work.

Leonard asked him how he was getting on.

'Always the same,' he replied, with a laugh. 'The study of the dramatic art presents endless difficulties. That is why we are loaded up with plays.'

'Then it remains for you to show the world what a play should be.'

'That is my mission. I shall continue my studies for a year or so more; and then—you shall see. My method is to study the art on the stage itself, not in books. I go to men and women on the stage. I sit in various parts of the stalls and watch and learn. Presently I shall sit down to write.'

'Well, I look forward to the result.'

'Look here, Leonard'—he dropped his voice. 'I hear that you go to see the old man sometimes. He is nearly ninety-five. He can't last much longer. Of course the estate is yours. But how about the accumulations?'

'I know nothing about the accumulations.'

'With the pater's large practice and our share of the accumulations, don't you think it is too bad of him to keep up this fuss about my work? Why should I trouble my head about money? There will be—there must be—plenty of money. My work,' he said proudly, 'shall be, at least, the work of one who is not driven

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by the ignoble stimulus of necessity. It will be entirely free from the ignoble stimulus of necessity. It will be free from the commercial taint—the curse of art—the blighting incubus of art—the degrading thought of money.'

Leonard left him. In the doorway stood his cousin Philippa.

'You have just been talking to Algernon,' she said. 'You see, he is always stretching out his hands in the direction of dramatic art.'

'So I observe,' he replied dryly. 'Some day, perhaps, he will grasp it. At present, as you say, he is only stretching out hands in that direction. And you?'

'I have but one dream—always one dream,' she replied, oppressed with endeavour.

'I hope it will come true, then. By the way, Philippa, I have just found a whole family of new cousins.'

'New cousins? Who are they?'

'And a great-aunt. I have seen one of the cousins; and I am going to-morrow to see the great-aunt and perhaps the other cousin.'

'Who are they? If they are your cousins, they must be cousins on papa's side. I thought that we three were the only cousins on his side.'

'Your uncle Fred may have children. Have you asked him if he is married?'

'No; he has promised to tell all his adventures. He is a bachelor. Is it not interesting to get another uncle, and a bachelor, and rolling in money? Algernon

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has already——' She stopped, remembering a warning. 'But who are these cousins?'

'Prepare for a shock to the family pride.'

'Why, we have no poor relations, have we? I thought——'

'Listen, my cousin. Your grandfather's sister Lucy married one Isaac Galley about the year 1847. It was not a good marriage for her. The husband became a bankrupt, and as by this time her father had fallen into his present condition or profession of a silent hermit, there was no help from him. Then they fell into poverty. Her son became a small clerk in the City, her grandson is a solicitor in the Commercial Road—not, I imagine, in the nobler or higher walks of that profession—and her grand-daughter is a teacher in a Board School.'

'Indeed!' The girl listened coldly; her eyes wandered round the room filled with well-dressed people. 'A teacher in a Board School! And our cousin! A Board School teacher! How interesting! Shall we tell all these people about our new cousins?'

'No doubt they have all got their own second cousins. It is, I believe, the duty of the second cousin to occupy a lower rank.'

'I dare say. At the same time, we have always thought our family a good deal above the general run. And it's rather a blow, Leonard, don't you think?'

'It is, Philippa. But, after all, it remains a good old family. One second cousin cannot destroy our record. You may still be proud of it.'

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He left the girl, and went in search of his uncle, whom he found, as he expected, in his study apart from the throng.

'Always over your papers,' he said. 'May I interrupt for a moment?'

The barrister shuffled his papers hurriedly into a drawer.

'Always busy,' he said. 'We lawyers work harder than any other folk, I believe, especially those with a confidential practice like my own, which makes no noise and is never heard of.'

'But not the less valuable, eh?'

The barrister smiled.

'We make both ends meet,' he said meekly—'both ends meet. Yes, yes, both ends meet.'

'I went to see the old man the other day,' Leonard went on, taking a chair. 'I thought you would like to know. He remains perfectly well, and there is no change in any respect. What I want to ask you is this—it may be necessary before long to get the question decided—is he in a condition to make a will?'

The lawyer took time to give an opinion. Backed by his long legal experience and extensive practice, it was an opinion carrying weight.

'My opinion,' he said gravely, and as one weighing the case judicially—in imagination he had assumed the wig and gown—'my opinion,' he repeated, 'would be, at first and on the statement of the case, that he is unfit, and has been unfit for the last seventy years, to make a will. He is undoubtedly on some points so

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eccentric as to appear of unsound mind. He does nothing; he allows house and gardens and furniture and pictures to fall into decay; he never speaks; he has no occupation. This points, I say, to a mind unhinged by the shock of seventy years ago.'

'A shock of which I only heard the other day.'

'Yes—I know. My sister-in-law—your mother and your grandfather—thought to screen you from what they thought family misfortune by never telling you the truth—that is to say, the whole truth. I have followed the same rule with my children.'

'Family misfortune! I hardly know even now what to understand by it.'

'Well, they are superstitious. Your father died young, your grandfather died young; like you, they were young men of promise. Your great-grandfather at the age of six-and-twenty or thereabouts was afflicted, as you know.'

'And they think——'

'They think that it is the visiting of the unknown sins of the fathers upon the children. They think that the old man's father must have done something terrible.'

'Oh, but this is absurd.'

'Very likely—very likely. Meantime, as to the power of making a will, we must remember that during all these years the old man has never done anything foolish. I have seen the solicitors. They tell me that from father to son, having acted for him all these years, they have found him perfectly clear-headed about

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money matters. I could not ask them what he has done with all his money, nor what he intends to do with it. But there is the fact—the evidence of the solicitors as to the clearness of his intellect. My opinion, therefore, is that he will do something astonishing, unexpected, and disgusting with his money, and that it will be very difficult, if not impossible, to set aside his will.'

'Oh, that is your opinion, is it? The reason why I ask is that I have just discovered a family of hitherto unknown cousins. Do you know the name of Galley?'

'No. It is not a name, I should say, of the highest nobility.'

'Possibly not. It is the name of our cousins, however. One of them is a solicitor—of a somewhat low class, I should say; the man has no pretensions whatever to be called a gentleman. He practises and lives in the Commercial Road, which is, I suppose, quite out of the ordinary quarter where you would find a solicitor of standing.'

'Quite, quite; as a place of residence—deplorable from that point of view.'

'He has a sister, it appears, who is a Board School teacher.'

'A Board School teacher? It is at least respectable. But who are these precious cousins of ours?'

'They are the grandchildren of an aunt of yours—Lucy by name.'

'Lucy! Yes. I have heard of her; I thought she was dead long ago.'

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'She married a man named Galley. They seem to have gone down in the world.'

'More family misfortune.' The lawyer shuddered. 'I am not superstitious,' he said, 'but really—more misfortunes.'

'Oh, misfortunes! Nonsense! There are always in every family some who go down—some who go up—some who stay there. You yourself have been borne steadily upwards to name and fortune.'

'I have,' said the lawyer, with half a groan. 'Oh yes—yes—I have.'

'And my uncle Fred, you see, comes home—all his wild oats sowed—with a great fortune.'

'Truly.' The lawyer's face lengthened. 'A great fortune. He told you so, didn't he? Yes; we have both been most fortunate and happy, both Fred and I. Go on, Leonard. About these cousins——'

'These are the grandchildren of Lucy Campaigne. I am to see the old lady in a day or two.'

'Do they want anything? Help? Recognition?'

'Nothing, so far as I know. Not even recognition.'

'That is well. I don't mind how many poor relations we've got, provided they don't ask for money or for recognition. If you give them money, they will infallibly decline to work, and live upon you. If you call upon them and give them recognition, they will infallibly disgrace you.'

'The solicitor asked for nothing. This cousin of ours has been building hopes upon what he calls accumulations. He evidently thinks that the old man

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is not in a condition to make a will, and that all that is left of personal property will be divided in two equal shares, one moiety among your father's heirs on our side, while the other will go to the old lady, his grandmother, on the other side.'

'That is, I am afraid, quite true. But there may have been a Will before he fell into—eccentricity. It is a great pity, Leonard, that these people have turned up—a great misfortune—because we may have to share with them. Still, there must be enormous accumulations. My mother did not tell us anything about possible cousins; yet they do exist, and they are very serious and important possibilities. These people will probably interfere with us to a very serious extent. And now Fred has turned up, and he will want his share, too. Another misfortune.'

'How came my grandfather to die so young?' Leonard passed on to another point.

'He fell into a fever. I was only two years old at the time.'

Leonard said nothing about the suicide. Clearly, not himself only, but his uncles also, had been kept in the dark about the true cause of that unexpected demise.

He departed, closing the door softly, so as not to shake up and confuse the delicate tissues of a brain always occupied in arriving at an opinion.

As soon as he was gone the barrister drew out his papers once more, and resumed the speech, for which he had prepared half a dozen most excellent stories. In

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such a case the British public does not ask for all the stories to be new.

Leonard rejoined the company upstairs.

His uncle Fred walked part of the way home with him.

'I hadn't expected,' he said, 'to find the old man still living. Of course, it cannot go on much longer. Have you thought about what may happen—when the end comes?'

'Not much, I confess.'

'One must. I take it that he does not spend the fiftieth part of his income. I heard as a boy that the estate was worth £6,000 a year.'

'Very likely, unless there has been depression.'

'Say he spends £150 a year. That leaves £5,850 a year. Take £850 for expenses and repairs—that leaves £5,000 a year. He has been going on like this for seventy years. Total accumulations, £420,000. At compound interest for all these years, it must reach two millions or so. Who is to have it?'

'His descendants, I suppose.'

'You, my brother Christopher, and myself. Two millions to divide between us. A very pretty fortune —very pretty indeed. Good-night, my boy—good-night.'

He walked away cheerfully and with elastic step.

'Accumulations — accumulations!' said Leonard, looking after him. 'They are all for accumulations. Shall I, too, begin to calculate how much has been accumulated? And how if the accumulations turn out to be lost—wasted—gone—to somebody else?'

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CHAPTER VII

THE CHILD OF SORROWS

On a cold day, with a gray sky and an east wind, Leonard for the first time walked down the Commercial Road to call upon the newly-found cousins. It is a broad thoroughfare, but breadth does not always bring cheerfulness with it; even under a warm summer sun some thoroughfares cannot be cheerful. Nothing can relieve the unvarying depression of the Commercial Road. It is felt even by the children, who refuse to play in it, preferring the narrow streets running out of it; the depression is felt even by the drivers and the conductors of the tram-cars, persons who are generally superior to these influences. Here and there is a chapel, here and there is a model lodging-house or a factory, or a square or a great shop. One square was formerly picturesque when the Fair of the Goats was held upon it; now it has become respectable; the goats are gone, and the site provokes melancholy. North and south of the road branch off endless rows of streets, crossed by streets laid out in a uniform check pattern. All these streets are similar and similarly situated, like

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door indicated. He found himself in a small back room—pity that the good old word 'parlour' has gone out!—where there were sitting three ladies representing three stages of human life—namely, twenty, fifty, and seventy.

The table was laid for tea; the kettle was on the old-fashioned hob—pity that the hospitable hob has gone!—and the kettle was singing; the buttered toast and the muffins were before the fire, within the high old-fashioned fender; the tea-things and the cake and the bread-and-butter were on the table, and the ladies were in their Sunday 'things,' waiting for him. It was with some relief that Leonard observed the absence of Mr. Samuel.

The eldest of the three ladies welcomed him.

'My grand-nephew Leonard,' she said, giving him her hand. 'I am very glad—very glad indeed to make your acquaintance. This'—she introduced the lady of middle life—'is my daughter-in-law, the widow—alas!—of my only son. And this'—indicating the girl—'is my granddaughter.'

The speaker was a gentlewoman. The fact was proclaimed in her speech, in her voice, in her bearing, in her fine features. She was tall, like the rest of her family; her abundant white hair was confined by a black lace cap, the last of the family possessions; her cheek was still soft, touched with a gentle colour and a tender bloom; her eyes were still full of light and warmth; her hands were delicate; her figure was still shapely; there was no bending of the shoulders, no

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dropping of the head. She reminded Leonard of the Recluse; but her expression was different: his was hard and defiant; hers was gentle and sad.

The second lady, who wore a widow's cap and a great quantity of black crape, evidently belonged to another class. Some people talk of a lower middle class. The distinction, I know, is invidious. Why do we say the lower middle class? We do not say the lower upper class. However, this lady belonged to the great and numerous class which has to get through life on slender means, and has to consider, before all things, the purchasing power of sixpence. This terrible necessity, in its worst form, takes all the joy and happiness out of life. When every day brings its own anxieties about this sixpence, there is left no room for the graces, for culture, for art, for poetry, for anything that is lovely and delightful. It makes life the continual endurance of fear, as dreadful as continued pain of body. Even when the terror of the morrow has vanished, or is partly removed by an increase of prosperity, the scars and the memory remain, and the habits of mind and of body.

Mrs. Galley the younger belonged to that class in which the terror of the morrow has been partly removed. But she remembered. In what followed she sat in silence. But she occupied, as of right, the proud position of pouring out the tea. She was short of stature, and might have been at one time pretty.

The third, the girl, who was Mary Anne, the Board School teacher, in some respects resembled her mother, being short and somewhat insignificant of aspect. But

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when she spoke she disclosed capacity. It is not to girls without capacity and resolution that places in Board Schools are offered.

'Let me look at you, Leonard.' The old lady still held his hand. 'Ah! what a joy it is to see once more one of my own people! You are very tall, Leonard, like the rest of us: you have the Campaigne face: and you are proud. Oh yes!—you are full of pride—like my father and my brothers. It is fifty years—fifty years and more—since I have seen any of my own people. We have suffered—we have suffered.' She sighed heavily. She released his hand. 'Sit down, my dear,' she said gently, 'sit down, and for once take a meal with us. Mary Anne, give your cousin some cake—it is my own making—unless he will begin with bread-and-butter.'

The tea was conducted with some ceremony; indeed, it was an occasion: hospitalities were not often proffered in this establishment. Leonard was good enough to take some cake and two cups of tea. The old lady talked while the other two ministered.

'I know your name, Leonard,' she said. 'I remember your birth, seven-and-twenty—yes, it was in 1873, about the same time as Samuel was born. Your mother and your grandmother lived together in Cornwall. I corresponded with my sister-in-law until she died; since then I have heard nothing about you. My grandson tells me that you are in the House. Father to son—father to son. We have always sent members to the House. Our family belongs to the House. There were

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Campaignes in the Long Parliament.' So she went on while the cups went round, the other ladies preserving silence.

At last the banquet was considered finished. Mary Anne herself carried out the tea-things, Mrs. Galley the younger followed, and Leonard was left alone with the old lady, as had been arranged. She wanted to talk with him about the family.

'Look,' she said, pointing to a framed photograph on the wall, 'that is the portrait of my husband at thirty. Not quite at his best—but—still handsome, don't you think? As a young man he was considered very handsome indeed. His good looks, unfortunately, like his good fortune and his good temper—poor man!—went off early. But he had heavy trials, partly redeemed by the magnitude of his failure.'

Leonard reflected that comeliness may go with very different forms of expression. In this case the expression was of a very inferior City kind. There also appeared to be a stamp or brand upon it, already at thirty, as of strong drinks.

'That is my son at the side. He was half a Campaigne to look at, but not a regular Campaigne. No; he had too much of the Galley in him. None of the real family pride, poor boy!'

The face of the young man, apparently about twenty years of age, was handsome, but weak and irresolute, and without character.

'He had no pride in himself and no ambition, my poor boy! I could never understand why. No push

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and no ambition. That was why he remained only a clerk in the City all his life. If he had had any pride he would have risen.'

'I must tell you,' said Leonard, 'that I have been kept, no doubt wisely, in ignorance of my own family history. It was only yesterday that I heard from your grandson that there have been troubles and misfortunes in our records.'

'Troubles and misfortunes? And you have never heard of them! Why, my grandchildren, who haven't nearly so much right as you to know, have learned the history of my people better than that of their own mother or their grandfather's people. To be sure, with the small folk, like those who live round here, trouble is not the same thing as with us. Mostly they live up to the neck in troubles, and they look for nothing but misfortune, and they don't mind it very much so long as they get their dinners. And you haven't even heard of the family misfortunes? I am astonished. Why, there never has been any family like ours for trouble. And you might have been cut off in your prime, or struck off with a stroke, or been run over with a waggon, and never even known that you were specially born to misfortune as the sparks fly upwards.'

'Am I born to misfortune? More than other people?'

It was in a kind of dream that Leonard spoke. His brain reeled: the room went round and round: he caught the arms of a chair. And for a moment he heard nothing except the voice of Constance, who

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warned him that Nature makes no one wholly happy: that he had been too fortunate: that something would fall upon him to redress the balance: that family scandals, poor relations, disgraces and shames, were the lot of all mankind, and if he would be human, if he would understand humanity, he must learn, like the rest of the world, by experience and by suffering. Was she, then, a Prophetess? For, behold! a few days only had passed, and these things had fallen upon him. But as yet he did not know the full extent of what had happened and what was going to happen.

He recovered. The fit had lasted but a moment; but thought and memory are swifter than time.

The old lady was talking on. 'To think that you've lived all these years and no one ever told you! What did they mean by keeping you in the dark? And I've always thought of you as sitting melancholy, waiting for the Stroke whenever it should fall.'

'I have been ignorant of any Stroke, possible or actual. Let me tell you that I have no fear of any Stroke. This is superstition.'

'No—no!' The old lady shook her head, and laid her hand on his. 'Dear boy, you are still under the curse. The Stroke will fall. Perhaps it will be laid in mercy. On me it fell with wrath. That is our distinction. That's what it is to be a Campaigne. The misfortunes, however, don't go on for ever. They will leave off after your generation. It will be when I am dead and gone; but I should like, I confess, to see happiness coming back once more to the family.'

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'I was a poor neglected thing with no mother, and as good as no father, to look after me. Galley came along; he was handsome, and I thought, being a silly girl, that he was a gentleman; so I married him. I ran away with him and married him. Then I found out. He thought I had a large fortune, and I had nothing; and father would not answer my letters. Well, he failed, and he used me cruelly—most cruelly, he did. And poverty came on—grinding, horrible poverty. You don't know, my dear nephew, what that means. I pray that you never may. There is no misfortune so bad as poverty, except it is dishonour. He died at last'—the widow heaved a sigh of relief, which told a tale of woe in itself—'and his son was a clerk, and kept us all. Now he's dead, and my grandson keeps me. For fifty years I have been slave and housemaid and cook and drudge and nurse to my husband and my son and my grandson. And, oh! I longed to speak once more with one of my own people.'

Leonard took her hand and pressed it. There was nothing to be said.

'Tell me more,' she said, 'about yourself.'

He told her, briefly, his position and his ambitions.

'You have done well,' she said, 'so far—but take care. There is the Family Luck. It may pass you over, but I don't know. I doubt. I fear. There are so many kinds of misfortune. I keep thinking of them all.' She folded her hands, resigned. 'Let trouble come to me,' she said, 'not to you or the younger ones. To me. That is what I pray daily. I

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am too old to mind much. Trouble to me means pain and suffering. Rather that than more trouble to you young people. Leonard, I remember now that your grandmother spoke in one of her letters of keeping the children from the knowledge of all this trouble. Yes, I remember.'

She went on talking; she told the whole of the family history. She narrated every misfortune at length.

To Leonard, listening in that little back room with the gathering twilight and the red fire to the soft, sad voice of the mournful lady, there came again the vision of two women, both in widows' weeds, in the cottage among the flowers—tree fuchsias, climbing roses, myrtles, and Passion-flowers. All through his childhood they sat together, seldom speaking, pale-faced, sorrowful. He understood now. It was not their husbands for whom they wept; it was for the fate which they imagined to be hanging over the heads of the children. Once he heard his mother say—now the words came back to him—'Thank God! I have but one.'

'Leonard,' the old woman was going on, 'for fifty years I have been considering and thinking. It means some great crime. The misfortunes began with my father; his life has been wrecked and ruined in punishment for someone else's crime. His was the first generation; mine was the second. All our lives have been wrecked in punishment for that crime. His was the first generation, I say'—she repeated the words as if to drive them home—'mine was the second; all our lives have been wrecked in punishment for that crime.

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Then came the third—your father died early, and his brother ran away because he was a forger. Oh! to think of a Campaigne doing such a thing! That was the third generation. You are the fourth—and the curse will be removed. Unto the third and fourth—but not the fifth.'

'Yes,' said Leonard. 'I believe—I now remember—they thought—at home—something of this kind. But, my dear lady, consider. If misfortune falls upon us in consequence of some great crime committed long ago, and impossible to be repaired or undone, what is there for us but to sit down quietly and to go on with our work?'

She shook her head.

'It is very well to talk. Wait till the blows begin. If we could find out the crime—but we never can. If we could atone—but we cannot. We are so powerless—oh, my God! so powerless, and yet so innocent!'

She rose. Her face was buried in her handkerchief. I think it consoled her to cry over the recollection of her sorrows almost as much as to tell them to her grand-nephew.

'I pray daily—day and night—that the hand of wrath may be stayed. Sitting here, I think all day long. I have forgotten how to read, I think——'

Leonard glanced at the walls. There were a few books.

'Until Mary Anne began to study, there were no books. We were so poor that we had to sell everything, books and all. This room is the only one in the house that is furnished decently. My granddaughter

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is my only comfort; she is a good girl, Leonard. She takes after the Galleys to look at, but she's a Campaigne at heart, and she's proud, though you wouldn't think it, because she's such a short bunch of a figure, not like us. She's my only comfort. We talk sometimes of going away and living together—she and I—it would be happier for us. My grandson is not—is not—altogether what one would wish. To be sure, he has a dreadful struggle. It's poverty, poverty, poverty. Oh, Leonard!'—she caught his hand—'pray against poverty. It is poverty which brings out all the bad qualities.'

Leonard interrupted a monologue which seemed likely to go on without end. Besides, he had now grasped the situation.

'I will come again,' he said, 'if I may.'

'Oh, if you may! If you only knew what a joy, what a happiness, it is only to look into your face! It is my brother's face—my father's face—oh, come again—come again.'

'I will come again, then, and soon. Meantime, remember that I am your nephew—or grand-nephew, which is the same thing. If in any way I can bring some increase to your comforts——'

'No, no, my dear boy. Not that way,' she cried hastily. 'I have been poor, but never—in that way. My father, who ought to help me, has done nothing, and if he will not, nobody shall. I would, if I could, have my rights; no woman of our family, except me, but was an heiress. And, besides—*he*'—she pointed to the front of the house, where was the office of her grandson—'he would take it all himself.'

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'Well, then, but if——'

'If I must, I will. Don't give him money. He is better without it. He will speculate in houses and lose it all. Don't, Leonard.'

'I will not—unless for your sake.'

'No—no—not for my sake. But come again, dear boy, and we will talk over the family history. I dare say there are quantities of misfortunes that I have left out—oh, what a happy day it has been to me!'

He pressed her hand again. 'Have faith, dear lady. We cannot be crushed in revenge for any crime by any other person. Do not think of past sorrows. Do not tremble at imaginary dangers. The future is in the hands of Justice, not of Revenge.'

They were brave words, but in his heart there lurked, say, the possibilities of apprehension.

In the hall Samuel himself intercepted him, running out of his office. 'I had my tea in here,' he said, 'because I wanted her to have a talk with you alone; and I'm sick of her family, to tell the truth, except for that chance of the accumulations. Did she mention them?' he whispered. 'I thought she wouldn't. I can't get her to feel properly about the matter. Women have got no imagination—none. Well, a man like that can't make a will. He can't. That's a comfort. Good-evening, Mr. Campaigne. We rely entirely upon you to maintain the interests of the family, if necessary, against madmen's wills. Those accumulations—ah! And he's ninety-five—or is it ninety-six? I call it selfish to live so long unless a man's a pauper. He ought to be thinking of his great-grandchildren.'

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CHAPTER VIII

IN THE LAND OF BEECHES

LEONARD met Constance a few days later at the club, and they dined at the same table. As for the decision and the rejection, they were ignored by tacit consent. The situation remained apparently unaltered. In reality, everything was changed.

'You look thoughtful,' she said presently, after twice making an observation which failed to catch his attention. 'And you are absent-minded.'

'I beg your pardon, yes. That is, I do feel thoughtful. You would, perhaps, if you found your family suddenly enlarged in all directions.'

'Have you received unknown cousins from America?'

'I have received a great-aunt, a lesser aunt, and two second cousins. They are not from America. They are, on the contrary, from the far East End of this town—even from Ratcliffe or Shadwell, or perhaps Stepney.'

'Oh!' Constance heard with astonishment, and naturally waited for more, if more was to follow. Perhaps, however, her friend might not wish to talk of connections with Shadwell.

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'The great-aunt is charming,' he continued; 'the lesser aunt is not so charming; the second cousins are—are—well, the man is a solicitor who seems to practise chiefly in a police-court, defending those who are drunk and disorderly, with all who are pickpockets, hooligans, and common frauds.'

'A variegated life, I should say, and full of surprises and unexpectedness.'

'He is something like my family—tall, with sharp features—more perhaps of the vulture than the eagle in him. But one may be mistaken. His sister is like her mother, short and round and plump, and—not to disguise the truth—common-looking. But I should say that she was capable. She is a Board School teacher. You were saying the other day, Constance, that it was a pity that I had never been hampered by poor relations.'

'I consider that you are really a spoiled child of fortune. I reminded you that you have your position already made: you have your distinguished University career; you are getting on in the House; you have no family scandals or misfortunes, or poor relations, or anything.'

'Well, this loss is now supplied by the accession of poor relations and—other things. Your mention of things omitted reminded Fortune, I suppose. So she hastened to turn on a supply of everything. I am now quite like the rest of the world.'

'Do the poor relations want money?'

'Yes, but not from me. The solicitor thinks that

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there must be great sums of money accumulated by the Patriarch of whom I have spoken to you. Cupidity of a sort, but not the desire to borrow, sent him to me. Partly he wanted to put in his claim informally, and partly he prepared the way to make me dispute any will that the old man may have made. He is poor, and therefore he is grasping, I suppose.'

'I believe we all have poor relations,' said Constance. 'Mine, however, do not trouble me much.'

'There has been a Family enlargement in another direction. A certain uncle of mine, who formerly enacted with much credit the old tragedy of the Prodigal Son, has come back from Australia.'

'Has he been living on the same diet as the Prodigal?'

'Shucks and bean-pods? He hardly looks as if that had been his diet. He is well dressed, big, and important. He repeats constantly, and is most anxious for everybody to know, that he is prosperous. I doubt, somehow——'

Leonard paused; the expression of doubt is not always wise.

'The return of a middle-aged Prodigal is interesting and unusual. I fear I must not congratulate you altogether on this unexpected enlargement.'

'Yet you said I ought to have poor relations. However, there is more behind. What was it you said about disgraces? Well, they've come too.'

'Oh!' Constance changed colour. 'Disgraces? But, Leonard, I am very sorry, and I really never supposed——'

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'Of course not; it is the merest coincidence. At the same time, like all coincidences, it is astonishing just after your remarks, which did really make me very uncomfortable. But I've stepped into quite a remarkable family history, full of surprising events, and all of them disasters.'

'But you had already a remarkable family history.'

'So I thought—a long history and a creditable history, ending with the ancient recluse of whom I have told you. We are rather proud of this old, old man—this singular being who has been a recluse for seventy years. I have always known about him. One of the very earliest things I was told was the miraculous existence of this eccentric ancestor. They told me so much, I suppose, because I am, as a matter of fact, heir to the estate whenever that happens to fall in. But I was never told—I suppose because it is a horrible story—why the old man became a recluse. That I only learned yesterday from this ancient aunt, who is the only daughter of the still more ancient recluse.'

'Why was it? That is, don't let me ask about your private affairs.'

'Not at all. There is nothing that might not be proclaimed from the house-top; there never is. There are no private affairs if we would only think so. Well, it seems that one day, seventy years ago, the brother-in-law of this gentleman, then a hearty young fellow of five- or six-and-twenty, was staying at the Hall. He went out after breakfast, and was presently found murdered in a wood, and in consequence of hearing this

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dreadful thing suddenly, his sister, my ancestor's wife, died on the same day. The ancient aunt was born on the day that the mother died. The blow, which was certainly very terrible, affected my ancestor with a grief so great that he became at once, what he is now, a melancholy recluse, taking no longer the least interest in anything. It is to me very strange that a young man, strong physically and mentally, should not have shaken off this obsession.'

'It does seem very strange. I myself had an ancestor murdered somewhere—father of one of my grandmothers. But your case is different.'

'The aged aunt told me the story. She had a theory about some great crime having been committed. She suggests that the parent of the recluse must have been a great unknown, unsuspected criminal—a kind of Gilles de Retz. There have been misfortunes scattered about—she related a whole string of calamities—all, she thinks, in consequence of some crime committed by this worthy, as mild a Christian, I believe, as ever followed the hounds or drank a bottle of port.'

'She is thinking, of course, of the visitation upon the third and fourth generation. To which of them do you belong?'

'I am of the fourth according to that theory. It is tempting; it lends a new distinction to the family. This lady is immensely proud of her family, and finds consolation for her own misfortunes in the thought that they are in part atonement for some past wickedness. Strange, is it not?'

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'Of course, if there is no crime there can be no consequences. Have the misfortunes been very marked?'

'Yes, very marked and unmistakable misfortunes. They cannot be got over or denied or explained away. Misfortunes, Dooms—what you please.'

'What does your recluse say about them?'

'He says nothing; he never speaks. Constance, will you ride over with me and see the man and the place? It is only five-and-twenty miles or so. The roads are dry; the spring is upon us. Come to-morrow. There is a pretty village, an old church, an eighteenth-century house falling into ruins, great gardens all run to bramble and thistle, and a park, besides the recluse himself.'

'The recluse might not like my visit.'

'He will not notice it. Besides, he sleeps all the afternoon. And when he is awake he sees nobody. His eyes go straight through one like a Röntgen ray. I believe he sees the bones and nothing else.'

The least frequented of the great highroads running out of London is assuredly that which passes through Uxbridge, and so right into the heart of the shire of Buckingham—the home or clearing or settlement of the Beeches. Few bicycles attempt this road; the ordinary cyclist knows or cares nothing for the attractions. Yet there is much to see. In one place you can visit the cottage where Milton finished 'Paradise Lost.' It is still kept just as when the poet lived in it. There are churches every two or three miles, churches

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memorable, and even historical, for the most part, and beautiful. Almost every church in this county has some famous man associated with it. On the right is the burial-place of the Russells, with their ancient manor-house, a joy and solace for the eyes: also on the right is another ancient manor-house. On the left is the quiet and peaceful burial-place of Penn and Elwood, those two illustrious members of the Society of Friends. Or, also on the left, you may turn aside to see the church and the road and the house of England's patriot, John Hampden. The road goes up and the road goes down over long low hills and through long low valleys. On this side and on that are woods and coppices and parks, with trees scattered about and country houses. No shire in England is more studded with country houses than this of Bucks. At a distance of every six or eight miles there stands a town. All the towns in Bucks are small; all are picturesque. All have open market-places and town-halls and ancient inns and old houses. I know of one where there is an inn of the fourteenth century. I have had it sketched by a skilful limner, and I call it the Boar's Head, Eastcheap, and I should like to see anybody question the authenticity of the name. If any were so daring, I would add the portrait of Jack Falstaff himself, sitting in the great chair by the fire.

On a fine clear day in early spring, two cyclists rode through this country. They were Leonard and his friend Constance. They went by train as far as Uxbridge, and then they took the road.

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At first it was enough to breathe the pure air of the spring; to fly along the quiet road, while the rooks cawed in the trees, and over the fields the larks sang. Then they drew nearer and began to talk.

'Is this what you brought me out to see?' asked Constance. 'I am well content if this is all. What a lovely place it is! And what a lovely air! It is fragrant; the sun brings out the fragrance from the very fields as well as from the woods.'

'This is the quietest and the most beautiful of all the roads near London. But I am going to show you more. Not all to-day. We must come again. I will show you Milton's cottage and Penn's burial-ground, John Hampden's church and tomb, and the old manor-house of Chenies and Latimer. To-day I am only going to show you our old family house.'

'We will come when the catkins have given place to the leaves and the hedge-rose is in blossom.'

'And when the Park is worth looking at. Everything, however, at our place is in a condition of decay. You shall see the house, and the church, and the village. Then, if you like, we will go on to the nearest town and get some kind of dinner, and go home by train.'

'That pleases me well.'

They went on in silence for a while.

Leonard took up the parable again about his family.

'We have been in the same place,' he said, 'for an immense time. We have never produced a great man or a distinguished man. If you consider it, there are not really enough distinguished men to go round the

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families. We have twice recently made a bid for a distinguished man. My own father and my grandfather were both promising politicians, but they were both cut off in early manhood.'

'Both? What a strange thing!'

'Yes. Part of what the ancient aunt calls the family luck. We have had, in fact, an amazing quantity of bad luck. Listen. It is like the history of a House driven and scourged by the hand of Fate.'

She listened while he went through the terrible list.

'Why,' she said, 'your list of disaster does really suggest the terrible words "unto the third and fourth generation." I don't wonder at your aunt looking about for a criminal. What could your forefathers have done to bring about such a succession of misfortunes?'

'Let us get down and rest a little.' They sat down on a stile, and turned the talk into a more serious vein.

'What have my forefathers done? Nothing. Of that I am quite certain. They have always been most respectable squires, good fox-hunters, with a touch of scholarship. They have done nothing. Our misfortunes are all pure bad luck, and nothing else. Those words, however, do force themselves on one. I am not superstitious, yet since that venerable dame—— However, this morning I argued with myself. I said, "It would be such a terrible injustice that innocent children should suffer from their fathers' misdeeds, that it cannot be so.'

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'I don't know,' said Constance. 'I am not so sure.'

'You, too, among the superstitious? I also, however, was brought up with that theory——'

'I suppose you went to church?'

'Yes, we went to church. And now I remember that my mother, for the reason which I have only just learned, believed that we were ourselves expiating the sins of our forefathers. It is very easy for me to go back to the language and ideas of my childhood, so much so that this morning I made a little search after a certain passage which I had well-nigh forgotten.'

'What was that?'

'It is directed against that very theory. It expresses exactly the opposite opinion. The passage is in the Prophet Ezekiel. Do you remember it?'

'No. I have never read that Prophet, and I have never considered the subject.'

'It is a very fine passage. Ezekiel is one of the finest writers possible. He ought to be read more and studied more.'

'Tell me the sense of the passage.'

'I can give you the very words. Listen.' He stood up and took off his hat, and declaimed the words with much force:

'"What mean ye that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge? As I live, saith the Lord God, ye shall not use this proverb any more. Behold, all souls are Mine: as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is Mine. The

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soul that sinneth, it shall die. But if a man be just, he shall surely live."

'These are very noble words, Constance;' indeed, Leonard spoke them with much solemnity. 'The verbal interpretation of the Prophets no longer occupies our minds. Still, they are very noble words. I have never believed myself to be superstitious or to believe in heredity of misfortune; still, after learning for the first time the long string of disasters that have fallen upon my people, I became possessed with a kind of terror, as if the hand of Fate was pressing upon us all.'

'They are very noble words,' Constance repeated. 'It seems as if the speaker was thinking of a distinction between consequences—certain consequences—of every man's life as regards his children and——'

'What consequences—from father to son?'

'Why, you have only to look around you. We live in conditions made for us by our forefathers. My people behaved well and prospered: they saved money and bought lands: they lived, in the old phrase, God-fearing lives. Therefore I am sound in mind and body, and I am tolerably wealthy.'

'Oh! that, of course. But I was not thinking of consequences like these.'

'You must think of them. A man loses his fortune and position. Down go children and grandchildren. The edifice of generations may have to be built up again from the very foundations. Is it nothing to inherit a name which has been smirched? If a man

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commits a bad action, are not his children disgraced with him?'

'Of course; but only by that act. They are not persecuted by the hand of Fate.'

'Who can trace the consequences of a single act? Who can follow it up in all the lines of consequence?'

'Yes; but the third and fourth generation. . . .'

'Who can say when those consequences will cease?'

'"As I live, saith the Lord." It is a solemn assurance—a form of words, perhaps—only a form of words—yet, if so, the audacity of it! "As I live"—the Lord Himself takes the oath—"if a man be just, he shall surely live."'

'A man may be kept down by poverty and shut out from the world by his father's shame. Yet he may still be just. It is the distinction that the Prophet would draw. What misfortune has fallen upon your house which affects the soul of a man? Death? Poverty? The wrong-doing of certain members?'

Leonard shook his head. 'Yes, I understand what you mean. I confess that I had been shaken by the revelations of that old lady. They seemed to explain so much.'

'Perhaps they explained the whole—yet not as she meant them to explain.'

'Now I understand so many things that were dark—my mother's sadness and the melancholy eyes which rested upon me from childhood. She was looking for the hand of Fate: she expected disaster: she kept me in ignorance: yet she was haunted by the thought that

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for the third and fourth generation the sins—the unknown sins—of the fathers would be visited upon the children. When I learned these things'—he repeated himself because his mind was so full of the thought—'I felt the same expectation, the same terror, the same sense of helplessness, as if wherever I turned, whatever I attempted, the hand which struck down my father, my grandfather, and that old man would fall upon me.'

'It was natural.'

'So that these words came to me like a direct message from the old Hebrew Prophet. Our ancestors went for consolation and instruction to those pages. They held that every doubt and every difficulty was met and solved by these writers. Perhaps we shall go back to the ancient faith. And yet——' He looked round; it was a new world that he saw, with new ideas. 'Not in my time,' he said. 'We are a scientific age. When the reign of Science is ended, we may begin again the Reign of Faith.' He spoke as one in doubt and uncertainty.

'Receive the words, Leonard, as a direct message.'

'At least, I interpreted the words into an order to look at events from another point of view. And I have taken all the misfortunes in turn. They have nothing whatever to do with heredity. Your illustration about a man losing his money, and so bringing poverty upon his children, does not apply. My great-grandfather has his head turned by a great trouble. His son commits suicide. Why? Nobody knows. The young sailor is drowned. Why? Because he is a sailor. The daughter marries beneath her station.

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Why? Because she was motherless and fatherless and neglected. My own father died young. Why? Because fever carried him off.'

'Leonard'—Constance laid her hand upon his arm—'do not argue the case any more. Leave it. A thing like this may easily become morbid. It may occupy your thoughts too much.'

'Let me forget it, by all means. At present, I confess, the question is always with me.'

'It explains something in your manner yesterday and to-day. You are always serious, but now you are absent-minded. You have begun to think too much about these troubles.'

He smiled. 'I am serious, I suppose, from the way in which I was brought up. We lived in Cornwall, right in the country, close to the seashore, with no houses near us, until I went to school. It was a very quiet household: my grandmother and my mother were both in widows' weeds. There was very little talking, and no laughing or mirth of any kind, within the house, and always, as I now understand, the memory of that misfortune and the dread of new misfortunes were upon these unhappy ladies. They did not tell me anything, but I felt the sadness of the house. I suppose it made me a quiet boy—without much inclination to the light heart that possessed most of my fellows.'

'I am glad you have told me,' she replied. 'These things explain a good deal in you. For now I understand you better.'

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They mounted their cycles, and resumed the journey in silence for some miles.

'Look!' he cried. 'There is our old place.'

He pointed across a park. At the end of it stood a house of red brick, with red tiles and stacks of red chimneys—a house of two stories only. In front was a carriage-drive, but no garden or enclosure at all. The house rose straight out of the park itself.

'You see only the back of the house,' said Leonard. 'The gardens are all in the front: but everything is grown over; nothing has been done to the place for seventy years. I wonder it has stood so long.' They turned off the road into the drive. 'The old man, when the double shock fell upon him, dropped into a state of apathy from which he has never rallied. We must go round by the servants' entrance. The front-doors are never opened.'

The great hall with the marble floor made echoes rolling and rumbling about the house above as they walked across it. There were arms on the walls and armour, but all rusted and decaying in the damp air. There were two or three pictures on the walls, but the colour had peeled off and the pictures had become ghosts and groups of ghosts in black frames.

'The recluse lives in the library,' said Leonard. 'Let us look first at the other rooms.' He opened a door. This was the dining-room. Nothing had been touched. There stood the great dining-hall. Against the walls were arranged a row of leather chairs. There was the sideboard; the mahogany was not

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affected by the long waiting, except that it had lost its lustre. The leather on the chairs was decaying and falling off. The carpet was moth-eaten and in threads. The paper on the wall, the old-fashioned red velvet paper, was hanging down in folds. The old-fashioned high brass fender was black with neglected age. On the walls the pictures were in better preservation than those in the hall, but they were hopelessly injured by the damp. The curtains were falling away from the rings. 'Think of the festive dinners that have been given in this room,' said Leonard. 'Think of the talk and the laughter and the happiness! And suddenly, unexpectedly, the whole comes to an end, and there has been silence and emptiness for seventy years.'

He closed the door and opened another. This was in times gone by the drawing-room. It was a noble room—long, high, well proportioned. A harp stood in one corner, its strings either broken or loose. A piano stood open; it had been open for seventy years. The keys were covered with dust and the wires with rust. The music which had last been played was still in its place. Old-fashioned sofas and couches stood about. The mantelshelf was ornamented with strange things in china. There were occasional tables in the old fashion of yellow and white and gold. The paper was peeling off like that of the dining-room. The sunshine streamed into the room through windows which had not been cleaned for seventy years. The moths were dancing merrily as if they rejoiced in solitude. On one table, beside the fireplace, were

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lying, as they had been left, the work-basket with some fancy work in it; the open letter-case, a half-finished letter, an inkstand, with three or four quill pens: on a chair beside the table lay an open volume; it had been open for seventy years.

Constance came in stepping noiselessly, as in a place where silence was sacred. She spoke in whispers; the silence fell upon her soul; it filled her with strange terrors and apprehensions. She looked around her.

'You come here often, Leonard?'

'No. I have opened the door once, and only once. Then I was seized with a strange sense of—I know not what; it made me ashamed. But it seemed as if the room was full of ghosts.'

'I think it is. The whole house is full of ghosts. I felt their breath upon my cheek as soon as we came into the place. They will not mind us, Leonard, nor would they hurt you if they could. Let us walk round the room.' She looked at the music. 'It is Gluck's "Orfeo"; the song, "Orfeo and Eurydice." She must have been singing it the day before—the day before——' Her eyes turned to the work-table. 'Here she was sitting at work the day before—the day before—— Look at the dainty work—a child's frock.' She took up the open book; it was Pascal's 'Pensées.' 'She was reading this the day before—the day before——' Her eyes filled with tears. 'The music—no common music; the book—a book only for a soul uplifted above the common level; the dainty, beautiful work—Leonard, it seems to reveal the woman and the household. Nothing

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base or common was in that woman's heart—or in the management of her house; they are slight indications, but they are sure. It seems as if I knew her already, though I never heard of her until to-day. Oh, what a loss for that man!—what a Tragedy! what a terrible Tragedy it was!' Her eyes fell upon the letter; she took it up. 'See!' she said. 'The letter was begun, but never finished. Is it not sacrilege to let it fall into other hands? Take it, Leonard.'

'We may read it after all these years,' Leonard said, shaking the dust of seventy years from it. 'There can be nothing in it that she would wish not to be written there.' He read it slowly. It was written in pointed and sloping Italian hand—a pretty hand belonging to the time when women were more separated from men in all their ways. Now we all write alike. '"My dearest . . ." I cannot make out the name. The rest is easy. "Algernon and Langley have gone off to the study to talk business. It is this affair of the Mill which is still unsettled. I am a little anxious about Algernon: he has been strangely distrait for this last two or three days; perhaps he is anxious about me: there need be no anxiety. I am quite well and strong. This morning he got up very early, and I heard him walking about in his study below. This is not his way at all. However, should a wife repine because her lord is anxious about her? Algernon is very determined about that Mill; but I fear that Langley will not give way. You know how firm he can be behind that pleasant smile of his." That is all, Constance. She wrote no more.'

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'It was written, then, the day before—the day before—— Keep the letter, Leonard. You have no other letter of hers—perhaps nothing at all belonging to the poor lady. I wonder who Langley was? I had a forefather, too, whose Christian name was Langley. It is not a common name.'

'The Christian name of my unfortunate grandfather who committed suicide was also Langley. It is a coincidence. No doubt he was named after the person mentioned in this letter. Not by any means a common name, as you say. As for this letter, I will keep it. There is nothing in my possession that I can connect with this unfortunate ancestress.'

'Where are her jewels and things?'

'Perhaps where she left them, perhaps sent to the bank. I have never heard of anything belonging to her.'

Constance walked about the room looking at everything; the dust lay thick, but it was not the black dust of the town—a light brown dust that could be blown away or swept away easily. She swept the strings of the harp, which responded with the discords of seventy years' neglect. She touched the keys of the piano, and started at the harsh and grating response. She looked at the chairs and the tables with their curly legs, and the queer things in china that stood upon the mantel-shelf.

'Why,' she said, 'the place should be kept just as it is, a museum of George the Fourth fashion in furniture. Here is a guitar. Did that lady play the guitar as

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