



ISRAEL
RANK

BY
ROY
HORNIMAN





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THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A CRIMINAL

BY
ROY HORNIMAN
AUTHOR OF

"THE SIN OF ATLANTIS," "THE LIVING BUDDHA," "THAT FAST MISS BLOUNT,"
"BELLAMY THE MAGNIFICENT," ETC.



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A PRELIMINARY NOTE

THERE is an old saying, 'Murder will out.' I am really unable to see why this should be so. At any rate, it is a statement impossible of proof, and one which must always remain a matter of opinion. Because certain clumsy criminals have placed themselves in full view of that dull dog, the Law, we are asked to believe that crime is invariably awkward. The logic is not very obvious. I am convinced that many a delightful member of society has found it necessary at some time or other to remove a human obstacle, and has done so undetected and undisturbed by those pangs of conscience which Society, afraid of itself, would have us believe wait upon the sinner.

ISRAEL RANK.

ISRAEL RANK

CHAPTER I

It was the close of a bleak, autumnal afternoon. All day long in the chill and windy atmosphere the dust had been driven helter-skelter along the shabbier streets of Clapham, whirling with it the leaves which had fallen from the depressed trees in the gardens of the innumerable semi-detached villas. Here and there, fragments of torn paper rustled spasmodically along the gutter as the driving gust caught them, or—now that the dusk had fallen—floated spectrally for a few moments in mid-air, like disembodied spirits, essaying an upward flight, only to be baulked by a lull in the wind and to come suddenly to earth again, where they lay until the next gust of wind caught them.

Among the dismal streets not one was more depressing than Ursula Grove. As if to deprive it of the least trace of individuality it was but a connecting link between two more important residential roads running parallel with each other, and even these were not very important; hence it is obvious that Ursula Grove was humble indeed.

Each house had a yard or two of front garden entered through cheaply varnished wooden gate-lets, which an-

nounced in faded gold lettering that should anyone enter he would find himself in Seaview, or on The Riviera, as the case might be. Provided the name was inappropriate there appeared to have been no initial objection to its being anything. In fact, those responsible for the christening of these desirable residences appeared to have acted on the same principle as the small builder, who, erecting houses at too great a rate to be able to waste time in seeking appropriate names, was accustomed to choose them haphazard out of the newspapers, and thus christened two small stucco atrocities joined together in semi-detached matrimony, the Vatican and the Quirinal, because these two names appeared in the course of the same leading article.

Each house had a little bow window which belonged to the drawing-room. If these bow windows could have been removed and all the little drawing-rooms placed, as it were, on exhibition they would have presented an extraordinary likeness. There were the same three or four saddle-bag chairs, the same saddle-bag sofa, the same little bamboo occasional table, and the same little gilt mirror; all luxuries that were rewarded, apparently, by their own virtue and a sense of their own unique beauty, for it was seldom that their owners enjoyed them. In the summer the blinds were kept down for fear the sun should spoil the carpet, which it certainly would have done if it had been allowed a fair field and no favour with the gaudy little stiff squares of cheap Kidderminster. These front rooms, although infinitely the largest and most convenient in the house, were never degraded to the level of living rooms, however large the family. Sometimes in the winter a fire was lighted on Sundays and the

inhabitants sat round it, but by Monday morning at breakfast time all traces of this revel had disappeared, and the fire ornaments were back again, trailing their gilded and tawdry finery over a highly polished grate, glittering out on the darkened, frosty room, that suggested nothing so much as the laying out of a corpse.

These chilly arcadias were the pride of their owners' hearts, and if, when about their household work, they heard the door of the sacred apartment open they were immediately on the alert.

"Willie, what are you doing in the drawing-room?"

"Nuffin', mama, I was only havin' a look."

"Then come out and shut the door immediately."

Willie, old enough to be troublesome, but not old enough to go to school, would do as he was bid, at the same time impressed by his mother's admonition with a sense of the splendour of the mansion in which it was his privilege to dwell.

The family always lived in the smaller sitting-room—an apartment rendered oblong by the exigencies of the staircase. These rooms were invariably furnished, as were the drawing-rooms, with a depressing similarity: two horse-hair arm chairs with the springs in a state of collapse; six ordinary dining-room chairs to match; some framed *Graphic* Christmas numbers on the wall, an untidy bookcase, and the flooring a waste of linoleum with a little oasis of moth-eaten rug before the fire.

I mention these facts because the atmosphere of my childhood is important in view of my after development.

It was on such an evening as I have described—at least, I am credibly informed that it was so—that my father descended from his 'bus two or three streets

off, and, after threading his way through the intervening maze of semi-detached villadom, entered the depressing length of Ursula Grove.

An unusual though not astonishing sight met his eyes. The blinds of the first-floor-front of his own house were drawn down and a bright light from within glowed against them and streamed from under them. It could not be his wife dressing for dinner, for they did not have dinner, and had they been in the habit of dining neither of them would have thought of dressing. Their evening meal was tea; it might be with an egg or it might be with ham, but it was certainly tea.

My father hastened his footsteps. The cause of this phenomenon had suddenly dawned on him. He opened the wooden gate-let with unwonted gentleness and without letting it swing to, which was the usual signal that he had come home. Then he went round to the back and softly let himself in.

He walked along the passage and paused at the foot of the stairs. There was borne down to him from above the wail of an infant. He was obliged to catch hold of the bannisters, for his heart leapt into his mouth and nearly suffocated him.

He sat down on the stairs to recover himself, while the tears of joy and pride welled into his tired eyes and flowed down his faded cheeks.

The doctor on his way downstairs nearly fell over him.

"Come, come, Mr. Rank, you must bear up. 'In the midst of life we are in death.'"

Apparently the doctor was condoling from force of habit. The speech was certainly alarming, and my father whitened.

"But my wife?"

"Mother and child, Mr. Rank, both doing well. It's a boy."

The alarm disappeared from his face. He was a father at last. "An Isaac was born unto him."

"May I go up?" he asked timidly.

"Most certainly, but be careful not to excite the patient."

My father went upstairs and knocked nervously. The nurse opened the door holding me in her arms. It is to my father's credit, however, that he hardly cast a look at the desire of their married life, but crossed at once to the bed.

My poor mother looked up tenderly and lovingly at the dowdy little figure bending over her, and smiled.

"It's a boy," she whispered, and then added: "We wanted a boy."

My father pressed her hand gently, but remembering the doctor's instructions not to excite the patient kissed her lips and stole gently out to look at his first, though somewhat late, born. A puckered face, to which the blood rushed spasmodically, clouding it almost to the suggestion of apoplexy, was all he could see. My father looked down at me and saw that I was dark. I could not well have been otherwise if he were to believe himself my father, for he was Jewish from the crown of his well-shaped head to the soles of his rather large feet.

If my mother is to be credited, he was when she fell in love with him a singularly handsome little man, but at the time of my birth the physical blight which falls on nearly all men of our race towards middle age was upon him.

She possessed a small cabinet photograph of him,

taken when such things were a novelty. In early years I was accustomed—misled by the out-of-date clothes—to regard it as a very frumpish affair indeed. When I grew up I came to think otherwise : for one day, placing my hand over the offending clothes, there looked out at me a face which, granting the wonderful complexion which my mother always insisted he possessed, was singularly handsome and very like my own.

I only remember him as a faded little creature, who had run to stomach to an extent which was absurd, especially when it was contrasted with the extreme thinness of the rest of his body. He was a commercial traveller, and always attributed this inharmonious excrescence on an otherwise slim form to the amount of aerated waters he was obliged to mix with those drinks the taking of which was indispensable to his calling.

My mother was dark too, so it was little wonder that such hair as I had when I was born was of the blackest imaginable hue, as likewise were my eyes.

“ He’s a beautiful baby ; a bit small, but beautiful,” said the nurse.

My father, who could not at the moment dissociate my appearance from Mr. Darwin’s theory of the origin of species, tried to believe her, and stole downstairs, where he made his own tea and boiled himself a couple of eggs. A meat pie with the unbaked crust lying beside it suggested that I had arrived quite unexpectedly, as indeed had been the case. This perhaps accounted for the fact that as a baby I was weakly.

Before the first year of my life was over, my doting parents had gone through many an agony of suspense, and my father had more than once slackened his steps

on returning home after his day's work, fearing to enter the house lest my mother should meet him and weeping inform him that the tiny thread of life, by which I was alone prevented from flying away and becoming a little angel, had snapped.

But by dint of the greatest care from a mother, who, whatever may have been her coldness to the outside world, possessed a burning affection for her husband and child, I was brought safely to my first birthday.

Sitting here during the last few unpleasant days with nothing to entertain me but the faces of ever-changing warders—whose personalities seem all to have been supplied from one pattern—I have had time to think over many things, and I have more than once reflected whether I would not rather my mother had been less careful and had allowed the before mentioned tiny thread to snap.

My present nervousness, which even my worst enemy will find excusable, tempts me to regret that her extreme care was so well rewarded. My intellect, however, which has always shone brightly through the murk of my emotions, tells me—and supports the information with irrefutable logic—that I am an ignoble fool to think anything of the kind. I question whether Napoleon would have foregone his triumphant career to escape St. Helena. The principle involved in his case and my own is the same. I have had a great career; I am paying for it—only fortunately the public are asking an absurdly low price. It is only when I have smoked too many cigarettes that I feel nervous about Monday's ceremony.

One thing I trust, however, and that is that my mother will not in any way be made unhappy, for should her spirit have the power of seeing my present

condition, and of suffering by reason of it, it would give me the greatest concern.

But to resume. My arrival must have been an immense comfort to my mother even more than to my father. His business frequently took him away from home for a week at a time, and although he rarely failed to be with us from Saturday till Monday the shabby little Clapham house had been very dull till my shrill baby cries broke the silence of his absence.

Until I arrived to keep her company my mother had been thrown almost entirely on her own resources, and the reason of this loneliness is also the reason of my strange career. They are inseparable one from the other.

My mother had married beneath her. Her father had been a solicitor in a fair way of business, blessed with one son and one daughter. They were not rich but they were gentlefolk, and by descent something more. In fact, only nine lives stood between my mother's brother and one of the most ancient peerages in the United Kingdom.

My mother's maiden name was Gascoyne, and her father was the great-grandson of a younger son. Her father's family had for the last two generations drifted away from, and ceased to have any acquaintance with, the main and aristocratic branch of the family. Beyond a couple of ancestral portraits, the one of Lord George Gascoyne, my mother's great-grandfather, and the other of that spendthrift's wife, there was no visible evidence that they were in any way of superior social extraction to their well-to-do but suburban surroundings.

My father and mother were brought together in this way. My mother's brother belonged to a cricket club

of which my father was also a member. The two struck up a friendship, although at a first glance there could appear to be very little in common between the successful solicitor's heir and the junior clerk in a wholesale city house. My father, however, had a gift of music which recommended him strongly to his new friend, and, as my mother always said, a natural refinement of manner which made him a quite possible guest at the quasi-aristocratic house of the Gascoynes.

"Perhaps I was sentimental and foolish," my mother would say, with that quiet, unemotional voice of hers which caused strangers to doubt whether she could ever be either, "but he had such beautiful eyes and played in such an unaffected, dreamy way. And he was so good," she would add, as if this were the quality which in the end had impressed her most. "He might have been much better off than he was, only he never could do anything underhand or mean. I don't think such things ever even tempted him. He was simply above them."

My father became a great favourite with the household till he committed the intolerable impertinence of falling in love with Miss Gascoyne. From the position of an ever welcome guest he descended to that of a "presuming little Jewish quill-driver," as my uncle—whose friendship for him had always been of a somewhat patronising order—described him.

In fact, my uncle was considerably more bitter in denouncing his presumption than my grandfather, who, his first irritation over, went so far as to suggest that the best should be made of a bad job, and that they should turn him into a lawyer, urging his nationality as a plea that his admission into the firm was not likely to do any harm.

But my uncle was certainly right in receiving such a proposal with derision.

"He hasn't even got the qualities of his race," he said—although this very fact had been, till their quarrel, a constantly reiterated argument in my father's favour.

My father and mother were forbidden to meet, and so one Sunday morning—Sunday being the only day on which my father could devote the whole day to so important an event—my mother stole out of the house and they were married before morning service, on a prospective income of a hundred a year. As mad a piece of sentimental folly as was ever perpetrated by a pair of foolish lovers.

The strange thing was that they were happy. They loved one another devotedly, and my grandfather—though quite under the thumb of my uncle—sur-reptitiously paid the rent of the small house where they spent the whole of their married life, and which after a time, still unknown to my uncle, he bought for them. My uncle, whom even when I was a child I thought a singularly interesting man—and the estrangement was certainly one of the griefs of my mother's life—had a great opinion of himself on account of the family from which he was derived.

He made a point of having in readiness all proofs of his claim to the title in case the extraordinary event should happen of the intervening lives going out one after the other like a row of candles. His researches on the subject enabled him to show a respectable number of instances in which an heir even as distant as himself had succeeded.

My mother's unequal marriage caused him to make all haste in choosing a wife. He might not have

betrayed nearly so much antipathy to my father as a brother-in-law had not the Gascoyne earldom been one of the few peerages capable of descending through the female line. Thus, till he should have an heir of his own, his sister and any child of hers stood next in succession.

He chose his wife with circumspection. She was the daughter of a baronet, not so reduced as to have ceased to be respectable ; and the main point was that the match would look well on the family tree. To his infinite chagrin his first child died an hour after birth, and Mrs. Gascoyne suffered so severely that a consolation was impossible. It thus became inevitable that should the unexpected happen the title would pass after himself to his sister and her children.

He drew some comfort from the fact that so far my father and mother had no child.

Whether it was the disappointment of his own childlessness, or a natural disposition to ostentation, I do not know, but from this time my uncle's mode of living grew more extravagant.

Through the death of my grandfather he became the head of the firm. He left the suburbs where he had been born, and he and his wife set up house in the West End, where they moved in a very expensive set, so expensive, in fact, that in less than five years my uncle, to avoid criminal proceedings—which must have ensued as the result of a protracted juggling with clients' money—put a bullet through his brains.

He was much mourned by my father and mother, who had both loved him. He was a fine, handsome fellow, good-natured at heart, and they had always deemed it certain that one day a reconciliation would take place.

Inasmuch as my parents had never met my aunt she could not become less to them than she had been, but evidently to show how little she desired to have anything to do with them, she allowed their letter of condolence to remain unanswered. Those who were responsible for winding up my uncle's affairs forwarded to my mother, in accordance with his wishes, the portrait of my ancestor, Lord George Gascoyne, together with an envelope containing a full statement of her claim to the Gascoyne peerage. My father, who was certainly more interested than ever my mother was in the documents that constituted this claim, took charge of them, and I believe that at my birth not a little of his elation was due to the fact that he was the parent of a being so exalted as to be only nine removes from an earldom. In time he came to regard himself as a sort of Prince Consort whose claims as father of the heir-apparent could not fail to be substantial.

I don't think there ever was a child more devotedly tended than I was. Arriving late, and being the only one, my parents were able to afford positive extravagances in the way of extra-quality perambulators and superfine toys, and in my earliest years it would have been quite impossible for me to guess that I was other than the child of affluence.

I was christened Israel Gascoyne Rank. From my earliest years, however, I cannot remember being called anything but Israel, and in my childhood if I were asked my name I was sure to answer "Israel Rank," and equally sure to supplement the information by adding, "and my other name is Gascoyne—Israel Gascoyne Rank."

I suppose that it is due to my sense of humour—which has never deserted me and which I trust will

not do so even at the last trying moment—that I cannot help feeling just a trifle amused at the idea of my saintly mother and my dear, lovable little father carefully bringing up—with all the love and affection which was in them—*me*. It must be admitted to have its humorous side.

I played about the dingy house at Clapham during my happy childhood and was strangely contented without other companionship than my mother's. I certainly betrayed no morbid symptoms, but was, on the contrary, noted for a particularly sunny disposition. My mother declared that my laugh was most infectious, so full was it of real enjoyment and gaiety.

I have always attributed my psychological development along the line it afterwards took to a remark made to my mother by a woman who used to come in and sew for her.

I was playing just outside the room with a wooden horse, when Mrs. Ives remarked as she threaded the needle preparatory to driving the machine: "Lord, mum, I do believe that boy of yours gets handsomer every time I come. I never see such a picture, never."

I was quite old enough to grasp the remark, and for it to sink deep into my soul, planting there the seeds of a superb self-consciousness. From that moment I was vain. I grew quite used to people turning to look at me in the streets, and saying: "What a lovely child!" and in time felt positively injured if the passers-by did not testify openly to their admiration. My mother discouraged my being flattered—I suppose from the point of view of strict morality, with which I cannot claim acquaintance. Flattery is bad, and yet at the same time it always seems an absurd thing to talk to and bring up a child of exceptional personal

attractions as if he or she were quite ordinary. If he be a boy, he is told that personal attractions are of no consequence, things not to be thought of and which can on no account make him better or worse, and then, whether girl or boy, the child finds on going out into the world that it is as valuable a weapon as can be given to anybody, that to beauty many obstacles are made easy which to the plain are often insuperable, and that above all his moral direction and his looks stand in very definite relation.

It was of no use telling me that I was not exceptionally good-looking ; I grasped the fact from the moment of Mrs. Ives' flattering little outburst

My father was immensely proud of my appearance ; I suppose the more so because he could claim that I was like him and that I did not resemble the Gascoynes in any way.

I was dark and Jewish, with an amazingly well-cut face and an instinctive grace of which I was quite conscious. I have never known from my childhood what it was to be ill at ease, and I have certainly never been shy. I inherited my father's gift of music. With him it had never developed into more than what might give him a slight social advantage ; with myself I was early determined it should be something more, and was quick to see the use it might be in introducing me into good society.

CHAPTER II

WHEN I was about seven years of age my father died. I think the cause was aerated waters, although I remember that on being shown his body after death it looked so small that my mind hardly established any very definite relation between it and the weary, kindly little man with the abnormal waist whom I had known as my father.

My mother must, I am sure, have sorrowed greatly, but she spared my tender years any harrowing spectacle of grief and set herself courageously to the task of keeping our home together.

My father had been insured for some five hundred pounds, which brought my mother in a tiny income. The house fortunately was her own. She immediately dismissed her one servant and let the front rooms, so that we were not so badly off after all. My mother, who had hitherto superintended my education, was now no longer able to do so, as the house took up most of her time. Certainly, the school I was sent to was a very much better one than a boy circumstanced as I was could have expected to attend. It was patronised by a great many sons of the comparatively wealthy in the neighbourhood, and was by no means inexpensive. I went right through it from the lowest form to the highest.

My masters pronounced me quick, but not studious. Personally, I don't think highly imaginative people are ever very studious in childhood or early youth. How is it possible? The imaginative temperament sets one dreaming of wonderful results achieved at a remarkably small outlay of effort. It is only the dull who receive any demonstration of the value of application.

My mother was careful that I should not be dressed so as to compare unfavourably in any way with my schoolfellows, and managed that I should always have a sufficiency of pocket-money, advantages which I hardly appreciated at the time. How she accomplished this I do not know, but I can honestly say that I never knew what want meant, and although my mother did all the work of the house herself, and cooked for the gentleman to whom our front rooms were let, we never lived in the kitchen or descended to a slovenly mode of life. We had our meals in quite a well-bred manner in the dining-room, which was also our living-room.

Our lodger was a mysterious creature who always brought me a handsome birthday and Christmas present and declined to be thanked. The first time he saw me he pronounced me to be too good-looking for a boy.

He was gruff and abrupt in manner, but the incarnation of deferential courtesy to my mother, whom I truly think he worshipped. I believe that his prolonged residence in our front rooms was not entirely due to their comfort or to my mother's cooking.

I am sure he embarrassed her by his chronic efforts to spare her trouble. By degrees he took to dining out nearly every evening, although his arrival

immediately after the dinner hour showed that he had no engagement anywhere else.

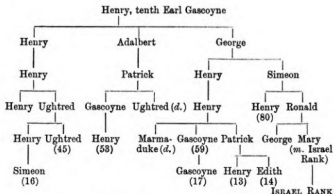
I have every reason to believe that he made her an offer of marriage, but if it were so he did not allow her refusal to drive him away. He remained, and continued to treat her with even greater deference than before.

Apart from the memory of my father, which she held sacred, her devotion as a mother would, I think, have kept her from the remotest contemplation of a second marriage. She lived entirely for me.

I was early made acquainted with the story of the Gascoyne succession, and it was with a quiet smile of indulgence that my mother told me of the interest with which my father would watch the ebb and flow of the heirs that stood between his wife and the peerage.

The idea, however, seized my vivid imagination. I got my mother to bring out all the papers and I set to work at once to see how far my claims had advanced or receded since my father's death.

I was obliged before I could completely determine my position to have recourse to a Peerage. I was surprised to discover that I had come appreciably nearer to the succession. There were still six lives between myself and the peerage, but two branches which had formerly barred the way had become extinct. Perhaps it will be as well to give a tree of the succession from the point where the branch to which I belong came into existence. It must be understood that I do not give those branches which had died out, or the names of individuals who did not affect the succession.



It will thus be seen that there was by no means a lack of male heirs and that my chance was remote indeed. In fact, on going into the question, so little prospect did there seem of my ever standing near to the succession that I gave up taking an interest in the matter, at least for the time being.

In looking back at the development of my character, I am not conscious of a natural wickedness staining and perverting all my actions. My career has been simply the result of an immense desire to be somebody of importance. My chief boyish trait was a love of beauty, whether in things animate or inanimate. People who have possessed that intangible something which is known as beauty—that degree of attraction made up of always varying proportions of line, colour and intelligence—have invariably done something more than merely attract me; they have filled me with a burning desire to be obviously in their outlook, to move for a time within their circumference, to feel that I had left an indelible impress on their memory, and it was my early apprecia-

tion of a capacity to do this that perhaps fostered my egotism, till it had become an article of faith with me that I must be someone. I looked upon the possession of rank or renown as a useful weapon for drawing attention to myself, of increasing the number of individuals brought under my personal influence.

I was greedy of importance, because of the beauty it might bring into life. Naturally the beautiful things in life vary according to temperament. Romance was to me the chief thing. After all, it is the salt of existence. Not that I believe romance to be necessarily conditioned by rank and wealth. A real artist may create it for himself out of very humble materials. One of the most complete romanticists I ever met was a coal-heaver, who had a list of experiences that sounded in the telling like the Arabian Nights entertainment. At the same time, rank and wealth fascinate the Jew as much as precious stones. They glitter, and they have value. The Israelite is probably less of a snob in these matters than the average Englishman, but as an Oriental he appreciates their decorative effect. Nevertheless, I doubt very much whether he is ever so far dazzled by them as to forget his own interests. I most certainly was not. I should have liked to be Earl Gascoyne. It would have meant grasping the lever to so many things, and this fact dawned on me more and more as I grew up.

My distant relationship to the Gascoynes was the cause of some humiliation to me at school. There was a boy whose father had just been made an Alderman of the City of London, and he was rather boastful of the fact.

“Bah! what’s an Alderman?” I asked.

Instinctively the other boys felt that it was not right that one of Hebraic extraction should make such a remark. They had the intuition of their race that a Jew is after all a Jew.

"Shut up, Sheeny," said one.

"Now then, old clo'," said another.

I was not the possessor of Jewish blood for nothing. Where an English boy would have struck out I remained Orientally contemptuous of insult. I merely wondered if the time would ever come when I should be able to remind Lionel Holland—the last boy who had spoken—of his insult.

"If six people were to die I should be Earl Gascoyne," I said grandly.

There arose a shout of laughter.

"Pigs might fly," said Lionel Holland.

I flushed. The only impression produced by my grandiloquent speech was that I was a stupid liar. Even my bosom friend Billy Statham shrank away from me. Such a useless lie offended his sense of propriety.

I was only twelve and had some difficulty in keeping back my tears.

"It's true," I asserted.

"How can it be true?" demanded Holland. "You are a Jew and your name is not Gascoyne."

"It is—my name is Israel Gascoyne Rank. My mother's name was Gascoyne."

But whatever I said they declined to believe in the possibility of such a thing. The incident taught me, however, to hold my tongue on the subject of my noble extraction, and that was a point gained.

I don't think I was unpopular at school, but I suffered the penalty of all marked personalities; that is to say,

I was very much liked or very much detested. I was not in one sense of great importance in the school life. I should have been untrue to myself if I had been. There is perhaps nothing more remarkable than the false estimate held by boys of character. Their giants are as often as not the pigmies of after life. Our school captain at the time I am speaking of was a boy called Jim Morton. He had a pleasant face bordering on good looks, and the body, so we thought, of a young Hercules. The basis of his popularity was a sense of justice and a reticence in the display of his physical strength. He was most certainly worshipped by the entire school, including myself, although I was by no means prone to idealise those in authority. For Jim Morton I had a veritable respect, although in any case my Jewish blood would have taught me to simulate deference until I was in a position to betray my true estimate without danger to my own interests. To my imagination as a small boy he seemed to possess something Titanic, to tower above everybody else in the school immeasurably. I met him in after years, an insignificant looking man with a ragged moustache and a slouch. It was quite a shock, and I waited for him to open his mouth, sure that his power over my juvenile imagination must have been a question of intellect. I talked to him for a long time, hoping for some echo at least of a lost magic. I can safely say I never met anyone more destitute of ideas, and it seemed impossible that he could ever have had any. Perhaps had he lived among savages the primitive virtues which had made him supreme among boys—and boyish communities are psychologically similar to savage races—would have developed, and he would have remained a force. It may be so ; I give him the

benefit of the doubt. I am inclined to think, however, that there never had been any personality in the true sense of the word.

Billy Statham, a boy a year older than myself, I loved. Where my affections are roused—and I have very strong affections, however much people may feel inclined to doubt it—I cling like a leech. I am supremely indifferent to defects in those I love, even when they affect myself. The only thing I ask is marked characteristics; I am incapable of concentrating myself on the colourless.

Billy Statham was certainly not colourless. He was gay, emotional, and beautiful as morning. He was brilliant and indolent. In many ways he seemed to be the most backward boy in the school, but to accuse him of being ignorant would have been preposterous. I never knew him tell a lie, and I never knew him do a dishonest thing; and yet once when a boy in the school who had been discovered in a flagrant piece of dishonesty was by general agreement sent to Coventry, Billy Statham was the one person who treated him as if nothing had happened. I really think his was the most Christ-like nature I have ever met. He always seemed to hold on to the intangible something in people which is above earthly stains. Evil had at times a bewildering effect on him. I have seen him look quite blank—when a curious look of wonder did not come into his face—as other boys were discussing matters which properly belonged to a more adult stage. The impending complexities of sex into which the other lads were always taking surreptitious peeps attracted him not at all. It seemed as if he must have possessed some inward consciousness that his body would never be called upon

to take part in the sterner struggle. When he was fourteen he contracted rheumatic fever, and was returned to us after a few months with the roses blanched from his cheeks and the consciousness of a weak heart. One day he told me that he had heard the doctor say to his parents that if he had rheumatic fever again he would die. On a damp afternoon in late autumn we were caught in a heavy downpour and I left him at his front door shivering. I did not see him alive again, and I have never known boys so profoundly moved by the death of one of their number. It seemed as if they realised that something spiritual and valuable had gone from them in their corporate capacity. He left behind him the recollection of a nature entirely unspoilt.

To me his death was a profound grief. I have never experienced so great a friendship for anyone since. At the time, I was unable to understand why he chose me as his Jonathan, excepting that, as I have already said, he had the instinct of great minds for grasping the essentials in human nature and allowing a man's actions to remain a matter of opinion. He seldom argued with me. He was content to influence, and in this he displayed another trait of great natures, which let fall here and there a truth, but are not prone to discussion. I have often thought that he might have been the remnant of a great consciousness, having somewhat, but not a great deal, to expiate in human form. His goodness seemed to stretch out, invisible, beyond himself.

When he died I was fourteen, and the firmest of friendships are not at that age sufficiently strong to leave an inconsolable grief. My next great friend was a boy of very different character. Grahame

Hallward was the son of a fairly well-to-do City man. They lived in comfortable style, albeit they were a somewhat uncomfortable family. Wherein their uncomfortableness lay it would have been difficult to say. They all had a more than usual share of good looks, and this possibly was their first attraction for me. Indeed, two of them, Grahame and Sibella, were quite beautiful to look upon. The family constituted a very aristocracy of physical gifts, and, despite their peculiar natures, I was always at my ease among them. It is true that they were inclined to patronise me, but the qualities of my race enabled me to endure this without resentment, and even with dignity. It was, however, only natural ; for although I was always neatly dressed, the position of my mother was well known, and had it been otherwise, the house and street in which we lived would sufficiently have revealed the truth. In matters of this sort I was not a snob ; besides, I had too quick an instinct for things well-bred not to realise that my mother was gentlewoman enough to hold her own with the very best.

One day I took Grahame Hallward home to tea. I think he felt a little nervous, wondering if tea in the house of such poor people would be a very uncomfortable affair. I realised from the way in which he accepted that he was a little surprised at the invitation. He always had beautiful manners, and he said that of course he would be delighted to come. The two words "of course !" were a mistake, however, and I resented them, although I was secretly amused.

He came one day after school, and when we reached the house my mother was already seated before the urn. There were flowers on the table, and the linen was spotless. There was a silver teapot and sugar-

basin given to my mother by our lodger on the occasion of his having completed two years' residence in the house. His ingenuity in finding occasions whereon it might be considered suitable to make my mother and myself presents was quite remarkable. I was entrusted with the task of calling him in the morning. Hence it became necessary for me to have a watch, entirely, as he explained, to suit his convenience. In the same way a piano arrived one day—our own had been sold at my father's death—and our lodger explained that it had been left to him by a distant relation. I gazed at it longingly as it disappeared into his sitting-room. After a day or two he said that he believed it would be spoilt unless it were played upon, and asked me as a favour to do so. Then, having come home once or twice as I was practising hard, he declared almost irritably that it was inconvenient and that he really thought considering the time he had been with us we might oblige him by having it in our sitting-room, but that of course if my mother objected there was nothing more to be said. He would have sold it had it not been in his cousin's house for so many years. Needless to chronicle that the piano stood henceforward in our sitting-room. Our suspicions were somewhat aroused when the man who came to tune it gave as his opinion that the instrument could not be more than two years old, if that; in fact, he should have said it was brand-new.

My mother was pleased for my sake that she was able to greet my friend from behind a silver teapot and sugar-basin. I was secretly conscious of the effect she produced on Grahame. He had, I am sure, believed—despite all my assurances to the contrary—that my mother was a Jewess, and he was not a little sur-

prised to find a well-bred Englishwoman with a reserved and quite distinguished manner. Tea being over my mother kept us seated, whilst, almost unobserved, she placed every article from the table on the tray. She was full of manœuvres for minimising the bustle consequent on the want of a servant. I was rather nervous of the moment when she would rise and bear forth the tray. I had set her on such a pinnacle before my friend that I could not bear that he should see her otherwise than enthroned. I was painfully conscious that there is no snob like a boy. My mother, however, had foreseen everything.

“Israel dear, Mr. Johnson has brought home a beautiful old Chinese cabinet. I am sure Mr. Hallward would like to see it.”

Mr. Hallward—barely fifteen and a half and very flattered at being referred to as Mr. Hallward—expressed himself as most anxious, and we adjourned to the front room.

Short as was the time we were gone, on our return all signs of a meal had disappeared, and my mother was seated before the fire as if she possessed ten servants instead of her own ten fingers.

Then I played. This was not entirely a novelty ; I had often been shown off at the Hallwards' house. Indeed, my musical abilities were, I fancied, often made an excuse when the Hallwards felt that the presence of my humble self in their mansion occasioned surprise. In Clapham, residence was everything, and the leading families were a little suspicious of anyone who lived in a house as small as our own. Had they been generally aware of the lodger they would have considered themselves entirely justified in deciding that I was not socially eligible !

I walked part of the way home with Grahame Hallward.

"I say," he burst out, "your mother is rippin'."

If Grahame Hallward said so I knew he meant it. His chief enemy in life was his tongue. He always had an uncontrollable habit of speaking his mind.

Sibella Hallward exercised an irresistible fascination over me from the first moment I saw her. She was undeniably lovely even at an age when most girls are at their worst. Her hair was deliciously silky and golden. Her eyes were large and blue, with dark-brown brows and lashes. Her cheeks were the petals of a blush rose. Her mouth was perfect and petulant, and the one imperfection with which Nature invariably salts the cream of the correct was her nose; it was a little tip-tilted, and seemed to have been made to match her voice, which was curiously childish and treble, with an acerb complaint in it that was indescribably delightful. She allowed me to play at sweet-hearting with her, and then one day when we quarrelled called me a horrid little Jew. I was possessed by my love for her from that day. My obsession has never been defensible. She was no excuse for any man's love excepting that she was beautiful, and I loved her because such beauty would confer distinction on the man who won her.

She was vain and shallow, but with a will of her own which was somewhat remarkable, combined with her other characteristics.

I was constantly at the Hallwards' house. I was always quarrelling with Sibella and declaring that I would never visit them any more, but she invariably managed to lure me back without in any way apologising or admitting herself to be in the wrong.

At this time she was a shameless little flirt and permitted me to make love to her, which I did with all the precocity of my semi-oriental nature. Her parents were a good-natured, indulgent couple, and they usually alluded to me as Sibella's sweetheart.

It was not a household where principles counted for much, and most of the inmates possessing, like Sibella, very strong wills the result was chaotic. At the same time, they were sympathetic in an egotistical way. To anybody who like myself was able to hold his own, and also to put up with them, the household was tolerable and enjoyable. Woe, however, to any luckless person who found them too fascinating to avoid and too strong-minded to be battled with! Such an one was ground to powder by the sheer weight of their egotism.

I suppose it was this egotism that made Grahame Hallward somewhat unpopular at school. He always bore himself with an extraordinary pride; not aggressive, but the sort of innate aloofness and condescension which might have been expected from the member of a reigning house. It was natural to the family, and even shallow Sibella possessed it. At times it gave one the impression that she had dignity, when in reality it was only an aspect of her vanity.

Amongst other things which Grahame Hallward and I had in common was a dislike of Lionel Holland. We had both suffered from his superior physical strength, and with Grahame even more than with me this was an unpardonable offence. Lionel Holland was not deficient in head; he had great intelligence of a certain kind, and almost a genius for displaying his mental wares to the best advantage. It was commonly reported that his father had begun life as a newspaper boy, and certainly his son's wit and repartee were of

the gutter order notwithstanding their veneer of middle-class suburbanism. He was slightly older than either of us and of an altogether stronger type. We found a means, however, of putting an end to his tyranny. We engaged in a defensive league, not verbally agreed upon—Grahame would have been much too proud to admit that such a thing was necessary—but we got into the way of standing by one another when he commenced to annoy us. Candour compels me to admit that he was almost a match for both of us, but we managed to inflict sufficient punishment to make him consider that the entertainment of baiting us had its risks, and finally he left us alone.

It was Lionel Holland's ambition to be captain of the school. He considered that his brilliance at certain sports entitled him to it, but somehow he never reached the position he aimed at. The boys did not trust him. He was deficient in those very qualities that make a boy's hero, and they were not to be deceived by the easy insolence of his manner. I never knew success in the cricket and football field carry a boy such a little way into his comrades' hearts. He was a handsome lad enough, embryo of the flashy, brilliant brute he afterwards became. I think, but for Grahame and myself, he might have been elected to the post he coveted. He had more money than any other boy in the school and spent it freely where he had an object in view. My friend and I, however, were determined that so unsuitable an election should not take place. The captain of the school had large powers, and we had no mind to see ourselves in Lionel Holland's hands. Our brains were more astute than his when it came to a real tussle of intellect. We discredited him in every way possible, and he endured

the humiliation of defeat. A psychologist would have been interested in noting how, when Lionel Holland's defeat was an accomplished fact, the different characteristics of Grahame's nature and my own displayed themselves. Grahame, having attained his object, was sorry for his antagonist. I was unfeignedly glad, and rejoiced in his humiliation to an extent which was very unpleasing to my friend. We had quite a quarrel over the matter; and Grahame, whose plain speech never failed, told me that I was exhibiting the worst faults of the Old Testament, in that I showed un-sportsmanlike exultation over a fallen foe. I ought perhaps to mention that Lionel Holland had attempted to win me to his side by asking me to go with him to the Crystal Palace and there treating me to all the side shows. I enjoyed the outing but took the liberty of continuing to distrust him; another method of which Grahame disapproved most strongly. Certainly Lionel Holland would never have attempted to bribe Grahame. The crudest of perceptions—which his was not—would at once have seen the futility of such an attempt.

I fancy that I was constantly disappointing my friend, and he was impatient of any point of view which he was unable to sympathise with. It was therefore the more remarkable that he should have remained so staunch. I think that at times his friendship for me was living on his capital of loyalty, of which he possessed an inexhaustible store. His loyalty tended to make him very inelastic in argument, but he was altogether an unexpected person and would on occasions display a susceptibility to logic which was amazing in one so young.

He was, what most people who knew him super-

ficially hardly suspected, sensitive to an extraordinary degree. His impassivity deceived them. He had a horror of death, and Billy Statham's end affected him more as a practical example of the inevitability and ruthlessness of bodily extinction than with regret at the loss of a schoolmate whom like all of us he had really loved.

He did not believe that my fear of death was not equal to his own, and concluded that my indifference was affected and mere bravado. In after years when I explained to him that without having any particular religious opinions, I regarded this body as a more or less useful vessel in which to perform part of the voyage of mental evolution, I found him quite unable to follow me and still possessed by just the same dread of death. The mere idea terrified him. The sight of all dead things, even when they happened to be the corpses of quite low forms of life, filled him with repulsion, and the idea of making him a doctor, which his father had entertained during his childhood, was abandoned.

I used to find a certain satisfaction in raising the question of death in order to see the colour fade out of his cheek. He was too proud to say that it frightened him, but it did. Fear was so little in his character that I came to the conclusion that it lay partly in the extraordinary value he and his family placed on personal appearance, and that in addition his terror might have its roots in some such cause as made Catherine de Medici faint when she saw an apple, even if it were a painted one in a picture.

As a boy I forbore to make him a confidant of my passion for his sister. Perhaps I realised that he would resent it. I think he believed that his sisters were

fit matches for the most exalted, and was secretly astonished and disgusted when the eldest married a struggling young solicitor.

Once, when Sibella had taunted me and teased me past bearing, I threw the Gascoyne pedigree in her face. I shall never forget the silvery and maddening laugh of disbelief with which she received the announcement. She did not even ask me for proof but went on laughing till I could have struck her. At the moment I hated her. It was on a half-holiday. I had been asked to tea, and was making love to her in the school-room, waiting for Grahame and his brother to come in from football.

"When you laugh at me like that," I said tersely, "I feel as if I could kill you."

"And when you tell stories like that," she said, mimicking my intonation in her childish treble, "you are simply ridiculous." She took another chocolate from the bag of sweets I had brought her. I used to save up my pocket-money for two or three weeks until I had sufficient to buy sweets worthy of her acceptance. It is very certain that had she considered them other than the best she would have told me so.

"Yes," she continued, "you are simply ridiculous. Just as if you could ever be a lord. I don't believe it! If six people died!" she concluded, with a laugh which made me feel what I was capable of. I could have killed her where she stood but for the consequences.

If I held human life cheap I was still possessed of the caution of my race, and even at that age I loved her. Even at that age indeed! Looking back at my boyhood I am astonished at the insanity of passion of

which I was capable. There is nothing more narrow than the scepticism with which older people treat the love-sickness of the young. Boys love even better perhaps than men ever can. Romeo was, I am convinced, not more than seventeen or eighteen — that is to say, as Shakespeare conceived him.

I felt humiliated by her disbelief. I had been anxious to give myself some importance in her eyes, and instead she treated the whole thing with absolute derision. That day was to be in every way one of bitterness. She was standing at the schoolroom window drumming on the glass, when suddenly she gave a little shrill cry of surprise.

“Oh what fun! Grahame is bringing someone in to tea, and father is with them.”

I looked out and saw to my annoyance Lionel Holland accompanying Grahame and his father up the drive. What was the meaning of it? Surely Lionel Holland had not succeeded in winning Grahame to friendship! It was hardly likely.

“And I do believe it’s that good-looking boy who won all the prizes at last year’s sports,” continued Sibella. “Yes, it is!”

I had, even at the age of sixteen, a very genius for the analysis of character—although analysis is hardly the word. Characters have always had a way of displaying themselves before me at a bird’s-eye view. From the first I mistrusted the effect of a handsome and confident piece of physical splendour on a nature like Sibella’s.

In the hall I could hear Lionel Holland apologising for his mudstained appearance, and Mr. Hallward’s breezy voice laughing away his scruples.

“Nonsense, my boy, nonsense, I like to see it. It

shows you have been enjoying yourself in a fine, manly way. Grahame, take your friend upstairs and let him wash his face and hands."

Mr. Hallward always took pleasure in the display of jovial hospitality. In reality he was a somewhat bad-tempered man, but when he was in the mood for a little display of amateur histrionics there was no one more genial or hearty.

Sibella was flushed with excitement and I was inwardly fuming.

"What is his name?" she demanded, turning to me as Lionel Holland's voice died away upstairs.

"Lionel Holland," I answered, as cheerfully as I could, determined that, if possible, I would not betray my annoyance.

"Do you like him?"

"Oh, he is all right." I might just as well have said plainly that I disliked him, for Sibella was not deceived. She had a Jezebel's gift for detecting antagonisms between those of the opposite sex and playing upon them. I believe this characteristic invariably differentiates the woman who uses her sex power for evil from the woman who uses it for good.

"You don't like him," she answered at once. "You are jealous of him."

"Jealous! Why?"

"Because he plays games better than you do."

I laughed. It was the last thing that was ever likely to make me jealous. She saw that the taunt had failed and tried another.

"And also because he is so much better looking than you are."

I laughed again. From Sibella the absolutely untrue was not convincing.

But Sibella had a way of thrusting till she thrust home.

"You needn't laugh—because it's quite true, and you are also jealous because he is so much more manly than you are."

I knew what she meant. Lionel Holland's flamboyant animalism and sex assurance stood in her eyes for prime qualities. She was superficially feminine and loved a brute. The woman of delicate upbringing, who astonishes her friends by her inexplicable infatuation for a boaster who is obviously a cad and a bully despite his physical advantages, is twin sister to the lady of the slums who worships the brute who blackens her eyes and kicks her as an amusing conclusion to the week's work. The poor slut flatters herself that it is evidence of a strength which he would not fail to use in her defence, forgetting that a bully is only occasionally a brave man.

I saw what was coming and grew sick at heart. One thing comforted me; Sibella was a snob, and despite his riches she would never be able to taunt me with his superior caste.

"I shouldn't show my jealousy if I were you," she concluded.

I looked at her quietly.

"You ought to be killed."

I said the thing I knew would bludgeon her into silence. She shared Grahame's fear of death, but in her case it was more ignoble. I believe if Grahame had been condemned to death his pride would have overcome his fear. I could imagine Sibella whining and fawning at the executioner's feet.

She looked at me with distinct apprehension, and at that moment Grahame entered the room accom-

panied by Lionel Holland. Sibella immediately began to exercise her fascinations and to concentrate the attention of the visitor on herself. I have often thought since that Lionel Holland must have manœuvred his invitation to the house, for he seemed already to have made up his mind how to proceed with Sibella. He flattered her vanity, said that he remembered her perfectly on the day of the sports, and declared that he should certainly not have tried so hard had she not been there.

The younger members of the Hallward household had tea in the dining-room, and on Saturdays were privileged to bring in their friends, so that there was generally a large gathering. The tea itself was a sumptuous affair, and as the elders were seldom present it was as a rule very enjoyable. Cynthia Hallward, one year older than Sibella, poured out.

Lionel Holland seemed supremely unconscious that Grahame was not very pleased at his presence.

I was of course unable to express my displeasure until I was given a lead. Grahame lingered a minute or two in the school-room with me.

"I wish the Guv'nor would mind his own business," he said sulkily.

"Didn't you ask him?"

"Is it likely? He insisted on walking home with me, and just as I was saying good-bye to him the Guv'nor met us and said 'Bring your friend in to tea.' Friend indeed!" And Grahame snorted.

When we reached the dining-room Sibella had arranged so that Lionel was on her right and a girl friend of her sister's on her left. I verily believe she wanted me to sit opposite to her in order that she might enjoy the spectacle of my chagrin. She should

have known me better. I betrayed not the least sign of the hatred and wounded vanity that were surging within me. I was measuring my chances against Lionel Holland. I was better looking than he was, but not in the way likely to appeal to Sibella. He was rich ; I was far cleverer. It appears to me on looking back that I quite understood, even at that early stage, that the incident was the prologue to a drama which would develop itself in after years. Most boy and girl romances might be ephemeral, but ours had the promise of permanence. This was the more curious in that two out of the three, Sibella and Lionel, were entirely superficial.

I joined in the conversation and laughter with very fair success, but Sibella was in her most aggravating mood. Cynthia Hallward asked Lionel Holland what he wanted to be. Apparently he did not quite know, but some cross-questioning from Sibella elicited the fact that his only definite ambition was for riches.

"My father wasn't always rich," he announced ; and, to do him justice, his pride in the fact that his father was self-made was the pleasantest trait in his character. "He began without a shilling, and he says that money is nine-tenths of everything, and he ought to know. I wouldn't give twopence to be anything which didn't bring in money."

"Wouldn't you like to be a lord?" said Sibella, looking at me mischievously.

"It's quite easy to be a lord if you're rich enough," said Lionel.

"Oh, but Israel is going to be a lord. That is to say, when six people die," laughed Sibella. And there was that peculiar quality in her laugh which when it was turned against myself made me feel cruel towards her.

Lionel Holland laughed too, delighted to assist Sibella in teasing me.

"Israel is always telling us that at school," he said.

"I've only said so once," I answered, keeping my temper by a violent effort of self-control, "and it's perfectly true." I think there must have been something in my voice that warned them to desist, for the subject was allowed to drop.

After tea we adjourned to the school-room. Sibella's appetite for sweets was insatiable, and she took the most comfortable seat by the fire and proceeded to finish the box of chocolates I had brought her.

"Do you like sweets?" I heard Lionel ask. He was sitting by her side.

She handed him the box and he helped himself.

"Awfully." Sibella's English was extremely slipshod.

"I'll send you some. What kind do you like best?"

"Chocolate nougat."

"Very well. I'll send you a much bigger box than that."

Sibella laughed appreciatively. "That will be jolly of you," she said, perfectly aware that I could hear. She was evidently entirely dazzled by her new admirer, but was too much a born flirt to let me go even if I had had the least intention of retiring from the contest.

Just before I left the house she sidled up to me.

"You're not angry, are you, Israel?"

I made a faint attempt at a smile as I answered:

"Angry? Of course not. Why should I be?"

Finding me inclined to fence, she assumed her most childish treble.

"I don't know, I'm sure, only you have been looking so dreadfully cross."

I very nearly shook her.

Lionel Holland left the house a few minutes before I did. Grahame walked with me as far as the gate.

"I say, Israel, what's that about your being a lord some day?"

"Nothing. I don't want to go into the matter. Everybody is so beastly rude about it."

"Is it true?"

"Of course it is. I'll show you the papers if you like."

"I don't want that. If you say it's true, of course I believe you."

But I was secretly determined that Grahame should see the papers, and I took the earliest opportunity of showing them to him, for I knew that though he liked me too much to say that he disbelieved me, he felt that there must be a mistake somewhere.

I explained the whole thing to him and showed him our genealogical tree.

I fancy he was more surprised than he appeared to be, for although he had always been very kind to me there had been just the faintest suspicion of patronage in his manner. It was perhaps only natural. A semi-Hebrew lad, in humble circumstances, with no prospects to speak of, was not in the ordinary course of things the most natural companion for the son of a successful city merchant.

I knew he told Sibella, for she condescendingly informed me that I was not such a story-teller as she had thought, adding, however, that it wasn't very much to boast of, as the six lives between me and the peerage would probably be sixty-six before very long, and it was quite evident that the Gascoynes did not even know of my existence. She became quite friendly again, but when I tried to kiss her she refused

to allow me to do so ; or rather, she attempted to prevent it and was really furious when I did so by force. I detected in her resistance that I no longer occupied her thoughts. Indeed, I was soon made aware that I was expected to be content with the place of an ordinary friend. Lionel Holland managed to be constantly at the house. Grahame had expressed his disinclination to bring him, but Sibella and her sister evidently had an understanding by which they were to meet him by appointment on Saturday afternoons and bring him back to tea. Mr. and Mrs. Hallward were too easy-going to notice these manœuvres, and would have treated them quite good-naturedly even had they done so

The Hallward children were allowed to do pretty well as they liked, with the result that careful mothers of the neighbourhood, resentful of their extreme good looks, made Cynthia and Sibella the subject of much spiteful gossip and whispered inuendoes which I verily believe had little truth in them. Compelled to stand by and watch Lionel Holland's triumph, I suffered terribly, and my mother grew quite anxious at my appearance, but attributed it to overwork.

Once, and once only, did I implore Sibella to have pity on me. She laughed in the most silvery manner, and frankly said she was tired of me. I recall my abjectness with humiliation. Lionel Holland's was a nature quite devoid of sympathy for his own sex, and where another lad might have decently veiled his triumph from his rival, he displayed it on every possible occasion. His manner was insufferably self-complacent. He had the natural contempt of all Westerns for anything Jewish, and he had not the breeding to disguise the fact. He told a mutual friend

that 'it was just like a beastly little Jew to make up to a girl like Sibella.'

I affected indifference because I knew the remark had been repeated to me with the object of goading me into fighting him ; and that was a matter which required thinking out. At the same time I planned the first attempt of my life to deal a secret blow at an enemy. It was crude, but youth and inexperience must be my excuse.

Lionel Holland was training for a mile handicap, and I knew that in the evening he used to go to the school sports ground, with a friend to time him, and train till after dusk.

The track, half a mile in circumference, ran round the entire ground, skirting the backs of houses, and bounded at one part for the length of about a hundred yards by a hedge. I conceived the idea of throwing him as he was running. The track was hard, and he might hurt himself seriously or not at all. There was at any rate the chance of a full retaliation.

I chose a spot about midway along the hedge opposite, where on the inner side of the track, just upon the grass, and facing the cricket pitch, was an iron seat firmly fixed to the ground.

One evening I followed Holland and his friend to the sports ground and, having seen them go in, reached the back of the hedge by a circuitous way. There was an aperture just large enough for me to crawl through. I waited. In about ten minutes I heard his measured stride on the hard asphalt. He passed me going at a good pace. As he disappeared in the dusk I crept swiftly through the hedge, passed a cord I had with me round the upper part of one of the legs of the iron seat, and, holding both ends in my hand, crept back.

In a few moments he came round again. I pulled the cord as tight as I could. He tripped, fell full length and lay still. I hauled in the cord and stole away.

My sensations are worth analysing. At first I felt a certain elation at having thrown an enemy. Then I experienced disappointment. What I had done was somewhat pointless. Unless I had spoilt his looks—which was hardly likely—I could not be said to have scored any advantage, unless—I stopped, and my breath came quickly. Was it possible I had killed him? I had heard of people dying from as slight a cause. I felt terribly uncomfortable. I grew afraid of having the cord in my pocket. I went swiftly home and burnt it, a small piece at a time, lest my mother should come in and find it being destroyed. Afterwards I was ashamed of my want of nerve. Even if he were dead nobody on earth could connect me with the accident. I had always heard that murder will out, but I was strong-minded enough, considering the circumstances, to doubt whether it was possible in this case.

Anxious as I was to know the upshot of the affair I slept quite well and started for school not a minute earlier than usual. I was in the same class as Holland. When school began he had not arrived and neither had the boy who was his time-keeper. Five minutes late the latter walked in with a note in his hand.

“Holland has had an accident, sir.” He handed the note to the master.

“Indeed? I am sorry to hear that.” He opened the note and began to read, his face growing more serious as he read on. “Concussion of the brain! Mr. Holland does not quite seem to know how it happened.”

“It was on the cricket ground, sir. It had just

got dusk and I was timing Holland for the mile. The second time he did not come round, so I went to see what had happened and found him lying on the path insensible. I had to leave him there whilst I went for help."

"Has he recovered consciousness?"

"Yes, sir."

"How did it happen?"

"I can't think. He must have tripped. The doctor says he is not to be asked any questions and that he is to be kept quite quiet for the next few days."

"Quite so. I suppose you will be going round there, so you can let us know how he is getting on."

"Yes, sir."

The boy went back to his seat. The class had been listening intently. The master looked up and caught sight of my face.

"Why, Rank, you have turned quite pale."

Everybody looked at me in surprise. The lack of friendliness between Lionel Holland and myself was generally known, and it certainly astonished them that I should have turned pale out of sympathy for him.

He came back to school in about a fortnight looking none the worse for his accident. He was as confident as before and as irritating to me as ever.

I heard him explaining the incident in the playground afterwards.

"I'll swear," he was saying, "that something caught me just above the ankle. I don't see how I could possibly have tripped otherwise."

"What could it have been?" asked Grainger, the boy who had been timing him.

"I can't think, I am sure, but I'm certain something tripped me up all the same."

"I expect you turned giddy," said a member of the Lower Fourth.

"Giddy? Never was less giddy in my life;" and Holland turned a withering glance upon the small boy that made him retire into the background.

He had a way of twisting the arms of small boys, and holding their elbows while he brought his knee sharply into contact with a soft but sensitive part of their bodies, besides many other little devices for making them wish it were possible to grow up suddenly into a strong man with a strong fist.

I have always resented cruelty for cruelty's sake, and petty tormenting with no object in view has invariably impressed me as being supremely silly. It is quite another matter when one is obliged to take a strong step in support of a logical line of action. The end must justify the means. The Jesuits are quite right. All around, Nature teaches us the lesson. An infinite amount of apparent evil is being done that good may come, and even if the end be not a particularly elevated one that surely is a man's own affair; especially if he be prepared to pay the penalty of supporting his own opinion with action which is against the moral sense of society in general.

Sibella's solicitude during Lionel Holland's illness was an ample revenge for the latter had he known it. It tortured me. At one time I calculated my chances in a stand-up fight with him supposing I should train for the event. I decided after careful thought that the odds would be against me, and I had no intention of fighting for honour's sake with the prospect of leaving him more triumphant and complacent than ever.

CHAPTER III

I WAS now sixteen and a half, and my mother had kept me at school much longer than her means had warranted. I think that at one time she had some idea that I might gain a scholarship and go to Oxford or Cambridge, but my progress, though respectable, never suggested that I might achieve honours. I think, as a matter of fact, that I could have done so had I cared to, but I had no ambition to spend the best years of early manhood in a torture chamber, and it is obvious that to a youth of imagination, who has no means of joining in the recreations of his fellows, and is expected to justify himself by brilliant scholastic success, a career at the 'Varsity can be little else.

The question of my future was a very serious one. It was not possible for my mother to pay anything towards giving me a profession, and without influence the outlook was not hopeful.

Unknown to her I conceived the idea of writing to Gascoyne Gascoyne, a distant cousin who was at the head of a large stockbroking firm. I pointed out our relationship and asked if he could possibly find room for me in his office. He replied in a type-written letter saying that he had no knowledge of the relationship. He did not deny it, it might be so, but at any rate he had no vacancies nor was he likely to have any.

It would therefore be of no use for Mr. Rank to trouble him again.

I kept his letter, but I did not run the risk of a second rebuff from any other member of the family.

Mr. Johnson came to the rescue. He had, it appeared, a great friend in the City who employed two or three clerks and who had a vacancy. I was interviewed, approved of, and engaged at the salary of fifteen shillings a week. From circumstances which afterwards came to my knowledge I believe that Mr. Johnson paid something in the way of a premium. My mother was delighted. It was a start in life, and in her eyes a good start was everything. Personally, I thought it a deplorable beginning, and only took it because nothing better offered. I was determined, however, not to stay longer than I could help.

With the best intentions in the world Mr. Johnson was quite incapable of grasping my character. He talked to me of a youth of application, a middle age of strenuous endeavour for a living wage, and an old age of decent competence. The prospect appalled me. It sounded inexpressibly gray. I gravitated towards wealth and luxury as the needle to a magnet. I remember his saying :

“By the time you are thirty, Israel, you should be able to keep your mother in this house and have it to yourselves.”

I had much ado to restrain a scornful laugh. By the time I was thirty I was determined to have established my mother in a house fully ten times the size.

I soon realised that the office I was in did not even afford a starting point for a career, and could not be a recommendation to anything better. I had no friends

in the City of my own age. I instinctively avoided those youths whom in the natural course of events a person in my position would have associated with. The school my mother had sent me to had put me out of sympathy with them, and—what was more to the point—they could not be of any possible use to me. I was bitterly envious of those boys who entered their relations' houses of business on advantageous terms, with sufficient allowances and smart clothes. My poverty appeared to me extreme. I was not in the first few months ever sufficiently in pocket to be able to go to theatres and places of amusement as other young men did, and yet I found myself with tastes equally expensive and with an abnormal love of pleasure. Of my fifteen shillings a week I gave my mother eight, and out of the remainder I was obliged to find my lunches and fares to town and back, a condition of things that reduced me to chronic discontent. I saw that the great point was to have rich friends and make use of them. I also grasped the cardinal maxim that for success in life it is essential to avoid the unlucky and the necessitous, and above all not to be led away by the fact that in themselves the latter are probably the most entertaining sections of society. If a man wishes to be rich he must live among the rich, and how to do this on fifteen shillings a week was the problem.

A Semitic appearance, however superior, is not the best recommendation to society. In the Western it rouses instinctive antagonism. At the same time, and because the laws of compensation are inevitable, it is this antagonism that makes the Jew what he is. His powers of resistance are automatically developed by it, and it encourages his virility. The greater the odds

a man has to fight the greater his ultimate skill of fence. That man is fortunate who has the world against him.

At sixteen and a half, however, my philosophy was not equal to the annoyances of the situation. I wasted a great deal of valuable energy in useless complaining. Sibella seemed lost to me for ever. Even had she promised herself to me I should have placed no faith in her staying power. I was quite sure that my humble start in life must have brought home to her the difference in our positions as nothing in our boy and girl relations had ever done. To Sibella, luxurious, pleasure-loving and flippant, the junior clerk in a third-rate business house was an altogether inferior and impossible person. The shabbier I seemed, the smarter Lionel Holland must have appeared. He was blossoming into a complete dandy, and had all the means at hand to gratify his taste for fine clothes. I had spent a year under these depressing conditions when I made a friend.

Godfrey Twyneham was the son of a rich man with whom our firm did a certain amount of business. He was about eighteen months older than myself, and there was nothing very remarkable about his personal appearance except a pervading air of gentlemanliness. He had been coming in and out of our office for twelve months before I realised that he was inclined to take special notice of me. One morning as I was on the way to my contemptible lunch he joined me. We walked a few yards together, I painfully sure that he must be very anxious to be rid of so shabby a companion. To my surprise, however, he asked me to lunch with him. I was on the point of refusing, but he linked his arm in mine in an altogether friendly and unpatronising manner, and I yielded.

He had evidently taken a great fancy to me and insisted on my lunching with him first about once a week, then twice a week, and finally every day. He also insisted on my going to theatres with him, and grew quite offended if we did not spend our Saturday evenings together. In vain I protested—not very vehemently perhaps—that I could in no way make any return. He laughed the idea to scorn. Why should I? We liked each other. He was well off, I was not. That was a mere accident, and we should be small-minded indeed if we allowed it to interfere with our intimacy. He insisted on lending me money, declaring that I was sure to make a fortune, and when that day came I could pay him back. He was certainly the most generous person I have ever met, and, though I have not paid him back, he has never mentioned the matter to me. I don't think he allowed the question of money to come between himself and his friends. At the present moment he is in South America, and just before the trial I received quite a heartbroken letter from him, declaring his belief in my innocence, and in case I should need it, placing a large sum of money at my disposal. Poor Godfrey! I suppose he forgot that Earl Gascoyne is a rich man.

Before I met him I had all the inclination for pleasure and indulgence, and his generosity had the effect of making me feel that I could never again endure life unaccompanied by a certain amount of excitement.

I was hopelessly unfitted by temperament for the dreary, sordid life of shabby suburbanism that lay before me. I dwell upon these facts because I think they may serve to show that I was impelled by all the forces of my nature to make some attempt to rescue

myself by decisive action from the mire in which it seemed only too probable I was destined to wade all my life. Godfrey Twyneham, with the best intentions in the world, and from motives of purest friendship, succeeded in making our house at Clapham appear ten degrees more shabby and my position in the City infinitely more humiliating. He introduced me to his tailor, bootmaker, and hosier, and lo! I found myself well dressed. I dined at his father's house in a decent dress suit, and was introduced to a circle of his friends who gave me a very good time indeed. The Twynehams lived at Highgate, and I constantly spent Saturday to Monday with them. I think my mother missed me, but she never complained and seemed only too glad that I was enjoying myself. I was compelled to invent some plausible excuse for being able to afford clothes so very superior to anything I had been accustomed to. I explained that Godfrey Twyneham had been able to put me in the way of some private business and that he had introduced me to his tailor, it being necessary that I should be well dressed in order to follow up my opportunity. Godfrey was one of those good-natured souls with no such strict principles as prevented his telling a small fib to oblige a friend. My mother and he took to each other at once, and it flattered my vanity not a little that he seemed to like coming to us and sharing my humble tenement bedroom apparently as much as I liked visiting their luxurious house at Highgate.

I think the only occasion on which I was tactless enough to cause him to disapprove of me was when I began to apologise for the poorness of our household. I think I detected the faintest suspicion of a scornful surprise in his face as he said :

“ I don't think those things matter, do you, except to snobs ?”

The rebuke was severe, but it did me good and I avoided such mistakes afterwards.

Even now I recall with pleasure the look of astonishment on Sibella's face the Sunday afternoon I called at the Hallwards' in my new finery. I felt that I had reason to be satisfied with myself. I knew that I could do justice to my clothes and that I need not fear comparison even with Lionel Holland. In fact, his smartness invariably had something of the dressed up shop boy about it, while I had reason to believe that in spite of my half Semitic origin I conveyed an impression of distinction. At least, Godfrey told me so, and I knew he was to be relied on in such matters. The drawing-room was full of people when I entered, and Sibella said in a confidential tone of approval :

“ You do look smart, Israel. You will make Lionel quite jealous.”

Lionel Holland was also taken by surprise when he came in a few minutes afterwards. Sibella, true to her character, and feeling that Lionel had perhaps received enough encouragement of late, ostentatiously permitted me to be her favoured cavalier for the afternoon. She was unable to control her desire to set men at each other's throats. Had it been anyone else I should have managed her properly and not permitted myself to be played fast and loose with. Sibella, however, was the exception in my life, and she was always drawing the unexpected from my character.

I heard her say to Lionel in a voice intended for me to hear :

“ Doesn't Israel look nice, Lionel ?”

“ He's been robbing the till, I suppose.”

Sibella laughed a high, silvery laugh. The reply was sufficiently spiteful and showed that she had succeeded in deepening an animosity already bitter enough.

The sneer had truth, in that it suggested the disparity between my apparel and my income, and consequently I hated Lionel Holland the more.

Mr. Johnson might have proved a most awkward inquirer as to the sources of my apparent prosperity, but just about this time he died. He was found one morning sitting in his armchair, in front of a fire which had burnt out hours before, dead, and clasped in his stiffening fingers was a portrait of my mother in a little leather case. He had evidently had it secretly copied, for she had not given it to him. He had no relations, and the only person who appeared on the scene to take charge of things was a local solicitor, who informed my mother that she had inherited through her late lodger the sum of one thousand pounds and all his personal effects. I think she was glad for my sake as much as for her own.

"You see, Israel, with the house, which is our own, and a thousand pounds properly invested in addition to what I have got, we can never come absolutely to want, and if I can only get another lodger who will pay well we should be quite comfortably off."

The prospect failed to dazzle me. My ideas of what constituted comfort grew daily. We discussed the manner of investing the thousand pounds endlessly. My mother would not hear of anything but gilt-edged securities, and would have been quite content with a miserable three and a half per cent., whereas I declared it was a matter of no difficulty to obtain a safe five or even six per cent. Before the matter was decided

my mother died and I found myself alone in the world.

The event plunged me into the deepest dejection, for I had loved her dearly. I took stock of my position and decided that whatever happened I would resign my clerkship. My resignation was promptly followed by the offer of a rise in salary, so potent a lever is independence to progress in life. They were unable, however, to make me any such proposal as tempted me to remain.

At first I made all sorts of good resolutions, which I might have kept had not Godfrey Twyneham, whose advice was always practical, been called away at this moment to South America. His father had a branch of his business at Buenos Ayres and Godfrey was destined to manage it, the control of the London house being reserved for the eldest son. He was anxious for me to accompany him and even went to considerable trouble in finding a post for me. I could not, however, bring myself to give up Sibella and at the last moment declined to go. Poor Godfrey! I don't think he ever quite forgave me, and since then we have not seen much of each other.

My fifteen hundred pounds soon began to dwindle. From day to day I salved my conscience by assuring myself that, though I was spending my capital, I was making friends who could not fail to be useful to me. Inwardly I knew perfectly well that the class of young men I was mixing with could never help me to a livelihood. I shut up the house at Clapham and took rooms near Piccadilly, and eighteen months of my life were wasted in unprofitable lounging. I seldom rose till late, and when I was dressed strolled round to a luxurious bar near Bond Street to meet several boon

companions and spend the afternoon in tipping. In the evening I frequented those theatres at which the more frivolous pieces were played, and afterwards hung about the stage doors. I soon found myself led into extravagances in the way of little suppers and small presents of jewellery, which made my capital disappear at an alarming rate. Like countless other young men before me, and no doubt since, I was unable to pull up, although I could feel my financial bark throbbing with impending disaster and could hear the roar of the rapids growing nearer and nearer. I shut my eyes and went ahead, hoping for a miracle. Somehow I obtained a reputation for riches for which there were no reasonable grounds. I managed to hold on for a year at high pressure, then for another six months with difficulty, living on the credit that twelve months' ostentatious solvency had secured me. Then ensued a few months of decline, and on the morning of my twenty-third birthday I found myself heavily in debt and penniless. A few borrowed fivers kept me afloat for a short time and then Lionel Holland put a spoke in my wheel and sent me headlong. I had been asked to a supper given by a friend of mine who had just come of age. He had partaken frequently of my hospitality in my prosperous days, and, having some sense of gratitude, had not omitted me on this important occasion.

To my annoyance, I found that Lionel Holland, with whom I did not know my friend was acquainted, was of the party. We welcomed each other with outward civility, but I saw danger in his eye.

The supper passed off pleasantly enough, and afterwards we took hansoms and drove to my friend's rooms. I escorted a chorus-girl from the Frivolity,

a particular friend of mine, with whom I was making desperate attempts to keep on terms of intimacy. Our hansom broke down, and my little friend, nervous and hysterical, fainted. I carried her into the vestibule of a well-known club, where, with the aid of brandy, she was brought round, and after ten minutes or so declared that she had no intention of going home, but asked me to take her on to join the others. We found them wondering what had happened to us, and in the excitement of detailing the scene I did not notice that the manner of the others had perceptibly changed towards me. As soon as I detected a certain coolness I realised that Lionel Holland had been saying something to my detriment. The women were especially distant, and I know no class who can make a man feel so unpleasantly that he is not wanted as the sort of female whom my host was entertaining. They have a genius for being cruel to anyone who is going under, and after all, it is not to be wondered at. They themselves have risked too much to care about increasing the odds. In such a mood, however, they are dangerous, for no considerations of breeding restrain them. My own particular friend was taken out of the room by one of the other women, and on her return I could see at once that she had had repeated to her whatever Lionel Holland had said. Her manner became suddenly insolent and aggressive, as if she felt that it was she who had been wronged. Inwardly I quaked, for I knew what she was capable of.

She had taken more wine than was good for her, and was by no means mistress of herself.

As usual, I was in charge of the piano, playing accompaniments for anyone who would contribute a song and filling in myself with snatches of music hall

ditties, or florid pianoforte arrangements of the most popular tunes of the day.

I had even successfully accompanied Lionel Holland, who had rather a nice voice, and had managed with great skill and tact to put him in high good humour with his performance. I was nervously conscious that it was necessary for my own dignity to make the evening pass off smoothly.

My little friend was then pressed to sing, and I hastened to join in the request. Though she had an exceedingly pretty voice she was one of those people who become vocally helpless if in any way under the influence of alcohol. Her voice sounded weak and tremulous ; she was unable to keep to the right key, and, feeling that she was making an exhibition of herself, lost her temper more and more at every bar. In an absolute panic I did everything I could in order that her song should pass off successfully, but to no purpose. She forgot her words, and I ventured to prompt her, which seemed to irritate her the more. To make matters worse the others laughed.

Suddenly she stopped and laughed too, an unpleasant laugh with little mirth in it.

"He's a nice pianist, isn't he ? He'd be more at home blacking the lodger's boots, instead of pretending to be a gentleman on his mother's hard earned savings."

She herself was a plumber's daughter, but in her case that was not to the point.

With commendable presence of mind I pretended not to hear, and commenced to play something loudly on the piano.

She was, however, transported with rage at her own failure and determined to make somebody pay.

She shut the lid of the piano down violently, and I

only just managed to save my hands from being crushed. To such a female, in such a condition, it is not a long way to hysterics.

"Get back to the lodgers!" she screamed. "What do you mean by coming here and pretending to be a gentleman? You ought to be horsewhipped. You ——" Here followed a string of epithets intensely humiliating to have to listen to under the circumstances. The other ladies present proceeded to take her part and to treat her as a highly injured female. They crowded round her as she lay sobbing and gurgling and swearing on the sofa, and deluged her with sympathy.

"I really don't wonder at her being upset," said one.

"Such a thing to find out. Enough to make her feel small," protested another.

"It is indeed," said a third, and turning to me added with a comic attempt at hauteur, "You cad!"

I felt terribly uncomfortable. I quite saw the sort of character Lionel Holland had been kind enough to give me. I felt like breaking a champagne bottle over his head, only it would have done no good, and vengeance should always bide its time if it is to be effective.

He too looked uncomfortable, as if he had not expected the mean part he had played to be brought home to him so obviously and so soon.

As my presence seemed to make the lady grow worse every moment I suggested that I should go. My host, a youth with every instinct of good breeding, would not hear of it, but several of the other men were growing a little tired of the scene. They had only met me in such society as we were now in and it did not matter to them what my origin was. They would not be called upon to recognise me in a legitimate social way.

“ Good-night, your lordship,” said one of the women mockingly, as I left the room.

It was no haphazard gibe. Obviously Holland, in order to heap further discredit upon me, had revived the boast of my schoolboy days. I went up to him before I left the house and said quite quietly, so that no one else could hear :

“ You will be very sorry for this, and I want to assure you of the fact.”

I cannot describe the intense conviction I managed to throw into the words. I felt they would come true. He tried to laugh scornfully but the failure died upon his lips. He was frightened in spite of himself.

CHAPTER IV

THE next morning I had a stormy interview with my landlord. He would wait no longer for the arrears of rent. He gave me three days to pay or to find other rooms. In the meantime he would detain my things. My little skiff had decidedly reached the rocks.

I went down to the house at Clapham, which I had failed to let. The blinds were drawn and a weather-beaten notice board leant in an intoxicated manner over the shabby railings. I had not been near it for months, and as I opened the front door the place smelt damp and reminded me with a shiver of the deaths that had taken place there. I almost heard the whisper of my mother's voice in my ear.

Curiously enough, I had made no attempt to sell the furniture. I seemed to have had a premonition that the house would yet be a home for me. I went over it, drawing up the blinds and letting in the dreary February light. Every now and then I paused and listened. I seemed to hear someone moving about the house. The garden, which had been my mother's hobby, was in a most desolate condition, and a dead and decomposing cat lay across the threshold of the back door. The atmosphere of the whole place seemed tuned to the key of my own depression, and I must admit to sitting down in the forlorn parlour and

shedding tears. Even the most self-reliant character must resent being absolutely alone in the world, and I felt terribly alone. I suppose those who have listened amazed to the story of what they are pleased to call my crimes would scarcely believe that I have a craving for sympathy. True, it must be sympathy on my own terms, but I crave for it. Personally I do not at present ask for pity, but were the comfortable classes given to psychological analysis—which they are not—it might astonish them to discover in how little they differ from the practised enemy of society, the criminal. Many a highly respected member of society whom prosperity has prevented from feeling the incentive of crime is a criminal in embryo. For myself, I have achieved my object; I shall die Earl Gascoyne, and my child will bear the title after me. My descendants will belong to the ruling classes, and I shall be handed down to posterity as an interesting study. The British snob never wholly deserts a lord, and will consider the scaffold to be not a little honoured by my patronage. I am sure that there are thousands of worthy people who would sooner the whole matter had been hushed up; I for one am of their opinion. I could have dispensed with a niche in history between Gille de Rais and Madame de Brinvilliers. The fame of posterity always asks too heavy a penalty in this life.

I realised that I should have to do the work of the house at Clapham myself, so I decided to lock up all the rooms except the sitting-room, a bedroom, and the kitchen.

I engaged a woman to come in for the first few days and light fires and clean up. Then, handing her the key, I returned to town.

I owed over sixty pounds at my lodgings which I

had not the least prospect of paying. I had my landlord's word for it that he would not allow a thing of mine to be moved out until my debt was discharged. I had no mind to lose my stock of wearing apparel, which constituted a very valuable asset. Removing my things during the night would be a very difficult business, and the slightest noise would rouse the people of the house and prevent my ever getting them out at all. I walked about the whole afternoon thinking the matter over and evolving one scheme after another, only to throw them all aside as impracticable. My chambers were on the second floor, which increased the difficulty. The only possible thing was to bring my clothes down loose and put them in a four-wheeled cab and then to remove my travelling bags empty. To carry down heavy luggage would have been impossible. I secured a four-wheeler and conceived the idea of telling the driver exactly what I was about to do, promising him a sovereign if he would help me. Never was money better spent.

I told my landlord to call me early as I had a certainty of obtaining a hundred pounds in the morning. So cheerful and optimistic was my manner that I am sure he was deceived, for he executed my order for a chop with alacrity. At about eleven I went to bed and, ringing my bell, asked for some whisky and hot water. This was in order that the servant might report that I had retired for the night. Three o'clock was the time my cabman was to make his appearance, and at half-past two I rose, dressed, and looked out of the window. There he was, and the street was clear of policemen.

I put on my fur coat and, carrying as many things as possible, crept downstairs. In an incredibly short

space of time I had placed my first instalment in the cab. Half a dozen times I crept upstairs and down again, with my heart in my mouth, till my belongings were bursting from both windows of the cab. To my infinite delight, I rescued everything, down to my boot-trees. There was hardly room for me in the cab, but I managed to squeeze in and we drove away. Robinson Crusoe returning to the island with his raft covered with useful articles from the wreck was not half so elated. We trundled away to Clapham, and at about four in the morning I had my belongings safe and sound in my own house. Their loss would have been a terrible blow, and as I retired to rest I breathed a sigh of gratitude. My landlord would, I suppose, declare that he is revenged, now that he has had the felicity of reading how an unfeeling judge gave me certain details as to the way in which the law proposed to deal with me. The death sentence has always sounded to me a most undignified and vindictive snarl. I have most certainly never been impressed by it, and never less so than when I was directly interested in its pronouncement.

It was very clear that I was now called upon to earn my own living. I did not doubt my ability to earn enough to keep me, but I shuddered at the prospect of days of hopeless drudgery in the City that other men might grow rich. For eighteen months I had lived in comparative luxury. I was spoilt for playing the part of a slave. Five times the salary I was ever likely to obtain seemed to me mere poverty. I strolled about the City day after day for some weeks without any definite result, and the very few pounds I had managed to scrape together were disappearing fast.

Grahame Hallward was now in the City and as

friendly to me as ever. He would, I was sure, lend me money if I asked him, but a very natural feeling prevented my exposing my parlous condition to Sibella's brother. In fact, I did everything possible to give him the impression that I was prosperous. Sometimes he would come in during the evening and smoke with me, and I invariably kept from him the truth that I did the housework myself, complaining bitterly of the incompetence of the imaginary female who came in to cook and put things straight for me. There was only one person from whom I could borrow money, and I felt a very natural diffidence in writing to Godfrey after the way I had treated him. Shipwreck, however, was too imminent for such scruples to prevail, and in reply to my request the kind-hearted fellow sent me twenty-five pounds, saying that I was on no account to allow pride to stand in the way of asking for more. As to my not having fallen in with his views, surely I had a right to manage my affairs my own way.

When alone in the evenings I used to draw out the genealogical tree of the Gascoynes and study it. Whilst living in London I had made a good many inquiries and had found out exactly where I stood. That is to say, I had collected a great deal of information as to the habits, health, and chances of longevity of the members of the different branches that stood between me and the succession. The table I have already given had not altered materially. The Earl at that time was twenty-three years of age, holding a commission in the Guards, and had been married some months before to an American heiress. They might have any number of children, so that it was strange that, though I was in no way lacking in com-

mon sense, I should persist in dreaming of myself as finally attaining the rank of Earl Gascoyne.

It was at this time I came across a book which interested me exceedingly. It was a record of most of the celebrated poisoning cases in history, but the author had the gift of vivifying whatever he touched with rare qualities of imagination. He was able to fill in the bare outlines left by mere chroniclers with an atmosphere which carried singular conviction, and he could weave a tale of interest from the most meagre details. Given the crime and the historical characters, he followed them all through the different emotions which led up to the catastrophe with faultless instinct. He possessed a breadth of mind in dealing with assassins which was unusual, and pointed out that great criminals are as a rule so far removed from other men that it is presumption to measure them by the same standard. The courage and fortitude with which they almost invariably face death, he cited as a proof that probably most of them had reached a philosophic elevation of which they themselves were perhaps unconscious, and from which death hardly seemed so terrible an event. He was not interested in the commonplace criminal. The Borgias, Madame de Brinvilliers, the Earl of Somerset, and Thomas Henry Wainwright, were the aristocrats in crime who roused his curiosity and seemed to him worthy of psychological analysis. A criminal in his eyes might be great, just as any other man might be great who lifted his profession out of the common rut by the magic of personality. He deprecated, for instance, the unreflective execration which historians pour out on those who have removed Kings and Emperors. Most of them, he held, were men who had everything to lose and nothing to gain

by their act. They could look for no immunity. Ravaiillac, torn to pieces by horses, Gerard, tortured to death for having done what he considered his duty in removing William the Silent, seemed to him to have missed their share of commendation. More dignified a hundredfold they seemed to him than the egotistical apes who sat in a mockery of the judicial mind in judgment on Charles I. For the latter at least there was every chance of escape and no personal courage was required.

Not that he had anything to say in actual defence of secret poisoners. If they chose such a line of conduct, they must not grumble when the day of reckoning came. At the same time, he paid all deference to their courage, for the risks of murder are always enormous. I cannot say when first the book began to exercise an influence over me, and to turn my mind in a certain direction, but as I grew more and more depressed with my failure to obtain a means of livelihood, an idea gradually formed itself which, though I dismissed it with a laugh at first, returned again and again, assuming more and more of a permanent character each time.

The loneliness of my life, for with the exception of visits from Grahame Hallward my days were solitary, encouraged morbid reflections. At first I entertained the idea as an abstraction. I clothed the Gascoyne family and myself in fifteenth-century garb, and placed the scene in a medieval Italian city. I wove plot and counterplot. One by one I removed them all from my path, and till the end walked unsuspected, doing my work with caution and precision.

Each day I had a new set of subsidiary characters whom I moved hither and thither according to the

exigencies of my mimic conspiracy. The game became a mania with me. I read every book I could discover that had to do with secret crimes.

For a while I walked with the grim shadows of the past and would have no companion but the shades of murderers. Cæsar Borgia whispered in my ear as we paced the gardens of the Vatican, and the scarlet bow of his mouth twisted sardonically when he told me in a low, musical voice of how Giuseppe died.

Lucrezia intoned as in a trance her secret deeds, telling me how she had killed her boy husband and taken her brother for a lover.

I bore Nero's cup of poison to his victims and watched their vain efforts to grapple with unconquerable agony, or their final look of terror as the growing paralysis of death crept over them. There was in the long list of poisoners, ancient and modern, a French abbé who in particular interested me. His crimes had been uniformly successful, for he had discovered a drug which left no trace, but a gradual terror took possession of him and, though unsuspected, he confessed his guilt.

Recorded poisoners have necessarily been the clumsiest. To be detected is to confess oneself unskilled. Pretty, dainty Madeline Smith, sitting imperturbable and charming through the long days of her trial, must have reflected that the thing could have been better done and that eighteen is a little young to begin.

Madame de Brinvilliers and the French poisoners in the reign of Louis XIV. were fascinating. The crime drew a meretricious charm from the daintiness of the period, even if the punishments were barbaric. It was certainly unlike the porcelain manners of the time to break a lady, an aristocrat, on the wheel.

CHAPTER V

ONE day it struck me that I had never seen Hammerton, the magnificent Hampshire home of the Gascoynes. It was the most important of the half-dozen places that went with the title, and I wondered that so far curiosity had not impelled me to visit any of them.

I made up my mind to see them all, beginning with Hammerton ; and so, one exquisite day in June, I got on my bicycle early in the morning and rode out of London. The bicycle probably strikes a jarring note in the telling, but I have no doubt that their emblazoned chariots, caparisoned horses, and luxurious barges, were to my great prototypes as little romantic.

As I rode along the level Roman road, the only figure in sight, I felt a great exhilaration. I was the adventurer setting forth, the hero of the story going to claim his own. The towers of Hammerton rose ever like a mirage on the horizon, and once or twice I was obliged to check myself, so far had my fancy roamed. I reflected seriously that my plans, if romantic in the after telling, should be practical in execution, and that it must be left to the poet and dramatist to mould them to poetic fancy. I doubted not that I should at least achieve a name worthy of their notice. Romance, however, was my master, as it must ever be of the imaginative. She is the mistress

of the secret ways, and the touch of her finger-tips is superior to the very lips of my Lady Commonplace.

I breakfasted at a wayside inn, my table set in a garden which was a melody of roses, while beyond, on fields and pasture-land, the growing sun drank up the morning mists. By the time I was on the road again the day had become tropical and I was fain to ride easily.

I had chosen, for an excellent reason, apart from a human weakness for fair weather, a fine day and a Saturday. Hammerton was a noted show place and on such a day there was likely to be a considerable number of visitors, and I should most probably not be noticed by the person whose duty it was to take the visiting parties round.

Hammerton lay some way from the main road and some thirty-five miles from London. I struck off into narrow lanes where the trees arched overhead and the sun streaming through their branches made lacework of the shadows beneath. An intense stillness lay about these bypaths, and it was but rarely I passed anyone. Here and there I saw little patches of red, violet, or white in front of me which when I overtook them turned out to be cottagers' children, and invariably there was a thatched dwelling near nestling by the road. I was too entirely town bred to be able to identify the countless species of birds that piped and warbled as I rode among them.

At last, after having descended a steep lane where the ground was so broken as to make riding impossible, I began to ascend, and finally emerged on the brow of a hill and on to another high road. Some three miles off, crowning another hill which was a mixture of rock and grass land, stood Hammerton Castle, lordly

and feudal. At the foot of the hill on which it was built a river wound its way through the pasture-land, and, about its base, nestling beneath its shadow as if for protection, clustered the little township of Hammerton, red-roofed and mellow. I looked at my watch. It was barely twelve o'clock, so I went into an adjacent field and lay down in the grass, amidst buttercups and daisies, and from the shadow of a great elm surveyed the home of my ancestors at leisure.

It was indeed a noble dwelling. The glamour of a great past was about it. Its majestic proportions and lordly turrets told of traditions which were little less than royal.

It was from these walls that a Gascoyne had flung defiance at King John, following it by so stout a defence that that amiable monarch had been compelled to pass on gnashing his teeth, only to meet his rebellious Barons at Runnymede.

A Gascoyne had held Hammerton for Edward of York. It had been a favourite with Queen Elizabeth, whose condescension had impoverished a couple of generations. Later, it had stood a siege from one of Cromwell's generals, and so stubborn had been the defence that the only military tyrant England has ever known hastened to its reduction, and was after all compelled to grant an honourable capitulation. Even now as I lay and dreamed in the morning sunlight I could see the shattered garrison emerging from those gates, drums beating, colours flying, while the Puritans, who never had a chivalrous word for their foes, looked sourly on.

I lay gazing over the intervening landscape at the castle till well on into the afternoon. I wove it and its surroundings into one day dream after another.

It was four o'clock when I arrived at the main entrance and stood with a small group of excursionists waiting for a guide. The great gates opened on to level lawns, and, large as the castle looked from without, I was amazed at the space of ground its circular and battlemented walls enclosed, even though it was broken up by buildings, some of them quite modern. I stepped after the guide with a distinct feeling of pride in the knowledge that even if far removed I was in the line of succession to all this magnificence. There was among us the usual historical authority who kept on stopping the guide to ask him some irrelevant question. The latter, however, had a very effectual manner of dealing with such tactics, and always began the particular description he was engaged on all over again. We were shown the spot where Lord Gascoyne, hero of the memorable defence against Cromwell, fell mortally wounded. In the banqueting hall there was a superb collection of armour, which included a coat of mail worn by Richard, the Lion Heart, and the sword used by Henry at Agincourt. It was the picture gallery, however, which interested me most, and I had barely scanned half a dozen Lelys, Reynolds and Gainsboroughs, before I saw how entirely my mother had been a Gascoyne.

She might have sat for the portrait of the celebrated Anne, Countess of Gascoyne, whose picture occupied the post of honour. My mother had possessed the same curiously deep blue eyes. The nose, just a little too large, was identical, as were the oval of the face and the turn of the head. I lingered behind the others to look at this picture more closely, and when finally I tore myself away I found the guide droning over the description of the most remarkable portrait in the gallery.

It was true that most of the Gascoynes were dark, but Ethel, the sixth Earl, was more like a Southern Italian than an Englishman. The name sounded curious as belonging to a man. He must have had singularly fine eyes, and yet the painter, with rare perception, had painted them half closed. To have done otherwise would have been obviously wrong. There was not a feature or a point in the portrait which did not suggest subtlety. Since that day I have often sat and gazed at the picture. It has a fascination for me which never palls. I intended to have had my own hung by the side of it. Indeed, I have left orders for a portrait to be done.

In common with most people who walk their way in secret he had apparently a love of green, for though the picture is slightly disturbed by a note of scarlet, in this again the artist showed rare judgment. He had rightly felt that the composition, to be characteristic, required it. The figure in the picture wears emerald earrings, and his sword, belt, and boots are embroidered with jewels. The guide book tells us that he secured the title by treachery. He was more than suspected of poisoning his eldest brother, and was known to have killed in a duel another brother who stood between himself and the earldom. He spent, so the guide told us, a great deal of his life in Italy, where his doings were reported to have been of unfathomable infamy. Late in life, long after the period of the emerald earrings, he returned to Hammerton, and if his youth had been prodigal he compensated for it by a penurious old age. He shut himself up in a tower and left the remainder of the castle to go to rack and ruin. He had one companion, reputed to be an Italian magician. The countryside told awful tales of the secret rites and

horrors practised by these two, and the guide-book mentioned a village maiden spirited away by supernatural means and compelled to bear them company against her will. True, another chronicler of the time confidently asserted that the self-same maiden was afterwards seen in a neighbouring town in very undesirable company, but this latter historian was a Gascoyne and obviously biassed.

I was in dread lest a most extraordinary coincidence should strike the guide or the excursionists. I at once noted the great likeness between the portrait and myself. The features were Jewish and so were mine. This was the more curious because in this respect we had no common ancestor. He must have been about my build and height, and the eyes seemed to meet mine with a slightly mocking smile of recognition and a subtle under-glance of sympathy.

I do not know whether the picture is all I fancy it to be, or whether my imagination, fired by its likeness to myself, gives it its atmosphere, but to me it is extraordinarily suggestive. Whenever I look upon it the life of this exquisite passes through my brain like a painted procession. He was obviously one of those born to the worship of beautiful apparitions, and his life had been passed at the extremes of joy and bitterness which that apparently exoteric, but in reality deeply esoteric, cult involves. It was a face that could never have known the lethargy of mediocrity. When his spirit slumbered it must have been the sleep of satiety. I am glad I never saw a picture of him in old age. That face, stained with the vices of an intoxicating youth and torn by the humiliation and agonies of middle and old age, could not have been pleasant. I am convinced that there were no looking-glasses in that

solitary tower where he and his mysterious friend died and were only found when the rats had half eaten them.

But to me the great point was that he was impatient of dullness, and had stretched out his hand to take what he wanted. The guide-book said he was without natural affection. How little the world understands men! As if an egotist of character might not slay the mother he loved for a dear purpose.

Morally, Ethel, Earl Gascoyne, was a matricide, the family chronicles deponing that his mother had died of grief at his crimes. He could not have been entirely destitute of natural affection, for he was apparently overwhelmed with sorrow at her death, as the inscription on the stately tomb which he erected to her memory in Hammerton chapel indicated.

I wandered after the gaping, chattering group hardly hearing what was said. How was it that I was so like this Gascoyne who was so singularly unlike his kinsmen, and who had put into practice the dreams I had dreamt? He had been right. Hammerton had been worth risking something for.

We visited the lonely tower where he was supposed to have spent the haunted evening of his days in searching for the elixir of life, and where the rats had left him a hideous, obscene corpse. The trippers seemed infected by the gloom of the story, for in silence they tramped through the spacious, echoing, upper chamber, where he was reputed to have studied the stars, and to have sold himself to the Evil One.

This old man who found it so difficult to die—he was nearly a hundred when the end came—spent his last years in a debauch of mystical speculation, remaining interesting to the end.

As we crossed the grassy lawn on our way out a

carriage and pair drove in through the great gates. It in were seated a young man and woman of a surprising distinction of appearance. The young man was dark, but not as Ethel, Earl Gascoyne, had been dark. The hair, eyes and moustache were dark brown. The face itself was almost feminine in its delicacy of colouring. The flush of the cheeks and the redness of the lips might have been envied by a young girl. The suggestion of effeminacy, however, was negated by the iron determination of the mouth. I don't think I have ever seen so firm a face which did not suggest obstinacy. The eyes were keen, and looked out from beneath the finely pencilled eyebrows with a winning expression of kindness. The face, however, was too sensitive to be designated by so stodgy an expression as good-natured.

The guide touched his cap, and turning to the group who stood waiting, said impressively: "That is his lordship."

The excursionists gaped after the carriage as if my lord and my lady were a show.

I rode back to London in the cool of a perfect summer evening thinking deeply. I had seen enough of the world to be quite sure that luck or capital were the only two things which could bring wealth while a man was still young enough to enjoy it. The first could in the nature of things only come to one man in a thousand, and the chances of a stroke of luck really worth having were even more remote. As for capital, I had none, nor was there the least probability of my obtaining any. Therefore, unless I was content to work hard to make some other man rich I must step out of the conventional path.

I was unknown to all my aristocratic relatives. Should mine be the unseen hand which was to remove

them from my path? And if so, was such a thing possible without risks disproportionate to the gain? It was a stupendous enterprise. The career of a murderer was not to be undertaken lightly and without reflection. The more I thought about it, however, the more convinced I became that I should decide on making a struggle for the Gascoyne title and the Gascoyne millions.

After all, the family was nothing to me. The member of it to whom I had appealed for assistance had refused even to see me, and should I persist in my design this would have been as well.

From the study of poisoners I proceeded to the study of poisons, and in this way I spent the remainder of the summer.

CHAPTER VI

WITH the help of Grahame Hallward and a strict economy of the money which Godfrey Twyneham had sent me I managed to get through the summer fairly comfortably. I visited the West End but rarely, and was spared the indignity of being cut by my former acquaintances.

I gathered from what Grahame Hallward let fall that Lionel Holland had given him an idea of the humiliation I had undergone in his presence. Grahame was much too chivalrous and sweet-natured to wound my feelings by any direct allusion to it; I doubt, indeed, if he realised that he had ever given me a hint of his knowledge.

Sibella had no chivalry, and when I called could not forbear to make pointed allusion to people who passed themselves off for being what they were not. Again I left the house hating her, and still my dreams were tormented by thoughts of her.

By the autumn I had quite made up my mind that I would try and clear my path to the Gascoyne earldom. I tabulated the lives it would be necessary to remove. They were as follows :

Simeon, Earl Gascoyne, aged	25
Ughtred Gascoyne,	55
Henry Gascoyne,	62
Gascoyne Gascoyne,	68
Gascoyne Gascoyne,	27
Henry Gascoyne,	22
Edith Gascoyne,	23
Henry Gascoyne,	80

It was strange that there were not more women, and it was somewhat of a relief. The killing of women is not a pleasant task, believe me. I have learnt so much from experience. The great question was, where to begin. The old gentleman of eighty-nine might be left out of the reckoning. It was highly probable that by the time I brought my operations to a conclusion, he would be beyond the need for attention.

I debated with myself the alternatives of beginning near the head of the house, or with those members who were furthest removed. After much reflection I decided that it would be better to begin where there was likely to be the least suspicion of foul play.

Gascoyne Gascoyne was the son of the man who had snubbed me so unmercifully when I applied to him for introductions. He was twenty-seven years of age, and I had absolutely no knowledge of him beyond that fact. I knew that his father was on the Stock Exchange, and the Red Book told me that he lived in a house at South Kensington. I wandered about in its vicinity for several evenings and gathered that young Gascoyne lived at home with his father and mother. It was hardly likely that the young man who came home every evening at the same time and only went out again at irregular intervals would be other than the son of the house, and I was assured that he was the man I was looking for by his entering a carriage one evening with the master and mistress of the house and being addressed by them as Gascoyne. The time had come to formulate a plan of campaign, and I went home and shut myself up with French cigarettes to think.

My study of poisons had been profoundly unpro-

ductive of suggestion. The vast majority of them were thrown aside as ridiculous. To use them would have been suicidal. Corrosives, for instance, with their obvious evidences, could never be employed except by the most thoughtless and ignorant. I even disliked reading about their symptoms. I would certainly as soon have dashed out the brains of my victim with a sledge-hammer.

True, there are, I believe, on record cases where poisoning by arsenic had passed undetected, but it was far too slow a medium ; I might not always have sufficient time at my command. I studied the irritants with an equal feeling of dissatisfaction, and the neurotics filled me with a sense of the hopelessness of the task I had undertaken. I was firmly convinced that there must be a poison somewhere in which the chances of detection were infinitesimal. Copper, and the possibility of its being administered so that its presence in food might appear accidental, detained me some time and cost me a great deal of thought, but how to manage it was not very apparent. At any rate, I mentally registered the idea ; I was determined that on no account would I commit anything to paper. I have at all times considered the carelessness of criminals in this respect most curious. I reflected that it would be an excellent thing to devote so much time every evening to a retrospect of the day's work and if possible to destroy all evidences as I went along.

My sinister resolution had been taken so imperceptibly that I found myself engrossed with the details before I was quite aware of how far I had travelled in the matter.

About this time I picked up a book on reincarnation, and I began to wonder if after all I might not be

Ethel, Lord Gascoyne, come again. In default of being able to prove the contrary I came to the conclusion that I was. The fancy pleased me and I would indulge it.

In my search for a good medium I was confronted with the fact that the secrets of the best poisoners have died with them. Confession does not recommend itself to the strongest intellects even when *in extremis*. Now and then of course the vanity of a great artist has led to inconvenient death-bed boasting, as in the case of Philippe Darville, who, imagining himself about to die, gave an exhaustive and circumstantial account of his crimes, and recovering, was brought to the block, only his sense of humour supporting him through the trying development.

I continued my search for the medium I wanted, and in the meanwhile made myself thoroughly acquainted with the habits of young Gascoyne Gascoyne.

In appearance he was tall and athletic, and his character seemed to be that of most young men about town with natural instincts and without too much imagination. He patronised the lighter forms of theatrical entertainment, and I recognised him as having been one of the habitués of the Frivolity Theatre. Further inquiry elicited the fact that he was being assisted to sow his wild oats by a young lady of the chorus with a snub nose and with that in her which can only be described as "devil." She appeared to be genuinely in love with him and had proved it by declining to allow him to marry her—an offer he had made in the first days of their acquaintance. He was busily employed in the City all day, and, being an only son, his parents seemed to expect more attention from him than would otherwise have been the case.

The house they lived in had gardens at the back which opened on to a quiet road. Having no very clear conception as to how I was going to act I derived a certain satisfaction from hanging about this road, and was surprised one night by almost running up against young Gascoyne Gascoyne as he emerged from a private gate which he locked behind him with a pass-key. I watched him walk swiftly into the thoroughfare, hail a cab and drive away. It was barely eleven o'clock, and when I returned and looked at the house all the lights in the lower windows were out. That, however, in what I had by observation gathered to be his bedroom was alight. Evidently he was not sufficiently emancipated from parental control to go his own way openly, or his secrecy was due to consideration for his parents' feelings.

I ascertained that as a rule when he spent the evening at home he left the house as soon as his parents were in bed, and if in time called at the theatre and drove his infatuation home. Sometimes he did not return to South Kensington till daybreak. It seemed such a daring proceeding that at times I wondered if his father might not be cognisant of it. The girl's name was Kate Falconer. I don't suppose it was her real name, but as such she figured with a couple of dozen others at the bottom of the play bill.

Since her attachment to young Gascoyne she had dispensed with the attentions of all her other admirers. I was sorry for her, as it meant that she was wasting time. She lived in a flat in Bloomsbury, three floors up, and once her front door was shut she was as secure from any observation as if she had been living in the moon.

The problem was a difficult one. It was essential

that I should not be acquainted with either of them. Put brutally, the task I had set myself was how to poison a man to whom I was a perfect stranger, and to whose food-supply I had absolutely no means of access.

Whichever way I looked at the matter I was forced to the conclusion that there could be no success without a certain amount of risk, and I had not yet accustomed myself to the idea of risk. It seemed inevitable that I must make myself acquainted with young Gascoyne somehow or other, but I left this as a last resource, and I am glad I did so, for fate assisted me in a most remarkable manner.

One Sunday afternoon I found myself wandering in the neighbourhood of the Bloomsbury flats where Kate Falconer lived. I had become so tenacious of my purpose that whilst thinking out some definite scheme I enjoyed feeling that I was in the vicinity of my intended victim. I knew that as a rule he spent Sunday afternoon at the flat. A sudden curiosity impelled me to enter the building, and, passing the hall-porter as if I had business, I climbed to the top. It seemed likely to have been an aimless proceeding, but as I was descending I heard Miss Falconer's door open on the landing just above me, and recognised her voice in conversation with young Gascoyne.

"I shan't see you till next Saturday then?"

"I'm afraid not; my father and mother will want me every day till they go away. I shall call for you on Saturday at eleven. Our train leaves Waterloo at eleven-thirty."

"Just fancy a whole week at the seaside together! It will be perfect, won't it?"

There was a silence eloquent of an embrace. I waited, anxious to know where they were going.

"You don't mind a quiet place?"

"I should have minded it a year ago. I like it now."

"Well, Lowhaven is quite quiet, and at this time of year we shall probably have the hotel to ourselves."

There was another embrace, and, conscious that the interview might draw to a close any moment, I stole downstairs.

I would go to Lowhaven and stay at the same hotel. It might lead to something. In thinking the matter over I had arrived at the conclusion that I, having apparently no motive in young Gascoyne's death, could use means which would be unwise on the part of people upon whom suspicion would fall as a natural consequence of their crime.

Supposing unseen I dropped aconite, or some such poison, into a whisky-and-soda, how could suspicion possibly fall on me? At any rate, it was worth while going to Lowhaven. I could not quite make up my mind whether to travel by the same train, or to precede them, or to follow them. Even such minor details required careful consideration. It was impossible to say which method of procedure might not leave a clue to the acute mind of Scotland Yard.

Discovering that there was only one hotel at Lowhaven, I decided to go down on the previous day.

Lowhaven turned out to be a mere village, at which I was somewhat sorry, as every new arrival became at once an object of attention. The hotel was situated at the extreme end of the tiny parade. Such walks as I took were all in the direction that led away from the town.

Whether I should write my own name in the hotel book or not was a question. I was undecided about

it up to the last moment. I reflected that it was quite possible that a smart detective might take the trouble to find out all about the only visitor to the hotel if anything should occur. As a matter of fact, there were three other visitors in the hotel, a mother and two daughters, who as a rule kept to their rooms, only emerging to go for walks or drives.

Gascoyne and his companion did not come by the train they had settled on, and I began to wonder whether after all they had changed their minds and gone somewhere else, or whether circumstances had prevented their coming at all. I was far too cautious to ask or seek information even in the most round-about way.

I studied the time table in the privacy of my own room. There was another train which would bring them down about five o'clock.

I established myself in the vestibule with some afternoon tea in front of me, and a little after five they drove up looking deliciously happy.

I grew quite sentimental over them, and was compelled to take a long walk to cure myself.

I had, before I left town, decided that aconite would be the best thing I could use if I chose to run the risk of a poison which left evidences. Aconite essentially knows its own mind, and the struggle is not a long one.

After tea I went for a long tramp, and on my way back met them walking along the edge of the cliff. They were entirely engrossed in each other and barely noticed me as I passed, although there was not another soul in sight. The day had been perfect, but a gale sprang up as soon as the sun went down, and the rioting wind shook the little hotel as if it had been

matchwood. There were six of us in the hotel dining-room at dinner, and with true British aloofness we had placed ourselves as far apart as possible. The lady and her two daughters dined in silence, as if it were a solemnity too deep for words. I sat alone and surveyed the reflection of young Gascoyne and Kate Falconer in the mirror in front of me. A bottle of champagne decorated their table, and between the courses they gazed into each other's eyes in an ecstasy of happiness. After dinner the widow and her two daughters disappeared. Young Gascoyne smoked a cigar and took coffee and liqueurs in the vestibule with his chair pushed close to Kate Falconer. By half-past ten everybody in the hotel had gone to bed, and I lay smoking innumerable cigarettes and thinking deeply, while the storm howled and raved without. In the morning when I awoke there lay before me a panorama of foam-crowned waves, driving furiously to the shore or tossing tumultuously and flinging their spray into the air.

It was Sunday, and despite the terrific wind the widow and her daughters went off to church, disappearing up the winding path of the cliff with superhuman struggles against the wind. I was late, and watched them from my bedroom window.

As I passed down the corridor on my way to the dining-room I met a servant carrying a breakfast tray. It could only be for Gascoyne and his friend, and I would have given a great deal to have had five seconds with that teapot undetected.

It disappeared into bedroom No. 10, and I went downstairs to a solitary breakfast in the dining-room. The day passed quite uneventfully. The two lovers appeared to a late lunch and spent the afternoon

in a bow window in the hall. Young Gascoyne smoked cigarettes which Kate Falconer lit for him, a proceeding contemplated by the elder of the widow's two daughters—who, apparently a little wearied by the company of her relatives, had descended to read a book in an armchair—with a tightening of the upper lip. Kate Falconer's bringing-up, however, had trained her to the disapproval of the more respectable members of her own sex.

I suppose the day would have been very dull but for the state of suppressed excitement I was in. Once I almost thought my chance had come.

After tea the lovers parted for the first time since they had arrived. She went upstairs and he went to the reading-room. I strolled out into the garden and glanced in at the window. He was seated at a table writing letters. After a few minutes I returned to the hotel. As I entered the door a waiter was carrying a whisky-and-soda to the reading-room. I sat down in the hall and waited, not imagining that I should be able to reach the whisky-and-soda but determined not to lose a chance. In a minute or so the waiter returned to the servants' quarters, and in a few minutes more Gascoyne came hurriedly out of the reading-room and ran lightly upstairs. I walked slowly into the room. The whisky-and-soda, untouched, stood on the writing-table by a half-finished letter. Unfortunately there was a glass door between the reading-room and the hall, and it caused me to hesitate. The next moment Gascoyne was back again in the room and the opportunity was gone.

He and Miss Falconer, who seemed to have recognised me, had evidently more than once made me the subject of conversation, but had been too wrapped up

in each other to take any further notice. Finding ourselves alone, however, he became quite companionable. He had charming manners and a singularly pleasant voice. I took a fancy to him from the first, and keenly regretted that our acquaintanceship must be so short.

I was compelled by the exigencies of the situation to avoid anything like actual friendliness, which I could see young Gascoyne was perfectly ready to display.

I had five days in which to do my work.

Monday passed uneventfully. It was a glorious day, and Gascoyne and Miss Falconer went out early in the morning and did not return till dinner-time. There was nothing to be gained by impatience. The only thing was to watch, and to seize the opportunity should one occur. Tuesday and Wednesday went by, and on Thursday I heard Gascoyne tell the manageress that they would be leaving the next day. It seemed as if my visit were to be in vain.

I had ascertained that Gascoyne and Miss Falconer had two rooms on the same landing as myself, Nos. 10 and 11. On Friday morning, the day of their departure, as I was on my way downstairs I saw a breakfast tray for two on a chair on the landing outside their room. The breakfast was untasted. It was obviously theirs, and the waiter had most probably gone back for something.

There was not a soul in sight. I looked over the staircase. There was no one to be seen in the hall below. In a second my resolution was taken. Swiftly I took the tiny phial containing the aconite from my pocket and dropped a few grains into the teapot.

As I descended the stairs I met the waiter returning, breathless. He held a sugar basin in his hands, which

he had evidently forgotten. I went on to the dining-room. To me the hotel was already full of the ghosts of pain. I was haunted even in that moment of stress by the one weak spot in my scheme. Aconitine is not instantaneous, neither does it rob the victims of their intelligence, which remains clear and undisturbed till the end. Should either of them be asked if it had been suicide the reply would of course be in the negative, and that would be an awkward factor at the inquest.

In a few minutes the hotel was in a state of excitement. This was what I had expected. The doctor was telephoned for from the village. Before he arrived, however, all was over and an awful gloom descended on the place. I felt severely the disadvantage of not knowing all that had passed in the death chamber. It appeared that the widow lady thoroughly understood nursing, and had at once ordered anyone who could not be of use out of the room. I was certainly not likely to pretend to any medical knowledge, so I remained in the hall asking eagerly for news from anyone who came down from the sick room, the widow's two daughters, all their reserve banished, keeping me company.

It was their mother who brought us word of the tragic ending.

In a few minutes everybody in the hotel was gathered in the hall discussing the affair in hushed voices, and it was at this moment that the doctor bustled in.

"I was not at home when you telephoned," he said.

The manageress explained that the people he had come to attend on were dead.

"Surely not, my dear Miss Worcester. Let me see them at once."

The widow stepped forward.

"I have been a hospital matron, doctor, and I have no doubt about it." She commenced to lead the way upstairs, the doctor and the manageress following her.

In a few minutes the manageress reappeared.

"Telephone to the village and tell them that someone is to come from the police-station at once."

This was unpleasant, and I must confess to a dismally nervous feeling, but I was somewhat reassured by hearing the manageress say in conversation with the widow :

"I think it must have been suicide."

"They seemed very happy," said the widow.

"Lately married, I suppose." And the manageress raised her eyebrows and looked at the widow interrogatively.

"One must not judge, but I fancy——" the widow stopped. She did not look the sort of woman who would take the least pleasure in scandal.

The doctor sent down again in a few minutes instructions to send a messenger for another medical man. The driver of the hotel fly mounted a horse and rode off in hot haste. We wondered whether it was possible that after all they were not dead. I scarcely knew which I hoped for. I was not sufficiently hardened to be without a vague desire that they should be alive. At the same time, it would be a terrible nuisance to have to do the work all over again.

Our doubts were soon set at rest. When the doctor came down he announced that there was no longer the least doubt that life was extinct. Gascoyne's card-case and his town address had been discovered, and his father had been wired for, who replied that he would be down by the next train. At the time he was

expected I went out. A nameless horror came over me at the idea of seeing the father's face in its first grief and despair.

When I returned to the hotel the coroner had arrived. The post-mortem took place that afternoon; the inquest was held the next morning, and I attended.

Mr. Gascoyne first gave evidence, formally identifying the body of the man as that of his son. He was marvellously self-controlled, but his face was ashy. So far it had been impossible to communicate with any of Kate Falconer's relatives, but in the course of the inquest a telegram was received by the coroner from a sister, who stated, however, that she had not seen her for two years.

The evidence of the waiter who carried up their breakfast followed. He deposed to leaving the breakfast tray in the room, when they appeared well and cheerful. It must have been about ten minutes later that the bell was rung violently and he hurried upstairs. He found the young man in an armchair and the young woman lying on the bed, both of them evidently in great pain. He immediately went for the manageress. The young woman kept on crying out that she had been poisoned, and the young man's distress at her suffering was such that it was impossible to get anything out of him.

The evidence of the widow and the manageress followed. Then came the doctor, and the court grew tense with interest.

It was undoubted, he said, that death was due to aconite, taken apparently in a cup of tea. When he arrived at the hotel they were both dead. Death had been singularly rapid. The other medical man corroborated.

The case had a distinct element of mystery, but in the absence of evidence of motive it seemed that a verdict of suicide was inevitable.

The inspector strengthened this presumption by the intangible insinuation which he managed to convey in his evidence. The jury obviously thought it curious that in reply to a question from the foreman he explained that nothing which could be shown to have contained the aconite was to be found.

Still, the coroner summed up distinctly in favour of suicide, and such was the decision of the jury, a verdict which caused Mr. Gascoyne the greatest distress.

Immediately after the verdict he took his son's body back to town, leaving instructions, as I discovered, that the girl's funeral was to be at his expense unless the relatives wished otherwise, and that he personally would attend, a display of feeling I had hardly thought him capable of.

I returned to town late that night and reached my house at Clapham in the early hours of the morning.

As I opened the door it was as if the voice of an unseen presence pervaded the emptiness of the house, whispering: "Murderer!" and when I awoke the next morning it seemed as if the heavy gray light of dawn wove itself into haunting, opaque shapes. With a shudder I realised that never again should I be alone and at peace.

CHAPTER VII

AFTER such a brilliant success I felt that I required rest. It would not do to set to work again until my nerves were thoroughly restored, and the period of excitement I had passed through had left them a little unstrung. It took me nearly a month after Gascoyne Gascoyne's funeral to recover from the haunting terror that I had left a clue, and that sooner or later someone would come across it. I had scoffed at the maxim 'Murder will out.' I found myself living in company with it. It had a way of springing into my head when I woke in the morning, and the letters danced in front of me like devillings. It repeated itself in my brain rhythmically for days, and it required the strongest effort of will on my part to silence it.

It must be remembered that I was very young, and that what I had done was irrevocable ; further, I am not naturally callous. I remained indoors smoking a great many French cigarettes, and accustoming myself to the consciousness of guilt. Grahame Hallward called one evening and, declaring that I looked too ill to be left, offered to spend the night with me. I was about to accept, but refused hastily on recollecting that in my sleep I might fill the house with confessions. No man can be answerable for himself in the silent watches of the night. It gave me a distinctly weird

feeling when I reflected that till my dying day I must lie alone o' nights with locked doors.

Grahame Hallward, unaware that I had chosen my profession, threw himself with all the loyalty of his nature into the question of my future. He could not understand my indifference, and, considering that I had borrowed a fairly large sum from him, it probably appeared a little unfair. He loved me too well, however, to give the least indication that he considered I was not behaving quite straightforwardly.

He suggested that I should go to South Africa, but I pointed out that without capital I could not hope to obtain work that was not mere drudgery. I explained also that I had some plans which I would tell him of later, but that at present they were not dependent on myself, which was perfectly true. I was fully aware of how important it was that I should secure some means of obtaining a regular supply of money, and at the moment I had not the least idea as to how this was to be done. It must obviously be something which would not occupy my whole time. I regretted my wasted capital every day. I might have made a small income out of racing. It would not have been very difficult provided I contented myself with small profits.

Whatever happened it was imperative that I should not sell my house. An insignificant, semi-detached villa in Clapham was an ideal lair. I thought at one time of seeing if I could obtain a footing on the stage—that refuge of the vain and derelict—but I decided that it might bring me into such prominence as might even cause the Gascoyne family to take notice of me, the last thing to be desired.

Day after day I racked my brains for a solution of

the difficulty. I believed I could carry through any feasible scheme, and my Jewish blood taught me to rely on my powers of application.

While I was deciding on a good method of providing for my current expenditure, I was also deciding on which member of the Gascoyne family my next blow should fall, and I consulted the chart daily.

It was highly improbable that the father of young Gascoyne would have any more children unless his wife died and he married again, and although her grief at the death of her son was extreme, she was not made of the material that succumbs under sorrow.

It was with a weird sense of shock that one morning I received the following letter :

“ DEAR SIR,

“ Some time ago you wrote claiming relationship to the Gascoyne family, and asking me to help you to some situation in which you might earn your living. I must apologise for my unsympathetic attitude on that occasion. Should you still be in need of a post I shall be glad if you will give me a call.

“ Yours very truly,

“ GASCOYNE GASCOYNE.”

The letter, together with the morning paper, was lying in the hall when, half asleep, I passed through it one early spring morning on my way to the kitchen to cook my breakfast. I was at the moment doing such housework as was necessary. I made myself a cup of tea, toasted some bread and boiled an egg before I opened it. Having read it I sat still as if mesmerised by its contents. I thought I must have misjudged the man, till I reflected that had it not been for the

blow my hand had dealt him his nature would have remained hard as before. I was on the borderland of remorse, and it was the aim of my life to keep out of that ghostly territory. I had from the first made up my mind to regard the whole matter of the Gascoyne family from a purely business-like point of view, and so I turned to the practical side of his letter, which required consideration.

Was it possible to make use of him in any way? That was the essential consideration. The first thing to decide was whether it was likely he would recognise me as having been at Lowhaven. As far as the inquest was concerned I had no fear. I had kept well out of his sight. On the other hand, even supposing he had not seen me, was it good policy to conceal the fact that I had been there—always supposing that I decided to make use of him? At any moment someone might turn up and betray the fact, and a reason for the concealment would not be easy to find. Perhaps some idea of putting me in his dead son's place had entered his mind, and thus the question of finance would be settled. I pondered over the pros and cons for nearly a week. One day the pros carried all before them and the cons were in full retreat. The next day the retreating objections had entrenched themselves, impossible to dislodge. The cons had behind them the full force of a nervous objection to facing Mr. Gascoyne, an objection well to be understood. Still, the solving of the financial difficulty was all important. I was near my last sovereign. I could always refuse any offer he made me should it threaten to clip my claws too completely, or smother my freedom of action in a London office. I waited till the sovereign was broken into before I made up

my mind. In fact, I waited till my last half-sovereign was eighteenpence to the bad, and all my boots showed signs of wear. Then I decided to risk it, and I wrote saying I would call on Mr. Gascoyne at his City address at noon the next day. I received a telegram saying that he would prefer it should be one o'clock, from which I deduced that he proposed to give me his luncheon hour, and would possibly ask me to share that meal should I be presentable. I have always had a rare instinct for deducing correct conclusions from the faintest suggestions, and it has been invaluable in acquainting me with the peculiarities of fields on which imminent battles were to be fought. Evidently Mr. Gascoyne was inclined to be friendly, therefore modesty and frankness were the weapons with which to make the victory decisive. He was a business man, and, considering my circumstances, nothing was to be gained by outward display. Indeed, a plain dressing for the occasion—blue serge, blue foulard tie with white spots, and a bowler—was absolutely right, and did not necessarily suggest a Bond Street wardrobe in reserve, rendered temporarily useless for lack of good boots.

I was as nervous as I have ever been when I mounted in the lift to the second floor of the tall block of buildings in the City where Mr. Gascoyne's offices were situated. I could not help reflecting that young Gascoyne must have ascended in the same lift times without number.

It was not for me, however, to indulge in such reflections, and I shook off any morbid cobwebs from my thoughts and stepped into the outer office with a subtle and affected consciousness of innocence which I was by constant practice enabling myself to assume at will.

The clerk took my card and noted the name with a look of intelligence.

"Oh yes, Mr. Gascoyne is expecting you, but there are two gentlemen with him now. Please take a seat. I will tell him you are here."

He went to a speaking-tube and informed some one at the other end that Mr. Rank was in the office.

"Mr. Gascoyne will see you in one minute." And he returned to his papers.

In a moment Mr. Gascoyne opened the door of his inner office, showing out two elderly men. Whilst listening to their last words he motioned me to enter with a grave smile.

In a minute he joined me and closed the door of the office behind him.

"Please sit down, Mr. Rank." He seated himself on the chair behind his desk and motioned me to the one opposite. I could not help noticing how much he had aged in the two or three months that had elapsed since I had seen him last.

"You are not like the Gascoynes," he said, with a smile, "and yet there is a something."

"My father was a Jew, and I think I am like him."

"To be frank with you, I have taken the trouble to find out exactly the relationship in which we stand."

I felt alarmed. It was distinctly unpleasant to hear that he had been making inquiries about me.

"This is my mother's photograph," I said, handing him a small likeness of her. He looked at it with interest.

"It is a very sweet face. She is dead, I believe?"

"Yes, I have no nearer relative than Henry Gascoyne."

"Ah, poor old man, I am afraid he does not know anyone. He is quite childish."

"So I understand."

"Have you ever seen the family portraits at Hammerton?"

"Never." I was determined to deny any particular knowledge of the family.

"Your mother is extraordinarily like some of the women. I do not know the present Earl, but I have visited Hammerton as an excursionist."

"I have never been there."

"And now will you come and have some lunch? I am a busy man and cannot afford to waste time."

Either he was wonderfully softened, or the letter he had written me when I first applied to him was utterly unlike himself. I was unable to make out which was correct, but I inclined to the former conclusion.

"I have been wondering," he said, when we were seated over some cutlets and a very good bottle of wine, "why you were so long in answering my letter."

I replied, with every appearance of frankness, that it had taken some amount of thought before I could decide to put my pride in my pocket and swallow his former snub.

"I thought it was that," he answered. "I must frankly admit that my reply to your application was very uncalled for, but when I wrote it I was smarting somewhat under the ingratitude of a young man I had taken into my office a short time before."

"It is forgotten," I said. "After all, men in your position must receive a host of requests for favours that you are unable to comply with."

"That is true," he said, "quite true; but still, from

one claiming relationship—however, let us forget it. Tell me about yourself.”

I was perfectly candid, and told him the story of my life. It was all inexpressibly strange; this man bending forward with every appearance of interest and sympathy listening to the life story of his son's murderer. I was amazed at the way I could pose, even to myself, as a perfectly innocent person, and was secretly vain of a great artistic success. I found myself filling in the picture which I was painting for him with numerous little touches, all deliberately designed to heighten a carefully considered effect. I told no lies, however; indeed, it was quite unnecessary. Without that part dealing with his own son the simple story was very effective. I did not hesitate to hint that there was the memory of a woman troubling me. He was sympathetic at once but did not urge further confidences at the moment.

“Perhaps one of the other reasons why I was not particularly drawn by your being a member of the Gascoyne family,” he said, when I had finished, “was that I am not on friendly terms with any of them. My wife was of humble origin, and such of them as I know were very uncivil to her, and, to tell you the truth, the name of Gascoyne had become somewhat distasteful to me.”

We were strolling back to the office and he had laid his hand loosely in my arm. He had evidently taken a fancy to me. So much for the voice of Nature. Indeed, all my life I have noticed that the voice of Nature is a somewhat misleading guide; very apt to call the listener to follow over all kinds of dangerous and quaking bogs. People have a way, too, of labelling the shrill scream and tuneless croaking of their own

pet conventions and prejudices as the voice of Nature, if the occasion suit them, and their shallow consciences do not imperatively demand correct definitions.

"Before I make you the offer that is in my mind," he said, when we again reached his office and I was once more seated opposite to him, "I wish to ask you whether you heard that I lost my only son a few months ago under somewhat tragic—circumstances."

"I was at Lowhaven," I said gently.

He looked at me in unfeigned surprise.

"You were at Lowhaven?"

"I did not mention it before, but I was staying in the same hotel."

"I don't remember you."

"I kept out of your way. I was naturally unwilling to intrude at such a time."

He buried his face in his hands, and something between a groan and a sigh escaped him. It was evident that the memory of his bereavement was inexpressibly poignant.

"I am glad you knew him, if only by sight. Did you ever speak to him?"

"A few words in the hotel smoking-room, that is all. He was a splendid looking fellow."

"He was. It has broken his mother's heart. It was strange that you should have been there."

"I did not even know his name, till——" I paused.

He uncovered a haggard face.

"Well, it is over; the past cannot be recalled. Would you care to come into my firm?"

He made the offer hurriedly, as if anxious to escape from painful thoughts.

He then laid his plan before me. I was to come

into the firm and learn the business of stockbroking. Further than that he was not prepared to go, and he made no promises.

He looked at me steadily as he said this, and I gathered that if I were satisfactory I might hope for all things. A glance at his face convinced me that he was not the man to recede from any promise, no matter how much his sympathy with me became a diminishing quantity, providing my abilities were sufficient. I accepted his offer. It might be possible to use the situation as a lever. It certainly put an end to the obscurity which I had considered so strong an asset. I have often wondered before and since the trial whether my original plans might not have been more successful. I believe that they would have furnished more adventure and excitement. At the same time, the difficulties would have been almost insurmountable, and—well, I chose my methods and I failed, although I have consolation in the brilliance of the failure.

I was to have two hundred and fifty pounds a year to begin with. It was decidedly a princely offer, considering that he would be paying for the trouble of teaching me.

“Later on, Mr. Rank, it would give me pleasure to present you to my wife. At present I am afraid that you, in the plenitude of your youth and manhood, might rouse sad thoughts.”

He drew me a cheque for twenty pounds, and, taking me into the outer office, introduced me to his manager, chief clerk, and the staff generally, and, asking me to be at the office at ten o'clock the next morning, dismissed me.

I walked all the way back to Clapham thinking

deeply. Financially I was evidently out of danger for life, and I had good warrant for dreaming of myself at the head of Mr. Gascoyne's firm. It was proof of how entirely the Gascoyne coronet had become an obsession with me, that the prospect of a permanent income, with wealth, even, in the perspective of middle life, did not in any way suggest that I should relinquish the glittering prize on which I had set my heart. Perhaps if Mr. Gascoyne's offer had come before my first success I might have abandoned my purpose, but it would have been obviously absurd to burden I had almost said my conscience—so strong is the habit of conventional thought—with a murder abortively. I could not help smiling ironically on recalling Mr. Gascoyne's evident liking for me. According to all rules of accepted psychology I should have had something unpleasant in my personality which he should at once have detected. It was extraordinarily remiss on the part of instinct that it should not have been so.

Grahame Hallward came in to see me that evening and was overjoyed at my news. He was evidently impressed when he learned that it was my relationship to the Gascoyne family which had secured me such an advantageous situation.

"So after all, Israel, what you used to tell me was true."

"Did you ever doubt it?"

"Not since the day you gave me your word of honour that it was so."

It may appear strange, but I have always been singularly fastidious about my word of honour.

Grahame then broke to me some news which came as a staggering blow. Sibella was engaged to Lionel Holland.

"The one thing I really like about Holland," he concluded, "is the way he has stuck to Sibella."

I could not simulate indifference, and Grahame saw that his announcement had been a shock to me.

I stood looking out on the little garden with its soot-begrimed walls which the sunset had drenched in scarlet, trying to control the tempest of feeling which surged within me.

Grahame understood, and came over, putting his arm round my neck.

"I am so sorry, Israel. I quite understand. Really, I'd sooner it were you."

I smiled somewhat bitterly.

Grahame's preference for me was hardly a consolation, fond as I was of him.

"I'll come over on Sunday," I said.

"Do." He understood my anxiety to impress Sibella with the idea that I did not care. I wondered whether things would have been different had Sibella known of my altered prospects. I was convinced that I held at least an equal place with Lionel Holland in such affection as Sibella was capable of. It was Thursday; by Sunday I might possibly have conquered the first sting of chagrin sufficiently to conceal my feelings. The excitement of my new venture in life was entirely lost in the night of despair I passed. Equally with the Gascoyne earldom, Sibella was my ambition. She was the kind of girl to whom the position of Countess Gascoyne would have come quite naturally. In common with her brothers and sisters she had that which would have enabled her to carry off any dignity, frivolous and superficial as her real nature was. I had dreamed of the joy of placing her

in a position so very much above anything she could have expected.

Still, the battle was not over. I believed in my power to conquer her in competition with Lionel Holland, if I were given equal worldly advantages, and it seemed as if such advantages were coming my way.

The fact that I was unable to idealise Sibella never cooled my love. I burned for her, and frankly confessed it. For the rest, she had spirits and special magnetism enough to make her a delightful companion. A great many of her faults matched my own weaknesses. I sympathised with her desire for beautiful clothes at any cost, as well as with her yearning for the right of entry to that society which the middle classes exalt by envying and imitating.

I made up my mind to fight, and went for the first time to Mr. Gascoyne's office somewhat comforted by the mere determination to give battle to my rival.

I discovered very speedily that the work suited me admirably. The rest of the clerks evidently gathered that my being taken into the firm had been made a special feature of, for they treated me almost with deference.

I had by this time fixed on the next member of the Gascoyne family whom I intended to remove. It was Henry Gascoyne, the orphan son of Patrick Gascoyne. He had a sister, but all intervening females yielded precedence to my mother, as heiress to her father. It was therefore not necessary to consider her. Her brother was about twenty-two years of age, and by a little inquiry I learned that he was at Oxford, where he had already gained a reputation as one of those who might do wonderful things if he chose to apply himself, but who preferred to be content with the reputation of his

potentialities and the cultivation of as much muscle as was consistent with nights spent in hard drinking. I inspected his father's will at Somerset House, and learned that he and his sister had been left some fifteen thousand pounds apiece, which capital, however, they could not touch till Henry Gascoyne was twenty-five. His sister was entirely devoted to him, and spent her own income in keeping up a small house in the New Forest which he had inherited from his father. He would have been content to let the whole place go to rack and ruin, but devotion to her father's memory, and a desire to have a place which her brother might look upon as home, induced her to support the establishment entirely out of her own resources. So much I had learned from two or three visits paid at irregular intervals to the neighbourhood.

CHAPTER VIII

THE Sunday after Grahame had brought me the news of Sibella's engagement I visited the Hallwards. I managed to get through a conventional speech of congratulation, stung to self-possession by a certain radiance and exhilaration in Sibella's bearing. Grahame had told them of my good fortune, and there was a distinct change of manner towards me on the part of the other members of the family. They had never wholly believed that I was related to the Gascoynes, or had thought that if it were true I was making the most of a very remote connection. To them I had been the object for as much patronage as they dared display towards one not prone to endure condescension. I could see that Sibella looked at me with a new interest. She was growing into a truly beautiful woman, and all trace of the slightly suburban minx was becoming rapidly obliterated by a crescendo of style and distinction. It was quite evident that she would have the manners and self-possession of a thoroughly well-bred beauty, and she had acquired a facility for putting on her clothes with an altogether overpowering effect of distinction. It seemed to me a little curious that a character which I knew to be somewhat small should have achieved a certain impression of breadth and ease in her personality. Prob-

ably it was the result of the unquestionable fact of her extreme beauty. At any rate, she was rapidly learning the secret of predominance, and she showed, captivating and delicious, in distinct relief to her surroundings.

Mr. Gascoyne's twenty pounds had enabled me, through the purchase of decent boots, gloves, etc., to bring my wardrobe into play again. I had dressed as rakishly as possible, determined that Sibella should have no satisfaction in the dejection of an unsuccessful lover. I knew her character and the pleasure she would have derived from it. I simulated the best of spirits, and Grahame loyally helped me to sustain the illusion. I was inwardly consumed with jealousy whenever my hungry eyes fell upon her, but I roused myself for a *tour de force* in acting and succeeded. Lionel Holland came in later. I saw him through the large drawing-room windows coming up the path, supremely confident and jaunty. He was evidently surprised to see me. We had not met since the evening of my humiliation. I greeted him cordially, however, and he was obliged to be civil, but I had the satisfaction of feeling that he was by no means at his ease. He was so perfectly assured that, being poor, I was an interloper in a well-to-do house, that he would have liked, I am sure, to ask me what the devil I meant by intruding. I on my part was galled by the attitude of superior intimacy he assumed in a house where I had been intimate when he was a stranger to it. I was perfectly determined that he should not dislodge me, and that nothing he said or did should interfere with my visits to the Hallward establishment. He was staying to supper as a matter of course, and I detected a shade of annoyance on his face when Mrs. Hall-

ward, in consequence of an aside from Grahame, extended an invitation to me to do likewise. I accepted, although I was compelled to submit to the disappearance of the lovers to the schoolroom for fully an hour previous to the meal. I sang and played to the others as I had been in the habit of doing, and worked hard to make myself agreeable. I was so far successful that Mrs. Hallward asked me why I came so seldom, and discussed the Gascoyne family in a corner of the drawing-room with me after supper. She was herself the great-grand-daughter of a Nova Scotian baronet and never forgot it, although she had saving perception enough not to allude to it directly. As a rule she brought it in with some such remark as—“There is I believe a baronetcy knocking about in our own family somewhere—where exactly I don't know—but it is there,” a remark subtly framed, so as to convey the impression that, being no snob, she forbore to mention how very near the said baronetcy was, in fact, that it was knocking about so very near that it was quite possible a collision might occur at any moment.

She was most decidedly a snob, but not of an objectionable kind. As a matter of fact, I have always considered well-bred snobs rather pleasant people, and have often wondered whether they would have been as well bred if they had not been snobs. People who love the pleasantly decorative in life have at least taste, and the preference for titles, fine surroundings and social paraphernalia may be a form of art.

“Do you and Lionel ever see each other in the City?” asked Sibella, who, I had already remarked, was not so much in love that she could refrain from teasing her lover.

"Never," said Lionel shortly.

"For eighteen months I hardly went near the City," I answered.

"Doing other things?" asked Lionel, in an unpleasant tone.

"Living on my capital," I answered airily, giving him a keen, steady glance of daring. "It was the most beautiful time I have ever had, and I don't regret it. It will never come again, and I might have spent it in a dingy City office."

"Earning your living," put in Lionel.

"There was no necessity," I laughed.

Grahame gazed at Lionel in haughty inquiry as if desirous of knowing what he meant by being rude to his guest.

In fact, Lionel's airs of intimacy and general at-homeness obviously irritated Grahame not less than the constant use of his Christian name.

I declined to be drawn into displaying the least sign of annoyance, although Holland seized every opportunity to deliver innuendo or satire, the latter weapon in his hands becoming more often than not mere clumsy facetiousness. I made a point of being gay, and without talking of my prospects in Mr. Gascoyne's firm took very good care to leave the impression that it was their promising nature that accounted for my good-humour. I managed by judicious circumlocution and tact to bring the conversation round to reminiscences, throwing them far enough back to prevent his joining in, and slyly flattering Sibella on the subject of her childish achievements so that she revived memories with zest, and became engrossed with the recapitulation of events and bygone adventures in which I, and not Lionel Holland, appeared as her cavalier.

"I believe Lionel is getting jealous," she remarked towards the end of supper, noticing her lover's sulky taciturnity.

I had been secretly sure of that fact for the last twenty minutes, and had been enjoying a discomfiture which the rest of the company had not appreciated. He had also, as I perceived, grasped that whenever I chose I was quick and dexterous enough to leave him conversationally a laggard every time.

Not that I relied on these qualities to pass him in the race for Sibella's appreciation. My instinct in female psychology was too sure. Certainly, if such superficial qualities could have dazzled any woman, they would have dazzled Sibella, whose mind was prone to skim airily and gracefully the surface of things. Even the most transparent of women, however—if there be such things as transparent women—elude analysis when the exact qualities which attract them in their lovers come under consideration.

Sibella was hardly the character one would have imagined overlooking the pinchbeck in Lionel Holland, and yet she had accepted it with a most surprising ease. Such a surrender seemed to negative all her leanings, at any rate in surface matters, to the well-bred and socially ascending scale. True, he would be rich, but Sibella had other admirers who would be richer. He had personality, and perhaps this wins with women more than anything. With all his faults he was not insignificant, and he was undeniably a very beautiful young man, notwithstanding his obvious veneer.

I had taken my courage in my hands and stayed and smoked with Grahame in the library, knowing full well that Lionel and Sibella were in each other's arms in the schoolroom. It is strange how we manage to

endure the things which in anticipation were to slay us with their mere agony.

Mr. and Mrs. Hallward were lax in their supervision of the engaged couple, as they had been about everything else in connection with their children. Sibella and her lover remained undisturbed when her father and mother retired for the night, and it was passably late for a young woman of respectable family to be letting her lover out when the front door closed behind him. She evidently heard our voices, for she came into the library.

"You two still here?"

She seated herself on the club-fender. She was wide awake, and I remembered that as a child she had never betrayed sleepiness at children's parties—she always expressed her capacity to stay up to any hour. Her family complained that she never could be induced to rise in proper time in the morning.

"Isn't it lovely, Israel, for you to have had such a piece of luck!"

"Oh, I shall always fall on my feet," I answered, easily. "You see, I was born lucky, and that is better than being born rich."

"How do you know you were born lucky?" she asked with interest.

I was not to be questioned out of my pose. "It's like genius. An instinct teaches the genius to know himself, and something of the same thought instructs the lucky man."

I spoke with such perfect good spirits and conviction that I could see she found herself believing me. She perched herself on the edge of the great desk which occupied the centre of the library and asked for a cigarette.

"Don't smoke, Sibella," said Grahame. He was the

sort of man who would not have objected to the female belongings of anyone else smoking, but who objected to his own doing so, on the ground that it was his business to see that they suffered no material damage in the eyes of the world.

"What nonsense, Grahame! Of course I shall smoke—as much as I like—well no, not quite as much as I like because that would spoil my teeth, and I don't intend to do anything that would injure my personal appearance."

"That is a very patriotic resolve," I laughed. "There is some beauty so striking that it becomes a national property."

Sibella made a face.

"Thank you. I'm nothing of the kind."

"For goodness' sake don't flatter Sibella," said Grahame. "She is vain enough already."

"So long as she is vain and not conceited it does not matter."

"The difference?"

"Well, vanity is a determination to make the best of our superiorities whilst frankly admitting them; conceit is a morbid desire to enforce the fact on other people."

"Subtle," murmured Grahame, who never spoke above his middle tones, "but I am not convinced. Sibella thinks a great deal too much of herself."

"It is better than thinking too little of one's self," said Sibella, blowing rings of smoke and pursing up her lips deliciously, till I could have cried out on her for heartlessness.

"Very much better," I assented. "People who think too little of themselves generally end by a mock humility which is a form of conceit infinitely tedious."

No, believe me, the vanity you decry has in it something of virtue."

Grahame turned to Sibella.

"Haven't you noticed, Sibella, how much older Israel has grown of late?"

"Not in looks," cried Sibella. "To-night he looks like a boy."

This idea pleased me. The author of the secret that lay in young Gascoyne's grave looking almost a boy savoured of the incongruous, for which I had developed an appetite.

"I didn't mean in appearance," said Grahame. "Israel looks as if he had never had a trouble."

The idea pleased me even more. Grahame's criticism showed that I was playing my game with the right effect, and that the weeks of prostration following on the successful *coup* at Lowhaven had left no effect. Sibella, from her very nature, could not forbear giving me one or two glances with just enough of feeling in them to fill the atmosphere with a vague suggestion of sentimentality, but I behaved as if the very air she breathed was not to me love's own narcotic. I fought fiercely against myself lest I should give the least sign that her power over me was supreme as ever.

"What lovely chocolates you used to bring me, Israel!"

I laughed buoyantly.

"Ah, but you remember the first Lionel brought you. They cost more."

"As if I cared for that!"

Grahame laughed in his turn.

"As if, Sibella dear, you ever cared for anything else."

Grahame had the most incomparable way of pointing out people's faults to their faces without offence.

Sibella, however, looked angry.

"No one can say that I am mercenary."

I was at some pains not to join Grahame in the roar of laughter provoked by this remark. Sibella knew of old how impossible it was for her to cope with Grahame, so she turned the batteries of her anger on me.

"I believe you quite agree with Grahame."

"What about?"

"About my being mercenary."

"I am sure I don't."

"Then why did you laugh?"

"I didn't."

"Well, I'm not mercenary, am I?"

"Of course not." I smiled.

She detected the irony.

"Lionel never says such things to me." For one instant I felt the lash and smarted. I was half inclined to retort "Lionel is the prince of good manners," but that would have given her the satisfaction she was waiting for, and most likely she would have gone to bed.

Grahame at heart was very proud of Sibella, but he, like myself, was under no delusions about her. His special fondness was also partly a result of their having been so much together as children. Mr. and Mrs. Hallward's other children were much older, and with the exception of Miss Hallward, an unmarried spinster verging on forty, were either married or out in the world. Miss Hallward, who must have been singularly handsome in her youth, and who as a matter of fact was so still, had devoted her whole life to her brothers and sisters, and was particularly fond of Sibella, who made use of her in every possible way. Miss Hallward had always been singularly kind to me, and I liked her.

I could well remember an incident which occurred on the occasion of one of my first visits to the house. Sibella had been asked to do something by Miss Hallward and had refused, and, working herself into a rage, had told her sister, who at that time could not have been more than thirty, that she was a disappointed old maid and that nobody had wanted to marry her because she was so unattractive. Miss Hallward had grown very white, and had turned on Sibella with a fierceness I never saw her display before or after. The occurrence was unimportant, except that it served to frame her, as it were, in the past of an unhappy love story, and she was always the more interesting to me because of it.

When I said good-bye to Sibella I felt sure that she was more interested in me than she had been since as a boy of sixteen I had declared my passion and had been granted the privilege of kissing her when opportunity offered, little love passages of which Grahame had remained in entire ignorance. I also saw that I had succeeded in giving her the impression I was aiming at—that I was wholly freed from her spell. To a girl of Sibella's temperament this is at all times amazing, and so far from being glad at her rejected lover being in spirits she was at pains to detect the unhealed wound. Still, she was in her way really in love with Lionel Holland, and was not prepared to invest more than the smallest superfluity of coquetry and fascination in bringing me again into her net. I verily believe it would have given her some pleasure to see Holland and myself at each other's throats. Then she would probably have been content to leave me to some other woman. Had she known how near I was at times to seizing her in my arms and kissing her,

with or without her will, she would have been satisfied—more, I think she would have been frightened.

She had a peculiar and unexpected effect on me. I found myself wavering in my purpose, and returning once more to the question which I had thought decided as to whether the risk I ran was worth the prize. I even found myself troubled with scruples as to the taking of life, and for some weeks was in serious danger of abandoning my undertaking.

And yet I cannot say that Sibella had any direct influence for good upon me, and it would have been hard to define why she should have exercised a restraining influence upon me at all.

I continued my visits to the Hallwards and saw that her pique at my apparent indifference to her engagement grew.

She might have been content with the number of admirers to whom it had obviously been a matter of some moment, but Sibella wanted the one admirer to care who was apparently indifferent.

I evidently pleased Mr. Gascovne at the office, for his cordiality towards me increased daily. I threw into my manner towards him just as much of the filial attitude as I could without suggesting the least desire to usurp the place of his dead son.

After a few weeks he asked me to come and dine and meet his wife.

“By the way, Rank, my wife does not know that you are a relative of mine, and for certain reasons I would sooner you did not mention it—at least yet.”

He was evidently nervous lest his wife might think he had been quick to fill their dead son's place.

“I have my reasons, and I am asking you to oblige me,” he added cordially, noting the faint look of

surprise I thought it policy to assume ; it would never have done to let him think I could be treated unceremoniously.

I dined at the house in South Kensington, outside which I had so often watched. It seemed a quiet and sad household. Mrs. Gascoyne possessed the feminine capacity for filling the house with the presence of her dead, and turning a home into a tomb. Mr. Gascoyne was pleased that I managed to make her smile once or twice, and said as much as we sat over our wine.

"I am afraid there is very little to amuse you here, but I should be glad if you would dine with us now and then. I think my wife likes you. You have dignity, and she always likes people with dignity."

I laughed.

"You have been very good to me, sir," I said.

"I see in you excellent qualities, Israel." It was the first time he had ever called me by my Christian name. I was obviously progressing in his esteem.

He was right. I had excellent qualities. I always had. I am affectionate, naturally truthful and kind-hearted. My secret deeds have been an abstraction, in no way in tune with the middle tones of my character.

Mr. Gascoyne was essentially a business man, and it was my business qualities which appealed to him most. I had a natural gift for order and method, and although he was not given to praise, I detected a look of pleased surprise when I displayed some unusual perception of what was wanted in a particular situation. Lionel Holland, who at least seemed to have imbibed a wholesome fear of irritating me when we were together, could not witness my progress in the scale of prosperity without making an attempt to injure me in the eyes of my employer.

It appeared that he knew a fellow-clerk of mine, a youth who considered that I had ousted him from the place which should in time have been his. I had not been in the office a couple of hours before I grasped this fact. He was a pleasant fellow enough in an ordinary way, but his disappointment had brought out—as far as his relations towards me were concerned—his worst points. He had a slight acquaintance with Lionel Holland. This acquaintance the latter improved upon, and I was not a little surprised to find Harry Cust one Sunday afternoon sitting in the Hallwards' drawing-room. He was staying with Lionel from Saturday till Monday, and I think it gave his host infinite pleasure to introduce him where I had been known from childhood—though what particular satisfaction it was to him I could not quite see.

I soon realised that my life's history was in the possession of my fellow-clerks. I was too much in favour with Mr. Gascoyne for them to venture to show the contempt they felt because my mother had let lodgings. I would have been glad if one of them had had the temerity to throw it in my teeth, for an insult to my dead mother would have found me a perfectly normal person with an absolutely primal sense of loyalty.

CHAPTER IX

I MISSED no opportunity of finding out every detail of young Henry Gascoyne's college career. From all accounts he must have been surprisingly lazy, for no one ever spoke of him without giving him credit for great abilities. He was at Magdalen, had just scraped through his Mods at the end of his second year, and had then apparently given up any idea of serious work, for in a few months his devotion to pleasure and his defiance of college rules became so acute that he was ignominiously sent down. A few days after this auspicious ending to his career as a student, I met him riding in the neighbourhood of his New Forest home with a most cheerful countenance, and humming a tune. I was on my bicycle, and later I came across him again in a by-lane down which I had turned with the object of smoking a pipe. My appearance was quite unexpected and a little awkward. His horse was tethered to a gate, and folded in his arms was a remarkably pretty girl of the cottager class. I wondered if all the human obstacles between myself and the Gascoyne earldom were engaged in surreptitious love affairs.

The girl drew back hastily and hid her face, but not before I detected that she had been crying. I was walking my bicycle, and was a little annoyed that Henry Gascoyne had had such a good opportunity of

seeing me. He was evidently thoroughly wasting his time from the worldly point of view, though I should probably have agreed—had he put the matter to me—that he was making the best of his youth.

He was not exactly handsome, but he had a colouring which, despite his dissipated life, gave assurance of clean blood. He was well made, and had hair the colour of ripe corn. Notwithstanding, however, his eminently healthy appearance his self-indulgence had absolutely no limitations except such as were prescribed by good form, and he was prepared to leap even this boundary if he could do so without danger of being seen.

He had the misfortune to be cursed until seventy times seven with the forgiveness of his friends ; Harry Gascoyne was not a person they could be angry with for long. He had been known to steal a man's mistress and yet retain his friendship, and as I saw him that summer morning, booted and spurred, playing with the little cottage maiden as a cat might have done with a mouse, the indulgence he managed to secure for himself from his fellow-men was not difficult to understand.

I knew that his next move would be London. A young man with means and no one to control his actions is as sure to gravitate towards London as the lizard is to seek the sun. His sister, who should have been the man, urged a profession, suggesting the army, but Harry Gascoyne kicked at the mere idea of a life of routine and discipline. This much I had gathered at the tiny little inn half a mile from the Gascoynes' house, which was much frequented by the old man who combined for them the office of indoor and outdoor factotum. The keeper of the public-house itself had

been placed in his present position by Harry Gascoyne's father, so that the establishment quite partook of the character of a feudal outpost. In addition, the landlady had been cook at the Grange.

"'E'll never do no work, won't Mr. 'Arry," said the old factotum, as he smoked his pipe on the wooden seat by the doorway and surveyed the pines etched black against the crimson flush of the setting sun.

"Not 'e, not 'e," agreed the landlord, taking in the prospect with as little poetical refreshment as his companion.

They were very proud of being able to converse with intimate knowledge of the gentlefolk living hard by, and conducted their conversation like inferior actors, casting side glances at their audience to watch the effect of the performance. Their audience was myself, seated on the wooden bench on the other side of the doorway and regaling myself with cold beef and pickles. Vanity has always kept me from drinking alcohol in any form, otherwise I verily believe I might have been a drunkard. I think, perhaps, that being unaccustomed to spirits, a glass of strong brandy on a certain grim morning that draws nearer and nearer will not be amiss.

But for this great matter of vanity, how many more drunkards would there not be! Not many with a weakness for the bottle are restrained by the immorality of voluntarily surrendering the gift of reason, or the prospect of declining in the scale of prosperity. The first objection appeals to them not at all, and the second is not sufficiently apparent in its immediate effects for it to act as a deterrent. An immediate coarsening of the features and a general degradation of appearance are different matters. Few people care

about being repulsive, and to the real drunkard this fact soon becomes apparent.

The two old men found the Gascoyne topic most absorbing, and talked incessantly, till the crimson light behind the pines changed to a faint opal, and the stars were alight in the heavens.

"'Is feyther, 'e never done no work," said the landlord.

"That be true," said the other, as if he were bearing witness to some virtue of the late Mr. Gascoyne.

"'E spent a deal of money too," said the landlord.

"'E wur generous with 'is money," answered the other.

"And none 'ave cause to know that better'n we."

"That's true enough."

"Miss Edith be more like 'er mother. A nice lady but a bit close."

"It was as well one of 'em wur close or there wouldn't 'ave been much left."

"True."

There was a whole family history in these few remarks. A man born rich, but a rake, and possibly a profligate—a long-suffering wife enduring the slur of meanness in her efforts to save something from the wreck. Indeed, it appeared a wonder that she should have saved so much.

Evidently young Gascoyne took after his father. I gathered afterwards that the reason there was anything in the nature of estate left was because the money and house had been largely the property of Mr. Gascoyne's wife, and it was through her forethought that the boy and girl had been left equally well off.

"A girl's natural protector is her brother," her husband had said when he and his wife were discussing

the matter. "It is natural the boy should be better off than his sister. If it is otherwise it puts the lad in a humiliating position." Mrs. Gascoyne, however, did not think so. She had absolute confidence in the girl's affection for her brother, whilst from early boyhood she had detected a singular likeness between the lad and his father. Yet although she trusted the girl, it was possible that she loved the boy more. Indeed, it was her very love that caused her to make provision for him in his sister's affection and rectitude.

All this I learned by degrees.

I learned also that the girl I had seen in his arms was something better than a cottager. She was the daughter of a blacksmith who was fairly well-to-do, and it was a tribute to young Gascoyne's courage that she possessed not only a father, but half a dozen stalwart brothers, who would most probably have killed him at sight could they have witnessed the embrace that summer morning in the lane. As I sat smoking my pipe in the perfect summer night, with the fragrant perfume of pine and tobacco mingling, I heard someone coming along the narrow strip of white road bordered with grass, whistling.

It was young Gascoyne on his way home.

It was evident that so far satiety had not begun to knock at the doors of conscience, for a more careless, happy creature it would have been impossible to imagine.

He paused outside the inn in the middle of the road, hesitating. I think I gathered what was in his mind. He was trying to decide whether he should go straight home to his sister, who was probably waiting for him, or stay and drink more beer than he would have cared for her to know of. Already the rose of his

youth was coarsening slightly through the habit he had inherited from his father.

He came to the opposite seat and sat down. He was the incarnation of the born loungeur. There was a careless ease in his carriage, and a just perceptible touch of exaggerated fashion in his clothes, which betrayed a pleasure in personal appearance, something beyond that merely incidental to youth.

At first he barely noticed my presence on the other seat, mistaking me in the gloom—for I was sitting in the shadow of the house—for some village yokel having his fill before going on his way home to a scolding wife. Gradually, however, it dawned upon him that the occupant of the other bench was not one of the stray labourers who patronised the place. As for myself, I was wondering whether I should retire before he entered into conversation with me, or run the risk, and see if matters turned out to my advantage.

“ Quiet place, this,” he said, tentatively.

“ I’m glad to say it is,” I answered, lazily.

Always answer lazily when a well-bred Englishman addresses you for the first time. It impresses him.

Young Gascoyne gathered from my voice that he was presumably talking to an equal. He became friendly.

“ I suppose you mean,” he said, laughing, “ that you came here for quiet, and that you mean to get it.”

“ No, I don’t quite mean that. So long as I can sleep where it is quiet, I don’t care very much about absolute silence.”

“ Then I may talk to you? The evenings are so beastly dull down here.” I made a very shrewd guess at the way he had been spending the earlier part of that evening. The possibility of six brothers to fight must have been exciting enough, but then Harry

Gascoyne belonged to the class that wants amusing all the time.

"The stillness of the nights here is awful—especially depressing if you've been used to keep it up till the small hours of the morning."

"I should have thought that it would have been a welcome relief."

"I don't find it so."

"I suppose you're too young to feel the need of rest."

He laughed. Evidently he thought it a good joke.

"Oh, I say, you're not much older than I am, if at all. Of course I can't quite make out in this light, but——"

"I've seen a good deal," I interrupted.

"You've come from town, haven't you?"

"How did you guess?"

"Oh, one can always tell."

"Sorry I look such a cockney."

"Everybody who comes from town isn't a cockney. It would be rather awful if it were so."

"Then how could you tell?"

"Oh, the best of people get a bit careless in the country. It's something in the way town men put on their clothes. Fellows who live in the country will tell you that it isn't quite good form to wear your clothes too well, but that's all rot. They're jealous because they know they're slovenly."

I liked the way he talked, and, finding me companionable, he showed not the least desire to move. A new friend always interested me, so I put away any unpleasant reflections as to our future relations, and abandoned myself to the pleasure of a novel and pleasant companionship. My cousin chattered on, and

gradually, as will almost invariably happen when two young men are talking together—the more especially over the bowl—the eternal feminine dominated. He was obviously neurotic, for all his healthy skin and philistine view of life in general.

He talked of women incessantly, but without any reference to their share in the higher things of life.

He hinted vaguely of the existence of the cottage maiden, but declined to be drawn when I encouraged him to take me into his confidence.

“It’s a ripping thing to be in love ; in fact, it’s the only thing that reconciles me to stopping in this beastly hole.”

“Romance is life,” I murmured, lilting agreeably to the rhythm he desired. “I don’t understand how people get on without it.”

“I suppose there comes a time when everyone wants to settle down,” he said, echoing the usual concessions of profligate youth to the demands of a period so very far ahead that there appears to be little inconvenience in confiding all promises of reformation to its keeping.

“When we are tired,” I assented. “Perhaps that is the truest definition of virtue, not to run any race with excesses we are not equal to.”

“I say, that means a pretty long rope for young people, doesn’t it ?”

“Yes, the rope will give out with youth, and then they can conveniently hang themselves.”

“I say, for goodness sake don’t talk like that. I shan’t dare to walk home.”

“Are you afraid of the dark ?”

“Yes, I believe everybody is more or less.”

“You are frank, at any rate. What a time primeval

man must have had of it! I should say that when night fell these woods were alive with ghosts. I suppose the man with muscle was the only possible romanticist in those days. It was romance under its most healthy aspect."

"You mean that men had to fight for their women?"

"Exactly; so much muscle, so many women."

"The women must have feasted on the sight they love best—men at each other's throats."

"On the other hand, the woman must now and then have lost the weakling on whom she had set her heart."

From primeval woman we wandered by easy stages to woman, beflooned, befrilled and perfumed—woman on the path to supremacy.

"I don't know," said young Gascoyne—the glamour of his cottage romance upon him, "but I don't think I care about the sophisticated sort. You never know when they are telling the truth. There was a girl at Oxford——"

Then followed a long story of a rather stupid romance of his college days, ending with, "And that put the finishing touch, and I got sent down."

"Sent down?" I murmured casually, as if it were news.

"Yes, frightfully unfair. The other chap got off scot free on the ground that he was a hard worker and that there was nothing against him. Said he loved the girl and intended to marry her. Silly ass!"

Young Gascoyne asked me to lunch the next day. I refused, but he announced his intention of walking over in the morning to fetch me.

"It'll be quite a relief to have someone to talk to. I've got one or two fellows coming down next week, but at present it's deadly."

He bade me good-night again and again but each time sat down and commenced a new conversation.

"I'm coming up to town in the autumn to read for the Bar. Then I shall have as good time as is possible for a man with no money."

"What do you call no money?" I asked.

I knew the amount of his income to a penny.

"Eight hundred a year. A fellow can't do much on that."

I laughed outright. "Eight hundred a year is a fortune to a man with no encumbrances, especially in town."

"Well, I can't exactly say I haven't got any encumbrances. There is this place to be looked after. Not that I do much towards it, I'm bound to say. I should like to sell it, but my sister likes it and as she lives here she does most of the keeping-up."

I strolled down the road with him. He was rather the worse for the amount he had drunk, and hiccoughed slightly as he affectionately bade me good-night and assured me that he would be round the first thing in the morning.

Leaning out of the little inn bedroom I considered the question of accepting his invitation to lunch.

So far I had withheld my identity. If I went to the house on the morrow I could no longer conceal the fact that I was a relation.

When they knew who I was, it might or it might not make my task more difficult, and by this my action must be guided entirely.

I finally came to the decision that I could not expect to gain any access to young Gascoyne unless I followed up the acquaintance.

It was quite possible that when he discovered who

I was he might drop me at once. I was a relation, certainly, but my comparatively humble origin on my father's side would not, I imagined, make me very acceptable. Besides, I had gathered that Miss Gascoyne was very proud. She was of good family on both sides, and the villagers spoke of her as being cold and haughty. She hardly sounded like the kind of woman who would forgive a Gascoyne a *mésalliance*. It was obvious that I must make her brother thoroughly understand who I was before I accepted his invitation. There was another point to be considered. Mr. Gascoyne was their uncle, and I knew that his brother had not been on good terms with him because he had married a tradesman's daughter, although from what I had seen of Mrs. Gascoyne, she had seemed to be quite fit to take her place in any family. Mr. Gascoyne might be offended if I became acquainted with his nephew and niece. I knew from one or two chance remarks which he had let fall that he bitterly resented the fact that they had never made any sign of wishing to become reconciled. I was a little astonished at this, because, after all, Mr. Gascoyne had money to leave, and I should not have thought that Harry Gascoyne was the sort of youth to allow scruples born of family pride to stand in the way of a possible access of riches. Perhaps I should discover more in the morning, that is, if my very distant cousin did not forget all about his invitation, given at a moment when he was not quite sober.

By twelve o'clock he had not put in an appearance, and I concluded that he had forgotten me. I waited till one, and was just about to ask for my bill and ride away when he appeared.

He gave me a swift glance as if to satisfy himself that

the favourable opinion he had formed of me the evening before was correct. Apparently the verdict was favourable, for he insisted on my going with him.

I pleaded my attire ; but he would hear of no excuse.

“ Well, perhaps you ought to know who I am.”

“ You’re not a criminal, I suppose ?”

“ Not exactly, but I’m a cousin of yours.”

He looked at me blankly.

“ A cousin ?”

“ Yes, we had a mutual great-great-grandfather—George Gascoyne. My name is Israel Gascoyne Rank. My mother was a Gascoyne. My father was a commercial traveller.”

“ Oh, I say, that doesn’t matter.”

“ I didn’t suppose it would, but all the same it’s just as well you should know.”

He talked gaily enough as we went along. I watched him keenly, and every now and then I noticed a shadow cross his face. I could make a fair guess at the cause of it. He was wondering how he should tell his sister that the offspring of a *mésalliance* in the family was her guest. He would no doubt have liked to ask me to say nothing about it, but was too well bred to do so. His chance came, however, when I informed him that I was in his uncle’s office.

He turned and looked at me in amazement.

“ I say, there’s plenty of time—let’s go down this path. It’s a longer way round, but I want to talk to you. It’s all a bit sudden and interesting, isn’t it ?”

We turned down a side path where the white loose sand was strewn with pine needles.

“ You know,” said young Gascoyne, “ my father and my uncle Gascoyne were not on speaking terms.”

“ I gathered as much,” I remarked.

"When my cousin committed suicide I wanted to write and say how sorry I was, but my sister said she thought that it would look as if we were after his money, so I didn't."

I began to wonder if perhaps the desire to throw a very poor relation in the teeth of this independent young couple might not have had something to do with the action of Mr. Gascoyne in taking me into his business.

"My sister has curious ideas. She thinks that if a Gascoyne went into business he should have changed his name."

"There are heaps of stockbrokers of first-rate family."

"Oh, I don't agree with her in the least. I think it's all rot, and I should rather have liked to be taken up by Uncle Gascoyne, but once my sister gets an idea into her head you can't move her."

"Perhaps she may not care about entertaining me."

"Oh, she'll be civil."

"I'll go back if you like," I said. "I shan't be offended. You could not know who I was."

He stood still and thought deeply.

"No," he said, shortly, "come on, you'll oblige me by doing so. It's beastly rude of me to have hesitated. I like you, cousin Israel. You are quite different from anyone I have ever met."

I laughed. "You forget. There is my point of view. Mr. Gascoyne may not at all like my having struck up an acquaintance with you."

"Well, you can always say you didn't know."

"What, and drop you?"

"Not that, old chap." He linked his arm affec-

tionately in mine. "We'll be great friends when I come to town, and damn it all, I'll be friends with Uncle Gascoyne whether my sister likes it or not."

I was not particularly pleased at the idea of this attractive and well-bred nephew getting into his uncle's good books; at any rate, not until Mr. Gascoyne had made me a definite promise as to my future.

I was very curious to see Miss Gascoyne. It was obvious that she was a strong character. After all, if she were distant it could not do me much harm, and I could leave soon after lunch.

We came upon the house suddenly. It was an old-fashioned place which had evidently been added to by degrees. Unexpected gables arose at every turn, and the red brick and ivy, clinging creeper, and gorgeous trails of passion flower and purple clematis were exquisitely mellow.

The place looked fairly well kept considering the limited means of the owners, and that very little of Harry Gascoyne's eight hundred a year went towards its upkeep.

"We haven't any horses since the gov'nor died—at least, that is, I've got a hack."

"You were riding the first day I saw you."

"When was that?"

I laughed. "I hope you won't think my excellent memory bad taste, but I think I saw your horse tethered to a gate one morning while you were otherwise engaged."

"By Jove! Was that you? I thought I had seen your face somewhere before."

"I wonder you did not recognise me."

"I say, don't breathe a word. It might get about. I can't keep away from her, she's so awfully pretty."

"Who is she?"

"Her father's a blacksmith. You'd never think it to hear her speak, though. I've often thought of taking her to town, but I should never be able to show my face down here again."

"It would be very awkward for your sister."

"It would be awkward altogether."

A figure in white appeared on the veranda. It was Edith Gascoyne, tall, fair, quite beautiful.

She greeted me courteously, her brother looking on nervously the while. He then hurried me off to get a brush down, and left me in his bedroom murmuring that he would be back in a minute. I was perfectly aware that he had gone to tell his sister who I was. In a few minutes he returned and I saw at a glance that his short interview had not been altogether pleasant. There was a determined look round his jaw that was somewhat unusual, and I guessed that he had been putting his foot down. If, however, he had been compelled to insist on his sister welcoming me, she certainly showed none of the chagrin of defeat in the perfect courtesy and queenliness with which she advanced to me when I came down into the drawing-room.

"My brother says we are cousins, Mr. Rank."

"Yes, it is strange my coming across him in this way, isn't it?"

"Very. I do not know my Uncle Gascoyne, but we were extremely sorry to hear of his son's tragic death. You knew him?"

"Barely. I had spoken to him once."

She waited as if expecting me to talk about young Gascoyne, but I held my tongue.

"Was my uncle very much affected?"

"Terribly. I don't think he or his wife will ever get over it."

"I am afraid he must have thought me very heartless." She evidently felt somewhat guilty at their neglect.

We went in to lunch. Everything was wonderfully well done, and I could see that she was determined to make the Grange as attractive as possible to her brother, and to give him no reason for keeping away from it. I recall that quiet Sunday lunch most vividly. The long, low dining-room with its panelled walls hung with pictures of dead and departed ancestors, the stretch of green lawn with the blue depth of the pine-wood beyond. From somewhere came the scream of a peacock, that perfect discord which only nature could have attempted. On my left at the head of the table sat Miss Gascoyne, beautiful and white, in a condition of stately and armed truce.

She managed most perfectly to import into her expression every now and then something which might remotely have laid claim to being called a smile. For the rest, she listened to me during the greater part of the meal with every appearance of attention, answering me with no vulgar or obvious intention of a desire to snub me, although her disapproval of my presence was patent.

I made her laugh, however, as soon as I had discovered the vulnerable point in her armour of gravity. Finally, I ventured an appeal to her snobbery; for I could see that she was a snob, although in her it was

a vice trained and cultivated by breeding into what might have passed before the world as a virtue.

I thought that I might venture to mention Hammerton, and did so, a little fearful that she might give me to understand that it was high presumption in me to consider myself in any way interested in the feudal home of the Gascoynes.

She was, on the contrary, frankly interested.

"I have never been there," she said. "I have only met the present Lord Gascoyne once, when I was a child. My brother and I were invited to his coming-of-age, but my mother had died only very shortly before, and we did not care to go."

I shrewdly guessed that had the decision been left to her brother he might not have found his sincere grief at his mother's loss an insuperable bar to his enjoying himself at Hammerton.

I continued, watching her carefully, prepared to beat a hasty retreat should she show the least sign of disapproval at the channel into which I had directed the conversation.

"Directly I saw you to-day I noticed how very like you are to some of the portraits at Hammerton. I was only there once, but I remember one distinctly."

"I should like to see the family pictures. Do you know Lord Gascoyne?"

"Oh, dear no, not at all. I went there quite as an excursionist. It was rather quaint going round as a tripper. The remarks of the people I was with were most amusing."

The suspicion of a shadow crossed her face. She was not pleased to think of the mob tramping through those ancestral halls for which she had an almost

Chinese reverence. I detected her disapproval, and hastened to add :

"They were in no way irreverent ; far from it, I think they were most impressed."

"I suppose," she said, "it is good for that sort of people to be put in mind of those who have been chiefly responsible for making England what she is."

I had considerable trouble to forbear smiling as I recalled the career of some of the Gascoynes.

"That sort of people had something to do with the making of England. It was not the aristocracy who used the bow and arrow at Crecy."

We both turned with some surprise to young Gascoyne. It was a deeper remark than he usually gave vent to.

"The people are nothing without their natural leaders," Miss Gascoyne replied.

"You think the aristocracy are the natural leaders of the people ?"

"Surely."

"It seems to me," I answered, for I saw that it did not flatter her to agree too readily, "that the people got very little done for them till they chose leaders of their own."

"Perhaps I ought to have said that the aristocracy are the natural leaders of the nation, and not of the people. There is a difference, is there not ?"

I appreciated the concession in civility implied in the appeal. I was evidently gaining ground.

"I quite see the distinction, and it is a true paradox."

Young Gascoyne, who had seemed anxious and fearful during the first part of the meal, feeling that I

had conquered and entered the outer works of at least acquaintanceship, grew happier, and said :

"Rank is afraid that Uncle Gascoyne will hardly be pleased to find that he has made friends with us."

"I am not afraid," I interposed hastily, for I saw that Miss Gascoyne had stiffened perceptibly.

"You said he was sure to be annoyed."

"That is quite a different thing. He has been very kind to me, but he can hardly expect to veto my acquaintances." I was about to say "friends," but checked myself in time and added : "Besides, I don't think he would wish to do so."

"He seems rather a jolly old chap from what you say."

"He is everything that is generous."

I made a point of always speaking enthusiastically of Mr. Gascoyne. Someone was sure sooner or later to repeat what I said.

"We should be sorry to do anything to injure your prospects, Mr. Rank." Miss Gascoyne spoke with just the faintest suspicion of stiffness.

"I don't think that is likely," I laughed.

After lunch she left us alone to smoke. Young Gascoyne wheeled two armchairs to the window, which was delightfully shaded, and, giving me an excellent cigar, seated himself opposite with a pipe, and began to talk of his love affair. Since he had discovered that I knew of the secret meetings he had been only too anxious to make a confidant of me.

"She absolutely prevents my thinking of anything else. I ought to be working, you know, but I can't. Every time I settle down to do anything I think of her—she's in my head and she stops there. The whole

day long I wonder what she's doing. She's an absolute servant to those great big lubberly brothers of hers. Of course, they are kind to her in a way, but they want her to marry some lout out of the village. I don't know how it will end, I am sure."

"Oh, these things have a way of deciding themselves."

"Yes, but not always satisfactorily."

"Why, you don't think——?"

"No, I don't mean that, at least I hope to goodness not."

"You had better make up your mind to forget her and come to town."

"I couldn't do it. It isn't in me. It would take a will of iron. If my sister were a man she would do it, but then Edith couldn't have fallen in love with anybody beneath her."

This was so obviously true that it required no comment.

I was busy thinking while young Gascoyne babbled on, quite happy that he had a listener. I reflected what a very useless person he was in the world. He was quite right when he accused himself of a lack of will. The probability was that at forty he would be a confirmed toper. He was a pleasant companion enough, but had evidently as little capacity for true friendship as for anything else.

His sudden affection for me was purely fictitious. I was the nearest thing to hand, and an ordinarily amusing companion was a godsend amid his present dullness. In town he would have seen nothing of me at all, unless I could contribute to the gaiety of his life; in which case he would no doubt give me a pro-

portionate amount of his attention. The poor girl whom he had honoured with his affection was likely to have a very bad time of it should any mischief accrue. He was lovable enough in his way, but he was of no particular value to mankind in general.

He was living in danger of at least a very sound thrashing from the girl's brothers if not from her village suitor, and it was most probable that should matters become acute he would—although not deficient in courage—leave the situation to settle itself without him, and the girl to take care of herself. Perhaps the brothers might not find out; young Gascoyne might ride away; the girl might dry her eyes and in time wed her village admirer, who would remain in ignorance of the guilty little episode in her life. If the brothers found out, were they the sort of men likely to take a violent revenge, and if they were not was the lover such a man? It was worth ascertaining. I decided to spend the next week-end at the village where the girl and her relations lived.

Later, young Gascoyne showed me over the Grange. There was not very much to see. It was a fairly roomy house, commenced in the Tudor style, and completed, or rather building operations had ceased, in the early Victorian. The latter age was marked by a hideous oblong, stucco wing devoted to servants and kitchen premises. Every other age had given the building something fairly picturesque, but the early Victorian era had given something worthy of itself. The semi-circular porch with its white columns, unmistakably Carolian in character; the Elizabethan red brick and mullioned panes, the Georgian drawing-room, and low-

ceilinged hall, all made a delightful jumble, and hardly deserved young Gascoyne's contemptuous remark that it was a 'ramshackle old place,' true in actual fact as such description was.

The room which had been his father's sanctum was now his; a delightful room with a south aspect and the only view which was not to a certain extent impeded by trees. Through the half open door of Miss Gascoyne's bedroom I caught a glimpse of a prie Dieu and a large crucifix above it. Evidently Miss Gascoyne was High Church and devotional.

We joined her in the garden for tea. The sun was yellowing through the pines, with here and there a faint suggestion of evening crimson, ere I rose and said good-bye. She evidently liked me, for she asked me to come again, and seconded her brother when he pressed me to run down from Saturday till Monday whenever I liked. For a Hebrew youth to have travelled so far in Miss Gascoyne's estimation in so short a time was an achievement.

Young Gascoyne walked back as far as the inn with me, talking volubly of when we should meet again and of what a lot we were to see of each other in town. I rode back thinking a good deal of Miss Gascoyne. I hold—what to the female mind is a heresy—that a man may be in love with half a dozen women at once.

Miss Gascoyne occupied my thoughts a great deal after I returned to town, and for the first few days I even thought that Sibella had been superseded. This I found not to be the case after a visit paid to the Hallwards, in the course of which Lionel Holland succeeded in rousing my jealousy to a high pitch by his osten-

tentious airs of proprietorship. I was in love with two women: with Sibella ecstatically as always, and with Miss Gascoyne. I was vain enough to think that the rapid change in the latter's demeanour towards me had been in spite of herself. There was between us a decided sympathy. She stood for all that, socially, I most admired.

My taste was always catholic, and her coldness and reserve attracted me immeasurably, although I was also a slave to Sibella's triviality and butterfly gaiety. The picture in each case was complete, the composition harmonious; and from the point of view of charm that is everything. Dull people may derive credit from their very dullness if they be consistent and hold their tongues; consistency achieves character and interest, but an ignoble desire to imitate some garrulous acquaintance will inevitably lead to disaster. In fact, social prominence can only be achieved by the expression of the self in its own peculiar way.

Miss Gascoyne's stately, lily-like personality had also a peculiar attraction for my Jewish blood. Her curiously vivid auburn hair, the almost marble pallor of her skin, the enormous dark blue eyes, full of a peaceful queenliness, were so alien to my own type as to subjugate the opposite in me. In my polygamous scheme I could see her nowhere except on the throne itself. Sibella might have the jewels, Edith Gascoyne would inevitably demand a share of real power. Miss Gascoyne made me proud to have a half right to the name she bore. She inspired me with the same feeling of pride in relationship as the turrets and battlements of Hammerton had done. For some days I indulged in dreams in which she and I walked hand in hand

through the social pageant, eminently the right people in the right place.

I said nothing that week to Mr. Gascoyne of my having made the acquaintance of his nephew and niece. I waited to see how matters progressed. As I thought things over I came to the conclusion that he would dislike it more than I had at first imagined. After all, it was not he who had been insulted, it was his wife, and that was the difficult thing to forgive. The young Gascoynes' opportunity had been their cousin's death. It was undoubtedly an aggravation of the estrangement that they seemed to have completely ignored the event.

I went down to Copsley, the village where Henry Gascoyne's romance dwelt, to reconnoitre. It was a fair-sized place, a village in the proper sense of the word, and not a mere hamlet.

Janet Gray's father was the blacksmith of the place, and he and two of his sons drove a thriving trade. Three more of his sons were well placed in the neighbourhood, and the sixth was a soldier, a lance corporal. Janet and her mother kept house, and from all that I could hear a happier or better managed establishment it would have been impossible to find. There was something patriarchal in the way the old blacksmith ruled his household. I have seen him, when his younger son proved rebellious, enforce his decree with a strong, effective clout. He was what would be described as an honest, God-fearing man; that is to say, he lived strictly within the conventions of his class, and would have scouted the idea that the rights and wrongs of almost every subject on earth were not to be easily grasped by a well-intentioned mind.

His daughter was his joy and delight. He was proud of her looks, which like those of all of his children were out of the common. When he stood on Sunday evening in church surrounded by his family, a more moving spectacle of physical health and primal beauty it would have been difficult to imagine.

He was also proud of his daughter's housekeeping capabilities, and not only he, but his wife and sons, looked forward with dismay to the time when some stalwart lover would claim her. Mrs. Gray almost hoped that her sons would marry and settle down first in order to avoid the desecration of her household arrangements by the unheard-of innovation of a servant.

Mrs. Gray had a sister, a spinster some years older than herself, who, having entered the service of the Gascoynes many years before, had never left it, but had become an institution in the family. The two sisters were devoted, and it had long been their habit to see each other at least once a week. Sometimes Janet accompanied her mother, and when Mrs. Gray was unable to go, for she suffered somewhat from rheumatism, her daughter went alone.

It was on one of these expeditions that she had met young Gascoyne. He had related the circumstances to me a dozen times.

"She was coming back to the station through the pine-trees, and I was struck all of a heap, bowled over first time. I don't know how it all came about, but we talked about her aunt. It was something to go on with. It took me a long time to persuade her to meet me, though."

Judging by the character and determination in the

faces of old Gray and his sons, it did not appear that the man who trifled with their womankind would have a very pleasant time of it. It was the identity of her rustic suitor, however, that I was anxious to discover. I was not long in doing so, for he haunted the Gray threshold. Personally, had I been in Janet's place, I should not have hesitated a moment between the magnificent specimen of manhood who was anxious to make her his wife, and the spoilt and vicious youth, who, if her ruin could have been accomplished with safety, would have regarded it as a mere pleasurable and excusable incident in his life.

Nat Holway was in every way a splendid fellow. His occasional violence of temper was a part of the general strenuousness of his character. He was slowly conquering this failing, however, and was likely to make the same sort of man as Janet's father. He had never known any other sweetheart. It had, at least as he thought, been an understood thing between them since they were children. He delayed speaking just a little too long, and it was after young Gascoyne had appeared on the scene that he asked her to be his wife. To his amazement and the no little surprise of her friends she refused him. Ignorant of the existence of Harry Gascoyne in his relation to Janet, they looked around vainly for a cause.

Was there anybody else in the village? True, young Tom Applin had come round with an obviously serious intent, but Janet had very soon shown him that she did not care for him. There were others, but, as she had never encouraged them in any way whatever, they did not suggest themselves as a reason for her refusal of Nat Holway. The only excuse she would

give was that she did not care sufficiently about Nat to marry him.

"But, Janet, you've always given us to understand——" commenced Mrs. Gray.

"Oh, but that was when we were children."

"No, Janet, that is not quite true. It's not so long ago that I was talking of you both settling down, and it didn't seem but what you favoured the idea."

Janet did not answer, but shut herself in her room and, unlocking a drawer, took out of it a little jewelled trinket which young Gascoyne had given her, and kissing it passionately, burst into a flood of tears. The poor girl vaguely realised, if she refused to confess as much to herself, that her romance was doomed to a dismal ending. Though she loved Harry Gascoyne she had some dim perception that the glitter of his charm was largely pinchbeck. She also realised with true feminine instinct that she had thrown away the only weapon with which she might have won her battle, and induced him to raise her to his position by marriage. She was already terrified of what might happen, and lay awake at nights possessed by the fear of an approaching presence. She was haunted by the singing of the wind in the pine-wood where they had first kissed, and stronger and stronger through the sad, sweet music came the wailing of an infant.

Young Gascoyne was almost as frightened as she at what he had done, and his true character asserted itself. He positively throbbed with selfishness. He poured out his woes to me at length. He would begin with some stereotyped recognition of the girl's position, thrown in for the sake of mere decency, but after that

it was all about the awkwardness of the affair as it would affect himself.

"I'm not a coward, old chap, and I don't mind a good stand-up fight. I can take a licking as well as any other man, and bear no grudge."

This I doubted, and set it down as merely the boastful jargon learnt at a public school.

"But I don't quite see having to fight the whole lot of them."

"They look awkward customers."

"Why, have you seen them?"

I had made a slip. I had not informed him of my visit to Copsley.

"I was passing through on my bicycle, and I just thought I would have a look in at the blacksmith's shop."

"My sister will never forgive me. You see, Janet is old nurse's niece. By Jove, it is a muddle."

He spoke as if the whole affair were not of his doing and as if he were the victim of a conspiracy.

It was the occasion of my spending a week-end at the Grange.

He discussed many ways of solving the difficulty.

"I shall take her away. There's nothing else to be done."

"You will be followed."

"Not if we go abroad. That'll be the thing. Edith will come round in time. I shouldn't wonder, once Janet were away from that common lot, if she didn't improve till one wouldn't mind taking her anywhere."

I was surprised to find that he was in earnest about eloping, but his was not a nature to look very far ahead,

and he talked of being able to get along at some quiet foreign town as if he were not the sort of person in whom such an existence would bring out all the worst qualities. At any rate, I was determined to run no risks. I had made too many inquiries about Nat Holway not to be able to predict with some certainty what he would do if he discovered the truth.

I posted an anonymous letter from the next village to Copsley written in an illiterate scrawl. It informed him of Janet's stolen meetings, and hinted the worst.

CHAPTER X

I HAD by this time informed Mr. Gascoyne of my acquaintance with his nephew and niece. At first he looked hurt.

“They are very heartless, I am afraid, Israel, very heartless; when my poor boy died neither of them wrote a line.”

“I am afraid, sir, that young Gascoyne has not much depth, but his sister seems to me a fine character.”

“What is she like?”

“Beautiful.”

Perhaps something in my voice betrayed what I felt, for he looked at me keenly.

“She is a little cold. Difficult, I should say, to rouse to enthusiasm, and she appears to have a will of iron.”

“She hardly sounds alluring.”

“She has charm.”

“Ah! Then everything else falls into line. I should like to see them, but I can hardly make the advances. You see, my poor brother chose to quarrel with me for two reasons; first, because I went on the Stock Exchange; secondly, because my wife’s father happened to have made his money in trade. It was all very foolish, but year after year reconciliation grew more difficult, and what had been a breach which I thought

could easily be bridged any moment widened imperceptibly, until it was impossible to make advances. If Miss Gascoyne would write to my wife the thing would be done."

Inwardly I thought it would have been just as easy for Mrs. Gascoyne to write to her.

"What is Harry like? His father was good-looking."

"He is handsome enough."

"Fair?"

"Very."

"So was his father. Dear me, it seems only the other day that we were boys together. It is all very sad, very sad indeed. It is incredible that people should drift apart so."

"I've never had anyone to drift apart from."

"You have your friends. There is young Hallward. He seems to be very devoted to you, and, do you know, I have sometimes wondered whether you appreciate his devotion."

"Oh, I'm very fond of Grahame."

"We must see if something can't be done to bring my nephew and niece and my wife together. You say you are going down there this week?"

"I thought of doing so."

"Then you might spy out the land and see how my niece would be likely to receive advances."

"I think Miss Gascoyne would welcome them," I said, with simulated warmth.

I now felt not the least hesitation in praising the young Gascoynes. I had complete confidence in my position with their uncle. He was not the sort of man to commit an injustice, and what he had made up his mind to do for me he would do; perhaps more, certainly not less.

It may perhaps be wondered why, having a comfortable position and fairly assured prospects, I did not rest content. That I did not do so was due to a consistency of aim which has always been my chief characteristic. In removing young Gascoyne from my path I had burnt my boats, and there did not appear to be any particular reason, except that of cowardice, to prevent my pursuing my original purpose. A middle-class position with moderate wealth in no way represented my ideal. I had dreamed from early childhood of a brilliant position, and if possible I intended to achieve one.

I found also that I was a person of a multiplying ambition. I had begun to meet certain people in a very good set. My musical accomplishments here stood me in very good stead—as they have done many another idle young adventurer. Lady Pebworth, who was an amateur vocalist who would not have been tolerated at a tenth-rate pier pavilion without her title, was singing at a charity concert at which I was assisting. Her accompanist failing her, I took his place. She declared that no one had ever accompanied her so sympathetically, and asked me to call. I was not of the order of modern youth who gives some great lady the use of his inferior baritone voice and other services in return for social protection, but Lady Pebworth had the tact to treat me with dignity, and I found her extremely useful. I paid my respects one Sunday afternoon. The drawing-room of her house in Bryanston Square was crowded, and I at once realised that I was in the society of people of quite a different tone from anything I had hitherto come into contact with. Fortunately her invitation had not been merely formal. She had evidently been anxious to see me,

for she welcomed me with a swift glance of pleasure and came from the extreme end of the long room to meet me.

“How good of you to come so soon!”

“It was good of you to ask me.”

Then she introduced me to a pretty, dark-eyed woman, whose beauty was just giving signs of approaching wane.

“Mrs. Hetherington, Mr. Rank.” And she left us.

Mrs. Hetherington talked incessantly, but I replied in monosyllables. I realised that Lady Pebworth was interested, and my vanity was flattered that a woman, so evidently admired and courted in a first-rate set, should be attracted by me. I could see that she was very much aware of my presence whilst seeming to be engrossed by the conversation of a man of distinguished appearance suggesting diplomacy. A feeble-looking young man with rather a pleasant laugh joined in the conversation between Mrs. Hetherington and myself. He was evidently inquisitive as to who I might be, and threw out one or two baits which I avoided.

Mrs. Hetherington droned on about Lord this and Lady that—if she mentioned commoners at all they possessed double-barrelled names—until there was a general movement to go. I rose with the others, but Lady Pebworth with the greatest cleverness managed to avoid saying good-bye to me till everyone else had gone and we were left alone. Mrs. Hetherington, who was the last to leave, looked at me with the insolent curiosity of good breeding as she was making her farewells, evidently fully conscious of her hostess's manœuvring.

"Are you in a great hurry?" asked Lady Pebworth, as the door closed behind Mrs. Hetherington.

"Oh, no."

"Then sit down and let us talk. I must have some fresh tea, and you will have something stronger."

I explained that I seldom drank anything stronger than tea.

She looked at me curiously.

"Dear me! You don't look a puritan."

I laughed. The expression as applied to myself sounded quite comic.

"I am afraid my virtue has its origin in vanity. I confine myself to champagne, and that only occasionally."

"You are quite right. It is dreadful the objects young men make of themselves with drink—and women, too, when they cease to attract."

"Do they ever realise when that time has come?"

"Yes, most women are philosophical enough for that."

"Women with charm need never cease to attract."

"That is very true, but you are young to have found it out. It is usually a discovery of the middle-aged."

"Age is not altogether a question of years."

I found Lady Pebworth a mental tonic. She made me talk as I had never talked before, indeed, as I had never known myself capable of talking.

I realised that I had made a distinct impression, and found myself calculating how far she might be useful to me.

She evidently knew everyone worth knowing. She could undoubtedly launch me in the great world if she cared to do so, and I was quite confident of my

ability to keep afloat providing I had a really good introduction. I could not help smiling as I reflected how envious Lionel Holland would have been could he have witnessed my *tête-à-tête* with Lady Pebworth.

Later Lord Pebworth came in. He was the personification of the elderly well-bred. It was not probable that he had ever possessed many brains, but he had the amount of conscience which causes a man highly placed to do the right thing at the right moment. He was devoid of enthusiasm, and being eminently safe had even achieved a second-rate position as a politician, which he was quite persuaded was a first-rate one. He treated his wife's young men friends—and I discovered afterwards that they had been a numerous procession—with kindly toleration, and even went out of his way to give them a good time when it lay in his power.

He seconded his wife's invitation to dinner with great cordiality, and accompanied me as far as the front door, an attention which was so unexpected that I began to wonder whether he regarded me as a suspicious character. He gave me an excellent cigar, and I walked down Park Lane in the red light of a Sunday evening in summer, feeling that socially, I had moved on.

Lady Pebworth took me up feverishly, and introduced me to a great many people who seemed quite pleased to know me. Nevertheless, I realised that I should have to make hay whilst the sun shone, for unless I persuaded my new acquaintances to accept me as an intimate I should very soon be dropped. Great ladies have a way of carrying young men into the vortex of society to which they have not been accustomed, and then, when weary, leaving them to be slowly slain by general indifference, till they are only too

glad to find themselves back again in their proper middle-class element.

I did not consider the middle-class my element, and I was determined that Lady Pebworth should keep me afloat as long as I chose and not as long as she chose.

As I was engaged in snaring young Gascoyne, I was only able to give her a divided attention. This turned out to be as well, for she concluded that there was another woman, and her interest in me was fanned by jealousy. She tried all manner of arts in order to discover who claimed my attention, arts which she imagined were undetected, but at which I was secretly amused.

Mr. Gascoyne used to chaff me good-naturedly about my smart acquaintances. Some employers in his position might have resented one of his clerks spending his spare time among people who would most probably lead him into extravagance; but Mr. Gascoyne, well born himself, hardly saw the incongruity of it to the extent that an ordinary middle-class commercial man would have done.

At the time I met Gascoyne my affair with Lady Pebworth was in full swing. That is to say, I was getting tired of her, for she had never really meant anything to me. She was beginning to reproach me with neglect, and to take exception to my Saturdays and Sundays being occupied.

I knew how far Lady Pebworth could be useful to me, and I was certainly not going to drop the solid substance of a position in my own right for the shadow of her social introductions.

It was quite extraordinary how ready people were to accept and make use of a young man who carried no other credentials than the good word of a pretty

Countess with a reputation for being rapid. I found myself dancing every evening with the peerage. I cannot honestly say that I received many invitations to dinner, or to those more select entertainments which argue any great degree of intimacy. My keen instinct warned me of the unreality of my position and of how necessary it was to make ties of some kind to enable me to retain my hold on society. The men were civil enough, but I had little in common with those who talked nothing but the jargon they had learned at a public school or at one of the 'Varsities.

I had the extreme satisfaction of being seen in a box at the Gaiety by Lionel Holland and Sibella while I was with Lord and Lady Pebworth and Sir Anthony Cross, a friend of theirs.

"What a very beautiful girl," said Lady Pebworth, as I bowed to Sibella.

"Quite lovely," said Lord Pebworth.

Sir Anthony Cross said nothing, but I repeatedly caught him looking at Sibella when Lady Pebworth was not using his opera glasses.

"Who is the man with her?" asked Lady Pebworth.

"Lionel Holland."

"Is he a friend of yours?"

"I know him. I went to school with him."

"I see you don't like him. He looks a bounder."

Lady Pebworth had in her conversation just that amount of ~~which~~ which may be permitted to an obviously well-bred woman without its giving offence.

As we were going out I found myself by the side of Sibella for a moment.

"You hardly ever come and see us now," she murmured.

Sibella never lost her charm for me, and the sound

of her voice—always a little sharp and unmusical, even when she made an attempt at modulating it, which was seldom—played upon my temperament in the most subtle manner.

I promised to visit them quite soon.

“Next Sunday?” she asked.

“I am going out of town next Sunday.”

Lady Pebworth’s carriage drew up, and, murmuring something about the Sunday after, I left her.

“Your friend, Mr. Rank,” said Lady Pebworth, “is decidedly pretty.”

“One of the prettiest girls I have ever set eyes on,” said Lord Pebworth.

Sir Anthony Cross still said nothing, but I had a shrewd conviction that he was more impressed than either.

On Saturday I bicycled down to stay with the Gascoynes till Monday, having promised my employer to do all which tactful diplomacy might accomplish to find out how they would take an effort at a reconciliation.

I went a certain part of the way by train, and sent my bag on. I had written to say that I should not be at the Grange for dinner, and found myself riding through a crimson summer evening with a sensuous enjoyment in the perfect peace of the rural scenery through which I was passing. According to the received notion of a man with a murder on his conscience, external objects, however beautiful, should have been unable to convey any sensation of peace to my inner being. So far from this being the case I was immensely soothed, and rode leisurely on with as much moral quiet as is enjoyed by most folk. After all, the degree of power of the conscience is entirely a

matter of individuality and force of character. A weak man, hypersensitive to received social obligation, may fret himself into a fever over the merest trifle of a moral lapse. I do not believe the aged Cenci slept the less well for—in the world's opinion—his awful crimes. I have no doubt his affectionate family found him in a comfortable doze when they came to bring him a deeper sleep. The rate at which one great crime will develop a man's intelligence is curious. It is a wonderful grindstone on which to sharpen the intellect. New values, hitherto unsuspected, develop themselves on all sides. An acute and sardonic appreciation of society's laws presents itself, together with an exhilarating sensation of being outside them, which assists in forming an unbiassed and comprehensive view. I could never have belonged to the anarchical type of man, because I never had any comprehension of or sympathy with those who starve in a land of plenty. I could not understand the intellect which could live in a dream of a society regenerated by revolution in the future, and which was yet unable to help itself to a crust of bread in the present. My abilities were essentially practical, so I removed those who were immediately in my way and left the dreamers to remove those whom they esteemed to be in the way of society.

I was indulging in such reflections as these when I passed the lane down which I had turned the day I had discovered young Gascoyne's love affair. The sun had almost set. Already the greater part of the landscape was in shadow. The song of the birds was silenced by the chill of coming night, and they slept. On the horizon the crimson blaze had sunk, and an expiring streak of amber marked where the day had passed. The evening star shone solitary, a little pale

for the moment, a faint flame set in a ghastly pallor. I turned down the lane of the romantic memory ; why, I could not have said, unless, perhaps, some occult informing power gave me a premonition of what I should find there. The actual road track was quite narrow, there being a wide expanse of grass on each side. I had not gone very far before I saw a figure lying in a curiously huddled heap close to the hedge. I knew it was young Gascoyne at a glance. The expected had happened. My heart almost leapt into my mouth. How seldom schemes carried as well as mine had done ! I got off my bicycle and looked stealthily around. There was not a soul in sight. The growing dusk of the lane gave birth to one or two shadows which somewhat startled me as I went towards the body. As I turned him over to look at his face a low groan escaped him.

He was not dead. This was awkward. His face was covered with blood, and there was a terrible wound in the side of his head, while his jaw hung loose as if it were broken. An idea struck me. I lifted his head. I almost fancied that I saw his eyes open, and that even in the gloom he recognised me. I hastened to put my idea into execution. I pressed my fingers gently to the veins behind his neck. I knew that this would produce an absolute insensibility which must inevitably end in death unless succour arrived within quite a short space of time.

After a few minutes I laid him back an inert mass on the turf, and, mounting my bicycle, reached the main road without meeting anyone.

I could not help regretting as I rode leisurely on to the Grange that it was Miss Gascoyne's brother whom I had been compelled to dispose of, but I agreed with

the writer who warned the ambitious that they must subordinate their affections to their aims in life if they wished to succeed. It is curious how affection can be subdued. For instance, I loved Sibella, but I was able to subdue my infatuation and keep it out of sight when necessary.

It was quite dark when I reached the Grange, and riding through the fir plantation I was entirely dependent on the light thrown from my bicycle lamp. Suddenly I received a weird reminder of the figure I had left behind me lying half concealed in the fern and bracken by the roadside. Perhaps I was a little more affected by what had happened than I imagined, for I am not superstitious, and only by reason of having young Gascoyne's image vividly in my mind can I account for what happened.

Half-way through the plantation the light of my lamp fell full on a white, human face dabbled in blood. It was young Gascoyne's face, and the blue eyes were wide open and glazed in death. I saw the head and trunk to the waist. The rest of the body appeared to be beneath the ground. So strong was the illusion that I swerved aside in order not to ride over it, and in doing so fell from my machine. When I picked myself up my lamp was out and I was in total darkness. I was about to hurry forward with a mad haste to get out of the wood when I pulled myself up short. Deliberately I remained where I was, picked up my bicycle, lit my lamp and mounting leisurely rode slowly out of the plantation. With such a career as I had planned it would never do to give way to fancies.

There was a light in the drawing-room as I wheeled my bicycle up the drive of the Grange. I could see

Miss Gascoyne sitting by a small table with a lamp on it. At first I thought she was reading, but as I drew near I could see that the book was lying in her lap, whilst her eyes were fixed on the ground in deep reflection. She came out into the hall when she heard my voice. I thought there was an unusual animation in her appearance as she welcomed me.

“Have you dined?”

“Well, not exactly, but I had an enormous tea at a wayside inn.”

“You look very tired.”

Evidently I still looked somewhat agitated by my adventure in the pine wood. No doubt for want of another explanation it must have struck her as fatigue.

“I have had rather a busy week.”

We moved towards the dining-room chatting freely and pleasantly, and I could not help contrasting her present friendliness with the hauteur and strictly formal manner she had displayed at our first meeting.

We sat and talked while I ate sandwiches.

“Harry said he was going to meet you.”

“I rather thought he might do so, and I looked out for him.”

“It is very rude of him not to have done so, or not to have been at home when you came. I shall scold him severely.”

She began to talk of her brother and his future. She wanted him to read for the law. Did I not think it would be the best thing?

“Do you really want my candid opinion?”

“Of course. You know I say what I mean.”

“I think it is about the very worst profession he could follow.”

“ But why ? ”

“ Well, apart from the difficulty of the examinations, which in our days is no small matter, it is a profession in which patience is the most important factor. There is no other profession like it for encouraging a naturally lazy man with a small income to idle.”

“ I should have thought application was altogether necessary.”

“ Absolutely, but it is optional. He cannot get on without it, but there will be no one to see that he uses his time well. Besides, men in the law are as a rule strenuous, earnest people with all kinds of ambitions, and Harry will hardly meet sympathetics.”

“ Then what is he to do ? ”

“ I know you will think it rather a curious suggestion, coming from me, but I give my vote for the Army.”

“ The Army ? But Harry is poor.”

I inwardly smiled at Miss Gascoyne's notion of poverty. I knew what she thought the Army should mean for a Gascoyne :—a crack cavalry regiment and unlimited private means.

“ An inexpensive line regiment.”

“ Oh dear ! ”

I laughed. “ It's the thing, depend upon it. He will be in a profession he likes, among men who take their profession seriously. After all, he will have a better average of gentlemen than he would have in a crack regiment, even if he does not have the high nobility of exceptions.”

“ I see what you mean, but I don't think Harry would ever consent.”

“ I believe you could make him do anything.”

I was inwardly congratulating myself on the perfect conviction with which I was discussing the future of

one who by this time was most probably solving problems in theology.

We talked on till Miss Gascoyne grew anxious.

"I really wish Harry would come home."

"Shall I go and look for him?"

She knew what was in my mind. His late home-coming meant as a rule that he was to be found at the inn.

"Was he at home to dinner?"

"No. He has some friends living a few miles off whom I don't know, and he rode over in the afternoon and proposed to stay to dinner. There he is."

We both listened. Along the hard road came the sound of a horse's hoofs.

Miss Gascoyne rose in alarm. Either the horse was riderless or it was no longer under control. It was not necessary to listen for more than a few seconds to be convinced of that.

We both went out on to the lawn. A figure came round the corner of the house and hastened on to the road. It was the groom.

"Oh, Mr. Rank, what can have happened?"

"I will go and see."

But she went with me to the gate. The mare had evidently come to a full stop just outside, and was now held by the groom. She was steaming with sweat and gave every evidence of the greatest distress.

Inwardly I was wondering how it was the animal had been so long in reaching the Grange. It must have wandered on slowly feeding by the wayside till it had taken fright at some passing object and started at full gallop for home.

Miss Gascoyne looked around in dismay for her brother.

"She wur alone, Miss," said the groom, blankly.

"It doesn't at all follow that your brother was on her back when she bolted," I ventured.

She looked at me, grateful for the suggestion. She was very white, but her character asserted itself. She turned to the groom.

"Baker, take Jenny round to the stables and make her comfortable as soon as possible. Mr. Rank and I will walk as far as the inn and you can follow us."

"Very good, Miss." The man did as he was directed.

"I will go as I am," she said, "though after all I may be alarming myself unnecessarily." She was not the woman to treat the situation hysterically if it could possibly be avoided. I was genuinely sorry for the grief that was coming upon her. I would have spared her if possible, but I either had to abandon the object of my life or to put up with such unpleasantnesses as were involved with the course I had laid out for myself.

We started to walk rapidly towards the inn.

"I dare say Harry missed his stirrup and Jenny bolted."

On the way her spirits rose. The fact that we met no one seemed to her a proof that nothing much was the matter. Sounds of drunken revelry reached us long before the inn came in sight.

"I will wait here," she said, as we reached the broadening of the road. I left her and went on.

"We'll all be merry,
Drinking whisky, wine, and sherry,
If he can't come, we'll ask his son."

The chorus was trolled forth in disjointed snatches, showing the singers to be very far gone indeed. The

door stood ajar and I went in. So convinced was I of the necessity of playing my part thoroughly that I looked carefully round to see if Harry Gascoyne were present. The half-dozen or so roysterers looked up stupidly with open mouths. As a matter of fact, they were none of them drinking whisky, wine or sherry, but had very substantial mugs of ale before them. The atmosphere was thick with tobacco smoke and heavy with the reek from peasant limbs. The landlord, with a figure that threatened apoplexy, surveyed them from the other side of the bar with an approving smile as if he were presiding over an assemblage of highly well-behaved infants. To me he suggested a genial but relentless ghoul, callous to the feelings of the mothers and children who were to welcome home these repulsive sots as governors and lords of their lives and welfare.

They sat waiting for me to speak.

"Has Mr. Gascoyne been here to-night?" I asked.

The landlord looked round the room, and, having as it were satisfied himself that none of the others knew of the young man being concealed unknown to himself, answered slowly :

"I ain't seen 'im."

"No more ain't 'I," came in phlegmatic chorus.

"Are you quite sure?"

"Quite."

"Thank you." I withdrew.

Miss Gascoyne came forward out of the dusk into the light which streamed from the front door.

"He's not there," I said gravely.

She looked at me in dismay.

"Shall I tell them?" I asked.

She reflected for a moment.

"Yes. He may have fallen from his horse. We must look for him at once."

I turned towards the inn.

"I will come with you," she said, and we passed through the low door.

The song had not been resumed. Evidently my errand had given food for conversation. The landlord paused in the middle of something he was saying and got down off his stool.

"Mr. Gascoyne's horse has returned home without him, and we are afraid he may have been thrown and hurt." I spoke in a loud tone.

At the sight of Miss Gascoyne the whole assemblage had risen. She was looked upon by the cottagers around with not a little awe.

"Will some of you oblige me by helping to look for him?"

The landlord, who had had more than one passage of arms with the justices of the peace as to the way in which his house was conducted, became officiousness itself. Anything to prove to the gentry what an estimable and respectable character he was.

"It ain't like Mr. Gascoyne to get into trouble on horseback," he said, with a laudatory shake of his head, as if to conciliate Miss Gascoyne by conveying to her what a very high sense he had of her brother's horsemanship.

He evidently had an idea of offering her some refreshment, for he looked from her to the bottles of spirit and coloured cordials on the shelf, and from them back again to her, but apparently without being able to make up his mind to so hazardous a proceeding.

As we were all standing outside the inn debating how to conduct the search, a dog-cart drove up.

Let me see, I am right for the Grange, am I not ?” asked a voice.

“ Yes,” I answered, “ but whom do you want at the Grange ?”

“ Miss Gascoyne.”

“ I am Miss Gascoyne.”

There was a silence. The man in the dog-cart was evidently somewhat taken aback. He was saved from further awkwardness by the character of the woman he had to deal with.

“ I am afraid something has happened. What is it ?”

“ Your brother has had an accident.”

“ Is he hurt ?”

“ I am afraid so.”

The answer was inconclusive, and it was obviously intended that it should be.

“ Seriously ?”

“ I am afraid so.”

The answer was still lacking in finality, and Miss Gascoyne guessed the worst.

We all stood round, the men looking stupid but concerned.

“ Will you take me to him, please ?”

“ I came to fetch you.”

“ Will you come too, Mr. Rank ?”

“ Of course.” I turned to the landlord’s wife, who had now joined us. “ Can you find a shawl for Miss Gascoyne ? She has no hat.”

The landlady disappeared, and returned with a white woollen shawl, which she was taking out of tissue paper.

“ When was he found ?” asked Miss Gascoyne, as we drove rapidly away, leaving the little group outside the public-house to discuss the matter.

“ About two hours and a half ago.”

“Where?”

The doctor explained, throwing into his account as much insinuation as he could of the worst. I don't know at what particular moment Miss Gascoyne grasped that her brother was dead, but it was apparent before we reached our destination that she had realised the truth.

He had been carried to a farmhouse, from whence they had sent for the doctor.

“I am afraid he was kicked by his horse. I cannot for the life of me imagine how it could have happened to so fine a horseman.”

The doctor ended a little lamely. Young Gascoyne's propensities were too well known for miles round his home for anyone to be ignorant of them.

I felt somewhat uncomfortable as we turned down the lane where I had left Harry Gascoyne. The doctor made no remark as we passed the spot where I knew he had been found.

I was full of curiosity as to how his sister would behave.

As we descended from the dog-cart, the doctor turned to her.

“I hope I have made myself clear.”

Miss Gascoyne stood silent for a few seconds, struggling for self-control. Then she answered quietly :

“Quite. You mean that my brother is dead?”

The doctor nodded his head gravely.

It was curious evidence of the apartness of Miss Gascoyne's character that the woman of the house, a buxom, garrulous body, made no attempt at comfort. She at once realised that it would have been an intrusion.

Miss Gascoyne went upstairs with the doctor. She

was not away long, and when she returned I saw that she must give way soon, or a mental catastrophe would ensue. Her features were rigid.

I went upstairs at her request.

All signs of violence had already been removed, and he lay as if asleep. Any indications of vice and intemperance had disappeared, and he looked very boyish and beautiful. The doctor was in the room.

"I don't quite see," he said, in a low voice, "how a mere kick or two could have inflicted such injuries. I don't mean, of course, that kicks could not have caused his death, but the blows seem as if they had been struck by a blunt instrument, directed with less velocity than would have been the case with a horse's hoof. I am waiting for a colleague, and then we must make a serious examination."

I murmured that I was no authority. I could not help reflecting how much Harry Gascoyne had been the gainer by dying when he did. Instead of growing into a debauched, worn-out old man, his physical casket lay before us in all the freshness of its youth and beauty. He would leave beautiful instead of ugly memories.

Yes, it was well he had died. His sister might continue to worship him and to preserve her illusions.

She returned to the Grange, and I, having left her to the care of the old housekeeper, went to the inn, though it struck me as being somewhat ridiculous to observe the conventions at such a time.

I did not believe for one moment that the blows which had struck young Gascoyne were from the horse's hoofs. Before leaving the house, however, I went round to the stables. There was no one about, and the mare was by this time as quiet as a lamb.

I examined her hoofs carefully. There was not the

least trace of blood—at any rate, not observable to myself. If there were any traces, they must be microscopic.

I sat down on an upturned pail and reflected. I should like to save Nat Holway—that is to say, if he had not already given himself up, which with a nature such as his was quite possible.

Would it help him to smear the horse's hind hoofs with blood? It was worth trying. Where was I to get the blood from? There was only one source, and that was myself.

I am not brave about blood, but the occasion demanded urgent measures. I took out my pocket-knife, and deliberately drew the blade across the little finger of my left hand. I then smeared the hoofs of the horse and, binding my finger, left the stable. The dawn was just beginning to lay ghostly hands on the garment of night. The stars trembled and burned pale in the growing light.

Through the firs the coming day gave almost the effect of an expanse of water beyond. In the cheerless air there was a touch of clamminess which suggested rain, whilst heavy, sulky-looking clouds were driven slowly towards the east.

I walked with a melancholy step along the sandy path that led through the plantation. What would poor Janet Gray do? I made a point of letting my sympathies have as much play as was compatible with my own interest. As a matter of fact, her situation was slightly bettered, excepting that her lover was dead—than which no greater grief can come to any human being. But at the same time she would receive a much larger meed of pity than would otherwise have been her lot.

If Nat Holway were fool enough to give himself up it would be unpleasant, although I could not forget that even if he had not actually accomplished his purpose, it had been his full intention to murder Harry Gascoyne. Still, he was a fine fellow, and it was not nice to think of lives unnecessarily wasted. The next afternoon I would go over to Copsley and reconnoitre. I must confess that I found the whole thing very exciting, especially as I myself stood in absolutely no danger.

On returning to the inn I found the landlord waiting up for me, a great feat for a man who was usually somewhat heavy with alcohol. He plied me with questions, and appeared terribly shocked at the sad catastrophe.

"Such an open-handed young gentleman, sir, and his sister doting on him as she did. Well, there, you never know. The Lord has His own way of doing things."

He sighed and looked as if to say that were it not for this undeniable fact he might be prevailed upon to take a hand in the management of the universe.

I lay open-eyed, tossing from side to side. Miss Gascoyne stood between myself and sleep. Although I could put an irrevocable fact like death out of my mind I could not dismiss a living grief so easily. I knew that she was capable of terrible suffering. Her brother had been her all. At the same time, while feeling acutely for her I could not help reflecting what a much better match she would now be. Sixteen hundred a year was not great wealth, but when combined with a woman like Miss Gascoyne it was a prize worth having.

I believe there is not the character, however elevated, which does not at a moment of supreme grief

calculate the particular degree of benefit or disadvantage it will obtain from it.

It was noon when I walked over to the Grange to ask how Miss Gascoyne was. The servant said her mistress particularly desired to be informed of my arrival, and I went into the inner hall and waited. She came down almost immediately. I was shocked at the change in her appearance. She had evidently been weeping bitterly, and for a moment I would have given anything to restore her brother to her. The weakness was only momentary, however, and after all it would have been doing her a very bad turn.

She appeared to derive a certain degree of comfort and help from my presence.

"It seems a little sad, Mr. Rank, that although we have so many relations there is hardly one to whom I could write at this emergency."

This was a great opportunity to please Mr. Gascoyne by obtaining her consent to send for him. There were also other schemes in my head, nebulous as yet, which such a reconciliation would assist materially.

"I should have thought," I said gently, "that your father's brother would be the proper person to send for under the circumstances."

She looked at me in surprise. The idea had evidently not struck her, and she became thoughtful.

"I am afraid he would not come."

"I think he would. I know it hurt his feelings somewhat that when his son died neither you nor your brother wrote to him."

"He told you so?"

"Yes."

"I will send a telegram."

"Let me take it."

She went to her desk and wrote several.

"The groom can take them," she said, as I rose.

"No, let me. I shall be quicker on my bicycle, and it will be something to do."

"It is very poor entertainment for you."

"Anything I can do to serve you. Your brother and I were great friends."

Most of the telegrams were conventional intimations of the news to relatives and friends. That to Mr. Gascoyne ran :

"My brother has been killed by an accident. I am in great trouble ; would you come to me ?"

My plan was that Miss Gascoyne should make friends with her uncle and aunt and that we four should form a harmonious quartet, and that finally I should marry her, and Mr. Gascoyne should leave us his money.

I fully realised all my own disabilities in Miss Gascoyne's eyes. The Semitic taint in my appearance could not possibly be a recommendation, and my parentage would certainly be a bar. There was no disguising the fact that my father was not, to the world's way of thinking, a gentleman, and from what I could remember I was inclined in strict honesty to agree with the world.

I was not so far even the adopted heir of Mr. Gascoyne, and I was running a grave risk in introducing a considerably nearer blood relation bearing his own name into the house. I did not fear that Mr. Gascoyne would do anything less for me than he had intended, but he might do considerably less than I had intended. He was just the sort of man to admire Miss Gascoyne. Still, should I fail in my scheme, she

already had an ample fortune, and was no claimant for relief. I sent off the telegram, but did not return to the house. I gathered that Miss Gascoyne would wish to be alone, and contented myself with sending over a message that I was at the inn should she want me, and that I should remain there till Mr. Gascoyne arrived. She sent back a grateful note thanking me, and asking me to come over in the evening.

In the afternoon I mounted my bicycle and rode to Copsley.

The little village lay still as death in the burning sun. The boys and young men were probably lounging about the adjacent lanes and fields, whilst the older people were taking their Sunday afternoon rest.

The blacksmith's shop was shut, the great worm-eaten doors barred with a massive piece of iron. The house next door, with its trim garden and green shutters, which evidenced the prosperity of the Grays, was in silence.

Or was I mistaken ?

I was wheeling my machine, and I paused with my back to the house and bent down, ostensibly to set something defective right. There was the sound of faint sobbing in the house behind me. At the same time I heard footsteps coming along the street. I looked up. It was Nat Holway. His face was impassive, but his features were set. Almost at the same moment the door of the house opened, and Mr. Gray came out.

Apparently he was expecting Nat Holway. They went into the forge together. Old Gray's face was white and stern.

I guessed that they had an appointment, and were keeping it there in order that they might talk undis-

turbed. I wondered if by any chance Nat Holway was offering to take Janet's shame upon his shoulders. He was the sort of man to do it. Really, if such a thing did happen, and the murderer were not suspected, what a convenient settlement it would be. I should have obtained what I wanted, Janet Gray would in time be happy, and Miss Gascoyne would remain in ignorance of her brother's peccadillo. It is certainly rare that matters move so easily along the ways of common-sense.

I rode back to the inn to find a telegram from Mr. Gascoyne to his niece which she had sent over for me to see. It was to say that he would come by the evening train. There were only four trains to Copsley Station on Sunday—two each way—and the London train did not arrive till ten o'clock. I saw her in the early evening. She seemed worn out with grief, and there was, I thought, a quite tragic loneliness in her appearance.

It pleased her to talk of her dead brother, and, sitting there saying all the nice things I could about him, and full of a real and genuine sympathy for her, I could hardly realise that it was I who had knelt in the dusky lane with my fingers on the dying youth's throat.

"He had a great admiration for you," she said, with a faint smile. "He thought you the cleverest person he had ever met."

"His was one of the sunniest natures; no one could help loving him."

"He was spoilt, of course. My father spoilt him terribly. It was not to be wondered at if he was a little wild."

I allowed her to talk on till I rose to go and meet Mr. Gascoyne.

"I don't know why," she said, as she came out into the lane with me, "but I have always imagined my uncle to be a very hard man. I read 'Nicholas Nickleby' when I was a little girl, and I could not help drawing a comparison between my father, who was like Nicholas's father, and lived in the country, and my uncle, who, of course, represented Ralph Nickleby."

I smiled. "You will find Mr. Gascoyne very different from that. He is much softened of late, but I don't think that he has ever been a miser, even if at times he has carried the principle of justice to the verge of hardness."

I was thinking of the circumstances of my first appeal to him.

When I left her I went at once to the station, and, as the train was late, had some time to wait.

There were one or two yokels in the tiny waiting-room, and the station-master addressed one of them as he passed through from his little ivy-covered cottage to the ticket-office.

"Sad thing, this, about Mr. Gascoyne, Edward."

The young man in question answered slowly :

"Yes. They say as 'is 'orse kicked him to death."

"That's strange—very strange. Was the horse bad-tempered?"

"Not that I know of, and I've shod the mare often enough."

"They say as Miss Gascoyne is powerful cut up."

"That's very likely; yer see, she doted on him."

I scrutinised young Gray, the last speaker, narrowly. His manner betrayed no indication that he was in any way aware of his sister's condition.

As Mr. Gascoyne descended from the train he pressed my hand warmly.

"This is very terrible," I said—"very terrible."

"Tell me, how did it happen?"

As we drove towards the Grange I detailed the event as well as I could.

"You think the horse kicked him to death—a horse that was fond of him? That is somewhat strange."

"I don't say it is so, sir. That is what has been surmised."

"When do they hold the inquest?"

"To-morrow."

"My wife is shocked beyond measure. If my niece had expressed the least wish for her to do so, she would have come too."

I did not answer. I could not say how Miss Gascoyne would welcome the idea of her aunt assuming the role of a near relation.

"I am very touched at her sending for me—very touched indeed. Is the body at the Grange?"

"No; it is at a farmhouse some miles off. It will be brought home after the inquest."

"Quite so."

We reached the Grange.

"If you don't mind, sir, I will get back to town. I would sooner. I don't think I can be of any further use."

He did not press me to remain, and I went back to town carrying messages for his managing clerk. I did not witness the meeting between Miss Gascoyne and himself, but it must have been quite satisfactory, for he stayed away over a week, and I learnt that Mrs. Gascoyne had joined them.

I fancied that Miss Gascoyne would be rather surprised at the dignity and well-bred restraint of the

tradesman's daughter, and would find it a little difficult to account for her father's prejudice ; in fact, his objection could not fail to strike her as having something in it of unreasoning snobbery.

I would have given a great deal to be at the inquest, but although there was no particular reason why I should not be, I thought Mr. Gascoyne might deem it a little officious. Neither did I go down to the funeral, but wrote a sympathetic note and sent a wreath. I let it fully appear that my reason for not going was diffidence, and a desire not to assume too intimate an attitude.

The morning of Mr. Gascoyne's return he called me into his office.

"Close the door, Israel."

He motioned me to a chair.

"Did you see any account of the inquest?"

"No, sir ; I have been waiting for you to tell me."

As a matter of fact, I had followed the case most carefully in the papers.

"It appeared that there was a serious doubt as to how my nephew received his injuries."

"Really?"

"Yes. In the first place, both doctors were a little surprised that they should have caused death at all. The whole case became quite complicated. There were distinct traces of blood on the horse's hoof, and yet one of the doctors absolutely refused to admit that the injuries could have been inflicted by the horse at all."

"How very extraordinary!"

"Did you at any time exchange confidences with my nephew on love affairs?"

I swiftly reflected. Had he the least proof of our

having done so ? It would not do to give a direct answer.

" I dare say we did, sir, but I cannot remember anything definite."

" Some letters were found in his pocket."

I almost started. How was it that it had never occurred to me to search young Gascoyne's pockets ?

" Were they love-letters ?"

" Yes."

" It is not very unusual for a young fellow of his age."

" No, and I am afraid that what they contained is also not unusual. It appears that he had accomplished the ruin of a girl in a neighbouring village."

I looked thoughtful. " Do you mean to suggest that there is a mystery ?"

" I am afraid there is. I cannot help thinking that the doctor who refused to accept the theory of his having been killed by the horse was right."

" Why did they not call in a third doctor ?"

" They did, and he was evidently under the influence of the man who believed in the horse theory."

" What was the verdict ?"

I had forborne to satisfy myself on this point in order to be able to ask the question with easy unconcern.

" Accidental death."

I was astonished, but the country bumpkins on the jury had, I imagined, made up their minds before the inquest that he had been kicked by his horse.

" Were the letters read in court ?"

" No. They were considered unnecessary, and no one thought they bore on the issue."

" Do you think they did ?"

"Decidedly I do," answered Mr. Gascoyne. "Depend upon it, there was foul play. I talked to the doctor who would not admit the horse theory, after the case was over, and he was quite positive the injuries could not have been inflicted by a horse's hoof."

"Who was the girl?" I asked.

"Well, I do not think it is quite right to disclose her name. I had a talk with her father, who was very distant and said the matter would be best settled by saying nothing more about it. I don't know what he meant."

"Was the girl's name by any chance Janet Gray?"

Mr. Gascoyne looked at me in surprise.

"That was her name, but how did you know?"

"Harry Gascoyne spoke to me once or twice about her, and I wondered at the time from something he said whether he had not made rather a mess of things."

"Yes, I am afraid we men are very selfish, that is, until we have wives and daughters of our own. The possession of sisters does not seem to instil the same sense of responsibility to woman-kind."

"Does Miss Gascoyne know of this?"

"No; unless the matter develops further I do not think it necessary to inform her."

"What did the police think of the affair?"

"I fancy they are quite prepared to accept the horse theory."

"Then the matter is settled?"

"Except for the trouble of the poor girl. It appears that he actually promised to marry her."

"He was generous-hearted enough for anything," I answered, with calculated impulsiveness.

"Her father asked me to give my word that the

matter would not go any further, so you will remember that you hold a secret that affects three human beings at least."

"I shall of course be as silent as the grave."

He began to open his correspondence, and I rose to leave the room.

"Oh, by the way, my wife and my niece have struck up quite a friendship. My wife remains at the Grange, and I shall go down there again for a few days next week."

I looked pleased.

"I believe," he added, smiling, "you have been indulging in some diplomacy at our expense. Don't you think my niece is a beautiful woman?"

"I think everyone would admit that."

"I expect she will make a very brilliant match."

I went out. I knew quite well why this last remark had been made, and smiled inwardly. Mr. Gascoyne had thought gently to dissuade me from indulging in hopes which were improbable of fulfilment. He could not know how carefully I had calculated all the obstacles that stood in the way of my success.

As I returned to my desk I found myself murmuring the word *two*. I had the most difficult part of my task still before me, but so far the two opening campaigns had been brilliant successes. I wondered if the Gascoyne family in general realised how much nearer I was to the succession. Probably with the exception of Mr. Gascoyne and his niece they had no idea of my existence.

I took out the genealogical tree and studied it carefully, although there was little need of this, as I could have passed an examination in the entire history of the Gascoynes up to date at any moment.

There were now four lives between me and the object of my ambition.

My great-uncle Henry, who was now very nearly ninety years of age, lived somewhere in the North of England. It was not necessary to consider him in any way. He was a widower without children. There was Ughtred, the uncle of the present peer, still a man in the prime of life. He might yet marry and have a family. He was devoted to good living and had a reputation as a dilettante. I had never seen him, but he had held office at Court, and was altogether rather an important person.

My difficulties would come when I arrived at the main branch of the family, and I reserved them for the final stroke. I should then be obviously near the succession and might be suspected of motives. A great many eyes would be upon me, and there would probably be a young baby and his perfectly healthy father to deal with. I began to realise that so far I had merely nibbled at my task.

It was advisable to give myself rest for a few months, as I discovered that after each campaign my nerve was apt to be slightly affected. I had proved to my own satisfaction that the dictum, 'murder will out,' was invented to frighten mankind, had in fact been set up as a perpetual bogey. Nat Holway's guilt might be discovered, but the tracing of my anonymous letter would be an almost impossible task.

I was very anxious to know how Janet Gray's affair was progressing, and rather hoped I might be asked to stay at the Grange for a day or two. I gathered as time went on that the friendship between Miss Gascoyne and her aunt had grown stronger and stronger. Mr. Gascoyne told me that their attachment was a

great relief to him, that the companionship of her niece had to a great extent dissipated his wife's melancholy, and that having a common sorrow they were very much in sympathy.

"They admire each other, and it is the dignified and warm friendship of two women to whom respect is essential. By the way, Israel, the girl Janet Gray is married."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, to a young miller called Nat Holway. He is very steady and very well-to-do. I almost wondered——" He pulled himself up abruptly.

"Yes, sir?" I queried.

"Nothing, nothing."

I knew what he had intended to say, and fervently wished that he would get rid of his vague suspicions.

I was glad, therefore, when he continued: "I have often wondered whether my nephew may not have had a fight with some admirer of Janet Gray, a fight that ended unexpectedly in a tragedy."

"Do you intend to pursue the matter?"

"No," he answered, energetically. "I think when a man undertakes the seduction of a girl he must look for violence from those whose feelings he outrages or from those whose hearths he pollutes. I could not if it were my own son bring the avenger to so-called justice. I may be wrong, but I believe that if my niece were asked, she would agree with me."

I breathed a sigh of relief, for they were not precisely the sentiments I had expected from him.

CHAPTER XI

I HAD reached quite a new phase of my career. The boy who had set out in life from the little house at Clapham with a distinctly suburban appearance was now hardly recognisable. I was twenty-three years of age. I knew that I had a certain romantic distinction of appearance, for I had been constantly reminded of the fact by women of society who made it their business to secure as good-looking cavaliers as possible. Someone had once said in my hearing that I was like the young Disraeli. Poor Lady Pebworth, in beginning what she conceived to be the patronage of an obscure youth, had been caught in her own trap, and had thrown modesty and virtue to the winds in an overmastering infatuation; she would likewise have discarded prudence had I been in the mind to allow her to do so. I am quite aware of the charge of coxcombry which will be made against me for writing in such a way about my conquests, but when a man sets forth to tell the history of his life he must make up his mind to be impervious to two accusations which are sure to be thrown at the head of the truthful memorist, namely, those of vanity and exaggeration. When we reflect that no novelist or diarist has ever yet dared to paint a truly analytical picture of a human career it is evident how amazingly difficult

such a performance must be, and there are few who would be willing to risk the fury of mankind by giving an accurate description of their lives and actions.

Jean Jacques Rousseau certainly made a pretence of doing so, but we read his incomplete memorials with a solemn wink and our tongue in our cheek. His dissipations and weaknesses, which he parades with such an ostentation of candour, he knows are not such as to bring down any great obloquy. Perhaps there is philosophy at the foundation of such an attitude on the part of society at large. An absolute ingenuousness on the subject of our failings might breed too broad a tolerance to suit the present views of humanity. I myself have no intention of admitting the public into the inner sanctuary where dwell my most esoteric emotions. The philosopher wisely avoids the company of those who, indifferent to the opportunities of learning, are ready to practise the habits of street urchins at a sight foreign to the daily life of the streets. Jean Jacques' drama was always legitimate.

Lady Pebworth undoubtedly was the victim of a great passion. Fortunately, she was possessed of a lord and master who was of an unsuspecting nature, otherwise I am afraid that in spite of all my discretion she would have landed me in the Divorce Court. The Peeress and the stockbroker's clerk would have made a meal for many a prurient appetite.

My income was three hundred pounds a year, more or less, and with the instincts of my race I had begun to speculate in a safe, quiet sort of way.

I made no boast of the nearness of my relation to the Gascoyne family in such society as I obtained entrance to. I was anxious for the matter to remain unknown.

I woke one morning to read in the social intelligence that Lady Gascoyne had been safely delivered of a son. The news was not the shock it might have been, as I had known for some time that she was in an interesting condition. The child would have to be removed as well as his father.

It was a task that might well tax the ingenuity of any man. I thought the matter over carefully, day after day. I knew their house, which overlooked the Green Park, and sat for hours gazing at the windows as if they might be expected to furnish inspiration.

Lord Gascoyne was now twenty-six years of age. Without being in any way a prig—in fact, he was a man of some gallantry—he had a great sense of his responsibilities, and was leaving the Guards in order to manage his huge estates the better. He and his wife were little heard of. Despite the fact of her American birth, she was the genuine great lady as opposed to the pinchbeck imposition. Her happiness was not measured by the amount of social noise she could make. Everything about her and her husband was correct, and with the exception of the extreme good looks of both probably somewhat dull.

They belonged to the inner sanctuary of English aristocracy, and I could not at the moment see how I was to scale the fortress of their exclusiveness. I knew that they had been perfectly ready to entertain and make much of the young Gascoynes. Harry Gascoyne had told me as much, but this was a very different thing from welcoming the son of the Hebrew commercial traveller. They might not be so easy to conciliate as Miss Gascoyne.

Lord and Lady Gascoyne's entertainments were not made a feature of in the newspapers. It was a

privilege to attend them, and the entrée to Lady Gascoyne's drawing-room was a passport to any society.

Lady Pebworth, I knew, visited them, and had been a guest at Hammerton, but I did not think it very probable she would be able to introduce me, and I was not quite sure that I cared about owing my introduction to her.

CHAPTER XII

ALTHOUGH I had from motives of policy given up the idea of making Sibella my wife, I was none the less somewhat overcome at receiving an invitation to her wedding. Grahame Hallward and I had lunch together in the City the day I received it.

"What do you think, Israel? Lionel has asked me to be his best man," he said.

"Are you going to?"

"Well, I told him that I thought it was rather silly for the bride's brother to be best man, and I asked him whether there was not someone else. He got quite annoyed, and so did Sibella. He was angry, I believe, chiefly because he could not think of a friend as a substitute. As a matter of fact, I don't think he has many friends."

"I don't understand him," I said. "He goes about a great deal, and knows some very decent people, and yet the men don't like him."

"Women do, though, don't they?"

"I suppose so."

"I'm sorry for Sibella, Israel—I am really. Of course, she won't suffer so much as other women might when she finds him out, because she has no heart."

"Do you really think that, Grahame?"

"Sorry to say I do. Of course, I would not say

such a thing to anybody else, but you're almost like one of us."

I gave him an affectionate glance. I was certainly very fond of Grahame.

"You should ask him if he would not like me to be his best man," I said.

We both laughed.

"I should think he rather objects to my coming to the wedding at all. I'm coming, all the same."

Grahame said nothing, and I guessed that there had been some discussion on the subject. I knew that Lionel Holland was not by any means above the vulgarity of showing temper should I be asked against his wish.

"Come and see us on Sunday. Lionel won't be there, and Sibella particularly told me to ask you."

"I'll come," I said. I wondered why Sibella was anxious to see me. "You'll be awfully dull at home without her," I added.

"Yes; she may not have much heart, but at the same time she's jolly good company."

"Yes, that's exactly the expression. Even when we were children she always kept things going."

We both grew a little quiet and thoughtful. I had had delightful times in the Hallward schoolroom with Grahame and Sibella, but I had travelled far since then. I was fighting also against a great and torturing jealousy. I was by practice enabled to keep this feeling well under control, but it had a habit of having a hasty nibble at my heart-strings when I was not on the alert.

Sibella received me with more subdued sweetness than I had ever known her display.

"You are getting on, Israel, aren't you?"

“ Oh, I don't know ; I'm just making a living, that is all.”

“ Why, you know that you are quite an important person now.”

I was surprised to find that no one else came in, and more surprised when she proposed that we three should spend the evening round the schoolroom fire, as we used to do. I began to gather from Sibella's manner that she was not looking forward to her marriage without misgivings. That she was in love with Lionel in a sort of way I had no doubt, but the price that was to be paid for a few months of ecstasy had begun to dawn upon her. Woman-like, she could not forbear to count the cost. She had never been ignorant of my feelings towards her, and from the day Lionel first entered the house there had been a constraint whenever we were left alone. Such a constraint fell upon us when Grahame, having remembered that he had a message for a friend who lived a little way off, left us for half an hour.

I believe it was at that moment that Sibella began to develop a vague feeling that from every point of view she had made a mistake. In fact, the unexpected happened, as it always does. The absolutely—from the worldly point of view—immoral and incongruous came about as if swiftly driven forward by some occult forces, and she was in my arms sobbing hysterically and erotically, without either of us quite knowing how it had happened.

I had thirsted for her lithe, sweet figure and the caressing of her golden hair so long that I was swept away and found myself murmuring :

“ I have not given you up, Sibella.”

She hardly gathered what I meant, and I put her

arms round my neck. Her mouth had always been to my mind her chief charm, and when I found my lips pressed against its large, sweet lines—which should have ciphered a broad, generous nature—I lost my head—that is, if I had had any desire to keep it.

Old Mr. and Mrs. Hallward dozed away in their arm-chairs by the drawing-room fire. Miss Hallward was writing her interminable Sunday letters in the library. I have no doubt the house outside looked just as respectable and unemotional to Grahame when he returned to it as when he went out of it, but, all the same, I was wondering when he rejoined us if Sibella would think it necessary to break off her marriage at the last moment rather than marry a man she had betrayed. She might do so, although in my wildest delirium I had kept some vague powers of caution and calculation, and had concluded that morality with Sibella meant self-interest.

I drove home to my rooms in St. James's laughing with triumph. Poor Lionel Holland would have all the appearance of victory with none of its reality.

Had Sibella been a woman of ordinary susceptibilities, I might have received a letter from her the next morning imploring me to bury the incident, accusing herself wildly, and vowing to make a model wife; but the elusive one—as I had named her to myself—was too clever to commit herself to paper, and if her marriage took place she would have it conducted without risks.

The marriage did take place, and I went as a guest. If it was bad taste on my part, it was entirely a question between Sibella and myself. She certainly betrayed no resentment. She had the grace to be very pale and subdued, which gave indications that there might be

a certain leaven of conscience somewhere. Holland took my congratulations civilly enough. I think he was feeling really happy, so much are human beings capable of being imposed on, and so little can we make sure of appearances.

They evidently both looked forward to emerging from suburban society, for they were to return from their honeymoon to a flat in Mount Street, although Mr. and Mrs. Holland had wished them to settle down close to their house at Clapham.

"I was not going to agree to that," Sibella had said. "I want to say good-bye to Clapham for good and for all. If it had been Hampstead, I should not have minded so much, but Clapham—ugh! it gets more and more sordid every year."

I did not suppose I should have the entrée to their establishment if Lionel could help it, but I meant to make an attempt, all the same. Sibella was necessary to me.

I suffered a good deal from jealousy the first few days of her married life, but there is a merciful dispensation of Providence which blunts the keenest pangs of wounded love very rapidly when the inevitable has taken place, however sharp they may remain when sustained by hope.

CHAPTER XIII

"My niece is staying with us, Israel," said Mr. Gascoyne one afternoon as he was leaving the office. "Will you dine with us on Friday evening?"

I said I should be delighted. Mr. Gascoyne and his wife had stayed at the Grange till the summer was almost over, and I knew that Miss Gascoyne was going to shut the house up for the winter, and that there was a possibility of her selling it in the spring.

She looked very stately and beautiful in her deep mourning, and was evidently glad to see me. We were together for fully a quarter of an hour before Mr. and Mrs. Gascoyne came down, and she talked quite freely and unconstrainedly of her brother.

The more I saw of her, the more I was struck by her absolute lack of pose in any small acceptation of the word. It positively gave me a sense of personal dignity to be with her.

"I am thinking of selling the Grange," she said. "So long as there was my brother it seemed to me a certain sort of duty that the offshoots of a great family should keep up an appearance and have a fair country residence." Then she smiled. "I am afraid, however, that my views are changing. I don't look upon the Gascoynes as quite such great people as I used to do, though I still think that if one bears a great name one owes it a duty."