

# **A Sydney Sovereign: And Other Tales**

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**A Sydney Sovereign**

**And Other Tales**

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# **A Sydney Sovereign**

# A Sydney Sovereign

## Chapter I

### The Black-Edged Envelope

MR. BARRINGTON had ridden over to Bulgaroo for his letters on the afternoon of February 15, '78—a day remembered long after on the Bulgaroo Plains for its fierce and malignant heat. His way had taken him along a dusty track that crossed his sheep-run, and the prospect that it had opened had not been enlivening. At the best of times there is much in the Australian landscape that can only be admired from a subjective, or at least from a utilitarian point of view. At its worst, when, in squatting language, the plains are “as bare as your hand,” it is indescribably hideous. Mr. Barrington thought it so this afternoon—viewing it with the sensations of a man who is practically testing the degree to which the thermometer can rise in Australia in the sun—and he was not sorry when the galvanised iron roof of the Bulgaroo post-office appeared in sight. Post-office it might have been called, however, more from courtesy than for the reason of its taking precedence in an official capacity in the township; for it was general store, butcher's shop, and “public” as well; and I am afraid that it was in the fulfilment of the functions of the last-named office that its influence was most widely felt in Bulgaroo.

Such as it was, Mr. Barrington dismounted before it, and having passed the bridle of his tired mare over a hook that projected from one of the white-painted verandah-posts in front of it, went inside, wiping his forehead with his handkerchief, and asked the young lady, who was fanning herself with a *Bulgaroo Advertiser* behind the bar, whether “his English mail letters had come?”

“Is it the mail ye'd be inquiring afther?” replied the young lady, with just such an accent as might have been looked for from the manner of her reply; “an' a letter with a black idge to it been waitin' for yez this two days an' more!”

So saying, she rose with the alacrity of a person upon whom the stimulating office of imparting the news of a domestic calamity has unexpectedly devolved, and proceeded to search amongst a packet of greasy envelopes for the letter in question. Perhaps she took a little longer over this operation than was absolutely necessary, but then there was the zest of watching the suspense of the victim.

There were occasionally exciting scenes in the bar-room of the Bulgaroo

post-office, as, for instance, when a Chinaman had been set upon by a drunken shearer, but a letter with a black “idge” to it was not an everyday occurrence. The young lady behind the bar was determined to make the most of it, and something is to be said for the way in which she tried to conceal her satisfaction as she handed the envelope to Mr. Barrington.

But I am afraid the result fell short of her anticipations after all. There was no “tearing open of the letter on the spot, with a groan and a staggering backwards,” as she had allowed herself to hope there might be; the recipient of the letter did not even unfold it in her presence. If he changed colour, a thirty-miles ride under a blazing sun, and subjection to a perfect *mitraille* of fine dust the whole time, prevented the fact from becoming evident enough to be quite satisfactory. And to add to her disappointment, he even put the black-edged envelope itself out of sight, slipping it with great composure into the breast-pocket of his silk overall (the “all” being represented in this instance by a foulard shirt, a pair of doeskin riding breeches, and a stout leather belt). After which he was collected enough to order a glass of half-and-half, and further to pay for a liqueur glass of some sweet and fiery compound on behalf of the young lady behind the bar. He even remembered his mare, whose nose was scraping itself against the bottom of a dry horse-trough outside; and after he had seen that the groom had brought her a bucket of water, and had been mindful to “tip” the man with Australian liberality, he remounted her deliberately, and rode quietly away, leaving the young lady in a state of justifiable exasperation.

“Did ye evert see the like o’ that?” she observed to the groom, after they had watched the retreating forms of the mare and its rider until they were lost to view on the bush road; “an’ maybe a sweetharrt or a sishter lyin’ dead in the ould counthry! Ah, thim’s the kind that’ll brake a poor girl’s heart wid their cruelty—bad luck to thim.”

This was hardly a fair deduction, as even the young lady herself might have allowed, if she could have followed the squatter a little farther on his homeward road. As soon as he was alone with the charred stumps and the gaunt white trunks of the gum trees—alone with that indifferent Mother Nature, to whom we carry our joys and sorrows, as though she had ever bestowed the smallest sympathy upon either—he drew out the black-edged envelope, and set himself to read its contents. His handsome face—for despite its mask of sunburn and dust it was undeniably a handsome face, of a good, clean-cut, manly cast—grew sad enough and heavy enough as he read. And then the fluttering of the open sheets in his hand was not caused entirely by the gusts of hot wind that came sweeping over them and turning them upside down and inside out with such indiscreet and persistent

violence. No. I think the same cause that made his heart beat and his temples tighten may have helped to set the letter trembling in his hand as well. Yet this cause was all contained in four words that seemed to start out of the page before he had time to see the context, or to make anything at all out of the phrases that should have softened it for his understanding.

Writers of bad news often give themselves a deal of useless trouble when they seek to “prepare the mind” of the person to whom they are sending an afflicting piece of news by roundabout methods. At best they only succeed in prolonging the instants of torturing suspense, for no one ever yet received the announcement of a death without divining, with the first line, that it was nothing short of *death* that he was to be informed about. Mr. Barrington overlooked the conventional “I must prepare you for something that will shock and grieve you greatly,” and the inevitable “God's will be done,” and fell right upon the blurred paragraph at the bottom of the page, from which “Your brother is dead” detached itself, as though the words had been written in living characters before him. It was all that he could grasp at the moment, and it seemed to bring with it a sudden chill that was curiously out of keeping with the temperature of the Bulgaroo Plains.

But a minute later—God forgive us—he was thinking of the manifest revolution in his own life that the unexpected news brought with it. The change from the “backwoodsman” that he had felt himself until now into Squire Barrington, of Barrington Hall, in the Isle of Wight—as good a title and as good an estate as any to be found in the England of squiredom. But he did not harbour the thought more than an instant. He put it away from him as mean and degrading, and set himself to recall the image of his dead brother, as far as his recollection might aid him.

It was by this process that he discovered that, apart from all personal and selfish considerations, the news he had just received was more of a shock than of an actual heart-stab after all. A man well up in the thirties, the past ten years of whose life have been spent in the absorbing cares that fat cattle, store sheep, washed and greasy wool, and all the other interests of a squatter's life bring with them, could not, in any case, feel the sense of desolation that a home-bred brother would experience under such tidings. Still, there are tender regrets, softening recollections, a feeling that more might have been done if the possibility of death had been taken into consideration, that take the place of a more poignant grief. Mr. Barrington reflected that he might have been more thoughtful in the matter of letter-writing, and have bestowed less time perhaps upon his model machines (he had a constructive bent that was worthy of Arkwright himself). In the same way he need not have kept putting off his promised “run home” year after year, until there was nothing but his brother's tombstone left to greet him.

True, "home" had not always been in his case the place that Mrs. Hemans and other poets and poetesses have represented it. Mr. Barrington could not remember the period in his existence when he had felt in harmony with all the members of his family at one and the same time. As to his parents, he had come to look upon them in the light of those little fine-and-wet-weather puppets, who are never seen in each other's company, because each is the embodiment of a contrary principle. If he had carried on the simile it would have been to feel that it was his father who came out in the sunshine, and his mother who was associated (like the figure with the umbrella) with the world under its damper aspect. His father belonged to the ideal type of the jovial squire, and would have been as hard-drinking and hard-living as the hardest-drinking and hardest-living of his compeers, had he lived in a former generation. But, living in the present one, he had indulged his hereditary instincts in other ways than by disappearing under the dining-room table, or by making his horse jump over it. However, he had died many years ago, and his *frasques* were buried with him. But his memory was still green in the squatter's heart.

Mr. Barrington's mother, still alive, had no jovial impulses. While she was yet a little child she disciplined herself and her dolls instinctively and unnecessarily, and as she grew older she continued to apply the same rule of life to her household. Her eldest son, the one who had just died, was not unlike her. The squatter had not been entirely happy in the company of his mother and brother, irreproachable personalities though they were. And as though to complete the "ugly duckling" sensation that he had carried about after his father's death, his youngest brother, now curate in the parish of Barrington, was anything but a sympathiser. It was evident that the mother's nature must have been the stronger, since of the three lads only the second one could be said in any way to "take after" his father. Ernest, the youngest of the three, was indeed less outwardly severe than his eldest brother, but not a whit behind him in his interpretation of the "whole duties of man." From a very early age he had resolved upon entering the Church, and our unfortunate and unregenerate hero, hemmed in on all sides by chilling and repressing influences, had acted as most other high-spirited young men would have acted in his place. First he had performed the feat which, whether as a human or an equine one, is not unattended with risk, known as "kicking over the traces." Then he had joined the army, and then he had "lived," in the sense, not indeed the best one, that young men in his circumstances attach to living.

Of course, we must prepare to have our acts judged by the measure of the *milieu* whence the judgment proceeds. Reginald Barrington had certainly lived what is called fast; and he had made debts—more than he could

pay—at least without applying to his brother and mother; and he had bent a fine intelligence to the pursuits of bookmaking and billiard-playing a little more than was actually necessary. But by his brother officers, and by the world in general, he was not looked upon as having exceeded the limits within which the strictest honour required him to keep. At Barrington Hall another standard of measurement was applied to him. His brother, wedded to a childless wife, and leading the most exemplary of lives by her side; his mother, who would have turned all the world into one vast parish of the Church of England, made scant allowances for his shortcomings. Between him and the prodigal son who wasted his heritage in riotous living there was only the difference that the prodigal was penitent and *he* was not. For the first and last time his debts were paid. But the usurers themselves could not have made harder conditions (though of a different kind) than the unrepentant prodigal's own kith and kin. The conditions of helping him were, that he should sell out of his regiment before he was five-and-twenty, and emigrate straightway to Australia, there to take up land and keep himself alive upon it, after receipt of the small advance that he was to receive from his brother after the payment of his debts. As the choice was not left to himself, but rather to that of the very partial arbitrator known as “Hobson,” he had nothing for it but to accept, and this is how he comes to be riding across Bulgaroo Plains to his unhomelike homestead on this particular day of February, '78.

## **Chapter II**

### **Which Treats of a Family Album**

WHEN Reginald had come to the end of his dreary journey, and taken a moonlight plunge into a waterhole in the bed of the fast-drying creek at the foot of the garden; when he had dined off a wild duck and a glass of wine, in the very unaesthetic apartment that served as dining-room, library, smoking-room, and office in one; when he had walked up and down the verandah outside with his great black retriever, Maori, at his heels, and smoked two pipefuls of a mild fragrant tobacco—then, and not till then, did he draw out his letter again, and seating himself in a leathern arm-chair by the table, and drawing the kerosene lamp a little closer, proceed to read it afresh.

For a long time he had cherished an idea of taking a run across to see the “old place,” and had kept putting it off, like a man who, in sailors' language, has no sweetheart to pull his ship over the seas. (Though, as far as this question of a sweetheart was concerned, there remains more to be

said anon.) But now delays were no longer to be thought of. Even if it had not fallen out that the present was a slack time, the shearing season being long over, and the lambing season not due for several months to come, he must still have abandoned the shearing and the lambing, that had seemed hitherto to demand him so imperatively, and have started forthwith for home. His mother's letter—for it was his mother who had filled these black-bound sheets with her large angular handwriting—left no room for doubt upon that point. The estate required his immediate presence. The Barringtons had always been their own stewards, and the sudden death of the late squire, whose management, truth to tell, had been of the kind that his tenants characterised as “muddling,” had left matters at a very complicated stage. Mrs. Barrington besought her son to return instantly. Reginald smiled as he read to perceive that there was a subtle change in his mother's manner of addressing him. The struggling squatter had not been accustomed to enjoy the consideration to which a squire of Barrington Hall was entitled, and the first impression of it was a curious one.

“I need not say how I long to see my Reginald,” said the letter, “now that it has pleased the Lord to take my dear and precious eldest-born to Himself. But you must prepare to find me greatly changed, though I can still, thank God, take my two-mile walk to church every Sunday morning.”

And now came a part of the letter which caused Mr. Barrington to come to a long halt, after which he read it over again, slowly and thoughtfully, laying down the sheet at last with a half sigh, as of one who bids farewell to some dream of youth, and resigns himself to accept the sober reality and to make the best of it.

—“You will be doubtless interested to hear that since the sad event Lucy has been constantly with me.

She has filled the place of a true daughter, and her ministrations have been of indescribable comfort to me. For sweetness of disposition and true piety I have never met her equal. He will indeed be favoured who wins her for his wife. Since she came into possession of Linlith at her father's death there have been many seekers after her hand, but her aunt tells me that they sue in vain. Perhaps a certain runaway knows the reason of this.”

After Mr. Barrington had read so far something prompted him to jump up suddenly and strike a match with a vigorous hand. When he had lit his pipe and carried it out to the verandah, where the mosquitoes were whining (in a menacing chorus in the hot, dark air), he took at least six turns up and down before he came back to his letter. Even then he did not set himself to read it again, but lay back in the leathern arm-chair, taking slow, methodical pulls at his richly-glazed pipe.

The forked flame of the kerosene lamp, trimmed by indifferent fingers,

had smoked and blackened the glass. There were suicidally-disposed moths whirling around it. The corners of the room (whose rhubarb-coloured paper and flapping ceiling of canvas would have driven a nervous person mad) were wrapped in gloom.

There are many people who, in Reginald's place, would have fled from these uncongenial surroundings. Not a stone's-throw from the homestead was the working manager's hut, with as rough an interior as you please, but still lightened by the presence of a real Mark Tapley of an overseer, who had seen better days, and who would probably be called upon to boss the station when its master abandoned it. The squatter, you see, would not have had far to go for companionship. There was no actual necessity for him to sit under that smoky lamp, with the black-edged letter at his elbow, and nothing to cheer his solitude but the occasional wail of a distant curlew—so like the moan of a Banshee that an Irishman would immediately have referred it to the news that the letter contained.

But Mr. Barrington continued to sit on, nevertheless. I daresay the moths, the mosquitoes, and even the dirge of the discontented curlew, were all unheeded by him. In the flesh he was certainly in a very dreary part of the infinite Australian wilds. Tonight it was too dark to see farther than to the rough verandah posts outside, but under the eye of day the landscape assumed a harsh and forbidding aspect. There were scraggy gum-trees, that looked as though they had tried to wrench themselves out of their barks, with grey, distorted branches, bare of leaves; and miles of post-and-rail fencing, that stretched away to the horizon, across a waste of brown and yellow herbage. These were the actual realities that encompassed Mr. Barrington. But in the spirit, and every one knows that the spirit's domain extends from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven, he was no longer in the wilds of Australia, or even in Australia at all.

He was in a lovely English village in the Isle of Wight. Some way out of the village was an old grey mansion, of which the entire front, and a tall side chimney besides, were covered with such a mat of ivy that it was only by looking at the bare corner near the dormer window that the original hue of the stone could be discovered. Anything softer than the blending of the grey and green it would have been impossible to imagine. In front of the house was one of those exquisite lawns that old painters used to delight in as a background for their artificial goddesses. Upon this lawn Mr. Barrington saw himself stretched, in the lazy mood of adolescence that finds its echo in Shelley or De Musset. Over his head the branches of a beautiful beech tree extended their glorious layers of green, and underneath their shadow, upon a bench as old as they, a grey-eyed girl, with a soft profile and pale cheeks, was seated, with her crochet-work in her lap.

At this point of his reflections the squatter reached out his hand to a side table, whereon vellum-covered ledgers, samples of wool, melon seeds, rulers, a large stock-whip, and a letter-weighing machine were in dusty and comfortless proximity, and drew from it an old portrait-album, of which he turned over the pages, with eyes that a French writer would have described as *attendris*, but which no English word can altogether adequately render. The likeness it contained dated from more than a decade back, but though the art of photography is so much improved nowadays that people seem actually to grow younger with every fresh portrait that is taken of them, there was yet something in these dark-looking effigies of his friends that brought the characteristics of each strongly before Mr. Barrington's mind.

Individuality declares itself in so many ways. Even though a portrait may be a libel upon the person whom it represents, there is always something in its outline or attitude that could have belonged to nobody else in the world. At best, portraits are but lay-figures, upon which we hang our memories of the dead or absent; and when they are as bad as Mr. Barrington's collection, all that can be said is that we must trust most to our own clothing of them.

And here I feel strongly tempted to make a Victor Hugoish disquisition upon portraits, and declare that for a dispassionate criticism of them they should be referred strictly to critics who have no knowledge of the originals. If any further proof were wanted of the manysidedness of truth, and the widely divergent points of view whence those who are closest to us must behold us, a record of the various opinions that one poor, unpretending photograph will elicit would be one of the most conclusive.

Who has not been told, of the very same likeness, by members of the very same family, that it is "exactly like," that it is "a complete caricature," that it is "good as a picture, but not at all like," and that it is "a failure as a picture, but very like," all in the same day—until, in the end, one feels as though one had not a scrap of objective identity left.

But to return to Mr. Barrington, and the special gallery that he is engaged in passing under review. The album has lain by, perhaps, more years than he can remember, so besides greeting his old acquaintances, he is able to bring the dispassionate outside standard that we have spoken of as being the only *fair* one to bear upon his relatives.

What would be the verdict upon the first portrait in the book—his mother's? I think the words "British matron" would be a sufficiently exhaustive one. There are attributes included in this title, when it is pronounced in a certain tone, which we have learned to recognise as well as those of the British lion itself. Yet Mrs. Barrington's portrait showed traces of a handsome girlhood. If the silhouette that the squatter's shadow was outlining at this moment on the rhubarb-papered wall would have

made an agreeable cameo carving of the least detestable of the Caesars, it was because he had inherited the arched nose, the prominent brows, and the square jaw of the portrait he was now considering. A British matron of the Roman type might have been the extension of the first verdict upon Mrs. Barrington, and a rider *might* have been added to the effect that the austerity of the likeness had been unduly intensified by bad chemicals.

As regarded austerity, there would have been no occasion to make excuses for the succeeding portrait in the album. It would have been hard perhaps to say, at the first glance, whether it was that of a country gentleman, or of a jolly old stage coachman of the Gilpin era. But whether as gentleman or coachman, it belonged to a kindly, jovial, self-indulgent, soft-natured type.

There was nothing in the face of the squatter that could be immediately connected with it. Yet, as his fingers rested upon the pages of the album, it might have been seen that they were identical with those which rested upon the knees of the portrait. Only, in the living hand they had been hardened and broadened by downright hard contact with the axe and the hammer, whereas in the portrait they looked as soft and white as a woman's. I think the verdict on this likeness would have been "Nobody's enemy but his own;" and, what is more, the portrait conveyed the impression of having arrived at much the same opinion itself. But this conclusion did not affect its good-humoured attitude towards itself, or things in general, in the very least. Mr. Barrington could not look sternly upon this portrait—less than ever now, with the thoughts suggested by the black-edged letter lying next to it. But he gave an involuntary sigh as he turned the page over.

The next portrait was that of a very young man, whose whole expression and attitude proved that he was, above all things, *correct*. Correct in dress, in manners and in morals, correct in the French as well as the English acceptance of the word. Reginald had never been able to look at this portrait in the days of his unruly youth without a strong desire to punch it. But, seeing it now, from the standpoint of his maturer years, and connecting it with the letter by his side, it was wonderful with what softened feelings he regarded it. He detected a something of earnestness, and anxiety, and conscientious-striving-after-right about it that touched him profoundly. The servant with *one* talent, but full of an overwhelming anxiety to do good service with it against the day of reckoning, might have been the judgment passed upon Reginald's elder brother.

Turning from the dead to the living, the last of the family portraits disclosed a young, a very young, curate, with Oxford written upon its every line. The curious part of it was that its affiliation with the jolly old coachman was unmistakable, notwithstanding the entire difference of its

pose and demeanour. Something like a smile hovered around Reginald's eyes as he considered it. It did not give the impression of a *strong* man, either in the physical or intellectual sense. Yet the forehead was high and refined; a little circumscribed, perhaps, in breadth, but not lacking in ideality. The squatter could not quite bring himself to contemplate "sitting under" this small brother of his in the church at Barrington. He remembered that he had been somewhat given to sitting upon *him*, or, in other words, to knocking him about, after the unjustifiable fashion peculiar to boyhood, in days gone by. He had called him "Miss Charlotte," instead of Charlie; but "Miss Charlotte" was now invested with an authority to which his former tyrant must defer. He wore a long black coat and a small gold cross. His curate's hat was on the chair by his side. Reginald looked long at this portrait, and when he finally turned it over it would have been impossible to tell by his expression just what his verdict would have been. The next, and last, of the likenesses which concern us carried the squatter back to the lawn and the beech-tree—the open "Shelley" lying on the grass and the quiet figure seated on the bench with its crochet. It displayed the features of a young, though not a very youthful-looking girl, with something of the expressionless beauty of a Perugino's Madonna in her placid countenance—the beauty that comes of a correct profile and smoothly-parted hair, drawn down on either side of a fair, submissive face. This was Reginald's fate. Between him and Lucy, in their very early days, there had existed a kind of informal engagement, unrecognised by Lucy's papa, who declared that a second son, without "prospects" of any kind, was not justified in dangling after his daughter. Singularly enough, it was Reginald who had preached patience at these times, and when nothing remained for him at the end of his career in the army but to emigrate, almost penniless, to Australia, it was he who had insisted upon freeing Lucy from her allegiance.

"It may be years before I have a home to offer you," he said; "it would be a wicked thing to ask you to wait, upon the chance of my being in a position to satisfy your father in ten or twenty years' time."

But Lucy would have preferred that Reginald should bind her by a promise of constancy. She had the kind of nature that has led poets to compare women with woodbine. She clung to him as to her first and only love. Why did he not take her with him to Australia? She would work too. He would see she could work, and she extended ten transparent little fingers that had never handled anything rougher than a crochet-needle in their life. Reginald was gallant enough to kiss these little fingers in succession, but as regarded the proposition of their toiling for him, he shook his head in a manner from which there was no appeal. Perhaps he

had his doubts as to the marketable value of the illuminated cards and the fine embroidery they were to achieve for him at the antipodes. At least he resisted their prayer. He embraced Lucy in a tranquil and brotherly fashion, and the following week he was on his way to Melbourne in one of the new P. and O. boats, feeling that things had fallen out for the best. Lucy was a good little thing, and would make some country squire happy before the year was out. And he, for his part, would be the first to wish her joy.

And now his mother had told him that Lucy had remained unwed all these years for his sake! What an unfeeling block he must be not to feel more deeply moved! He looked once more at the portrait. Lucy's whole life was written there. Her whole innocent life, of which there was not a single day that might not have been recorded in rose-coloured ink, and presented as a prize to a *Rosière*. So much visiting with her maiden aunt (who had always taken the place of mother to Lucy since her own mother's death); so much reading of Macaulay, of Miss Yonge, of Tennyson, or of Eugénie de Guêrin, when there was French to be laboured through; so much practising, fancy-working, driving, and school or poor visiting! All her existence was there. Though who could say how many gentle sighs and heart-throbs for the absent Reginald found a place in it as well?

There was a marked expression of discontent—the discontent that comes of self-upbraiding — in the squatter's eyes as they dwelt upon this portrait. Lucy had been barely eighteen when it was taken, and now she must be thirty and—how much? How the years of waiting must have dragged on! She must be beginning to look quite old. She was like Mariana in the moated grange, and it was all his own fault. Pooh! Perhaps his mother was mistaken after all! Lucy's letters were like those of a sister, a favourite sister, and he had been careful every time he spoke of coming home to leave the possible end of his visit out of the question.

For how was he to force his feelings? Miss Edgworth makes propinquity the all-powerful factor in the bringing about of marriages, and propinquity was certainly responsible for his early and fleeting fancy as regarded Lucy. She lived close by, in a large gloomy house, wherein she was kept by her father in a state of tutelage. He thought her a sweet girl, and a good girl, but if he had not seen her so constantly, it would never have occurred to him to fall even temporarily in love with her. But he saw her grow up, and there is something almost irresistible to a very young man in watching the child he has played with “put on the grace of womanhood.” Still, he had never quite known how his friendship for her had glided into a betrothal; for it was impossible to imagine that Lucy, sweet, modest Lucy, with her virginal brow and timid manner, had contributed the principal share in bringing it about. No! he had never been really in love with her. Had he

ever been really in love in his life? Once or twice, perhaps, though he had outlived his passion; yet while it lasted he had recognised that it was something quite different from the sentiment he had bestowed upon Lucy. And now fate and Lucy's fidelity were drawing him back to her once more. They would prove too strong for him in the end! Well, they were perhaps kinder to him than he deserved. Who was he, and what had his life been, that he should crown the autumn years of it with a spring idyl? With a gentle companion by his side, and the home of his ancestors for his own, what room would there be for regrets? The latter reflection reminded the squatter that he must already be up and doing. He closed his family gallery, and with the faithful Maori at his heels, set off to confer with his overseer.

## Chapter III

### The Last of the Portraits and the First of the Sovereign

THERE was summer lightning flashing along the horizon as Reginald left the house, and with every flash a transient glimpse of the well-known landscape shot itself before him. With the assistance of this electric illumination, straight from Nature's battery, he made his way across the enclosure of fig-trees and watermelons known as the garden, passed behind the men's kitchen, whence a strong odour of tobacco and the sound of the shuffling of cards reached his nostrils and ears, and walked straight through the open door of a two-roomed cottage or hut, in which a young man, lying back upon one chair, with his feet resting upon another, was playing "Home, Sweet Home" upon the concertina, to the doleful accompaniment of the alternate howling and whining of a large kangaroo dog standing beside him.

"All right, Marl," said the squatter, as the young man was about to rise on seeing him; "don't let me interrupt the performance."

"I've been having an *encore*," said the performer, taking the kangaroo dog by the neck and shaking him. "This old woman's got an ear for music worthy of a Christian."

With this implied compliment to his own powers, the young man offered Reginald his chair, and after reaching the whisky-bottle and tumblers from a side-table, and refilling the monkey from a canvas bag swinging before the door, he seated himself upon the chair that had done duty for his feet, and waited for his employer to speak.

It was easy to see that the squatter and his manager were upon a different footing than that of mere employer and *employé*. Frank Marl's manner was more like that of a man offering hospitality to a friend than of an overseer

waiting for "instructions." To all outward appearance the status of the two men was the same; only, the manager seemed to live even more "in the rough" than his master. A collarless Crimean shirt, corduroys, and boots represented his entire costume. A bit of matting, a rickety side-table and bench, and a promiscuous assortment of pannikins, straps, spurs, bridles, stockwhips, powder-flasks, cartridge-boxes, and guns, with a superb cockatoo upon a perch in the corner, formed his whole stock of furniture. Yet, notwithstanding this rough background, there was nothing rough or ungainly in the young man himself. On the contrary, he had the easy grace of a natural athlete, whose muscles are all in training; and his sun-burned face, probably of a very fair complexion in days gone by, with its dare-devil expression, and honest-looking eyes, of the deepest, purest blue, were very pleasant to look upon.

Possibly Reginald was of the same opinion. At least, it was in an undeniably cordial tone that he spoke. "You see, old fellow, there's no help for it. I'm bound to be off by next mail, and the question is, 'What's to be done with Bulgaroo?'"

It was a question that might well be asked, seeing that at this moment there were no less than seventeen thousand sheep running upon the Bulgaroo Plains; not in number sufficient, indeed, to justify the table-napkins and piano, whose presence (as Trollope has told us) is only implied by a much larger proportion, but arguing, at least, an unlimited supply of mutton and wool, and requiring a good number of hands for their management.

But, *apropos* of the table-napkins and pianos, I must say, in behalf of Australian bush life, that there are "stations and stations." I have, as I write, a picture in my mind of a home in the bush, wherein the guest might fancy himself in Horace Walpole's villa or in a Florentine palace. Nothing but the view of the olive-tinted trees that dot the yellow grass, and the strangeness of Nature's dress in these antipodean regions, could remind him that he was not in Europe. But just as every squatter is not a Maecenas, so every squatter's home is not of the kind that I am thinking of. Bulgaroo had always been looked upon by its proprietor as more of a means than an end. It was in that part of Riverina which is typical of all the dreariest characteristics of the Australian landscape. No one would have cared to build a house where nothing seemed to grow but the raggedest gums and the scratchiest grass. Mr. Barrington had not come to Australia with sufficient means to allow him to take aesthetic considerations into account when he bought his run. He had resigned himself to three or four years of hard work, trusting that at the end of that time he might sell out at a profit and return home, or find a more congenial abiding-place in the colonies.

But the three or four years had grown into seven, and the seven had expanded into twelve, and the prospect of leaving Bulgaroo had seemed just as indefinite as ever, until the black-edged letter had brought a sudden and immediate necessity for putting a long-deferred plan into execution.

But what was to become of Bulgaroo? Strangely enough, notwithstanding the shock of the news of his brother's sudden death, mingled with the thought of his own new responsibilities and dignity, and of poor little Lucy's tenacious attachment, concern for Bulgaroo and its destinies was the uppermost consideration in Reginald's mind as he came to consult with his overseer. If any one could have reassured him, it was the latter. Frank's smile, disclosing a set of teeth that would have done credit to a black fellow, was a kind of "away with melancholy" in smiles. It spoke of such unbounded confidence, not exactly in himself—for he was rather diffident than self-assured as regarded his own powers—but in some presiding deity of youth, and health, and pluck, and honest work, that one could not but feel encouraged by it. Reginald could not quite resist its influence, but he felt that some clearer guarantee of the future well-being of Bulgaroo was necessary. "I know, I know! You think you'll run the place better when I'm out of the way; eh, old man? I'm too cautious, you say! Well! I should go away easier if I could leave some of my caution behind. It's the only thing that makes me hesitate about leaving you in sole charge. *You're not cautious enough!*" . . .

The smile on Frank's face had given way to a preternaturally grave expression as Reginald spoke. "You won't understand," he expostulated. "It's only when *you're* here that I go in for ventures. But there won't be a more cautious, creeping manager in the whole of Australia when you're gone; you'll see . . . small profits and sure returns, . . . and no experiments." . . .

It was now the squatter's turn to smile.

"You won't even have anything to say to my new clipping-machine, I expect. Well, I must chance it, I suppose. Have you got the books made up to date?"

And now followed a long and earnest conversation, more interesting to the proprietor of Bulgaroo than to the world of readers. Sheep to be travelled and sheep to be kept; horses, broken and unbroken, branded and unbranded; outbuildings, machines, stores, and sundowners; fires, clearings, dams, and timber formed the themes of it; and midnight, heavy with heat and blackness, was resting upon the bark roof of the overseer's hut before Mr. Barrington bethought himself of taking his leave.

But before he did so he abandoned the business-like tone that this solemn conference had demanded, and inquired of his young overseer whether he

should not look up his people in the old country. Frank hesitated before replying. His people, truth to tell, concerned themselves very little about his fate.

“Since my poor old dad died,” he replied, “I don't think there's a soul in the old country that cares whether I'm dead or alive. He married again, you know, and his wife was very glad to see the back of me. Wait a bit, though! I've got a little half-sister somewhere or other in the Isle of Wight (that's where my stepmother lived, you know). She was a nice little kid, if ever there was one. I've got her likeness here somewhere.”

He was turning over the contents of an old cigar-box as he spoke, whence he produced, in the end, a not over-clean packet of faded photographs. The one he handed to Reginald was of a round little child of some three or four years of age. It was just such a photograph as grown-up people laugh at in after-years, wondering what they can have had in common with the quaint little mortals who hug a doll or wooden horse to their breasts, while they gaze at nothing with such solemn eyes. The portrait of Frank's little sister was not without a suggestion of himself, and Reginald declared that she must have been a charming child. “She was quite a character,” explained Frank, looking with pride at the shaggy little head and the big astonished eyes of the likeness. “Her name was Robina, but we used to call her Bobby. I gave her a doll once, only her mother collared it, because she caught her making it kneel down by her at family prayers behind her pinafore. I did all I could to get it back for her, and we had some words about it, and then I cleared out. I wrote once after that, to ask about Bobby, but I never got any answer, and I don't know what's become of her by this time.”

“How long was it ago?” asked Reginald. “For if she is still in the Isle of Wight, I can easily find her out for you.”

“Would you?” said the young man, whose eyes had become somewhat wistful with the scrutiny of the likeness.

“She must be quite a young woman by this time. I'd like to send her something, if she remembers me. I dare say she's got a kind of recollection of”—

“By the bye, Frank,” asked Mr. Barrington, suddenly interrupting him, “how have you come to lead such a knock-about life? Didn't your father leave you anything, or have you taught a profession or something?”

The young man shook his head. “My governor was a poor old half-pay lieutenant. He left just enough to keep my stepmother and Bobby from starving, and I could not be a drag upon them. I cleared out when I was about fifteen and 'listed. I have seen fighting, but not of much account; only against the niggers in New Zealand.”

“Well, I'll remember the likeness,” said Reginald.

“I suppose you wouldn't like me to send your sister out to keep house for you at Bulgaroo?”

“Wouldn't I just!” exclaimed the young man; “but not the old woman, please. I'm sure Bobby's game for anything, if they haven't spoilt her. She was the pluckiest little devil you ever saw. She didn't know what fear was.”

While this encomium was being passed upon Miss Robina Marl the squatter was engaged in writing her name thus in his pocket-book, when he had finished which operation his young overseer held out a sovereign to him.

“What's that for?” said Mr. Barrington.

“I know you'll make a shindy about it,” said Frank; “but it's a fancy I've got. It's the only favour I've ever asked of you. I want you to give her something from me if she's alive, or—or—give it to any one who tells you about her.”

“Don't be a fool, Frank,” said the squatter, pushing away the coin. “Of course I'll do what you want.”

But the young overseer was in earnest. “You may call me a fool, or anything you like, sir. It's a fancy—a superstition, if you will. I'll chuck it into the dam if you don't take it, but really I should take it as a greater favour than you have any idea of if you would.”

Reginald's face was a study. Perplexity and indignation, with a gleam of half-compassionate mockery, such as one might bestow upon a favourite child, whom one was conscious of spoiling, were all plainly written there. Finally the compassion got the mastery. “Here! it's not worth arguing about,” he said, dropping the sovereign into his pocket with not the best grace in the world. “You always *were* a pig-headed young fool. You'll see about getting in Fidget and Merrilegs to drive me over to the station on Saturday. Lord, how hot it is! Good-night.”

The following Saturday the Bulgaroo buggy, with a trunk of modest dimensions, was standing outside the weatherboard tenement, with a galvanised iron roof, that represented the railway station. As the solitary porter carried off the trunk, Reginald and Frank exchanged a hearty hand-grip, eloquent of the strong and deep-seated liking that each entertained for the other. The one entered a first-class carriage, and was carried, at the rate of thirty miles an hour, on the first stage of the journey that was to land him Squire Barrington, of Barrington Hall. The other, with a handkerchief under his old bush-hat to keep off sunstroke, and a netting over his face to keep off the flies, was bounding in the elastic old buggy over the scorched Australian plains, at the rate of eleven miles an hour, towards the primitive collection of huts that formed the Bulgaroo homestead. But in the eyes of

both there was plainly visible the strained expression that eyes wear when they are under the influence of a recent parting with something to which they hold, and when they do not belong to the sex to which ready tears bring instant relief; and among the promiscuous heap of sovereigns in Reginald's waistcoat-pocket was one, very bright and yellow, from the Sydney Mint. It was the one with which he was to get something for Bobby.

## Chapter IV

### Second Appearance of the Sovereign

OF the sixteen female candidates for the rite of Confirmation, in whose behalf the Rev. Mr. Barrington had announced from the pulpit the promise of episcopal benediction, the youngest who presented herself in the vestry-room for the preliminary and tri-weekly catechising was Miss Robina Marl. Whether she was incited thereto by the sole desire of partaking of the benefits about which every one who has studied his Church Service must be informed, or whether some leaven of mundane ambition, which prompted her to entreat that her dresses might be lengthened at the same time, had had its share in influencing her to this step, I cannot say. It is certain that she brought the most demure of youthful faces to the class that assembled every Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday in the vestry-room, and that, on more than one occasion, when the curate had been conducting his examination in the somewhat sing-song utterance that a long course of intoning had induced, she had utterly put to rout the elder lambs of his flock by the promptitude and certainty of her replies.

So far nothing could be better. Unfortunately, there were grounds for fearing, before long, that Miss Robina might prove herself to be the *enfant-terrible* of the band, in respect of her comments upon doctrinal discrepancies. Though praise may be perfected out of the mouths of babes and sucklings, we all know that questions that are better left unanswered will sometimes issue from their lips as well. Miss Robina had a knack of holding out the most uncrackable nuts to her pastor, and looking at him at the same time with a pair of expectant blue eyes, that were quite bright with intelligence. It would have gone against the grain of even a John Knox to be constrained to put them off with platitudes. Yet more than once the Rev. Mr. Barrington had known the mortification of seeing these very eyes droop over their Testament with an utterly unconvinced and hopeless expression.

Matters were at this crisis, when Robina, after following out a process of

reflection that was all her own, arrived, one afternoon, at the conclusion that she would like to be a cow. Walking home through the cowslip-scattered fields with her hat off, and her brown head bent under the weight of the contradictions that had just been put into it for her edification, she leaned against a stile, with her chin in her hands, and contemplated the cattle that were standing almost up to their knees in clover in front of her. They were silky-coated, they were sleek, they were satisfied; as well they might be, having nothing but their material well-being to busy themselves about. When Robina looked at them, they just raised their heads with an air of calm disdain, worthy of a great lady, and returned quietly to their occupation. Probably they considered that this intrusive young person, in a blue cotton frock hardly reaching below her ankles, was altogether beneath their notice, or they had it in their minds to read her a lesson in manners, and prove to her that in polite society, among cows, it is not customary to stare.

But I am afraid she did not relax her gaze for that. The tenth commandment, that she had repeated that very afternoon at her Confirmation class, had warned her, truly enough, against coveting her neighbour's ox; but there was no restriction laid upon the indulgence of a certain amount of envy, as regarded the ox itself; and certainly it was not the greed of possession which animated her eyes upon this occasion. Rather, I should say, a kind of sympathy with the utter contentment of the four-footed beasts, mingled with a little wistful longing, upon her own behalf, as she surveyed the peaceful picture. . . . For the cows so evidently had the best of it! Theirs was genuine enjoyment of life. No calls upon their faith to disturb them, and make them feel as though the great universe itself, or they themselves, were all hopelessly wrong, and never, never could be set right! As for her, the curate had told her to wait, for now she saw "through a glass darkly." Did she ask any better than to wait? But why hold the glass up to her at all? Why insist upon showing her through it a smoke-besmeared, blood-besmeared, tryant, and telling her that all the "groaning and travailing" was to His glory? Why not let her fling herself down upon the cool, scented grass and confess her impotence, and take hope and heart from the waves of light that ran towards her across the meadows, and the rustling of the leaves that were dancing in the spring breeze? But there, in the vestry-room, they were shutting all hope out of her heart. Why had she embarked upon this dismal enterprise? Why would not the curate let Hope do duty for Faith? If she was a "vessel of wrath," and her confusion was to be another tribute to the glory of God, whose fault was that?

Evidently the cows were to be envied. What a completely satisfied,

nothing-beyond expression their sleepy eyes seemed to wear! No need for a hereafter of adjustments for them, provided they were well treated here. They *had* their heaven below. Any one might see they were in Paradise, for they could imagine nothing better than the world that “lay about their feet” in the spring grass and the cowslips. They never looked at the sky, or troubled themselves about anything beyond the hedge. As for eternity— if eternity meant “always now”—the cows were in it already; at any rate, they had the sensation of it, for they knew nothing about the black shadow which is waiting for *us* at the end, and they had it in such a pleasant way, too. It was nearly always for what it was to *bring* that Robina troubled about anything she did, and when she had attained it, was it ever entirely what she wanted? And if heaven meant bringing it really, what would there be left to live for? Could any one endure going on in the same way always, and was it not enough to drive one mad to think about it; and, on the whole, might it not be better to go mad, and get out of thinking of oneself; or would it be of any use to look straight at the buttercups, like the cows, and think of nothing— nothing at all—until one had arrived at a cow-like acquiescence in the inevitable?

I am afraid the Rev. Mr. Barrington's pupil was fast relapsing into a kind of unconscious Buddhism, which, as every one knows, enjoins its disciples to remain in fixed contemplation of Nature as a refuge from the oppression of the *ego*. Who can say, indeed, whether the Buddhists themselves were not prompted to such a course in the first instance by watching a cow, like Robina? Cows were already sacred among the Brahmins, and a holy, and consequently well-tended, cow would afford such a perfect type of finality as regards the casting-off of worldly ambitions and fruitless questionings, that she might well have served as a model for beings who, even in that early stage of human history, had learned what it was

“On the torture of the mind  
To lie in restless ecstasy.”

A more favourable time for Robina's absorption into the great heart of Nature it would have been impossible to find. The air was so soft and balmy that she let her hat slip to the ground and stood with her forehead bare. The sweetest little zephyr, full of scent of the May blossoms that it had been sporting with, played over her temples and caressed the nape of her neck. Her head, of the Clytie type, with the hair growing low on the forehead, showed the narrow line of her parting running like a white thread through the silky dark tresses it divided. You would have thought in the

shade that her hair was black, but here in the sunlight it was crossed by burnished bars, and when she shook it out for her mother's braiding of it, it might be seen that it had underlying hues of pale gold and red.

Ah me! what weighty problems, that, for having been turned over in every active brain for so many ages past, will still keep rolling to the end, were at work now under that glossy covering! Any one might have guessed that Robina was having a *think*. Her two hands, as plump as the rest of her round limbs, and with the distressing brand of youthfulness equally prominent in them, were still supporting her chin; her smooth forehead had quite a *docte* wrinkle between the brows; the full red lips, as tempting to kiss as a child's, were close-pressed together. She was so still that an inquisitive sparrow perched upon the stile gradually hopped closer and closer, and the only cow that still eyed her with suspicion turned its back upon her, with a flourish of its tail, that seemed to say it had given her up altogether. But Robina was not destined, upon this occasion, to experience the "philosophic calm" that she was striving after, for her metaphysical speculations were scattered to the winds in a quite unlooked-for manner. The interruption came in the shape of a huge black retriever, that, rushing against her skirts before she was even aware of its neighbourhood, caused her to cry out with alarm. I cannot say whether he resented her quiet attitude as being something constrained and unnatural in a young creature of the chain, or whether he thought to gain her goodwill after the manner of the donkey in the fable. But, however this might have been, his attentions were not reassuring. Robina had been prone to hug dogs indiscriminately from her babyhood, but she was none the less disconcerted now. "Quiet, sir! Down, good dog!" "Poor old man! poor doggie!" Her ringing treble voice, pierced by a note of half-hysterical entreaty that might have appealed to a very Cerberus, was raised in vain. The dog was indifferent to the entire canine vocabulary. He ran at his victim's feet, and buried his head in her skirts. He dragged her hat along with him, and worried it out of its encircling wreath of cherries. After looking distressfully round, Robina made up her mind that she would leave him master of the field. If she had any spark of desire left now to find herself transformed into a cow, it was with the sole desire of charging her enemy with her horns.

But help was closer at hand than she had supposed. Just as she was preparing to run her very hardest towards home, with the nightmare of the dog in full chase at her heels, she heard a sudden, sharp, and peremptory whistle. The black retriever, with a parting lunge of good-fellowship that took away her breath, and all but took her off her feet as well, rushed away from her at the summons. Robina saw her enemy crouch at the feet of a gentleman who was coming towards her and wag his tail with abject and

frantic persistency. She herself, breathing a little hard, picked up her battered hat, and made an attempt to restore it to a semblance of its original shape, with an expression in which her sense of the comic side of the affair seemed to overcome her sense of the injury she had received.

Undoubtedly she had a very rustic air as she was performing this operation. Bareheaded and ungloved, in a blue cotton frock of primitive country make, her colour heightened by the excitement of the contest, as well as by the unwonted warmth of a retreating May sun—there is something to be said for the error into which Mr. Barrington (the curate's brother, and as unlike the curate himself as an Australian squatter can be to an English priest)—there is something, I repeat, to be said for the error into which Mr. Barrington allowed himself to fall. Otherwise, I can answer for it that he would never have been prompted to think of administering the particular form of consolation which suggested itself to him. But no one could have been severely judged for supposing, in his place, that the offer of a golden coin stamped at the Sydney Mint—wherewith to buy a new hat—and the request for a favour which would almost spontaneously occur to “a body” meeting “a body” near “a field of rye,” could have led to such a catastrophe. It seemed, indeed, as though the spirit of the ballad were to be carried into effect altogether, and the “need a body cry?” practically tested, for, far from dropping a curtsey and running away, as Mr. Barrington had anticipated, Robina almost sobbed at the insult.

“How did you dare?” she cried, whether with reference to the sovereign or the kiss did not remain clear to the discomfited gentleman's understanding.

“Don't go away!” he cried breathlessly, almost barring her passage as she sought to escape down the lane. “You *must* hear me. I beg your pardon from the bottom of my heart. I am an awful fool. Upon my honour, I thought you were a little girl, and that you had been frightened out of your wits by my brute of a dog; and then, you understand”—

“I'm not a little girl,” said Robina, wiping her eyes, and only half-appeased by the explanation.

“No; I know you're not, but you looked so like it, and Maori's such a brute—really you mustn't be too hard upon me. What can I say to show you how sorry I am? Will you take my walking-stick and give us both a hammering?”

“Don't be so silly, *please!*”

“There. I can see that you're smiling, although you have turned your face away. You can't think how I should like to be forgiven. Maori, come here, you ruffian! roll your head at the feet of this lady —so. Now lick the dust at her feet! Do you see? That's his way of apologising!”

“Why do you call him Maori?” said Robina, turning her face towards him again. She was paler than before, her lashes were still wet, and her lips were quivering, but there was that about her which brought into the squatter's keen grey eyes the untranslatable light that feminine loveliness is so potent to call forth in the male regard, and ever has been from the days when Adam first took cognisance of Eve in the garden of Eden, and discovered that she was “fair to look upon.” “Did he come from New Zealand?”

“By Jove!” exclaimed the squatter, looking at her with increased admiration, “who would have dreamed of such a thing? Do you know,” with great solemnity, “you're the first Englishwoman I've met with who has ever connected a Maori with New Zealand, in *my* hearing?”

The word “Englishwoman” almost covered the affront of the “little girl” under which Robina was still smarting. She lifted her still moist eyes towards her aggressor's face. He was big, and brown, and heavily moustached—quite old, thought Robina, with the insolence of her seventeen years' standard of man's age. There was something half-serious and half-mocking in his expression. She could not determine whether it was his eyes or his nostrils that gave him this look, but, as she met his gaze, her lids seemed to lower themselves involuntarily, and she felt that the colour was rising again in her cheeks.

“What do you know about New Zealand?” he asked her, and it seemed to Robina that his tone was a shade more peremptory than before. “Have you ever been there?”

“No. I had a brother who went to fight with the Maories—and—and—he never came back.”

“Really?” He seemed to be speaking quite eagerly now. “Perhaps,” looking at her very intently, “I knew him—perhaps he was a brother officer of mine.”

“He wasn't an officer,” said Robina bravely, but this time the flush seemed to rise to her very temples. “He was only a common soldier!”

“Ah!”—Mr. Barrington was smiling now—a warm, friendly smile that somehow gladdened Robina's heart. “I might have known him all the same—isn't your name Robina Marl?”

“Yes,” said the girl, looking at him with childlike wonder in her eyes. “How do you know?”

“Never mind!” said the squatter solemnly, moved by a sudden mischievous desire to pose for a mysterious magician a little longer in the eyes of this charming *ingenue*. “I know a great many things about you—more than you know about yourself— I dare say.”

He had made up his mind that he would not disclose his knowledge of

Frank immediately. He would find out a little more about her, and keep the news and the present for a future *bonne-bouche*. If the young overseer had only commissioned him to give his little sister a proper fraternal greeting on his behalf! But Frank always *was* a thoughtless young fool.

Everything about Robina delighted the squatter. To his thinking, she was a true wayside flower. Her cultivated English struck gratefully upon his ear after the colonialised rendering of it he had been hearing for so long, and he could detect no alloy of provincialism in her accent. As for her manner, she seemed to him like the very incarnation of the heroine of Wordsworth's poem:—

“And Nature said, A lovelier flower  
On earth was never sown;  
This child I to myself will take,  
She shall be mine, and I will make  
A lady of my own.”

“So your brother was in New Zealand?” he questioned again. “How long ago was that?”

“I don't know exactly,” said Robina sadly; “he ran away from home. We don't know what has become of him now.”

All this time the bright yellow sovereign from the Sydney Mint was lying on the ground, in the very spot where it had fallen, after she had indignantly rejected it. “Strange coincidence!” thought the squatter, as he picked it up with a penitent face; he had tried to get rid of that sovereign a score of times, and it was always turning up. On board it had come back to him in sweepstakes and change. He knew it by the peculiar new shine of the freshly-coined yellow gold. And here, before he had been two days in England, it must needs come to his fingers out of every other coin in his waistcoat-pocket. “There is a fate about it,” he thought.

Still, as this or any other sovereign had the same market value, and as he had made up his mind that Frank's present to his sister should be worth several such, there was no reason why he should not try to get rid of it now.

“What a fool I must have been!” he said, holding out the coin once more. “As a proof that I'm forgiven, will you drop this wretched sovereign into the plate next Sunday? I'll come to church if you will. I'll never dare to go again if you refuse. You don't want to keep me away from church for evermore, do you?”

“*That* would not be the cause,” said Robina, promptly.

“Don't be logical!” said the squatter, pleadingly. “Im so frightened of

logical women. I've no weapons to fight them with. Besides, I am a believer in free-will. If I choose to say I won't go to church unless you put that money into the plate, I *make* you the cause of my attending Divine Service or of my remaining away, to the manifest imperilling of my immortal soul."

He said these words with an intonation so exactly like that of the curate that Robina was startled. She was suddenly brought back to a recollection of her vestry-room troubles, which, truth to tell, had been completely thrust out of sight by her late adventure.

"You say that just like Mr. Barrington does," she observed, not heeding the gleam of amused surprise which shone in the squatter's eyes. "Oh! *were* you ever confirmed, and *please* would you mind telling me about it?"

The suddenness of the question, its irrelevancy to the matter in hand, and, more than all, the eager earnestness of the questioner, were altogether so startling and unexpected that the squatter hardly knew how to frame his reply. That very morning he had been shown, among other remarkable relics in the neighbourhood, the grave of "Jane—the Dairyman's Daughter." He had gathered that Jane was a phenomenon of early piety, and that, in obedience to the laws which govern human phenomena of piety, she had died early. He had been offered a small book with a green cover, wherein, for the price of sixpence, the reader may acquaint himself with all the evidences of Jane's precocity, as set forth in her conversations with her spiritual and temporal master, the rector of Brading Church. Did "dairymen's daughters" continue to grow behind the hedges of the Isle of Wight still? Was his new acquaintance in the habit of tilting a theological lance with his brother, who officiated in the same church? From a profane point of view, Mr. Barrington thought that spiritual exercises of this kind might be charming; but taken unawares, and not sure of the ground he was treading upon, he felt that it behoved him to feel his way carefully before he ventured to indulge in them upon his own behalf.

"I was confirmed before you were born," he said, looking down upon her with a strange admixture of the paternal and the old-Adam element in his eyes. "It's so long ago that I've almost forgotten my sensations upon the occasion. But if you'll put the money into the plate on Sunday, and show a Christian spirit of forgiveness, I'll try and remember everything about it, I promise you."

"And whether you wanted to give it up when you were half-way through?"

"And whether I wanted to give it up when I was half-way through."

"And whether it made you wish you hadn't got a soul?"

"And whether it made me with I hadn't got a soul. Only, before we go

into that part of the question, you must let me repair the damage I have done to your hat.”

“It isn't hurt,” said the girl hastily, blushing more painfully than ever; “it isn't hurt at all.”

“Not hurt, with all those cherry globes pounded into powder? Why, even a Maori belle wouldn't put it on her head! Do people who are confirmed have a dispensation for telling stories?”

“It's my old hat—I wasn't going to wear it much longer. Mother knows it's my old one.”

## **Chapter V**

### **Temporary Eclipse of the Sovereign**

THE foregoing reference to an actual, tangible mother seemed to remind the squatter, for the first time, that Nature was not the only parent who would have to be consulted in connection with his new acquaintance. Somewhere in the background was the real and conventional mother, of whom Frank had spoken, whom the violation of etiquette that had marked the interview from the outset would probably have outraged in her tenderest feelings. Here, in the fields, with the birds twittering their love-songs in the hedges, and the green meadows all aglow under the red embrace of the westerly sun, with pastoral sounds and odours that might have suggested a golden age of innocence to drown the recollection of a world of artificialities and formalities, the affair, as it had been conducted from the first, seemed natural enough. A frightened child-face, the sweetest he had ever seen—a kiss, followed by some tears that were quickly dried—a conversation, whence the unconventional introduction by which it had been ushered in had chased even the possibility of stiffness—it all seemed to have grown out of the occasion, without anybody's contrivance or responsibility. But would the adventure stop there? It is one of the penalties of an existence conducted upon cause-and-effect principles, that the smallest action may entail the most tremendous consequences. A vision of an irate lady in a widow's cap—Frank had said she was a widow—without the smallest comprehension of spring influences as applied to the usages of society, shaped itself, a very Nemesis, before him.

He had somewhat the air of a man who has been awakened from a pleasant dream as he walked by Robina's side along the lane. Clearly there was nothing to be done but to go the whole way with her, and explain the disaster as best he might to Nemesis herself in person, though he still intended to hold back his news of Frank for a private reason of his own.

But what would the little maid have to say as to his manner of introducing himself after he was gone? He looked sideways at her as she walked next to him, telling himself that he had never seen so guileless an expression in his life. Every word, every look, was so evidently the outcome of the actual feeling of the moment that he felt as though the person who should leave the first breath on the mirror of her soul would be almost guilty of an act of desecration. And almost at the same instant the vision of another face that had been wont to find itself, like this one, in the close neighbourhood of his own, came into his mind—a face that had been fair, too, and loyal, like its owner; but a face that had been tutored to hide its emotions, like a deep mountain-lake, whose unchanging surface gives no hint of the currents below.

And now they had arrived before the ivy-covered cottage that Robina declared to be her home.

As she entered by the little white gate the squatter held it open, as though he would have followed her in. “Really,” he said, gravely, “you must let me explain the disaster to your mother! I can't go away without apologising for all the harm that has befallen her little girl through me!” (“Why ‘little girl’ again?” thought Robina, resentfully.) “And then there is Maori's clumsiness to”——

“Please *don't!*” said Robina, earnestly, almost barring the way as she spoke. “Don't ask me to ask you to come in this time.”

The little house was profoundly quiet. There was a white-lilac bush for all adornment of the tiny garden. The doorstep was scrupulously white; the muslin curtains behind the row of open windows were fresh and white likewise. But it did not need a glance to perceive that it was a poor habitation. There might have been reasons for the girl's evident reluctance to allow him to enter, that it would have distressed her to betray. The squatter could not insist on this occasion, but he would not confess himself beaten. He drew out his card-case and extracted therefrom an oblong card, whereon *Mr. Reginald Barrington* was printed in old English characters, and presented it to her. “And now you see we are neighbours,” he said, looking intently upon the sweet, shy face that was bent over it, “I hope you won't be quite so inhospitable another time. Do you know, my next-door neighbour in Australia lived sixty miles away. What would he have said if I had said ‘Not at home’ when he came to see me?”

“But *we* don't live sixty miles away.”

“You are dreadfully matter-of-fact. Well, then, if I look out in *Bradshaw* for a railway town just sixty miles away, and if I go and live there on purpose to come back and call upon you, will you be at home to me then?”

But the girl was evidently ill at ease. The charming confidence that had

marked her manner hitherto was gone. Whether the discovery that the stranger she had been talking to so unconstrainedly was the master of the estate she had so often trespassed upon unknown to its former proprietor had intimidated her —whether their relative positions of country gentleman and little cottage-girl had forced themselves upon her, for the first time, as she looked at the card he had given her, was not clear to his mind. He only knew that her manner was changed, though he still considered her

“The sweetest thing that ever grew  
Beside a cottage-door,”

and the thought of her passing out of his life was curiously distasteful to him. Still, there was but little way to be made under the present aspect of affairs.

“You must not forget our compact,” he said, and he held out the yellow Sydney sovereign again. This time Robina took it without a word, and Mr. Barrington raised his hat to her in token of adieu. But, as he did so, he looked at her with an expression for which the Nemesis in the widow's cap might have visited him with even severer reprobation than for what was already on his conscience. For it was the kind of look that might have stirred the emotional nature of even a seasoned flirt. Robina had been as Eve before the Fall up to the moment of receiving it. But from the instant that a man's eyes have enabled a woman to read that she has found favour in his sight —from the instant that the revelation has brought a throb of rapture with it, and that she is moved by the sense of a power which makes her feel, for the moment, as rich as though all that Satan showed Christ from the summit of a high mountain were within her grasp —from that instant her Garden of Eden closes upon her for ever. She has tasted of a fruit whose flavour will remain within her lips to the end of time. Things will have a new meaning for her. The fair universe that she has gazed upon so innocently hitherto will begin to put on the inevitable subjective aspect that a knowledge of the secret springs which move it must induce. Robina, entering into the tiny hall of Ivy Cottage, with her fingers closed on the sovereign for the plate, her heart beating tumultuously, was no longer the same as the Robina who had left it an hour or two ago, her church service and exercise book in her hand, and thoughts that for all their metaphysical complexity might have been enshrined under cover of the church service in her brain.

She hesitated for a moment before the door of the parlour (at Ivy Cottage the dining-room, drawing-room, and work-room were all merged into a

twelve-foot-square enclosure that was known as the parlour), listening to the click of the sewing-machine under her mother's active fingers. The gold felt strange and heavy against her palm. She had never possessed more than five shillings of her own, all at once, in her life. As she opened the door a grey, faded face, with inquisitorial eyes, turned itself round upon her. "You have been wasting your time, child," was all her mother's greeting, for Mrs. Marl's one rule of life was "up and doing," and time spent in meditation was time thrown away. "Mr. Barrington cannot possibly have kept you all this time. I am certain of *that*."

A Jesuit would have sworn that none other than Mr. Barrington was answerable for the delay, but Robina's new education had not, happily, carried her so far as yet. Nevertheless, she felt an unaccountable reluctance to explain the real reason of her coming in so late. She displayed her injured hat, and recounted her adventure with the dog after a somewhat confused and hurried fashion. That she should have said nothing whatever about the manner of her rescue was the strongest proof of all that she had tasted of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and that she was under the influence of the same feeling as that which prompted Eve to hide herself when she discovered that she was fair. Mrs. Marl was not the most sympathetic of listeners, but Robina had never felt prompted to conceal anything from her mother before. But now it seemed *impossible* to make open and plenary confession. Perhaps she had an intuitive sense that she had taken a sudden leap into a world whither her mother could not follow her. Mrs. Marl had unbounded faith in her "system" as applied to her daughter's bringing up, but Nature has a way of setting at nought the most admirable systems, and if it should turn out that the fledgeling which the hen has kept within the coop should have been hatched from a duck egg, and should adventure itself on the surface of the deceitful lake as soon as it sees the water, what is the hen to do? Robina's mother would not have admitted the existence of instincts in one of her brood which come under the heading of "unregulated," and Robina dare not tell her towards what treacherous depths she felt herself drawn. Besides, there was something in her mother's nature that was antagonistic to the merest semblance of an adventure. Spontaneity, or what the French call the *imprévu*, was her aversion. She believed, as we have seen, in employment—unceasing and regular—not that she objected to "healthy exercise," provided it were taken in due time and season. But there should have been hours for drill and dancing, as there were hours for sleeping and eating. Moods were not to be consulted, excepting in the study of grammar. She would have made an almanac of each day's occupations for every man, woman, and child in the world, and contrived a routine of flower-wreathing and cocoa-nut-picking

for the South Sea Islanders themselves. She was not entirely an illiberal woman, but disliked any departure from the established order of things. *Work, work*, was her *mot d'ordre*; her favourite quotation was that

“Satan finds some mischief still  
For idle hands to do.”

In the insect world she would have taken her place among those ants that are always seen hurrying along with a burden which they never seem to deposit anywhere. A little younger, a little less angular in form, she might have served for the model of La Fourmi. Her activity gave all who lived with her a sense of unrest. Robina had been taught to think that to sit with her hands before her, doing nothing, was to commit a deliberate sin.

Acting upon this principle now, Mrs. Marl continued to drive her machine along with great energy, lamenting the fate of the cherry hat the while. It was true that she was obliged five minutes afterwards to undo all the stitches she had accomplished, but the end of “setting a good example” had been achieved. One motherly glance at the daughter to assure herself that she had escaped without hurt or scratch from the fangs of the retriever, one sigh of reassurance at the thought that she was whole in wind and limb, and the authoritative voice made itself heard once more.

“Bring down your last year's hat, child. You may unpick the flowers from it at once. I shall lodge a complaint at the police-station about that dog as soon as I have time. Come, make haste—there has been too much time wasted already.”

But Robina did not make haste nor look for the “last year's hat” when she found herself at the top of the steep stairs, in the solitary attic that was her own domain. She walked straight to a small mirror suspended against the whitewashed wall. It was an uncompromising mirror, and it had been put into its place in a side-light—and an infinitely unflattering one—by the hands of Robina's mother. But, however uncompromising in intention, it could not throw back a harsh reflection of the face that looked into it now. What mirror could, in fact, when it is appealed to by anything so pretty as Robina? The most it could do was to confirm the triumph that the blue eyes and flushed cheeks had brought to it, and to repeat the tale that the squatter's eyes had been the first of all to tell. And she had longed only half an hour ago to be a cow!—with such a human body as this all the time in her possession! Robina, we may be sure, did not stop to think of all that the possession might entail.

She only smiled back at the image that she saw within the frame. A

dispassionate observer would have seen in this very action the first fruits of the discovery she had made. A physiognomist might have gone further, and considered the softness of her features and the impressionable temperament they betrayed. Her lips were full and red, her chin white and rounded; but they lacked the lines that we associate with force of will; her nose was a charming little nose that could not be said to “turn upwards” in the brutal acceptation of the term, but only looked capable of doing something of the kind under great and unwarrantable provocation. But all these were but secondary attractions. It was in her eyes, like stars, set perhaps a little too close together, but blue as mountain lakes, and darkened by the natural blackness of the black fringe that surrounded them, that her chief beauty lay. As for expression, she was still at the age when the world, as we find it, is reflected in our faces. Until ten minutes ago it had lacked at least the element of self-consciousness.

The sovereign and the card were in the pocket into which she had slipped them when she went into her mother's presence. She put them now into the corner of a drawer wherein her birds' eggs, shells, woolwork, and the destructible property known as “keepsakes” were lying in unclassified heterogeneousness. She liked a look at the yellow gold, and the surface of the glazed card was so cool and smooth that she laid it against her warm cheek. But the result was not entirely satisfactory, and when she had thrown it into the drawer and closed it away from her with violence, she carried such troubled eyes into the darkening parlour, together with her last year's hat, that her mother's mind misgave her. “Are you *quite* sure you are not hurt, my child?” she queried anxiously, but Robina only shook her curly head. She was telling herself that after she had put the sovereign into the plate, and perhaps, after the Confirmation was over, she would, without fail, tell her mother all about everything.

## **Chapter VI**

### **The Original of the Portrait**

MENTION has been made, in the last chapter, of a certain face that outlined itself to Mr. Barrington's imagination as he walked by Robina's side through the lanes. Not only this afternoon, but upon all occasions when the squatter's appreciative eye had been arrested by such passing attractions as a shapely feminine foot or a dimpled chin, the same face had interposed itself between him and them. And it was the harder to drive away, that it never presented itself with a wrathful or vindictive aspect, but seemed to regard him only with a kind of appealing glance, such as a

guardian angel might direct towards an erring soul. It was in vain that Mr. Barrington tried to shake off its influence. It followed him with the pertinacity of those faiths of our childhood which our reason may long ago have killed, but which are as vivid to our imaginations as ever.

If you will look back only two days from the time when Robina had first wished to be a cow, you will understand why this gentle haunting face exercised so strong an influence over her new acquaintance, and why, as he walked back through the spring-scented lanes, with the disgraced retriever and his own lank evening shadow for all company, it gradually asserted itself more and more, until, as he passed through the private entrance into the plantation, called by courtesy a park, that surrounded Barrington Hall, it had almost chased away the new image that had temporarily obscured it. But did it fill the same kind of place in his fancy? or had its gradual resumption of its rights brought a certain gleam into his eyes—a half-resentful expression into his lower lip?

Poor face! It had spent itself in waiting for the response that none but he could give it, and could it have beheld him at this moment. I think it would have received its death-blow.

Three days ago, however, it had been radiant with hope; for three days ago the prodigal had set foot at Plymouth, after more than thirteen years' absence from England. Lucy had been sent for by Reginald's mother to read the telegram announcing his arrival. All her life she would remember the rapture of that morning. How the summons had come after breakfast, as she was setting herself to the monotonous crewel-work in front of the fire that her invalid aunt—Lucy's sole companion—kept burning day and night, like a vestal virgin, in the drug-invaded, camphor-and-musk-charged atmosphere of her room; how, as she *rushed*—yes, Lucy actually rushed—for her sealskin jacket and muff (the May morning was still chilly enough for that), she had been conscious of a feeling of elation that was almost painful in its intensity; and how the rejuvenated face and sparkling eyes, that had smiled back at her as she tied on her big gauze veil before the glass, had filled her with a sudden delighted hope that all her little day was not irretrievably over, as she had so often fancied in her most desponding moods that it *must* be.

And then there had been the delightful errand to Barrington Hall.

The sharp air of the English spring, bringing its lesson of discipline to the baby blades and flowers, had heightened the colour in her cheeks as she drove her little pony-carriage through the awakening lanes. Reginald's mother, still a stately woman in her morning-robe of deep mourning, had received her with marked affection, kissing her after a fashion that was more eloquent than words, and Reginald's younger brother, as he took off

his clerical hat to her while he assisted her out of her low pony-carriage, had bestowed a smile of grave sympathy upon her, as though he were already her brother as well as her spiritual adviser; and then she had been drawn into the great, old-fashioned, unaesthetic, faded drawing-room that Lucy loved, and Mrs. Barrington had put into her hands the slip of paper that confirmed the great news:—

“Arrived Plymouth. With you to-night.—REGINALD.”

“And now, my dear,” said Mrs. Barrington solemnly, “it shall be exactly as you like. Will you dine with us this evening, and help us to give him a welcome home, or shall I drive him over to Linlith to-morrow morning? Remember that you have promised to spend next week with us. No, I will take no denial! You can see your aunt every day if you choose, but next week you *must* come. The Bishop is coming, you know—at least Ernest expects him—for the Confirmation; and perhaps—who knows?—we may gain his ear for the performance of another ceremony more interesting still. You must not be harsh towards our ‘wild man’ of the woods after his long banishment, my dear.”

Harsh! when Lucy wanted nothing more than to be allowed to creep back into his favour. Had she not lived upon the hope of such a consummation from the time when she had first fancied that his affections had been set towards her? But there had always been a tormenting *insufficiency* in his way of expressing them. Even now, when his mother and brother had taken her, metaphorically speaking, to their hearts, she dared not follow the desire of her soul, and take advantage of the position to join with them in welcoming Reginald on the first night of his arrival.

Perhaps it would have been different if he had been returning, as in olden times, in the position of a penniless younger brother. Moreover, Lucy could not forget that it was the change in his circumstances, caused by his brother's death, that had brought him to England. As far as *she* was concerned, he might have remained in Australia, for all she could see to the contrary, for another thirteen years.

No! All things considered, she must give up following the dictates of her heart for this evening. Her former lover should not find her armed with the “nine points of the law” that her presence under his roof would seem to give her. “I cannot stay this evening, indeed, dear Mrs. Barrington,” she said firmly; “but I shall hope to see you to-morrow, if Regi—if your son will.” So, when she had been kissed again by the elder lady and smiled upon with renewed benignity by the curate, Lucy drove away again in her little pony-carriage, feeling as though she could never fill up the hours of waiting until the morrow in her usual quiet methodical fashion. I think if she had consulted her own inclination she would have spent them on her

knees. For Lucy's one leaning, over and above the one that she had cherished for Reginald during all these dragging years, was towards High Church principles. She was eminently refined, even to the manner of communing with her own soul, and the transcendental influences that the Church seemed to shed around the work-a-day world gratified this sense of refinement. She was the antitype of many a modern English young lady, for she can only be negatively described. She expressed neither the restless age we live in, nor her own individuality through any of those channels open to young women in the present day. She was neither cultured nor aesthetic, nor strong-minded, nor fast. She might have been compared, indeed, to one of those soft decorative images that artists render by a pale flat wash of colour; she harmonised with and merged into her quiet conventional surroundings so completely. One little weakness she had, which had crept upon her unknown to herself. She was given to heaping upon her person a superabundance of frills, ruffles, charms, knitted shawls, and other superfluities, which, seeing that she was somewhat spare in form, gave an uncomfortable suggestion of her being entirely made up of them. They were rather a detriment than otherwise to the peculiar kind of placid beauty that marked her face; for, as we have seen in her portrait, Lucy possessed beauty, though in real life it lacked the animating principle that warm blood and a quick brain impart. Her complexion was what is known as *passée*, but in semi-lights and in rare moments of happiness it became soft and girlish; and now you have as true a presentment as I can give you of the young lady who at the present moment is the material embodiment of *duty* in the eyes of the returned squatter. And certainly not a "duty set about by thorns," as the worthy Jerrold describes it, but hedged in by all those adjuncts of fortune which are her birth-right. It is no dowerless hand that Lucy will bestow with her heart. Broad acres, and a rent-roll in keeping with them—a name that may be traced back with honourable directness through a line of sword-bearing ancestors—family plate and old china, in quantity to stock a museum—and with all this the truest, fondest, most constant of hearts, of a constancy that even the most exacting of Crusaders could hardly have imagined—are surely accompaniments to duty that might throw a halo round it in the eyes of the most captious. Whether they did so for Reginald or not will be seen in another chapter.

## Chapter VII

### Lucy Hopes

"MRS. BARRINGTON, Miss, and a gentleman with her; he didn't give

his name.”

Though Lucy had been expecting such an announcement all day, the realisation of it caused the blood to rush from her heart with violence. There should be no keener delight than that of meeting a friend after many years' absence. Even Paradise itself does not foreshadow a more perfect joy than the one which reunited lovers experience. But then the conditions of “a spiritual *milieu*” are so different from those of a perishable world. It is agreed that the angelic age is fixed at the most becoming period of the soul's appearance; whereas mortals, and mortal women especially, are oppressed by the sense that Time's scythe has left its mark upon them in passing. Lucy was more than ordinarily sensitive upon this point, because she could not take courage from the trust that Reginald's love was blind. She had been reading his letters, which even her delicate handling of them could hardly keep from falling to pieces—so often had they been folded and unfolded in the course of the year—and had found but little to take heart from in their contents. What if he should come back to her with something worse than indifference in his heart? Could she reproach him for her wasted youth, and the traces of the salt tears that the arrival of the Australian mail had caused her to shed on more than one occasion? She set herself to review the past, trying to feel as though she were called upon to decide a case in a court of love with which she had no personal concern. In the beginning, in her school-girl days, she had thrown herself in Mr. Barrington's way. She might, indeed, plead that she had done so in most innocent fashion, being unversed in the most elementary principles of coquetry.

But she had done so none the less. Before she had been wise enough or mature enough to analyse her emotions, she had “run after” her lover. Literally “run after” him—for the pleasure of sunning herself in his presence, without thought or understanding of the consequences. He had called her his “little wife,” more in fun than in earnest, at first. Poor Lucy's cheeks burned as she brought these charges against herself. What if Reginald had felt nothing from the beginning but an elder-brotherly kind of regard for her, and she (always a dreadfully matter-of-fact little creature) had been responsible for holding him to his word, like a severe Scotch spinster or a juvenile Mrs. M'Stinger? If he had ever really cared for her, would he have taken advantage of the first opportunity for breaking his troth that came into his way? Had she not written to him again and again—letters in which he might have read between the lines that she was true to him? And had he ever once replied in like fashion? She had fancied at first that, if he were cold, his coldness might have been caused by absence; that he had allowed his memory of her to grow pale, like the old-fashioned

photograph of her that she had given him to keep. But now she was afraid that there were not even the ashes of a by-gone love in his heart—nothing that the sight of her might rekindle into a glow! She went tremblingly downstairs like a culprit, feeling far more of terror than of joy, and as she opened the door her heart stood still a second time. Mr. Barrington came forward to meet her, with both his hands held out— warm, powerful, brown hands, that had learned their understanding of moods in their dealing with unbroken colts. Her own were cold and thin, and he could feel that they were trembling in his grasp. But he shook them heartily and warmly nevertheless, and led her, holding them still, to the sofa where his mother was seated. Mrs. Barrington had been watching the meeting, under cover of her crape veil, with an emotion which, in another direction, was almost as great as Lucy's. She had been measuring the barometer of her son's affections during the drive to Linlith with many secret misgivings; but now the meeting made her hope that they were “set fair” at last. Perhaps the strongest wish she possessed in life was to see Reginald safely and securely married to Lucy, so exactly suited to him in birth, position, age, and fortune (for Lucy was now a *châtelaine* in her own right) that, from his mother's point of view, the finger of Providence might plainly be seen in the fate which had brought them together again at last. It is true that Mrs. Barrington generally saw the “finger of Providence” in every event that tended in the direction of her desires, and that she spared no efforts to maintain it in the right course.

“I could not keep Reginald quiet,” she exclaimed, after she had kissed Lucy with solemn significance. “There is an east wind, and you know what a poor creature I am in an east wind. Even Reginald grumbled about it, my dear, for it seems their east winds are quite hot in Australia, but still he would come—he literally dragged me here.”

Lucy raised her grateful eyes to her lover's face. Such a timid appeal might have disarmed even a less responsive nature than his. Tender recollections of far-away early times came into his mind. It is probable that he hardly noted the lines that had gathered round Lucy's eyes. He was looking right through into the soul within, and he saw something written there which softened his face and made him exclaim, “You are not changed at all!”

“I will not say *you* are not changed,” replied Lucy, archly, looking up into his face with all her life's adoration of it plainly expressed in her own. This broad, brown man, with the grizzling moustache and keen eyes, was very unlike the youthful sallow-hued soldier she remembered. But if he had returned to her with the beard of the Wandering Jew himself, he would have been Reginald still. There was a tremulous thrill of happiness in her

voice as she spoke to him. She could have found it in her heart to throw herself at his feet and clasp his knees for joy. There are women, indeed, to whom the words "lord and master" mean nothing, unless in the literal acceptation of them—women who, in the lower rank of life, are prone to fondle the hand that strikes them.

Lucy was the most orthodox of Christians, but she felt about Reginald like other equally orthodox and inconsistent Christians have felt about the king. He could do no wrong. Reginald's mother had less confidence in the immaculateness of her son. She was not so sure of his being a nineteenth-century Sir Galahad as Lucy was. She did not like the complete ignoring of all former ties between Lucy and himself that his letters had seemed to imply. She had heard dark stories of entanglements with Oriental women from mothers whose sons had been in India, and her imagination peopled Australia with tribes of dusky heathen houris, whose images interposed themselves between her son and the fair English girl whom Providence and she destined for him. If Reginald were really free, what was to prevent his speaking to Lucy at once? "I am going to look over your fuchsias, my dear," said Mrs. Barrington, as the outcome of her reflections. The conservatory door was standing open, and as Reginald's mother passed into it with rustling intention in every step, poor Lucy blushed so painfully that Reginald felt sorry for her. But somehow the impulse to take her to his heart would not come at this opportune moment, and when Mrs. Barrington returned after a prolonged inspection of the fuchsias, that was all the more creditable that she had not the least idea of what she had been looking at, she found Lucy sitting just where she had left her, answering Reginald's questions about people and places in the neighbourhood, in her soft, well-bred voice, as though he had been the most casual of morning visitors. And so disconcerted was the tactician at the failure of her manoeuvre that she cut the visit short.

"But you will come on Friday, my dear, to stay." Lucy was standing opposite the mother and son, with something of a wistful expression in her eyes that increased the measure of maternal indignation. "Though I forgot. *Here* is the actual master of Barrington Hall. Reginald, will you endorse my invitation, please?"

The squatter smiled without making the reason thereof quite clear to his mother's comprehension.

"Lucy knows that when I say, like the Spaniards, 'My house is yours,' it is no figure of speech," he answered. And then he took her little hands once more into his powerful grasp, and wished her "Good-bye until Friday."

"She is a dear girl, is she not?" urged Mrs. Barrington anxiously, as they

were driving home, wondering how much the visit might have done towards advancing Lucy's cause.

"Who—Lucy?" said the squatter. "A capital girl. But she was always a good little thing."

Mrs. Barrington's heart sank. The Australian wife was becoming a definite fact.

"And what a wife she will make! That is rarer than ever in these days. Everything has changed in the years that you have spent away from us, but nothing more than the way in which young married people behave themselves. There are very few wives who aspire to be 'ornaments in their husbands' eyes' nowadays."

"I wonder Lucy has not married long ago," said Mr. Barrington, feeling that something was expected from him on that head.

"Oh, Reginald!" exclaimed his mother, in a deep-voiced tone of reproach; "but men have so little understanding. You know better than any one that Lucy might have married a hundred times over if she had chosen."

There could be no longer any doubt about it. Somewhere against the dim background of the antipodean forest Mrs. Barrington saw an actual barbaric daughter-in-law. Did not travellers pretend that the Maori women were dangerously beautiful? And had not her son taken the trouble to bring a retriever dog all the way from Australia, just because he was called "Maori"? She felt her courage fail her as she threw her last card.

"Yes, indeed; and no one knows better than you *why* Lucy has not married all these years." Then, after a long pause, "Lucy is not a woman to love twice in a lifetime," she added, gently.

And to this assertion Mr. Barrington made no reply. What could he say, indeed? He felt he was fulfilling the ungracious *rôle* of the horse that has been led to the water, and that subsequently refuses to drink. He had not come home with the intention of marrying Lucy. He could not force the sentiment—and what a transient one it had been at the best!—that had made him in years gone by call her his "little wife." He could give her the most affectionate regard, but the other, the stronger feeling, *would not come*. Still, as he had felt when he read his lover's letter at Bulgaroo, Lucy's fidelity would prove too strong for him in the end. And it humbled him to think of it. He did not deserve it. Poor Lucy was in love with her own innocent idealised conception of him. He had thought so, even when he was quite a young man, and he had welcomed the necessity that had obliged him to give her up. When he was in Australia he had comforted himself with the belief that she would be married long before he could think of returning. But now it seemed as though fate had called him from the "uttermost ends of the earth" on purpose to restore him to her.

Yes! the horse would be made to drink in the end. He had shied and started away this morning, but gentle hands were in waiting to lead him to the same spot. There was only one possibility of escape for him, and that was to lead Lucy unconsciously to the conclusion that he was not all she had thought him, and that it would not cost her so much to give him up as she had imagined. But how was this apparently unattainable end to be accomplished?

It was to come to something like a resolution that Reginald had walked through the lanes, with Maori at his heels, on that glorious spring afternoon when Robina had wished so much that she could be turned into a cow. Had that wish been granted before his meeting with her, perhaps the plan that he was turning over in his mind would never have been carried out. Yet, what had the little village girl to do with it? Certainly he did not see any possibility then that she would influence his after-life, but the very fact of his being able to feel so fresh and strong an interest in the first young woman of beauty and originality whom chance had thrown into his way, seemed to be an argument in favour of making one last effort to regain his entire freedom, one last attempt to lessen Lucy's worship of him.

## **Chapter VIII**

### **Inopportune Reappearance of the Sovereign**

TO lessen Lucy's worship of him! But how? If there is a plan that is harder to put into execution than another, it is the one which has for its object the chilling of a sincere passion. What woman was ever heroic enough to render herself ugly and disagreeable as a slave to the wounds that she inflicted? She would rather see her victim die at her feet from the pangs of unrequited love! And for a man the task is just as difficult, though he should be less unwilling to sacrifice his vanity in the cause; more especially as he is generally loved for qualities which the shaving off of his moustache would not affect in the least. Cruelty is his only recourse, but even cruelty has a fascination for certain feminine natures.

As regarded Lucy, Mr. Barrington had no wish to be cruel, but if he could have rendered himself an undesirable ogre in the eyes of the faithful girl, I do not think he would have been otherwise than gratified. But to attain this object there was only one means he could think of, and it must be said, to his credit, that until his meeting with Robina he had hesitated to have recourse to it. He had noticed that Lucy was very constant in her attendance at church. Since she had been staying at Barrington Hall he had discovered that she was in the habit of rising at dawn, and attending an

early morning service that had not existed when he went to Australia, but that his brother had inaugurated since under the name of “matins.” He had seen her returning in her little pony-carriage from the window of his dressing-room, wrapped in a kind of nunlike ulster with large sleeves, and he had also noticed that she wore a small crucifix at her waist, and that, in addition to the frills and ribands with which she always seemed to be encumbered, there was a jasper rosary round her neck on the Friday of her arrival.

He had never offered to drive her over to early service, nor made allusion to the crucifix or rosary, but as he entered the house after his meeting with Robina he thought of these things as possible aids to his purpose. For he had made up his mind at last. He would not shock or afflict poor Lucy's religious sense more than he could possibly help, but he would show her that he was not in sympathy with it, and he would leave her to choose between the faith of which the crucifix and rosary were the symbols—and himself. If she chose the former, as I am afraid he hoped might be the case, she would be saved from a broken heart by the sustaining sense of martyrdom that carried the Christian virgins triumphantly through all the tortures that Nero could inflict upon them, and *he* would be free to advise Robina in her theological difficulties, and to take her “Frank's present” in its magnified form without compunction.

Mr. Barrington was quite aware, as he turned this plan over in his mind, that it was worthy of Henry VIII., and that he was, in fact, hardly a whit better than that delicately conscientious monarch, whose religious scruples as to his marriage with Katharine of Aragon coincided so curiously with his fancy for Anne of Boleyn. But the reflection did not turn him from his purpose. On the contrary, he continued to ponder over his project, until he had hit upon the means of rendering it most effective. Much would depend upon the time and manner of carrying it out. As for the time, he told himself that the following Sunday forenoon would be the best. He would propose to go with Lucy to morning service—the eleven o'clock one that he had been made to attend as a boy. Then they would walk home together through the fields, and while the impression of the closing notes of the organ and the final benediction were still influencing her mood, and the “Sabbath look” that he had learned to recognise since his return was still shining in her gentle eyes, he would take her to some quiet seat under the trees, and question her as to whether she could find it in her heart to deliver herself up to a “scoffer,” an “unbeliever,” an “infidel” (he was determined to spare himself no dreadful-sounding names that might further his end—there was to be no smoothing over of harsh facts under such euphonious names as Agnosticism and Materialism), and if she seemed to hold that he

was quite unworthy of her love, he would quietly resign himself to her decision.

The Sunday that was to witness the consummation of this deep-laid scheme dawned fair and soft over the grey-green frame of Barrington Hall as Lucy descended the stairs with her parasol and Prayerbook, in readiness for that most delightful expedition to morning service that Reginald had proposed to her at breakfast-time. They were to go alone. For once in her life Mrs. Barrington had deemed it expedient to break through the law which had been as “that of the Medes and Persians” hitherto, and to sit at home, with a printed volume of Ernest’s sermons in her lap, in lieu of walking to church. The day seemed to be made for joy. The thrushes were still singing as Lucy passed through the shrubbery by her lover’s side. To have his strong, tall form there, next to her, in the flesh, was such inexpressible happiness that every bird-note found its echo in her heart. She had never known a spring day like this before. Surely the sky was more vast and beautiful, the unfolding elm-leaves more transparently, tenderly green than in any other May month she had known! Only, how disappointingly short the way to church seemed to have become! Lucy could have found it in her heart to wish they might have lingered over it just a little longer as she made her way up the aisle followed by Reginald, and showed him where to sit next to her in a great uncurtained pew just below the pulpit, exactly opposite which, but without any protecting ledge for Prayer-books, was a row of benches, and upon the very foremost of these Robina and her mother.

Though Reginald knew that the poor child had seen him—by one of those magnetic currents that telegraph sensations as surely as the electric wire telegraphs messages—he could not resist the temptation of casting one keen, sweeping glance in her direction, while Lucy was bending her head in prayer by his side. She had turned suddenly white, and it was as though he could *feel* the quick pulsations of her heart as she turned her eyes away from him and looked steadfastly at the ground. Reginald did not look long. But that one glance enabled him to make up his mind upon a point that had more than once puzzled him since he had first seen her. She really was remarkably, exceptionally pretty. He had imagined that possibly the background of the sunset and the green lanes, her peach-like colouring and childish confusion, had heightened the illusion before; but now he told himself that there had been no illusion at all. In her go-to-meeting frock—perhaps the most trying habiliment in humble life that imagination can conceive—she was even prettier than his recollection had pictured her. She wore a little old-fashioned black silk mantilla over her stuff frock, and cotton gloves. The cherry hat was replaced by one of black straw, with

new, cheap, stiff, blue flowers. But the pure young face it surmounted was as charming as ever, and its sudden pallor when Reginald entered gave him quite a curious and novel experience. He had not thought himself capable of an emotion of the kind. It required his best endeavours after this to follow the psalms over Lucy's shoulder, for, to add to Lucy's happiness, he had forgotten to bring his Prayer-book (it could not have been that he did not possess one), and she had to give him half her own, and to find all the places for him.

As for Robina, if the Rev. Mr. Barrington's voice carried occasionally no more meaning than the noise of a far-away waterfall, under the influence of the distracting thoughts that *would* intrude themselves into her mind, her punishment was prompt and severe. As the moment for handing the plate came round, just when a little relaxation of the eyes is permissible among the best-conducted congregation, Reginald allowed his glance to wander once more to the opposite bench. He had "taken in" Robina's mother at the outset. Just as Frank had described her—rigid, energetic, watchful, a very drum-major of mothers, but with an air of breeding in her black silk gown of antique make and shape that accounted for Robina's unprovincial intonation. And now the organ had ceased, and the Rev. Mr. Barrington was intoning the various Scriptural encouragements to his congregation to open their hearts and their purses. A very old churchwarden, with crumpled hands, was creeping from pew to pew to receive the contributions, only, instead of a plate, Reginald perceived that he carried a velvet bag at the end of a stick. Robina's hands had been tightly closed upon a coin that was hidden in the palm of one of the little cotton gloves aforesaid, but, as the old man came towards her, she held it out with a quick, nervous movement towards his bag. But whether the glancing of the gold had startled the old churchwarden beyond measure; whether, between the trembling of her fingers and the clumsiness of her cotton gloves, Robina had lost hold of her coin; or whether, as the squatter said within himself, "the devil was in that money," it is certain that the sovereign did not fall into the bag. Quite the contrary. It fell with a dreadful resonance to the ground, rolled round and round, gleaming and glittering the while, and deposited itself, with a malicious intention that more than justified the squatter's conclusion, exactly at the feet of Robina's mother.

Reginald could not help watching the course of events now. He saw Mrs. Marl pounce upon the coin and pick it up; he saw her direct one keen sidelong glance of astonished indignation at her daughter; and finally he saw her pull out a very faded purse from a side-pocket, and extracting therefrom a threepenny-bit, drop it, after a minute's hesitation, into the bag, while she carefully put the sovereign into its place in her purse, with a

compression of the lips that said, as plainly as lips could speak, "This matter must be inquired into."

It was very wrong of Reginald, seeing that Robina's distress was so great and so genuine, but I am afraid he smiled behind his moustache at this manoeuvre. And it was more than he could do to refrain from sending a glance of sympathetic and amused understanding towards Robina herself. Though whether it succeeded is another question. To turn into a cow was nothing now. Instantaneous death would have been the only satisfactory escape from a world of such misery and such humiliation. This much the squatter could divine by the utterly downcast expression of the flushed face, which gave him quite a guilty feeling of responsibility, and an impatient longing to bring the light into it again.

But now it was *his* turn to be punished! The service being over, he would have hurried from the church. He could not let Robina go away with such a face as that. But as the notes of the voluntary sent their soft echo down the aisle, and Robina and her mother passed out through the porch, he perceived that Lucy was still on her knees, with her face hidden in her ungloved right hand. He could not be sacrilegious enough to manifest his impatience, and Lucy seemed to have no thought of rising. It was not until the last soft note had died away and the last step had passed out of the porch that she raised her gentle face, full of chastened ecstasy, towards his, and wound the inevitable wrap round her shoulders previous to leaving the church.

## Chapter IX

### A Discouraging Suit

THE gloomy Scotch Sabbatarians, who held it as a principle to inculcate a "Sabbath frame of mind," were never more mistaken than in trying to induce it through repression. There is nothing more religious than happiness, which converts the whole world into an altar for our heaven-directed aspirations. Lucy had never felt so "like a Sunday," even to her own interpretation of it, as when she found herself, by her lover's side, upon the very bench where she had so often carried his letters in the old, unhappy days. The truth was, that the *mise-en-scene* harmonised perfectly with the unspoken idyll that Lucy was carrying in her heart. It had all fallen out so happily, she thought. Reginald must have chosen this ideal morning, of all others, for telling his long-deferred tale. He had been certainly rather silent during the homeward walk across the fields, and her ignorance of the ground upon which she stood with him always made her timid, for her own

part, of speaking to him. But he had looked over the same Prayer-book with her at church. The same stream of red light that descended obliquely from Abraham's crimson gown, through one of the painted windows in the aisle, had illumined his brown-grey moustache and the ribands of her bonnet at one and the same time. And he had seemed to interest himself in home details; in the service; in different people among the congregation. He had asked one or two questions about them as he left the church. "Who was the very old woman with eyes like carbuncles tottering in front of them? Who the youthful schoolmaster with the consumptive face? And who the fresh-looking little girl with cotton gloves that had sat just opposite to them, by the side of the severe-eyed lady in black?" Lucy had been able to tell him something about each of these. The "pretty girl"—for, now that she understood whom he meant, she generously declared that Robina was something more than "fresh-looking"—was a Miss Marl.

Was she a lady? Lucy could not say. Mrs. Marl had been in Ivy Cottage a long time. But though she had apparently something to live upon, they kept no servant and never went anywhere. But the Rev. Mr. Barrington knew more about them, for he was "preparing the girl for Confirmation." Reginald had not appeared to take much note of the information; and all humanity, to Lucy's thinking, was so entirely concentrated just then in her lover that she had forgotten the next moment that there was one village girl more or less in the world.

For here they were, he and she, on the very bench that had witnessed her most despondent moods in the sad long years of his absence. She could almost have laughed now to remember what a cold sense of desolation the endings of his letters had given her at times; how she had dwelt upon the "yours most sincerely," the "very sincerely yours," and the "ever yours sincerely," and how happy she had been on one occasion when there was "ever yours" only. And now the author of these harrowing terminations was here by her side in the bodily presence! Perhaps in another minute her long probation would be at an end, for surely there could be only *one* reason for his bringing her here this morning. Until he broke the silence she gave herself up to a blissful day-dream, in which she saw the accomplishment of all her long-cherished hopes. For believers may say as they please, the strongest faith in an immaterial heaven has never excluded from the heart of the woman who loves the vision of the earthly paradise that she would like to occupy first of all.

Poor Lucy's Eden was a very innocent one. To share Barrington Hall with Reginald, and lay her heart and her dowry at his feet; to keep him all the year round close by her side at home, and walk with him to church on Sunday mornings; to win him to week-day attendance by gentle

persuasions; to take the place of a kind of Lady Bountiful in the parish, and patronise bazaars and tea-meetings—and so to “climb no steep and thorny road to heaven” with her hand in his—her ambition went no further than this. And as our conception of the kind of life that we most covet tends to array it with impossibly bright colours, the less its realisation appears probable, so Lucy had come of late years to look upon her modest castle in Spain as an abode too blissful for human habitation; yet here she was standing upon the very threshold of it. . . . Nevertheless, the silence was becoming a little embarrassing, and when Mr. Barrington did break it at last, his words were not exactly what Lucy had been waiting for.

“Where does that come from?” he said suddenly, “that about being ‘cabin’d, cribbed, confined’? You know the rest, Lucy.”

“ ‘Macbeth,’ I think,” said Lucy, who had studied “Selections from Shakespeare” with the same conscientiousness that she brought to bear upon her practising and crewel-work. “But what makes you think of it now?”

“Because that is exactly how I feel since I came home. Everything seems to close in around me here somehow. One hardly gets breathing-space under this contracted horizon; and, upon my word, I could not have believed that the parks and paddocks about here were so small.”

“Oh dear!” said Lucy, dismayed; “and it's all so lovely around Barrington Hall.”

“Yes, it's lovely enough, I suppose,”—the short laugh that accompanied this admission did not bring any sense of mirth with it to Lucy,—“but I'm afraid I've lost my taste for combed and trimmed landscape. I've been too long away from civilisation; that's it, Lucy. Why, I'll answer for it, you didn't feel a bit bored with all the business in there this morning,” pointing in the direction of the church, “not even with my brother's long-winded sermon; and I could hardly sit it out patiently.”

If Reginald had not been looking straight in front of him, with an expression the reverse of amiable, as he said these words, he would have been surely silenced by the look in Lucy's eyes. The hope that had been shining in them ever since the morning had died suddenly out, and in its stead a look of pain and bewilderment—such a look as a child who had held up its face to be kissed and who had received a blow in the place of it might wear—had come into them. Instinctively she laid hold of the wrap nearest to hand, and folded it closer round her shoulders, and as she performed this action the youth and freshness seemed to die out of her features and leave her pinched and shivering, despite the balminess of the atmosphere.

But she said nothing. There was that in Reginald's voice that forbade the

idea that he was only grimly joking; and, taken earnestly, his words had shocked and distressed her too profoundly to enable her to frame a fitting reply.

“Have I shocked you, Lucy?” His voice had taken a less harsh intonation now. “Well, as the murder's out now, perhaps I'd better go on to the end. It's better for—for—for many reasons that you should know me exactly as I am. I'm afraid you've been giving me credit for all kinds of virtues that I can't pretend to in the least. To begin with, I'm an out-and-out unbeliever.”

“Oh!” cried Lucy, drawing a little handkerchief from her muff. She was struggling not to cry, but the tears were starting into her eyes, notwithstanding all her endeavours.

“What's the use of hiding the fact? If ever I had children, Lucy, I wouldn't have their intelligences tampered with in the way in which mine was. I'd teach 'em to walk as straight as they could through life, but I wouldn't let them be taught one particle of any kind of religion whatever.”

“Oh!” said Poor Lucy again, and this time she was crying outright. “What would become of their souls, Reginald?—and, oh! what *will* become of yours?”

“Souls! Do you mean to tell me seriously, Lucy, you think there's any kind of individual existence distinct from the body? What is life, after all, but a kind of electric current (I don't know what other name to call it) running through different forms? If the machine gets out of order the current is suspended; when the machine is worn out the current passes into another machine, or is held, maybe, in some latent form, until it gets excited to action again. But—souls!”

The scorn in his voice was more than half-provoked by his own bitterness against himself. What a ruffian he was to decoy this poor, simple, loving creature into this lonely spot (like the villains in the story-books who lead away children to rob and murder them, under the promise that they shall see “London town”), and then to make her tears flow! It was all very well to tell himself that she was narrow and bigoted; that she would be certain to turn ultimately into one of those severe saints in presence of whom a man dare hardly call his soul (or whatever does duty for it) his own. Was not the fault rather in himself? Had he not been acting in the spirit of that proverb of the Kroumirs which says, “When you want to hang your dog you say he is mad”? Whichever way he thought of it, he could only consider himself a brute, but it was too late to retract now; and, saving for the way in which he had made his confession, he could not blame himself for telling Lucy the truth.

“Don't cry, Lucy; for God's sake, don't cry!” he replied. “I am not worth it. I assure you I'm not. You're one of the best and truest-hearted women in

the world, and I'm not worth your tears. But before I could venture to ask you"—the words seemed somehow to be dragged out of him—"before I could ask you to link your fate with mine, I thought it only right to tell you that I am irrevocably an unbeliever, a materialist, an infidel, an atheist, a— a—" He paused, thinking what other terrifying titles he could bestow upon himself. Lucy was silent, but he could see the fluttering of the handkerchief that she was pressing to her eyes. Through all the anguish that his statement had caused her, through all the thrusts that the words "infidel," "atheist," "unbeliever," drove into her gentle soul, there was yet the immense relief, the unspeakable joy, of hearing that he desired her for his own. She was too confused at first to make the answer clear, even to herself. Had it been prophesied to her that morning that Reginald would ask her to be his wife, and that she would hesitate in finding words wherewith to reply, she would not have believed the prophecy. Yet the event found her dumb—hesitating between her love and her salvation—her passion and her soul, for Lucy was not a half-hearted believer. There was, indeed, hardly one out of the many threats directed by the early Christians against those virgins who dishonoured their faith, and gave their affections to a renegade, that she would not have applied in its most literal sense.

As she sat, a picture that she had seen in the Doré Gallery, the last time she had gone to London, came into her mind, the picture of Francesca and her lover,

"Blown about upon the accursed air."

It seemed to her as though even in that eternity of unrest there must have been compensation for Francesca, since she might lay her head upon Paolo's breast and feel his arms about her. Whereas *she* must go unmated to heaven, and miss her Paradise above as well as below. No! she could not renounce! There was a limit to self-torture after all! She had imagined all kinds of possibilities, but she had never thought of anything as terrible as the reality. What, lose him not only here, but hereafter! Know that if she drove him from her now, it was not for to-day, or for to-morrow, or for her little span of earthly existence, but for ever and ever! No—she could not do it! There must be a middle course. Reginald would be influenced by his brother. . . . Or, if they were married, he could not prevent her from praying for him. She had never ceased to pray for him since he went away. Perhaps she was appointed to save him! But she could see nothing clearly now. Why did he keep his face turned away from her? Why had he told her at all? It would not have killed her to learn it after she was his wife—at

least she might have remained with him to the end.

And now the sun was shining out again, the birds twittering, the spring laughing from every field and hedgerow! The squatter was conscious that Lucy was sobbing by his side. He felt as though he were tightening his grasp upon a wounded bird, fluttering in his cruel hands.

“You are thinking,” he said deliberately, “whether you can make up your mind to ‘sit in the seat of the scoffer.’ Is not that it, Lucy?”

“Ah! you are cruel!” cried the girl. “Do you think I can stay and hear you call yourself those names?”

She had risen as she spoke, and was walking rapidly away, her hands pressed over her face in an abandonment of grief. Mr. Barrington followed her with a sense of having been defeated in his project.

He could have withstood all but her tears.

“I tell you, Lucy, I am not worth crying for,” he protested once more. But Lucy had fled to the house, and Mr. Barrington took counsel of the pipe that had befriended him through so many solitary rides across the Australian plains. I am afraid, however, that it had nothing very satisfactory to say to him upon the present occasion.

“I am a brute,” he reflected again, as he lit it under the shadow of the chestnut-tree where he had caused Lucy's tears to flow. And the pipe did not contradict him.

## **Chapter X**

### **Scruples**

THE Rev. Mr. Barrington was as unlike his unregenerate brother in a physical as he was in a moral sense. He was neither brown, nor moustached, nor sardonic. On the contrary, he was pale, close-shaven, and full of a pre-Raphaelite intensity of expression. Nothing earthly seemed to have power to divert his thoughts from the pinnacle upon which he rested them, but on this same Sunday afternoon, just after he had closed his last Confirmation class in the vestry, they were forced to take an unexpected turn. For just as he was leaving the vestry door, Lucy crept to him, with her face closely covered with a veil, and asked leave to say a few words to him in private. “Willingly,” said the curate; “I am at your service when you will.”

He lingered, however, to look over one or two exercise-books, a slight frown gathering upon his fore-head as he pondered over a page written in a large unformed hand, sighed “Robina Marl.” Then he poured himself out a glass of water, and signified to Lucy that he was ready to listen to her.

“I will tell you walking home—if I may,” said Lucy in a low voice, feeling her courage fail her at the thought of recounting her lover's blasphemies in this sacred spot.

Then, as they turned down the lane beyond the churchyard that led into the private road to Barrington Hall—he listening anxiously, and stooping his head to catch the faltering words that came so brokenly from the depths of the thick gauze tied round her black bonnet—he gathered the details of the avowal that had been made beneath the chestnut-tree that morning.

“What am I to do?” said Lucy, ending her narrative with a kind of sob; “for it is not as though he were a Catholic, you know—he believes in nothing—nothing at all.”

“But surely,” said the young curate gravely, “your own feeling for him is changed by the knowledge of it. One may feel pity for any one who voluntarily commits the worst kind of suicide, but I should think that any warmer sentiment”—

He stopped suddenly—confused. The vision of two incredulous eyes, shining out of their encircling lashes and meeting his own, only half an hour ago in the vestry-room—the recollection of the emotion, less spiritual than human, if he had cared about analysing it, that the glances of this “stray lamb” had power to call forth in him, held him silent.”

“At least,” he continued after a pause, “I would examine my heart most carefully. If you have given your Saviour the first place in it, there cannot be room for His enemy. How can you tell but that this is the test to which He is putting you—the cross He is giving you to bear? When you have crucified your human affections in Him you may look for peace, but not till then—no, not till then, Lucy.”

He said it almost vehemently, for even as he was speaking he beheld a sight that caused his heart to beat in painful echo of his words, and in throbbing unison with Lucy's. It was the unexpected sight, as they turned the corner of the lane, of Reginald himself, and not alone! The upright figure of a young girl was walking by his side; his head was bent towards her as they went slowly along. There was no mistaking the identity of either, although their backs were turned towards Lucy and the curate. No mistaking the broad, square shoulders of the squatter, with ever so slight a stoop in them—the consequence of long hours of solitude in the saddle away in the Australian bush; nor the graceful walk of Robina, unconsciously betraying the supple form of the young girl. They looked curiously well matched, even from this distance, and the subtle suggestion of sympathy that may be read in the outlines of couples who feel drawn towards each other, even when they are seen walking most decorously together, was very plainly written in their attitude. As Lucy recognised

them she uttered a gasp of horrified astonishment.

“Oh, turn back, *please!*” she cried, growing suddenly very pale, and feeling somehow as though even her lover's atheism had been preferable to this. The Rev. Mr. Barrington did not change colour (perhaps his natural pallor could hardly have been increased), but something very like anger shone in his eyes as he turned round in obedience to her request and proceeded to follow the carriage-drive towards the Hall.

Neither spoke for about five minutes. When the clergyman again raised his voice it had assumed a dryness that Lucy had never noticed in it before.

“It would be well to decide upon a line of action of some kind,” he said, clearing his throat, and looking fixedly in front of him.

“I will do as you tell me,” said Lucy, wearily, humbled by the discovery that infidelity towards herself on Reginald's part should seem so much worse to bear than his infidelity to her God.

Was the Rev. Mr. Barrington conscious of feeling something of the same kind as well, or why did he not take immediate advantage of Lucy's submissive attitude to insist upon the sacrifice he had demanded of her a few minutes ago? It could not, surely, have been the recollection of the proximity of those two figures in the lane that influenced him, as he replied that he must needs hesitate to take the sole responsibility of deciding for her, and went on to remind her of instances, in the history of the Church, of notable conversions operated through the influence of devout wives.

I do not think that he would have admitted, even to himself, that he had been so influenced; but Lucy listened in amazement, troubled all the time by a sense of guilty satisfaction—a little spoiled, nevertheless, by the suspicion that the clergyman had relented in pity for her weakness. It was a sad game of cross-purposes, such as human hearts are for ever engaged in playing. And Robina's unexpected appearance had introduced an element into it that, if other people had been in question, might have resembled the passion of jealousy, but which neither Lucy nor her adviser were capable of recognising as such. The Rev. Mr. Barrington was only aware, as he parted from Lucy at the Hall door, that it was his “imperative duty” to inquire into the manner in which his brother had become acquainted with Robina Marl, and to denounce it if necessary. And if ever a frown expressed “anathema” upon infidels and libertines in general—for “who says one says the other,” reflected the curate—it was the frown which accompanied his resolution to execute this duty unflinchingly. Lucy could not speak with sacerdotal authority, but she had her “rights” too, as she told herself, with two burning spots on either cheek, when the vision of the couple in the lane presented itself to her mind. Had she not lived in the parish for the whole thirty and odd years of her blameless life, and was she

not a perfect authority upon whom to know and whom *not* to know? If Robina had been a proper acquaintance for Reginald, of course Lucy herself would have been upon visiting terms with her. She had yielded to a moment of cowardice in turning back. But she would claim her rights now, and insist upon an explanation.

Her meditations were interrupted by a summons to afternoon tea in Mrs. Barrington's dressing-room. Reginald's mother was in a state of agitation respecting the success of her tactics that was no longer to be endured. She had been sure that the *tête-à-tête* of this morning must have resulted in "something," and I am afraid her conjectures anent this "something" had rendered her a little oblivious of the contents of the volumes of Ernest's sermons lying upon her lap, a special edition, dedicated to herself, bound in vellum and gilt, with a Greek cross painted in imitation of mosaic upon the cover. But Lucy's pale cheeks and red-rimmed eyes had been far from answering the result she had anticipated, and she was feeling very angry with Reginald in consequence. The bugbear of an Australian wife was becoming more and more real, and the pleasant vision that she had been nursing was fading before the awful possibility of her existence. It was hard to think of foregoing the satisfactory arrangements she had planned, all of which depended upon Reginald's marrying Lucy without loss of time. Mrs. Barrington was quite convinced, in her own mind, that true maternal affection was the only motive that prompted her anxiety, but who shall sift the mass of motives that go to make up an absorbing desire? Perhaps Lucy's qualification for the office of daughter-in-law counted for something, as well as her fitness for the office of wife. Mrs. Barrington had not felt that her eldest son's wife had been all that a daughter *might* have been to her. Indeed, that lady had with-drawn herself and her fortune, and as much of her deceased husband's fortune as she could lay any claim to, immediately upon the death of Reginald's eldest brother. But Lucy was gentleness and submission itself. She would never think of "administering" Barrington Hall during the lifetime of her husband's mother; and then it was impossible to help recollecting what a desirable fortune she possessed. When her aunt came to die (and though Mrs. Barrington trusted the poor lady might still have many a good year of life left in her, it must be remembered that she was *very* delicate), there would be Linlith entirely at Lucy's disposal. What a charming place it was, to be sure! With that and Barrington Hall, and the Vicarage for Ernest, there would be ample room for everybody, and in that case who would hold the reins of power unless Mrs. Barrington herself? She could not help feeling that there was a latent self-assertion, a tendency to *masterfulness*, in Reginald, that might clash with her own views sooner or later. But with Lucy and Ernest on her

side—with wife, mother, and brother all united to lead him the right way—the unruly spirit could not but yield in the end. In short, for everybody's interest, there was only one step to be taken, and the sooner it was taken (unless the awful contingency that had become Mrs. Barrington's constant nightmare should turn out to be a stern fact) the better.

“I may come in?” said Lucy, appearing at the door, just as the elder lady had arrived at the foregoing point in her reflections.

She was in a dressing-gown of Sèvres blue (tea-gowns were not as yet in fashion), with a soft lace wrapper round her throat, and her smooth colourless hair surmounted by a complicated “Dolly Varden” cap, in contrast with which the drawn appearance of her eyes and lips, tired by emotion and tears, was plainly visible.

“Oh! you are there, my dear child! Come in; I was waiting for you,” cried Mrs. Barrington, and she wheeled forward a cosy arm-chair next to a little table where a tiny copper kettle was singing over a spirit-lamp (Mrs. Barrington would not allow anybody to make afternoon tea in her own particular sanctum but herself). “You look tired, Lucy. I am afraid the walk was too much for you this morning—and that long-legged son of mine strides along at such a pace.”

All this time she was pouring out tea into the delicate cups of real old Dresden that she kept for these special occasions, and pressing hot muffin upon her guest. Lucy lay back in her chair, enjoying the repose. The afternoon sun, screened by the delicate spring greenery of the grand old oaks and elms, was sending pleasant rays into the apartment, full of family associations and relics. Lucy felt as though she belonged to them already, as her eyes travelled over an oil-painting hanging over an old oak cabinet that represented Reginald in the uniform of a cadet—just as she remembered him in those far-away days when she had first given him her heart. How he had trampled upon it since! Even to this morning, when she wanted nothing but the permission to love and worship him to the end! And then this afternoon! Lucy shivered, and an involuntary sigh escaped her as the scene in the lane outlined itself once more before her with terrible distinctness.

“You are not well, my dear,” said Mrs. Barrington, pushing the tea towards her anxiously. “You have been over-tiring yourself. I must scold you, Lucy. Indeed I must. That is a mother's privilege, you know.” She stopped and looked at Lucy with an air of questioning intentness as she said these words.

“Dear Mrs. Barrington,” murmured Lucy—she was hesitating as to how much she should relate to Reginald's mother—“would you really like to have me for a daughter?”

“How can you ask me such a question, Lucy? You know it is the one wish of my heart,” replied Mrs. Barrington earnestly.

“Well, then”—Lucy was sipping her tea with an embarrassed air (if *vino veritas* be true as applied to men, one might certainly say that women wax confidential on tea)—“Reginald *did* ask me to be his wife this morning, and oh! indeed, I would have said yes—you know whether I have cared for him from a child or not—but—but—there is—an obstacle.”

“An obstacle!” faltered Reginald's mother. With the vision of the black Australian wife in her mind, Lucy's words made her feel almost faint with alarm. Quick as light, divorce cases, high and low, travelled through her brain—publicity, degradation, misery—what did it all mean?

“Yes!” continued Lucy in her gentle tones, “he told me he was an—an—” (she hesitated to bring out the cruel words) “an unbeliever—an infidel! Oh!” and now she covered her face with her hands, and the suppressed tears of this afternoon flowed without restraint.

But Reginald's mother was breathing more freely. A great weight of terror was lifted from her soul. If this were the only obstacle she would soon take it upon herself to remove it.

“Ah! my dear child,” she said, softly, watching Lucy cry with something of perplexity in her gaze, “Ernest has told me that a great wave of infidelity has passed over the Christian world of late, and some of the proudest, highest, most noble spirits have been submerged by it. I little thought it would have extended to the wilds where Reginald has been hiding himself. But *you* will save him, Lucy. The finger of Providence points to you as his rescuer. You will not turn away from it. You will not turn a deaf ear to the prayer of the mother, who implores you to save her dear, her noble son; for it is a noble nature, Lucy, and he has come to you for help. You will win him to the fold, my dear, and we will help you. Ernest will help you. Oh! do not hesitate.”

“I was thinking,” said Lucy, wiping her eyes, “that as the Bishop is to come to-morrow for the Confirmation on Tuesday night, you know, I would wait a day or two before giving Reginald my answer—perhaps I may be advised.”

“No, no, my dear; don't be advised,” interrupted Mrs. Barrington hastily. “At least I don't mean that—but consult your own heart. It will plead in favour of poor Reginald. He has been in a heathen land, my dear; but here, with our own church at hand, and earnest preaching, and above all with *your* influence, Lucy”—

Poor Lucy smiled feebly. What could her lover have had to say to the young woman in the lane? But this was a mystery for her own private discussion with Reginald. Somehow she shrank from alluding to it in

presence of his mother. But the words she had just heard were an immense solace to her. It is so seldom that duty and inclination consent to run in the same direction. But now she had just heard that the thing she most desired was also her first and most sacred duty. What matter if secret misgivings as to the strength and heat of Reginald's sentiment intruded themselves, like a chilling wind, into the warmth of her joy? They were quickly stifled under the one certain blissful reality. Reginald had been true to her after all, and was only *waiting now for her to accept him*.

## Chapter XI

### Misgivings

"I HAVE been thinking, Ernest, that we must invite one or two of the Bishop's friends on Tuesday evening after the Confirmation is over. There are Lady Hastings and her daughters. You have been preparing the youngest, you say. And our little friends from India! There are no others in our set that I can think of."

It was Mrs. Barrington who spoke. The gas had just been lit in the great drawing-room at Barrington Hall, and Lucy had seated herself at the piano, with the music of some old-world chants in front of her. She played correctly, but no spark of the sacred fire passed through her fingers to the notes. Reginald, buried in an arm-chair with the latest-arrived *Australasian* on his lap, was making a feint of reading, but at his mother's words he laid the paper down and walked over to where she was standing.

"If there is a question of inviting anybody," he said, "I want two friends of mine invited. I was going to ask you to drive over with me to call upon them to-morrow."

"Friends of yours, Reginald!" The doubtful inflection with which these words were uttered conveyed the suggestion that Mrs. Barrington was on the defensive. "And people I don't know! How exceedingly strange! But they are visitors to the island, I suppose! *Australian* friends—may I ask?"

"Not exactly! At least, that is to say, the brother—the son, I mean—is an Australian friend—one of the best I have out there. He is managing Bulgaroo for me until I have settled how I shall dispose of it."

"Ah! indeed!" The amount of dubious meaning that can be condensed into an "ah" is something astonishing. "And it is to make the acquaintance of his relatives that you purpose taking me out to-morrow? But, my dear Reginald, you must reflect a little. It is no kindness to people to take them out of their proper sphere. We are not in Australia, you know. I dare say your manager's family is a *very* worthy one, but that is hardly a sufficient

reason for inviting them to Barrington Hall.”

Reginald smiled grimly. “It is the last I should think of giving; but you need not be afraid that Mrs. and Miss Marl are *only* worthy. They are poor; but”—

“Marl!” interrupted the curate, looking at Lucy, who returned the glance with a look of glad understanding. “*Robina* Marl, do you mean?”

“Yes! Robina Marl,” said the squatter firmly, the charming image of radiant youth evoked by that name seeming suddenly to light up the formal society in which he pronounced it. “She is the half-sister of my friend. Her mother is the widow of a naval officer. Do you see any reason why my mother should not do them, or rather do *me*, the favour of inviting them here?”

“N—n—no!” answered the curate, hesitating. It required, indeed, some time to grasp so revolutionary a measure. He could not see into the meaning or consequences of it all in a moment. Robina had never appeared to him in any other light than that of a dangerously pretty and intelligent village girl. There was certainly a fascination in the idea of meeting her on equal terms, and performing the agreeable office of host and cicerone at Barrington Hall. But the idea was sternly rebuked down almost as soon as it had arisen, and the other contingency—the danger that might arise from Reginald's influence over the already rebellious spirit of his young pupil—took its place.

“You—a—have called already?” he said at last, addressing his elder brother in a tone of grave inquiry. “At least, I infer as much from the fact of your having been seen with Miss Marl this afternoon.”

“This afternoon! Where?” exclaimed Mrs. Barrington, with a sudden apprehension lest the danger she had connected with an Australian gin or a Maori belle (for to the thinking of Reginald's mother the two terms were equivalent) lay nearer home after all. “Where?”

“On my way to her mother's cottage,” replied the squatter, answering Lucy's earnest gaze as much as Mrs. Barrington's sharp-toned inquiry. “Lucy had given me all the necessary indications.”

“Yes,” said Lucy slowly, with a sigh of relief. “I remember. And so you—you introduced yourself to Miss Marl—as soon as you met her, I suppose.”

“Yes, I introduced myself,” answered Reginald, with a curious half-smile in his eyes that it puzzled Lucy to account for. He was thinking of the manner in which he had “introduced himself,” to borrow Lucy's words, and of the bombshell he would have thrown into the midst of the assembled company had he attempted to narrate it. Come what might, it was a recollection sacred to Robina and himself, and he, for his own part, had no

wish to recall it.

“And Mrs. Marl?” continued Lucy, curiously. “Is she what you fancied she would be—a ‘severe-eyed lady in black’—as you called her this morning?”

“I should not fancy she was very convivially inclined,” said Reginald. “She shook her cap when I told her my opinion of Frank. Yet he is one of those fellows we call a ‘white man’ in the colonies—if ever there was one.”

“A white man? But you are all white men?” interrupted Lucy.

“Not in that sense, I am afraid. Frank's kind of ‘white man’ means something high-minded and honourable and generous—and what we call in Australian slang ‘game to the core.’ A man who would conduct a forlorn hope as gaily as he would ride a steeplechase, but not a man to keep a savings bank going.”

“It is curious,” observed the curate, conscientiously striving to improve the occasion, “how even in rough, lawless communities, such as I take most parts of Australia to be, there is yet a recognition of the outward sign of inward purity that we are accustomed to associate with the adjective white. ‘Though thy sins be as scarlet, I will make them as white as snow;’ you remember that, Lucy?”

Lucy bowed her head, but the squatter appeared less edified by this exhibition of professional zeal on the young curate's part. “And it is curious,” he retorted, “how amazingly ignorant you people are about everything connected with the colonies. What do you mean, I should like to know, by coupling ‘law-less communities’ with ‘most parts of Australia?’ Why, my good fellow, there isn't a more law-abiding population than that of any one of the Australian capitals; and as for the term ‘white man,’ which came into vogue, perhaps, in rather rough localities, it owes its origin only to the fact that the men who knocked about among the Australian blacks and the South Sea savages wanted to emphasise the qualities that separate the civilised man from the nigger. And the more of these qualities any one possesses the more of a ‘white man’ he is. There's the whole explanation of it.”

“But ‘whiteness’ is still the characteristic insisted upon,” replied the curate, feeling that Reginald's want of respect to the “cloth” was a thing to be deplored. “And this Frank is such a worthy young fellow, you say?”

“Ay, that he is,” said the squatter, heartily; then, turning to Lucy, he asked her if she would do him a favour and consent to call with his mother on the morrow on Mrs. Marl and her daughter.

“If Mrs. Barrington approves,” answered Lucy softly, but blushing with pleasure at this direct appeal from her lover.

Reginald's mother declared herself to be in Lucy's hands, and the following afternoon the two ladies drove over to Ivy Cottage; each with the unexpressed feeling that the other was making an enormous concession, and both a little curious as to the result of the visit.

"We may come at an inopportune time," observed Mrs. Barrington. "What if the poor creatures should be washing or ironing? Really Reginald is very thoughtless, but it all comes from goodness of heart. You will teach him the *convenances*, Lucy, by-and-by."

Lucy pressed the hostess's hand, but made no reply. And the carriage stopped before the tiny gate of Ivy Cottage.

Possibly the groom, who had carried a note from Barrington Hall to Robina's modest home at an early hour that morning, might have been less surprised than were the visitors to find that there were not only no signs of washing or ironing, but that even the sewing-machine stood idle in its corner, while Mrs. Marl, in the ancient silk that Lucy recognised, acknowledged the unexpected honour with the quiet dignity of a gentlewoman receiving her equals.

Robina opened the door, and led them into the little sitting-room, unconsciously causing a pang to Lucy by her fresh young beauty, and driving the theory of the Maori belle from the head of Reginald's mother for ever. Then there was a little stately introduction of herself and her mission on the part of Mrs. Barrington, to whom Robina presented the chair of state, while Lucy took mental note of a couple of old china vases and a crested university cup (Lucy was a great authority upon antiques and heirlooms), and allowed her eyes to rest upon Robina, sitting a little in the background, and looking, in her clean cotton frock, with a rose-bud in her collar, as like a study of Spring as human youth and grace can look like an incarnation of the colours and odours of awakening flowers.

Both ladies were a little silent during the homeward drive, and it was not until Reginald mentioned the subject at the dinner-table the same evening that they made public their opinions respecting the inmates of Ivy Cottage.

"Did you persuade them to come to-morrow evening?" asked Reginald, almost as soon as the long grace intoned by his brother was over.

"I cannot say they needed much persuading," said Mrs. Barrington, with a touch of asperity in her voice. "Mrs. Marl is a most self-assured person. The—a—the little girl was naturally eager to come."

"Ah!" said Reginald, and he turned towards Lucy with a passing shadow upon his face. "What do *you* think of my friends, Lucy?"

"I think Miss Marl is very pretty," answered Lucy, heroically. "Her manners are not quite formed, but Mrs. Marl seems quite a lady."

"Thank you," said Reginald, and there was a look in his eyes as he said

these simple words that somehow seemed to warm poor little Lucy's heart. "You will be good to them to-morrow evening, won't you?"

"I am still of opinion that it is somewhat of a mistaken kindness to have invited them," remarked Mrs. Barrington; "but they quite understood that the object was to enable some of the foremost among the candidates whom my son has been preparing for tomorrow's ceremony to enjoy the great advantage of seeing the bishop in private."

"Yes!" interposed the curate, "it is well to enforce the impressions of the great rite of Confirmation by every good means we can think of. A quiet gathering, and the opportunity of hearing individually a few words from the Bishop himself, which may be stored up for future meditation, will be a precious occasion for good to the favoured few whom you invite."

Mrs. Barrington's face had not spoken of inward contentment during the course of the conversation, but with Ernest's words it assumed its usual expression of austere calm. "I am grateful to you, my son," she said; "I should not like to-day's proceedings to be looked upon as a precedent for future exchange of relations—unless of a very limited kind—but it is a satisfaction to think that the invitation (now that it has been given) may be a real spiritual benefit to my son's *protégé*."

And this was the only mention of Robina that was made. But somehow Lucy felt as though she would breathe more freely after to-morrow evening had come and gone.

## Chapter XII

### The Sovereign Reappears

BUT what was the fate of the sovereign?

Once more it lay twinkling among its more soberhued compeers in Reginald's waistcoat-pocket. After it had danced out of Robina's hand on the eventful Sunday morning that was to witness its disappearance into the decrepit churchwarden's bag, its next stage was performed in Mrs. Marl's purse, a faded and somewhat maltreated article, more familiar with the contact of heavy English coppers than with that of Australian gold. Robina had had no other resource than to make a "clean breast of it" to her mother after service was over, and having been made thoroughly aware that her conduct had been "indecorous," "unbecoming," "unladylike," not to say "immodest" and "deceitful," at the same time had wetted the sovereign with her tears, and promised penitently that it should be sent back the very next day in a registered letter from the post-office. But the same afternoon, as she was returning from her Confirmation class, somewhat heavy-hearted

and heavy-lidded (for tears are treacherous tell-tales), she had met Mr. Barrington again—without Maori this time—and all her troubles had been forgotten. For he greeted her so like an old friend, and laughed with her so naturally over her discomfiture of the morning, that the tragic aspect of the affair vanished for ever. Then he had asked her to tell him all about her Confirmation perplexities and afflictions, and, to his own great astonishment, he had found words wherewith to fortify and console her. The very same man who, only a few hours ago, had proclaimed himself to poor terrified Lucy an atheist, an infidel, and a scoffer, had now all kinds of Victor Hugoish and Tennysonian inspirations to bring forward by way of upholding the theory that things were bound to “come right” in the end. The “how,” the “when,” and the “where” must needs wait for an answer; but, even taking this life, there was more of interest and pleasure than there was of actual pain and sadness in it, if one reckoned up all the minutes and sensations that went to make it up. As for orthodoxy, it was a matter of temperament. Robina must not distress herself about the Thirty-nine Articles or the Sacraments. She might simply make choice of certain gospel precepts, and fortify herself in them as her share in the Confirmation, ignoring all the rest. I cannot pretend that Reginald did not feel himself an abominable hypocrite while he played the novel *rôle* of father confessor, and preached optimistic doctrines that he would have been the first to combat if any one else had advanced them. But he was conscious of a curious feeling of compunction and tenderness as regarded Robina. In her own fresh young being she seemed to justify a vague belief in optimism. He would as soon have thought of crushing a flower under his heel as of blighting her young spirit by the final decisions of pessimism.

It was while he was expounding the foregoing confession of faith, and almost persuading himself that he believed what he was saying, that the curate and Lucy had perceived him walking by Robina's side up the lane. If they had followed yet a little farther, they would have seen that he had conducted her all the way home, and that this time Robina had not refused to give him the freedom of Ivy Cottage. For on Sunday afternoons things were very *right* in the poor little home.

The old couch of faded tapestry in the sitting-room was uncovered, and the “Christian Year” and a century-old “Pilgrim's Progress” (that was to descend to Robina in course of time) were brought out. The sewing-machine reposed in a corner, under a carefully polished lid, and a bright kettle, with the two birthday and Sunday cups that rested all the other days of the year, were in readiness for the Sunday treat of tea and cake that had been associated in Robina's mind with Sabbath afternoons as long as she could remember.

Strong in the knowledge of these invariable Sunday rules, which also required that the apron which protected Mrs. Marl's black silk gown should be taken off and hung behind the kitchen-door at four o'clock precisely, Robina consented to bring her new friend to call upon her mother. And so adroitly did Reginald behave upon the occasion, and such capital did he make out of the coincidence that had thrown him into the way of the very people he was most anxious to see, on account of his valued friend Frank, that all Mrs. Marl's suspicions were vanquished, and nothing but a pleasurable excitement, and the unexpected and astonishing promotion, in a social sense, of being on "visiting terms" with the new squire, remained in their place.

And then the adventure with Maori, and the curious career of the sovereign, had been touched upon; and Mrs. Marl had explained, with dignity, how unbecoming it was for people of their means to make rich donations to the plate. And Reginald had declared that it "served him right," because Frank had confided this—and—and *nine* other sovereigns (a lie which he mentally condoned by telling himself it was the interest he chose to give upon Frank's loan) wherewith to buy a present for his sister. And he had consented to take it back for the purpose for which it had been bestowed, and to substitute a less remarkable coin for the plate. And at mention of the "present" Robina's eyes had opened wide with incredulous delight, and the possibility of *anybody's* spending ten pounds all at once upon herself had presented itself as a grave problem to her imagination.

Reginald had gone away, after that visit, more uncertain than ever. The only point about which he was quite clear was, that he must not see Robina again until Lucy had given him her answer. And, after all, had he been bound in honour to renew his offer of marriage—even in the discouraging way in which he had done so this morning—simply because Lucy had remained unwed for his sake? Yes! he was so bound. Fifteen years ago, in the first bloom of her girlhood—when he himself had admired and courted her, and when she had had wealth and suitors at her command—she had offered to marry him against her father's will, and to go with him into exile and poverty, until such time as she might enrich him with her own inheritance, and *he* had refused. But though he had freed her she had not freed herself; and then how could he consider himself free? Supposing he took the straight course of declaring that he could no longer command his heart? Nay—he could not make the cruel avowal in so many words. If Lucy did not divine he could not reward her love and constancy by heaping pain and humiliation upon her. The refusal must come from herself, or, if it did not come—well, Robina would not suffer; that was one comfort. How should a child like she recognise the subtle sentiment that seemed to have

drawn him towards her from the beginning? Yet something cried out to Reginald that, unknown to Robina herself, the response was ready—that, old, weather-beaten, time-battered cynical as he sometimes felt himself, he had only to open his arms to have this charming child of nature take refuge in them. How he would have cherished and cared for her! As long as he was there to protect her, she should never have realised the meaning of evil. And what a new influence the fresh young life would have shed upon his conventional surroundings! But it did not do to think of these things now. It was not loyal to Lucy, and Reginald, be it said to his credit, strove to drive the “contemplation of the might have been” out of his mind.

On Monday he went up to London. On Tuesday he returned. There was an atmosphere of subdued excitement at Barrington Hall, for which the long-talked-of visit of the Bishop was clearly responsible. Lucy wore her cross of jade, and the vellum-and-gilt-bound volume of Ernest's sermons lay in apparently accidental prominence, with a paper-cutter among its pages, next to the latest numbers of the *Graphic* and the *Episcopalian Review*. Reginald learned that the ceremony of Confirmation was to take place after a special seven o'clock evening service, and that after it was over certain favoured acquaintances of Mrs. Barrington's, also Reginald's *protégées* (as his mother persisted in calling them), were to be invited to Barrington Hall, where an elaborate cold supper, specially prepared in their own and the Bishop's honour, was to be offered to them.

The afternoon, prolonged by the persistent twilight of a lovely day in May, went slowly by for Reginald. He was oppressed by a sense of being somehow outside the charmed circle at Barrington Hall (which was, nevertheless, his own inherited home), and of having neither the power nor even the wish to enter it. The Bishop was certainly—like many other Bishops—a man of the world, and glided from the discussion of London School Boards to the topic of Australian State education, and thence to Chinese immigration and Sydney society, with the air of being at home in everything he touched upon. But when he, and the curate, and Mrs. Barrington, and Lucy began to talk of matters ecclesiastical, it seemed to Reginald as though they had lifted the curtain of a great, busy, marvellous world of blinking moles, in which the discernment of black as black, and white as white, was not in the least necessary. He screened himself behind the sporting columns of a weekly newspaper, and the conversation became nothing but a meaningless murmur in his ears. Was it he himself or the world around him that was out of joint? Or was his liver going wrong, perhaps? In his present mood if he could have possessed Bulgaroo entirely free of all debts, and persuaded Robina to marry him and stay there with him—or, at least, upon a station of his own choosing in Australia—he

could have found it in his heart to forswear England for ever.

“You are not coming with us then, Reginald?” said Lucy, the same evening, as she entered the drawingroom, dressed in her walking attire. There was something of gentle rebuke in her tone, though it was addressed in the form of a question, and Reginald felt that some explanation was expected. Truth to tell, he had scruples about mingling any thought of himself in Robina's mind with the thing she had come to promise and vow in presence of the whole congregation; but, at Lucy's words, he yielded to a sudden impulse, and declared his readiness to accompany her.

The large family carriage held all the Barrington Hall party, with the exception of the curate, who had left earlier in the evening. As they entered the church, Reginald perceived that all the front pews were occupied. Two separate bands, suggestive of the sheep and the goats of Scripture, seeing that all the girls, robed from head to foot in white, were assembled on the right, and all the boys, in black jackets and trousers, were grouped on the left, filled the centre of the church. Reginald ran his eye over the white flock with the keen eyes of one who has helped to draft many thousands of sheep in the far-away wilds, and speedily arrested them on the face he was looking for. Never had Robina's curly dark head and charming brows looked lovelier. The struggling sunset-rays seemed to surround her white garments with a kind of misty glory. She looked straight and steadfastly towards the altar, and the squatter turned his own eyes away from her, and thought vaguely of the stories of taking of vows and hiding in convents that he had read of, while Lucy whispered reverently and enthusiastically in his ear, “Isn't it a beautiful sight, Reginald?”

And now there was the singing of a special hymn, in which the young voices joined; and by-and-by, after the twilight had deepened into darkness, and the church stood alone illumined in the mysterious night, the Bishop mounted into the pulpit to give his preliminary address. It was then that Reginald understood what a mighty and soul-stirring gift real eloquence is. Never was a more powerful and passionate appeal poured forth in a sacred place. To kneel before the altar with doubts, or misgivings, or half-hearted faith seemed little short of a crime. Yet he was hardly prepared for what followed. As the curate came forward at the close of the Bishop's sermon to marshal his troop of communicants to the altar, in little divisions of threes and fours, the squatter perceived that Robina was not among them. In rising with the rest she must have slipped quietly out into the darkness. He understood just what she must have felt and suffered; what an effort it must have cost her to turn thus away at the very last moment, and stand confessed to those who did not know all the struggles and perplexities of the valiant young soul, as too great a sinner to

belong to the chosen band. He could hardly sit patiently now until the close. Ivy Cottage was only half a mile from the church. He foresaw that Robina could not be among his mother's guests that evening, and, come what might, he could not go back without learning what had become of her.

So he whispered to Lucy, at the close of the service, that he intended to walk home, and was out of church and away before she had time to give utterance to the mild expostulations that she would have offered in reply. It was a divine night, starry and dewy, and musical, as only a night in May can be, with subtle perfumes wandering upon every breeze. There was a light in the little sitting-room of Ivy Cottage. The front door was open. Reginald tapped loudly, and hardly waited for the "Who's there?" which followed, before he walked in.

## **Chapter XIII**

### **Final Disappearance of the Sovereign**

HOWEVER quietly people may comport themselves when interrupted during the disagreeable process known as a *scene*, there is always something in their voices or expressions that betrays them to the careful observer. Reginald knew, as though he had been present all the time, that Mrs. Marl had been saying "hard things" to her daughter, and that Robina's flushed cheeks and shining eyes were caused by any other feeling than that of pleasure. Could he only have guessed how the poor child had looked forward to this special evening—how the thought of seeing him in his own wonderful home of Barrington Hall—which her imagination had invested with the splendour of a Lord Mayor's state-residence—had filled her brain; how she had lain awake half the night thinking of it, and picturing it, and what a delightful, wonderful event it appeared to her—he would have appreciated the sacrifice she had made to her conscience, or to the cause of truth (for the one is but the servant of the other), when, under the influence of the Bishop's words, she had stolen away from the church. She felt now as though she had branded herself eternally in the eyes of the entire world; for the great, grand, unknown world of Barrington Hall, and her own contracted little world around Ivy Cottage, represented, between them, the entire world to poor Robina; and as though, in refusing spiritual joys, she had also shut the door upon all the earthly and immediate joys that might have fallen to her share. But as regarded the latter, Reginald had brought prompt and all-healing consolation.

"You must let me speak like an old friend," he said to Mrs. Marl, after

she had deplored her daughter's *impulsiveness*, and her unfortunate tendency to act upon it. "If I had a daughter, I should like to see her act exactly as Miss Robina did. There would be very little hypocrisy in the world if there were a few more 'impulses' of that kind. But I am not going to let you off your promised visit to us. Will you fix a day for coming to lunch *now*? My mother will send you a note to-morrow."

He stopped, afraid of betraying his own eagerness. If Mrs. Marl could only have known, as she held forth upon "impulses," how strong the impulse was to hold out his hands to Robina and to say to her there and then, "Will you give me the right to defend and protect you against all the world, my own dear little love?"

But he resisted it, as indeed it was very essential that he should do, for before Mrs. Marl had had more than time to murmur her thanks, and to declare that the invitation was an unexpected pleasure and honour—before he had been able to enjoy the returning gladness and hope that beamed in Robina's face—there was another tap at the door, a softer one this time, and the curate, with an expression of pained and bewildered surprise, perplexity, protestation, and reproach all in one, walked into the room.

As the brothers confronted each other, a glance that could hardly be called brotherly seemed to acknowledge in the eyes of each the unlooked-for presence of the other. But among the impulses that cannot be acted upon in a civilised community, the one that suggests the desire to turn a rival out of the room is one of those that cannot well be acted upon.

"*You* here!" said the curate, in a tone which, if translated, would have signified, "What business have you here?"

"You choose a late hour for your pastoral visits," said Reginald, with a short laugh.

"I came to see if anything was the matter," said the curate, turning to Mrs. Marl and ignoring his brother's observation, though the colour mounted in his pale cheeks. "I am sure no trifling cause would have kept your daughter away from the solemn call of this evening."

Though his question was addressed to Robina's mother, his eyes were wandering uneasily over Robina herself. Physically or spiritually ailing, was she not one of his own especial flock, whom it behoved him to protect from the wolves that wander round the fold? And though he had no wish to be uncharitable, he was by no means certain that Reginald was not a wolf.

In answer to the searching glance directed towards her, Robina had risen again from her seat. She walked forward now towards the light, with her eyes bent to the ground.

"It was the Bishop's sermon," she said, simply. "I could not, after that; but I am very sorry; indeed I am very sorry. I hope Mr. Barrington will

forgive me.”

“It is not *I* who have the power of forgiveness, Robina,” said the curate in sad, grave tones; “but this is not the time”—with a sideway glance at his brother, who was standing hat in hand near the doorway— “this is not the time for discussion. I am glad, at least, you are not indisposed. Good-night. Good-night, Mrs. Marl.”

“Some day this week, then,” said Reginald, as he also took his leave and followed his brother out.

Silently enough the homeward walk was accomplished. Upon the subject that lay nearest to the heart of both men not a syllable was exchanged, but as they neared the house the curate said suddenly—

“Lucy tells us that we may shortly give you our congratulations upon a very happy termination to the long friendship that has bound you together for so many years. I was rejoiced to hear it. She is, indeed, a pearl among women.”

As the curate spoke, the lights from within streamed out of the drawing-room windows along the broad path in front of the house, and Lucy flitted out in the midst of this subdued radiance to meet the brothers. Instinctively Reginald held out his hand, and immediately the delicate little fingers closed upon it—so closely, so appealingly, there was nothing for it but to draw the owner thereof still closer to his side. Then, without saying a word, he passed his strong arm round the frail form, that, trembling in its joy, was nestling as close to him as it could manage. Nothing was said on either side; but, as they entered the hall—which seemed full of the influence of the lights, and flowers, and murmurs of voices in the great drawing-room at hand—Lucy knew that her answer had been given and accepted.

It must not be supposed that poor little Robina was cheated of her visit to Barrington Hall. When Reginald's mother discovered that it was her son's intention to send Mrs. Marl and his “interesting little *protégée*” out to Australia to join the lion-hearted Frank, she put herself, as the French say, “in four” to entertain them. Robina never forgot that enchanting afternoon, when, after a lunch to which a Lord Mayor's banquet was a very vulgar and second-rate affair in comparison, Mr. Barrington had shown her the gardens, and hothouses, and stables, and the New Zealand curiosities, and, to crown all, had given her Frank's present—ten wonderful shining sovereigns, in which *the* sovereign of sovereigns reigned conspicuous—in an exquisite little purse that he had begged her to accept as a little souvenir of their first meeting. And everybody had been so kind to her! Mrs. Barrington (who had seemed rather *severe* the first time she had seen her), and the Rev. Mr. Barrington, and that gentle lady whom they all called Lucy! It was a red-letter day to be dwelt upon when the whole of a

hemisphere divided her from Barrington Hall (for Mrs. Marl did not hesitate to accept the brilliant terms which accompanied the squatter's proposal that she should go and keep house for his "manager" upon a station less dreary than Bulgaroo), a day the recollection of which even the addresses of all the young (and even of some of the old) members of squatterdom in her neighbourhood could never quite efface. I am bound to say that she found a most sympathising listener in her brother Frank, from whom she learned likewise, during the short time of her stay at Bulgaroo, to know the favourite mare and the preferred verandah-corner of the departed squatter. Strange to say, she would learn to ride upon no other steed, and installed herself habitually in no other corner, while Mr. Barrington, out of all the beautiful fields and lanes that surrounded Barrington Hall, kept one green bye-lane entirely sacred to his rare solitary walks, or to his walks with no other companion than Maori. It was the lane in which Robina had rested, with her arms upon the stile, and wished that she might be a cow.

## **How A Claim was Nearly Jumped in Gum-Tree Gully**

FOR the first time for ten years—a long period in the history of a country that can look back upon its lawless past of less than thirty years ago—sounds associated with human life were to be heard in Gum-tree Gully. Where only the magpie had hitherto tuned his voice in his own grotesquely melodious key, and pretentious native companions had not been afraid to stand in a ludicrous row, where kangaroos had hopped and nibbled, nervously alert without cause, while their little ones took headers in and out of their pouches unconcernedly, and lithe snakes had projected their quivering bodies fearlessly through the scrub—hard-handed men and women began to make their way. Gum-tree Gully, worthless from an auriferous point of view, had capabilities of its own for cultivation, and Gum-tree Gully was open for selection.

How it acquired its name, in a district where every gully is made up, more or less, of gum-trees, is a matter to be chronicled. There are “gums and gums,” and the early explorers of Gum-tree Gully had testified to their appreciation of differences in trees, as we mark our appreciation of differences in people.

The veteran gum-tree, which had sufficed, on its own merits, to give its name to a range of country some miles in extent, grew close to the bed of one of the many creeks that may be credited with an equivocal share in the progenitorship of the River Coliban. Its claims to military honours were at least as well founded as those of any royal heir-apparent who has never seen a battle, or any fancifully martial princess who coquets with her sword and rides about in her dainty uniform on review days. I do not go so far as to say that if its claims had been brought before a colonial Duke of Cambridge they would have been precisely examined into, or that a medal would thenceforth have depended from one of its splattered branches. But supposing a committee of arboriculturists, in these days of stamping out all the joyous old pantheistic customs, were to sit in open-air conclave and adjudge the reward of a caressing parasite to the sturdiest old trunk in the Australian bush, this ancient gum-tree would have been entwined for its remaining decades—years are of little account in the life of such a tree—by the very Abishag of a creeper.

What of unseen warfare it had sustained could only be found out by noting in its uppermost branches, where a stump or a splintered jag betokened the loss of a limb. But these were small tributes to pay to the force of contending winds that had broken the backs of all the frailer trees around. It was easy to see what of resistance it had made by looking up its

majestic trunk. There was a grand assurance in the rigidity of its uprightness, a calm self-assertion in its uncompromising straightness, as if, poised upon circumvagant roots, that, in exploring the quartzzy soil, had curled themselves around a layer of primeval granite, it knew that nothing short of an earthquake which should have power to upheave the foundations of the hill itself could compel its stately body to the performance of any undue genuflexions.

Every succeeding season had stamped it with hieroglyphics of its own, to the interpretation of which only nature could furnish the key. Becoming warty as it reached maturity, and discharging its acrid juices less frequently than in its more expansive and full-blooded days, it had acquired a seasoned appearance as compared with the juvenile gums around it, that gave it all the dignity of a Chiron in the world of the Eucalypti. A close examination of its seared back would have brought to light a succession of short horizontal indentations, succeeding each other at somewhat irregular intervals from about four feet above the ground to within a few feet of its first throwing out of a branch—a proof that, if time is to be measured by impressions, the gum-tree was older than the most aged oak in Britain—for what English tree can remember a time when naked savages scaled it, and scooped out hollows for the reception of their monkey-toes? Fresh bark had grown around these scars, very much as the skin grows over our childish cuts and wounds, at which we look in more advanced life, on being told that our bodies have been all transformed the while, wondering what we have in common with the absurd little being who lay awake half the night in anticipation of a new pocket-knife, and mutilated himself with it in the morning. Only that the impression has left its mark on the mind as distinctly as the knife has left its mark on the body, such a being, we would say, had passed away altogether.

Besides the indentations afore-mentioned—not to be twisted by the most acute decipherer of cuneiform inscriptions into signifying anything more than *points d'appui* for aboriginal fingers and toes—there were some characters inscribed on the opposite side of the tree, which favoured the supposition that they were channels for the outlet of an idea. A close inspection would have left, moreover, no doubt as to the original intentions of the artist. There was evidence of a lobsided cross, laboriously cut into the very substance of the trunk. In lieu of the arms of a crucified Saviour, a capital D of lean proportions stood at the left-hand transverse extremity of the cross. Similarly, at the right-hand extremity, a letter of unsteady build, which could only be allowed to pass for a T on the hypothesis that it could have been intended for nothing else, balanced the capital D.

Above this ornamental design the successful designer had proudly cut out

the popular representation of a heart—apparently in an advanced state of fatty degeneration. There was further proof of a desire on his part to portray the heart transfixed by a sharp instrument; but the difficulty of the perspective having overcome him at this point, he had launched out into *basso-relievo*, as was testified by the fraction of a splint, inserted into a small hole that had been drilled in the very centre of the inflamed heart.

Upon these mysterious signs many outward forces had been brought into play. The rain had guttered down them; black ants had established an emigration depôt in their midst; opossums had scratched at them in running up the tree. It could not be supposed to matter to any one in the world that they should be obliterated altogether. In fact, if it had not been for the juxtaposition of the cross and the heart, the letters D.T. might mean nothing more than a waggish commemoration of a carouse, held in the early digging days under the shadow of the majestic gum.

Very few people passed by them. For the chance “sundowner” who cast his tired eyes upon them, they could not signify much. Trees tell no tales of the emotions they have been witness to, otherwise every novelist who walks about the woods might fill his volumes without trouble. The letters had, then, apparently no mission to fulfil, other than the unsoughtfor one of serving for rainducts and ant colonies. As they became gradually more indistinct, even the swagsmen, who, for the most part, were not great readers, took no heed that they were there. It might be, nevertheless, that an accident would bring them into prominence. They were as weather-beaten as the tree itself when the first selectors began to file through Gum-tree Gully, with their train of sheep and bullocks and canvas-covered carts. This was quite another race from the diggers. Plodders, in a great measure, who saw no lottery-box in the uncultivated bush; but a home in prospective, to be fought for, inch by inch, with the stony soil. For the most part these pioneers were young. The courage to begin at the beginning is lacking in middle age; nevertheless, they comprehended the inevitable sprinkling of unsuccessful colonists—the men who are always too late at a “rush,” who always appear on the scene of action just when the good time is over, who are struggling at home when they ought to be in Victoria, and struggling in Victoria when they ought to be in Queensland.

Gum-tree Gully was only faintly lighted by the waning after-effects of a brilliant sunset, when one of those disappointed ones, himself on the wane, pulled up his cart under the legendary gum-tree, and looked solemnly aloft into its far-seeing leaves. There is no prolonged crepuscular glow after sundown in Australia. The sun disappears in a gorgeous nest of varying colours, and long after the vivid carmines have died out the sky retains a faint impression of them, and borders the tops of the hills with semi-tints of

green and rose, like the inside of a shell. But down in hollows it is dark. The light ceases abruptly, and the opal line in the far-off horizon is the last lingering protest of daylight against the stars that are beginning to hurry to the front and pierce the cool atmosphere with more or less of silver or gold, according to their separate individualities.

Gum-tree Gully had probably seen its unruly days in the period when Melbourne was described by contemporaneous writers of the "Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge" school as "a wicked city; there is no city in the world so wicked as Melbourne." But, purified by the solitary contemplation of the "pearly gates of heaven," it evoked no associations unbefitting virgin soil in the minds of the well-intentioned workers on the way to their selections, whose highest aim in life was probably to establish themselves on their 320 acres as "boss cockatoos."

Such associations as it evoked for the middle-aged selector, standing in front of his cart, with the last red rays suffusing his face, were all centred in the gum-tree. His face was so irradiated, as he turned it round after his lengthy survey, that his mate, not prone to personal observation, felt it incumbent upon him to inquire, in an aggrieved sort of way, into the cause.

"Seems like as if you'd struck a patch, Dave!" he said, putting his pipe into his pocket, and working his way out through timber and hen-coops to the front, by way of seeing where the luck lay.

So he had, but it was not a divisible patch.

He had struck his bygone youth and heart's desire. In the malformed capitals, the cross dropping crystallised gum, the fading heart, he had struck the spectre of all his hopes and aims. It confronted him now and he bared his grizzled head before it. In a way, the letters and he had kept pace together. They were not more misshapen than his path in life. They were typical of all his undertakings. But they had endured, and he had endured. There *had* been a time, then, when he had felt as if success were possible to him.

In reply to his mate's comment, he pointed to the tree with the butt-end of his whip, putting on his wide-awake the while with dreamy air. His mate was in the habit of making allowances for him. Dave, according to his estimate, had "no more savvy than a child, but you never got a rough word out of him," and his learning was patent to all who found their friend's caligraphy a stumbling-block to the due enjoyment of their letters. But this was conduct that required checking. A man was not to be called from his sleepy corner and his pipe and fooled into staring at a rotten tree with its head in the clouds like Dave himself!

It was with sarcastic politeness that Dave's mate indicated the tree by a fine flourish of the right hand as he gravely inquired, "You're prospecting,

I s'pose, Mister?"

Dave's face was still illuminated by the sunset as he rejoined, "That's just what it is; I'm prospecting."

"First time I ever heard tell of prospecting up a gum-tree. I'd like to know now what 'ud be the vally of gold. Say, Dave, I think I'll jump your claim."

"Tisn't a claim as any one can jump," answered Dave. He looked fondly at the defaced inscription, and muttered softly, "Dave and Tilly"—there was something about the sound of the words that must have satisfied his fullest sense of euphony. After they had camped down for the night—Dave rolled up in his grey blanket at the very foot of the tree like a mammoth caterpillar—he reiterated at long intervals, in whispered inflections, "Dave and Tilly," "Dave and Tilly." "Dave and Tilly" were apparently the talismanic words that made of Dave a lion of labour. Gum-tree Gully soil demanded work of a sort to make a Hercules ponder. If only a new Amphion could have piped to the gums and brought them trooping down to the side of the creek, the rest of the work would have been easy. It was the grubbing up of the monstrous stumps that clung by their hundred roots to the soil beneath the river-bed itself that took it out of Dave and his mate. They worked silently, devastating, as is prescribed by nature, that they might regenerate. Dave was a destroying angel among the trees. There are still to be seen in Gum-tree Gully stark grey gums, dead and leafless, that look with their rung trunks like the bowstrung corpses of malefactors. When the moon shines on these ghosts of trees, it is as if the end of life had come, and a dreary dead world were illumined by the non-vivifying light left in another dead world.

There was a triumph in felling the tallest gums. Dave's mate was fain to admit within himself that it was not he who struck the hardest blows. He tried to account for this contradiction according to his lights. "Was it a put-up game on Dave's part before?" He had always thought him a bit soft, but this looked like artfulness. He worked the harder for his perplexity, hammering his doubts into whatever he took in hand. Gum-tree Gully can testify to the prodigies that may be accomplished by a couple of sound men, who, by a rare chance, do not drink, and who work—each to his utmost—the one from motives only known to himself, the other from pride. There were queer hypotheses afloat. It was reputed that they were deadly enemies, and that each had made a vow to kill the other from overwork. But they worked on.

There was only one point at issue between them. Dave's mate, chopping on one occasion at the monumental gum-tree, found his wrist seized from behind by fingers hard as flexible steel. He dropped his axe, as if he had been committing an act of desecration, and turned round apologetically.

Dave's pensive eyes were aflame. His careworn face was rejuvenated by the fervour of his sudden wrath.

"Don't you go for to do it, mate," he said, half threateningly; "don't you go for to do it. You know better than that!"

Dave's mate had at least ten years the advantage of him, but at that moment his conviction that he was the "better man of the two" received a shock. He remained sulkily dignified the whole of that day, only observing in a general sort of way, over the evening meal, as if he had been telling it in confidence to the quart pot in front of him, "that he would take to planting spuds; he'd had about enough of working like a nigger. If he couldn't hack at all the blasted timber on the creek he'd let it rip; he was full up of your *close* people; you never knew where to have them; he was open as the day himself," &c.

Dave waited patiently for the end of this somewhat pointed soliloquy, and put out his hand humbly.

"Don't you take it ill of me," he asked; "that writin's been as good as a prophecy to me. It's going on for twelve years since I wrote it, and it's been struggle and disappointment ever since. That cross, you see, 's got betwixt me and her, and it's kept us apart ever since. But when I come upon the old letters, unawares, the other day, I took fresh heart. It seemed like as if they were waitin' to come true. I've always kept the one wish in my mind, and I don't know now but what it may come off. Any way, so long as I've got the tree to look at I keep thinking so!"

Such a long speech for taciturn Dave took due effect. That his mate was mollified was evident from his looking higher than the quart pot, and addressing himself with a show of condescension to Dave himself. Only, having a nature not quite so transcendental for his own part, he sought to give the conversation a practical turn, and call things by their right names.

"T. 'll be a young woman, I expect?"

"That's it," replied Dave, deprecatingly.

"And you was goin' to be fixed off so soon as you'd get a streak o'luck?"

"Well, we were pledged to one another before I come out from the old country."

Dave's mate pulled out his triangular slice of tobacco and settled himself against the back of the tent, as one who was about to continue his catechism at his ease.

"Is T. settin' still a-waitin' for you?"

"She gave me her sacred word she'd wait till I'd get a home for her."

"And she's been waitin' all this time?"

"All this time!"

"Why didn't you bring her along with you at the start?"

“Well, she hadn't been brought up to rough it, as you may say,” Dave explained, “and latterly I'd been losin' heart. I told her when I wrote to her—nigh upon two years back it is now—if it was to break my heart I couldn't justify it to myself to see her wait no longer. And after that I wouldn't so much as send her my address, so I couldn't get no more letters from her.”

The tobacco was cut, and Dave's mate was pressing it into his evening pipe—so absorbed apparently in the work of ramming in more than the pipe could conveniently hold, that Dave plunged afresh into his explanation.

“It's come to my knowledge since I come here that she's just as I left her. I think if I could get as bit of a homestead fixed up down by the creek, that writin' mightn't be for nought after all—there's no telling!”

The pause that followed, only broken by the shrill chorus of the clamorous locusts, was awful. The romance of Dave's youth and middle age, avowed with a pathetic timidity which seemed to deprecate the treasuring of a romance at all, would have seemed less incongruous if some encouragement had been given, some reply audible, other than the intermittent puffs at the pipe.

But this was a case in which it behoved Dave's mate to be oracular. He waited until Dave's humiliation was complete before he spoke.

“You can't do more nor chance it. If it's for better, why, it'll be for better; and if it's for worse, well, it'll be for worse, and that's putten' it straight.”

The oracle had spoken. Oracles are like the counsels of time-servers. You may accept them very much as you please. They allow of as free an interpretation as most inspired sayings, being ambiguous enough to satisfy all elucidators of the meanings of prophecy.

Whatever gratitude Dave might have felt for this comprehensive exposition of his case he expressed by a gesture of acquiescence. Shrinking more than ever into himself, as was his wont, after any unlooked-for burst of extemporaneous confidence, he baffled his mate's well-meant endeavours to lead up to the subject of the tree. Gum-tree Gully was only aware that all along the bed of the creek the twisted trunks of the native trees were lying prone, and that, solitary, a giant gum stood, massive, tapering, grey, like a petrification for seventy feet from the ground, and thereupon breaking into a rustling mass of shining dark foliage—a leafy fountain through which the sunbeams pricked dancing holes of light into the shadow below. Further, that the eccentric selectors, who felled in earnest as Gladstone is credited with felling in sport, had built round the foot of the giant gum a sort of brush fence, within which the elder man of the two had been seen one moonlight night, his face, to all appearance,

resting against the rugged bark. Verdict —“They were a queer lot.”

During the succeeding season the influence of the writing was as marked as if it had been traced by a spirit hand. It was especially perceptible in the building of the house. If “Tilly” was all Dave's, Dave's mate might claim a joint-proprietorship in the “T.” If Dave pondered with tender forethought before fixing the position of the front door, weighing the rival influences of a sunrise that seemed the harbinger of a rose-coloured day, and a sunset that turned the creek into a new Pactolus with golden edges, Dave's mate had an intuitive perception of the way in which T. would “shape” with regard to the stacking of the chimneys. It was he who shingled the roof, from a preconceived certainty that T. was not the kind to be put off with galvanised iron; it was he who carted the hardwood boards from the township for the flooring of the verandah, having settled it to his own satisfaction that it would not do to “foist any of your clay flooring upon T.” There was a promise of permanence in every nail that was driven into every plank. It is the idea which governs—not the fact. The secret of the potentiality of the old gum-tree was not even known to the selector and his mate. If it had been explained to them that all this sinew-stretching and muscle-pulling work was a straining after the ideal, they would not have understood it. But it was nothing else. The best work that has ever been done has always been done in response to it; for it is the only work into which is put the truest part of oneself. If the veriest atheist feels devotional perforce when he looks up at a sublime spire piercing the hazy blue far over his head, or hears an excursive burst of high, sweet melody in the middle of a midnight mass, it is not, as he will explain to you, because his senses of sight or hearing are suddenly taken by storm, but because through these senses the intense spirit of the artificer or the musician impresses him with a reflection of its absorbing devotion. The part left in the spire or the music will make itself heard while the world lasts.

It was during the Christmas week of 187—, at a time when the Victorian landscape was enlivened by the canary-coloured patches of ripening crop, that Dave's mate drove the fresh-painted cart over to the township to meet Dave and his wife. The newly-engaged young lady at the Commercial Hotel, in whose unabashed eyes his manly face and figure, toned down in their tendency to fleshiness by his fat-repressing work, had found favour, smirked behind the bar as she saw him rein up in the yard. In the bright green of the cart and the bright scarlet of his tie, set off by the cheerful uniformity of his new slop suit, she saw delicate evidences of his intentions. We are so apt to think that every falling shower has its designs against us, or for us, as the case may be, that it was natural enough on the part of the young person at the Commercial to see in these details a

something bearing directly upon herself. She adopted forthwith her most insinuating expression, and threw it away, after all, on a half-tipsy swagman, blind of one eye; for Dave's mate, after a word with the groom, passed straight out of the yard, and stationed himself at the corner of the street, there to watch for the arrival of Cobb and Co.'s coach.

The mystic T. was about to assume the shape of a flesh-and-blood woman. Dave's mate fidgeted under the heated verandah in front of the general store; his temples were throbbing as if he had been working in the sun with his hat off. The prospect of finding the coach packed with a whole harem consigned to him alone could not have excited him more than the advent of the newly-married wife of another man. No special houri, before whose particular charms Dave's mate would certainly have been the first to abase himself, could quite have taken the place of the T. whose unseen presence had encouraged him for so long—in deference to whose divined inclinations he had shingled the house and floored the verandah. Not that he was at all likely to tell himself anything of the sort. There is no possible analysis of sentiment without education. He probably told himself that the coach was late, and that he'd been “gaping down the road a devil of a time.” The *ennui* of standing about was beginning to tell in favour of the young lady behind the bar of the Commercial, and Dave's mate had already turned his back to the verandah and the corner, when an intermittent rattle in the distance made him pause. His hardihood went away on the spot. Any one seeing the sheepish expression on the face of the big brown-bearded man in the slop suit would never have given him credit for fancying himself to the extent indulged in under ordinary circumstances by Dave's mate. The coach came tilting along from the bush track on to the macadamised road, with a jingling and a clattering of appalling force. A puff of north wind threw the dust right ahead into the wide-open eyes of Dave's mate, and by the time he could see out of them again the coach had drawn noisily up at the side of the pavement, and Dave, with the very look his mate remembered when they had first come upon the gumtree, was holding out his hand from the inside. Next to him was the top of a woman's brown hat. The coach-door being opened, Dave descended first, and turning quickly round, held out his arms to the woman in the brown hat. He jumped her out like a child, and she stood, with her head reaching no higher than his shoulder, quite close to him on the pavement. And now Dave's mate saw his creation materialised. A small-faced, sallow woman, inexpressibly neat all over, with large eyes and white teeth, and a *pose* foreign to Gum-tree Gully belles, with dark plaits just showing on their smooth surface a chance grey hair, and a slight round waist, and a small round throat. Dave's mate had a sudden perception of the loudness of his

tie which hampered the freedom of his greeting. It made him almost ashamed to think of the green cart. He had never "fancied himself" so little before.

"It's my mate" was all Dave said by way of introducing him. "I put you first, you see, Tilly, and he comes second."

Tilly held out an ungloved cool little hand that almost made him laugh. It felt like nothing but a tiny squirrel. He shook it with exceeding care, not knowing how strong a pressure of his horny muscular hand it was safe to bestow upon it. As to saying anything, that was quite out of the question. But Tilly had a woman's secret for putting him at ease. She looked up into his face from under her brown hat, and made her large shining eyes say to him in so many words, "You please me, don't you see? and I want to please you in my turn."

She had looked so at Dave years ago—he believed for his own part that she had never looked so at anybody else—and she had found occasion to practise the look during his absence a few scores of times at least, which accounted for its coming so readily. But to Dave's mate it was a new sort of experience. The "minauderies" of the young lady at the Commercial were quite another thing from this soul and sense quelling glance. He was not even aware as yet whether he was beholden to her for it or no. The T. he had toiled for could never come back again; but already he was not sure that he would change it for the living "Mrs. Dave."

Tilly was a born woman of the world. On being hoisted up into the green cart she sat on a high plank between her husband and his mate, her toes barely touching the bottom, as much at her ease as if she were a little sister whom they were bringing home for the holidays. She asked questions in a demure way, knowing that they would both answer at once; and feigned to be delightfully "new-chummish," by way of making them laugh. For all that, they had never been alive to the beauties of the bush track before, having hurried up, as a rule, to get back to work. But when Tilly sniffed at the aromatic odour of the gums and peppermints, blown into their faces by the cool evening breeze, standing right up to watch a flight of "blue mountains" swooping through the air, and pushed back her brown hat to remark upon the funny colour of the range of hills ahead of them—which, indeed, were turning from slate-colour to delicate mauve in the sunset—they took note of these facts for the first time, all the while naïvely convinced that they were "showing Tilly the ropes."

This was the way with them at first. It should have been the way with them always. But then Dave's mate should have been a Sir Galahad, and Tilly a woman without eyes, and Dave himself anything but the simple-hearted being he was.

Gum-tree Gully was witness at first to a trinity in unity. Where an incorporeal presence had given a spur to physical effort, a light-footed woman moved about all day. In spite of Dave's fears on the score of her power of "roughing it," Tilly might have been born to look after a bushman's home, to bake in a camp oven, to carry her weekly wash to the river-side, and twitter along with the birds over her wash-tub. But if a woman, in the prime of her life, is to be helpmate to two men, she should be at least a Metis (wisest of all the daughters of gods and men), or they should be blind, or one of them should be willing to go by the "steep and thorny way to heaven." Failing these alternatives the trinity at Gum-tree Gully must inevitably have its term.

It came to no tragical end. Mrs. Dave was mending the socks of the selectors indiscriminately under the shadow of the gum-tree. She had arranged each heap with regard to its separate owners, nattily, as was her fashion of doing things, when, a darker shadow enveloping her, she looked up with a start. Dave's mate, his face white as if he had been drinking, came hastily up to her and laid violent hands on his particular pile of socks. He picked them up without so much as looking at her, and as he almost turned his back upon her in speaking, she had some ado to make out the purport of his few hurried words.

"It's about time for me to clear out," she heard; "if I wasn't a fool I'd have cleared out at the first—and that's all about it!"

"Oh my!" said Tilly, "you're not going to leave us?"

There was a dismayed note ringing in her accent. Dave's mate turned round, and encountered her upturned eyes, pleading from beneath the rim of the travelled brown hat—those eyes that had done all the mischief from the beginning! He looked as severe as if his heart had not been sinking to sickness. "Yes, I am," he said huskily, "and I guess you know why!"

Her eyes wandered inquiringly over his face.

"Have you had words with Dave?"

"Not I. I don't s'pose you think I have neither."

"Oh, then, *why* do you go?"

There was no actual guilt to be laid at the door of Dave's wife, but perhaps it was just as well that Dave was not at hand to see the expression in her steadfast eyes as she slowly repeated the words, "Why—do—you—go?"

Dave's mate found that his knees were trembling. They would have given way in another instant, and he would have fallen down upon them in front of Mrs. Dave, but looking up in the desperation of his mental tussle, the rude letters on the gum-tree confronted him as plainly as if they had been traced in fire by the finger which threw confusion into the hearts of the

Babylonian revellers in olden times. From this moment he looked down no more. There was not a turn in the D or the T which was not somehow characteristic of Dave. His blunders, his simplicity, and his goodness seemed to cry out against treachery from the twisted cross and the half-obliterated heart.

He had said, in reply to his mate's joke on his new sort of gold discovery, “ 'Tisn't a claim as any one can jump!” never taking into account that his claim was a human one, and humanity false. But Dave's mate remembered it all.

“I'd be stopping on for no good,” he replied, always looking straight ahead of him at the tree. “There's no two words about it. Maybe I'll see you again—by'nd-by—anyhow, I wish you luck.”

He was gone before she could put out her hand, or even call up another of her wonderful glances. She sat, thinking, under the tree long after he had left her. It was all but dark when her husband came out to call her in, and found her still, pensive, in the same place. No one could have been tenderer of her; but of Dave's tenderness she had not been hitherto as ambitious as was compatible with wifely sentiment. She smiled at him now, lowering her eyes, and listening with head turned partly aside, but without comment, to his disjointed observations touching the departure of his mate.

“He hasn't been the chap he used to be, latterly. It seems to me like as if there was something on his mind—and that 'ud work on him, d'ye see—for I've never known him to keep a thing to himself all the years we've lived together. I said as much, mind you, as I'd give the best part of the farm to have him stop; and he up and says, ‘Do you want to cut your own throat?’ quite savage-like. There was no holding him after that, but I doubt he's got something on his mind, as I said before. . . . But there's only one good can come of it, as fur as I can see—I've got my little woman all to myself.”

It must have been nothing more than a chance streak of moonlight which filtered at that instant through the black gum-leaves, silvering the bark and the old inscription, and softening Tilly's face to penitence. Still, it could not have been a moonbeam that she wiped away with a furtive gesture of her small palm, before giving her hand to Dave and passing out with him from under the shadow of the tree into the light of the home within.

# Barren Love

## Chapter I

ONLY two veins standing out from a woman's neck—that was all! The cynic told himself he was a fool, and telling himself so, walked away to the farther end of the deck. Blue veins starting up from a young throat! There was nothing, after all, in a phenomenon of the sort—nothing, that is to say, that could not be explained on physiological grounds. The cynic was accustomed to look at manifestations of pain from a point of view purely scientific. Thus, when you cut off the head of a dog-fish, the monster squirms with the agony. Like the evil it typifies, there is a hold-fastness in its grip of life. But you know, or you believe you know, of how much account is all this resistant wrestling with death! What softer sensation do you have than one of animosity towards the dog-fish for dying so hard, and for giving you such a world of trouble to get your blunt knife through a neck like animated indiarubber?

The cynic admitted a difference between the throat of a placoidian and the throat of a young girl. But to watch the one gasping its death-gurgle from a bleeding gash, and the other, distorted, working against a sentimental grief, might not of itself be a process provocative of intensely differing emotions. The cynic, holding it as a theory that softening of the heart and softening of the brain have meanings almost synonymous, pooh-poohed his maudlin fancies, and walked resolutely back to his old post by the bulwarks. Those obtrusive veins annoyed him! In thirty or forty years' time they might ride up, if they chose. Everything should be smooth in youth, even to the trunk of a tree. Nature had given these veins a semi-opaque covering, smoother and softer than the blossom of an arum. In their normal condition they obliterated themselves behind it, or only started into the faintest show of self-assertion when their home was unsettled. And here they had risen like blue weals, raised by the lash of an inward thong!

The cynic, feeling justified in his irritation, looked up from the demonstrative neck to the face above it—and immediately walked away. This time it was for good. He felt about as much ashamed of himself as if he had torn open the girl's dress and asked her where she was smarting.

Not that the cynic was unacquainted with the nature of tears—"a limpid fluid secreted by the lachrymal gland," &c. If you come to tears, nothing can shed them more profusely than a seal. The soft-eyed creature wails and cries on the score of her outraged maternity. She plants her unwieldy body in front of her little one and asks for mercy with streaming eyes. Tears,

therefore, are nothing in themselves! Sterne shed them by the bucketsful, with much maudlin satisfaction to himself the while. The cynic loathed Sterne, and despised the sentimentalist for his perpetual flourish of handkerchiefs in the faces of his readers. But on the present occasion he came very near to despising himself. He wondered just when he would forget the strained eyes—every gleam of self-consciousness washed out of them—nothing but an intelligence of suffering left. He did not require to be told that from among the departing boats, fast turning into mere buoyant dots in the distance, one more than another must have magnetised the hopeless gaze.

Looking half-way across Plymouth harbour, by the light of a sudden burst of yellow sunshine, he could discern the outline of a man standing upright in the foremost boat of all.

The cynic was so quick in connecting the dejection of the man's attitude with the crushed aspect of the girl, that he would have despised himself with a fresh access of vigour if it had occurred to him to think about himself in the matter at all. Somehow, he forgot at the moment to make proper sport of his own show of human interest. The fluttering of a handkerchief in the boat called forth a curious corresponding signal on the part of the girl. Her hands, trembling all over, like the rest of her body, tugged at her collar-fastening and extracted a hidden white envelope. They carried it to her lips—she was past all heed of curious bystanders long ago! The passionate kissing of the unheeding paper—the stretching of it out towards the boat, as if so frantic a gesture might stay even the stolid Plymouth boatman—the effort that she made to restore it to its place and lay it as a sort of healing plaster against her gasping throat—all this might have been grotesque if it had been only one shade less humanly real. The cynic found a characteristic outlet for his unaccountable sensations by glaring with an expression of appalling severity at any unwary waif who might venture within three yards of the desolate girl. Long after the boat was out of sight she continued to stand in the same spot, stonily indifferent to the scene before her. For the last English sunset was sending the ship on her way in a rose-coloured light. People on the Plymouth pier saw her in a haze of burnished mist, moving airily away under gilded sails.

## **Chapter II**

THE cynic, who was not called Mr. Cynic, however, by those on board, but Mr. Ralph Grimwood, or Mr. Grimwood only, was very sea-sick. Between the intervals of his degradation he thought about dog-fishes and seals; he thought about the affections too—those perplexing equivalents in

the sum total of the disturbing influences that control us. On principle, he execrated the affections — officious meddlers in the sound mechanical functions of the body. On principle, he was antagonistic to love, the mere display of which would have been nauseous if it had not been so ludicrous! But sea-sickness, it would seem, had rendered him illogical. As he lay in his bunk, careful not to look at the swinging port-hole, a mere glance at which seemed to heave him up into the watery clouds and drag him down into the watery depths, he fell to picturing what his life might have become if he could have changed personalities with the vague outline in the boat. Being weakened by so much diminution of bile, he was fain to indulge the fancy. He had never known what it was to be light-headed as yet. Instead, therefore, of controlling his impulse, according to his stern creed, he was constrained to let his impulse control him. And it controlled him utterly!

Now he could see the boat racing after the ship, while he himself was urging it on! Now he could see himself climbing up the ship's side, clothed always in the shadowy form he had distinguished. How soon he had kissed back into their white hiding-place the poor swollen veins! He had separated the helpless hands twisted into each other for their own support, and put them round his strong, surly shoulders. His lips had closed for one instant the heavily-weighted eyelids, that he might see the grey eyes open again with such a look as his touch would have restored to them. It need not be pointed out that the light-headed fancy was running riot through his brain.

Meanwhile a wind had set in that was driving away all traces of tears from the emigrant's cheeks, and blowing a fresher brininess against them—instead. The ship, at the outset, swayed timorously along, like a child in leading-strings. The wind pushed her about, slapped her alternately on either side, tilted her forward, and hitched her back, till she jerked like a gibbing horse—finally took her by the hand and pulled her smoothly along across the Bay of Biscay. Then Mr. Grimwood came on deck.

The passengers up above were proudly displaying their newly-acquired sea-legs. They strutted along uncertainly, after the manner of ducks,—very much pressed for time to get nowhere at all. Mr. Grimwood watched them stumping past him, the same strained expression peculiar to landsfolk at the outset of a long voyage, stamping them all; the rims of their eyes reddened by the wind.

The deck was a flush one, and amid-ships was a balustrade dividing the spaces allotted respectively to the first and second-class passengers. As it is always easier to lower one's social status than to raise it, on board ship as in the world, passengers from the first cabin were allowed the run of the space paid for by passengers from the second cabin. None of them however, with the sole exception of Mr. Grimwood seemed in any especial

hurry to snatch at their privilege. Probably it was one of the cynic's eccentricities to like whiffs of a mixed character.

On the second-class deck the nostrils conveyed food to the mind in the shape of a hundred conjectures. For instance, on the weather side, it was impossible after a few enforced sniffs, to abstain from speculations as to the state in which the fowls might be kept. On the lee side, the speculative mind might find a still wider range and lose itself in dwelling on the odoriferous origin of ship's grease. It is not certain whether these inducements allured Mr. Grimwood from the quarter-deck. If neither fowls nor ship's grease attracted him, it may be inferred that the people were worth a glance, albeit not from Mr. Grimwood's point of view—a cynic always sees a crumbling skeleton behind the most life-warm flesh.

They were of all varieties—the needy family man whose olive branches would have borne pruning, the runaway defaulter who looked even at the horizon with suspicion—the willing-to-better-herself spinster, who knew to a nicety how many of the ship's officers were married, and could have told off each mate to his watch on deck with less hesitation than the Captain himself. In none of these classes would you have included the one solitary passenger standing by herself on a coil of rope, with arms leaning on the bulwarks and eyes directed to the impalpable boundary-line of the sea. Neither would you have found her counterpart more readily among the first-class passengers. In the quiescence of her present attitude, as in the mute storminess of her grief, she seemed absolutely to ignore all human surroundings. Andromeda, chained to a rock, with foam leaping over her white limbs, could not have been more oblivious of the impression she was conveying than was this plaid-enveloped girl.

Mr. Grimwood had cultivated art even before he cultivated cynicism. To a stirring of the ancient artimpulse within him he sacrificed his reflections anent dog-fishes and seals. With such a model for an Andromeda, his cynicism might all have spent itself on the Dragon. Who can say? It is certain that some of his bile had spent itself already. Andromeda would not, perhaps, have worn a black felt hat or a green plaid shawl; but could even Andromeda's hair have been blown back into softer, silkier rings from whiter temples; could Andromeda's eyes—always granting that they were of the same transparent grey—have been hedged in by longer lashes; could Andromeda herself have shown a purer profile, or—now that the mutinous veins were laid to rest—have displayed a more rounded throat? Mr. Grimwood, gravely parading the second-deck, must have known all this by intuition. It was soon after his excursive walk along the hen-coops that he was seen in conversation with the Captain.

That same afternoon, the second-class steward, who was washing

second-class plates in second-class slop, was half-deafened by a call from the Captain himself. The steward was to fetch him the young woman in plaid—Miss Leighton by name—and to look sharp about it.

The Captain was a sort of typical tar—one of a race not quite extinct; still to be met with on old colonial wool-ships, despite the new genus introduced by steam. He did not think about Andromeda when he saw Miss Leighton, but it partly occurred to him that it was a blank shame such an eternally fine girl should be spooking about the world by herself. It seemed that he had summoned her to give her a cheering piece of news. It appeared, according to the Captain's story, that a letter and a deposit had been put into his hands at starting. Which, by some remarkable oversight, had never been opened until to-day. The letter bore no signature—over this part of his story the Captain blundered unaccountably. Somebody, about whose appearance the Captain was by no means clear, had entrusted the letter to his keeping. In fact, only as regarded the instructions, did the Captain express himself with anything like clearness, and on that head he was more than explicit. Miss Leighton was to travel as a saloon passenger, the deposit being sufficient not only to defray the cost of her passage-money, but to give her a cabin to herself. Here the Captain attempted an apology for his delay in imparting the news. Somehow, he blundered again, and stopped suddenly short.

Certainly Miss Leighton's mind must have been given to travelling on its own account. All the time the Captain was speaking, it seemed to be journeying back from some dreary distance, until it shone through her great abstracted eyes. Their lost, desolate look made way for the light that a warm sense of surrounding care brought into them. It was no longer Andromeda with the horror of the Dragon's presence in her white face, but Andromeda with uplifted eyes watching the glittering pathway of her deliverer through the air.

Poetical justice should have awarded Mr. Grimwood a seat next to Miss Leighton at the dinner-table, but poetical justice was not embodied in the head-steward—a ginger-hued little man, upon whom devolved the arrangement of the passengers' places. A constant suspicion that some outrage upon his dignity might be meditated had caused the little steward's eyes to protrude. His exalted position was a bar to his making any confidential friends. He was on speaking terms only with the cook, and spent his life with one eye upon the lazarete and the other on the look-out for a slight.

The cynic's post at the dinner-table was exactly in front of his cabin. When his eyes travelled along a row of ungainly noses on the same side of the table as his own, they invariably stopped at a small Greek profile,

standing out like a cameo from among the irregular heads that flanked it. There was something embarrassing in looking down a column of strongly-defined nose-tips. The cynic waited until the regulation plum-duff was put into its place; then he took a rapid glance to the rear. Out of all the assortment of heads, there was only one that could possibly correspond to the profile—a stately little head, very black and shining, perhaps a shade too upright, as if the knot of heavy hair on the nape had pulled it ever so slightly back.

And through all the swinging about in the Bay of Biscay, Mr. Grimwood continued to take his daily glance. It was not, perhaps, so fruitful of consequences as a nearer approach to the *Andromeda* might have proved itself. Sympathies have declared themselves on board ship between young men and women in proximity at meal-time, which otherwise must have been everlastingly ignored. What will not a constant adherence to black-current tart in two young persons of different sexes engender? How steel yourself against a growing interest in the possessor of a plate that accompanies your own with such unswerving fidelity?

Only that the cynic was like nobody else on board ship or elsewhere, he would not have sat daily with an afflicted dowager and a failing octogenarian on either side of him. He would have found means to install himself in the place of one of the nondescript spinsters who enclosed Miss Leighton. But being unlike anybody else in any respect whatever, it was entirely consistent with his character to make a point of avoiding her. As to analysing his motives, that is another thing. It is not pretended that any man's intimate feelings are open to dissection.

There have been natures sufficiently high-flown to set a flesh-and-blood statue on an ideal pedestal, and to shrink from seeing the statue come down to its regular meals. There have been natures, high-flown too, to whom the quintessence of beauty lies in the bloom which covers it. Perhaps, in the cynic's eyes, the mystery surrounding the luxury of Miss Leighton's position was the bloom that covered its solid good. There are yet other natures, and these are not necessarily high-flown, who argue that only one passion can move a woman to so intense an agony of grief as that of which the cynic had been witness. Were such a passion immediately transferable, at what value must the new recipient place it in the sum of human emotions? Its sweetness might be just as transitory as its grief—all a piece of unconscious play-acting. Now the list of possible reasons is quite exhausted, it is hardly necessary to repeat that the cynic was unlike anybody else. As for the present of the cabin, there have been precedents in this direction. Amelia Sedley played on the piano Dobbin had restored to her, with something of the feeling that comforted Miss Leighton when she

closed her eyes in the new cabin that the George Osborne of her dreams had chosen for her.

### Chapter III

IF Mr. Mantalini had ever been in the doldrums, he might have added to his experience of “demmed moist unpleasant bodies.” A ship constrained to loiter there breaks out into a cold sweat. Everything she carries becomes clammy. In this respect there is not much difference between the animate and the inanimate bodies that she holds—unless it be that the first are pervaded with a warm stickiness, and the last with a cold stickiness. The most sanguineous of people assume the consistency of dough before it is kneaded. As for the spare folk, they look as if the scant supply of blood in their veins had turned to London milk. Then simple practical suggestions on the great question of “demand and supply” occur to those unversed in the rudiments of political economy. The balance between the internal and the external moisture must be maintained; in maintaining it, panting passengers are reminded of “Fair-shon's Son”—

“Who married Noah's daughter,  
And nearly spoilt ta Flood  
By drinking up ta water.”

“Which he would have done,” adds his sceptical chronicler—

... “Had the mixture been  
Only half Glenlivet.”

In emulation of the patriarch's convivial son-in-law, passengers only temper their drink with the tepid water served in regulation quantities to all on board. It is calculated that a little tepid water is very satisfying. Niggards, who depend upon it entirely, not using it as a tempering medium, but as a pure draught, are not taken into account on board a sailing-ship. They cannot even act upon Mr. Barlow's sage advice, and only “drink when they are dry.” For they are always dry, and there is nothing to drink.

Under all ordinary and everyday circumstances the usual lot of the niggard at sea would have fallen to Miss Leighton's share. The Turkish bath atmosphere had wrapped her round, as it had enveloped her fellows. The cynic could see that his marble Andromeda was fast turning into an Andromeda of alabaster. Alabaster needs more tender handling than marble. The deposit placed in the Captain's hands seemed to have become

self-fertilising like an oyster. How else could it be that a friendless young woman, who had come on board with nothing but a second-class ticket, a pair of strange grey eyes, and a Grecian profile, should find all her wants guessed at and gratified, before she had had time to acknowledge them as wants at all? The pompous little steward “put himself in four” (as the French say) on her behalf. The easiest of easy-chairs was always in waiting for her, in the shadiest patch on deck so soon as the top of her strawhat could be seen in the saloon beneath the skylight. While simmering dowagers wiped their faces, palmleaf fans lay ready to hand, to beat away the too bold air resting in heavy heat on her pure cheeks. She could no longer look in the direction of the damp decanter with its freight of rusty warm water. So sure as she did so, the steward's eyes goggled at her meaningly. A moment later, in spite of all her laughing, wondering protestations, she was assailed with a whole battery of bottles. For peace's sake she was constrained to make choice from among the cool effervescent drinks drawn up before her. She was like Beauty in the enchanted palace, whose sensations were responded to as soon as they were born—but where was the BEAST?

The mystification gave rise to the sweetest of day-dreams. Whether the mysterious guardianship was exerted, like an electric wire of love, from the home she had left—whether it was held by some loyally-loving soul on board, she could not so much as conjecture. It was always there—like a soothing magnetic influence. Sometimes she fancied it must be very close to her—only there was nobody exactly like the Beast on board. The cynic, to be sure, in his aloofness from his kind, had something of the untamed beast about him; but then he never came to her to be stroked. He spoke rarely, and his rare speech was only exchanged with two persons—the Captain, who was “boss” on deck, and the steward, who was “boss” down below.

By the time the ship had passed through the Tropic Belt most of the resources in the way of amusement had been exhausted. The Trades, in rescuing the vessel from the doldrums, had been so much in earnest, that before long they would launch her into the “roaring Forties” south of the Line. They had not quite abandoned her yet, but took her up and dropped her capriciously, treating her very much after the manner of a sovereign to a court favourite.

The cynic did not as yet admit to himself that he was well content they should drop her thus. He would never have allowed that, of his own accord, he indulged in the ridiculous visions that forced themselves upon him as he stood night after night intently watching the heaped-up glories in the west. Mad visions of finding the ship converted into a love-laden

*Flying Dutchman* everlastingly sailing over such a glowing sea as this, to such an impalpable shore as the landscape in the clouds. With only one passenger, whom he would have chosen! The rest were for the most part sensible, prosaic folk, who would have looked properly disconcerted had it been suggested to them that, instead of sailing direct to Melbourne, they should make tracks for airy cities built up of glittering hues.

## Chapter IV

THE cynic did not drivel in the morning. It was his wont to wake himself early and think over a subject he had in his mind to write about. The subject was to bear upon the futility of giving the reins to the indulgence of the weakness called sentiment. He had his arguments all ready before coming on board. The perplexing part of it was, that although he was as much convinced of their soundness as ever, he did not see his way to putting them as clearly as he would have wished. He woke himself up on purpose to think of them at such an early hour, one morning in particular, that his ideas respecting sentiment were rather confused. They were mixed up with a sort of apathetic wonder at the noise of the swishing of water overhead. He supposed, lazily, that the middies must be washing the deck earlier than usual.

He felt no curiosity, however, about the change of time, being in the condition of sleepy receptiveness which makes everything indifferent to us. Neither did he trouble himself so far as to open his half-closed eyelids, even when a sort of red glare pervaded the darkness before them. Half-raising them at last, he saw—always with the same dream-like stolidity of gaze—that the sunrise seemed to illuminate his cabin in bursts of crimson light, and that the calm sea, lying tranquilly before his port-hole, was stained a deep carmine. He would have shut his eyes again on this phenomenon, if his sight had been the only sense appealed to. But a vigorous call was suddenly made upon his bearing and smelling perceptions as well.

Through the tarred planks over his head came the discordant sound of a woman's agonised scream—through the chinks and crannies of his cabin came a sickening scent of burning. Away went the thread of his argument against sentiment; away went the fagend of his meaningless dream! As he bounded on to the cabin floor, a hundred trembling wretches, waking to so cruel a mockery of the morning sun, shrieked and raved to the Captain and the Omnipotent to save them from the flames.

Mr. Grimwood's cynicism ensured his keeping a cool head. One glance at the deck was enough to convince him that in a very few hours the ship

would be nothing more than a flaming tar-barrel. The fire, he could see, must have been working in an underhand way in the hold, from the mouth of which it was coming up now as from the bottomless pit. There was something so sublime in its greed of prey, as it rolled up in scorching volumes of transparent bloodcolour, that he stood watching it for a few seconds, unheeding the yells of the passengers.

There was a show being made of keeping the triumphant flames at bay, whereat they crouched like a panther preparing for a final spring. But Mr. Grimwood could see through this pretence from the first. The real work of the moment lay in the getting out of the boats for escape. But two of the boats were already useless, and the others could never have held the souls, all counted, on board. The cynic's theories about sentiment were strangely revolutionised as he went below and passed the open cabin-doors. Of all the distorted faces that he saw, how many would ever shape themselves into a laugh again?

The one cabin-door that he stopped at was ajar. In his hurry he hardly made a show of knocking before he pushed it open. Already there was a thin smoke spreading itself over the saloon. Inside the cabins the air was unnaturally warm. The cynic knew that all this was real. He knew that he had no more proprietorship over the girl he had come to save than he had over the ship itself. Yet it would have been just as easy to tell the upstart flames overhead to lie down and lick at empty space as to tell his own foolish heart to stop beating with unreasonable, exultant joy while he edged his way into the little cabin. He had hungered for it so often in his dreams—for just what had come to pass now! Only, as a dying man, he might speak without attuning his voice to a pitch of artificial coldness—he might look without dreading lest the love-light in his eyes should betray him. He had forced his way through with the one thought only uppermost in his mind. The sinister glare from above—the crackling noise of the flames as they ran around the mainmast—the ugly chorus of screams overhead—screams of vitality that will not be tortured out of being, and protests against surrendering itself: all these were ministers to his absorbing passion. Now that he had passed into the cabin, pity and tenderness for its occupant swallowed up the egotistic triumph.

She was crouched on her berth like one waiting; partly smothered up in the worn plaid shawl, an old-fashioned covering of modern date, invested with all the grace of ancient drapery in the cynic's eyes—partly wrapped round by layers of brightly-dark hair, that lost itself somewhere in the blankets beneath her. Through all the terror in her drawn face, there was a something of expectation in the startled eyes—a vague trust that the guardianship she had taken refuge in would not forsake her in this pass. It

could not be that the unknown power so quick to divine her wants, to forestall her fancies, to humour her passing whims, should leave her here, until her white skin shrivelled away with the heat and her voice was strangled by the smoke in the middle of its prayer for help. She had not so much as uttered one cry as yet. When Mr. Grimwood made his way in she broke into a sob of relief.

“I knew you would come,” she said. “You are come to take care of me!”

Perhaps if the goggle-eyed little steward had come in she would have said the same thing. Any one appearing at this crisis must be the embodiment of the invisible love that had cherished her. Only it is doubtful whether, even at this supreme moment, the red light could have transformed the perky expression of the little steward as it had transformed Mr. Grimwood's. Women's rights' champions are without doubt altogether right. They have no end of solid grievances to redress. Let them bring about—if they can—social, intellectual, and muscular equality between the sexes. There is a certain sentimental instinct they can never do away with—the blind, unreasoning sense of comfort a trembling, frightened woman feels when a strong, earnest man takes her under his protection in a moment of danger.

There was such a volume of father-like, lover-like tenderness in Mr. Grimwood's tone as he came closer to reassure her—if the fire had curled itself round her doorway as the faint wreaths of smoke were beginning to curl she could not but have taken hope. He did not even hurry her unduly, though he knew that every second lost was a chance of life gone. He kneeled down by her berth—she had held out her hands to him as he came in—and holding her hands he spoke.

“She should go in the first boat,” he told her; “the sea was so calm that the journey would be an easy one—they were within a hundred miles of Cape Town—he knew she was a brave girl and would do as he told her—he guaranteed to save her, but she must dress without loss of time—never mind what she put on—he would bring her a cloak and wraps from his cabin—in a minute he would be back again for her—only she must not lose any time.”

He was happier than he had ever been in his life as he scrambled together the coverings in his cabin that were to protect her from the chill sea-air. He dived into his trunk for a small treasure-box filled with his money and valuables, and carried it out with the wraps. When he returned to Miss Leighton's cabin the saloon was already dusky with smoke. She was waiting for him, dressed as when she came on board, and held close to his arm as he piloted her through the tumult below to the deck.

She could not help clinging to him afresh, with a gasp of horror, when

she saw the scene above. It is all very well for people to die when they are let down to it by long illness or age! To be forced out of life so summarily—to be whipped into the green deep water, from which all your body shrinks, by the tingle of an unnatural smart against your flesh, is enough to make you shriek and protest. To see your own belongings in the same plight is enough to make you blaspheme. As for the sense that your kind is suffering along with you—there is not much comfort to be got out of it. Companionship in the search for glory is quite another thing. Warfare is as much a preparation for death as an illness without the bodily attenuation. A company of soldiers incite each other to mount a breach. On board a burning ship there is no glory to be gained—no predominant feeling for the most part, but a frenzied desire to save self. Nothing but a system of discipline can prevent the weak from being sacrificed to the strong.

There was just so much discipline on board, that the Captain's roaring order to call up the women and children was attended to. They were wailing as they were hustled into the boat. No mother set her foot in it until every child belonging to her had been tumbled in before her. Wives were in a sad pass. They clutched at their husbands and smuggled them into the boat at the risk of upsetting it.

Just as it was about to be pushed off, Mr. Grimwood's peremptory voice was raised high. "Stop a moment!" he called loudly; "another lady!"

At the instant of Miss Leighton's leaving him he put his small strong-box into her hands. She remembered afterwards that he had spoken quietly, but with wonderful quickness and clearness, as if these few last sentences were the outcome of a whole world of thought he had been fain to conceal. She seemed to read in his face that he looked for nothing but death after she had gone from him, and that as death only it would not be loathsome to him. She would have thought herself contemptible if at such a moment she had fettered her demonstrations by any apprehensions as to the after-construction that might be put upon them. She raised her face to his, put both her arms about his neck, and kissed him on the lips, as if in tearing her body away she were leaving her soul in his keeping. Then it was that he said what was on his mind.

"I can't help myself, darling! It's just as well that I should be going out of the world. We couldn't have made things square, I know! I only want you to remember that I would rather die like this than live as I did before I saw you."

If he had more to explain, there was no time for it.

The sad boat pushed off, and already a wild fight for the means of salvation was raging all round him. The cynic watched the little boat so

long as it remained within sight. It was cheering to see it pass out from the ghastly red influence of the ugly flames, into the sweet gold-scattering light of the morning sun. When it was lost in the brightness of those wholesome beams, the apotheosis of the cynic had begun. Who will say he was to be pitied? A barren life is not such a boon that any, save the timorous, need cling to it. But it is worth living even through a barren life to know an instant's unalloyed happiness at the last. What if the happiness involve the surrender of all your finely-constructed theories?—if it prove that you have been blundering from the beginning? What if the discovery come too late for you individually? You could not have made such a discovery without incorporating yourself so far with humanity as to die Christ-like—hoping for all! For to know the rapture of merging your spiritual being into that of another is dimly to conceive the possibility of an after-fulness of content for all that part of your nature which is not entangled with the bodily mechanism. That is why—since materialists logically maintain that the heart is nothing more than a muscular viscus, and the brain a whitish viscus, and tell us that the dissolution of these two means the annihilation of the keenly-conscious self—we, being unable to gainsay in truth a single reason advanced by materialists, may find an aimless life atoned for by an unreasoning flash of hope at the last. No matter how it is brought about, to die while you are in possession of it is to rejoice that you were born. Who would refuse the alternative?

Perhaps Miss Leighton, finding the cynic's money heavy and cold compared with the cynic's love, wished in after-years that she had flung it into the boat and stayed behind herself, to share in a hope-crowned death. Perhaps the shadowy outline in the Plymouth harbour developed into a prosaic husband, who liked modern cooking better than Greek art. Perhaps his wife thought sometimes of a tranquil southern sea, all aglow with a lurid stain—a sea ready to take into mysterious depths of changing colour two tightly-locked bodies that should never have been separated. Perhaps she dreamed all this after a futile fashion of her own. It is one thing to poetise about going to the bottom of the sea when in a cheerful sitting-room with a bright fire, and another thing to be brought face to face with it on a flame-shrouded ship a hundred miles from land.

As for deciding whether the cynic's fate or the girl's was the better one—it is for each one to judge according to his lights.

# A Philanthropist's Experiment

## Chapter I

“Oh, suffering, sad humanity;  
Oh, ye afflicted ones, who lie,  
Steeped to the lips in misery.”

—LONGFELLOW.

IT is necessary to obtain something of an insight into Mr. Boundy's character to arrive at an understanding of his experiment, its most distinctive feature being a tendency to act upon impulse, which, after all, is nothing more than the sudden provoking to action of a latent principle underlying the conventional considerations that rule our everyday lives. For, as regards the theory that generous impulses may spring from all orders of mind, I can no more believe that they can be evoked in certain narrow organisations than that a creature without an ear for music may be startled into melody. Mr. Boundy's impulses were the result of an under-current of kindly feeling for his fellow. Even a sixteen years' perfunctory fulfilment of magisterial duties in a decayed mining town in Victoria had not tinged this feeling with misanthropy. On the contrary, it endured through all the irksomeness of a daily contact with the victims of marital amenities and adulterated whisky; though it must be conceded that every time he took his seat upon the bench he did himself as great a violence as certain weak and well-meaning divines of the present day must do themselves every time they mount into the pulpit and deliver a discourse within the confines of strict orthodoxy—being hampered, in fact, by the possession of a bump that no judicative person, from Brutus downwards, should have been allowed to develop. Phrenologists have called such a bump the “organ of benevolence;” and allowing, in pursuance of their theory, a corresponding depression for every elevation, it is probable that, somewhere about the firm and combative regions, Mr. Boundy's head would have been found to exhibit dents instead of ridges.

This was especially observable in his illogical conclusions respecting life. For sixteen years he hardly ever passed a day without seeing some offshoot of corruption that all the prisons and fines in existence could not have restrained from following its bent—that to knock on the head would have been tantamount to uprooting a sort of human dock—and yet, from an extra-judicial point of view, he was fond of maintaining that every entity

had what he called its “nook” in creation. That the “nook” of some of the smaller species of entity was more often than not inside the bodies of some of the larger, and that the “nook” of many a stalwart youth was occasionally within the trenches, were facts of a disagreeable prominence. But accidents of this nature might be interpreted as representing all that we are accustomed to call “Evil,” and once looked at in the light of irregularities, accorded perfectly with Mr. Boundy's theory, and allowed him the full enjoyment of the optimism almost invariably consequent upon the possession of a bump of benevolence.

It was through this comfortable, self - involved medium that he made up his mind to see all the little inconsistencies incidental to even the highest phase of civilisation—upon which Mr. Boundy was now about to enter—for he had served his probationary sixteen years, not in doing a sentence, but in passing sentences upon others, and the goal of all this uncongenial labour lay right before him in European travel. He could now exchange, for the miscellaneous row of stores and public-houses, most of which were only kept in existence by the toppers who came before him with such confiding persistency, the colonnade of the Rue de Rivoli, and expend, maybe, a little genuine sentiment upon some of those grand achievements that have their archetype in Greek art, instead of bestowing servile admiration upon the new lodge (shaped like a large herring-tin) of the U.O.O. or the U.O.R. of Burrumberie. It is a fact that he abased himself before the marvels of the old world with a zest hardly in accordance with the self-adjusting spirit of a naturalised Australian. For Mr. Boundy, despite the unwarrantable size of the afore-mentioned bump, had none of the gloomy philosophy whereby Dr. Young was led to a conclusion no better than that of many a *blasé* worldling respecting the futility of expending admiration or enthusiasm upon mere worldly objects. And, touching the bump, as it was evident that he could not possibly leave it behind him, nor even reconcile it in a reasonable way to a good many of the consequences resulting from overcrowded cities, he promised himself that he would keep it in subjection by adhering to his favourite theory, and remembering that evil, like dirt, was a sort of misplaced matter, and, in fact, would not be evil at all if it were not for the little mistake which had caused a confusion as to the “nooks” of a large proportion of beings.

Mr. Boundy, moreover, was not the first instance of a person (as well-intentioned as Don Quixote) whose faith in his own power of adjusting part of this confusion was sincere. Chance (which, with all due deference to South, I must here make use of in the “impious and profane signification” attributed to it by the heathen) was the sole cause that led Mr. Boundy to test his theory individually. For where could there have been a more

unlikely place for finding any one in doubt as to his “nook” than the platform of the railway station known as the “Gare du Nord,” just without Paris? Stern officialdom (French suspicion) would make you “suspect” if you showed any hesitancy as to your immediate destination. Even Mr. Boundy, whose fresh colonial colour and mild magisterial eyes might certainly have exonerated from the suspicion of any ferocious Bonapartist designs, had an uncomfortable sense of being followed by watchful, beady eyes because he had stammered in the attempt to give to the French a turn to the word called by general English consent “Boolong.” Watched, too, even after it was evident that he was waiting in a deprecatory way for his train—which was late—and wiling away the time, without reference to politics, by curiously regarding the semaphore. Seen in the semi-light of a winter's afternoon, when a long conflict between the dethroned sun and the rising moon had occasioned a fantastic twilight, there was a fascination about its erratic movements that obliged him to watch it for a while. It was like a modern Briareus or a gaunt pugilist—spasmodically jerking out its stiff arms in a sort of general challenge to the world. All modern appliances are marvels for the uninitiated. Mr. Boundy might have pondered long on the pugilistic attitude of the semaphore but for an event that, while he was most intent upon it, aimed a sudden thrust at his bump and his theory all at the same time. And what was the thrust that struck home with such force! Nothing but the sound of two meaningless words, “Maman! maman!” that Mr. Boundy had assuredly heard over and over again from the benches along the Champs Elysées without much disturbance to his bachelor's heart thereby. But these tones were nasalised by suffering. They were reiterated in a voice of cracked intensity, at once imperious and weak. They might have come from the wheezy lungs of an octogenarian, as well as from those of a worn infant, but, wherever they had come from, only hunger could have lent them a ring so persistently feeble and clamorous. They broke in upon Mr. Boundy's speculative meditations like the intermittent wail of a curlew, an intrusion of the spirit of want and disquiet upon a mind inclined to see only the agreeable surface of things, to the point even of carrying an unpleasant promise of repeating themselves with importunate distinctness next time he might find occasion to discourse upon “nooks;” for here was a being that could hardly have had a responsible voice in the selection of its “nook,” yet was held accountable, as Mr. Boundy inferred from the sort of despairing protest that sounded through the monotonous cry, “Maman! maman!” And, strangely enough, no one seemed to heed the appeal! Least of all the “Maman” appealed to, who, with the child in her arms, bound up in the same flimsy shawl that covered her own shoulders, displayed all the apathy of the unjust judge under somewhat similar

circumstances. Our philanthropist moved a little closer to her. It seemed to him that her eyes were fixed with covetous longing upon a golden-wigged, red-lipped, beautifully-formed woman, who, in rich travelling dress, had apparently found her “nook” in a *coupé*, which she shared with a sensual-lipped old gentleman.

She herself, seen through the mist of the gathering winter evening, by the sort of illusory gas rays that brought into prominence only the upper part of her body, reminded Mr. Boundy of the ancient image of Night, holding in her arms the twin children Sleep and Death. For though only one of these might be said to be actually present, Mr. Boundy could not fail to perceive that the other would creep quietly into its place if he did not upon this occasion make good his theory, that for every existence there is, somewhere or other, its corresponding “nook.”

I cannot say that it discomposed him excessively to find that his French was more at his command in the free translation of a treatise by Montesquieu than in the following of Parisian *argot*, “since all mankind's concern is charity.” Rosalie—Rosalies, by the way, are as plentiful in Paris as Sarah Anns in London—jerked her child into a momentary suspension of its weak breath, transforming the dreary “Maman! Maman!” into a subdued bleat, and fixed her hard, bright eyes upon Mr. Boundy with instant comprehension of his benevolent designs. She was by no means an impersonation of the peace-giving, spirit-soothing night of the ancients, when darkness signified repose for plant and animal, for faun and dryad, but more an outcome of all that is ignoble in the present restless night of the moderns, a production of gas and the *coulisses* of a theatre, rather than that of starlight and the leafy avenues of an arcadian forest. There was effrontery in every pinched feature of her cat-like face, effrontery in the seasoned weather-beaten hue of her sallow skin. It was clear that her “nook” was as yet unfound. Now, as Mr. Boundy had full confidence in his capability of finding it, herein lies his renowned experiment.

Still, as it might have proved rather embarrassing to give there and then, in a foreign tongue, the exact rendering of the special meaning he attached to the word “nook,” and to expound to Rosalie the paramount importance of its fitness to the individual, he contented himself with pointing pityingly to the complaining child. Rosalie seized upon the cue afforded her to nod her head, directed a bony forefinger towards the child's mouth and her own, and shrugged her shoulders despairingly. It was as explicit as the gesture of the man Friday. Mr. Boundy responding by a feint of devouring a Barmecides' Feast, with much smacking of the lips, invited Rosalie to share in it by slapping his trousers-pocket. She signified her willing alacrity by pointing in the direction of Paris and uttering a short chuckle

full of meaning. Moreover, while Mr. Boundy resignedly took up his small valise, resolved to forego his trip to Boulogne, and inwardly quailing at the thought of having to run the gauntlet of the beaky-nosed officials, she found occasion to bestow a sharp pinch upon her exhausted child and wake it anew to the dreary refrain of “Maman! Maman!”

I wish I could say of my philanthropist, that, conscious of the innocence of his motives, he boldly demanded back his ticket-money. For I am aware that he looked the very image of deprecating guilt as he stole from the platform with Rosalie in his wake. What she was doing there has never been made clear, even to Mr. Boundy's satisfaction, unless, indeed, the cry of “Maman! Maman!” had so worked upon her unmaternal heart, that she was waiting an opportunity to thrust the child under the seats of one of the carriages. In which she would only have been following the example of a teacher regarded by her nation as the apostle of nature and humanity. Rousseau could discourse like an angel upon parental duties, and carry his babies at dead of night to a foundling hospital. Instinct, after all, is not a thing to be instilled or talked down. But Mr. Boundy would have said the mistake all arose because a father's “nook” was inappropriate in the instance of Rousseau.

There are modest little buildings known as *crémeries* in all the less magnificent streets of Paris—a kind of breakfast restaurant—where the bestowal of two sous upon the waiter in attendance will stamp you as a customer of high consideration. Rosalie was quick to detect the first of these before she had tramped past many corners by Mr. Boundy's side. Neither, it must be allowed, had made much progress, so far, in a conversational sense. Mr. Boundy, by way of considerably implying that she was in need of help, had queried, “Vous avez du besoin?”—whereat she had nodded in a sort of mystified acquiescence.

“De quoi?” Mr. Boundy had pursued, charmed with the facility with which he could speak French.

“Dame! de tout!” replied Rosalie, promptly, which sounded so like an English oath, that Mr. Boundy was at a loss how to respond.

On entering the *crémérie* the philanthropist quickly perceived that he was not entertaining “an angel unawares.” Rosalie threw herself down in a chair near the stove, and gave her order for a “*bifteck saignant*”—which order was echoed with a dreary prolongation of the word “*saigna-n-t*” down a flight of steps at the rear—as if the delight of being insolent were a part of the treat. She unstrapped the child from the shawl and set it on the sanded floor at her feet, indifferent as to its inability to stand. Mr. Boundy, having drawn from his experience of Australian police-courts the deduction that all children, even the children of beaten wives, were

similarly round and fat and dirty, regarded Rosalie's peaky child with horror. For the first time he felt inclined to question whether it would not have been better, so far, without a "nook" at all, than a "nook" that could have misshapen childhood thus—leaving it as devoid of sex or age or humanity as a changeling. He could fancy its dwindling down into nothing but the dreary night-voice that had first attacked his philanthropic susceptibilities. But he was more inclined to accord it substantiality as soon as he saw it eat with a famished mien, clutching at the strips of "*bifteks saignant*" that Rosalie dropped into its lap, and gnawing them with its carnivorous little jaws, like a starved Abyssinian. When the pair had regaled themselves until even the greasily-golden slices of "*pommes frites*" fell from between their thin fingers, Mr. Boundy paid the score, and confirmed the waiter's opinion that he was an eccentric millionaire by giving him fivepence for himself. As for Rosalie, she scraped up the dregs of her coffee, picked up her satiated child, and followed Mr. Boundy out of the *crémérie*.

## Chapter II

“Thought he, this is the lucky hour,  
Wines work when vines are in the flower;  
This crisis then I will set my rest on,  
And put her boldly to the question.”

—BUTLER.

ROSALIE'S "mansarde," from a philanthropical point of view, was hardly a more eligible "nook" than the platform of the railway station. Misery in London grovels in the basement, in Paris it is perched on the house-tops; inversely to the actual elevation is the ratio of the scale of well-being. Perhaps the brazen spirit that glittered in Rosalie's unwomanly eyes would have found less place there if she had not been suffered, night after night, to carry her starveling up the treadmill round of steep back-stairs, past the doors of eight kitchens, through the mingled steams of eight different kinds of soup; so Mr. Boundy reflected, at least, as he landed panting on the last step of all, and realised as a fact that this dark, impure corner was the type of the "nook" (materially, not figuratively, speaking) of perhaps some hundreds of thousands of beings.

As it was handsomely furnished with the remnants of a checked mattress and an old broom, Mr. Boundy felt some delicacy about inviting himself to take a seat. Standing, it was difficult to retain his usual magisterial dignity.

But it was standing, nevertheless, while Rosalie sat like a Maori on her mattress, with her callous face turned up to his, that he gravely set about inaugurating his experiment.

And first, in such French as he could muster.

“What brought you to this plight?”

“Ask it of the patron! All is so dear since the war. I have been ill. I make my five sous the hour. It is not enough.”

“Where is your husband?”

A quick glance of suspicion from the hardened eyes, and a laugh.

“Where, at least, is the father of your child?”

Another sharp glance and a shrug.

There is nothing the shrug proper does not convey from a French pair of shoulders. Thus—

“Will it be fine?” A shrug of doubt.

“You like that picture?” A shrug of dissent.

“Who spilt the ink?” A shrug of disavowal.

“A thousand thanks!” A shrug of deprecation.

“How shall we spend the afternoon?” A shrug of the completest deference to the inclinations of the proposer.

Rosalie's shrug might have meant anything, from negation of a husband's existence to indifference as to his whereabouts. Mr. Boundy concluded that the marital nook was as yet unfilled.

“I see you have got into the wrong place,” he said, benignly. “There is a right place for every one who is born in the world; yours is right away from here. Tell me, would you like to live in a country where you would have plenty to eat and drink?”

“I hold not to leave Paris” (promptly).

“Eh! What! Not leave Paris!” exclaimed Mr. Boundy, much perplexed. He looked round upon the vermin-stained walls, exuding their stale odour of damp and dirt. As he passed, an echo of the never-dying clamour below faintly reached his hearing. He vaguely comprehended that Rosalie breathed in with the heavily-charged atmosphere a something intoxicating which she was very unwilling to leave—a whiff of the mingled mass of emanations, tangible and spiritual, that are ever mounting upwards from a great city, like a cloud of human incense. And still he could not, with his well-defined bump of benevolence, and a self-evolved theory almost rivalling that of Dr. Pangloss, bring himself to believe that there are human beings that cling to the dust of great centres, like those unwholesome larvae that thrive in odorous chests upon the fibrous shreds of rich brocades, but would waste and fall into nothingness before the sunlight and the wide air without. “But you will die of want in Paris. Your child will die

of want. It is only by a mistake that you are not accountable for that you come to be here. I can set it all right, however.” Mr. Boundy parenthetically murmured in his own language something with reference to a “a million unoccupied nooks in the antipodes.” “But you must consent to leave Paris.”

“I do not care to live in the provinces.”

As a philanthropist who had chanced upon a restive subject for an experiment that tended towards the enlightenment of humanity as to its destiny, there is something to be said in extenuation of Mr. Boundy's irritation. “You are a fool!” he said in very plain French. “I speak not of the provinces, but of a country far across the sea, where, if you work for a few hours every day, you and your child may have ‘*bifteks saignant*’ twenty times in a week.”

It was a searching appeal. What was there to counteract it save the deadened echo of the sounding life below, of which Rosalie's share displayed itself, partly in the wizened child, partly in her own shrivelled skin and hungry, unabashed eyes?

“Ribands, too, are cheap and abundant out there,” added Mr. Boundy, in a musing tone of voice.

The echo of the fascination of Parisian life to even this one of its dreariest scapegoats was thus finally hushed. Surely a land of unlimited underdone beefsteaks and plenty of ribands must offer something of an equivalent for the loss of the vicarious joys of treading on the borders of an enchanted region. Though who can limit the extension of its spell? The Peri might have been disporting herself in spiceladen breezes when she chose to cry before the entrance of heaven after a very derogatory fashion. Rosalie was more like a smooth-faced ape than a Peri, and Paris, in her case, was but a “fool's paradise” at the best. Yet, granting that such questions are purely relative, I doubt whether, even if no prospect of entering by the celestial gate had been held out to the Peri, she would not have preferred waiting her chance of catching some more stray gleams of “light upon her wings” to taking to respectable vagrancy among the grosser planets, at the bidding of a philanthropic and well-intentioned angel of Mr. Boundy's way of thinking.

### Chapter III

“He tried the luxury of doing good.”—CRABBE.

THAT faint flavour of magisterial pomposity, which the surmised suspicion of impertinent French officials had so completely taken out of Mr. Boundy, returned in full force when he again found himself outside the

court-house of Burrumberie. It was further heightened by something of a “Sir Oracle” mien, as he walked erect down the street, called—in deference to the branching bush roads shadowed forth in its neighbourhood—Main Street. Main Street itself, of immense scope and width, was a mournful evidence of ambition and collapse. Its pavements were still in an embryo stage, allowing full facilities for the social intercourse of the goats and geese that represented the active, unconventional life of Burrumberie. The immense gaps between its low wooden buildings carried unpleasant suggestions of toothless jaws. In the distance were deserted shafts, and trees that had become mummified in the baked soil. It was necessary to glance at the far-away horizon, which will form as golden a background for gibbet as for arch of triumph, to remember that Burrumberie was of a piece with the world Mr. Boundy had so lately seen.

I have alluded to his oracular deportment, and must admit that, in a philanthropist, his elation was pardonable. A year ago, under a misty winter's sky, right in the heart of a clamorous throng, he had distinguished the dreary plaints of one of those entities whose minimum of superfluity helps to make up the sum of unexplained evil. And thereupon he had found an immediate outlet for the working of his theory. Long ago he had been inspired to feel that on the proper portioning out of “nooks” depended the well-being of humanity. Now he felt himself capable of illustrating his theory—of “speaking aloud for future times to hear”—of recounting how an utterly stranded waif, transported to her appropriate “nook”—signifying thereby the nook Mr. Boundy had found for her—became forthwith a very model of industry and virtue. He could not fail to approve his own sagacity in the ensuring of this end.

For, bearing in mind Rosalie's carnivorous proclivities, how fitting it was that she should be received into the bosom of the butcher's family at the corner. A family, too, whose sanguineous hue was a complete advertisement in itself.

Mr. Boundy's benevolence had the first foretaste of its rapture when he stumbled over a bloated baby on the step—a baby that could no more in its present plethoric condition have concentrated the wail of superfluous humanity in its fretful cry than it could have awed and appalled Mr. Boundy into foregoing a journey for the sake of appeasing it.

“Now this is what I like!” said the philanthropist aloud, either with reference to tumbling over the baby or in approbation of its solidity; “you'll fill a big ‘nook’ one of these days, I can see! Where's Maman?”

“Maman! maman!” echoed the baby, in a sort of burlesque of its old professional cry.

“That's right,” said Mr. Boundy, delighted, “and ‘bif-tek’ too. I thought

as much!”

He turned into the shop. The butcher, whose mottled skin might have put his own sausages to the blush, held out his hand to the magistrate heartily. He had never had justice dealt to him during all Mr. Boundy's term of office, and he had served him with meat ever since the beginning of that time. This was quite enough in Burrumberie to establish an equality. “And how about my *protégée*?” asked Mr. Boundy, beamingly, after he had carefully inquired into the well-being of Mrs. Butcher and the smaller butchers.

There was a suffusion in the butcher's mottled cheeks.

“It's this way, Mr. Boundy,” he explained. “Your prodigy's give you what I should call leg-bail.”

“Good gracious!” said Mr. Boundy. “But you know where she is, I hope.”

“No, faith! she's give us the slip,” said the butcher. “You meant well by her, I make no doubt of it, Mr. Boundy; but you didn't study the make of her. There wasn't no taming her. She put me in mind of a native cat one o' my little chaps had a fancy for rearing. Petting! Why, all the petting in the world wouldn't a' kept it from fretting its life away.”

“But what did she want?” urged the philanthropist, with a sense that to be dictated to by the butcher did not exactly compensate for the astonishing miscarriage of his plan. “I found her in a sink of misery. What did she want beyond meat and drink, and a home for herself and her child?”

“That's where it is,” said the butcher, meditatively; “it beats me, I tell you. But I see from the first she wouldn't settle down to it, and one day a French swagman must needs come into the shop, and there was a jabbering in their own tongue—I couldn't make head nor tale of it. I think I got hold o' them two words, though—‘movement’ and ‘Paris’—for she was always harping on them in her outlandish way; and next day she was gone, and left the child behind her.”

Gone, as Mr. Boundy afterwards found, without leaving a clue or a trace whereby to recapture her; gone, to carry out the blind design of sharing a stow-away's nook with the rats on some homeward-bound vessel; gone, to re-enter the shadows whence he had dragged her into the light, following, by an instinct that set his theory at derision, her entozoic destiny in the corrupt heart of Paris.

And yet, as the magistrate passed again up the street, endeavouring to look through Rosalie's restless eyes at the stagnant life around him, he fell to thinking whether, through the ingratitude, the unmotherliness, the abandonment, there was a spark of some blind groping after progress in the impulse that led her to run away. It was not solely because cold is so cruel

to the perceptions of an Italian that Dante made imprisonment in the ice the final and crowning anguish of the arch-offenders of mankind. The horror lay in the infinite stagnation it implied. Compared with this, the perpetual capering of the less guilty souls among pellets of flame was life and hope. Rosalie must needs find the “nook” before long that there can be no mistake about all of us filling sooner or later, and she would find it probably through the gates of the Hôtel Dieu, but was Mr. Boundy to relinquish his theory because he had chanced upon an exception? There cannot be, he told himself, a more ungrateful subject for experiment than a human organisation—or a more unsatisfactory one. For whereas, under vivi-section, dogs or rabbits or frogs have the grace to do just what is expected of them, and as animals generally so comport themselves as to allow us to say, inclusive of all types, “The ass is stubborn; the dog is faithful; the horse is a noble, useful beast,” and so on—of man it can only be said, with Dryden, that he “is always in the wrong.”

And in such sweeping conclusion resulted our philanthropist's experiment. He found a temporary “nook,” nevertheless, for Rosalie's child in his own household. It is known in the township as “Boundy's babby,” and unless it dies of apoplexy, may yet vindicate his theory, about which he has had less to say latterly than before his foreign travels.

# Monsieur Caloche

## Chapter I

A MORE un-English, uncolonial appearance had never brightened the prosaic interior of Bogg & Company's big warehouse in Flinders Lane. Monsieur Caloche, waiting in the outer office, under fire of a row of curious eyes, was a wondrous study of "Frenchiness" to the clerks. His vivacious dark eyes, shining out of his sallow face, scarred and seamed by the marks of smallpox, met their inquisitive gaze with an expression that seemed to plead for leniency. The diabolical disease that had scratched the freshness from his face had apparently twisted some of the youthfulness out of it as well; otherwise it was only a young soul that could have been made so diffident by the consciousness that its habitation was disfigured. Some pains had been taken to obviate the effects of the disfigurement and to bring into prominence the smooth flesh that had been spared. It was not chance that had left exposed a round white throat, guiltless of the masculine Adam's apple, or that had brushed the fine soft hair, ruddily dark in hue like the eyes, away from a vein-streaked temple. A youth of unmanly susceptibilities, perhaps—but inviting sympathy rather than scorn—sitting patiently through the dreary silent three-quarters of an hour, with his back to the wall which separated him from the great head of the firm of Bogg & Co.

The softer-hearted of the clerks commiserated him. They would have liked to show their goodwill, after their own fashion, by inviting him to have a "drink," but—the possibility of shouting for a young Frenchman, waiting for an interview with their chief! . . . Any one knowing Bogg, of Bogg & Co., must have divined the outrageous absurdity of the notion. It was safer to suppose that the foreigner would have refused the politeness. He did not look as though whisky and water were as familiar to him as a tumbler of *eau sucrée*. The clerks had heard that it was customary in France to drink absinthe. Possibly the slender youth in his loose-fitting French paletôt reaching to his knees, and sitting easily upon shoulders that would have graced a shawl, had drunk deeply of this fatal spirit. It invested him with something mysterious in the estimation of the juniors, peering for traces of dissipation in his foreign face. But they could find nothing to betray it in the soft eyes, undimmed by the enemy's hand, or the smooth lips set closely over the even row of small French teeth. Monsieur Caloche lacked the happy French confidence which has so often turned a joke at the foot of the guillotine. His lips twitched every time the door of the private

office creaked. It was a ground-glass door to the left of him, and as he sat, with his turned-up hat in his hand, patiently waiting, the clerks could see a sort of suppression overspreading his disfigured cheeks whenever the noise was repeated. It appeared that he was diffident about the interview. His credentials were already in the hands of the head of the firm, but no summons had come. His letter of recommendation, sent in fully half an hour back, stated that he was capable of undertaking foreign correspondence; that he was favourably known to the house of business in Paris whose principal had given him his letter of presentation; that he had some slight knowledge of the English language; that he had already given promise of distinguishing himself as an *homme de lettres*. This final clause of the letter was responsible for the length of time Monsieur Caloche was kept waiting. *Homme de lettres!* It was a stigma that Bogg, of Bogg and Co., could not overlook. As a practical man, a self-made man, a man who had opened up new blocks of country and imported pure stock into Victoria—what could be expected of him in the way of holding out a helping hand to a scribbler—a pauper who had spent his days in making rhymes in his foreign jargon? Bogg would have put your needy professionals into irons. He forgave no authors, artists, or actors who were not successful. *Homme de lettres!* Coupled with his poverty it was more unpardonable a title than jail-bird. There was nothing to prove that the latter title would not have fitted Monsieur Caloche as well. He was probably a ruffianly Communist. The French Government could not get hold of all the rebels, and here was one in the outer office of Bogg & Co. coolly waiting for a situation.

Not so coolly, perhaps, as Bogg, in his aggrieved state of mind, was ready to conclude. For the day was a hot-wind day, and Bogg himself, in white waistcoat and dust-coat, sitting in the cool depths of his revolving-chair in front of the desk in his private office, was hardly aware of the driving dust and smarting grit emptied by shovelfuls upon the unhappy people without. He perspired, it is true, in deference to the state of his big thermometer, which even here stood above 85° in the corner, but having come straight from Brighton in his private brougham, he could wipe his moist bald head without besmearing his silk handkerchief with street grime. And it was something to be sitting here, in a lofty office, smelling of yellow soap and beeswax, when outside a north wind was tormenting the world with its puffs of hot air and twirling relays of baked rubbish and dirt. It was something to be surrounded by polished mahogany, cool to the touch, and cold iron safes, and maps that conveyed in their rippling lines of snowy undulations far-away suggestions of chill heights and mountain breezes. It was something to have iced water in the decanter at hand, and a

little fountain opposite, gurgling a running reminder of babbling brooks dribbling through fern-tree valleys and wattle-studded flats. Contrasting the shaded coolness of the private office with the heat and turmoil without, there was no cause to complain.

Yet Bogg clearly had a grievance, written in the sour lines of his mouth, never too amiably expanded at the best of times, and his small, contracted eyes, full of shrewd suspicion-darting light. He read the letter sent in by Monsieur Caloche with the plentiful assistance of the tip of his broad forefinger, after a way peculiar to his early days, before he had acquired riches, or knighthood, or rotundity.

For Bogg, now Sir Matthew Bogg, of Bogg and Company, was a self-made man, in the sense that money makes the man, and that he had made the money before it could by any possibility make him. Made it by dropping it into his till in those good old times when all Victorian storekeepers were so many Midases, who saw their spirits and flour turn into gold under their handling; made it by pocketing something like three thousand per cent, upon every penny invested in divers blocks of scrubby soil hereafter to be covered by those grand and gloomy bluestone buildings which make of Melbourne a city of mourning; made it by reaching out after it, and holding fast to it, whenever it was within spirit-call or finger-clutch, from his early grog-shanty days, when he detected it in the dry lips of every grimy digger on the flat, to his latter station-holding days, when he sniffed it in the drought which brought his neighbours low. Add to which he was lucky—by virtue of a certain inherent faculty he possessed in common with the Vanderbilts, the Stewarts, the Rothschilds of mankind—and far-seeing. He could forestall the news in the *Mark Lane Express*. He was almost clairvoyant in the matter of rises in wool. His luck, his foresight, were only on a par with his industry, and the end of all his slaving and sagacity was to give him at sixty years of age a liver, a paunch, an income bordering on a hundred thousand pounds, and the title of Sir Matthew Bogg.

It was known that Sir Matthew had worked his way to the colonies, acting indiscriminately as pig-sticker and deck-swabber on board the *Sarah Jane*. In his liverless, paunchless, and titleless days he had tossed for coppers with the flat-footed sailors on the forecastle. Now he was bank director, railway director, and a number of other things that formed a graceful flourish after Sir Matthew, but that would have sounded less euphonious in the wake of plain “Bogg.” Yet “plain Bogg” Nature had turned him out, and “plain Bogg” he would always remain while in the earthly possession of his round, overheated face and long, irregular teeth. His hair had abandoned its lawful territory on the top of his head, and

planted itself in a vagrant fashion, in small tufts in his ears and nostrils. His eyebrows had run riot over his eyes, but his eyes asserted themselves through all. They were eyes that, without being stronger or larger or bolder than any average pair of eyes to be met with in walking down the street, had such a knack of “taking your measure” that no one could look at them without discomfiture. In the darkened atmosphere of the Flinders Lane office, Sir Matthew knew how to turn these colourless unwinking orbs to account. To the maliciously inclined among the clerks in the outer office there was nothing more amusing than the crestfallen appearance of the applicants, as they came out by the ground-glass door, compared with the jauntiness of their entrance. Young men who wanted colonial experience, overseers who applied for managerships on his stations, youths fresh from school who had a turn for the bush, had all had specimens of Sir Matthew's mode of dealing with his underlings. But his favourite plan, his special hobby, was to “drop on to them unawares.”

There is nothing in the world that gives such a zest to life as the possession of a hobby, and the power of indulging it. We may be pretty certain that the active old lady's white horse at Banbury Cross was nothing more than a hobby-horse, as soon as we find out in the sequel that she “had rings on her fingers and bells on her toes,” and that “she shall have music wherever she goes.” It is the only horse an old lady could be perpetually engaged in riding without coming to grief—the only horse that ever makes us travel through life to the sound of music wherever we go.

From the days when Bogg had the merest shred of humanity to bully, in the shape of a waif from the Chinese camp, the minutes slipped by with a symphony they had never possessed before. As fulness of time brought him increase of riches and power, he yearned to extend the terror of his sway. It was long before he tasted the full sweetness of making strong men tremble in their boots. Now, at nearly sixty years of age, he knew all the delights of seeing victims, sturdier and poorer than himself, drop their eyelids before his gaze. He was aware that the men in the yard cleared out of his path as he walked through it; that his managers up-country addressed him in tones of husky conciliation; that every eye met his with an air of deprecation, as much as to apologise for the fact of existing in his presence; and in his innermost heart he believed that in the way of mental sensation there could be nothing left to desire. But how convey the impression of rainbow-tints to eyes that have never opened upon aught save universal blackness? Sir Matthew had never seen an eye brighten, a small foot dance, at his approach. A glance of impotent defiance was the only equivalent he knew for a gleam of humid affection. He was accustomed to encounter a shifting gaze. The lowest form of self-interest

was the tie which bound his people to him. He paid them as butts, in addition to paying them as servants. Where would have been his daily appetiser in the middle of the day if there had been no yard, full of regulations impossible to obey; no warehouse to echo his harsh words of fault-finding; no servile men, and slouching fast-expanding boys, to scuttle behind the big cases, or come forth as if they were being dragged by hooks, to stand with sheepish expression before him? And when he had talked himself hoarse in town, where would have been the zest of wandering over his stations, of surveying his fat bullocks and woolly merinos, if there had been no accommodating managers to listen reverentially to his loudly-given orders, and take with dejected, apologetic air his continued rating? The savour of life would have departed,—not with the bodily comfort and the consequence that riches bring, but with the power they confer of asserting yourself before your fellow-men after any fashion you please. Bogg's fashion was to bully them, and he bullied them accordingly.

But, you see, Monsieur Caloche is still waiting; in the position, as the junior clerks are well aware, of the confiding calf awaiting butchery in a frolicsome mood outside the butcher's shop. Not that I would imply that Monsieur Caloche frolicked, even metaphorically speaking. He sat patiently on with a sort of sad abstracted air; unconsciously pleating and unpleating the brim of his soft Paris hat, with long lissome fingers that might have broidered the finest silk on other than male hands. The flush of colour, the slight trembling of lips, whenever there was a noise from within, were the only signs that betrayed how acutely he was listening for a summons. Despite the indentations that had marred for ever the smoothness of the face, and pitted the forehead and cheeks as if white gravel had been shot into them, the colour that came and went so suddenly was pink as rose-coloured lake. It stained even the smooth white neck and chin, upon which the faintest traces of down were not yet visible to the scrutinising eyes of the juniors.

Outside, the north wind ran riot along the pavement, upsetting all orderly arrangements for the day with dreadful noise and fussiness, battering trimly-dressed people into red-eyed wretches heaped up with dust; wrenching umbrellas from their handles, and blinding their possessors trying to run after them; filling open mouths with grit, making havoc with people's hats and tempers, and proving itself as great a blusterer in its character of a peppery emigrant as in its original *rôle* of the chilly Boreas of antiquity.

Monsieur Caloche had carefully wiped away from his white wristband the dust that it had driven into his sleeve, and now the dust on his boots—palpably large for the mere slips of feet they enclosed—seemed to give

him uneasiness; but it would seem that he lacked the hardihood to stoop and flick it away. When, finally, he extended surreptitiously a timid hand, it might have been observed of his uncovered wrist that it was singularly frail and slender. This delicacy of formation was noticeable in every exterior point. His small white ear, setting close to his head, might have been wrapped up over and over again in one of the fleshy lobes that stretched away from Sir Matthew's skull. Decidedly, the two men were of a different order of species. One was a heavy mastiff of lupine tendencies—the other a delicate Italian greyhound, silky, timorous, quivering with sensibility.

And there had been time for the greyhound to shiver long with expectancy before the mastiff prepared to swallow him up.

It was a quarter to twelve by the gloomy-faced clock in the outer office, a quarter to twelve by all the clerks' watches, adjusted every morning to the patriarch clock with unquestioning faith, when Monsieur Caloche had diffidently seated himself on the chair in the vicinity of the ground-glass door. It was half-past twelve by the gloomy-faced clock, half-past twelve by all the little watches that toadied to it, when Sir Matthew's bell rang. It was a bell that must have inherited the spirit of a fire-bell or a doctor's night-bell. It had never been shaken by Sir Matthew's fingers without causing a fluttering in the outer office. No one knew what hair-suspended sword might be about to fall on his head before the messenger returned. Monsieur Caloche heard it ring, sharply and clamorously, and raised his head. The white-faced messenger, returning from his answer to the summons, and speaking with the suspension of breath that usually afflicted him after an interview with Sir Matthew, announced that "Mister Caloosh" was wanted, and diving into the gloomy recess in the outer office, relapsed into his normal occupation of breathing on his penknife and rubbing it on his sleeve.

Monsieur Caloche meanwhile stood erect, more like the startled greyhound than ever. To the watchful eyes of the clerks, staring their full at his retreating figure, he seemed to glide rather than step through the doorway. The ground-glass door, attached by a spring from the inside, shut swiftly upon him, as if it were catching him in a trap, and so hid him in full from their curious scrutiny. For the rest, they could only surmise. The lamb had given itself up to the butcher's knife. The diminutive greyhound was in the mastiff's grip.

Would the knife descend on the instant? Would the mastiff fall at once upon the trembling foreigner, advancing with sleek uncovered head, and hat held in front by two quivering hands? Sir Matthew's usual glare of reception was more ardent than of custom as Monsieur Caloche

approached. If every “foreign adventurer” supposed he might come and loaf upon Bogg, of Bogg & Company, because he was backed up by a letter from a respectable firm, Sir Matthew would soon let him find out he was mistaken! His glare intensified as the adventurous stripling glided with softest footfall to the very table where he was sitting, and stood exactly opposite to him. None so adventurous, however, but that his lips were white and his bloodless face a pitiful set-off to the cruelly prominent marks that disfigured it. There was a terror in Monsieur Caloche's expression apart from the awe inspired by Sir Matthew's glare which might have disarmed a butcher or even a mastiff. His large, soft eyes seemed to ache with repressed tears. They pleaded for him in a language more convincing than words, “I am friendless—I am a stranger—I am—” but no matter! They cried out for sympathy and protection, mutely and unconsciously.

But to Sir Matthew's perceptions visible terror had only one interpretation. It remained for him to “find out” Monsieur Caloche. He would “drop on to him unawares” one of these days. He patted his hobby on the back, seeing a gratification for it in prospective, and entering shortly upon his customary stock of searching questions, incited his victim to reply cheerfully and promptly by looking him up and down with a frown of suspicion.

“What brought you 'ere?”

“Please?” said Monsieur Caloche, anxiously.

He had studied a vocabulary opening with “Goodday, sir. What can I have the pleasure of doing for you this morning?” The rejoinder to which did not seem to fit in with Sir Matthew's special form of inquiry.

“What brought you 'ere, I say?” reiterated Sir Matthew, in a roar, as if deafness were the only impediment on the part of foreigners in general to a clear comprehension of our language.

“De sheep, Monsieur! La Reine Dorée,” replied Monsieur Caloche, in low-toned, guttural, musical French.

“That ain't it,” said Sir Matthew, scornfully. “What did you come 'ere for? What are you fit for? What can you do?”

Monsieur Caloche raised his plaintive eyes. His sad desolation was welling out of their inmost depths. He had surmounted the first emotion that had driven the blood to his heart at the outset, and the returning colour, softening the seams and scars in his cheeks, gave him a boyish bloom. It deepened as he answered with humility, “I will do what Monsieur will! I will do my possible!”

“I'll soon see how you shape,” said Sir Matthew, irritated with himself for the apparent difficulty of thoroughly bullying the defenceless stranger. “I don't want any of your parley-voing in my office—do you hear! I'll

find you work—jolly quick, I can tell you! Can you mind sheep? Can you drive bullocks, eh? Can you put up a post and rail? You ain't worth your salt if you can't use your 'ands!”

He cast such a glance of withering contempt on the tapering white fingers with olive-shaped nails in front of him that Monsieur Caloche instinctively sheltered them in his hat. “Go and get your traps together! I'll find you a billet, never fear!”

“*Mais, Monsieur*”—

“Go and get your traps together, I say! You can come 'ere again in an hour. I'll find you a job up-country!” His peremptory gesture made any protest on the part of Monsieur Caloche utterly unavailing. There was nothing for him to do but to bow and to back in a bewildered way from the room. If the more sharp-eared of the clerks had not been in opportune contiguity to the ground-glass door during Sir Matthew's closing sentences, Monsieur Caloche would have gone away with the predominant impression that “Sir Bang” was an *enragé*, who disapproved of salt with mutton and beef, and was clamorous in his demands for “traps,” which Monsieur Caloche, with a gleam of enlightenment in the midst of his heart-sickness and perplexity, was proud to remember meant “an instrument for ensnaring animals.” It was with a doubt he was too polite to express that he accepted the explanation tendered him by the clerks, and learned that if he “would strike while the iron is hot” he must come back in an hour's time with his portmanteau packed up. He was a lucky fellow, the juniors told him, to jump into a billet without any bother; they wished to the Lord they were in *his* shoes, and could be drafted off to the Bush at a moment's notice.

Perhaps it seemed to Monsieur Caloche that these congratulations were based on the Satanic philosophy of “making evil his good.” But they brought with them a flavour of the human sympathy for which he was hungering. He bowed to the clerks all round before leaving, after the manner of a court-page in an opera. The hardiest of the juniors ran to the door after he was gone. Monsieur Caloche was trying to make head against the wind. The warm blast was bespattering his injured face. It seemed to revel in the pastime of filling it with grit. One small hand was spread in front of the eyes—the other was resolutely holding together the front of his long, light paletôt, which the rude wind had sportively thrown open. The junior was cheated of his fun. Somehow the sight did not strike him as being quite so funny as it ought to have been.

## Chapter II

THE station hands, in their own language, “gave Frenchy best.” No

difference of nationality could account for some of his eccentricities. As an instance, with the setting in of the darkness he regularly disappeared. It was supposed that he camped up a tree with the birds. The wit of the woolshed surmised that "Froggy" slept with his relatives, and it would be found that he had "croaked" with them one of these odd times. Again, there were shearers ready to swear that he had "blubbered" on finding some sportive ticks on his neck. He was given odd jobs of wool-sorting to do, and was found to have a mania for washing the grease off his hands whenever there was an instant's respite. Another peculiarity was his aversion to blood. By some strange coincidence, he could never be found whenever there was any slaughtering on hand. The most plausible reason was always advanced for necessitating his presence in some far-distant part of the run. Equally he could never be induced to learn how to box—a favourite Sunday morning and summer evening pastime among the men. It seemed almost to hurt him when damage was done to one of the assembled noses. He would have been put down as a "cur" if it had not been for his pluck in the saddle, and for his gentle winning ways. His pluck, indeed, seemed all concentrated in his horsemanship. Employed as a boundary-rider, there was nothing he would not mount, and the station hands remarked, as a thing "that beat them once for all," that the "surliest devils" on the place hardly ever played up with him. He employed no arts. His bridle-hand was by no means strong. Yet it remained a matter of fact that the least amenable of horses generally carried him as if they liked to bear his weight. No one being sufficiently learned to advance the hypothesis of magnetism, it was concluded that he carried a charm.

This power of touch extended to human beings. It was almost worth while spraining a joint or chopping at a finger to be bandaged by Monsieur Caloche's deft fingers. His horror of blood never stood in his way when there was a wound to be doctored. His supple hands, browned and strengthened by his outdoor work, had a tenderness and a delicacy in their way of going to work that made the sufferer feel soothed and halfhealed by their contact. It was the same with his manipulation of things. There was a refinement in his disposition of the rough surroundings that made them look different after he had been among them.

And not understood, jeered at, petted, pitied alternately—with no confidant of more sympathetic comprehension than the horse he bestrode—was Monsieur Caloche absolutely miserable? Granting that it were so, there was no one to find it out. His brown eyes had such an habitually wistful expression, he might have been born with it. Very trifles brought a fleeting light into them—a reminiscence, perhaps that, while it crowned him with "sorrow's crown of sorrow," was yet a reflection of

some past joy. He took refuge in his ignorance of the language directly he was questioned as to his bygone life. An embarrassed little shrug, half apologetic, but powerfully conclusive, was the only answer the most curious examiner could elicit.

It was perceived that he had a strong objection to looking in the glass, and invariably lowered his eyes on passing the cracked and uncompromising fragment of mirror supported on two nails against the planking that walled the rough, attached kitchen. So decided was this aversion that it was only when Bill, the blacksmith, asked him chaffingly for a lock of his hair that he perceived with confusion how wantonly his silken curls were rioting round his neck and temples. He cut them off on the spot, displaying the transparent skin beneath. Contrasted with the clear tan that had overspread his scarred cheeks and forehead, it was white as freshly-drawn milk.

He was set down on the whole as given to moping; but, taking him all round, the general sentiment was favourable to him. Possibly it was with some pitiful prompting of the sort that the working manager sent him out of the way one still morning, when Sir Matthew's buggy, creaking under the unwelcome preponderance of Sir Matthew himself, was discerned on its slow approach to the homestead. A most peaceful morning for the initiation of Sir Matthew's blustering presence! The sparse gum-leaves hung as motionless on their branches as if they were waiting to be photographed. Their shadows on the yellowing grass seemed painted into the soil. The sky was as tranquil as the plain below. The smoke from the homestead reared itself aloft in a long, thinly-drawn column of grey. A morning of heat and repose, when even the sunlight does not frolic and all nature toasts itself, quietly content. The dogs lay blinking at full length, their tails beating the earth with lazy, measured thump. The sheep seemed rooted to the patches of shade, apathetic as though no one wore flannel vests or ate mutton-chops. Only the mingled voices of wild birds and multitudinous insects were upraised in a blended monotony of subdued sounds. Not a morning to be devoted to toil! Rather, perchance, to a glimmering perception of a golden age, when sensation meant bliss more than pain, and to be was to enjoy.

But to the head of the firm of Bogg & Company, taking note of scattered thistles and straggling wire fencing, warmth and sunshine signified only dry weather. Dry weather clearly implied a fault somewhere, for which somebody must be called to account. Sir Matthew had the memory of a strategist. Underlying all considerations of shorthorns and merinos was the recollection of a timid foreign lad to be suspected for his shy, bewildered air—to be suspected again for his slim white hands—to be doubly

suspected and utterly condemned for his graceful bearing, his appealing eyes, that even now Sir Matthew could see with their soft lashes drooping over them as he fronted them in his darkened office in Flinders Lane. A scapegoat for dry weather, for obtrusive thistles, for straggling fencing! A waif of foreign scum to be found out! Bogg had promised himself that he would “drop on to him unawares.” Physically, Bogg was carried over the ground by a fast trotter; spiritually, he was borne along on his hobby, ambling towards its promised gratification with airy speed.

The working manager, being probably of Bacon's way of thinking, that “dissimulation is but a faint kind of policy,” did not, in his own words, entirely “knuckle down” to Sir Matthew. His name was Blunt—he was proud to say it—and he would show you he could make his name good if you “crossed” him. Yet Blunt could bear a good deal of “crossing” when it came to the point. Within certain limits, he concluded that the side on which his bread was buttered was worth keeping uppermost, at the cost of some hard words from his employer.

And he kept it carefully uppermost on this especial morning, when the quietude of the balmy atmosphere was broken by Sir Matthew's growls. The head of the firm, capturing his manager at the door of the homestead, had required him to mount into the double-seated buggy with him. Blunt reckoned that these tours of inspection in the companionship of Bogg were more conducive to taking off flesh than a week's hard training. He listened with docility, nevertheless, to complaints and ratings—was it not a fact that his yearly salaries had already made a nest-egg of large proportions?—and might have listened to the end, if an evil chance had not filled him with a sudden foreboding. For, pricking his way over the plain, after the manner of Spencer's knight, Monsieur Caloche, on a fleet, newly broken-in two-year-old, was riding towards them. Blunt could feel that Sir Matthew's eyes were sending out sparks of wrath. For the first time in his life he hazarded an uncalled-for opinion.

“He's a good working chap, that, sir!”—indicating by a jerk of the head that the lad now galloping across the turf was the subject of his remark.

“Ah!” said Sir Matthew.

It was all he said, but it was more than enough.

Blunt fidgeted uneasily. What power possessed the boy to make him show off his riding at this juncture? If he could have stopped him, or turned him back, or waved him off!—but his will was impotent.

Monsieur Caloche, well back in the saddle, his brown eyes shining, his disfigured face flushed and glowing, with wide felt-hat drawn closely over his smooth small head, with slender knees close pressed to the horse's flanks, came riding on, jumping small logs, bending with flexible joints

under straggling branches, never pausing in his reckless course, until on a sudden he found himself almost in front of the buggy, and, reining up, was confronted in full by the savage gleam of Sir Matthew's eyes. It was with the old scared expression that he pulled off his wideawake and bared his head, black and silky as a young retriever's. Sir Matthew knew how to respond to the boy's greeting. He stood up in the buggy and shook his fist at him; his voice, hoarse from the work he had given it that morning, coming out with rasping intensity.

“What the devil do you mean by riding my ‘orses’ tails off, eh?”

Monsieur Caloche, in his confusion, straining to catch the full meaning of the question, looked fearfully round at the hind-quarters of the two-year-old, as if some hitherto unknown phenomenon peculiar to Australian horses might in fact have suddenly left them tailless.

But the tail was doing such good service against the flies at the moment of his observations, that, reassured, he turned his wistful gaze upon Sir Matthew.

“Monsieur,” he began apologetically, “permit that I explain it to you. I did ga-lopp.”

“You can ga-lopp to hell!” said Sir Matthew with furious mimicry. “I’ll teach you to ruin my ‘orses’ legs!”

Blunt saw him lift his whip and strike Monsieur Caloche on the chest. The boy turned so unnaturally white that the manager looked to see him reel in his saddle. But he only swayed forward and slipped to the ground on his feet. Sir Matthew, sitting down again in the buggy with an uncomfortable sensation of some undue excess it might have been as well to recall, saw this white face for the flash of an instant's space, saw its desperation, its shame, its trembling lips; then he was aware that the two-year-old stood riderless in front of him, and away in the distance the figure of a lad was speeding through the timber, one hand held against his chest, his hat gone and he unheeding, palpably sobbing and crying in his loneliness and defencelessness as he stumbled blindly on.

Run-away boys, I fear, call forth very little solicitude in any heart but a mother's. A cat may be nine-lived, but a boy's life is centuple. He seems only to think it worth keeping after the best part of it is gone. Boys run away from schools, from offices, from stations, without exciting more than an ominous prognostication that they will go to the bad. According to Sir Matthew's inference, Monsieur Caloche had “gone to the bad” long ago—*ergo*, it was well to be rid of him. This being so, what utterly inconsistent crank had laid hold of the head of the great firm of Bogg & Company, and tortured him through a lengthy afternoon and everlasting night, with the vision of two despairing eyes and a scarred white face? Even his hobby

cried out against him complainingly. It was not for this that it had borne him prancing along. Not to confront him night and day with eyes so distressful that he could see nothing else. Would it be always so? Would they shine mournfully out of the dim recesses of his gloomy office in Flinders Lane, as they shone here in the wild bush on all sides of him?—so relentlessly sad that it would have been a relief to see them change into the vindictive eyes of the Furies who gave chase to Orestes. There was clearly only one remedy against such a fate, and that was to change the nature of the expression which haunted him by calling up another in its place. But how and when!

Sir Matthew prowled around the homestead the second morning after Monsieur Caloche's flight, in a manner unaccountable to himself. That he should return “possessed” to his elaborate warehouse, where he would be alone all day—and his house of magnificent desolation, where he would be alone all night, was fast becoming a matter of impossibility. What sums out of all proportion would he not have forfeited to have seen the white-faced foreign lad, and to be able to pay him out for the discomfort he was causing him—instead of being bothered by the sight of his “cursed belongings” at every turn! He could not go into the stable without seeing some of his gimcracks; when he went blustering into the kitchen it was to stumble over a pair of miniature boots, and a short curl of hair, in silken rings, fell off the ledge at his very feet. There was only one thing to be done! Consulting with Blunt, clumsily enough, for nothing short of desperation would have induced Sir Matthew to approach the topic of Monsieur Caloche, he learned that nothing had been seen or heard of the lad since the moment of his running away.

“And 'twasn't in the direction of the township, neither,” added Blunt, gravely. “I doubt the sun'll have made him stupid, and he'll have camped down some place on the run.”

Blunt's insinuation anent the sun was sheer artifice, for Blunt, in his private heart, did not endorse his own suggestion in the least degree. It was his belief that the lad had struck a shepherd's hut, and was keeping (with a show of common-sense he had not credited him with) out of the way of his savage employer. But it was worth while making use of the artifice to see Sir Matthew's ill-concealed uneasiness. Hardly the same Sir Matthew, in any sense, as the bullying growler who had driven by his side not two days ago. For *this* morning the double-seated buggy was the scene of neither complaints nor abuse. Quietly over the bush track—where last Monsieur Caloche, with hand to his breast, had run sobbing along—the two men drove, their wheels passing over a wideawake hat, lying neglected and dusty in the road. For more than an hour and a half they followed the track,

the dusty soil that had been witness to the boy's flight still indicating at intervals traces of a small footprint. The oppressive calm of the atmosphere seemed to have left even the ridges of dust undisturbed. Blunt reflected that it must have been "rough on a fellow" to run all that way in the burning sun. It perplexed him, moreover, to remember that the shepherd's hut would be now far in their rear. Perhaps it was with a newly-born sense of uneasiness on his own account that he flicked his whip and made the trotter "go," for no comment could be expected from Sir Matthew, sitting in complete silence by his side.

To Blunt's discerning eyes the last of the footprints seemed to occur right in the middle of the track. On either side was the plain. Ostensibly, Sir Matthew had come that way to look at the sheep. There was, accordingly, every reason for turning to the right and driving towards a belt of timber some hundred yards away, and there were apparently more forcible reasons still for making for a particular tree—a straggling tree, with some pretensions to a meagre shade, the sight of which called forth an ejaculation, not entirely coherent, from Blunt.

Sir Matthew saw the cause of Blunt's ejaculation—a recumbent figure that had probably reached "the quiet haven of us all"—it lay so still. But whether quiet or no, it would seem that to disturb its peace was a matter of life or death to Sir Matthew Bogg. Yet surely here was satiety of the fullest for his hobby! Had he not "dropped on to the 'foreign adventurer' unawares?" So unawares, in fact, that Monsieur Caloche never heeded his presence, or the presence of his working manager, but lay with a glaze on his half-closed eyes in stiff unconcern at their feet.

The clerks and juniors in the outer office of the great firm of Bogg & Co. would have been at some loss to recognise their chief in the livid man who knelt by the dead lad's side. He wanted to feel his heart, it appeared, but his trembling fingers failed him. Blunt comprehended the gesture. Whatever of tenderness Monsieur Caloche had expended in his short lifetime was repaid by the gentleness with which the working manager passed his hand under the boy's rigid neck. It was with a shake of the head that seemed to Sir Matthew like the fiat of his doom that Blunt unbuttoned Monsieur Caloche's vest and discovered the fair, white throat beneath. Unbuttoning still—with tremulous fingers, and a strange apprehension creeping chillily over him—the manager saw the open vest fall loosely asunder, and then—

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Yes; then it was proven that Sir Matthew's hobby had gone its extremest length. Though it could hardly have been rapture at its great triumph that filled his eyes with such a strange expression of horror as he stood looking fearfully down on the corpse at his feet. For he had, in point of fact,

“dropped on to it unawares;” but it was no longer Monsieur Caloche he had “dropped on to,” but a girl with breast of marble, bared in its cold whiteness to the open daylight, and to his ardent gaze. Bared, without any protest from the half-closed eyes, unconcerned behind the filmy veil which glazed them. A virgin breast, spotless in hue, save for a narrow purple streak, marking it in a dark line from the collar-bone downwards. Sir Matthew knew, and the working manager knew, and the child they called Monsieur Caloche had known, by whose hand the mark had been imprinted. It seemed to Sir Matthew that a similar mark, red hot like a brand, must now burn on his own forehead for ever. For what if the hungry Australian sun, and emotion, and exhaustion had been the actual cause of the girl's death? he acknowledged, in the bitterness of his heart, that the “cause of the cause” was his own bloodstained hand.

It must have been poor satisfaction to his hobby, after this, to note that Blunt had found a tiny pocket-book on the person of the corpse, filled with minute foreign handwriting. Of which nothing could be made! For, with one exception, it was filled with French quotations, all of the same tenor—all pointing to the one conclusion—and clearly proving (if it has not been proved already) that a woman who loses her beauty loses her all. The English quotation will be known to some readers of Shakespeare, “So beauty blemished once for ever's lost!” Affixed to it was the faintly-traced signature of Henriette Caloche.

So here was a sort of insight into the mystery. The “foreign adventurer” might be exonerated after all. No baser designs need be laid at the door of dead “Monsieur Caloche” than the design of hiding the loss which had deprived her of all glory in her sex. If, indeed, the loss were a *real* one! For beauty is more than skin-deep, although Monsieur Caloche had not known it. It is of the bone, and the fibre, and the nerves that thrill through the brain. It is of the form and the texture too, as any one would have allowed who scrutinised the body prone in the dust. Even the cruel scars seemed merciful now, and relaxed their hold on the chiselled features, as though “eloquent, just, and mightie Death” would suffer no hand but his own to dally with his possession.

It is only in Christmas stories, I am afraid, where, in deference to so rollicking a season, everything is bound to come right in the end, that people's natures are revolutionised in a night, and from narrow-minded villains they become open-hearted seraphs of charity. Still, it is on record of the first Henry that from the time of the sinking of the *White Ship* “he never smiled again.” I cannot say that Sir Matthew was never known to smile, in his old sour way, or that he never growled or scolded, in his old bullying fashion, after the discovery of Monsieur Caloche's body. But he

was none the less a changed man. The outside world might rightly conjecture that henceforth a slender, mournful-eyed shadow would walk by his side through life. But what can the outside world know of the refinement of mental anguish that may be endured by a mind awakened too late? In Sir Matthew's case—relatively as well as positively. For constant contemplation of a woman's pleading eyes and a dead statuesque form might give rise to imaginings that it would be maddening to dwell upon. What a wealth of caresses those stiff little hands had had it in their power to bestow! What a power of lighting up the solemnest office, and—be sure—the greatest, dreariest house, was latent in those dejected eyes!

Brooding is proverbially bad for the liver. Sir Matthew died of the liver complaint, and his will was cited as an instance of the eccentricity of a wealthy Australian, who, never having been in France, left the bulk of his money to the purpose of constructing and maintaining a magnificent wing to a smallpox hospital in the south of France. It was stipulated that it should be called the “Henriette” wing, and is, I believe, greatly admired by visitors from all parts of the world.

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