# IN THE YEAR OF JUBILEE

VOL. III

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BY

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IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III

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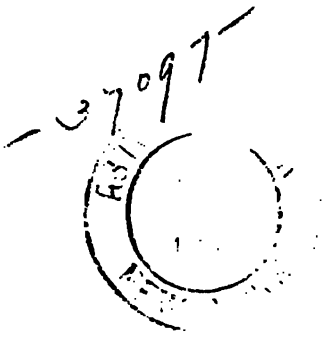

# Part the Fifth

## COMPASSED ROUND

# IN THE YEAR OF JUBILEE

## I

THERE needed not Mary Woodruff's suggestion to remind Nancy that no further away than Champion Hill were people of whom, in extremity, she might inquire concerning her husband. At present, even could she have entertained the thought, it seemed doubtful whether the Vawdrey household knew more of Tarrant's position and purposes than she herself; for, only a month ago, Jessica Morgan had called upon the girls and had ventured a question about their cousin, whereupon they answered that he was in America, but that he had not written for a long time. To Mrs. Baker, Jessica did not like to speak on the subject, but probably that lady could have answered only as the children did.

Once, indeed, a few days after her return, Nancy

took the familiar walk along Champion Hill, and glanced, in passing, at Mr. Vawdrey's house; afterwards, she shunned that region. The memories it revived were infinitely painful. She saw herself an immature and foolish girl, behaving in a way which, for all its affectation of reserve and dignity, no doubt offered to such a man as Lionel Tarrant a hint that here, if he chose, he might make a facile conquest. Had he not acted upon the hint? It wrung her heart with shame to remember how, in those days, she followed the lure of a crude imagination. A year ago? Oh, a lifetime!

Unwilling, now, to justify herself with the plea of love; doubtful, in very truth, whether her passion merited that name; she looked back in the stern spirit of a woman judging another's frailty. What treatment could she have anticipated at the hands of her lover save that she had received? He married her—it was much; he forsook her—it was natural. The truth of which she had caught troublous glimpses in the heyday of her folly now stood revealed as pitiless condemnation. Tarrant never respected her, never thought of her as a

woman whom he could seriously woo and wed. She had a certain power over his emotions, and not the sensual alone; but his love would not endure the test of absence. From the other side of the Atlantic he saw her as he had seen her at first, and shrank from returning to the bondage which in a weak moment he had accepted.

One night about this time she said to herself:

"I was his mistress, never his wife."

And all her desperate endeavours to obscure the history of their love, to assert herself as worthy to be called wife, mother, had fallen fruitless. Those long imploring letters, despatched to America from her solitude by the Cornish sea, elicited nothing but a word or two which sounded more like pity than affection. Pity does not suffice to recall the wandering steps of a man wedded against his will.

In her heart, she absolved him of all baseness. The man of ignoble thought would have been influenced by her market value as a wife. Tarrant, all the more because he was reduced to poverty, would resolutely forget the crude advantage of remaining faithful to her.

Herein Nancy proved herself more akin to her father than she had ever seemed when Stephen Lord sought eagerly in her character for hopeful traits.

The severity of her self-judgment, and the indulgence tempering her attitude towards Tarrant, declared a love which had survived its phase of youthful passion. But Nancy did not recognise this symptom of moral growth. She believed herself to have become indifferent to her husband, and only wondered that she did not hate him. Her heart seemed to spend all its emotion on the little being to whom she had given life—a healthy boy, who already, so she fancied, knew a difference between his mother and his nurse, and gurgled a peculiar note of contentment when lying in her arms. Whether wife or not, she claimed every privilege of motherhood. Had the child been a weakling, she could not have known this abounding solace: the defect would have reproached her. But from the day of his birth he manifested so vigorous a will to live, clung so hungrily to the fountain-breast, kicked and clamoured with such

irresistible self-assertion, that the mother's pride equalled her tenderness. "My own brave boy! My son!" Wonderful new words: honey upon the lips and rapture to the ear. She murmured them as though inspired with speech never uttered by mortal.

The interval of a day between her journeys to see the child taxed her patience; but each visit brought a growth of confidence. No harm would befall him: Mary had chosen wisely.

Horace kept aloof and sent no message. When at length she wrote to him a letter all of sisterly kindness, there came a stinted reply. He said that he was going away for a holiday, and might be absent until September. "Don't bother about me. You shall hear again before long. There's just a chance that I may go in for business again, with prospect of making money. Particulars when I see you."

Nancy found this note awaiting her after a day's absence from home, and with it another. To her surprise, Mrs. Damerel had written. "I called early this afternoon, wishing particularly to see you. Will you please let me know when I should find you at

home? It is about Horace that I want to speak." It began with "My dear Nancy," and ended, "Yours affectionately." Glad of the opportunity thus offered, she answered at once, making an appointment for the next day.

When Mrs. Damerel came, Nancy was even more struck than at their former meeting with her resemblance to Horace. Eyes and lips recalled Horace at every moment. This time, the conversation began more smoothly. On both sides appeared a disposition to friendliness, though Nancy only marked her distrust in the hope of learning more about this mysterious relative and of being useful to her brother.

"You have a prejudice against me," said the visitor, when she had inquired concerning Nancy's health. "It's only natural. I hardly seem to you a real relative, I'm afraid—you know so little about me; and now Horace has been laying dreadful things to my charge."

"He thinks you responsible for what has happened to Fanny French," Nancy replied, in an impartial voice.

"Yes, and I assure you he is mistaken. Miss

French deceived him and her own people, leading them to think that she was spending her time with me, when really she was—who knows where? To you I am quite ready to confess that I hoped something might come between her and Horace; but as for plotting—really I am not so melodramatic a person. All I did in the way of design was to give Horace an opportunity of seeing the girl in a new light. You can imagine very well, no doubt, how she conducted herself. I quite believe that Horace was getting tired and ashamed of her, but then came her disappearance, and that made him angry with me."

Even the voice suggested Horace's tones, especially when softened in familiar dialogue. Nancy paid closer attention to the speaker's looks and movements than to the matter of what she said. Mrs. Damerel might possibly be a well-meaning woman—her peculiarities might result from social habits, and not from insincerity; yet Nancy could not like her. Everything about her prompted a question and a doubt. How old was she? Probably much older than she looked. What was her breeding, her education?

Probably far less thorough than she would have one believe. Was she in good circumstances? Nancy suspected that her fashionable and expensive dress signified extravagance and vanity rather than wealth.

"I have brought a letter to show you which she has sent me from abroad. Read it, and form your own conclusion. Is it the letter of an injured innocent?"

A scrawl on foreign note-paper, which ran thus:

"DEAR MRS. DAMEREL,—Just a word to console you for the loss of my society. I have gone to a better world, so dry your tears. If you see my masher, tell him I've met with somebody a bit more like a man. I should advise him to go to school again and finish his education. I won't trouble you to write. Many thanks for the kindness you *didn't* mean to do me.—Yours in the best of spirits (I don't mean Cognac),

"FANNY (*née*) FRENCH."

Nancy returned the paper with a look of disgust, saying, "I didn't think she was as bad as that."

"No more did I. It really gave me a little shock of surprise."

"Do you think it likely she is married?"

Mrs. Damerel pursed her lips and arched her eyebrows with so unpleasant an effect on Nancy that she looked away.

"I have no means whatever of forming an opinion."

"But there's no more fear for Horace," said Nancy.

"I hope not—I think not. But my purpose in coming was to consult with you about the poor boy. He has renounced me; he won't answer my letters; and I am so dreadfully afraid that a sort of despair —it sounds ridiculous, but he is so very young— may drive him into reckless living. You have taken part with him against me, I fear——"

"No, I haven't. I told him I was quite sure the girl had only herself to blame, whatever happened."

"How kind of you!" Mrs. Damerel sank her voice to a sort of cooing, not unmelodious, but to Nancy's ear a hollow affectation. "If we could understand each other! I am so anxious for your

dear brother's happiness—and for yours, believe me. I have suffered greatly since he told me I was his enemy, and cast me off."

Here sounded a note of pathos which impressed the critical listener. There was a look, too, in Mrs. Damerel's eyes quite unlike any that Nancy had yet detected.

"What do you wish him to do?" she asked. "If I must tell you the truth, I don't think he'll get any good in the life of society."

Society's representative answered in a tone of affectionate frankness:

"He won't; I can see that. I don't wish him to live idly. The question is, What ought he to do? I think you know a gentleman of his acquaintance, Mr. Crewe?"

The question was added rather abruptly, and with a watchful gaze.

"I know him a little."

"Something has been said, I believe, about Horace investing money in Mr. Crewe's business. Do you think it would be advisable?"

Surprise kept Nancy silent.

"Is Mr. Crewe trustworthy? I understand he has been in business for himself only a short time."

Nancy declared herself unable to judge Mr. Crewe, whether in private or in commercial life. And here she paused, but could not refrain from adding the question whether Mrs. Damerel had personal knowledge of him.

"I have met him once."

Immediately, all Nancy's suspicions were revived. She had felt a desire to talk of intimate things, with mention of her mother's name; but the repulsion excited in her by this woman's air of subtlety, by looks, movements, tones which she did not understand, forbade it. She could not speak with satisfaction even of Horace, feeling that Mrs. Damerel's affection, however genuine, must needs be baleful. From this point her part in the dialogue was slight.

"If any of Miss French's relatives," said the visitor presently, "should accuse me to you, you will be able to contradict them. I am sure I can depend upon you for that service?"

"I am not likely to see them; and I should have thought you would care very little what was said about you by people of that kind."

"I care little enough," rejoined Mrs. Damerel, with a curl of the lips. "It's Horace I am thinking of. These people will embitter him against me, so long as they have any ground to go upon."

"But haven't you let him know of that letter?"

Mrs. Damerel seemed to fall into abstraction, answered with a vague "Yes," and after surveying the room, said softly:

"So you must live here alone for another two or three years?"

"It isn't compulsory: it's only a condition."

Another vague "Yes." Then:

"I do so wish Horace would come back and make his home here."

"I'm afraid you have spoilt him for that," said Nancy, with relief in this piece of plain speaking.

Mrs. Damerel did not openly resent it. She looked a mild surprise, and answered blandly:

"Then I must undo the mischief. You shall help me. When he has got over this little trouble, he

will see who are his true friends. Let us work together for his good."

Nancy was inclined, once more, to reproach herself, and listened with patience whilst her relative continued talking in grave kindly tones. Lest she should spoil the effect of these impressive remarks, Mrs. Damerel then took leave. In shaking hands, she bent upon the girl a gaze of affection, and, as she turned away, softly sighed.

Of what had passed in the recent interview with Beatrice French, Nancy said nothing to her faithful companion. This burden of shame must be borne by herself alone. It affected profoundly the courageous mood which had promised to make her life tolerable; henceforth, she all but abandoned the hope of gaining that end for which she had submitted to so deep a humiliation. Through Beatrice, would not her secret, coloured shamefully, become known to Luckworth Crewe, and to others? Already, perchance, a growing scandal attached to her name. Fear had enabled her to endure dishonour in the eyes of one woman, but at any moment the disgrace might front her in an intolerable shape; then,

regardless of the cost, she would proclaim her marriage, and have, in return for all she had suffered, nothing but the reproach of an attempted fraud.

To find employment, means of honourable support, was an urgent necessity.

She had written in reply to sundry advertisements, but without result. She tried to draw up an advertisement on her own account, but found the difficulty insuperable. What was there she could do? Teach children, perhaps; but as a visiting governess, the only position of the kind which circumstances left open to her, she could hope for nothing more than the paltriest remuneration. Be somebody's "secretary"? That sounded pleasant, but very ambitious: a sense of incompetency chilled her. In an office, in a shop, who would dream of giving her an engagement?

Walking about the streets of London in search of suggestions, she gained only an understanding of her insignificance. In the battle of life every girl who could work a sewing-machine or make a match-box was of more account than she. If she entered a shop to make purchases, the young women at the

counter seemed to smile superiority. Of what avail her "education," her "culture"? The roar of myriad industries made mocking laughter at such futile pretensions. She shrank back into her suburban home.

A little book on "employments for women," which she saw advertised and bought, merely heightened her discouragement. Here, doubtless, were occupations she might learn; but, when it came to choosing, and contemplating the practical steps that must be taken, her heart sank. She was a coward; she dreaded the world; she saw as never yet the blessedness of having money and a secure home.

The word "home" grew very sweet to her ears. A man, she said to herself, may go forth and find his work, his pleasure, in the highways; but is not a woman's place under the sheltering roof? What right had a mother to be searching abroad for tasks and duties? Task enough, duty obvious, in the tending of her child. Had she but a little country cottage with needs assured, and her baby cradled beside her, she would ask no more.

How idle all the thoughts of her girlhood! How

little she knew of life as it would reveal itself to her mature eyes!

Fatigued into listlessness, she went to the lending-library, and chose a novel for an hour's amusement. It happened that this story was concerned with the fortunes of a young woman who, after many an affliction sore, discovered with notable suddenness the path to fame, lucre, and the husband of her heart: she became at a bound a successful novelist. Nancy's cheek flushed with a splendid thought. Why should not *she* do likewise? At all events—for modesty was now her ruling characteristic—why should she not earn a little money by writing stories? Numbers of women took to it; not a few succeeded. It was a pursuit that demanded no apprenticeship, that could be followed in the privacy of home, a pursuit wherein her education would be of service. With imagination already fired by the optimistic author, she began to walk about the room and devise romantic incidents. A love story, of course—and why not one very like her own? The characters were ready to her hands. She would begin this very evening.

Mary saw the glow upon her face, the delightful frenzy in her eyes, and wondered.

"I have an idea," said Nancy. "Don't ask me about it. Just leave me alone. I think I see my way."

Daily she secluded herself for several hours; and, whatever the literary value of her labour, it plainly kept her in good spirits, and benefited her health. Save for the visits to her baby, regular as before, she hardly left home.

Jessica Morgan came very often, much oftener than Nancy desired; not only was her talk wearisome, but it consumed valuable time. She much desired to see the baby, and Nancy found it difficult to invent excuses for her unwillingness. When importunity could not be otherwise defeated, she pretended a conscientious scruple.

"I have deceived my husband in telling him that no one knows of our marriage but Mary. If I let you see the child, I should feel that I was deceiving him again. Don't ask me; I can't."

Not unnaturally this struck Jessica as far-fetched. She argued against it, and became petulant. Nancy lost patience, but remembered in time that she was

at Jessica's mercy, and, to her mortification, had to adopt a coaxing, almost a suppliant, tone, with the result that Miss Morgan's overweening conceit was flattered into arrogance. Her sentimental protestations became strangely mixed with a self-assertiveness very galling to Nancy's pride. Without the slightest apparent cause for ill-humour, she said one day:

"I do feel sorry for you; it must be a dreadful thing to have married a man who has no sense of honour."

Nancy fired up.

"What do you mean?"

"How can he have, when he makes you deceive people in this way for the sake of the money he'll get?"

"He doesn't! It's my own choice."

"Then he oughtn't to let you do it. No honourable man would."

"That has nothing to do with you," Nancy exclaimed, anger blanching her cheek. "Please don't talk about my husband. You say things you ought to be ashamed of."

"Oh, don't be angry!" The facile tears started in Jessica's eyes. "It's because I feel indignant on your account, dear."

"I don't want your indignation. Never mention this subject again, or I shall feel sure you do it on purpose to annoy me."

Jessica melted into mawkishness; none the less, Nancy felt a slave to her former friend, who, for whatever reason, seemed to have grown hypocritical and spiteful. When next the girl called, she was told that Miss Lord had left home for the day, a fiction which spared Nancy an hour's torment. Miss Morgan made up for it by coming very early on the next Sunday afternoon, and preparing herself avowedly for a stay until late in the evening. Resolute to avoid a long *tête-à-tête*, which was sure to exasperate her temper, Nancy kept Mary in the room, and listened to no hint from Jessica that they should retire for the accustomed privacy.

At four o'clock they were joined by Samuel Barmby, whom, for once, Nancy welcomed with pleasure. Samuel, who had come in the hope of finding Miss Lord alone, gave but the coldest attention

to Jessica; Mary, however, he greeted with grave courtesy, addressing to her several remarks which were meant as a recognition of social equality in the quondam servant. He was dressed with elaborate care. Snowy cuffs concealed half his hands; his moustache, of late in training, sketched the graceful curl it would presently achieve; a faint perfume attended the drawing forth of his silk handkerchief.

Samuel never lacked a subject for the display of eloquence. To-day it was one that called for indignant fervour.

"A most disgraceful fact has come under my notice, and I am sorry to say, Miss Lord, that it concerns some one with whom you are acquainted."

"Indeed?" said Nancy, not without tremor. "Who is that?"

"Mr. Peachey, of De Crespigny Park. I believe you are on terms of friendship with the family."

"Oh, you can hardly call it friendship. I know them."

"Then I may speak without fear of paining you. You are aware that Mr. Peachey is a member of the firm of Ducker, Blunt & Co., who manufacture

disinfectants. Now, if any manufacture should be carried on in a conscientious spirit—as of course *all* manufactures should—surely it is that of disinfectants. Only think what depends upon it! People who make disinfectants ought to regard themselves as invested with a sacred trust. The whole community looks to them for protection against disease. The abuse of such confidence cannot be too severely condemned, all the more so, that there is absolutely no legal remedy against the adulteration of disinfectants. Did you know that, Miss Lord? The law guards against adulteration of food, but it seems—I have been making inquiry into the matter—that no thought has ever been given by the legislature to the subject of disinfectants!"

Nancy saw that Jessica was watching the speaker with jealous eyes, and, in spite of prudence, she could not help behaving to Mr. Barmby more graciously than usual; a small revenge for the treatment she had suffered at the hands of Miss Morgan.

"I could point out a great number of such anomalies," pursued Samuel. "But this matter of disinfectants is really one of the gravest. My father

has written to the *Times* about it, and his letter will probably be inserted to-morrow. I am thinking of bringing it before the attention of our Society."

"Do Mr. Peachey's people adulterate their disinfectants?" inquired Nancy.

"I was going to tell you. Some acquaintances of ours have had a severe illness in their house, and have been using disinfectants made by Ducker, Blunt & Co. Fortunately they have a very good medical man, and through him it has been discovered that these pretended safeguards are all but absolutely worthless. He had the stuff analysed. Now, isn't this shameful? Isn't this abominable? For my own part, I should call it constructive murder."

The phrase came by haphazard to Samuel's tongue, and he uttered it with gusto, repeating it twice or thrice.

"Constructive murder—nothing short of that. And to think that these people enjoy a positive immunity—impunity." He corrected himself quickly; then, uncertain whether he had really made a mistake, reddened and twisted his gloves. "To think"—he raised his voice—"that they are capable of

making money out of disease and death! It is one of the worst illustrations of a corrupt spirit in the commercial life of our times that has yet come under my observation."

He remained for a couple of hours, talking ceaselessly. A glance which he now and then cast at Miss Morgan betrayed his hope that she would take her leave before the necessary time of his own departure. Jessica, perfectly aware of this desire, sat as though no less at home than Nancy. Every remark she made was a stroke of malice at her friend, and in her drawn features appeared the passions by which she was tormented.

As soon as Mr. Barmby had regretfully withdrawn, Nancy turned upon the girl with flashing eyes.

"I want to speak to you. Come downstairs."

She led the way to the dining-room. Jessica followed without a word.

"Why are you behaving like this? What has come to you?"

The feeble anæmic creature fell back before this outbreak of wholesome wrath; her eyes stared in alarm.

"I won't put up with it," cried Nancy. "If you think you can insult me because I trusted you when you were my only friend, you'll find your mistake. A little more, and you shall see how little your power over me is worth. Am I to live at *your* mercy! I'd starve rather. What do you mean by it?"

"Oh—Nancy—to think you should speak to me like this."

"You are to be allowed to spit poison at me—are you? And I must bear it? No, that I won't! Of course I know what's the matter with you. You have fallen in love with Samuel Barmby.—You have! Any one can see it. You have no more command of yourself than a child. And because he prefers me to you, you rage against me. Idiot! What is Samuel Barmby to me? Can I do more to keep him off? Can I say to him, 'Do have pity on poor Miss Morgan, who——'"

She was interrupted by a scream, on which followed a torrent of frenzied words from Jessica.

"You're a bad-hearted woman! You've behaved disgracefully yourself—oh! I know more than you

think; and now you accuse me of being as bad. Why did you get married in such a hurry? Do you think I didn't understand it? It's *you* who have no command over yourself. If the truth were known, no decent woman would ever speak to you again. And you've got your reward. Pretend as you like, I know your husband has deserted you. What else could you expect? That's what makes you hate every one that hasn't fallen into the mud. I wouldn't have such a character as yours! All this afternoon you've been looking at that man as no married woman could who respected herself. You encourage him; he comes here often—— "

Hysterical passion strangled her voice, and before she could recover breath, Nancy, terrible in ire, advanced upon her.

" Leave this house, and never dare to show yourself here again! Do what you like, I'll endure you no longer—be off! "

Jessica retreated, her bloodless lips apart, her eyes starting as in suffocation. She stumbled against a chair, fell to the ground, and, with a cry of anguish, threw herself upon her knees before Nancy.

"What did I say? I didn't mean it—I don't know what I have been saying—it was all madness. Oh, do forgive me! That isn't how I really think of you—you know it isn't—I'm not so wicked as that. We have been friends so long—I must have gone mad to speak such words. Don't drive me away from you, dear, dear Nancy! I implore you to forgive me! Look, I pray to you on my knees to forget it. Despise me for being such a weak, wicked creature, but don't drive me away like that! I didn't mean one word I said."

"Rubbish! Of course you meant it. You have thought it every day, and you'll say it again, behind my back, if not to my face. Stand up, and don't make yourself sillier than you are."

"You can't call me anything too bad—but don't drive me away. I can't bear it. You are the only friend I have in the world—the only, only friend. No one was ever kind and good to me but you, and this is how I have repaid you. Oh, I hate myself! I could tear my tongue out for saying such things. Only say that you'll try to forgive me—dear Nancy —dear——"

She fell with face upon the carpet, and grovelled there in anguish of conflicting passions, a lamentable object. Unable to bear the sight of her, Nancy moved away, and stood with back turned, perforce hearing the moans and sobs and half-articulate words which lasted until the fit of hysteria left its victim in mute exhaustion. Then, contemptuously pitiful, she drew near again to the prostrate figure.

"Stand up at once, and let us have an end of this vulgar folly. Stand up, or I'll leave you here, and never speak to you again."

"Nancy—can you forgive me?"

"I believe you have never got over your illness. If I were you, I should see the doctor again, and try to be cured. You'll end in an asylum, if you don't mind."

"I often feel almost mad—I do really. Will you forget those dreadful words I spoke? I know you can't forgive me at once——"

"Only stand up, and try to behave like a reasonable being. What do I care for your words?"

The girl raised herself, threw her arms over a chair, and wept miserably.

## II

On an afternoon at the end of October, Samuel Barmby, returned from business, found Miss Morgan having tea with his sisters. For a month or two after Midsummer the Barmbys had scarcely seen her; now their friendly intercourse was renewed, and Jessica came at least once a week. She had an engagement at a girls' school in this neighbourhood, and, though her health threatened another collapse, she talked of resuming study for the Matriculation of next year.

Samuel, perfectly aware of the slavish homage which Miss Morgan paid him, took pleasure in posing before her. It never entered his mind to make any return beyond genial patronage, but the incense of a female devotee was always grateful to him, and he had come to look upon Jessica as a young person peculiarly appreciative of intellectual distinction. A week ago, walking with her to the omnibus after

an evening she had spent in Dagmar Road, he had indulged a spirit of confidence, and led her to speak of Nancy Lord. The upshot of five minutes' conversation was a frank inquiry, which he could hardly have permitted himself but for the shadow of night and the isolating noises around them. As an intimate friend, did she feel able to tell him whether or not Miss Lord was engaged to be married? Jessica, after a brief silence, answered that she did *not* feel at liberty to disclose what she knew on the subject; but the words she used, and her voice in uttering them, left no doubt as to her meaning. Samuel said no more. At parting, he pressed the girl's hand warmly.

This afternoon, they began by avoiding each other's look. Samuel seemed indisposed for conversation; he sipped at a cup of tea with an abstracted and somewhat weary air, until Miss Morgan addressed him.

"To-morrow is the evening of your lecture, isn't it, Mr. Barmby?"

"To-morrow."

By the agency of a friend who belonged to a

society of mutual improvement at Pentonville, Samuel had been invited to go over and illumine with his wisdom the seekers after culture in that remote district, a proposal that flattered him immensely, and inspired him with a hope of more than suburban fame. For some months he had spoken of the engagement. He was to discourse upon "National Greatness: its Obligations and its Dangers."

"Of course it will be printed afterwards?" pursued the devotee.

"Oh, I don't know. It's hardly worth that."

"Oh, I'm sure it will be!"

And Jessica appealed to the sisters, who declared that certain passages they had been privileged to hear seemed to them very remarkable.

Ladies were to be admitted, but the Miss Barmbys felt afraid to undertake so long a journey after dark.

"I know some one who would very much like to go," said Jessica, steadying her voice. "Could you spare me a ticket to give away, Mr. Barmby?"

Samuel smiled graciously, and promised the ticket.

Of course it was for Jessica's own use. On the

following evening, long before the hour which would have allowed her ample time to reach Pentonville by eight o'clock, she set forth excitedly. Unless Samuel Barmby were accompanied by some friend from Camberwell,—only too probable,—she might hope to make the return journey under his protection. Perhaps he would speak again of Nancy Lord, and this time he should be answered with less reserve. What harm if she even told him the name of the man whom Nancy was "engaged" to marry?

Nancy was no longer her friend. A show of reconciliation had followed that scene on the Sunday afternoon three months ago; but Jessica well knew that she had put herself beyond forgiveness, nor did she desire it. Even without the memory of her offence, by this time she must needs have regarded Nancy with steadfast dislike. Weeks had gone by since their last meeting, which was rendered so unpleasant by mutual coldness that a renewal of intercourse seemed out of the question.

She would not be guilty of treachery. But, in justice to herself, she might give Samuel Barmby to understand how hopeless was his wooing.

To her disappointment, the lecture-room was small and undignified; she had imagined a capacious hall, with Samuel Bennett Barmby standing up before an audience of several hundred people. The cane-bottomed chairs numbered not more than fifty, and at eight o'clock some of them were still unoccupied. Nor did the assembly answer to her expectation. It seemed to consist of young shopmen, with a few females of their kind interspersed. She chose a place in the middle of the room, where the lecturer could hardly fail to observe her presence.

With Barmby's entrance disillusion gave way before the ardours of flesh and spirit. The whole hour through she never took her eyes from him. His smooth, pink face, with its shining moustache, embodied her ideal of manly beauty; his tall figure inflamed her senses; the words that fell from his lips sounded to her with oracular impressiveness, conveying a wisdom before which she bowed, and a noble enthusiasm to which she responded in fervent exaltation. And she had been wont to ridicule this man, to join in mockery of his elo-

quence with a conceited wanton such as Nancy Lord! No, it never came from her heart; it was moral cowardice; from the first she had recognised Samuel Barmby's infinite superiority to the ignoble, the impure girl who dared to deride him.

He saw her; their eyes met once, and again, and yet again. He knew that she alone in the audience could comprehend his noble morality, grasp the extent of his far-sighted speculations. To her he spoke. And in his deep glowing heart he could not but thank her for such evidence of sympathy.

There followed a tedious debate, a muddy flow of gabble and balderdash. It was over by ten o'clock. With jealous eyes she watched her hero surrounded by people who thought, poor creatures, that they were worthy of offering him congratulations. At a distance she lingered. And behold, his eye once more fell upon her! He came out from among the silly chatterers, and walked towards her.

"You played me a trick, Miss Morgan. I should never have allowed you to come all this way to hear me."

"If I had come ten times the distance, I should have been repaid!"

His round eyes gloated upon the flattery.

"Well, well, I mustn't pretend that I think the lecture worthless. But you might have had the manuscript to read. Are you quite alone? Then I must take care of you. It's a wretched night; we'll have a cab to King's Cross."

He said it with a consciousness of large-handed generosity. Jessica's heart leapt and throbbed.

She was by his side in the vehicle. Her body touched his. She felt his warm breath as he talked. In all too short a time they reached the railway station.

"Did you come this way? Have you a ticket? Leave that to me."

Again largely generous, he strode to the booking-office.

They descended and stood together upon the platform, among hurrying crowds, in black fumes that poisoned the palate with sulphur. This way and that sped the demon engines, whirling lighted waggons full of people. Shrill whistles, the

hiss and roar of steam, the bang, clap, bang of carriage-doors, the clatter of feet on wood and stone—all echoed and reverberated from a huge cloudy vault above them. High and low, on every available yard of wall, advertisements clamoured to the eye: theatres, journals, soaps, medicines, concerts, furniture, wines, prayer-meetings—all the produce and refuse of civilisation announced in staring letters, in daubed effigies, base, paltry, grotesque. A battle-ground of advertisements, fitly chosen amid subterranean din and reek; a symbol to the gaze of that relentless warfare which ceases not, night and day, in the world above.

For the southward train they had to wait ten minutes. Jessica, keeping as close as possible to her companion's side, tried to converse, but her thoughts were in a tumult like to that about her. She felt a faintness, a quivering in her limbs.

"May I sit down for a moment?" she said, looking at Barmby with a childlike appeal.

"To be sure."

She pointed in a direction away from the crowd.

"I have something to say—it's quieter——"

Samuel evinced surprise, but allowed himself to be led towards the black mouth of the tunnel, whence at that moment rushed an engine with glaring lights upon its breast.

"We may not be alone in the train," continued Jessica. "There's something you ought to know I must tell you to-night. You were asking me about Nancy Lord."

She spoke with panting breath, and looked fixedly at him. The eagerness with which he lent ear gave her strength to proceed.

"You asked me if she was engaged."

"Yes—well?"

He had even forgotten his politeness; he saw in her a mere source of information. Jessica moved closer to him on the bench.

"Had you any reason for thinking she was?"

"No particular reason, except something strange in her behaviour."

"Would you like to know the whole truth?"

It was a very cold night, and a keen wind swept the platform; but Jessica, though indifferently clad, felt no discomfort from this cause. Yet she pressed

closer to her companion, so that her cheek all but touched his shoulder.

"Of course I should," Barmby answered. "Is there any mystery?"

"I oughtn't to tell."

"Then you had better not. But why did you begin?"

"You ought to know."

"Why ought I to know?"

"Because you——." She broke off. A sudden chill made her teeth chatter.

"Well—why?" asked Samuel, with impatience.

"Are you—are you in love with her?"

Voice and look embarrassed him. So did the girl's proximity; she was now all but leaning on his shoulder. Respectable Mr. Barmby could not be aware that Jessica's state of mind rendered her scarcely responsible for what she said or did.

"That's a very plain question," he began; but she interrupted him.

"I oughtn't to ask it. There's no need for you to answer. I know you have wanted to marry her for a long time. But you never will."

"Perhaps not—if she has promised somebody else."

"If I tell you—will you be kind to me?"

"Kind?"

"I didn't mean that," she added hurriedly. "I mean—will you understand that I felt it a duty? I oughtn't to tell a secret; but it's a secret that oughtn't to be kept. Will you understand that I did it out of—out of friendship for you, and because I thought it right?"

"Oh, certainly. After going so far, you had better tell me and have done with it."

Jessica approached her lips to his ear, and whispered:

"She is married."

"What? Impossible!"

"She was married at Teignmouth, just before she came back from her holiday, last year."

"Well! Upon my word! And that's why she has been away in Cornwall?"

Again Jessica whispered, her body quivering the while:

"She has a child. It was born last May."

"Well! Upon my word! Now I understand. Who could have imagined!"

"You see what she is. She hides it for the sake of the money."

"But who is her husband?" asked Samuel, staring at the bloodless face.

"A man called Tarrant, a relative of Mr. Vawdrey, of Champion Hill. She thought he was rich. I don't know whether he is or not, but I believe he doesn't mean to come back to her. He's in America now."

Barmby questioned, and Jessica answered, until there was nothing left to ask or to tell,—save the one thing which rose suddenly to Jessica's lips.

"You won't let her know that I have told you?"

Samuel gravely, but coldly, assured her that she need not fear betrayal.

## III

It was to be in three volumes. She saw her way pretty clearly to the end of the first; she had ideas for the second; the third must take care of itself—until she reached it. Hero and heroine ready to her hand; subordinate characters vaguely floating in the background. After an hour or two of meditation, she sat down and dashed at Chapter One.

Long before the end of the year it ought to be finished.

But in August came her baby's first illness; for nearly a fortnight she was away from home, and on her return, though no anxiety remained, she found it difficult to resume work. The few chapters completed had a sorry look; they did not read well, not at all like writing destined to be read in print. After a week's disheartenment she made a new beginning.

At the end of September baby again alarmed

her. A trivial ailment as before, but she could not leave the child until all was well. Again she reviewed her work, and with more repugnance than after the previous interruption. But go on with it she must and would. The distasteful labour, slow, wearisome, often performed without pretence of hope, went on until October. Then she broke down. Mary Woodruff found her crying by the fireside, feverish and unnerved.

"I can't sleep," she said. "I hear the clock strike every hour, night after night."

But she would not confess the cause. In writing her poor novel she had lived again through the story enacted at Teignmouth, and her heart failed beneath its burden of hopeless longing. Her husband had forsaken her. Even if she saw him again, what solace could be found in the mere proximity of a man who did not love her, who had never loved her? The child was not enough; its fatherless estate enhanced the misery of her own solitude. When the leaves fell, and the sky darkened, and the long London winter gloomed before her, she sank with a moan of despair.

Mary's strength and tenderness were now invaluable. By sheer force of will she overcame the malady in its physical effects, and did wonders in the assailing of its moral source. Her appeal now, as formerly, was to the nobler pride always struggling for control in Nancy's character. A few days of combat with the besieging melancholy that threatened disaster, and Nancy could meet her friend's look with a smile. She put away and turned the key upon her futile scribbling; no more of that. Novel-writing was not her vocation; she must seek again.

Early in the afternoon she made ready to go forth on the only business which now took her from home. It was nearly a week since she had seen her boy.

Opening the front door, she came unexpectedly under two pairs of eyes. Face to face with her stood Samuel Barmby, his hand raised to signal at the knocker, just withdrawn from him. And behind Barmby was a postman, holding a letter, which in another moment would have dropped into the box.

Samuel performed the civil salute.

"Ha!—How do you do, Miss Lord?—You are going out, I'm afraid."

"Yes, I am going out."

She replied mechanically, and in speaking took the letter held out to her. A glance at it sent all her blood rushing upon the heart.

"I want to see you particularly," said Samuel. "Could I call again, this afternoon?"

Nancy gazed at him, but did not hear. He saw the sudden pallor of her cheeks, and thought he understood it. As she stood like a statue, he spoke again.

"It is very particular business. If you could give me an appointment——"

"Business?—Oh, come in, if you like."

She drew back to admit him, but in the passage stood looking at her letter. Barmby was perplexed and embarrassed.

"You had rather I called again?"

"Called again? Just as you like."

"Oh, then I will stay," said Samuel bluntly. For he had things in mind which disposed him to resent this flagrant discourtesy.

His voice awakened Nancy. She opened the door of the dining-room.

"Will you sit down, Mr. Barmby, and excuse me for a few minutes?"

"Certainly. Don't let me inconvenience you, Miss Lord."

At another time Nancy would have remarked something very unusual in his way of speaking, especially in the utterance of her name. But for the letter in her hand she must have noticed with uneasiness a certain severity of countenance, which had taken the place of Barmby's wonted smile. As it was, she scarcely realised his presence; and, on closing the door of the room he had entered, she forthwith forgot that such a man existed.

Her letter! His handwriting at last. And he was in England.

She flew up to her bedroom, and tore open the envelope. He was in London; "Great College Street, S.W." A short letter, soon read.

"DEAREST NANCY,—I am ashamed to write, yet write I must. All your letters reached me; there

was no reason for my silence but the unwillingness to keep sending bad news. I have still nothing good to tell you, but here I am in London again, and you must know of it.

"When I posted my last letter to you from New York, I meant to come back as soon as I could get money enough to pay my passage. Since then I have gone through a miserable time, idle for the most part, ill for a few weeks, and occasionally trying to write something that editors would pay for. But after all I had to borrow. It has brought me home (steerage, if you know what that means), and now I must earn more.

"If we were to meet, I might be able to say something else. I can't write it. Let me hear from you, if you think me worth a letter.—Yours ever, dear girl, L."

For a quarter of an hour she stood with this sheet open, as though still reading. Her face was void of emotion; she had a vacant look, cheerless, but with no more decided significance.

Then she remembered that Samuel Barmby was

waiting for her downstairs. He might have something to say which really concerned her. Better see him at once and get rid of him. With slow step she descended to the dining-room. The letter, folded and rolled, she carried in her hand.

"I'm sorry to have kept you waiting, Mr. Barmby."

"Don't mention it. Will you sit down?"

"Yes, of course." She spoke abstractedly, and took a seat not far from him. "I was just going out, but—there's no hurry."

"I hardly know how to begin. Perhaps I had better prepare you by saying that I have received very strange information."

His air was magisterial; he subdued his voice to a note of profound solemnity.

"What sort of information?" asked Nancy vaguely, her brows knitted in a look rather of annoyance than apprehension.

"Very strange indeed."

"You have said that already."

Her temper was failing. She felt a nervous

impulse to behave rudely, to declare the contempt it was always difficult to disguise when talking with Barmby.

"I repeat it, because you seem to have no idea what I am going to speak of. I am the last person to find pleasure in such a disagreeable duty as is now laid upon me. In that respect, I believe you will do me justice."

"Will you speak plainly? This roundabout talk is intolerable."

Samuel drew himself up, and regarded her with offended dignity. He had promised himself no small satisfaction from this interview, had foreseen its salient points. His mere aspect would be enough to subdue Nancy, and when he began to speak she would tremble before him. Such a moment would repay him for the enforced humility of years. Perhaps she would weep; she might even implore him to be merciful. How to act in that event he had quite made up his mind. But all such anticipations were confused by Nancy's singular behaviour. She seemed, in truth, not to understand the hints which should have overwhelmed her.

More magisterial than ever, he began to speak with slow emphasis.

"Miss Lord,—I will still address you by that name,—though for a very long time I have regarded you as a person worthy of all admiration, and have sincerely humbled myself before you, I cannot help thinking that a certain respect is due to me. Even though I find that you have deceived me as to your position, the old feelings are still so strong in me that I could not bear to give you needless pain. Instead of announcing to my father, and to other people, the strange facts which I have learnt, I come here as a friend,—I speak with all possible forbearance,—I do my utmost to spare you. Am I not justified in expecting at least courteous treatment?"

A pause of awful impressiveness. The listener, fully conscious at length of the situation she had to face, fell into a calmer mood. All was over. Suspense and the burden of falsehood had no longer to be endured. Her part now, for this hour at all events, was merely to stand by whilst Fate unfolded itself.

"Please say whatever you have to say, Mr. Barmby," she replied with quiet civility. "I believe your intention was good. You made me nervous, that was all."

"Pray forgive me. Perhaps it will be best if I ask you a simple question. You will see that the position I hold under your father's will leaves me no choice but to ask it. Is it true that you are married?"

"I will answer if you tell me how you came to think that I was married."

"I have been credibly informed."

"By whom?"

"You must forgive me. I can't tell you the name."

"Then I can't answer your question."

Samuel mused. He was unwilling to break a distinct promise.

"No doubt," said Nancy, "you have undertaken not to mention the person."

"I have."

"If it is some one who used to be a friend of mine, you needn't have any scruples. She as good

as told me what she meant to do. Of course it is Miss Morgan?"

"As you have yourself spoken the name——"

"Very well. She isn't in her senses, and I wonder she has kept the secret so long."

"You admit the truth of what she has told me?"

"Yes. I am married."

She made the avowal in a tone very like that in which, to Beatrice French, she had affirmed the contrary.

"And your true name is Mrs. Tarrant?"

"That is my name."

The crudely masculine in Barmby prompted one more question, but some other motive checked him. He let his eyes wander slowly about the room. Even yet there was a chance of playing off certain effects which he had rehearsed with gusto.

"Can you imagine,"—his voice shook a little,—"how much I suffer in hearing you say this?"

"If you mean that you still had the hopes expressed in your letter some time ago, I can only say, in my defence, that I gave you an honest answer."

"Yes. You said you could never marry me. But of course I couldn't understand it in this sense. It is a blow. I find it very hard to bear."

He rose and went to the window, as if ashamed of the emotion he could not command. Nancy, too much occupied with her own troubles to ask or care whether his distress was genuine, laid Tarrant's letter upon a side-table, and began to draw off her gloves. Then she unbuttoned her jacket. These out-of-door garments oppressed her. Samuel turned his head and came slowly back.

"There are things that might be said, but I will not say them. Most men in my position would yield to the temptation of revenge. But for many years I have kept in view a moral ideal, and now I have the satisfaction of conquering my lower self. You shall not hear one word of reproach from my lips."

He waited for the reply, the expected murmur of gratitude. Nancy said nothing.

"Mrs. Tarrant,"—he stood before her,—"what do you suppose must be the result of this?"

"There can only be one."

"You mean the ruin of your prospects. But do you forget that all the money you have received since Mr. Lord's death has been obtained by false pretences? Are you not aware that this is a criminal offence?"

Nancy raised her eyes and looked steadily at him.

"Then I must bear the punishment."

For a minute Barmby enjoyed her suffering. Of his foreseen effects, this one had come nearest to succeeding. But he was not satisfied; he hoped she would beseech his clemency.

"The punishment might be very serious. I really can't say what view my father may take of this deception."

"Is there any use in talking about it? I am penniless—that's all you have to tell me. What else I have to bear, I shall know soon enough."

"One thing I must ask. Isn't your husband in a position to support you?"

"I can't answer that. Please to say nothing about my husband."

Barmby caught at hope. It might be true, as

Jessica Morgan believed, that Nancy was forsaken. The man Tarrant might be wealthy enough to disregard her prospects. In that case an assiduous lover, one who, by the exercise of a prudent generosity, had obtained power over the girl, could yet hope for reward. Samuel had as little of the villain in his composition as any Camberwell householder. He cherished no dark designs. But, after the manner of his kind, he was in love with Nancy, and even the long pursuit of a lofty ideal does not render a man proof against the elementary forces of human nature.

"We will suppose then," he said, with a certain cheerfulness, "that you have nothing whatever to depend upon but your father's will. What is before you? How can you live?"

"That is my own affair."

It was not said offensively, but in a tone of bitter resignation. Barmby sat down opposite to her, and leaned forward.

"Do you think for one moment,"—his voice was softly melodious,—"that I—I who have loved you for years—could let you suffer for want of money?"

He had not skill to read her countenance. Trouble he discerned, and shame; but the half-veiled eyes, the quivering nostril, the hard, cold lips, spoke a language beyond Samuel's interpretation. Even had he known of the outrages previously inflicted upon her pride, and that this new attack came at a moment when her courage was baffled, her heart cruelly wounded, he would just as little have comprehended the spirit which now kept her mute.

He imagined her overcome by his generosity. Another of his great effects had come off with tolerable success.

"Put your mind at rest," he pursued mellifluously. "You shall suffer no hardships. I answer for it."

Still mute, and her head bowed low. Such is the power of nobility displayed before an erring soul!

"You have never done me justice. Confess that you haven't!"

To this remarkable appeal Nancy perforce replied:

"I never thought ill of you."

When she had spoken, colour came into her

cheeks. Observing it, Samuel was strangely moved. Had he impressed her even more profoundly than he hoped to do? Jessica Morgan's undisguised subjugation had flattered him into credulity respecting his influence over the female mind.

"But you didn't think me capable of—of anything extraordinary?"

Even in her torment, Nancy marvelled at this revelation of fatuity. She did not understand the pranks of such a mind as Barmby's when its balance is disturbed by exciting circumstance.

"What are you offering me?" she asked, in a low voice. "How could I take money from you?"

"I didn't mean that you should. Your secret has been betrayed to me. Suppose I refuse to know anything about it, and leave things as they were?"

Nancy kept her eyes down.

"Suppose I say: Duty bids me injure this woman who has injured *me;* but no, I will not! Suppose I say: I can make her regret bitterly that she married that other man; but no, I will not! Suppose, instead of making your secret

known, I do my utmost to guard it! What would be your opinion of this behaviour?"

"I should think it was kindly meant, but useless."

"Useless? Why?"

"Because it isn't in your power to guard the secret. Jessica Morgan won't leave her work half done."

"If that's all, I say again that you can put your mind at rest. I answer for Miss Morgan. With her my will is law."

Samuel smiled. A smile ineffable. The smile of a suburban deity.

"Why should you take any trouble about me?" said Nancy. "I can do nothing for you in return."

"You can."

She looked anxiously at him, for his voice sounded ominous.

"What?"

"You can acknowledge that you never did me justice."

"It's true that I didn't," she answered languidly, speaking as though the concession mattered little.

Barmby brightened. His hands were upon his knees; he raised his chin, and smiled at vacancy.

"You thought me unworthy of you. You can confess to me that you were mistaken."

"I didn't know you as I do now," fell from the expressionless lips.

"Thank you for saying that! Well, then, your anxiety is at an end. You are not in the hands of a mercenary enemy, but of a man whose principles forbid him to do anything ignoble, who has an ideal of life, the result of much study and thought. You have never heard me speak about religion, but you would be gravely mistaken if you thought I had no religious convictions. Some day I shall treat that subject before our Society, and it is probable that my views will give rise to a good deal of discussion. I have formed a religion for myself; when I write my essay, I think I shall call it 'The Religion of a Man of Business.' One of the great evils of the day is the vulgar supposition that commerce has nothing to do with religious faith. I shall show how utterly wrong that is. It would take too long to explain to you my mature views

of Christianity. I am not sure that I recognise any of the ordinary dogmas; I think I have progressed beyond them. However, we shall have many opportunities of talking about these things."

Nancy uttered a mere "Yes." She was looking at Tarrant's letter on the side-table, and wishing to be alone that she might read it again.

"In the meantime," Samuel pursued, "whatever difficulty arises, confide it to me. Probably you will wish to tell me more before long; you know that I am not unworthy to be your adviser. And so let us shake hands, in sign of genuine friendship."

Nancy gave her fingers, which felt very cold upon Barmby's warm, moist palm.

"This conversation has been trying to you," he said, "but relief of mind will soon follow. If anything occurs to me that may help to soothe you, I will write."

"Thank you."

"At the beginning of our interview you didn't think it would end like this?"

There was something of the boy in Samuel,

perhaps the wholesomest part of him. Having manifested his admirable qualities, he felt a light-hearted pleasure in asking for renewed assurance of the good opinion he had earned.

"I hardly cared," said Nancy, as she rose with a sigh of weariness.

"But you have got over that. You will be quite cheerful now?"

"In time, no doubt."

"I shall call again—let us say on Wednesday evening. By that time I shall be able to put you entirely at ease with regard to Miss Morgan."

Nancy made no reply. In shaking hands, she regarded the radiant Samuel with a dreamy interest; and when he had left her, she still gazed for a few moments at the door.

## IV

THE habit of confidence prompted Nancy to seek Mary Woodruff, and show her the long-expected letter. But for Barmby's visit she would have done so. As it was, her mind sullenly resisted the natural impulse. Forlorn misery, intensified by successive humiliations, whereof the latest was the bitterest, hardened her even against the one, the indubitable friend, to whom she had never looked in vain for help and solace. Of course it was not necessary to let Mary know with what heart-breaking coldness Tarrant had communicated the fact of his return; but she preferred to keep silence altogether. Having sunk so low as to accept, with semblance of gratitude, pompous favours, dishonouring connivance, at the hands of Samuel Barmby, she would now stand alone in her uttermost degradation. Happen what might, she would act and suffer in solitude.

Something she had in mind to do which Mary, if told of it, would regard with disapproval. Mary was not a deserted and insulted wife; she could reason and counsel with the calmness of one who sympathised, but had nothing worse to endure. Even Mary's sympathy was necessarily imperfect, since she knew not, and should never know, what had passed in the crucial interviews with Beatrice French, with Jessica Morgan, and with Samuel Barmby. Bent on indulging her passionate sense of injury, hungering for a taste of revenge, however poor, Nancy executed with brief delay a project which had come into her head during the hour of torture just elapsed.

She took a sheet of notepaper, and upon it wrote half-a-dozen lines, thus:

"As your reward for marrying me is still a long way off, and as you tell me that you are in want, I send you as much as I can spare at present. Next month you shall hear from me again."

Within the paper she folded a five-pound note, and placed both in an envelope, which she addressed to Lionel Tarrant, Esq., at his lodgings

in Westminster. Having posted this at the first pillar-box she walked on.

Her only object was to combat mental anguish by bodily exercise, to distract, if possible, the thoughts which hammered upon her brain by moving amid the life of the streets. In Camberwell Road she passed the place of business inscribed with the names "Lord and Barmby"; it made her think, not of the man who, from being an object of her good-natured contempt, was now become a hated enemy, but of her father, and she mourned for him with profounder feeling than when her tears flowed over his new-made grave. But for headstrong folly, incredible in the retrospect, that father would have been her dear and honoured companion, her friend in every best sense of the word, her guide and protector. Many and many a time had he invited her affection, her trust. For long years it was in her power to make him happy, and, in doing so, to enrich her own life, to discipline her mind as no study of books, even had it been genuine, ever could. Oh, to have the time back again—the despised privilege—the thwarted

embittered love! She was beginning to understand her father, to surmise with mature intelligence the causes of his seeming harshness. To her own boy, when he was old enough, she would talk of him and praise him. Perhaps, even thus late, his spirit of stern truthfulness might bear fruit in her life and in her son's.

The tender memory and pure resolve did not long possess her. They soon yielded before the potency of present evil, and for an hour or more she walked along the sordid highway, nursing passions which struck their venom into her heart.

It was one of those cold, dry, clouded evenings of autumn, when London streets affect the imagination with a peculiar suggestiveness. New-lit lamps, sickly yellow under the dying day, stretch in immense vistas, unobscured by fog, but exhibit no detail of the track they will presently illumine; one by one the shop-fronts grow radiant on deepening gloom, and show in silhouette the figures numberless that are hurrying past. By accentuating a pause between the life of daytime and that which will begin after dark, this grey hour excites to an

unwonted perception of the city's vastness and of its multifarious labour; melancholy, yet not dismal, the brooding twilight seems to betoken Nature's compassion for myriad mortals exiled from her beauty and her solace. Noises far and near blend into a muffled murmur, sound's equivalent of the impression received by the eye; it seems to utter the weariness of unending ineffectual toil.

Nancy had now walked as far as Newington, a district unfamiliar to her, and repulsive. By the Elephant and Castle she stood watching the tumultuous traffic which whirls and roars at this confluence of six highways; she had neither a mind to go on, nor yet to return. The conductor of an omnibus close at hand kept bellowing "London Bridge!" and her thoughts wandered to that day of meeting with Luckworth Crewe, when he took her up the Monument. She had never felt more than an idle interest in Crewe, and whenever she remembered him nowadays, it was only to reflect with bitterness that he doubtless knew a part of her secret,—the part that was known to Beatrice French,—and on that account had ceased to urge

his suit; yet at this moment she wished that she had pledged herself to him in good faith. His behaviour argued the steadfast devotion of an honest man, however lacking in refinement. Their long engagement would have been brightened with many hopes; in the end she might have learned to love him, and prosperity would have opened to her a world of satisfactions, for which she could no longer hope.

It grew cold. She allowed the movements of a group of people to direct her steps, and went eastward along New Kent Road. But when the shops were past, and only a dreary prospect of featureless dwellings lay before her, she felt her heart sink, and paused in vacillating wretchedness.

From a house near by sounded a piano; a foolish jingle, but it smote her with a longing for companionship, for friendly, cheerful talk. And then of a sudden she determined that this life of intolerable isolation should come to an end. Her efforts to find employment that would bring her among people had failed simply because she applied to strangers, who knew nothing of her capa-

bilities, and cared nothing for her needs. But a way offered itself if she could overcome the poor lingering vestiges of pride and shame which hitherto had seemed to render it impossible. In this hour her desolate spirit rejected everything but the thought of relief to be found in new occupation, fresh society. She had endured to the limit of strength. Under the falling night, before the grey vision of a city which, by its alien business and pleasure, made her a mere outcast, she all at once found hope in a resource which till now had signified despair.

Summoning the first empty cab, she gave an address known to her only by hearsay, that of the South London Fashionable Dress Supply Association, and was driven thither in about a quarter of an hour. The shop, with its windows cunningly laid out to allure the female eye, spread a brilliant frontage between two much duller places of business; at the doorway stood a commissionaire, distributing some newly printed advertisements to the persons who entered, or who paused in passing. Nancy accepted a paper without thinking about

it, and went through the swing doors held open for her by a stripling in buttons; she approached a young woman at the nearest counter, and in a low voice asked whether Miss French was on the premises.

"I'm not sure, madam. I will inquire at once."

"She calls me 'madam,'" said Nancy to herself whilst waiting. "So do shopkeepers generally. I suppose I look old."

The young person (she honeyed a Cockney twang) speedily came back to report that Miss French had left about half-an-hour ago, and was not likely to return.

"Can you give me her private address?"

Not having seen Miss French since the latter's unwelcome call in Grove Lane, she only knew that Beatrice had left De Crespigny Park to inhabit a flat somewhere or other.

"I wish to see her particularly, on business."

"Excuse me a moment, madam."

On returning, the young person requested Nancy to follow her up the shop, and led into a glass-partitioned office, where, at a table covered with

fashion-plates, sat a middle-aged man, with a bald head of peculiar lustre. He rose and bowed; Nancy repeated her request.

"Could I despatch a message for you, madam?"

"My business is private."

The bald-headed man coughed urbanely, and begged to know her name.

"Miss Lord—of Grove Lane."

Immediately his countenance changed from deprecating solemnity to a broad smile of recognition.

"Miss Lord! Oh, to be sure; I will give you the address at once. Pray pardon my questions; we have to be so very careful. So many people desire private interviews with Miss French. I will jot down the address."

He did so on the back of an advertisement, and added verbal directions. Nancy hurried away.

Another cab conveyed her to Brixton, and set her down before a block of recently built flats. She ascended to the second floor, pressed the button of a bell, and was speedily confronted by a girl of the natty parlour-maid species. This time she began by giving her name, and had only a moment

to wait before she was admitted to a small drawing-room, furnished with semblance of luxury. A glowing fire and the light of an amber-shaded lamp showed as much fashionable upholstery and bric-à-brac as could be squeezed into the narrow space. Something else was perceptible which might perhaps have been dispensed with; to wit, the odour of a very savoury meal, a meal in which fried onions had no insignificant part. But before the visitor could comment to herself upon this disadvantage attaching to flats, Beatrice joined her.

"I could hardly believe it! So you have really looked me up? Awfully jolly of you! I'm quite alone; we'll have a bit of dinner together."

Miss French was in her most expansive mood. She understood the call as one of simple friendliness.

"I wasn't sure that you knew the address. Got it at the shop? They don't go telling everybody, I hope——"

"Some one there seemed to know my name," said Nancy, whom the warmth and light and cheery welcome encouraged in the step she had taken. And she explained.

"Ah, Mr. Clatworthy—rum old cove, when you get to know him. Yes, yes; no doubt he has heard me speak of you—in a general way, you know. Come into my snooze-corner, and take your things off."

The snooze-corner, commonly called a bedroom, lacked one detail of comfort—pure air. The odour of dinner blending with toilet perfumes made an atmosphere decidedly oppressive. Beatrice remarked on the smallness of the chamber, adding archly, "But I sleep single."

"What's your brother doing?" she asked, while helping to remove Nancy's jacket. "I passed him in Oxford Street the other day, and he either didn't see me, or didn't want to. Thought he looked rather dissipated."

"I know very little about him," answered the visitor, who spoke and acted without reflection, conscious chiefly at this moment of faintness induced by fatigue and hunger.

"Fanny 's in Paris," pursued Miss French. "Writes as if she was amusing herself. I think I shall run over and have a look at her. Seen Ada?

She's been playing the fool as usual. Found out that Arthur had taken the kid to his sister's at Canterbury; went down and made a deuce of a kick-up; they had to chuck her out of the house. Of course she cares no more about the child than I do; it's only to spite her husband. She's going to law with him, she says. She won't leave the house in De Crespigny Park, and she's running up bills—you bet!"

Nancy tried to laugh. The effort, and its semi-success, indicated surrender to her companion's spirit rather than any attention to the subject spoken of.

They returned to the drawing-room, but had not time to begin a conversation before the servant summoned them to dinner. A very satisfying meal it proved; not badly cooked, as cooking is understood in Brixton, and served with more of ceremony than the guest had expected. Fried scallops, rump steak smothered in onions, an apple tart, and very sound Stilton cheese. Such fare testified to the virile qualities of Beatrice's mind; she was above the feminine folly of neglecting honest victuals. More-

over, there appeared two wines, sherry and claret.

"Did you ever try this kind of thing?" said the hostess finally, reaching a box of cigarettes.

"I?—Of course not," Nancy replied, with a laugh.

"It's expected of a sensible woman nowadays. I've got to like it. Better try; no need to make yourself uncomfortable. Just keep the smoke in your mouth for half-a-minute, and blow it out prettily. I buy these in the Haymarket; special brand for women."

"And you dine like this, by yourself, every day?"

"Like this, but not always alone. Some one or other drops in. Luckworth Crewe was here yesterday."

Speaking, she watched Nancy, who bore the regard with carelessness, and replied lightly:

"It's an independent sort of life, at all events."

"Just the kind of life that suits me. I'm my own mistress."

There was a suggested allusion in the sly tone of the last phrase; but Nancy, thinking her own thoughts, did not perceive it. As the servant

had left them alone, they could now talk freely. Beatrice, by her frequent glance of curiosity, seemed to await some explanation of a visit so unlooked-for.

"How are things going with you?" she asked at length, tapping the ash of her cigarette over a plate.

"I want something to do," was the blunt reply.

"Too much alone—isn't that it?"

"Yes."

"Just what I thought. You don't see him often?"

Nancy had ceased her pretence of smoking, and leaned back. A flush on her face, and something unwonted in the expression of her eyes,—something like a smile, yet touched with apathy,—told of physical influences which assisted her resolve to have done with scruple and delicacy. She handled her wine-glass, which was half full, and, before answering, raised it to her lips.

"No, I don't see him often."

"Well, I told you to come to me if I could be any use. What's your idea?"

"Do you know of anything I could do? It

isn't so much to earn money, as to—to be occupied, and escape from loneliness. But I must have two afternoons in the week to myself."

Beatrice nodded and smiled.

"No,—not for that," Nancy added hastily. "To see my boy."

The other appeared to accept this correction.

"All right. I think I can find you something. We're opening a branch." She mentioned the locality. "There'll be a club-room, like at head-quarters, and we shall want some one ladylike to sit there and answer questions. You wouldn't be likely to see any one that knows you, and you'd get a good deal of fun out of it. Hours from ten to five, but Saturday afternoon off, and Wednesday after three, if that would do?"

"Yes, that would do very well. Any payment, at first?"

"Oh, we wouldn't be so mean as all that. Say ten shillings a week till Christmas, and afterwards we could see"—she laughed—"whether you're worth more."

"I know nothing about fashions."

"You can learn all you need to know in an hour. It's the ladylike appearance and talk more than anything else."

Nancy sipped again from her wine-glass.

"When could I begin?"

"The place 'll be ready on Monday week. Next week you might put in a few hours with us. Just sit and watch and listen, that's all; to get the hang of the thing."

"Thank you for being so ready to help me."

"Not a bit of it. I haven't done yet. There's a condition. If I fix up this job for you, will you tell me something I want to know?"

Nancy turned her eyes apprehensively.

"You can guess what it is. I quite believe what you told me some time ago, but I shan't feel quite easy until I know——"

She finished the sentence with a look. Nancy's eyes fell.

"Curiosity, nothing else," added the other. "Just to make quite sure it isn't anybody I've thought of."

There was a long silence. Leaning forward upon the table, Nancy turned her wine-glass about and

about. She now had a very high colour, and breathed quickly.

"Is it off, then?" said Beatrice, in an indifferent tone.

Thereupon Nancy disclosed the name of her husband—her lover, as Miss French thought him. Plied with further questions, she told where he was living, but gave no account of the circumstances that had estranged them. Abundantly satisfied, Beatrice grew almost affectionate, and talked merrily.

Nancy wished to ask whether Luckworth Crewe had any knowledge of her position. It was long before her lips could utter the words, but at length they were spoken. And Beatrice assured her that Crewe, good silly fellow, did not even suspect the truth.

# V

"FOR a man," said Tarrant, "who can pay no more than twelve and sixpence a week, it's the best accommodation to be found in London. There's an air of civilisation about the house. Look; a bath, and a little book-case, and an easy-chair such as can be used by a man who respects himself. You feel you are among people who tub o' mornings and know the meaning of leisure. Then the view!"

He was talking to his friend Harvey Munden, the journalist. The room in which they stood might with advantage have been larger, but as a bedchamber it served well enough, and only the poverty of its occupant, who put it to the additional use of sitting-room and study, made the lack of space particularly noticeable. The window afforded a prospect pleasant enough to eyes such as theirs. Above the lower houses on

the opposite side of the way appeared tall trees, in the sere garb of later autumn, growing by old Westminster School; and beyond them, grey in twilight, rose the towers of the Abbey. From this point of view no vicinage of modern brick-work spoilt their charm; the time-worn monitors stood alone against a sky of ruddy smoke-drift and purple cloud.

"The old Adam is stronger than ever in me," he pursued. "If I were condemned for life to the United States, I should go mad, and perish in an attempt to swim the Atlantic."

"Then why did you stay so long?"

"I could have stayed with advantage even longer. It's something to have studied with tolerable thoroughness the most hateful form of society yet developed. I saw it at first as a man does who is living at his ease; at last, as a poor devil who is thankful for the institution of free lunches. I went first-class, and I came back as a steerage passenger. It has been a year well spent."

It had made him, in aspect, more than a twelve-month older. His lounging attitude, the spirit of

his talk, showed that he was unchanged in bodily and mental habits; but certain lines new-graven upon his visage, and an austerity that had taken the place of youthful self-consciousness, signified a more than normal progress in experience.

"Do you know," said Munden slyly, "that you have brought back a trans-Atlantic accent?"

"Accent? The devil! I don't believe it."

"Intonation, at all events."

Tarrant professed a serious annoyance.

"If that's true, I'll go and live for a month in Limerick."

"It would be cheaper to join a Socialist club in the East End. But just tell me how you stand. How long can you hold out in these aristocratic lodgings?"

"Till Christmas. I'm ashamed to say how I've got the money, so don't ask. I reached London with empty pockets. And I'll tell you one thing I have learnt, Munden. There's no villainy, no scoundrelism, no baseness conceivable, that isn't excused by want of money. I understand the whole 'social question.' The man who has never

felt the perspiration come out on his forehead in asking himself how he is going to keep body and soul together, has no right to an opinion on the greatest question of the day."

"What particular scoundrelism or baseness have you committed?" asked the other.

Tarrant averted his eyes.

"I said I could understand such things."

"One sees that you have been breathed upon by democracy."

"I loathe the word and the thing even more than I did, which is saying a good deal."

"Be it so. You say you are going to work?"

"Yes, I have come back to work. Even now, it's difficult to realise that I must work or starve. I understand how fellows who have unexpectedly lost their income go through life sponging on relatives and friends. I understand how an educated man goes sinking through all the social grades, down to the common lodging-house and the infirmary. And I honestly believe there's only one thing that saves me from doing likewise."

"And what's that?"

"I can't tell you—not yet, at all events."

"I always thought you a very fine specimen of the man born to do nothing," said Munden, with that smile which permitted him a surprising candour in conversation.

"And you were quite right," returned Tarrant, with a laugh. "I am a born artist in indolence. It's the pity of pities that circumstances will frustrate Nature's purpose."

"You think you can support yourself by journalism?"

"I must try.—Run your eye over that."

He took from the table a slip of manuscript, headed, "A Reverie in Wall Street." Munden read it, sat thoughtful for a moment, and laughed.

"Devilish savage. Did you write it after a free lunch?"

"Wrote it this morning. Shall I try one of the evening papers with it,—or one of the weeklies?"

Munden suggested a few alterations, and mentioned the journal which he thought might possibly find room for such a bit of satire.

"Done anything else?"

"Here's a half-finished paper—'The Commercial Prospects of the Bahamas.'"

"Let me look."

After reading a page or two with critically wrinkled forehead, Munden laid it down.

"Seems pretty solid,—libellous, too, I should say. You've more stuff in you than I thought. All right: go ahead.—Come and dine with me to-morrow, to meet a man who may be useful."

"To-morrow I can't. I dine at Lady Pollard's."

"Who is she?"

"Didn't you know Pollard of Trinity?—the only son of his mother, and she a widow."

"Next day, then."

"Can't. I dine with some people at Bedford Park."

Munden lifted his eyebrows.

"At this rate, you may live pretty well on a dress suit. Any more engagements?"

"None that I know of. But I shall accept all that offer. I'm hungry for the society of decent English people. I used to neglect my acquaintances; I know better now. Go and live for a

month in a cheap New York boarding-house, and you'll come out with a wholesome taste for English refinement."

To enable his friend to read, Tarrant had already lit a lamp. Munden, glancing about the room, said carelessly:

"Do you still possess the furniture of the old place?"

"No," was the answer, given with annoyance. "Vawdrey had it sold for me."

"Pictures, books, and all the nick-nacks?"

"Everything.—Of course I'm sorry for it; but I thought at the time that I shouldn't return to England for some years."

"You never said anything of that kind to me."

"No, I didn't," the other replied gloomily. And all at once he fell into so taciturn a mood, that his companion, after a few more remarks and inquiries, rose from his chair to leave.

From seven to nine Tarrant sat resolutely at his table, and covered a few pages with the kind of composition which now came most easily to him,—a somewhat virulent sarcasm. He found pleasure in

the work; but after nine o'clock his thoughts strayed to matters of personal interest, and got beyond control. Would the last post of the evening bring him an answer to a letter he had despatched this morning? At length he laid down his pen, and listened nervously for that knock which, at one time or another, is to all men a heart-shaking sound.

It came at the street door, and was quickly followed by a tap at his own. Nancy had lost no time in replying. What her letter might contain he found it impossible to conjecture. Reproaches? Joyous welcome? Wrath? Forgiveness? He knew her so imperfectly, that he could not feel sure even as to the probabilities of the case. And his suspense was abundantly justified. Her answer came upon him with the force of a shock totally unexpected.

He read the lines again and again; he stared at the bank-note. His first sensation was one of painful surprise; thereupon succeeded fiery resentment. Reason put in a modest word, hinting that he had deserved no better; but he refused to listen. Nothing could excuse so gross an insult. He had not thought Nancy capable of this behaviour. Tested,

she betrayed the vice of birth. Her imputation upon his motive in marrying her was sheer vulgar abuse, possible only on vulgar lips. Well and good; now he knew her; all the torment of conscience he had suffered was needless. And for the moment he experienced a great relief.

In less than ten minutes letter and bank-note were enclosed in a new envelope, and addressed back again to the sender. With no word of comment; she must interpret him as she could, and would. He went out, and threw the offensive packet into the nearest receptacle for such things.

Work was over for to-night. After pacing in the obscurity of Dean's Yard until his pulse had recovered a normal beat, he issued into the peopled ways, and turned towards Westminster Bridge.

Despite his neglect of Nancy, he had never ceased to think of her with a tenderness which, in his own judgment, signified something more than the simple fidelity of a married man. Faithful in the technical sense he had not been, but the casual amours of a young man caused him no self-reproach; Nancy's image remained without rival in his mind; he had

continued to acknowledge her claims upon him, and, from time to time, to think of her with a lover's longing. As he only wrote when prompted by such a mood, his letters, however unsatisfying, were sincere. Various influences conflicted with this amiable and honourable sentiment. The desire of independence which had speeded him away from England still accompanied him on his return; he had never ceased to regret his marriage, and it seemed to him that, without this legal bondage, it would have been much easier to play a manly part at the time of Nancy's becoming a mother. Were she frankly his mistress, he would not be keeping thus far away when most she needed the consolation of his presence. The secret marriage condemned him to a course of shame, and the more he thought of it, the more he marvelled at his deliberate complicity in such a fraud. When poverty began to make itself felt, when he was actually hampered in his movements by want of money, this form of indignity, more than any galling to his pride, intensified the impatience with which he remembered that he could no longer roam the world as an adventurer. Any

day some trivial accident might oppress him with the burden of a wife and child who looked to him for their support. Tarrant the married man, unless he were content to turn simple rogue and vagabond, must make for himself a place in the money-earning world. His indolence had no small part in his revolt against the stress of such a consideration. The climate of the Bahamas by no means tended to invigorate him, and in the United States he found so much to observe, — even to enjoy, — that the necessity of effort was kept out of sight as long as, by one expedient and another, he succeeded in procuring means to live upon without working.

During the homeward voyage—a trial such as he had never known, amid squalid discomforts which enraged even more than they disgusted him—his heart softened in anticipation of a meeting with Nancy, and of the sight of his child. Apart from his fellow-travellers,—in whom he could perceive nothing but coarseness and vileness,—he spent the hours in longing for England and for the home he would make there, in castigating the flagrant faults of his character, moderating his ambitions, and

endeavouring to find a way out of the numerous grave difficulties with which his future was beset.

Landed, he rather forgot than discarded these wholesome meditations. What he had first to do was so very unpleasant, and taxed so rudely his self-respect, that he insensibly fell back again into the rebellious temper. Choice there was none; reaching London with a few shillings in his pocket, of necessity he repaired forthwith to Mr. Vawdrey's office in the City, and made known the straits into which he had fallen.

"Now, my dear fellow," said Mr. Vawdrey, with his usual good-humour, "how much have you had of me since you started for the Bahamas?"

"That is hardly a fair question," Tarrant replied, endeavouring not to hang his head like an every-day beggar. "I went out on a commission——"

"True. But after you ceased to be a commissioner?"

"You have lent me seventy pounds. Living in the States is expensive. What I got for my furniture has gone as well, yet I certainly haven't been extravagant; and for the last month or two I lived

like a tramp. Will you make my debt to you a round hundred? It shall be repaid, though I may be a year or two about it."

The loan was granted, but together with a great deal of unpalatable counsel. Having found his lodging, Tarrant at once invested ten pounds in providing himself with a dress suit, and improving his ordinary attire,—he had sold every garment he could spare in New York. For the dress suit he had an immediate use; on the very platform of Euston Station, at his arrival, a chance meeting with one of his old college friends resulted in an invitation to dine, and, even had not policy urged him to make the most of such acquaintances, he was in no mood for rejecting a summons back into the world of civilisation. Postponing the purposed letter to Nancy (which, had he written it sooner, would have been very unlike the letter he subsequently sent), he equipped himself once more as a gentleman, and spent several very enjoyable hours in looking up the members of his former circle—Hodiernals and others. Only to Harvey Munden did he confide something of the anxieties

which lay beneath his assumed light-heartedness. Munden was almost the only man he knew for whom he had a genuine respect.

Renewal of intercourse with people of good social standing made him more than ever fretful in the thought that he had clogged himself with marriage. Whatever Nancy's reply to his announcement that he was home again, he would have read it with discontent. To have the fact forced upon him (a fact he seriously believed it) that his wife could not be depended upon even for elementary generosity of thought, was at this moment especially disastrous; it weighed the balance against his feelings of justice and humanity, hitherto, no matter how he acted, always preponderant over the baser issues of character and circumstance.

He stood leaning upon the parapet of Westminster Bridge, his eyes scanning the dark façade of the Houses of Parliament.

How would the strong, unscrupulous, really ambitious man act in such a case? What was to prevent him from ignoring the fact that he was married, and directing his course precisely as he

would have done if poverty had come upon him before his act of supreme foolishness? Journalism must have been his refuge then, as now; but Society would have held out to him the hope of every adventurer—a marriage with some woman whose wealth and connections would clear an upward path in whatever line he chose to follow. Why not abandon to Nancy the inheritance it would degrade him to share, and so purchase back his freedom? The bargain might be made; a strong man would carry it through, and ultimately triumph by daring all risks.

Having wrought himself to this point of insensate revolt, he quitted his musing-station on the bridge, and walked away.

Nancy did not write again. There passed four or five days, and Tarrant, working hard as well as enjoying the pleasures of Society, made up his mind not to see her. He would leave events to take their course. A heaviness of heart often troubled him, but he resisted it, and told himself that he was becoming stronger.

After a long day of writing, he addressed a

packet to a certain periodical, and went out to post it. No sooner had he left the house than a woman, who had been about to pass him on the pavement, abruptly turned round and hurriedly walked away. But for this action, he would not have noticed her; as it was, he recognised the figure, and an impulse which allowed of no reflection brought him in a moment to her side. In the ill-lighted street a face could with difficulty be observed, but Nancy's features were unmistakable to the eye that now fell upon them.

"Stop, and let me speak to you," he exclaimed.

She walked only the more quickly, and he was obliged to take her by the arm.

"What do you want?"

She spoke as if to an insolent stranger, and shook off his grasp.

"If you have nothing to say to me, why are you here?"

"Here? I suppose the streets are free to me?"

"Nothing would bring you to Great College Street if you didn't know that I was living here. Now that we have met, we must talk."

"I have nothing at all to say to you."

"Well, then *I* will talk.—Come this way; there's a quiet place where no one will notice us."

Nancy kept her eyes resolutely averted from him; he, the while, searched her face with eagerness, as well as the faint rays of the nearest lamp allowed it.

"If you have anything to say, you must say it here."

"It's no use, then. Go your way, and I'll go mine."

He turned, and walked slowly in the direction of Dean's Yard. There was the sound of a step behind him, and when he had come into the dark, quiet square, Nancy was there too.

"Better to be reasonable," said Tarrant, approaching her again. "I want to ask you why you answered a well-meant letter with vulgar insult?"

"The insult came from you," she answered, in a shaking voice.

"What did I say that gave you offence?"

"How can you ask such a question? To write in that way after never answering my letter for months, leaving me without a word at such a time,

making me think either that you were dead or that you would never let me hear of you again——"

"I told you it was a mere note, just to let you know I was back. I said you should hear more when we met."

"Very well, we have met. What have you to say for yourself?"

"First of all, this. That you are mistaken in supposing I should ever consent to share your money. The thought was natural to you, no doubt; but I see things from a different point of view."

His cold anger completely disguised the emotion stirred in him by Nancy's presence. Had he not spoken thus, he must have given way to joy and tenderness. For Nancy seemed more beautiful than the memory he had retained of her, and even at such a juncture she was far from exhibiting the gross characteristics attributed to her by his rebellious imagination.

"Then I don't understand," were her next words, "why you wrote to me again at all."

"There are many things in me that you don't understand, and can't understand."

"Yes, I think so. That's why I see no use in our talking."

Tarrant was ashamed of what he had said—a meaningless retort, which covered his inability to speak as his heart prompted.

"At all events I wanted to see you, and it's fortunate you passed just as I was coming out."

Nancy would not accept the conciliatory phrase.

"I hadn't the least intention of seeing you," she replied. "It was a curiosity to know where you lived, nothing else. I shall never forgive you for the way in which you have behaved to me, so you needn't try to explain yourself."

"Here and now, I should certainly not try. The only thing I will say about myself is, that I very much regret not having made known that you were married to me when plain honesty required it. Now, I look upon it as something over and done with, as far as I am concerned. I shall never benefit by the deception——"

She interrupted him.

"How do you know that *I* shall benefit by it?

How can you tell what has been happening since you last heard from me in America?"

"I have taken it for granted that things are the same."

"Then you didn't even take measures to have news of me from any one else?"

"What need? I should always have received any letter you sent."

"You thought it likely that I should appeal to you if I were in difficulties."

He stood silent, glad of the obscurity which made it needless for him to command his features. At length:

"What is the simple fact? Has your secret been discovered, or not?"

"How does it concern you?"

"Only in this way: that if you are to be dependent upon any one, it must be upon me."

Nancy gave a scornful laugh.

"That's very generous, considering your position. But happily you can't force me to accept your generosity, any more than I can compel you to take a share of my money."

"Without the jibe at my poverty," Tarrant said, "that is a sufficient answer. As we can't even pretend to be friendly with each other, I am very glad there need be no talk of our future relations. You are provided for, and no doubt will take care not to lose the provision. If ever you prefer to forget that we are legally bound, I shall be no obstacle."

"I have thought of that," replied Nancy, after a pause, her voice expressing satisfaction. "Perhaps we should do better to make the understanding at once. You are quite free; I should never acknowledge you as my husband."

"You seriously mean it?"

"Do I seem to be joking?"

"Very well. I won't say that I should never acknowledge you as my wife; so far from that, I hold myself responsible whenever you choose to make any kind of claim upon me. But I shall not dream of interfering with your liberty. If ever you wish to write to me, you may safely address to the house at Champion Hill.—And remember always," he added sternly, "that it

was not I who made such a parting necessary."

Nancy returned his look through the gloom, and said in like tone:

"I shall do my best never to think of it at all. Fortunately, my time and my thoughts are occupied."

"How?" Tarrant could not help asking, as she turned away; for her tone implied some special significance in the words.

"You have no right to ask anything whatever about me," came from Nancy, who was already moving away.

He allowed her to go.

"So it is to be as I wished," he said to himself, with mock courage. "So much the better."

And he went home to a night of misery.

## VI

Not long after the disappearance of Fanny French, Mrs. Damerel called one day upon Luckworth Crewe at his office in Farringdon Street. Crewe seldom had business with ladies, and few things could have surprised him more than a visit from this lady in particular, whom he knew so well by name, and regarded with such special interest. She introduced herself as a person wishing to find a good investment for a small capital; but the half-hour's conversation which followed became in the end almost a confidential chat. Mrs. Damerel spoke of her nephew Horace Lord, with whom, she understood, Mr. Crewe was on terms of intimacy; she professed a grave solicitude on his account, related frankly the unhappy circumstances which had estranged the young man from her, and ultimately asked whether Crewe could not make it worth his own while to save Horace

from the shoals of idleness, and pilot him into some safe commercial haven. This meeting was the first of many between the fashionable lady and the keen man of affairs. Without a suspicion of how it had come about, Horace Lord presently found himself an informal partner in Crewe's business; he invested only a nominal sum, which might be looked upon as a premium of apprenticeship; but there was an understanding that at the close of the term of tutelage imposed by his father's will, he should have the offer of a genuine partnership on very inviting terms.

Horace was not sorry to enter again upon regular occupation. He had considerably damaged his health in the effort to live up to his ideal of thwarted passion, and could no longer entertain a hope that Fanny's escapade was consistent with innocence. Having learnt how money slips through the fingers of a gentleman with fastidious tastes, he welcomed a prospect of increased resources, and applied himself with some energy to learning his new business. But with Mrs. Damerel he utterly refused to be reconciled, and of his sister he saw

very little. Nancy, however, approved the step he had taken, and said she would be content to know that all was well with him.

Upon a Sunday morning, when the church bells had ceased to clang, Luckworth Crewe, not altogether at his ease in garb of flagrant respectability, sat by the fireside of a pleasant little room conversing with Mrs. Damerel. Their subject, as usual at the beginning of talk, was Horace Lord.

"He won't speak of you at all," said Crewe, in a voice singularly subdued, sympathetic, respectful. "I have done all I could, short of telling him that I know you. He's very touchy still on that old affair."

"How would he like it," asked the lady, "if you told him that we are acquaintances?"

"Impossible to say. Perhaps it would make no difference one way or another."

Mrs. Damerel was strikingly, yet becomingly, arrayed. The past year had dealt no less gently with her than its predecessors; if anything, her complexion had gained in brilliancy, perhaps a consequence of the hygienic precautions due to her fear

of becoming stout. A stranger, even a specialist in the matter, might have doubted whether the fourth decade lay more than a month or two behind her. So far from seeking to impress her visitor with a pose of social superiority, she behaved to him as though his presence honoured as much as it delighted her; look, tone, bearing, each was a flattery which no obtuseness could fail to apprehend, and Crewe's countenance proved him anything but inappreciative. Hitherto she had spoken and listened with her head drooping in gentle melancholy; now, with a sudden change intended to signify the native buoyancy of her disposition, she uttered a rippling laugh, which showed her excellent teeth, and said prettily:

"Poor boy! I must suffer the penalty of having tried to save him from one of my own sex.—Not," she added, "that I foresaw how that poor silly girl would justify my worst fears of her. Perhaps," her head drooping again, "I ought to reproach myself with what happened."

"I don't see that at all," replied Crewe, whose eyes lost nothing of the exhibition addressed to

them. "Even if you had been the cause of it, which of course you weren't, I should have said you had done the right thing. Every one knew what Fanny French must come to."

"Isn't it sad? A pretty girl—but so ill brought up, I fear. Can you give me any news of her sister, the one who came here and frightened me so?"

"Oh, she's going on as usual."

Crewe checked himself, and showed hesitation.

"She almost threatened me," Mrs. Damerel pursued, with timid sweetness. "Do you think she is the kind of person to plot any harm against one?"

"She had better not try it on," said Crewe, in his natural voice. Then, as if recollecting himself, he pursued more softly: "But I was going to speak of her. You haven't heard that Miss Lord has taken a position in the new branch of that Dress Supply Association?"

Mrs. Damerel kept an astonished silence.

"There can't be any doubt of it; I have been told on the best authority. She is in what they

call the 'club-room,' a superintendent. It's a queer thing; what can have led her to it?"

"I must make inquiries," said Mrs. Damerel, with an air of concern. "How sad it is, Mr. Crewe, that these young relatives of mine,—almost the only relatives I have,—should refuse me their confidence and their affection. Pray, does Horace know of what his sister is doing?"

"I thought I wouldn't speak to him about it until I had seen you."

"How very kind! How grateful I am to you for your constant thoughtfulness!"

Why Crewe should have practised such reticence, why it signified kindness and thoughtfulness to Mrs. Damerel, neither he nor she could easily have explained. But their eyes met, with diffident admiration on the one side, and touching amiability on the other. Then they discussed Nancy's inexplicable behaviour from every point of view; or rather, Mrs. Damerel discussed it, and her companion made a pretence of doing so. Crewe's manner had become patently artificial; he either expressed himself in trivial phrases, which merely

avoided silence, or betrayed an embarrassment, an abstraction, which caused the lady to observe him with all the acuteness at her command.

"You haven't seen her lately?" she asked, when Crewe had been staring at the window for a minute or two.

"Seen her?—No; not for a long time."

"I think you told me you haven't called there since Mr. Lord's death?"

"I never was there at all," he answered abruptly.

"Oh, I remember your saying so. Of course there is no reason why she shouldn't go into business, if time is heavy on her hands, as I dare say it may be. So many ladies prefer to have an occupation of that kind nowadays. It's a sign of progress; we are getting more sensible; Society used to have such silly prejudices. Even within my recollection—how quickly things change!—no lady would have dreamt of permitting her daughter to take an engagement in a shop or any such place. Now we have women of title starting as milliners and modistes, and soon it will be quite a common thing to see one's friends behind the counter."

She gave a gay little laugh, in which Crewe joined unmelodiously,—for he durst not be merry in the note natural to him,—then raised her eyes in playful appeal.

"If ever I should fall into misfortune, Mr. Crewe, would you put me in the way of earning my living."

"You couldn't. You're above all that kind of thing. It's for the rough and ready sort of women, and I can't say I have much opinion of them."

"That's a very nice little compliment; but at the same time, it's rather severe on the women who are practical.—Tell me frankly: Is my—my niece one of the people you haven't much opinion of?"

Crewe shuffled his feet.

"I wasn't thinking of Miss Lord."

"But what is really your opinion of her?" Mrs. Damerel urged softly.

Crewe looked up and down, smiled in a vacant way, and appeared very uncomfortable.

"May I guess the truth?" said his playful companion.

"No, I'll tell you. I wanted to marry her, and did my best to get her to promise."

"I thought so!" She paused on the note of arch satisfaction, and mused. "How nice of you to confess!—And that's all past and forgotten, is it?"

Never man more unlike himself than the bold advertising-agent in this colloquy. He was subdued and shy; his usual racy and virile talk had given place to an insipid mildness. He seemed bent on showing that the graces of polite society were not so strange to him as one might suppose. But under Mrs. Damerel's interrogation a restiveness began to appear in him, and at length he answered in his natural blunt voice:

"Yes, it's all over—and for a good reason."

The lady's curiosity was still more provoked.

"No," she exclaimed laughingly, "I am *not* going to ask the reason. That would be presuming too far on friendship."

Crewe fixed his eyes on a corner of the room, and seemed to look there for a solution of some difficulty. When the silence had lasted more than a minute, he began to speak slowly and awkwardly.

"I've half a mind to—in fact, I've been thinking that you ought to know."

"The good reason?"

"Yes. You're the only one that could stand in the place of a mother to her. And I don't think she ought to be living alone, like she is, with no one to advise and help her."

"I have felt that very strongly," said Mrs. Damerel. "The old servant who is with her can't be at all a suitable companion—that is, to be treated on equal terms. A very strange arrangement, indeed. But you don't mean that you thought less well of her because she is living in that way?"

"Of course not. It's something a good deal more serious than that."

Mrs. Damerel became suddenly grave.

"Then I certainly ought to know."

"You ought. I think it very likely she would have been glad enough to make a friend of you, if it hadn't been for this—this affair, which stood in the way. There can't be any harm in telling you, as you couldn't wish anything but her good."

"That surely you may take for granted."

"Well then, I have an idea that she's trying to earn money because some one is getting all he can out of her—leaving her very little for herself; and if so, it's time you interfered."

The listener was so startled that she changed colour.

"You mean that some man has her in his power?"

"If I'm not mistaken, it comes to that. But for her father's will, she would have been married long ago, and—she ought to be."

Having blurted out these words, Crewe felt much more at ease. As Mrs. Damerel's eyes fell, the sense of sexual predominance awoke in him, and he was no longer so prostrate before the lady's natural and artificial graces.

"How do you know this?" she asked, in an undertone.

"From some one who had it from Miss Lord herself."

"Are you quite sure that it isn't a malicious falsehood?"

"As sure as I am that I sit here. I know the man's name, and where he lives, and all about him. And I know where the child is at nurse."

"The child?—Oh—surely—never!"

A genuine agitation possessed her; she had a frightened, pain-stricken look, and moved as if she must act without delay.

"It's nearly six months old," Crewe continued. "Of course that's why she was away so long."

"But why haven't you told me this before? It was your duty to tell me—your plain duty. How long have you known?"

"I heard of it first of all about three months ago, but it was only the other day that I was told the man's name, and other things about him."

"Is it known to many people? Is the poor girl talked about?"

"No, no," Crewe replied, with confidence. "The person who told me is the only one who has found it out; you may depend upon that."

"It must be a woman," said Mrs. Damerel sharply.

"Yes, it's a woman. Some one *I* know very well.

She told me just because she thought I was still hoping to marry Miss Lord, and—well, the truth is, though we're good friends, she has a little spite against me, and I suppose it amused her to tell me something disagreeable."

"I have no doubt," said Mrs. Damerel, "that the secret has been betrayed to a dozen people."

"I'll go bail it hasn't!" returned Crewe, falling into his vernacular.

"I can hardly believe it at all. I should never have dreamt that such a thing was possible. What is the man's name? what is his position?"

"Tarrant is his name, and he's related somehow to a Mr. Vawdrey, well known in the City, who has a big house over at Champion Hill. I have no notion how they came together, or how long it was going on. But this Mr. Tarrant has been in America for a year, I understand; has only just come back; and now he's living in poorish lodgings,—Great College Street, Westminster. I've made a few inquiries about him, but I can't get at very much. A man who knows Vawdrey tells me that Tarrant has no means, and that he's a

loafing, affected sort of chap. If that's true,—and it seems likely from the way he's living,—of course he will be ready enough to marry Miss Lord when the proper time has come; I'm only afraid that's all he had in view from the first. And I can't help suspecting, as I said, that she's supporting him now. If not, why should she go and work in a shop? At all events, a decent man wouldn't allow her to do it."

"A decent man," said the listener, "would never have allowed her to fall into disgrace."

"Certainly not," Crewe assented with energy. "And as for my keeping quiet about it, Mrs. Damerel, you've only to think what an awkward affair it was to mention. I'm quite sure you'll have a little feeling against me, because I knew of it——"

"I beg you not to think that!" She returned to her manner of suave friendliness. "I shall owe you gratitude for telling me, and nothing but gratitude. You have behaved with very great delicacy; I cannot say how highly I appreciate your feeling on the poor girl's behalf."

"If I can be of any use, I am always at your service."

"Thank you, dear Mr. Crewe, thank you! In you I have found a real friend,—and how rarely they are met with! Of course I shall make inquiries at once. My niece must be protected. A helpless girl in that dreadful position may commit unheard-of follies. I fear you are right. He is making her his victim. With such a secret, she is absolutely at his mercy. And it explains why she has shunned me. Oh, do you think her brother knows it?"

"I'm quite sure he doesn't; hasn't the least suspicion."

"Of course not. But it's wonderful how she has escaped. Your informant—how did she find it out? You say she had the story from the girl's own lips. But why? She must have shown that she knew something."

Crewe imparted such details as had come to his knowledge; they were meagre, and left many obscurities, but Mrs. Damerel rewarded him with effusive gratitude, and strengthened the spell which she had cast upon this knight of Farringdon Street.

## VII

EVERY day Tarrant said to himself: "I am a free man; I was only married in a dream." Every night he thought of Nancy, and suffered heartache.

He thought, too, of Nancy's child, his own son. That Nancy was a tender mother, he knew from the letter she had written him after the baby's birth,—a letter he would have liked to read again, but forbore. Must not the separation from her child be hard? If he saw the poor little mortal, how would the sight affect him? At moments he felt a longing perhaps definable as the instinct of paternity; but he was not the man to grow sentimental over babies, his own or other people's. Irony and sarcasm—very agreeable to a certain class of newspaper readers—were just now his stock-in-trade, and he could not afford to indulge any softer mode of meditation.

His acquaintances agreed that the year of absence had not improved him. He was alarmingly clever;

he talked well; but his amiability, the poetry of his mind, seemed to have been lost in America. He could no longer admire or praise.

For his own part, he did not clearly perceive this change. It struck him only that the old friends were less interesting than he had thought them; and he looked for reception in circles better able to appreciate his epigrams and paradoxes.

A few weeks of such life broke him so completely to harness, that he forgot the seasonable miseries which had been wont to drive him from London at the approach of November. When the first fog blackened against his windows, he merely lit the lamp and wrote on, indifferent. Two years ago he had declared that a London November would fatally blight his soul; that he must flee to a land of sunshine, or perish. There was little time, now, to think about his soul.

One Monday morning arrived a letter which surprised and disturbed him. It ran thus:

"Mrs. Eustace Damerel presents her compliments to Mr. Tarrant, and would take it as a great favour if he could call upon her, either to-morrow or Tues-

day, at any hour between three and seven. She particularly desires to see Mr. Tarrant on a private matter of mutual interest."

Now this could have but one meaning. Mrs. Eustace Damerel was, of course, Nancy's relative; from Nancy herself, or in some other way, she must have learnt the fact of his marriage. Probably from Nancy, since she knew where he lived. He was summoned to a judicial interview. Happily, attendance was not compulsory.

Second thoughts advised him that he had better accept the invitation. He must know what measures were in progress against him. If Nancy had already broken her word, she might be disposed to revenge herself in every way that would occur to an angry woman of small refinement; she might make life in London impossible for him.

He sat down and penned a reply, saying that he would call upon Mrs. Damerel at five to-morrow. But he did not post this. After all, a day's delay would only irritate him; better to go this afternoon, in which case it was not worth while sending an answer.

It seemed to him very probable that Nancy would be with her aunt, to confront him. If so,—if indeed she were going to act like any coarse woman, with no regard but for her own passions and interests,—he would at least have the consolation of expelling from his mind, at once and for ever, her haunting image.

Mrs. Damerel, who during the past twelve months had changed her abode half-a-dozen times, now occupied private lodgings in Tyburnia. On his admittance, Tarrant sat alone for nearly five minutes in a pretentiously furnished room—just the room in which he had expected to find Nancy's relative; the delay and the surroundings exasperated his nervous mood, so that, when the lady entered, he behaved with slighter courtesy than became his breeding. Nothing in her appearance surprised or interested him. There was a distant facial resemblance to Nancy, natural in her mother's sister; there was expensive, though not particularly tasteful dress, and a gait, a manner, distinguishable readily enough from what they aimed at displaying—the grace of a woman born to social privilege.

It would be a humiliating conversation; Tarrant braced himself to go through with it. He stood stiffly while his hostess regarded him with shrewd eyes. She had merely bent her head.

"Will you sit down, Mr. Tarrant?"

He took a chair without speaking.

"I think you know me by name?"

"I have heard of a Mrs. Damerel."

"Some time ago, I suppose? And in that you have the advantage of me. I heard your name yesterday for the first time."

It was the sharp rejoinder of a woman of the world. Tarrant began to perceive that he had to do with intelligence, and would not be allowed to perform his share of the talking *de haut en bas*.

"In what can I be of service to you?" he asked with constrained civility.

"You can tell me, please, what sort of connection there is between you and my niece, Miss Lord."

Mrs. Damerel was obviously annoyed by his demeanour, and made little effort to disguise her feeling. She gave him the look of one who does not mean to be trifled with.

"Really," answered the young man with a smile, "I don't know what authority you have to make such inquiries. You are not, I believe, Miss Lord's guardian."

"No, but I am her only relative who can act on her behalf where knowledge of the world is required. As a gentleman, you will bear this in mind. It's quite true that I can't oblige you to tell me anything; but when I say that I haven't spoken even to my niece of what I have heard, and haven't communicated with the gentlemen who *are* her guardians, I think you will see that I am not acting in a way you ought to resent."

"You mean, Mrs. Damerel, that what passes between us is in confidence?"

"I only mean, Mr. Tarrant, that I am giving you an opportunity of explaining yourself—so that I can keep the matter private if your explanation is satisfactory."

"You have a charge of some kind to bring against me," said Tarrant composedly. "I must first of all hear what it is. The prisoner at the bar can't be prosecuting counsel at the same time."

"Do you acknowledge that you are on intimate terms with Miss Lord?"

"I have known her for a year or two."

Tarrant began to exercise caution. Nancy had no hand in this matter; some one had told tales about her, that was all. He must learn, without committing himself, exactly how much had been discovered.

"Are you engaged to her?"

"Engaged to marry her? No."

He saw in Mrs. Damerel's clear eye that she convicted him of ambiguities.

"You have not even made her a promise of marriage?"

"How much simpler, if you would advance a clear charge. I will answer it honestly."

Mrs. Damerel seemed to weigh the value of this undertaking. Tarrant met her gaze with steady indifference.

"It may only be a piece of scandal,—a mistake, or a malicious invention. I have been told that —that you are in everything but law my niece's husband."

They regarded each other during a moment's silence. Tarrant's look indicated rapid and anxious thought.

"It seems," he said at length, "that you have no great faith in the person who told you this."

"It is the easiest matter in the world to find out whether the story is true or not. Inquiries at Falmouth would be quite sufficient, I dare say. I give you the opportunity of keeping it quiet, that's all."

"You won't care to let me know who told you?"

"There's no reason why I shouldn't," said Mrs. Damerel, after reflection. "Do you know Mr. Luckworth Crewe?"

"I don't think I ever heard the name."

"Indeed? He is well acquainted with Miss Lord. Some one he wouldn't mention gave him all the particulars, having learnt them from Miss Lord herself, and he thought it his duty to inform me of my niece's very painful position."

"Who is this man?" Tarrant asked abruptly.

"I am rather surprised you have never heard of him. He's a man of business. My nephew,

Mr. Horace Lord, is shortly to be in partnership with him."

"Crewe? No, the name is quite strange to me."

Tarrant's countenance darkened; he paused for an instant, then added impatiently:

"You say he had 'all the particulars.' What were they, these particulars?"

"Will one be enough? A child was born at Falmouth, and is now at a place just outside London, in the care of some stranger."

The source of this information might, or might not, be Nancy herself. In either case, there was no further hope of secrecy. Tarrant abandoned his reserve, and spoke quietly, civilly.

"So far, you have heard the truth. What have you to ask of me, now?"

"You have been abroad for a long time, I think?"

"For about a year."

"Does that mean that you wished to see no more of her?"

"That I deserted her, in plain words? It meant nothing of the kind."

"You are aware, then, that she has taken a place in a house of business, just as if she thought it necessary to earn her own living?"

Tarrant displayed astonishment.

"I am aware of no such thing. How long has that been going on?"

"Then you don't see her?"

"I have seen her, but she told me nothing of that."

"There's something very strange in this, Mr. Tarrant. You seem to me to be speaking the truth. No, please don't take offence. Before I saw you, you were a total stranger to me, and after what I had heard, I couldn't think very well of you. I may as well confess that you seem a different kind of man from what I expected. I don't wish to offend you, far from it. If we can talk over this distressing affair in a friendly way, so much the better. I have nothing whatever in view but to protect my niece—to do the best that can be done for her."

"That I have taken for granted," Tarrant replied. "I understand that you expected to meet a scoun-

drel of a very recognisable type. Well, I am not exactly that. But what particular act of rascality have you in mind? Something worse than mere seduction, of course."

"Will you answer a disagreeable question? Are you well-to-do?"

"Anything but that."

"Indeed? And you can form no idea why Nancy has gone to work in a shop?"

Tarrant raised his eyebrows.

"I see," he said deliberately. "You suspect that I have been taking money from her?"

"I *did* suspect it; now it seems to me more unlikely."

"Many thanks," he answered, with cold irony. "So the situation was this: Miss Lord had been led astray by a rascally fellow, who not only left her to get on as best she could, but lived on her income, so that she had at length to earn money for her own needs. There's something very clear and rounded, very dramatic, about that. What I should like to know is, whether Miss Lord tells the story in this way."

"I can't say that she does. I think it was Mr. Crewe who explained things like that."

"I am obliged to Mr. Crewe. But he may, after all, only repeat what he has heard. It's a pity we don't know Miss Lord's actual confidante."

"Of course you have *not* received assistance from her?"

Tarrant stared for a moment, then laughed unpleasantly.

"I have no recollection of it."

"Another disagreeable question. Did you really go away and leave her to get on as best she could?"

He looked darkly at her.

"And if I did?"

"Wasn't it rather unaccountable behaviour—in a gentleman?"

"Possibly."

"I can't believe it. There is something unexplained."

"Yes, there *is* something unexplained.—Mrs. Damerel, I should have thought you would naturally speak first to your niece. Why did you send for me before doing so?"

"To find out what sort of man you were, so that I should be able to form my own opinion of what Nancy chose to tell me. Perhaps she may refuse to tell me anything at all—we are not like ordinary relatives, I am sorry to say. But I dare say you know better than I do how she thinks of me."

"I have heard her speak of you only once or twice. At all events, now that you are prepared, you will go and see her?"

"I must. It would be wrong to stand by and do nothing."

"And you will see her guardians?"

"That must depend. I certainly shall if she seems to be suffering hardships. I must know why she goes out to work, as if she were pinched for money. There is her child to support, of course, but that wouldn't make any difference to her; she is well provided for."

"Yes. There's no choice but to fall back upon the villain theory."

He rose, and took up his hat.

"You mustn't go yet, Mr. Tarrant," said his

hostess firmly. "I have said that I can't believe such things of you. If you would only explain——"

"That's just what I can't do. It's as much a mystery to me as to you—her wishing to earn money."

"I was going to say—if you would only explain your intentions as to the future——"

"My intentions will depend entirely on what I hear from your niece. I shall see her as soon as possible. Perhaps you can tell me at what hour she returns from business?"

"No, I can't. I wish you would talk a little longer."

His eyes flashed angrily.

"Mrs. Damerel, I have said all that I am willing to say. What you have heard is partly true; you probably won't have to wait very long for the rest of the story, but I have no time and no inclination to tell it. Go and see your niece to-morrow by all means,—or her guardians, if it seems necessary."

"I am very sorry we are parting in this way."

"You must remember how difficult it is to keep one's temper under certain kinds of accusation."

"I don't accuse you."

"Well, then, to explain calmly that one couldn't commit this or that sordid rascality;—it comes to the same thing. However, I am obliged to you for opening my eyes. I have got into a very foolish position, and I promise you I will get out of it as quickly as may be."

Whereupon he bowed his leave-taking, and withdrew.

## VIII

It was not yet dark, but street-lamps had begun to flare and flicker in the gust of a cold, damp evening. A thin and slippery mud smeared the pavement. Tarrant had walked mechanically as far as to the top of Park Lane before he began to consider his immediate course. Among the people who stood waiting for omnibuses, he meditated thus:

"She may not get home until seven or half-past; then she will have a meal. I had better put it off till about half-past eight. That leaves me some four hours to dispose of. First of all I'll walk home, and—yes, by all the devils! I'll finish that bit of writing. A year ago I could no more have done it, under such circumstances, than have built a suspension bridge. To-day I will—just to show that I've some grit in me."

Down Park Lane, and by Buckingham Palace across to Westminster, he kept his thoughts for the

most part on that bit of writing. Only thus could he save himself from an access of fury which would only have injured him—the ire of shame in which a man is tempted to beat his head against stone walls. He composed aloud, balancing many a pretty antithesis, and polishing more than one lively paradox.

In his bedroom-study the fire had gone out. No matter; he would write in the cold. It was mere amanuensis work, penning at the dictation of his sarcastic demon. Was he a sybarite? Many a poor scribbler has earned bed and breakfast with numb fingers. The fire in his body would serve him for an hour or two.

So he sat down, and achieved his task to the last syllable. He read it through, corrected it, made it up for post, and rose with the plaudits of conscience. "Who shall say now that I am a fop and a weakling?"

Half-past seven. Good; just time enough to appease his hunger and reach Grove Lane by the suitable hour. He went out to the little coffee-shop which was his resort in Spartan moods, ate with

considerable appetite, and walked over Westminster Bridge to the Camberwell tram. To kill time on the journey he bought a halfpenny paper.

As he ascended Grove Lane his heart throbbed more than the exercise warranted. At the door of the house, which he had never yet entered, and which he had not looked upon for more than a year, he stood to calm himself, with lips set and cheek pale in the darkness. Then a confident peal at the knocker.

It was Mary who opened. He had never seen her, but knew that this grave, hard-featured person, not totally unlike a born gentlewoman, must be Mary Woodruff. And in her eyes he read a suspicion of his own identity.

"Is Miss Lord at home?" he asked, in a matter-of-fact way.

"Yes.—What name shall I mention?"

"Mr. Tarrant."

Her eyes fell, and she requested him to enter, to wait in the hall for a moment, then went upstairs. She was absent for a few minutes, and on returning asked him to follow her. She led to the drawing-

room: on the way, Tarrant felt a surprise that in so small a house the drawing-room should be correctly situated on the upper floor.

Here he had again to wait. A comfortable room, he thought, and with a true air of home about it. He knew how significant is this impression first received on entering a strange abode; home or encampment, attraction or repulsion, according to the mind of the woman who rules there. Was it Nancy, or Mary, who made the atmosphere of the house?

The door opened, and he faced towards it.

Nancy's dress had an emphasis of fashion formerly unknown to it; appropriate enough considering her new occupation. The flush upon her cheeks, the light of doubtful meaning in her eyes, gave splendour to a beauty matured by motherhood. In the dark street, a fortnight ago, Tarrant could hardly be said to have seen her; he gazed in wonder and admiration.

"What has brought you here?"

"A cause quite sufficient.—This is a little house; can we talk without being overheard?"

"You can shout if you wish to," she answered flippantly. "The servant is out, and Mary is downstairs."

Nancy did not seat herself, and offered no seat to the visitor.

"Why have you made yourself a shop-girl?"

"I didn't know that I had."

"I am told you go daily to some shop or other."

"I am engaged at a place of business, but I don't. —However, that doesn't matter. What business is it of yours?"

"Who is Mr. Luckworth Crewe?"

Nancy kept her eyes still more resolutely fronting his severe look.

"A man I used to know."

"You don't see him nowadays?"

"It's many months since I saw him."

"Who, then, is the woman who has told him your whole story — with embellishments, and who says she has had it from you yourself?"

Nancy was speechless.

"I don't say there is any such person," Tarrant continued. "The man may have lied in that parti-

cular. But he has somehow got to know a good deal about you,—where and when your child was born, where it is now, where I live, and so on. And all this he has reported to your aunt, Mrs. Damerel."

"To her?—How do you know?"

For answer he held out Mrs. Damerel's note of invitation, then added:

"I have been with her this afternoon. She is coming to offer you her protection against the scoundrel who has ruined you, and who is now living upon you."

"What do you mean?"

"That's the form the story has taken, either in Mr. Crewe's mind, or in that of the woman who told it to him."

"Don't they know that I am married?"

"Evidently not."

"And they think you—are having money from me?"

"That's how they explain your taking a place in a shop."

Nancy laughed, and laughed again.

"How ridiculous!"

"I'm glad you can get amusement out of it. Perhaps you can suggest how the joke began?"

She moved a few steps, then turned again to him.

"Yes, I know who the woman must be. It's Beatrice French."

"A bosom friend of yours, of course."

"Nothing of the kind."

"But you have taken her into your confidence—up to a certain point?"

"Yes, I have told her. And she told Mr. Crewe? I understand that. Well, what does it matter?"

Tarrant was at a loss to interpret this singular levity. He had never truly believed that reading of Nancy's character by means of which he tried to persuade himself that his marriage was an unmitigated calamity, and a final parting between them the best thing that could happen. His memories of her, and the letters she had written him, coloured her personality far otherwise. Yet was not the harsh judgment after all the true one?

"It doesn't matter to you," he said, "that people think you an unmarried mother,—that people are talking about you with grins and sneers?"

Nancy reddened in angry shame.

"Let them talk!" she exclaimed violently. "What does it matter, so long as they don't know I'm married?"

"So long as they don't know?—How came you to tell this woman?"

"Do you suppose I told her for amusement? She found out what had happened at Falmouth,—found out simply by going down there and making inquiries; because she suspected me of some secret affair with a man she wants to marry herself—this Mr. Crewe. The wonder of wonders is that no one else got to know of it in that way. Any one who cared much what happened to me would have seen the all but impossibility of keeping such a secret."

It is a notable instance of evolutionary process that the female mind, in wrath, flies to just those logical ineptitudes which most surely exasperate the male intelligence. Tarrant gave a laugh of irate scorn.

"Why, you told me the other day that I cared particularly whether your secret was discovered or

not—that I only married you in the hope of profiting by it?"

"Wouldn't any woman think so?"

"I hope not. I believe there are some women who don't rush naturally to a base supposition."

"Did I?" Nancy exclaimed, with a vehement passion that made her breast heave. "Didn't I give you time enough—believe in you until I could believe no longer?"

The note of her thrilling voice went to Tarrant's heart, and his head drooped.

"That may be true," he said gravely. "But go on with your explanation. This woman came to you, and told you what she had discovered?"

"Yes."

"And you allowed her to think you unmarried?"

"What choice had I? How was my child to be brought up if I lost everything?"

"Good God, Nancy! Did you imagine I should leave you to starve?"

His emotion, his utterance of her name, caused her to examine him with a kind of wonder.

"How did I know?—How could I tell, at that

time, whether you were alive or dead?—I had to think of myself and the child."

"My poor girl!"

The words fell from him involuntarily. Nancy's look became as scornful and defiant as before.

"Oh, that was nothing. I've gone through a good deal more than that."

"Stop. Tell me this. Have you in your anger—anger natural enough—allowed yourself to speak to any one about me in the way I should never forgive? In the spirit of your letter, I mean. Did you give this Beatrice French any ground for thinking that I made a speculation of you?"

"I said nothing of that kind."

"Nor to any one else?"

"To no one."

"Yet you told this woman where I was living, and that I had been abroad for a long time. Why?"

"Yes, I told her so much about you," Nancy replied. "Not when she first came to me, but afterwards—only the other day. I wanted employment, and didn't know how to get it, except through her. She promised me a place if I would disclose

your name; not that she knew or cared anything about *you*, but because she still had suspicions about Mr. Crewe. I was desperate, and I told her."

"Desperate? Why?"

"How can I make you understand what I have gone through? What do you care? And what do *I* care whether you understand or not? It wasn't for money, and Beatrice French knew it wasn't."

"Then it must have been that you could not bear the monotony of your life."

Her answer was a short, careless laugh.

"Where is this shop? What do you do?"

"It's a dress-supply association. I advise fools about the fashions, and exhibit myself as a walking fashion-plate. I can't see how it should interest you."

"Whatever concerns you, Nancy, interests me more than anything else in the world."

Again she laughed.

"What more do you want to know?"

She was half turned from him, leaning at the mantelpiece, a foot on the fender.

"You said just now that you have gone through worse things than the shame of being thought unmarried. Tell me about it all."

"Not I, indeed. When I was willing to tell you everything, you didn't care to hear it. It's too late now."

"It's not too late, happily, to drag you out of this wretched slough into which you are sinking. Whatever the cost, *that* shall be done!"

"Thank you, I am not disposed to let any one drag me anywhere. I want no help; and if I did, you would be the last person I should accept it from. I don't know why you came here after the agreement we made the other night."

Tarrant stepped towards her.

"I came to find out whether you were telling lies about me, and I should never have thought it possible but for my bad conscience. I know you had every excuse for being embittered and for acting revengefully. It seems you have only told lies about yourself. As, after all, you are my wife, I shan't allow that."

Once more she turned upon him passionately.

"I am *not* your wife! You married me against your will, and shook me off as soon as possible. I won't be bound to you; I shall act as a free woman."

"Bound to me you are, and shall be—as I to you."

"You may say it fifty times, and it will mean nothing.—How bound to you? Bound to share my money?"

"I forgive you that, because I have treated you ill. You don't mean it either. You know I am incapable of such a thought. But that shall very soon be put right. Your marriage shall be made known at once."

"Known to whom?"

"To the people concerned—to your guardians."

"Don't trouble yourself," she answered, with a smile. "They know it already."

Tarrant half closed his eyes as he looked at her.

"What's the use of such a silly falsehood?"

"I told you I had gone through a good deal more than you imagined. I have struggled to keep my money, in spite of shames and miseries, and I will have it for myself—and my child! If you want

to know the truth, go to Samuel Barmby, and ask him what he has had to do with me. I owe no explanation to *you*."

Tarrant could see her face only in profile. Marvelling at the complications she gradually revealed, he felt his blood grow warm with desire of her beauty. She was his wife, yet guarded as by maidenhood. A familiar touch would bring the colour to her cheeks, the light of resentment to her eyes. Passion made him glad of the estrangement which compelled a new wooing, and promised, on her part, a new surrender.

"You don't owe it me, Nancy; but if I beg you to tell me all—because I have come to my senses again—because I know how foolish and cruel I have been——"

"Remember what we agreed. Go your way, and let me go mine."

"I had no idea of what I was agreeing to. I took it for granted that your marriage was strictly a secret, and that you might be free in the real sense if you chose."

"Yes, and you were quite willing, because it

gave you your freedom as well. I am as free as I wish to be. I have made a life for myself that satisfies me—and now you come to undo everything. I won't be tormented—I have endured enough."

"Then only one course is open to me. I shall publish your marriage everywhere. I shall make a home for you, and have the child brought to it; then come or not, as you please."

At mention of the child Nancy regarded him with cold curiosity.

"How are you to make a home for me? I thought you had difficulty enough in supporting yourself."

"That is no concern of yours. It shall be done, and in a day or two. Then make your choice."

"You think I can be forced to live with a man I don't love?"

"I shouldn't dream of living with a woman who didn't love me. But you are married, and a mother, and the secrecy that is degrading you shall come to an end. Acknowledge me or not, I shall acknowledge *you*, and make it known that I am to blame for all that has happened."

"And what good will you do?"

"I shall do good to myself, at all events. I'm a selfish fellow, and shall be so to the end, no doubt."

Nancy glanced at him to interpret the speech by his expression. He was smiling.

"What good will it do you to have to support me? The selfishness I see in it is your wishing to take me from a comfortable home and make me poor."

"That can't be helped. And, what's more, you won't think it a hardship."

"How do you know that? I have borne dreadful degradations rather than lose my money."

"That was for the child's sake, not for your own."

He said it softly and kindly, and for the first time Nancy met his eyes without defiance.

"It was; I could always have earned my own living, somehow."

Tarrant paused a moment, then spoke with look averted.

"Is he well, and properly cared for?"

"If he were not well and safe, I shouldn't be away from him."

"When will you let me see him, Nancy?"

She did not smile, but there was a brightening of her countenance, which she concealed. Tarrant stepped to her side.

"Dear—my own love—will you try to forgive me? It was all my cursed laziness. It would never have happened if I hadn't fallen into poverty. Poverty is the devil, and it overcame me."

"How can you think that *I* shall be strong enough to face it?" she asked, moving half a step away. "Leave me to myself; I am contented; I have made up my mind about what is before me, and I won't go through all that again."

Tired of standing, she dropped upon the nearest chair, and lay back.

"You can't be contented, Nancy, in a position that dishonours you. From what you tell me, it seems that your secret is no secret at all. Will you compel me to go to that man Barmby and seek information from him about my own wife?"

"I have had to do worse things than that."

"Don't torture me by such vague hints. I entreat you to tell me at once the worst that you

have suffered. How did Barmby get to know of your marriage? And why has he kept silent about it? There can't be anything that you are ashamed to say."

"No. The shame is all yours."

"I take it upon myself, all of it; I ought never to have left you; but that baseness followed only too naturally on the cowardice which kept me from declaring our marriage when honour demanded it. I have played a contemptible part in this story; don't refuse to help me now that I am ready to behave more like a man. Put your hand in mine, and let us be friends, if we mayn't be more."

She sat irresponsive.

"You were a brave girl. You consented to my going away because it seemed best, and I took advantage of your sincerity. Often enough that last look of yours has reproached me. I wonder how I had the heart to leave you alone."

Nancy raised herself, and said coldly:

"It was what I might have expected. I had only my own folly to thank. You behaved as most men would."

This was a harder reproach than any yet. Tarrant winced under it. He would much rather have been accused of abnormal villainy.

"And I was foolish," continued Nancy, "in more ways than you knew. You feared I had told Jessica Morgan of our marriage, and you were right; of course I denied it. She has been the cause of my worst trouble."

In rapid sentences she told the story of her successive humiliations, recounted her sufferings at the hands of Jessica and Beatrice and Samuel Barmby. When she ceased, there were tears in her eyes.

"Has Barmby been here again?" Tarrant asked sternly.

"Yes. He has been twice, and talked in just the same way, and I had to sit still before him——"

"Has he said one word that——?"

"No, no," she interrupted hastily. "He's only a fool—not man enough to——"

"That saves me trouble," said Tarrant; "I have only to treat him like a fool. My poor darling, what vile torments you have endured! And you

pretend that you would rather live on this fellow's interested generosity—for, of course, he hopes to be rewarded—than throw the whole squalid entanglement behind you and be a free, honest woman, even if a poor one?"

"I see no freedom."

"You have lost all your love for me. Well, I can't complain of that. But bear my name you shall, and be supported by me. I tell you that it was never *possible* for me actually to desert you and the little one—never possible. I shirked a duty as long as I could; that's all it comes to. I loafed and paltered until the want of a dinner drove me into honesty. Try to forget it, dear Nancy. Try to forgive me, my dearest!"

She was dry-eyed again, and his appeal seemed to have no power over her emotions.

"You are forgetting," she said practically, "that I have lived on money to which I had no right, and that I—or you—can be forced to repay it."

"Repaid it must be, whether demanded or not. Where does Barmby live? Perhaps I could see him to-night."

"What means have you of keeping us all alive?"

"Some of my work has been accepted here and there; but there's something else I have in mind. I don't ask you to become a poverty-stricken wife in the ordinary way. I can't afford to take a house. I must put you, with the child, into as good lodgings as I can hope to pay for, and work on by myself, just seeing you as often as you will let me. Even if you were willing, it would be a mistake for us to live together. For one thing, I couldn't work under such conditions; for another, it would make you a slave. Tell me: are you willing to undertake the care of the child, if nothing else is asked of you?"

Nancy gave him a disdainful smile, a smile like those of her girlhood.

"I'm not quite so feeble a creature as you think me."

"You would rather have the child to yourself, than be living away from him?"

"If you have made up your mind, why trouble to ask such questions?"

"Because I have no wish to force burdens upon

you. You said just now that you could see little prospect of freedom in such a life as I have to offer you. I thought you perhaps meant that the care of the child would——"

"I meant nothing," Nancy broke in, with fretful impatience.

"Where is he—our boy?"

"At Dulwich. I told you that in my last letter."

"Yes—yes. I thought you might have changed."

"I couldn't have found a better, kinder woman. Can you guess how many answers I had to the advertisement? Thirty-two."

"Of course five-and-twenty of them took it for granted you would pay so much a week and ask no questions. They would just not have starved the baby,—unless you had hinted to them that you were willing to pay a lump sum for a death-certificate, in which case the affair would have been more or less skilfully managed."

"Mary knew all about that. She came from Falmouth, and spent two days in visiting people. I knew I could rely on her judgment. There were

only four or five people she cared to see at all, and of these only one that seemed trustworthy."

"To be sure. One out of two-and-thirty. A higher percentage than would apply to mankind at large, I dare say. By-the-bye, I was afraid you might have found a difficulty in registering the birth."

"No. I went to the office myself, the morning that I was leaving Falmouth, and the registrar evidently knew nothing about me. It isn't such a small place that everybody living there is noticed and talked of."

"And Mary took the child straight to Dulwich?"

"Two days before I came,—so as to have the house ready for me."

"Perhaps it was unfortunate, Nancy, that you had so good a friend. But for that, I should have suffered more uneasiness about you."

She answered with energy:

"There is no husband in the world worth such a friend as Mary."

At this Tarrant first smiled, then laughed. Nancy kept her lips rigid. It happened that he again saw

her face in exact profile, and again it warmed the current of his blood.

"Some day you shall think better of that."

She paid no attention. Watching her, he asked:

"What are you thinking of so earnestly?"

Her answer was delayed a little, but she said at length, with an absent manner:

"Horace might lend me the money to pay back what I owe."

"Your brother?—If he can afford it, there would be less objection to that than to any other plan I can think of. But I must ask it myself; you shall beg no more favours. I will ask it in your presence."

"You will do nothing of the kind," Nancy replied drily. "If you think to please me by humiliating yourself, you are very much mistaken. And you mustn't imagine that I put myself into your hands to be looked after as though I had no will of my own. With the past you have nothing to do,—with *my* past, at all events. Care for the future as you like."

"But I must see your guardians."

"No. I won't have that."

She stood up to emphasise her words.

"I must. It's the only way in which I can satisfy myself——"

"Then I refuse to take a step," said Nancy. "Leave all that to me, and I will go to live where you please, and never grumble, however poor I am. Interfere, and I will go on living as now, on Samuel Barmby's generosity."

There was no mistaking her resolution. Tarrant hesitated, and bit his lip.

"How long, then, before you act?" he inquired abruptly.

"When my new home is found, I am ready to go there."

"You will deal honestly with me? You will tell every one, and give up everything not strictly yours?"

"I have done with lies," said Nancy.

"Thank heaven, so have I!"

# Part the Sixth

## A VIRTUE OF NECESSITY

# I

UPON the final tempest in De Crespigny Park there followed, for Arthur Peachey, a calmer and happier season than he had ever known. To have acted with stern resolve is always a satisfaction, especially to the man conscious of weak good-nature, and condemned for the most part to yield. In his cheap lodging at Clapham, Peachey awoke each morning with a vague sense of joy, which became delight as soon as he had collected his senses. He was a free man. No snarl greeted him as he turned his head upon the pillow; he could lie and meditate, could rise quietly when the moment sounded, could go downstairs to a leisurely meal, cheered perhaps by a letter reporting that all was well with his dear little son. Simple, elementary pleasures, but how he savoured them after his years of sordid bondage!

It was the blessedness of divorce, without squalid

publicity. It was the vast relief of widowerhood, without dreary memories of death and burial.

In releasing himself from such companionship, the man felt as though he had washed and become clean.

Innocent of scientific speculation, he had the misfortune about this time to read in paper or magazine something on the subject of heredity, the idle verbiage of some half-informed scribbler. It set him anxiously thinking whether his son would develop the vices of the mother's mind, and from that day he read all the printed chatter regarding natural inheritance that he could lay his hands on. The benefit he derived from this course of study was neither more nor less than might have been expected; it supplied him with a new trouble, which sometimes kept him wakeful. He could only resolve that his boy should have the best education procurable for money, if he starved himself in providing it.

He had begun to live with the utmost economy, and for a twofold reason: the business of Messrs. Ducker, Blunt & Co. threatened a decline, and, this apart, he desired to get out of it, to obtain an interest

in some more honourable concern. For a long time it had been known to him that the disinfectants manufactured by his firm were far from trustworthy, and of late the complaints of purchasers had become frequent. With the manufacturing department he had nothing to do; he tried to think himself free from responsibility; for, in spite of amiable qualities, he was a man of business, and saw a great part of life through the commercial spectacles commonly worn nowadays. Nevertheless conscience unsettled him. One day he heard his partners joking over the legislative omission by virtue of which they were able to adulterate their disinfectants to any extent without fear of penalty; their laughter grated upon him, and he got out of the way. If he could lay aside a few thousands of pounds, assuredly his connection with the affair should be terminated. So he lived, for his own part, on a pound a week, and informed Ada through his solicitor that she must be satisfied with a certain very moderate allowance.

Mrs. Peachey naturally laid herself out to give every one as much trouble as possible. Insulting

post-cards showered upon her husband at his place of business. After a few weeks she discovered his lodging, and addressed the post-cards thither; but she made no attempt at personal molestation. The loss of her child gave her not the slightest concern, yet she determined to find out where the boy was living. She remembered that Peachey had relatives at Canterbury, and after a troublesome search succeeded in her purpose. An interview with her husband's married sister proved so unsatisfactory to Ada, that she had recourse to her familiar weapons, rage, insult, and menace; with the result that she was forcibly removed, and made a scandal in the quiet street.

Then she consulted men of law, and found one who encouraged her to sue for restitution of conjugal rights. It came to nothing, however; for in the meantime she was growing tired of her solitary existence,—friends of course she had none,—and the spirit moved her to try a change of tactics.

She wrote a long, long letter, penitent, tear-bestained. "I have behaved outrageously to you, dearest Arthur; I must have been mad to say and do

such things. The doctor tells me that my health has been in a very bad state for a long time, and I really don't remember half that has happened. You were quite right when you told me that I should be better if I didn't live such an idle life, and I have quite, quite made up my mind to be an industrious and a *good* woman. All yesterday I spent in needlework and crying. Oh, the tears that I have shed! My darling husband, what can I do to win your forgiveness? Do consider how lonely I am in this house. Beatrice has been horrid to me. If I said all I think about *her*, she wouldn't like to hear it; but I am learning to control my tongue. She lives alone in a flat, and has men to spend every evening with her; it's disgraceful! And there's Fanny, who I am sure is leading an immoral life abroad. Of course I shall never speak to her again. You were quite right when you said my sisters were worthless."—Peachey had never permitted himself any such remark.—"I will have no one but you, my dear, good, sweet husband."

So on, over several pages. Reading it, the husband stood aghast at this new revelation of

female possibilities; at the end, he hurriedly threw it into the fire, fearing, and with good reason, that weakness in his own character to which the woman addressed herself.

Every day for a week there arrived a replica of this epistle, and at length he answered. It was the fatal concession. Though he wrote with almost savage severity, Ada replied in terms of exuberant gratitude. Oh, how delighted she was to see his dear handwriting once more! How it reminded her of happy days, when they loved each other so tenderly! Then came two strophes of a sentimental drawing-room song, and lastly, an impassioned appeal to be allowed to see her husband, were it only for five minutes.

Another week of such besieging, and the poor fellow's foolish heart gave way. He would see the wretched woman, and tell her that, though never could he consent to live with her again, he had no malicious feeling, and was willing to be her friend at a distance. So, at six o'clock one evening, behold him tremulously approaching the house in De Crespigny Park, — tremulously, because he

dreaded the assault upon his emotions to which he so recklessly exposed himself. He was admitted by a very young servant, in a very clean cap and apron. Silence possessed the dwelling; he did not venture to tread with natural step. He entered the drawing-room, and there, from amid a heap of household linen which required the needle, rose the penitent wife. Ostentatiously she drew from her finger a thimble, then advanced with head bent.

"How kind of you, Arthur! How—how very——"

And she was dissolved in tears—so genuine, that they marked pale rillets across the bloom of her cheeks.

About a month after that the furniture was removed from De Crespigny Park to a much smaller house at Brixton, where Mr. and Mrs. Peachey took up their abode together. A medical man shortly called, and Ada, not without secret disgust, smilingly made known to her husband that she must now be very careful of her health.

On one point only the man had held to a rational resolve; he would not allow his little son to be

brought back to London, away from the home where he was happy and thriving. Out of mere self-will Ada strove for a long time to overcome this decision; finding argument and artifice of no avail, she dropped the matter. Peachey owed this triumph largely to the firm commonsense of his sister, who plainly refused to let the little fellow quit her care for that of such a woman as he was unfortunate enough to call mother.

Christmas came, and with it an unanticipated call from Miss Fanny French, who said she had lately recovered from a serious illness in Paris; the nature of her malady she did not specify; it had left her haggard and thin, but by no means deficient in vivacity. She was dressed with tawdry extravagance, wore a mass of false yellow hair, had her eyebrows dyed black,—piquant contrast, —and her cheeks and lips richly carmined. No veritable information as to her past and present could be gleaned from the mixture of French and English which she ceaselessly gabbled. She had come over for Christmas, that was all; could not dream of returning to live in wretched England.

At Brussels and in Paris she had made hosts of friends, just the right sort of people.

Ada told her all the news. Of most interest was that which related to Nancy Lord. Only a month ago it had become known that Nancy was married, and the mother of a child.

"The Barmbys found it out somehow," Ada narrated. "She was married to a man called Tarrant, some one we never heard of, on the very day of her father's death, and, of course, before she knew anything about his will. Then, of course, it had to be kept dark, or she'd lose all her money. Her husband hadn't a farthing. She supported him, and they say he lived most of the time in her house. He's a regular scamp, a drinking, betting fellow. Well, it all came out, and the Barmbys turned her into the street at a moment's notice—serve her right!"

Fanny shrieked with merriment.

"And what is she doing?"

"She went on her knees to Beatrice, and begged for a place at the shop, if it was only a few shillings a week. Nice come-down for Nancy Lord, wasn't

it? Of course Beatrice sent her off with a flea in her ear. I don't know where she's living, but I've heard that her husband has gone to America, and left her to shift for herself, now there's nothing more to be got out of her."

For supplementary details of this racy narrative, Fanny sought out Beatrice; but to her astonishment and annoyance Beatrice would tell nothing. The elder sister urged Fanny to give an account of herself, and used some very plain speech of the admonitory kind.

"What has become of that jackanapes, Horace Lord?" asked Fanny, after a contemptuous remark about "sermons."

"I don't know. The question is, what's going to become of *you?*"

Whereupon the girl grew vituperative in two languages, and made off. Her relatives saw no more of her for a long time.

To Mrs. Peachey was born a daughter. Naturally, the months preceding this event had been, for her husband, a renewal of martyrdom; his one supporting solace lay in the thought of the little lad at

Canterbury. All the old troubles were revived; from morning to night the house rang with brawls between mistress and servants; in the paroxysms favoured by her physical condition, Ada behaved like a candidate for Bedlam, and more than once obliged her husband to seek temporary peace in lodgings. He left home at eight o'clock every morning, and returned as late as possible. The necessity of passing long evenings made him haunt places of entertainment, and he sometimes had recourse to drink,—he by nature the soberest of men,—in fear of what awaited him on his tardy appearance at Brixton. A month after Ada's confinement he once more acted a sane part, and announced by letter that he would die rather than continue living with his wife. As it was fine autumn weather he went down to a seaside place, where his Canterbury relatives and the little boy joined him for a holiday of several weeks. Again Ada was to receive an allowance. She despatched a few very virulent post-cards, but presently grew quiet, and appeared to accept the situation.

In early winter Fanny French came over to

England. She had again been ill, and this time with results obviously graver. Her first call was upon Beatrice, who still occupied the flat at Brixton, and here she unbosomed herself of a dolorous story. All her money had vanished; stolen, most of it, Fanny declared; she was without resources, and, as any one could see, in a wretched state of health. Would Beatrice have compassion on her? Would she lend her money till she was well enough to "look round"?

Miss French at once took the girl into her own home, and had her looked after. Fanny coughed in an alarming way; the doctor, speaking privately with Beatrice, made an unpleasant report; was it possible to send the patient to a mild climate for the winter months? Yes, Miss French could manage that, and would. A suitable attendant having been procured, Fanny was despatched to Bournemouth, whence, in a day or two, she wrote to her sister thus:

"You've been awfully kind to me, and I shan't forget it when I'm well again. Feel a good deal fitter already. Dullish place this, but I've got to

put up with it. I've had a letter from Ada. If you see her, tell her she's a beast, and I wish Arthur would wring her scraggy neck. She says it's all my own fault; wait till I'm back again, and I'll pay her a call. My own fault indeed! It seems to me I'm very much to be pitied."

Walking one day along the sea-front by herself, Fanny observed a young man's figure a few paces in advance of her, which seemed to awaken recollections. Presently the young man turned and showed, beyond doubt, the countenance of Horace Lord. He met her eyes, gave a doubtful, troubled look, and was going past when Fanny accosted him.

"Well, don't you know me?"

"Why, it *is*—it really *is!* How glad I am to see you! But what on earth are you doing here?"

"Amusing myself—*comme vous voyez;* and you?"

"Oh, doing the same."

They had shaken hands, and were sauntering on together.

"Anything wrong with your health?" Fanny asked, scrutinising the pale thin face, with its touch of warmth on the cheeks.

"Oh, I've had a bit of a cold; nothing to speak of. You been out of sorts?"

"A little run down. Over-study, they say."

Horace looked his surprise.

"Why, I didn't know you went in for that kind of thing."

"Didn't you? I've been studying abroad for a long time. Thinking of taking a place as French teacher in some tip-top high school."

"I am very glad to hear it. Capital idea. Sure I hope you'll be successful."

"Thanks awf'ly. Tell me something about yourself. Why, it's two years since we saw each other, isn't it? Are you married yet?"

Horace smiled and coloured.

"No, no—not yet. I'm in business with Luckworth Crewe,—sort of sleeping partner just now."

"Are you really? And how's your sister?"

The young man bent his brows uncomfortably.

"Don't you know anything about her?" he asked.

"I've heard she's married."

"Yes, a man called Tarrant. Very clever fellow; he writes for the papers.—I say, Miss French, I

generally have a glass of wine and a biscuit, at the confectioner's, about this time. Will you give me the pleasure of your company?"

"*Charmée, Monsieur!* I generally go in for the same kind of thing."

So they repaired to the cake-shop, and sat talking for half-an-hour of trifles which made them laugh.

"And you really didn't know me?" said Fanny, when her glass of wine was finished. "Have I changed so much?"

"A good deal. Not for the worse, oh dear no!"

The girl giggled.

"Well, I don't mind saying that *you* have changed a good deal for the better."

Horace flushed at the compliment.

"I'm much older," he answered with a sigh, as though the years of a sexagenarian weighed upon him.

"That's just what I like in you. You're so much more of a man. Don't be offended."

They went forth again into the sunshine. At the door both coughed, and both pretended that it wasn't a cough at all, but a voluntary little hem.

## II

MRS. DAMEREL was younger than ever. She had spent October abroad, with her friends Mrs. and Miss Chittle, and the greater part of November at Brighton, with other friends. Back in town she established herself at one of the various boarding-houses honoured by her patronage, and prepared to enjoy the social life of winter.

Half a year ago an unwonted depression had troubled her serene existence. At the close of the London season she seemed weary and spiritless, very unlike herself; having no invitation for the next two months, she withdrew to Whitsand, and there spent some cheerless weeks.

Whitsand was the as yet unfashionable seaside place which had attracted the speculative eye of Luckworth Crewe. For the past two years he had been trying to inspire certain men of capital with his own faith in the possibilities of Whit-

sand; he owned a share in the new hotel just opened; whenever his manifold affairs allowed him a day's holiday, he spent it at Whitsand, pacing the small esplanade, and meditating improvements. That these "improvements" signified the conversion of a pretty little old-world spot into a hideous brand new resort of noisy hordes, in no degree troubled Mr. Crewe's conscience. For his own part, he could appreciate the charms of Whitsand as it stood; he was by no means insensible to natural beauty and the ancient peace which so contrasted with his life of every day; but first and foremost in his mind came the necessity of making money; and to fill his pockets he would no more hesitate about destroying the loveliest spot on earth, than the starving hunter would stay his hand out of admiration for bird or beast.

It was with much delight that he heard of Mrs. Damerel's retreat to Whitsand. To the note in which she acquainted him with her arrival there he replied effusively. "The patronage of a few really fashionable people, such as yourself, would soon do wonders. We must have a special para-

graph in the local paper, drawing attention to your being there"—and so on. An answer by return of post rather disappointed him. On no account, wrote Mrs. Damerel, must her name be specially mentioned in the paper. She had taken very simple lodgings, very inexpensive, and wished to live as quietly as possible. But, after seeing the place, she quite agreed with Mr. Crewe that it had a future, and if he could run down some day, whilst she was here, it would give her great pleasure to hear his projects explained on the spot.

Crewe ran down. In speaking of Mrs. Damerel as a "really fashionable" person, he used no insincerity; from their first meeting he had seen in this lady his ideal of social distinction; she was, in fact, the only woman of skilfully pretentious demeanour with whom he had ever spoken. Her distant likeness to Nancy Lord interested and attracted him; her suave superiority awed his conscious roughness; she seemed to him exquisitely gracious, wonderfully sweet. And as, little by little, he attained the right to think of her almost

as a friend, his humble admiration became blended with feelings he took particular care not to betray, lest he should expose himself to ridicule. That her age exceeded his own by some years he was of course aware, but this fact soon dropped out of his mind, and never returned to it. Not only did he think Mrs. Damerel a type of aristocratic beauty, he saw in her countenance all the freshness and the promise of youth.

The slight mystery attaching to her position only increased his susceptibility to her charms. It seemed to him very probable that she had but a moderate income; perhaps she was not free from anxieties on that score. But such a woman would of course marry again, and marry well. The thought grew troublesome, and presently accounted for ebullitions of wrath, accompanied by more than usually vigorous language, when business matters went wrong.

At Whitsand, Mrs. Damerel showed herself more than ever sweetly affable. The season, she said, had been rather too much for her; she must take care of her health; besides—and her smile played

upon Crewe's pulses—there were troubles, cares, of which she could not speak *even* to so valued a friend.

"I'm afraid you're anxious about your nephew," murmured the man of business; though at the same time he suspected other things, for the lodgings in which he found Mrs. Damerel were certainly modest.

"Yes, I trouble a good deal about him. If only dear Horace would be reconciled to me. It seems such a long, long time. You know that we have corresponded, but he refuses to see me. It pains me deeply, Mr. Crewe."

And, after a silence:

"There's a special reason why I wish he would be friends with me,—a reason that concerns his own future. Why should I not tell you? I am sure you will respect my confidence.—He will very soon become independent, and then I do so fear he may make a foolish marriage. Yet all the time there is a chance waiting for him which would establish his fortune and his happiness for life. Did he ever speak to you of Miss Chittle?"

"I don't remember the name."

"Such a dear, sweet girl, and with really large means. He was introduced to her during the happy time when we saw so much of each other, and she at once became interested in him. Her dear mother assured me of it. She is a very shy, retiring girl, and has refused many offers, before and since then. Isn't it a pity? But I am losing all hope, and I so fear he may have formed some other attachment."

Crewe went back to London resolved that Horace Lord should no longer "play the fool." And he was successful. Horace had all but lost his resentment against Mrs. Damerel; he kept aloof out of stubborn conceit—it had not dignity enough to be called pride; the same feeling that still estranged him from Nancy, though he would gladly have welcomed his sister's offer of affection. Persuaded, or commanded, by Luckworth Crewe, he took the train to Whitsand, and remained there for several days. Mrs. Damerel wrote her friend in Farringdon Street a letter of gratitude, which acted upon him like champagne. In a postscript she said: "Mrs. Chittle

and her daughter have consented to come here for a week or two. They will take rooms at the Imperial."

Before the end of September, Horace Lord was engaged to Winifred Chittle.

Two years had made very little change in Miss Chittle's appearance. She was still colourless and abnormally shy, still had the look of one who sheds secret tears, and her repugnance to Society had, if possible, increased. Horace thought her pretty, was impressed by her extreme gentleness and refinement, but she obtained no power over his emotions such as that formerly exercised by Fanny French. It struck him, too, as a very strange thing, that a young lady with a large fortune should be willing to marry a man of his social insignificance. "My dear," said Mrs. Damerel, "it was a case of love at first sight." But Horace, who had gained some experience of life, could not believe this. He wooed, and won; yet even when Winifred accepted him, he felt that she did it under some constraint. Her pale face declared no happiness.

Had she chosen, Mrs. Damerel could have ex-

plained the mystery. She knew that, several years ago, Winifred's name had been blighted by a scandal, and that the girl's shrinking from every proposal of marriage was due, in part perhaps, to the memory of love betrayed, in part to a sense of honour, and to the suspicion that men, knowing her disgrace, condoned it for the sake of her wealth. Interest made Mrs. Damerel generous; she admitted every excuse for Winifred, and persuaded herself that in procuring Horace such a wife she was doing him only a nominal wrong. The young people could live apart from that corner of Society in which Miss Chittle's name gave occasion to smiles or looks of perfunctory censure. If Winifred, after marriage, chose to make confession, why, that was her own affair, and Horace would be wise enough, all advantages considered, to take the matter philosophically.

That was the view of a practical-minded observer. To read Winifred perfectly, there needed a much more subtle and sympathetic intelligence. The girl had, in truth, conceived a liking for Horace Lord, and it grew stronger when she learnt that neither

by birth nor present circumstances did he belong to her own world. To please her mother she was willing to take a husband, but the husband must be of her own choice. She wished to enter upon a wholly new life, remote from the social conditions which of late years had crushed her spirit. From the men who had hitherto approached her, she shrank in fear. Horace Lord, good-looking and not uneducated, yet so far from formidable, suggested a new hope; even though he might be actuated by the ordinary motives, she discerned in him a softness, a pliability of nature, which would harmonise with her own timid disposition. To the thought of deceiving him on the subject of her past, she was reconciled by a resolve to make his happiness the sole object of her existence in the future. Horace was amiability itself, and seemed, if not to love her ardently (which, perhaps, she did not even desire), at least to regard her with an increasing affection.

Nothing was said about the condition of the prospective bridegroom's health, though Horace had confided to Mrs. Damerel that he suffered from a

troublesome cough, accompanied now and then by an alarming symptom. In her boundless exultation at the end achieved, Mrs. Damerel made light of this complaint. Horace was not free to marry until nearly the end of the year; for, though money would henceforth be no matter of anxiety, he might as well secure the small inheritance presently due to him. November and December he should spend at Bournemouth under the best medical care, and after that, if needful, his wife would go with him to Madeira or some such place.

No wonder Mrs. Damerel could think of nothing but the great fact that Horace had secured a fortune. Her own resources were coming to an end, and but for the certainty that Horace would not grudge her an ample provision, she must at this moment have been racking her brains (even as through the summer) for help against the evil that drew near. Constitutional lightness of heart had enabled her to enjoy life on a steadily, and rapidly, diminishing fund. There had been hope in Nancy's direction, as well as in her brother's; but the disclosure of Nancy's marriage, and Horace's per-

sistency in unfriendliness, brought Mrs. Damerel to a sense of peril. One offer of marriage she had received and declined; it came from a man of advanced years and small property. Another offer she might, or thought she might, at any moment provoke; but only in direst extremity could she think of bestowing her hand upon Luckworth Crewe. Crewe was in love with her, an amusing fact in itself, and especially so in regard to his former relations with Nancy Lord. He might become a wealthy man; on the other hand, he might not; and in any case he was a plebeian.

All such miseries were now dismissed from her mind. She went abroad with the Chittles, enjoyed herself at Brighton, and came home to prepare for Horace's wedding, Horace himself being at Bournemouth. After her letter of gratitude to Crewe she had ceased to correspond with him; she did not trouble to acquaint him with Horace's engagement; and when Crewe, having heard the news from his partner, ventured to send her a letter of congratulation, Mrs. Damerel replied in two or three very civil but cold sentences. Back in London, she did

not invite the man of projects to call upon her. The status she had lost when fears beset her must now be recovered. Let Crewe cherish a passion for her if he liked, but let him understand that social reasons made it laughably hopeless.

Horace was to come up to London in the third week of December, and to be married on New Year's Day; the honeymoon would be spent at Ventnor, or somewhere thereabout. Afraid to lose sight of her relative for more than a week or two, Mrs. Damerel had already been twice to Bournemouth, and now she decided to go for a third time, just to talk quietly over the forthcoming event, and, whether Horace broached the subject or not, to apprise him of the straits into which she was drifting. Unannounced by letter, she reached Bournemouth early in the afternoon, and went straight to Horace's lodgings. The young man had just finished luncheon, and, all things considered, including the fact that it was a remarkably bright and warm day for the time of year, he might have been expected to welcome Mrs. Damerel cheerfully. Yet on seeing her his countenance fell; he betrayed

an embarrassment which the lady noted with anxious suspicion.

"Aren't you glad to see me, dear boy?" she began, with a kiss upon his cheek.

"Yes—oh yes. I never dreamt of your appearing just now, that was all."

"I couldn't resist the temptation. Such a morning in London! Almost as fine as it is here. And how is your cough?"

Even as she made the inquiry, he answered it by coughing very badly.

"I don't think this place suits you, Horace," said Mrs. Damerel gravely. "You're not imprudent, I hope? Don't go out after dark?"

Oh, it was nothing, Horace maintained; for several days he had hardly coughed at all. But with every word he uttered, Mrs. Damerel became more convinced of something unusual in his state of mind; he could not keep still, and, in trying to put himself at ease, assumed strange postures.

"When did you hear from Winifred?" she asked.

"Yesterday—no, the day before."

He shrank from her scrutiny, and an expression

of annoyance began to disturb his features. Mrs. Damerel knew well enough the significance of that particular look; it meant the irritation of his self-will, the summoning of forces to resist something he disliked.

"There has been no difference between you, I hope?"

"No—oh no," Horace replied, wriggling under her look.

At that moment a servant opened the door.

"Two ladies have called in a carriage, sir, and would like to see you."

"I'll go down. Excuse me for a moment, aunt."

"Who are they, Horace?" asked Mrs. Damerel, rising with an ill-concealed look of dismay.

"Some friends I have made here. I'll just go and speak to them."

He hurried away. No sooner was he gone than Mrs. Damerel sprang to the window, where she could look down upon the carriage standing before the house; it was open, and in it sat two ladies, one middle-aged, the other much younger. To her vexation she could not, from this distance, clearly

discern their faces; but on glancing rapidly round the room, she saw Horace's little binocular. An instant brought it into focus upon the carriage, and what she then saw gave Mrs. Damerel such a shock, that an exclamation escaped her. Still she gazed through the glasses, and only turned away when the vehicle drove on.

Horace came up flushed and panting.

"It's all right. They wanted me to go for a drive, but I explained——"

He saw the binocular in Mrs. Damerel's hand, and at the same moment read detection on her countenance. She gazed at him; he answered the look with lowering challenge.

"Horace, that was Fanny French."

"So it was, aunt."

"What is going on between you?"

The young man took a seat on the edge of the table, and swung his leg. He looked sullenly obstinate.

"We met by accident—here—the other day."

"How can I believe that, Horace?" said Mrs. Damerel, in a voice of soft reproach. And she

drew near to him. "Be truthful with me, dear. Do tell me the truth!—Is she anything to you?"

"I have told you the truth, aunt. She came here, as I have done, for her health. I haven't seen her for two years."

"And you don't wish to renew acquaintance with her,—I'm sure you don't."

He looked away, and said nothing.

"My dear, do you know her character?"

"What about her?"

The tone was startling, but Mrs. Damerel kept firm, though agitated.

"She has led the most disgraceful life. I heard about her half a year after she ran away, but of course I wouldn't tell you such painful things."

Horace reddened with anger.

"And who is to blame for it?" he cried passionately. "Who drove her to it?"

"Oh, don't, don't come back to that again, Horace!" pleaded the other. "How can any one drive a girl into a life of scandalous immorality? It was in herself, dear. She took to it naturally, as so many women do. Remember that letter she

wrote from Brussels, which I sent you a copy of——"

"It was a forgery!" thundered Horace. "I have asked her. She says she never wrote any such letter."

"Then she lies, as such creatures always do."

Bitterness of apprehension overcame Mrs. Damerel's prudence. With flashing eyes, she faced the young man and dared his wrath. As they stood thus, the two were astonishingly like each other, from forehead to chin.

"It's no use, I'm not going to quarrel with you, aunt. Think what you like of Miss French, *I* know the truth about her."

He slipped from the table, and moved away.

"I will say no more, Horace. You are independent, and must have your own acquaintances. But after you are married——"

The other voice interrupted.

"I had better tell you at once. I shall not marry Miss Chittle. I am going to write this afternoon to break it off."

Mrs. Damerel went pale, and stood motionless.

"Horace, you can't be so wicked as that!"

"It's better," he pursued recklessly, "to break it off now, than to marry her and make her miserable. I don't love her, and I have never really thought I did. I was going to marry her only for her money. Why she wants to marry me, I don't know. There's something wrong; she doesn't really care for me."

"She does! I assure you she does!"

"Then I can't help it."

Mrs. Damerel went close to him, and touched his arm.

"My dear,"—her voice was so low that it seemed terror-stricken,—"you don't mean to marry—any one else?"

He drew apart, she followed him.

"Oh, that would be terrible! What can I say to open your eyes and show you what you are doing? Horace, have you no sense of honour? Can you find it in your heart to cast off a girl who loves you, and thinks that in so short a time she will be your wife?"

"This again is your fault," he replied, with a violence which proved the conflict of emotions in

him. "But for you, I should never have proposed to Winifred—never dreamt of such a thing. What do I want with her money? I have enough of my own, and I shall make more in business. Why have you driven me into this? Did you expect to get some profit out of it?"

The blow struck home, and Mrs. Damerel flinched.

"I had your happiness in view, my dear."

"My happiness! that's your view of things; that's why I couldn't really like you, from the first. You think of nothing but money. Why you objected to Fanny French at first was because you wished me to marry some one richer. I don't thank you for that kind of happiness; I had rather marry a woman I can love."

"And you can love such a creature as that?"

Again she lost her self-command; the mere thought of Fanny's possible triumph exasperated her.

"I won't hear her abused," cried Horace, with answering passion. "You are the last person who ought to do it. Comparing her and you, I can't help saying——"

An exclamation of pain checked his random words; he looked at Mrs. Damerel, and saw her features wrung with anguish.

"You mustn't speak to me like that!" Once more she approached him. "If you only knew—I can't bear it—I've always been a worldly woman, but you are breaking my heart, Horace! My dear, my dear, if only out of pity for me——"

"Why should I pity you?" he cried impatiently.

"Because—Horace—give me your hand, dear; let me tell you something.—I am your mother."

She sobbed and choked, clinging to his arm, resting her forehead against it. The young man, stricken with amazement, stared at her, speechless.

"I am your own mother, dear," she went on, in a quivering voice. "Your mother and Nancy's. And neither of you can love me."

"How can that be?" Horace asked, with genuine perplexity. "How could you have married some one else?"

She passed an arm about his neck, and hid her face against him.

"I left your father—and he made me free to marry again."

"You were divorced?"

Horace did not mean to speak brutally; in his wonderment he merely pressed for a complete explanation. The answer was a sob, and for some moments neither of them spoke. Then the mother, her face still hidden, went on in a thick voice:

"I married because I was poor—for no other reason—and then came the temptation. I behaved wickedly, I deserted my little children. Don't revenge yourself upon me now, darling! If only I could have told you this before—I did so want to, but I was afraid. I had to conceal half my love for you. You can't imagine how I have suffered from your anger, and from Nancy's coldness. You don't know me; I have never been able to let you see what I really think and feel. I am worldly; I can't live without luxuries and society and amusements; but I love you, my dear son, and it will break my heart if you ruin yourself. It's true I thought of Winifred's money, but she is very fond of you, Horace; her mother has told me she is.

And it was because of my own position. I have spent nearly all my husband left me; it wasn't enough to supply me with an income; I could only hope that something—that you, dear, would forgive your poor mother, and help her. If you cast me off, what shall I do?"

There was a silence. Then the young man spoke gravely:

"You are welcome, mother, to half my income. But you must leave me free to marry as I like."

"Then I can't take a penny from you," she answered, weeping. "If you ruin yourself, you ruin me as well."

"The ruin would come if I married Winifred I love Fanny; I love her with all my heart and soul, and have never ceased to love her. Tell me what you like about her, it will make no difference."

A fit of violent coughing stopped his speech; he turned away, and stood by the window, holding his handkerchief to his mouth.

Mrs. Damerel sank upon a chair in mute misery.

## III

BELOW the hill at Harrow, in a byway which has no charm but that of quietness, stands a row of small plain houses, built not long ago, yet at a time when small houses were constructed with some regard for soundness and durability. Each contains six rooms, has a little strip of garden in the rear, and is, or was in 1889, let at a rent of six-and-twenty pounds. The house at the far end of the row (as the inhabitants described it) was then tenanted by Mary Woodruff, and with her, as a lodger, lived Mrs. Tarrant.

As a lodger, seeing that she paid a specified weekly sum for her shelter and maintenance; in no other respect could the wretched title apply to her. To occupy furnished lodgings, is to live in a house owned and ruled by servants; the least tolerable status known to civilisation. From her long experience at Falmouth, Nancy knew enough

of the petty miseries attendant upon that condition to think of it with dread when the stress of heroic crisis compelled her speedy departure from the old home. It is seldom that heroic crisis bears the precise consequence presumed by the actors in it; supreme moments are wont to result in some form of compromise. So Nancy, prepared to go forth into the wilderness of landladies, babe in arm, found that so dreary a self-sacrifice neither was exacted of her, nor would indeed be permitted; she had to reckon with Mary Woodruff. Mary, thanks to her old master, enjoyed an income more than sufficient to her needs; if Nancy must needs go into lodgings,—inevitable, perhaps, as matters stood,—her friend was ready with kind and practical suggestion; to wit, that she should take and furnish a house for herself, and place a portion of it at Mrs. Tarrant's disposal. To this even Tarrant could offer no objection; he stipulated only that his wife should find a temporary refuge from the home she had occupied on false pretences until Mary had her new house in readiness. This was managed without difficulty. Nancy went to Dulwich, and for several

weeks dwelt with the honest woman who took care of her child.

Of the dealings between Nancy and her legal guardians Tarrant learned nothing, save the bare fact that her marriage was avowed, and all benefit under her father's will renounced. He did not visit the house at Dulwich, and only saw his child after the removal to Harrow. On this occasion he asked Nancy what arrangements had been made concerning the money that must be reimbursed to the Messrs. Barmby; she replied that justice would be done, but the affair was hers alone, and to her must be left.

Tarrant himself suggested the neighbourhood of Harrow for Nancy's abode. It united the conditions of being remote from Camberwell, of lying beyond the great smoke-area, and of permitting him, poor as he was, to visit his wife whenever he thought fit.

In December, Nancy had lived thus for all but a twelvemonth, seeing the while none of her old acquaintances, and with very little news from her old world. What she heard came through Horace, who, after learning with astonishment the secret in

his sister's life, came by degrees to something like the old terms of affection with her, and went over to Harrow pretty frequently. Of his engagement to Winifred Chittle he at once informed Nancy, who tried to be glad of it, but could have little faith in anything traceable to the influence of Mrs. Damerel. With that lady the Harrow household had no direct communication; Tarrant had written to her on the night of crisis, civilly requesting her to keep aloof, as her advice and assistance were in nowise needed. She answered him with good temper, and wrote kindly to Nancy; after that, silence on both sides.

It wanted a few days to Christmas; with night-fall had come a roaring wind and sleety rain; the house-door was locked; within, lamps and fires burned cheerily. At half-past six, Nancy — she occupied the two front rooms—sat in her parlour, resting after the exertion of putting her son to bed. To judge from her countenance, she was well and happy. The furniture about her aimed at nothing but homely comfort; the pictures and books, being beyond dispute her own, had come from Grove Lane.

Save when Tarrant was here, Nancy and Mary

of course lived like friends who share a house, eating together and generally sitting together. During an hour or two each day the younger woman desired solitude, for a reason understood by her companion, who then looked after the baby. This present evening Nancy had proposed to spend alone; but, after sitting idly for a few minutes, she opened the door and called Mary—just then occupied in teaching a young servant how to iron.

"I shall not write, after all," she said, when her friend came. "I'm too tired. Bring your sewing, or your book, here."

Mary was never talkative; Nancy kept a longer silence than usual.

"How," she exclaimed at length, "do poor women with a lot of children manage? It really is a mystery to me. Here am I with one baby, and with the constant help of two people; yet he tires me out. Not a troublesome baby, either; healthy and good-tempered. Yet the thought and anxiety and downright hard labour for a good twelve hours out of the twenty-four! I feel that a second child would be too much for me."

She laughed, but looked seriously for the reply.

"Poor mothers," said Mary, "can't give the same care to their children that you give to baby. The little ones grow up, or they don't grow up—that's what it comes to."

"Yes; that is to say, only the fit survive. A very good thing—when other people's children are in question. But I should kill myself in taking care of them, if I had a large family."

"I have known mothers who did," Mary remarked.

"It comes to this. Nature doesn't intend a married woman to be anything *but* a married woman. In the natural state of things, she must either be the slave of husband and children, or defy her duty. She can have no time to herself, no thoughts for herself. It's a hard saying, but who can doubt that it is Nature's law? I should like to revolt against it, yet I feel revolt to be silly. One might as well revolt against being born a woman instead of a man."

Mary reflected, but held her peace.

"Then comes in money," pursued Nancy, "and that alters the state of the case at once. The wife

with money says to people: Come here, and be my slaves. Toil for me, whilst I am enjoying myself in ways that Dame Nature wouldn't allow. I want to read, to play music, to see my friends, to see the world. Unless you will slave for me, I can't budge from nursery and kitchen.—Isn't it a queer thing?"

The less sophisticated woman had a difficulty in catching Nancy's point of view. She began to argue that domestic service was no slavery.

"But it *comes* to that," Nancy insisted. "And what I mean is, that the thought has made me far more contented than I was at first. After all, one can put up with a great deal, if you feel you're obeying a law of Nature. Now, I have brains, and I should like to use them; but Nature says that's not so important as bringing up the little child to whom I have given life. One thought that troubles me is, that every generation of women is sacrificed to the generation that follows; and of course that's why women are so inferior to men. But then again, Nature says that women are born *only* to be sacrificed. I always come round to that. I don't like it, but I am bound to believe it."

"Children grow up," said Mary, "and then mothers are free."

"Free to do what? To think of what they *might* have done in the best years of their life."

It was not said discontentedly; Nancy's mood seemed to be singularly calm and philosophical. She propped her chin on her hand, and gazed at the fire.

"Well," remarked Mary, with a smile, "you, at all events, are not one of the poorest women. All seems to be going well, and you will be able, I am sure, to get all the help you need."

"Perhaps. But I shall never feel quiet in my conscience. I shall feel as if I had defeated Nature by a trick, and fear that she'll somehow be revenged on me."

This was quite beyond Mary's scope of thought, and she frankly said so.

"One thing I'm quite sure of, Nancy," she added, "and that is, that education makes life very much harder to live. That's why I don't hold with educating the poor—not beyond reading and writing. Without education, life is very plain, though it may

be a struggle. But from what I have seen of highly-taught people, I'm very sure they suffer worse in their minds than the poor ever do in their bodies."

Nancy interrupted her.

"Hush! Was that baby?"

"Only the wind, I think."

Not content, Nancy went to the foot of the stairs. Whilst she stood there listening, Mary came out, and said in a low voice:

"There's a tap at the window."

"No!—You must have been mistaken."

"I'm sure it was a tap on the glass."

She withdrew to the back sitting-room, and Nancy, with quick step, went to open the house-door. A great gust of wind forced it against her as soon as she turned the handle; standing firm, she peeped into darkness.

"Any one there?"

"No enemy but winter and rough weather," chanted a familiar voice.

"Why, what brings you here, frightening lone women at this time of night? Shut and lock the

door for me. The house will be blown out of the windows."

Nancy retreated to her parlour, and stood there in an attitude of joyous expectation. Without hurry Tarrant hung up his coat and hat in the passage, then came forward, wiping rain from his moustache. Their eyes met in a smile, frank and confident.

"Why have you come, Lionel?"

"No reason in particular. The fancy took me. Am I unwelcome?"

For answer, his wife's arms were thrown about him. A lovers' meeting, with more of tenderness, and scarcely less of warmth, than when Nancy knocked at the door in Staple Inn.

"Are you hungry?"

"Only for what you have given me."

"Some tea, then, after that wretched journey."

"No. How's the boy?"

He drew her upon his knee, and listened laughingly whilst the newest marvels of babyhood were laughingly related.

"Anything from Horace?"

"Not a word. He must be in London now; I shall write to-morrow."

Tarrant nodded carelessly. He had the smallest interest in his wife's brother, but could not help satisfaction in the thought that Horace was to be reputably, and even brilliantly, married. From all he knew of Horace, the probability had seemed that his marriage would be some culmination of folly.

"I think you have something to tell me," Nancy said presently, when her hand had been fondled for a minute or two.

"Nothing much, but good as far as it goes. Bunbury has asked me to write him an article every week for the first six months of '90. Column and a half, at two guineas a column."

"Three guineas a week."

"O rare head!"

"So there's no anxiety for the first half of next year, at all events," said Nancy, with a sigh of relief.

"I think I can count on a margin of fifty pounds or so by midsummer—towards the debt, of course."

Nancy bit her lip in vexation, but neither made nor wished to make any protest. Only a week or two ago, since entering upon his patrimony, Horace Lord had advanced the sum necessary to repay what Nancy owed to the Barmbys. However rich Horace was going to be, this debt to him must be cancelled. On that, as on most other points, Tarrant and his wife held a firm agreement of opinion. Yet they wanted money; the past year had been a time of struggle to make ends meet. Neither was naturally disposed to asceticism, and if they did not grumble it was only because grumbling would have been undignified.

"Did you dine with the great people on Thursday?" Nancy asked.

"Yes, and rather enjoyed it. There were one or two clever women."

"Been anywhere else?"

"An hour at a smoking-concert the other evening. Pippit, the actor, was there, and recited a piece much better than I ever heard him speak anything on the stage. They told me he was drunk; very possibly that accounted for it."

To a number of such details Nancy listened quietly, with bent head. She had learned to put absolute faith in all that Tarrant told her of his quasi-bachelor life; she suspected no concealment; but the monotony of her own days lay heavy upon her whilst he talked.

"Won't you smoke?" she asked, rising from his knee to fetch the pipe and tobacco-jar kept for him upon a shelf. Slippers also she brought him, and would have unlaced his muddy boots had Tarrant permitted it. When he presented a picture of masculine comfort, Nancy, sitting opposite, cautiously approached a subject of which as yet there had been no word between them.

"Oughtn't you to get more comfortable lodgings?"

"Oh, I do very well. I'm accustomed to the place, and I like the situation."

He had kept his room in Great College Street, though often obliged to scant his meals as the weekly rent-day approached.

"Don't you think we might make some better—some more economical arrangement?"

"How?"

Nancy took courage, and spoke her thoughts.

"It's more expensive to live separately than if we were together."

Tarrant seemed to give the point his impartial consideration.

"H'm—no, I think not. Certainly not, with our present arrangements. And even if it were, we pay for your comfort, and my liberty."

"Couldn't you have as much liberty if we were living under the same roof? Of course I know that you couldn't live out here; it would put a stop to your work at once. But suppose we moved. Mary might take a rather larger house—it needn't be much larger—in a part convenient for you. We should be able to pay her enough to set off against her increased expenses."

Smoking calmly, Tarrant shook his head.

"Impracticable. Do you mean that this place is too dull for you?"

"It isn't lively, but I wasn't thinking of the place. If *you* lived here, it would be all I should wish."

"That sounds so prettily from your lips, Nancy,

that I'm half ashamed to contradict it. But the truth is that you can only say such things because we live apart. Don't deceive yourself. With a little more money, this life of ours would be as nearly perfect as married life ever can be."

Nancy remembered a previous occasion when he spoke to the same purpose. But it was in the time she did not like to think of, and in spite of herself the recollection troubled her.

"You must have more variety," he added. "Next year you shall come into town much oftener——"

"I'm not thinking of that. I always like going anywhere with you; but I have plenty of occupations and pleasures at home.—I think we ought to be under the same roof."

"Ought? Because Mrs. Tomkins would cry *haro!* if her husband the greengrocer wasn't at her elbow day and night?"

"Have more patience with me. I didn't mean *ought* in the vulgar sense—I have as little respect for Mrs. Tomkins as you have. I don't want to interfere with your liberty for a moment; indeed it would be very foolish, for I know that it would

make you detest me. But I so often want to speak to you—and—and then, I can't quite feel that you acknowledge me as your wife so long as I am away."

Tarrant nodded.

"I quite understand. The social difficulty. Well, there's no doubt it is a difficulty; I feel it on your account. I wish it were possible for you to be invited wherever I am. Some day it will be, if I don't get run over in the Strand; but——"

"I should like the invitations," Nancy broke in, "but you still don't understand me."

"Yes, I think I do. You are a woman, and it's quite impossible for a woman to see this matter as a man does. Nancy, there is not one wife in fifty thousand who retains her husband's love after the first year of marriage. Put aside the fools and the worthless; think only of women with whom you might be compared—brave, sensible, pure-hearted; they can win love, but don't know how to keep it."

"Why not put it the other way about, and say that men can love to begin with, but so soon grow careless?"

"Because I am myself an instance to the contrary."

Nancy smiled, but was not satisfied.

"The only married people," Tarrant pursued, "who can live together with impunity, are those who are rich enough, and sensible enough, to have two distinct establishments under the same roof. The ordinary eight or ten-roomed house, inhabited by decent middle-class folk, is a gruesome sight. What a huddlement of male and female! They are factories of quarrel and hate—those respectable, brass-curtain-rodded sties—they are full of things that won't bear mentioning. If our income never rises above that, we shall live to the end of our days as we do now."

Nancy looked appalled.

"But how can you hope to make thousands a year?"

"I have no such hope; hundreds would be sufficient. I don't aim at a house in London; everything there is intolerable, except the fine old houses which have a history, and which I could never afford. For my home, I want to find some rambling

old place among hills and woods, — some house where generations have lived and died,—where my boy, as he grows up, may learn to love the old and beautiful things about him. I myself never had a home; most London children don't know what is meant by home; their houses are only more or less comfortable lodgings, perpetual change within and without."

"Your thoughts are wonderfully like my father's, sometimes," said Nancy.

"From what you have told me of him, I think we should have agreed in a good many things."

"And how unfortunate we were! If he had recovered from that illness,—if he had lived only a few months,—everything would have been made easy."

"For me altogether too easy," Tarrant observed.

"It has been a good thing for you to have to work," Nancy assented. "I understand the change for the better in you. But"—she smiled—"you have more self-will than you used to have."

"That's just where I have gained.—But don't think that I find it easy or pleasant to resist your

wish. I couldn't do it if I were not so sure that I am acting for your advantage as well as my own. A man who finds himself married to a fool, is a fool himself if he doesn't take his own course regardless of his wife. But I am in a very different position; I love you more and more, Nancy, because I am learning more and more to respect you; I think of your happiness most assuredly as much as I think of my own. But even if my own good weighed as nothing against yours, I should be wise to resist you just as I do now. Hugger-mugger marriage is a defilement and a curse. We know it from the experience of the world at large,—which is perhaps more brutalised by marriage than by anything else.—No need to test the thing once more, to our own disaster."

"What I think is, that, though you pay me compliments, you really have a very poor opinion of me. You think I should burden and worry you in endless silly ways. I am not such a simpleton. In however small a house, there could be your rooms and mine. Do you suppose I should interfere with your freedom in coming and going?"

"Whether you meant to or not, you would—so long as we are struggling with poverty. However self-willed I am, I am not selfish; and to see you living a monotonous, imprisoned life would be a serious hindrance to me in my own living and working. Of course the fact is so at present, and I often enough think in a troubled way about you; but you are out of my sight, and that enables me to keep you out of mind. If I am away from home till one or two in the morning, there is no lonely wife fretting and wondering about me. For work such as mine, I must live as though I were not married at all."

"But suppose we got out of our poverty," urged Nancy, "you would be living the same life, I suppose; and how would it be any better for you or me that we had a large house instead of a small one?"

"Your position will be totally changed. When money comes, friends come. You are not hiding away from Society because you are unfit for it, only because you can't live as your social equals do. When you have friends of your own, social

engagements, interests on every hand, I shall be able to go my own way without a pang of conscience. When we come together, it will be to talk of your affairs as well as of mine. Living as you do now, you have nothing on earth but the baby to think about — a miserable state of things for a woman with a mind. I know it is miserable, and I'm struggling tooth and nail to help you out of it."

Nancy sighed.

"Then there are years of it still before me."

"Heaven forbid! Some years, no doubt, before we shall have a home; but not before I can bring you in contact with the kind of people you ought to know. You shall have a decent house—socially possible — somewhere out west; and I, of course, shall still go on in lodgings."

He waited for Nancy's reply, but she kept silence.

"You are still dissatisfied?"

She looked up, and commanded her features to the expression which makes whatever woman lovely —that of rational acquiescence. On the faces of most women such look is never seen.

"No, I am content. You are working hard, and I won't make it harder for you."

"Speak always like that!" Tarrant's face was radiant. "That's the kind of thing that binds man to woman, body and soul. With the memory of that look and speech, would it be possible for me to slight you in my life apart? It makes you my friend; and the word friend is better to my ear than wife. A man's wife is more often than not his enemy. Harvey Munden was telling me of a poor devil of an author who daren't be out after ten at night because of the fool-fury waiting for him at home."

Nancy laughed.

"I suppose she can't trust him."

"And suppose she can't? What is the value of nominal fidelity, secured by mutual degradation such as that? A rational woman would infinitely rather have a husband who was often unfaithful to her than keep him faithful by such means. Husband and wife should interfere with each other not a jot more than two friends of the same sex living together. If a man, under such circumstances,

worried his friend's life out by petty prying, he would get his head punched. A wife has no more justification in worrying her husband with jealousies."

"How if it were the wife that excited suspicion?" asked Nancy.

"Infidelity in a woman is much worse than in a man. If a man really suspects his wife, he must leave her, that's all; then let her justify herself if she can."

Nancy cared little to discuss this point. In argument with any one else, she would doubtless have maintained the equality of man and woman before the moral law; but that would only have been in order to prove herself modern-spirited. Tarrant's dictum did not revolt her.

"Friends are equals," she said, after a little thought. "But you don't think me your equal, and you won't be satisfied with me unless I follow your guidance."

Tarrant laughed kindly.

"True, I am your superior in force of mind and force of body. Don't you like to hear that? Doesn't

it do you good—when you think of the maudlin humbug generally talked by men to women? We can't afford to disguise that truth. All the same, we are friends, because each has the other's interest at heart, and each would be ashamed to doubt the other's loyalty."

The latter part of the evening they spent with Mary, in whom Tarrant always found something new to admire. He regarded her as the most wonderful phenomenon in nature—an uneducated woman who was neither vulgar nor foolish.

Baby slept in a cot beside Nancy's bed. For fear of waking him, the wedded lovers entered their room very softly, with a shaded candle. Tarrant looked at the curly little head, the little clenched hand, and gave a silent laugh of pleasure.

On the breakfast-table next morning lay a letter from Horace. As soon as she had opened it, Nancy uttered an exclamation which prepared her companion for ill news.

"Just what I expected—though I tried not to think so. 'I write a line only to tell you that my marriage is broken off. You will know the explana-

tion before long. Don't trouble yourself about it. I should never have been happy with Winifred, nor she with me. We may not see each other for some time, but I will write again soon.' He doesn't say whether he or she broke it off. I hope it was Winifred."

"I'm afraid not," said Tarrant, "from the tone of that letter."

"I'm afraid not, too. It means something wretched. He writes from his London lodgings. Lionel, let me go back with you, and see him."

"By all means."

Her gravest fear Nancy would not communicate. And it hit the truth.

## IV

THEY parted at Baker Street, Tarrant for his lodgings and the work that awaited him there, Nancy to go westward by another train.

When she reached the house from which her brother had dated his letter, it was half-past ten. At the door stood a cab, and a servant was helping the driver to hoist a big trunk on to the top.

"Is Mr. Lord still here?" Nancy asked of the girl.

"He's just this minute a-goin', miss. This is his luggage."

She sent her name, and was quickly led up to the first floor. There stood Horace, ready for departure.

"Why have you come?" he asked, with annoyance.

"What else could I do on hearing such news?"

"I told you I should write again, and I said plainly that it was better we shouldn't see each

other for some time.—Why will people pester me out of my life?—I'm not a child to be hunted like this!"

On the instant, he had fallen into a state of excitement which alarmed his sister. There were drops of sweat on his forehead, and tears in his eyes; the blood had rushed to his cheeks, and he trembled violently.

"I am so troubled about you," said Nancy, with anxious tenderness. "I have been looking forward with such hope to your marriage,—and now——"

"I can't tell you anything about it just now. It was all Mrs. Damerel's doing; the engagement, I mean. It's a good thing I drew back in time.—But I have a train to catch; I really mustn't stay talking."

"Are you going far, Horace?"

"To Bournemouth again,—for the present. I've given up these rooms, and I'm taking all my things away. In a month or two I may go abroad; but I'll let you know."

Already he was out of the room; his sister had no choice but to follow him downstairs. He looked

so ill, and behaved with such lack of self-restraint, that Nancy kept her eyes upon him in an awe-stricken gaze, as though watching some one on the headlong way to destruction. Pouring rain obliged her to put up her umbrella as she stepped down on to the pavement. Horace, having shouted a direction to the driver, entered the cab.

"You haven't even shaken hands with me, Horace," Nancy exclaimed, standing at the window.

"Good-bye, dear; good-bye! You shouldn't have come in weather such as this. Get home as fast as you can. Good-bye!—Tell the fellow to drive sharp."

And the cab clattered away, sending spurts of mud on to Nancy's waterproof.

She walked on for a few paces without reflection, until the vehicle disappeared round a corner. Coming to herself, she made for the railway again, which was at only a few minutes' distance, and there she sat down by the fire in the waiting-room. Her health for the last year had been sound as in the days of girlhood; it was rarely that she caught cold, and weather would have been indifferent to

her but for the discomfort which hindered her free movement.

Vexed at so futile a journey, she resolved not to return home without making another effort to learn something about Horace. The only person to whom she could apply was the one who would certainly be possessed of information,—Mrs. Damerel. At the time of Horace's engagement, Nancy had heard from Mrs. Damerel, and replied to the letter; she remembered her aunt's address, and as the distance was not great, the temptation to go there now proved irresistible. Her husband would dislike to hear of such a step, but he had never forbidden communication with Mrs. Damerel.

By help of train and omnibus she reached her new destination in half-an-hour, and felt a relief on learning that Mrs. Damerel was at home. But it surprised her to be conducted into a room where lamps were burning, and blinds drawn close; she passed suddenly from cheerless day to cosy evening. Mrs. Damerel, negligently attired, received her with a show of warm welcome, but appeared nervous and out of spirits.

"I am not very well," she admitted, "and that's why I have shut out the dreadful weather. Isn't it the most sensible way of getting through the worst of a London winter? To pretend that there is daylight is quite ridiculous, so one may as well have the comforts of night."

"I have come to speak about Horace," said Nancy, at once. In any case, she would have felt embarrassment, and it was increased by the look with which Mrs. Damerel kept regarding her,—a look of confusion, of shrinking, of intense and painful scrutiny.

"You know what has happened?"

"I had a letter from him this morning, to say that his marriage was broken off—nothing else. So I came over from Harrow to see him. But he had hardly a minute to speak to me. He was just starting for Bournemouth."

"And what did he tell you?" asked Mrs. Damerel, who remained standing,—or rather had risen, after a pretence of seating herself.

"Nothing at all. He was very strange in his manner. He said he would write."

"You know that he is seriously ill?"

"I am afraid he must be."

"He has grown much worse during the last fortnight. Don't you suspect any reason for his throwing off poor Winifred?"

"I wondered whether he had met that girl again. But it seemed very unlikely."

"He has. She was at Bournemouth for her health. She, too, is ill; consumptive, like poor Horace,—of course a result of the life she has been leading. And he is going to marry her."

Nancy's heart sank. She could say nothing. She remembered Horace's face, and saw in him the victim of ruthless destiny.

"I have done my utmost. He didn't speak of me?"

"Only to say that his engagement with Winifred was brought about by you."

"And wasn't I justified? If the poor boy must die, he would at least have died with friends about him, and in peace. I always feared just what has happened. It's only a few months ago that he forgave me for being, as he thought, the cause of

that girl's ruin; and since then I have hardly dared to lose sight of him. I went down to Bournemouth unexpectedly, and was with him when that creature came to the door in a carriage. You haven't seen her. She looks what she is, the vilest of the vile. As if any one can be held responsible for that! She was born to be what she is. And if I had the power, I would crush out her hateful life to save poor Horace!"

Nancy, though at one with the speaker in her hatred of Fanny French, found it as difficult as ever to feel sympathetically towards Mrs. Damerel. She could not credit this worldly woman with genuine affection for Horace; the vehemence of her speech surprised and troubled her, she knew not how.

"He said nothing more about me?" added Mrs. Damerel, after a silence.

"Nothing at all."

It seemed to Nancy that she heard a sigh of relief. The other's face was turned away. Then Mrs. Damerel took a seat by the fire.

"They will be married to-morrow, I dare say, at Bournemouth—no use trying to prevent it. I don't

know whether you will believe me, but it is a blow that will darken the rest of my life."

Her voice sounded slightly hoarse, and she lay back in the chair, with drooping head.

"You have nothing to reproach yourself with," said Nancy, yielding to a vague and troublous pity. "And you have done as much as any one could on his behalf."

"I shall never see him again—that's the hardest thought. She will poison him against me. He told me I had lied to him about a letter that girl wrote from Brussels; she has made him think her a spotless innocent, and he hates me for the truth I told about her."

"However short his life," said Nancy, "he is only too likely to find out what she really is."

"I am not sure of that. She knows he is doomed, and it's her interest to play a part. He will die thinking the worst of me.—Nancy, if he writes to you, and says anything against me, you will remember what it means?"

"My opinion of people is not affected by hearsay," Nancy replied.

It was a remark of dubious significance, and Mrs. Damerel's averted eyes seemed to show that she derived little satisfaction from it. As the silence was unbroken, Nancy rose.

"I hope you will soon get rid of your cold."

"Thank you, my dear. I haven't asked how the little boy is. Well, I hope?"

"Very well, I am glad to say."

"And your husband—he is prospering?"

"I shouldn't like to say he is prospering; it seems to mean so much; but I think he is doing good work, and we are satisfied with the results."

"My dear, you are an admirable wife."

Nancy coloured; for the first time, a remark of Mrs. Damerel's had given her pleasure. She moved forward with hand offered for leave-taking. They had never kissed each other, but, as if overcoming diffidence, Mrs. Damerel advanced her lips; then, as suddenly, she drew back.

"I had forgotten. I may give you my sore throat."

Nancy kissed her cheek.

That night Mrs. Damerel was feverish, and the

next day she kept her bed. The servant who waited upon her had to endure a good many sharp reproofs; trouble did not sweeten this lady's temper, yet she never lost sight of self-respect, and even proved herself capable of acknowledging that she was in the wrong. Mrs. Damerel possessed the elements of civilisation.

This illness tried her patience in no slight degree. Something she had wished to do, something of high moment, was vexatiously postponed. A whole week went by before she could safely leave the house, and even then her mirror counselled a new delay. But on the third day of the new year she made a careful toilette, and sent for a cab,—the brougham she had been wont to hire being now beyond her means.

She drove to Farringdon Street, and climbed to the office of Mr. Luckworth Crewe. Her knowledge of Crewe's habits enabled her to choose the fitting hour for this call; he had lunched, and was smoking a cigar.

"How delightful to see you here!" he exclaimed. "But why did you trouble to come? If you had

written, or telegraphed, I would have saved you the journey. I haven't even a chair that's fit for you to sit down on."

"What nonsense! It's a most comfortable little room. Haven't you improved it since I called?"

"I shall have to look out for a bigger place. I'm outgrowing this."

"Are you really? That's excellent news. Ah, but what sad things have been happening!"

"It's a bad business," Crewe answered, shaking his head.

"I thought I should have heard from you about it."

The reason of his silence she perfectly understood. Since Horace's engagement, there had been a marked change in her demeanour towards the man of business; she had answered his one or two letters with such cold formality, and, on the one occasion of his venturing to call, had received him with so marked a reserve, that Crewe, as he expressed it to himself, "got his back up." His ideas of chivalrous devotion were anything but complex; he could not bend before a divinity who snubbed him; if the once gracious lady chose to avert her

countenance, he would let her know that it didn't matter much to him after all. Moreover, Mrs. Damerel's behaviour was too suggestive; he could hardly be wrong in explaining it by the fact that her nephew, about to be enriched by marriage, might henceforth be depended upon for all the assistance she needed. This, in the Americanism which came naturally to Crewe's lips, was "playing it rather low down," and he resented it.

The sudden ruin of Horace Lord's prospects (he had learnt the course of events from Horace himself) amused and gratified him. How would the high and mighty Mrs. Damerel relish this catastrophe? Would she have the "cheek" to return to her old graciousness? If so, he had the game in his hands; she should see that he was not to be made a fool of a second time.

Yet the mere announcement of her name sufficed to shatter his resolve. Her smile, her soft accents, her polished manners, laid the old spell upon him. He sought to excuse himself for having forsaken her in her trial.

"It really floored me. I didn't know what to

say or do. I was afraid you might think I was meddling with what didn't concern me."

"Oh, how could I have thought that? It has made me ill; I have suffered more than I can tell you."

"You don't look quite the thing," said Crewe, searching her face.

"Have you heard all?"

"I think so. He is married, and that's the end of it, I suppose."

Mrs. Damerel winced at this blunt announcement.

"When was it?" she asked, in an undertone. "I only knew he had made up his mind."

Crewe mentioned the date; the day after Nancy's call upon her.

"And are they at Bournemouth?"

"Yes. Will be for a month or so, he says."

"Well, we won't talk of it. As you say, that's the end. Nothing worse could have happened. Has he been speaking of me again like he used to?"

"I haven't heard him mention your name."

She heaved a sigh, and began to look round the office.

"Let us try to forget, and talk of pleasanter things. It seems such a long time since you told me anything about your business. You remember how we used to gossip. I suppose I have been so absorbed in that poor boy's affairs; it made me selfish—I was so overjoyed, I really could think of nothing else. And now—! But I must and will drive it out of my mind. I have been moping at home, day after day, in wretched solitude. I wanted to write to you, but I hadn't the heart—scarcely the strength. I kept hoping you might call—if only to ask how I was. Of course everything had to be explained to inquisitive people—how I hate them all! It's the nature of the world to mock at misfortunes such as this. It would really have done me good to speak for a few minutes with such a friend as you—a real friend. I am going to live a quiet, retired life. I am sick of the world, its falsity, and its malice, and its bitter, bitter disappointments."

Crewe's native wit and rich store of experience availed him nothing when Mrs. Damerel discoursed thus. The silvery accents flattered his ear,

and crept into the soft places of his nature. He felt as when a clever actress in a pathetic part wrought upon him in the after-dinner mood.

"You must bear up against it, Mrs. Damerel. And I don't think a retired life would suit you at all. You are made for Society."

"Don't seek for compliments. I am speaking quite sincerely. Ah, those were happy days that I spent at Whitsand! Tell me what you have been doing. Is there any hope of the pier yet?"

"Why, it's as good as built!" cried the other. "Didn't you see the advertisements, when we floated the company a month ago? I suppose you don't read that kind of thing. We shall begin at the works in early spring.—Look here!"

He unrolled a large design, a coloured picture of Whitsand pier as it already existed in his imagination. Not content with having the mere structure exhibited, Crewe had persuaded the draughtsman to add embellishments of a kind which, in days to come, would be his own peculiar care; from end to end, the pier glowed with the placards of advertisers. Below, on the sands,

appeared bathing-machines, and these also were covered with manifold advertisements. Nay, the very pleasure-boats on the sunny waves declared the glory of somebody's soap, of somebody's purgatives.

"I'll make that place one of the biggest advertising stations in England—see if I don't! You remember the caves? I'm going to have them lighted with electricity, and painted all round with advertisements of the most artistic kind."

"What a brilliant idea!"

"There's something else you might like to hear of. It struck me I would write a Guide to Advertising, and here it is." He handed a copy of the book. "It advertises *me*, and brings a little grist to the mill on its own account. Three weeks since I got it out, and we've sold three thousand of it. Costs nothing to print; the advertisements more than pay for that. Price, one shilling."

"But how you do work, Mr. Crewe! It's marvellous. And yet you look so well,—you have really a seaside colour!"

"I never ailed much since I can remember. The harder I work, the better I feel."

"I, too, have always been rather proud of my constitution." Her eyes dropped. "But then I have led a life of idleness. Couldn't you make me useful in some way? Set me to work! I am convinced I should be so much happier. Let me help you, Mr. Crewe. I write a pretty fair hand, don't I?"

Crewe smiled at her, made a sound as if clearing his throat, grasped his knee, and was on the very point of momentous utterance, when the door opened. Turning his head impatiently, he saw, not the clerk whose duty it was to announce people, but a lady, much younger than Mrs. Damerel, and more fashionably dressed, who for some reason had preferred to announce herself.

"Why do you come in like that?" Crewe demanded, staring at her. "I'm engaged."

"Are you indeed?"

"You ought to send in your name."

"They said you had a lady here, so I told them another would make no difference.—How do you do, Mrs. Damerel? It's so long since I had the pleasure of seeing you."

Beatrice French stepped forward, smiling ominously, and eyeing first Crewe then his companion with curiosity of the frankest impertinence. Mrs. Damerel stood up.

"We will speak of our business at another time, Mr. Crewe."

Crewe, red with anger, turned upon Beatrice.

"I tell you I am engaged——"

"To Mrs. Damerel?" asked the intruder airily.

"You might suppose,"—he addressed the elder lady,—"that this woman has some sort of hold upon me——"

"I'm sure I hope not," said Mrs. Damerel, "for your own sake."

"Nothing of the kind. She has pestered me a good deal, and it began in this way."

Beatrice gave him so fierce a look, that his tongue faltered.

"Before you tell that little story," she interposed, "you had better know what I've come about. It's a queer thing that Mrs. Damerel should be here; happens more conveniently than things generally do. I had something to tell you about her. You

may know it, but most likely you don't.—You remember," she faced the other listener, "when I came to see you a long time ago, I said it might be worth while to find out who you really were. I haven't given much thought to you since then, but I've got hold of what I wanted, as I knew I should."

Crewe did not disguise his eagerness to hear the rest. Mrs. Damerel stood like a statue of British respectability, deaf and blind to everything that conflicts with good-breeding; stony-faced, she had set her lips in the smile appropriate to one who is braving torture.

"Do you know who she is—or not?" Beatrice asked of Crewe.

He shuffled, and made no reply.

"Fanny has just told me in a letter; she got it from her husband. Our friend here is the mother of Horace Lord and of Nancy. She ran away from her first husband, and was divorced. Whether she really married afterwards, I don't quite know; most likely not. At all events, she has run through her money, and wants her son to set her up again."

For a few seconds Mrs. Damerel bore the astonished gaze of her admirer, then, her expression scarcely changing, she walked steadily to the door and vanished. The silence was prolonged till broken by Beatrice's laugh.

"Has she been bamboozling you, old man? I didn't know what was going on. You had bad luck with the daughter; shouldn't wonder if the mother would suit you better, all said and done."

Crewe seated himself and gave vent to his feelings in a phrase of pure soliloquy: "Well, I'm damned!"

"I cut in just at the right time, did I?—No malice. I've had my hit back at her, and that's enough."

As the man of business remained absorbed in his thoughts, Beatrice took a chair. Presently he looked up at her, and said savagely:

"What the devil do you want?"

"Nothing."

"Then take it and go."

But Beatrice smiled, and kept her seat.

## V

NANCY stood before her husband with a substantial packet in brown paper. It was after breakfast, at the moment of their parting.

"Here is something I want you to take, and look at, and speak about the next time you come."

"Ho, ho! I don't like the look of it." He felt the packet. "Several quires of paper here."

"Be off, or you'll miss the train."

"Poor little girl! *Et tu!*"

He kissed her affectionately, and went his way. In the ordinary course of things Nancy would not have seen him again for ten days or a fortnight. She expected a letter very soon, but on the fourth evening Tarrant's fingers tapped at the window-pane. In his hand was the brown paper parcel, done up as when he received it.

Nancy searched his face, her own perturbed and pallid.

"How long have you been working at this?"

"Nearly a year. But not every day, of course. Sometimes for a week or more I could get no time. You think it bad?"

"No,"—puff—"not in any sense"—puff—"bad. In one sense, it's good. But"—puff—"that's a private sense; a domestic sense."

"The question is, dear, can it be sold to a publisher."

"The question is nothing of the kind. You mustn't even try to sell it to a publisher."

"Why not? You mean you would be ashamed if it came out. But I shouldn't put my own name to it. I have written it only in the hope of making money, and so helping you. I'll put any name to it you like."

Tarrant smoked for a minute or two, until his companion gave a sign of impatience. He wore a very good-humoured look.

"It's more than likely you might get the thing accepted——"

"Oh, then why not?" she interrupted eagerly, with bright eyes.

"Because it isn't literature, but a little bit of Nancy's mind and heart, not to be profaned by vulgar handling. To sell it for hard cash would be horrible. Leave that to the poor creatures who have no choice. You are not obliged to go into the market."

"But, Lionel, if it is a bit of my mind and heart, it must be a good book. You have often praised books to me just on that account—because they were genuine."

"The books I praised were literature. Their authors came into the world to write. It isn't enough to be genuine; there must be workmanship. Here and there you have a page of very decent English, and you are nowhere on the level of the ordinary female novelist. Indeed—don't take it ill—I was surprised at what you had turned out. But——"

He finished the sentence in smoke wreaths.

"Then I'll try again. I'll do better."

"Never *much* better. It will never be literature."

"What does that matter? I never thought

myself a Charlotte Brontë or a George Eliot. But so many women make money out of novels, and as I had spare time I didn't see why I shouldn't use it profitably. We want money, and if it isn't actually disgraceful—and if I don't use my own name——"

"We don't want money so badly as all that. I am writing, because I must do something to live by, and I know of nothing else open to me except pen-work. Whatever trash I turned out, I should be justified; as a man, it's my duty to join in the rough-and-tumble for more or less dirty ha'pence. You, as a woman, have no such duty; nay, it's your positive duty to keep out of the beastly scrimmage."

"It seemed to me that I was *doing* something. Why should a woman be shut out from the life of the world?"

"It seems to me that your part in the life of the world is very considerable. You have given the world a new inhabitant, and you are shaping him into a man."

Nancy laughed, and reflected, and returned to her discontent.

"Oh, every woman can do that."

"Not one woman in a thousand can bear a sound-bodied child; and not one in fifty thousand can bring up rightly the child she has borne. Leisure you must have; but for Heaven's sake don't waste it. Read, enjoy, sit down to the feast prepared for you."

"I wanted to *do* something," she persisted, refusing to catch his eye. "I have read enough."

"Read enough? Ha, then there's no more to be said."

His portentous solemnity overcame her. Laughter lighted her face, and Tarrant, laying down his pipe. shouted extravagant mirth.

"Am I to burn it then?"

"You are not. You are to seal it with seven seals, to write upon it *péché de jeunesse*, and to lay it away at the back of a very private drawer. And when you are old, you shall some day bring it out, and we'll put our shaky heads together over it, and drop a tear from our dim old eyes. —By-the-bye, Nancy, will you go with me to a music-hall to-morrow night?"

"A music-hall?"

"Yes. It would do us both good, I think. I feel fagged, and you want a change.—Here's the end of March; please Heaven, another month shall see us rambling in the lanes somewhere; meantime, we'll go to a music-hall. Each season has its glory; if we can't hear the lark, let us listen to the bellow of a lion-comique.—Do you appreciate this invitation? It means that I enjoy your company, which is more than one man in ten thousand can say of his wife. The ordinary man, when he wants to dissipate, asks—well, not his wife. And I, in plain sober truth, would rather have Nancy with me than any one else."

"You say that to comfort me after my vexation."

"I say it because I think it.—The day after to-morrow I want you to come over in the morning to see some pictures in Bond Street. And the next day we'll go to the theatre."

"You can't afford it."

"Mind your own business. I remembered this morning that I was young, and that I shall not be so always. Doesn't that ever come upon you?"

The manuscript, fruit of such persevering toil, was hidden away, and its author spoke of it no more. But she suffered a grave disappointment. Once or twice a temptation flashed across her mind; if she secretly found a publisher, and if her novel achieved moderate success (she might alter the title), would not Tarrant forgive her for acting against his advice? It was nothing more than advice; often enough he had told her that he claimed no coercive right; that their union, if it were to endure, must admit a genuine independence on both sides. But herein, as on so many other points, she subdued her natural impulse, and conformed to her husband's idea of wifehood. It made her smile to think how little she preserved of that same "genuine independence;" but the smile had no bitterness.

Meanwhile, nothing was heard of Horace. The winter passed, and June had come before Nancy again saw her brother's handwriting. It was on an ordinary envelope, posted, as she saw by the office-stamp, at Brighton; the greater her surprise to read a few lines which coldly informed her that

Horace's wife no longer lived. "She took cold one evening a fortnight ago, and died after three days' illness."

Nancy tried to feel glad, but she had little hope of any benefit to her brother from this close of a sordid tragedy. She answered his letter, and begged that, as soon as he felt able to do so, he would come and see her. A month's silence on Horace's part had led her to conclude that he would not come, when, without warning, he presented himself at her door. It was morning, and he stayed till nightfall, but talked very little. Sitting in the same place hour after hour, he seemed overcome with a complete exhaustion, which made speech too great an effort and kept his thoughts straying idly. Fanny's name did not pass his lips; when Nancy ventured an inquiry concerning her, he made an impatient gesture, and spoke of something else.

His only purpose in coming, it appeared, was to ask for information about the Bahamas.

"I can't get rid of my cough, and I'm afraid it may turn to something dangerous. You said, I

remember, that people with weak chests wintered in the Bahamas."

"Lionel can tell you all about it. He'll be here to-morrow. Come and have a talk with him."

"No." He moved pettishly. "Tell me as much as you know yourself. I don't feel well enough to meet people."

Looking at him with profound compassion, Nancy thought it very doubtful whether he would see another winter. But she told him all she could remember about Nassau, and encouraged him to look forward with pleasure and hopefulness to a voyage thither.

"How are you going to live till then?"

"What do you mean?" he answered, with a startled and irritated look. "I'm not so bad as all that."

"I meant—how are you going to arrange your life?" Nancy hastened to explain.

"Oh, I have comfortable lodgings."

"But you oughtn't to be quite alone.—I mean it must be so cheerless."

She made a proposal that he should have a room in this little house, and use it as a home whenever

he chose; but Horace so fretted under the suggestion, that it had to be abandoned. His behaviour was that of an old man, enfeebled in mind and body. Once or twice his manner of speaking painfully reminded Nancy of her father during the last days of his life.

With a peevish sort of interest he watched his little nephew toddling about the room, but did not address a word to the child.

A cab was sent for to convey him to the railway station. Nancy had known few such melancholy days as this.

On the morning when, by agreement, she was to go into town to see her brother, there arrived a note from him. He had been advised to try a health-resort in Switzerland, and was already on the way. Sorry he could not let Nancy know before; would visit her on his return. Thus, in the style of telegraphy, as though he wrote in hot haste.

From Switzerland came two letters, much more satisfactory in tone and contents. The first, written in July, announced a distinct improvement of health. No details being supplied, Nancy could

only presume that her brother was living alone at the hotel from which he dated. The second communication, a month later, began thus: "I think I forgot to tell you that I came here with Mrs. Damerel. She will stay till the end of the summer, and then, perhaps, go with me to the Bahamas, if that seems necessary. But I am getting wonderfully well and strong. Mrs. Damerel is kinder to me than any one in the world ever was. I shall tell you more about her some day." The writer went on to describe a project he had of taking a small farm in Devonshire, and living upon it as a country gentleman.

Tarrant warned his wife not to build hopes upon this surprising report, and a few weeks brought news that justified him. Horace wrote that he had suffered a very bad attack, and was only now sufficiently recovered to hold a pen. "I don't know what we shall do, but I am in good hands. No one was ever better nursed, night and day.—More before long."

Indeed, it was not long. A day or two after Nancy's return from a seaside holiday, Mary brought in a telegram. It came from Mrs. Damerel. "Your

brother died at ten o'clock last night, suddenly, and without pain. I am posting a letter he had written for you."

When the promised letter arrived, it was found to bear a date two months ago. An unwonted tenderness marked the opening words.

"MY DEAREST SISTER,—What I am going to write is not to be sent to you at once. Sometimes I feel afraid that I can't live very long, so I have been making a will, and I want you to know why I have left you only half of what I have to leave. The other half will go to some one who has an equal claim on me, though you don't know it. She has asked me to tell you. If I get thoroughly well again, there will be no need of this letter, and I shall tell you in private something that will astonish you very much. But if I were to die, it will be best for you to learn in this way that Mrs. Damerel is much more to us than our mother's sister; she is our own mother. She told me at the time when I was behaving like an idiot at Bournemouth. It ought

to have been enough to stop me. She confessed that she had done wrong when you and I were little children; that was how she came to marry again whilst father was still alive. Though it seemed impossible, I have come to love her for her great kindness to me. I know that I could trust you, dearest Nancy, to let her share whatever you have; but it will be better if I provide for her in my will. She has been living on a small capital, and now has little left. What I can give her is little enough, but it will save her from the worst extremities. And I beg you, dear sister, to forgive her fault, if only for my sake, because she has been so loving to a silly and useless fellow.

"I may as well let you know about my wife's death. She was consumptive, but seemed to get much better at Bournemouth; then she wanted to go to Brighton. We lived there at a boarding-house, and she behaved badly, very badly. She made acquaintances I didn't like, and went about with them in spite of my objections. Like an obstinate fool, I had refused to believe what people told me about her, and now I found it all out

for myself. Of course she only married me because I had money. One evening she made up her mind to go with some of her friends in a boat, by moonlight. We quarrelled about it, but she went all the same. The result was that she got inflammation of the lungs, and died. I don't pretend to be sorry for her, and I am thankful to have been released from misery so much sooner than I deserved.

"And now let me tell you how my affairs stand——"

At the first reading, Nancy gave but slight attention to this concluding paragraph. Even the thought of her brother's death was put aside by the emotions with which she learnt that her mother still lived. After brooding over the intelligence for half a day, she resolved to question Mary, who perhaps, during so long a residence in Grove Lane, had learnt something of the trouble that darkened her master's life. The conversation led to a disclosure by Mary of all that had been confided to her by Mr. Lord; the time had come for a fulfilment of her promise to the dead man.

## VI

HORACE'S letter Nancy sent by post to her husband, requesting him to let her know his thoughts about it in writing before they again met. Of her own feeling she gave no sign. "I want you to speak of it just as if it concerned a stranger, plainly and simply. All I need say is, that I never even suspected the truth."

Tarrant did not keep her long in suspense, and his answer complied in reasonable measure with the desire she had expressed.

"The disclosure has, of course, pained you. Equally, of course, you wish it were not necessary to let me know of it; you are in doubt as to how it will affect me; you perhaps fear that I shall—never mind about phrasing. First, then, a word on that point. Be assured once for all that nothing external to yourself can ever touch the feeling which I now have for you. 'One word is too often

profaned'; I will say simply that I hold you in higher regard that any other human being.

"Try not to grieve, my dearest. It is an old story, in both senses. You wish to know how I view the matter. Well, if a wife cannot love her husband, it is better she should not pretend to do so; if she love some one else, her marriage is at an end, and she must go. Simple enough—provided there be no children. Whether it is ever permissible for a mother to desert her children, I don't know. I will only say that, in you yourself, I can find nothing more admirable than the perfect love which you devote to your child. Forsake it, you could not.

"In short, act as feeling dictates. Your mother lives; that fact cannot be ignored. In your attitude towards her, do not consult me at all; whatever your heart approves, I shall find good and right. Only, don't imagine that your feeling of to-day is final—I would say, make no resolve; they are worth little, in any concern of life.

"Write to me again, and say when you wish to see me."

After reading this, Nancy moved about with the radiance of a great joy on her countenance. She made no haste to reply; she let a day elapse; then, in the silence of a late hour, took pen and paper.

"When do I wish to see you? Always; in every moment of my day. And yet I have so far conquered 'the unreasonable female'—do you remember saying that?—that I would rather never see you again than bring you to my side except when it was your pleasure to be with me. Come as soon as you can—as soon as you will.

"My mother—how shall I word it? She is nothing to me. I don't feel that Nature bids me love her. I could pardon her for leaving my father; like you, I see nothing terrible in that; but, like you, I *know* that she did wrong in abandoning her little children, and her kindness to Horace at the end cannot atone for it. I don't think she has any love for *me*. We shall not see each other; at all events, that is how I feel about it at present. But I am very glad that Horace made provision for her—that of course was right;

if he had not done it, it would have been my duty.

"I had better tell you that Mary has known my mother's story for a long time—but not that she still lived. My father told her just before his death, and exacted her promise that, if it seemed well, she would repeat everything to me. You shall know more about it, though it is bad all through. My dear father had reason bitterly to regret his marriage long before she openly broke it.

"But come and see me, and tell me what is to be done now that we are free to look round. There is no shame in taking what poor Horace has given us. You see that there will be at least three thousand pounds for our share, apart from the income we shall have from the business."

He was sure to come on the evening of the morrow. Nancy went out before breakfast to post her letter; light-hearted in the assurance that her husband's days of struggle were over, that her child's future no longer depended upon the bare

hope that its father would live and thrive by a profession so precarious as that of literature, she gave little thought to the details of the new phase of life before her. Whatever Tarrant proposed would be good in her sight. Probably he would wish to live in the country; he might discover the picturesque old house of which he had so often spoken. In any case, they would now live together. He had submitted her to a probation, and his last letter declared that he was satisfied with the result.

Midway in the morning, whilst she was playing with her little boy,—rain kept them in the house, —a knock at the front door announced some unfamiliar visit. Mary came to the parlour, with a face of surprise.

"Who is it?"

"Miss Morgan."

"What? Jessica?"

Mary handed an envelope, addressed to "Mrs. Tarrant." It contained a sheet of paper, on which was written in pencil: "I beg you to see me, if only for a minute."

"Yes, I will see her," said Nancy, when she had frowned in brief reflection.

Mary led away the little boy, and, a moment after, introduced Jessica Morgan. At the appearance of her former friend, Nancy with difficulty checked an exclamation; Miss Morgan wore the garb of the Salvation Army. Harmonious therewith were the features shadowed by the hideous bonnet: a face hardly to be recognised, bloodless, all but fleshless, the eyes set in a stare of weak-minded fanaticism. She came hurriedly forward, and spoke in a quick whisper.

"I was afraid you would refuse to see me."

"Why have you come?"

"I was impelled—I had a duty to perform."

Coldly, Nancy invited her to sit down, but the visitor shook her head.

"I mustn't take a seat in your house. I am unwelcome; we can't pretend to be on terms of friendliness. I have come, first of all,"—her eyes wandered as she spoke, inspecting the room,—"to humble myself before you—to confess that I was a dishonourable friend,—to make known with my lips that I betrayed your secret——"

Nancy interrupted the low, hurrying, panting voice, which distressed her ear as much as the facial expression that accompanied it did her eyes.

"There's no need to tell me. I knew it at the time, and you did me no harm. Indeed, it was a kindness."

She drew away, but Jessica moved after her.

"I supposed you knew. But it is laid upon me to make a confession before you. I have to ask your pardon, most humbly and truly."

"Do you mean that some one has told you to do this?"

"Oh no!" A gleam of infinite conceit shot over the humility of Jessica's countenance. "I am answerable only to my own soul. In the pursuit of an ideal which I fear you cannot understand, I subdue my pride, and confess how basely I behaved to you. Will you grant me your forgiveness?"

She clasped her gloveless hands before her breast, and the fingers writhed together.

"If it is any satisfaction to you," replied Nancy,

overcome with wonder and pity, "I will say those words. But don't think that I take upon myself——"

"Only say them. I ask your pardon—say you grant it."

Nancy uttered the formula, and with bowed head Jessica stood for a minute in silence; her lips moved.

"And now," she said at length, "I must fulfil the second part of the duty which has brought me here." Her attitude changed to one of authority, and her eyes fixed themselves on Nancy's, regarding her with the mild but severe rebuke of a spiritual superior. "Having acknowledged my wrong-doing, I must remind you of your own. Let me ask you first of all—have you any religious life?"

Nancy's eyes had turned away, but at these words they flashed sternly upon the speaker.

"I shall let you ask no such question."

"I expected it," Jessica sighed patiently. "You are still in the darkness, out of which *I* have been saved."

"If you have nothing more to say than this, I must refuse to talk any longer."

"There is a word I must speak," pursued Jessica. "If you will not heed it now, it will remain in your memory, and bear fruit at the appointed time. I alone know of the sin which poisons your soul, and the experiences through which I have passed justify me in calling you to repentance."

Nancy raised her hand.

"Stop! That is quite enough. Perhaps you are behaving conscientiously; I will try to believe it. But not another word, or I shall speak as I don't wish to."

"It is enough. You know very well what I refer to. Don't imagine that because you are now a married woman——"

Nancy stepped to the door, and threw it open.

"Leave the house," she said, in an unsteady tone. "You said you were unwelcome, and it was true. Take yourself out of my sight!"

Jessica put her head back, murmured some inaudible words, and with a smile of rancorous compassion went forth into the rain.

On recovering from the excitement of this scene, Nancy regretted her severity; the poor girl in the hideous bonnet had fallen very low, and her state of mind called for forbearance. The treachery for which Jessica sought pardon was easy to forgive; not so, however, the impertinent rebuke, which struck at a weak place in Nancy's conscience. Just when the course of time and favour of circumstances seemed to have completely healed that old wound, Jessica, with her crazy malice grotesquely disguised, came to revive the half-forgotten pangs, the shame and the doubt that had seemed to be things gone by. It would have become her, Nancy felt, to treat her hapless friend of years ago in a spirit of gentle tolerance; that she could not do so proved her—and she recognised the fact—still immature, still a backward pupil in the school of life.—"And in the Jubilee year I thought myself a decidedly accomplished person!"

Never mind. Her husband would come this evening. Of him she could learn without humiliation.

His arrival was later than of wont. Only at eleven o'clock, when with disappointment she had

laid aside her book to go to bed, did Tarrant's rap sound on the window.

"I had given you up," said Nancy.

"Yet you are quite good-tempered."

"Why not?"

"It is the pleasant custom of wives to make a husband uncomfortable if he comes late."

"Then I am no true wife!" laughed Nancy.

"Something much better," Tarrant muttered, as he threw off his overcoat.

He began to talk of ordinary affairs, and nearly half-an-hour elapsed before any mention was made of the event that had bettered their prospects. Nancy looked over a piece of his writing in an evening paper which he had brought; but she could not read it with attention. The paper fell to her lap, and she sat silent. Clearly, Tarrant would not be the first to speak of what was in both their minds. The clock ticked; the rain pattered without; the journalist smoked his pipe and looked thoughtfully at the ceiling.

"Are you sorry," Nancy asked, "that I am no longer penniless?"

"Ah—to be sure. We must speak of that. No, I'm not sorry. If I get run over, you and the boy——"

"Can make ourselves comfortable, and forget you; to be sure. But for the present, and until you *do* get run over?"

"You wish to make changes?"

"Don't you?"

"In one or two respects, perhaps. But leave me out of the question. You have an income of your own to dispose of; nothing oppressively splendid, I suppose. What do you think of doing?"

"What do you advise?"

"No, no. Make your own suggestion."

Nancy smiled, hesitated, and said at length:

"I think we ought to take a house."

"In London?"

"That's as you wish."

"Not at all. As *you* wish. Do you want society?"

"In moderation. And first of all, yours."

Tarrant met her eyes.

"Of my society, you have quite as much as is

good for you," he answered amiably. "That you should wish for acquaintances, is reasonable enough. Take a house somewhere in the western suburbs. One or two men I know have decent wives, and you shall meet them."

"But you? You won't live with me?"

"You know my view of that matter."

Nancy kept her eyes down, and reflected.

"Will it be known to everybody that we don't live together?"

"Well," answered Tarrant, with a laugh, "by way of example, I should rather like it to be known; but as I know *you* wouldn't like it, let the appearances be as ordinary as you please."

Again Nancy reflected. She had a struggle with herself.

"Just one question," she said at length. "Look me in the face. Are you—ever so little—ashamed of me?"

He regarded her steadily, smiling.

"Not in the least."

"You were—you used to be?"

"Before I knew you; and before I knew myself.

When, in fact, *you* were a notable young lady of Camberwell, and *I*——"

He paused to puff at his pipe.

"And you?"

"A notable young fool of nowhere at all."

THE END.

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