The Woman Who Did

by Grant Allen

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THE WOMAN WHO DID

by

Grant Allen

1895

TO MY DEAR WIFE TO WHOM I HAVE DEDICATED MY TWENTY HAPPIEST YEARS I DEDICATE ALSO THIS BRIEF MEMORIAL OF A LESS FORTUNATE LOVE

WRITTEN AT PERUGIA SPRING 1893 FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MY LIFE WHOLLY AND SOLELY TO SATISFY MY OWN TASTE AND MY OWN CONSCIENCE

PREFACE

“But surely no woman would ever dare to do so,” said my friend. “I knew a woman who did,” said I; “and this is her story.”

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CHAPTER I

Mrs Dewsbury’s lawn was held by those who knew it the loveliest in Surrey. The smooth and springy sward that stretched in front of the house was all composed of a tiny yellow clover. It gave beneath the foot like the pile on velvet. One’s gaze looked forth from it upon the endless middle distances of the oak-clad Weald, with the uncertain blue line of the South Downs in the background. Ridge behind ridge, the long, low hills of paludina limestone stood out in successive tiers, each thrown up against its neighbour by the misty haze that broods eternally over the wooded valley; till, roaming across them all, the eye rested at last on the rearing scarp of

Chanctonbury Ring, faintly pencilled on the furthest skyline. Shadowy phantoms of dim heights framed the verge to east and west. Alan Merrick drank it in with profound satisfaction. After those sharp and clear-cut Italian outlines, hard as lapis lazuli, the mysterious vagueness, the pregnant suggestiveness, of our English scenery strikes the imagination; and Alan was fresh home from an early summer tour among the Peruginesque solidities of the Umbrian Apennines. “How beautiful it all is, after all,” he said, turning to his entertainer. “In Italy ’tis the background the painter dwells upon; in England, we look rather at the middle distance.”

Mrs Dewsbury darted round her the restless eye of a hostess, to see upon whom she could socially bestow him. “Oh, come this way,” she said, sweeping across the lawn towards a girl in a blue dress at the opposite corner. “You must know our new-comer. I want to introduce you to Miss Barton, from Cambridge. She’s such a nice girl too—the Dean of Dunwich’s daughter.”

Alan Merrick drew back with a vague gesture of distaste.

“Oh, thank you,” he replied; “but, do you know, I don’t think I like deans, Mrs Dewsbury.”

Mrs Dewsbury’s smile was recondite and diplomatic.

“Then you’ll exactly suit one another,” she answered with gay wisdom. “For, to tell you the truth, I don’t think she does either.”

The young man allowed himself to be led with a passive protest in the direction where Mrs Dewsbury so impulsively hurried him. He heard that cultivated voice murmuring in the usual inaudible tone of introduction, “Miss Barton, Mr Alan Merrick.” Then he raised his hat. As he did so, he looked down at Herminia Barton’s face with a sudden start of surprise. Why, this was a girl of most unusual beauty!

She was tall and dark, with abundant black hair, richly waved above the ample forehead; and she wore a curious Oriental-looking navy-blue robe of some soft woollen stuff, that fell in natural folds and set off to the utmost the lissome grace of

her rounded figure. It was a sort of sleeveless sack, embroidered in front with arabesques in gold thread, and fastened obliquely two inches below the waist with a belt of gilt braid, and a clasp of Moorish jewel-work. Beneath it, a bodice of darker silk showed at the arms and neck, with loose sleeves in keeping. The whole costume, though quite simple in style, a compromise either for afternoon or evening, was charming in its novelty, charming too in the way it permitted the utmost liberty and variety of movement to the lithe limbs of its wearer. But it was her face particularly that struck Alan Merrick at first sight. That face was above all things the face of a free woman. Something so frank and fearless shone in Herminia's glance, as her eye met his, that Alan, who respected human freedom above all other qualities in man or woman, was taken on the spot by its perfect air of untrammelled liberty. Yet it was subtle and beautiful too, undeniably beautiful. Herminia Barton's features, I think, were even more striking in their way in later life, when sorrow had stamped her, and the mark of her willing martyrdom for humanity's sake was deeply printed upon them. But their beauty then was the beauty of holiness, which not all can appreciate. In her younger days, as Alan Merrick first saw her, she was beautiful still with the first flush of health and strength and womanhood in a free and vigorous English girl's body. A certain lofty serenity, not untouched with pathos, seemed to strike the keynote. But that was not all. Some hint of every element in the highest loveliness met in that face and form—physical, intellectual, emotional, moral.

"You'll like him, Herminia," Mrs Dewsbury said, nodding. "He's one of your own kind, as dreadful as you are; very free and advanced; a perfect firebrand. In fact, my dear child, I don't know which of you makes my hair stand on end most." And with that introductory hint, she left the pair forthwith to their own devices.

Mrs Dewsbury was right. It took those two but little time to feel quite at home with one another. Built of similar mould, each seemed instinctively to grasp what each was aiming at. Two or three turns pacing up and down the lawn, two or three steps along the box-covered path at the side, and they read one another perfectly. For he

was true man, and she was real woman.

“Then you were at Girton?” Alan asked, as he paused with one hand on the rustic seat that looks up towards Leith Hill, and the heather-clad moorland.

“Yes, at Girton,” Herminia answered, sinking easily upon the bench, and letting one arm rest on the back in a graceful attitude of unstudied attention. “But I didn’t take my degree,” she went on hurriedly, as one who is anxious to disclaim some too great honour thrust upon her. “I didn’t care for the life; I thought it cramping. You see, if we women are ever to be free in the world, we must have in the end a freeman’s education. But the education at Girton made only a pretence at freedom. At heart, our girls were as enslaved to conventions as any girls elsewhere. The whole object of the training was to see just how far you could manage to push a woman’s education without the faintest danger of her emancipation.”

“You are right,” Alan answered briskly, for the point was a pet one with him. “I was an Oxford man myself, and I know that servitude. When I go up to Oxford now and see the girls who are being ground in the mill at Somerville, I’m heartily sorry for them. It’s worse for them than for us; they miss the only part of university life that has educational value. When we men were undergraduates, we lived our whole lives, lived them all round, developing equally every fibre of our natures. We read Plato, and Aristotle, and John Stuart Mill, to be sure—and I’m not quite certain we got much good from them; but then our talk and thought were not all of books, and of what we spelt out in them. We rowed on the river, we played in the cricket-field, we lounged in the billiard-rooms, we ran up to town for the day, we had wine in one another’s rooms after hall in the evening, and behaved like young fools, and threw oranges wildly at one another’s heads, and generally enjoyed ourselves. It was all very silly and irrational, no doubt, but it was life, it was reality; while the pretended earnestness of those pallid Somerville girls is all an affectation of one-sided culture.”

“That’s just it,” Herminia answered, leaning back on the rustic seat like David’s Madame Récamier. “You put your finger on the real blot when you said those words, developing equally every fibre of your natures. That’s what nobody yet wants us women to do. They’re trying hard enough to develop us intellectually; but morally and socially they want to mew us up just as close as ever. And they won’t succeed. The zenana must go. Sooner or later, I’m sure, if you begin by educating women, you must end by emancipating them.”

“So I think too,” Alan answered, growing every moment more interested. “And for my part, it’s the emancipation, not the mere education, that most appeals to me.”

“Yes, I’ve always felt that,” Herminia went on, letting herself out more freely, for she felt she was face to face with a sympathetic listener. “And for that reason, it’s the question of social and moral emancipation that interests me far more than the mere political one—woman’s rights as they call it. Of course I’m a member of all the woman’s franchise leagues and everything of that sort—they can’t afford to do without a single friend’s name on their lists at present; but the vote is a matter that troubles me little in itself, what I want is to see women made fit to use it. After all, political life fills but a small and unimportant part in our total existence. It’s the perpetual pressure of social and ethical restrictions that most weighs down women.”

Alan paused and looked hard at her. “And they tell me,” he said in a slow voice, “you’re the Dean of Dunwich’s daughter!”

Herminia laughed lightly—a ringing girlish laugh. Alan noticed it with pleasure. He felt at once that the iron of Girton had not entered into her soul, as into so many of our modern young women’s. There was vitality enough left in her for a genuine laugh of innocent amusement. “Oh yes,” she said, merrily; “that’s what I always answer to all possible objectors to my ways and ideas. I reply with dignity, ‘I was brought up in the family of a clergyman of the Church of England.’”

“And what does the Dean say to your views?” Alan interposed doubtfully.

Herminia laughed again. If her eyes were profound, two dimples saved her. “I thought you were with us,” she answered with a twinkle; “now, I begin to doubt it. You don’t expect a man of twenty-two to be governed in all things, especially in the formation of his abstract ideas, by his father’s opinions. Why then a woman?”

“Why, indeed?” Alan answered. “There I quite agree with you. I was thinking not so much of what is right and reasonable as of what is practical and usual. For most women, of course, are—well, more or less dependent upon their fathers.”

“But I am not,” Herminia answered, with a faint suspicion of just pride in the undercurrent of her tone. “That’s in part why I went away so soon from Girton. I felt that if women are ever to be free, they must first of all be independent. It is the dependence of women that has allowed men to make laws for them, socially and ethically. So I wouldn’t stop at Girton, partly because I felt the life was one-sided—our girls thought and talked of nothing else on earth except Herodotus, trigonometry, and the higher culture—but partly also because I wouldn’t be dependent on any man, not even my own father. It left me freer to act and think as I would. So I threw Girton overboard, and came up to live in London.”

“I see,” Alan replied. “You wouldn’t let your schooling interfere with your education. And now you support yourself?” he went on quite frankly.

Herminia nodded assent.

“Yes, I support myself,” she answered; “in part by teaching at a high school for girls, and in part by doing a little hack-work for newspapers.”

“Then you’re just down here for your holidays, I suppose?” Alan put in, leaning forward.

“Yes, just down here for my holidays. I’ve lodgings on the Holmwood, in such a dear old thatched cottage; roses peep in at the porch, and birds sing on the bushes. After a term in London, it’s a delicious change for one.”

“But are you alone?” Alan interposed again, still half hesitating.

Herminia smiled once more; his surprise amused her. “Yes, quite alone,” she answered. “But if you seem so astonished at that, I shall believe you and Mrs Dewsbury have been trying to take me in, and that you’re not really with us. Why shouldn’t a woman come down alone to pretty lodgings in the country?”

“Why not, indeed?” Alan echoed in turn. “It’s not at all that I disapprove, Miss Barton; on the contrary, I admire it; it’s only that one’s surprised to find a woman, or for the matter of that anybody, acting up to his or her convictions. That’s what I’ve always felt; ’tis the Nemesis of reason; if people begin by thinking rationally, the danger is that they may end by acting rationally also.”

Herminia laughed. “I’m afraid,” she answered, “I’ve already reached that pass. You’ll never find me hesitate to do anything on earth, once I’m convinced it’s right, merely because other people think differently on the subject.”

Alan looked at her and mused. She was tall and stately, but her figure was well developed, and her form softly moulded. He admired her immensely. How incongruous an outcome from a clerical family! “It’s curious,” he said, gazing hard at her, “that you should be a dean’s daughter.”

“On the contrary,” Herminia answered, with perfect frankness, “I regard myself as a living proof of the doctrine of heredity.”

“How so?” Alan inquired.

“Well, my father was a Senior Wrangler,” Herminia replied, blushing faintly; “and I suppose that implies a certain moderate development of the logical faculties. In his generation, people didn’t apply the logical faculties to the grounds of belief; they took those for granted; but within his own limits, my father is still an acute reasoner. And then he had always the ethical and social interests. Those two things—a love of logic, and a love of right—are the forces that tend to make us what we call religious. Worldly people don’t care for fundamental questions of the universe at all; they accept passively whatever is told them; they think they think, and believe they

believe it. But people with an interest in fundamental truth inquire for themselves into the constitution of the cosmos; if they are convinced one way, they become what we call theologians; if they are convinced the other way, they become what we call free-thinkers. Interest in the problem is common to both; it's the nature of the solution alone that differs in the two cases."

"That's quite true," Alan assented. "And have you ever noticed this curious corollary, that you and I can talk far more sympathetically with an earnest Catholic, for example, or an earnest Evangelical, than we can talk with a mere ordinary worldly person."

"Oh dear, yes," Herminia answered with conviction. "Thought will always sympathise with thought. It's the unthinking mass one can get no further with."

Alan changed the subject abruptly. This girl so interested him. She was the girl he had imagined, the girl he had dreamt of, the girl he had thought possible, but never yet met with. "And you're in lodgings on the Holmwood here?" he said, musing. "For how much longer?"

"For six weeks, I'm glad to say," Herminia answered, rising.

"At what cottage?"

"Mrs Burke's—not far from the station."

"May I come to see you there?"

Herminia's clear brown eyes gazed down at him, all puzzlement. "Why, surely," she answered; "I shall be delighted to see you!" She paused for a second. "We agree about so many things," she went on; "and it's so rare to find a man who can sympathise with the higher longings in women."

"When are you likeliest to be at home?" Alan asked.

"In the morning, after breakfast—that is, at eight o'clock," Herminia answered, smiling; "or later, after lunch, say two or thereabouts."

"Six weeks," Alan repeated, more to himself than to her. Those six week were precious. Not a moment of them must be lost. "Then I think," he went on quietly, "I shall call tomorrow."

A wave of conscious pleasure broke over Herminia's cheek, blush rose on white lily; but she answered nothing. She was glad this kindred soul should seem in such a hurry to renew her acquaintance.

CHAPTER II

Next afternoon, about two o'clock, Alan called with a tremulous heart at the cottage. Herminia had heard not a little of him meanwhile from her friend Mrs Dewsbury. "He's a charming young man, my dear," the woman of the world observed with confidence. "I felt quite sure you'd attract one another. He's so clever and advanced, and everything that's dreadful—just like yourself, Herminia. But then he's also very well connected. That's always something, especially when one's an oddity. You wouldn't go down one bit yourself, dear, if you weren't a dean's daughter. The shadow of a cathedral steeple covers a multitude of sins. Mr Merrick's the son of the famous London gout doctor—you must know his name—all the royal dukes flock to him. He's a barrister himself, and in excellent practice. You might do worse, do you know, than to go in for Alan Merrick."

Herminia's lip curled an almost imperceptible curl as she answered gravely, "I don't think you quite understand my plans in life, Mrs Dewsbury. It isn't my present intention to go in for anybody."

But Mrs Dewsbury shook her head. She knew the world she lived in. "Ah, I've heard a great many girls talk like that beforehand," she answered at once with her society glibness; "but when the right man turned up, they soon forgot their protestations. It makes a lot of difference, dear, when a man really asks you!"

Herminia bent her head. "You misunderstand me," she replied. "I don't mean to say

I will never fall in love. I expect to do that. I look forward to it frankly—it is a woman's place in life. I only mean to say, I don't think anything will ever induce me to marry—that is to say, legally."

Mrs Dewsbury gave a start of surprise and horror. She really didn't know what girls were coming to nowadays—which, considering her first principles, was certainly natural. But if only she had seen the conscious flush with which Herminia received her visitor that afternoon, she would have been confirmed in her belief that Herminia, after all, in spite of her learning, was much like other girls. In which conclusion Mrs Dewsbury would not in the end have been fully justified.

When Alan arrived, Herminia sat at the window by the quaintly clipped box-tree, a volume of verse held half closed in her hand, though she was a great deal too honest and transparent to pretend she was reading it. She expected Alan to call, in accordance with his promise, for she had seen at Mrs Dewsbury's how great an impression she produced upon him; and, having taught herself that it was every true woman's duty to avoid the affectations and self-deceptions which the rule of man has begotten in women, she didn't try to conceal from herself the fact that she on her side was by no means without interest in the question how soon he would pay her his promised visit. As he appeared at the rustic gate in the privet hedge, Herminia looked out, and changed colour with pleasure when she saw him push it open.

"Oh, how nice of you to look me up so soon!" she cried, jumping from her seat (with just a glance at the glass) and strolling out bareheaded into the cottage garden. "Isn't this a charming place? Only look at our hollyhocks! Consider what an oasis after six months of London!"

She seemed even prettier than last night, in her simple white morning dress, a mere ordinary English gown, without affectation of any sort, yet touched with some faint reminiscence of a flowing Greek chiton. Its half-classical drapery exactly suited the severe regularity of her pensive features and her graceful figure. Alan thought as he

looked at her he had never before seen anybody who appeared at all points so nearly to approach his ideal of womanhood. She was at once so high in type, so serene, so tranquil, and yet so purely womanly.

“Yes, it is a lovely place,” he answered, looking around at the clematis that drooped from the gable-ends. “I’m staying myself with the Watertons at the Park, but I’d rather have this pretty little rose-bowered garden than all their balustrades and Italian terraces. The cottagers have chosen the better part. What gillyflowers and what columbines! And here you look out so directly on the common. I love the gorse and the bracken, I love the stagnant pond, I love the very geese that tug hard at the silverweed, they make it all seem so deliciously English.”

“Shall we walk to the ridge?” Herminia asked with a sudden burst of suggestion. “It’s too rare a day to waste a minute of it indoors. I was waiting till you came. We can talk all the freer for the fresh air on the hilltop.”

Nothing could have suited Alan Merrick better, and he said so at once. Herminia disappeared for a moment to get her hat. Alan observed almost without observing it that she was gone but for a second. She asked none of that long interval that most women require for the simplest matter of toilet. She was back again almost instantly, bright and fresh and smiling, in the most modest of hats, set so artlessly on her head that it became her better than all art could have made it. Then they started for a long stroll across the breezy common, yellow in places with upright spikes of small summer furze, and pink with wild pea-blossom. Bees buzzed, broom crackled, the chirp of the field cricket rang shrill from the sand-banks. Herminia’s light foot tripped over the spongy turf. By the top of the furthest ridge, looking down on North Holmwood church, they sat side by side for a while on the close short grass, brocaded with daisies, and gazed across at the cropped sward of Denbies and the long line of the North Downs stretching away towards Reigate. Tender greys and greens melted into one another on the larches hard by; Betchworth chalk-pit

gleamed dreamy white in the middle distance. They had been talking earnestly all the way, like two old friends together; for they were both of them young, and they felt at once that nameless bond which often draws one closer to a new acquaintance at first sight than years of converse.

“How seriously you look at life,” Alan cried at last, in answer to one of Herminia’s graver thoughts. “I wonder what makes you take it so much more earnestly than all other women?”

“It came to me all at once when I was about sixteen,” Herminia answered with quiet composure, like one who remarks upon some objective fact of external nature. “It came to me in listening to a sermon of my father’s—which I always look upon as one more instance of the force of heredity. He was preaching on the text, ‘The Truth shall make you Free,’ and all that he said about it seemed to me strangely alive, to be heard from a pulpit. He said we ought to seek the Truth before all things, and never to rest till we felt sure we had found it. We should not suffer our souls to be beguiled into believing a falsehood merely because we wouldn’t take the trouble to find out the Truth for ourselves by searching. We must dig for it; we must grope after it. And as he spoke, I made up my mind, in a flash of resolution, to find out the Truth for myself about everything, and never to be deterred from seeking it, and embracing it, and ensuing it when found, by any convention or preconception. Then he went on to say how the Truth would make us Free, and I felt he was right. It would open our eyes, and emancipate us from social and moral slaveries. So I made up my mind, at the same time, that whenever I found the Truth I would not scruple to follow it to its logical conclusions, but would practise it in my life, and let it make me Free with perfect freedom. Then, in search of Truth, I got my father to send me to Girton; and when I had lighted on it there half by accident, and it had made me Free indeed, I went away from Girton again, because I saw if I stopped there I could never achieve and guard my freedom. From that day forth I have aimed at nothing but to know the Truth, and to act upon it freely; for, as Tennyson says—

‘To live by law Acting the law we live by without fear, And because right is right to follow right, Were wisdom in the scorn of consequence.’”

She broke off suddenly, and looking up, let her eye rest for a second on the dark thread of clambering pines that crest the down just above Brockham.

“This is dreadfully egotistical,” she cried, with a sharp little start. “I ought to apologise for talking so much to you about my own feelings.”

Alan gazed at her and smiled.

“Why apologise,” he asked, “for managing to be interesting? You are not egotistical at all. What you are telling me is history—the history of a soul, which is always the one thing on earth worth hearing. I take it as a compliment that you should hold me worthy to hear it. It is a proof of confidence. Besides,” he went on, after a second’s pause, “I am a man; you are a woman. Under those circumstances, what would otherwise be egotism becomes common and mutual. When two people sympathise with one another, all they can say about themselves loses its personal tinge and merges into pure human and abstract interest.”

Herminia brought back her eyes from infinity to his face.

“That’s true,” she said frankly. “The magic link of sex that severs and unites us makes all the difference. And, indeed, I confess I wouldn’t so have spoken of my inmost feelings to another woman.”

CHAPTER III

From that day forth, Alan and Herminia met frequently. Alan was given to sketching, and he sketched a great deal in his idle times on the common. He translated the cottages from real estate into poetry. On such occasions, Herminia’s walks often led her in the same direction. For Herminia was frank; she liked the young man, and, the truth having made her free, she knew no reason why she should

avoid or pretend to avoid his company. She had no fear of that sordid impersonal goddess who rules Philistia; it mattered not to her what “people said,” or whether or not they said anything about her. “Aiunt: quid aiunt? aiant,” was her motto. Could she have known to a certainty that her meetings on the common with Alan Merrick had excited unfavourable comment among the old ladies of Holmwood, the point would have seemed to her unworthy of an emancipated soul’s consideration. She could estimate at its true worth the value of all human criticism upon human action.

So, day after day, she met Alan Merrick, half by accident, half by design, on the slopes of the Holmwood. They talked much together, for Alan liked her and understood her. His heart went out to her. Compact of like clay, he knew the meaning of her hopes and aspirations. Often as he sketched he would look up and wait, expecting to catch the faint sound of her light step, or see her lithe figure poised breezy against the sky on the neighbouring ridges. Whenever she drew near, his pulse thrilled at her coming—a somewhat unusual experience with Alan Merrick. For Alan, though a pure soul in his way, and mixed of the finer paste, was not quite like those best of men, who are, so to speak, born married. A man with an innate genius for loving and being loved cannot long remain single. He must marry young; or at least, if he does not marry, he must find a companion, a woman to his heart, a help that is meet for him. What is commonly called prudence in such concerns is only another name for vice and cruelty. The purest and best of men necessarily mate themselves before they are twenty. As a rule, it is the selfish, the mean, the calculating, who wait, as they say, “till they can afford to marry.” That vile phrase scarcely veils hidden depths of depravity. A man who is really a man, and who has a genius for loving, must love from the very first, and must feel himself surrounded by those who love him. ’Tis the first necessity of life to him; bread, meat, raiment, a house, an income, rank far second to that prime want in the good man’s economy.

But Alan Merrick, though an excellent fellow in his way, and of noble fibre, was not

quite one of the first, the picked souls of humanity. He did not count among the finger-posts who point the way that mankind will travel. Though Herminia always thought him so. That was her true woman's gift of the highest idealising power. Indeed, it adds, to my mind, to the tragedy of Herminia Barton's life that the man for whom she risked and lost everything was never quite worthy of her; and that Herminia to the end not once suspected it. Alan was over thirty, and was still "looking about him." That alone, you will admit, is a sufficiently grave condemnation. That a man should have arrived at the ripe age of thirty and not yet have lighted upon the elect lady—the woman without whose companionship life would be to him unendurable is in itself a strong proof of much underlying selfishness, or, what comes to the same thing, of a calculating disposition. The right sort of man doesn't argue with himself at all on these matters. He doesn't say with selfish coldness, "I can't afford a wife;" or, "If I marry now, I shall ruin my prospects." He feels and acts. He mates, like the birds, because he can't help himself. A woman crosses his path who is to him indispensable, a part of himself, the needful complement of his own personality; and without heed or hesitation he takes her to himself, lawfully or unlawfully, because he has need of her. That is how nature has made us; that is how every man worthy of the name of man has always felt, and thought, and acted. The worst of all possible and conceivable checks upon population is the vile one which Malthus glossed over as "the prudential," and which consists in substituting prostitution for marriage through the spring-tide of one's manhood.

Alan Merrick, however, was over thirty and still unmarried. More than that, he was heart-free—a very evil record. And, like most other unmarried men of thirty, he was a trifle fastidious. He was "looking about him." That means to say, he was waiting to find some woman who suited him. No man does so at twenty. He sees and loves. But Alan Merrick, having let slip the golden moment when nature prompts every growing youth to fling himself with pure devotion at the feet of the first good angel

who happens to cross his path and attract his worship, had now outlived the early flush of pure passion, and was thinking only of “comfortably settling himself.” In one word, when a man is young, he asks himself with a thrill what he can do to make happy this sweet soul he loves; when he has let that critical moment flow by him unseized, he asks only, in cold blood, what woman will most agreeably make life run smooth for him. The first stage is pure love; the second, pure selfishness.

Still, Alan Merrick was now “getting on in his profession,” and, as people said, it was high time he should be settled. They said it as they might have said it was high time he should take a business partner. From that lowest depth of emotional disgrace Herminia Barton was to preserve him. It was her task in life, though she knew it not, to save Alan Merrick’s soul. And nobly she saved it.

Alan, “looking about him,” with some fine qualities of nature underlying in the background that mean social philosophy of the class from which he sprang, fell frankly in love almost at first sight with Herminia. He admired and respected her. More than that, he understood her. She had power in her purity to raise his nature for a time to something approaching her own high level. True woman has the real Midas gift: all that she touches turns to purest gold. Seeing Herminia much and talking with her, Alan could not fail to be impressed with the idea that here was a soul which could do a great deal more for him than “make him comfortable,”—which could raise him to moral heights he had hardly yet dreamt of—which could wake in him the best of which he was capable. And watching her thus, he soon fell in love with her, as few men of thirty are able to fall in love for the first time—as the young man falls in love, with the unselfish energy of an unspoilt nature. He asked no longer whether Herminia was the sort of girl who could make him comfortable; he asked only, with that delicious tremor of self-distrust which belongs to naïve youth, whether he dare offer himself to one so pure and good and beautiful. And his hesitation was justified; for our sordid England has not brought forth many such serene and single-minded souls as Herminia Barton.

At last one afternoon they had climbed together the steep red face of the sandy slope that rises abruptly from the Holmwood towards Leith Hill, by the Robin Gate entrance. Near the top, they had seated themselves on a carpet of sheep-sorrel, looking out across the imperturbable expanse of the Weald, and the broad pastures of Sussex. A solemn blue haze brooded soft over the land. The sun was sinking low; oblique afternoon lights flooded the distant South Downs. Their combes came out aslant in saucer-shaped shadows. Alan turned and gazed at Herminia; she was hot with climbing, and her calm face was flushed. A town-bred girl would have looked red and blowsy; but the colour and the exertion just suited Herminia. On that healthy brown cheek it seemed natural to discern the visible marks of effort. Alan gazed at her with a sudden rush of untrammelled feeling. The elusive outline of her grave sweet face, the wistful eyes, the ripe red mouth enticed him. “Oh, Herminia,” he cried, calling her for the first time by her Christian name alone, “how glad I am I happened to go that afternoon to Mrs Dewsbury’s. For otherwise perhaps I might never have known you.”

Herminia’s heart gave a delicious bound. She was a woman, and therefore she was glad he should speak so. She was a woman, and therefore she shrank from acknowledging it. But she looked him back in the face tranquilly, none the less on that account, and answered with sweet candour, “Thank you so much, Mr Merrick.”

“I said ‘Herminia,’” the young man corrected, smiling, yet aghast at his own audacity.

“And I thanked you for it,” Herminia answered, casting down those dark lashes, and feeling the heart throb violently under her neat bodice.

Alan drew a deep breath. “And it was that you thanked me for,” he ejaculated, tingling.

“Yes, it was that I thanked you for,” Herminia answered, with a still deeper rose spreading down to her bare throat. “I like you very much, and it pleases me to hear

you call me Herminia. Why should I shrink from admitting it? 'Tis the Truth, you know; and the Truth shall make us Free. I'm not afraid of my freedom."

Alan paused for a second, irresolute. "Herminia," he said at last, leaning forward till his face was very close to hers, and he could feel the warm breath that came and went so quickly; "that's very, very kind of you. I needn't tell you I've been thinking a great deal about you these last three weeks or so. You have filled my mind; filled it to the brim, and I think you know it."

Philosopher as she was, Herminia plucked a blade of grass, and drew it quivering through her tremulous fingers. It caught and hesitated. "I guessed as much, I think," she answered, low but frankly.

The young man's heart gave a bound. "And you, Herminia?" he asked, in an eager ecstasy.

Herminia was true to the Truth. "I've thought a great deal about you too, Mr Merrick," she answered, looking down, but with a great gladness thrilling her.

"I said 'Herminia,'" the young man repeated, with a marked stress on the Christian name.

Herminia hesitated a second. Then two crimson spots flared forth on her speaking face, as she answered with an effort, "About you too, Alan."

The young man drew back and gazed at her. She was very, very beautiful. "Dare I ask you, Herminia?" he cried. "Have I a right to ask you? Am I worthy of you, I mean? Ought I to retire as not your peer, and leave you to some man who could rise more easily to the height of your dignity?"

"I've thought about that too," Herminia answered, still firm to her principles. "I've thought it all over. I've said to myself, Shall I do right in monopolising him, when he is so great, and sweet, and true, and generous? Not monopolising, of course, for that would be wrong and selfish; but making you my own more than any other woman's. And I answered my own heart, Yes, yes, I shall do right to accept him, if

he asks me; for I love him, that is enough. The thrill within me tells me so. Nature put that thrill in our souls to cry out to us with a clear voice when we had met the soul she then and there intended for us."

Alan's face flushed like her own. "Then you love me," he cried, all on fire. "And you deign to tell me so; O Herminia, how sweet you are. What have I done to deserve it?"

He folded her in his arms. Her bosom throbbed on his. Their lips met for a second. Herminia took his kiss with sweet submission, and made no faint pretence of fighting against it. Her heart was full. She quickened to the finger-tips.

There was silence for a minute or two—the silence when soul speaks direct to soul through the vehicle of touch, the mother-tongue of the affections. Then Alan leaned back once more, and hanging over her in a rapture murmured in soft low tones, "So, Herminia, you will be mine! You say beforehand you will take me."

"Not will be yours," Herminia corrected in that silvery voice of hers. "Am yours already, Alan. I somehow feel as if I had always been yours. I am yours this moment. You may do what you would with me."

She said it so simply, so purely, so naturally, with all the supreme faith of the good woman, enamoured, who can yield herself up without blame to the man who loves her, that it hardly even occurred to Alan's mind to wonder at her self-surrender. Yet he drew back all the same in a sudden little crisis of doubt and uncertainty. He scarcely realised what she meant. "Then, dearest," he cried tentatively, "how soon may we be married?"

At sound of those unexpected words from such lips as his, a flush of shame and horror overspread Herminia's cheek. "Never!" she cried firmly, drawing away. "Oh, Alan, what can you mean by it? Don't tell me, after all I've tried to make you feel and understand, you thought I could possibly consent to marry you?"

The man gazed at her in surprise. Though he was prepared for much, he was

scarcely prepared for such devotion to principle. “O Herminia,” he cried, “you can’t mean it. You can’t have thought of what it entails. Surely, surely, you won’t carry your ideas of freedom to such an extreme, such a dangerous conclusion!”

Herminia looked up at him, half hurt. “Can’t have thought of what it entails!” she repeated. Her dimples deepened. “Why, Alan, haven’t I had my whole lifetime to think of it? What else have I thought about in any serious way, save this one great question of a woman’s duty to herself, and her sex, and her unborn children? It’s been my sole study. How could you fancy I spoke hastily, or without due consideration on such a subject? Would you have me like the blind girls who go unknowing to the altar, as sheep go to the shambles? Could you suspect me of such carelessness?—such culpable thoughtlessness?—you, to whom I have spoken of all this so freely?”

Alan stared at her, disconcerted, hardly knowing how to answer. “But what alternative do you propose, then?” he asked in his amazement.

“Propose?” Herminia repeated, taken aback in her turn. It all seemed to her so plain, and transparent, and natural. “Why, simply that we should be friends, like any others, very dear, dear friends, with the only kind of friendship that nature makes possible between men and women.”

She said it so softly, with some womanly gentleness, yet with such lofty candour, that Alan couldn’t help admiring her more than ever before for her translucent simplicity, and directness of purpose. Yet her suggestion frightened him. It was so much more novel to him than to her. Herminia had reasoned it all out with herself, as she truly said, for years, and knew exactly how she felt and thought about it. To Alan, on the contrary, it came with the shock of a sudden surprise, and he could hardly tell on the spur of the moment how to deal with it. He paused and reflected. “But do you mean to say, Herminia,” he asked, still holding that soft brown hand unresisted in his, “you’ve made up your mind never to marry any one? made up your

mind to brave the whole mad world, that can't possibly understand the motives of your conduct, and live with some friend, as you put it, unmarried?"

"Yes, I've made up my mind," Herminia answered, with a faint tremor in her maidenly voice, but with hardly a trace now of a traitorous blush, where no blush was needed. "I've made up my mind, Alan; and from all we had said and talked over together, I thought you at least would sympathise in my resolve."

She spoke with a gentle tinge of regret, nay almost of disillusion. The bare suggestion of that regret stung Alan to the quick. He felt it was shame to him that he could not rise at once to the height of her splendid self-renunciation. "You mistake me, dearest," he answered, petting her hand in his own (and she allowed him to pet it). "It wasn't for myself, or for the world I hesitated. My thought was for you. You are very young yet. You say you have counted the cost. I wonder if you have. I wonder if you realise it."

"Only too well," Herminia replied, in a very earnest mood. "I have wrought it all out in my mind beforehand—covenanted with my soul that for women's sake I would be a free woman. Alan, whoever would be free must himself strike the blow. I know what you will say—what every man would say to the woman he loved under similar circumstances—'Why should you be the victim? Why should you be the martyr? Bask in the sun yourself; leave this doom to some other.' But, Alan, I can't. I feel I must face it. Unless one woman begins, there will be no beginning." She lifted his hand in her own, and fondled it in her turn with caressing tenderness. "Think how easy it would be for me, dear friend," she cried, with a catch in her voice, "to do as other women do; to accept the honourable marriage you offer me, as other women would call it; to be false to my sex, a traitor to my convictions; to sell my kind for a mess of pottage, a name and a home, or even for thirty pieces of silver, to be some rich man's wife, as other women have sold it. But, Alan, I can't. My conscience won't let me. I know what marriage is, from what vile slavery it has sprung; on what

unseen horrors for my sister women it is reared and buttressed; by what unholy sacrifices it is sustained, and made possible. I know it has a history, I know its past, I know its present, and I can't embrace it; I can't be untrue to my most sacred beliefs. I can't pander to the malignant thing, just because a man who loves me would be pleased by my giving way and would kiss me, and fondle me for it. And I love you to fondle me. But I must keep my proper place, the freedom which I have gained for myself by such arduous efforts. I have said to you already, 'So far as my will goes, I am yours; take me, and do as you choose with me.' That much I can yield, as every good woman should yield it, to the man she loves, to the man who loves her. But more than that, no. It would be treason to my sex; not my life, not my future, not my individuality, not my freedom."

"I wouldn't ask you for those," Alan answered, carried away by the torrent flood of her passionate speech. "I would wish you to guard them. But, Herminia, just as a matter of form—to prevent the world from saying the cruel things the world is sure to say—and as an act of justice to you, and your children! A mere ceremony of marriage; what more does it mean nowadays than that we two agree to live together on the ordinary terms of civilised society?"

Still Herminia shook her head. "No, no," she cried vehemently. "I deny and decline those terms; they are part and parcel of a system of slavery. I have learnt that the righteous soul should avoid all appearance of evil. I will not palter and parley with the unholy thing. Even though you go to a registry office and get rid as far as you can of every relic of the sacerdotal and sacramental idea, yet the marriage itself is still an assertion of man's supremacy over woman. It ties her to him for life, it ignores her individuality, it compels her to promise what no human heart can be sure of performing; for you can contract to do or not to do, easily enough, but contract to feel or not to feel—what transparent absurdity! It is full of all evils, and I decline to consider it. If I love a man at all, I must love him on terms of perfect freedom. I can't bind myself down to live with him to my shame one day longer than I love

him; or to love him at all if I find him unworthy of my purest love, or unable to retain it; or if I discover some other more fit to be loved by me. You admitted the other day that all this was abstractly true; why should you wish this morning to draw back from following it out to its end in practice?”

Alan was only an Englishman, and shared, of course, the inability of his countrymen to carry any principle to its logical conclusion. He was all for admitting that though things must really be so, yet it were prudent in life to pretend they were otherwise. This is the well-known English virtue of moderation and compromise; it has made England what she is, the shabbiest, sordidest, worst organised of nations. So he paused for a second and temporised. “It’s for your sake, Herminia,” he said again; “I can’t bear to think of your making yourself a martyr. And I don’t see how, if you act as you propose, you could escape martyrdom.”

Herminia looked up at him with pleading eyes. Tears just trembled on the edge of those glistening lashes. “It never occurred to me to think,” she said gently but bravely, “my life could ever end in anything else but martyrdom. It must needs be so with all true lives, and all good ones. For whoever sees the truth, whoever strives earnestly with all his soul to be good, must be raised many planes above the common mass of men around him; he must be a moral pioneer, and the moral pioneer is always a martyr. People won’t allow others to be wiser and better than themselves, unpunished. They can forgive anything except moral superiority. We have each to choose between acquiescence in the wrong, with a life of ease, and struggle for the right, crowned at last by inevitable failure. To succeed is to fail, and failure is the only success worth aiming at. Every great and good life can but end in a Calvary.”

“And I want to save you from that,” Alan cried, leaning over her with real tenderness, for she was already very dear to him. “I want to save you from yourself; I want to make you think twice before you rush headlong into such a danger.”

“Not to save me from myself, but to save me from my own higher and better nature,” Herminia answered with passionate seriousness. “Alan, I don’t want any man to save me from that; I want you rather to help me, to strengthen me, to sympathise with me. I want you to love me, not for my face and form alone, not for what I share with every other woman, but for all that is holiest and deepest within me. If you can’t love me for that, I don’t ask you to love me; I want to be loved for what I am in myself, for the yearnings I possess that are most of all peculiar to me. I know you are attracted to me by those yearnings above everything; why wish me untrue to them? It was because I saw you could sympathise with me in these impulses that I said to myself, ‘Here, at last, is the man who can go through life as an aid and a spur to me.’ Don’t tell me I was mistaken; don’t belie my belief. Be what I thought you were, what I know you are. Work with me, and help me. Lift me! raise me! exalt me! Take me on the sole terms on which I can give myself up to you.”

She stretched her arms out, pleading; she turned those subtle eyes to him, appealingly. She was a beautiful woman. Alan Merrick was human. The man in him gave way; he seized her in his clasp, and pressed her close to his bosom. It heaved tumultuously.

“I could do anything for you, Herminia,” he cried, “and indeed, I do sympathise with you. But give me, at least, till tomorrow to think this thing over. It is a momentous question; don’t let us be precipitate.”

Herminia drew a long breath. His embrace thrilled through her.

“As you will,” she answered with a woman’s meekness. “But remember, Alan, what I say I mean; on these terms it shall be, and upon none others. Brave women before me have tried for a while to act on their own responsibility, for the good of their sex; but never of their own free will from the very beginning. They have avoided marriage, not because they thought it a shame and a surrender, a treason to their sex,

a base yielding to the unjust pretensions of men, but because there existed at the time some obstacle in their way in the shape of the vested interest of some other woman. When Mary Godwin chose to mate herself with Shelley, she took her good name in her hands;—but still there was Harriet. As soon as Harriet was dead, Mary showed she had no deep principle of action involved, by marrying Shelley. When George Eliot chose to pass her life with Lewes on terms of equal freedom, she defied the man-made law; but still, there was his wife to prevent the possibility of a legalised union. As soon as Lewes was dead, George Eliot showed she had no principle involved, by marrying another man. Now, I have the rare chance of acting otherwise; I can show the world from the very first that I act from principle, and from principle only. I can say to it in effect, ‘See, here is the man of my choice, the man I love, truly, and purely, the man any one of you would willingly have seen offering himself in lawful marriage to your own daughters. If I would, I might go the beaten way you prescribe, and marry him legally. But of my own free will I disdain that degradation; I choose rather to be free. No fear of your scorn, no dread of your bigotry, no shrinking at your cruelty, shall prevent me from following the thorny path I know to be the right one. I seek no temporal end. I will not prove false to the future of my kind in order to protect myself from your hateful indignities. I know on what vile foundations your temple of wedlock is based and built, what pitiable victims languish and die in its sickening vaults; and I will not consent to enter it. Here, of my own free will, I take my stand for the right, and refuse your sanctions! No woman that I know of has ever yet done that. Other women have fallen, as men choose to put it in their odious dialect; no other has voluntarily risen as I propose to do.’” She paused a moment for breath.

“Now you know how I feel,” she continued, looking straight into his eyes. “Say no more at present; it is wisest so. But go home and think it out, and talk it over with me tomorrow.”

CHAPTER IV

That night Alan slept little. Even at dinner his hostess, Mrs Waterton, noticed his preoccupation; and, on the pretext of a headache, he retired early to his own bedroom. His mind was full of Herminia and these strange ideas of hers; how could he listen with a becoming show of interest to Ethel Waterton's aspirations on the grand piano after a gipsy life—oh, a gipsy life for her!—when in point of fact she was a most insipid blonde from the cover of a chocolate box? So he went to bed betimes, and there lay long awake, deep wondering to himself how to act about Herminia.

He was really in love with her. That much he acknowledged frankly. More profoundly in love than he had ever conceived it possible he could find himself with any one. Hitherto, he had "considered" this girl or that, mostly on his mother's or sister's recommendation; and after observing her critically for a day or two, as he might have observed a horse or any other intended purchase, he had come to the conclusion "she wouldn't do," and had ceased to entertain her. But with Herminia, he was in love. The potent god had come upon him. That imperious inner monitor which cries aloud to a man, "You must have this girl, because you can't do without her; you must strive to make her happy, because her happiness is more to you now ten thousandfold than your own,"—that imperious inner monitor had spoken out at last in no uncertain tone to Alan Merrick. He knew for the first time what it is to be in love; in love with a true and beautiful woman, not with his own future convenience and comfort. The keen fresh sense it quickened within him raised him for the moment some levels above himself. For Herminia's sake, he felt, he could do or dare anything.

Nay, more; as Herminia herself had said to him, it was her better, her inner self he was in love with, not the mere statuesque face, the full and faultless figure. He saw how pure, how pellucid, how noble the woman was; treading her own ideal world of

high seraphic harmonies. He was in love with her stainless soul; he could not have loved her so well, could not have admired her so profoundly, had she been other than she was, had she shared the common prejudices and preconceptions of women. It was just because she was Herminia that he felt so irresistibly attracted towards her. She drew him like a magnet. What he loved and admired was not so much the fair, frank face itself, as the lofty Cornelia-like spirit behind it.

And yet—he hesitated.

Could he accept the sacrifice this white soul wished to make for him? Could he aid and abet her in raising up for herself so much undeserved obloquy? Could he help her to become Anathema maranatha among her sister women? Even if she felt brave enough to try the experiment herself for humanity's sake, was it not his duty as a man to protect her from her own sublime and generous impulses? Is it not for that in part that nature makes us virile? We must shield the weaker vessel. He was flattered not a little that this leader among women should have picked him out for herself among the ranks of men as her predestined companion in her chosen task of emancipating her sex. And he was thoroughly sympathetic (as every good man must needs be) with her aims and her method. Yet, still he hesitated. Never before could he have conceived such a problem of the soul, such a moral dilemma possible. It rent heart and brain at once asunder. Instinctively he felt to himself he would be doing wrong should he try in any way to check these splendid and unselfish impulses which led Herminia to offer herself willingly up as a living sacrifice on behalf of her enslaved sisters everywhere. Yet the innate feeling of the man, that 'tis his place to protect and guard the woman, even from her own higher and purer self, intervened to distract him. He couldn't bear to feel he might be instrumental in bringing upon his pure Herminia the tortures that must be in store for her; he couldn't bear to think his name might be coupled with hers in shameful ways, too base for any man to contemplate.

And then, intermixed with these higher motives, came others that he hardly liked to confess to himself where Herminia was concerned, but which nevertheless would obtrude themselves, will he, nill he, upon him. What would other people say about such an innocent union as Herminia contemplated? Not indeed, “What effect would it have upon his position and prospects?” Alan Merrick’s place as a barrister was fairly well assured, and the Bar is luckily one of the few professions in lie-loving England where a man need not grovel at the mercy of the moral judgment of the meanest and grossest among his fellow-creatures, as is the case with the Church, with medicine, with the politician, and with the schoolmaster. But Alan could not help thinking all the same how people would misinterpret and misunderstand his relations with the woman he loved, if he modelled them strictly upon Herminia’s wishes. It was hateful, it was horrible to have to con the thing over, where that faultless soul was concerned, in the vile and vulgar terms other people would apply to it; but for Herminia’s sake, con it over so he must; and though he shrank from the effort with a deadly shrinking, he nevertheless faced it. Men at the clubs would say he had seduced Herminia. Men at the clubs would lay the whole blame of the episode upon him; and he couldn’t bear to be so blamed for the sake of a woman, to save whom from the faintest shadow of disgrace or shame he would willingly have died a thousand times over. For since Herminia had confessed her love to him yesterday, he had begun to feel how much she was to him. His admiration and appreciation of her had risen inexpressibly. And was he now to be condemned for having dragged down to the dust that angel whose white wings he felt himself unworthy to touch with the hem of his garment?

And yet, once more, when he respected her so much for the sacrifice she was willing to make for humanity, would it be right for him to stand in her way, to deter her from realising her own highest nature? She was Herminia just because she lived in that world of high hopes, just because she had the courage and the nobility to dare this great thing. Would it be right of him to bring her down from that pedestal

whereon she stood so austere, and urge upon her that she should debase herself to be as any other woman—even as Ethel Waterton? For the Watertons had brought him there to propose to Ethel.

For hours he tossed and turned and revolved these problems. Rain beat on the leaded panes of the Waterton dormers. Day dawned, but no light came with it to his troubled spirit. The more he thought of this dilemma, the more profoundly he shrank from the idea of allowing himself to be made into the instrument for what the world would call, after its kind, Herminia's shame and degradation. For even if the world could be made to admit that Herminia had done what she did from chaste and noble motives—which, considering what we all know of the world, was improbable—yet, at any rate it could never allow that he himself had acted from any but the vilest and most unworthy reasons. Base souls would see in the sacrifice he made to Herminia's ideals, only the common story of a trustful woman cruelly betrayed by the man who pretended to love her, and would proceed to treat him with the coldness and contempt with which such a man deserves to be treated.

As the morning wore on, this view of the matter obtruded itself more and more forcibly every moment on Alan. Over and over again he said to himself, let come what come might, he must never aid and abet that innocent soul in rushing blindfold over a cliff to her own destruction. It is so easy at twenty-two to ruin yourself for life; so difficult at thirty to climb slowly back again. No, no, holy as Herminia's impulses were, he must save her from herself; he must save her from her own purity; he must refuse to be led astray by her romantic aspirations. He must keep her to the beaten path trod by all petty souls, and preserve her from the painful crown of martyrdom she herself designed as her eternal diadem.

Full of these manful resolutions, he rose up early in the morning. He would be his Herminia's guardian angel. He would use her love for him—for he knew she loved him—as a lever to egg her aside from these slippery moral precipices.

He mistook the solid rock of ethical resolution he was trying to disturb with so frail an engine. The fulcrum itself would yield far sooner to the pressure than the weight of Herminia's uncompromising rectitude. Passionate as she was—and with that opulent form she could hardly be otherwise—principle was still deeper and more imperious with her than passion.

CHAPTER V

He met her by appointment on the first ridge of Bore Hill. A sunny summer morning smiled fresh after the rain. Bumble-bees bustled busily about the closed lips of the red-rattle, and ripe gorse pods burst with little elastic explosions in the basking sunlight.

When Alan reached the trysting-place, under a broad-armed oak, in a glade of the woodland, Herminia was there before him; a good woman always is, 'tis the prerogative of her affection. She was simply dressed in her dainty print gown, a single tea-rosebud peeped out from her bodice; she looked more lily-like, so Alan thought in his heart, than he had ever yet seen her. She held out her hand to him with parted lips and a conscious blush. Alan took it, but bent forward at the same time, and with a hasty glance around, just touched her rich mouth. Herminia allowed him without a struggle; she was too stately of mien ever to grant a favour without granting it of pure grace, and with queenly munificence.

Alan led her to a grassy bank where thyme and basil grew matted, and the hum of myriad wings stirred the sultry air; Herminia let him lead her. She was woman enough by nature to like being led; only, it must be the right man who led her, and he must lead her along the path that her conscience approved of. Alan seated himself by her side, and took her hand in his; Herminia let him hold it. This lovemaking was pure honey. Dappled spots of light and shade flecked the ground beneath the trees like a jaguar's skin. Wood-pigeons crooned, unseen, from the leafy covert. She sat

there long without uttering a word. Once Alan essayed to speak, but Herminia cut him short. “Oh, no, not yet,” she cried half petulantly; “this silence is so delicious. I love best just to sit and hold your hand like this. Why spoil it with language?”

So they sat for some minutes, Herminia with her eyes half-closed, drinking in to the full the delight of first love. She could feel her heart beating. At last Alan interposed, and began to speak to her. The girl drew a long breath; then she sighed for a second, as she opened her eyes again. Every curve of her bosom heaved and swayed mysteriously. It seemed such a pity to let articulate words disturb that reverie. Still, if Alan wished it. For a woman is a woman, let Girton do its worst; and Herminia not less but rather more than the rest of them.

Then Alan began. With her hand clasped in his, and fondling it while he spoke, he urged all he could urge to turn her from her purpose. He pointed out to her how unwise, how irretrievable her position would be, if she once assumed it. On such a road as that there is no turning back. The die once cast, she must forever abide by it. He used all arts to persuade and dissuade; all eloquence to save her from herself and her salvation. If he loved her less, he said with truth, he might have spoken less earnestly. It was for her own sake he spoke, because he so loved her. He waxed hot in his eager desire to prevent her from taking this fatal step. He drew his breath hard, and paused. Emotion and anxiety overcame him visibly.

But as for Herminia, though she listened with affection and with a faint thrill of pleasure to much that he said, seeing how deeply he loved her, she leaned back from time to time, half weary with his eagerness, and his consequent iteration. “Dear Alan,” she said at last, soothing his hand with her own, as a sister might have soothed it, “you talk about all this as though it were to me some new resolve, some new idea of my making. You forget it is the outcome of my life’s philosophy. I have grown up to it slowly. I have thought of all this, and of hardly anything else, ever since I was old enough to think for myself about anything. Root and branch, it is to

me a foregone conclusion. I love you. You love me. So far as I am concerned, there ends the question. One way there is, and one way alone, in which I can give myself up to you. Make me yours if you will; but if not, then leave me. Only, remember, by leaving me, you won't any the more turn me aside from my purpose. You won't save me from myself, as you call it; you will only hand me over to some one less fit for me by far than you are." A quiet moisture glistened in her eyes, and she gazed at him pensively. "How wonderful it is," she went on, musing. "Three weeks ago, I didn't know there was such a man in the world at all as you; and now—why, Alan, I feel as if the world would be nothing to me without you. Your name seems to sing in my ears all day long with the song of the birds, and to thrill through and through me as I lie awake on my pillow with the cry of the nightjar. Yet, if you won't take me on my own terms, I know well what will happen. I shall go away, and grieve over you, of course, and feel bereaved for months, as if I could never possibly again love any man. At present it seems to me I never could love him. But though my heart tells me that, my reason tells me I should some day find some other soul I might perhaps fall back upon. But it would only be falling back. For the sake of my principles alone, and of the example I wish to set the world, could I ever fall back upon any other. Yet fall back I would. And what good would you have done me then by refusing me? You would merely have cast me off from the man I love best, the man who I know by immediate instinct, which is the voice of nature and of God within us, was intended from all time for me. The moment I saw you my heart beat quicker; my heart's evidence told me you were the one love meant for me. Why force me to decline upon some other less meet for me?"

Alan gazed at her, irresolute. "But if you love me so much," he said, "surely, surely, it is a small thing to trust your future to me."

The tenderness of woman let her hand glide over his cheek. She was not ashamed of her love. "O Alan," she cried, "if it were only for myself, I could trust you with my life; I could trust you with anything. But I haven't only myself to think of. I have to

think of right and wrong; I have to think of the world; I have to think of the cause which almost wholly hangs upon me. Not for nothing are these impulses implanted in my breast. They are the voice of the soul of all women within me. If I were to neglect them for the sake of gratifying your wishes—if I were to turn traitor to my sex for the sake of the man I love, as so many women have turned before me, I should hate and despise myself. I couldn't love you, Alan, quite so much, loved I not honour more, and the battle imposed upon me."

Alan wavered as she spoke. He felt what she said was true; even if he refused to take her on the only terms she could accept, he would not thereby save her. She would turn in time and bestow herself upon some man who would perhaps be less worthy of her—nay even on some man who might forsake her in the sequel with unspeakable treachery. Of conduct like that, Alan knew himself incapable. He knew that if he took Herminia once to his heart, he would treat her with such tenderness, such constancy, such devotion as never yet was shown to living woman. (Love always thinks so.) But still, he shrank from the idea of being himself the man to take advantage of her; for so in his unregenerate mind he phrased to himself their union. And still he temporised. "Even so, Herminia," he cried, bending forward and gazing hard at her, "I couldn't endure to have it said it was I who misled you."

Herminia lifted her eyes to his with just a tinge of lofty scorn, tempered only by the womanliness of those melting lashes. "And you can think of that? she murmured, gazing across at him half in tears. "O Alan, for my part I can think of nothing now but the truths of life and the magnitude of the issues. Our hearts against the world—love and duty against convention."

Then Alan began again and talked all he knew. He urged, he prayed, he bent forward, he spoke soft and low, he played on her tenderest chords as a loving woman. Herminia was moved, for her heart went forth to him, and she knew why he tried so hard to save her from her own higher and truer nature. But she never yielded

an inch. She stood firm to her colours. She shook her head to the last, and murmured over and over again, “There is only one right way, and no persuasion on earth will ever avail to turn me aside from it.”

The Truth had made her Free, and she was very confident of it.

At last, all other means failing, Alan fell back on the final resort of delay. He saw much merit in procrastination. There was no hurry, he said. They needn’t make up their minds, one way or the other, immediately. They could take their time to think. Perhaps, with a week or two to decide in, Herminia might persuade him; or he might persuade her. Why rush on fate so suddenly?

But at that, to his immense surprise, Herminia demurred. “No, no,” she said, shaking her head, “that’s not at all what I want. We must decide today one way or the other. Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation. I couldn’t let you wait, and slip by degrees into some vague arrangement we hardly contemplated definitely. To do that would be to sin against my ideas of decorum. Whatever we do we must do, as the apostle says, decently and in order, with a full sense of the obligations it imposes upon us. We must say to one another in so many words, ‘I am yours; you are mine;’ or we must part forever. I have told you my whole soul; I have bared my heart before you. You may take it or leave it; but for my dignity’s sake, I put it to you now, choose one way or the other.”

Alan looked at her hard. Her face was crimson by this with maidenly shame; but she made no effort to hide or avert it. For the good of humanity, this question must be settled once for all; and no womanish reserve should make her shrink from settling it. Happier maidens in ages to come, when society had reconstructed itself on the broad basis of freedom, would never have to go through what she was going through that moment. They would be spared the quivering shame, the tingling regret, the struggle with which she braced up her maiden modesty to that supreme effort. But she would go through with it all the same. For eternal woman’s sake she had long

contemplated that day; now it had come at last, she would not weakly draw back from it.

Alan's eyes were all admiration. He stood near enough to her level to understand her to the core. "Herminia," he cried, bending over her, "you drive me to bay. You press me very hard. I feel myself yielding. I am a man; and when you speak to me like that, I know it. You enlist on your side all that is virile within me. Yet how can I accept the terms you offer? For the very love I bear you, how do you this injustice? If I loved you less, I might perhaps say yes; because I love you so well, I feel compelled to say no to you."

Herminia looked at him hard in return. Her cheeks were glowing now with something like the shame of the woman who feels her love is lightly rejected. "Is that final?" she asked, drawing herself up as she sat, and facing him proudly.

"No, no, it's not final," Alan answered, feeling the woman's influence course through body and blood to his quivering fingertips. Magical touches stirred him. "How can it be final, Herminia, when you look at me like that? How can it be final, when you're so gracious, so graceful, so beautiful? Oh, my child, I am a man; don't play too hard on those fiercest chords in my nature."

Herminia gazed at him fixedly; the dimples disappeared. Her voice was more serious now, and had nothing in it of pleading. "It isn't like that that I want to draw you, Alan," she answered gravely. "It isn't those chords I want to play upon. I want to convince your brain, your intellect, your reason. You agree with me in principle. Why then, should you wish to draw back in practice?"

"Yes, I agree with you in principle," Alan answered. "It isn't there that I hesitate. Even before I met you, I had arrived at pretty much the same ideas myself, as a matter of abstract reasoning. I saw that the one way of freedom for the woman is to cast off, root and branch, the evil growth of man's supremacy. I saw that the honourableness of marriage, the disgrace of free union, were just so many ignoble

masculine devices to keep up man's lordship; vile results of his determination to taboo to himself beforehand and monopolise for life some particular woman. I know all that; I acknowledge all that. I see as plainly as you do that sooner or later there must come a revolution. But, Herminia, the women who devote themselves to carrying out that revolution, will take their souls in their hands, and will march in line to the freeing of their sex through shame and calumny and hardships innumerable. I shrink from letting you, the woman that I love, bring that fate upon yourself; I shrink still more from being the man to aid and abet you in doing it."

Herminia fixed her piercing eyes upon his face once more. Tears stood in them now. The tenderness of woman was awakened within her. "Dear Alan," she said gently, "don't I tell you I have thought long since of all that? I am prepared to face it. It is only a question of with whom I shall do so. Shall it be with the man I have instinctively loved from the first moment I saw him, better than all others on earth, or shall it be with some lesser? If my heart is willing, why should yours demur to it?"

"Because I love you too well," Alan answered doggedly.

Herminia rose and faced him. Her hands dropped by her side. She was splendid when she stood so with her panting bosom. "Then you decide to say goodbye?" she cried, with a lingering cadence.

Alan seized her by both wrists, and drew her down to his side. "No, no, darling," he answered low, laying his lips against hers. "I can never say goodbye. You have confessed you love me. When a woman says that, what can a man refuse her? From such a woman as you, I am so proud, so proud, so proud of such a confession; how could I ever cease to feel you were mine—mine—mine—wholly mine for a lifetime?"

"Then you consent?" Herminia cried, all aglow, half nestling to his bosom.

"I consent," Alan answered, with profound misgivings. "What else do you leave

open to me?”

Herminia made no direct answer; she only laid her head with perfect trust upon the man’s broad shoulder. “O Alan,” she murmured low, letting her heart have its way, “you are mine, then; you are mine. You have made me so happy, so supremely happy.”

CHAPTER VI

Thus, half against his will, Alan Merrick was drawn into this irregular compact.

Next came that more difficult matter, the discussion of ways and means, the more practical details. Alan hardly knew at first on what precise terms it was Herminia’s wish that they two should pass their lives together. His ideas were all naturally framed on the old model of marriage; in that matter, Herminia said, he was still in the gall of bitterness, and the bond of iniquity. He took it for granted that of course they must dwell under one roof with one another. But that simple ancestral notion, derived from man’s lordship in his own house, was wholly adverse to Herminia’s views of the reasonable and natural. She had debated these problems at full in her own mind for years, and had arrived at definite and consistent solutions for every knotty point in them. Why should this friendship differ at all, she asked, in respect of time and place, from any other friendship? The notion of necessarily keeping house together, the cramping idea of the family tie, belonged entirely to the régime of the man-made patriarchate, where the woman and the children were the slaves and chattels of the lord and master. In a free society, was it not obvious that each woman would live her own life apart, would preserve her independence, and would receive the visits of the man for whom she cared—the father of her children? Then only could she be free. Any other method meant the economic and social superiority of the man, and was irreconcilable with the perfect individuality of the woman.

So Herminia reasoned. She rejected at once, therefore, the idea of any change in her

existing mode of life. To her, the friendship she proposed with Alan Merrick was no social revolution; it was but the due fulfilment of her natural functions. To make of it an occasion for ostentatious change in her way of living seemed to her as unnatural as is the practice of the barbarians in our midst who use a wedding—that most sacred and private event in a young girl's life—as an opportunity for display of the coarsest and crudest character. To rivet the attention of friends on bride and bridegroom is to offend against the most delicate susceptibilities of modesty. From all such hateful practices, Herminia's pure mind revolted by instinct. She felt that here at least was the one moment in a woman's history when she would shrink with timid reserve from every eye save one man's—when publicity of any sort was most odious and horrible.

Only the blinding effect of custom, indeed, could ever have shut good women's eyes to the shameful indecorousness of wedding ceremonial. We drag a young girl before the prying gaze of all the world at the very crisis in her life, when natural modesty would most lead her to conceal herself from her dearest acquaintance. And our women themselves have grown so blunted by use to the hatefulness of the ordeal that many of them face it now with inhuman effrontery. Familiarity with marriage has almost killed out in the maidens of our race the last lingering relics of native modesty.

Herminia, however, could dispense with all that show. She had a little cottage of her own, she told Alan—a tiny little cottage, in a street near her school-work; she rented it for a small sum, in quite a poor quarter, all inhabited by work-people. There she lived by herself; for she kept no servants. There she should continue to live; why need this purely personal compact between them two make any difference in her daily habits? She would go on with her school-work for the present, as usual. Oh, no, she certainly didn't intend to notify the head-mistress of the school or any one else, of her altered position. It was no alteration of position at all, so far as she was concerned; merely the addition to life of a new and very dear and natural friendship.

Herminia took her own point of view so instinctively indeed—lived so wrapped in an ideal world of her own and the future's—that Alan was often quite alarmed in his soul when he thought of the rude awakening that no doubt awaited her. Yet whenever he hinted it to her with all possible delicacy, she seemed so perfectly prepared for the worst the world could do, so fixed and resolved in her intention of martyrdom, that he had no argument left, and could only sigh over her.

It was not, she explained to him further, that she wished to conceal anything. The least tinge of concealment was wholly alien to that frank fresh nature. If her head-mistress asked her a point-blank question, she would not attempt to parry it, but would reply at once with a point blank answer. Still, her very views on the subject made it impossible for her to volunteer information unasked to any one. Here was a personal matter of the utmost privacy; a matter which concerned nobody on earth, save herself and Alan; a matter on which it was the grossest impertinence for any one else to make any inquiry or hold any opinion. They two chose to be friends; and there, so far as the rest of the world was concerned, the whole thing ended. What else took place between them was wholly a subject for their own consideration. But if ever circumstances should arise which made it necessary for her to avow to the world that she must soon be a mother, then it was for the world to take the first step, if it would act upon its own hateful and cruel initiative. She would never deny, but she would never go out of her way to confess. She stood upon her individuality as a human being.

As to other practical matters, about which Alan ventured delicately to throw out a passing question or two, Herminia was perfectly frank, with the perfect frankness of one who thinks and does nothing to be ashamed of. She had always been self-supporting, she said, and she would be self-supporting still. To her mind, that was an essential step towards the emancipation of women. Their friendship implied for her no change of existence, merely an addition to the fulness of her living. He was the complement of her being. Every woman should naturally wish to live her

whole life, to fulfil her whole functions; and that she could do only by becoming a mother, accepting the orbit for which nature designed her. In the end, no doubt, complete independence would be secured for each woman by the civilised state, or in other words by the whole body of men, who do the hard work of the world, and who would collectively guarantee every necessary and luxury to every woman of the community equally. In that way alone could perfect liberty of choice and action be secured for women; and she held it just that women should so be provided for, because the mothers of the community fulfil in the state as important and necessary a function as the men themselves do. It would be well, too, that the mothers should be free to perform that function without preoccupation of any sort. So a free world would order things. But in our present barbaric state of industrial slavery, capitalism, monopoly—in other words under the organised rule of selfishness—such a course was impossible. Perhaps, as an intermediate condition, it might happen in time that the women of certain classes would for the most part be made independent at maturity each by her own father; which would produce for them in the end pretty much the same general effect of freedom. She saw as a first step the endowment of the daughter. But meanwhile there was nothing for it save that as many women as could should aim for themselves at economic liberty, in other words at self-support. That was an evil in itself, because obviously the prospective mothers of a community should be relieved as far as possible from the stress and strain of earning a livelihood; should be set free to build up their nervous systems to the highest attainable level against the calls of maternity. But above all things we must be practical; and in the practical world here and now around us, no other way existed for women to be free save the wasteful way of each earning her own livelihood. Therefore she would continue her schoolwork with her pupils as long as the school would allow her; and when that became impossible, would fall back upon literature.

One other question Alan ventured gently to raise—the question of children. Fools always put that question, and think it a crushing one. Alan was no fool, yet it

puzzled him strangely. He did not see for himself how easy is the solution; how absolutely Herminia's plan leaves the position unaltered. But Herminia herself was as modestly frank on the subject as on every other. It was a moral and social point of the deepest importance; and it would be wrong of them to rush into it without due consideration. She had duly considered it. She would give her children, should any come, the unique and glorious birthright of being the only human beings ever born into this world as the deliberate result of a free union, contracted on philosophical and ethical principles. Alan hinted certain doubts as to their up-bringing and education. There, too, Herminia was perfectly frank. They would be half hers, half his; the pleasant burden of their support, the joy of their education, would naturally fall upon both parents equally. But why discuss these matters like the squalid rich, who make their marriages a question of settlements and dowries and business arrangements? They two were friends and lovers; in love, such base doubts could never arise. Not for worlds would she import into their mutual relations any sordid stain of money, any vile tinge of bargaining. They could trust one another; that alone sufficed for them.

So Alan gave way bit by bit all along the line, overborne by Herminia's more perfect and logical conception of her own principles. She knew exactly what she felt and wanted; while he knew only in a vague and formless way that his reason agreed with her.

A week later, he knocked timidly one evening at the door of a modest little workman-looking cottage, down a small side street in the back-wastes of Chelsea. 'Twas a most unpretending street; Bower Lane by name, full of brown brick houses, all as like as peas, and with nothing of any sort to redeem their plain fronts from the common blight of the London jerry-builder. Only a soft serge curtain and a pot of mignonette on the ledge of the window, distinguished the cottage at which Alan Merrick knocked from the others beside it. Externally that is to say; for within it was as dainty as Morris wall-papers and merino hangings and a delicate feminine taste in

form and colour could make it. Keats and Shelley lined the shelves; Rossetti's wan maidens gazed unearthly from the over-mantel. The door was opened for him by Herminia in person; for she kept no servant—that was one of her principles. She was dressed from head to foot in a simple white gown, as pure and sweet as the soul it covered. A white rose nestled in her glossy hair; three sprays of white lily decked a vase on the mantel-piece. Some dim survival of ancestral ideas made Herminia Barton so array herself in the white garb of affiance for her bridal evening. Her cheek was aglow with virginal shrinking as she opened the door, and welcomed Alan in. But she held out her hand just as frankly as ever to the man of her free choice as he advanced to greet her. Alan caught her in his arms and kissed her forehead tenderly. And thus was Herminia Barton's espousal consummated.

CHAPTER VII

The next six months were the happiest time of her life, for Herminia. All day long she worked hard with her classes; and often in the evenings Alan Merrick dropped in for sweet converse and companionship. Too free from any taint of sin or shame herself ever to suspect that others could misinterpret her actions, Herminia was hardly aware how the gossip of Bower Lane made free in time with the name of the young lady who had taken a cottage in the row, and whose relations with the tall gentleman that called so much in the evenings were beginning to attract the attention of the neighbourhood. The poor slaves of washer-women and working men's wives all around, with whom contented slavery to a drunken husband was the only "respectable" condition—couldn't understand for the life of them how the pretty young lady could make her name so cheap; "and her that pretends to be so charitable and that, and goes about in the parish like a district visitor!" Though to be sure it had already struck the minds of Bower Lane that Herminia never went "to church nor chapel;" and when people cut themselves adrift from church and chapel, why, what

sort of morality can you reasonably expect of them? Nevertheless, Herminia's manners were so sweet and engaging, to rich and poor alike, that Bower Lane seriously regretted what it took to be her lapse from grace. Poor purblind Bower Lane! A lifetime would have failed it to discern for itself how infinitely higher than its slavish "respectability" was Herminia's freedom. In which respect, indeed, Bower Lane was no doubt on a dead level with Belgravia, or, for the matter of that, with Lambeth Palace.

But Herminia, for her part, never discovered she was talked about. To the pure all things are pure; and Herminia was dowered with that perfect purity. And though Bower Lane lay but some few hundred yards off from the Carlyle Place Girl's School, the social gulf between them yet yawned so wide that good old Miss Smith-Waters from Cambridge, the head-mistress of the school, never caught a single echo of the washerwomen's gossip. Herminia's life through those six months was one unclouded honeymoon. On Sundays, she and Alan would go out of town together, and stroll across the breezy summit of Leith Hill, or among the brown heather and garrulous pine-woods that perfume the radiating spurs of Hind Head with their aromatic resins. Her love for Alan was profound and absorbing; while as for Alan, the more he gazed into the calm depths of that crystal soul, the more deeply did he admire it. Gradually she was raising him to her own level. It is impossible to mix with a lofty nature and not acquire in time some tincture of its nobler and more generous sentiments. Herminia was weaning Alan by degrees from the world; she was teaching him to see that moral purity and moral earnestness are worth more, after all, than to dwell with purple hangings in all the tents of iniquity. She was making him understand and sympathise with the motives which led her stoutly on to her final martyrdom, which made her submit without a murmur of discontent to her great renunciation.

As yet, however, there was no hint or forecast of actual martyrdom. On the contrary, her life flowed in all the halo of a honeymoon. It was a honeymoon, too, undisturbed

by the petty jars and discomforts of domestic life; she saw Alan too seldom for either ever to lose the keen sense of fresh delight in the other's presence. When she met him, she thrilled to the delicate fingertips. Herminia had planned it so of set purpose. In her reasoned philosophy of life, she had early decided that 'tis the wear and tear of too close daily intercourse which turns unawares the lover into the husband; and she had determined that in her own converse with the man she loved that cause of disillusion should never intrude itself. They conserved their romance through all their plighted and united life. Herminia had afterwards no recollections of Alan to look back upon save ideally happy ones.

So six months wore away. On the memory of those six months Herminia was to subsist for half a lifetime. At the end of that time, Alan began to fear that if she did not soon withdraw from the Carlyle Place School, Miss Smith-Waters might begin to ask inconvenient questions. Herminia, ever true to her principles, was for stopping on till the bitter end, and compelling Miss Smith-Waters to dismiss her from her situation. But Alan, more worldly wise, foresaw that such a course must inevitably result in needless annoyance and humiliation for Herminia; and Herminia was now beginning to be so far influenced by Alan's personality that she yielded the point with reluctance to his masculine judgment. It must be always so. The man must needs retain for many years to come the personal hegemony he has usurped over the woman; and the woman who once accepts him as lover or as husband must give way in the end, even in matters of principle, to his virile self-assertion. She would be less a woman, and he less a man, were any other result possible. Deep down in the very roots of the idea of sex we come on that prime antithesis—the male, active and aggressive; the female, sedentary, passive, and receptive.

And even on the broader question, experience shows one it is always so in the world we live in. No man or woman can go through life in consistent obedience to any high principle—not even the willing and deliberate martyrs. We must bow to circumstances. Herminia had made up her mind beforehand for the crown of

martyrdom, the one possible guerdon this planet can bestow upon really noble and disinterested action. And she never shrank from any necessary pang, incidental to the prophet's and martyr's existence. Yet even so, in a society almost wholly composed of mean and petty souls, incapable of comprehending or appreciating any exalted moral standpoint, it is practically impossible to live from day to day in accordance with a higher or purer standard. The martyr who should try so to walk without deviation of any sort, turning neither to the right nor to the left in the smallest particular, must accomplish his martyrdom prematurely on the pettiest side-issues, and would never live at all to assert at the stake the great truth which is the lodestar and goal of his existence.

So Herminia gave way. Sadly against her will she gave way. One morning in early March, she absented herself from her place in the class-room without even taking leave of her beloved schoolgirls, whom she had tried so hard unobtrusively to train up towards a rational understanding of the universe around them, and sat down to write a final letter of farewell to poor straight-laced kind-hearted Miss Smith-Waters. She sat down to it with a sigh; for Miss Smith-Waters, though her outlook upon the cosmos was through one narrow chink, was a good soul up to her lights, and had been really fond and proud of Herminia. She had rather shown her off, indeed, as a social trump card to the hesitating parent—"This is our second mistress, Miss Barton; you know her father, perhaps; such an excellent man, the Dean of Dunwich." And now, Herminia sat down with a heavy heart, thinking to herself what a stab of pain the avowal she had to make would send throbbing through that gentle old breast, and how absolutely incapable dear Miss Smith-Waters could be of ever appreciating the conscientious reasons which had led her, Iphigenia-like, to her self-imposed sacrifice.

But, for all that, she wrote her letter through, delicately, sweetly, with feminine tact and feminine reticence. She told Miss Smith-Waters frankly enough all it was necessary Miss Smith-Waters should know; but she said it with such daintiness that

even that conventionalised and hide-bound old maid couldn't help feeling and recognising the purity and nobility of her misguided action. Poor child, Miss Smith-Waters thought; she was mistaken, of course, sadly and grievously mistaken; but, then, 'twas her heart that misled her, no doubt; and Miss Smith-Waters, having dim recollections of a far-away time when she herself too possessed some rudimentary fragment of such a central vascular organ, fairly cried over the poor girl's letter with sympathetic shame, and remorse, and vexation. Miss Smith-Waters could hardly be expected to understand that if Herminia had thought her conduct in the faintest degree wrong, or indeed anything but the highest and best for humanity, she could never conceivably have allowed even that loving heart of hers to hurry her into it. For Herminia's devotion to principle was not less but far greater than Miss Smith-Waters's own; only, as it happened, the principles themselves were diametrically opposite.

Herminia wrote her note with not a few tears for poor Miss Smith-Waters's disappointment. That is the worst of living a life morally ahead of your contemporaries; what you do with profoundest conviction of its eternal rightness cannot fail to arouse hostile and painful feelings even in the souls of the most right-minded of your friends who still live in bondage to the conventional lies and the conventional injustices. It is the good, indeed, who are most against you. Still, Herminia steeled her heart to tell the simple truth—how, for the right's sake and humanity's she had made up her mind to eschew the accursed thing, and to strike one bold blow for the freedom and unfettered individuality of women. She knew in what obloquy her action would involve her, she said; but she knew too, that to do right for right's sake was a duty imposed by nature upon every one of us; and that the clearer we could see ahead, and the farther in front we could look, the more profoundly did that duty shine forth for us. For her own part, she had never shrunk from doing what she knew to be right for mankind in the end, though she felt sure it must lead her to personal misery. Yet unless one woman were prepared to lead the

way, no freedom was possible. She had found a man with whom she could spend her life in sympathy and united usefulness; and with him she had elected to spend it in the way pointed out to us by nature. Acting on his advice, though somewhat against her own judgment, she meant to leave England for the present, only returning again when she could return with the dear life they had both been instrumental in bringing into the world, and to which henceforth her main attention must be directed. She signed it, “Your ever-grateful and devoted HERMINIA.”

Poor Miss Smith-Waters laid down that astonishing, that incredible letter in a perfect whirl of amazement and stupefaction. She didn’t know what to make of it. It seemed to run counter to all her preconceived ideas of moral action. That a young girl should venture to think for herself at all about right and wrong was passing strange; that she should arrive at original notions upon those abstruse subjects, which were not the notions of constituted authority and of the universal slave-drivers and obscurantists generally—notions full of luminousness upon the real relations and duties of our race—was to poor, cramped Miss Smith-Waters well-nigh inconceivable. That a young girl should prefer freedom to slavery; should deem it more moral to retain her divinely-conferred individuality in spite of the world than to yield it up to a man for life in return for the price of her board and lodging; should refuse to sell her own body for a comfortable home and the shelter of a name—these things seemed to Miss Smith-Waters, with her smaller-catechism standards of right and wrong, scarcely short of sheer madness. Yet Herminia had so endeared herself to the old lady’s soul that on receipt of her letter Miss Smith-Waters went upstairs to her own room with a neuralgic headache, and never again in her life referred to her late second mistress in any other terms than as “my poor dear sweet misguided Herminia.”

But when it became known next morning in Bower Lane that the queenly-looking school-mistress who used to go round among “our girls” with tickets for concerts and lectures and that, had disappeared suddenly with the nice-looking young man

who used to come a-courting her on Sundays and evenings, the amazement and surprise of respectable Bower Lane was simply unbounded. “Who would have thought,” the red-faced matrons of the cottages remarked, over their quart of bitter, “the poor thing had it in her! But there, it’s these demure ones as is always the slyest!” For Bower Lane could only judge that austere soul by its own vulgar standard (as did also Belgravia). Most low minds, indeed, imagine absolute hypocrisy must be involved in any striving after goodness and abstract right-doing on the part of any who happen to disbelieve in their own blood-thirsty deities, or their own vile woman-degrading and prostituting morality. In the topsy-turvy philosophy of Bower Lane and of Belgravia, what is usual is right; while any conscious striving to be better and nobler than the mass around one is regarded at once as either insane or criminal.

CHAPTER VIII

They were bound for Italy; so Alan had decided. Turning over in his mind the pros and cons of the situation, he had wisely determined that Herminia’s confinement had better take place somewhere else than in England. The difficulties and inconveniences which block the way in English lodgings would have been well-nigh insufferable; in Italy, people would only know that an English signora and her husband had taken apartments for a month or two in some solemn old palazzo. To Herminia, indeed, this expatriation at such a moment was in many ways to the last degree distasteful; for her own part, she hated the merest appearance of concealment, and would rather have flaunted the open expression of her supreme moral faith before the eyes of all London. But Alan pointed out to her the many practical difficulties, amounting almost to impossibilities, which beset such a course; and Herminia, though it was hateful to her thus to yield to the immoral prejudices of a false social system, gave way at last to Alan’s repeated expression of the necessity

for prudent and practical action. She would go with him to Italy, she said, as a proof of her affection and her confidence in his judgment, though she still thought the right thing was to stand by her guns fearlessly, and fight it out to the bitter end undismayed in England.

On the morning of their departure, Alan called to see his father, and explain the situation. He felt some explanation was by this time necessary. As yet no one in London knew anything officially as to his relations with Herminia; and for Herminia's sake, Alan had hitherto kept them perfectly private. But now, further reticence was both useless and undesirable; he determined to make a clean breast of the whole story to his father. It was early for a barrister to be leaving town for the Easter vacation; and though Alan had chambers of his own in Lincoln's Inn, where he lived by himself, he was so often in and out of the house in Harley Street that his absence from London would at once have attracted the parental attention.

Dr Merrick was a model of the close-shaven clear-cut London consultant. His shirt-front was as impeccable as his moral character was spotless—in the way that Belgravia and Harley Street still understood spotlessness. He was tall and straight, and unbent by age; the professional poker which he had swallowed in early life seemed to stand him in good stead after sixty years, though his hair had whitened fast, and his brow was furrowed with most deliberative wrinkles. So unapproachable he looked, that not even his own sons dared speak frankly before him. His very smile was restrained; he hardly permitted himself for a moment that weak human relaxation.

Alan called at Harley Street immediately after breakfast, just a quarter of an hour before the time allotted to his father's first patient. Dr Merrick received him in the consulting-room with an interrogative raising of those straight, thin eyebrows. The mere look on his face disconcerted Alan. With an effort the son began and explained his errand. His father settled himself down into his ample and dignified professional

chair—old oak round-backed—and with head half turned, and hands folded in front of him, seemed to diagnose with rapt attention this singular form of psychological malady. When Alan paused for a second between his halting sentences and floundered about in search of a more delicate way of gliding over the thin ice, his father eyed him closely with those keen, grey orbs, and after a moment's hesitation put in a "Well, continue," without the faintest sign of any human emotion. Alan, thus driven to it, admitted awkwardly bit by bit that he was leaving London before the end of term because he had managed to get himself into delicate relations with a lady.

Dr Merrick twirled his thumbs, and in a colourless voice enquired, without relaxing a muscle of his set face,

"What sort of lady, please? A lady of the ballet?"

"Oh, no!" Alan cried, giving a little start of horror. "Quite different from that. A real lady."

"They always are real ladies—for the most part brought down by untoward circumstances," his father responded coldly. "As a rule, indeed, I observe, they're clergyman's daughters."

"This one is," Alan answered, growing hot. "In point of fact, to prevent your saying anything you might afterwards regret, I think I'd better mention the lady's name. It's Miss Herminia Barton, the Dean of Dunwich's daughter."

His father drew a long breath. The corners of the clear-cut mouth dropped down for a second, and the straight, thin eyebrows were momentarily elevated. But he gave no other overt sign of dismay or astonishment.

"That makes a great difference, of course," he answered, after a long pause. "She is a lady, I admit. And she's been to Girton."

"She has," the son replied, scarcely knowing how to continue.

Dr Merrick twirled his thumbs once more, with outward calm, for a minute or two. This was most inconvenient in a professional family.

“And I understand you to say,” he went on in a pitiless voice, “Miss Barton’s state of health is such that you think it advisable to remove her at once—for her confinement, to Italy?”

“Exactly so,” Alan answered, gulping down his discomfort.

The father gazed at him long and steadily.

“Well, I always knew you were a fool,” he said at last with paternal candour; “but I never yet knew you were quite such a fool as this business shows you. You’ll have to marry the girl now in the end. Why the devil couldn’t you marry her outright at first, instead of seducing her?”

“I did not seduce her,” Alan answered stoutly. “No man on earth could ever succeed in seducing that stainless woman.”

Dr Merrick stared hard at him without changing his attitude on his old oak chair. Was the boy going mad, or what the dickens did he mean by it?

“You have seduced her,” he said slowly. “And she is not stainless if she has allowed you to do so.”

“It is the innocence which survives experience that I value, not the innocence which dies with it,” Alan answered gravely.

“I don’t understand these delicate distinctions,” Dr Merrick interposed with a polite sneer. “I gather from what you said just now that the lady is shortly expecting her confinement; and as she isn’t married, you tell me, I naturally infer that somebody must have seduced her—either you, or some other man.”

It was Alan’s turn now to draw himself up very stiffly.

“I beg your pardon,” he answered; “you have no right to speak in such a tone about a lady in Miss Barton’s position. Miss Barton has conscientious scruples about the

marriage-tie, which in theory I share with her; she was unwilling to enter into any relations with me except in terms of perfect freedom."

"I see," the old man went on with provoking calmness. "She preferred, in fact, to be, not your wife, but your mistress."

Alan rose indignantly. "Father," he said, with just wrath, "if you insist upon discussing this matter with me in such a spirit, I must refuse to stay here. I came to tell you the difficulty in which I find myself, and to explain to you my position. If you won't let me tell you in my own way, I must leave the house without having laid the facts before you."

The father spread his two palms in front of him with demonstrative openness. "As you will," he answered. "My time is much engaged. I expect a patient at a quarter past ten. You must be brief, please."

Alan made one more effort. In a very earnest voice, he began to expound to his father Herminia's point of view. Dr Merrick listened for a second or two in calm impatience. Then he consulted his watch. "Excuse me," he said. "I have just three minutes. Let us get at once to the practical part—the therapeutics of the case, omitting its aetiology. You're going to take the young lady to Italy. When she gets there, will she marry you? And do you expect me to help in providing for you both after this insane adventure?"

Alan's face was red as fire. "She will not marry me when she gets to Italy," he answered decisively. "And I don't want you to do anything to provide for either of us."

The father looked at him with the face he was wont to assume in scanning the appearance of a confirmed monomaniac. "She will not marry you," he answered slowly; "and you intend to go on living with her in open concubinage! A lady of birth and position! Is that your meaning?"

"Father," Alan cried despairingly, "Herminia would not consent to live with me on

any other terms. To her it would be disgraceful, shameful, a sin, a reproach, a dereliction of principle. She couldn't go back upon her whole past life. She lives for nothing else but the emancipation of women."

"And you will aid and abet her in her folly?" the father asked, looking up sharply at him. "You will persist in this evil course? You will face the world and openly defy morality?"

"I will not counsel the woman I most love and admire to purchase her own ease by proving false to her convictions," Alan answered stoutly.

Dr Merrick gazed at the watch on his table once more. Then he rose and rang the bell. "Patient here?" he asked curtly. "Show him in then at once. And, Napper, if Mr Alan Merrick ever calls again, will you tell him I'm out?—and your mistress as well, and all the young ladies." He turned coldly to Alan. "I must guard your mother and sisters at least," he said in a chilly voice, "from the contamination of this woman's opinions."

Alan bowed without a word, and left the room. He never again saw the face of his father.

CHAPTER IX

Alan Merrick strode from his father's door that day stung with a burning sense of wrong and injustice. More than ever before in his life he realised to himself the abject hollowness of that conventional code which masquerades in our midst as a system of morals. If he had continued to "live single" as we hypocritically phrase it, and so helped by one unit to spread the festering social canker of prostitution, on which as basis, like some mediæval castle on its foul dungeon vaults, the entire superstructure of our outwardly decent modern society is reared, his father no doubt would have shrugged his shoulders and blinked his cold eyes, and commended the wise young man for abstaining from marriage till his means could permit him to

keep a wife of his own class in the way she was accustomed to. The wretched victims of that vile system might die unseen and unpitied in some hideous back slum, without touching one chord of remorse or regret in Dr Merrick's nature. He was steeled against their suffering. Or again, if Alan had sold his virility for gold to some rich heiress of his set, like Ethel Waterton—had bartered his freedom to be her wedded paramour in a loveless marriage, his father would not only have gladly acquiesced, but would have congratulated his son on his luck and his prudence. Yet, because Alan had chosen rather to form a blameless union of pure affection with a woman who was in every way his moral and mental superior, but in despite of the conventional ban of society, Dr Merrick had cast him off as an open reprobate. And why? Simply because that union was unsanctioned by the exponents of a law they despised, and unblessed by the priests of a creed they rejected. Alan saw at once it is not the intrinsic moral value of an act such people think about, but the light in which it is regarded by a selfish society.

Unchastity, it has been well said, is union without love; and Alan would have none of it.

He went back to Herminia more than ever convinced of that spotless woman's moral superiority to every one else he had ever met with. She sat, a lonely soul, enthroned amid the halo of her own perfect purity. To Alan, she seemed like one of those early Italian Madonnas, lost in a glory of light that surrounds and half hides them. He reverenced her far too much to tell her all that had happened. How could he wound those sweet ears with his father's coarse epithets?

They took the club train that afternoon to Paris. There they slept the night in a fusty hotel near the Gare du Nord, and went on in the morning by the daylight express to Switzerland. At Lucerne and Milan they broke the journey once more. Herminia had never yet gone further afield from England than Paris; and this first glimpse of a wider world was intensely interesting to her. Who can help being pleased, indeed,

with that wonderful St Gothard—the crystal green Reuss shattering itself in white spray into emerald pools by the side of the railway; Wasen church perched high upon its solitary hilltop; the Biaschina ravine, the cleft rocks of Faido, the serpentine twists and turns of the ramping line as it mounts or descends its spiral zigzags? Dewy Alpine pasture, tossed masses of land-slip, white narcissus on the banks, snowy peaks in the background—all alike were fresh visions of delight to Herminia; and she drank it all in with the pure childish joy of a poetic nature. It was the Switzerland of her dreams, reinforced and complemented by unsuspected detail.

One trouble alone disturbed her peace of mind upon that delightful journey. Alan entered their names at all the hotels where they stopped as “Mr and Mrs Alan Merrick of London.” That deception, as Herminia held it, cost her many qualms of conscience; but Alan, with masculine common-sense, was firm upon the point that no other description was practically possible; and Herminia yielded with a sign to his greater worldly wisdom. She had yet to learn the lesson which sooner or later comes home to all the small minority who care a pin about righteousness, that in a world like our own, it is impossible for the righteous always to act consistently up to their most sacred convictions.

At Milan, they stopped long enough to snatch a glimpse of the cathedral, and to take a hasty walk through the pictured glories of the Brera. A vague suspicion began to cross Herminia’s mind, as she gazed at the girlish Madonna of the Sposalizio, that perhaps she wasn’t quite as well adapted to love Italy as Switzerland. Nature she understood; was art yet a closed book to her? If so, she would be sorry; for Alan, in whom the artistic sense was largely developed, loved his Italy dearly; and it would be a real cause of regret to her if she fell short in any way of Alan’s expectations. Moreover, at table d’hôte that evening, a slight episode occurred which roused to the full once more poor Herminia’s tender conscience. Talk had somehow turned on Shelley’s Italian wanderings; and a benevolent-looking clergyman opposite, with that vacantly well-meaning smile, peculiar to a certain type of country rector, was

apologising in what he took to be a broad and generous spirit of divine, toleration for the great moral teacher's supposed lapses from the normal rule of right living. Much, the benevolent-looking gentleman opined, with beaming spectacles, must be forgiven to men of genius. Their temptations no doubt are far keener than with most of us. An eager imagination—a vivid sense of beauty—quick readiness to be moved by the sight of physical or moral loveliness—these were palliations, the old clergyman held, of much that seemed wrong and contradictory to our eyes in the lives of so many great men and women.

At sound of such immoral and unworthy teaching, Herminia's ardent soul rose up in revolt within her. "Oh, no," she cried eagerly, leaning across the table as she spoke. "I can't allow that plea. It's degrading to Shelley, and to all true appreciation of the duties of genius. Not less but more than most of us is the genius bound to act up with all his might to the highest moral law, to be the prophet and interpreter of the highest moral excellence. To whom much is given, of him much shall be required. Just because the man or woman of genius stands raised on a pedestal so far above the mass have we the right to expect that he or she should point us the way, should go before us as pioneer, should be more careful of the truth, more disdainful of the wrong, down to the smallest particular, than the ordinary person. There are poor souls born into this world so petty and narrow and wanting in originality that one can only expect them to tread the beaten track, be it ever so cruel and wicked and mistaken. But from a Shelley or a George Eliot, we expect greater things, and we have a right to expect them. That's why I can never quite forgive George Eliot—who knew the truth, and found freedom for herself, and practised it in her life—for upholding in her books the conventional lies, the conventional prejudices; and that's why I can never admire Shelley enough, who, in an age of slavery, refused to abjure or to deny his freedom, but acted unto death to the full height of his principles."

The benevolent-looking clergyman gazed aghast at Herminia. Then he turned slowly

to Alan. “Your wife,” he said in a mild and terrified voice, “is a very advanced lady.”

Herminia longed to blurt out the whole simple truth. “I am not his wife. I am not, and could never be wife or slave to any man. This is a very dear friend, and he and I are travelling as friends together.” But a warning glance from Alan made her hold her peace with difficulty and acquiesce as best she might in the virtual deception. Still, the incident went to her heart, and made her more anxious than ever to declare her convictions and her practical obedience to them openly before the world. She remembered, oh, so well one of her father’s sermons that had vividly impressed her in the dear old days at Dunwich Cathedral. It was preached upon the text, “Come ye out and be ye separate.”

From Milan they went on direct to Florence. Alan had decided to take rooms for the summer at Perugia, and there to see Herminia safely through her maternal troubles. He loved Perugia, he said; it was cool and high-perched; and then, too, it was such a capital place for sketching. Besides, he was anxious to complete his studies of the early Umbrian painters. But they must have just one week at Florence together before they went up among the hills. Florence was the place for a beginner to find out what Italian art was aiming at. You got it there in its full logical development—every phase, step by step, in organic unity; while elsewhere you saw but stages and jumps and results, interrupted here and there by disturbing lacunae. So at Florence they stopped for a week en route, and Herminia first learnt what Florentine art proposed to itself.

Ah, that week in Florence! What a dream of delight! ’Twas pure gold to Herminia. How could it well be otherwise? It seemed to her afterwards like the last flicker of joy in a doomed life, before its light went out and left her forever in utter darkness. To be sure, a week is a terribly cramped and hurried time in which to view Florence, the beloved city, whose ineffable glories need at least one whole winter adequately

to grasp them. But failing a winter, a week with the gods made Herminia happy. She carried away but a confused phantasmagoria, it is true, of the soaring tower of the Palazzo Vecchio, pointing straight with its slender shaft to heaven; of the swelling dome and huge ribs of the cathedral, seen vast from the terrace in front of San Miniato; of the endless Madonnas and the deathless saints niched in golden tabernacles at the Uffizi and the Pitti; of the tender grace of Fra Angelico at San Marco; of the infinite wealth and astounding variety of Donatello's marble in the spacious courts of the cool Bargello. But her window at the hotel looked straight as it could look down the humming Calzaioli to the pierced and encrusted front of Giotto's campanile, with the cupola of San Lorenzo in the middle distance, and the façade of Fiesole standing out deep-blue against the dull red glare of evening in the background. If that were not enough to sate and enchant Herminia, she would indeed have been difficult. And with Alan by her side, every joy was doubled.

She had never before known what it was to have her lover continuously with her. And his aid in those long corridors, where Bambinos smiled down at her with childish lips, helped her wondrously to understand in so short a time what they sought to convey to her. Alan was steeped in Italy; he knew and entered into the spirit of Tuscan art; and now for the first time Herminia found herself face to face with a thoroughly new subject in which Alan could be her teacher from the very beginning, as most men are teachers to the women who depend upon them. This sense of support and restfulness and clinging was fresh and delightful to her. It is a woman's ancestral part to look up to the man; she is happiest in doing it, and must long remain so; and Herminia was not sorry to find herself in this so much a woman. She thought it delicious to roam through the long halls of some great gallery with Alan, and let him point out to her the pictures he loved best, explain their peculiar merits, and show the subtle relation in which they stood to the pictures that went before them and the pictures that came after them, as well as to the other work of the same master or his contemporaries. It was even no small joy to her to find that he

knew so much more about art and its message than she did; that she could look up to his judgment, confide in his opinion, see the truth of his criticism, profit much by his instruction. So well did she use those seven short days, indeed, that she came to Florence with Fra Angelico, Filippo Lippi, Botticelli, mere names; and she went away from it feeling that she had made them real friends and possessions for a lifetime.

So the hours whirled fast in those enchanted halls, and Herminia's soul was enriched by new tastes and new interests. O towers of fretted stone! O jasper and porphyry! Her very state of health made her more susceptible than usual to fresh impressions, and drew Alan at the same time every day into closer union with her. For was not the young life now quickening within her half his and half hers, and did it not seem to make the father by reflex nearer and dearer to her? Surely the child that was nurtured, unborn, on those marble colonnades and those placid Saint Catherines must draw in with each pulse of its antenatal nutriment some tincture of beauty, of freedom, of culture! So Herminia thought to herself as she lay awake at night and looked out of the window from the curtains of her bed at the boundless dome and the tall campanile gleaming white in the moonlight. So we have each of us thought—especially the mothers in Israel among us—about the unborn babe that hastens along to its birth with such a radiant halo of the possible future ever gilding and glorifying its unseen forehead.

CHAPTER X

All happy times must end, and the happier the sooner. At one short week's close they hurried on to Perugia.

And how full Alan had been of Perugia beforehand! He loved every stone of the town, every shadow of the hillsides, he told Herminia at Florence; and Herminia started on her way accordingly well prepared to fall quite as madly in love with the

Umbrian capital as Alan himself had done.

The railway journey, indeed, seemed extremely pretty. What a march of sweet pictures! They mounted with creaking wheels the slow ascent up the picturesque glen where the Arno runs deep, to the white towers of Arezzo; then Cortona throned in state on its lonely hilltop, and girt by its gigantic Etruscan walls; next the low bank, the lucid green water, the olive-clad slopes of reedy Thrasymene; last of all, the sere hills and city-capped heights of their goal, Perugia.

For its name's sake alone, Herminia was prepared to admire the antique Umbrian capital. And Alan loved it so much, and was so determined she ought to love it too, that she was ready to be pleased with everything in it. Until she arrived there—and then, oh, poor heart, what a grievous disappointment! It was late April weather when they reached the station at the foot of that high hill where Augusta Perusia sits lording it on her throne over the wedded valleys of the Tiber and the Clitumnus. Tramontana was blowing. No rain had fallen for weeks; the slopes of the lower Apennines, ever dry and dusty, shone still drier and dustier than Alan had yet beheld them. Herminia glanced up at the long white road, thick in deep grey powder, that led by endless zigzags along the dreary slope to the long white town on the shadeless hilltop. At first sight alone, Perugia was a startling disillusion to Herminia. She didn't yet know how bitterly she was doomed hereafter to hate every dreary dirty street in it. But she knew at the first blush that the Perugia she had imagined and pictured to herself didn't really exist and had never existed.

She had figured in her own mind a beautiful breezy town, high set on a peaked hill, in fresh and mossy country. She had envisaged the mountains to her soul as clad with shady woods, and strewn with huge boulders under whose umbrageous shelter bloomed waving masses of the pretty pale blue Apennine anemones she saw sold in big bunches at the street corners in Florence. She had imagined, in short, that Umbria was a wilder Italian Wales, as fresh, as green, as sweet-scented, as

fountain-fed. And she knew pretty well whence she had derived that strange and utterly false conception. She had fancied Perugia as one of those mountain villages described by Macaulay, the sort of hilltop stronghold

“That, hid by beech and pine, Like an eagle’s nest hangs on the crest Of purple Apennine.”

Instead of that, what manner of land did she see actually before her? Dry and shadeless hillsides, tilled with obtrusive tilth to their topmost summit; ploughed fields and hoary olive-groves silvering to the wind, in interminable terraces; long suburbs, unlovely in their gaunt, bare squalor, stretching like huge arms of some colossal cuttlefish over the spurs and shoulders of that desecrated mountain. No woods, no moss, no coolness, no greenery; all nature toned down to one monotonous greyness. And this dreary desert was indeed the place where her baby must be born, the baby predestined to regenerate humanity!

Oh, why did they ever leave that enchanted Florence!

Meanwhile Alan had got together the luggage, and engaged a ramshackle Perugian cab; for the public vehicles of Perugia are perhaps, as a class, the most precarious and incoherent known to science. However, the luggage was bundled on to the top by Our Lady’s grace, without dissolution of continuity; the lean-limbed horses were induced by explosive volleys of sound Tuscan oaths to make a feeble and spasmodic effort; and bit by bit the sad little cavalcade began slowly to ascend the interminable hill that rises by long loops to the platform of the Prefettura.

That drive was the gloomiest Herminia had ever yet taken. Was it the natural fastidiousness of her condition, she wondered, or was it really the dirt and foul smells of the place that made her sicken at first sight of the wind-swept purlieus? Perhaps a little of both; for in dusty weather Perugia is the most endless town to get out of in Italy; and its capacity for the production of unpleasant odours is unequalled no doubt from the Alps to Calabria. As they reached the bare white platform at the

entry to the upper town, where Pope Paul's grim fortress once frowned to overawe the audacious souls of the liberty-loving Umbrians, she turned mute eyes to Alan for sympathy. And then for the first time the terrible truth broke over her that Alan wasn't in the least disappointed or disgusted; he knew it all before; he was accustomed to it and liked it! As for Alan, he misinterpreted her glance, indeed, and answered with that sort of proprietary pride we all of us assume towards a place we love, and are showing off to a newcomer: "Yes, I thought you'd like this view, dearest; isn't it wonderful, wonderful? That's Assisi over yonder, that strange white town that clings by its eyelashes to the sloping hillside: and those are the snowclad heights of the Gran Sasso beyond; and that's Montefalco to the extreme right, where the sunset gleam just catches the hilltop."

His words struck dumb horror into Herminia's soul. Poor child, how she shrank at it! It was clear, then, instead of being shocked and disgusted, Alan positively admired this human Sahara. With an effort she gulped down her tears and her sighs, and pretended to look with interest in the directions he pointed. She could see nothing in it all but dry hillsides, crowned with still drier towns; unimagined stretches of sultry suburb; devouring wastes of rubbish and foul immemorial kitchen-middens. And the very fact that for Alan's sake she couldn't bear to say so—seeing how pleased and proud he was of Perugia, as if it had been built from his own design—made the bitterness of her disappointment more difficult to endure. She would have given anything at that moment for an ounce of human sympathy.

She had to learn in time to do without it.

They spent that night at the comfortable hotel, perhaps the best in Italy. Next morning, they were to go hunting for apartments in the town, where Alan knew of a suite that would exactly suit them. After dinner, in the twilight, filled with his artistic joy at being back in Perugia, his beloved Perugia, he took Herminia out for a stroll, with a light wrap round her head, on the terrace of the Prefettura. The air blew

fresh and cool now with a certain mountain sharpness; for, as Alan assured her with pride, they stood seventeen hundred feet above the level of the Mediterranean. The moon had risen; the sunset glow had not yet died off the slopes of the Assisi hillsides. It streamed through the perforated belfry of San Domenico; it steeped in rose-colour the slender and turreted shaft of San Pietro, “Perugia’s Pennon,” the Arrowhead of Umbria. It gilded the gaunt houses that jut out upon the spine of the Borgo hill into the valley of the Tiber. Beyond, rose shadowy Apennines, on whose aerial flanks towns and villages shone out clear in the mellow moonlight. Far away on their peaks faint specks of twinkling fire marked indistinguishable sites of high hilltop castles.

Alan turned to her proudly. “Well, what do you think of that?” he asked with truly personal interest.

Herminia could only gasp out in a half reluctant way, “It’s a beautiful view, Alan. Beautiful; beautiful; beautiful!”

But she felt conscious to herself it owed its beauty in the main to the fact that the twilight obscured so much of it. Tomorrow morning, the bare hills would stand out once more in all their pristine bareness; the white roads would shine forth as white and dusty as ever; the obtrusive rubbish heaps would press themselves at every turn upon eye and nostril. She hated the place, to say the truth; it was a terror to her to think she had to stop so long in it.

Most famous towns, in fact, need to be twice seen: the first time briefly to face the inevitable disappointment to our expectations; the second time, at leisure, to reconstruct and appraise the surviving reality. Imagination so easily beggars performance. Rome, Cairo, the Nile, are obvious examples; the grand exceptions are Venice and Florence—in a lesser degree, Bruges, Munich, Pisa. As for Umbria, ’tis a poor thing; our own Devon snaps her fingers at it.

Moreover, to say the truth, Herminia was too fresh to Italy to appreciate the smaller

or second-rate towns at their real value. Even northerners love Florence and Venice at first sight; those take their hearts by storm; but Perugia, Siena, Orvieto, are an acquired taste, like olives and caviare, and it takes time to acquire it. Alan had not made due allowance for this psychological truth of the northern natures. A Celt in essence, thoroughly Italianate himself, and with a deep love for the picturesque, which often makes men insensible to dirt and discomfort, he expected to Italianise Herminia too rapidly. Herminia, on the other hand, belonged more strictly to the intellectual and somewhat inartistic English type. The picturesque alone did not suffice for her. Cleanliness and fresh air were far dearer to her soul than the quaintest street corners, the oddest old archways; she pined in Perugia for a green English hillside.

The time, too, was unfortunate, after no rain for weeks; for rainlessness, besides doubling the native stock of dust, brings out to the full the ancestral Etruscan odours of Perugia. So, when next morning Herminia found herself installed in a dingy flat, in a morose palazzo, in the main street of the city, she was glad that Alan insisted on going out alone to make needful purchases of groceries and provisions, because it gave her a chance of flinging herself on her bed in a perfect agony of distress and disappointment, and having a good cry, all alone, at the aspect of the home where she was to pass so many eventful weeks of her existence.

Dusty, gusty Perugia! O baby, to be born for the freeing of woman, was it here, was it here you must draw your first breath, in an air polluted by the vices of centuries!

CHAPTER XI

Somewhat later in the day, they went out for a stroll through the town together. To Herminia’s great relief, Alan never even noticed she had been crying. Man-like, he was absorbed in his own delight. She would have felt herself a traitor if Alan had discovered it.

“Which way shall we go?” she asked listlessly, with a glance to right and left, as they passed beneath the sombre Tuscan gate of their palazzo.

And Alan answered, smiling, “Why, what does it matter? Which way you like. Every way is a picture.”

And so it was, Herminia herself was fain to admit, in a pure painter’s sense that didn’t at all attract her. Lines grouped themselves against the sky in infinite diversity. Whichever way they turned, quaint old walls met their eyes, and tumble-down churches, and mouldering towers, and mediæval palazzi with carved doorways or rich loggias. But whichever way they turned, dusty roads too confronted them, illimitable stretches of gloomy suburb, unwholesome airs, sickening sights and sounds and perfumes. Narrow streets swept, darkling, under pointed archways, that framed distant vistas of spire or campanile, silhouetted against the solid blue sky of Italy. The crystal hardness of that sapphire firmament repelled Herminia. They passed beneath the triumphal arch of Augustus with its Etruscan mason-work, its Roman decorations, and round the antique walls, aglow with tufted gillyflowers, to the bare Piazza d’Armi. A cattle fair was going on there; and Alan pointed with pleasure to the curious fact that the oxen were all cream-coloured—the famous white steers of Clitumnus. Herminia knew her Virgil as well as Alan himself, and murmured half aloud the sonorous hexameter, “Romanos ad templa deum duxere triumphos.” But somehow, the knowledge that these were indeed the milk-white bullocks of Clitumnus failed amid so much dust to arouse her enthusiasm. She would have been better pleased just then with a yellow English primrose.

They clambered down the terraced ravines sometimes, a day or two later, to arid banks by a dry torrent’s bed where Italian primroses really grew, interspersed with tall grape-hyacinths, and scented violets, and glossy cleft leaves of winter aconite. But even the primroses were not the same thing to Herminia as those she used to

gather on the dewy slopes of the Redlands; they were so dry and dust-grimed, and the path by the torrent's side was so distasteful and unsavory. Bare white boughs of twisted fig-trees depressed her. Besides, these hills were steep, and Herminia felt the climbing. Nothing in city or suburbs attracted her soul. Etruscan Volumnii, each lolling in white travertine on the sculptured lid of his own sarcophagus urn, and all duly ranged in the twilight of their tomb at their spectral banquet, stirred her heart but feebly. St Francis, Santa Chiara, fell flat on her English fancy. But as for Alan, he revelled all day long in his native element. He sketched every morning, among the huddled, strangled lanes; sketched churches and monasteries, and portals of palazzi; sketched mountains clear-cut in that pellucid air; till Herminia wondered how he could sit so long in the broiling sun or keen wind on those bare hillsides, or on broken brick parapets in those noisome byways. But your born sketcher is oblivious of all on earth save his chosen art; and Alan was essentially a painter in fibre, diverted by pure circumstance into a Chancery practice.

The very pictures in the gallery failed to interest Herminia, she knew not why. Alan couldn't rouse her to enthusiasm over his beloved Buonfigli. Those naïve flaxen-haired angels, with sweetly parted lips, and baskets of red roses in their delicate hands, own sisters though they were to the girlish Lippis she had so admired at Florence, moved her heart but faintly. Try as she might to like them, she responded to nothing Perugian in any way.

At the end of a week or two, however, Alan began to complain of constant headache. He was looking very well, but grew uneasy and restless. Herminia advised him to give up sketching for a while, those small streets were so close; and he promised to yield to her wishes in the matter. Yet he grew worse next day, so that Herminia, much alarmed, called in an Italian doctor. Perugia boasted no English one. The Italian felt his pulse, and listened to his symptoms. "The signore came here from Florence?" he asked.

“From Florence,” Herminia assented, with a sudden sinking.

The doctor protruded his lower lip. “This is typhoid fever,” he said after a pause. “A very bad type. It has been assuming such a form this winter at Florence.”

He spoke the plain truth. Twenty-one days before in his bedroom at the hotel in Florence, Alan had drunk a single glass of water from the polluted springs that supply in part the Tuscan metropolis. For twenty-one days those victorious microbes had brooded in silence in his poisoned arteries. At the end of that time, they swarmed and declared themselves. He was ill with an aggravated form of the most deadly disease that still stalks unchecked through unsanitated Europe.

Herminia’s alarm was painful. Alan grew rapidly worse. In two days he was so ill that she thought it her duty to telegraph at once to Dr Merrick, in London: “Alan’s life in danger. Serious attack of Florentine typhoid. Italian doctor despairs of his life. May not last till tomorrow.—HERMINIA BARTON.”

Later on in the day came a telegram in reply; it was addressed to Alan: “Am on my way out by through train to attend you. But as a matter of duty, marry the girl at once, and legitimatise your child while the chance remains to you.”

It was kindly meant in its way. It was a message of love, of forgiveness, of generosity, such as Herminia would hardly have expected from so stern a man as Alan had always represented his father to be to her. But at moments of unexpected danger angry feelings between father and son are often forgotten, and blood unexpectedly proves itself thicker than water. Yet even so Herminia couldn’t bear to show the telegram to Alan. She feared lest in this extremity, his mind weakened by disease, he might wish to take his father’s advice, and prove untrue to their common principles. In that case, woman that she was, she hardly knew how she could resist what might be only too probably his dying wishes. Still, she nerved herself for this trial of faith, and went through with it bravely. Alan, though sinking, was still conscious at moments; in one such interval, with an effort to be calm, she showed

him his father's telegram. Tears rose into his eyes.

"I didn't expect him to come," he said. "This is all very good of him." Then, after a moment, he added, "Would you wish me in this extremity, Hermy, to do as he advises?"

Herminia bent over him with fierce tears on her eyelids.

"O Alan darling," she cried, "you mustn't die! You mustn't leave me! What could I do without you? oh, my darling, my darling! But don't think of me now. Don't think of the dear baby. I couldn't bear to disturb you even by showing you the telegram. For your sake, Alan, I'll be calm—I'll be calm. But oh, not for worlds—not for worlds—even so, would I turn my back on the principles we would both risk our lives for!"

Alan smiled a faint smile.

"Hermy," he said slowly, "I love you all the more for it. You're as brave as a lion. Oh, how much I have learned from you!"

All that night and next day Herminia watched by his bedside. Now and again he was conscious. But for the most part he lay still, in a comatose condition, with eyes half closed, the whites showing through the lids, neither moving nor speaking. All the time he grew worse steadily. As she sat by his bedside, Herminia began to realise the utter loneliness of her position. That Alan might die was the one element in the situation she had never even dreamt of. No wife could love her husband with more perfect devotion than Herminia loved Alan. She hung upon every breath with unspeakable suspense and unutterable affection. But the Italian doctor held out little hope of a rally. Herminia sat there, fixed to the spot, a white marble statue.

Late next evening Dr Merrick reached Perugia. He drove straight from the station to the dingy flat in the morose palazzo. At the door of his son's room, Herminia met him, clad from head to foot in white, as she had sat by the bedside. Tears blinded her eyes; her face was wan; her mien terribly haggard.

“And my son?” the Doctor asked, with a hushed breath of terror.

“He died half an hour ago,” Herminia gasped out with an effort.

“But he married you before he died?” the father cried, in a tone of profound emotion. “He did justice to his child?—he repaired his evil?”

“He did not,” Herminia answered, in a scarcely audible voice. “He was staunch to the end to his lifelong principles.”

“Why not?” the father asked, staggering. “Did he see my telegram?”

“Yes,” Herminia answered, numb with grief, yet too proud to prevaricate. “But I advised him to stand firm; and he abode by my decision.”

The father waved her aside with his hands imperiously. “Then I have done with you,” he exclaimed. “I am sorry to seem harsh to you at such a moment. But it is your own doing. You leave me no choice. You have no right any longer in my son’s apartments.”

CHAPTER XII

No position in life is more terrible to face than that of the widowed mother left alone in the world with her unborn baby. When the child is her first one—when, besides the natural horror and agony of the situation, she has also to confront the unknown dangers of that new and dreaded experience—her plight is still more pitiable. But when the widowed mother is one who has never been a wife—when in addition to all these pangs of bereavement and fear, she has further to face the contempt and hostility of a sneering world, as Herminia had to face it—then, indeed, her lot becomes well-nigh insupportable; it is almost more than human nature can bear up against. So Herminia found it. She might have died of grief and loneliness then and there, had it not been for the sudden and unexpected rousing of her spirit of opposition by Dr Merrick’s words. That cruel speech gave her the will and the

power to live. It saved her from madness. She drew herself up at once with an injured woman's pride, and, facing her dead Alan's father with a quick access of energy,

"You are wrong," she said, stilling her heart with one hand. "These rooms are mine—my own, not dear Alan's. I engaged them myself, for my own use, and in my own name, as Herminia Barton. You can stay here if you wish. I will not imitate your cruelty by refusing you access to them; but if you remain here, you must treat me at least with the respect that belongs to my great sorrow, and with the courtesy due to an English lady."

Her words half cowed him. He subsided at once. In silence he stepped over to his dead son's bedside. Mechanically, almost unconsciously, Herminia went on with the needful preparations for Alan's funeral. Her grief was so intense that she bore up as if stunned; she did what was expected of her without thinking or feeling it. Dr Merrick stopped on at Perugia till his son was buried. He was frigidly polite meanwhile to Herminia. Deeply as he differed from her, the dignity and pride with which she had answered his first insult impressed him with a certain sense of respect for her character, and made him feel at least he could not be rude to her with impunity. He remained at the hotel, and superintended the arrangements for his son's funeral. As soon as that was over, and Herminia had seen the coffin lowered into the grave of all her hopes, save one, she returned to her rooms alone—more utterly alone than she had ever imagined any human being could feel in a cityful of fellow-creatures.

She must shape her path now for herself without Alan's aid, without Alan's advice. And her bitterest enemies in life, she felt sure, would henceforth be those of Alan's household.

Yet, lonely as she was, she determined from the first moment no course was left open for her save to remain at Perugia. She couldn't go away so soon from the spot

where Alan was laid—from all that remained to her now of Alan. Except his unborn baby—the baby that was half his, half hers—the baby predestined to regenerate humanity. Oh, how she longed to fondle it! Every arrangement had been made in Perugia for the baby's advent; she would stand by those arrangements still, in her shuttered room, partly because she couldn't tear herself away from Alan's grave; partly because she had no heart left to make the necessary arrangements elsewhere; but partly also because she wished Alan's baby to be born near Alan's side, where she could present it after birth at its father's last resting-place. It was a fanciful wish, she knew, based upon ideas she had long since discarded; but these ancestral sentiments echo long in our hearts; they die hard with us all, and most hard with women.

She would stop on at Perugia, and die in giving birth to Alan's baby; or else live to be father and mother in one to it.

So she stopped and waited; waited in tremulous fear, half longing for death, half eager not to leave that sacred baby an orphan. It would be Alan's baby, and might grow in time to be the world's true saviour. For, now that Alan was dead, no hope on earth seemed too great to cherish for Alan's child within her.

And oh, that it might be a girl, to take up the task she herself had failed in!

The day after the funeral, Dr Merrick called in for the last time at her lodgings. He brought in his hand a legal-looking paper, which he had found in searching among Alan's effects, for he had carried them off to his hotel, leaving not even a memento of her ill-starred love to Herminia.

"This may interest you," he said dryly. "You will see at once it is in my son's handwriting."

Herminia glanced over it with a burning face. It was a will in her favour, leaving absolutely everything of which he died possessed "to my beloved friend, Herminia Barton."

Herminia had hardly the means to keep herself alive till her baby was born; but in those first fierce hours of ineffable bereavement what question of money could interest her in any way? She stared at it, stupefied. It only pleased her to think Alan had not forgotten her.

The sordid moneyed class of England will haggle over bequests and settlements and dowries on their bridal eve, or by the coffins of their dead. Herminia had no such ignoble possibilities. How could he speak of it in her presence at a moment like this? How obtrude such themes on her august sorrow?

“This was drawn up,” Dr Merrick went on in his austere voice, “the very day before my late son left London. But, of course, you will have observed it was never executed.”

And in point of fact Herminia now listlessly noted that it lacked Alan’s signature.

“That makes it, I need hardly say, of no legal value,” the father went on, with frigid calm. “I bring it round merely to show you that my son intended to act honourably towards you. As things stand, of course, he has died intestate, and his property, such as it is, will follow the ordinary law of succession. For your sake, I am sorry it should be so; I could have wished it otherwise. However, I need not remind you”—he picked his phrases carefully with icy precision—“that under circumstances like these neither you nor your child have any claim whatsoever upon my son’s estate. Nor have I any right over it. Still”—he paused for a second, and that incisive mouth strove to grow gentle, while Herminia hot with shame, confronted him helplessly—“I sympathise with your position, and do not forget it was Alan who brought you here. Therefore, as an act of courtesy to a lady in whom he was personally interested . . . if a slight gift of fifty pounds would be of immediate service to you in your present situation, why, I think, with the approbation of his brothers and sisters, who of course inherit——”

Herminia turned upon him like a wounded creature. She thanked the blind caprice

which governs the universe that it gave her strength at that moment to bear up under his insult. With one angry hand she waved dead Alan's father inexorably to the door. "Go," she said simply. "How dare you? how dare you? Leave my rooms this instant."

Dr Merrick still irresolute, and anxious in his way to do what he thought was just, drew a roll of Italian bank notes from his waistcoat pocket, and laid them on the table. "You may find these useful," he said, as he retreated awkwardly.

Herminia turned upon him with the just wrath of a great nature outraged. "Take them up!" she cried fiercely. "Don't pollute my table!" Then, as often happens to all of us in moments of deep emotion, a Scripture phrase, long hallowed by childish familiarity, rose spontaneous to her lips. "Take them up!" she cried again. "Thy money perish with thee!"

Dr Merrick took them up, and slank noiselessly from the room, murmuring as he went some inarticulate words to the effect that he had only desired to serve her. As soon as he was gone, Herminia's nerve gave way. She flung herself into a chair, and sobbed long and violently.

It was no time for her, of course, to think about money. Sore pressed as she was, she had just enough left to see her safely through her confinement. Alan had given her a few pounds for housekeeping when they first got into the rooms, and those she kept; they were hers; she had not the slightest impulse to restore them to his family. All he left was hers too, by natural justice; and she knew it. He had drawn up his will, attestation clause and all, with even the very date inserted in pencil, the day before they quitted London together; but finding no friends at the club to witness it, he had put off executing it; and so had left Herminia entirely to her own resources. In the delirium of his fever, the subject never occurred to him. But no doubt existed as to the nature of his last wishes; and if Herminia herself had been placed in a similar position to that of the Merrick family, she would have scorned to take so mean an

advantage of the mere legal omission.

By this time, of course, the story of her fate had got across to England, and was being read and retold by each man or woman after his or her own fashion. The papers mentioned it, as seen through the optic lens of the society journalist, with what strange refraction. Most of them descried in poor Herminia's tragedy nothing but material for a smile, a sneer, or an innuendo. The Dean himself wrote to her, a piteous, paternal note, which bowed her down more than ever in her abyss of sorrow. He wrote as a dean must—grey hairs brought down with sorrow to the grave; infinite mercy of Heaven; still room for repentance; but oh, to keep away from her pure young sisters! Herminia answered with dignity, but with profound emotion. She knew her father too well not to sympathise greatly with his natural view of so fatal an episode.

So she stopped on alone for her dark hour in Perugia. She stopped on, untended by any save unknown Italians whose tongue she hardly spoke, and uncheered by a friendly voice at the deepest moment of trouble in a woman's history. Often for hours together she sat alone in the cathedral, gazing up at a certain mild-featured Madonna, enshrined above an altar. The unwedded widow seemed to gain some comfort from the pitying face of the maiden mother. Every day, while still she could, she walked out along the shadeless suburban road to Alan's grave in the parched and crowded cemetery. Women trudging along with crammed creels on their backs turned round to stare at her. When she could no longer walk, she sat at her window towards San Luca and gazed at it. There lay the only friend she possessed in Perugia, perhaps in the universe.

The dreaded day arrived at last, and her strong constitution enabled Herminia to live through it. Her baby was born, a beautiful little girl, soft, delicate, wonderful, with Alan's blue eyes, and its mother's complexion. Those rosy feet saved Herminia. As she clasped them in her hands—tiny feet, tender feet—she felt she had now

something left to live for—her baby, Alan's baby, the baby with a future, the baby that was destined to regenerate humanity.

So warm! So small! Alan's soul and her own, mysteriously blended.

Still, even so, she couldn't find it in her heart to give any joyous name to dead Alan's child. Dolores she called it, at Alan's grave. In sorrow had she borne it; its true name was Dolores.

CHAPTER XIII

It was a changed London to which Herminia returned. She was homeless, penniless, friendless. Above all she was déclassée. The world that had known her now knew her no more. Women who had smothered her with their Judas kisses passed her by in their victorias with a stony stare. Even men pretended to be looking the other way, or crossed the street to avoid the necessity for recognising her. "So awkward to be mixed up with such a scandal!" She hardly knew as yet herself how much her world was changed indeed; for had she not come back to it, the mother of an illegitimate daughter? But she began to suspect it the very first day when she arrived at Charing Cross, clad in a plain black dress, with her baby at her bosom.

Her first task was to find rooms; her next to find a livelihood. Even the first involved no small relapse from the purity of her principles. After long hours of vain hunting, she found at last she could only get lodgings for herself and Alan's child by telling a virtual lie, against which her soul revolted. She was forced to describe herself as Mrs Barton; she must allow her landlady to suppose she was really a widow. Woe unto you, scribes and hypocrites! in all Christian London, Miss Barton and her baby could never have found a "respectable" room in which to lay their heads. So she yielded to the inevitable, and took two tiny attics in a small street off the Edgware Road at a moderate rental. To live alone in a cottage as of yore would have been impossible now she had a baby of her own to tend, besides earning her livelihood;

she fell back regretfully on the lesser evil of lodgings.

To earn her livelihood was a hard task, though Herminia's indomitable energy rode down all obstacles. Teaching, of course, was now quite out of the question; no English parent could entrust the education of his daughters to the hands of a woman who has dared and suffered much, for conscience' sake, in the cause of freedom for herself and her sisters. But even before Herminia went away to Perugia, she had acquired some small journalistic connection; and now, in her hour of need, she found not a few of the journalistic leaders by no means unwilling to sympathise and fraternise with her. To be sure, they didn't ask the free woman to their homes, nor invite her to meet their own women: even an enlightened journalist must draw a line somewhere in the matter of society; but they understood and appreciated the sincerity of her motives, and did what they could to find employment and salary for her. Herminia was an honest and conscientious worker; she knew much about many things; and nature had gifted her with the instinctive power of writing clearly and unaffectedly the English language. So she got on with editors. Who could resist, indeed, the pathetic charm of that girlish figure, simply clad in unobtrusive black, and sanctified in every feature of the shrinking face by the beauty of sorrow? Not the men who stand at the head of the one English profession which more than all others has escaped the leprous taint of that national moral blight that calls itself "respectability."

In a slow and tentative way, then, Herminia crept back into unrecognised recognition. It was all she needed. Companionship she liked; she hated society. That mart was odious to her where women barter their bodies for a title, a carriage, a place at the head of some rich man's table. Bohemia sufficed her. Her terrible widowhood, too, was rendered less terrible to her by the care of her little one. Babbling lips, pattering feet, made heaven in her attic. Every good woman is by nature a mother, and finds best in maternity her social and moral salvation. She shall be saved in child-bearing. Herminia was far removed indeed from that blatant and

decadent sect of “advanced women” who talk as though motherhood were a disgrace and a burden, instead of being, as it is, the full realisation of woman’s faculties, the natural outlet for woman’s wealth of emotion. She knew that to be a mother is the best privilege of her sex, a privilege of which unholy man-made institutions now conspire to deprive half the finest and noblest women in our civilised communities. Widowed as she was, she still pitied the unhappy beings doomed to the cramped life and dwarfed heart of the old maid; pitied them as sincerely as she despised those unhealthy souls who would make of celibacy, wedded or unwedded, a sort of anti-natural religion for women. Alan’s death, however, had left Herminia’s ship rudderless. Her mission had failed. That she acknowledged herself. She lived now for Dolores. The child to whom she had given the noble birthright of liberty was destined from her cradle to the apostolate of women. Alone of her sex, she would start in life emancipated. While others must say, “With a great sum obtained I this freedom,” Dolores could answer with Paul, “But I was free born.” That was no mean heritage.

Gradually Herminia got work to her mind; work enough to support her in the modest way that sufficed her small wants for herself and her baby. In London, given time enough, you can live down anything, perhaps even the unspeakable sin of having struck a righteous blow in the interest of women. And day by day, as months and years went on, Herminia felt she was living down the disgrace of having obeyed an enlightened conscience. She even found friends. Dear old Miss Smith-Waters used to creep round by night, like Nicodemus—respectability would not have allowed her to perform that Christian act in open daylight—and sit for an hour or two with her dear misguided Herminia. Miss Smith-Waters prayed nightly for Herminia’s “conversion,” yet not without an uncomfortable suspicion, after all, that Herminia had very little indeed to be “converted” from. Other people also got to know her by degrees; an editor’s wife; a kind literary hostess; some socialistic ladies who liked to be “advanced”; a friendly family or two of the Bohemian literary or artistic pattern.

Among them Herminia learned to be as happy in time as she could ever again be, now she had lost her Alan. She was Mrs Barton to them all; that lie she found it practically impossible to fight against. Even the Bohemians refused to let their children ask after Miss Barton's baby.

So wrapt in vile falsehoods and conventions are we. So far have we travelled from the pristine realities of truth and purity. We lie to our children—in the interests of morality.

After a time, in the intervals between doing her journalistic work and nursing Alan's baby, Herminia found leisure to write a novel. It was seriously meant, of course, but still it was a novel. That is every woman's native idea of literature. It reflects the relatively larger part which the social life plays in the existence of women. If a man tells you he wants to write a book, nine times out of ten he means a treatise or argument on some subject that interests him. Even the men who take in the end to writing novels have generally begun with other aims and other aspirations, and have only fallen back upon the art of fiction in the last resort as a means of livelihood. But when a woman tells you she wants to write a book, nine times out of ten she means she wants to write a novel. For that task nature has most often endowed her richly. Her quicker intuitions, her keener interest in social life, her deeper insight into the passing play of emotions and of motives, enable her to paint well the complex interrelations of every-day existence. So Herminia, like the rest, wrote her own pet novel.

By the time her baby was eighteen months old, she had finished it. It was blankly pessimistic, of course. Blank pessimism is the one creed possible for all save fools. To hold any other is to curl yourself up selfishly in your own easy chair, and say to your soul, "O soul, eat and drink; O soul, make merry. Carouse thy fill. Ignore the maimed lives, the stricken heads and seared hearts, the reddened fangs and ravening claws of nature all round thee." Pessimism is sympathy. Optimism is selfishness.

The optimist folds his smug hands on his ample knees, and murmurs contentedly, “The Lord has willed it;” “There must always be rich and poor;” “Nature has, after all, her great law of compensation.” The pessimist knows well self-deception like that is either a fraud or a blind, and recognising the seething mass of misery at his doors gives what he can—his pity, or, where possible, his faint aid, in redressing the crying inequalities and injustices of man or nature.

All honest art is therefore of necessity pessimistic. Herminia’s romance was something more than that. It was the despairing heart-cry of a soul in revolt. It embodied the experiences and beliefs and sentiments of a martyred woman. It enclosed a lofty ethical purpose. She wrote it with fiery energy, for her baby’s sake, on waste scraps of paper, at stray moments snatched from endless other engagements. And as soon as it was finished, she sent it in fear and trembling to a publisher.

She had chosen her man well. He was a thinker himself, and he sympathised with thinkers. Though doubtful as to the venture, he took all the risk himself with that generosity one so often sees in the best-abused of professions. In three or four weeks’ time A Woman’s World came out, and Herminia waited in breathless anxiety for the verdict of the reviewers.

For nearly a month she waited in vain. Then, one Friday, as she was returning by underground railway from the Strand to Edgware Road, with Dolores in her arms, her eye fell as she passed upon the display-bill of the Spectator. Sixpence was a great deal of money to Herminia; but bang it went recklessly when she saw among the contents an article headed, “A Very Advanced Woman’s Novel.” She felt sure it must be hers, and she was not mistaken. Breathlessly she ran over that first estimate of her work. It was with no little elation that she laid down the number.

Not that the critique was by any means at all favourable. How could Herminia expect it in such a quarter? But the Spectator is at least conspicuously fair, though it

remains in other ways an interesting and ivy-clad mediæval relic. “Let us begin by admitting,” said the Spectatorial scribe, “that Miss Montague’s book” (she had published it under a pseudonym) “is a work of genius. Much as we dislike its whole tone, and still more its conclusions, the gleam of pure genius shines forth undeniable on every page of it. Whoever takes it up must read on against his will till he has finished the last line of this terrible tragedy; a hateful fascination seems to hold and compel him. Its very purity makes it dangerous. The book is mistaken; the book is poisonous; the book is morbid; the book is calculated to do irremediable mischief; but in spite of all that, the book is a book of undeniable and sadly misplaced genius.”

If he had said no more, Herminia would have been amply satisfied. To be called morbid by the Spectator is a sufficient proof that you have hit at least the right tack in morals. And to be accused of genius as well was indeed a triumph. No wonder Herminia went home to her lonely attic that night justifiably elated. She fancied after this her book must make a hit. It might be blamed and reviled, but at any rate it was now safe from the ignominy of oblivion.

Alas, how little she knew of the mysteries of the book-market! As little as all the rest of us. Day after day, from that afternoon forth, she watched in vain for succeeding notices. Not a single other paper in England reviewed her. At the libraries, her romance was never so much as asked for. And the reason for these phenomena is not far to seek by those who know the ways of the British public. For her novel was earnestly and sincerely written; it breathed a moral air, therefore it was voted dull; therefore nobody cared for it. The Spectator had noticed it because of its manifest earnestness and sincerity; for though the Spectator is always on the side of the lie and the wrong, it is earnest and sincere, and has a genuine sympathy for earnestness and sincerity, even on the side of truth and righteousness. Nobody else even looked at it. People said to themselves, “This book seems to be a book with a teaching not thoroughly banal, like the novels-with-a-purpose after which we flock; so we’ll give it a wide berth.” And they shunned it accordingly.

That was the end of Herminia Barton's literary aspirations. She had given the people of her best, and the people rejected it. Now she gave them of her most mediocre; the nearest to their own level of thought and feeling to which her hand could reduce itself. And the people accepted it. The rest of her life was hack-work; by that, she could at least earn a living for Dolores. Her "Antigone, for the Use of Ladies' Schools" still holds its own at Girton and Somerville.

CHAPTER XIV

I do not propose to dwell at any length upon the next ten or twelve years of Herminia Barton's life. An episode or two must suffice; and those few told briefly.

She saw nothing of her family. Relations had long been strained between them; now they were ruptured. To the rest of the Bartons, she was even as one dead; the sister and daughter's name was never pronounced among them. But once, when little Dolores was about five years old, Herminia happened to pass a church door in Marylebone, where a red-lettered placard announced in bold type that the Very Reverend the Dean of Dunwich would preach there on Sunday. It flashed across her mind that this was Sunday morning. An overpowering desire to look on her father's face once more—she had never seen her mother's—impelled Herminia to enter those unwonted portals. The Dean was in the pulpit. He looked stately and dignified in his long white hair, a noticeable man, tall and erect to the last, like a storm-beaten pine; in spite of his threescore years and ten, his clear-cut face shone thoughtful, and striking, and earnest as ever. He was preaching from the text, "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling." And he preached, as he always did, eloquently. His river of speech flowed high between banks out of sight of the multitude. There was such perfect sincerity, such moral elevation in all he said, that Herminia felt acutely, as she had often felt before, the close likeness of fibre which united her to him, in spite of extreme superficial differences of belief and action. She

felt it so much that when the sermon was over she waited at the vestry door for her father to emerge. She couldn't let him go away without making at least an effort to speak with him.

When the Dean came out, a gentle smile still playing upon his intellectual face—for he was one of the few parsons who manage in their old age to look neither sordid nor inane—he saw standing by the vestry door a woman in a plain black dress, like a widow of the people. She held by the hand a curly-haired little girl of singularly calm and innocent expression. The woman's dark hair waved gracefully on her high forehead, and caught his attention. Her eyes were subtly sweet, her mouth full of pathos. She pressed forward to speak to him; the Dean, all benignity, bent his head to listen.

"Father!" Herminia cried, looking up at him.

The Dean started back. The woman who thus addressed him was barely twenty-eight, she might well have been forty; grief and hard life had made her old before her time. Her face was haggard. Beautiful as she still was, it was the beauty of a broken heart, of a Mater Dolorosa, not the roundfaced beauty of the fresh young girl who had gone forth rejoicing some ten years earlier from the Deanery at Dunwich to the lecture-rooms at Girton. For a moment the Dean stared hard at her. Then with a burst of recognition he uttered aghast the one word "Herminia!"

"Father," Herminia answered, in a tremulous voice, "I have fought a good fight; I have pressed toward the mark for the prize of a high calling. And when I heard you preach, I felt just this once, let come what come might, I must step forth to tell you so."

The Dean gazed at her with melting eyes. Love and pity beamed strong in them. "Have you come to repent, my child?" he asked, with solemn insistence.

"Father," Herminia made answer, lingering lovingly on the word, "I have nothing to repent of. I have striven hard to do well, and have earned scant praise for it. But I

come to ask today for one grasp of your hand, one word of your blessing. Father, father, kiss me!”

The old man drew himself up to his full height, with his silvery hair round his face. Tears started to his eyes; his voice faltered. But he repressed himself sternly. “No, no, my child,” he answered. “My poor old heart bleeds for you. But not till you come with full proofs of penitence in your hands can I ever receive you. I have prayed for you without ceasing. God grant you may repent. Till then, I command you, keep far away from me, and from your untainted sisters.”

The child felt her mother’s hand tremble quivering in her own as she led her from the church; but never a word did Herminia say, lest her heart should break with it. As soon as she was outside, little Dolly looked up at her. (It had dwindled from Dolores to Dolly in real life by this time; years bring these mitigations of our first fierce outbursts.) “Who was that grand old gentleman?” the child asked, in an awe-struck voice.

And Herminia, clasping her daughter to her breast, answered with a stifled sob, “That was your grandpa, Dolly; that was my father, my father.”

The child put no more questions just then as is the wont of children; but she treasured up the incident for long in her heart, wondering much to herself why, if her grandpa was so grand an old gentleman, she and her mamma should have to live by themselves in such scrubby little lodgings. Also, why her grandpa, who looked so kind, should refuse so severely to kiss her Mammy.

It was the beginning of many doubts and questionings to Dolores.

A year later, the Dean died suddenly. People said he might have risen to be a bishop in his time, if it hadn’t been for that unfortunate episode about his daughter and young Merrick. Herminia was only once mentioned in his will; and even then merely to implore the divine forgiveness for her. She wept over that sadly. She didn’t want the girls’ money, she was better able to take care of herself than Elsie

and Ermyntrude; but it cut her to the quick that her father should have quitted the world at last without one word of reconciliation.

However, she went on working placidly at her hack-work, and living for little Dolly. Her one wish now was to make Dolly press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling she herself by mere accident had missed so narrowly. Her own life was done; Alan's death had made her task impossible; but if Dolly could fill her place for the sake of humanity, she would not regret it. Enough for her to have martyred herself; she asked no mercenary palm and crown of martyrdom.

And she was happy in her life; as far as a certain tranquil sense of duty done could make her, she was passively happy. Her kind of journalism was so commonplace and so anonymous that she was spared that worst insult of seeing her hack-work publicly criticised as though it afforded some adequate reflection of the mind that produced it, instead of being merely an index of taste in the minds of those for whose use it was intended. So she lived for years, a machine for the production of articles and reviews; and a devoted mother to little developing Dolly.

On Dolly the hopes of half the world now centred.

CHAPTER XV

Not that Herminia had not at times hard struggles and sore temptations. One of the hardest and sorest came when Dolly was about six years old. And this was the manner of it.

One day the child who was to reform the world was returning from some errand on which her mother had sent her, when her attention was attracted by a very fine carriage, stopping at a door not far from their lodgings. Now Dolly had always a particular weakness for everything "grand"; and so grand a turn-out as this one was rare in their neighbourhood. She paused and stared hard at it. "Whose is it, Mrs Biggs?" she asked awe-struck of the friendly charwoman, who happened to pass at

the moment—the charwoman who frequently came in to do a day's cleaning at her mother's lodging-house. Mrs Biggs knew it well; "It's Sir Anthony Merrick's," she answered in that peculiarly hushed voice with which the English poor always utter the names of the titled classes. And so in fact it was; for the famous gout doctor had lately been knighted for his eminent services in saving a royal duke from the worst effects of his own self-indulgence. Dolly put one fat finger to her lip, and elevated her eyebrows, and looked grave at once. Sir Anthony Merrick! What a very grand gentleman he must be indeed, and how nice it must seem to be able to drive in so distinguished a vehicle with a liveried footman.

As she paused and looked, lost in enjoyment of that beatific vision, Sir Anthony himself emerged from the porch. Dolly took a good stare at him. He was handsome, austere, close-shaven, implacable. His profile was clear-cut, like Trajan's on an aureus. Dolly thought that was just how so grand a gentleman ought to look; and, so thinking, she glanced up at him, and with a flash of her white teeth, smiled her childish approval. The austere old gentleman, unwontedly softened by that cherub face—for indeed she was as winsome as a baby angel of Raphael's—stooped down and patted the bright curly head that turned up to him so trustfully. "What's your name, little woman?" he asked, with a sudden wave of gentleness.

And Dolly, all agog at having arrested so grand an old gentleman's attention, spoke up in her clear treble, "Dolores Barton."

Sir Anthony started. Was this a trap to entangle him? He was born suspicious, and he feared that woman. But he looked into Dolly's blue eyes of wonder, and all doubt fled from him. Was it blood? was it instinct? was it unconscious nature? At any rate, the child seemed to melt the grandfather's heart as if by magic. Long years after, when the due time came, Dolly remembered that melting. To the profound amazement of the footman, who stood with the carriage door ready open in his hand, the old man bent down and kissed the child's red lips. "God bless you, my dear!" he

murmured, with unwonted tenderness to his son's daughter. Then he took out his purse, and drew from it a whole gold sovereign. "That's for you, my child," he said, fondling the pretty golden curls. "Take it home, and tell your mammy an old man in the street gave it to you."

But the coachman observed to the footman, as they drove on together to the next noble patient's, "You may take your oath on it, Mr Wells, that little 'un there was Mr Alan's love-child!"

Dolly had never held so much money in her hand before; she ran home, clutching it tight, and burst in upon Herminia with the startling news that Sir Anthony Merrick, a very grand gentleman in a very fine carriage, had given a gold piece to her.

Gold pieces were rare in the calm little attic, but Herminia caught her child up with a cry of terror; and that very same evening, she changed the tainted sovereign with Dolly for another one, and sent Sir Anthony's back in an envelope without a word to Harley Street. The child who was born to free half the human race from æons of slavery must be kept from all contagion of man's gold and man's bribery. Yet Dolly never forgot the grand gentleman's name, though she hadn't the least idea why he gave that yellow coin to her.

Out of this small episode, however, grew Herminia's great temptation.

For Sir Anthony, being a man tenacious of his purpose, went home that day full of relenting thoughts about that girl Dolores. Her golden hair had sunk deep into his heart. She was Alan's own child, after all; she had Alan's blue eyes; and in a world where your daughters go off and marry men you don't like, while your sons turn out badly, and don't marry at all to vex you, it's something to have some fresh young life of your blood to break in upon your chilly old age and cheer you. So the great doctor called a few days later at Herminia's lodgings, and having first ascertained that Herminia herself was out, had five minutes' conversation alone with her landlady.

There were times, no doubt, when Mrs Barton was ill? The landlady with the caution of her class, admitted that might be so. And times no doubt when Mrs Barton was for the moment in arrears with her rent? The landlady, good loyal soul, demurred to that suggestion; she knit her brows and hesitated. Sir Anthony hastened to set her mind at rest. His intentions were most friendly. He wished to keep a watch—a quiet, well-meaning, unsuspected watch—over Mrs Barton's necessities. He desired, in point of fact, if need were, to relieve them. Mrs Barton was distantly connected with relations of his own; and his notion was that without seeming to help her in obtrusive ways, he would like to make sure Mrs Barton got into no serious difficulties. Would the landlady be so good—a half sovereign glided into that subservient palm—as to let Sir Anthony know if she ever had reason to suspect a very serious strain was being put on Mrs Barton's resources?

The landlady, dropping the modern apology for a curtsey, promised with effusion under pressure of hard cash, to accede to Sir Anthony's benevolent wishes. The more so as she'd do anything to serve dear Mrs Barton, who was always in everything a perfect lady, most independent, in fact; one of the kind as wouldn't be beholden to anybody for a farthing.

Some months passed away before the landlady had cause to report to Sir Anthony. But during the worst depths of the next London winter, when grey fog gathered thick in the purlieus of Marylebone, and shivering gusts groaned at the street corners, poor little Dolly caught whooping-cough badly. On top of the whooping-cough came an attack of bronchitis; and on top of the bronchitis a serious throat trouble. Herminia sat up night after night, nursing her child, and neglecting the work on which both depended for subsistence. Week by week things grew worse and worse; and Sir Anthony, kept duly informed by the landlady, waited and watched, and bided his time in silence. At last the case became desperate. Herminia had no money left to pay her bill or buy food; and one string to her bow after another broke down in journalism. Her place as the weekly lady's-letter writer to an

illustrated paper passed on to a substitute; blank poverty stared her in the face, inevitable. When it came to pawning the type-writer, as the landlady reported, Sir Anthony smiled a grim smile to himself. The moment for action had now arrived. He would put on pressure to get away poor Alan's illegitimate child from that dreadful woman.

Next day he called. Dolly was dangerously ill—so ill that Herminia couldn't find it in her heart to dismiss the great doctor from her door without letting him see her. And Sir Anthony saw her. The child recognised him at once and rallied, and smiled at him. She stretched her little arms. She must surely get well if a gentleman who drove in so fine a carriage, and scattered sovereigns like ha'pennies, came in to prescribe for her. Sir Anthony was flattered at her friendly reception. Those thin small arms touched the grandfather's heart.

"She will recover," he said; "but she needs good treatment, delicacies, refinements." Then he slipped out of the room, and spoke seriously to Herminia.

"Let her come to me," he urged. "I'll adopt her, and give her her father's name. It will be better for herself; better for her future. She shall be treated as my granddaughter, well-taught, well-kept; and you may see her every six months for a fortnight's visit. If you consent, I will allow you a hundred a year for yourself. Let bygones be bygones. For the child's sake, say yes! She needs so much that you can never give her!"

Poor Herminia was sore tried. As for the hundred a year, she couldn't dream of accepting it; but like a flash it went through her brain how many advantages Dolly could enjoy in that wealthy household that the hard-working journalist could not possibly afford her. She thought of the unpaid bills, the empty cupboard, the wolf at the door, the blank outlook for the future. For a second, she half hesitated.

"Come, come!" Sir Anthony said; "for the child's own sake; you won't be so selfish as to stand in her way, will you?"

Those words roused Herminia to a true sense of her duty.

“Sir Anthony Merrick,” she said holding her breath, “that child is my child, and my dear dead Alan’s. I owe it to Alan—I owe it to her—to bring her up in the way that Alan would approve of. I brought her into the world; and my duty is to do what I can to discharge the responsibilities I then undertook to her. I must train her up to be a useful citizen. Not for thousands would I resign the delight and honour of teaching my child to those who would teach her what Alan and I believed to be pernicious; who would teach her to despise her mother’s life, and to reject the holy memory of her father. As I said to you before, that day at Perugia, so I say to you now, ‘Thy money perish with thee.’ You need never again come here to bribe me.”

“Is that final?” Sir Anthony asked. And Herminia answered with a bow, “Yes, final; quite final.”

Sir Anthony bent his head and left. Herminia stood face to face with abject poverty. Spurred by want, by indignation, by terror, by a sense of the absolute necessity for action, she carried her writing materials then and there into Dolly’s sick-room, and sitting by her child’s cot, she began to write, she hardly knew what, as the words themselves came to her. In a fever of excitement she wrote and wrote and wrote. She wrote as one writes in the silence of midnight. It was late before she finished. When her manuscript was complete, she slipped out and posted it to a weekly paper. It appeared that same Saturday, and was the beginning of Herminia’s most valuable connection.

But even after she had posted it the distracted mother could not pause or rest. Dolly tossed and turned in her sleep, and Herminia sat watching her. She pined for sympathy. Vague ancestral yearnings, gathering head within her, made her long to pray—if only there had been anybody or anything to pray to. She clasped her bloodless hands in an agony of solitude. Oh, for a friend to comfort! At last her overwrought feelings found vent in verse. She seized a pencil from her desk, and

sitting by Dolly's side, wrote down her heart-felt prayer, as it came to her that moment—

A crowned Caprice is god of the world: On his stony breast are his white wings furled. No ear to hearken, no eye to see, No heart to feel for a man hath he.

But his pitiless hands are swift to smite, And his mute lips utter one word of might In the clash of gentler souls and rougher— 'Wrong must thou do, or wrong must suffer.'

Then grant, O dumb, blind god, at least that we Rather the sufferers than the doers be.

CHAPTER XVI

A change came at last, when Dolly was ten years old. Among the men of whom Herminia saw most in these later days, were the little group of advanced London socialists who call themselves the Fabians. And among her Fabian friends one of the most active, the most eager, the most individual, was Harvey Kynaston.

He was a younger man by many years than poor Alan had been; about Herminia's own age; a brilliant economist with a future before him. He aimed at the Cabinet. When first he met Herminia he was charmed at one glance by her chastened beauty, her breadth and depth of soul, her transparent sincerity of purpose and action. Those wistful eyes captured him. Before many days passed he had fallen in love with her. But he knew her history; and, taking it for granted she must still be immersed in regret for Alan's loss, he hardly even reckoned the chances of her caring for him.

'Tis a common case. Have you ever noticed that if you meet a woman, famous for her connection with some absorbing grief, some historic tragedy, you are half appalled at first sight to find that at times she can laugh, and make merry, and look gay with the rest of us. Her callous glee shocks you. You mentally expect her to be forever engaged in the tearful contemplation of her own tragic fate; wrapt up in

those she has lost, like the mourners in a Pietà. Whenever you have thought of her, you have connected her in your mind with that one fact in her history, which perhaps may have happened a great many years ago. But to you, it is as yesterday. You forget that since then many things have occurred to her. She has lived her life; she has learned to smile; human nature itself cannot feed for years on the continuous contemplation of its own deepest sorrows. It even jars you to find that the widow of a patriotic martyr, a murdered missionary, has her moments of enjoyment, and must wither away without them.

So, just at first, Harvey Kynaston was afraid to let Herminia see how sincerely he admired her. He thought of her rather as one whose life is spent, who can bring to the banquet but the cold dead ashes of a past existence. Gradually, however, as he saw more and more of her, it began to strike him that Herminia was still in all essentials a woman. His own throbbing heart told him so as he sat and talked with her. He thrilled at her approach. Bit by bit the idea rose up in his mind that this lonely soul might still be won. He set to work in earnest to woo and win her.

As for Herminia, many men had paid her attentions already in her unwedded widowhood. Some of them, after the fashion of men, having heard garbled versions of her tragic story, and seeking to gain some base advantage for themselves from their knowledge of her past, strove to assail her crudely. Them, with unerring womanly instinct, she early discerned, and with unerring feminine tact, undeceived and humbled. Others, genuinely attracted by her beauty and her patience, paid real court to her heart; but all these fell far short of her ideal standard. With Harvey Kynaston it was different. She admired him as a thinker; she liked him as a man; and she felt from the first moment that no friend, since Alan died, had stirred her pulse so deeply as he did.

For some months they met often at the Fabian meetings and elsewhere; till at last it became a habit with them to spend their Sunday mornings on some breezy wold in

the country together. Herminia was still as free as ever from any shrinking terror as to what “people might say;” as of old, she lived her life for herself and her conscience, not for the opinion of a blind and superstitious majority. On one such August morning, they had taken the train from London to Haslemere, with Dolly of course by their side, and then had strolled up Hind Head by the beautiful footpath which mounts at first through a chestnut copse, and then between heather-clad hills to the summit. At the loneliest turn of the track, where two purple glens divide, Harvey Kynaston seated himself on the soft bed of ling. Herminia sank by his side; and Dolly, after a while, not understanding their conversation, wandered off by herself a little way afield in search of harebells and spotted orchises. Dolly found her mother’s friends were apt to bore her; she preferred the society of the landlady’s daughters.

It was a delicious day. Hard by, a slow-worm sunned himself on the basking sand. Blue dragon-flies flashed on gauze wings in the hollows. Harvey Kynaston looked on Herminia’s face and saw that she was fair. With an effort he made up his mind to speak at last. In plain and simple words he asked her reverently the same question that Alan had asked her so long ago on the Holmwood.

Herminia’s throat flushed a rosy red, and an unwonted sense of pleasure stole over that hard-worked frame as she listened to his words; for indeed she was fond of him. But she answered him at once without a moment’s hesitation. “Harvey, I’m glad you ask me, for I like and admire you. But I feel sure beforehand my answer must be no. For I think what you mean is to ask, will I marry you?”

The man gazed at her hard. He spoke low and deferentially. “Yes, Herminia,” he replied. “I do mean, will you marry me? I know, of course, how you feel about this matter; I know what you have sacrificed, how deeply you have suffered, for the sake of your principles. And that’s just why I plead with you now to ignore them. You have given proof long ago of your devotion to the right. You may surely fall back

this second time upon the easier way of ordinary humanity. In theory, Herminia, I accept your point of view; I approve the equal liberty of men and women, politically, socially, personally, ethically. But in practice, I don't want to bring unnecessary trouble on the head of a woman I love; and to live together otherwise than as the law directs does bring unnecessary trouble, as you know too profoundly. That is the only reason why I ask you to marry me. And Herminia, Herminia," he leant forward appealingly, "for the love's sake I bear you, I hope you will consent to it."

His voice was low and tender. Herminia, sick at heart with that long, fierce struggle against overwhelming odds, could almost have said yes to him. Her own nature prompted her; she was very, very fond of him. But she paused for a second. Then she answered him gravely.

"Harvey," she said, looking deep into his honest brown eyes, "as we grow middle-aged, and find how impossible it must ever be to achieve any good in a world like this, how sad a fate it is to be born a civilised being in a barbaric community, I'm afraid moral impulse half dies down within us. The passionate aim grows cold; the ardent glow fades and flickers into apathy. I'm ashamed to tell you the truth, it seems such weakness; yet as you ask me this, I think I will tell you. Once upon a time, if you had made such a proposal to me, if you had urged me to be false to my dearest principles, to sin against the light, to deny the truth, I would have flashed forth a no upon you without one moment's hesitation. And now, in my disillusioned middle-age what do I feel? Do you know, I almost feel tempted to give way to this Martinmas summer of love, to stultify my past by unsaying and undoing everything. For I love you, Harvey. If I were to give way now, as George Eliot gave way, as almost every woman who once tried to live a free life for her sisters' sake, has given way in the end, I should counteract any little good my example has ever done or may ever do in the world; and Harvey, strange as it sounds, I feel more than half inclined to do it. But I will not, I will not; and I'll tell you why. It's not so much

principle that prevents me now. I admit that freely. The torpor of middle-age is creeping over my conscience. It's simple regard for personal consistency, and for Dolly's position. How can I go back upon the faith for which I have martyred myself? How can I say to Dolly, 'I wouldn't marry your father in my youth, for honour's sake; but I have consented in middle life to sell my sisters' cause for a man I love, and for the consideration of society; to rehabilitate myself too late with a world I despise by becoming one man's slave, as I swore I never would be.' No, no, dear Harvey; I can't do that. Some sense of personal continuity restrains me still. It is the Nemesis of our youth; we can't go back in our later life on the holier and purer ideals of our girlhood."

"Then you say no definitely?" Harvey Kynaston asked.

Herminia's voice quivered. "I say no definitely," she answered; "unless you can consent to live with me on the terms on which I lived with Dolly's father."

The man hesitated a moment. Then he began to plead hard for reconsideration. But Herminia's mind was made up. She couldn't belie her past; she couldn't be false to the principles for whose sake she had staked and lost everything. "No, no," she said firmly, over and over again. "You must take me my own way, or you must go without me."

And Harvey Kynaston couldn't consent to take her her own way. His faith was too weak, his ambitions were too earthly. "Herminia," he said, before they parted that afternoon, "we may still be friends; still dear friends as ever? This episode need make no difference to a very close companionship?"

"It need make no difference," Herminia answered, with a light touch of her hand. "Harvey, I have far too few friends in the world willingly to give up one of them. Come again and go down with Dolly and me to Hind Head as usual next Sunday."

"Thank you," the man answered. "Herminia, I wish it could have been otherwise. But since I must never have you, I can promise you one thing; I will never marry

any other woman."

Herminia started at the words. "Oh, no," she cried quickly. "How can you speak like that? How can you say anything so wrong, so untrue, so foolish? To be celibate is a very great misfortune even for a woman; for a man it is impossible, it is cruel, it is wicked. I endure it myself, for my child's sake, and because I find it hard to discover the help meet for me; or because, when discovered, he refuses to accept me in the only way in which I can bestow myself. But for a man to pretend to live celibate is to cloak hateful wrong under a guise of respectability. I should be unhappy if I thought any man was doing such a vicious thing out of desire to please me. Take some other woman on free terms if you can; but if you cannot, it is better you should marry than be a party to still deeper and more loathsome slavery."

And from that day forth they were loyal friends, no more, one to the other.

CHAPTER XVII

And yet—our Herminia was a woman after all. Some three years later, when Harvey Kynaston came to visit her one day, and told her he was really going to be married—what sudden thrill was this that passed through and through her. Her heart stood still. She was aware that she regretted the comparative loss of a very near and dear acquaintance.

She knew she was quite wrong. It was the leaven of slavery. But these monopolist instincts, which have wrought more harm in the world we live in than fire or sword or pestilence or tempest, hardly die at all as yet in a few good men, and die, fighting hard for life, even in the noblest women.

She reasoned with herself against so hateful a feeling. Though she knew the truth, she found it hard to follow. No man indeed is truly civilised till he can say in all sincerity to every woman of all the women he loves, to every woman of all the women who love him, "Give me what you can of your love and of yourself; but

never strive for my sake to deny any love, to strangle any impulse that pants for breath within you. Give me what you can, while you can, without grudging, but the moment you feel you love me no more, don't pollute your own body by yielding it up to a man you have ceased to desire; don't do injustice to your own prospective children by giving them a father whom you no longer respect, or admire, or yearn for. Guard your chastity well. Be mine as much as you will, as long as you will, to such extent as you will, but before all things be your own; embrace and follow every instinct of pure love that nature, our mother, has imparted within you." No woman, in turn, is truly civilised till she can say to every man of all the men she loves, of all the men who love her, "Give me what you can of your love, and of yourself; but don't think I am so vile, and so selfish, and so poor as to desire to monopolise you. Respect me enough never to give me your body without giving me your heart; never to make me the mother of children whom you desire not and love not." When men and women can say that alike, the world will be civilised. Until they can say it truly, the world will be as now a jarring battlefield for the monopolist instincts.

Those jealous and odious instincts have been the bane of humanity. They have given us the stiletto, the Morgue, the bowie-knife. Our race must inevitably in the end outlive them. The test of man's plane in the scale of being is how far he has outlived them. They are surviving relics of the ape and tiger. But we must let the ape and tiger die. We must cease to be Calibans. We must begin to be human.

Patriotism is the one of these lowest vices which most often masquerades in false garb as a virtue. But what after all is patriotism? "My country, right or wrong, and just because it is my country!" This is clearly nothing more than collective selfishness. Often enough, indeed, it is not even collective. It means merely, "My business interests against the business interests of other people, and let the taxes of my fellow-citizens pay to support them." At other times it means pure pride of race, and pure lust of conquest: "My country against other countries! My army and navy against other fighters! My right to annex unoccupied territory against the equal right

of all other peoples! My power to oppress all weaker nationalities, all inferior races!" It never means or can mean anything good or true. For if a cause be just, like Ireland's, or once Italy's, then 'tis a good man's duty to espouse it with warmth, be it his own or another's. And if a cause be bad, then 'tis a good man's duty to oppose it, tooth and nail, irrespective of your patriotism. True, a good man will feel more sensitively anxious that strict justice should be done by the particular community of which chance has made him a component member than by any others; but then, people who feel acutely this joint responsibility of all the citizens to uphold the moral right are not praised as patriots but reviled as unpatriotic. To urge that our own country should strive with all its might to be better, higher, purer, nobler, more generous than other countries—the only kind of patriotism worth a moment's thought in a righteous man's eyes, is accounted by most men both wicked and foolish.

Then comes the monopolist instinct of property. That, on the face of it, is a baser and more sordid one. For patriotism at least can lay claim to some sort of delusive expansiveness beyond mere individual interest; whereas property stops short at the narrowest limits of personality. It is no longer "Us against the world!" but "Me against my fellow-citizens!" It is the last word of the intercivic war in its most hideous avatar. Look how it scars the fair face of our common country with its anti-social notice-boards, "Trespassers will be prosecuted." It says in effect, "This is my land. As I believe, God made it; but I have acquired it, and tabooed it to myself, for my own enjoyment. The grass on the wold grows green; but only for me. The mountains rise glorious in the morning sun; no foot of man, save mine and my gillies', shall tread them. The waterfalls leap white from the ledge in the glen; avaunt there, non-possessors; your eye shall never see them. For you the muddy street; for me, miles of upland. All this is my own. And I choose to monopolise it."

Or is it the capitalist? "I will add field to field," he cries aloud, despite his own Scripture; "I will join railway to railway. I will juggle into my own hands all the

instruments for the production of wealth that my cunning can lay hold of; and I will use them for my own purposes against producer and consumer alike with impartial egoism. Corn and coal shall lie in the hollow of my hand. I will enrich myself by making dear by craft the necessaries of life; the poor shall lack, that I may roll down fair streets in needless luxury. Let them starve, and feed me!" That temper, too, humanity must outlive. And those who are incapable of outliving it of themselves must be taught by stern lessons, as in the splendid uprising of the spirit of man in France, that their race has outstripped them.

Next comes the monopoly of human life, the hideous wrong of slavery. That, thank goodness, is now gone. 'Twas the vilest of them all—the nakedest assertion of the monopolist platform: "You live, not for yourself, but wholly and solely for me. I disregard your claims to your own body and soul, and use you as my chattel." That worst form has died. It withered away before the moral indignation even of existing humanity. We have the satisfaction of seeing one dragon slain, of knowing that one monopolist instinct at least is now fairly bred out of us.

Last, and hardest of all to eradicate in our midst, comes the monopoly of the human heart, which is known as marriage. Based upon the primitive habit of felling the woman with a blow, stunning her by repeated strokes of the club or spear, and dragging her off by the hair of her head as a slave to her captor's hut or rock-shelter, this ugly and barbaric form of serfdom has come in our own time by some strange caprice to be regarded as of positively divine origin. The Man says now to himself, "This woman is mine. Law and the Church have bestowed her on me. Mine for better, for worse; mine, drunk or sober. If she ventures to have a heart or a will of her own, woe betide her! I have tabooed her for life: let any other man touch her, let her so much as cast eyes on any other man to admire or desire him—and, knife, dagger, or law-court, they shall both of them answer for it." There you have in all its native deformity another monopolist instinct—the deepest-seated of all, the grimmest, the most vindictive. "She is not yours," says the moral philosopher of the

new dispensation; “she is her own; release her! The Turk hales his offending slave, sews her up in a sack, and casts her quick into the eddying Bosphorus. The Christian Englishman, with more lingering torture, sets spies on her life, drags what he thinks her shame before a prying court, and divorces her with contumely. All this is monopoly, and essentially slavery. Mankind must outlive it on its way up to civilisation.”

And then the Woman, thus taught by her lords, has begun to retort in these latter days by endeavoring to enslave the Man in return. Unable to conceive the bare idea of freedom for both sexes alike, she seeks equality in an equal slavery. That she will never achieve. The future is to the free. We have transcended serfdom. Women shall henceforth be the equals of men, not by levelling down, but by levelling up; not by fettering the man, but by elevating, emancipating, unshackling the woman.

All this Herminia knew well. All these things she turned over in her mind by herself on the evening of the day when Harvey Kynaston came to tell her of his approaching marriage. Why, then, did she feel it to some extent a disappointment? Why so flat at his happiness? Partly, she said to herself, because it is difficult to live down in a single generation the jealousies and distrusts engendered in our hearts by so many ages of harem life. But more still, she honestly believed, because it is hard to be a free soul in an enslaved community. No unit can wholly sever itself from the social organism of which it is a corpuscle. If all the world were like herself, her lot would have been different. Affection would have been free; her yearnings for sympathy would have been filled to the full by Harvey Kynaston or some other. As it was, she had but that one little fraction of a man friend to solace her; to resign him altogether to another woman, leaving herself bankrupt of love, was indeed a bitter trial to her.

Yet for her principles’ sake and Dolly’s, she never let Harvey Kynaston or his wife suspect it; as long as she lived, she was a true and earnest friend at all times to both of them.

CHAPTER XVIII

Meanwhile, Dolores was growing up to woman's estate. And she was growing into a tall, a graceful, an exquisitely beautiful woman.

Yet in some ways Herminia had reason to be dissatisfied with her daughter's development. Day by day she watched for signs of the expected apostolate. Was Dolores pressing forward to the mark for the prize of her high calling? Her mother half doubted it. Slowly and regretfully, as the growing girl approached the years when she might be expected to think for herself, Herminia began to perceive that the child of so many hopes, of so many aspirations, the child predestined to regenerate humanity, was thinking for herself—in a retrograde direction. Incredible as it seemed to Herminia, in the daughter of such a father and such a mother, Dolores' ideas—nay, worse, her ideals—were essentially commonplace. Not that she had much opportunity of imbibing commonplace opinions from any outside source; she redeveloped them from within by a pure effort of atavism. She had reverted to lower types. She had thrown back to the Philistine.

Heredity of mental and moral qualities is a precarious matter. These things lie, as it were, on the topmost plane of character; they smack of the individual, and are therefore far less likely to persist in offspring than the deeper-seated and better-established peculiarities of the family, the clan, the race, or the species. They are idiosyncratic. Indeed, when we remember how greatly the mental and moral faculties differ from brother to brother, the product of the same two parental factors, can we wonder that they differ much more from father to son, the product of one like factor alone, diluted by the addition of a relatively unknown quality, the maternal influence? However this may be, at any rate, Dolores early began to strike out for herself all the most ordinary and stereotyped opinions of British respectability. It seemed as if they sprang up in her by unmitigated reversion. She had never heard in the society of her mother's lodgings any but the freest and most

rational ideas; yet she herself seemed to hark back, of internal congruity, to the lower and vulgarer moral plane of her remoter ancestry. She showed her individuality only by evolving for herself all the threadbare platitudes of ordinary convention.

Moreover, it is not parents who have most to do with moulding the sentiments and opinions of their children. From the beginning, Dolly thought better of the landlady's views and ideas than of her mother's. When she went to school, she considered the moral standpoint of the other girls a great deal more sensible than the moral standpoint of Herminia's attic. She accepted the beliefs and opinions of her schoolfellows because they were natural and congenial to her character. In short, she had what the world calls common-sense: she revolted from the unpractical Utopianism of her mother.

From a very early age, indeed, this false note in Dolly had begun to make itself heard. While she was yet quite a child, Herminia noticed with a certain tender but shrinking regret that Dolly seemed to attach undue importance to the mere upholsteries and equipages of life—to rank, wealth, title, servants, carriages, jewelry. At first, to be sure, Herminia hoped this might prove but the passing foolishness of childhood: as Dolly grew up, however, it became clearer each day that the defect was in the grain—that Dolly's whole mind was incurably and congenitally aristocratic or snobbish. She had that mean admiration for birth, position, adventitious advantages, which is the mark of the beast in the essentially aristocratic or snobbish nature. She admired people because they were rich, because they were high-placed, because they were courted, because they were respected; not because they were good, because they were wise, because they were noble-natured, because they were respectworthy.

But even that was not all. In time, Herminia began to perceive with still profounder sorrow that Dolly had no spontaneous care or regard for righteousness. Right and

wrong meant to her only what was usual and the opposite. She seemed incapable of considering the intrinsic nature of any act in itself apart from the praise or blame meted out to it by society. In short, she was sunk in the same ineffable slough of moral darkness as the ordinary inhabitant of the morass of London.

To Herminia this slow discovery, as it dawned bit by bit upon her, put the final thorn in her crown of martyrdom. The child on whose education she had spent so much pains, the child whose success in the deep things of life was to atone for her own failure, the child who was born to be the apostle of freedom to her sisters in darkness, had turned out in the most earnest essentials of character a complete disappointment, and had ruined the last hope that bound her to existence.

Bitterer trials remained. Herminia had acted through life to a great extent with the idea ever consciously present to her mind that she must answer to Dolly for every act and every feeling. She had done all she did with a deep sense of responsibility. Now it loomed by degrees upon her aching heart that Dolly's verdict would in almost every case be a hostile one. The daughter was growing old enough to question and criticise her mother's proceedings; she was beginning to understand that some mysterious difference marked off her own uncertain position in life from the solid position of the children who surrounded her—the children born under those special circumstances which alone the man-made law chooses to stamp with the seal of its recognition. Dolly's curiosity was shyly aroused as to her dead father's family. Herminia had done her best to prepare betimes for this inevitable result by setting before her child, as soon as she could understand it, the true moral doctrine as to the duties of parenthood. But Dolly's own development rendered all such steps futile. There is no more silly and persistent error than the belief of parents that they can influence to any appreciable extent the moral ideas and impulses of their children. These things have their springs in the bases of character: they are the flower of individuality; and they cannot be altered or affected after birth by the foolishness of preaching. Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, you will

find soon enough he will choose his own course for himself and depart from it.

Already when Dolly was a toddling little mite and met her mother's father in the church in Marylebone, it had struck her as odd that while they themselves were so poor and ill-clad, her grandpapa should be such a grand old gentleman of such a dignified aspect. As she grew older and older, and began to understand a little more the world she lived in, she wondered yet more profoundly how it could happen, if her grandpapa was indeed the Very Reverend the Dean of Dunwich, that her mamma should be an outcast from her father's church, and scarcely well seen in the best carriage company. She had learnt that deans are rather grand people—almost as much so as admirals; that they wear shovel-hats to distinguish them from the common ruck of rectors; that they lived in fine houses in a cathedral close; and that they drive in a victoria with a coachman in livery. So much essential knowledge of the church of Christ she had gained for herself by personal observation; for facts like these were what interested Dolly. She couldn't understand, then, why she and her mother should live precariously in a very small attic; should never be visited by her mother's brothers, one of whom she knew to be a Prebendary of Old Sarum, while the other she saw gazetted as a Colonel of Artillery; and should be totally ignored by her mother's sister, Ermyntrude, who lolled in a landau down the sunny side of Bond Street.

At first, indeed, it only occurred to Dolly that her mother's extreme and advanced opinions had induced a social breach between herself and the orthodox members of her family. Even that Dolly resented; why should mamma hold ideas of her own which shut her daughter out from the worldly advantages enjoyed to the full by the rest of her kindred? Dolly had no particular religious ideas; the subject didn't interest her; and besides, she thought the New Testament talked about rich and poor in much the same unpractical nebulous way that mamma herself did—in fact, she regarded it with some veiled contempt as a rather sentimental radical publication. But, she considered, for all that, that it was probably true enough as far as the facts

and the theology went; and she couldn't understand why a person like mamma should cut herself off contumaciously from the rest of the world by presuming to disbelieve a body of doctrine which so many rich and well-gaitered bishops held worthy of credence. All stylish society accepted the tenets of the Church of England. But in time it began to occur to her that there might be some deeper and, as she herself would have said, more disgraceful reason for her mother's alienation from so respectable a family. For, to Dolly, that was disgraceful which the world held to be so. Things in themselves, apart from the world's word, had for her no existence. Step by step, as she grew up to blushing womanhood, it began to strike her with surprise that her grandfather's name had been, like her own, Barton. "Did you marry your cousin, mamma?" she asked Herminia one day quite suddenly.

And Herminia, flushing scarlet at the unexpected question, the first with which Dolly had yet ventured to approach that dangerous quicksand, replied with a deadly thrill, "No, my darling. Why do you ask me?"

"Because," Dolly answered abashed, "I just wanted to know why your name should be Barton, the same as poor grandpapa's."

Herminia didn't dare to say too much just then. "Your dear father," she answered low, "was not related to me in any way."

Dolly accepted the tone as closing the discussion for the present; but the episode only strengthened her underlying sense of a mystery somewhere in the matter to unravel.

In time, Herminia sent her child to a day-school. Though she had always taught Dolly herself as well as she was able, she felt it a matter of duty, as her daughter grew up, to give her something more than the stray ends of time in a busy journalist's moments of leisure. At the school, where Dolly was received without question, on Miss Smith-Waters' recommendation, she found herself thrown much into the society of other girls, drawn for the most part from the narrowly

Mammon-worshipping ranks of London professional society. Here, her native tendencies towards the real religion of England, the united worship of Success and Respectability, were encouraged to the utmost. But she noticed at times with a shy shrinking that some few of the girls had heard vague rumors about her mother as a most equivocal person, who didn't accept all the current superstitions, and were curious to ask her questions as to her family and antecedents. Crimson with shame, Dolly parried such enquiries as best she could; but she longed all the more herself to pierce this dim mystery. Was it a runaway match?—with the groom, perhaps, or the footman? Only the natural shamefacedness of a budding girl in prying into her mother's most domestic secrets prevented Dolores from asking Herminia some day point-blank all about it.

But she was gradually becoming aware that some strange atmosphere of doubt surrounded her birth and her mother's history. It filled her with sensitive fears and self-conscious hesitations.

And if the truth must be told, Dolly never really returned her mother's profound affection. It is often so. The love which parents lavish upon their children, the children repay, not to parents themselves, but to the next generation. Only when we become fathers or mothers in our turn do we learn what our fathers and mothers have done for us. Thus it was with Dolly. When once the first period of childish dependence was over, she regarded Herminia with a smouldering distrust and a secret dislike that concealed itself beneath a mask of unfelt caresses. In her heart of hearts, she owed her mother a grudge for not having put her in a position in life where she could drive in a carriage with a snarling pug and a clipped French poodle, like Aunt Ermyntrude's children. She grew up, smarting under a sullen sense of injustice, all the deeper because she was compelled to stifle it in the profoundest recesses of her own heart.

CHAPTER XIX

When Dolly was seventeen, a pink wild rose just unrolling its petals, a very great event occurred in her history. She received an invitation to go and stop with some friends in the country.

The poor child's life had been in a sense so uneventful that the bare prospect of this visit filled her soul beforehand with tremulous anticipation. To be sure, Dolly Barton had always lived in the midmost centre of the Movement in London; she had known authors, artists, socialists, the cream of our race; she had been brought up in close intercourse with the men and women who are engaged in revolutionising and remodelling humanity. But this very fact that she had always lived in the Thick of Things made a change to the Thin of Things only by so much the more delicious and enchanting. Not that Dolores had not seen a great deal, too, of the country. Poor as they were, her mother had taken her to cheap little seaside nooks for a week or two of each summer; she had made pilgrimages almost every Sunday in spring or autumn to Leith Hill or Mapledurham; she had even strained her scanty resources to the utmost to afford Dolly an occasional outing in the Ardennes or in Normandy. But what gave supreme importance to this coming visit was the special fact that Dolly was now for the first time in her life to find herself "in society".

Among the friends she had picked up at her Marylebone day-school were two west-country girls, private boarders of the head-mistress's, who came from the neighbourhood of Combe Neville in Dorset. Their name was Compson, and their father was rector of their native village, Upcombe. Dolly liked them very much, and was proud of their acquaintance, because they were reckoned about the most distinguished pupils in the school, their mother being the niece of a local viscount. Among girls in middle-class London sets, even so remote a connection with the title-bearing classes is counted for a distinction. So when Winnie Compson asked Dolly to go and stop with her at her father's rectory during three whole weeks of the

summer holidays, Dolly felt that now at last by pure force of native worth she was rising to her natural position in society. It flattered her that Winnie should select her for such an honour.

The preparations for that visit cost Dolly some weeks of thought and effort. The occasion demanded it. She was afraid she had no frocks good enough for such a grand house as the Compsons'. "Grand" was indeed a favourite epithet of Dolly's; she applied it impartially to everything which had to do, as she conceived, with the life of the propertied and privileged classes. It was a word at once of cherished and revered meaning—the shibboleth of her religion. It implied to her mind something remote and unapproachable, yet to be earnestly striven after with all the forces at her disposal. Even Herminia herself stretched a point in favour of an occasion which she could plainly see Dolly regarded as so important; she managed to indulge her darling in a couple of dainty new afternoon dresses, which touched for her soul the very utmost verge of allowable luxury. The materials were oriental; the cut was the dressmaker's—not home-built, as usual. Dolly looked so brave in them, with her rich chestnut hair and her creamy complexion—a touch, Herminia thought, of her Italian birthplace—that the mother's full heart leapt up to look at her. It almost made Herminia wish she was rich—and anti-social, like the rich people—in order that she might be able to do ample justice to the exquisite grace of Dolly's unfolding figure. Tall, lissome, supple, clear of limb and light of footstep, she was indeed a girl any mother might have been proud of.

On the day she left London, Herminia thought to herself she had never seen her child look so absolutely lovely. The unwonted union of blue eyes with that olive-grey skin gave a tinge of wayward shyness to her girlish beauty. The golden locks had ripened to nut-brown, but still caught stray gleams of nestling sunlight. 'Twas with a foreboding regret that Herminia kissed Dolly on both peach-bloom cheeks at parting. She almost fancied her child must be slipping from her motherly grasp when she went off so blithely to visit these unknown friends, away down in

Dorsetshire. Yet Dolly had so few amusements of the sort young girls require that Herminia was overjoyed this opportunity should have come to her. She reproached herself not a little in her sensitive heart for even feeling sad at Dolly's joyous departure. Yet to Dolly it was a delight to escape from the atmosphere of Herminia's lodgings. Those calm heights chilled her.

The Compsons' house was quite as "grand" in the reality as Dolly had imagined it. There was a manservant in a white tie to wait at table, and the family dressed every evening for dinner. Yet, much to her surprise, Dolly found from the first the grandeur did not in the least incommode her. On the contrary, she enjoyed it. She felt forthwith she was to the manner born. This was clearly the life she was intended by nature to live, and might actually have been living—she, the granddaughter of so grand a man as the late Dean of Dunwich—had it not been for poor Mamma's ridiculous fancies. Mamma was so faddy! Before Dolly had spent three whole days at the rectory, she talked just as the Compsons did; she picked up by pure instinct the territorial slang of the county families. One would have thought, to hear her discourse, she had dressed for dinner every night of her life, and passed her days in the society of the beneficed clergy.

But even that did not exhaust the charm of Upcombe for Dolly. For the first time in her life, she saw something of men—real men, with horses and dogs and guns—men who went out partridge shooting in the season and rode to hounds across country, not the pale abstractions of cultured humanity who attended the Fabian Society meetings or wrote things called articles in the London papers. Her mother's friends wore soft felt hats and limp woollen collars; these real men were richly clad in tweed suits and fine linen. Dolly was charmed with them all, but especially with one handsome and manly young fellow named Walter Brydges, the stepson and ward of a neighbouring parson. "How you talked with him at tennis today!" Winnie Compson said to her friend, as they sat on the edge of Dolly's bed one evening. "He seemed quite taken with you."

A pink spot of pleasure glowed on Dolly's round cheek to think that a real young man, in good society, whom she met at so grand a house as the Compsons', should seem to be quite taken with her.

"Who is he, Winnie?" she asked, trying to look less self-conscious. "He's extremely good-looking."

"Oh, he's Mr Hawkshaw's stepson, over at Combe Mary," Winnie answered with a nod. "Mr Hawkshaw's the vicar there till Mamma's nephew is ready to take the living—what they call a warming-pan. But Walter Brydges is Mrs Hawkshaw's son by her first husband. Old Mr Brydges was the squire of Combe Mary, and Walter's his only child. He's very well off. You might do worse, dear. He's considered quite a catch down in this part of the country."

"How old is he?" Dolly asked, innocently enough, standing up by the bedside in her dainty white nightgown. But Winnie caught at her meaning with the preternatural sharpness of the girl brought up in immediate contact with the landed interest. "Oh, he's of age," she answered quickly, with a knowing nod. "He's come into the property; he has nobody on earth but himself to consult about his domestic arrangements."

Dolly was young; Dolly was pretty; Dolly's smile won the world; Dolly was still at the sweetest and most susceptible of ages. Walter Brydges was well off; Walter Brydges was handsome; Walter Brydges had all the glamour of a landed estate, and an Oxford education. He was a young Greek god in a Norfolk shooting-jacket. Moreover, he was a really good and pleasant young fellow. What wonder, therefore, if before a week was out, Dolly was very really and seriously in love with him? And what wonder if Walter Brydges in turn, caught by that maiden glance, was in love with Dolly? He had every excuse, for she was lithe, and beautiful, and a joyous companion; besides being, as the lady's maid justly remarked, a perfect lady.

One day, after Dolly had been a fortnight at Upcombe, the Compsons gave a picnic

in the wild Combe undercliff. ’Tis a broken wall of chalk, tumbled picturesquely about in huge shattered masses, and deliciously overgrown with ferns and blackthorn and golden clusters of close-creeping rock-rose. Mazy paths thread tangled labyrinths of fallen rock, or wind round tall clumps of holly-bush and bramble. They lighted their fire under the lee of one such buttress of broken cliff, whose summit was festooned with long sprays of clematis, or “old man’s beard”, as the common west-country name expressively phrases it. Thistledown hovered on the basking air. There they sat and drank their tea, couched on beds of fern or propped firm against the rock; and when tea was over, they wandered off, two and two, ostensibly for nothing, but really for the true business of the picnic—to afford the young men and maidens of the group some chance of enjoying, unspied, one another’s society.

Dolly and Walter Brydges strolled off by themselves toward the rocky shore. There Walter showed her where a brook bubbled clear from the fountain-head; by its brink, blue veronicas grew, and tall yellow loosestrife, and tasselled purple heads of great English eupatory. Bending down to the stream he picked a little bunch of forget-me-nots, and handed them to her. Dolly pretended unconsciously to pull the dainty blossoms to pieces, as she sat on the clay bank hard by and talked with him. “Is that how you treat my poor flowers?” Walter asked, looking askance at her.

Dolly glanced down, and drew back suddenly. “Oh, poor little things!” she cried, with a quick droop of her long lashes. “I wasn’t thinking what I did.” And she darted a shy glance at him. “If I’d remembered they were forget-me-nots, I don’t think I could have done it.”

She looked so sweet and pure in her budding innocence, like a half-blown water-lily, that the young man, already more than two-thirds in love, was instantly captivated. “Because they were forget-me-nots, or because they were mine, Miss Barton?” he asked softly, all timorousness.

“Perhaps a little of both,” the girl answered, gazing down, and blushing at each word a still deeper crimson.

The blush showed sweet on that translucent skin. Walter turned to her with a sudden impulse. “And what are you going to do with them now?” he enquired, holding his breath for joy and half-suppressed eagerness.

Dolly hesitated a moment with genuine modesty. Then her liking for the well-knit young man overcame her. With a frightened smile her hand stole to her bodice; she fixed them in her bosom. “Will that do?” she asked timidly.

“Yes, that will do,” the young man answered, bending forward and seizing her soft fingers in his own. “That will do very well. And, Miss Barton—Dolores—I take it as a sign you don’t wholly dislike me.”

“I like you very much,” Dolly answered in a low voice, pulling a rock-rose from a cleft and tearing it nervously to pieces.

“Do you love me, Dolly?” the young man insisted.

Dolly turned her glance to him tenderly, then withdrew it in haste. “I think I might, in time,” she answered very slowly.

“Then you will be mine, mine, mine?” Walter cried in an ecstasy.

Dolly bent her pretty head in reluctant assent, with a torrent of inner joy. The sun flashed in her chestnut hair. The triumph of that moment was to her inexpressible.

But as for Walter Brydges, he seized the blushing face boldly in his two brown hands, and imprinted upon it at once three respectful kisses. Then he drew back, half-terrified at his own temerity.

CHAPTER XX

From that day forth it was understood at Upcombe that Dolly Barton was informally engaged to Walter Brydges. Their betrothal would be announced in the Morning

Post—"We learn that a marriage has been arranged," and so forth—as soon as the chosen bride had returned to town, and communicated the great news in person to her mother. For reasons of her own, Dolly preferred this delay; she didn't wish to write on the subject to Herminia. Would mamma go and spoil it all? she wondered. It would be just like her.

The remaining week of her stay at the rectory was a golden dream of delight to Dolly. Beyond even the natural ecstasy of first love, the natural triumph of a brilliant engagement, what visions of untold splendour danced hourly, day and night, before her dazzled eyes! What masques of magnificence! county balls, garden parties! It was heaven to Dolly. She was going to be grander than her grandest daydream.

Walter took her across one afternoon to Combe Mary, and introduced her in due form to his mother and his step-father, who found the pink-and-white girl "so very young", but saw no other grave fault in her. He even escorted her over the ancestral home of the masters of Combe Mary, in which they were both to live, and which the young squire had left vacant of set purpose till he found a wife to his mind to fill it. 'Twas the ideal crystallised. Rooks cawed from the high elms; ivy clambered to the gables; the tower of the village church closed the vista through the avenue. The cup of Dolly's happiness was full to the brim. She was to dwell in a manor-house with livery servants of her own, and to dress for dinner every night of her existence.

On the very last evening of her stay in Dorsetshire, Walter came round to see her. Mrs Compson and the girls managed to keep discreetly out of the young people's way; the rector was in his study preparing his Sunday sermon, which arduous intellectual effort was supposed to engage his close attention for five hours or so weekly. Not a mouse interrupted. So Dolly and her lover had the field to themselves from eight to ten in the rectory drawing-room.

From the first moment of Walter's entry, Dolly was dimly aware, womanlike, of something amiss, something altered in his manner. Not, indeed, that her lover was

less affectionate or less tender than usual—if anything he seemed rather more so; but his talk was embarrassed, pre-occupied, spasmodic. He spoke by fits and starts, and seemed to hold back something. Dolly taxed him with it at last. Walter tried to put it off upon her approaching departure. But he was an honest young man, and so bad an actor that Dolly, with her keen feminine intuitions, at once detected him. “It’s more than that,” she said, all regret, leaning forward with a quick-gathering moisture in her eye, for she really loved him. “It’s more than that, Walter. You’ve heard something somewhere that you don’t want to tell me.”

Walter’s colour changed at once. He was a man, and therefore but a poor dissembler. “Well, nothing very much,” he admitted, awkwardly.

Dolly, drew back like one stung; her heart beat fast. “What have you heard?” she cried trembling; “Walter, Walter, I love you! You must keep nothing back. Tell me now what it is. I can bear to hear it.”

The young man hesitated. “Only something my step-father heard from a friend last night,” he replied, floundering deeper and deeper. “Nothing at all about you, darling. Only—well—about your family.”

Dolly’s face was red as fire. A lump rose in her throat; she started in horror. Then he had found out the Truth. He had probed the Mystery.

“Something that makes you sorry you promised to marry me?” she cried aloud in her despair. Heaven faded before her eyes. What evil trick could Mamma have played her?

As she stood there that moment—proud, crimson, breathless—Walter Brydges would have married her if her father had been a tinker and her mother a gipsy girl. He drew her toward him tenderly. “No, darling,” he cried, kissing her, for he was a chivalrous young man, as he understood chivalry; and to him it was indeed a most cruel blow to learn that his future wife was born out of lawful wedlock. “I’m proud of you; I love you. I worship the very ground your sweet feet tread on. Nothing on

earth could make me anything but grateful and thankful for the gift of your love you're gracious enough to bestow on me."

But Dolly drew back in alarm. Not on such terms as those. She, too, had her pride; she, too, had her chivalry. "No, no," she cried, shrinking. "I don't know what it is. I don't know what it means. But till I've gone home to London and asked about it from mother—oh, Walter, we two are no longer engaged. You are free from your promise."

She said it proudly; she said it bravely. She said it with womanly grace and dignity. Something of Herminia shone out in her that moment. No man should ever take her—to the grandest home—unless he took her at her full worth, pleased and proud to win her.

Walter soothed and coaxed; but Dolores stood firm. Like a rock in the sea, no assault could move her. As things stood at present, she cried, they were no longer engaged. After she had seen her mother and talked it all over, she would write to him once more, and tell him what she thought of it.

And, crimson to the finger-tips with shame and modesty, she rushed from his presence up to her own dark bedroom.

CHAPTER XXI

Next morning early, Dolly left Combe Neville on her way to London. When she reached the station, Walter was on the platform with a bunch of white roses. He handed them to her deferentially as she took her seat in the third-class carriage; and so sobered was Dolly by this great misfortune that she forgot even to feel a passing pang of shame that Walter should see her travel in that humble fashion. "Remember," he whispered in her ear, as the train steamed out, "we are still engaged; I hold you to your promise."

And Dolly, blushing maidenly shame and distress, shook her head decisively. "Not

now," she answered. "I must wait till I know the truth. It has always been kept from me. And now I will know it."

She had not slept that night. All the way up to London, she kept turning her doubt over. The more she thought of it, the deeper it galled her. Her wrath waxed bitter against Herminia for this evil turn she had wrought. The smouldering anger of years blazed forth at last. Had she blighted her daughter's life, and spoiled so fair a future by obstinate adherence to those preposterous ideas of hers?

Never in her life had Dolly loved her mother. At best, she had felt towards her that contemptuous toleration which inferior minds often extend to higher ones. And now—why, she hated her.

In London, as it happened, that very morning, Herminia, walking across Regent's Park, had fallen in with Harvey Kynaston, and their talk had turned upon this self-same problem.

"What will you do when she asks you about it, as she must, sooner or later?" the man inquired.

And Herminia, smiling that serene sweet smile of hers, made answer at once without a second's hesitation, "I shall confess the whole truth to her."

"But it might be so bad for her," Harvey Kynaston went on. And then he proceeded to bring up in detail casuistic objections on the score of a young girl's modesty; all of which fell flat on Herminia's more honest and consistent temperament.

"I believe in the truth," she said simply; "and I'm never afraid of it. I don't think a lie, or even a suppression, can ever be good in the end for any one. The Truth shall make you Free. That one principle in life can guide one through everything."

In the evening, when Dolly came home, her mother ran out proudly and affectionately to kiss her. But Dolly drew back her face with a gesture of displeasure, nay, almost of shrinking. "Not now, mother!" she cried. "I have something to ask you about. Till I know the truth, I can never kiss you."

Herminia's face turned deadly white; she knew it had come at last. But still she never flinched. "You shall hear the truth from me, darling," she said, with a gentle touch. "You have always heard it."

They passed under the doorway and up the stairs in silence. As soon as they were in the sitting-room, Dolly fronted Herminia fiercely. "Mother," she cried, with the air of a wild creature at bay, "were you married to my father?"

Herminia's cheek blanched, and her pale lips quivered as she nerved herself to answer; but she answered bravely, "No, darling, I was not. It has always been contrary to my principles to marry."

"Your principles!" Dolores echoed in a tone of ineffable, scorn. "Your principles! Your principles! All my life has been sacrificed to you and your principles!" Then she turned on her madly once more. "And who was my father?" she burst out in her agony.

Herminia never paused. She must tell her the truth. "Your father's name was Alan Merrick," she answered, steadying herself with one hand on the table. "He died at Perugia before you were born there. He was a son of Sir Anthony Merrick, the great doctor in Harley Street."

The worst was out. Dolly stood still and gasped. Hot horror flooded her burning cheeks. Illegitimate! illegitimate! Dishonoured from her birth! A mark for every cruel tongue to aim at! Born in shame and disgrace! And then, to think what she might have been, but for her mother's madness! The granddaughter of two such great men in their way as the Dean of Dunwich and Sir Anthony Merrick!

She drew back, all aghast. Shame and agony held her. Something of maiden modesty burned bright in her cheek and down her very neck. Red waves coursed through her. How on earth after this could she face Walter Brydges?

"Mother, mother!" she broke out, sobbing, after a moment's pause, "oh, what have you done? What have you done? A cruel, cruel mother you have been to me. How

can I ever forgive you?”

Herminia gazed at her appalled. It was a natural tragedy. There was no way out of it. She couldn’t help seizing the thing at once, in a lightning flash of sympathy, from Dolly’s point of view, too. Quick womanly instinct made her heart bleed for her daughter’s manifest shame and horror.

“Dolly, Dolly,” the agonised mother cried, flinging herself upon her child’s mercy, as it were; “Don’t be hard on me; don’t be hard on me! My darling, how could I ever guess you would look at it like this? How could I ever guess my daughter and his would see things for herself in so different a light from the light we saw them in?”

“You had no right to bring me into the world at all,” Dolly cried, growing fiercer as her mother grew more unhappy. “If you did, you should have put me on an equality with other people.”

“Dolly,” Herminia moaned, wringing her hands in her despair, “my child, my darling, how I have loved you! how I have watched over you! Your life has been for years the one thing I had to live for. I dreamed you would be just such another one as myself. Equal with other people! Why, I thought I was giving you the noblest heritage living woman ever yet gave the child of her bosom. I thought you would be proud of it, as I myself would have been proud. I thought you would accept it as a glorious birthright, a supreme privilege. How could I foresee you would turn aside from your mother’s creed? How could I anticipate you would be ashamed of being the first free-born woman ever begotten in England? ’Twas a blessing I meant to give you, and you have made a curse of it.”

“You have made a curse of it!” Dolores answered, rising and glaring at her. “You have blighted my life for me. A good man and true was going to make me his wife. After this, how can I dare to palm myself off upon him?”

She swept from the room. Though broken with sorrow, her step was resolute. Herminia followed her to her bedroom. There Dolly sat long on the edge of the bed,

crying silently, silently, and rocking herself up and down like one mad with agony. At last, in one fierce burst, she relieved her burdened soul by pouring out to her mother the whole tale of her meeting with Walter Brydges. Though she hated her, she must tell her. Herminia listened with deep shame. It brought the colour back into her own pale cheek to think any man should deem he was performing an act of chivalrous self-devotion in marrying Herminia Barton's unlawful daughter. Alan Merrick's child! The child of so many hopes! The baby that was born to regenerate humanity!

At last, in a dogged way, Dolly rose once more. She put on her hat and jacket.

"Where are you going?" her mother asked, terrified.

"I am going out," Dolores answered, "to the post, to telegraph to him."

She worded her telegram briefly but proudly:

"My mother has told me all. I understand your feeling. Our arrangement is annulled. Goodbye. You have been kind to me."

An hour or two later, a return telegram came:

"Our engagement remains exactly as it was. Nothing is changed. I hold you to your promise. All tenderest messages. Letter follows."

That answer calmed Dolly's mind a little. She began to think after all—if Walter still wanted her—she loved him very much; she could hardly dismiss him.

When she rose to go to bed, Herminia, very wistful, held out her white face to be kissed as usual. She held it out tentatively. Worlds trembled in the balance; but Dolly drew herself back with a look of offended dignity. "Never!" she answered in a firm voice. "Never again while I live. You are not fit to receive a pure girl's kisses."

And two women lay awake all that ensuing night sobbing low on their pillows in the Marylebone lodging-house.

CHAPTER XXII

It was half-past nine o'clock next morning when the manservant at Sir Anthony Merrick's in Harley Street brought up to his master's room a plain hand-written card on which he read the name, "Dolores Barton."

"Does the girl want to blackmail me?" Sir Anthony thought testily.

The great doctor's old age was a lonely and a sordid one. He was close on eighty now, but still to this day he received his patients from ten to one, and closed his shrivelled hand with a clutch on their guineas. For whom, nobody knew. Lady Merrick was long dead. His daughters were well married, and he had quarrelled with their husbands. Of his two younger sons, one had gone into the Fusiliers and been speared at Suakim; the other had broken his neck on a hunting-field in Warwickshire. The old man lived alone, and hugged his money-bags. They were the one thing left for which he seemed to retain any human affection.

So, when he read Dolly's card, being by nature suspicious, he felt sure the child had called to see what she could get out of him.

But when he descended to the consulting-room with stern set face, and saw a beautiful girl of seventeen awaiting him—a tall sunny-haired girl, with Alan's own smile and Alan's own eyes—he grew suddenly aware of an unexpected interest. The sun went back on the dial of his life for thirty years or thereabouts, and Alan himself seemed to stand before him. Alan, as he used to burst in for his holidays from Winchester! After all, this pink rosebud was his eldest son's only daughter.

Chestnut hair, pearly teeth, she was Alan all over.

Sir Anthony bowed his most respectful bow, with old-fashioned courtesy.

"And what can I do for you, young lady?" he asked in his best professional manner.

"Grandfather," the girl broke out, blushing red to the ears, but saying it out none the less; "Grandfather, I'm your granddaughter, Dolores Barton."

The old man bowed once more, a most deferential bow. Strange to say, when he saw her, this claim of blood pleased him.

“So I see, my child,” he answered. “And what do you want with me?”

“I only knew it last night,” Dolly went on, casting down those blue eyes in her shamefaced embarrassment. “And this morning . . . I’ve come to implore your protection.”

“That’s prompt,” the old man replied, with a curious smile, half suspicious, half satisfied. “From whom, my little one?” And his hand caressed her shoulder.

“From my mother,” Dolly answered, blushing still deeper crimson. “From the mother who put this injustice upon me. From the mother who, by her own confession, might have given me an honourable birthright, like any one else’s, and who cruelly refused to.”

The old man eyed her with a searching glance.

“Then she hasn’t brought you up in her own wild ideas?” he said. “She hasn’t dinged them into you!”

“She has tried to,” Dolly answered. “But I will have nothing to do with them. I hate her ideas, and her friends, and her faction.”

Sir Anthony drew her forward and gave her a sudden kiss. Her spirit pleased him.

“That’s well, my child,” he answered. “That’s well—for a beginning.”

Then Dolly, emboldened by his kindness—for in a moment, somehow, she had taken her grandfather’s heart by assault—began to tell him how it had all come about; how she had received an offer from a most excellent young man at Combe Mary in Dorsetshire—very well connected, the squire of his parish; how she had accepted him with joy; how she loved him dearly; how this shadow intervened; how thereupon, for the first time, she had asked for and learned the horrid truth about her parentage; how she was stunned and appalled by it; how she could never again live

under one roof with such a woman; and how she came to him for advice, for encouragement, for assistance. She flung herself on his mercy. Every word she spoke impressed Sir Anthony. This was no mere acting; the girl really meant it. Brought up in those hateful surroundings, innate purity of mind had preserved her innocent heart from the contagion of example. She spoke like a sensible, modest, healthy English maiden. She was indeed a granddaughter any man might be proud of. 'Twas clear as the sun in the London sky to Sir Anthony that she recoiled with horror from her mother's position. He sympathised with her and pitied her. Dolores, all blushes, lifted her eyelids and looked at him. Her grandfather drew her towards him with a smile of real tenderness, and, unbending as none had seen him unbend before since Alan's death, told her all the sad history as he himself envisaged it. Dolores listened and shuddered. The old man was vanquished. He would have taken her once to himself, he said, if Herminia had permitted it; he would take her to himself now, if Dolores would come to him.

As for Dolly, she lay sobbing and crying in Sir Anthony's arms, as though she had always known him. After all, he was her grandfather. Nearer to her in heart and soul than her mother. And the butler could hardly conceal his surprise and amazement when three minutes later Sir Anthony rang the bell, and being discovered alone with a strange young lady in tears, made the unprecedented announcement that he would see no patients at all that morning, and was at home to nobody.

But before Dolly left her new-found relation's house, it was all arranged between them. She was to come there at once as his adopted daughter; was to take and use the name of Merrick; was to see nothing more of that wicked woman, her mother; and was to be married in due time from Sir Anthony's house, and under Sir Anthony's auspices, to Walter Brydges.

She wrote to Walter then and there, from her grandfather's consulting-room. Numb with shame as she was, she nerved her hand to write to him. In what most delicate

language she could find, she let him plainly know who Sir Anthony was, and all else that had happened. But she added at the end one significant clause: “While my mother lives, dear Walter, I feel I can never marry you.”

CHAPTER XXIII

When she returned from Sir Anthony’s to her mother’s lodgings, she found Herminia, very pale, in the sitting-room, waiting for her. Her eyes were fixed on a cherished autotype of a Pinturicchio at Perugia—Alan’s favourite picture. Out of her penury she had bought it. It represented the Madonna bending in worship over her divine child, and bore the inscription: “Quem genuit adoravit.” Herminia loved that group. To her it was no mere emblem of a dying creed, but a type of the eternal religion of maternity. The Mother adoring the Child! ’Twas herself and Dolly.

“Well?” Herminia said interrogatively, as her daughter entered, for she half feared the worst.

“Well,” Dolores answered in a defiant tone, blurting it out in sudden jerks, the rebellion of a lifetime finding vent at last. “I’ve been to my grandfather, my father’s father; and I’ve told him everything; and it’s all arranged: and I’m to take his name; and I’m to go and live with him.”

“Dolly!” the mother cried, and fell forward on the table with her face in her hands. “My child, my child, are you going to leave me?”

“It’s quite time,” Dolly answered, in a sullen, stolid voice. “I can’t stop here, of course, now I’m almost grown-up and engaged to be married, associating any longer with such a woman as you have been. No right-minded girl who respected herself could do it.”

Herminia rose and faced her. Her white lips grew livid. She had counted on every element of her martyrdom—save one; and this, the blackest and fiercest of all, had never even occurred to her. “Dolly,” she cried, “oh, my daughter, you don’t know

what you do! You don't know how I've loved you! I've given up my life for you. I thought when you came to woman's estate, and learned what was right and what wrong, you would indeed rise up and call me blessed. And now—oh, Dolly, this last blow is too terrible. It will kill me, my darling. I can't go on outliving it."

"You will," Dolly answered. "You're strong enough and wiry enough to outlive anything. . . . But I wrote to Walter from Sir Anthony's this morning, and told him I would wait for him if I waited forever. For, of course, while you live, I couldn't think of marrying him. I couldn't think of burdening an honest man with such a mother-in-law as you are!"

Herminia could only utter the one word, "Dolly!" It was a heart-broken cry, the last despairing cry of a wounded and stricken creature.

CHAPTER XXIV

That night, Herminia Barton went up sadly to her own bedroom. It was the very last night that Dolores was to sleep under the same roof with her mother. On the morrow, she meant to remove to Sir Anthony Merrick's.

As soon as Herminia had closed the door, she sat down to her writing-table and began to write. Her pen moved of itself. And this was her letter:—

"MY DARLING DAUGHTER,—By the time you read these words, I shall be no longer in the way, to interfere with your perfect freedom of action. I had but one task left in life—to make you happy. Now I find I only stand in the way of that object, no reason remains why I should endure any longer the misfortune of living. "My child, my child, you must see, when you come to think it over at leisure, that all I ever did was done, up to my lights, to serve and bless you. I thought, by giving you the father and the birth I did, I was giving you the best any mother on earth had ever yet given her dearest daughter. I believe it still; but I see I should never succeed in making you feel it. Accept this reparation. For all the wrong I may have done, all the mistakes I

may have made, I sincerely and earnestly implore your forgiveness. I could not have had it while I lived; I beseech and pray you to grant me dead what you would never have been able to grant me living. “My darling, I thought you would grow up to feel as I did; I thought you would thank me for leading you to see such things as the blind world is incapable of seeing. There I made a mistake; and sorely am I punished for it. Don’t visit it upon my head in your recollections when I can no longer defend myself. “I set out in life with the earnest determination to be a martyr to the cause of truth and righteousness, as I myself understood them. But I didn’t foresee this last pang of martyrdom. No soul can tell beforehand to what particular cross the blind chances of the universe will finally nail it. But I am ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is close at hand. I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith I started in life with. Nothing now remains for me but the crown of martyrdom. My darling, it is indeed a very bitter cup to me that you should wish me dead; but ’tis a small thing to die, above all for the sake of those we love. I die for you gladly, knowing that by doing so I can easily relieve my own dear little girl of one trouble in life, and make her course lie henceforth through smoother waters. Be happy! be happy! Goodbye, my Dolly! Your mother’s love go forever through life with you! “Burn this blurred note the moment you have read it. I enclose a more formal one, giving reasons for my act on other grounds, to be put in, if need be, at the coroner’s inquest. Good-night, my heart’s darling. Your truly devoted and affectionate

MOTHER.

“Oh, Dolly, my Dolly, you never will know with what love I loved you.”

When she had finished that note, and folded it reverently with kisses and tears, she wrote the second one in a firm hand for the formal evidence. Then she put on a fresh white dress, as pure as her own soul, like the one she had worn on the night of her self-made bridal with Alan Merrick. In her bosom she fastened two innocent white

roses from Walter Brydges's bouquet, arranging them with studious care very daintily before her mirror. She was always a woman. "Perhaps," she thought to herself, "for her lover's sake, my Dolly will kiss them. When she finds them lying on her dead mother's breast, my Dolly may kiss them." Then she cried a few minutes very softly to herself; for no one can die without some little regret, some consciousness of the unique solemnity of the occasion.

At last she rose and moved over to her desk. Out of it she took a small glass-stoppered phial, that a scientific friend had given her long ago for use in case of extreme emergency. It contained prussic acid. She poured the contents into a glass and drank it off. Then she lay upon her bed and waited for the only friend she had left in the world, with hands folded on her breast, like some saint of the middle ages.

Not for nothing does blind fate vouchsafe such martyrs to humanity. From their graves shall spring glorious the church of the future.

When Dolores came in next morning to say goodbye, she found her mother's body cold and stiff upon the bed, in a pure white dress, with two crushed white roses just peeping from her bodice.

Herminia Barton's stainless soul had ceased to exist for ever.

THE END.

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