

strewn with scraps of manuscript, he said: "There must have been some extraordinary force that called you out of the heart of London to come down here and work for me."

In the calm and deliberate way in which he made the remark it was the nearest to a compliment he had ever paid her. There was a force; she felt it herself, but had no romantic ideas about affinity. Never could she have believed she would have found a man whose work and whose type of intellect appealed to her so much. But where her mind came to an estimate of his character she found her thoughts flocking in confusion, like birds in winter, having no singleness of purpose, no clear idea of direction. Jenny did not know what she thought of Mr. Bottleby as a man. Reading that description of him in her daughter's letter, Mrs. Hazlitt had probably received a clearer impression of Jenny's opinion than she had herself.

Whatever she felt, her instincts were awake and quickened to danger when she heard there was to be a meeting of the council that Monday morning. With a questioning look that brought apprehension into her eyes, she asked Mr. Bottleby what it was for. The usual quarterly meeting had only been a month ago.

"Some little thing they want to discuss," he replied casually, and found himself with the mumming instinct, but did not know how poorly developed it was. She knew. He was quite incapable of hiding what it was he anticipated from her. Possessing the ingredient of common sense in her composition, she inquired no farther. She was curious, but not for mere curiosity's sake. Half of her curiosity was fear. She knew it was about her.

What an ugly place the world could be sometimes! She shuddered and went away to her typewriter.

Mr. Bottleby was in the council-room before anyone

arrived. As to what was about to happen, his mind was more or less of a blank. If he had any quality of imagination at all, it was not for what might be but for the hidden places of what was. By power of imagination he could conceive where a bird had built her nest. It was utterly beyond him to prognosticate what, in such an interview, the council was going to say to him or what might be the nature of his reply.

He was busily engaged in reading through some old notes Jenny had collected for his selection on what was now the most absorbing topic of his mind and did not even see that Mr. Overend had entered the room.

"Good morning," said Mr. Overend.

"Good morning—good morning," replied Mr. Bottleby. "I see here from a note I made ten years ago that the instinct noticeable amongst almost every species of insects, birds and animals to attack and destroy the aged and diseased of their kind largely disappears under the influence of domesticity. It is recognisable again in the savage races of man, as in the cases of some pagan tribes in Central Africa where the family is the basis of the community. There they kill off the old man of the tribe when he is no longer able to breed with his wives. They kill him off and eat him. It becomes a matter of considerable interest to the anthropologist to trace what becomes of that instinct in man when he in turn is submitted to the domesticating influence of civilisation. I forget whether I told you I was beginning a work on the persistence of instincts."

Mr. Overend shook his head.

"I had not heard of it," said he.

"Yes—the persistence of instincts. I am convinced of what one might call the wastelessness of life. I want in this work to show that instincts which offer every sign of disappearance are not wasted, but transmuted. In the case

of this instinct to kill off the aged and impotent, for example——”

He stopped. The room had become suddenly full of the presence of Mr. Purch. Immediately behind him came Mr. Mercer and Mr. Charrington. Having much the same opinion about trade as Mrs. Twiss, he had not accompanied them in the street. Seeing them then in the seclusion of the council-room, he gave them a jovial and hearty “Good morning.”

Mr. Bottleby put aside his notes and they all sat down. An apparent gloom was hanging over the four gentlemen which had the sense of being forced and artificial. With a natural lightness of spirit due to the lack of his imagination as to what they had to say, they seemed to Mr. Bottleby like four undertakers at a funeral. If they were grieved at what they felt it their duty to say, it was a grief they wore like four top-hats with deep bands rather than an inward emotion.

Looking from one to the other and receiving certain almost cabalistic signs of encouragement, Mr. Overend began in the suave and easy manner that was to be expected of him.

“It has been brought to our notice,” he said, “that Miss Hazlitt, your assistant, is occupying rooms in the curator’s wing. Perhaps you would tell us if this is correct.”

“Quite,” said Mr. Bottleby affably. “She has a bedroom and a sitting-room.”

“Before we go any further,” interposed Mr. Purch, “I should like to ask—it has just occurred to me—whether she is paying for the use of these rooms, and if so, how much?”

“She is not paying anything,” replied Mr. Bottleby.

Mr. Overend checked the expressions that quickened the faces of Mr. Charrington and Mr. Mercer.

“Where does she get her meals?” continued Mr. Purch.

Here Mr. Bottleby surprised them all with the simplicity of the answer that he gave.

"You know quite well," said he.

"We have heard," said Mr. Overend, "that she has her meals with you."

"Don't you believe it?" asked Mr. Bottleby.

"We find it difficult to believe," replied Mr. Mercer.

The curator affably informed them he could make it quite easy for them if this was their only difficulty.

"She does," said he.

Following the legal line of examination set by Mr. Purch, Mr. Charrington conceived the idea—illuminating to him—of asking Mr. Bottleby if she paid for these.

He was given a simple answer in the negative.

"For rooms," said Mr. Purch, "she would pay about thirty shillings a week; for food, say fifteen——" The inclination to make it like a lawyer's bill of costs was irresistible. "In all," he concluded, "about forty-five shillings a week."

"To which," added Mr. Bottleby, "must be included extras—sixpence a piece, I understand, for cleaning shoes, light, firing in winter. On an average I should imagine another five shillings a week."

"Perhaps," said Mr. Purch. "Let us allow fifty shillings in all. All of which, we should like to point out to you, for no reason that is apparent to us, you have of your own generosity added on to her salary."

"May I suggest one possible reason?" said Mr. Bottleby.

With all the generosity of the law in addition to such personal generosity as he possessed, Mr. Overend said: "Certainly."

"The council," said Mr. Bottleby, "were only allowing Miss Hazlitt a salary of forty shillings a week."

Mr. Purch was the first to recover his presence of mind.

"Quite—quite," he said. "Viewed in that light, it's obvious that forty shillings was not enough. She has not only to live, she has to dress herself."

"That had not occurred to me," said Mr. Bottleby, "when I offered her the rooms that were lying idle in the curator's wing. However, gentlemen, if that reason is not sufficient for you, and I am still at a loss to know why you wanted a reason, I must tell you that she could not have the rooms in Leather Lane where she was staying any longer, and there being no other lodgings anywhere in Thurnham, this was the only alternative. May I ask if this is the matter of importance you wanted to discuss?"

Mr. Mercer looked at Mr. Charrington; Mr. Charrington at Mr. Overend; Mr. Overend at Mr. Purch.

Mr. Purch said it was.

"Then I hope," said Mr. Bottleby, "these answers are satisfactory."

In all ingenuousness he was about to rise to his feet, thinking this was an end of the matter, when Mr. Overend, coughing a trifle nervously for one who had frequently to deal with delicate matters amongst the gentry, replied: "Well, I'm afraid it is not quite."

Mr. Bottleby resumed his seat and waited. Beetling his brows in an evident effort to choose his words carefully, Mr. Overend continued:

"The general opinion in Thurnham," he said, "is somewhat—er—is somewhat disturbed to find one of its public servants—if for the moment I may describe you as that—so far defying the conventions of society. I think I am not exaggerating when I say there are many people in Thurnham who do not consider it customary. I don't wish to mention any names; but it has been brought to our notice, and we feel compelled to discuss the matter with you."

As a council of men, the various gentlemen present felt

the matter could not have been more tactfully put. Even Mr. Purch, rivalling in every instinct his brother lawyer, had no amendments to make. He adopted a Georgian attitude, in keeping with his clothes, and looked towards Mr. Bottleby.

The full force and meaning of their presence there was slowly dawning on the simple mind of the curator. All that Jenny had prognosticated had come to pass. In a word, people were saying things about them. For one moment a sensation of unexpected and violent anger possessed Mr. Bottleby. He could not remember ever having felt so disturbing an emotion before. It was a compound of militant disgust and active resentment. The strange part of it was that it was not for himself, but for her. In some detached fashion, he seemed to find it a disgusting insult. So far as he was concerned himself, it did not appear to matter what they said or thought. As his mind switched to a personal consideration, he laughed.

The four gentlemen sat there, amazed at his laughter.

"I do not seem to see this is a laughing matter myself," said Mr. Purch. "Perhaps you will explain."

"So far as I can," said Mr. Bottleby, "I will endeavour to do so. But I'm afraid I can't give you the explanation you require."

"And what is that?" inquired Mr. Charrington.

"I can't inform you that I am behaving as your imagination evidently leads you to suppose I am."

"We imagine nothing," said Mr. Overend blandly.

"Then upon what impulse are you acting, gentlemen, in calling this meeting this morning?"

Mr. Overend explained with that delicacy with which he handled the very private affairs of the titled families in the neighbourhood that they were acting in response to the

attention drawn by various ladies in the town to this breach of the conventions of society.

"What we think ourselves," he added with urbanity, "has very little to do with it. I trust we are all men of the world and above such petty judgments as are based on morbid imagination. In calling this meeting we are acting for the unwritten laws of society, and while we freely accept your explanation of Miss Hazlitt's occupation of the rooms in the curator's wing, we feel bound to say that that occupation cannot continue. She must find rooms elsewhere."

In a first emotion of despair, Mr. Bottleby repeated there were no rooms to be found in Thurnham.

"There is only one alternative, then," said Mr. Overend. "We must find someone to assist you in your work who already lives here."

"But you couldn't!" shouted Mr. Bottleby. "You couldn't. You can sit there calmly and say you will find someone in Thurnham to take her place, but they don't exist. There may be people here in Thurnham with the heads of Aristotles, but they've got the brains of linnets. You don't know what you're saying, gentlemen. You want to rob me of the better part of my energy for work. In the bare month she's been here, Miss Hazlitt has not only saved me hours of unnecessary labour, she's improved my work. And my work, gentlemen, is all that matters to me. It matters much more to me than what you call the unwritten laws of society. What's society got to do with me? I don't attend its functions. I shouldn't know how to behave if I did. You might as well ostracise me for not being able to balance a piece of bread and butter on a saucer, or for having more buttons to my waistcoat than I ought to have and then for not buttoning them up. I'm quite prepared for you to say that my work doesn't matter. Nobody's work

matters, except to himself. A man's duty is to do the best that's in him, not what other people consider the best."

He turned with a gesture to Mr. Charrington.

"If I were to do what you consider the best," he said, "I should be spending the rest of my life in the study of underlinen. No, gentlemen, where his work is concerned, it's up to a man to find the best he's composed of and to give that to your society for what it's worth. With the assistance of time your society will judge of it. If you insist upon depriving me of the help of Miss Hazlitt, you cripple me for the sake of what a few ladies in the town are amused by gossiping about me. If I don't mind what they say, why should it matter to you?"

If eloquence were not Mr. Bottleby's strong point, he certainly surprised the council by the force of his emotion. For a moment or two they were silent. Mr. Charrington was smarting under the curator's reference to underlinen, and in the rest of them was a strong resentment to his comparison of the brains of linnets. In common with most people of genuine emotion, Mr. Bottleby had done himself no good by his capacity for speaking the truth. They were more determined than ever to hold to their point. Though they might have been proud of what he had done for the Museum in the last three years, it was only a pride that reflected on themselves. In comparison with such a matter as this that pride counted for nothing. Before all else the curator they had selected must behave as they behaved, or he was little more than a disgrace to them. As a body of men, representing a township, it was more incumbent upon them to see that Mr. Bottleby behaved conventionally than that he made the most wonderful discoveries in the cause of science. Before all else they had to answer to their women-folk, and, on behalf of their women-folk, Mr. Overend replied.

"I think I may say," he began with a generosity of

admission that boded ill for Mr. Bottleby, "that we all appreciate the force of your remarks. No one"—he bowed an apology to Mr. Charrington—"would regret it more than I, were you to spend the rest of your intellect in the study of underlinen."

"I should regret it myself," interposed Mr. Purch.

"But here," continued Mr. Overend, "we are acting not upon personal motives, but upon the broad motives of a society which has made England the most noble, the most undissembling, the most virtuous nation in the world."

"Hear, hear," said Mr. Purch.

"Hear, hear," echoed Mr. Charrington.

"Personally," concluded Mr. Overend, "we would like you to have every facility for your work here, which, believe me, we value very highly. We quite appreciate the value which you say Miss Hazlitt is to you in the pursuit of that work, and we are glad we were the means of bringing her to your assistance, but in respect to that society to which we all belong——"

"And are proud to belong," said Mr. Purch.

"We must insist that if she cannot find a lodging in the town you must select someone else or continue without assistance as you did when you first came here."

Mr. Bottleby sat listening in silence to the last words of Mr. Overend as they sonorously died away. Here was the overwhelming force of circumstance as he had never encountered it in his life before. As an expression of it, the will of Mrs. Naylor was nothing to this. Here again he felt the presence of that same extraordinary force driving him, as he had told Jenny must have driven her out of the heart of London to come down there and work for him. The first inevitable alternative that occurred to him with which to oppose it was to hand in his resignation. On the impulse of the moment he said:

"Supposing I resign, gentlemen?"

After the first shock of this suggestion, which had never occurred to them, Mr. Overend said craftily:

"Do you think you would find another position so helpful to the variety of your work as you have here in the museum? At any of the State museums you would be relegated to one department. I think, if I remember rightly, you told us you disapproved of specialisation. You said it suppressed the growth of the mind. If, as you say, it is a man's duty to do the best that's in him, don't you consider you would have that opportunity better here than elsewhere?"

The truth of that was undeniable. Mr. Bottleby's impulse bent but did not wholly break beneath it. It was true he would find no better post in which to pursue his studies to his heart's content than this. The salary had nothing to do with it. So long as he could live, that was all that mattered. The freedom for his work was his consideration, and where could he find such surroundings as these in the country around Thurnham? He knew there was no other public post so suitable to his requirements. On the other hand, where could he discover another Miss Hazlitt who, as he had told them, not only saved him hours of unnecessary labour, but by her criticism and knowledge of all the things he did not know, had so improved his work?

Without doubt he was being crushed between the upper and the nether millstones. He did not know which way to turn. What was this society for which these men were mere agents, that it had the power to compel him to be its servant or sacrifice something he knew to be vital to the spirit of his life? It was more than mere circumstance. His breaking of Mrs. Naylor's window was that. This was a force as inevitable and persistent as the instincts of life.

His head shot up as that thought passed across his mind.

The persistence and transmutation of instincts! He laughed out loud. That was what it was! The transmutation of the instinct to hunt down and kill and destroy the aged, the diseased, the impotent of the species! They were hunting him out. So far as he did not conform to this social demand, they were going to destroy him, to weed him out of the tribe.

"Gentlemen!" He stood to his feet. In the excitement of his discovery, he brought his fist down upon the table. "Gentlemen—the persistence and transmutation of instincts! When first you pronounced your opinion about this state of affairs I thought it was uncalled for, unreasonable, unjust. You talked about your society and all my mind visualised was a lot of tea-drinking old ladies with as much intelligence between them as would fill a thimble. I was wrong."

"I'm gratified to hear it," said Mr. Purch.

"Yes—utterly and enormously I was wrong. Your society as you call it, is nature diversifying the instincts she employed in primeval man to maintain the perpetuation of the species. You, sir—" he pointed a finger at Mr. Purch, "in the period of Palæolithic man, you joined with others of your tribe and hunted down the weakling and the effete who was no longer of service to the propagation of your kind. You killed him. More than probably you ate him. It was not a peculiar cruelty on your part. The animals from whom you had sprung only a few thousand years before had handed on the instinct to you. Other species had handed it on to them. It was bred in your blood, in your tissues. You could not have done anything else."

Mr. Charrington and Mr. Mercer looked with some disquietude at Mr. Purch. If it had not been too palpable an inference, they would have liked to have shifted their chairs. Mr. Purch himself felt a peculiar inability to deny the

Curator's assertion. He was about to say that if true, then he knew nothing about it, when Mr. Bottleby continued:

"These instincts were the foundation of the family, the scaffolding of the tribe. I pass over thousands of years in which man in nomadic companies was wandering about the earth, cutting his crops wherever he found them, feeding his cattle wherever he discovered pastures. That is as it might be a flash of time, till out of those tribal beginnings man crept into the first dawn of civilisation. Slowly through the ages this society you talk of was built up out of the old instincts of the tribe. Nothing could destroy them. Nothing in life is wasted. They were transmuted. Out of those barbarous impulses to destroy the weakling and the effete has developed this purpose in your coming here to-day. In you and the ladies of Thurnham who sit sipping their tea and talking their gossip about me, I perceive the *agents provocateurs* of Nature. You will not let things be as they are. You must have the race carried on. There can be no dallying as I am dallying. If I were to go up to London occasionally and enjoy myself promiscuously and secretly, as many men do, you would say nothing. Outwardly that is not flouting the nature you represent to her face. But here, there is a young lady living in my house so that all the town may know of it and we are not married according to your principles. We are defying the organisation of your society which nature has contrived for the continuation of the human race. Without it, there is little doubt that many would avoid their natural responsibilities. Without it, those who did not avoid them, might desert their offspring and cast their burden upon the state. To you, therefore, I am a weakling and with such weapons as society has placed in your hands you are going to hunt one or both of us out; you are going to destroy our means of subsistence; you are going to kill us and after we are dead,

doubtless you will sit around your fires and consume our reputations. You are quite right, gentlemen. You have my enthusiastic support. I could not now find it in any reasoning process of my mind to disagree with you. I recognise the persistence and transmutation of instincts. I succumb to your decision. This state of affairs can go on no longer. I will put an end to it myself to-day."

Mr. Overend, Mr. Charrington and Mr. Mercer smiled their approval. Whatever Mr. Bottleby may have said of the ladies of Thurnham, amongst whom it was difficult not to include their wives, they felt a deep sense of gratification outweighing all other disadvantages, at having successfully manipulated a difficult matter. Even Mr. Purch, though he could not entirely forget the Curator's allusion to his ancestry, was mollified.

"And how," inquired Mr. Overend, "do you intend to set about this rather delicate situation? We have nothing we can say against Miss Hazlitt. The matter of not being able to find rooms is unfortunate. But it cannot be helped. You say yourself her work for you has been excellent. Would you like us to write her a letter, impersonally, as from the Council?"

"I think not," said Mr. Bottleby.

"Then how," said Mr. Purch, "do you propose to proceed? A month's salary I think would be only fair."

"I don't think I'll insult her with that," said Mr. Bottleby.

"I think it's better that you offer her something," said Mr. Overend, who, amongst his titled clients, knew the mollifying powers of unexpected generosity.

"Oh—yes—I shall."

"What?" inquired Mr. Purch.

"Marriage," said Mr. Bottleby.

## CHAPTER XXIX

THERE could be no doubt that logically and with inevitable sequence of reason, Mr. Bottleby was convinced of the justice of the Council's action. Marriage was not merely a contrivance of society. It was a principle of nature. From the mating of birds upwards, there was a distinct evidence in every phase of the animal world of a disposition of individuals to pair with one another. Nightingales parted during migration, but in the spring, the same two birds returned to each other and to the same spot over distances often measuring some thousands of miles.

There had been a certain degree of impulse in the decision he had offered to the Council. So overwhelming had been his sudden realisation of the naturally transmuted instincts of society, that he had yielded without question to its demands. It had been irresistible. The whole scope of his vision had been enlarged. Instead of seeing life as a process losing all interest with the higher civilisation of man, he had suddenly beheld it in operation on the continuous lines of nature right into his own time.

Arresting and comprehensive as this was, it only advanced the mind of Mr. Bottleby in one direction. He saw a wider vista of life in general. But it was a bird's-eye view. In recognising this just purpose of society as a whole, he could not discern the little purpose that had animated Mrs. Charrington or Mrs. Spiers. He could not have understood the maidenly psychology of Miss Pinsett.

Briefly, in discovering the wide meaning of life, he had not discovered the narrow existence of the individual. He had appreciated the rights of society, but had not considered the rights either of Jenny or of himself.

As he sat in his room while Mrs. Twiss laid the mid-

day meal and Jenny was in the Museum, typing in his office, he astounded the good woman with the following statement:—

“Mrs. Twiss,” he said, “you were quite right about marriage. When the interests of a man and a woman so closely coincide as to be practically identical, society has a right to demand that they shall unite in the custom of matrimony.”

“Did I say that, sir?” asked the astonished Mrs. Twiss.

“Those,” said Mr. Bottleby, “to the best of my belief were your very words.”

Not knowing what they meant in any case, Mrs. Twiss was constrained to let it pass without contradiction. That Mr. Bottleby should have a memory for anything she had said, would not have surprised her had she known the Curator’s capacity for putting his own thoughts into other people’s mouths and confronting them with the origin of any statement he approved of.

Mrs. Twiss supposed she must have said this, whatever it was. What she did remember saying was that there were fewer and fewer women who wanted to have children and, more or less to this effect, that if he knew the trouble they were to some poor women he wouldn’t be surprised.

Plainly she recollected this and repeated it to him.

“Oh, yes—yes,” he agreed, “it isn’t entirely a matter of having children. The civilised world is considerably overpopulated as it is. I regard marriage as a concession, an inevitable concession to the inevitable instincts of society. In many cases to have children is only placing a burden upon the shoulders of society which it is getting less and less able to support. Some women, as I remember your saying, marry for this reason alone. Nowadays, I fancy, it is becoming more and more prevalent for men and women to marry for the sake of mutual company, mutual interest

and support. You could not assert there was not the embodiment of a family in two people who have no children. It's a small family, that's all. Some people, curates for example, have large ones. Fecundity, like chastity, is a taste. Some people like it."

This was beyond Mrs. Twiss. Having laid the table, she left Mr. Bottleby seated in front of a nicely-browned shepherd's pie and went up to the office to tell Jenny that the meal was ready.

"Is Mr. Bottleby there?" she asked.

"There, miss? He's talking nineteen to the dozen all about society and I can't understand a single word he says."

Filled with apprehension, Jenny came downstairs and passed through the private door in the hall into the Curator's wing.

Mr. Bottleby looked up from the shepherd's pie as she entered and there spread over his face as engaging a smile as she had ever seen to illuminate his countenance. She seemed to detect in it a consciousness of herself as an individual which she had never believed possible in him. He actually appeared pleased to see her. He even pulled out a chair for her to sit on. She found her heart rising with a bounding joyfulness of expectation. It was not all over. It was not finished. Her work with him there was to go on. All she had suffered that morning, hammering the keys of the typewriter to drown the sound of her own despair, had been a needless agony of mind. She sat down.

"Well?" she said.

He drove the spoon into the shepherd's pie and left it there.

"Well, the meeting's over," he replied, and did nothing with the spoon but sat staring at her.

With a nervous movement she pushed her spectacles farther on to the bridge of her nose.

"Was it about that?" she asked.

"Yes—it was about that."

"They didn't like my staying here?"

"No—they didn't like it."

"Oh—do help the pie," she murmured—"or tell me—  
or do something."

He helped the pie. It was the last thing she wanted him to do.

"You like it brown, don't you?" said he.

She muttered that she did not mind what it was like, if he would only tell her what had happened.

He had meant to tell her straight away, but an extraordinary thing had happened in his mind in those last few moments. He had suddenly become overwhelmed with a sense of awkwardness. He was acutely aware that they were alone in the room together. Once or twice he looked round at the door in the hope that Mrs. Twiss would appear. But Mrs. Twiss had gone out of that room determining not to come back till the bell rang. In the Council Chamber, the whole argument had appeared so reasonable to him. An impregnable reason was the whole construction of it. Now, alone with Jenny in the sitting-room, it seemed there were other aspects to be considered. But he could not quite make out what they were. The nearest he could approach to it was the realisation that her mind as well as his had to be convinced. Then something that Mrs. Twiss had said to him not so long ago returned with a disturbing echo amongst his thoughts.

"There are women and women," Mrs. Twiss had said.

He was suddenly conscious of the astounding possibility of that being true. And what sort was Jenny? As he looked at her, with his hand still holding the spoon in the shepherd's pie, he became overwhelmed by a sense of mystery. He did not know what she was like. Now that

he came to think of it, he had never known what a woman was like in his life. Supposing she did not like this suggestion that they should be married for the betterment of their mutual companionship, their mutual interest in work? In the Council Room it had seemed such an obvious conclusion to come to. They had driven him to it. Surely he was on the verge of being analytical and it almost terrified him. He did not know what to say next. It was she who helped him out.

"Did they want me to go?" she asked, when she could bear that spoon in the shepherd's pie no longer.

This appeared to give Mr. Bottleby purchase to recollect his thoughts.

"Yes," he said, "the ladies of Thurnham have been talking. They explained it—well—they didn't explain it—I explained it to them. They didn't understand what they represented. I told them. I doubt if they understood then. But first of all they said if you could not get rooms elsewhere in Thurnham, then I must find someone else."

"But I've tried," she whispered, "I've tried everywhere, I couldn't get any anywhere."

"I told them that."

"Then I've got to go."

In the depth of her despair, could he have heard it, there was all the terror of that life with Crupper and Dodds'. A thousand times it was more terrible now, now that she had learnt how free life could be in her work with him. In that old atmosphere her spirit would be stifled, as she had seen it stifled in so many others. The desire for amusement like a drug would insidiously steal its way into her mind. In a few years, she would be living like the rest of them, squandering the hours of leisure to forget the hours of work. There was no growth in that. Every hour of it was a creeping decay. Her love of poetry would go. She

would need all her mind for that and what mind would she have when, after eight hours of soulless work in an office, she fought with hundreds of others to get her place in the 'bus home.

A moment of revolt against this edict of the Council blazed up in her.

"Why should they have the right," she cried, "to say where I should live or where I should not! Isn't my life my own to live as I like?"

"That's what I felt like at first," said Mr. Bottleby, "and I suggested to them I should resign."

That frightened her. Without consideration of what she did, Jenny impulsively thrust out her hand and caught at his. "You couldn't do that!" she exclaimed. "That would be worse than anything. I may think my life matters, but I don't think it matters as much as all that. You couldn't do that. Do you think I don't realise what this place means to your work. Hundreds of times you've said it, that there's no other post in the whole country you'd hold rather than this. It gives you all the freedom you want for your other work. I'd rather go back and work in Crupper and Dodds' till I was an old woman than that you should do that."

She suddenly realised she was clutching his hand and as quickly let go of it.

"Promise me you won't do anything so foolish."

"Don't worry yourself about that," said he. "I'm not going to resign."

She did her best to smile her relief. But once he had said that, she knew it was all over. The dream was finished. She was awake. In a day or two from then she would be sharing the bedroom again with her sister. The sitting-room that belonged to the whole family would be her sitting-room once more. She would no longer have that wonderful

sensation of entering a room, or shutting a door and knowing she was by herself.

"Then when do they want me to go?" she asked.

If Mr. Bottleby noticed the catch in her voice, it was an observation from which his mind was incapable then of deducing its full significance. All his thoughts had returned to the discovery he had made concerning the persistence and transmutation of instincts. This was something to tell her which would arouse her interest. Almost with triumph in his voice he said:—

"You're not going to go at all—not unless you wish to."

Her heart appeared to twist inside her. Then in a moment she found it hammering in different places. Not going at all! Not unless she wished to! Wished to!

"Tell me," she muttered.

He told her everything, but told it more as a biologist than as a lover proposing marriage. Long before he came to the culminating point of that interview with the Council, the conclusion was obvious to Jenny towards which the argument was leading. But it was not this solution her imagination led her to expect. There was some other way out of it she could not see. A certain note of triumph in his voice as he talked stirred her anticipation. With that extraordinary simplicity of his mind which could waive aside all social obligations, he had discovered some answer to the riddle. In his own time and his own way he would let her know what it was. Nothing would hurry him. He had to follow the sequences of his mind. All she could do was to listen patiently and wait.

"I don't quite know what has happened to me," said Mr. Bottleby, as he came near the end of his argument, "but apparently I'm a different man. Hitherto I have seen things entirely microscopically. I shall continue to see them in that fashion. That is my nature. But something has

been added to it. I have a view of life now which might be described as geometric. I see life in angles and planes, as well as in its minutiae. I even see myself," he said, and stopped to fix her with an astonished gaze.

Then he went on.

"These people, whoever they are, in Thurnham are quite right. They are acting in strict accordance with the natural instincts they have inherited in common with monkeys, the four-legged animals, birds and even insects. They may not know it, but they are strangely like the savage beasts that prowl the jungles of the tropics. They are just as cruel, as carnivorous, only that the flesh they eat is of a different nature. By reason of certain qualities of coordinated thought due to the evolution of speech, they have added to their complement a variety of moral codes which become inoperative the moment their natures are deeply roused. They have a commandment not to kill, but as soon as their possessions are threatened or what they call their honour impugned, they will set a body of men to kill without mercy another body of men who have no conception what they are killing each other for. And in obedience to their natural instincts they are right. They have a commandment not to commit adultery, and so long as that is not broken before their face they will take no notice of what they know is being done behind their backs. But once it is broken to the common knowledge, they know no mercy, no pity, no forgiveness. And all the time, inevitably, irresistibly they are right. They belong to the nature that bred them with everything else in the world, that crawls and walks and flies. If I had studied men and women as I've studied toads and newts and water-beetles, I believe I should have grown to love them. I must begin."

"Did you say all this to them?" asked Jenny.

"No," said Mr. Bottleby, "I've been thinking it since.

I'd never bothered my head about marriage. It had never occurred to me. I'd never seen anything to warrant the relationship. All I'd seen in marriage was men working to accumulate wealth and women living on a percentage of those accumulations. I see something else now."

Instinctively, Jenny held her breath. When she released it again she found herself saying: "What do you mean you see now?"

"I see there is a relationship," he said, "of mutual interest, mutual company and support. A woman may do as much for a man as he can for her. Marriage can fill her life, not empty it. There is no need for the sense of proprietorship which marriage brings to most men. A man and woman can share. Nothing belongs to either of them. It belongs to both."

He had said all he had got to say. So far did he return in consciousness to the actual needs of the moment that he took a spoonful of the shepherd's pie out of the dish and, depositing it on a plate, he handed it to her.

She laid it in front of her but could say nothing. By now she knew what he had said to the council. She knew how he had secured their consent to her staying there. She knew the conditions under which she was not going to go at all—not unless she wished. There was no need, but the need of the sound of his voice, to tell her any more.

And what did it mean? As a conception of marriage it sounded as wonderful to her as all the days of her work had seemed since she had been in Thurnham. No contract could she have entered into so willingly as this. With no man, she admitted it to herself, could she have found greater contentment of existence than with Mr. Bottleby. But the essential spirit of it all was missing. Forcing herself to a courage she scarcely knew she possessed, she asked him what he had said to the council.

"I said," he replied, "that I'd ask you to be my wife—if you'd do me the honour to accept."

She looked at him straightly for one moment in his eyes. Her chin jerked upwards, thrusting out her lower lip. After three little spasmodic movements like this, she suddenly stood up from the table.

"I don't mean to be rude," she said with difficulty. "Don't misunderstand."

Before Mr. Bottleby could gather what it was he was expected to appreciate, she had turned from her place at the table and gone out of the room.

By some instinct that chanced to be right, he sat there where he was.

So long a time had passed without the bell ringing that at last Mrs. Twiss, having knocked upon the door, came in to see whether they wanted the pudding at all. It was a rice pudding. She had it in her hand. She found Mr. Bottleby sitting at the table with one helping of shepherd's pie untouched on a plate beside him, and the spoon containing another helping still lying in the dish.

"What is it, Mrs. Twiss?" he inquired. "What is it?"

"The rice pudding, sir."

"Rice pudding," he repeated, and stared at the shepherd's pie. Then he said it again. "Rice pudding."

### CHAPTER XXX

WITH an emotional upheaval too violent to be regulated even in Mr. Bottleby's presence, Jenny went away, out of the curator's wing into the museum. She did not know the direction she took. Of all the mingled variety of sensations that emotion brought with it, one stood out before all others. She had never felt so alone in her life before.

There was no satisfactory explanation for this loneliness.

She just felt it. So impenetrable did it seem, moreover, that she made no effort to beat it away. In a momentarily supine condition of will, she let it sweep over her.

She found herself standing by the body of the mummy, having pulled aside the covering of American oilcloth. She was gazing down at the shrivelled features of Ta-mai and the tears were dropping from her eyes on to the glass case.

There was nothing academic about this. Had Mr. Bottleby seen Jenny then it would have been impossible for him to recognise in her the grammarian, the shrewd critic of his literary style, the creature of sharp common sense who sometimes startled him out of himself with the profundity of her discrimination.

Here in the same person was another woman he had never seen at all, one indeed he might have studied with interest. She was not even quite clear about this other woman herself.

Something in all that had just happened had brought her her first sharp disillusionment in life. She did not imagine she was romantic. At college she had even had the reputation of being frigid, distant, unapproachable. Framed in the horn-rimmed spectacles, others as well perhaps as Mr. Bottleby, had seen the blue-stocking, the brain at the expense of the heart. She had made few friends. Her keen rapidity of criticism, in which often there sounded to be a cynic speaking, was mistaken for sharpness of tongue and of nature. She was too proud to let it be known that it was mere virility of intellect. She knew she was not romantic, but somewhere she believed there was a responsiveness of heart in her that only needed revelation. Some day some happening in her life would arouse it. She knew now that the greatest happening had come and gone and it had scarcely stirred.

Again and again, as she stood there, she told herself she was not a romantic. In all probability she was right. Nevertheless, whether by instinct or a plain process of reasoning, she sensed that love was a volcanic experience, probably isolated, in a woman's life, and that the occasion when a man first asked her to marry him should by all rights be a never-to-be-forgotten moment of its consciousness.

In those little adventures of the heart which come to every girl the moment she puts up her hair, she had known young men who with but the slightest encouragement would have asked her to marry them. Up to what point she had allowed these adventures to develop was not a question of ethics. There is always the essence of the game in life. Each must look after himself. With an instinct for preserving something of mysterious value, she had never allowed such a proposal to be made. There had always come a point in the acquaintanceship when she had known that to allow it to proceed any further would be to admit it within the region of a state of mind to which it could never belong. If she had not known what it was to be in love, at least she knew the negation of it. She had not been in love with any of them. If they were adventures of the heart they were adventures merely, the questing spirit with which every girl enterprises with life. She had been full of a shrewd and timorous caution those days after she had left college, and while she was working at Crupper and Dodds' a subconscious voice was always at her side, ready to warn her of inclinations that might at any moment become irretrievable decisions. The sharpness of her tongue, the quickness of her wit were always ready to her assistance. Often she had watched young men start away, disconcerted and as frightened, had they known it, as she was herself. There had been many such adventures as these, but never had she permitted them to encroach within those precincts

of her heart where some sense, mysterious even to herself, awaited fulfilment.

Now it had come, and all unawares it had invaded her. The one man she had admired beyond all others, the one man with whose mind she felt in closest sympathy, had asked her to marry him, and so far from that mysterious sense finding fulfilment, there was nothing but a void and hollow aching in her heart. If this was being romantic, then that was what she was. She cared little in those moments how she judged herself. If these emotions were beneath all the standards of behaviour she had set for herself where her heart was concerned, then she was contemptible. But this self-criticism made it none the easier to bear.

The imperturbable expression on the face of Ta-mai slowly forced itself, a steadying influence, upon her mind. Her tears dried. The last drop fell as in Debussy's garden in the rain. The measured tranquillity of these two thousand five hundred years seemed to fall about her. They stilled the violence of her emotion. She felt them quietening the pulse of her heart with gently intruding questions as to the meaning and the necessity for this struggle in her mind against what, once spoken, could never be unsaid.

Did it matter so much the way things happened when, in the passage of years, all that was would be at rest with the stillness of that body in its wooden coffin? How might not have Ta-mai herself have suffered in disillusionment in those days when Tchet-ra was doorkeeper in the Temple of Osiris at Thebes? According to Mr. Bottleby she may well have been one of the sacred women in the Temple, wedded to Osiris, her body the property of the priests of the temple while her heart had<sup>\*</sup>ached, as Jenny's was aching then, for—oh, yes, call it romance! If she had been ashamed of that word and were ashamed of it still, at least let her have these truth-speaking qualities of Ta-mai and admit it now!

It was romance that was lacking in all that Mr. Bottleby had said. But he had asked her to marry him. Such realisation and hope of life as that presented may never have been the fortune of Ta-mai. Yet what disturbance did it bring to the peace of her now, lying there?

Involuntarily the prayer of Ta-mai to the Goddess mother Nüt was called forth in Jenny's mind.

"Oh, Mother Nüt, I am in thy presence. I have done nought with a false heart."

What a cry that was. What would the circumstances of life matter if Jenny could say as much? Would it be falseness of heart if she took Mr. Bottleby at his word? If she accepted this offer stripped of romance when all her life she had sworn to herself she would never marry unless the full understanding of love had justified it? Would that be falseness of heart?

She could not answer. How could she say it was? But she could not swear it was not. It was a disillusionment now. Who was to say it would be a disillusionment always? Did she hope? She dared not hope of her will, yet could not put hope away.

In this proposal of marriage Mr. Bottleby had made to her there was at least no simulation of love. Had there been that it would have utterly killed all hope.

It was an expedient, no more; an expedient assuring her of this work that meant the freedom for her spirit to grow. Might his grow too—in time? What was time? Two thousand five hundred years. Had the spirit of Ta-mai grown in these ages of rest?

"Spread out thy wings that I may rest among the stars that never set."

Ta-mai had needed it—that rest. Doubtless all needed it, that rest of death, when it came. Whether she married Mr. Bottleby or not, what else could she suppose but that

she would need it too? And what would her life be if she did not marry him? Would there be any certainty beyond the refusal she must have given if he had insisted upon her answer then? The name of Crupper and Dodds' on the list of firms painted on the wall in that building in Creechurch Lane blazed itself in front of her eyes. If, after all, the hope died fruitless and unfulfilled, there was at least this rest amongst the stars. Nothing could rob her of that. And what hope was there at all in Creechurch Lane? She had lived and worked there. She knew there was none. It drained away. Day by day it was less. The only hope they nurtured there was the hope of such material things as would make her heart sick before it died. At least there was this—this rest amongst the stars.

"Let my body be stablished that it doth not decay. Let it germinate. Let it wake up in peace."

That was what her body would do. If the hope failed and the heart in her body died at the end of it all, still disillusioned, still unfulfilled, at least there would have been no falseness in it. And after all those years of rest it would wake up in peace to seek its way again.

"Let it bathe in the light of the Disk. Let it drink water from the depths of the river. Let my soul come forth and perform its journey."

She bent down, peering closely through the glass at the inscrutable features of Ta-mai. Had her soul come forth after those two thousand five hundred years? Was it pursuing its journey once again? If she had found no lover amongst those priests in the Temple of Osiris at Thebes, would she not find a lover in the new journey of her soul? Did every woman find a lover? Amongst the many who found husbands, did many find that?

"You will find a lover one of your journeys."

She found herself talking to Ta-mai, which was only another form of talking to herself.

"It isn't this life that matters, or the next, or the one after; it's the spirit we keep to live it with."

Probably the spirit of Ta-mai knew more about this than she did. She stood up, cynically laughing at herself for talking platitudes into a measureless space of time. For to the spirit once inhabiting that body there beneath her what were two thousand five hundred years?

And so far as her own spirit was concerned, did it matter whether she found a lover or not in the spirit of Mr. Bottleby? All that he had said about marriage, the mutual companionship, the mutual interest, the sharing of its advantages, did many women get as much? Had he pretended affection to her, then, much as it was, it would have been unthinkable. They were to go on just as they were. He had not said it in so many words. But it was not difficult with him to suppose it. Only in such a manner was this sharing possible. She could not pretend. Still less could she accept pretence.

Beyond this she seemed afraid to permit herself to think. Never once did she question herself as to what her thoughts of Mr. Bottleby really were. Quite critically and candidly she regarded his for her.

He did not love her. Was he capable of love? Almost as frankly she would have admitted he was not. He did not know the meaning of it. It did not enter any province of his mind. Would he ever know? Candour and criticism left her there. She could not answer. She passed the question by in silence.

Beyond this she believed all he said of her virtue as companion and collaborator. Inherited pride was with her there. Without conceit she knew her worth. But in the thought that her value was realised in these capacities, there

was romance there. She clung to it with a desperate joy. Nothing could take that from her, and there was no man in the world who could give it her so surely as Mr. Bottleby.

She admitted her thoughts of him so far as this, but no farther. A certain subconscious modesty, even before her most secret self, forbade her questioning herself more closely than this.

Here, after some time in the presence of Ta-mai, the first storm of her emotional disillusionment had abated. She went downstairs again into the curator's wing, with her spectacles well set on the bridge of her nose, to find Mr. Bottleby.

Mrs. Twiss was clearing away. Neither shepherd's pie nor rice pudding had been touched. Mrs. Twiss was struggling in a slough of depression. She moved about the room like a heavy animal in the mud.

"He's gone up to his office," she said drearily. "The only words he said to me was 'rice puddin''—and then he never ate it. I couldn't get nothin' else out of him. What's the matter with you both?" she burst out. "He's never eat his meals so well as since you came. There was both of you sittin' and talking—I've heard him laugh sometimes—and then all of a sudden—and you both said you liked shepherd's pie—you goes off in a lump—the both of you. He's up in his office if you wants him. And I shan't bring no tea in not unless you actually rings for it."

This was all that Mrs. Twiss appreciated. They had not touched their meal. Some psychologists would have needed no more.

Jenny went up to Mr. Bottleby's office. He saw the decision in her face as she opened the door. The thought that she was about to refuse his offer frightened him. Since this idea of marriage had come to him he had realised in every effort of contemplation what a sound scheme it was.

The question of salary was a futile one between two people working together. What he had would be hers. What was more, he had often lately realised he was alone. Once he had tried talking to Mrs. Twiss about his newts that he kept in captivity, but her remarks had only been like a small boy's with a jam-jar full of water. He had given that up. Miss Hazlitt—Jenny—yes, he supposed, Jenny—liked his newts. But more than his newts, she disliked his grammar. It was stimulating to be corrected, to be pulled up sharp. He knew he had felt more alive since she had come there. For years he had been collecting his notes for the persistence and transmutation of instincts. Now he was beginning the book. The first section of it had almost been framed out already. Her questions about the form of it had been in the nature of criticism. He had made improvements. Before she came, he would have written it anyhow if at all. Style and construction had meant practically nothing to him. They meant something now. Once she had said:

“Words aren't dead things until you kill them yourself. I shall go on saying poetry to you till you realise how alive they are.”

He looked up now as she entered, knowing he was frightened at what she was going to say.

“I want you to let me go back to London,” she said. He stared through her spectacles.

“That's your answer?”

“I haven't given you any answer.”

“Then why do you want to go back to London?”

“Because I want to——” It sounded childish. Well, let him think her a child. “I want to see my mother.”

All he said was: “When are you coming back?”

“I'll let you know,” she said—“if I'm coming back at all.”

## CHAPTER XXXI

MR. BOTTLEBY did a thing that afternoon which, while it did not appear extraordinary to him, certainly flabbergasted Mrs. Twiss when she heard it. He offered to go and see Jenny off at the station. That day was full of unprecedented happenings, for she also heard Jenny refuse to allow him to do so. At five minutes to five a fly came to the street door of the curator's wing and Jenny went alone.

Mr. Bottleby departed directly up to his office and, as he did not ring the bell, Mrs. Twiss kept to her word. She waited, listening for it in the kitchen, with the kettle ready boiling on the hob, but she would not bring him any tea. It distressed her considerably more, apparently, than it did him. Indeed Mr. Bottleby knew nothing about it.

He came down when the light was failing and asked for his supper as though it mattered little whether he even had that or not. A certain irresistible curiosity prompting her, Mrs. Twiss inquired when Miss Hazlitt was returning. Mr. Bottleby growled an answer. It was so incoherent that she could not distinguish what he said and was afraid to ask him again. She had never seen him in that mood before. Usually he was preoccupied. Frequently he gave no answers at all to her questions. And that was preferable to this. She left him alone and cleared the supper away in silence.

Mr. Bottleby himself was in a tumult of strange mental experiences. For the first time in his life he was conscious of himself without relation to his work. In fact he could not work. For hours he sat at his desk reading his notes. They meant nothing to him. The whole of his mind was absorbed and obsessed with foolish considerations about inconsequent and commonplace things. Having agreed with

the decision of the council at the meeting from natural and scientific reasons, he now found himself criticising their action from stupid and material considerations.

In the light of nature they might be right. Yet, nevertheless, what business was it of theirs to interfere with the ordered regulation of his life? How did it concern Mr. Purch or Mr. Overend? He found himself making an analytical study of the character of Mr. Charrington and coming to the conclusion that it was nothing short of impertinence for a man of that mental equipment to interfere with his private affairs. For what did Mr. Purch or Mr. Overend or any of them care, personally, what he did? It had not altered their lives one jot or tittle that Jenny had occupied those rooms in the curator's wing. They were busybodies who, having no vital life of their own to conduct, must needs endeavour to conduct and interfere with the lives of others.

In these arguments with himself he lost all sight of his convictions about the universal compulsions of nature. Normally an extremely logical man, he became grossly illogical. Normally of unruffled temper, he became unreasonably irritable.

This state of mind came to a climax when, on the third day after Jenny's departure, he had heard nothing from her. He stood up from his desk and flung a handful of his notes on the floor.

"Damn these old women of Thurnham!" he shouted.

Then, unexpectedly, it was as though he stood aside and were observing himself. In astonishment at what he beheld, he asked himself dispassionately what he was doing.

"I am cursing the whole of nature," he replied. "I'm cursing cats because they kill birds and torture mice before they eat them. I'm cursing rats because they live on vermin and breed innumerable young in places that are convenient

to them but objectionably inconvenient to me. I'm cursing all the disgusting things in nature without which we should never know how ordered and beautiful a thing life is. I've lost my reason. I must pull myself together."

He made a great effort with himself. Largely it was reinforced by his stealing up to Jenny's rooms when Mrs. Twiss was not about and discovering there that she had left many things behind her for which she must surely return. This sustained him. For the next twenty-four hours he found his mind more amenable to reason. He tried to work again, but that was impossible. The portentous figure of Mr. Purch obtruded itself between him and the construction of his ideas about the persistence and transmutation of instincts. He would start all over again until the sonorous voice of the same gentleman assessing Jenny's liabilities at number ten Leather Lane would drive the last thought out of his head.

He roamed about the museum, looking in the cases and watched by Ramp with strong suspicions as to the curator's sanity. Questioning Mrs. Twiss on this subject, he discovered that Mr. Bottleby was the same distracted being in the privacy of the curator's wing.

"It's him bein' clever like he is," said Ramp. "Men like that, they easy gets a slate loose, yer know. It's not like you an' me, well thatched and nothing much underneath."

Mrs. Twiss considered this a sound opinion and nothing at which to take offence. She was beginning to fear herself that Mr. Bottleby, to put it respectfully, was not all there. In ordinary times he was peculiar; but now she could make neither head nor tail of him.

Roaming about the museum, like Jenny, he found himself removing the piece of American oilcloth and gazing down at the immobile face of Ta-mai.

Such peace as that was what he wanted. He had never

known such peace of mind united with the energy of work as he had in those weeks that Jenny had been there as his assistant. He even missed those repetitions of poetry of hers. Deprived of them now, he was beginning to realise that they had had the effect upon him she had predicted. He had begun to appreciate the so-easily-destructible vitality of words.

"The fact of the matter is," he said aloud, "the whole of my mentality was growing inwards. She has altered that. At the moment, though a most uncomfortable sensation, it is growing outwards. I'm even conscious of Mr. Purch. That in itself maybe is disagreeable, but it is no doubt essential to the change that is coming over me."

In much the same manner as Jenny, though with less consciousness of her personality, he addressed his remarks to Ta-mai. Furthermore, he recalled as he stood there, that meeting of theirs in this exact spot after the council had decided upon her selection. What was it Jenny had said? That she was trying to believe that Ta-mai was dead and could not convince herself of the fact. That was a somewhat extraordinary statement for a young girl to make who, he had discovered later, held no views about theosophy or transmigration. But then she was extraordinary. Every day that prolonged her absence convinced him of what the professor had said of her. She had an original mind.

Notwithstanding that, it was really ridiculous to think that a man of his age, with his established mentality and habits of thought, could not carry on with his work just the same, whether she were there or not. From being secretly ashamed of himself, he pointedly accused himself of insipidity.

"No doubt she saves you trouble," said he; "but mere fetching and carrying never stopped a man from doing his work if he wanted to." And with that he went straight

away to his office. He sat down at his desk and pulled out a sheet of foolscap paper from a drawer which he remembered she had said was to be kept for writing-paper only and not for sealing-wax, pens, clips, labels, gum-bottles and the like.

It was time that he began to sketch out a rough plan of the first phase of the book. He had talked it all out with her. By subtle processes of criticism she had suggested the economy of material here, there the more logical co-ordination of argument.

"You don't want it to be like some of those histories, do you," she had said, "which regard time rather than circumstance as the arbitrator of events?"

"But you don't know anything about the writing of a scientific work," he had said.

"I know that," she had replied, unperturbed, "but I know that there is a form for everything. Do you ever discover anything in nature that's haphazard once you've traced its origin? Did you ever write a rough outline of the 'Evolution of Desire'?"

He had shaken his head.

"I thought not," said she.

He had been so astonished he had asked her why.

"Because it doesn't hang together. It's like a rag-bag full of the most wonderful pieces of material, and you haven't even made it into patchwork."

He had been too bewildered to stand up for himself. It was so true. He had just gathered notes together and trusted to luck that he had assembled them in cohesive order. He told her so, much in the manner of a child confessing how it had worked out a sum on its fingers. He did not stand up and say: "I am the curator of Thurnham Museum. I am a recognised authority upon natural history subjects. I was educated at Leipzig and Vienna and have

lectured in those cities since my college days. You are a young girl of twenty-three. It is true you have the B.A. degree, but you have spent all your time since your college education in a firm of ship brokers, and when you first came here you did not know a sparrow from a tit."

He had said nothing like this. He had merely replied: "Yes—you're quite right. You're quite right."

And then she had felt ashamed of herself.

He sat down now, feeling how essential and invaluable this scheme of making a scaffolding was. It would probably please her to know he was beginning it. She had a peculiar kind of smile to show her pleasure in anything concerned with work. He recollected it was different from any other kind of smile indicating amusement or material satisfaction. Now he came to think of it, it was a smile that appeared to emerge from within, from behind her eyes, penetrating those horn-rimmed spectacles she wore. It did not so much part her lips or screw up her cheeks as other smiles did.

He wished she could know he was beginning to write his plan, and, as he wished it, he wrote on the piece of foolscap paper: "Dear Jenny, I am beginning the plan of the first part of my book."

From that he went on. The letter became his synopsis. He told her all he was doing and then admitted he had done nothing but what he had written to her.

"I find myself at loggerheads with everything and everyone," he concluded. "Even the newts seem to be behaving badly, and Mrs. Twiss is becoming unbearable. She is forcibly feeding me. Do you remember that first day we went out into the country and I walked you out of breath? Is that what you are afraid of, that you went off without giving me the faintest suggestion of your answer?"

He went out that evening and posted the letter himself,

and from that moment wrote to her every day. All energy for his work went into these epistles. In effect they became the only work he did.

One day Mr. Purch met him in the street when, having planted himself like a full-grown and majestic oak in Mr. Bottleby's path, he said:

"Miss Hazlitt departed, I hear."

"She's gone away," said Mr. Bottleby.

"You can never be sure of women," declared Mr. Purch. "Queer cattle. Horses to the water and often as not it's only the slimy ponds where they'll drink. Romantic, is she?"

"What do you mean?" asked Mr. Bottleby. He frankly did not know what the lawyer was talking about.

Mr. Purch looked at him a moment and then, out of what he knew in himself to be a pure generosity of spirit, he said: "She's said—no—well, let her eat it. That's the best food for women—their own words."

He accompanied this statement with a bending movement of the upper part of his body as though for the moment he were allowing Mr. Bottleby to shelter in the shadow of his wisdom.

"She's not said—no," retorted Mr. Bottleby.

"Ah!" said Mr. Purch, and stood erect, when by some unexpected intuition, Mr. Bottleby realised the lawyer had merely been pumping him for information intended for the benefit of Thurnham. At the same moment he suddenly experienced sensations similar to those which must have animated Captain Wolhop on the *Georgina Mary*. His blood grew hot. He actually calculated what a satisfaction it would be, if Mr. Purch were standing on the deck of a barge, to knock him backwards into the river. With a supreme effort of control, he steadied himself and looked the lawyer squarely in his glittering little eyes.

"Will you inform Thurnham," he requested, "that what Miss Hazlitt says or does not say is her own private affair and mine, and that what is said of us is a matter for our own personal indifference."

He left Mr. Purch with the impression that there is little gratitude in the world. Being a lawyer he knew that this was not to be wondered at.

The speed at which Mr. Bottleby walked away was not characteristic of him. It was unnatural. He made straight for the post office, entered, and wrote a telegram to Jenny:

"When are you coming back?"

It was only when the young lady on the other side of the counter had read, counted and re-read the words that he realised the whole of Thurnham would know his state of mind better even than he knew it himself.

## CHAPTER XXXII

THE reply to Mr. Bottleby's telegram was the first communication he had received from Jenny since she had gone to London. The following morning Mrs. Twiss put a letter on his plate at breakfast. Recognising her handwriting, he tore it open when usually he ignored his correspondence.

It was a short letter. By a process of reading it through half a dozen times he made it serve as well as a long one.

"Dear Mr. Bottleby," it began. That did not strike him as being distant. He had never studied the subtle, psychological significance of endearments in letter-writing.

"I am glad to hear you are getting on with your work. Does not that enlighten you a little as to the exaggerated value you put upon my assistance?"

But he was not getting on with it. All he had done in framing out the argument for the first part of his book, he had done in his letters to her. And she had those. He

was not getting on with it! Seeing that the documents of those letters were in her possession, he had not done a stroke of work that was any use to him since she went away.

He took a pencil out of his pocket and in the margin against this place he wrote:

"Have not done any work. She has it all."

"Probably," the letter continued, "you miss someone to type your letters and collect your notes; but I think the council had common sense on their side when they suggested you could get someone in Thurnham."

He made another note in the margin.

"Fiddlesticks!" he wrote.

What fiddlesticks had to do with it he could not have said, but fiddlesticks was the word he felt possessing virility to convey his feelings. Then he read on.

"I don't want to appear ungrateful in suggesting this, because no one could feel more grateful than I have done for that short time of work down at Thurnham. I was happy in everything I had to do. But in the light of what has happened and what you have suggested, I feel it my duty to you and to myself to point out to you the misapprehension under which I think you are labouring."

He took out his pencil again and wrote opposite this:

"Was never clearer in my mind about anything. Seem under your influence to have contracted a critical and analytical state of mind. Know very well what I am talking about."

The letter then concluded:

"Please try to understand me in this, and believe that so far as you are concerned, I understand that what you have offered to do you sincerely think would be for the best."

What did it all mean? Was it yes, or no? Would she come back, or wouldn't she? Did she care whether he improved his work, or didn't she?

He swallowed a cup of tea and went up to his office. There he wrote her a letter covering six sheets of foolscap embodying and elaborating upon the notes he had made in the margin of hers. The last sheet of it was entirely composed of reflections upon marriage.

"Marriage," he wrote, "is a serious thing to contemplate. Perhaps because I proposed it suddenly you think I regard it lightly. I do not. I will admit I have made no study of the subject. It is not my province. But being of an observing habit of mind, I have noticed various friends of mine who are married. Hitherto I have made no deductions. You will say I have been more interested in my newts and tadpoles and the different variety of water beetles I am collecting. That is quite true. But when you gave no answer to my proposal of marriage, I began to realise that, amongst human beings, it is a state of life requiring as much consideration as nature undertakes in the mating of species. I have remembered certain things I have noticed from time to time amongst my married friends. I have not many friends, but enough to form conclusions, and I have carefully thought out certain points which I will set down for your consideration.

"So far as human beings have evolved that nebulous expression of personality which we term spirit, they must be regarded separately from the lower animals. Believing as I do in the transmigration of spirit, that after death it is indestructible and remains in a state of quiescence until it finds suitable environment for its further development, you can readily appreciate the importance I find myself forced to place upon the state of marriage. Marriage is not only the mating of two bodies. That is a simple matter easily contrived by nature. It is the mating of two minds. This is not so simple, and in the case of many of my friends I have noticed how liable it is to catastrophe.

"Yet the laws of nature operate here in the same broad principles of reproduction. In animal life the species must be protected. This result is determined by a simple axiom that if like mates with unlike there follows an automatic sterility. In considering these matters I have arrived at the conclusion that the same law operates upon the spiritual plane. There are as many spiritual planes in the human cosmogony as there are species in the animal world. Few indeed are on the exact same plane, and it remains a question for special psychological analysis to prove whether those on similar planes are the best fitted for union. We know little or nothing of this except by experience in individual cases. Some blend, others are antagonistic. No hard and fast rules can be laid down. But of this I become more certain the more the subject occupies my thoughts—there is the same sterility of spirit brought about by the mating of like with unlike on the spiritual plane. Probably for this reason, according to theosophy, some spirits have a longer devachan than others. A devachan is that period of time during which a spirit rests before it finds a suitable environment to continue its journey of the soul.

"To undertake marriage then on the mere pretext of animal attraction—which is the basis of ninety-nine per cent. of marriages to-day—is frequently to invite a spiritual sterility which, in the minds of sensitive and progressive people, is little short of a life of hell for both parties."

This subject became so interesting to Mr. Bottleby that he could have written another six pages of foolscap had he not been brought to an end by the consideration of the post. He wanted it to reach her by the evening if possible, and took it out to the General Post Office himself.

Having slipped it into the letter-box, he took out the epistle he had received from her that morning and, standing in the High Street, he read it again for the sixth time.

Again it defied him. Then, with a quick fall of his spirits like a barometer before a storm, he seemed to find the worst possible construction. She was not coming back. Plainly it was telling him she had thought it all out and had decided marriage was impossible. "I feel it my duty to point out the misapprehension under which you are labouring——" What else could it mean? He ran back into the post office and wrote out another wire.

"Meet me at the National Gallery at 5.30."

From the post office he went straight to the station. He took the next train to London. Mrs. Twiss was left to create the appetising odours of a beef-steak pudding that percolated heedlessly through all the empty rooms in the curator's wing.

### CHAPTER XXXIII

MR. BOTTLEBY arrived in London at about half-past one. At the sight of people coming in and out of an A.B.C. shop in the Strand he remembered he would not have any lunch unless he took this opportunity. It was not exactly that he felt hungry, but orderly things occurred to him. Latterly he had suspected his habits in a house were not of the easiest. It was within the bounds of possibility that that was why Jenny had not accepted his offer of marriage. He could not forget that there were women and women. Here it was lunch time. He went into an A.B.C., sat down and ordered a poached egg on toast and a cup of coffee.

While he consumed his meal, he was thinking principally of the National Gallery. He had not asked Jenny to meet him at the entrance. She might be roaming about inside through the various galleries. He must be there well before five-thirty so that he could meet her coming in. Was it five-thirty or five? He had forgotten which. He would have to be there before five to be on the safe side. The

thought of hunting through those vast galleries and then perhaps missing her frightened him. It would be in the nature of a tragedy if after all this he did not see her.

From thinking of the vast spaces in the National Gallery he thought of the galleries in the British Museum. There was time to go there if he hurried. He had not been to London for two years. He never came to London without going there. He swallowed the rest of his egg, drank his cup of coffee, and then found he had not enough money to pay the bill.

The manageress was brought to him by the attendant, who had heard that story before. Mr. Bottleby looked up from counting fivepence for the third time and found an elderly and severe-looking woman sceptically waiting for him to conclude his calculations.

"No money?" she said.

"Only fivepence," replied Mr. Bottleby. "You can have my name and address."

"We've had those before," said the manageress. "Sometimes they aren't worth the paper they're written on." A look of pitiable confusion on Mr. Bottleby's face induced her to add that she did not suggest it was that way in his case.

"I can't reproduce the egg," said Mr. Bottleby.

"No—well, I must pay the extra myself," she said, "and trust to you sending it on. I might say that that sort of generosity costs me a few shillings every year," and she looked at him as though she expected to find herself out of pocket in this instance.

Mr. Bottleby's shame was quite genuine. He felt in all his pockets. There was a flint arrow-head in one of them, an excellent specimen. He had found it on his last tramp across country and forgotten to put it out on his table. It was worth nothing less than five shillings to any collector.

He would have paid five shillings for it himself to have it in the museum collection. He handed it to the manageress.

"You can have this," said he, "till I send the money. I can assure you I'll send it as soon as possible because I want that back."

Feeling for the first time in his life that people were looking at him with open suspicion from two or three tables about him, he hurried out into the street. The manageress stood looking at the flint arrow-head in her hand.

"If somebody doesn't take care of him," said she, "he'll be putting a thing like this in his mouth one of these days and trying to swallow it. A piece of stone! And he owes me threepence!"

As a comment upon the relative qualities of the labour that had been expended upon the poaching of Mr. Bottleby's egg and the work some ancient Briton had put into the shaping of that implement, this remark of the manageress would have been invaluable to the curator. He did not hear it, however. He was out in the Strand and turning towards the British Museum before she had had time to make it.

In the British Museum, Mr. Bottleby became absorbed in the Etruscan vases. Even had he had a watch with him he would have probably forgotten to look at it. Having none, it was five o'clock before he thought of asking one of the attendants for the time. Hearing what it was, he ran nearly all the way to the National Gallery, bumping into people on the pavement, twice being nearly run over, and arriving at Trafalgar Square breathless and perspiring.

She was not there. He took out his handkerchief and mopped his forehead, then the lining of his hat, finally seating himself on the base of one of the columns and staring down Whitehall through the spray of the fountains in the Square. Through those white jets of water and across the

distance of the Square, the traffic of London seemed very far removed from the reality of its fretful procession. He recollected the docks at Millwall. He remembered some of the descriptions Jenny had given him of her work in Creechurch Lane. With some inoperative function of his brain he knew that it was neither distant nor haloed in those rainbows the fountains made in the sun.

"But this, I suppose," he said aloud to himself, "is the way I see the whole of life since civilisation seized hold upon it, and undoubtedly I am wrong. Here"—he even stretched out his arm indicating the whole metropolis—"here is a nest of ants. They are fetching and carrying. They are fighting and struggling. There is not one amongst those crawling black figures I can see on the pavements but who is not centred upon some little, petty, personal consideration which, when at last it is achieved, will be of as much importance as a piece of stick in an ants' nest a schoolboy can scatter to nothing with a kick of his foot."

He was saying this half aloud in a muttering of his voice when, conscious of a shadow across the column where he was sitting, he looked up and saw Jenny.

To his considerable confusion and hers, he found himself stammering something to the effect that he was glad she had come. Then he remembered his flint arrow-head. All his confusion left him. He asked her with a sharp directness if she could lend him threepence.

On their way down to the A.B.C. in the Strand he explained.

"You'd come out without any money?" she asked.

He told her how he had come, straight from the post office, without going back to the museum at all.

"And you didn't even put on a clean collar to come?"

"I didn't know it was dirty," he said apologetically.

"It was on my shirt, so I put it on this morning when I got up."

"But how did you manage at the A.B.C. if you hadn't got enough money?"

"Lend me some money," he said. She gave him her purse and they went into the shop. He found the manageress. Jenny watched the transaction—his flint arrow-head for her threepence. His simplicity was incredible. For one moment, sharing the impressions with the manageress, she found it almost pathetic. He was not fit to take care of himself.

"Was that what you left as security?" she asked.

He gave it a polish on the leg of his trousers and laid it with pride on the table.

"It probably took a man the better part of three days to cut that with a flint knife. The making of weapons of war in times of peace was the birth of what we call spirit. Without the immediate presence of an enemy it's not difficult to conceive the mind of the man who made this beginning to love it for the form of it as well as for what it could do. From that you come to the sense of abstract beauty—and after abstract beauty, abstract good—after good, God—after God, what more conclusive than the breath of God entering into and making the spirit of man?"

At that word—spirit—he remembered his letter.

"Well, do you agree with what I said?" he asked.

"Said when?"

"In my letter."

"What letter?"

"The letter I wrote—when? This morning."

"But I shouldn't have got it yet. When did you post it?"

"Just before I came up to town."

"Can I have some tea?" she said.

He looked at her, then at her purse still in his hand. Then he called a waitress.

While they had tea he reconstructed for her the whole of his argument concerning marriage, with additional points as they occurred to him. A little group of waitresses collected round the hot-water urn at the counter. They could not take their eyes away from this customer who had left a stone with the manageress in security for threepence which he could not pay and now, having redeemed his pledge with someone else's money, and that a lady's, was talking as they had never seen anyone talk in the shop before.

"Get along—girls—get along," said the manageress. "He's one of those scientifics—that's what he is. No need to keep staring at him. Get along. He's talking some kind of physics to her, that's what he's doing—nothing to stand and gape about."

Had they known Mr. Bottleby was urging Jenny to marry him with all the passionate energy of his intellect and reason, they might have stood around the urn till the water boiled over. If it was just physics or whatever it was she said, then it was merely dull. There was only one subject of conversation they knew of worth listening to. At every available opportunity they talked it amongst themselves and were quite ready to overhear it from others. But physics!

"I wonder," said Jenny when he had finished, "whether any girl has ever been proposed to like this before!"

Evidently Mr. Bottleby had achieved one thing. He had won her to that state of mind when she was prepared to admit it into her conversation. At Thurnham she had said nothing. In her letter since it could scarcely be reckoned she had touched the subject. Now at least she

had given it a name. She was prepared to allow it was a proposal of marriage. She was ready to discuss it.

For all that, she was still in complete confusion as to what she felt about it all. One new aspect, however, had been brought to her mind that afternoon. She felt intense pity for Mr. Bottleby. At moments it amounted to a tenderness. It was obvious he needed someone to look after him. It was obvious likewise that Mrs. Twiss, with all her culinary excellence and capacity for clothes mending, was not wholly efficient.

Hearing his account of all he had done that day, and questioning him as to what he had done since she went away, Jenny could see, without that sense of pride a woman needs to sweep her with it, how much he had missed her. It brought her no real lift of absolute joy. At the same time there was the first beginning of a conviction that it would be difficult to refuse him what he asked.

In every conception she had ever formed of marriage, love was an essential component. Here was her confusion, for love was not in question. Mr. Bottleby had never mentioned it; had never even excused himself or apologised for its absence. Yet in every other respect, in that of mutual companionship and interest, in this last regard which he had set forth in his letter, and now in his almost pathetic need of her, there seemed combined in his proposal more real justification for her acceptance than would have actually appealed to her in the importunate passion of a young man.

She was trying to be reasonable about it, yet had an uncomfortable feeling at the same time that reason was treachery to her sex and to the whole of life in such a case. She did not in fact know she was in love with Mr. Bottleby herself. She did not realise that even her reason was love. Without experience she could not tell that love is learnt by women in their lesson of life, and often when

too late. She could not reckon how many times it was not until his first embrace that a young woman knew whether she loved a man or not.

In all these matters her experience was a negative quantity. And this, had she known it, was all she had found lacking in Mr. Bottleby to realise the depth and warmth of her feelings for him. And this he made no offer to give her. All that he wooed her with—if indeed it was a wooing—was a pathetic helplessness which had roused her to pity.

With an involuntary remembrance of her thoughts that day as she stood by the body of Ta-mai, her mind was possessed of a momentary determination to satisfy itself once and for all.

“Do you think many people marry,” she asked him, “who are not in love with each other?”

“It all depends what you mean by being in love,” replied Mr. Bottleby. “I’ve seen a couple on their honeymoon who I suppose were what you would call in love with each other.”

He told her the story of Captain and Mrs. Wolhop, omitting no detail of what had seemed to the bargee’s wife to be the utter degradation of his manhood.

“They were in love,” said he, “a condition which seemed to unfit him for any exercise of his reason and which appeared to affect her with a quality of shamelessness that was quite engaging in its way when you thought of it in relation to the common phenomenon of the mating season.”

A sudden hatred of Captain and Mrs. Wolhop, a sudden contempt of herself, a sudden longing for the sweeter life of the mind such as she had shared with him that day when they had eaten their meal of bread and cheese and eggs in the parlour of the Hen Pheasant seized hold of her.

She leant across the marble-topped table and looked

with the full assurance of reason through her horn-rimmed spectacles into Mr. Bottleby's face.

"I consent," she said. "As soon as you like. As soon as you can," and then more quickly she murmured: "Don't let me wait. Marry me now."

Mr. Bottleby's mouth fell open. He felt as though a ton weight had been lifted from off his shoulders and did not quite know whether it had been dropped on to the top of his head.

#### CHAPTER XXXIV

MRS. PENNYQUICK shared an instinct in common, not only with her own sex, but with human nature in general. She was curious. She was small enough to be very curious, and her heart was big enough for that curiosity to be of a kindly order.

Amongst the many varieties of curiosity that exist, and there are not a few, hers was of that nature which importunately desired to know either whether people were in trouble so that she might help them, or whether they were happy so that she might congratulate them. Another uncommon feature of her curiosity lay in the fact that she felt no motion of it towards people she did not like. In this respect, and the consequent characteristics that went with it, she was difficult of understanding to the people in Thurnham. Here in fact was vested the meaning of that twinkle in her eye which defied their comprehension.

How the affairs of Mr. Bottleby and Jenny Hazlitt at the museum reached her ears is not to be calculated with any degree of accuracy. In small towns the most intimate affairs of the inhabitants travel by a process similar to that in savage countries. The obstacles which information does not have to overcome in the way of distance are substituted by the variety of minds it has to penetrate and the number

of versions of a fact which need to be digested by the common gastric juice of gossip before any general interpretation can be accepted.

The passage of the news to Mrs. Pennyquick that Mr. Bottleby was going to marry Jenny Hazlitt was as intricate and confusing as the descent of King David. It is sufficient that it reached her ears, and practically it is most of all to the point that she made her way down to the museum the next morning after she had heard it.

This was the day after Mr. Bottleby's unexpected visit to London. With a stride that appeared long for her and suggested dignity doing its best not to hurry in the pursuit of curiosity, she marched into the museum.

Ramp, in his green baize apron, was sitting in the hall. His eyes, cast obliquely at a fine specimen of grandfather's clock presented by Mr. Bracebridge—after his death—were watching the hands turn the corner of half-past twelve in their last struggle to reach one o'clock.

"Just tell me where Mr. Bottleby is," said Mrs. Pennyquick. "I don't want any of this silly announcing business. This isn't the British Museum."

Knowing something about women, mainly because he was susceptible to them, Ramp felt this to be not impertinent, but imperative. Without the slightest hesitation he informed her that the curator was in his office.

"And where is that?" she asked. "No—you needn't come up. I don't want to take you away from your duties. Just show me."

He showed her.

By reason of her short stature, her high instep and still higher heels, her footsteps as she went up the stairs sounded like the distant infliction of corporal punishment with a slipper. Ramp sat listening to it till it culminated in her two sharp blows on Mr. Bottleby's door.

At the slight suggestion of the curator's murmur of admission Mrs. Pennyquick opened the door, went in and closed it positively behind her. Then, seeing the puzzled expression on his face as she crossed to his desk, she said by way of making matters easier:

"I'm Mrs. Pennyquick."

"I remember," said Mr. Bottleby, but not convincingly.

"I've come to see you," she proceeded, "to know if I can be of any help."

"I have an assistant," said Mr. Bottleby; "she's away at present."

Without being asked, Mrs. Pennyquick sat down.

"Not that sort of help," she said. "I'm Mrs. Pennyquick."

"I remember," he repeated.

"Ah, yes—but you don't remember. It's no good talking that kind of nonsense, because you remember nothing. You're not that sort of man. You must forgive me talking like this, but I've heard everything. I've heard you're in trouble and I can just imagine the sort of trouble you would get into. Why didn't you come to me when you found Miss Hazlitt couldn't get any rooms in Thurnham?"

With a sharp thrust of memory Mr. Bottleby recalled the fact that there were women and women and submitted to this treatment without a murmur. Instinctively he felt it to be friendly, and, at the moment, sorely feeling the need of organisation, he submitted to this superior management. In the confiding spirit of a child he related to her the extraordinary meeting held by the council on the question of Miss Hazlitt's occupation of rooms in the curator's wing.

"And so," said she, "out of a quixotic spirit of chivalry you offered to marry her?"

She said it so emphatically and with such reproval that

for the moment he lost hold of his wits to deny it, and only stared at her in astonishment for thinking of such a thing.

"I guessed pretty accurately the sort of man you were," she continued, "those few times I came down to the Museum after I had presented that Saxon mirror." She was taking him completely in hand.

"I remember!" he exclaimed.

"Oh—you do remember now. Well, it wasn't difficult to make an estimate of your character. I knew you were one of those men who, because they've rescued a naked lady from the hands of thieves and robbers, think they're in honour bound to clothe her with a bridal veil and a sprig of orange blossom."

She twinkled her eyes as she said this. Remembering their first conversation about clothes, she felt it was a simile that would appeal to him. She would not have made use of it to any other man in Thurnham. A strict sense of delicacy would have forbidden her. She knew Mr. Bottleby to be non-delicate as some people are non-moral. She liked him for it. Amongst other things in life Mrs. Pennyquick found a lot of hypocrisy both in morals and delicacy. She kept them by her for those that expected them, just as she would have insisted on her husband wearing a black tie with a dinner jacket.

It was considerably to her surprise when Mr. Bottleby disclaimed any of the virtues of a knight-errant.

"Oh, please don't say that," said she. "I'd pictured you just like the man in Millais's painting. And I've heard Miss Hazlitt's very pretty without her spectacles."

Without her spectacles. For an instant there flashed through his mind the memory of that incident by the mummied body of Ta-mai when he had found her without her spectacles. Having no capacity for self-analysis, he

could not recall what his thoughts had been. He just remembered they were disturbing. The incident went by. He was more concerned with Mrs. Pennyquick's assumption that he had behaved like a man in armour. He did not see himself like that at all; but what was peculiar to him in this connexion was that he was actually beginning to see himself. This was a state of mind he had never experienced before.

As he told her of the decision he had come to before the council, and related the effect his proposal had had upon Jenny, he did actually behold some indistinct vision of himself as of one man compared with another. Undoubtedly there were men and men, just as there were women and women. The vague impression he received of himself was as of one who, propelled by the crude forces of life, was emerging, bewildered and helpless, from the chrysalis stage. There had never been any desire in him to submit to these crude forces of life. He had liked to observe them as he observed his tadpoles, his newts and his water-beetles. Up to that moment when he had met Mrs. Wolhop and Captain Wolhop had knocked him into the river at Rochester he had never submitted. He had only been an observer. Since then he was becoming gradually conscious of being drawn into the current of a stream upon the banks of which for some considerable portion of forty-one years it had been his deep contentment to sit and watch.

When, at the end of his account of all that had happened, Mrs. Pennyquick said: "It's real romance, then? You're in love with her? And now that she's consented, of course she's in love with you." Then Mr. Bottleby felt really frightened.

"Why 'of course'?" he asked.

"Because," said Mrs. Pennyquick, "that is the peculiarity of all young women who have got anything in the way of

heads on their shoulders." She was thinking particularly of her Elsie. "They won't have anything to do with marriage until they fall in love, and then they lose their heads altogether. It's only your shallow-brained, empty-headed young woman who marries for convenience. She's got no head to lose."

"And is that what marriage means," asked Mr. Bottleby—"that people have lost their heads?"

"It means that the woman has," said Mrs. Pennyquick. "With men of your age it usually means that they've found theirs. When did she consent?"

"Yesterday."

"You saw her in London?"

"Yes."

"Where did this meeting take place?"

In all simplicity he informed her it was in an A.B.C. shop in the Strand. Her eyes twinkled again.

"That's all right," she chuckled—"that's all right. Those are the proper modern settings for romance."

He assured her there was no such thing as romance about it at all.

"We shall settle down here," said he, "just as if nothing had happened. We've become partners, that's all. We work together."

"Mr. Bottleby," she said, "you're a very clever man. You've spent so much of your time acquiring knowledge that you've lost all opportunity of learning anything. You've discovered, as you tell me, that society is composed of tribal instincts outwardly somewhat changed, but fundamentally the same as you have observed in a nest of ants and as anyone can see amongst the four-legged animals. Seeing people about me in Thurnham, I wouldn't deny that for a moment. Certainly I hadn't considered it before, but with your cleverness you've made it quite plain to me. I can

even see a lot of people I know in their crude animal forms. There's one of my acquaintances exactly like the ant-eater at the Zoo. There's a certain man I can think of who I should always see as a wart-hog now. It's disconcerting. But then the truth always is. There's one great satisfaction. One can never apply it to oneself. And that's what's the matter with you. You see society in the mass as personified by Mr. Overend and Mr. Purch, Mrs. Charrington and Mr. Mercer, but you fail to recognise that you yourself are a member of it. You're in the cage with the rest of us, Mr. Bottleby. You're under observation. I don't want you to think me guilty of blasphemy, so I won't suggest by whom."

She rose to her feet. It would not be exaggeration to say that the whole of her face was twinkling. She stretched out and took his hand from off the desk and shook it.

"If you won't let me be one of the witnesses," she said, "I shall come and call on Mrs. Bottleby as soon as our society considers it proper for me to do so."

Her feet tapped her out of the room. She closed the door just as positively as she had closed it when she came in. Mr. Bottleby sat alone in his office regarding a vision of himself under observation behind iron bars. He refused to believe that such a thing was possible.

#### CHAPTER XXXV

ONE thing had remained from their meeting in the A.B.C. and was continually repeating itself in Mr. Bottleby's mind.

"Don't let me wait," Jenny had said. "Marry me now." It had been more her tone of voice than the words themselves that had lingered with him. They had conveyed

an imperative sense of speed which, without being able to explain to himself, he implicitly obeyed. Calling at the house of the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages immediately on his return, he ascertained that they could be married by licence with no more than a mere day's delay. He filled the form in at once and felt himself then to be like some buoyant, floating object, borne along upon a swift tide of events. None of his actions appeared to be positively of his own volition. In such uneventful affairs as so far had made up the sum of his life, he seemed to have had powers of choice and direction. Here he had none. Was it that his will had weakened? Had something external taken possession of him? It was not that he objected to anything he was doing so much as that he resented this impelling force that was driving him to its accomplishment.

He resented, more than he could say, this visit to a total stranger to whom he must give information of what to him were the most private intentions he had ever had. He objected to the questions he had to answer on the form that was placed in front of him. He kept on asking what was the sense of them and, very patiently, the Registrar enlightened him.

In all this, Mr. Bottleby felt again he had thrown himself headlong into a rushing stream which hitherto he had been content to observe from the uneventful security of the bank. It was all very bewildering.

"My sensations," he said to himself that morning after Mrs. Pennyquick's departure, "must be much the same as those of a young salmon being borne down a rapid river to the sea. It is no doubt his clear purpose to reach that destination, but to a fish of any spirit it is conceivable he may resent at times the force of the current that rushes him there, whether he likes it or not."

Here Mr. Bottleby saw himself again, a comprehensible

vision such as he could readily understand. Once during a visit to Ireland, he had made a study of salmon in the Blackwater. The desire of the salmon for the sea, and the returning desire for those shallow, rushing waters where it was born, that it might give birth again, had appeared in the argument of his book, "The Evolution of Desire." He could quite picture himself in that guise. It almost consoled him. What he did not like was seeing himself as a full grown man struggling against forces he was bound to admit were beyond his comprehension.

The following day when he met Jenny at the station with her brother, who had come as a witness, he talked of salmon and their habits all the way in the cab to the Registrar's office. Geoffrey Hazlitt regarded him with a kind of bewildered suspicion. No man can quite stomach the man his sister marries. The alliance usually appears to him a humiliation for the family. He bears it as well as he can. It is plainly visible that he is bearing it. But Mr. Bottleby had to be more than put up with. He had to be understood, and that was frankly impossible. Mrs. Twiss being the other witness did not make matters any clearer.

However, the good woman did what was required of her. She tittered audibly when the Registrar asked her to sign her name. Having achieved this, she heaved a very deep sigh and looked at Mr. Bottleby as though, by her signature, she had taken the responsibility of all his happiness upon her shoulders. The Curator was watching a fly caught in a spider's web in a corner of the window and did not notice her glance.

They went back to the Curator's wing, where Mrs. Twiss had prepared for them a repast which even Mr. Bottleby became aware of as one course followed another. Besides soup and chicken, over the carving of which Mr.

Bottleby displayed none of his skill as a zoologist, there was apple charlotte, his favourite dish.

He was in the best of spirits. Indeed, with the serious pre-occupation of Jenny and the critical disapproval of her brother, Mr. Bottleby was the life of the party. Having submerged and submitted himself to the current of events, he now felt himself to be in less turbulent water. What more could the forces of life and the violent rectitude of Thurnham society do to him now? So far as he could see he had fulfilled his obligations to both these agencies of circumstance. He was at liberty now to pursue his life just as before. The regained sense of freedom exhilarated his spirits. He became intoxicated with ideas for his new work and talked with such flights of speculation about the persistence and transmutation of instincts that Geoffrey Hazlitt thought the beer they were drinking had gone to his head.

He returned to London that afternoon with the just report that this individual who, by the signature of Mrs. Twiss and one or two other formalities, had been made a relation, was something in the nature of a freak. They recalled Jenny's description of him—"What we should call a silly ass"—and omitted the further amendment that he would carry his burden till his legs dropped under him.

There were still bright hours of daylight and the whole of a May evening before them when Jenny's brother had departed for his train. In an exuberance of spirits, Mr. Bottleby suggested they should leave the Museum to Ramp and go out into the country.

She was glad of anything that suggested this day to be a departure from the ordinary routine of work. Something she felt must mark it upon that calendar a woman keeps hidden in the recesses of her sense of life. There had been no proposal for what might have been called a honeymoon.

She had not expected it, but nevertheless had done her utmost to hide such knowledge from her family.

"We shall probably go away later," she had told them. "He's terribly busy just now getting his catalogue ready for the printers."

She would have told any lie sooner than let them know the truth. This was the truth. This was the only honeymoon she would ever have, this walk through fields and woods, always in company with that nature that was his true mistress.

Yet it was better than staying indoors and waiting with no movement of her heart till nightfall. Already she was longing for sleep to end that day in order that her new life might begin as she knew it was to be.

She went up to her room to make herself ready for their walk. It was the first time she had seen it since she had been away. Why was it she had so regretted going and now returned instinct with fear? What was she afraid of? This was to be her room. She had known that. She opened the door and looked in. Everything was just as she had left it. Then a sudden beat of her heart caught her breath. On the dressing table was a vase of roses. She closed the door gently and crossed the room. She picked them up and raised them to her face. She resisted a moment's inclination to lay them against her lips.

Mrs. Twiss might have put them there. The thought that she was making a fool of herself, that she might be cheapening something she held in pride and value, caught her back. She put them down. But there they were. The last thing as she went out of the room, she looked at them. Then she went downstairs. Mr. Bottleby was ready waiting for her.

He had bought her a walking-stick for their cross-country rambles. It was a sign of thoughtfulness for her

in which she saw a certain significance, though not so much as it really contained for Mr. Bottleby. It was the first self-prompted thought for someone else which the Curator had ever entertained. He was astonished at it himself.

"I've bought you a walking-stick," he said, and held it out for her to take. She did not quite realise how the gift of it was giving him intense satisfaction. She had not seen the pleasure he had had when the thought had occurred to him and he had rushed into a tobacconist's shop in the High Street and bought it for her. He had regarded it with a far greater sense of importance than the ring.

She took it and smiled and there was gratitude in her smile. There was a quaint twist of amusement too. This was the only wedding present he had made her. She had another intense longing then to thank him for the roses, but dared not lest she should discover in reality they were put there by Mrs. Twiss.

They would have been the real wedding present to her could she have known he had given them. There was nothing in them but the desire to give her pleasure. She could not fail to realise that in this present of a walking-stick there had been some definite consciousness in his mind of utility. He had remembered the days before she went away when, from want of practice in walking, she had lagged behind. He had given her this to help her along while he strode with his mistress a few steps ahead.

They walked and walked. Never had he been so interesting before in all he told and showed her of the mysteries of nature. At every suggestion he made that they should return, she begged a little longer yet. She feared to go back. She wanted to make herself so tired that sleep would fall like a wild beast upon her, devouring her consciousness.

And all the time she kept on asking herself what more

could she want than this. It was impossible not to realise he had grown much tenderer in his consideration of her than that first walk they had had together. He stayed now and helped her over the hedges. More than once he offered his hand to assist her jump a ditch, but always on the other side he let it go again.

Moreover, if she had admired his mind before, she must have admired it a thousand times more that day of their honeymoon in the fields. New wild flowers had come into bloom since she had been away. Not only did he know them botanically. He knew the country talk of them, the origin of their natural names, the uses to which the herb-women put them.

Whenever she remembered poetry concerned with them she repeated it. He listened with sharp exclamations of delight when they pleased his fancy. At moments like these she was almost happy. Almost it conveyed the essence of a honeymoon to her, the inconsequent freedom and the spirit of life.

She did not want to go back. There in her little room in the Curator's wing would come the realisation of that hollow meaning that lurked and peeped and shamed her behind it all.

"Not yet—not yet," she said again and again when he proposed their return.

The evening had passed through primrose twilight to the faint purple of night before she consented to leave the fields and find the road back to Thurnham. She was tired out then. He found her steps getting slower and slower. He found his own mind becoming distressed by the realisation of her fatigue. He was sorry for her. A white owl skimmed the hedge by the road on which they were walking. He did not even follow it with his eyes.

In some unexpected way he was coming to the ex-

perience that now she was in his charge. He knew no sense of possession, but a strong feeling of responsibility had been added to his mind.

He took her arm and helped her along. She smiled up to his eyes for that. Her smile gratified him. He felt he was doing something that was of use. As well there was a fear, not for himself, but for her, that she might not have strength to reach home at all. The road seemed endless, whereas it would have been nothing to him without her. He began to suspect himself of its being all his fault that she had got to this condition of fatigue. He said as much. He said he was sorry. He accused himself of being a fool.

Presently, out of a side lane, they saw the light of a cart turn into the road to Thurnham. He shouted to it to stop. It went on. The rumble of the wheels was louder to the driver than the sound of his voice.

Mr. Bottleby told her to walk on slowly after him, and he careered down the road after the cart. Nature had never intended him for speed. His legs flew in all directions. Notwithstanding her fatigue, Jenny could not refrain from laughter as she watched him. Had there been any speed in the horse he would never in a lifetime have overtaken it.

It was a carrier's cart, struggling over its last four miles to Thurnham. He caught it up and then went back in the gathering darkness to fetch her. Instinctively he gave her his arm for the remaining fifty yards. With an eager sense of gratitude she took it. In half an hour they were back in the Curator's wing.

He stood at the bottom of the stairs and said good night to her. With an effort of will, resisting fatigue, she restrained herself from leaning into his arms. At the last, she turned her head quickly away, pushed her spectacles on to her nose and went upstairs.

On the landing she found Mrs. Twiss just going to bed.

"Did you see the flowers, mum," she asked, "in your room—on the dressing-table?"

"I saw them," said Jenny.

"Lor', didn't I try hard to get red roses," said Mrs. Twiss. "But there weren't none to be had. Still, a little bunch of flowers is better than nothin', ain't it? Least, that's what I said to meself."

What she said to herself! What *she* said!

Jenny closed the door of her room and stumbled across to the bed. She flung herself down and stifled the sound of her sobbing in the pillows.

#### CHAPTER XXXVI

TRUE to her word, Mrs. Pennyquick called. Mrs. Twiss, with much solemnity and a great deal of inward satisfaction, came up to Mr. Bottleby's office in the museum where Jenny was working on the notes and announced that a visitor was in the sitting-room. Jenny looked at her husband in terror.

"As I said before," he remarked, "this is one of the penalties of civilisation. It's a development of the herding instinct, probably a sort of advanced olfactory process by which those with a keen sense can determine the admissibility of a newcomer into the herd. You need not submit to it unless you like. I've never studied the principles and effects of these habits in human beings, but I fancy that, as in the canine species for example, any resentment would be regarded as unfriendly. You had better go."

Then he turned to Mrs. Twiss, asking her if the lady had given her name. When he heard it was Mrs. Pennyquick he relieved Jenny's anxiety considerably by informing her that Mrs. Pennyquick was the one person he had

met in Thurnham society whom he regarded as a human being.

Mrs. Pennyquick's stature was in her favour in the matter of making friends. By no means, unless she mounted herself on a chair, could she look down on anyone. Her tendency both in manner and expression was to climb up into the warmest corners of people's hearts. To those who had the faintest understanding of that twinkle in her eye this approach to friendliness could not possibly be denied.

Quickly overcoming the first restraint of nervousness in Jenny by the irresistible inconsequence of that chatter which is the insignia of social intercourse, she soon sensed with a sharp intuition the little tragedy harbouring itself in the curator's wing.

"Well," she said presently, and *apropos* of something that had nothing to do with the vagaries of men or the vicissitudes of marriage, "I always think this life is far too serious for any single one of us to take it seriously."

Instinctively Jenny felt that that was meant for her. With a still clearer sense of divination she realised this was the deep root of Mrs. Pennyquick's philosophy. From that instant they became friends. To Jenny it was an event in her life. When she returned upstairs to the office her eyes were sparkling. To Mrs. Pennyquick it was an ordinary occurrence. When she wanted friendship she could climb anywhere and find it.

In the case of Jenny she had climbed impetuously and with unerring direction. Hers was not an academic intelligence. She was not even particularly well read. She frankly admitted it. But her natural intellect was quick with observation and shrewd in its deductions. She left Jenny feeling that the degrees of universities were poor things to help one through life, compared to that diploma

of nimble wisdom granted to a chosen few in a sternly competitive world.

"I'm having an at home on Friday week," she said as she went away. "Write it down. You're to be my guest of honour. You may not like it, but you've got to be introduced to Thurnham. I didn't like it. But it's easiest in the long run."

Even Mr. Bottleby noticed the sparkle in Jenny's eyes when she opened the door of the office.

"Well?" said he.

"I suppose," said she, "that that's what society is for."

"For what?" he asked.

"To sharpen your wits so that if you're lucky you can pick out one friend from the crowd and be thankful if you do as much as that."

He made a note on a piece of paper, and later, when he was out of the room, she had an irresistible curiosity to look at it.

"What remains to human nature of a sense of smell," he had written, "is such as in many cases needs artificial stimulation. Modern methods of hygiene have destroyed most of the objectionable smells, and this is but inadequately counteracted by the artificial manufacture of synthetic scents from chemical formulæ. Unless the sense of smell can be retained amongst the human faculties, there must inevitably follow a certain loss of instinct which is to be observed in many animals to whom this sense is of paramount importance to life. The sense of smell is associated with memory. The scent of violets always brings to my mind tender recollections of my mother, who frequently wore them. *N.B.*—Is there any relation to memory in our sympathies and antipathies? Trace the direct or indirect relation between the inquiring scent of animals and this inquisitive social instinct which induces people to penetrate

the homes of others and, in vulgar parlance, to nose about."

The last phrase almost made her laugh. But one sentence more than any other remained in her mind: "The scent of violets always brings to my mind tender recollections of my mother, who frequently wore them."

Tender recollections? It was the first time she had realised his mind was capable of cherishing such things.

On the following Friday week, having bought a new cotton dress she had seen on show in Mr. Wincklebotham's window, Jenny went in much trembling to Mrs. Pennyquick's at home. She went early because she did not want to make an entrance. By the time she reached the door and her hand was raised to the bell push she wished she had never come. She wished there were no such things as social amenities; she considered no friendship worth such forced and artificial terrors as these.

There were other things to do in life. The uninterrupted peace of her work at the museum, with all that she lacked in life, seemed preferable to her than this fretful inquisitiveness of society. She wanted to turn away from the door and run, and found that by her own action she had rendered that impossible. Inevitably her finger had pressed the bell.

A smart parlour-maid came to the door. Jenny longed for the loose figure of Mrs. Twiss. She thought of herself working in the office of Crupper and Dodds', of Mrs. Crupper who used to come into the office, casting disdainful glances at her—and then this.

"Is Mrs. Pennyquick at home?" she found herself asking.

"Yes, madam." The door was flung open.

Madam! Yes—that was all right. She was no longer plain Jenny Hazlitt. She was Mrs.—Madam—Bottleby.

She gave her name and could have laughed. It was like a game she used to play with her sister when they were children. It was making a game of life. What meaning was there in wasting time like this unless it were a game like tiddley-winks which some people liked to play to pass the time? It could not be argued that it advanced anyone either mentally or physically. Yet people like these in Thurnham played at it every day from one year's end to another. The whole expression on her face was full of apprehensive questions as she entered the drawing-room. It was only dispelled by the relief of finding Mrs. Pennyquick alone.

Here again, in the friendship and interest which she found in Mrs. Pennyquick's mind, her former conception of the utility of these social processes returned. By the adroit and sympathetic curiosity of her hostess she was approaching a desire to pour out all her troubles when the parlour-maid opened the door and Mrs. Spiers was announced.

The smile which she had for Mrs. Pennyquick—that same smile which she brought with her into every drawing-room as people bring their own battledore to a house where badminton is enjoyed—seemed to undergo a subtle change when she was introduced to Jenny. In the far arctic regions, if one breathes into the air, one's breath immediately solidifies into fine needles of ice. It is the same volume of breath but of a different consistency. Something like this—a physical metamorphosis—happened to Mrs. Spiers's smile. She had not the social courage to remove it from her face altogether. She just let it freeze. Taking no notice of Jenny's half-stretched-out hand, she said: "How-d'you-do?" Then, readjusting her expression by an automatic function of the muscles responding through the nervous centre to some still more automatic and collective idea in her brain, she turned to Mrs. Pennyquick. Jenny

sat listening to her conversation and wondered whether there was any truth in Mr. Bottleby's theory of the wastefulness of life.

Following Mrs. Spiers there came Mrs. Charrington. Having retired from the drapery business with a small fortune, there was something intrinsically different in the social standing of Mr. Charrington from that of Mr. Wincklebotham who was still energetically engaged in work.

Knowing these people by name and occupation, Jenny assumed that whereas Mr. Charrington had ceased, with whatever advantage, in extracting large profits from a submissive public, he was of a better class socially than Mr. Wincklebotham who had only recently begun. In the silence in which they endeavoured to leave her, Jenny had opportunity to form ideas which would have been impossible had she joined in their conversation. It was interesting as an experience, but she felt she was not called for this sort of life. Every moment she longed more and more to return to the quietness of the curator's wing. Whatever was said there to break the peace of it all was at least said with meaning and stirred the mind to its purposes of thought.

By the time Mrs. Overend had arrived and two other ladies of Thurnham whose names she did not catch, Jenny felt that they had had enough opportunity for the expression of their united disapproval. She rose to say good-bye. The four ladies engaged themselves immediately in animated conversation. None of them socially realised she was going until they found themselves without their hostess. Mrs. Pennyquick had accompanied her out into the hall.

"Well," said Mrs. Pennyquick, "what do you think of the ladies of Thurnham?"

"Must I think of them?" asked Jenny.

The little lady laughed.

"You're very young," she said. "We have to think something of everything. They have their place. I'll come and tell you to-morrow what it is."

She was glad to get back. She went upstairs to her room and changed her dress. As she put away the one she had been wearing in the cupboard she said: "Four guineas for one afternoon, and they all looked at it as though they'd seen it in the shop window."

When Mrs. Pennyquick came the following day, Jenny had forgotten any resentment she may have felt. In obedience to the advice she had been given, she had thought about the ladies of Thurnham and come to the conclusion that the emptiness of their lives was more than an excuse for the way they lived them.

Sitting by the light of the lamp that evening before she went to bed, she had said:

"Is there any living thing in nature that has no use at all?"

"None," had replied Mr. Bottleby without looking up from his book.

"What is the use of ear-wigs?"

"I cannot tell you at the moment," he had said, "of any other use than that they constitute one of those obstacles the overcoming of which makes for the survival of the fittest. Although this may appear a trite and evasive answer, it contains an infallible truth which applies to every species whatsoever. I must make a study of ear-wigs."

Mrs. Pennyquick found Jenny alone in the curator's wing. Mr. Bottleby had gone over to inspect the discovery of a mammoth's tusk that had been unearthed at Alford drifts.

"Do you still like your work?" she asked.

"Love it," said Jenny.

"Does it make up for everything?"

With a startled glance Jenny raised her eyes. At the moment of that influx of visitors to Mrs. Pennyquick's at home she had resented their intrusion upon the confidence she was about to make. By the time she rose to go she was glad she had never made it. It had not been that she had trusted Mrs. Pennyquick any the less, so much as that in that environment she felt that both her sorrows and her joys were sacred. No one in Thurnham should ever know. Pride rose by her side to support her. And now this question—does it make up for everything?

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"Well—I learnt after you went away yesterday why those good ladies so plainly showed their disapproval."

"Oh—you needn't tell me that. I know. I stayed in the curator's wing before he asked me to marry him."

"No—they've forgotten that. You're married. In so far as that goes, you're one of them. In so far as you are married to Mr. Bottleby you would take precedence of Mrs. Charrington, whose father-in-law once lived over a shop in the High Street. No—that's not it. It is that being married, you don't live as married people do live."

With a suppressed cry of shame and astonishment Jenny asked how they knew that.

"Don't ask me," said Mrs. Pennyquick. "How do they know that Mr. and Mrs. Overend sleep in separate rooms and that Mr. and Mrs. Purch share a big four-poster with a feather mattress and big side curtains to keep out the lightning in a thunderstorm. I don't know how they know, and I couldn't tell you how I know they're right—but I'm sure they are and they think it's indelicate. That was the very word Mrs. Spiers used after you had gone. Mrs. Charrington described it as unnatural, and Mrs. Overend said—'Odd—but interesting.'"

In all this report the motives of Mrs. Pennyquick had

been altruistic and disinterested in so far as it had been her desire to help someone else in trouble. But she did not realise the sensitive creature she was dealing with. Behind those horn-rimmed spectacles, she believed as others did, that she saw the modern advanced young woman who had her own ideas about the conduct of married life.

When therefore behind those horn-rimmed spectacles she beheld the eyes a-swim with tears and observed the chin puckering in sharp, convulsive movements, she generously and impulsively stretched out her hand.

The next moment Jenny was hiding her face in Mrs. Pennyquick's arms and Mrs. Pennyquick was contemplating the necessity of standing to her feet the better to support her.

#### CHAPTER XXXVII

DILLINGHAM GARDENS lay at the back of the museum. There is reason to suppose the ground was that once representing the home paddock or home orchard of Dillingham Manor.

When the land was given over to the town by Dr. James it was converted into public gardens with broad asphalt walks, prim flower beds and stretches of grass upon which the public were requested not to walk. The time of Mr. Hitch, the gardener, was largely occupied during the late spring and summer months in seeing that this rule was not infringed by the children with their nurses.

In a gruff voice he would say: "What are you doing there?" and then suddenly appear round the corner of a shrub with a rake in his hand whether there was anyone there or not.

In an endeavour always to be on good terms with the curator at the museum, whose public capacity he secretly

believed was far less important than his own, he said one day to Mr. Bottleby:

"You'd think, wouldn't you, seeing those notices up, enamelled and all, the children 'ud have some sense of what's expected of them? But no! Sure as there's a piece of grass anywhere, they must run about and play on it."

This happened to be said one evening that summer in Jenny's hearing.

Seeing Mr. Bottleby somewhat impressed with the gardener's difficulties, she interposed.

"Do you think we know what to expect of children, Mr. Hitch?" she asked.

He looked at her in surprise.

"To do what they're told, I suppose," said he. "What's the good of having children if you can't get them to do what they're told."

"What's the good of having children," she replied, "if you don't know what to tell them."

Mr. Hitch did not quite follow this. Knowing her better than any other woman—in fact, being the only woman he had ever known anything about in his life—Mr. Bottleby waited.

"I saw some calves being let out into the fields for the first time the other day."

On one of their expeditions she and Mr. Bottleby had stayed by a farmyard and watched this operation.

"They went quite mad," she said, "when they felt the grass under their feet. All their energy seemed loosed out of them. They were like pieces of elastic you twist up till it becomes a ball and then let go. They couldn't keep still."

"I was talking about children," said Mr. Hitch. "I wasn't talking about animals."

"But what else are they?" she asked. "You go and lay stretches of grass there in the gardens that call to the

instincts of a child louder than any nursemaid, and then, without a railing, simply by a printed notice on a piece of tin, you tell them they're not to walk on the grass. You might as well tell a young duck not to swim in the water. You might as well put a big notice on all your bushes that young blackbirds are requested not to fly in the air. I don't know why half of us have children. We don't know how to grow them."

Seeing this sort of talk was not going to keep his grass in order, Mr. Hitch walked away. That was just like women. He was married. What did they know of the struggle he had to keep a piece of turf so that when any member of the council came round he would say: "Well—that's as good a piece of turf as I've seen in any garden in Kent."

What did they know about that? Nothing. What did they care? They cared still less.

He just noticed as he went away that Mr. Bottleby was staring at his wife. No wonder. One woman could make a dozen men stare. Mr. Hitch was annoyed with this talk about the liberties of children. He disagreed with it entirely. He disagreed with it not only intellectually but fundamentally. There was one outstanding reason why he disagreed with it.

In the centre of one of those open spaces of grass in the gardens there stood a plum tree. Its lower branches bent down close to the ground. Anyone could reach up and pick a plum. As well as that, he sometimes found pieces of stick on the grass which had evidently been thrown up into the branches. What was the good of netting the tree against the birds if that sort of thing was going to go on? All these were intelligent reasons why no one should be allowed to walk on the grass. And fundamentally he disagreed with the liberties of children because the plums on that tree be-

longed to him. They constituted one of his little perquisites as a public servant. He had made as much as seven pounds fourteen and tenpence out of one crop from that tree.

But how could women be expected to understand practical reasons like that? He did not expect it.

Nevertheless he had an uncomfortable feeling that Mrs. Bottleby's views might come to the ears of the council. There was no knowing the harm a meddling woman might not do. He felt it expedient to keep on the right side of the curator and his wife. When, therefore, one evening he found an uncommon-looking bird caught in the meshes of his net over the plum tree, he secured it with no little difficulty and brought it into the museum.

Ramp sent him up to the curator's office. Mr. Bottleby and Jenny were working there.

"I've got a bird here, Mr. Bottleby," he said. "Don't know nothing about birds—but——"

"Kestrel hawk," said Mr. Bottleby, and took it out of the gardener's hands. From the fluttering, aggressive creature it had been in the grasp of Mr. Hitch it became singularly passive and docile. The pale lids of its sharp eyes closed and opened less spasmodically. Its fierce talons relaxed. It no longer attacked with its hooked beak. It lay quite still. Jenny had heard Mr. Bottleby say "Kestrel hawk" and had come over at once to look at it.

"It's a rare bird then," said Mr. Hitch, who wanted to appraise the value of his gift.

"No, not rare," said Mr. Bottleby. "Common enough in Great Britain. Any fine day you can see it hovering over its favourite feeding ground. Its circular flight when it rises to altitudes for observation is one of the most beautiful feats in nature. It almost seems to defy the very laws of gravity. It's not rare, but it's a shy bird. There's a lot of controversy about its food. It's raptorial. There's no

doubt it's carnivorous. Its principal diet is mice and young birds. I've seen it myself attack a full-grown starling, and when it found that too heavy to carry away, it decapitated it, took the head off to its nest, and let the headless body fall to the ground. Some ornithologists hold that it lives on vegetable matter too. That's not been proved. But this is interesting, Mr. Hitch. You caught him in the net over your plum tree. If you hadn't said that I should have let him go straight out of the window. We've got all the specimens we want in the museum. What was he doing in your plum tree?"

"Well, sir, when I found him, one of his wings was caught up in the mesh and he was trying to get away. Fighting like a demon he was."

"Exactly. It isn't likely you'd have seen him at his food. But that doesn't prevent us from finding out if he's been at your plums."

"What do you mean?" asked Jenny quickly. "How could you find out?"

"He's just been feeding," said Mr. Bottleby. "We can have a look at what he's got in his stomach."

For some reason she could not explain to herself Jenny cried out: "You wouldn't kill it!"

He looked at her in some surprise. This was not like her. Squeamish? She had known him to make a post-mortem on a bird he had killed before. It had never occurred to Mr. Bottleby he was not humane. He considered the interest of his work before everything else, but nothing on earth would induce him to put that before an animal's sufferings. Death need not be a painful business. It was not natural to seek it. But in accordance with the laws of chance it came at any moment, just as the kestrel swooped down from the air and seized its prey.

"I'm doing no more to this bird," said he, "than it

has done hundreds of times itself to mice and other little birds that are just learning to fly. My raptorial instincts are probably more merciful than his. I shan't make my examination till he's dead. Death in a lethal chamber to him will mean nothing."

She was not satisfied with a single word he said. The urgent impulse to prevent his doing what he suggested was just as quick in her voice. It sharpened the expression of her face with a look of apprehension.

"You couldn't do that!" she exclaimed.

"Why not?"

"Because there it is—alive. It's got something you've no right to take away."

She did not understand it, but she felt as if she were fighting for something in herself. She realised by the odd light in his eyes that he was astonished; more than that, that he was annoyed. Yet she could not stop herself. She knew it might even prove a breach in their sympathy, but that could not be helped. It seemed imperative in her to save the life of the hawk.

"I don't understand this," he said. She had never seen him frown before. It made a different man of him. Somehow it made him more human. She almost felt a sense of mastery in him. She was half afraid of it, but could not and would not draw back then.

"You've known that I've put birds in the lethal chamber before now," he continued. "There can't be a more merciful death. They suffer nothing. It's ridiculous to say I'm taking away from it something I've no right to take. Who would have had the right to take my life if I were run over in the street to-morrow? We're all instruments of chance. I happen to be a conscious instrument, but I didn't make the chance that caught this bird in Mr. Hitch's plum tree under circumstances that make it interesting to

the ornithologist any more than the taxi-driver or the cab-driver would have made the chance of running me over which makes me interesting to the undertaker."

Not knowing how people of intelligence squabbled with each other, this had all the sound to Mr. Hitch of the beginnings of a domestic quarrel. Having enough of these at home, he edged to the door.

"Well, sir, I don't mind what you do with the bird," said he. "I've brought it here and I make a present of it to the museum—if you like to put it that way. Personally I should think it 'ud be very interesting to see what it had been eating—though I don't know nothing about these things."

What in fact concerned Mr. Hitch more than anything else was that if Mr. Bottleby killed it in the interests of science it would at least be one bird the less to eat his plums. It was like the curator's wife to interfere with common sense. It was like all women. Having no children of his own, Mr. Hitch had never discovered any convincing reason for the existence of women at all. With this last tentative suggestion as to what he would consider the best thing to do, he went out and left them to it.

The sound of his footsteps had reached the hall before Mr. Bottleby spoke again. Then he said:

"What's the matter? Why are you so agitated about it?"

She knew by his voice that he was roused to antagonism. He was going to oppose her. She realised she had no sufficient reasons to justify her request. The conviction that he must not kill that bird was insistent. Even in face of the possibility of their first quarrel she could not put that conviction away. It dominated her.

"I'm only agitated," she said, "if you like to call it that, because it seems wanton, unnecessary waste of life."

This sounded bad enough when said to him whom she

knew had never wantonly hurt anything in his life. But she calculated it would not rouse him so much as her real reason, which was that somewhere within her she felt some disastrous thing would happen to them if he did. How this premonition had arisen in her she could not say, except that in some way she associated the whole incident with what he had told her about Ba, the animal spirit of the dead, and the appearance of the hawk, settled on the coffin of Ta-mai, that day on which the bandages of the mummy had been unrolled.

This, she knew if she said it, would exasperate him if he were capable of exasperation. She was beginning to think he was. He always detested superstition. He would detest this. Wisely she kept it to herself. But even the answer she did give was disturbing enough.

He was experiencing a new sensation. He was losing his temper. It was uncomfortable but appeared to be unavoidable. There had never been any occasion in his life that he could remember when he had known sensations assume control of him in direct disregard of his reason.

"I was not aware," said he, "that anyone could accuse me of a wanton wastefulness of life. Even if I were a vivisectionist I hope I should have enough regard for life not to make any experiments that did not definitely further the cause of science."

He did not recognise himself as he said this. If it was anything, it was a matter concerned with his work. It had nothing to do with him personally as a man. But he was making it personal. He was challenging it as an attack upon his character. Had he been capable of comparative analysis he would have seen the resemblance in himself at that moment to Captain Wolhop. The very quality of his sensations was that he could see nothing so purely prompted by reason as this. He was getting rather hot in the face.

And all this time the kestrel hawk was shutting and opening its pale eyelids and, without a struggle, resting in the grip of his hand.

"You're going to do it, then?" asked Jenny.

"I see no reason why I shouldn't," he replied. "The circumstances under which this bird was caught are unusual. Kestrel hawks are shy birds. They don't hunt for their food in places frequented by human beings. I always considered it a most extraordinary thing to find that bird in the museum that day we were taking the bandages off the mummy. It's the first case I've ever heard of a kestrel flying into a room. One scarcely ever sees them near a house. Now here's another."

"How do you know it's not the same one?" she asked.

"It may be for all I know," said he. "We can't prove it. It's not ringed. But then if it were the same it would be doubly interesting."

"Why?"

"Well, it would seem to suggest that it has some reason for coming here—a reason strong enough to make it ignore the usual habits of its kind—some reason that emboldens it sufficiently to enable it to resist its natural fears."

"What reason?" asked Jenny. She felt her voice was quick, but could not control it. "What reason?" she repeated.

"There's only one," said Mr. Bottleby. "There can't be any other—food. That's precisely why I want to examine the contents of the stomach."

Involuntarily she clasped her hands together.

"Please don't do that," she begged—"please don't—if I ask you."

Failing utterly to understand the reason of her appeal, which was not to be wondered at, seeing how little she

understood it herself, Mr. Bottleby made a movement of irritation and rose to his feet.

"I can't make any such ridiculous promise," he said bluntly. "I thought you were interested in my work. If you're not, I can't have you interfering with it."

This was definitely cruel. She flinched under it. He could hurt her. She believed in that moment he had hurt her intentionally. It was unlike him. He was a different person. Smarting with the pain of it, she wished wildly she could have the equable, unimpressionable man back again. She could not bear that he should think she had lost interest. And that word—interference! It hurt! Deep in!

Notwithstanding that these were her emotions, as he turned away to the room he called his observatory, she followed him. There was a premonition in her stronger than any suffering in her heart.

"Are you going to do it now?" she asked.

"No," said he plainly, "I won't upset you by doing it now. I'll put him in a cage for the time being. Perhaps to-night, after you've gone to bed. Have a good sleep, and perhaps it won't seem such wanton waste to you in the morning."

Even his voice had an unnatural hardness. She did not stop to ask herself whether that hardness might not be the natural sheath protecting some deeper feeling behind it. She did not stop to compare it with the easy note his voice had always had. She just knew that a barrier had been raised between them and, with a thick pain in her throat, she turned away.

#### CHAPTER XXXVIII

SUCH conversation as they had during their supper meal was disjointed and mostly monosyllabic. Jenny asked Mr.

Bottleby if he wanted the salt, and Mr. Bottleby said he did. Later she passed him the butter. This was a mere act of attention, without words. He took it and handed it to her. She helped herself. Then he helped himself.

Mr. Bottleby found himself studying politeness. He was in fact doing a number of things that were quite unnatural to him. He had never felt so miserable in his life. At the same time he had no inclination to feel anything else. He was directly conscious for the first time that he was married. He was suspicious as well that all marriages were like this. He bolted his food with the intention of getting away from the room as quickly as possible, yet once, when Jenny rose from the table to get herself some bread and he thought she was going, he felt a hot wave of indignation on his face.

On the other hand, Jenny had never felt more gentle. She knew Mr. Bottleby was behaving in such a way as would have smarted her to cynicism in other men. She knew she did not deserve what he had said about her interference, yet she submitted to it in him. She did not know why. It hurt, yet, like him, she did not at the same time wish it to do anything else. She could have shuddered at herself had she felt indifferent.

Directly the meal was finished, Mr. Bottleby rose and went to the door. He was dimly conscious of behaving very like a child. But the situation was quite new to him. Lacking experience, he did not quite know how else he could behave.

"Are you going up to work?" asked Jenny.

"That was my intention," he replied.

Ordinarily he would have said, "Yes," but in the circumstances, being strongly alive to a new sense of dignity in himself, "That was my intention" sounded more distinguished.

"Is there anything I can help you with?"

He realised she was giving him every opportunity. He knew he would have been annoyed if she had not done so. Equally well he knew he had no intention of accepting any proffer of her assistance.

This was what was most disconcerting. If ever he had possessed the virtue of philosophy he had lost it now. Some surge of feeling inside him made it impossible for him to let her come up to his room and work with him that evening. The fact that he knew quite well the help she was made no difference. Indeed, if anything, it only aggravated his sensations.

"I can get along quite well by myself," said he, and went out hoping he had hurt her as much, if not more, than he was hurting himself.

The first section of the persistence and transmutation of instincts had been finished that afternoon. He had kept it as a surprise to read to her that evening. He had been gloating like a child over the thought of it. Twice he had nearly blurted it out. And now, by the mere influence of a single incident, he was become a different man, secretive, resentful and bewilderingly inconsistent.

"The fact of the matter is," he said aloud as he walked through the museum to his room, "this close relationship of the sexes which we call marriage is a highly dangerous and uncertain experiment. As much as anything else, it is like letting two children have the free run of a laboratory with all the test-tubes, retorts, pestles and mortars and rows of highly poisonous, inflammable and combustible chemicals at their disposal. God knows what mixture they will not concoct. It is impossible to predict whether in the course of a few hours they may not blow the roof off their heads or be found writhing in the agonies produced by some

violently corrosive poison. Yet year after year we throw open the doors of the laboratory of life for these childlike couples to enter without the first elementary knowledge of the salts and metals in the earth."

Having relieved himself of these opinions, he went into his room and closed the door, feeling himself to be in a more reasonable state of mind.

Jenny had no such vent to her emotions as this. On the moment of Mr. Bottleby's departure after supper she found the tears irresistibly welling into her eyes. She knew by this how unhappy she was. But when, after five minutes, she found he was not returning, her tears ceased. There was no satisfaction in crying by herself. But she had no substitute like his generalisations upon marriage to take the place of her tears. For an hour she sat alone in the living-room of the curator's wing, faced with the tragedy of the end of all happiness in her married life and knowing it could never be said to have begun.

When that hour was passed, in an utter darkness of spirit, she crept out into the museum. From the end of the geological gallery she could see the door of his room. There was a strip of pale orange light beneath it. For some moments she stood there watching it, torturing herself, picturing him working there contentedly without her.

This was more than she could bear. She was not really married. She was not even his assistant now. She turned away. Dragging her steps back to the curator's wing, she passed the hermetically sealed case containing the body of Ta-mai. From the window just above it a clear moon was throwing sharp light through the latticed casements. She thought of the hawk-headed spirit, Ba, and involuntarily she stopped. With an irresistible impulse she drew back the cover of American oilcloth. The chequered light from the window was falling across the face of the mummy. A

shadow from the lattice had touched and was twisting the line of its lip. It was smiling.

In that mood Jenny had no inclination to analyse realities. Ta-mai was smiling at her because human nature had not altered in two thousand five hundred years, because life itself was made for men, whilst women, as it was in that temple of Osiris at Thebes, and as it always would be, were only made for life.

She could not bear that smile on the face of Ta-mai. She shuddered as she drew the cover back again and went to her room. And all the time she was undressing she was picturing Mr. Bottleby at work upon his examination of the hawk. The vision of it became an obsession in which it seemed there would always be time to stop him if she went at once. Yet still she continued with her undressing. Putting on her dressing-gown, she brushed her hair in front of the mirror, the last operation before she got into bed. Now he was preparing the lethal chamber. Perhaps even then, as she was drawing the brush through her hair, he was taking the hawk out of its cage. Some intuition informed her he had made up his mind to do it. There was no doubt about this. She had challenged his right to individual action. That had been her mistake. Doubly it had been her mistake because right was not the true basis of her reason.

She was superstitious and had been too proud of her intellect to admit it to him. She had felt if he killed that bird he would be destroying their chance of happiness. By some agency outside herself that idea had seized hold on her mind. With all her reason she could not shake it off.

If she had told him that, he would have pitied her, but in such a mood he might have done what she asked. Now it was too late. Was it too late? He had said he would make his examination after she had gone to bed. He had meant by that when there was no chance of her interference.

Interference! Well, she would interfere! She would tell him the truth if that would stop him. He must see that for all her intelligence, her degree and her education, she was no more than a silly, superstitious girl; but if it was not too late she would stop him. That smile on the face of Tamai, that look in the eyes of the hawk as it lay in the grip of his hand, all the unreal things which seemed to have accumulated in her mind about this incident, urged her on.

She caught up her dressing-gown, thrust her feet into her bedroom slippers, and went to the door. In her haste she left the candles burning on her dressing-table, her spectacles lying on the bed.

The moonlight was falling through all the windows on that side of the museum. It was almost as light as day. Her pace gathered as she went. Down the whole length of the geological gallery, towards that strip of light under Mr. Bottleby's door, her feet were practically running. She did not pause to knock for admission.

Mr. Bottleby looked across the room as she entered. Screwing up his eyes to distinguish things through the light, he beheld a woman he had never seen before, a woman in a strange garment over which her hair hung in pale brown masses that surrounded her face and gave it an indescribable appearance of youth he had never associated with a woman's face.

She closed the door behind her and stood against it. She was in time. The whole picture was there, as she had visualised it. The cage was on the table. He had taken the hawk out. It was in his hands, the pale eyelids were shutting and opening paler than ever in the lamplight.

"Who is it?" he asked.

She told him who it was.

He stared at her across the glow of the lamp.

"What do you want?"

"Don't you know what I want?" she replied.

He did not answer. He seemed to be more engrossed with the sight of his eyes than any comprehensible thought in his mind. She came slowly down the room towards his chair and stood there beside him.

"I've come to tell you really why I asked you not to do that," she said.

He appeared to take no notice of that. All he said in reply to it was: "Have you got out of bed?"

"No—I was just going—then I thought I might be in time to stop you. I saw you in my mind, just like this, with the bird in your hand, and I thought if I came quickly——" She stopped.

With a deliberate movement as though some new thought had taken possession of his mind, Mr. Bottleby put the hawk back again in the cage and closed the door. Then he turned again to look at her.

She saw another man in him, just as he was seeing another woman in her. When he spoke his voice was different. She did not know whether it had anger in it or what it was. He spoke as though it were difficult for him to speak.

"Why didn't you want me to make the examination?" he asked.

She began with a rush of words, giving him as little time as she could to think of the folly of her reasons. He could call it superstition if he liked. She did not care what he called it, but if there were any consideration in his mind for their happiness——

He stopped her and asked what she meant when she was talking about happiness.

"Haven't you been happy?" she said.

"I?"

"Since we were married?"

He tried to look at her as he looked when she repeated her poems from memory; as when they argued together. An unfamiliar self-consciousness made it impossible. In that array, with her hair clinging about her face and over her shoulders, he felt he had no right to look at her. Who had the right, then, if he hadn't? He was becoming bewildered, awkward, distressed. He realised he could never look at her again without seeing her as she was then. He remembered it was like this he had seen her when she had stood without her spectacles beside the body of Ta-mai. She was without her spectacles now. He wished to heaven she had not come. It seemed in some way to be the end of life as he had known it and the beginning of some completely new state of existence. Yet if she had turned to go out of the room again he knew he could not have let her go.

"Why are you looking at me like this?" she asked. "Can't you answer my question? Haven't you been happy?"

"I thought so," he said bluntly.

"You don't any longer?"

"I don't know."

"Have I spoilt it all just by showing you I am foolish enough to be superstitious? I can't help it. I feel it all has something to do with us. Don't ask me how. I don't know. If you thought it had anything to do with our happiness would you kill it?"

"You keep on talking about happiness," said he. "I'm beginning to wonder if I know what it is. If you'd asked me a few months ago what it was, unhesitatingly I might have said that when I discovered a new species of water-beetle I had about as clear a conception of happiness as it was possible for a man to have. I haven't felt that for a long time. I haven't felt that since the day I asked you to marry me and you went up to London. I realise now that

all those days I was in a condition of mind that might be described as the direct opposite of happiness. To put it concisely, I was miserable. When, however, I ask myself if I would sooner not have experienced it, quite emphatically I should say—no.”

He was beginning to regain his composure. However different the look might be in his eye from what she had ever seen before, it was becoming more self-possessed. His glance was growing more assured. He looked at her as he talked. He was warming to his subject.

With an amazement at the strange progression of his mind, she slid into a chair by his side and listened.

He went on.

“It tempts one to inquire philosophically into what are the most supportable conditions of life. Contentment apparently is by no means the foremost amongst them. Somewhere in the ‘Evolution of Desire’ I said something to the effect that achievement in evolution is the combined result of revolt against existing conditions and suffering to acquire others. If I remember rightly, I added: ‘The persistent irony of life lies in the fact that achievement is never reached in a present generation.’ If that applies through every species of life, as presumably I meant it to, then it would appear that man is only really satisfied with his lot when he is suffering and in revolt. That being so, then during those days while you were away and I was doing my utmost to get you back, the conditions of existence were more supportable to me than at any other time. Now you ask me if I have not been happy since we were married. Presumably I ought to say no, because having got you back here again I should be in a state of contentment which we have demonstrated was not a supportable condition of life.”

“And are you in that state of contentment?” she asked.

“No,” said he—“I’m not.”

"Why not?" She did not know what answer she would have preferred.

"Well, firstly because from time to time, by your criticism of my work, you have made me feel a peculiar resentful consciousness that I am not just a man at liberty, working here in the Museum by himself. You have forced me to recognise the fact that my mind is an incomplete faculty for acquiring and distributing the knowledge it accumulates. Frequently I have felt revolt against that. I have begun to want to be something other than I am. Knowing that with all my fixed habits of mind this is virtually impossible in my life-time, this sense of revolt has distressed me. I have suffered. This evening, when you opposed my examination of the hawk, I felt it, palpably, consciously. To such an extent did I feel that revolt that I wanted to strike back against circumstance. I felt aggressive. I wanted to hurt. I found I wanted and intended and endeavoured to hurt you."

"You did," she whispered.

"I thought I did," he continued, "and with none of the sense of shame I ought to feel, I confess it gave me considerable satisfaction. But I can't say that that satisfaction made me what you would call happy. It did not, for example, bring me a sense of joy. I had hurt you, but I had not altered the facts. I had not become independent of you because I'd succeeded in hurting you. To be closely accurate, I had become more dependent than before. In wilfully inflicting pain, I had, as it were, asserted a proprietary right over you. One of the considerable fallacies with modern social economists is that proprietorship in its various degrees is attended by various degrees of independence. It is not. You found me just now, as you suspected, about to put that bird in the lethal chamber. I was going to do it much more to assert my independence than because

I thought science would materially profit by my examination of the contents of the stomach. You will notice how the assertion of independence is frequently accompanied by the submission of the will to an extraneous object. As a matter of fact the process of digestion taking place with rapidity in the stomach of a bird, the fruit that hawk may possibly have eaten off Mr. Hitch's plum tree, would probably have disappeared more than an hour ago. Nevertheless I was going to kill it in order to assert my right to do, not what I wanted to, but what I willed. Now it occurred to me during supper and since I have been up here in my room alone that this state of mind amongst human beings is common to the male in his attitude towards the female. I realised that an assertion of supremacy in what you might call the conduct and affairs of life is natural to and inseparable from the male. I realised for the first time since that ceremony of documents in the registrar's office that we were married. I informed myself that this disquietude and distress—for I was very distressed—was common to the married state. I was prepared to heap upon marriage a quality of sarcasm quite foreign to my nature."

He paused to study her under the light of the lamp. She was listening, partly in wonder, partly in fear. It was impossible for her to guess what all this dissertation was leading to. She was held by every word he said, at one moment in apprehension, at another almost in joy. He had wanted to hurt her. If it was not joy she had felt to hear that, then it was some sensation so closely akin to it as was able to lift her spirit into illimitable spaces of air. In his last words before he paused, her heart had sunk again. His mind had revolted not only against her, but against marriage. In a thousand ways she was thinking how she could give in to him to let him feel that mastery if his nature demanded it. Indeed, what was it but mastery that she

needed? But how could she alter the bonds of marriage? Their names were written in the registrar's book. She would have torn out the page for him if she could. Such formalities as these meant nothing to her compared with the quietude and satisfaction of his mind. Her last hope lay in the belief that he had not told her all.

"What else did you think?" she whispered. "Say everything. I want to hear it all."

"I came to the conclusion," he went on, "that this apparent insistence upon supremacy on the part of the male was an anomaly to the laws of nature. The fundamental canon of nature is balance. If we were able to compute the rate of the reproduction of life in relation to its consumption, as, for example, in the number of young the herring produces, and the number of the young fry consumed by larger fish, we should find an equality of result that would astound the highest mathematician. These two factors are in perfect balance and, governed by that law of absolute compensation, they are the two factors that make up the essence of life. Having assumed this to be uncontrovertible, I asked myself how it could be applied to this discrepancy of balance in the relation of the sexes amongst human beings. To my surprise I made a discovery. I found that the instinct for supremacy in the male was closely allied to the principles of consumption. Consumption is destruction. It is painful. I would not hold that a young herring feels any pain when it is being swallowed by a mackerel, but it certainly flies from the prospect, and in the larger animals the killing of their prey must cause considerable distress to the smaller animal that is killed.

"Man," said Mr. Bottleby, with a note of triumph in his voice as of one who in a treacherous ascent has gained a sure foothold, "man, in the scheme of physical evolution, is not creative, he is destructive. He hunts, he kills. He

wages war. He struggles in competition with his fellows. In all these acts and their variant instincts he is a consumer of life. Such life as he does create is not for others, but for himself. It is to establish his own mastery. He desires to be the leader of the tribe. His ambition is to be the head of his army. Napoleon is the outstanding example of the destructive instincts of man creating supremacy for himself at the expense of thousands of the lives of others. This instinct the male carries with him into his relationship with the female. He must dominate in his own home. He must be master. His will must be obeyed, and if it is thwarted then he exerts it in other directions, completely devoid of reason and frequently offensive to the intellect of a child. Meanwhile, what has become of the compensating balance of nature?"

He looked to her for an answer. She had lost no thread of all he was saying, but she was bewildered. She could no more than just follow the progress of his words.

"Had there been any truth in the sarcasm I was prepared to heap upon the married state I should have said: 'In modern marriage there is an unequal balance of reproduction and consumption.' Whether because we are at the tail end of a civilisation or what it is, child-bearing has become in many cases a malady unavoidably suffered by some and fortuitously escaped by others. This leaves the female to fight for a destructive supremacy in the home which by no means or intention of nature can ever be hers. The result is a domestic chaos. It is evident in the social life of to-day. The creative supremacy which by nature's right belongs to the female no longer balances the destructive supremacy of the male. More essential vitality is being consumed than is ever being produced. We may of course be leading to a determination of sex in which the State will set aside certain females for breeding, and by an artificial

generation of neuters the surplus destructive energy may be diverted into channels of mere soulless labour. If that is done the life of the family may yet be saved. If it is not, the life of the family would appear to be careering towards the abyss of destruction. Like the Galilean swine, the whole of this civilisation will rush over the cliff's edge into the sea."

He ceased in the same discursive tone of voice as he had begun and did not know that he had been talking for ten minutes with scarcely a pause to take his breath. With hardly more than a raising of his eyebrows he looked at Jenny.

"Well?" said he.

She could not believe what she had heard. Her reason had grasped the whole trend of his argument to its overwhelming conclusion, but it was staggering and dizzy with the conviction he had forced it to.

"What does it all mean?" she muttered.

He stood up to his feet. He took the cage with the hawk in it to the window. He opened the window. He opened the door of the cage. With a sudden convulsion of wings that beat the bars of the cage the hawk flew out into the night. He closed the door and came back to her.

"It means," he said slowly, "that if our marriage is to last we must have children."

The room became flooded with the light of the lamp. She felt it dazzle her as though the lamp itself had exploded with one blazing flash. Then it was all dark. She had leant with the whole weight of her body against him. She felt him put his arms about her to save her from falling. She felt his consciousness of her as his hands touched the form of her body. Then, with a suppressed cry, she realised some new thing about him.

Mr. Bottleby was trembling like a little child.

## CHAPTER XXXIX

IN the prescribed time which nature regards as necessary for these matters, Mr. Bottleby found himself one morning in that condition of helpless impotence which comes to most men on some occasion or another during their life-time.

The nurse and the doctor were up in Jenny's room and Mr. Bottleby had been told that for the next two hours or so he could go and busy himself with his work, or do anything he liked, for he would not be wanted.

"Perhaps it would be as well if you didn't go away from the Museum," said the doctor. Seeing a frightened expression in Mr. Bottleby's eyes, he had added quickly: "Don't suppose I think there are likely to be any complications, but well——" He smiled, intending it to be a cheerful statement—"it isn't child's play—though we hope it will be one day."

To Mr. Bottleby, whose mind was never partial to witticisms, it seemed an effrontery when he laughed.

What he did during those intervening two hours and a half the curator never remembered. Through all the hours of the previous night he had found himself sharing with Jenny the pain she did her utmost to conceal from him. Being, with him, a purely mental suffering in which his mind was not occupied with the strain of bearing a physical pain, there was greater room for fear and all the torturing apprehensions of a quickened imagination. The gale that had been blowing all night, rattling the windows and sometimes shaking the very house on its ancient foundations, had seemed a fit accompaniment to his sensations.

Such violent experiences as these were new to him. By the time the doctor came finally to dismiss him from the curator's wing and advise him to go into the Museum his

endurance was nearly exhausted. He looked mentally dilapidated. Having studied the principles and functions of nature for so long, he had never believed he could ever be brought so closely in touch with her as this. He was not prepared for it. From examining nature in captivity and under the microscope he found himself caged, pinioned, or, as it were, set upon a slide, and was sensitively conscious of a monstrous and pre-deliberate eye observing all these twitchings of his mind and body under the stimulus of apprehension.

Finding Ramp in his green-baize apron dusting a piece of Jacobean armour in the large hall, he stood for a moment watching him and then he said:

"Do you think, Ramp, as you dust that piece of armour, of the fingers that forged those hundreds of little rivets, or the body that animated those beetle-like leg pieces and swelled and relaxed under that gorgeous breastplate?"

Catching the drift of the question Mr. Bottleby had put to him, Ramp replied with honesty that he was not thinking of these things.

The Curator's interest was roused. In the definite negative which Ramp had given him, the hall-porter had conveyed he was far from being oblivious of the thoughts that were occupying his mind.

"Of what were you thinking then?"

"Well, yesterday morning, sir," said Ramp, "Mrs. Ramp was doin' her bit of shoppin'. She was buyin' some bones for soup at the butcher's—Kidner's, in Leather Lane. It's only six doors from us, and we always goes to Kidner's. Well, Kidner's has an open window facin' on the street—a sort of stall as you might call it, with pieces of meat, sausages, suet and what not spread about on it. Well, Kidner, he's got poor sight, Kidner has, he was just doin' up the bones for Mrs. Ramp in a piece of newspaper, when

a dog comes along on the pavement and, unbeseen by them, he puts his paws up on the open window. Mrs. Ramp says she just seen him out of the corner of her eye, so to speak, catch hold of a piece of meat and off with it. She shouted to Mr. Kidner: 'Hi! Mr. Kidner, there's a dog gone off with a piece of your meat.' Well, Kidner, he outs of the shop like a whisk. The dog heard him comin' and—done it before, more than likely—by the time Mr. Kidner was out in the street, the dog had gone. Nowhere to be seen. 'Damn that dog!' he says and he comes back again. Mrs. Ramp goes home. The street door was open. Mind you, I'm not hidin' nothing. I'm tellin' you the thing just as it happened. The street door was open. In she goes and there on the floor of the room was a piece of steak. I asked her straight did she see what piece of meat it was the dog took, and she says 'No.' 'Did Mr. Kidner tell you the piece he missed?' I asked her, and she says 'No.' And Mrs. Ramp is not a woman to tell a lie."

"Is that what you were thinking of?" asked Mr. Bottleby. "Were you working out the ethics of the ownership of this piece of steak in your mind?"

"No, sir—no."

"What then?"

"Well, sir, I was just thinkin' while I was dustin' that piece of armour, how my wife said she'd give me a steak and kidney puddin' to-day, because I like steak and kidney puddin'. I was thinkin' of that. Greedy if you like. And then I was wonderin' if she oughtn't to have gone to Kidner's for the kidney. I asked her if she wasn't, and she said: 'No. I'm goin' to Fletcher's in the High Street. His meat's better, and seein' we've only got the kidney to buy I'm goin' to Fletcher's.' But I've been thinkin' it over, dustin' this piece of armour, and I think she ought to have gone to Kidner's."

"Ramp," said Mr. Bottleby, "you are as ephemeral and as eternal as the man whose body once animated that piece of armour."

Being interested by the emphasis if he did not exactly understand the sense of Mr. Bottleby's statement, Ramp inquired if that were actually the case.

"We might throw that piece of armour on the dust heap, Ramp," continued the Curator, "along with the empty sardine and preserved fruit tins, if its sole interest were the body of flesh and blood that once inhabited it. But there it stands, an object of vital interest, if not to you, Ramp, then to those who have not cleaned it every day with a duster for the last ten years. Why is that?"

Ramp scratched his head.

"It is," said Mr. Bottleby, "because at the period when that was worn, the spirit of man was fighting to decide the violent issues between autocracy and democracy. We do not even know that that piece of armour was ever worn. It may have come direct from the armourer's and straight-way been put upon a shelf. But here, as visitors to the Museum stand and look at it, it represents the eternal spirit of man fighting for some abstract ideal which he can never prove to be right. You will eat your beef-steak and kidney pudding at midday, Ramp, and all the time you are satisfying your body your spirit will be distressed with the thought that your wife ought not to have gone to Fletcher's for the kidney. You will not enjoy that steak and kidney pudding, Ramp. The man that is in you, that will live after you, as this piece of armour lives, when your internal anatomy has long crumbled into dust, will revolt against injustice with every forkful of the pudding you put in your mouth. You will not die, Ramp, when your time comes. So long as we have that in us which defends the rights of the Kidners in Leather Lanes, we shall all live until it will

not need a piece of armour to commemorate us. We shall be ourselves."

So completely carried away was Mr. Bottleby by his visions of the eternal spirit of Ramp, that he did not hear the approach of footsteps across the hall. The doctor was at his side before he actually realised his presence.

"Sooner than we expected," said he. "You are the father of an eight-and-a-half-pound daughter."

Again for the next half-hour, Mr. Bottleby remembered but little of what he had done. He had vague recollections of going up to Jenny's bedroom. He did not notice that both doctor and nurse left him to go into the room alone. A cot, which he had completely forgotten ever having bought, was standing over the farther side of the room. He saw it, but immediately forgot it was there. One memory remained with him. He remembered and never forgot the sight of Jenny's face lying on the pillows. He remembered she looked to him as though she had been on a long and perilous journey, as though she had seen things upon that adventure more terrible than he would ever see in life. He recollected, too, in the faint smile she gave him, an impression that she was thankful he never would see them. Then he remembered going slowly down on his knees by the side of the bed.

But he never remembered saying:

"You've come back."

Half an hour later, they told him to go away. He went back into the Museum. Ramp had gone to his dinner. He was alone. For some reason, quite unknown to him, he went to the little landing where the mummy was lying. He was thinking of death and where Jenny had been. He wanted to remind himself what death was, and he took off the oil-cloth cover.

The body of Ta-mai was gone.

In the bottom of the coffin lay a little heap of dust.

Caught back suddenly into the concrete realm of reality, he realised what must have happened. The case was no longer hermetically sealed. Someone had tampered with it. He examined it all over. Down one side he found a little fractured star in the glass. There it had happened. The air had got in. He suddenly remembered the occasion when, with the scissors in her hand, Jenny had stumbled and he had caught her to save her falling. He remembered the sound of the metal scissors striking the glass. They had not examined it then. But then it had happened.

And all that time the air had gradually been stealing its way in. Then the night before, when the storm had shaken the house——!

In one moment it must have happened. From some cause of the circumstance beyond his power of determination, the body of Ta-mai, after two thousand five hundred years, had crumbled into dust. What did it mean? Had at last the spirit of the truth-speaking daughter of Tchet-ra found the human body in which her soul could come forth to pursue its journey?

THE END

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PRINTED BY BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ, LEIPZIG

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