Mr. Warricombe shook his head, and with a laugh rose to say good-night.

'It's a great pity,' he remarked next day to Sidwell, who had been saying that her brother seemed less vivacious than usual, 'that Buckland is defective on the side of humour. For a man who claims to be philosophical he takes things with a rather obtuse seriousness. I know nothing better than humour as a protection against the kind of mistake he is always committing.'

The application of this was not clear to Sidwell.

'Has something happened to depress him?' she asked.

'Not that I know of. I spoke only of his general tendency to intemperate zeal. That is enough to account for intervals of reaction. And how much sounder his judgment of men would be if he could only see through a medium of humour now and then!—You know he is going over to Budleigh Salterton this afternoon?'

Sidwell smiled, and said quietly:

'I thought it likely he would.'

At Budleigh Salterton, a nook on the coast some fifteen miles away, Sylvia Moorhouse was now dwelling. Her mother, a widow of substantial means, had recently established herself there, in the proximity of friends, and the mathematical brother made his home with them. That Buckland took every opportunity of enjoying Sylvia's conversation was no secret; whether the predilection was mutual, none of his relatives could say, for in a matter such as this Buckland was by nature disposed to reticence. Sidwell's intimacy with Miss Moorhouse put her in no better position than the others for forming an opinion; she could only suspect that the irony which flavoured Sylvia's talk with and concerning the Radical, intimated a lurking kindness. Buckland's preference was easily understood, and its

growth for five or six years seemed to promise stability.

Immediately after luncheon the young man set forth, and did not reappear until the evening of the next day. His spirits had not benefited by the excursion; at dinner he was noticeably silent, and instead of going to the drawing-room afterwards he betook himself to the studio up on the roof, and smoked in solitude. There, towards ten o'clock, Sidwell sought him. Heavy rain was beating upon the glass, and a high wind blended its bluster with the cheerless sound.

'Don't you find it rather cold here?' she asked, after observing her brother's countenance of gloom.

'Yes; I'm coming down.—Why don't you keep up your painting?'

'I have lost interest in it, I'm afraid.'

'That's very weak, you know. It seems to me that nothing interests you permanently.'

Sidwell thought it better to make no reply.

'The characteristic of women,' Buckland pursued, with some asperity, throwing away the stump of his cigar. 'It comes, I suppose, of their ridiculous education—their minds are never trained to fixity of purpose. They never understand themselves, and scarcely ever make an effort to understand any one else. Their life is a succession of inconsistencies.'

'This generalising is so easy,' said Sidwell, with a laugh, 'and so worthless. I wonder you should be so far behind the times.'

'What light have the times thrown on the subject?'

'There's no longer such a thing as *woman* in the abstract. We are individuals.'

'Don't imagine it! That may come to pass three or four generations hence, but as yet the best of you can only vary the type in unimportant particulars. By the way, what is Peak's address?'

'Longbrook Street; but I don't know the number. Father can give it you, I think.'

'I shall have to drop him a note. I must get back to town early in the morning.'

'Really? We hoped to have you for a week.'

'Longer next time.'

They descended together. Now that Louis no longer abode here (he had decided at length for medicine, and was at work in London), the family as a rule spent very quiet evenings. By ten o'clock Mrs. Warricombe and Fanny had retired, and Sidwell was left either to talk with her father, or to pursue the calm meditations which seemed to make her independent of companionship as often as she chose.

'Are they all gone?' Buckland asked, finding a vacant room.

'Father is no doubt in the study.'

'It occurs to me——. Do you feel satisfied with this dead-alive existence?'

'Satisfied? No life could suit me better.'

'You really think of living here indefinitely?'

'As far as I am concerned, I hope nothing may ever disturb us.'

'And to the end of your life you will scent yourself with sweet-brier? Do try a bit of mint for a change.'

'Certainly, if it will please you.'

'Seriously, I think you might all come to town for next winter. You are rusting, all of you. Father was never so dull, and mother doesn't seem to know how to pass the days. It wouldn't be bad for Louis to be living with you instead of in lodgings. Do just think of it. It's ages since you heard a concert, or saw a picture.'

Sidwell mused, and her brother watched her askance.

'I don't know whether the others would care for it,' she said, 'but I am not tempted by a winter of fog.'

'Fog? Pooh! Well, there *is* an occasional fog, just now and then, but it's much exaggerated. Who ever thinks of the weather in England? Fanny might have a time at Bedford College or some such place—she learns nothing here. Think it over. Father would be delighted to get among the societies, and so on.'

He repeated his arguments in many forms, and Sidwell listened patiently, until they were joined by Mr. Warricombe, whereupon the subject dropped; to be resumed, however, in correspondence, with a persistency which Buckland seldom exhibited in anything which affected the interests of his relatives. As the summer drew on, Mrs. Warricombe began to lend serious ear to this suggestion of change, and Martin was at all events moved to discuss the pros and cons of half a year in London. Sidwell preserved neutrality, seldom making an allusion to the project; but Fanny supported her brother's proposal with sprightly zeal, declaring on one occasion that she began distinctly to feel the need of 'a higher culture,' such as London only could supply.

In the meantime there had been occasional interchange of visits between the family and their friends at Budleigh Salterton. One evening, when Mrs. Moorhouse and Sylvia were at the Warricombes', three or four Exeter people came to dine, and among the guests was Godwin Peak—his invitation being due in this instance to Sylvia's express wish to meet him again.

'I am studying men,' she had said to Sidwell not long before, when the latter was at the seaside with her. 'In our day this is the proper study of womankind. Hitherto we have given serious attention only to one another. Mr. Peak remains in my memory as a type worth observing; let me have a chance of talking to him when I come next.'

She did not neglect her opportunity, and Mrs. Moorhouse, who also conversed with the theologian and found him interesting, was so good as to hope that he would

call upon her if ever his steps turned towards Budleigh Salterton.

After breakfast next morning, Sidwell found her friend sitting with a book beneath one of the great trees of the garden. At that moment Sylvia was overcome with laughter, evidently occasioned by her reading.

'Oh,' she exclaimed, 'if this man isn't a great humorist! I don't think I ever read anything more irresistible.'

The book was Hugh Miller's *Testimony of the Rocks*, a richly bound copy belonging to Mrs. Warricombe.

'I daresay you know it very well; it's the chapter in which he discusses, with perfect gravity, whether it would have been possible for Noah to collect examples of all living creatures in the ark. He decides that it wouldn't—that the deluge *must* have spared a portion of the earth; but the details of his argument are delicious, especially this place where he says that all the insects could have been brought together only "at enormous expense of miracle"! I suspected a secret smile; but no—that's out of the question. "At enormous expense of miracle"!'

Sylvia's eyes winked as she laughed, a peculiarity which enhanced the charm of her frank mirth. Her dark, pure complexion, strongly-marked eyebrows, subtle lips, were shadowed beneath a great garden hat, and a loose white gown, with no oppressive moulding at the waist, made her a refreshing picture in the glare of midsummer.

'The phrase is ridiculous enough,' assented Sidwell. 'Miracle can be but miracle, however great or small its extent.'

'Isn't it strange, reading a book of this kind nowadays? What a leap we have made! I should think there's hardly a country curate who would be capable of bringing this argument into a sermon.'

'I don't know,' returned Sidwell, smiling. 'One still hears remarkable sermons.'

'What will Mr. Peak's be like?'

They exchanged glances. Sylvia wore a look of reflective curiosity, and her friend answered with some hesitation, as if the thought were new to her:

'They won't deal with Noah, we may take that for granted.'

'Most likely not with miracles, however little expensive.'

'Perhaps not. I suppose he will deal chiefly with the moral teaching of Christianity.'

'Do you think him strong as a moralist?' inquired Sylvia.

'He has very decided opinions about the present state of our civilisation.'

'So I find. But is there any distinctly moral force in him?'

'Father thinks so,' Sidwell replied, 'and so do our friends the Lilywhites.'

Miss Moorhouse pondered awhile.

'He is a great problem to me,' she declared at length, knitting her brows with a hint of humorous exaggeration. 'I wonder whether he believes in the dogmas of Christianity.'

Sidwell was startled.

'Would he think of becoming a clergyman?'

'Oh, why not? Don't they recognise nowadays that the spirit is enough?'

There was silence. Sidwell let her eyes wander over the sunny grass to the red-flowering creeper on the nearest side of the house.

'That would involve a great deal of dissimulation,' she said at length. 'I can't reconcile it with what I know of Mr. Peak.'

'And I can't reconcile anything else,' rejoined the other.

'He impresses you as a rationalist?'

'You not?'

'I confess I have taken his belief for granted. Oh, think! He couldn't keep up such a pretence. However you justify it, it implies conscious deception. It would be dishonourable. I am sure *he* would think it so.'

'How does your brother regard him?' Sylvia asked, smiling very slightly, but with direct eyes.

'Buckland can't credit anyone with sincerity except an aggressive agnostic.'

'But I think he allows honest credulity.'

Sidwell had no answer to this. After musing a little, she put a question which indicated how her thoughts had travelled.

'Have you met many women who declared themselves agnostics?'

'Several.'

Sylvia removed her hat, and began to fan herself gently with the brim. Here, in the shade, bees were humming; from the house came faint notes of a piano—Fanny practising a mazurka of Chopin.

'But never, I suppose, one who found a pleasure in attacking Christianity?'

'A girl who was at school with me in London,' Sylvia replied, with an air of amused reminiscence. 'Marcella Moxey. Didn't I ever speak to you of her?'

'I think not.'

'She was bitter against religion of every kind.'

'Because her mother made her learn collects, I daresay?' suggested Sidwell, in a tone of gentle satire.

'No, no. Marcella was about eighteen then, and had neither father nor mother.—(How Fanny's touch improves!)—She was a born atheist, in the fullest sense of the word.'

'And detestable?'

'Not to me—I rather liked her. She was remarkably honest, and I have sometimes thought that in morals, on the whole, she stood far above most women. She hated falsehood—hated it with all her heart, and a story

of injustice maddened her. When I think of Marcella it helps me to picture the Russian girls who propagate Nihilism.'

'You have lost sight of her?'

'She went abroad, I think. I should like to have known her fate. I rather think there will have to be many like her before women are civilised.'

'How I should like to ask her,' said Sidwell, 'on what she supported her morality?'

'Put the problem to Mr. Peak,' suggested the other, gaily. 'I fancy he wouldn't find it insoluble.'

Mrs. Warricombe and Mrs. Moorhouse appeared in the distance, walking hither under parasols. The girls rose to meet them, and were presently engaged in less interesting colloquy.

IV

This summer Peak became a semi-graduate of London University. To avoid the risk of a casual meeting with acquaintances, he did not go to London, but sat for his examination at the nearest provincial centre. The revival of boyish tremors at the successive stages of this business was anything but agreeable ; it reminded him, with humiliating force, how far he had strayed from the path indicated to his self-respecting manhood. Defeat would have strengthened in overwhelming revolt all the impulses which from time to time urged him to abandon his servile course. But there was no chance of his failing to satisfy the examiners. With ' Honours ' he had now nothing to do ; enough for his purpose that in another year's time he would write himself Bachelor of Arts, and thus simplify the clerical preliminaries. In what quarter he was to look for a curacy remained uncertain. Meanwhile his enterprise seemed to prosper, and success emboldened his hopes.

Hopes which were no longer vague, but had defined themselves in a way which circumstances made inevitable. Though he had consistently guarded himself against the obvious suggestions arising out of his intercourse with the Warricombe family, though he still emphasised every discouraging fact, and strove to regard it as axiomatic that nothing could be more perilous to his future than a hint of presumption or self-interest in word or deed beneath that friendly roof, it was coming to pass that he thought of Sidwell not only as the type

of woman pursued by his imagination, but as herself the object of his converging desires. Comparison of her with others had no result but the deepening of that impression she had at first made upon him. Sidwell exhibited all the qualities which most appealed to him in her class; in addition, she had the charms of a personality which he could not think of common occurrence. He was yet far from understanding her; she exercised his powers of observation, analysis, conjecture, as no other person had ever done; each time he saw her (were it but for a moment) he came away with some new perception of her excellence, some hitherto unmarked grace of person or mind whereon to meditate. He had never approached a woman who possessed this power at once of fascinating his senses and controlling his intellect to a glad reverence. Whether in her presence or musing upon her in solitude, he found that the unsparing naturalism of his scrutiny was powerless to degrade that sweet, pure being.

Rare, under any circumstances, is the passionate love which controls every motive of heart and mind; rarer still that form of it which, with no assurance of reciprocation, devotes exclusive ardour to an object only approachable through declared obstacles. Godwin Peak was not framed for romantic languishment. In general, the more complex a man's mechanism, and the more pronounced his habit of introspection, the less capable is he of loving with vehemence and constancy. Heroes of passion are for the most part primitive natures, nobly tempered; in our time they tend to extinction. Growing vulgarism on the one hand, and on the other a development of the psychological conscience, are unfavourable to any relation between the sexes, save those which originate in pure animalism, or in reasoning less or more generous. Never having experienced any feeling which he could dignify with the name of love, Godwin had no criterion in himself whereby to test the emotions now besetting him. In a man of his age this was an unusual

state of things, for when the ardour which will bear analysis has at length declared itself, it is wont to be moderated by the regretful memory of that fugacious essence which gave to the first frenzy of youth its irrecoverable delight. He could not say in reply to his impulses: If that was love which overmastered me, this must be something either more or less exalted. What he *did* say was something of this kind: If desire and tenderness, if frequency of dreaming rapture, if the calmest approval of the mind and the heart's most exquisite, most painful throbbing, constitute love,—then assuredly I love Sidwell. But if to love is to be possessed with madness, to lose all taste of life when hope refuses itself, to meditate frantic follies, to deem it inconceivable that this woman should ever lose her dominion over me, or another reign in her stead,—then my passion falls short of the true œstrum, and I am only dallying with fancies which might spring up as often as I encountered a charming girl.

All things considered, to encourage this amorous preoccupation was probably the height of unwisdom. The lover is ready at deluding himself, but Peak never lost sight of the extreme unlikelihood that he should ever become Martin Warricombe's son-in-law, of the thousand respects which forbade his hoping that Sidwell would ever lay her hand in his. That deep-rooted sense of class which had so much influence on his speculative and practical life asserted itself, with rigid consistency, even against his own aspirations; he attributed to the Warricombes more prejudice on this subject than really existed in them. He, it was true, belonged to no class whatever, acknowledged no subordination save that of the hierarchy of intelligence; but this could not obscure the fact that his brother sold seeds across a counter, that his sister had married a haberdasher, that his uncle (notoriously) was somewhere or other supplying the public with cheap repasts. Girls of Sidwell's delicacy do not misally

themselves, for they take into account the fact that such misalliance is fraught with elements of unhappiness, affecting husband as much as wife. No need to dwell upon the scruples suggested by his moral attitude; he would never be called upon to combat them with reference to Sidwell's future.

What, then, was he about? For what advantage was he playing the hypocrite? Would he, after all, be satisfied with some such wife as the average curate may hope to marry?

A hundred times he reviewed the broad question, by the light of his six months' experience. Was Sidwell Warricombe his ideal woman, absolutely speaking? Why, no; not with all his glow of feeling could he persuade himself to declare her that. Satisfied up to a certain point, admitted to the sphere of wealthy refinement, he now had leisure to think of yet higher grades, of the women who are not only exquisite creatures by social comparison but rank by divine right among the foremost of their race. Sidwell was far from intolerant, and held her faiths in a sincerely ethical spirit. She judged nobly, she often saw with clear vision. But must not something of kindly condescension always blend with his admiring devotedness? Were it but possible to win the love of a woman who looked forth with eyes thoroughly purged from all mist of tradition and conventionalism, who was at home among arts and sciences, who, like himself, acknowledged no class and bowed to no authority but that of the supreme human mind!

Such women are to be found in every age, but how many of them shine with the distinctive ray of womanhood? These are so rare that they have a place in the pages of history. The truly emancipated woman—it was Godwin's conviction—is almost always asexual; to him, therefore, utterly repugnant. If, then, he were not content to waste his life in a vain search for the priceless jewel, which is won and worn only by fortune's supreme

favourites, he must acquiesce in the imperfect marriage commonly the lot of men whose intellect allows them but little companionship even among their own sex; for that matter, the lot of most men, and necessarily so until the new efforts in female education shall have overcome the vice of wedlock as hitherto sanctioned. Nature provides the hallucination which flings a lover at his mistress's feet. For the chill which follows upon attainment she cares nothing—let society and individuals make their account with that as best they may. Even with a wife such as Sidwell the process of disillusion would doubtless have to be faced, however liberal one's allowances in the forecast.

Reflections of this colour were useful; they helped to keep within limits the growth of agitating desire. But there were seasons when Godwin surrendered himself to luxurious reverie, hours of summer twilight which forbade analysis and listened only to the harmonies of passion. Then was Sidwell's image glorified, and all the delights promised by such love as hers fired his imagination to intolerable ecstasy. O heaven! to see the smile softened by rosy warmth which would confess that she had given her heart—to feel her supple fingers intertwined with his that clasped them—to hear the words in which a mind so admirable, instincts so delicate, would make expression of their tenderness! To live with Sidwell—to breathe the fragrance of that flower of womanhood in wedded intimacy—to prove the devotion of a nature so profoundly chaste! The visionary transport was too poignant; in the end it drove him to a fierce outbreak of despairing wrath. How could he dream that such bliss would be the reward of despicable artifice, of calculated dishonour? Born a rebel, how could his be the fate of those happy men who are at one with the order of things? The prophecy of a heart wrung with anguish foretold too surely that for him was no rapturous love, no joy of noble wedlock. Solitude, now and for

ever, or perchance some base alliance of the flesh, which would involve his later days in sordid misery.

In moods of discouragement he thought with envy of his old self, his life in London lodgings, his freedom in obscurity. It belongs to the pathos of human nature that only in looking back can one appreciate the true value of those long tracts of monotonous ease which, when we are living through them, seem of no account save in relation to past or future; only at a distance do we perceive that the exemption from painful shock was in itself a happiness, to be rated highly in comparison with most of those disturbances known as moments of joy. A wise man would have entertained no wish but that he might grow old in that same succession of days and weeks and years. Without anxiety concerning his material needs (certainly the most substantial of earthly blessings), his leisure not inadequate to the gratification of a moderate studiousness, with friends who offered him an ever-ready welcome,—was it not much? If he were condemned to bachelorhood, his philosophy was surely capable of teaching him that the sorrows and anxieties he thus escaped made more than an offset against the satisfactions he must forego. Reason had no part in the fantastic change to which his life had submitted, nor was he ever supported by a hope which would bear his cooler investigation.

And yet hope had her periods of control, for there are times when the mind wearies of rationality, and, as it were in self-defence, in obedience to the instinct of progressive life, craves a specious comfort. It seemed undeniable that Mr. Warricombe regarded him with growth of interest, invited his conversation more unreservedly. He began to understand Martin's position with regard to religion and science, and thus could utter himself more securely. At length he ventured to discourse with some amplitude on his own convictions—the views, that is to say, which he thought fit to adopt in his character

of a liberal Christian. It was on an afternoon of early August that this opportunity presented itself. They sat together in the study, and Martin was in a graver mood than usual, not much disposed to talk, but a willing listener. There had been mention of a sermon at the Cathedral, in which the preacher declared his faith that the maturity of science would dispel all antagonisms between it and revelation.

'The difficulties of the unbeliever,' said Peak, endeavouring to avoid a sermonising formality, though with indifferent success, 'are, of course, of two kinds; there's the theory of evolution, and there's modern biblical criticism. The more I study these objections, the less able I am to see how they come in conflict with belief in Christianity as a revealed religion.'

'Yet you probably had your time of doubt?' remarked the other, touching for the first time on this personal matter.

'Oh, yes; that was inevitable. It only means that one's development is imperfect. Most men who confirm themselves in agnosticism are kept at that point by arrested moral activity. They give up the intellectual question as wearisome, and accept the point of view which flatters their prejudices: thereupon follows a blunting of the sensibilities on the religious side.'

'There are men constitutionally unfitted for the reception of spiritual truth,' said Martin, in a troubled tone. He was playing with a piece of string, and did not raise his eyes.

'I quite believe that. There's our difficulty when we come to evidences. The evidences of science are wholly different in *kind* from those of religion. Faith cannot spring from any observation of phenomena, or scrutiny of authorities, but from the declaration made to us by the spiritual faculty. The man of science can only become a Christian by the way of humility—and that a kind of humility he finds it difficult even to conceive.

One wishes to impress upon him the harmony of this faith with the spiritual voice that is in every man. He replies: I know nothing of that spiritual voice. And if that be true, one can't help him by argument.'

Peak had constructed for himself, out of his reading, a plausible system which on demand he could set forth with fluency. The tone of current apologetics taught him that, by men even of cultivated intellect, such a position as he was now sketching was deemed tenable; yet to himself it sounded so futile, so nugatory, that he had to harden his forehead as he spoke. Trial more severe to his conscience lay in the perceptible solicitude with which Mr. Warricombe weighed these disingenuous arguments. It was a hateful thing to practise such deception on one who probably yearned for spiritual support. But he had committed himself to this course, and must brave it out.

'Christianity,' he was saying presently—appropriating a passage of which he had once made careful note—' is an organism of such vital energy that it perforce assimilates whatever is good and true in the culture of each successive age. To understand this is to learn that we must depend rather on *constructive*, than on *defensive*, apology. That is to say, we must draw evidence of our faith from its latent capacities, its unsuspected affinities, its previsions, its adaptability, comprehensiveness, sympathy, adequacy, to human needs.'

'That puts very well what I have always felt,' replied Mr. Warricombe. 'Yet there will remain the objection that such a faith may be of purely human origin. If evolution and biblical criticism seem to overthrow all the historic evidences of Christianity, how convince the objectors that the faith itself was divinely given?'

'But I cannot hold for a moment,' exclaimed Peak, in the words which he knew his interlocutor desired to hear, 'that all the historic evidences have been destroyed. That indeed would shake our position.'

He enlarged on the point, with display of learning, yet studiously avoiding the tone of pedantry.

'Evolution,' he remarked, when the dialogue had again extended its scope, 'does not touch the evidence of design in the universe; at most it can correct our imperfect views (handed down from an age which had no scientific teaching because it was not ripe for it) of the mode in which that design was executed, or rather is still being executed. Evolutionists have not succeeded in explaining life; they have merely discovered a new law relating to life. If we must have an explanation, there is nothing for it but to accept the notion of a Deity. Indeed, how can there be religion without a divine author? Religion is based on the idea of a divine mind which reveals itself to us for moral ends. The Christian revelation, we hold, has been developed gradually, much of it in connection with secondary causes and human events. It has come down to us in anything but absolute purity—like a stream which has been made turbid by its earthly channel. The lower serves its purpose as a stage to the higher, then it falls away, the higher surviving. Hitherto, the final outcome of evolution is the soul in a bodily tenement. May it not be that the perfected soul alone survives in the last step of the struggle for existence?'

Peak had been talking for more than a quarter of an hour. Under stress of shame and intellectual self-criticism (for he could not help confuting every position as he stated it) his mind often wandered. When he ceased speaking there came upon him an uncomfortable dreaminess which he had already once or twice experienced when in colloquy with Mr. Warricombe; a tormenting metaphysical doubt of his own identity strangely beset him. With involuntary attempt to recover the familiar self he grasped his own wrist, and then, before he was aware, a laugh escaped him, an all but mocking laugh, unsuitable enough to the spirit of the moment. Mr.

Warricombe was startled, but looked up with a friendly smile.

'You fear,' he said, 'that this last speculation may seem rather fanciful to me?'

Godwin was biting his lip fiercely, and could not command himself to utterance of a word.

'By no means, I assure you,' added the other. 'It appeals to me very strongly.'

Peak rose from his chair.

'It struck me,' he said, 'that I had been preaching a sermon rather than taking part in a conversation. I'm afraid it is the habit of men who live a good deal alone to indulge in monologues.'

On his return home, the sight of *Bibel und Natur* and his sheets of laborious manuscript filled him with disgust. It was two or three days before he could again apply himself to the translation. Yet this expedient had undoubtedly been of great service to him in the matter of his relations with Mr. Warricombe. Without the aid of Reusch he would have found it difficult to speak naturally on the theme which drew Martin into confidences and established an intimacy between them.

Already they had discussed in detail the first half of the book. How a man of Mr. Warricombe's intelligence could take grave interest in an arid exegesis of the first chapter of Genesis, Godwin strove in vain to comprehend. Often enough the debates were perilously suggestive of burlesque, and, when alone, he relieved himself of the laughter he had scarce restrained. For instance, there was that terrible *thohu wabohu* of the second verse, a phrase preserved from the original, and tossed into all the corners of controversy. Was *thohu wabohu* the first condition of the earth, or was it merely a period of division between a previous state of things and creation as established by the Hexæmeron? Did light exist or not, previous to the *thohu wabohu?* Then, again, what kind of 'days' were the three which passed

before the birth of the sun? Special interest, of course, attached to the successive theories of theology on the origin of geologic strata. First came the 'theory of restitution,' which explained unbiblical antiquity by declaring that the strata belonged to a world before the Hexæmeron, a world which had been destroyed, and succeeded by the new creation. Less objectionable was the 'concordistic theory,' which interprets the 'six days' as so many vast periods of creative activity. But Reusch himself gave preference to the 'ideal theory,' the supporters whereof (diligently adapting themselves to the progress of science) hold that the six days are not to be understood as consecutive periods at all, but merely as six phases of the Creator's work.

By the exercise of watchfulness and dexterity, Peak managed for the most part to avoid expression of definite opinions. His attitude was that of a reverent (not yet reverend) student. Mr. Warricombe was less guarded, and sometimes allowed himself to profess that he saw nothing but vain ingenuity in Reusch's argument: as, for example, where the theologian, convinced that the patriarchs did really live to an abnormal age, suggests that man's life was subsequently shortened in order that 'sin might not flourish with such exuberance.' This passage caused Martin to smile.

'It won't do, it won't do,' he said, quietly. 'Far better apply his rationalism here as elsewhere. These are wonderful old stories, not to be understood literally. Nothing depends upon them—nothing essential.'

Thereupon Peak mused anxiously. Not for the first time there occurred to him a thought which suited only too well with his ironic habits of mind. What if this hypocritic comedy were altogether superfluous? What if Mr. Warricombe would have received him no less cordially had he avowed his sincere position, and contented himself with guarding against offensiveness?

Buckland, it was true, had suffered in his father's esteem on account of his unorthodoxy, but that young man had been too aggressive, too scornful. With prudence, would it not have been possible to win Martin's regard by fortifying the scientific rather than the dogmatic side of his intellect? If so, what a hopeless error had he committed!—But Sidwell! Was *she* liberal enough to take a personal interest in one who had renounced faith in revelation? He could not decide this question, for of Sidwell he knew much less than of her father. And it was idle to torment himself with such debate of the irreversible.

And, indeed, there seemed much reason for believing that Martin, whatever the extent of his secret doubts, was by temperament armed against agnosticism. Distinctly it comforted him to hear the unbelievers assailed —the friends of whom he spoke most heartily were all on the orthodox side; if ever a hint of gentle malice occurred in his conversation, it was when he spoke of a fallacy, a precipitate conclusion, detected in works of science. Probably he was too old to overcome this bias.

His view of the Bible appeared to harmonise with that which Peak put forth in one of their dialogues. 'The Scriptures were meant to be literally understood in primitive ages, and spiritually when the growth of science made it possible. Genesis was never intended to teach the facts of natural history; it takes phenomena as they appear to uninstructed people, and uses them only for the inculcation of moral lessons; it presents to the childhood of the world a few great elementary truths. And the way in which phenomena are spoken of in the Old Testament is never really incompatible with the facts as we know them nowadays. Take the miracle of the sun standing still, which is supposed to be a safe subject of ridicule. Why, it merely means that light was miraculously prolonged; the words used are

those which common people would at all times understand.'

(Was it necessary to have admitted the miracle? Godwin asked himself. At all events Mr. Warricombe nodded approvingly.)

'Then the narrative of the creation of man; that's not at all incompatible with his slow development through ages. To teach the scientific fact—if we yet really know it—would have been worse than useless. The story is meant to express that spirit, and not matter, is the source of all existence. Indeed, our knowledge of the true meaning of the Bible has increased with the growth of science, and naturally that must have been intended from the first. Things which do not concern man's relation to the spiritual have no place in this book; they are not within its province. Such things were discoverable by human reason, and the knowledge which achieves has nothing to do with a divine revelation.'

To Godwin it was a grinding of the air, but the listener appeared to think it profitable.

With his clerical friend, Mr. Lilywhite, he rarely touched on matters of religion. The vicar of St. Ethelreda's was a man well suited to support the social dignity of his Church. A gentleman before everything, he seemed incapable of prying into the state of a parishioner's soul; you saw in him the official representative of a Divinity characterised by well-bred tolerance. He had written a pleasant little book on the by-ways of Devon and Cornwall, which brought about his intimacy with the Warricombe household. Peak liked him more the better he knew him, and in the course of the summer they had one or two long walks together, conversing exclusively of the things of earth. Mr. Lilywhite troubled himself little about evolution; he spoke of trees and plants, of birds and animals, in a loving spirit, like the old simple naturalists. Geology did not come within his sphere.

'I'm very sorry,' he said, 'that I could never care much for it. Don't think I'm afraid of it—not I! I feel the grandeur of its scope, just as I do in the case of astronomy; but I have never brought myself to study either science. A narrowness of mind, no doubt. I can't go into such remote times and regions. I love the sunlight and the green fields of this little corner of the world—too well, perhaps: yes, perhaps too well.'

After one of these walks, he remarked to Mrs. Lilywhite:

'It's my impression that Mr. Peak has somehow been misled in his choice of a vocation. I don't think he'll do as a churchman.'

'Why not, Henry?' asked his wife, with gentle concern, for she still spoke of Peak's 'quiet moral force.'

'There's something too restless about him. I doubt whether he has really made up his mind on any subject whatever. Well, it's not easy to explain what I feel, but I don't think he will take Orders.'

Calling at the vicarage one afternoon in September, Godwin found Mrs. Lilywhite alone. She startled him by saying at once:

'An old acquaintance of yours was with us yesterday, Mr. Peak.'

'Who could that be, I wonder?'

He smiled softly, controlling his impulse to show quite another expression.

'You remember Mr. Bruno Chilvers?'

'Oh, yes!'

There was a constriction in his throat. Struggling to overcome it, he added:

'But I should have thought he had no recollection of me.'

'Quite the contrary, I assure you. He is to succeed Mr. Bell of St. Margaret's at Christmas; he was down here only for a day or two, and called upon my husband with a message from an old friend of ours. It appears

he used to know the Warricombes, when they lived at Kingsmill, and he had been to see them before visiting us; it was there your name was mentioned to him.'

Godwin had seated himself, and leaned forward, his hands grasping the glove he had drawn off.

'We were contemporaries at Whitelaw College,' he observed.

'So we learnt from him. He spoke of you with the greatest interest; he was delighted to hear that you contemplated taking Orders. Of course we knew Mr. Chilvers by reputation, but my husband had no idea that he was coming to Exeter. What an energetic man he is! In a few hours he seemed to have met everyone, and to have learnt everything. My husband says he felt quite rebuked by such a display of vigour!'

Even in his discomposure, graver than any that had affected him since his talks with Buckland Warricombe, Peak was able to notice that the Rev. Bruno had not made a wholly favourable impression upon the Lily-whites. There was an amiable causticity in that mention of his 'display of vigour,' such as did not often characterise Mrs. Lilywhite's comments. Finding that the vicar would be away till evening, Godwin stayed for only a quarter of an hour, and when he had escaped it irritated and alarmed him to reflect how unusual his behaviour must have appeared to the good lady.

The blow was aimed at his self-possession from such an unlikely quarter. In Church papers he had frequently come across Chilvers' name, and the sight of it caused him a twofold disturbance: it was hateful to have memories of humiliation revived, and perhaps still more harassing to be forced upon acknowledgment of the fact that he stood as an obscure aspirant at the foot of the ladder which his old rival was triumphantly ascending. Bad enough to be classed in any way with such a man as Chilvers; but to be regarded as at one with him in religious faith, to be forbidden the utterance of scorn

when Chilvers was extolled, stung him so keenly that he rushed into any distraction to elude the thought. When he was suffering shame under the gaze of Buckland Warricombe he remembered Chilvers, and shrank as before a merited scoff. But the sensation had not been abiding enough to affect his conduct. He had said to himself that he should never come in contact with the fellow, and that, after all, community of religious profession meant no more, under their respective circumstances, than if both were following law or physic.

But the unforeseen had happened. In a few months, the Rev. Bruno Chilvers would be a prominent figure about the streets of Exeter; would be frequently seen at the Warricombes', at the Lilywhites', at the houses of their friends. His sermons at St. Margaret's would doubtless attract, and form a staple topic of conversation. Worse than all, his expressions of 'interest' and 'delight' made it probable that he would seek out his College competitor and offer the hand of brotherhood. These things were not to be avoided—save by abandonment of hopes, save by retreat, by yielding to a hostile destiny.

That Chilvers might talk here and there of Whitelaw stories was comparatively unimportant. The Warricombes must already know all that could be told, and what other people heard did not much matter. It was the man himself that Peak could not endure. Dissembling had hitherto been no light task. The burden had more than once pressed so gallingly that its permanent support seemed impossible; but to stand before Bruno Chilvers in the attitude of humble emulation, to give respectful ear whilst the popular cleric advised or encouraged, or bestowed pontifical praise, was comparable only to a searing of the flesh with red irons. Even with assured prospect of recompense in the shape of Sidwell Warricombe's heart and hand, he could hardly submit to such an ordeal. As it was, reason having so

often convinced him that he clung to a visionary hope, the torture became gratuitous, and its mere suggestion inspired him with a fierce resentment destructive of all his purposes.

For several days he scarcely left the house. To wrath and dread had succeeded a wretched torpor, during which his mind kept revolving the thoughts prompted by his situation, turbidly and to no issue. He tasted all the bitterness of the solitude to which he had condemned himself; there was not a living soul with whom he could commune. At moments he was possessed with the desire of going straightway to London, and making Earwaker the confidant of all his folly. But that demanded an exertion of which he was physically incapable. He thought of the old home at Twybridge, and was tempted also in that direction. His mother would welcome him with human kindness; beneath her roof he could lie dormant until fate should again point his course. He even wrote a letter saying that in all probability he should pay a visit to Twybridge before long. But the impulse was only of an hour's duration, for he remembered that to talk with his mother would necessitate all manner of new falsehoods, a thickening of the atmosphere of lies which already oppressed him. No; if he quitted Exeter, it must be on a longer journey. He must resume his purpose of seeking some distant country, where new conditions of life would allow him to try his fortune at least as an honest adventurer. In many parts of colonial England his technical knowledge would have a value, and were there not women to be won beneath other skies—women perhaps of subtler charm than the old hidebound civilisation produced? Reminiscences of scenes and figures in novels he had read nourished the illusion. He pictured some thriving little town at the ends of the earth, where a young Englishman of good manners and unusual culture would easily be admitted to the intimacy of the richest families; he saw the ideal

colonist (a man of good birth, but a sower of wild oats in his youth) with two or three daughters about him—beautiful girls, wondrously self-instructed—living amid romantic dreams of the old world, and of the lover who would some day carry them off (with a substantial share of papa's wealth) to Europe and the scenes of their imagination.

The mind has marvellous methods of self-defence against creeping lethargy of despair. At the point to which he had been reduced by several days of blank despondency, Peak was able to find genuine encouragement in visions such as this. He indulged his fancy until the vital force began to stir once more within him, and then, with one angry sweep, all his theological books and manuscripts were flung out of sight. Away with this detestable mummery! Now let Bruno Chilvers pour his eloquence from the pulpit of St. Margaret's, and rear to what heights he could the edifice of his social glory; men of that stamp were alone fitted to thrive in England. Was not *he* almost certainly a hypocrite, masking his brains (for brains he had) under a show of broadest Anglicanism? But his career was throughout consistent. He trod in the footsteps of his father, and with inherited aptitude moulded antique traditions into harmony with the taste of the times. Compared with such a man, Peak felt himself a bungler. The wonder was that his clumsy lying had escaped detection.

Another day, and he had done nothing whatever, but was still buoyed up by the reaction of visionary hope. His need now was of communicating his change of purpose to some friendly hearer. A week had passed since he had exchanged a word with anyone but Mrs. Roots, and converse he must. Why not with Mr. Warricombe? That was plainly the next step: to see Martin and make known to him that after all he could not become a clergyman. No need of hinting a conscientious reason. At all events, nothing more definite than a sense of

personal unfitness, a growing perception of difficulties inherent in his character. It would be very interesting to hear Mr. Warricombe's replies.

A few minutes after this decision was taken, he set off towards the Old Tiverton Road, walking at great speed, flourishing his stick—symptoms of the nervous cramp (so to speak) which he was dispelling. He reached the house, and his hand was on the bell, when an unexpected opening of the door presented Louis Warricombe just coming forth for a walk. They exchanged amiabilities, and Louis made known that his father and mother were away on a visit to friends in Cornwall.

'But pray come in,' he added, offering to re-enter.

Peak excused himself, for it was evident that Louis made a sacrifice to courtesy. But at that moment there approached from the garden Fanny Warricombe and her friend Bertha Lilywhite, eldest daughter of the genial vicar; they shook hands with Godwin, Fanny exclaiming:

'Don't go away, Mr. Peak. Have a cup of tea with us—Sidwell is at home. I want to show you a strange sort of spleenwort that I gathered this morning.'

'In that case,' said her brother, smiling, 'I may confess that I have an appointment. Pray forgive me for hurrying off, Mr. Peak.'

Godwin was embarrassed, but the sprightly girl repeated her summons, and he followed into the house.

V

HAVING led the way to the drawing-room, Fanny retired again for a few moments, to fetch the fern of which she had spoken, leaving Peak in conversation with little Miss Lilywhite. Bertha was a rather shy girl of fifteen, not easily induced, under circumstances such as these, to utter more than monosyllables, and Godwin, occupied with the unforeseen results of his call, talked about the weather. With half-conscious absurdity he had begun to sketch a theory of his own regarding rain-clouds and estuaries (Bertha listening with an air of the gravest attention) when Fanny reappeared, followed by Sidwell. Peak searched the latter's face for indications of her mood, but could discover nothing save a spirit of gracious welcome. Such aspect was a matter of course, and he knew it. None the less, his nervousness and the state of mind engendered by a week's miserable solitude, tempted him to believe that Sidwell did not always wear that smile in greeting a casual caller. This was the first time that she had received him without the countenance of Mrs. Warricombe. Observing her perfect manner, as she sat down and began to talk, he asked himself what her age really was. The question had never engaged his thoughts. Eleven years ago, when he saw her at the house near Kingsmill and again at Whitelaw College, she looked a very young girl, but whether of thirteen or sixteen he could not at the time have determined, and such a margin of possibility allowed her now to have reached—it might be—her

twenty-seventh summer. But twenty-seven drew perilously near to thirty; no, no, Sidwell could not be more than twenty-five. Her eyes still had the dewy freshness of flowering maidenhood; her cheek, her throat, were so exquisitely young——

In how divine a calm must this girl have lived to show, even at five-and-twenty, features as little marked by inward perturbation as those of an infant! Her position in the world considered, one could forgive her for having borne so lightly the inevitable sorrows of life, for having dismissed so readily the spiritual doubts which were the heritage of her time; but was she a total stranger to passion? Did not the fact of her still remaining unmarried make probable such a deficiency in her nature? Had she a place among the women whom coldness of temperament preserves in a bloom like that of youth, until fading hair and sinking cheek betray them——?

Whilst he thought thus, Godwin was in appearance busy with the fern Fanny had brought for his inspection. He talked about it, but in snatches, with intervals of abstractedness.

Yet might he not be altogether wrong? Last year, when he observed Sidwell in the Cathedral and subsequently at home, his impression had been that her face was of rather pallid and dreamy cast; he recollected that distinctly. Had she changed, or did familiarity make him less sensible of her finer traits? Possibly she enjoyed better health nowadays, and, if so, it might result from influences other than physical. Her air of quiet happiness seemed to him especially noticeable this afternoon, and as he brooded there came upon him a dread which, under the circumstances was quite irrational, but for all that troubled his views. Perhaps Sidwell was betrothed to some one? He knew of but one likely person—Miss Moorhouse's brother. About a month ago the Warricombes had been on a visit at

Budleigh Salterton, and something might then have happened. Pangs of jealousy smote him, nor could he assuage them by reminding himself that he had no concern whatever in Sidwell's future.

'Will Mr. Warricombe be long away?' he asked, coldly.

'A day or two. I hope you didn't wish particularly to see him to-day?'

'Oh, no.'

'Do you know, Mr. Peak,' put in Fanny, 'that we are all going to London next month, to live there for half a year?'

Godwin exhibited surprise. He looked from the speaker to her sister, and Sidwell, as she smiled confirmation, bent very slightly towards him.

'We have made up our minds, after much uncertainty,' she said. 'My brother Buckland seems to think that we are falling behind in civilisation.'

'So we are,' affirmed Fanny, 'as Mr. Peak would admit, if only he could be sincere.'

'Am I never sincere, then, Miss Fanny?' Godwin asked.

'I only meant to say that nobody can be when the rules of politeness interfere. Don't you think it's a pity? We might tell one another the truth in a pleasant way.'

'I agree with you. But then we must be civilised indeed. How do you think of London, Miss Warricombe? Which of its aspects most impresses you?'

Sidwell answered rather indefinitely, and ended by mentioning that in *Villette*, which she had just re-read, Charlotte Brontë makes a contrast between the City and the West End, and greatly prefers the former.

'Do you agree with her, Mr. Peak?'

'No, I can't. One understands the mood in which she wrote that; but a little more experience would have led her to see the contrast in a different light. That term, the West End, includes much that is despicable, but it

means also the best results of civilisation. The City is hateful to me, and for a reason which I only understood after many an hour of depression in walking about its streets. It represents the ascendency of the average man.'

Sidwell waited for fuller explanation.

'A liberal mind,' Peak continued, 'is revolted by the triumphal procession that roars perpetually through the City highways. With myriad voices the City bellows its brutal scorn of everything but material advantage. There every humanising influence is contemptuously disregarded. I know, of course, that the trader may have his quiet home, where art and science and humanity are the first considerations; but the *mass* of traders, corporate and victorious, crush all such things beneath their heels. Take your stand (or try to do so) anywhere near the Exchange; the hustling and jolting to which you are exposed represents the very spirit of the life about you. Whatever is gentle and kindly and meditative must here go to the wall—trampled, spattered, ridiculed. Here the average man has it all his own way—a gross utilitarian power.'

'Yes, I can see that,' Sidwell replied, thoughtfully. 'And perhaps it also represents the triumphant forces of our time.'

He looked keenly at her, with a smile of delight.

'That also! The power which centres in the world's money-markets—plutocracy.'

In conversing with Sidwell, he had never before found an opportunity of uttering his vehement prejudices. The gentler side of his character had sometimes expressed itself, but those impulses which were vastly more significant lay hidden beneath the dissimulation he consistently practised. For the first time he was able to look into Sidwell's face with honest directness, and what he saw there strengthened his determination to talk on with the same freedom.

'You don't believe, then,' said Sidwell, 'that democracy is the proper name for the state into which we are passing?'

'Only if one can understand democracy as the opening of social privileges to free competition amongst men of trade. And social privilege is everything; home politics refer to nothing else.'

Fanny, true to the ingenuous principle of her years, put a direct question:

'Do you approve of real democracy, Mr. Peak?'

He answered with another question:

'Have you read the "Life of Phokion" in Plutarch?'

'No, I'm sorry to say.'

'There's a story about him which I have enjoyed since I was your age. Phokion was once delivering a public speech, and at a certain point the majority of his hearers broke into applause; whereupon he turned to certain of his friends who stood near and asked, "What have I said amiss?"'

Fanny laughed.

'Then you despise public opinion?'

'With heart and soul!'

It was to Sidwell that he directed the reply. Though overcome by the joy of such an utterance, he felt that, considering the opinions and position of Buckland Warricombe, he was perhaps guilty of ill manners. But Sidwell manifested no disapproval.

'Did you know that story?' Fanny asked of her.

'It's quite new to me.'

'Then I'm sure you'll read the "Life of Phokion" as soon as possible. He will just suit you, Sidwell.'

Peak heard this with a shock of surprise which thrilled in him deliciously. He had the strongest desire to look again at Sidwell but refrained. As no one spoke, he turned to Bertha Lilywhite and put a commonplace question.

A servant entered with the tea-tray, and placed it

on a small table near Fanny. Godwin looked at the younger girl; it seemed to him that there was an excess of colour in her cheeks. Had a glance from Sidwell rebuked her? With his usual rapidity of observation and inference he made much of this trifle.

Contrary to what he expected, Sidwell's next remark was in a tone of cheerfulness, almost of gaiety.

'One advantage of our stay in London will be that home will seem more delightful than ever when we return.'

'I suppose you won't be back till next summer?'

'I am afraid not.'

'Shall you be living here then?' Fanny inquired.

'It's very doubtful.'

He wished to answer with a decided negative, but his tongue refused. Sidwell was regarding him with calm but earnest eyes, and he knew, without caring to reflect, that his latest projects were crumbling.

'Have you been to see our friends at Budleigh Salterton yet?' she asked.

'Not yet. I hope to in a few days.'

Pursuing the subject, he was able to examine her face as she spoke of Mr. Moorhouse. His conjecture was assuredly baseless.

Fanny and Bertha began to talk together of domestic affairs, and presently, when tea-cups were laid aside, the two girls went to another part of the room; then they withdrew altogether. Peak was monologising on English art as represented at the Academy, but finding himself alone with Sidwell (it had never before happened) he became silent. Ought he to take his leave? He must already have been sitting here more than half-an-hour. But the temptation of *tête-à-tête* was irresistible.

'You had a visit from Mr. Chilvers the other day?' he remarked, abruptly.

'Yes; did he call to see you?'

Her tone gave evidence that she would not have introduced this topic.

'No; I heard from Mrs. Lilywhite. He had been to the vicarage. Has he changed much since he was at Whitelaw?'

'So many years must make a difference at that time of life,' Sidwell answered, smiling.

'But does he show the same peculiarities of manner?'

He tried to put the question without insistency, in a tone quite compatible with friendliness. Her answer, given with a look of amusement, satisfied him that there was no fear of her taking Mr. Chilvers too seriously.

'Yes. I think he speaks in much the same way.'

'Have you read any of his publications?'

'One or two. We have his lecture on *Altruism*.'

'I happen to know it. There are good things in it, I think. But I dislike his modern interpretation of old principles.'

'You think it dangerous?'

He no longer regarded her frankly, and in the consciousness of her look upon him he knit his brows.

'I think it both dangerous and offensive. Not a few clergymen nowadays, who imagine themselves free from the letter and wholly devoted to spirit, are doing their best in the cause of materialism. They surrender the very points at issue between religion and worldliness. They are so blinded by a vague humanitarian impulse as to make the New Testament an oracle of popular Radicalism.'

Sidwell looked up.

'I never quite understood, Mr. Peak, how you regard Radicalism. You think it opposed to all true progress?'

'Utterly, as concerns any reasonable limit of time.'

'Buckland, as you know, maintains that spiritual progress is only possible by this way.'

'I can't venture to contradict him,' said Godwin; 'for it may be that advance is destined only to come

after long retrogression and anarchy. Perhaps the way *does* lie through such miseries. But we can't foresee that with certainty, and those of us who hate the present tendency of things must needs assert their hatred as strongly as possible, seeing that we *may* have a more hopeful part to play than seems likely.'

'I like that view,' replied Sidwell, in an undertone.

'My belief,' pursued Godwin, with an earnestness very agreeable to himself, for he had reached the subject on which he could speak honestly, 'is that an instructed man can only hold views such as your brother's—hopeful views of the immediate future—if he has never been brought into close contact with the lower classes. Buckland doesn't know the people for whom he pleads.'

'You think them so degraded?'

'It is impossible, without seeming inhumanly scornful, to give a just account of their ignorance and baseness. The two things, speaking generally, go together. Of the ignorant, there are very few indeed who can think purely or aspiringly. You, of course, object the teaching of Christianity; but the lowly and the humble of whom it speaks scarcely exist, scarcely can exist, in our day and country. A ludicrous pretence of education is banishing every form of native simplicity. In the large towns, the populace sink deeper and deeper into a vicious vulgarity, and every rural district is being affected by the spread of contagion. To flatter the proletariat is to fight against all the good that still characterises educated England—against reverence for the beautiful, against magnanimity, against enthusiasm of mind, heart, and soul.'

He quivered with vehemence of feeling, and the flush which rose to his hearer's cheek, the swimming brightness of her eye, proved that a strong sympathy stirred within her.

'I know nothing of the uneducated in towns,' she said, 'but the little I have seen of them in country places

certainly supports your opinion. I could point to two or three families who have suffered distinct degradation owing to what most people call an improvement in their circumstances. Father often speaks of such instances, comparing the state of things now with what he can remember.'

'My own experience,' pursued Godwin, 'has been among the lower classes in London. I don't mean the very poorest, of whom one hears so much nowadays; I never went among them because I had no power of helping them, and the sight of their vileness would only have moved me to unjust hatred. But the people who earn enough for their needs, and whose spiritual guide is the Sunday newspaper—I know them, because for a long time I was obliged to lodge in their houses. Only a consuming fire could purify the places where they dwell. Don't misunderstand me; I am not charging them with what are commonly held vices and crimes, but with the consistent love of everything that is ignoble, with utter deadness to generous impulse, with the fatal habit of low mockery. And *these* are the people who really direct the democratic movement. They set the tone in politics; they are debasing art and literature; even the homes of wealthy people begin to show the effects of their influence. One hears men and women of gentle birth using phrases which originate with shop-boys; one sees them reading print which is addressed to the coarsest million. They crowd to entertainments which are deliberately adapted to the lowest order of mind. When commercial interest is supreme, how can the tastes of the majority fail to lead and control?'

Though he spoke from the depths of his conviction, and was so moved that his voice rose and fell in tones such as a drawing-room seldom hears, he yet kept anxious watch upon Sidwell's countenance. That hint afforded him by Fanny was invaluable; it had enabled him to appeal to Sidwell's nature by the ardent expression of

what was sincerest in his own. She too, he at length understood, had the aristocratic temperament. This explained her to him, supplied the key of doubts and difficulties which had troubled him in her presence. It justified, moreover, the feelings with which she had inspired him—feelings which this hour of intimate converse had exalted to passion. His heart thrilled with hope. Where sympathies so profound existed, what did it matter that there was variance on a few points between his intellect and hers? He felt the power to win her, and to defy every passing humiliation that lay in his course.

Sidwell raised her eyes with a look which signified that she was shaping a question diffidently.

'Have you always thought so hopelessly of our times?'

'Oh, I had my stage of optimism,' he answered, smiling. 'Though I never put faith in the masses, I once believed that the conversion of the educated to a purely human religion would set things moving in the right way. It was ignorance of the world.'

He paused a moment, then added:

'In youth one marvels that men remain at so low a stage of civilisation. Later in life, one is astonished that they have advanced so far.'

Sidwell met his look with appreciative intelligence and murmured:

'In spite of myself, I believe that expresses a truth.'

Peak was about to reply, when Fanny and her friend reappeared. Bertha approached for the purpose of taking leave, and for a minute or two Sidwell talked with her. The young girls withdrew again together.

By the clock on the mantelpiece it was nearly six. Godwin did not resume his seat, though Sidwell had done so. He looked towards the window, and was all but lost in abstraction, when the soft voice again addressed him:

'But you have not chosen your life's work without some hope of doing good?'

'Do you think,' he asked gently, 'that I shall be out of place in the Christian Church?'

'No—no, I certainly don't think that. But will you tell me what you have set before yourself?'

He drew nearer and leaned upon the back of a chair.

'I hope for what I shall perhaps never attain. Whatever my first steps may be—I am not independent; I must take the work that offers—it is my ambition to become the teacher of some rural parish which is still unpolluted by the influences of which we have been speaking—or, at all events, is still capable of being rescued. For work in crowded centres, I am altogether unfit; my prejudices are too strong; I should do far more harm than good. But among a few simple people I think my efforts mightn't be useless. I can't pretend to care for anything but individuals. The few whom I know and love are of more importance to me than all the blind multitude rushing to destruction. I hate the word *majority;* it is the few, the very few, that have always kept alive whatever of effectual good we see in the human race. There are individuals who outweigh, in every kind of value, generations of ordinary people. To some remote little community I hope to give the best energies of my life. My teaching will avoid doctrine and controversy. I shall take the spirit of the Gospels, and labour to make it a practical guide. No doubt you find inconsistencies in me; but remember that I shall not declare myself to those I instruct as I have done to you. I have been laying stress on my antipathies. In the future it will be a duty and a pleasure to forget these and foster my sympathies, which also are strong when opportunity is given them.'

Sidwell listened, her face bent downwards but not hidden from the speaker.

'My nature is intolerant,' he went on, 'and I am

easily roused to an antagonism which destroys my peace. It is only by living apart, amid friendly circumstances, that I can cultivate the qualities useful to myself and others. The sense that my life was being wasted determined me a year ago to escape the world's uproar and prepare myself in quietness for this task. The resolve was taken here, in your house.'

'Are you quite sure,' asked Sidwell, 'that such simple duties and satisfactions '——

The sentence remained incomplete, or rather was finished in the timid glance she gave him.

'Such a life wouldn't be possible to me,' he replied, with unsteady voice, 'if I were condemned to intellectual solitude. But I have dared to hope that I shall not always be alone.'

A parched throat would have stayed his utterance, even if words had offered themselves. But sudden confusion beset his mind—a sense of having been guilty of monstrous presumption—a panic which threw darkness about him and made him grasp the chair convulsively. When he recovered himself and looked at Sidwell there was a faint smile on her lips, inexpressibly gentle.

'That's the rough outline of my projects,' he said, in his ordinary voice, moving a few steps away. 'You see that I count much on fortune; at the best, it may be years before I can get my country living.'

With a laugh, he came towards her and offered his hand for good-bye. Sidwell rose.

'You have interested me very much. Whatever assistance it may be in my father's power to offer you, I am sure you may count upon.'

'I am already much indebted to Mr. Warricombe's kindness.'

They shook hands without further speech, and Peak went his way.

. . . . . .

For an hour or two he was powerless to collect his

thoughts. All he had said repeated itself again and again, mixed up with turbid comments, with deadly fears and frantic bursts of confidence, with tumult of passion and merciless logic of self-criticism. Did Sidwell understand that sentence: 'I have dared to hope that I shall not always be alone'? Was it not possible that she might interpret it as referring to some unknown woman whom he loved? If not, if his voice and features had betrayed him, what could her behaviour mean, except distinct encouragement? 'You have interested me very much.' But could she have used such words if his meaning had been plain to her? Far more likely that her frank kindness came of misconception. She imagined him the lover of some girl of his own 'station'—a toiling governess, or some such person; it could not enter into her mind that he 'dared' so recklessly as the truth implied.

But the glow of sympathy with which she heard his immeasurable scorn: there was the spirit that defies artificial distances. Why had he not been bolder? At this rate he must spend a lifetime in preparing for the decisive moment. When would another such occasion offer itself?

Women are won by audacity; the poets have repeated it from age to age, and some truth there must be in the saying. Suspicion of self-interest could not but attach to him; that was inherent in the circumstances. He must rely upon the sincerity of his passion, which indeed was beginning to rack and rend him. A woman is sensitive to that, especially a woman of Sidwell's refinement. In matters of the intellect she may be misled, but she cannot mistake quivering ardour for design simulating love. If it were impossible to see her again in private before she left Exeter, then he must write to her. Half a year of complete uncertainty, and of counterfeiting face to face with Bruno Chilvers, would overtax his resolution.

The evening went by he knew not how. Long after nightfall he was returning from an aimless ramble by way of the Old Tiverton Road. At least he would pass the house, and soothe or inflame his emotions by resting for a moment thus near to Sidwell.

What? He had believed himself incapable of erotic madness? And he pressed his forehead against the stones of the wall to relieve his sick dizziness.

It was Sidwell or death. Into what a void of hideous futility would his life be cast, if this desire proved vain, and he were left to combat alone with the memory of his dishonour! With Sidwell the reproach could be outlived. She would understand him, pardon him—and thereafter a glorified existence, rivalling that of whosoever has been most exultant among the sons of men!

PART IV

I

EARWAKER'S struggle with the editor-in-chief of *The Weekly Post* and the journalist Kenyon came to its natural close about a month after Godwin Peak's disappearance. Only a vein of obstinacy in his character had kept him so long in a position he knew to be untenable. From the first his sympathy with Mr. Runcorn's politics had been doubtful, and experience of the working of a Sunday newspaper, which appealed to the ignobly restive, could not encourage his adhesion to this form of Radicalism. He anticipated dismissal by retirement, and Kenyon, a man of coarsely vigorous fibre, at once stepped into his place.

Now that he had leisure to review the conflict, Earwaker understood that circumstances had but hastened his transition from a moderate ardour in the parliamentary cause of the people, to a regretful neutrality regarding all political movements. Birth allied him with the proletarian class, and his sentiment in favour of democracy was unendangered by the disillusions which must come upon every intellectual man brought into close contact with public affairs. The course of an education essentially aristocratic (Greek and Latin can have no other tendency so long as they are the privilege of the few) had not affected his natural bent, nor was he the man to be driven into reaction because of obstacles to his faith inseparable from human weakness. He had learnt that the emancipation of the poor and untaught must proceed more slowly than he once hoped—that was

all. Restored to generous calm, he could admit that such men as Runcorn and Kenyon—the one with his polyarchic commercialism, the other with his demagogic violence—had possibly a useful part to play at the present stage of things. He, however, could have no place in that camp. Too indiscreetly he had hoisted his standard of idealism, and by stubborn resistance of insuperable forces he had merely brought forward the least satisfactory elements of his own character. 'Hold on!' cried Malkin. 'Fight the grovellers to the end!' But Earwaker had begun to see himself in a light of ridicule. There was just time to save his self-respect.

He was in no concern for his daily bread. With narrower resources in the world of print, he might have been compelled, like many another journalist, to swallow his objections and write as Runcorn dictated; for the humble folks at home could not starve to allow him the luxury of conscientiousness, whatever he might have been disposed to do on his own account. Happily, his pen had a scope beyond politics, and by working steadily for reviews, with which he was already connected, he would be able to keep his finances in reasonable order until, perchance, some hopeful appointment offered itself. In a mood of much cheerfulness he turned for ever from party uproar, and focussed his mind upon those interests of humanity which so rarely coincide with the aims of any league among men.

Half a year went by, and at length he granted himself a short holiday, the first in a twelvemonth. It took the form of a voyage to Marseilles, and thence of a leisurely ramble up the Rhone. Before returning, he spent a day or two in Paris, for the most part beneath café awnings, or on garden seats—an indulgence of contented laziness.

On the day of his departure, he climbed the towers of Notre Dame, and lingered for half-an-hour in pleasant solitude among the stone monsters. His reverie was broken by an English voice, loud and animated:

'Come and look at this old demon of a bird; he has always been a favourite of mine.—Sure you're not tired, Miss Bella? When you want to rest, Miss Lily, mind you say so at once. What a day!—What a sky!—When I was last up here I had my hat blown away. I watched it as far as Montmartre. A fact! Never knew such a wind in my life—unless it was that tornado I told you about——Hollo! By the powers, if that isn't Earwaker! Confound you, old fellow! How the deuce do you do? What a glorious meeting! Hadn't the least idea where you were!—Let me have the pleasure of introducing you to Mrs. Jacox—and to Miss Jacox—and to Miss Lily. They all know you thoroughly well. Now who would have thought of our meeting up here! Glorious!'

It was with some curiosity that Earwaker regarded the companions of his friend Malkin—whose proximity was the last thing he could have imagined, as only a few weeks ago he had heard of the restless fellow's departing, on business unknown, for Boston, U.S. Mrs. Jacox, the widow whose wrongs had made such an impression on Malkin, announced herself, in a thin, mealy face and rag-doll figure, as not less than forty, though her irresponsible look made it evident that years profited her nothing, and suggested an explanation of the success with which she had been victimised. She was stylishly dressed, and had the air of enjoying an unusual treat. Her children were of more promising type, though Earwaker would hardly have supposed them so old as he knew them to be. Bella, just beyond her fourteenth year, had an intelligent prettiness, but was excessively shy; in giving her hand to the stranger she flushed over face and neck, and her bosom palpitated visibly. Her sister, two years younger, was a mere child, rather self-conscious, but of laughing temper. Their toilet suited ill with that of their mother; its plainness and negligence might have passed muster in London, but

here, under the lucent sky, it seemed a wrong to their budding maidenhood.

'Mrs. Jacox is on the point of returning to England,' Malkin explained. 'I happened to meet her, by chance —I'm always meeting my friends by chance; you, for instance, Earwaker. She is so good as to allow me to guide her and the young ladies to a few of the sights of Paris.'

'O Mr. Malkin!' exclaimed the widow, with a stress on the exclamation peculiar to herself—two notes of deprecating falsetto. 'How can you say it is good of me, when I'm sure there are no words for your kindness to us all! If only you knew our debt to your friend, Mr. Earwaker! To our dying day we must all remember it. It is entirely through Mr. Malkin that we are able to leave that most disagreeable Rouen —a place I shall never cease to think of with horror. O Mr. Earwaker! you have only to think of that wretched railway station, stuck between two black tunnels! O Mr. Malkin!'

'What are you doing?' Malkin inquired of the journalist. 'How long shall you be here? Why haven't I heard from you?'

'I go to London to-night.'

'And we to-morrow. On Friday I'll look you up. Stay, can't you dine with me this evening? Anywhere you like. These ladies will be glad to be rid of me, and to dine in peace at their hotel.'

'O Mr. Malkin!' piped the widow, 'you know how very far that is from the truth. But we shall be very glad indeed to know that you are enjoying yourself with Mr. Earwaker.'

The friends made an appointment to meet near the Madeleine, and Earwaker hastened to escape the sound of Mrs. Jacox's voice.

Punctual at the rendezvous Malkin talked with his wonted effusiveness as he led towards the Café Anglais.

'I've managed it, my boy! The most complete success! I had to run over to Boston to get hold of a scoundrelly relative of that poor woman. You should have seen how I came over him—partly dignified sternness, partly justifiable cajolery. The affair only wanted some one to take it up in earnest. I have secured her about a couple of hundred a year—withheld on the most paltry and transparent pretences. They're going to live at Wrotham, in Kent, where Mrs. Jacox has friends. I never thought myself so much of a man of business. Of course old Haliburton, the lawyer, had a hand in it, but without my personal energy it would have taken him a year longer. What do you think of the girls? How do you like Bella?'

'A pretty child.'

'Child? Well, yes, yes—immature, of course; but I'm rather in the habit of thinking of her as a young lady. In three years she'll be seventeen, you know. Of course you couldn't form a judgment of her character. She's quite remarkably mature for her age; and, what delights me most of all, a sturdy Radical! She takes the most intelligent interest in all political and social movements, I assure you! There's a great deal of democratic fire in her.'

'You're sure it isn't reflected from your own fervour?'

'Not a bit of it! You should have seen her excitement when we were at the Bastille Column yesterday. She'll make a splendid woman, I assure you. Lily's very interesting, too—profoundly interesting. But then she is certainly very young, so I can't feel so sure of her on the great questions. She hasn't her sister's earnestness, I fancy.'

In the after-glow of dinner, Malkin became still more confidential.

'You remember what I said to you long since? My mind is made up—practically made up. I shall devote

myself to Bella's education, in the hope—you understand me? Impossible to have found a girl who suited better with my aspirations. She has known the hardships of poverty, poor thing, and that will keep her for ever in sympathy with the downtrodden classes. She has a splendid intelligence, and it shall be cultivated to the utmost.'

'One word,' said Earwaker, soberly. 'We have heard before of men who waited for girls to grow up. Be cautious, my dear fellow, both on your own account and hers.'

'My dear Earwaker! Don't imagine for a moment that I take it for granted she will get to be fond of me. My attitude is one of the most absolute discretion. You must have observed how I behaved to them all—scrupulous courtesy, I trust; no more familiarity than any friend might be permitted. I should never dream of addressing the girls without ceremonious prefix—never! I talk of Bella's education, but be assured that I regard my own as a matter of quite as much importance. I mean, that I shall strive incessantly to make myself worthy of her. No laxity! For these next three years I shall live as becomes a man who has his eyes constantly on a high ideal—the pure and beautiful girl whom he humbly hopes to win for a wife.'

The listener was moved. He raised his wine-glass to conceal the smile which might have been misunderstood. In his heart he felt more admiration than had yet mingled with his liking for this strange fellow.

'And Mrs. Jacox herself,' pursued Malkin; 'she has her weaknesses, as we all have. I don't think her a very strong-minded woman, to tell the truth. But there's a great deal of goodness in her. If there's one thing I desire in people, it is the virtue of gratitude, and Mrs. Jacox is grateful almost to excess for the paltry exertions I have made on her behalf. You know that kind of thing costs me nothing; you know I like run-

ning about and getting things done. But the poor woman imagines that I have laid her under an eternal obligation. Of course I shall show her in time that it was nothing at all; that she might have done just as much for herself if she had known how to go about it.'

Earwaker was musing, a wrinkle of uneasiness at the corner of his eye.

'She isn't the kind of woman, you know, one can regard as a mother. But we are the best possible friends. She *may*, perhaps, think of me as a possible son-in-law. Poor thing; I hope she does. Perhaps it will help to put her mind at rest about the girls.'

'Then shall you often be down at Wrotham?' inquired the journalist, abstractedly.

'Oh, not often—that is to say, only once a month or so, just to look in. I wanted to ask you: do you think I might venture to begin a correspondence with Bella?'

'M—m—m! I can't say.'

'It would be so valuable, you know. I could suggest books for her reading; I could help her in her study of politics, and so on.'

'Well, think about it. But be cautious, I beg of you. Now I must be off. Only just time enough to get my traps to the station.'

'I'll come with you. Gare du Nord? Oh, plenty of time, plenty of time! Nothing so abominable as waiting for trains. I make a point of never getting to the station more than three minutes before time. Astonishing what one can do in three minutes! I want to tell you about an adventure I had in Boston. Met a fellow so devilish like Peak that I *couldn't* believe it wasn't he himself. I spoke to him, but he swore that he knew not the man. Never saw such a likeness!'

'Curious. It may have been Peak.'

'By all that's suspicious, I can't help thinking the same! He had an English accent, too.'

'Queer business, this of Peak's. I hope I may live to hear the end of the story.'

They left the restaurant, and in a few hours Earwaker was again on English soil.

At Staple Inn a pile of letters awaited him, among them a note from Christian Moxey, asking for an appointment as soon as possible after the journalist's return. Earwaker at once sent an invitation, and on the next evening Moxey came. An intimacy had grown up between the two, since the mysterious retreat of their common friend. Christian was at first lost without the companionship of Godwin Peak; he forsook his studies, and fell into a state of complete idleness which naturally fostered his tendency to find solace in the decanter. With Earwaker, he could not talk as unreservedly as with Peak, but on the other hand there was a tonic influence in the journalist's personality which he recognised as beneficial. Earwaker was steadily making his way in the world, lived a life of dignified independence. What was the secret of these strong, calm natures? Might it not be learnt by studious inspection?

Born in Exile—Galley 75.

'How well you look!' Christian exclaimed, on entering. 'We enjoyed your Provençal letter enormously. That's a ramble I have always meant to do. Next year perhaps.'

'Why not this? Haven't you got into a dangerous habit of postponement?'

'Yes, I'm afraid I have. But, by-the-bye, no news of Peak, I suppose?'

Earwaker related the story he had heard from Malkin, adding:

'You must remember that they met only once in London; Malkin might very well mistake another man for Peak.'

'Yes,' replied the other musingly. 'Yet it isn't impossible that Peak has gone over there. If so, what on

earth can he be up to? Why *should* he hide from his friends?'

'*Cherchez la femme*,' said the journalist, with a smile. 'I can devise no other explanation.'

'But I can't see that it would be an explanation at all. Grant even—something unavowable, you know—are we Puritans? How could it harm him, at all events, to let us know his whereabouts? No such mystery ever came into my experience. It is too bad of Peak; it's confoundedly unkind.'

'Suppose he has found it necessary to assume a character wholly fictitious—or, let us say, quite inconsistent with his life and opinions as known to us?'

This was a fruitful suggestion, long in Earwaker's mind, but not hitherto communicated. Christian did not at once grasp its significance.

'How could that be necessary? Peak is no swindler. You don't imply that he is engaged in some fraud?'

'Not in the ordinary sense, decidedly. But picture some girl or woman of conventional opinions and surroundings. What if he resolved to win such a wife, at the expense of disguising his true self?'

'But what an extraordinary idea!' cried Moxey. 'Why, Peak is all but a woman-hater!'

The journalist uttered croaking laughter.

'Have I totally misunderstood him?' asked Christian, confused and abashed.

'I think it not impossible.'

'You amaze me!—But no, no; you are wrong, Earwaker. Wrong in your suggestion, I mean. Peak could never sink to that. He is too uncompromising'——

'Well, it will be explained some day, I suppose.'

And with a shrug of impatience, the journalist turned to another subject. He, too, regretted his old friend's disappearance, and in a measure resented it. Godwin Peak was not a man to slip out of one's life and leave

no appreciable vacancy. Neither of these men admired him, in the true sense of the word, yet had his voice sounded at the door both would have sprung up with eager welcome. He was a force—and how many such beings does one encounter in a lifetime?

II

In different ways, Christian and Marcella Moxey had both been lonely since their childhood. As a schoolgirl Marcella seemed to her companions conceited and repellent; only as the result of reflection in after years did Sylvia Moorhouse express so favourable an opinion of her. In all things she affected singularity; especially it was her delight to utter democratic and revolutionary sentiments among hearers who, belonging to a rigidly conservative order, held such opinions impious. Arrived at womanhood, she affected scorn of the beliefs and habits cherished by her own sex, and shrank from association with the other. Godwin Peak was the first man with whom she conversed in the tone of friendship, and it took a year or more before that point was reached. As her intimacy with him established itself, she was observed to undergo changes which seemed very significant in the eyes of her few acquaintances. Disregard of costume had been one of her characteristics, but now she moved gradually towards the opposite extreme, till her dresses were occasionally more noticeable for richness than for good taste.

Christian, for kindred reasons, was equally debarred from the pleasures and profits of society. At school, his teachers considered him clever, his fellows for the most part looked down upon him as a sentimental weakling. The death of his parents, when he was still a lad, left him to the indifferent care of a guardian nothing

akin to him. He began life in an uncongenial position, and had not courage to oppose the drift of circumstances. The romantic attachment which absorbed his best years naturally had a debilitating effect, for love was never yet a supporter of the strenuous virtues, save when it has survived fruition and been blessed by reason. In most men a fit of amorous mooning works its own cure; energetic rebound is soon inevitable. But Christian was so constituted that a decade of years could not exhaust his capacity for sentimental languishment. He made it a point of honour to seek no female companionship which could imperil his faith. Unfortunately, this avoidance of the society which would soon have made him a happy renegade, was but too easy. Marcella and he practically encouraged each other in a life of isolation, though to both of them such an existence was anything but congenial. Their difficulties were of the same nature as those which had always beset Godwin Peak; they had no relatives with whom they cared to associate, and none of the domestic friends who, in the progress of time, establish and extend a sphere of genuine intimacy.

Most people who are capable of independent thought rapidly outgrow the stage when compromise is abhorred; they accept, at first reluctantly, but ere long with satisfaction, that code of polite intercourse which, as Steele says, is 'an expedient to make fools and wise men equal.' It was Marcella's ill-fate that she could neither learn tolerance nor persuade herself to affect it. The emancipated woman has fewer opportunities of relieving her mind than a man in corresponding position; if her temper be aggressive she must renounce general society, and, if not content to live alone, ally herself with some group of declared militants. By correspondence, or otherwise, Marcella might have brought herself into connection with women of a sympathetic type, but this effort she had never made. And chiefly because of her acquaintance with Godwin Peak. In him she concen-

trated her interests; he was the man to whom her heart went forth with every kind of fervour. So long as there remained a hope of moving him to reciprocal feeling she did not care to go in search of female companions. Year after year she sustained herself in solitude by this faint hope. She had lost sight of the two or three schoolfellows who, though not so zealous as herself, would have welcomed her as an interesting acquaintance; and the only woman who assiduously sought her was Mrs. Morton, the wife of one of Christian's friends, a good-natured but silly person bent on making known that she followed the 'higher law.'

Godwin's disappearance sank her in profound melancholy. Through the black weeks of January and February she scarcely left the house, and on the plea of illness refused to see any one but her brother. Between Christian and her there was no avowed confidence, but each knew the other's secret; their mutual affection never spoke itself in words, yet none the less it was indispensable to their lives. Deprived of his sister's company, Christian must have yielded to the vice which had already too strong a hold upon him, and have become a maudlin drunkard. Left to herself, Marcella had but slender support against a grim temptation already beckoning her in nights of sleeplessness. Of the two, her nature was the more tragic. Circumstances aiding, Christian might still forget his melancholy, abandon the whisky bottle, and pass a lifetime of amiable uxoriousness, varied with scientific enthusiasm. But for Marcella, frustrate in the desire with which every impulse of her being had identified itself, what future could be imagined?

When a day or two of sunlight (the rays through a semi-opaque atmosphere which London has to accept with gratitude) had announced that the seven-months' winter was overcome, and when the newspapers began to speak, after their fashion, of pictures awaiting scru-

tiny, Christian exerted himself to rouse his sister from her growing indolence. He succeeded in taking her to the Academy. Among the works of sculpture, set apart for the indifference of the public, was a female head, catalogued as 'A Nihilist'—in itself interesting, and specially so to Marcella, because it was executed by an artist whose name she recognised as that of a schoolmate, Agatha Walworth. She spoke of the circumstance to Christian, and added:

'I should like to have that. Let us go and see the price.'

The work was already sold. Christian, happy that his sister could be aroused to this interest, suggested that a cast might be obtainable.

'Write to Miss Walworth,' he urged. 'Bring yourself to her recollection.—I should think she must be the right kind of woman.'

Though at the time she shook her head, Marcella was presently tempted to address a letter to the artist, who responded with friendly invitation. In this way a new house was opened to her; but, simultaneously, one more illusion was destroyed. Knowing little of life, and much of literature, she pictured Miss Walworth as inhabiting a delightful Bohemian world, where the rules of conventionalism had no existence, and everything was judged by the brain-standard. Modern French biographies supplied all her ideas of studio society. She prepared herself for the first visit with a joyous tremor, wondering whether she would be deemed worthy to associate with the men and women who lived for art. The reality was a shock. In a large house at Chiswick she found a gathering of most respectable English people, chatting over the regulation tea-cup; not one of them inclined to disregard the dictates of Mrs. Grundy in dress, demeanour, or dialogue. Agatha Walworth lived with her parents and her sisters like any other irreproachable young woman. She had a nice little studio,

and worked at modelling with a good deal of aptitude; but of Bohemia she knew nothing whatever, save by hearsay. Her 'Nihilist' was no indication of a rebellious spirit; some friend had happened to suggest that a certain female model, a Russian, would do very well for such a character, and the hint was tolerably well carried out—nothing more. Marcella returned in a mood of contemptuous disappointment. The cast she had desired to have was shortly sent to her as a gift, but she could take no pleasure in it.

Still, she saw more of the Walworths and found them not illiberal. Agatha was intelligent, and fairly well read in modern authors; no need to conceal one's opinions in conversation with her. Marcella happened to be spending the evening with these acquaintances whilst her brother was having his chat at Staple Inn; on her return, she mentioned to Christian that she had been invited to visit the Walworths in Devonshire a few weeks hence.

'Go by all means,' urged her brother.

'I don't think I shall. They are too respectable.'

'Nonsense! They seem very open-minded; you really can't expect absolute unconventionality. Is it desirable? Really is it, now?—Suppose I were to marry some day, Marcella, do you think my household would be unconventional?'

His voice shook a little, and he kept his eyes averted. Marcella, to whom her brother's romance was anything but an agreeable subject,—the slight acquaintance she had with the modern Laura did not encourage her to hope for that lady's widowhood,—gave no heed to the question.

'They are going to have a house at Budleigh Salterton; do you know of the place? Somewhere near the mouth of the Exe. Miss Walworth tells me that one of our old school friends is living there—Sylvia Moorhouse. Did I ever mention Sylvia? She had gleams of sense,

I remember; but no doubt society has drilled all that out of her.'

Christian sighed.

'Why?' he urged. 'Society is getting more tolerant than you are disposed to think. Very few well-educated people would nowadays object to an acquaintance on speculative grounds. Some one—who was it?—was telling me of a recent marriage between the daughter of some well-known Church people and a man who made no secret of his agnosticism; the parents acquiescing cheerfully. The one thing still insisted on is decency of behaviour.'

Marcella's eyes flashed.

'How can you say that? You know quite well that most kinds of immorality are far more readily forgiven by people of the world than sincere heterodoxy on moral subjects.'

'Well, well, I meant decency from *their* point of view. And there really must be such restrictions, you know. How very few people are capable of what you call sincere heterodoxy, in morals or religion! Your position is unphilosophical; indeed it is. Take the world as you find it, and make friends with kind, worthy people. You have suffered from a needless isolation. Do accept this opportunity of adding to your acquaintances!—Do, Marcella! I shall take it as a great kindness, dear girl.'

His sister let her head lie back against the chair, her face averted. A stranger seated in Christian's place, regarding Marcella whilst her features were thus hidden, would have thought it probable that she was a woman of no little beauty. Her masses of tawny hair, her arms and hands, the pose and outline of her figure, certainly suggested a countenance of corresponding charm, and the ornate richness of her attire aided such an impression. This thought came to Christian as he gazed at her; his eyes, always so gentle, softened to a tender compassion. As the silence continued, he looked un-

easily about him; when at length he spoke, it was as though a matter of trifling moment had occurred to him.

'By-the-bye, I am told that Malkin (Earwaker's friend, you know) saw Peak not long ago—in America.'

Marcella did not change her position, but at the sound of Peak's name she stirred, as if with an intention, at once checked, of bending eagerly forward.

'In America?' she asked, incredulously.

'At Boston. He met him in the street—or thinks he did. There's a doubt. When Malkin spoke to the man, he declared that he was not Peak at all—said there was a mistake.'

Marcella moved so as to show her face; endeavouring to express an unemotional interest, she looked coldly scornful.

'That ridiculous man can't be depended upon,' she said.

There had been one meeting between Marcella and Mr. Malkin, with the result that each thoroughly disliked the other—an antipathy which could have been foreseen.

'Well, there's no saying,' replied Christian. 'But of one thing I feel pretty sure: we have seen the last of Peak. He'll never come back to us.'

'Why not?'

'I can only say that I feel convinced he has broken finally with all his old friends.—We must think no more of him, Marcella.'

His sister rose slowly, affected to glance at a book, and in a few moments said good-night. For another hour Christian sat by himself in gloomy thought.

At breakfast next morning Marcella announced that she would be from home the whole day; she might return in time for dinner, but it was uncertain. Her brother asked no questions, but said that he would lunch in town. About ten o'clock a cab was summoned, and Marcella, without leave-taking, drove away.

Christian lingered as long as possible over the morning paper, unable to determine how he should waste the weary hours that lay before him. There was no reason for his remaining in London through this brief season of summer glow. Means and leisure were his, he could go whither he would. But the effort of decision and departure seemed too much for him. Worst of all, this lassitude (not for the first time) was affecting his imagination; he thought with a dull discontent of the ideal love to which he had bound himself. Could he but escape from it, and begin a new life! But he was the slave of his airy obligation; for very shame's sake his ten years' consistency must be that of a lifetime.

There was but one place away from London to which he felt himself drawn, and that was the one place he might not visit. This morning's sunshine carried him back to that day when he had lain in the meadow near Twybridge and talked with Godwin Peak. How distinctly he remembered his mood! 'Be practical—don't be led astray after ideals—concentrate yourself;'—yes, it was he who had given that advice to Peak; and had he but recked his own rede——! Poor little Janet! was she married? If so, her husband must be a happy man.

Why should he not go down to Twybridge? His uncle, undoubtedly still living, must by this time have forgotten the old resentment, perhaps would be glad to see him. In any case he might stroll about the town and somehow obtain news of the Moxey family.

With vague half-purpose he left the house and walked westward. The stream of traffic in Edgware Road brought him to a pause; he stood for five minutes in miserable indecision, all but resolving to go on as far as Euston and look for the next northward train. But the vice in his will prevailed; automaton-like he turned in another direction, and presently came out into Sussex Square. Here was the house to which his thoughts had

perpetually gone forth ever since that day when Constance gave her hand to a thriving City man, and became Mrs. Palmer. At present, he knew, it was inhabited only by domestics: Mr. Palmer, recovering from illness that threatened to be fatal, had gone to Bournemouth, where Constance of course tended him. But he would walk past and look up at the windows.

All the blinds were down—naturally. Thrice he went by and retraced his steps. Then, still automaton-like, he approached the door, rang the bell. The appearance of the servant choked his voice for an instant, but he succeeded in shaping an inquiry after Mr. Palmer's health.

'I'm sorry to say, sir,' was the reply, 'that Mr. Palmer died last night. We received the news only an hour or two ago.'

Christian tottered on his feet and turned so pale that the servant regarded him with anxiety. For a minute or two he stared vacantly into the gloomy hall; then, without a word, he turned abruptly and walked away.

Unconscious of the intervening distance, he found himself at home, in his library. The parlour-maid was asking him whether he would have luncheon. Scarcely understanding the question, he muttered a refusal and sat down.

So, it had come at last. Constance was a widow. In a year or so she might think of marrying again.

He remained in the library for three or four hours. At first incapable of rejoicing, then ashamed to do so, he at length suffered from such a throbbing of the heart that apprehension of illness recalled him to a normal state of mind. The favourite decanter was within reach, and it gave him the wonted support. Then at length did heart and brain glow with exulting fervour.

Poor Constance! Noble woman! Most patient of martyrs! The hour of her redemption had struck. The fetters had fallen from her tender, suffering body. Of

him she could not yet think. He did not wish it. Her womanhood must pay its debt to nature before she could gladden in the prospect of a new life. Months must go by before he could approach her, or even remind her of his existence. But at last his reward was sure.

And he had thought of Twybridge, of his cousin Janet! O unworthy lapse!

He shed tears of tenderness. Dear, noble Constance! It was now nearly twelve years since he first looked upon her face. In those days he mingled freely with all the society within his reach. It was not very select, and Constance Markham shone to him like a divinity among creatures of indifferent clay. They said she was coquettish, that she played at the game of love with every presentable young man—envious calumny! No, she was single-hearted, inexperienced, a lovely and joyous girl of not yet twenty. It is so difficult for such a girl to understand her own emotions. Her parents persuaded her into wedding Palmer. That was all gone into the past, and now his concern—their concern—was only with the blessed future.

At three o'clock he began to feel a healthy appetite. He sent for a cab and drove towards the region of restaurants.

Had he yielded to the impulse which this morning directed him to Twybridge, he would have arrived in that town not very long after his sister.

For that was the aim of Marcella's journey. On reaching the station, she dropped a light veil over her face and set forth on foot to discover the abode of Mrs. Peak. No inhabitant of Twybridge save her uncle and his daughters could possibly recognise her, but she shrank from walking through the streets with exposed countenance. Whether she would succeed in her quest was uncertain. Godwin Peak's mother still dwelt here, she knew, for less than a year ago she had asked the question of Godwin himself; but a woman in humble

circumstances might not have a house of her own, and her name was probably unknown save to a few friends.

However, the first natural step was to inquire for a directory. A stationer supplied her with one, informing her, with pride, that he himself was the author of it—that this was only the second year of its issue, and that its success was 'very encouraging.' Retiring to a quiet street, Marcella examined her purchase, and came upon 'Peak, Oliver; seedsman'—the sole entry of the name. This was probably a relative of Godwin's. Without difficulty she found Mr. Peak's shop; behind the counter stood Oliver himself, rubbing his hands. Was there indeed a family likeness between this fresh-looking young shopkeeper and the stern, ambitious, intellectual man whose lineaments were ever before her mind? Though with fear and repulsion, Marcella was constrained to recognise something in the commonplace visage. With an uncertain voice, she made known her business.

'I wish to find Mrs. Peak—a widow—an elderly lady'——

'Oh yes, madam! My mother, no doubt. She lives with her sister, Miss Cadman—the milliner's shop in the first street to the left. Let me point it out.'

With a sinking of the heart, Marcella murmured thanks and walked away. She found the milliner's shop—and went past it.

Why should discoveries such as these be so distasteful to her? Her own origin was not so exalted that she must needs look down on trades-folk. Still, for the moment she all but abandoned her undertaking. Was Godwin Peak in truth of so much account to her? Would not the shock of meeting his mother be final? Having come thus far, she must go through with it. If the experience cured her of a hopeless passion, why, what more desirable?

She entered the shop. A young female assistant came forward with respectful smile, and waited her commands.

'I wish, if you please, to see Mrs. Peak.'

'Oh yes, madam! Will you have the goodness to walk this way?'

Too late Marcella remembered that she ought to have gone to the house-entrance. The girl led her out of the shop into a dark passage, and thence into a sitting-room which smelt of lavender. Here she waited for a few moments; then the door opened softly, and Mrs. Peak presented herself.

There was no shock. The widow had the air of a gentlewoman—walked with elderly grace—and spoke with propriety. She resembled Godwin, and this time it was not painful to remark the likeness.

'I have come to Twybridge,' began Marcella, gently and respectfully, 'that is to say, I have stopped in passing—to ask for the address of Mr. Godwin Peak. A letter has failed to reach him.'

It was her wish to manage without either disclosing the truth about herself or elaborating fictions, but after the first words she felt it impossible not to offer some explanation. Mrs. Peak showed a slight surprise. With the courage of cowardice, Marcella continued more rapidly:

'My name is Mrs. Ward. My husband used to know Mr. Peak, in London, a few years ago, but we have been abroad, and unfortunately have lost sight of him. We remembered that Mr. Peak's relatives lived at Twybridge, and, as we wish very much to renew the old acquaintance, I took the opportunity—passing by rail. I made inquiries in the town, and was directed to you—I hope rightly'——

The widow's face changed to satisfaction. Evidently her straightforward mind accepted the story as perfectly credible. Marcella, with bitterness, knew herself far from comely enough to suggest perils. She looked old enough for the part she was playing, and the glove upon her hand might conceal a wedding-ring.

'Yes, you were directed rightly,' Mrs. Peak made quiet answer. 'I shall be very glad to give you my son's address. He left London about last Christmas, and went to live at Exeter.'

'Exeter? We thought he might be out of England.'

'No; he has lived all the time at Exeter. The address is Longbrook Street'—she added the number. 'He is studying, and finds that part of the country pleasant. I am hoping to see him here before very long.'

Marcella did not extend the conversation. She spoke of having to catch a train, and veiled as well as she could beneath ordinary courtesies her perplexity at the information she had received.

When she again reached the house at Notting Hill, Christian was absent. He came home about nine in the evening. It was impossible not to remark his strange mood of repressed excitement; but Marcella did not question him, and Christian had resolved to conceal the day's event until he could speak of it without agitation. Before they parted for the night, Marcella said carelessly:

'I have decided to go down to Budleigh Salterton when the time comes.'

'That's right!' exclaimed her brother, with satisfaction. 'You couldn't do better—couldn't possibly. It will be a very good thing for you in several ways.'

And each withdrew to brood over a perturbing secret.

III

THREE or four years ago, when already he had conceived the idea of trying his fortune in some provincial town, Peak persuaded himself that it would not be difficult to make acquaintances among educated people, even though he had no credentials to offer. He indulged his fancy and pictured all manner of pleasant accidents which surely, sooner or later, must bring him into contact with families of the better sort. One does hear of such occurrences, no doubt. In every town there is some one or other whom a stranger may approach: a medical man—a local antiquary—a librarian—a philanthropist; and with moderate advantages of mind and address, such casual connections may at times be the preface to intimacy, with all resulting benefits. But experience of Exeter had taught him how slight would have been his chance of getting on friendly terms with any mortal if he had depended solely on his personal qualities. After a nine months' residence, and with the friendship of such people as the Warricombes, he was daily oppressed by his isolation amid this community of English folk. He had done his utmost to adopt the tone of average polished life. He had sat at the tables of worthy men, and conversed freely with their sons and daughters; he exchanged greetings in the highways: but this availed him nothing. Now, as on the day of his arrival, he was an alien—a lodger. What else had he ever been, since boyhood? A lodger in Kingsmill, a lodger in London, a lodger in Exeter. Nay, even as a

boy he could scarcely have been said to 'live at home,' for from the dawn of conscious intelligence he felt himself out of place among familiar things and people, at issue with prevalent opinions. Was he never to win a right of citizenship, never to have a recognised place among men associated in the duties and pleasures of life ?

Sunday was always a day of weariness and despondency, and at present he suffered from the excitement of his conversation with Sidwell, followed as it had been by a night of fever. Extravagant hope had given place to a depression which could see nothing beyond the immediate gloom. Until mid-day he lay in bed. After dinner, finding the solitude of his little room intolerable, he went out to walk in the streets.

Not far from his door some children had gathered in a quiet corner, and were playing at a game on the pavement with pieces of chalk. As he drew near, a policeman, observing the little group, called out to them in a stern voice :

'Now then ! what are you doing there ? Don't you know *what day* it is ? '

The youngsters fled, conscious of shameful delinquency.

There it was ! There spoke the civic voice, the social rule, the public sentiment ! Godwin felt that the policeman had rebuked *him*, and in doing so had severely indicated the cause of that isolation which he was condemned to suffer. Yes, all his life he had desired to play games on Sunday ; he had never been able to understand why games on Sunday should be forbidden. And the angry laugh which escaped him as he went by the guardian of public morals, declared the impossibility of his ever being at one with communities which made this point the prime test of worthiness.

He walked on at a great speed, chafing, talking to himself. His way took him through Heavitree (when Hooker saw the light here, how easy to believe that the Anglican

Church was the noblest outcome of human progress!) and on and on, until by a lane with red banks of sandstone, thick with ferns, shadowed with noble boughs, he came to a hamlet which had always been one of his favourite resorts, so peacefully it lay amid the exquisite rural landscape. The cottages were all closed and silent; hark for the reason! From the old church sounded an organ prelude, then the voice of the congregation, joining in one of the familiar hymns.

A significant feature of Godwin's idiosyncrasy. Notwithstanding his profound hatred and contempt of multitudes, he could never hear the union of many voices in song but his breast heaved and a choking warmth rose in his throat. Even where prejudice wrought most strongly with him, it had to give way before this rush of emotion; he often hurried out of earshot when a group of Salvationists were singing, lest the involuntary sympathy of his senses should agitate and enrage him. At present he had no wish to draw away. He entered the churchyard, and found the leafy nook with a tombstone where he had often rested. And as he listened to the rude chanting of verse after verse, tears fell upon his cheeks.

This sensibility was quite distinct from religious feeling. If the note of devotion sounding in that simple strain had any effect upon him at all, it merely intensified his consciousness of pathos as he thought of the many generations that had worshipped here, living and dying in a faith which was at best a helpful delusion. He could appreciate the beautiful aspects of Christianity as a legend, its nobility as a humanising power, its rich results in literature, its grandeur in historic retrospect. But at no moment in his life had he felt it as a spiritual influence. So far from tending in that direction, as he sat and brooded here in the churchyard, he owed to his fit of tearfulness a courage which determined him to abandon all religious pretences, and henceforth trust only

to what was sincere in him—his human passion. The future he had sketched to Sidwell was impossible; the rural pastorate, the life of moral endeavour which in his excitement had seemed so nearly a genuine aspiration that it might perchance become reality—dreams, dreams! He must woo as a man, and trust to fortune for his escape from a false position. Sidwell should hear nothing more of clerical projects. He was by this time convinced that she held far less tenaciously than he had supposed to the special doctrines of the Church; and, if he had not deceived himself in interpreting her behaviour, a mutual avowal of love would involve ready consent on her part to his abandoning a career which—as he would represent it—had been adopted under a mistaken impulse. He returned to the point which he had reached when he set forth with the intention of bidding good-bye to the Warricombes—except that in flinging away hypocrisy he no longer needed to trample his desires. The change need not be declared till after a lapse of time. For the present his task was to obtain one more private interview with Sidwell ere she went to London, or, if that could not be, somehow to address her in unmistakable language.

The fumes were dispelled from his brain, and as he walked homeward he plotted and planned with hopeful energy. Sylvia Moorhouse came into his mind; could he not in some way make use of her? He had never yet been to see her at Budleigh Salterton. That he would do forthwith, and perchance the visit might supply him with suggestions.

On the morrow he set forth, going by train to Exmouth, and thence by the coach which runs twice a day to the little seaside town. The delightful drive, up hill and down dale, with its magnificent views over the estuary, and its ever-changing wayside beauties, put him into the best of spirits. About noon, he alighted at the Rolle Arms, the hotel to which the coach conducts its pas-

sengers, and entered to take a meal. He would call upon the Moorhouses at the conventional hour. The intervening time was spent pleasantly enough in loitering about the pebbled beach. A south-west breeze which had begun to gather clouds drove on the rising tide. By four o'clock there was an end of sunshine, and spurts of rain mingled with flying foam. Peak turned inland, pursued the leafy street up the close-sheltered valley, and came to the house where his friends dwelt.

In crossing the garden he caught sight of a lady who sat in a room on the ground floor; her back was turned to the window, and before he could draw near enough to see her better she had moved away, but the glimpse he had obtained of her head and shoulders affected him with so distinct an alarm that his steps were checked. It seemed to him that he had recognised the figure, and if he were right.—But the supposition was ridiculous; at all events so vastly improbable, that he would not entertain it. And now he descried another face, that of Miss Moorhouse herself, and it gave him a reassuring smile. He rang the door bell.

How happy—he said to himself—those men who go to call upon their friends without a tremor! Even if he had not received that shock a moment ago, he would still have needed to struggle against the treacherous beating of his heart as he waited for admission. It was always so when he visited the Warricombes, or any other family in Exeter. Not merely in consequence of the dishonest part he was playing, but because he had not quite overcome the nervousness which so anguished him in earlier days. The first moment after his entering a drawing-room cost him pangs of complex origin.

His eyes fell first of all upon Mrs. Moorhouse, who advanced to welcome him. He was aware of three other persons in the room. The nearest, he could perceive without regarding her, was Sidwell's friend; the other two, on whom he did not yet venture to cast a glance,

sat—or rather had just risen—in a dim background. As he shook hands with Sylvia, they drew nearer; one of them was a man, and, as his voice at once declared, no other than Buckland Warricombe. Peak returned his greeting, and, in the same moment, gazed at the last of the party. Mrs. Moorhouse was speaking.

'Mr. Peak—Miss Moxey.'

A compression of the lips was the only sign of disturbance that anyone could have perceived on Godwin's countenance. Already he had strung himself against his wonted agitation, and the added trial did not sensibly enhance what he suffered. In discovering that he had rightly identified the figure at the window, he experienced no renewal of the dread which brought him to a standstill. Already half prepared for this stroke of fate, he felt a satisfaction in being able to meet it so steadily. Tumult of thought was his only trouble; it seemed as if his brain must burst with the stress of its lightning operations. In three seconds, he re-lived the past, made several distinct anticipations of the future, and still discussed with himself how he should behave this moment. He noted that Marcella's face was bloodless; that her attempt to smile resulted in a very painful distortion of brow and lips. And he had leisure to pity her. This emotion prevailed. With a sense of magnanimity, which afterwards excited his wonder, he pressed the cold hand and said in a cheerful tone:

'Our introduction took place long ago, if I'm not mistaken. I had no idea, Miss Moxey, that you were among Mrs. Moorhouse's friends.'

'Nor I that you were, Mr. Peak,' came the answer, in a steadier voice than Godwin had expected.

Mrs. Moorhouse and her daughter made the pleasant exclamations that were called for. Buckland Warricombe, with a doubtful smile on his lips, kept glancing from Miss Moxey to her acquaintance and back again. Peak at length faced him.

'I hoped we should meet down here this autumn.'

'I should have looked you up in a day or two,' Buckland replied, seating himself. 'Do you propose to stay in Exeter through the winter?'

'I'm not quite sure—but I think it likely.'

Godwin turned to the neighbour of whose presence he was most conscious.

'I hope your brother is well, Miss Moxey?'

Their eyes encountered steadily.

'Yes, he is quite well, thank you. He often says that it seems very long since he heard from you.'

'I'm a bad correspondent.—Is he also in Devonshire?'

'No. In London.'

'What a storm we are going to have!' exclaimed Sylvia, looking to the window. 'They predicted it yesterday. I should like to be on the top of Westdown Beacon—wouldn't you, Miss Moxey?'

'I am quite willing to go with you.'

'And what pleasure do you look for up there?' asked Warricombe, in a blunt, matter-of-fact tone.

'Now, there's a question!' cried Sylvia, appealing to the rest of the company.

'I agree with Mr. Warricombe,' remarked her mother. 'It's better to be in a comfortable room.'

'Oh, you Radicals! What a world you will make of it in time!'

Sylvia affected to turn away in disgust, and happening to glance through the window she saw two young ladies approaching from the road.

'The Walworths—struggling desperately with their umbrellas.'

'I shouldn't wonder if you think it unworthy of an artist to carry an umbrella,' said Buckland.

'Now you suggest it, I certainly do. They should get nobly drenched.'

She went out into the hall, and soon returned with her friends—Miss Walworth the artist, Miss Muriel Wal-

worth, and a youth, their brother. In the course of conversation Peak learnt that Miss Moxey was the guest of this family, and that she had been at Budleigh Salterton with them only a day or two. For a time he listened and observed, endeavouring to postpone consideration of the dangers into which he had suddenly fallen. Marcella had made herself his accomplice, thus far, in disguising the real significance of their meeting, and whether she would betray him in her subsequent talk with the Moorhouses remained a matter of doubt. Of course he must have assurance of her disposition—but the issues involved were too desperate for instant scrutiny. He felt the gambler's excitement, an irrational pleasure in the consciousness that his whole future was at stake. Buckland Warricombe had a keen eye upon him, and doubtless was eager to strike a train of suspicious circumstances. His face, at all events, should give no sign of discomposure. Indeed, he found so much enjoyment in the bright gossip of this assembly of ladies that the smile he wore was perfectly natural.

The Walworths, he gathered, were to return to London in a week's time. This meant, in all probability, that Marcella's stay here would not be prolonged beyond that date. Perhaps he could find an opportunity of seeing her apart from her friends. In reply to a question from Mrs. Moorhouse, he made known that he proposed staying at the Rolle Arms for several days, and when he had spoken he glanced at Marcella. She understood him, he felt sure. An invitation to lunch here on the morrow was of course accepted.

Before leaving, he exchanged a few words with Buckland.

'Your relatives will be going to town very soon, I understand.'

Warricombe nodded.

'Shall I see you at Exeter?' Godwin continued.

'I'm not sure. I shall go over to-morrow, but it's

uncertain whether I shall still be there when you return.'

The Radical was distinctly less amicable than even on the last occasion of their meeting. They shook hands in rather a perfunctory way.

Early in the evening there was a temporary lull in the storm; rain no longer fell, and in spaces of the rushing sky a few stars showed themselves. Unable to rest at the hotel, Peak set out for a walk towards the cliff summit called Westdown Beacon; he could see little more than black vacancies, but a struggle with the wind suited his temper, and he enjoyed the incessant roar of surf in the darkness. After an hour of this buffeting he returned to the beach, and stood as close as possible to the fierce breakers. No person was in sight. But when he began to move towards the upper shore, three female figures detached themselves from the gloom and advanced in his direction. They came so near that their voices were audible, and thereupon he stepped up to them.

'Are you going to the Beacon after all, Miss Moorhouse?'

Sylvia was accompanied by Agatha Walworth and Miss Moxey. She explained laughingly that they had stolen out, by agreement, whilst the males of their respective households still lingered at the dinner-table.

'But Mr. Warricombe was right after all. We shall be blown to pieces. A very little of the romantic goes a long way, nowadays.'

Godwin was determined to draw Marcella aside. Seemingly she met his wish, for as all turned to regain the shelter of houses she fell behind her female companions, and stood close by him.

'I want to see you before you go back to London,' he said, bending his head near to hers.

'I wrote a letter to you this morning,' was her reply.

'A letter? To what address?'

'Your address at Exeter.'

'But how did you know it?'

'I'll explain afterwards.'

'When can I see you?'

'Not here. It's impossible. I shall go to Exeter, and there write to you again.'

'Very well. You promise to do this?'

'Yes, I promise.'

There was danger even in the exchange of these hurried sentences. Miss Walworth had glanced back, and might possibly have caught a phrase that aroused curiosity. Having accompanied the girls to within view of their destination, Peak said good-night, and went home to spend the rest of the evening in thought which was sufficiently absorbing.

The next day he had no sight of Marcella. At luncheon the Moorhouses were alone. Afterwards Godwin accepted a proposal of the mathematician (who was generally invisible amid his formulæ) for a walk up the Otter valley. Naturally they talked of Coleridge, whose metaphysical side appealed to Moorhouse. Peak dwelt on the human and poetical, and was led by that peculiar recklessness of mood, which at times relieved his nervous tension, to defend opium eating, as a source of pleasurable experience.

'You will hardly venture on that paradox in the pulpit,' remarked his companion, with laughter.

'Perhaps not. But I have heard arguments from that place decidedly more immoral.'

'No doubt.'

Godwin corrected the impression he perhaps had made by turning with sudden seriousness to another subject. The ironic temptation was terribly strong in him just now. One is occasionally possessed by a desire to shout in the midst of a silent assembly; an impulse of the same kind kept urging him to utter words which would irretrievably ruin his prospects. The sense that life is

an intolerable mummery can with difficulty be controlled by certain minds, even when circumstances offer no keen incitement to rebellion. But Peak's position to-day demanded an incessant effort to refrain from self-betrayal. What a joy to declare himself a hypocrite, and snap mocking fingers in the world's face! As a safeguard, he fixed his mind upon Sidwell, recalled her features and her voice as clearly as possible, stamped into his heart the conviction that she half loved him.

When he was alone again, he of a sudden determined to go to Exeter. He could no longer endure uncertainty as to the contents of Marcella's letter. As it was too late for the coach, he set off and walked five miles to Exmouth, where he caught a train.

The letter lay on his table, and with it one on which he recognised his mother's handwriting.

Marcella wrote in the simplest way, quite as if their intercourse had never been disturbed. As she happened to be staying with friends at Budleigh Salterton, it seemed possible for her to meet him. Might she hope that he would call at the hotel in Exeter, if she wrote again to make an appointment?

Well, that needed no reply. But how had she discovered the address? Was his story known in London? In a paroxysm of fury, he crushed the letter into a ball and flung it away. The veins of his forehead swelled; he walked about the room with senseless violence, striking his fist against furniture and walls. It would have relieved him to sob and cry like a thwarted child, but only a harsh sound, half-groan, half-laughter, burst from his throat.

The fit passed, and he was able to open the letter from Twybridge, the first he had received from his mother for more than a month. He expected to find nothing of interest, but his attention was soon caught by a passage, which ran thus:

'Have you heard from some friends of yours, called

Ward? Some time ago a lady called here to ask for your address. She said her name was Mrs. Ward, and that her husband, who had been abroad for a long time, very much wished to find you again. Of course I told her where you were to be found. It was just after I had written, or I should have let you know about it before.'

Ward? He knew no one of that name. Could it be Marcella who had done this? It looked more than likely; he believed her capable of strange proceedings.

In the morning he returned to the seaside. Prospect of pleasure there was none, but by moving about he made the time pass more quickly. Wandering in the lanes (which would have delighted him with their autumnal beauties had his mind been at rest), he came upon Miss Walworth, busy with a water-colour sketch. Though their acquaintance was so slight, he stopped for conversation, and the artist's manner appeared to testify that Marcella had as yet made no unfavourable report of him. By mentioning that he would return home on the morrow, he made sure that Marcella would be apprised of this. Perhaps she might shorten her stay, and his suspense.

Back in Longbrook Street once more, he found another letter. It was from Mrs. Warricombe, who wrote to tell him of their coming removal to London, and added an invitation to dine four days hence. Then at all events he would speak again with Sidwell. But to what purpose? Could he let her go away for months, and perhaps all but forget him among the many new faces that would surround her. He saw no feasible way of being with her in private. To write was to run the gravest risk; things were not ripe for that. To take Martin into his confidence? That asked too much courage. Deliberate avowals of this kind seemed to him ludicrous and humiliating, and under the circumstances—no, no; what force

of sincerity could make him appear other than a scheming adventurer ?

He lived in tumult of mind and senses. When at length, on the day before his engagement with the Warricombes, there came a note from Marcella, summoning him to the interview agreed upon, he could scarcely endure the hour or two until it was time to set forth ; every minute cost him a throb of pain. The torment must have told upon his visage, for on entering the room where Marcella waited he saw that she looked at him with a changing expression, as if something surprised her.

They shook hands, but without a word. Marcella pointed to a chair, yet remained standing. She was endeavouring to smile ; her eyes fell, and she coloured.

'Don't let us make each other uncomfortable,' Peak exclaimed suddenly, in the off-hand tone of friendly intimacy. 'There's nothing tragic in this affair, after all. Let us talk quietly.'

Marcella seated herself.

'I had reasons,' he went on, 'for going away from my old acquaintances for a time. Why not, if I chose ? You have found me out. Very well ; let us talk it over as we have discussed many another moral or psychological question.'

He did not meditate these sentences. Something must of necessity be said, and words shaped themselves for him. His impulse was to avoid the emotional, to talk with this problematic woman as with an intellectual friend of his own sex.

'Forgive me,' were the first sounds that came from Marcella's lips. She spoke with bent head, and almost in a whisper.

'What have I to forgive ?' He sat down and leaned sideways in the easy chair. 'You were curious about my doings ? What more natural ?'

'Do you know how I learnt where you were ?'

She looked up for an instant.

'I have a suspicion. You went to Twybridge?'

'Yes.'

'But not in your own name?'

'I can hardly tell why not.'

Peak laughed. He was physically and mentally at rest in comparison with his state for the past few days. Things had a simpler aspect all at once. After all, who would wish to interfere maliciously with him? Women like to be in secrets, and probably Marcella would preserve his.

'What conjectures had you made about me?' he asked, with an air of amusement.

'Many, of course. But I heard something not long ago which seemed so unlikely, yet was told so confidently, that at last I couldn't overcome my wish to make inquiries.'

'And what was that?'

'Mr. Malkin has been to America, and he declared that he had met you in the streets of Boston—and that you refused to admit you were yourself.'

Peak laughed still more buoyantly. His mood was eager to seize on any point that afforded subject for jest.

'Malkin seems to have come across my *Doppelgänger*. One mustn't pretend to certainty in anything, but I am disposed to think I never was in Boston.'

'He was of course mistaken.'

Marcella's voice had an indistinctness very unlike her ordinary tone. As a rule she spoke with that clearness and decision which corresponds to qualities of mind not commonly found in women. But confidence seemed to have utterly deserted her; she had lost her individuality, and was weakly feminine.

'I have been here since last Christmas,' said Godwin, after a pause.

'Yes. I know.'

Their eyes met.

'No doubt your friends have told you as much as they know of me?'

'Yes—they have spoken of you.'

'And what does it amount to?'

He regarded her steadily, with a smile of indifference.

'They say'—she gazed at him as if constrained to do so—'that you are going into the Church.' And as soon as she uttered the last word, a painful laugh escaped her.

'Nothing else? No comments?'

'I think Miss Moorhouse finds it difficult to understand.'

'Miss Moorhouse?' He reflected, still smiling. 'I shouldn't wonder. She has a sceptical mind, and she doesn't know me well enough to understand me.'

'Doesn't know you well enough?'

She repeated the words mechanically. Peak gave her a keen glance.

'Has she led you to suppose,' he asked, 'that we are on intimate terms?'

'No.' The word fell from her, absently, despondently.

'Miss Moxey, would anything be gained by our discussing my position? If you think it a mystery, hadn't we better leave it so?'

She made no answer.

'But perhaps,' he went on, 'you have told them—the Walworths and the Moorhouses—that I owe my friends an explanation? When I see them again, perhaps I shall be confronted with cold, questioning faces?'

'I haven't said a word that could injure you,' Marcella replied, with something of her usual self-possession, passing her eyes distantly over his face as she spoke. 'I knew the suggestion was unjust, when I made it.'

'Then why should you refuse me your confidence?'

She bent forward slightly, but with her eyes cast down. Tone and features intimated a sense of shame, due partly to the feeling that she offered complicity in deceit.

'What can I tell you more than you know?' said

Godwin, coldly. 'I propose to become a clergyman, and I have acknowledged to you that my motive is ambition. As the matter concerns my conscience, that must rest with myself; I have spoken of it to no one. But you may depend upon it that I am prepared for every difficulty that may spring up. I knew, of course, that sooner or later some one would discover me here. Well, I have changed my opinions, that's all; who can demand more than that?'

Marcella answered in a tone of forced composure.

'You owe me no explanation at all. Yet we have known each other for a long time, and it pains me that—to be suddenly told that we are no more to each other than strangers.'

'Are we talking like strangers, Marcella?'

She flushed, and her eyes gleamed as they fixed themselves upon him for an instant. He had never before dreamt of addressing her so familiarly, and least of all in this moment was she prepared for it. Godwin despised himself for the impulse to which he had yielded, but its policy was justified. He had taken one more step in disingenuousness—a small matter.

'Let it be one of those things on which even friends don't open their minds to each other,' he pursued. 'I am living in solitude, and perhaps must do so for several years yet. If I succeed in my purposes, you will see me again on the old terms; if I fail, then too we shall be friends—if you are willing.'

'You won't tell me what those purposes are?'

'Surely you can imagine them.'

'Will you let me ask you—do you look for help to anyone that I have seen here?' She spoke with effort and with shame.

'To no one that you have met,' he answered, shortly.

'Then to some one in Exeter? I have been told that you have friends.'

He was irritated by her persistency, and his own in-

ability to decide upon the most prudent way of answering.

'You mean the Warricombe family, I suppose?'

'Yes.'

'I think it very likely that Mr. Warricombe may be able to help me substantially.'

Marcella kept silence. Then, without raising her eyes, she murmured:

'You will tell me no more?'

'There is nothing more to tell.'

She bit her lips, as if to compel them to muteness. Her breath came quickly; she glanced this way and that, like one who sought an escape. After eyeing her askance for a moment, Peak rose.

'You are going?' she said.

'Yes; but surely there is no reason why we shouldn't say good-bye in a natural and friendly way?'

'Can you forgive me for that deceit I practised?'

Peak laughed.

'What does it matter? We should in any case have met at Budleigh Salterton.'

'No. I had no serious thought of accepting their invitation.'

She stood looking away from him, endeavouring to speak as though the denial had but slight significance. Godwin stirred impatiently.

'I should never have gone to Twybridge,' Marcella continued, 'but for Mr. Malkin's story.'

He turned to her.

'You mean that his story had a disagreeable sound?'

Marcella kept silence, her fingers working together.

'And is your mind relieved?' he added.

'I wish you were back in London. I wish this change had never come to pass.'

'I wish that several things in my life had never come to pass. But I am here, and my resolve is unalterable.

One thing I must ask you—how shall you represent my position to your brother ? '

For a moment Marcella hesitated. Then, meeting his look, she answered with nervous haste :

' I shall not mention you to him.'

Ashamed to give any sign of satisfaction, and oppressed by the feeling that he owed her gratitude, Peak stood gazing towards the windows with an air of half-indifferent abstractedness. It was better to let the interview end thus, without comment or further question ; so he turned abruptly, and offered his hand.

' Good-bye. You will hear of me, or from me.'

' Good-bye ! '

He tried to smile ; but Marcella had a cold face, expressive of more dignity than she had hitherto shown. As he closed the door she was still looking towards him.

He knew what the look meant. In his position, a man of ordinary fibre would long ago have nursed the flattering conviction that Marcella loved him. Godwin had suspected it, but in a vague, unemotional way, never attaching importance to the matter. What he *had* clearly understood was, that Christian wished to inspire him with interest in Marcella, and on that account, when in her company, he sometimes set himself to display a deliberate negligence. No difficult undertaking, for he was distinctly repelled by the thought of any relations with her more intimate than had been brought about by his cold intellectual sympathy. Her person was still as disagreeable to him as when he first met her in her uncle's house at Twybridge. If a man sincerely hopes that a woman does not love him (which can seldom be the case where a suggestion of such feeling ever arises), he will find it easy to believe that she does not. Peak not only had the benefit of this principle ; the constitution of his mind made it the opposite of natural for him to credit himself with having inspired affection. That his male friends held him in any warm esteem

always appeared to him improbable, and as regards women his modesty was profound. The simplest explanation, that he was himself incapable of pure devotedness, perhaps hits the truth. Unsympathetic, however, he could with no justice be called, and now that the reality of Marcella's love was forced upon his consciousness he thought of her with sincere pity,—the emotion which had already possessed him (though he did not then analyse it) when he unsuspectingly looked into her troubled face a few days ago.

It was so hard to believe, that, on reaching home, he sat for a long time occupied with the thought of it, to the exclusion of his own anxieties. What! this woman had made of *him* an ideal such as he himself sought among the most exquisite of her sex? How was that possible? What quality of his, personal, psychical, had such magnetic force? What sort of being was he in Marcella's eyes? Reflective men must often enough marvel at the success of whiskered and trousered mortals in wooing the women of their desire, for only by a specific imagination can a person of one sex assume the emotions of the other. Godwin had neither that endowment nor the peculiar self-esteem which makes love-winning a matter of course to some intelligent males. His native arrogance signified a low estimate of mankind at large, rather than an overweening appreciation of his own qualities, and in his most presumptuous moments he had never claimed the sexual prefulgence which many a commonplace fellow so gloriously exhibits. At most, he had hoped that some woman might find him *interesting*, and so be led on to like him well enough for the venture of matrimony. Passion at length constrained him to believe that his ardour might be genuinely reciprocated, but even now it was only in paroxysms that he held this assurance; the hours of ordinary life still exposed him to the familiar self-criticism, sometimes more scathing than ever. He dreaded the looking-glass, consciously

avoided it; and a like disparagement of his inner being tortured him through the endless labyrinths of erotic reverie.

Yet here was a woman who so loved him that not even a proud temper and his candid indifference could impose restraint upon her emotions. As he listened to the most significant of her words he was distressed with shame, and now, in recalling them, he felt that he should have said something, done something, to disillusion her. Could he not easily show himself in a contemptible light? But reflection taught him that the shame he had experienced on Marcella's behalf was blended with a gratification which forbade him at the moment to be altogether unamiable. It was not self-interest alone that prompted his use of her familiar name. In the secret places of his heart he was thankful to her for a most effective encouragement. She had confirmed him in the hope that he was loved by Sidwell.

And now that he no longer feared her, Marcella was gradually dismissed from mind. For a day or two he avoided the main streets of the town, lest a chance meeting with her should revive disquietude; but, by the time that Mrs. Warricombe's invitation permitted him once more to follow his desire, he felt assured that Marcella was back in London, and the sense of distance helped to banish her among unrealities.

The hours had never pressed upon him with such demand for resolution. In the look with which Sidwell greeted him when he met her in the drawing-room, he seemed to read much more than wonted friendliness; it was as though a half secret already existed between them. But no occasion offered for a word other than trivial. The dinner-party consisted of about a score of people, and throughout the evening Peak found himself hopelessly severed from the one person whose presence was anything but an importunity to him. He maddened with jealousy, with fear, with ceaseless mental manœuv-

ring. More than one young man of agreeable aspect appeared to be on dangerous terms with Sidwell, approaching her with that air of easy, well-bred intimacy which Godwin knew too well he would never be able to assume in perfection. Again he was humiliated by self-comparison with social superiors, and again reminded that in this circle he had a place merely on sufferance. Mrs. Warricombe, when he chanced to speak with her, betrayed the slight regard in which she really held him, and Martin devoted himself to more important people. The evening was worse than lost.

Yet in two more days Sidwell would be beyond reach. He writhed upon his bed as the image of her loveliness returned again and again,—her face as she conversed at table, her dignity as she rose with the other ladies, her smile when he said good-night. A smile that meant more than civility; he was convinced of it. But memory would not support him through half-a-year of solitude and ill-divining passion.

He would write to her, and risk all. Two o'clock in the morning saw him sitting half-dressed at the table, raging over the difficulties of a composition which should express his highest self. Four o'clock saw the blotched letter torn into fragments. He could not write as he wished, could not hit the tone of manly appeal. At five o'clock he turned wretchedly into bed again.

A day of racking headache; then the long restful sleep which brings good counsel. It was well that he had not sent a letter, nor in any other way committed himself. If Sidwell were ever to be his wife, the end could only be won by heroic caution and patience. Thus far he had achieved notable results; to rush upon his aim would be the most absurd departure from a hopeful scheme gravely devised and pursued. To wait, to establish himself in the confidence of this family, to make sure his progress step by step,—that was the course indicated from the first by his calm reason. Other men might triumph by

sudden audacity; for him was no hope save in slow, persevering energy of will. Passion had all but ruined him; now he had recovered self-control.

Sidwell's six months in London might banish him from her mind, might substitute some rival against whom it would be hopeless to contend. Yes; but a thousand possibilities stood with menace in the front of every great enterprise. Before next spring he might be dead.

Defiance, then, of every foreboding, of every shame; and a life that moulded itself in the ardour of unchangeable resolve.

IV

Martin Warricombe was reconciled to the prospect of a metropolitan winter by the fact that his old friend Thomas Gale, formerly Geological Professor at Whitelaw College, had of late returned from a three years' sojourn in North America, and now dwelt in London. The breezy man of science was welcomed back among his brethren with twofold felicitation; his book on the Appalachians would have given no insufficient proof of activity abroad, but evidence more generally interesting accompanied him in the shape of a young and beautiful wife. Not every geologist whose years have entered the fifties can go forth and capture in second marriage a charming New England girl, thirty years his junior. Yet those who knew Mr. Gale—his splendid physique, his bluff cordiality, the vigour of his various talk—were scarcely surprised. The young lady was no heiress; she had, in fact, been a school teacher, and might have wearied through her best years in that uncongenial pursuit. Transplanted to the richest English soil, she developed remarkable aptitudes. A month or two of London exhibited her as a type of all that is most attractive in American womanhood.

Between Mrs. Gale and the Warricombes intimacy was soon established. Sidwell saw much of her, and liked her. To this meditative English girl the young American offered an engrossing problem, for she avowed her indifference to all religious dogmas, yet was singularly tolerant and displayed a moral fervour which Sidwell had

believed inseparable from Christian faith. At the Gales' house assembled a great variety of intellectual people, and with her father's express approval (Martin had his reasons) Sidwell made the most of this opportunity of studying the modern world. Only a few days after her arrival in London, she became acquainted with a Mr. Walsh, a brother of that heresiarch, the Whitelaw Professor, whose name was still obnoxious to her mother. He was a well-favoured man of something between thirty and forty, brilliant in conversation, personally engaging, and known by his literary productions, which found small favour with conservative readers. With surprise Sidwell in a short time became aware that Mr. Walsh had a frank liking for her society. He was often to be seen in Mrs. Warricombe's drawing-room, and at Mrs. Gale's he yet more frequently obtained occasions of talking with her. The candour with which he expressed himself on most subjects enabled her to observe a type of mind which at present had peculiar interest for her. Discretion often put restraint upon her curiosity, but none the less Mr. Walsh had plausible grounds for believing that his advances were not unwelcome. He saw that Sidwell's gaze occasionally rested upon him with a pleasant gravity, and noted the mood of meditation which sometimes came upon her when he had drawn apart. The frequency of these dialogues was observed by Mrs. Warricombe, and one evening she broached the subject to her daughter rather abruptly.

'I am surprised that you have taken such a liking to Mr. Walsh.'

Sidwell coloured, and made answer in the quiet tone which her mother had come to understand as a reproof, a hint of defective delicacy:

'I don't think I have behaved in a way that should cause you surprise.'

'It seemed to me that you were really very—friendly with him.'

'Yes, I am always friendly. But nothing more.'

'Don't you think there's a danger of his misunderstanding you, Sidwell?'

'I don't, mother. Mr. Walsh understands that we differ irreconcilably on subjects of the first importance. I have never allowed him to lose sight of that.'

Intellectual differences were of much less account to Mrs. Warricombe than to her daughter, and her judgment in a matter such as this was consequently far more practical.

'If I may advise you, dear, you oughtn't to depend much on that. I am not the only one who has noticed something—I only mention it, you know.'

Sidwell mused gravely. In a minute or two she looked up and said in her gentlest voice:

'Thank you, mother. I will be more careful.'

Perhaps she had lost sight of prudence, forgetting that Mr. Walsh could not divine her thoughts. Her interest in him was impersonal; when he spoke she was profoundly attentive, only because her mind would have been affected in the same way had she been reading his words instead of listening to them. She could not let him know that another face was often more distinct to her imagination than his to her actual sight, and that her thoughts were frequently more busy with a remembered dialogue than with this in which she was engaged. She had abundantly safe-guarded herself against serious misconstruction, but if gossip were making her its subject, it would be inconsiderate not to regard the warning.

It came, indeed, at a moment when she was very willing to rest from social activity. At the time of her last stay in London, three years ago, she had not been ripe for reflection on what she saw. Now her mind was kept so incessantly at strain, and her emotions answered so intensely to every appeal, that at length she felt the need of repose. It was not with her as with the young women who seek only to make the most of their time

in agreeable ways. Sidwell's vital forces were concentrated in an effort of profound spiritual significance. The critical hour of her life was at hand, and she exerted every faculty in the endeavour to direct herself aright.

Having heard from his brother that Sidwell had not been out for several days, Buckland took an opportunity of calling at the house early one morning. He found her alone in a small drawing-room, and sat down with an expression of weary discontent. This mood had been frequent in the young man of late. Sidwell remarked a change that was coming over him, a gloominess unnatural to his character.

'Seen the Walworths lately?' he asked, when his sister had assured him that she was not seriously ailing.

'We called a few days ago.'

'Meet anyone there?'

'Two or three people. No one that interested me.'

'You haven't come across some friends of theirs called Moxey?'

'Oh yes! Miss Moxey was there one afternoon about a fortnight ago.'

'Did you talk to her at all?' Buckland asked.

'Yes; we hadn't much to say to each other, though. How do you know of her? Through Sylvia, I daresay.'

'Met her when I was last down yonder.'

Sidwell had long since heard from her friend of Miss Moxey's visit to Budleigh Salterton, but she was not aware that Buckland had been there at the same time. Sylvia had told her, however, of the acquaintance existing between Miss Moxey and Peak, a point of much interest to her, though it remained a mere unconnected fact. In her short conversation with Marcella, she had not ventured to refer to it.

'Do you know anything of the family?'

'I was going to ask you the same,' returned Buckland. 'I thought you might have heard something from the Walworths.'

Sidwell had in fact sought information, but, as her relations with the Walworths were formal, such inquiry as she could make from them elicited nothing more than she already knew from Sylvia.

'Are you anxious to discover who they are?' she asked.

'Oh, not particularly.'

Buckland moved uneasily, and became silent.

'I dined with Walsh yesterday,' he said, at length, struggling to shake off the obvious dreariness that oppressed him. 'He suits me; we can get on together.'

'No doubt.'

'But you don't dislike him, I think?'

'Implying that I dislike *you*,' said Sidwell, lightsomely.

'You have no affection for my opinions.—Walsh is an honest man.'

'I hope so.'

'He says what he thinks. No compromise with fashionable hypocrisy.'

'I despise that kind of thing quite as much as you do.'

They looked at each other. Buckland had a sullen air.

'Yes, in your own way,' he replied, 'you are sincere enough, I have no doubt. I wish all women were so.'

'What exception have you in mind?'

He did not seem inclined to answer.

'Perhaps it is your understanding of them that's at fault,' added Sidwell, gently.

'Not in one case, at all events,' he exclaimed. 'Suppose you were asked to define Miss Moorhouse's religious opinions, how would you do it?'

'I am not well enough acquainted with them.'

'Do you imagine for a moment that she has any more faith in the supernatural than I have?'

'I think there is a great difference between her position and yours.'

'Because she is hypocritical!' cried Buckland, angrily. 'She deceives you. She hasn't the courage to be honest.'

Sidwell wore a pained expression.

'You judge her,' she replied, 'far too coarsely. No one is called upon to make an elaborate declaration of faith as often as such subjects are spoken of. Sylvia thinks so differently from you about almost everything that, when she happens to agree with you, you are misled and misinterpret her whole position.'

'I understand her perfectly,' Buckland went on, in the same irritated voice. 'There are plenty of women like her—with brains enough, but utter and contemptible cowards. Cowards even to themselves, perhaps. What can you expect, when society is based on rotten shams?'

For several minutes he pursued this vein of invective, then took an abrupt leave. Sidwell had a piece of grave counsel ready to offer him, but he was clearly in no mood to listen, so she postponed it.

A day or two after this, she received a letter from Sylvia. Miss Moorhouse was anything but a good correspondent; she often confessed her inability to compose anything but the briefest and driest statement of facts. With no little surprise, therefore, Sidwell found that the envelope contained two sheets all but covered with her friend's cramped handwriting. The letter began with apology for long delay in acknowledging two communications.

'But you know well enough my dilatory disposition. I have written to you mentally at least once a day, and I hope you have mentally received the results—that is to say, have assured yourself of my goodwill to you, and I had nothing else to send.'

At this point Sylvia had carefully obliterated two lines, blackening the page into unsightliness. In vain Sidwell pored over the effaced passage, led to do so by a fancy that she could discern a capital P, which looked like the first letter of a name. The writer continued:

'Don't trouble yourself so much about insoluble questions. Try to be more positive—I don't say become a Positivist. Keep a receptive mind, and wait for time to shape your views of things. I see that London has agitated and confused you; you have lost your bearings amid the maze of contradictory finger-posts. If you were here I could soothe you with Sylvian (much the same as sylvan) philosophy, but I can't write.'

Here the letter was to have ended, for on the line beneath was legible 'Give my love to Fanny,' but this again had been crossed out, and there followed a long paragraph:

'I have been reading a book about ants. Perhaps you know all the wonderful things about them, but I had neglected that branch of natural history. Their doings are astonishingly like those of an animal called man, and it seems to me that I have discovered one point of resemblance which perhaps has never been noted. Are you aware that at an early stage of their existence ants have wings? They fly—how shall I express it?—only for the brief time of their courtship and marriage, and when these important affairs are satisfactorily done with their wings wither away, and thenceforth they have to content themselves with running about on the earth. Now isn't this a remarkable parallel to one stage of human life? Do not men and women also soar and flutter—at a certain time? And don't their wings manifestly drop off as soon as the end of that skyward movement has been achieved? If the gods had made me poetical, I would sonnetise on this idea. Do you know any poet with a fondness for the ant-philosophy? If so, offer him this suggestion with liberty to "make any use of it he likes."

'But the fact of the matter is that some human beings are never winged at all. I am decidedly coming to the conclusion that I am one of those. Think of me henceforth as an apteryx—you have a dictionary at hand?

Like the tailless fox, I might naturally maintain that my state is the more gracious, but honestly I am not assured of that. It may be (I half believe it is) a good thing to soar and flutter, and at times I regret that nature has forbidden me that experience. Decidedly I would never try *to persuade anyone else* to forego the use of wings. Bear this in mind, my dear girl. But I suspect that in time to come there will be an increasing number of female human creatures who from their birth are content with *walking*. Not long ago, I had occasion to hint that—though under another figure—to your brother Buckland. I hope he understood me—I think he did—and that he wasn't offended.

'I had something to tell you. I have forgotten it—never mind.'

And therewith the odd epistle was concluded. Sidwell perused the latter part several times. Of course she was at no loss to interpret it. Buckland's demeanour for the past two months had led her to surmise that his latest visit to Budleigh Salterton had finally extinguished the hopes which drew him in that direction. His recent censure of Sylvia might be thus explained. She grieved that her brother's suit should be discouraged, but could not persuade herself that Sylvia's decision was final. The idea of a match between those two was very pleasant to her. For Buckland she imagined it would be fraught with good results, and for Sylvia, on the whole, it might be the best thing.

Before she replied to her friend nearly a month passed, and Christmas was at hand. Again she had been much in society. Mr. Walsh had renewed his unmistakable attentions, and when her manner of meeting them began to trouble him with doubts, had cleared the air by making a formal offer of marriage. Sidwell's negative was absolute, much to her mother's relief. On the day of that event, she wrote rather a long letter to Sylvia, but Mr. Walsh's name was not mentioned in it.

'Mother tells me,' it began, 'that *your* mother has written to her from Salisbury, and that you yourself are going there for a stay of some weeks. I am sorry, for on the Monday after Christmas Day I shall be in Exeter, and hoped somehow to have seen you. We—mother and I—are going to run down together, to see after certain domestic affairs; only for three days at most.

'Your ant-letter was very amusing, but it saddened me, dear Sylvia. I can't make any answer. On these subjects it is very difficult even for the closest friends to open their minds to each other. I don't—and don't wish to—believe in the *apteryx* profession; that's all I must say.

'My health has been indifferent since I last wrote. We live in all but continuous darkness, and very seldom indeed breathe anything that can be called air. No doubt this state of things has its effect on me. I look forwards, not to the coming of spring, for here we shall see nothing of its beauties, but to the month which will release us from London. I want to smell the pines again, and to see the golden gorse in *our* road.

'By way of being more "positive," I have read much in the newspapers, supplementing from them my own experience of London society. The result is that I am more and more confirmed in the fears with which I have already worried you. Two movements are plainly going on in the life of our day. The decay of religious belief is undermining morality, and the progress of Radicalism in politics is working to the same end by overthrowing social distinctions. Evidence stares one in the face from every column of the papers. Of course you have read more or less about the recent "scandal"—I mean the *most* recent.—It isn't the kind of thing one cares to discuss, but we can't help knowing about it, and does it not strongly support what I say? Here is materialism sinking into brutal immorality, and high social rank degrading itself by intimacy with the corrupt vulgar.

There are newspapers that make political capital out of these "revelations." I have read some of them, and they make me so *fiercely* aristocratic that I find it hard to care anything at all even for the humanitarian efforts of people I respect. You will tell me, I know, that this is quite the wrong way of looking at it. But the evils are so monstrous that it is hard to fix one's mind on the good that may long hence result from them.

'I cling to the essential (that is the *spiritual*) truths of Christianity as the only absolute good left in our time. I would say that I care nothing for forms, but some form there must be, else one's faith evaporates. It has become very easy for me to understand how men and women who know the world refuse to believe any longer in a directing Providence. A week ago I again met Miss Moxey at the Walworths', and talked with her more freely than before. This conversation showed me that I have become much more tolerant towards individuals. But though this or that person may be supported by moral sense alone, the world cannot dispense with religion. If it tries to—and it *will*—there are dreadful times before us.

'I wish I were a man! I would do something, however ineffectual. I would stand on the side of those who are fighting against mob-rule and mob-morals. How would you like to see Exeter Cathedral converted into a "coffee music-hall"? And that will come.'

Reading this, Sylvia had the sense of listening to an echo. Some of the phrases recalled to her quite a different voice from Sidwell's. She smiled and mused.

On the morning appointed for her journey to Exeter Sidwell rose early, and in unusually good spirits. Mrs. Warricombe was less animated by the prospect of five hours in a railway carriage, for London had a covering of black snow, and it seemed likely that more would fall. Martin suggested postponement, but circumstances made this undesirable.

'Let Fanny go with me,' proposed Sidwell, just after breakfast. 'I can see to everything perfectly well, mother.'

But Fanny hastened to decline. She was engaged for a dance on the morrow.

'Then I'll run down with you myself, Sidwell,' said her father.

Mrs. Warricombe looked at the weather and hesitated. There were strong reasons why she should go, and they determined her to brave discomforts.

It chanced that the morning post had brought Mr. Warricombe a letter from Godwin Peak. It was a reply to one that he had written with Christmas greetings; a kindness natural in him, for he had remembered that the young man was probably hard at work in his lonely lodgings. He spoke of it privately to his wife.

'A very good letter—thoughtful and cheerful. You're not likely to see him, but if you happen to, say a pleasant word.'

'I shouldn't have written, if I were you,' remarked Mrs. Warricombe.

'Why not? I was only thinking the other day that he contrasted very favourably with the younger generation as we observe it here. Yes, I have faith in Peak. There's the right stuff in him.'

'Oh, I daresay. But still'——

And Mrs. Warricombe went away with an air of misgiving.

V

In volunteering a promise not to inform her brother of Peak's singular position, Marcella spoke with sincerity. She was prompted by incongruous feelings—a desire to compel Godwin's gratitude, and disdain of the circumstances in which she had discovered him. There seemed to be little likelihood of Christian's learning from any other person that she had met with Peak at Budleigh Salterton; he had, indeed, dined with her at the Walworths', and might improve his acquaintance with that family, but it was improbable that they would ever mention in his hearing the stranger who had casually been presented to them, or indeed ever again think of him. If she held her peace, the secret of Godwin's retirement must still remain impenetrable. He would pursue his ends as hitherto, thinking of *her*, if at all, as a weak woman who had immodestly betrayed a hopeless passion, and who could be trusted never to wish him harm.

That was Marcella's way of reading a man's thoughts. She did not attribute to Peak the penetration which would make him uneasy. In spite of masculine proverbs, it is the habit of women to suppose that the other sex regards them confidingly, ingenuously. Marcella was unusually endowed with analytic intelligence, but in this case she believed what she hoped. She knew that Peak's confidence in her must be coloured with contempt, but this mattered little so long as he paid her the compliment of feeling sure that she was superior to ignoble

temptations. Many a woman would behave with treacherous malice. It was in her power to expose him, to confound all his schemes, for she knew the authorship of that remarkable paper in *The Critical Review*. Before receiving Peak's injunction of secrecy, Earwaker had talked of 'The New Sophistry' with Moxey and with Malkin; the request came too late. In her interview with Godwin at the Exeter hotel, she had not even hinted at this knowledge, partly because she was unconscious that Peak imagined the affair a secret between himself and Earwaker, partly because she thought it unworthy of her even to seem to threaten. It gratified her, however, to feel that he was at her mercy, and the thought preoccupied her for many days.

Passion which has the intellect on its side is more easily endured than that which offers sensual defiance to all reasoning, but on the other hand it lasts much longer. Marcella was not consumed by her emotions; she often thought calmly, coldly, of the man she loved. Yet he was seldom long out of her mind, and the instigation of circumstances at times made her suffering intense. Such an occasion was her first meeting with Sidwell Warricombe, which took place at the Walworths', in London. Down in Devonshire she had learnt that a family named Warricombe were Peak's intimate friends; nothing more than this, for indeed no one was in a position to tell her more. Wakeful jealousy caused her to fix upon the fact as one of significance; Godwin's evasive manner when she questioned him confirmed her suspicions; and as soon as she was brought face to face with Sidwell, suspicion became certainty. She knew at once that Miss Warricombe was the very person who would be supremely attractive to Godwin Peak.

An interval of weeks, and again she saw the face that in the meantime had been as present to her imagination as Godwin's own features. This time she conversed at some length with Miss Warricombe. Was it merely a

fancy that the beautiful woman looked at her, spoke to her, with some exceptional interest? By now she had learnt that the Moorhouses and the Warricombes were connected in close friendship; it was all but certain, then, that Miss Moorhouse had told Miss Warricombe of Peak's visit to Budleigh Salterton, and its incidents. Could this in any way be explanatory of the steady, searching look in those soft eyes?

Marcella had always regarded the emotion of jealousy as characteristic of a vulgar nature. Now that it possessed her, she endeavoured to call it by other names; to persuade herself that she was indignant on abstract grounds, or anxious only with reference to Peak's true interests. She could not affect surprise. So intensely sympathetic was her reading of Godwin's character that she understood—or at all events recognised—the power Sidwell would possess over him. He did not care for enlightenment in a woman; he was sensual—though in a subtle way; the aristocratic vein in his temper made him subject to strong impressions from trivialities of personal demeanour, of social tone.

Yet all was mere conjecture. She had not dared to utter Peak's name, lest in doing so she should betray herself. Constantly planning to make further discoveries, she as constantly tried to dismiss all thought of the matter—to learn indifference. Already she had debased herself, and her nature must be contemptible indeed if anything could lure her forward on such a path.

None the less, she was assiduous in maintaining friendly relations with the Walworths. Christian, too, had got into the habit of calling there; it was significant of the noticeable change which was come upon him—a change his sister was at no loss to understand from the moment that he informed her (gravely, but without expressiveness) of Mr. Palmer's death. Instead of shunning ordinary society, he seemed bent on extending the circle of his acquaintance. He urged Marcella to

invite friendly calls, to have guests at dinner. There seemed to be a general revival of his energies, exhibited in the sphere of study as well as of amusement. Not a day went by without his purchasing books or scientific apparatus, and the house was brightened with works of art chosen in the studios which Miss Walworth advised him to visit. All the amiabilities of his character came into free play; with Marcella he was mirthful, affectionate, even caressing. He grew scrupulous about his neckties, his gloves, and was careful to guard his fingers against corroding acids when he worked in the laboratory. Such indications of hopefulness caused Marcella more misgiving than pleasure; she made no remark, but waited with anxiety for some light on the course of events.

Just before dinner, one evening, as she sat alone in the drawing-room, Christian entered with a look which portended some strange announcement. He spoke abruptly:

'I have heard something astonishing.'

'What is that?'

'This afternoon I went to the matinée at the Vaudeville, and found myself among a lot of our friends—the Walworths and the Hunters and the Mortons. Between the acts I was talking to Hunter, when a man came up to us, spoke to Hunter, and was introduced to me—a Mr. Warricombe. What do you think he said? "I believe you know my friend Peak, Mr. Moxey?" "Peak? To be sure! Can you tell me what has become of him?" He gave me an odd look. "Why, I met him last, some two months ago, in Devonshire." At that moment we were obliged to go to our places, and I couldn't get hold of the fellow again. Hunter told me something about him; he knows the Walworths, it seems—belongs to a good Devonshire family. What on earth can Peak be doing over there?'

Marcella kept silence. The event she had judged im-

probable had come to pass. The chance of its doing so had of course increased since Christian began to associate freely with the Walworths and their circle. Yet, considering the slightness of the connection between that group of people and the Warricombe family, there had seemed no great likelihood of Christian's getting acquainted with the latter. She debated rapidly in her troubled mind how to meet this disclosure. Curiosity would, of course, impel her brother to follow up the clue; he would again encounter Warricombe, and must then learn all the facts of Peak's position. To what purpose should she dissemble her own knowledge?

Did she desire that Godwin should remain in security? A tremor more akin to gladness than its opposite impeded her utterance. If Warricombe became aware of all that was involved in Godwin Peak's withdrawal from among his friends—if (as must follow) he imparted the discovery to his sister——

The necessity of speaking enabled her to ignore these turbulent speculations, which yet were anything but new to her.

'They met at Budleigh Salterton,' she said, quietly.

'Who did? Warricombe and Peak?'

'Yes. At the Moorhouses'. It was when I was there.'

Christian stared at her.

'When you were there? But—*you* met Peak?'

His sister smiled, turning from the astonished gaze.

'Yes, I met him.'

'But, why the deuce——? Why didn't you tell me, Marcella?'

'He asked me not to speak of it. He didn't wish you to know that—that he has decided to become a clergyman.'

Christian was stricken dumb. In spite of his sister's obvious agitation, he could not believe what she told

him; her smile gave him an excuse for supposing that she jested.

'Peak a clergyman?' He burst out laughing. 'What's the meaning of all this?—Do speak intelligibly! What's the fellow up to?'

'I am quite serious. He is studying for Orders—has been for this last year.'

In desperation, Christian turned to another phase of the subject.

'Then Malkin *was* mistaken?'

'Plainly.'

'And you mean to tell me that Peak——? Give me more details. Where's he living? How has he got to know people like these Warricombes?'

Marcella told all that she knew, and without injunction of secrecy. The affair had passed out of her hands; destiny must fulfil itself. And again the tremor that resembled an uneasy joy went through her frame.

'But how,' asked Christian, 'did this fellow Warricombe come to know that *I* was a friend of Peak's?'

'That's a puzzle to me. I shouldn't have thought he would have remembered my name; and, even if he had, how could he conclude——?'

She broke off, pondering. Warricombe must have made inquiries, possibly suggested by suspicions.

'I scarcely spoke of Mr. Peak to anyone,' she added. 'People saw, of course, that we were acquaintances, but it couldn't have seemed a thing of any importance.'

'You spoke with him in private, it seems?'

'Yes, I saw him for a few minutes—in Exeter.'

'And you hadn't said anything to the Walworths that—that would surprise them?'

'Purposely not.—Why should I injure him?'

Christian knit his brows. He understood too well why his sister should refrain from such injury.

'You would have behaved in the same way,' Marcella added.

'Why really—yes, perhaps so. Yet I don't know.—In plain English, Peak is a wolf in sheep's clothing!'

'I don't know anything about that,' she replied, with gloomy evasion.

'Nonsense, my dear girl!—Had he the impudence to pretend to you that he was sincere?'

'He made no declaration.'

'But you are convinced he is acting the hypocrite, Marcella. You spoke of the risk of injuring him.—What are his motives? What does he aim at?'

'Scarcely a bishopric, I should think,' she replied, bitterly.

'Then, by Jove! Earwaker may be right!'

Marcella darted an inquiring look at him.

'What has he thought?'

'I'm ashamed to speak of it. He suggested once that Peak might disguise himself for the sake of—of making a good marriage.'

The reply was a nervous laugh.

'Look here, Marcella.' He caught her hand. 'This is a very awkward business. Peak is disgracing himself; he will be unmasked; there'll be a scandal. It was kind of you to keep silence—when don't you behave kindly, dear girl?—but think of the possible results to *us*. We shall be something very like accomplices.'

'How?' Marcella exclaimed, impatiently. 'Who need know that we were so intimate with him?'

'Warricombe seems to know it.'

'Who can prove that he isn't sincere?'

'No one, perhaps. But it will seem a very odd thing that he hid away from all his old friends. You remember, I betrayed that to Warricombe, before I knew that it mattered.'

Yes, and Mr. Warricombe could hardly forget the circumstance. He would press his investigation—knowing already, perhaps, of Peak's approaches to his sister Sidwell.

'Marcella, a man plays games like that at his own peril. I don't like this kind of thing. Perhaps he has audacity enough to face out any disclosure. But it's out of the question for you and me to nurse his secret. We have no right to do so.'

'You propose to denounce him?'

Marcella gazed at her brother with an agitated look.

'Not denounce. I am fond of Peak; I wish him well. But I can't join him in a dishonourable plot.—Then, we mustn't endanger our place in society.'

'I have no place in society,' Marcella answered, coldly.

'Don't say that, and don't think it. We are both going to make more of our lives; we are going to think very little of the past, and a great deal of the future. We are still young; we have happiness before us.'

'We?' she asked, with shaken voice.

'Yes—both of us! Who can say'——

Again he took her hand and pressed it warmly in both his own. Just then the door opened, and dinner was announced. Christian talked on, in low hurried tones, for several minutes, affectionately, encouragingly. After dinner, he wished to resume the subject, but Marcella declared that there was no more to be said; he must act as honour and discretion bade him; for herself, she should simply keep silence as hitherto. And she left him to his reflections.

Though with so little of ascertained fact to guide her, Marcella interpreted the hints afforded by her slight knowledge of the Warricombes with singular accuracy. Precisely as she had imagined, Buckland Warricombe was going about on Peak's track, learning all he could concerning the theological student, forming acquaintance with anyone likely to supplement his discoveries. And less than a fortnight after the meeting at the theatre, Christian made known to his sister that Warricombe and he had had a second conversation, this time uninterrupted.

'He inquired after you, Marcella, and—really I had no choice but to ask him to call here. I hardly think he'll come. He's not the kind of man I care for—though liberal enough, and all that.'

'Wasn't it rather rash to give that invitation?'

'The fact was, I so dreaded the appearance of—of seeming to avoid him,' Christian pleaded, awkwardly. 'You know, that affair—we won't talk any more of it; but, if there *should* be a row about it, you are sure to be compromised unless we have managed to guard ourselves. If Warricombe calls, we must talk about Peak without the least show of restraint. Let it appear that we thought his choice of a profession unlikely, but not impossible. Happily, we needn't know anything about that anonymous *Critical* article.—Indeed, I think I have acted wisely.'

Marcella murmured:

'Yes, I suppose you have.'

'And, by the way, I have spoken of it to Earwaker. Not of your part in the story, of course. I told him that I had met a man who knew all about Peak.—Impossible, you see, for me to keep silence with so intimate a friend.'

'Then Mr. Earwaker will write to him?' said Marcella, reflectively.

'I couldn't give him any address.'

'How does Mr. Warricombe seem to regard Mr. Peak?'

'With a good deal of interest, and of the friendliest kind. Naturally enough; they were College friends, as you know, before I had heard of Peak's existence.'

'He has no suspicions?'

Christian thought not, but her brother's judgment had not much weight with Marcella.

She at once dreaded and desired Warricombe's appearance. If he thought it worth while to cultivate her acquaintance, she would henceforth have the opportunity of studying Peak's relations with the Warricombes;

on the other hand, this was to expose herself to suffering and temptation from which the better part of her nature shrank with disdain. That she might seem to have broken the promise voluntarily made to Godwin was a small matter; not so the risk of being overcome by an ignoble jealousy. She had no overweening confidence in the steadfastness of her self-respect, if circumstances were all on the side of sensual impulse. And the longer she brooded on this peril, the more it allured her. For therewith was connected the one satisfaction which still remained to her: however little he desired to keep her constantly in mind, Godwin Peak must of necessity do so after what had passed between them. Had but her discovery remained her own secret, then the pleasure of commanding her less pure emotions, of proving to Godwin that she was above the weakness of common women, might easily have prevailed. Now that her knowledge was shared by others, she had lost that safeguard against lower motive. The argument that to unmask hypocrisy was in itself laudable she dismissed with contempt; let that be the resource of a woman who would indulge her rancour whilst keeping up the inward pretence of sanctity. If *she* erred in the ways characteristic of her sex, it should at all events be a conscious degradation.

'Have you seen that odd creature Malkin lately?' she asked of Christian, a day or two after.

'No, I haven't; I thought of him to make up our dinner on Sunday; but you had rather not have him here, I daresay.'

'Oh, he is amusing. Ask him by all means,' said Marcella, carelessly.

'He may have heard about Peak from Earwaker, you know. If he begins to talk before people'——

'Things have gone too far for such considerations,' replied his sister, with a petulance strange to her habits of speech.

'Well, yes,' admitted Christian, glancing at her. 'We can't be responsible.'

He reproached himself for this attitude towards Peak, but was heartily glad that Marcella seemed to have learnt to regard the intriguer with a wholesome indifference.

On the second day after Christmas, as they sat talking idly in the dusking twilight, the door of the drawing-room was thrown open, and a visitor announced. The name answered with such startling suddenness to the thought with which Marcella had been occupied that, for an instant, she could not believe that she had heard aright. Yet it was undoubtedly Mr. Warricombe who presented himself. He came forward with a slightly hesitating air, but Christian made haste to smooth the situation. With the help of those commonplaces by which even intellectual people are at times compelled to prove their familiarity with social usages, conversation was set in movement.

Buckland could not be quite himself. The consciousness that he had sought these people not at all for their own sake made him formal and dry; his glances, his half-smile, indicated a doubt whether the Moxeys belonged entirely to the sphere in which he was at home. Hence a rather excessive politeness, such as the man who sets much store on breeding exhibits to those who may at any moment, even in a fraction of a syllable, prove themselves his inferiors. With men and women of the unmistakably lower orders, Buckland could converse in a genial tone that recommended him to their esteem; on the borderland of refinement, his sympathies were repressed, and he held the distinctive part of his mind in reserve.

Marcella desired to talk agreeably, but a weight lay upon her tongue; she was struck with the resemblance in Warricombe's features to those of his sister, and this held her in a troubled preoccupation, occasionally

evident when she made a reply, or tried to diversify the talk by leading to a new topic. It was rather early in the afternoon, and she had slight hope that any other caller would appear; a female face would have been welcome to her, even that of foolish Mrs. Morton, who might possibly look in before six o'clock. To her relief the door did presently open, but the sharp, creaking footstep which followed was no lady's; the servant announced Mr. Malkin.

Marcella's eyes gleamed strangely. Not with the light of friendly welcome, though for that it could be mistaken. She rose quietly, and stepped forward with a movement which again seemed to betoken eagerness of greeting. In presenting the newcomer to Mr. Warricombe, she spoke with an uncertain voice. Buckland was more than formal. The stranger's aspect impressed him far from favourably, and he resented as an impudence the hearty hand-grip to which he perforce submitted.

'I come to plead with you,' exclaimed Malkin, turning to Marcella, in his abrupt, excited way. 'After accepting your invitation to dine, I find that the thing is utterly and absolutely impossible. I had entirely forgotten an engagement of the very gravest nature. I am conscious of behaving in quite an unpardonable way.'

Marcella laughed down his excuses. She had suddenly become so mirthful that Christian looked at her in surprise, imagining that she was unable to restrain her sense of the ridiculous in Malkin's demeanour.

'I have hurried up from Wrotham,' pursued the apologist. 'Did I tell you, Moxey, that I had taken rooms down there, to be able to spend a day or two near my friends the Jacoxes occasionally? On the way here, I looked in at Staple Inn, but Earwaker is away somewhere. What an odd thing that people will go off without letting one know! It's such common

ill-luck of mine to find people gone away—I'm really astonished to find you at home, Miss Moxey.'

Marcella looked at Warricombe and laughed.

'You must understand that subjectively,' she said, with nervous gaiety which again excited her brother's surprise. 'Please don't be discouraged by it from coming to see us again; I am very rarely out in the afternoon.'

'But,' persisted Malkin, 'it's precisely my ill fortune to hit on those rare moments when people *are* out!—Now, I never meet acquaintances in the streets of London; but, if I happen to be abroad, as likely as not I encounter the last person I should expect to find. Why, you remember, I rush over to America for scarcely a week's stay, and there I come across a man who has disappeared astonishingly from the ken of all his friends!'

Christian looked at Marcella. She was leaning forward, her lips slightly parted, her eyes wide as if in gaze at something that fascinated her. He saw that she spoke, but her voice was hardly to be recognised.

'Are you quite sure of that instance, Mr. Malkin?'

'Yes, I feel quite sure, Miss Moxey. Undoubtedly it was Peak!'

Buckland Warricombe, who had been waiting for a chance of escape, suddenly wore a look of interest. He rapidly surveyed the trio. Christian, somewhat out of countenance, tried to answer Malkin in a tone of light banter.

'It happens, my dear fellow, that Peak has not left England since we lost sight of him.'

'What? He has been heard of? Where is he then?'

'Mr. Warricombe can assure you that he has been living for a year at Exeter.'

Buckland, perceiving that he had at length come

upon something important to his purposes, smiled genially.

'Yes, I have had the pleasure of seeing Peak down in Devon from time to time.'

'Then it was really an illusion!' cried Malkin. 'I was too hasty. Yet that isn't a charge that can be often brought against me, I think. Does Earwaker know of this?'

'He has lately heard,' replied Christian, who in vain sought for a means of checking Malkin's loquacity. 'I thought he might have told you.'

'Certainly not. The thing is quite new to me. And what is Peak doing down there, pray? Why did he conceal himself?'

Christian gazed appealingly at his sister. She returned the look steadily, but neither stirred nor spoke. It was Warricombe's voice that next sounded:

'Peak's behaviour seems mysterious,' he began, with ironic gravity. 'I don't pretend to understand him. What's *your* view of his character, Mr. Malkin?'

'I know him very slightly, indeed, Mr. Warricombe. But I have a high opinion of his powers. I wonder he does so little. After that article of his in *The Critical*'——

Malkin became aware of something like agonised entreaty on Christian's countenance, but this had merely the effect of heightening his curiosity.

'In *The Critical?*' said Warricombe, eagerly. 'I didn't know of that. What was the subject?'

'To be sure, it was anonymous,' went on Malkin, without a suspicion of the part he was playing before these three excited people. 'A paper called "The New Sophistry," a tremendous bit of satire.'

Marcella's eyes closed as if a light had flashed before them; she drew a short sigh, and at once seemed to become quite at ease, the smile with which she regarded Warricombe expressing a calm interest.

'That article was Peak's?' Buckland asked, in a very quiet voice.

Christian at last found his opportunity.

'He never mentioned it to you? Perhaps he thought he had gone rather too far in his Broad Churchism, and might be misunderstood.'

'Broad Churchism?' cried Malkin. 'Uncommonly broad, I must say!'

And he laughed heartily; Marcella seemed to join in his mirth.

'Then it would surprise you,' said Buckland, in the same quiet tone as before, 'to hear that Peak is about to take Orders?'

'Orders?—For what?'

Christian laughed. The worst was over; after all, it came as a relief.

'Not for wines,' he replied. 'Mr. Warricombe means that Peak is going to be ordained.'

Malkin's amazement rendered him speechless. He stared from one person to another, his features strangely distorted.

'You can hardly believe it?' pressed Buckland.

The reply was anticipated by Christian saying:

'Remember, Malkin, that you had no opportunity of studying Peak. It's not so easy to understand him.'

'But I don't see,' burst out the other, 'how I could possibly so *mis*understand him! What has Earwaker to say?'

Buckland rose from his seat, advanced to Marcella, and offered his hand. She said mechanically, 'Must you go?' but was incapable of another word. Christian came to her relief, performed the needful civilities, and accompanied his acquaintance to the foot of the stairs. Buckland had become grave, stiff, monosyllabic; Christian made no allusion to the scene thus suddenly interrupted, and they parted with a formal air.

Malkin remained for another quarter of an hour, when the muteness of his companions made it plain to him that he had better withdraw. He went off with a sense of having been mystified, half resentful, and vastly impatient to see Earwaker.

PART V

I

THE cuckoo clock in Mrs. Roots's kitchen had just struck three. A wind roared from the north-east, and light thickened beneath a sky which made threat of snow. Peak was in a mood to enjoy the crackling fire; he settled himself with a book in his easy-chair, and thought with pleasure of two hours' reading, before the appearance of the homely teapot.

Christmas was just over—one cause of the feeling of relief and quietness which possessed him. No one had invited him for Christmas Eve or the day that followed, and he did not regret it. The letter he had received from Martin Warricombe was assurance enough that those he desired to remember him still did so. He had thought of using this season for his long postponed visit to Twybridge, but reluctance prevailed. All popular holidays irritated and depressed him; he loathed the spectacle of multitudes in Sunday garb. It was all over, and the sense of that afforded him a brief content.

This book, which he had just brought from the circulating library, was altogether to his taste. The author, Justin Walsh, he knew to be a brother of Professor Walsh, long ago the object of his rebellious admiration. Matter and treatment rejoiced him. No intellectual delight, though he was capable of it in many forms, so stirred his spirit as that afforded him by a vigorous modern writer joyously assailing the old moralities. Justin Walsh was a modern of the moderns; at once

man of science and man of letters; defiant without a hint of popular cynicism, scornful of English reticences yet never gross. '*Oui, répondit Pococurante, il est beau d'écrire ce qu'on pense; c'est le privilége de l'homme.*' This stood by way of motto on the title-page, and Godwin felt his nerves thrill in sympathetic response.

What a fine fellow he must be to have for a friend! Now a man like this surely had companionship enough and of the kind he wished? He wrote like one who associates freely with the educated classes both at home and abroad. Was he married? Where would *he* seek his wife? The fitting mate for him would doubtless be found among those women, cosmopolitan and emancipated, whose acquaintance falls only to men in easy circumstances and of good social standing, men who travel much, who are at home in all the great centres of civilisation.

As Peak meditated, the volume fell upon his knee. Had it not lain in his own power to win a reputation like that which Justin Walsh was achieving? His paper in *The Critical Review*, itself a decided success, might have been followed up by others of the same tenor. Instead of mouldering in a dull cathedral town, he might now be living and working in France or Germany. His money would have served one purpose as well as the other, and two or three years of determined effort——

Mrs. Roots showed her face at the door.

'A gentleman is asking for you, sir,—Mr. Chilvers.'

'Mr. Chilvers? Please ask him to come up.'

He threw his book on to the table, and stood in expectancy. Someone ascended the stairs with rapid stride and creaking boots. The door was flung open, and a cordial but affected voice burst forth in greeting.

'Ha, Mr. Peak! I hope you haven't altogether forgotten me? Delighted to see you again!'

Godwin gave his hand, and felt it strongly pressed,

whilst Chilvers gazed into his face with a smiling wistfulness which could only be answered with a grin of discomfort. The Rev. Bruno had grown very tall, and seemed to be in perfect health; but the effeminacy of his brilliant youth still declared itself in his attitudes, gestures, and attire. He was dressed with marked avoidance of the professional pattern. A hat of soft felt but not clerical, fashionable collar and tie, a sweeping ulster, and beneath it a frock-coat, which was doubtless the pride of some West End tailor. His patent-leather boots were dandiacally diminutive; his glove fitted like that of a lady who lives but to be *bien gantée*. The feathery hair, which at Whitelaw he was wont to pat and smooth, still had its golden shimmer, and on his face no growth was permitted.

'I had heard of your arrival here, of course,' said Peak, trying to appear civil, though anything more than that was beyond his power. 'Will you sit down?'

'This is the "breathing time o' the day" with you, I hope? I don't disturb your work?'

'I was only reading this book of Walsh's. Do you know it?'

But for some such relief of his feelings, Godwin could not have sat still. There was a pleasure in uttering Walsh's name. Moreover, it would serve as a test of Chilvers' disposition.

'Walsh?' He took up the volume. 'Ha! Justin Walsh. I know him. A wonderful book! Admirable dialectic! Delicious style!'

'Not quite orthodox, I fancy,' replied Godwin, with a curling of the lips.

'Orthodox? Oh, of course not, of course not! But a rich vein of humanity. Don't you find that?—Pray allow me to throw off my overcoat. Ha, thanks!—A rich vein of humanity. Walsh is by no means to be confused with the nullifidians. A very broad-hearted,

large-souled man; at bottom the truest of Christians. Now and then he effervesces rather too exuberantly. Yes, I admit it. In a review of his last book, which I was privileged to write for one of our papers, I ventured to urge upon him the necessity of *restraint*; it seems to me that in this new work he exhibits more self-control, an approach to the serene fortitude which I trust he may attain. A man of the broadest brotherliness. A most valuable ally of renascent Christianity.'

Peak was hardly prepared for this strain. He knew that Chilvers prided himself on 'breadth,' but as yet he had enjoyed no intercourse with the broadest school of Anglicans, and was uncertain as to the limits of modern latitudinarianism. The discovery of such fantastic liberality in a man whom he could not but dislike and contemn gave him no pleasure, but at least it disposed him to amusement rather than antagonism. Chilvers' pronunciation and phraseology were distinguished by such original affectation that it was impossible not to find entertainment in listening to him. Though his voice was naturally thin and piping, he managed to speak in head notes which had a ring of robust utterance. The sound of his words was intended to correspond with their virile warmth of meaning. In the same way he had cultivated a habit of the muscles which conveyed an impression that he was devoted to athletic sports. His arms occasionally swung as if brandishing dumb-bells, his chest now and then spread itself to the uttermost, and his head was often thrown back in an attitude suggesting self-defence.

'So you are about to join us,' he exclaimed, with a look of touching interest, much like that of a ladies' doctor speaking delicately of favourable symptoms. Then, as if consciously returning to the virile note, 'I think we shall understand each other. I am always eager to study the opinions of those among us who have scientific minds. I hear of you on all hands; already

you have strongly impressed some of the thinking people in Exeter.'

Peak crossed his legs and made no reply.

'There is distinct need of an infusion of the scientific spirit into the work of the Church. The churchman hitherto has been, as a matter of course, of the literary stamp; hence much of our trouble during the last half-century. It behoves us to go in for science—physical, economic—science of every kind. Only thus can we resist the morbific influences which inevitably beset an Established Church in times such as these. I say it boldly. Let us throw aside our Hebrew and our Greek, our commentators ancient and modern! Let us have done with polemics and with compromises! What we have to do is to construct a spiritual edifice on the basis of scientific revelation. I use the word revelation advisedly. The results of science are the divine message to our age; to neglect them, to fear them, is to remain under the old law whilst the new is demanding our adherence, to repeat the Jewish error of bygone time. Less of St. Paul, and more of Darwin! Less of Luther and more of Herbert Spencer!'

'Shall I have the pleasure of hearing this doctrine at St. Margaret's?' Peak inquired.

'In a form suitable to the intelligence of my parishioners, taken in the mass. Were my hands perfectly free, I should begin by preaching a series of sermons on *The Origin of Species*. Sermons! An obnoxious word! One ought never to use it. It signifies everything inept, inert.'

'Is it your serious belief, then, that the mass of parishioners—here or elsewhere—are ready for this form of spiritual instruction?'

'Most distinctly—given the true capacity in the teacher. Mark me; I don't say that they are capable of receiving much absolute knowledge. What I desire is that their minds shall be relieved from a state of harass-

ing conflict—put at the right point of view. They are not to think that Jesus of Nazareth teaches faith and conduct incompatible with the doctrines of Evolutionism. They are not to spend their lives in kicking against the pricks, and regard as meritorious the punctures which result to them. The establishment in their minds of a few cardinal facts—that is the first step. Then let the interpretation follow—the solace, the encouragement, the hope for eternity!'

'You imagine,' said Godwin, with a calm air, 'that the mind of the average church-goer is seriously disturbed on questions of faith?'

'How can you ignore it, my dear Peak?—Permit me this familiarity; we are old fellow-collegians.—The average church-goer is the average citizen of our English commonwealth,—a man necessarily aware of the great Radical movement, and all that it involves. Forgive me. There has been far too much blinking of actualities by zealous Christians whose faith is rooted in knowledge. We gain nothing by it; we lose immensely. Let us recognise that our churches are filled with sceptics, endeavouring to believe in spite of themselves.'

'Your experience is much larger than mine,' remarked the listener submissively.

'Indeed I have widely studied the subject.'

Chilvers smiled with ineffable self-content, his head twisted like that of a sagacious parrot.

'Granting your average citizen,' said the other, 'what about the average citizeness? The female church-goers are not insignificant in number.'

'Ha! There we reach the core of the matter! Woman! woman! Precisely *there* is the most hopeful outlook. I trust you are strong for female emancipation?'

'Oh, perfectly sound on that question!'

'To be sure! Then it must be obvious to you that

women are destined to play the leading part in our Christian renascence, precisely as they did in the original spreading of the faith. What else is the meaning of the vast activity in female education? Let them be taught, and forthwith they will rally to our Broad Church. A man may be content to remain a nullifidian; women cannot rest at that stage. They demand the spiritual significance of everything.—I grieve to tell you, Peak, that for three years I have been a widower. My wife died with shocking suddenness, leaving me her two little children. Ah, but leaving me also the memory of a singularly pure and noble being. I may say, with all humility, that I have studied the female mind in its noblest modern type. I *know* what can be expected of woman, in our day and in the future.'

'Mrs. Chilvers was in full sympathy with your views?'

'Three years ago I had not yet reached my present standpoint. In several directions I was still narrow. But her prime characteristic was the tendency to spiritual growth. She would have accompanied me step by step. In very many respects I must regard myself as a man favoured by fortune,—I know it, and I trust I am grateful for it,—but that loss, my dear Peak, counterbalances much happiness. In moments of repose, when I look back on work joyously achieved, I often murmur to myself, with a sudden sigh, *Excepto quod non simul esses, cætera lætus!*'

He pronounced his Latin in the new-old way, with Continental vowels. The effect of this on an Englishman's lips is always more or less pedantic, and in his case it was intolerable.

'And when,' he exclaimed, dismissing the melancholy thought, 'do you present yourself for ordination?'

It was his habit to pay slight attention to the words of anyone but himself, and Peak's careless answer merely

led him to talk on wide subjects with renewal of energy. One might have suspected that he had made a list of uncommon words wherewith to adorn his discourse, for certain of these frequently recurred. 'Nullifidian,' 'morbific,' 'renascent,' were among his favourites. Once or twice he spoke of 'psychogenesis,' with an emphatic enunciation which seemed to invite respectful wonder. In using Latin words which have become fixed in the English language, he generally corrected the common errors of quantity: '*minnus* the spiritual fervour,' 'acting as his *loccum tennens*.' When he referred to Christian teachers with whom he was acquainted, they were seldom or never members of the Church of England. Methodists, Romanists, Presbyterians appeared to stand high in his favour, and Peak readily discerned that this was a way of displaying 'large-souled tolerance.' It was his foible to quote foreign languages, especially passages which came from heretical authors. Thus, he began to talk of Feuerbach for the sole purpose of delivering a German sentence.

'He has been of infinite value to me—quite infinite value. You remember his definition of God! It is constantly in my mind. "*Gott ist eine Thräne der Liebe, in tiefster Verborgenheit vergossen über das menschliche Elend.*" Profoundly touching! I know nothing to approach it.'

Suddenly he inquired:

'Do you see much of the Exeter clergy?'

'I know only the Vicar of St. Ethelreda's, Mr. Lily-white.'

'Ha! Admirable fellow! Large-minded, broad of sympathies. Has distinctly the scientific turn of thought.'

Peak smiled, knowing the truth. But he had hit upon a way of meeting the Rev. Bruno which promised greatly to diminish the suffering inherent in the situation. He would use the large-souled man deliberately

for his mirth. Chilvers' self-absorption lent itself to persiflage, and by indulging in that mood Godwin tasted some compensation for the part he had to play.

'And I believe you know the Warricombes very well?' pursued Chilvers.

'Yes.'

'Ha! I hope to see much of them. They are people after my own heart. Long ago I had a slight acquaintance with them. I hear we shan't see them till the summer.'

'I believe not.'

'Mr. Warricombe is a great geologist, I think?—Probably he frequents public worship as a mere tribute to social opinion?'

He asked the question in the airiest possible way, as if it mattered nothing to him what the reply might be.

'Mr. Warricombe is a man of sincere piety,' Godwin answered, with grave countenance.

'That by no means necessitates church-going, my dear Peak,' rejoined the other, waving his hand.

'You think not? I am still only a student, you must remember. My mind is in suspense on not a few points.'

'Of course! Of course! Pray let me give you the results of my own thought on this subject.'

He proceeded to do so, at some length. When he had rounded his last period, he unexpectedly started up, swung on his toes, spread his chest, drew a deep breath, and with the sweetest of smiles announced that he must postpone the delight of further conversation.

'You must come and dine with me as soon as my house is in reasonable order. As yet, everything is *sens dessus-dessous*. Delightful old city, Exeter! Charming! Charming!'

And on the moment he was gone.

What were this man's real opinions? He had brains and literature; his pose before the world was not that of an ignorant charlatan. Vanity, no doubt, was his prime motive, but did it operate to make a cleric of a secret materialist, or to incite a display of excessive liberalism in one whose convictions were orthodox? Godwin could not answer to his satisfaction, but he preferred the latter surmise.

One thing, however, became clear to him. All his conscientious scruples about entering the Church were superfluous. Chilvers would have smiled pityingly at anyone who disputed his right to live by the Establishment, and to stand up as an authorised preacher of the national faith. And beyond a doubt he regulated his degree of 'breadth' by standards familiar to him in professional intercourse. To him it seemed all-sufficient to preach a gospel of moral progress, of intellectual growth, of universal fraternity. If this were the tendency of Anglicanism, then almost any man who desired to live a cleanly life, and to see others do the same, might without hesitation become a clergyman. The old formulæ of subscription were so symbolised, so volatilised, that they could not stand in the way of anyone but a combative nihilist. Peak was conscious of positive ideals by no means inconsistent with Christian teaching, and in his official capacity these alone would direct him.

He spent his evening pleasantly, often laughing as he recalled a phrase or gesture of the Rev. Bruno's.

In the night fell a sprinkling of snow, and when the sun rose it gleamed from a sky of pale, frosty blue. At ten o'clock Godwin set out for his usual walk, choosing the direction of the Old Tiverton Road. It was a fortnight since he had passed the Warricombes' house. At present he was disposed to indulge the thoughts which a sight of it would make active.

He had begun the ascent of the hill when the sound of

an approaching vehicle caused him to raise his eyes—they were generally fixed on the ground when he walked alone. It was only a hired fly. But, as it passed him, he recognised the face he had least expected to see,—Sidwell Warricombe sat in the carriage, and unaccompanied. She noticed him—smiled—and bent forward. He clutched at his hat, but it happened that the driver had turned to look at him, and, instead of the salute he had intended, his hand waved to the man to stop. The gesture was scarcely voluntary; when he saw the carriage pull up, his heart sank; he felt guilty of monstrous impudence. But Sidwell's face appeared at the window, and its expression was anything but resentful; she offered her hand, too. Without preface of formal phrase he exclaimed:

'How delightful to see you so unexpectedly! Are you all here?'

'Only mother and I. We have come for a day or two.'

'Will you allow me to call? If only for a few minutes'——

'We shall be at home this afternoon.'

'Thank you! Don't you enjoy the sunshine after London?'

'Indeed I do!'

He stepped back and signed to the driver. Sidwell bent her head and was out of sight.

But the carriage was visible for some distance, and even when he could no longer see it he heard the horse's hoofs on the hard road. Long after the last sound had died away his heart continued to beat painfully, and he breathed as if recovering from a hard run.

How beautiful were these lanes and hills, even in midwinter! Once more he sang aloud in his joyous solitude. The hope he had nourished was not unreasonable; his boldness justified itself. Yes, he was one of the men who succeed, and the life before him would be richer

for all the mistakes and miseries through which he had passed. Thirty, forty, fifty—why, twenty years hence he would be in the prime of manhood, with perhaps yet another twenty years of mental and bodily vigour. One of the men who succeed!

II

On the morning after her journey down from London, Mrs. Warricombe awoke with the conviction that she had caught a cold. Her health was in general excellent, and she had no disposition to nurse imaginary ailments, but when some slight disorder broke the routine of her life she made the most of it, enjoying—much as children do—the importance with which for the time it invested her. At such seasons she was wont to regard herself with a mildly despondent compassion, to feel that her family and her friends held her of slight account; she spoke in a tone of conscious resignation, often with a forgiving smile. When the girls redoubled their attentions, and soothed her with gentle words, she would close her eyes and sigh, seeming to remind them that they would know her value when she was no more.

'You are hoarse, mother,' Sidwell said to her, when they met at breakfast.

'Am I, dear? You know I felt rather afraid of the journey. I hope I shan't be laid up.'

Sidwell advised her not to leave the house to-day. Having seen the invalid comfortably established in an upper room, she went into the city on business which could not be delayed. On her way occurred the meeting with Peak, but of this, on her return, she made no mention. Mother and daughter had luncheon upstairs, and Sidwell was full of affectionate solicitude.

'This afternoon you had better lie down for an hour or two,' she said.

'Do you think so? Just drop a line to father, and warn him that we may be kept here for some time.'

'Shall I send for Dr. Endacott?'

'Just as you like, dear.'

But Mrs. Warricombe had eaten such an excellent lunch, that Sidwell could not feel uneasy.

'We'll see how you are this evening. At all events, it will be safer for you not to go downstairs. If you lie quiet for an hour or two, I can look for those pamphlets that father wants.'

'Just as you like, dear.'

By three o'clock the invalid was calmly slumbering. Having entered the bedroom on tiptoe and heard regular breathing, Sidwell went down and for a few minutes lingered about the hall. A servant came to her for instructions on some domestic matter; when this was dismissed she mentioned that, if anyone called, she would be found in the library.

The pamphlets of which her father had spoken were soon discovered. She laid them aside, and seated herself by the fire, but without leaning back. At any sound within or outside the house she moved her head to listen. Her look was anxious, but the gleam of her eyes expressed pleasurable agitation.

At half-past three she went into the drawing-room, where all the furniture was draped, and the floor bare. Standing where she could look from a distance through one of the windows, at which the blind had been raised, she waited for a quarter of an hour. Then the chill atmosphere drove her back to the fireside. In the study, evidences of temporary desertion were less oppressive, but the windows looked only upon a sequestered part of the garden. Sidwell desired to watch the approach from the high-road, and in a few minutes she was again in the drawing-room. But scarcely had she closed the door behind her when a ringing of the visitors' bell sounded with unfamiliar distinctness. She started, has-

tened from the room, fled into the library, and had time to seat herself before she heard the footsteps of a servant moving in answer to the summons.

The door opened, and Peak was announced.

Sidwell had never known what it was to be thus overcome with emotion. Shame at her inability to command the calm features with which she would naturally receive a caller flushed her cheeks and neck; she stepped forward with downcast eyes, and only in offering her hand could at length look at him who stood before her. She saw at once that Peak was unlike himself; he too had unusual warmth in his countenance, and his eyes seemed strangely large, luminous. On his forehead were drops of moisture.

This sight restored her self-control, or such measure of it as permitted her to speak in the conventional way.

'I am sorry that mother can't leave her room. She had a slight cold this morning, but I didn't think it would give her any trouble.'

Peak was delighted, and betrayed the feeling even whilst he constrained his face into a look of exaggerated anxiety.

'It won't be anything serious, I hope? The railway journey, I'm afraid.'

'Yes, the journey. She has a slight hoarseness, but I think we shall prevent it from '——

Their eyes kept meeting, and with more steadfastness. They were conscious of mutual scrutiny, and, on both sides, of changes since they last met. When two people have devoted intense study to each other's features, a three months' absence not only revives the old impressions but subjects them to sudden modification which engrosses thought and feeling. Sidwell continued to utter commonplaces, simply as a means of disguising the thoughts that occupied her; she was saying to herself that Peak's face had a purer outline than she had believed, and that his eyes had gained in expres-

siveness. In the same way Godwin said and replied he knew not what, just to give himself time to observe and enjoy the something new—the increased animation or subtler facial movements—which struck him as often as he looked at his companion. Each wondered what the other had been doing, whether the time had seemed long or short.

'I hope you have kept well?' Sidwell asked.

Godwin hastened to respond with civil inquiries.

'I was very glad to hear from Mr. Warricombe a few days ago,' he continued. Sidwell was not aware that her father had written, but her pleased smile seemed to signify the contrary.

'She looks younger,' Peak said in his mind. 'Perhaps that London dress and the new way of arranging her hair have something to do with it. But no, she looks younger in herself. She must have been enjoying the pleasures of town.'

'You have been constantly occupied, no doubt,' he added aloud, feeling at the same time that this was a clumsy expression of what he meant. Though he had unbuttoned his overcoat, and seated himself as easily as he could, the absurd tall hat which he held embarrassed him; to deposit it on the floor demanded an effort of which he was yet incapable.

'I have seen many things and heard much talk,' Sidwell was replying, in a gay tone. It irritated him; he would have preferred her to speak with more of the old pensiveness. Yet perhaps she was glad simply because she found herself again talking with him?

'And you?' she went on. 'It has not been all work, I hope?'

'Oh no! I have had many pleasant intervals.'

This was in imitation of her vivacity. He felt the words and the manner to be ridiculous, but could not restrain himself. Every moment increased his uneasiness; the hat weighed in his hands like a lump of

lead, and he was convinced that he had never looked so clownish. Did her smile signify criticism of his attitude?

With a decision which came he knew not how, he let his hat drop to the floor and pushed it aside. There, that was better; he felt less of a bumpkin.

Sidwell glanced at the glossy grotesque, but instantly averted her eyes, and asked rather more gravely:

'Have you been in Exeter all the time?'

'Yes.'

'But you didn't spend your Christmas alone, I hope?'

'Oh, I had my books.'

Was there not a touch of natural pathos in this? He hoped so; then mocked at himself for calculating such effects.

'I think you don't care much for ordinary social pleasures, Mr. Peak?'

He smiled bitterly.

'I have never known much of them,—and you remember that I look forward to a life in which they will have little part. Such a life,' he continued, after a pause, 'seems to you unendurably dull? I noticed that, when I spoke of it before.'

'You misunderstood me.' She said it so undecidedly that he gazed at her with puzzled look. Her eyes fell.

'But you like society?'

'If you use the word in its narrowest meaning,' she answered, 'then I not only dislike society, but despise it.'

She had raised her eyebrows, and was looking coldly at him. Did she mean to rebuke him for the tone he had adopted? Indeed, he seemed to himself presumptuous. But if they were still on terms such as these, was it not better to know it, even at the cost of humiliation? One moment he believed that he could read Sidwell's thoughts, and that they were wholly favourable to him; at another he felt absolutely ignorant of all

that was passing in her, and disposed to interpret her face as that of a conventional woman who had never regarded him as on her own social plane. These uncertainties, these frequent reversions to a state of mind which at other times he seemed to have long outgrown, were a singular feature of his relations with Sidwell. Could such experiences consist with genuine love? Never had he felt more willing to answer the question with a negative. He felt that he was come here to act a part, and that the end of the interview, be it what it might, would only affect him superficially.

'No,' he replied, with deliberation; 'I never supposed that you had any interest in the most foolish class of wealthy people. I meant that you recognise your place in a certain social rank, and regard intercourse with your equals as an essential of happiness.'

'If I understood why you ask'——she began abruptly, but ceased as she met his glance. Again he thought she was asserting a distant dignity.

'The question arose naturally out of a train of thought which always occupies me when I talk with you. I myself belong to no class whatever, and I can't help wondering how—if the subject ever occurred to you—you would place me.'

He saw his way now, and, having said thus much, could talk on defiantly. This hour must decide his fortune with Sidwell, yet his tongue utterly refused any of the modes of speech which the situation would have suggested to an ordinary mind. He could not 'make love.' Instead of humility, he was prompted to display a rough arrogance; instead of tender phrases, he uttered what sounded like deliberate rudeness. His voice was less gently tuned than Sidwell had been wont to hear it. It all meant that he despaired of wooing successfully, and more than half wished to force some word from Sidwell which would spare him the necessity of a plain avowal.

But before he had finished speaking, her face changed. A light of sudden understanding shone in her eyes; her lips softened to a smile of exquisite gentleness.

'The subject never *did* occur to me,' she answered. 'How should it? A friend is a friend.'

It was not strictly true, but in the strength of her emotion she could forget all that contradicted it.

'A friend—yes.'

Godwin began with the same note of bluntness. But of a sudden he felt the influence of Sidwell's smile. His voice sank into a murmur, his heart leapt, a thrill went through his veins.

'I wish to be something more than a friend.'

He felt that it was bald, inadequate. Yet the words had come of their own accord, on an impulse of unimpaired sincerity. Sidwell's head was bent.

'That is why I can't take simple things for granted,' he continued, his gaze fixed upon her. 'If I thought of nothing but friendship, it would seem rational enough that you should accept me for what I am—a man of education, talking your own language. Because I have dared to hope something more, I suffer from the thought that I was not born into your world, and that you must be always remembering this difference.'

'Do you think me so far behind the age?' asked Sidwell, trying to laugh.

'Classes are getting mixed, confused. Yes, but we are so conscious of the process that we talk of class distinctions more than of anything else,—talk and think of them incessantly. You have never heard me make a profession of Radicalism; *I* am decidedly behind the age. Be what I may—and I have spiritual pride more than enough—the fact that I have relatives in the lower, even the lowest, social class must necessarily affect the whole course of my life. A certain kind of man declares himself proud of such an origin—and most often lies. Or one may be driven by it into rebellion against social

privilege. To me, my origin is simply a grave misfortune, to be accepted and, if possible, overcome. Does that sound mean-spirited? I can't help it; I want you to know me.'

'I believe I know you very well,' Sidwell replied.

The consciousness that she was deceived checked the words which were rising to his lips. Again he saw himself in a pitiful light, and this self-contempt reflected upon Sidwell. He could not doubt that she was yielding to him; her attitude and her voice declared it; but what was the value of love won by imposture? Why had she not intelligence enough to see through his hypocrisy, which at times was so thin a veil? How defective must her sympathy be!

'Yet you have seen very little of me,' he said, smiling.

There was a short silence; then he exclaimed in a voice of emotion:

'How I wish we had known each other ever since that day when your brother brought me to your house near Kingsmill! If we had met and talked through all those years! But that was impossible for the very reason which makes me inarticulate now that I wish to say so much. When you first saw me I was a gawky schoolboy, learning to use my brains, and knowing already that life had nothing to offer me but a false position. Whether I remained with my kith and kin, or turned my back upon them in the hope of finding my equals, I was condemned to a life of miserable incompleteness. I was born in exile. It took a long time before I had taught myself how to move and speak like one of the class to which I belonged by right of intellect. I was living alone in London, in mean lodging-houses. But the day came when I felt more confidence in myself. I had saved money, and foresaw that in a year or two I should be able to carry out a plan, make one serious attempt to win a position among educated people.'

He stopped. Had he intended a full confession, it was thus he might have begun it. Sidwell was regarding him, but with a gentle look, utterly unsuspecting. She was unable to realise his character and his temptations.

'And have you not succeeded?' she asked, in a low voice.

'Have I? Let me put it to the test. I will set aside every thought of presumption; forget that I am a penniless student looking forward to a country curacy; and say what I wished to when we had our last conversation. Never mind how it sounds. I have dared to hope that some day I shall ask you to be my wife, and that you won't refuse.'

The word 'wife' reverberated on his ears. A whirl of emotion broke the defiant calm he had supported for the last few minutes. The silence seemed to be endless; when he looked at Sidwell, her head was bent, the eyes concealed by their drooping lids. Her expression was very grave.

'Such a piece of recklessness,' he said at length, 'deserves no answer.'

Sidwell raised her eyes and spoke gently, with voice a little shaken.

'Why should you call it recklessness? I have never thought of the things that seem to trouble you so much. You were a friend of ours. Wasn't that enough?'

It seemed to him an evasive reply. Doubtless it was much that she showed neither annoyance nor prudish reserve. He had won the right of addressing her on equal terms, but she was not inclined to anticipate that future day to which he pointed.

'You have never thought of such things, because you have never thought of me as I of you. Every day of your absence in London has caused me torments which were due most often to the difference between your social position and mine. You have been among people of leisure and refinement and culture. Each

evening you have talked with men whom it cost no effort to make themselves liked and respected. I think of that with bitterness.'

'But why? I have made many acquaintances; have met very interesting people. I am glad of it; it enables me to understand you better than I could before.'

'You are glad on that account?'

'Yes; indeed I am.'

'Dare I think you mean more than a civil phrase?'

'I mean quite simply all that my words imply. I have thought of you, though certainly without bitterness. No one's conversation in London interested me so much as yours.'

Soothed with an exquisite joy, Godwin felt his eyes moisten. For a moment he was reconciled to all the world, and forgot the hostilities of a lifetime.

'And will it still be so, now, when you go back?' he asked, in a soft voice.

'I am sure it will.'

'Then it will be strange if I ever feel bitterly again.'

Sidwell smiled.

'You could have said nothing that could please me more. Why should your life be troubled by these dark moods? I could understand it if you were still struggling with—with doubts, with all manner of uncertainties about your course'——

She hesitated, watching his face.

'You think I have chosen well?' said Godwin, meeting her look.

Sidwell's eyes were at once averted.

'I hope,' she said, 'we may talk of that again very soon. You have told me much of yourself, but I have said little or nothing of my own—difficulties. It won't be long before we come back from London, and then'——

Once more their eyes met steadily.

'You think,' Godwin asked, 'that I am right in aiming at a life of retirement?'

'It is one of my doubts. Your influence would be useful anywhere; but most useful, surely, among people of active mind.'

'Perhaps I shan't be able to choose. Remember that I am seeking for a livelihood as well as for a sphere of usefulness.'

His eyes fell as he spoke. Hitherto he had had no means of learning whether Sidwell would bring her husband a dowry substantial enough to be considered. Though he could not feel that she had betrothed herself to him, their talk was so nearly that of avowed lovers that perchance she would disclose whatever might help to put his mind at rest. The thought revived his painful self-consciousness; it was that of a schemer, yet would not the curse of poverty have suggested it to any man?

'Perhaps you won't be able to choose—at first,' Sidwell assented, thereby seeming to answer his unspoken question. 'But I am sure my father will use whatever influence he has.'

Had he been seated near enough, he would have been tempted to the boldness of taking her hand. What more encouragement did he await? But the distance between them was enough to check his embarrassed impulses. He could not even call her 'Sidwell'; it would have been easier a few minutes ago, before she had begun to speak with such calm friendliness. Now, in spite of everything, he felt that to dare such a familiarity must needs call upon him the reproof of astonished eyes.

'You return to-morrow?' he asked, suddenly.

'I think so. You have promised me to be cheerful until we are home again.'

'A promise to be cheerful wouldn't mean much. But it *does* mean much that I can think of what you have said to-day.'

Sidwell did not speak, and her silence seemed to compel him to rise. It was strange how remote he still felt

from her pure, grave face, and the flowing outlines of her figure. Why could he not say to her, 'I love you; give me your hands; give me your lips'? Such words seemed impossible. Yet passion thrilled in him as he watched the grace of her movements, the light and shadow upon her features. She had risen and come a step or two forward.

'I think you look taller—in that dress.'

The words rather escaped him than were spoken. His need was to talk of common things, of trifles, that so he might come to feel humanly.

Sidwell smiled with unmistakable pleasure.

'Do I? Do you like the dress?'

'Yes. It becomes you.'

'Are you critical in such things?'

'Not with understanding. But I should like to see you every day in a new and beautiful dress.'

'Oh, I couldn't afford it!' was the laughing reply.

He offered his hand; the touch of her warm, soft fingers fired his blood.

'Sidwell!'

It was spoken at last, involuntarily, and he stood with his eyes on hers, her hand crushed in his.

'Some day!' she whispered.

If their lips met, the contact was so slight as to seem accidental; it was the mere timorous promise of a future kiss. And both were glad of the something that had imposed restraint.

When Sidwell went up to her mother's sitting-room, a servant had just brought tea.

'I hear that Mr. Peak has been,' said Mrs. Warricombe, who looked puffy and uncomfortable after her sleep. 'Emma was going to take tea to the study, but I thought it unnecessary. How could he know that we were here?'

'I met him this morning on my way into the town.'

'Surely it was rather inconsiderate of him to call.'

'He asked if he might.'

Mrs. Warricombe turned her head and examined Sidwell.

'Oh! And did he stay long?'

'Not very long,' replied Sidwell, who was in quiet good-humour.

'I think it would have been better if you had told him by the servant that I was not well enough to see callers. You didn't mention that he might be coming.'

Mrs. Warricombe's mind worked slowly at all times, and at present she was suffering from a cold.

'Why didn't you speak of it, Sidwell?'

'Really—I forgot,' replied the daughter, lightly.

'And what had he to say?'

'Nothing new, mother. Is your head better, dear?'

There was no answer. Mrs. Warricombe had conceived a vague suspicion which was so alarming that he would not press inquiries alluding to it. The encouragement given by her husband to Godwin Peak in the latter's social progress had always annoyed her, though she could not frame solid objections. To be sure, to say of a man that he is about to be ordained meets every possible question that society can put; but Mrs. Warricombe's uneasiness was in part due to personal dislike. Oftener than not, she still thought of Peak as he appeared some eleven years ago—an evident plebeian, without manners, without a redeeming grace. She knew the story of his relative who had opened a shop in Kingsmill; thinking of that now, she shuddered.

Sidwell began to talk of indifferent matters, and Peak was not again mentioned.

Her throat being still troublesome, Mrs. Warricombe retired very soon after dinner. About nine o'clock Sidwell went to the library, and sat down at her father's writing-table, purposing a letter to Sylvia. She penned a line or two, but soon lapsed into reverie, her head

on her hands. Of a sudden the door was thrown open, and there stood Buckland, fresh from travel.

'What has brought you?' exclaimed his sister, starting up anxiously, for something in the young man's look seemed ominous.

'Oh, nothing to trouble about. I had to come down —on business. Mother gone to bed?'

Sidwell explained.

'All right; doesn't matter. I suppose I can sleep here? Let them get me a mouthful of something; cold meat, anything will do.'

His needs were quickly supplied, and before long he was smoking by the library fire.

'I was writing to Sylvia,' said his sister, glancing at her fragmentary letter.

'Oh!'

'You know she is at Salisbury?'

'Salisbury? No, I didn't.'

His carelessness proved to Sidwell that she was wrong in conjecturing that his journey had something to do with Miss Moorhouse. Buckland was in no mood for conversation; he smoked for a quarter of an hour whilst Sidwell resumed her writing.

'Of course you haven't seen Peak?' fell from him at length.

His sister looked at him before replying.

'Yes. He called this afternoon.'

'But who told him you were here?'

His brows were knitted, and he spoke very abruptly. Sidwell gave the same explanation as to her mother, and had further to reply that she alone received the caller.

'I see,' was Buckland's comment.

Its tone troubled Sidwell.

'Has your coming anything to do with Mr. Peak?'

'Yes, it has. I want to see him the first thing to-morrow.'

'Can you tell me what about?'

He searched her face, frowning.

'Not now. I'll tell you in the morning.'

Sidwell saw herself doomed to a night of suspense. She could not confess how nearly the mystery concerned her. Had Buckland made some discovery that irritated him against Peak? She knew he was disposed to catch at anything that seemed to tell against Godwin's claims to respectful treatment, and it surely must be a grave affair to hurry him on so long a journey. Though she could imagine no ground of fear, the situation was seriously disturbing.

She tried to go on with her letter, but failed. As Buckland smoked in silence, she at length rose and said she would go upstairs.

'All right! Shall see you at breakfast. Good-night!'

At nine next morning Mrs. Warricombe sent a message to Buckland that she wished to see him in her bedroom. He entered hurriedly.

'Cold better, mother? I have only just time to drink a cup of coffee. I want to catch Peak before he can have left home.'

'Mr. Peak? Why? I was going to speak about him.'

'What were you going to say?' Buckland asked, anxiously.

His mother began in a roundabout way which threatened long detention. In a minute or two Buckland had gathered enough to interrupt her with the direct inquiry:

'You don't mean that there's anything between him and Sidwell?'

'I do hope not; but I can't imagine why she should—really, almost make a private appointment. I am very uneasy, Buckland. I have hardly slept. Sidwell is rather—you know'——

'The deuce! I can't stop now. Wait an hour or

two, and I shall have seen the fellow. You needn't alarm yourself. He will probably have disappeared in a few days.'

'What do you mean?' Mrs. Warricombe asked, with nervous eagerness.

'I'll explain afterwards.'

He hurried away. Sidwell was at the breakfast-table. Her eyes seemed to declare that she had not slept well. With an insignificant word or two, the young man swallowed his cup of coffee, and had soon left the house.

III

THE wrath which illumined Buckland's countenance as he strode rapidly towards Longbrook Street was not unmingled with joy. In the deep pocket of his ulster lay something heavy which kept striking against his leg, and every such contact spurred him with a sense of satisfaction. All his suspicions were abundantly justified. Not only would his father and Sidwell be obliged to confess that his insight had been profounder than theirs, but he had the pleasure of standing justified before his own conscience. The philosophy by which he lived was strikingly illustrated and confirmed.

He sniffed the morning air, enjoyed the firmness of the frozen ground, on which his boots made a pleasant thud. To be sure, the interview before him would have its disagreeableness, but Buckland was not one of those over-civilised men who shrink from every scene of painful explanation. The detection of a harmful lie was decidedly congenial to him—especially when he and his had been made its victims. He was now at liberty to indulge that antipathetic feeling towards Godwin Peak which sundry considerations had hitherto urged him to repress. Whatever might have passed between Peak and Sidwell, he could not doubt that his sister's peace was gravely endangered; the adventurer (with however much or little sincerity) had been making subtle love to her. Such a thought was intolerable. Buckland's class-prejudice asserted itself with brutal vigour now that it had moral indignation for an ally.

He had never been at Peak's lodgings, but the address was long since noted. Something of disdain came into his eyes as he approached the row of insignificant houses. Having pulled the bell, he stood at his full height, looking severely at the number painted on the door.

Mrs. Roots opened to him, and said that her lodger was at home. He gave his name, and after waiting for a moment was led to the upper floor. Godwin, who had breakfasted later than usual, still sat by the table. On Warricombe's entrance, he pushed back his chair and rose, but with deliberate movement, scarcely smiling. That Buckland made no offer of a friendly hand did not surprise him. The name of his visitor had alarmed him with a sudden presentiment. Hardening his features, he stood in expectancy.

'I want to have a talk with you,' Buckland began. 'You are at leisure, I hope?'

'Pray sit down.'

Godwin pointed to a chair near the fire, but Warricombe, having thrown his hat on to a side table, seated himself by one of the windows. His motions proved that he found it difficult to support a semblance of courtesy.

'I have come down from London on purpose to see you. Unless I am strangely misinformed you have been guilty of conduct which I shouldn't like to call by its proper name.'

Remembering that he was in a little house, with thin partitions, he kept his voice low, but the effort this cost him was obvious. He looked straight at Peak, who did not return the gaze.

'Indeed?' said Godwin, coldly. 'What is my crime?'

'I am told that you have won the confidence of my relatives by what looks like a scheme of gross dishonesty.'

'Indeed? Who has told you so?'

'No one in so many words. But I happened to come

across certain acquaintances of yours in London—people who know you very well indeed; and I find that they regard your position here as altogether incredible. You will remember I had much the same feeling myself. In support of their view it was mentioned to me that you had published an article in *The Critical*—the date less than a year ago, observe. The article was anonymous, but I remember it very well. I have re-read it, and I want you to tell me how the views it expresses can be reconciled with those you have maintained in conversation with my father.'

He drew from his pocket the incriminating periodical, turned it back at the article headed 'The New Sophistry,' and held it out for inspection.

'Perhaps you would like to refresh your memory.'

'Needless, thank you,' returned Godwin, with a smile —in which the vanity of an author had its part.

Had Marcella betrayed him? He had supposed she knew nothing of this article, but Earwaker had perhaps spoken of it to Moxey before receiving the injunction of secrecy. On the other hand, it might be Earwaker himself from whom Warricombe had derived his information. Not impossible for the men to meet, and Earwaker's indignation might have led him to disregard a friend's confidence.

The details mattered little. He was face to face with the most serious danger that could befall him, and already he had strung himself to encounter it. Yet even in the same moment he asked, 'Is it worth while?'

'Did you write this?' Buckland inquired.

'Yes, I wrote it.'

'Then I wait for your explanation.'

'You mustn't expect me to enter upon an elaborate defence,' Godwin replied, taking his pipe from the mantelpiece and beginning to fill it. 'A man charged with rascality can hardly help getting excited—and that excitement, to one in your mood, seems evidence against

him. Please to bear in mind that I have never declared myself an orthodox theologian. Mr. Warricombe is well acquainted with my views; to you I have never explained them.'

'You mean to say that my father knew of this article?'

'No. I have not spoken of it.'

'And why not?'

'Because, for one thing, I shouldn't write in that way now; and, for another, the essay seems to imply more than I meant when I did write it.'

'"Seems to imply"——? I understand. You wish to represent that this attack on M'Naughten involves no attack on Christianity?'

'Not on Christianity as I understand it.'

Buckland's face expressed profound disgust, but he controlled his speech.

'Well, I foresaw this. You attacked a new sophistry, but there is a newer sophistry still, and uncommonly difficult it is to deal with. Mr. Peak, I have a plain word to say to you. More than a year ago you asked me for my goodwill, to aid you in getting a social position. Say what you like, I see now that you dealt with me dishonestly. I can no longer be your friend in any sense, and I shall do my best to have you excluded from my parents' house. My father will re-read this essay—I have marked the significant passages throughout—and will form his own judgment; I know what it will be.'

'You are within your rights.'

'Undoubtedly,' replied Buckland, with polished insolence, as he rose from his seat. 'I can't forbid you to go to the house again, but—I hope we mayn't meet there. It would be very unpleasant.'

Godwin was still pressing down the tobacco in the bowl of his pipe. He smiled, and glanced about the room. Did Warricombe know how far things had gone between him and Sidwell? Whether or no, it was cer-

tain now that Sidwell would be informed of this disastrous piece of authorship—and the result ?

What did it matter ? There is no struggling against destiny. If he and Sidwell were ever fated to come together, why, these difficulties would all be surmounted. If, as seemed more than likely, he was again to be foiled on the point of success—he could bear it, perhaps even enjoy the comedy.

' There is no possibility of arguing against determined anger,' he said, quietly. ' I am not at all inclined to plead for justice ; one only does that with a friend who desires to be just. My opinions are utterly distasteful to you, and personal motives have made you regard me as—a scoundrel to be got rid of. Well, there's an end of it. I don't see what is to be gained by further talk.'

This was a dismissal. Godwin felt the necessity of asserting himself thus far.

' One question,' said Warricombe, as he put the periodical back into his pocket. ' What do you mean by my " personal motives " ? '

Their eyes met for an instant.

' I mean the motives which you have spoken of.'

It was Buckland's hope that Peak might reveal his relations with Sidwell, but he shrank from seeming to know anything of the matter. Clearly, no light was to be had from this source.

' I am afraid,' he said, moving to the door, ' that you will find my motives shared by all the people whose acquaintance you have made in Exeter.'

And without further leave-taking he departed.

There was a doubt in his mind. Peak's coolness might be the audacity of rascaldom ; he preferred to understand it so ; but it *might* have nothing to do with baseness.

' Confound it ! ' he muttered to himself, irritably. ' In our times life is so deucedly complicated. It used to be the easiest thing to convict a man of religious hypocrisy ;

nowadays, one has to bear in mind such a multiplicity of fine considerations. There's that fellow Bruno Chilvers: mightn't anyone who had personal reasons treat him precisely as I have treated Peak? Both of them *may* be honest. Yet in Peak's case all appearances are against him—just because he is of low birth, has no means, and wants desperately to get into society. The fellow is a scoundrel; I am convinced of it. Yet his designs may be innocent. How, then, a scoundrel?——

'Poor devil! Has he really fallen in love with Sidwell?——

'Humbug! He wants position, and the comfort it brings. And if he hadn't acted like a blackguard—if he had come among us telling the truth—who knows? Sidwell wouldn't then have thought of him, but for my own part I would willingly have given him a hand. There are plenty of girls who have learned to think for themselves.'

This was an unhappy line of reflection. It led to Sylvia Moorhouse—and to grinding of the teeth. By the time he reached the house, Buckland was again in remorseless mood.

He would have it out with Sidwell. The desire of proving to her that he had been right from the first overrode all thought of the pain he might inflict.

She was in the library. At breakfast he had noticed her heavy eyes, and that she made only a pretence of eating. She was now less unlike herself, but her position at the window showed that she had been waiting impatiently.

'Isn't mother coming down to-day?' he asked.

'Yes; after luncheon she will go out for an hour, if it keeps fine.'

'And to-morrow you return?'

'If mother feels able to travel.'

He had *The Critical* in his hand, and stood rustling the pages with his fingers.

'I have been to see Peak.'

'Have you?'

She moved a few steps and seated herself sideways on a small chair.

'My business with him was confoundedly unpleasant. I'm glad it's over. I wish I had known what I now do half a year ago.'

'Let me hear what it is.'

'You remember that I told you to be on your guard against Peak?'

Sidwell smiled faintly, and glanced at him, but made no answer.

'I knew he wasn't to be trusted,' pursued her brother, with gloomy satisfaction. 'And I had far better means of judging than father or you; but, of course, my suspicions were ungenerous and cynical.'

'Will you come to the point?' said Sidwell, in an irritated tone.

'I think you read this article in *The Critical?*' He approached and showed it to her. 'We spoke of it once, *à propos* of M'Naughten's book.'

She raised her eyes, and met his with a look of concern she could not disguise.

'What of that?'

'Peak is the author of it. It seems to have been written just about the time when I met him and brought him here as a visitor, and it was published after he had begun to edify you with his zeal for Christianity.'

She held out her hand.

'You remember the tone of the thing?' Buckland added. 'I'll leave it with you; but just glance at one or two of the passages I have marked. The Anglicanism of their writer is decidedly "broad," it seems to me.'

He moved apart and watched his sister as she bent over the pages. There was silence for five minutes. Seeing that Sidwell had ceased to read, he ejaculated, 'Well?'

'Has Mr. Peak admitted the authorship?' she asked, slowly and distinctly.

'Yes, and with a cool impudence I hardly expected.'

'Do you mean that he has made no attempt to justify himself?'

'None worth listening to. Practically he refused an explanation.'

Sidwell rested her forehead lightly upon the tips of her fingers; the periodical slipped from her lap and lay open on the floor.

'How did you find this out?'

'In the simplest way. Knowing perfectly well that I had only to get familiar with some of his old friends to obtain proof that he was an impostor, I followed up my acquaintance with Miss Moxey—got hold of her brother—called upon them. Whilst I was there, a man named Malkin came in, and somehow or other he began talking of Peak. I learned at once precisely what I expected, that Peak was known to all these people as a violent anti-Christian. Malkin refused to believe the story of his going in for the Church—it sounded to him a mere joke. Then came out the fact that he had written this article. They all knew about it.'

He saw a flush of shame upon Sidwell's half-hidden face. It gratified him. He was resolved to let her taste all the bitterness of her folly.

'It seems pretty clear that the Moxeys—at all events Miss Moxey—knew the rascally part he was playing. Whether they wished to unmask him, or not, I can't say. Perhaps not. Yet I caught an odd look on Miss Moxey's face when that man Malkin began to talk of Peak's characteristics and achievements. It came out, by-the-bye, that he had given all his acquaintances the slip; they had completely lost sight of him—I suppose until Miss Moxey met him by chance at Budleigh Salterton. There's some mystery still. She evidently kept

Peak's secret from the Moorhouses and the Walworths. A nice business, altogether!'

Again there was a long silence. Then Sidwell raised her face and said, abruptly:

'You may be quite mistaken.'

'How?'

'You went to Mr. Peak in a spirit of enmity and anger. It is not likely he would explain himself. You may have quite misunderstood what he said.'

'Ridiculous! You mean that he was perhaps "converted" after writing this article?—Then why did he allow it to be published?'

'He did not sign it. He may have been unable to withdraw it from the editor's hands.'

'Bosh! He didn't sign it, because the idea of this Exeter campaign came between the reception and the appearance of his paper. In the ordinary course of things, he would have been only too glad to see his name in *The Critical*. The scoundrelly project was conceived perhaps the very day that I brought him here—perhaps in that moment—at lunch, do you remember?—when he began to talk of the sermon at the Cathedral?'

'Why did he go to the Cathedral and hear that sermon?'

'To amuse a Sunday morning, I suppose.'

'That is not very likely in a man who hates and ridicules religion.'

'It is decidedly more probable than the idea of his conversion.'

Sidwell fell back again into her brooding attitude.

'The reason of your mistake in judging him,' resumed Buckland, with emphasis, 'is that you have undervalued his intellect. I told you long ago that a man of Peak's calibre could not possibly be a supporter of dogmas and churches. No amount of plausible evidence would have made me believe in his sincerity. Let me beg you to

appreciate the simple fact that *no* young man of brains and education is nowadays an honest defender of mediæval Christianity—the Christianity of your churches. Such fellows may transact with their conscience, and make a more or less decent business of the clerical career; or, in rare cases, they may believe that society is served by the maintenance of a national faith, and accordingly preach with all manner of mental reserves and symbolical interpretations. These are in reality politicians, not priests. But Peak belongs to neither class. He is an acute cynic, bent on making the best of this world, since he believes in no other. How he must have chuckled after every visit to this house! He despises you, one and all. Believe me, he regards you with profound contempt.'

Buckland's obtuseness on the imaginative side spared him the understanding of his sister's state of mind. Though in theory he recognised that women were little amenable to reasoning, he took it for granted that a clear demonstration of Peak's duplicity must at once banish all thought of him from Sidwell's mind. Therefore he was unsparing in his assaults upon her delusion. It surprised him when at length Sidwell looked up with flashing, tear-dewed eyes and addressed him indignantly:

'In all this there is not one word of truth! You know that in representing the clergy as a body of ignorant and shallow men you speak out of prejudice. If you believed what you say, you would be yourself both ignorant and shallow. I can't trust your judgment of anyone whatever.'

She paused, but in a moment added the remark which would have come first had she spoken in the order of her thoughts.

'It is because the spirit of contempt is so familiar to you that you are so ready to perceive it in others. I consider that habit of mind worse than hypocrisy—yes, worse, far worse!'

Buckland was sorry for the pain he had given. The retort did not affect him, but he hung his head and looked uncomfortable. His next speech was in a milder strain:

'I feel it a duty, Sidwell, to represent this man to you in what I verily believe to be the true light. To be despised by one who is immeasurably contemptible surely can't distress you. If a butler gets into your house by means of a forged character, and then lays his plans for a great burglary, no doubt he scorns you for being so easily taken in,—and that is an exact parallel to Peak's proceedings. He has somehow got the exterior of a gentleman; you could not believe that one who behaved so agreeably and talked so well was concealing an essentially base nature. But I must remind you that Peak belongs by origin to the lower classes, which is as much as to say that he lacks the sense of honour generally inherited by men of our world. A powerful intellect by no means implies a corresponding development of the moral sense.'

Sidwell could not close her ears against the argument. But her features were still set in an expression of resentment, and she kept silence lest her voice should sound tearful.

'And don't be tempted by personal feeling,' pursued her brother, 'to make light of hypocrisy—especially this kind. The man who can act such a part as Peak's has been for the last twelve months must be capable of any depravity. It is difficult for you to estimate his baseness, because you are only half convinced that any one can really be an enemy of religious faith. You suspect a lurking belief even in the minds of avowed atheists. But take the assurance from me that a man like Peak (and I am at one with him in this matter) regards with absolute repugnance every form of supernaturalism. For him to affect belief in *your* religion, is a crime against conscience. Peak has committed this crime with a mer-

cenary motive,—what viler charge could be brought against him ? '

Without looking at him, his sister replied :

' Whether he is guilty or not, I can't yet determine. But the motive of his life here was not mercenary.'

' Then how would you describe it ? ' Buckland asked, in astonishment.

' I only know that it can't be called mercenary.'

' Then the distinction you draw must be a very fine one.—He has abandoned the employment by which he lived, and by his own admission he looks to the Church for means of support. It was necessary for him to make interest with people of social position ; the closer his relations with them the better. From month to month he has worked skilfully to establish his footing in this house, and among your friends. What do you call this ? '

She had no verbal answer to make, but her look declared that she held to another interpretation.

' Well,' Buckland added, impatiently, ' we will hear father's opinion. He, remember, has been deceived in a very gross and cruel way. Possibly he may help you to see the thing in all its hatefulness.'

Sidwell turned to him.

' You go to London this afternoon ? '

' In an hour or two,' he replied, consulting his watch.

' Is it any use my asking you to keep silence about everything until I am back in town ? '

Buckland frowned and hesitated.

' To mother as well as father, you mean ? '

' Yes. Will you do me this kindness ? '

' Answer me a question, Sidwell. Have you any thought of seeing Peak ? '

' I can't say,' she replied, in agitation. ' I must leave myself free. I have a right to use my own judgment.'

' Don't see him ! I beg you not to see him ! '

He was so earnest that Sidwell suspected some other reason in his request than regard for her dignity.

'I must leave myself free,' she repeated, with shaking voice. 'In any case I shall be back in London to-morrow evening—that is, if—but I am sure mother will wish to go. Grant me this one kindness; say nothing here or there till I am back and have seen you again.'

He turned a deaf ear, for the persistency with which she resisted proof of Peak's dishonour had begun to alarm him. Who could say what miserable folly she might commit in the next four-and-twenty hours? The unavoidable necessity of his own return exasperated him; he wished to see her safe back in London, and under her father's care.

'No,' he exclaimed, with a gesture of determination; 'I can't keep such a thing as this secret for another hour. Mother must know at once—especially as you mean to invite that fellow into the house again.—I have half a mind to telegraph to Godolphin that I can't possibly be with him to-night.'

Sidwell regarded him and spoke with forced composure.

'Do as seems right to you, Buckland. But don't think that by remaining here you would prevent me from seeing Mr. Peak, if I wish to do so. That is treating me too much like a child. You have done your part—doubtless your duty; now I must reflect and judge for myself. Neither you nor anyone else has authority over me in such circumstances.'

'Very well. I have no authority, as you say, but common sense bids me let mother know how the case stands.'

And angrily he left the room.

The Critical still lay where it had fallen. When Sidwell had stood a while in confused thought, her eye turned to it, and she went hurriedly to take it up. Yes, that was the first thing to be done, to read those pages

with close care. For this she must have privacy. She ran upstairs and shut herself in her bedroom.

But did not at once begin to read. It concerned her deeply to know whether Peak had so expressed himself in this paper, that no room was left for doubt as to his convictions; but another question pressed upon her with even more urgency—could it be true that he did not love her? If Buckland were wholly right, then it mattered little in what degree she had been misled by intellectual hypocrisy.

It was impossible to believe that Peak had made love to her in cold blood, with none but sordid impulses. The thought was so humiliating that her mind resolutely rejected it; and she had no difficulty in recalling numberless minutiæ of behaviour—nuances of look and tone such as abide in a woman's memory—any one of which would have sufficed to persuade her that he felt genuine emotion. How had it come to pass that a feeling of friendly interest, which did not for a moment threaten her peace, changed all at once to an agitation only the more persistent the more she tried to subdue it,—how, if it were not that her heart responded to a passionate appeal, effectual as only the sincerest love can prove? Prior to that long talk with Godwin, on the eve of her departure for London, she had not imagined that he loved her; when they said good-bye to each other, she knew by her own sensations all that the parting meant to him. She felt glad, instead of sorry, that they were not to meet again for several months; for she wished to think of him calmly and prudently, now that he presented himself to her imagination in so new an aspect. The hand-clasp was a mutual assurance of fidelity.

'I should never have loved him, if he had not first loved me. Of that I am as firmly convinced as of my own existence. It is not in my nature to dream romances. I never did so even as a young girl, and at this age I am not likely to fall into a foolish self-decep-

tion. I had often thought about him. He seemed to me a man of higher and more complex type than those with whom I was familiar; but most surely I never attributed to him even a corresponding interest in me. I am neither vain, nor very anxious to please; I never suffered because men did not woo me; I have only moderate good looks, and certainly no uncommon mental endowments.—If he had been attracted by Sylvia, I should have thought it natural; and I more than once suspected that Sylvia was disposed to like him. It seemed strange at first that his choice should have fallen upon me; yet when I was far away from him, and longed so to sit once more by him and hear him talk, I understood that it might be in my power to afford him the companionship he needed.—Mercenary? If I had been merely a governess in the house, he would have loved me just the same!'

Only by a painful effort could she remind herself that the ideal which had grown so slowly was now defaced. He loved her, but it was not the love of an honest man. After all, she had no need to peruse this writing of his; she remembered so well how it had impressed her when she read it on its first appearance, how her father had spoken of it. Buckland's manifold evidence was irresistible. Why should Peak have concealed his authorship? Why had he disappeared from among the people who thoroughly knew him?

She had loved a dream. What a task would it be to distinguish between those parts of Peak's conversation which represented his real thoughts, and those which were mockery of his listeners? The plan of a retired life which he had sketched to her—was it all falsehood? Impossible, for his love was inextricably blended with the details. Did he imagine that the secret of his unbelief could be preserved for a lifetime, and that it would have no effect whatever upon his happiness as a man? This seemed a likely reading of the problem. But what

a multitude of moral and intellectual obscurities remained! The character which had seemed to her nobly simple was become a dark and dread enigma.

She knew so little of his life. If only it could all be laid bare to her, the secret of his position would be revealed. Buckland's violence altogether missed its mark; the dishonour of such a man as Godwin Peak was due to no gross incentive.

It was probable that, in talk with her father, he had been guilty of more deliberate misrepresentation than had marked his intercourse with the rest of the family. Her father, she felt sure, had come to regard him as a valuable source of argument in the battle against materialism. Doubtless the German book, which Peak was translating bore upon that debate, and consequently was used as an aid to dissimulation. Thinking of this she all but shared her brother's vehement feeling. It pained her to the inmost heart that her father's generous and candid nature should thus have been played upon. The deceit, as it concerned herself alone, she could forgive; at least she could suspend judgment until the accused had offered his defence—feeling that the psychology of the case must till then be beyond her powers of analysis. But the wrong done to her father revolted her.

A tap at the door caused her to rise, trembling. She remembered that by this time her mother must be aware of the extraordinary disclosure, and that a new scene of wretched agitation had to be gone through.

'Sidwell!'

It was Mrs. Warricombe's voice, and the door opened.

'Sidwell!—What *does* all this mean? I don't understand half that Buckland has been telling me.'

The speaker's face was mottled, and she stood panting, a hand pressed against her side.

'How very, very imprudent we have been! How

wrong of father not to have made inquiries! To think that such a man should have sat at our table!'

'Sit down, mother; don't be so distressed,' said Sidwell, calmly. 'It will all very soon be settled.'

'Of course not a word must be said to anyone. How very fortunate that we shall be in London till the summer! Of course he must leave Exeter.'

'I have no doubt he will. Let us talk as little of it as possible, mother. We shall go back to-morrow'——

'This afternoon! We will go back with Buckland. That is decided. I couldn't sleep here another night.'

'We must remain till to-morrow,' Sidwell replied, with quiet determination.

'Why? What reason can there be?'

Mrs. Warricombe's voice was suspended by a horrible surmise.

'Of course we shall go to-day, Sidwell,' she continued, in nervous haste. 'To think of that man having the impudence to call and sit talking with you! If I could have dreamt'——

'Mother,' said Sidwell, gravely, 'I am obliged to see Mr. Peak, either this evening or to-morrow morning.'

'To—to *see* him——? Sidwell! What can you mean?'

'I have a reason for wishing to hear from his own lips the whole truth.'

'But we *know* the whole truth!—What can you be thinking of, dear? Who is this Mr. Peak that you should ask him to come and see you, under *any* circumstances?'

It would never have occurred to Sidwell to debate with her mother on subtle questions of character and motive, but the agitation of her nerves made it difficult for her to keep silence under these vapid outcries. She desired to be alone; commonplace discussion of the misery that had come upon her was impossible. A little more strain, and she would be on the point of tears, a weakness she was resolute to avoid.

'Let me think quietly for an hour or two,' she said, moving away. 'It's quite certain that I must stay here till to-morrow. When Buckland has gone, we can talk again.'

'But, Sidwell '——

'If you insist, I must leave the house, and find a refuge somewhere else.'

Mrs. Warricombe tossed her head.

'Oh, if I am not permitted to speak to you! I only hope you won't have occasion to remember my warning! Such extraordinary behaviour was surely never known! I should have thought '——

Sidwell was by this time out of the room. Safe in privacy she sat down as if to pen a letter. From an hour's agitated thought, the following lines resulted:

'My brother has told me of a conversation he held with you this morning. He says you admit the authorship of an article which seems quite inconsistent with what you have professed in our talks. How am I to understand this contradiction? I beg that you will write to me at once. I shall anxiously await your reply.'

This, with her signature, was all. Having enclosed the note in an envelope, she left it on her table and went down to the library, where Buckland was sitting alone in gloomy reverie. Mrs. Warricombe had told him of Sidwell's incredible purpose. Recognising his sister's independence, and feeling sure that if she saw Peak it could only be to take final leave of him, he had decided to say no more. To London he must perforce return this afternoon, but he had done his duty satisfactorily, and just in time. It was plain that things had gone far between Peak and Sidwell; the latter's behaviour avowed it. But danger there could be none, with 'The New Sophistry' staring her in the eyes. Let her see the fellow, by all means. His evasions and hair-splittings would complete her deliverance.

'There's a train at 1.53,' Buckland remarked, rising,

'and I shall catch it if I start now. I can't stay for the discomfort of luncheon. You remain here till to-morrow, I understand ?'

'Yes.'

'It's a pity you are angry with me. It seems to me I have done you a kindness.'

'I am not angry with you, Buckland,' she replied, gently. 'You have done what you were plainly obliged to do.'

'That's a sensible way of putting it. Let us say good-bye with friendliness then.'

Sidwell gave her hand, and tried to smile. With a look of pained affection, Buckland went silently away.

Shortly after, Sidwell fetched her note from upstairs, and gave it to the housekeeper to be delivered by hand as soon as possible. Mrs. Warricombe remained invisible, and Sidwell went back to the library, where she sat with *The Critical* open before her at Godwin's essay.

Hours went by; she still waited for an answer from Longbrook Street.

At six o'clock she went upstairs and spoke to her mother.

'Shall you come down to dinner ?'

'No, Sidwell,' was the cold reply. 'Be so good as to excuse me.'

Towards eight, a letter was brought to her; it could only be from Godwin Peak. With eyes which endeavoured to take in all at once, and therefore could at first distinguish nothing, she scanned what seemed to be hurriedly written lines.

'I have tried to answer you in a long letter, but after all I can't send it. I fear you wouldn't understand. Better to repeat simply that I wrote the article you speak of. I should have told you about it some day, but now my intentions and hopes matter nothing.

Whatever I said now would seem dishonest pleading. Good-bye.'

She read this so many times that at length she had but to close her eyes to see every word clearly traced on the darkness. The meanings she extracted from each sentence were scarcely less numerous than her perusals. In spite of reason, this enigmatic answer brought her some solace. He *could* defend himself; that was the assurance she had longed for. Impossible (she again and again declared to herself with emphasis) for their intimacy to be resumed. But in secret she could hold him, if not innocent, at all events not base. She had not bestowed her love upon a mere impostor.

But now a mournful, regretful passion began to weigh upon her heart. She shed tears, and presently stole away to her room for a night of sorrow.

What must be her practical course? If she went back to London without addressing another word to him, he must understand her silence as a final farewell. In that case his departure from Exeter would, no doubt, speedily follow, and there was little likelihood that she would ever again see him. Were Godwin a vulgar schemer, he would not so readily relinquish the advantage he had gained; he would calculate upon the weakness of a loving woman, and make at least one effort to redeem his position. As it was, she could neither hope nor fear that he would try to see her again. Yet she wished to see him, desired it ardently.

And yet—for each impulse of ardour was followed by a cold fit of reasoning—might not his abandonment of the position bear a meaning such as Buckland would of course attribute to it? If he were hopeless of the goodwill of her parents, what profit would it be to him to retain her love? She was no heiress; supposing him actuated by base motive, her value in his eyes came merely of his regarding her as a means to an end.

But this was to reopen the question of whether or not he truly loved her. No; he was forsaking her because he thought it impossible for her to pardon the deceit he had undeniably practised—with whatever palliating circumstances. He was overcome with shame. He imagined her indignant, scornful.

Why had she written such a short, cold note, the very thing to produce in his mind a conviction of her resentment?

Hereupon came another paroxysm of tearful misery. It was intensified by a thought she had half consciously been repressing ever since the conversation with her brother. Was it true that Miss Moxey had had it in her power to strip Godwin of a disguise? What, then, were the relations existing between him and that strangely impressive woman? How long had they known each other? It was now all but certain that a strong intellectual sympathy united their minds—and perhaps there had been something more.

She turned her face upon the pillow and moaned.

IV

And from the Moxeys Buckland had derived his information. What was it he said—something about ' an odd look ' on Miss Moxey's face when that friend of theirs talked of Peak ? Might not such a look signify a conflict between the temptation to injure and the desire to screen ?

Sidwell constructed a complete romance. Ignorance of the past of both persons concerned allowed her imagination free play. There was no limit to the possibilities of self-torment.

The desire to see Godwin took such hold upon her, that she had already begun to think over the wording of another note to be sent to him the first thing in the morning. His reply had been insufficient : simple justice required that she should hear him in his own defence before parting with him for ever. If she kept silence, he would always remember her with bitterness, and this would make her life-long sorrow harder to bear. Sidwell was one of those few women whose love, never demonstrative, never exigent, only declares itself in all its profound significance when it is called upon to pardon. What was likely to be the issue of a meeting with Godwin she could not foresee. It seemed all but impossible for their intercourse to continue, and their coming face to face might result in nothing but distress to both, better avoided ; yet judgment yielded to emotion. Yesterday—only yesterday—she had yielded herself to the joy of loving, and before her consciousness

had had time to make itself familiar with its new realm, before her eyes had grown accustomed to the light suddenly shed about her, she was bidden to think of what had happened as only a dream. Her heart refused to make surrender of its hope. Though it could be held only by an encouragement of recognised illusion, she preferred to dream yet a little longer. Above all, she must taste the luxury of forgiving her lover, of making sure that her image would not dwell in his mind as that of a self-righteous woman who had turned coldly from his error, perhaps from his repentance.

A little after midnight, she rose from bed, slipped on her dressing-gown, and sat down by the still burning lamp to write what her passion dictated:

'Why should you distrust my ability, or my willingness to understand you? It would have been so much better if you had sent what you first wrote. These few lines do not even let me know whether you think yourself to blame. Why do you leave me to form a judgment of things as they appear on the surface? If you *wish* to explain, if you sincerely feel that I am in danger of wronging you by misconstruction, come to me as soon as you have received this note. If you will not come, then at least write to me—the letter you at first thought of sending. This afternoon (Friday) I return to London, but you know my address there. Don't think because I wrote so briefly that I have judged you. S. W.'

To have committed this to paper was a relief. In the morning she would read it over and consider again whether she wished to send it.

On the table lay *The Critical*. She opened it once more at the page that concerned her, and glanced over the first few lines. Then, having put the lamp nearer to the bed, she again lay down, not to sleep but to read.

This essay was not so repugnant to her mind or her feelings as when she first became acquainted with it. Its bitterness no longer seemed to be directed against herself. There was much in it with which she could have agreed at any time during the last six months, and many strokes of satire, which till the other day would have offended her, she now felt to be legitimate. As she read on, a kind of anger such as she had never experienced trembled along her nerves. Was it not flagrantly true that English society at large made profession of a faith which in no sense whatever it could be said sincerely to hold? Was there not every reason to believe that thousands of people keep up an ignoble formalism, because they feared the social results of declaring their severance from the religion of the churches? This was a monstrous evil; she had never till this moment understood the scope of its baneful effects. But for the prevalence of such a spirit of hypocrisy, Godwin Peak would never have sinned against his honour. Why was it not declared in trumpet-tones of authority, from end to end of the Christian world, that Christianity, as it has been understood through the ages, can no longer be accepted? For that was the truth, the truth, the *truth!*

She lay back, quivering as if with terror. For an instant her soul had been filled with hatred of the religion for which she could once have died. It had stood before her as a power of darkness and ignorance, to be assailed, crushed, driven from the memory of man.

Last night she had hardly slept, and now, though her body was numb with weariness, her mind kept up a feverish activity. She was bent on excusing Godwin, and the only way in which she could do so was by arraigning the world for its huge dishonesty. In a condition between slumber and waking, she seemed to plead for him before a circle of Pharisaic accusers.

Streams of silent eloquence rushed through her brain, and the spirit which prompted her was closely akin to that of 'The New Sophistry.' Now and then, for a few seconds, she was smitten with a consciousness of extraordinary change in her habits of thought. She looked about her with wide, fearful eyes, and endeavoured to see things in the familiar aspect. As if with physical constraint her angry imagination again overcame her, until at length from the penumbra of sleep she passed into its profoundest gloom.

To wake when dawn was pale at the window. A choking odour reminded her that she had not extinguished the lamp, which must have gone out for lack of oil. She opened the window, took a draught of water, and addressed herself to sleep again. But in recollecting what the new day meant for her, she had spoilt the chances of longer rest. Her head ached; all worldly thoughts were repulsive, yet she could not dismiss them. She tried to repeat the prayers she had known since childhood, but they were meaningless, and a sense of shame attached to their utterance.

When the first gleam of sun told her that it was past eight o'clock, she made an effort and rose.

At breakfast Mrs. Warricombe talked of the departure for London. She mentioned an early train; by getting ready as soon as the meal was over, they could easily reach the station in time. Sidwell made no direct reply and seemed to assent; but when they rose from the table, she said, nervously:

'I couldn't speak before the servants. I wish to stay here till the afternoon.'

'Why, Sidwell?'

'I have asked Mr. Peak to come and see me this morning.'

Her mother knew that expostulation was useless, but could not refrain from a long harangue made up of warning and reproof.

'You have very little consideration for me,' was her final remark. 'Now we shan't get home till after dark, and of course my throat will be bad again.'

Glad of the anti-climax, Sidwell replied that the day was much warmer, and that with care no harm need come of the journey.

'It's easy to say that, Sidwell. I never knew you to behave so selfishly, never!'

'Don't be angry with me, mother. You don't know how grieved I am to distress you so. I can't help it, dear; indeed, I can't. Won't you sacrifice a few hours to put my mind at rest?'

Mrs. Warricombe once more gave expression to her outraged feelings. Sidwell could only listen silently with bent head.

. . . . . .

If Godwin were coming at all, he would be here by eleven o'clock. Sidwell had learnt that her letter was put into his hands. She asked him to come at once, and nothing but a resolve not to meet her could delay him more than an hour or two.

At half-past ten the bell sounded. She was sitting in the library with her back turned to the door. When a voice announced 'Mr. Peak,' she did not at once rise, and with a feeling akin to terror she heard the footstep slowly approaching. It stopped at some distance from her; then, overcoming a weakness which threatened to clog her as in a nightmare, she stood up and looked round.

Peak wore neither overcoat nor gloves, but otherwise was dressed in the usual way. As Sidwell fixed her eyes upon him, he threw his hat into a chair and came a step or two nearer. Whether he had passed the night in sleep or vigil could not be determined; but his look was one of shame, and he did not hold himself so upright as was his wont.

'Will you come and sit down?' said Sidwell, pointing

to a chair not far from that on which one of her hands rested.

He moved forward, and was about to pass near her, when Sidwell involuntarily held her hand to him. He took it and gazed into her face with a melancholy smile.

'What does it mean?' she asked, in a low voice.

He relinquished her fingers, which he had scarcely pressed, and stood with his arms behind his back.

'Oh, it's all quite true,' was his reply, wearily spoken.

'What is true?'

'All that you have heard from your brother.'

'All?—But how can you know what he has said?'

They looked at each other. Peak's lips were set as if in resistance of emotion, and a frown wrinkled his brows. Sidwell's gaze was one of fear and appeal.

'He said, of course, that I had deceived you.'

'But in what?—Was there no truth in anything you said to me?'

'To you I have spoken far more truth than falsehood.'

A light shone in her eyes, and her lips quivered.

'Then,' she murmured, 'Buckland was not right in everything.'

'I understand. He wished you to believe that my love was as much a pretence as my religion?'

'He said that.'

'It was natural enough.—And you were disposed to believe it?'

'I thought it impossible. But I should have thought the same of the other things.'

Peak nodded, and moved away. Watching him, Sidwell was beset with conflicting impulses. His assurance had allayed her worst misgiving, and she approved the self-restraint with which he bore himself, but at the same time she longed for a passionate declaration. As a reasoning woman, she did her utmost to remember

that Peak was on his defence before her, and that nothing could pass between them but grave discussion of the motives which had impelled him to dishonourable behaviour. As a woman in love, she would fain have obscured the moral issue by indulgence of her heart's desire. She was glad that he held aloof, but if he had taken her in his arms, she would have forgotten everything in the moment's happiness.

'Let us sit down, and tell me—tell me all you can.'

He delayed a moment, then seated himself opposite to her. She saw now that his movements were those of physical fatigue; and the full light from the window, enabling her to read his face more distinctly, revealed the impress of suffering. Instead of calling upon him to atone in such measure as was possible for the wrong he had done her, she felt ready to reproach herself for speaking coldly when his need of solace was so great.

'What can I tell you,' he said, 'that you don't know, or that you can't conjecture?'

'But you wrote that there was so much I could not be expected to understand. And I can't, can't understand you. It still seems impossible. Why did you hide the truth from me?'

'Because if I had begun by telling it, I should never have won a kind look or a kind thought from you.'

Sidwell reflected.

'But what did you care for me then—when it began?'

'Not so much as I do now, but enough to overthrow all the results of my life up to that time. Before I met you in this house I had seen you twice, and had learned who you were. I was sitting in the Cathedral when you came there with your sister and Miss Moorhouse—do you remember? I heard Fanny call you by your name, and that brought to my mind a young girl whom I had known in a slight way years before. And the next day I again saw you there, at the service; I waited about the entrance only to see you. I cared

enough for you then to conceive a design which for a long time seemed too hateful really to be carried out, but—at last it was, you see.'

Sidwell breathed quickly. Nothing he could have urged for himself would have affected her more deeply than this. To date back and extend the period of his love for her was a flattery more subtle than Peak imagined.

'Why didn't you tell me that the day before yesterday?' she asked, with tremulous bosom.

'I had no wish to remind myself of baseness in the midst of a pure joy.'

She was silent, then exclaimed, in accents of pain:

'Why should you have thought it necessary to be other than yourself? Couldn't you see, at first meeting with us, that we were not bigoted people? Didn't you know that Buckland had accustomed us to understand how common it is nowadays for people to throw off the old religion? Would father have looked coldly on you if he had known that you followed where so many good and thoughtful men were leading?'

He regarded her anxiously.

'I had heard from Buckland that your father was strongly prejudiced; that you also were quite out of sympathy with the new thought.'

'He exaggerated—even then.'

'Exaggerated? But on what plea could I have come to live in this neighbourhood? How could I have kept you in sight—tried to win your interest? I had no means, no position. The very thought of encouraging my love for you demanded some extraordinary step. What course was open to me?'

Sidwell let her head droop.

'I don't know. You might perhaps have discovered a way.'

'But what was the use, when the mere fact of my heresy would have forbidden hope from the outset?'

'Why should it have done so?'

'Why? You know very well that you could never even have been friendly with the man who wrote that thing in the review.'

'But here is the proof how much better it is to behave truthfully! In this last year I have changed so much that I find it difficult to understand the strength of my former prejudices. What is it to me now that you speak scornfully of attempts to reconcile things that can't be reconciled? I understand the new thought, and how natural it is for you to accept it. If only I could have come to know you well, your opinions would not have stood between us.'

Peak made a slight gesture, and smiled incredulously.

'You think so now.'

'And I have such good reason for my thought,' rejoined Sidwell, earnestly, 'that when you said you loved me, my only regret in looking to the future was—that you had resolved to be a clergyman.'

He leaned back in the chair, and let a hand fall on his knee. The gesture seemed to signify a weary relinquishment of concern in what they were discussing.

'How could I foresee that?' he uttered, in a corresponding tone.

Sidwell was made uneasy by the course upon which she had entered. To what did her words tend? If only to a demonstration that fate had used him as the plaything of its irony—if, after all, she had nothing to say to him but 'See how your own folly has ruined you,' then she had better have kept silence. She not only appeared to be offering him encouragement, but was in truth doing so. She wished him to understand that his way of thinking was no obstacle to her love, and with that purpose she was even guilty of a slight misrepresentation. For it was only since the shock of this disaster that she had clearly recognised the change in her own mind. True, the regret of which

she spoke had for an instant visited her, but it represented a mundane solicitude rather than an intellectual scruple. It had occurred to her how much brighter would be their prospect if Peak were but an active man of the world, with a career before him distinctly suited to his powers.

His contention was undeniably just. The influence to which she had from the first submitted was the same that her father felt so strongly. Godwin interested her as a self-reliant champion of the old faiths, and his personal characteristics would never have awakened such sympathy in her but for that initial recommendation. Natural prejudice would have prevented her from perceiving the points of kindred between his temperament and her own. His low origin, the ridiculous stories connected with his youth—why had she, in spite of likelihood, been able to disregard these things? Only because of what she then deemed his spiritual value.

But for the dishonourable part he had played, this bond of love would never have been formed between them. The thought was a new apology for his transgression; she could not but defy her conscience, and look indulgently on the evil which had borne such fruit.

Godwin had begun to speak again.

'This is quite in keeping with the tenor of my whole life. Whatever I undertake ends in frustration at a point where success seems to have just come within my reach. Great things and trifles—it's all the same. My course at College was broken off at the moment when I might have assured my future. Later, I made many an effort to succeed in literature, and when at length something of mine was printed in a leading review, I could not even sign it, and had no profit from the attention it excited. Now—well, you see. Laughable, isn't it?'

Sidwell scarcely withheld herself from bending forward and giving him her hand.

'What shall you do?' she asked.

'Oh, I am not afraid. I have still enough money left to support me until I can find some occupation of the old kind. Fortunately, I am not one of those men whose brains have no marketable value.'

'If you knew how it pains me to hear you!'

'If I didn't believe that, I couldn't speak to you like this. I never thought you would let me see you again, and if you hadn't asked me to come, I could never have brought myself to face you. But it would have been a miserable thing to go off without even knowing what you thought of me.'

'Should you never have written to me?'

'I think not. You find it hard to imagine that I have any pride, no doubt; but it is there, explain it how one may.'

'It would have been wrong to leave me in such uncertainty.'

'Uncertainty?'

'About you—about your future.'

'Did you quite mean that? Hadn't your brother made you doubt whether I loved you at all?'

'Yes. But no, I didn't doubt. Indeed, indeed, I didn't doubt! But I felt such a need of hearing from your own lips that—— Oh, I can't explain myself!'

Godwin smiled sadly.

'I think I understand. But there was every reason for my believing that *your* love could not bear such a test. You must regard me as quite a different man—one utterly unknown to you.'

He had resolved to speak not a word that could sound like an appeal to her emotions. When he entered the room he felt a sincere indifference as to what would result from the interview, for to his mind the story was ended, and he had only to retire with the dignity still possible to a dishonoured man. To touch the note of pathos would be unworthy; to exert what influence

might be left to him, a wanton cruelty. But he had heard such unexpected things, that it was not easy for him to remember how complete had seemed the severance between him and Sidwell. The charm of her presence was reasserting itself, and when avowal of continued love appeared so unmistakably in her troubled countenance, her broken words, he could not control the answering fervour. He spoke in a changed voice, and allowed his eyes to dwell longingly upon hers.

'I felt so at first,' she answered. 'And it would be wrong to pretend that I can still regard you as I did before.'

It cost her a great effort to add these words. When they were spoken, she was at once glad and fearful.

'I am not so foolish as to think it possible,' said Peak, half turning away.

'But that is no reason,' she pursued, 'why we should become strangers. You are still so young a man; life must be so full of possibilities for you. This year has been wasted, but when you leave Exeter'——

An impatient movement of Godwin's checked her.

'You are going to encourage me to begin the struggle once more,' he said, bitterly. 'Where? How? It is so easy to talk of "possibilities."'

'You are not without friends—I mean friends whose sympathy is of real value to you.'

Saying this, she looked keenly at him.

'Friends,' he replied, 'who perhaps at this moment are laughing over my disgrace.'

'How do they know of—what has happened?'

'How did your brother get his information? I didn't care to ask him.—No, I don't even wish you to say anything about that.'

'But surely there is no reason for keeping it secret. Why may I not speak freely? Buckland told me that he had heard you spoken of at the house of people named Moxey.'

She endeavoured to understand the smile which rose to his lips.

'Now it is clear to me,' he said. 'Yes, I suppose that was inevitable, sooner or later.'

'You knew that he had become acquainted with the Moxeys?'

Her tone was more reserved than hitherto.

'Yes, I knew he had. He met Miss Moxey by chance at Budleigh Salterton, and I happened to be there—at the Moorhouses'—on the same day.'

Sidwell glanced at him inquiringly, and waited for something more.

'I saw Miss Moxey in private,' he added, speaking more quickly, 'and asked her to keep my secret. I ought to be ashamed to tell you this, but it is better you should know how far my humiliation has gone.'

He saw that she was moved with strong feeling. The low tone in which she answered had peculiar significance.

'Did you speak of me to Miss Moxey?'

'I must forgive you for asking that,' Peak replied, coldly. 'It may well seem to you that I have neither honour nor delicacy left.'

There had come a flush on her cheeks. For some moments she was absorbed in thought.

'It seems strange to you,' he continued at length, 'that I could ask Miss Moxey to share such a secret. But you must understand on what terms we were—she and I. We have known each other for several years. She has a man's mind, and I have always thought of her in much the same way as of my male companions. —Your brother has told you about her, perhaps?'

'I have met her in London.'

'Then that will make my explanation easier,' said Godwin, disregarding the anxious questions that at once suggested themselves to him. 'Well, I misled her, or tried to do so. I allowed her to suppose that I was

sincere in my new undertakings, and that I didn't wish —— Oh!' he exclaimed, suddenly breaking off, 'Why need I go any further in confession? It must be as miserable for you to hear as for me to speak. Let us make an end of it. I can't understand how I have escaped detection so long.'

Remembering every detail of Buckland's story, Sidwell felt that she had possibly been unjust in representing the Moxeys as her brother's authority; in strictness, she ought to mention that a friend of theirs was the actual source of information. But she could not pursue the subject; like Godwin, she wished to put it out of her mind. What question could there be of honour or dishonour in the case of a person such as Miss Moxey, who had consented to be party to a shameful deceit? Strangely, it was a relief to her to have heard this. The moral repugnance which threatened to estrange her from Godwin, was now directed in another quarter; unduly restrained by love, it found scope under the guidance of jealousy.

'You have been trying to adapt yourself,' she said, 'to a world for which you are by nature unfitted. Your place is in the new order; by turning back to the old, you condemned yourself to a wasted life. Since we have been in London, I have come to understand better the great difference between modern intellectual life and that which we lead in these far-away corners. You must go out among your equals, go and take your part with men who are working for the future.'

Peak rose with a gesture of passionate impatience.

'What is it to me, new world or old? My world is where *you* are. I have no life of my own; I think only of you, live only by you."

'If I could help you!' she replied, with emotion. 'What can I do—but be your friend at a distance? Everything else has become impossible.'

'Impossible for the present—for a long time to come. But is there no hope for me?'

She pressed her hands together, and stood before him unable to answer.

'Remember,' he continued, 'that you are almost as much changed in my eyes as I in yours. I did not imagine that you had moved so far towards freedom of mind. If my love for you was profound and absorbing, think what it must now have become! Yours has suffered by my disgrace, but is there no hope of its reviving—if I live worthily—if I——?'

His voice failed.

'I have said that we can't be strangers,' Sidwell murmured brokenly. 'Wherever you go, I must hear of you.'

'Everyone about you will detest my name. You will soon wish to forget my existence.'

'If I know myself, never!—Oh, try to find your true work! You have such abilities, powers so much greater than those of ordinary men. You will always be the same to me, and if ever circumstances '——

'You would have to give up so much, Sidwell. And there is little chance of my ever being well-to-do; poverty will always stand between us, if nothing else.'

'It must be so long before we can think of that.'

'But can I ever see you?—No, I won't ask that. Who knows? I may have to go too far away. But I *may* write to you—after a time?'

'I shall live in the hope of good news from you,' she replied, trying to smile and to speak cheerfully. 'This will always be my home. Nothing will be changed.'

'Then you don't think of me as irredeemably base?'

'If I thought you base,' Sidwell answered, in a low voice, 'I should not now be speaking with you. It is because I feel and know that you have erred only—that is what makes it impossible for me to think of your fault as outweighing the good in your nature.'

'The good? I wonder how you understand that. What is there *good* in me? You don't mean mere intellect?'

He waited anxiously for what she would say. A necessity for speaking out his inmost thoughts had arisen with the emotion, scarcely to be called hope, excited by Sidwell's magnanimity. Now, or never, he must stand before this woman as his very self, and be convinced that she loved him for his own sake.

'No, I don't mean intellect,' she replied, with hesitation.

'What then? Tell me of one quality in me strong enough to justify a woman's love.'

Sidwell dropped her eyes in confusion.

'I can't analyse your character—I only know'——

She became silent.

'To myself,' pursued Godwin, with the modulated, moving voice which always expressed his genuine feeling, 'I seem anything but lovable. I don't underrate my powers—rather the opposite, no doubt; but what I always seem to lack is the gift of pleasing—moral grace. My strongest emotions seem to be absorbed in revolt; for once that I feel tenderly, I have a hundred fierce, resentful, tempestuous moods. To be suave and smiling in common intercourse costs me an effort. I have to act the part, and this habit makes me sceptical, whenever I am really prompted to gentleness. I criticise myself ceaselessly; expose without mercy all those characteristics which another man would keep out of sight. Yes, and for this very reason, just because I think myself unlovable—the gift of love means far more to me than to other men. If you could conceive the passion of gratitude which possessed me for hours after I left you the other day! You cannot!'

Sidwell regarded him fixedly.

'In comparison with this sincerity, what becomes of the pretence you blame in me? If you knew how

paltry it seems—that accusation of dishonesty! I believed the world round, and pretended to believe it flat: that's what it amounts to! Are you, on such an account as that, to consider worthless the devotion which has grown in me month by month? You—I was persuaded—thought the world flat, and couldn't think kindly of any man who held the other hypothesis. Very well; why not concede the trifle, and so at least give myself a chance? I did so—that was all.'

In vain her conscience strove to assert itself. She was under the spell of a nature infinitely stronger than hers; she saw and felt as Godwin did.

'You think, Sidwell, that I stand in need of forgiveness. Then be great enough to forgive me, wholly—once and for all. Let your love be strengthened by the trial it has passed through. That will mean that my whole life is yours, directed by the ever-present thought of your beauty, face and soul. Then there *will* be good in me, thanks to you. I shall no longer live a life of hypocrisy, of suppressed rage and scorn. I know how much I am asking; perhaps it means that for my sake you give up everything else that is dear to you'——

The thought checked him. He looked at her despondently.

'You can trust me,' Sidwell answered, moving nearer to him, tears on her cheeks. 'I must hear from you, and I will write.'

'I can ask no more than that.'

He took her hands, held them for a moment, and turned away. At the door he looked round. Sidwell's head was bowed, and, on her raising it, he saw that she was blinded with tears.

So he went forth.

PART VI

I

For several days after the scene in which Mr. Malkin unconsciously played an important part, Marcella seemed to be ill. She appeared at meals, but neither ate nor conversed. Christian had never known her so sullen and nervously irritable; he did not venture to utter Peak's name. Upon seclusion followed restless activity. Marcella was rarely at home between breakfast and dinner-time, and her brother learnt with satisfaction that she went much among her acquaintances. Late one evening, when he had just returned from he knew not where, Christian tried to put an end to the unnatural constraint between them. After talking cheerfully for a few minutes, he risked the question:

'Have you seen anything of the Warricombes?'

She replied with a cold negative.

'Nor heard anything?'

'No. Have you?'

'Nothing at all. I have seen Earwaker. Malkin had told him about what happened here the other day.'

'Of course.'

'But he had no news.—Of Peak, I mean.'

Marcella smiled, as if the situation amused her; but she would not discuss it. Christian began to hope that she was training herself to a wholesome indifference.

A month of the new year went by, and Peak seemed to be forgotten. Marcella had returned to her studious habits, was fenced around with books, seldom left the house. Another month and the brother and sister were

living very much in the old way, seeing few people, conversing only of intellectual things. But Christian concealed an expectation which enabled him to pass hours of retirement in the completest idleness. Since the death of her husband, Mrs. Palmer had been living abroad. Before the end of March, as he had been careful to discover, she would be back in London, at the house in Sussex Square. By that time he might venture, without indelicacy, to call upon her. And after the first interview——

The day came, when, ill with agitation, he set forth to pay this call. For two or three nights he had scarcely closed his eyes; he looked ghastly. The weather was execrable, and on that very account he made choice of this afternoon, hoping that he might find his widowed Laura alone. Between ringing the bell and the opening of the door, he could hardly support himself. He asked for Mrs. Palmer in a gasping voice which caused the servant to look at him with surprise.

The lady was at home. At the drawing-room door, before his name could be announced, he caught the unwelcome sound of voices in lively conversation. It seemed to him that a score of persons were assembled. In reality there were six, three of them callers.

Mrs. Palmer met him with the friendliest welcome. A stranger would have thought her pretty, but by no means impressive. She was short, anything but meagre, fair-haired, brisk of movement, idly vivacious in look and tone. The mourning she wore imposed no restraint upon her humour, which at present was not far from gay.

'Is it really Mr. Moxey?' she exclaimed. 'Why, I had all but forgotten you, and positively it is your own fault! It must be a year or more since you came to see me. No? Eight months?—But I have been through so much trouble, you know.' She sighed mechanically. 'I thought of you one day at Bordighera, when we were

looking at some funny little sea-creatures—the kind of thing you used to know all about. How is your sister ? '

A chill struck upon his heart. Assuredly he had no wish to find Constance sunk in the semblance of dolour ; such hypocrisy would have pained him. But her sprightliness was a shock. Though months had passed since Mr. Palmer's decease, a decent gravity would more have become her condition. He could reply only in broken phrases, and it was a relief to him when the widow, as if tiring of his awkwardness, turned her attention elsewhere.

He was at length able to survey the company. Two ladies in mourning he faintly recognised, the one a sister of Mr. Palmer's, comely but of dull aspect ; the other a niece, whose laugh was too frequent even had it been more musical, and who talked of athletic sports with a young man evidently better fitted to excel in that kind of thing than in any pursuit demanding intelligence. This gentleman Christian had never met. The two other callers, a grey-headed, military-looking person, and a lady, possibly his wife, were equally strangers to him.

The drawing-room was much changed in appearance since Christian's last visit. There was more display, a richer profusion of ornaments not in the best taste. The old pictures had given place to showily-framed daubs of the most popular school. On a little table at his elbow, he remarked the photograph of a jockey who was just then engrossing public affection. What did all this mean ? Formerly, he had attributed every graceful feature of the room to Constance's choice. He had imagined that to her Mr. Palmer was indebted for guidance on points of æsthetic propriety. Could it be that—— ?

He caught a glance which she cast in his direction, and instantly forgot the troublesome problem. How dull of him to misunderstand her ! Her sportiveness had a double significance. It was the expression of a

hope which would not be subdued, and at the same time a means of disguising the tender interest with which she regarded *him*. If she had been blithe before his appearance, how could she suddenly change her demeanour as soon as he entered? It would have challenged suspicion and remark. For the same reason she affected to have all but forgotten him. Of course! how could he have failed to see that? 'I thought of you one day at Bordighera'—was not that the best possible way of making known to him that he had never been out of her mind?

Sweet, noble, long-suffering Constance!

He took a place by her sister, and began to talk of he knew not what, for all his attention was given to the sound of Constance's voice.

'Yes,' she was saying to the man of military appearance, 'it's very early to come back to London, but I did get so tired of those foreign places.'

(In other words, of being far from her Christian—thus he interpreted.)

'No, we didn't make a single pleasant acquaintance. A shockingly tiresome lot of people wherever we went.'

(In comparison with the faithful lover, who waited, waited.)

'Foreigners are so stupid—don't you think so? Why should they always expect you to speak *their* language? —Oh, of course I speak French; but it is such a disagreeable language—don't you think so?'

(Compared with the accents of English devotion, of course.)

'Do you go in for cycling, Mr. Moxey?' inquired Mrs. Palmer's laughing niece, from a little distance.

'For cycling?' With a great effort he recovered himself and grasped the meaning of the words. 'No, I—I'm sorry to say I don't. Capital exercise!'

'Mr. Dwight has just been telling me such an awfully good story about a friend of his. Do tell it again, Mr. Dwight! It'll make you laugh no end, Mr. Moxey.'

The young man appealed to was ready enough to repeat his anecdote, which had to do with a bold cyclist, who, after dining more than well, rode his machine down a steep hill and escaped destruction only by miracle. Christian laughed desperately, and declared that he had never heard anything so good.

But the tension of his nerves was unendurable. Five minutes more of anguish, and he sprang up like an automaton.

'Must you really go, Mr. Moxey?' said Constance, with a manner which of course was intended to veil her emotion. 'Please don't be another year before you let us see you again.'

Blessings on her tender heart! What more could she have said, in the presence of all those people? He walked all the way to Notting Hill through a pelting rain, his passion aglow.

Impossible to be silent longer concerning the brilliant future. Arrived at home, he flung off hat and coat, and went straight to the drawing-room, hoping to find Marcella alone. To his annoyance, a stranger was sitting there in conversation, a very simply dressed lady, who, as he entered, looked at him with a grave smile and stood up. He thought he had never seen her before.

Marcella wore a singular expression; there was a moment of silence, for Christian decidedly embarrassing, since it seemed to be expected that he should greet the stranger.

'Don't you remember Janet?' said his sister.

'Janet?' He felt his face flush. 'You don't mean to say——? But how you have altered! And yet, no; really, you haven't. It's only my stupidity.' He grasped her hand, and with a feeling of genuine pleasure, despite awkward reminiscences.

'One does alter in eleven years,' said Janet Moxey, in a very pleasant, natural voice—a voice of habitual self-

command, conveying the idea of a highly cultivated mind, and many other agreeable things.

'Eleven years? Yes, yes! How very glad I am to see you! And I'm sure Marcella was. How very kind of you to call on us!'

Janet was as far as ever from looking handsome or pretty, but it must have been a dullard who proclaimed her face unpleasing. She had eyes of remarkable intelligence, something like Marcella's, but milder, more benevolent. Her lips were softly firm; they would not readily part in laughter; their frequent smile meant more than that of the woman who sets herself to be engaging.

'I am on my way home,' she said, 'from a holiday in the South,—an enforced holiday, I'm sorry to say.'

'You have been ill?'

'Overworked a little. I am practising medicine in Kingsmill.'

Christian did not disguise his astonishment.

'Medicine?'

'You don't remember that I always had scientific tastes?'

If it was a reproach, none could have been more gently administered.

'Of course—of course I do! Your botany, your skeletons of birds and cats and mice—of course! But where did you study?'

'In London. The Women's Medical School. I have been in practice for nearly four years.'

'And have overworked yourself.—But why are we standing? Let us sit down and talk. How is your father?'

Marcella was watching her brother closely, and with a curious smile.

Janet remained for another hour. No reference was made to the long rupture of intercourse between her family and these relatives. Christian learnt that his uncle was still hale, and that Janet's four sisters all

lived, obviously unmarried. To-day he was disposed to be almost affectionate with anyone who showed him a friendly face: he expressed grief that his cousin must leave for Twybridge early in the morning.

'Whenever you pass through the Midlands,' was Janet's indirect reply, addressed to Marcella, 'try to stop at Kingsmill.'

And a few minutes after that she took her leave. There lingered behind her that peculiar fragrance of modern womanhood, refreshing, inspiriting, which is so entirely different from the merely feminine perfume, however exquisite.

'What a surprising visit!' was Christian's exclamation, when he and his sister were alone. 'How did she find us?'

'Directory, I suppose.'

'A lady doctor!' he mused.

'And a very capable one, I fancy,' said Marcella. 'We had nearly an hour's talk before you came. But she won't be able to stand the work. There'll be another breakdown before long.'

'Has she a large practice, then?'

'Not very large, perhaps; but she studies as well. I never dreamt of Janet becoming so interesting a person.'

Christian had to postpone till after dinner the talk he purposed about Mrs. Palmer. When that time came, he was no longer disposed for sentimental confessions; it would be better to wait until he could announce a settled project of marriage. Through the evening, his sister recurred to the subject of Janet with curious frequency, and on the following day her interest had suffered no diminution. Christian had always taken for granted that she understood the grounds of the breach between him and his uncle; without ever unbosoming himself, he had occasionally, in his softer moments, alluded to the awkward subject in language which she thought

easy enough to interpret. Now at length, in reply to some remark of Marcella's, he said with significant accent:

'Janet was very friendly to me.'

'She has studied science for ten years,' was his sister's comment.

'Yes, and can forgive a boy's absurdities.'

'Easier to forgive, certainly, than those of a man,' said Marcella, with a curl of the lip.

Christian became silent, and went thoughtfully away.

A week later, he was again in Mrs. Palmer's drawing-room, where again he met an assemblage of people such as seemed to profane this sanctuary. To be sure—he said to himself—Constance could not at once get rid of the acquaintances forced upon her by her husband; little by little she would free herself. It was a pity that her sister and her niece—persons anything but intelligent and refined—should be permanent members of her household; for their sake, no doubt, she felt constrained to welcome men and women for whose society she herself had little taste. But when the year of her widowhood was past——

Petrarch's Laura was the mother of eleven children; Constance had had only three, and one of these was dead. The remaining two, Christian now learnt, lived with a governess in a little house at Bournemouth, which Mrs. Palmer had taken for that purpose.

'I'm going down to see them to-morrow,' she informed Christian, 'and I shall stay there over the next day. It's so quiet and restful.'

These words kept repeating themselves to Christian's ear, as he went home, and all through the evening. Were they not an invitation? Down there at Bournemouth, Constance would be alone the day after to-morrow. 'It is so quiet and restful;' that was to say, no idle callers would break upon her retirement; she would be able to welcome a friend, and talk reposefully

with him. Surely she must have meant that; for she spoke with a peculiar intonation—a look——

By the second morning he had worked himself up to a persuasion that yonder by the seaside Constance was expecting him. To miss the opportunity would be to prove himself dull of apprehension, a laggard in love. With trembling hands, he hurried through his toilet and made haste downstairs to examine a railway time-table. He found it was possible to reach Bournemouth by about two o'clock, a very convenient hour; it would allow him to take refreshment, and walk to the house shortly after three.

His conviction strong as ever, he came to the journey's end, and in due course discovered the pleasant little house of which Constance had spoken. At the door, his heart failed him; but retreat could not now be thought of. Yes, Mrs. Palmer was at home. The servant led him into a sitting-room on the ground floor, took his name, and left him.

It was nearly ten minutes before Constance appeared. On her face he read a frank surprise.

'I happened to—to be down here; couldn't resist the temptation '——

'Delighted to see you, Mr. Moxey. But how did you know I was here?'

He gazed at her.

'You—don't you remember? The day before yesterday—in Sussex Square—you mentioned '——

'Oh, did I?' She laughed. 'I had quite forgotten.'

Christian sank upon his chair. He tried to convince himself that she was playing a part; perhaps she thought that she had been premature in revealing her wish to talk with him.

Mrs. Palmer was good-natured. This call evidently puzzled her, but she did not stint her hospitality. When Christian asked after the children, they were summoned; two little girls daintily dressed, pretty, affectionate with

their mother. The sight of them tortured Christian, and he sighed deeply with relief when they left the room. Constance appeared rather absent; her quick glance at him signified something, but he could not determine what. In agony of constraint, he rose as if to go.

'Oh, you will have a cup of tea with me,' said Mrs. Palmer. 'It will be brought in a few minutes.'

Then she really wished him to stop. Was he not behaving like an obtuse creature? Why, everything was planned to encourage him.

He talked recklessly of this and that, and got round to the years long gone by. When the tea came, he was reviving memories of occasions on which he and she had met as young people. Constance laughed merrily, declared she could hardly remember.

'Oh, what a time ago!—But I was quite a child.'

'No—indeed, no! You were a young lady, and a brilliant one.'

The tea seemed to intoxicate him. He noticed again that Constance glanced at him significantly. How good of her to allow him this delicious afternoon!

'Mr. Moxey,' she said, after meditating a little, 'why haven't you married? I should have thought you would have married long ago.'

He was stricken dumb. Her jerky laugh came as a shock upon his hearing.

'Married——?'

'What is there astonishing in the idea?'

'But—I— How can I answer you?'

The pretty, characterless face betrayed some unusual feeling. She looked at him furtively; seemed to suppress a tendency to laugh.

'I mustn't pry into secrets,' she simpered.

'But there is no secret!' Christian panted, laying down his teacup for fear he should drop it. 'Whom should I—could I have married?'

Constance also put aside her cup. She was bewildered,

and just a little abashed. With courage which came he knew not whence, Christian bent forward and continued speaking:

'Whom could I marry after that day when I met you in the little drawing-room at the Robinsons'?'

She stared in genuine astonishment, then was embarrassed.

'You cannot—cannot have forgotten——?'

'You surely don't mean to say, Mr. Moxey, that *you* have remembered? Oh, I'm afraid I was a shocking flirt in those days!'

'But I mean *after* your marriage—when I found you in tears'——

'Please, please don't remind me!' she exclaimed, giggling nervously. 'Oh how silly!—of me, I mean. To think that—but you are making fun of me, Mr. Moxey?'

Christian rose and went to the window. He was not only shaken by his tender emotions—something very like repugnance had begun to affect him. If Constance were feigning, it was in very bad taste; if she spoke with sincerity—what a woman had he worshipped! It did not occur to him to lay the fault upon his own absurd romanticism. After eleven years' persistence in one point of view, he could not suddenly see the affair with the eyes of common sense.

He turned and approached her again.

'Do you not know then,' he asked, with quiet dignity, 'that ever since the day I speak of, I have devoted my life to the love I then felt? All these years, have you not understood me?'

Mrs. Palmer was quite unable to grasp ideas such as these. Neither her reading nor her experience prepared her to understand what Christian meant. Courtship of a married woman was intelligible enough to her; but a love that feared to soil itself, a devotion from afar encouraged by only the faintest hope of reward other

than the most insubstantial—of that she had as little conception as any woman among the wealthy vulgar.

'Do you really mean, Mr. Moxey, that you—have kept unmarried for *my* sake?'

'You don't know that?' he asked hoarsely.

'How could I? How was I to imagine such a thing? Really, was it proper? How could you expect me, Mr. Moxey——?'

For a moment she looked offended. But her real feelings were astonishment and amusement, not unmingled with an idle gratification.

'I must ask you to pardon me,' said Christian, whose forehead gleamed with moisture.

'No, don't say that. I am really so sorry! What an odd mistake!'

'And I have hoped in vain—since you were free——?'

'Oh, you mustn't say such things! I shall never dream of marrying again—never!'

There was a matter-of-fact vigour in the assertion which proved that Mrs. Palmer spoke her genuine thought. The tone could not be interpreted as devotion to her husband's memory; it meant, plainly and simply, that she had had enough of marriage, and delighted in her freedom.

Christian could not say another word. Disillusion was complete. The voice, the face, were those of as unspiritual a woman as he could easily have met with, and his life's story was that of a fool.

He took his hat, held out his hand, with 'Good-bye, Mrs. Palmer.' The cold politeness left her no choice but again to look offended, and with merely a motion of the head she replied, 'Good-bye, Mr. Moxey.'

And therewith permitted him to leave the house.

II

On calling at Earwaker's chambers one February evening, Malkin became aware, from the very threshold of the outer door, that the domicile was not as he had known it. With the familiar fragrance of Earwaker's special 'mixture' blended a suggestion of new upholstery. The little vestibule had somehow put off its dinginess, and an unwontedly brilliant light from the sitting-room revealed changes of the interior which the visitor remarked with frank astonishment.

'What the deuce! Has it happened at last? Are you going to be married?' he cried, staring about him at unrecognised chairs, tables, and bookcases, at whitened ceiling and pleasantly papered walls, at pictures and ornaments which he knew not.

The journalist shook his head, and smiled contentedly.

'An idea that came to me all at once. My editorship seemed to inspire it.'

After a year of waiting upon Providence, Earwaker had received the offer of a substantial appointment much more to his taste than those he had previously held. He was now literary editor of a weekly review which made no kind of appeal to the untaught multitude.

'I have decided to dwell here for the rest of my life,' he added, looking round the walls. 'One must have a homestead, and this shall be mine; here I have set up my penates. It's a portion of space, you know; and what more can be said of Longleat or Chatsworth? A house I shall never want, because I shall never have a

wife. And on the whole I prefer this situation to any other. I am well within reach of everything urban that I care about, and as for the country, that is too good to be put to common use ; let it be kept for holiday. There's an atmosphere in the old Inns that pleases me. The new flats are insufferable. How can one live sandwiched between a music-hall singer and a female politician ? For lodgings of any kind no sane man had ever a word of approval. Reflecting on all these things, I have established myself in perpetuity.'

' Just what I can't do,' exclaimed Malkin, flinging himself into a broad, deep, leather-covered chair. ' Yet I have leanings that way. Only a few days ago I sat for a whole evening with the map of England open before me, wondering where would be the best place to settle down—a few years hence, I mean, you know ; when Bella is old enough.—That reminds me. Next Sunday is her birthday, and do you know what ? I wish you'd go down to Wrotham with me.'

' Many thanks, but I think I had better not.'

' Oh, but do ! I want you to see how Bella is getting on. She's grown wonderfully since you saw her in Paris —an inch taller, I should think. I don't go down there very often, you know, so I notice these changes. Really, I think no one could be more discreet than I am, under the circumstances. A friend of the family ; that's all. Just dropping in for a casual cup of tea now and then. Sunday will be a special occasion, of course. I say, what are your views about early marriage ? Do you think seventeen too young ? '

' I should think seven-and-twenty much better.'

Malkin broke into fretfulness.

' Let me tell you, Earwaker, I don't like the way you habitually speak of this project of mine. Plainly, I don't like it. It's a very serious matter indeed—eh ? What ? Why are you smiling ? '

' I agree with you as to its seriousness.'

'Yes, yes; but in a very cynical and offensive way. It makes me confoundedly uncomfortable, let me tell you. I don't think that's very friendly on your part. And the fact is, if it goes on I'm very much afraid we shan't see so much of each other as we have done. I like you, Earwaker, and I respect you; I think you know that. But occasionally you seem to have too little regard for one's feelings. No, I don't feel able to pass it over with a joke.—There! The deuce take it! I've bitten off the end of my pipe.'

He spat out a piece of amber, and looked ruefully at the broken stem.

'Take a cigar,' said Earwaker, fetching a box from a cupboard.

'I don't mind.—Well—what was I saying? Oh yes; I was quarrelling with you. Now, look here, what fault have you to find with Bella Jacox?'

'None whatever. She seemed to me a very amiable child.'

'Child! Pooh! pshaw! And fifteen next Sunday, I tell you. She's a young lady, and to tell you the confounded plain truth, I'm in love with her. I am, and there's nothing to be ashamed of. If you smile, we shall quarrel. I warn you, Earwaker, we shall quarrel.'

The journalist, instead of smiling, gave forth his deepest laugh. Malkin turned very red, scowled, and threw his cigar aside.

'You really wish me to go on Sunday?' Earwaker asked, in a pleasant voice.

The other's countenance immediately cleared.

'I shall take it as a great kindness. Mrs. Jacox will be delighted. Meet me at Holborn Viaduct at one-twenty-five. No, to make sure I'll come here at one o'clock.'

In a few minutes he was chatting as unconcernedly as ever.

'Talking of settling down, my brother Tom and his

wife are on the point of going to New Zealand. Necessity of business ; may be out there for the rest of their lives. Do you know that I shall think very seriously of following them some day ? With Bella, you know. The fact of the matter is, I don't believe I could ever make a solid home in England. Why, I can't quite say ; partly, I suppose, because I have nothing to do. Now there's a good deal to be said for going out to the colonies. A man feels that he is helping the spread of civilisation ; and that's something, you know. I should compare myself with the Greek and Roman colonists—something inspiriting in that thought—what ? Why shouldn't I found a respectable newspaper, for instance ? Yes, I shall think very seriously of this.'

'You wouldn't care to run over with your relatives, just to have a look ? '

'It occurred to me,' Malkin replied, thoughtfully. 'But they sail in ten days, and—well, I'm afraid I couldn't get ready in time. And then I've promised to look after some little affairs for Mrs. Jacox—some trifling money matters. But later in the year—who knows ? '

Earwaker half repented of his promise to visit the Jacox household, but there was no possibility of excusing himself. So on Sunday he journeyed with his friend down to Wrotham. Mrs. Jacox and her children were very comfortably established in a small new house. When the companions entered they found the mother alone in her sitting-room, and she received them with an effusiveness very distasteful to Earwaker.

'Now you shouldn't ! ' was her first exclamation to Malkin. 'Indeed you shouldn't ! It's really very naughty of you. O Mr. Earwaker ! Who ever took so much pleasure in doing kindnesses ? Do look at this *beautiful* book that Mr. Malkin has sent as a present to my little Bella. O Mr. Earwaker ! '

The journalist was at once struck with her tone and manner as she addressed Malkin. He remarked that

phrase, 'my little Bella,' and it occurred to him that Mrs. Jacox had been growing younger since he made her acquaintance on the towers of Notre Dame. When the girls presented themselves, they also appeared to him more juvenile; Bella, in particular, was dressed with an exaggeration of childishness decidedly not becoming. One had but to look into her face to see that she answered perfectly to Malkin's description; she was a young lady and no child. A very pretty young lady, moreover; given to colouring, but with no silly simper; intelligent about the eyes and lips; modest, in a natural and sweet way. He conversed with her, and in doing so was disagreeably affected by certain glances she occasionally cast towards her mother. One would have said that she feared censure, though it was hard to see why.

On the return journey Earwaker made known some of his impressions, though not all.

'I like the girls,' he said, 'Bella especially. But I can't say much good of their mother.'

They were opposite each other in the railway carriage. Malkin leaned forward with earnest, anxious face.

'That's my own trouble,' he whispered. 'I'm confoundedly uneasy about it. I don't think she's bringing them up at all in a proper way. Earwaker, I would pay down five thousand pounds for the possibility of taking Bella away altogether.'

The other mused.

'But, mind you,' pursued Malkin, 'she's not a *bad* woman. By no means! Thoroughly good-hearted, I'm convinced; only a little weak here.' He tapped his forehead. 'I respect her, for all she has suffered, and her way of going through it. But she isn't the ideal mother, you know.'

On his way home, Malkin turned into his friend's chambers 'for five minutes.' At two in the morning he was still there, and his talk in the meanwhile had been of nothing but schemes for protecting Bella against her

mother's more objectionable influences. On taking leave, he asked :

'Any news of Peak yet ?'

'None. I haven't seen Moxey for a long time.'

'Do you think Peak will look you up again, if he's in London ?'

'No, I think he'll keep away. And I half hope he will ; I shouldn't quite know how to behave. Ten to one he's in London now. I suppose he couldn't stay at Exeter. But he may have left England.'

They parted, and for a week did not see each other. Then, on Monday evening, when Earwaker was very busy with a mass of manuscript, the well-known knock sounded from the passage, and Malkin received admission. The look he wore was appalling, a look such as only some fearful catastrophe could warrant.

'Are you busy ?' he asked, in a voice very unlike his own.

Earwaker could not doubt that the trouble was this time serious. He abandoned his work, and gave himself wholly to his friend's service.

'An awful thing has happened,' Malkin began. 'How the deuce shall I tell you ? Oh, the ass I have made of myself ! But I couldn't help it ; there seemed no way out of it.'

'Well ? What ?'

'It was last night, but I couldn't come to you till now. By Jove ! I veritably thought of sending you a note, and then killing myself. Early this morning I was within an ace of suicide. Believe me, old friend. This is no farce.'

'I'm waiting.'

'Yes, yes ; but I can't tell you all at once. Sure you're not busy ? I know I pester you. I was down at Wrotham yesterday. I hadn't meant to go, but the temptation was too strong. I got there at five o'clock, and found that the girls were gone to have tea with

some young friends. Well, I wasn't altogether sorry; it was a good opportunity for a little talk with their mother. And I *had* the talk. But, oh, ass that I was!'

He smote the side of his head savagely.

'Can you guess, Earwaker? Can you give a shot at what happened?'

'Perhaps I might,' replied the other, gravely.

'Well?'

'That woman asked you to marry her.'

Malkin leapt from his chair, and sank back again.

'It came to that. Yes, upon my word, it came to that. She said she had fallen in love with me—that was the long and short of it. And I had never said a word that could suggest—— Oh, confound it! What a frightful scene it was!'

'You took a final leave of her?'

Malkin stared with eyes of anguish into his friend's face, and at length whispered thickly:

'I said I would!'

'What? Take leave?'

'Marry her!'

Earwaker had much ado to check an impatiently remonstrant laugh. He paused awhile, then began his expostulation, at first treating the affair as too absurd for grave argument.

'My boy,' he concluded, 'you have got into a preposterous scrape, and I see only one way out of it. You must flee. When does your brother start for the Antipodes?'

'Thursday morning.'

'Then you go with him; there's an end of it.'

Malkin listened with the blank despairing look of a man condemned to death.

'Do you hear me?' urged the other. 'Go home and pack. On Thursday I'll see you off.'

'I can't bring myself to that,' came in a groan from Malkin. 'I've never yet done anything to be seriously

ashamed of, and I can't run away after promising marriage. It would weigh upon me for the rest of my life.'

'Humbug! Would it weigh upon you less to marry the mother, and all the time be in love with the daughter? To my mind, there's something peculiarly loathsome in the suggestion.'

'But, look here; Bella is very young, really very young indeed. It's possible that I have deluded myself. Perhaps I don't really care for her in the way I imagined. It's more than likely that I might be content to regard her with fatherly affection.'

'Even supposing that, with what sort of affection do you regard Mrs. Jacox?'

Malkin writhed on his chair before replying.

'You mustn't misjudge her!' he exclaimed. 'She is no heartless schemer. The poor thing almost cried her eyes out. It was a frightful scene. She reproached herself bitterly. What *could* I do? I have a tenderness for her, there's no denying that. She has been so vilely used, and has borne it all so patiently. How abominable it would be if I dealt her another blow!'

The journalist raised his eyebrows, and uttered inarticulate sounds.

'Was anything said about Bella?' he asked, abruptly.

'Not a word. I'm convinced she doesn't suspect that I thought of Bella like that. The fact is, I have misled her. She thought all along that my chief interest was in *her*.'

'Indeed? Then what was the ground of her self-reproach that you speak of?'

'How defective you are in the appreciation of delicate feeling!' cried Malkin frantically, starting up and rushing about the room. 'She reproached herself for having permitted me to get entangled with a widow older than myself, and the mother of two children. What could be simpler?'

Earwaker began to appreciate the dangers of the

situation. If he insisted upon his view of Mrs. Jacox's behaviour (though it was not the harshest that the circumstances suggested, for he was disposed to believe that the widow had really lost her heart to her kind, eccentric champion), the result would probably be to confirm Malkin in his resolution of self-sacrifice. The man must be saved, if possible, from such calamity, and this would not be effected by merely demonstrating that he was on the highroad to ruin. It was necessary to try another tack.

'It seems to me, Malkin,' he resumed, gravely, 'that it is you who are deficient in right feeling. In offering to marry this poor woman, you did her the gravest wrong.'

'What? How?'

'You know that it is impossible for you to love her. You know that you will repent, and that she will be aware of it. You are not the kind of man to conceal your emotions. Bella will grow up, and—well, the state of things won't tend to domestic felicity. For Mrs. Jacox's own sake, it is your duty to put an end to this folly before it has gone too far.'

The other gave earnest ear, but with no sign of shaken conviction.

'Yes,' he said. 'I know this is one way of looking at it. But it assumes that a man can't control himself, that his sense of honour isn't strong enough to keep him in the right way. I don't think you quite understand me. I am not a passionate man; the proof is that I have never fallen in love since I was sixteen. I think a great deal of domestic peace, a good deal more than of romantic enthusiasm. If I marry Mrs. Jacox, I shall make her a good and faithful husband,—so much I can safely say of myself.'

He waited, but Earwaker was not ready with a rejoinder.

'And there's another point. I have always admitted the defect of my character—an inability to settle down.

Now, if I run away to New Zealand, with the sense of having dishonoured myself, I shall be a mere Wandering Jew for the rest of my life. All hope of redemption will be over. Of the two courses now open to me, that of marriage with Mrs. Jacox is decidedly the less disadvantageous. Granting that I have made a fool of myself, I must abide by the result, and make the best of it. And the plain fact is, I *can't* treat her so disgracefully; I *can't* burden my conscience in this way. I believe it would end in suicide; I do, indeed.'

'This sounds all very well, but it is weakness and selfishness.'

'How can you say so?'

'There's no proving to so short-sighted a man the result of his mistaken course. I've a good mind to let you have your way just for the satisfaction of saying afterwards, "Didn't I tell you so?" You propose to behave with abominable injustice to two people, putting yourself aside. Doesn't it occur to you that Bella may already look upon you as her future husband? Haven't you done your best to plant that idea in her mind?'

Malkin started, but quickly recovered himself.

'No, I haven't! I have behaved with the utmost discretion. Bella thinks of me only as of a friend much older than herself.'

'I don't believe it!'

'Nonsense, Earwaker! A child of fifteen!'

'The other day you had quite a different view, and after seeing her again I agreed with you. She is a young girl, and if not already in love with you, is on the way to be so.'

'That will come to nothing when she hears that I am going to be her step-father.'

'Far more likely to develop into a grief that will waste the best part of her lifetime. She will be shocked and made miserable. But do as you like. I am tired of arguing.'

Earwaker affected to abandon the matter in disgust. For several minutes there was silence, then a low voice sounded from the corner where Malkin stood leaning.

'So it is your honest belief that Bella has begun to think of me in that way?'

'I am convinced of it.'

'But if I run away, I shall never see her again.'

'Why not? *She* won't run away. Come back when things have squared themselves. Write to Mrs. Jacox from the ends of the earth, and let her understand that there is no possibility of your marrying her.'

'Tell her about Bella, you mean?'

'No, that's just what I don't mean. Avoid any mention of the girl. Come back when she is seventeen, and, if she is willing, carry her off to be happy ever after.'

'But she may have fallen in love with someone else.'

'I think not. You must risk it, at all events.'

'Look here!' Malkin came forward eagerly. 'I'll write to Mrs. Jacox to-night, and make a full confession. I'll tell her exactly how the case stands. She's a good woman; she'll gladly sacrifice herself for the sake of her daughter.'

Earwaker was firm in resistance. He had no faith whatever in the widow's capacity for self-immolation, and foresaw that his friend would be drawn into another 'frightful scene,' resulting probably in a marriage as soon as the licence could be obtained.

'When are you to see her again?' he inquired.

'On Wednesday.'

'Will you undertake to do nothing whatever till Wednesday morning, and then to have another talk with me? I'll come and see you about ten o'clock.'

In the end Malkin was constrained into making this engagement, and not long after midnight the journalist managed to get rid of him.

On Tuesday afternoon arrived a distracted note. 'I

shall keep my promise, and I won't try to see you till you come here to-morrow. But I am sore beset. I have received *three* letters from Mrs. Jacox, all long and horribly pathetic. She seems to have a presentiment that I shall forsake her. What a beast I shall be if I do! Tom comes here to-night, and I think I shall tell him all.'

The last sentence was a relief to the reader; he knew nothing of Mr. Thomas Malkin, but there was a fair presumption that this gentleman would not see his brother bent on making such a notable fool of himself without vigorous protest.

At the appointed hour next morning, Earwaker reached his friend's lodgings, which were now at Kilburn. On entering the room he saw, not the familiar figure, but a solid, dark-faced, black-whiskered man, whom a faint resemblance enabled him to identify as Malkin the younger.

'I was expecting you,' said Thomas, as they shook hands. 'My brother is completely floored. When I got here an hour ago, I insisted on his lying down, and now I think he's asleep. If you don't mind, we'll let him rest for a little. I believe he has hardly closed his eyes since this unfortunate affair happened.'

'It rejoiced me to hear that he was going to ask your advice. How do matters stand?'

'You know Mrs. Jacox?'

Thomas was obviously a man of discretion, but less intellectual than his brother; he spoke like one who is accustomed to the management of affairs. At first he was inclined to a polite reserve, but Earwaker's conversation speedily put him more at ease.

'I have quite made up my mind,' he said presently, 'that we must take him away with us to-morrow. The voyage will bring him to his senses.'

'Of course he resists?'

'Yes, but if you will give me your help, I think we

can manage him. He is not very strong-willed. In a spasmodic way he can defy everyone, but the steady pressure of common sense will prevail with him, I think.'

They had talked for half-an-hour, when the door opened and the object of their benevolent cares stood before them. He was clad in a dressing-gown, and his disordered hair heightened the look of illness which his features presented.

'Why didn't you call me?' he asked his brother, irritably. 'Earwaker, I beg a thousand pardons! I'm not very well; I've overslept myself.'

'Yes, yes; come and sit down.'

Thomas made an offer to leave them.

'Don't go,' said Malkin. 'No need whatever. You know why Earwaker has been so kind as to come here. We may as well talk it over together.'

He sat on the table, swinging a tassel of his dressing-gown round and round.

'Now, what do you really think of doing?' asked the journalist, in a kind voice.

'I don't know. I absolutely do not know. I'm unutterably wretched.'

'In that case, will you let your brother and me decide for you? We have no desire but for your good, and we are perfectly at one in our judgment.'

'Of course I know what you will propose!' cried the other, excitedly. 'From the prudential point of view, you are right, I have no doubt. But how can you protect me against remorse? If you had received letters such as these three,' he pulled them out of a pocket, 'you would be as miserable as I am. If I don't keep my promise, I shall never know another moment of peace.'

'You certainly won't if you *do* keep it,' remarked Thomas.

'No,' added Earwaker, 'and one if not two other persons will be put into the same case. Whereas by

boldly facing these reproaches of conscience, you do a great kindness to the others.'

'If only you could assure me of that!'

'I *can* assure you. That is to say, I can give it as my unassailable conviction.'

And Earwaker once more enlarged upon the theme, stating it from every point of view that served his purpose.

'You're making a mountain out of a mole-heap,' was the confirmatory remark that came from Thomas. 'This respectable lady will get over her sorrows quickly enough, and some day she'll be only too glad to have you for a son-in-law, if Miss Bella still pleases you.'

'It's only right,' urged Earwaker, in pursuance of his subtler intention, 'that you should bear the worst of the suffering, for the trouble has come out of your own thoughtlessness. You are fond of saying that you have behaved with the utmost discretion; so far from that you have been outrageously indiscreet. I foresaw that something of this kind might come to pass'——

'Then why the devil didn't you warn me?' shouted Malkin, in an agony of nervous strain.

'It would have been useless. In fact, I foresaw it too late.'

The discussion continued for an hour. By careful insistence on the idea of self-sacrifice, Earwaker by degrees demolished the arguments his friend kept putting forward. Thomas, who had gone impatiently to the window, turned round with words that were meant to be final.

'It's quite decided. You begin your preparations at once, and to-morrow morning you go on board with us.'

'But if I don't go to Wrotham this afternoon, she'll be here either to-night or the first thing to-morrow. I'm sure of it!'

'By four or five o'clock,' said Earwaker, 'you can

have broken up the camp. You've often done it at shorter notice. Go to an hotel for the night.'

'I must write to the poor woman.'

'Do as you like about that.'

'Who is to help her, if she gets into difficulties—as she's always doing? Who is to advise her about Bella's education? Who is to pay——I mean, who will see to——? Oh, confound it!'

The listeners glanced at each other.

'Are her affairs in order?' asked Earwaker. 'Has she a sufficient income?'

'For ordinary needs, quite sufficient. But'——

'Then you needn't be in the least uneasy. Let her know where you are, when the equator is between you. Watch over her interests from a distance, if you like. I can as good as promise you that Bella will wait hopefully to see her friend again.'

Malkin succumbed to argument and exhaustion. Facing Earwaker with a look of pathetic appeal, he asked hoarsely:

'Will you stand by me till it's over? Have you time?'

'I can give you till five o'clock.'

'Then I'll go and dress. Ring the bell, Tom, and ask them to bring up some beer.'

. . . . . .

Before three had struck, the arrangements for flight were completed. A heavily-laden cab bore away Malkin's personal property; within sat the unhappy man and his faithful friend.

The next morning Earwaker went down to Tilbury, and said farewell to the travellers on board the steamship *Orient*. Mrs. Thomas had already taken her brother-in-law under her special care.

'It's only three children to look after, instead of two,' she remarked, in a laughing aside to the journalist.

'How grateful he will be to you in a few days! And I'm sure *we* are already.'

Malkin's eyes were no longer quite lustreless. At the last moment he talked with animation of 'two years hence,' and there was vigour in the waving of his hand as the vessel started seaward.

III

PEAK lost no time in leaving Exeter. To lighten his baggage, and to get rid of possessions to which hateful memories attached, he sold all his books that had any bearing on theology. The incomplete translation of *Bibel und Natur* he committed to the flames in Mrs. Roots's kitchen, scattering its black remnants with savage thrusts of the poker. Whilst engaged in packing, he debated with himself whether or not he should take leave of the few acquaintances to whom he was indebted for hospitality and other kindness. The question was: Had Buckland Warricombe already warned these people against him? Probably it had seemed to Buckland the wiser course to be content with driving the hypocrite away; and, if this were so, regard for the future dictated a retirement from Exeter which should in no way resemble secret flight. Sidwell's influence with her parents would perhaps withhold them from making his disgrace known, and in a few years he might be glad that he had behaved with all possible prudence. In the end, he decided to write to Mr. Lily-white, saying that he was obliged to go away at a moment's notice, and that he feared it would be necessary altogether to change the scheme of life which he had had in view. This was the best way. From the Lily-whites, other people would hear of him, and perchance their conjectures would be charitable.

Without much hesitation he had settled his immediate plans. To London he would not return, for he dreaded

the temptations to which the proximity of Sidwell would expose him, and he had no mind to meet with Moxey or Earwaker. As it was now imperative that he should find work of the old kind, he could not do better than go to Bristol, where, from the safe ground of a cheap and obscure lodging, he might make inquiries, watch advertisements, and so on. He already knew of establishments in Bristol where he might possibly obtain employment. Living with the utmost economy, he need not fall into difficulties for more than a year, and before then his good repute with the Rotherhithe firm would ensure him some position or other; if not in Bristol, then at Newcastle, St. Helen's—any great centre of fuming and malodorous industry. He was ready to work, would delight in work. Idleness was now the intolerable thing.

So to Bristol he betook himself, and there made his temporary abode. After spending a few weeks in fruitless search for an engagement, he at length paid his oft-postponed visit to Twybridge. In the old home he felt completely a stranger, and his relatives strengthened the feeling by declaring him so changed in appearance that they hardly knew his face. With his mother only could he talk in anything like an intimate way, and the falsehoods with which he was obliged to answer her questions all but destroyed the pleasure he would otherwise have found in being affectionately tended. His sister, Mrs. Cusse, was happy in her husband, her children, and a flourishing business. Oliver was making money, and enjoyed distinction among the shopkeeping community. His aunt still dealt in millinery, and kept up her acquaintance with respectable families. To Godwin all was like a dream dreamt for the second time. He could not acknowledge any actual connection between these people and himself. But their characteristics no longer gravely offended him, and he willingly recognised the homespun worth which their lives displayed. It

was clear to him that by no possible agency of circumstances could he have been held in normal relations with his kinsfolk. However smooth his career, it must have wafted him to an immeasurable distance from Twybridge. Nature had decreed that he was to resemble the animals which, once reared, go forth in complete independence of birthplace and the ties of blood. It was a harsh fate, but in what had not fate been harsh to him? The one consolation was that he alone suffered. His mother was no doubt occasionally troubled by solicitude on his account, but she could not divine his inward miseries, and an assurance that he had no material cares sufficed to set her mind at ease.

'You are very like your father, Godwin,' she said, with a sigh. 'He couldn't rest, however well he seemed to be getting on. There was always something he wanted, and yet he didn't know what it was.'

'Yes, I must be like him,' Godwin replied, smiling.

He stayed five days, then returned to Bristol. A week after that, his mother forwarded to him a letter which had come to Twybridge. He at once recognised the writing, and broke the envelope with curiosity.

'If you should be in London,' the note began, 'I beg you to let me see you. There is something I have to say. To speak to you for a few minutes I would come any distance. Don't accuse me of behaving treacherously; it was not my fault. I know you would rather avoid me, but do consent to hear what I have to say. If you have no intention of coming to London, will you write and let me know where you are living? M. M.'

What could Marcella have to say to him? Nothing surely that he at all cared to hear. No doubt she imagined that he might be in ignorance of the circumstances which had led to Buckland Warricombe's discovery; she wished to defend herself against the suspicion of 'treachery.' He laughed carelessly, and threw her note aside.

Two months passed, and his efforts to find employment were still vain, though he had received conditional promises. The solitude of his life grew burdensome. Several times he began a letter to Sidwell, but his difficulty in writing was so great that he destroyed the attempt. In truth, he knew not how to address her. The words he penned were tumid, meaningless. He could not send professions of love, for his heart seemed to be suffering a paralysis, and the laborious artificiality of his style must have been evident. The only excuse for breaking silence would be to let her know that he had resumed honest work; he must wait till the opportunity offered. It did not distress him to be without news of her. If she wished to write, and was only withheld by ignorance of his whereabouts, it was well; if she had no thought of sending him a word, it did not matter. He loved her, and consciously nourished hope, but for the present there was nothing intolerable in separation. His state of mind resulted partly from nervous reaction, and in part from a sense that only by silent suffering could his dignity in Sidwell's eyes be ultimately restored. Between the evil past and the hopeful future must be a complete break.

His thoughts kept turning to London, though not because Sidwell might still be there. He felt urgent need of speaking with a friend. Moxey was perhaps no longer to be considered one; but Earwaker would be tolerant of human weaknesses. To have a long talk with Earwaker would help him to recover his mental balance, to understand himself and his position better. So one morning in March, on the spur of the moment, he took train and was once more in the metropolis. On his way he had determined to send a note to Earwaker before calling at Staple Inn. He wrote it at a small hotel in Paddington, where he took a room for the night, and then spent the evening at a theatre, as the best way of killing time.

By the first post next morning came a card, whereon Earwaker had written :—'Be here, if you can, at two o'clock. Shall be glad to see you.'

'So you have been new-furnishing!' Godwin remarked, as he was admitted to the chambers. 'You look much more comfortable.'

'I'm glad you think so. It is the general opinion.'

They had shaken hands as though this were one of the ordinary meetings of old time, and their voices scarcely belied the appearance. Peak moved about the study, glancing at pictures and books, Earwaker eyeing him the while with not unfriendly expression. They were sincerely glad to see each other, and when Peak seated himself it was with an audible sigh of contentment.

'And what are you doing?' he inquired.

The journalist gave a brief account of his affairs, and Peak brightened with pleasure.

'This is good news. I knew you would shake off the ragamuffins before long. Give me some of your back numbers, will you? I shall be curious to examine your new style.'

'And you?—Come to live in London?'

'No; I am at Bristol, but only waiting. There's a chance of an analyst's place in Lancashire; but I may give the preference to an opening I have heard of in Belgium. Better to go abroad, I think.'

'Perhaps so.'

'I have a question to ask you. I suppose you talked about that *Critical* article of mine *before* you received my request for silence?'

'That's how it was,' Earwaker replied, calmly.

'Yes; I understood. It doesn't matter.'

The other puffed at his pipe, and moved uneasily.

'I am taking for granted,' Peak continued, 'that you know how I have spent my time down in Devonshire.'

'In outline. Need we trouble about the details?'

'No. But don't suppose that I should feel any shame

in talking to you about them. That would be a confession of base motive. You and I have studied each other, and we can exchange thoughts on most subjects with mutual understanding. You know that I have only followed my convictions to their logical issue. An opportunity offered of achieving the supreme end to which my life is directed, and what scruple could stand in my way? We have nothing to do with names and epithets. *Here* are the facts of life as I had known it; *there* is the existence promised as the reward of successful artifice. To live was to pursue the object of my being. I could not feel otherwise; therefore, could not act otherwise. You imagine me defeated, flung back into the gutter.' His words came more quickly, and the muscles of his face worked under emotion. 'It isn't so. I have a great and reasonable hope. Perhaps I have gained everything I really desired. I could tell you the strangest story, but there a scruple *does* interpose. If we live another twenty years—but now I can only talk about myself.'

'And this hope of which you speak,' said Earwaker, with a grave smile, 'points you at present to sober work among your retorts and test-tubes?'

'Yes, it does.'

'Good. Then I can put faith in the result.'

'Yet the hope began in a lie,' rejoined Peak, bitterly. 'It will always be pleasant to look back upon that, won't it? You see: by no conceivable honest effort could I have gained this point. Life utterly denied to me the satisfaction of my strongest instincts, so long as I plodded on without cause of shame; the moment I denied my faith, and put on a visage of brass, great possibilities opened before me. Of course I understand the moralist's position. It behoved me, though I knew that a barren and solitary track would be my only treading to the end, to keep courageously onward. If I can't *believe* that any such duty is imposed upon me, where is the obligation to

persevere, the morality of doing so? That is the worst hypocrisy. I have been honest, inasmuch as I have acted in accordance with my actual belief.'

'M—m—m,' muttered Earwaker, slowly. 'Then you have never been troubled with a twinge of conscience?'

'With a thousand! I have been racked, martyred. What has that to do with it? Do you suppose I attach any final significance to those torments? Conscience is the same in my view as an inherited disease which may possibly break out on any most innocent physical indulgence.—What end have I been pursuing? Is it criminal? Is it mean? I wanted to win the love of a woman—nothing more. To do that, I have had to behave like the grovelling villain who has no desire but to fill his pockets. And with success!—You understand that, Earwaker? I have succeeded! What respect can I have for the common morality, after this?'

'You have succeeded?' the other asked, thoughtfully. 'I could have imagined that you had been in appearance successful'——

He paused, and Peak resumed with vehemence:

'No, not in appearance only. I can't tell you the story'——

'I don't wish you to'——

'But what I have won is won for ever. The triumph no longer rests on deceit. What I insist upon is that by deceit only was it rendered possible. If a starving man succeeds in stealing a loaf of bread, the food will benefit him no less than if he had purchased it; it is good, true sustenance, no matter how he got it. To be sure, the man may prefer starvation; he may have so strong a metaphysical faith that death is welcome in comparison with what he calls dishonour. I—I have no such faith; and millions of other men in this country would tell the blunt truth if they said the same. I have *used means*, that's all. The old way of candour led me to bitterness and cursing; by dissimulation I

have won something more glorious than tongue can tell.'

It was in the endeavour to expel the subtlest enemy of his peace that Godwin dwelt so defiantly upon this view of the temptation to which he had yielded. Since his farewell interview with Sidwell, he knew no rest from the torment of a mocking voice which bade him bear in mind that all his dishonour had been superfluous, seeing that whilst he played the part of a zealous Christian, Sidwell herself was drifting further and further from the old religion. This voice mingled with his dreams, and left not a waking hour untroubled. He refused to believe it, strove against the suggestion as a half-despairing man does against the persistent thought of suicide. If only he could obtain Earwaker's assent to the plan he put forward, it would support him in disregard of idle regrets.

'It is impossible,' said the journalist, 'for anyone to determine whether that is true or not—for you, as much as for anyone else. Be glad that you have shaken off the evil and retained the good,—no use in saying more than that.'

'Yes,' declared the other, stubbornly, 'there is good in exposing false views of life. I ought to have come utterly to grief and shame, and instead '——

'Instead—— ? Well ? '

'What I have told you.'

'Which I interpret thus : that you have permission to redeem your character, if possible, in the eyes of a woman you have grievously misled.'

Godwin frowned.

'Who suggested this to you, Earwaker ? '

'You ; no one else. I don't even know who the woman is of whom you speak.'

'Grant you are right. As an honest man, I should never have won her faintest interest.'

'It is absurd for us to talk about it. Think in the

way that is most helpful to you,—that, no doubt, is a reasonable rule. Let us have done with all these obscurities, and come to a practical question. Can I be of any use to you? Would you care, for instance, to write an article now and then on some scientific matter that has a popular interest? I think I could promise to get that kind of thing printed for you. Or would you review an occasional book that happened to be in your line?'

Godwin reflected.

'Thank you,' he replied, at length. 'I should be glad of such work—if I can get into the mood for doing it properly. That won't be just yet; but perhaps when I have found a place'——

'Think it over. Write to me about it.'

Peak glanced round the room.

'You don't know how glad I am,' he said, 'that your prosperity shows itself in this region of bachelordom. If I had seen you in a comfortable house, married to a woman worthy of you—I couldn't have been sincere in my congratulations: I should have envied you so fiercely.'

'You're a strange fellow. Twenty years hence—as you said just now—you will one day or another have got rid of your astounding illusions. At fifty—well, let us say at sixty—you will have a chance of seeing things without these preposterous sexual spectacles.'

'I hope so. Every stage of life has its powers and enjoyments. When I am old, I hope to perceive and judge without passion of any kind. But is that any reason why my youth should be frustrated? We have only one life, and I want to live mine throughout.'

Soon after this Peak rose. He remembered that the journalist's time was valuable, and that he no longer had the right to demand more of it than could be granted to any casual caller. Earwaker behaved with all friendliness, but their relations had necessarily suffered a change. More than a year of separation, spent by the

one in accumulating memories of dishonour, had given the other an enviable position among men; Earwaker had his place in the social system, his growing circle of friends, his congenial labour; perhaps—notwithstanding the tone in which he spoke of marriage—his hopes of domestic happiness. All this with no sacrifice of principle. He was fortunate in his temper, moral and intellectual; partly directing circumstances, partly guided by their pressure, he advanced on the way of harmonious development. Nothing great would come of his endeavours, but what he aimed at he steadily perfected. And this in spite of the adverse conditions under which he began his course. Nature had been kind to him; what more could one say?

When he went forth into the street again, Godwin felt his heart sink. His solitude was the more complete for this hour of friendly dialogue. No other companionship offered itself; if he lingered here, it must be as one of the drifting crowd, as an idle and envious spectator of the business and pleasure rife about him. He durst not approach that quarter of the town where Sidwell was living—if indeed she still remained here. Happily, the vastness of London enabled him to think of her as at a great distance; by keeping to the district in which he now wandered he was practically as remote from her as when he walked the streets of Bristol.

Yet there was one person who would welcome him eagerly if he chose to visit her. And, after all, might it not be as well if he heard what Marcella had to say to him? He could not go to the house, for it would be disagreeable to encounter Moxey; but, if he wrote, Marcella would speedily make an appointment. After an hour or two of purposeless rambling, he decided to ask for an interview. He might learn something that really concerned him; in any case, it was a final meeting with Marcella, to whom he perhaps owed this much courtesy.

The reply was as prompt as that from Earwaker. By the morning post came a letter inviting him to call upon Miss Moxey as soon as possible before noon. She added, 'My brother is away in the country; you will meet no one here.'

By eleven o'clock he was at Notting Hill; in the drawing-room, he sat alone for two or three minutes. Marcella entered silently, and came towards him without a smile; he saw that she read his face eagerly, if not with a light of triumph in her eyes. The expression might signify that she rejoiced at having been an instrument of his discomfiture; perhaps it was nothing more than gladness at seeing him again.

'Have you come to live in London?' she asked, when they had shaken hands without a word.

'I am only here for a day or two.'

'My letter reached you without delay?'

'Yes. It was sent from Twybridge to Bristol. I didn't reply then, as I had no prospect of being in London.'

'Will you sit down? You can stay for a few minutes?'

He seated himself awkwardly. Now that he was in Marcella's presence, he felt that he had acted unaccountably in giving occasion for another scene between them which could only end as painfully as that at Exeter. Her emotion grew evident; he could not bear to meet the look she had fixed upon him.

'I want to speak of what happened in this house about Christmas time,' she resumed. 'But I must know first what you have been told.'

'What have *you* been told? he replied, with an uneasy smile. 'How do you know that anything which happened here had any importance for me?'

'I don't know that it had. But I felt sure that Mr. Warricombe meant to speak to you about it.'

'Yes, he did.'

'But did he tell you the exact truth? Or were you led to suppose that I had broken my promise to you?'

Unwilling to introduce any mention of Sidwell, Peak preferred to simplify the story by attributing to Buckland all the information he had gathered.

'I understood,' he replied, 'that Warricombe had come here in the hope of learning more about me, and that certain facts came out in general conversation. What does it matter how he learned what he did? From the day when he met you down in Devonshire, it was of course inevitable that the truth should sooner or later come out. He always suspected me.'

'But I want you to know,' said Marcella, 'that I had no willing part in it. I promised you not to speak even to my brother, and I should never have done so but that Christian somehow met Mr. Warricombe, and heard him talk of you. Of course he came to me in astonishment, and for your own interest I thought it best to tell Christian what I knew. When Mr. Warricombe came here, neither Christian nor I would have enlightened him about—about your past. It happened most unfortunately that Mr. Malkin was present, and he it was who began to speak of the *Critical* article—and other things. I was powerless to prevent it.'

'Why trouble about it? I quite believe your account.'

'You *do* believe it? You know I would not have injured you?'

'I am sure you had no wish to,' Godwin replied, in as unsentimental a tone as possible. And, he added after a moment's pause, 'Was this what you were so anxious to tell me?'

'Yes. Chiefly that.'

'Let me put your mind at rest,' pursued the other, with quiet friendliness. 'I am disposed to turn optimist; everything has happened just as it should have

done. Warricombe relieved me from a false position. If *he* hadn't done so, I must very soon have done it for myself. Let us rejoice that things work together for such obvious good. A few more lessons of this kind, and we shall acknowledge that the world is the best possible.'

He laughed, but the tense expression of Marcella's features did not relax.

'You say you are living in Bristol?'

'For a time.'

'Have you abandoned Exeter?'

The word implied something that Marcella could not utter more plainly. Her face completed the question.

'And the clerical career as well,' he answered.

But he knew that she sought more than this, and his voice again broke the silence.

'Perhaps you have heard that already? Are you in communication with Miss Moorhouse?'

She shook her head.

'But probably Warricombe has told your brother——?'

'What?'

'Oh, of his success in ridding Exeter of my objectionable presence.'

'Christian hasn't seen him again, nor have I.'

'I only wish to assure you that I have suffered no injury. My experiment was doomed to failure. What led me to it, how I regarded it, we won't discuss; I am as little prepared to do so now as when we talked at Exeter. That chapter in my life is happily over. As soon as I am established again in a place like that I had at Rotherhithe, I shall be quite contented.'

'Contented?' She smiled incredulously. 'For how long?'

'Who can say? I have lost the habit of looking far forward.'

Marcella kept silence so long that he concluded she had

nothing more to say to him. It was an opportunity for taking leave without emotional stress, and he rose from his chair.

'Don't go yet,' she said at once. 'It wasn't only this that I'——

Her voice was checked.

'Can I be of any use to you in Bristol?' Peak asked, determined to avoid the trial he saw approaching.

'There is something more I wanted to say,' she pursued, seeming not to hear him. 'You pretend to be contented, but I know that is impossible. You talk of going back to a dull routine of toil, when what you most desire is freedom. I want—if I can—to help you.'

Again she failed to command her voice. Godwin raised his eyes, and was astonished at the transformation she had suddenly undergone. Her face, instead of being colourless and darkly vehement, had changed to a bright warmth, a smiling radiance such as would have become a happy girl. His look seemed to give her courage.

'Only hear me patiently. We are such old friends—are we not? We have so often proclaimed our scorn of conventionality, and why should a conventional fear hinder what I want to say? You know—don't you?—that I have far more money than I need or am ever likely to. I want only a few hundreds a year, and I have more than a thousand.' She spoke more and more quickly, fearful of being interrupted. 'Why shouldn't I give you some of my superfluity? Let me help you in this way. Money can do so much. Take some from me, and use it as you will—just as you will. It is useless to *me*. Why shouldn't someone whom I wish well benefit by it?'

Godwin was not so much surprised as disconcerted. He knew that Marcella's nature was of large mould, and that whether she acted for good or evil its promptings would be anything but commonplace. The ardour

with which she pleaded, and the magnitude of the benefaction she desired to bestow upon him, so affected his imagination that for the moment he stood as if doubting what reply to make. The doubt really in his mind was whether Marcella had calculated upon his weakness, and hoped to draw him within her power by the force of such an obligation, or if in truth she sought only to appease her heart with the exercise of generosity.

'You will let me?' she panted forth, watching him with brilliant eyes. 'This shall be a secret for ever between you and me. It imposes no debt of gratitude —how I despise the thought! I give you what is worthless to me,—except that it can do *you* good. But you can thank me if you will. I am not above being thanked.' She laughed unnaturally. 'Go and travel at first, as you wished to. Write me a short letter every month—every two months, just that I may know you are enjoying your life. It is agreed, isn't it?'

She held her hand to him, but Peak drew away, his face averted.

'How can you give me the pain of refusing such an offer?' he exclaimed, with remonstrance which was all but anger. 'You know the thing is utterly impossible. I should be ridiculous if I argued about it for a moment.'

'I can't see that it is impossible.'

'Then you must take my word for it. But I have no right to speak to you in that way,' he added, more kindly, seeing the profound humiliation which fell upon her. 'You meant to come to my aid at a time when I seemed to you lonely and miserable. It was a generous impulse, and I do indeed thank you. I shall always remember it and be grateful to you.'

Marcella's face was again in shadow. Its lineaments hardened to an expression of cold, stern dignity.

'I have made a mistake,' she said. 'I thought you above common ways of thinking.'

'Yes, you put me on too high a pedestal,' Peak

answered, trying to speak humorously. 'One of my faults is that I am apt to mistake my own position in the same way.'

'You think yourself ambitious. Oh, if you knew really great ambition! Go back to your laboratory, and work for wages. I would have saved you from that.'

The tone was not vehement, but the words bit all the deeper for their unimpassioned accent. Godwin could make no reply.

'I hope,' she continued, 'we may meet a few years hence. By that time you will have learnt that what I offered was not impossible. You will wish you had dared to accept it. I know what your *ambition* is. Wait till you are old enough to see it in its true light. How you will scorn yourself! Surely there was never a man who united such capacity for great things with so mean an ideal. You will never win even the paltry satisfaction on which you have set your mind—never! But you can't be made to understand that. You will throw away all the best part of your life. Meet me in a few years, and tell me the story of the interval.'

'I will engage to do that, Marcella.'

'You will? But not to tell me the truth. You will not dare to tell the truth.'

'Why not?' he asked, indifferently. 'Decidedly I shall owe it you in return for your frankness to-day. Till then—good-bye.'

She did not refuse her hand, and as he moved away she watched him with a smile of slighting good-nature.

On the morrow Godwin was back in Bristol, and there he dwelt for another six months, a period of mental and physical lassitude. Earwaker corresponded with him, and urged him to attempt the work that had been proposed, but such effort was beyond his power.

He saw one day in a literary paper an announcement that Reusch's *Bibel und Natur* was about to be pub-

lished in an English translation. So someone else had successfully finished the work he undertook nearly two years ago. He amused himself with the thought that he could ever have persevered so long in such profitless labour, and with a contemptuous laugh he muttered '*Thohu wabohu.*'

Just when the winter had set in, he received an offer of a post in chemical works at St. Helen's, and without delay travelled northwards. The appointment was a poor one, and seemed unlikely to be a step to anything better, but his resources would not last more than another half year, and employment of whatever kind came as welcome relief to the tedium of his existence. Established in his new abode, he at length wrote to Sidwell. She answered him at once in a short letter which he might have shown to anyone, so calm were its expressions of interest, so uncompromising its words of congratulation. It began 'Dear Mr. Peak,' and ended with 'Yours sincerely.' Well, he had used the same formalities, and had uttered his feelings with scarcely more of warmth. Disappointment troubled him for a moment, and for a moment only. He was so far from Exeter, and further still from the life that he had led there. It seemed to him all but certain that Sidwell wrote coldly, with the intention of discouraging his hopes. What hope was he so foolish as to entertain? His position poorer than ever, what could justify him in writing love-letters to a girl who, even if willing to marry him, must not do so until he had a suitable home to offer her?

Since his maturity, he had never known so long a freedom from passion. One day he wrote to Earwaker: 'I begin to understand your independence with regard to women. It would be a strange thing if I became a convert to that way of thinking, but once or twice of late I have imagined that it was happening. My mind has all but recovered its tone, and I am able to read,

to think—I mean really to *think*, not to muse. I get through big and solid books. Presently, if your offer still hold good, I shall send you a scrap of writing on something or other. The pestilent atmosphere of this place seems to invigorate me. Last Saturday evening I took train, got away into the hills, and spent the Sunday geologising. And a curious experience befell me,—one I had long, long ago, in the Whitelaw days. Sitting down before some interesting strata, I lost myself in something like nirvana, grew so subject to the idea of vastness in geological time that all human desires and purposes shrivelled to ridiculous unimportance. Awaking for a minute, I tried to realise the passion which not long ago rent and racked me, but I was flatly incapable of understanding it. Will this philosophic state endure? Perhaps I have used up all my emotional energy? I hardly know whether to hope or fear it.'

About midsummer, when his short holiday (he would only be released for a fortnight) drew near, he was surprised by another letter from Sidwell. 'I am anxious,' she wrote, 'to hear that you are well. It is more than half a year since your last letter, and of late I have been constantly expecting a few lines. The spring has been a time of trouble with us. A distant relative, an old and feeble lady who has passed her life in a little Dorsetshire village, came to see us in April, and in less than a fortnight she was seized with illness and died. Then Fanny had an attack of bronchitis, from which even now she is not altogether recovered. On her account we are all going to Royat, and I think we shall be away until the end of September. Will you let me hear from you before I leave England, which will be in a week's time? Don't refrain from writing because you think you have no news to send. Anything that interests you is of interest to me. If it is only to tell me what you have been reading, I shall be glad of a letter.'

It was still 'Yours sincerely'; but Godwin felt that the letter meant more. In re-reading it he was pleasantly thrilled with a stirring of the old emotions. But his first impulse, to write an ardent reply, did not carry him away; he reflected and took counsel of the experience gained in his studious solitude. It was evident that by keeping silence he had caused Sidwell to throw off something of her reserve. The course dictated by prudence was to maintain an attitude of dignity, to hold himself in check. In this way he would regain what he had so disastrously lost, Sidwell's respect. There was a distinct pleasure in this exercise of self-command; it was something new to him; it flattered his pride. 'Let her learn that, after all, I am her superior. Let her fear to lose me. Then, if her love is still to be depended upon, she will before long find a way to our union. It is in her power, if only she wills it.'

So he sat down and wrote a short letter which seemed to him a model of dignified expression.

IV

SIDWELL took no one into her confidence. The case was not one for counsel; whatever her future action, it must result from the maturing of self-knowledge, from the effect of circumstance upon her mind and heart. For the present she could live in silence.

'We hear,' she wrote from London to Sylvia Moorhouse, 'that Mr. Peak has left Exeter, and that he is not likely to carry out his intention of being ordained. You, I daresay, will feel no surprise.' Nothing more than that; and Sylvia's comments in reply were equally brief.

Martin Warricombe, after conversations with his wife and with Buckland, felt it impossible not to seek for an understanding of Sidwell's share in the catastrophe. He was gravely perturbed, feeling that with himself lay the chief responsibility for what had happened. Buckland's attitude was that of the man who can only keep repeating 'I told you so'; Mrs. Warricombe could only lament and upbraid in the worse than profitless fashion natural to women of her stamp. But in his daughter Martin had every kind of faith, and he longed to speak to her without reserve. Two days after her return from Exeter, he took Sidwell apart, and, with a distressing sense of the delicacy of the situation, tried to persuade her to frank utterance.

'I have been hearing strange reports,' he began, gravely, but without show of displeasure. 'Can you

help me to understand the real facts of the case, Sidwell? What is your view of Peak's behaviour?'

'He has deceived you, father,' was the quiet reply.

'You are convinced of that?—It allows of no——?'

'It can't be explained away. He pretended to believe what he did not and could not believe.'

'With interested motives, then?'

'Yes.—But not motives in themselves dishonourable.'

There was a pause. Sidwell had spoken in a steady voice, though with eyes cast down. Whether her father could understand a position such as Godwin's, she felt uncertain. That he would honestly endeavour to do so, there could be no doubt, especially since he must suspect that her own desire was to distinguish between the man and his fault. But a revelation of all that had passed between her and Peak was not possible; she had the support neither of intellect nor of passion; it would be asking for guidance, the very thing she had determined not to do. Already she found it difficult to recover the impulses which had directed her in that scene of parting; to talk of it would be to see her action in such a doubtful light that she might be led to some premature and irretrievable resolve. The only trustworthy counseller was time; on what time brought forth must depend her future.

'Do you mean, Sidwell,' resumed her father, 'that you think it possible for us to overlook this deception?'

She delayed a moment, then said:

'I don't think it possible for you to regard him as a friend.'

Martin's face expressed relief.

'But will he remain in Exeter?'

'I shouldn't think he can.'

Again a pause. Martin was of course puzzled exceedingly, but he began to feel some assurance that Peak need not be regarded as a danger.

'I am grieved beyond expression,' he said at length.

'So deliberate a fraud—it seems to me inconsistent with any of the qualities I thought I saw in him.'

'Yes—it must.'

'Not—perhaps—to you?' Martin ventured, anxiously.

'His nature is not base.'

'Forgive me, dear.—I understand that you spoke with him after Buckland's call at his lodgings——?'

'Yes, I saw him.'

'And—he strove to persuade you that he had some motive which justified his conduct?'

'Excused, rather than justified.'

'Not—it seems—to your satisfaction?'

'I can't answer that question, father. My experience of life is too slight. I can only say that untruthfulness in itself is abhorrent to me, and that I could never try to make it seem a light thing.'

'That, surely, is a sound view, think as we may on speculative points. But allow me one more question, Sidwell. Does it seem to you that I have no choice but to break off all communication with Mr. Peak?'

It was the course dictated by his own wish, she knew. And what could be gained by any middle way between hearty goodwill and complete repudiation? Time—time alone must work out the problem.

'Yes, I think you have no choice,' she answered.

'Then I must make inquiries—see if he leaves the town.'

'Mr. Lilywhite will know, probably.'

'I will write before long.'

So the dialogue ended, and neither sought to renew it.

Martin enjoined upon his wife a discreet avoidance of the subject. The younger members of the family were to know nothing of what had happened, and, if possible, the secret must be kept from friends at Exeter. When a fortnight had elapsed, he wrote to Mr. Lilywhite, asking whether it was true that Peak had gone away. 'It seems that private circumstances have obliged him to

give up his project of taking Orders. Possibly he has had a talk with you?' The clergyman replied that Peak had left Exeter. 'I have had a letter from him, explaining in general terms his change of views. It hardly surprises me that he has reconsidered the matter. I don't think he was cut out for clerical work. He is far more likely to distinguish himself in the world of science. I suspect that conscientious scruples may have something to do with it; if so, all honour to him!'

The Warricombes prolonged their stay in London until the end of June. On their return home, Martin was relieved to find that scarcely an inquiry was made of him concerning Peak. The young man's disappearance excited no curiosity in the good people who had come in contact with him, and who were so far from suspecting what a notable figure had passed across their placid vision. One person only was urgent in his questioning. On an afternoon when Mrs. Warricombe and her daughters were alone, the Rev. Bruno Chilvers made a call.

'Oh!' he exclaimed, after a few minutes' conversation, 'I am so anxious to ask you what has become of Mr. Peak. Soon after my arrival in Exeter, I went to see him, and we had a long talk—a most interesting talk. Then I heard all at once that he was gone, and that we should see no more of him. Where is he? What is he doing?'

There was a barely appreciable delay before Mrs. Warricombe made answer.

'We have quite lost sight of him,' she said, with an artificial smile. 'We know only that he was called away on some urgent business—family affairs, I suppose.'

Chilvers, in the most natural way, glanced from the speaker to Sidwell, and instantly, without the slightest change of expression, brought his eyes back again.

'I hope most earnestly,' he went on, in his fluty tone,

'that he will return. A most interesting man! A man of *large* intellectual scope, and really *broad* sympathies. I looked forward to many a chat with him. Has he, I wonder, been led to change his views? Possibly he would find a secular sphere more adapted to his special powers.'

Mrs. Warricombe had nothing to say. Sidwell, finding that Mr. Chilvers' smile now beamed in her direction, replied to him with steady utterance:

'It isn't uncommon, I think, nowadays, for doubts to interfere with the course of study for ordination?'

'Far from uncommon!' exclaimed the Rector of St. Margaret's, with almost joyous admission of the fact. 'Very far from uncommon. Such students have my profound sympathy. I know from experience exactly what it means to be overcome in a struggle with the modern spirit. Happily for myself, I was enabled to recover what for a time I lost. But charity forbid that I should judge those who think they must needs voyage for ever in "sunless gulfs of doubt," or even absolutely deny that the human intellect can be enlightened from above.'

At a loss even to follow this rhetoric, Mrs. Warricombe, who was delighted to welcome the Rev. Bruno, and regarded him as a gleaming pillar of the Church, made haste to introduce a safer topic. After that, Mr. Chilvers was seen at the house with some frequency. Not that he paid more attention to the Warricombes than to his other acquaintances. Relieved by his curate from the uncongenial burden of mere parish affairs, he seemed to regard himself as an apostle at large, whose mission directed him to the households of well-to-do people throughout the city. His brother clergymen held him in slight esteem. In private talk with Martin Warricombe, Mr. Lilywhite did not hesitate to call him 'a mountebank,' and to add other depreciatory remarks.

'My wife tells me—and I can trust her judgment in

such things—that his sole object just now is to make a good marriage. Rather disagreeable stories seem to have followed him from the other side of England. He makes love to all unmarried women—never going beyond what is thought permissible, but doing a good deal of mischief, I fancy. One lady in Exeter—I won't mention names—has already pulled him up with a direct inquiry as to his intentions; at her house, I imagine, he will no more be seen.'

The genial parson chuckled over his narrative, and Martin, by no means predisposed in the Rev. Bruno's favour, took care to report these matters to his wife.

'I don't believe a word of it!' exclaimed Mrs. Warricombe. 'All the clergy are jealous of Mr. Chilvers.'

'What? Of his success with ladies?'

'Martin! It is something new for you to be profane! —They are jealous of his high reputation.'

'Rather a serious charge against our respectable friends.'

'And the stories are all nonsense,' pursued Mrs. Warricombe. 'It's very wrong of Mr. Lilywhite to report such things. I don't believe any other clergyman would have done so.'

Martin smiled—as he had been accustomed to do all through his married life—and let the discussion rest there. On the next occasion of Mr. Chilvers being at the house, he observed the reverend man's behaviour with Sidwell, and was not at all pleased. Bruno had a way of addressing women which certainly went beyond the ordinary limits of courtesy. At a little distance, anyone would have concluded that he was doing his best to excite Sidwell's affectionate interest. The matter of his discourse might be unobjectionable, but the manner of it was not in good taste.

Mrs. Warricombe was likewise observant, but with other emotions. To her it seemed a subject for pleasurable reflection, that Mr. Chilvers should show interest

in Sidwell. The Rev. Bruno had bright prospects. With the colour of his orthodoxy she did not concern herself. He was ticketed 'broad,' a term which carried with it no disparagement; and Sidwell's sympathies were altogether with the men of 'breadth.' The time drew near when Sidwell must marry, if she ever meant to do so, and in comparison with such candidates as Mr. Walsh and Godwin Peak, the Rector of St. Margaret's would be an ideal husband for her. Sidwell's attitude towards Mr. Chilvers was not encouraging, but Mrs. Warricombe suspected that a lingering regard for the impostor, so lately unmasked, still troubled her daughter's mind: a new suitor, even if rejected, would help the poor girl to dismiss that shocking infatuation.

Sidwell and her father nowadays spent much time together, and in the autumn days it became usual for them to have an afternoon ramble about the lanes. Their talk was of science and literature, occasionally skirting very close upon those questions which both feared to discuss plainly—for a twofold reason. Sidwell read much more than had been her wont, and her choice of authors would alone have indicated a change in her ways of thinking, even if she had not allowed it to appear in the tenor of her talk. The questions she put with reference to Martin's favourite studies were sometimes embarrassing.

One day they happened to meet Mr. Chilvers, who was driving with his eldest child, a boy of four. The narrowness of the road made it impossible—as Martin would have wished—to greet and pass on. Chilvers stopped the carriage and jumped out. Sidwell could not but pay some attention to the youthful Chilvers.

'Till he is ten years old,' cried Bruno, 'I shall think much more of his body than of his mind. In fact, at this age the body *is* the mind. Books, books—oh, we attach far too much importance to them. Over-study is one of the morbific tendencies of our time. Some

one or other has been trying to frown down what he calls the excessive athleticism of our public schools. No, no! Let us rejoice that our lads have such an opportunity of vigorous physical development. The culture of the body is a great part of religion.' He always uttered remarks of this kind as if suggesting that his hearers should note them in a collection of aphorisms. 'If to labour is to pray, so also is the practice of open-air recreation.'

When they had succeeded in getting away, father and daughter walked for some minutes without speaking. At length Sidwell asked, with a smile:

'How does this form of Christianity strike you?'

'Why, very much like a box on the ear with a perfumed glove,' replied Martin.

'That describes it very well.'

They walked a little further, and Sidwell spoke in a more serious tone.

'If Mr. Chilvers were brought before the ecclesiastical authorities and compelled to make a clear statement of his faith, what sect, in all the history of heresies, would he really seem to belong to?'

'I know too little of him, and too little of heresies.'

'Do you suppose for a moment that he sincerely believes the dogmas of his Church?'

Martin bit his lip and looked uneasy.

'We can't judge him, Sidwell.'

'I don't know,' she persisted. 'It seems to me that he does his best to give us the means of judging him. I half believe that he often laughs in himself at the success of his audacity.'

'No, no. I think the man is sincere.'

This was very uncomfortable ground, but Sidwell would not avoid it. Her eyes flashed, and she spoke with a vehemence such as Martin had never seen in her.

'Undoubtedly sincere in his determination to make a figure in the world. But a Christian, in any intelli-

gible sense of that much-abused word,—no! He is one type of the successful man of our day. Where thousands of better and stronger men struggle vainly for fair recognition, he and his kind are glorified. In comparison with a really energetic man, he is an acrobat. The crowd stares at him and applauds, and there is nothing he cares for so much as that kind of admiration.'

Martin kept silence, and in a few minutes succeeded in broaching a wholly different subject.

Not long after this, Mr. Chilvers paid a call at the conventional hour. Sidwell, hoping to escape, invited two girls to step out with her on to the lawn. The sun was sinking, and, as she stood with eyes fixed upon it, the Rev. Bruno's voice disagreeably broke her reverie. She was perforce involved in a dialogue, her companions moving aside.

'What a magnificent sky!' murmured Chilvers. '"There sinks the nebulous star." Forgive me, I have fallen into a tiresome trick of quoting. How differently a sunset is viewed nowadays from what it was in old times! Our impersonal emotions are on a higher plane —don't you think so? Yes, scientific discovery has done more for religion than all the ages of pious imagination. A theory of Galileo or Newton is more to the soul than a psalm of David.'

'You think so?' Sidwell asked, coldly.

In everyday conversation she was less suave than formerly. This summer she had never worn her spray of sweet-brier, and the omission might have been deemed significant of a change in herself. When the occasion offered, she no longer hesitated to express a difference of opinion; at times she uttered her dissent with a bluntness which recalled Buckland's manner in private.

'Does the comparison seem to you unbecoming?' said Chilvers, with genial condescension. 'Or untrue?'

'What do you mean by "the soul"?' she inquired, still gazing away from him.

'The principle of conscious life in man—that which understands and worships.'

'The two faculties seem to me so different that'—— She broke off. 'But I mustn't talk foolishly about such things.'

'I feel sure you have thought of them to some purpose. I wonder whether you ever read Francis Newman's book on *The Soul?*'

'No, I never saw it.'

'Allow me to recommend it to you. I believe you would find it deeply interesting.'

'Does the Church approve it?'

'The Church?' He smiled. 'Ah! what Church? Churchmen there are, unfortunately, who detest the name of its author, but I hope you have never classed me among them. The Church, rightly understood, comprehends every mind and heart that is striving upwards. The age of intolerance will soon be as remote from us as that of persecution. Can I be mistaken in thinking that this broader view has your sympathy, Miss Warricombe?'

'I can't sympathise with what I don't understand, Mr. Chilvers.'

He looked at her with tender solicitude, bending slightly from his usual square-shouldered attitude.

'Do let me find an opportunity of talking over the whole matter with you—by no means as an instructor. In my view, a clergyman may seek instruction from the humblest of those who are called his flock. The thoughtful and high-minded among them will often assist him materially in his endeavour at self-development. To my "flock,"' he continued, playfully, 'you don't belong; but may I not count you one of that circle of friends to whom I look for the higher kind of sympathy?'

Sidwell glanced about her in the hope that some one might be approaching. Her two friends were at a distance, talking and laughing together.

'You shall tell me some day,' she replied, with more attention to courtesy, 'what the doctrines of the Broad Church really are. But the air grows too cool to be pleasant; hadn't we better return to the drawing-room?'

The greater part of the winter went by before she had again to submit to a *tête-à-tête* with the Rev. Bruno. It was seldom that she thought of him save when compelled to do so by his exacting presence, but in the meantime he exercised no small influence on her mental life. Insensibly she was confirmed in her alienation from all accepted forms of religious faith. Whether she wished it or not, it was inevitable that such a process should keep her constantly in mind of Godwin Peak. Her desire to talk with him at times became so like passion that she appeared to herself to love him more truly than ever. Yet such a mood was always followed by doubt, and she could not say whether the reaction distressed or soothed her. These months that had gone by brought one result, not to be disguised. Whatever the true nature of her feeling for Godwin, the thought of marrying him was so difficult to face that it seemed to involve impossibilities. He himself had warned her that marriage would mean severance from all her kindred. It was practically true, and time would only increase the difficulty of such a determination.

The very fact that her love (again, if love it were) must be indulged in defiance of universal opinion tended to keep emotion alive. A woman is disposed to cling to a lover who has disgraced himself, especially if she can believe that the disgrace was incurred as a result of devotion to her. Could love be separated from thought of marriage, Sidwell would have encouraged herself in fidelity, happy in the prospect of a life-long spiritual communion—for she would not doubt of Godwin's upward progress, of his eventual purification. But this was a mere dream. If Godwin's passion were steadfast,

the day would come when she must decide either to cast in her lot with his, or to bid him be free. And could she imagine herself going forth into exile?

There came a letter from him, and she was fortunate enough to receive it without the knowledge of her relatives. He wrote that he had obtained employment. The news gave her a troubled joy, lasting for several days. That no emotion appeared in her reply was due to a fear lest she might be guilty of misleading him. Perhaps already she had done so. Her last whisper—'Some day!'—was it not a promise and an appeal? Now she had not the excuse of profound agitation, there must be no word her conscience could not justify. But in writing those formal lines she felt herself a coward. She was drawing back—preparing her escape.

Often she had the letter beneath her pillow. It was the first she had ever received from a man who professed to love her. So long without romance in her life, she could not but entertain this semblance of it, and feel that she was still young.

It told much in Godwin's favour that he had not ventured to write before there was this news to send her. It testified to the force of his character, the purity of his purpose. A weaker man, she knew, would have tried to excite her compassion by letters of mournful strain, might even have distressed her with attempts at clandestine meeting. She had said rightly—his nature was not base. And she loved him! She was passionately grateful to him for proving that her love had not been unworthily bestowed.

When he wrote again, her answer should not be cowardly.

The life of the household went on as it had been wont to do for years, but with the spring came events. An old lady died whilst on a visit to the house (she was a half-sister of Mrs. Warricombe), and by a will executed a few years previously she left a thousand pounds, to be

equally divided between the children of this family. Sidwell smiled sadly on finding herself in possession of this bequest, the first sum of any importance that she had ever held in her own right. If she married a man of whom all her kith and kin so strongly disapproved that they would not give her even a wedding present, two hundred and fifty pounds would be better than no dowry at all. One could furnish a house with it.

Then Fanny had an attack of bronchitis, and whilst she was recovering Buckland came down for a few days, bringing with him a piece of news for which no one was prepared. As if to make reparation to his elder sister for the harshness with which he had behaved in the affair of Godwin Peak, he chose her for his first confidante.

'Sidwell, I am going to be married. Do you care to hear about it?'

'Certainly I do.'

Long ago she had been assured of Sylvia Moorhouse's sincerity in rejecting Buckland's suit. That was still a grief to her, but she acknowledged her friend's wisdom, and was now very curious to learn who it was that the Radical had honoured with his transferred affections.

'The lady's name,' Buckland began, 'is Miss Matilda Renshaw. She is the second daughter of a dealer in hides, tallow, and that kind of thing. Both her parents are dead; she has lived of late with her married sister at Blackheath.'

Sidwell listened with no slight astonishment, and her countenance looked what she felt.

'That's the bald statement of the cause,' pursued her brother, seeming to enjoy the consternation he had excited. 'Now, let me fill up the outline. Miss Renshaw is something more than good-looking, has had an admirable education, is five-and-twenty, and for a couple of years has been actively engaged in humanitarian work in the East End. She has published a book on social

questions, and is a very good public speaker. Finally, she owns property representing between three and four thousand a year.'

'The picture has become more attractive,' said Sidwell.

'You imagined a rather different person? If I persuade mother to invite her down here presently, do you think you could be friendly with her?'

'I see no reason why I should not be.'

'But I must warn you. She has nothing to do with creeds and dogmas.'

He tried to read her face. Sidwell's mind was a mystery to him.

'I shall make no inquiry about her religious views,' his sister replied, in a dispassionate tone, which conveyed no certain meaning.

'Then I feel sure you will like her, and equally sure that she will like you.'

His parents had no distinct fault to find with this choice, though they would both greatly have preferred a daughter-in-law whose genealogy could be more freely spoken of. Miss Renshaw was invited to Exeter, and the first week of June saw her arrival. Buckland had in no way exaggerated her qualities. She was a dark-eyed beauty, perfect from the social point of view, a very interesting talker,—in short, no ordinary woman. That Buckland should have fallen in love with her, even after Sylvia, was easily understood; it seemed likely that she would make him as good a wife as he could ever hope to win.

. . . . . .

Sidwell was expecting another letter from the north of England. The silence which during those first months had been justifiable was now a source of anxiety. But whether fear or hope predominated in her expectancy, she still could not decide. She had said to herself that her next reply should not be cowardly, yet she was as far as ever from a courageous resolve.

Mental harassment told upon her health. Martin, watching her with solicitude, declared that for her sake as much as for Fanny's they must have a thorough holiday abroad.

Urged by the approaching departure, Sidwell overcame her reluctance to write to Godwin before she had a letter to answer. It was done in a mood of intolerable despondency, when life looked barren before her, and the desire of love all but triumphed over every other consideration. The letter written and posted, she would gladly have recovered it—reserved, formal as it was. Cowardly still; but then Godwin had not written.

She kept a watch upon the postman, and again, when Godwin's reply was delivered, escaped detection.

Hardly did she dare to open the envelope. Her letter had perchance been more significant than she supposed; and did not the mere fact of her writing invite a lover's frankness?

But the reply was hardly more moving than if it had come from a total stranger. For a moment she felt relieved; in an hour's time she suffered indescribable distress. Godwin wrote—so she convinced herself after repeated perusals—as if discharging a task; not a word suggested tenderness. Had the letter been unsolicited, she could have used it like the former one; but it was the answer to an appeal. The phrases she had used were still present in her mind. 'I am anxious . . . it is more than half a year since you wrote . . . I have been expecting . . . anything that is of interest to you will interest me . . .' How could she imagine that this was reserved and formal? Shame fell upon her; she locked herself from all companionship, and wept in rebellion against the laws of life.

A fortnight later, she wrote from Royat to Sylvia Moorhouse. It was a long epistle, full of sunny descriptions, breathing renewed vigour of body and mind. The last paragraph ran thus:

'Yesterday was my birthday; I was twenty-eight. At this age, it is wisdom in a woman to remind herself that youth is over. I don't regret it; let it go with all its follies! But I am sorry that I have no serious work in life; it is not cheerful to look forward to perhaps another eight-and-twenty years of elegant leisure—that is to say, of wearisome idleness. What can I do? Try and think of some task for me, something that will last a lifetime.'

PART VII

I

At the close of a sultry day in September, when factory fumes hung low over the town of St. Helen's, and twilight thickened luridly, and the air tasted of sulphur, and the noises of the streets, muffled in their joint effect, had individually an ominous distinctness, Godwin Peak walked with languid steps to his lodgings and the meal that there awaited him. His vitality was at low ebb. The routine of his life disgusted him; the hope of release was a mockery. What was to be the limit of this effort to redeem his character? How many years before the past could be forgotten, and his claim to the style of honourable be deemed secure? Rubbish! It was an idea out of old-fashioned romances. What he was, he was, and no extent of dogged duration at St. Helen's or elsewhere could affect his personality. What, practically, was to be the end? If Sidwell had no money of her own, and no expectations from her father, how could she ever become his wife? Women liked this kind of thing, this indefinite engagement to marry when something should happen, which in all likelihood never would happen—this fantastic mutual fidelity with only the airiest reward. Especially women of a certain age.

A heavy cart seemed to be rumbling in the next street. No, it was thunder. If only a good rattling storm would sweep the bituminous atmosphere, and allow a breath of pure air before midnight.

She could not be far from thirty. Of course there

prevails much conventional nonsense about women's age; there are plenty of women who reckon four decades, and yet retain all the essential charm of their sex. And as a man gets older, as he begins to persuade himself that at forty one has scarce reached the prime of life——

The storm was coming on in earnest. Big drops began to fall. He quickened his pace, reached home, and rang the bell for a light.

His landlady came in with the announcement that a gentleman had called to see him, about an hour ago; he would come again at seven o'clock.

'What name?'

None had been given. A youngish gentleman, speaking like a Londoner.

It might be Earwaker, but that was not likely. Godwin sat down to his plain meal, and after it lit a pipe. Thunder was still rolling, but now in the distance. He waited impatiently for seven o'clock.

To the minute, sounded a knock at the house-door. A little delay, and there appeared Christian Moxey.

Godwin was surprised and embarrassed. His visitor had a very grave face, and was thinner, paler, than three years ago; he appeared to hesitate, but at length offered his hand.

'I got your address from Earwaker. I was obliged to see you—on business.'

'Business?'

'May I take my coat off? We shall have to talk.'

They sat down, and Godwin, unable to strike the note of friendship lest he should be met with repulse, broke silence by regretting that Moxey should have had to make a second call.

'Oh, that's nothing! I went and had dinner.—Peak, my sister is dead.'

Their eyes met; something of the old kindness rose to either face.

'That must be a heavy blow to you,' murmured God-

win, possessed with a strange anticipation which he would not allow to take clear form.

'It is. She was ill for three months. Whilst staying in the country last June she met with an accident. She went for a long walk alone one day, and in a steep lane she came up with a carter who was trying to make a wretched horse drag a load beyond its strength. The fellow was perhaps half drunk; he stood there beating the horse unmercifully. Marcella couldn't endure that kind of thing—impossible for her to pass on and say nothing. She interfered, and tried to persuade the man to lighten his cart. He was insolent, attacked the horse more furiously than ever, and kicked it so violently in the stomach that it fell. Even then he wouldn't stop his brutality. Marcella tried to get between him and the animal—just as it lashed out with its heels. The poor girl was so badly injured that she lay by the road-side until another carter took her up and brought her back to the village. Three months of accursed suffering, and then happily came the end.'

A far, faint echoing of thunder filled the silence of their voices. Heavy rain splashed upon the pave-ment.

'She said to me just before her death,' resumed Christian, '"I have ill luck when I try to do a kindness —but perhaps there is one more chance." I didn't know what she meant till afterwards. Peak, she has left nearly all her money to you.'

Godwin knew it before the words were spoken. His heart leaped, and only the dread of being observed enabled him to control his features. When his tongue was released he said harshly:

'Of course I can't accept it.'

The words were uttered independently of his will. He had no such thought, and the sound of his voice shook him with alarm.

'Why can't you?' returned Christian.

'I have no right—it belongs to you, or to some other relative—it would be '——

His stammering broke off. Flushes and chills ran through him; he could not raise his eyes from the ground.

'It belongs to no one but you,' said Moxey, with cold persistence. 'Her last wish was to do you a kindness, and I, at all events, shall never consent to frustrate her intention. The legacy represents something more than eight hundred a year, as the investments now stand. This will make you independent—of everything and everybody.' He looked meaningly at the listener. 'Her own life was not a very happy one; she did what she could to save yours from a like doom.'

Godwin at last looked up.

'Did she speak of me during her illness?'

'She asked me once, soon after the accident, what had become of you. As I knew from Earwaker, I was able to tell her.'

A long silence followed. Christian's voice was softer when he resumed.

'You never knew her. She was the one woman in ten thousand—at once strong and gentle; a fine intellect, and a heart of rare tenderness. But because she had not the kind of face that '——

He checked himself.

'To the end her mind kept its clearness and courage. One day she reminded me of Heine—how we had talked of that "conversion" on the mattress-grave, and had pitied the noble intellect subdued by disease. "I shan't live long enough," she said, "to incur that danger. What I have thought ever since I could study, I think now, and shall to the last moment." I buried her without forms of any kind, in the cemetery at Kingsmill. That was what she wished. I should have despised myself if I had lacked that courage.'

'It was right,' muttered Godwin.

'And I wear no mourning, you see. All that kind of thing is ignoble. I am robbed of a priceless companionship, but I don't care to go about inviting people's pity. If only I could forget those months of suffering! Some day I shall, perhaps, and think of her only as she lived.'

'Were you alone with her all the time?'

'No. Our cousin Janet was often with us.' Christian spoke with averted face. 'You don't know, of course, that she has gone in for medical work—practises at Kingsmill. The accident was at a village called Lowton, ten miles or more from Kingsmill. Janet came over very often.'

Godwin mused on this development of the girl whom he remembered so well. He could not direct his thoughts; a languor had crept over him.

'Do you recollect, Peak,' said Christian, presently, 'the talk we had in the fields by Twybridge, when we first met?'

The old friendliness was reappearing in his manner. He was yielding to the impulse to be communicative, confidential, which had always characterised him.

'I remember,' Godwin murmured.

'If only my words then had had any weight with you! And if only I had acted upon my own advice! Just for those few weeks I was sane; I understood something of life; I saw my true way before me. You and I have both gone after ruinous ideals, instead of taking the solid good held out to us. Of course, I know your story in outline. I don't ask you to talk about it. You are independent now, and I hope you can use your freedom. —Well, and I too am free.'

The last words were in a lower tone. Godwin glanced at the speaker, whose sadness was not banished, but illumined with a ray of calm hope.

'Have you ever thought of me and my infatuation?' Christian asked.

'Yes.'

'I have outlived that mawkish folly. I used to drink too much; the two things went well together. It would shame me to tell you all about it. But, happily, I have been able to go back about thirteen years—recover my old sane self—and with it what I then threw away.'

'I understand.'

'Do you? Marcella knew of it, just before her death, and it made her glad. But the waste of years, the best part of a lifetime! It's incredible to me as I look back. Janet called on us one day in London. Heaven be thanked that she was forgiving enough to do so! What would have become of me now?'

'How are you going to live, then?' Godwin asked, absently.

'How? My income is sufficient'——

'No, no; I mean, where and how will you live in your married life?'

'That's still uncertain. Janet mustn't go on with professional work. In any case, I don't think she could for long; her strength isn't equal to it. But I shouldn't wonder if we settle in Kingsmill. To you it would seem intolerable! But why should we live in London? At Kingsmill Janet has a large circle of friends; in London we know scarcely half-a-dozen people—of the kind it would give us any pleasure to live with. We shall have no lack of intellectual society; Janet knows some of the Whitelaw professors. The atmosphere of Kingsmill isn't illiberal, you know; we shan't be fought shy of because we object to pass Sundays in a state of coma. But the years that I have lost! The irrecoverable years!'

'There's nothing so idle as regretting the past,' said Godwin, with some impatience. 'Why groan over what couldn't be otherwise? The probability is, Janet and you are far better suited to each other now than you ever would have been if you had married long ago.'

'You think that?' exclaimed the other, eagerly. 'I

have tried to see it in that light. If I didn't feel so despicable!'

'She, I take it, doesn't think you so,' Godwin muttered.

'But how can she understand? I have tried to tell her everything, but she refused to listen. Perhaps Marcella told her all she cared to know.'

'No doubt.'

Each brooded for a while over his own affairs, then Christian reverted to the subject which concerned them both.

'Let us speak frankly. You will take this gift of Marcella's as it was meant?'

How *was* it meant? Critic and analyst as ever, Godwin could not be content to see in it the simple benefaction of a woman who died loving him. Was it not rather the last subtle device of jealousy? Marcella knew that the legacy would be a temptation he could scarcely resist—and knew at the same time that, if he accepted it, he practically renounced his hope of marrying Sidwell Warricombe. Doubtless she had learned as much as she needed to know of Sidwell's position. Refusing this bequest, he was as far as ever from the possibility of asking Sidwell to marry him. Profiting by it, he stood for ever indebted to Marcella, must needs be grateful to her, and some day, assuredly, would reveal the truth to whatever woman became his wife. Conflict of reasonings and emotions made it difficult to answer Moxey's question.

'I must take time to think of it,' he said, at length.

'Well, I suppose that is right. But—well, I know so little of your circumstances'——

'Is that strictly true?' Peak asked.

'Yes. I have only the vaguest idea of what you have been doing since you left us. Of course I have tried to find out.'

Godwin smiled, rather gloomily.

'We won't talk of it. I suppose you stay in St. Helen's for the night?'

'There's a train at 10.20. I had better go by it.'

'Then let us forget everything but your own cheerful outlook. At ten, I'll walk with you to the station.'

Reluctantly at first, but before long with a quiet abandonment to the joy that would not be suppressed, Christian talked of his future wife. In Janet he found every perfection. Her mind was something more than the companion of his own. Already she had begun to inspire him with a hopeful activity, and to foster the elements of true manliness which he was conscious of possessing, though they had never yet had free play. With a sense of luxurious safety, he submitted to her influence, knowing none the less that it was in his power to complete her imperfect life. Studiously he avoided the word 'ideal'; from such vaporous illusions he had turned to the world's actualities; his language dealt with concretes, with homely satisfactions, with prospects near enough to be soberly examined.

A hurry to catch the train facilitated parting. Godwin promised to write in a few days.

He took a roundabout way back to his lodgings. The rain was over, the sky had become placid. He was conscious of an effect from Christian's conversation which half counteracted the mood he would otherwise have indulged,—the joy of liberty and of an outlook wholly new. Sidwell might perchance be to him all that Janet was to Christian. Was it not the luring of 'ideals' that prompted him to turn away from his long hope?

There must be no more untruthfulness. Sidwell must have all the facts laid before her, and make her choice.

Without a clear understanding of what he was going to write, he sat down at eleven o'clock, and began, 'Dear Miss Warricombe.' Why not 'Dear Sidwell'? He took another sheet of paper.

'DEAR SIDWELL,—To-night I can remember only your last word to me when we parted. I cannot address you coldly, as though half a stranger. Thus long I have kept silence about everything but the outward events of my life; now, in telling you of something that has happened, I must speak as I think.

'Early this evening I was surprised by a visit from Christian Moxey—a name you know. He came to tell me that his sister (she of whom I once spoke to you) was dead, and had bequeathed to me a large sum of money. He said that it represented an income of eight hundred pounds.

'I knew nothing of Miss Moxey's illness, and the news of her will come to me as a surprise. In word or deed, I never sought more than her simple friendship—and even *that* I believed myself to have forfeited.

'If I were to refuse this money, it would be in consequence of a scruple which I do not in truth respect. Christian Moxey tells me that his sister's desire was to enable me to live the life of a free man, and if I have any duty at all in the matter, surely it does not constrain me to defeat her kindness. No condition whatever is attached. The gift releases me from the necessity of leading a hopeless existence—leaves me at liberty to direct my life how I will.

'I wish, then, to put aside all thoughts of how this opportunity came to me, and to ask you if you are willing to be my wife.

'Though I have never written a word of love, my love is unchanged. The passionate hope of three years ago still rules my life. Is *your* love strong enough to enable you to disregard all hindrances? I cannot of course know whether, in your sight, dishonour still clings to me, or whether you understand me well enough to have forgiven and forgotten those hateful things in the past. Is it yet too soon? Do you wish me still to wait? Is your interest in the free man less than

in the slave? For my life has been one of slavery and exile—exile, if you know what I mean by it, from the day of my birth.

'Dearest, grant me this great happiness! We can live where we will. I am not rich enough to promise all the comforts and refinements to which you are accustomed, but we should be safe from sordid anxieties. We can travel; we can make a home in any European city. It would be idle to speak of the projects and ambitions that fill my mind—but surely I may do something worth doing, win some position among intellectual men of which you would not be ashamed. You yourself urged me to hope that. With you at my side—Sidwell, grant me this chance, that I may know the joy of satisfied love! I am past the age which is misled by vain fancies. I have suffered unspeakably, longed for the calm strength, the pure, steady purpose which would result to me from a happy marriage. There is no fatal divergence between our minds; did you not tell me that? You said that if I had been truthful from the first, you might have loved me with no misgiving. Forget the madness into which I was betrayed. There is no soil upon my spirit. I offer you love as noble as any man is capable of. Think—think well—before replying to me; let your true self prevail. You *did* love me, dearest.—Yours ever,

'GODWIN PEAK.'

At first he wrote slowly, as though engaged on a literary composition, with erasions, insertions. Facts once stated, he allowed himself to forget how Sidwell would most likely view them, and thereafter his pen hastened: fervour inspired the last paragraph. Sidwell's image had become present to him, and exercised all—or nearly all—its old influence.

The letter must be copied, because of that laboured beginning. Copying one's own words is at all times a

disenchanting drudgery, and when the end was reached Godwin signed his name with hasty contempt. What answer could he expect to such an appeal? How vast an improbability that Sidwell would consent to profit by the gift of Marcella Moxey!

Yet how otherwise could he write? With what show of sincerity could he offer to refuse the bequest? Nay, in that case he must not *offer* to do so, but simply state the fact that his refusal was beyond recall. Logically, he had chosen the only course open to him,—for to refuse independence was impossible.

A wheezy clock in his landlady's kitchen was striking two. For very fear of having to revise his letter in the morning, he put it into its envelope, and went out to the nearest pillar-post.

That was done. Whether Sidwell answered with 'Yes' or with 'No,' he was a free man.

On the morrow he went to his work as usual, and on the day after that. The third morning might bring a reply—but did not. On the evening of the fifth day, when he came home, there lay the expected letter. He felt it; it was light and thin. That hideous choking of suspense——Well, it ran thus:

'I cannot. It is not that I am troubled by your accepting the legacy. You have every right to do so, and I know that your life will justify the hopes of her who thus befriended you. But I am too weak to take this step. To ask you to wait yet longer, would only be a fresh cowardice. You cannot know how it shames me to write this. In my very heart I believe I love you, but what is such love worth? You must despise me, and you will forget me. I live in a little world; in the greater world where your place is, you will win a love very different.

S. W.'

Godwin laughed aloud as the paper dropped from his hand.

Well, she was not the heroine of a romance. Had he expected her to leave home and kindred—the 'little world' so infinitely dear to her—and go forth with a man deeply dishonoured? Very young girls have been known to do such a thing; but a thoughtful mature woman——! Present, his passion had dominated her: and perhaps her nerves only. But she had had time to recover from that weakness.

A woman, like most women, of cool blood, temperate fancies. A domestic woman; the ornament of a typical English home.

Most likely it was true that the matter of the legacy did not trouble her. In any case she would not have consented to marry him, and *therefore* she knew no jealousy. Her love! why, truly, what was it worth?

(Much, much! of no less than infinite value. He knew it, but this was not the moment for such a truth.)

A cup of tea to steady the nerves. Then thoughts, planning, world-building.

He was awake all night, and Sidwell's letter lay within reach.—Did *she* sleep calmly? Had she never stretched out her hand for *his* letter, when all was silent? There were men who would not take such a refusal. A scheme to meet her once more—the appeal of passion, face to face, heart to heart—the means of escape ready—and then the 'greater world!'——

But neither was he cast in heroic mould. He had not the self-confidence, he had not the hot, youthful blood. A critic of life, an analyst of moods and motives; not the man who dares and acts. The only important resolve he had ever carried through was a scheme of ignoble trickery—to end in frustration.

'The greater world.' It was a phrase that had been in his own mind once or twice since Moxey's visit. To point him thither was doubtless the one service Sidwell could render him. And in a day or two, that phrase was all that remained to him of her letter.

. . . . . .

On a Sunday afternoon at the end of October, Godwin once more climbed the familiar stairs at Staple Inn, and was welcomed by his friend Earwaker. The visit was by appointment. Earwaker knew all about the legacy; that it was accepted; and that Peak had only a few days to spend in London, on his way to the Continent.

'You are regenerated,' was his remark as Godwin entered.

'Do I look it? Just what I feel. I have shaken off a good (or a bad) ten years.'

The speaker's face, at all events in this moment, was no longer that of a man at hungry issue with the world. He spoke cheerily.

'It isn't often that fortune does a man such a kind turn. One often hears it said: If only I could begin life again with all the experience I have gained! That is what I *can* do. I can break utterly with the past, and I have learnt how to live in the future.'

'Break utterly with the past?'

'In the practical sense. And even morally to a great extent.'

Earwaker pushed a box of cigars across the table. Godwin accepted the offer, and began to smoke. During these moments of silence, the man of letters had been turning over a weekly paper, as if in search of some paragraph; a smile announced his discovery.

'Here is something that will interest you—possibly you have seen it.'

He began to read aloud:

'"On the 23rd inst. was celebrated at St. Bragg's, Torquay, the marriage of the Rev. Bruno Leathwaite Chilvers, late Rector of St. Margaret's, Exeter, and the Hon. Bertha Harriet Cecilia Jute, eldest daughter of the late Baron Jute. The ceremony was conducted by the Hon. and Rev. J. C. Jute, uncle of the bride, assisted

by the Rev. F. Miller, the Very Rev. Dean Pinnock, the Rev. H. S. Crook, and the Rev. William Tomkinson. The bride was given away by Lord Jute. Mr. Horatio Dukinfield was best man. The bridal dress was of white brocade, draped with Brussels lace, the corsage being trimmed with lace and adorned with orange blossoms. The tulle veil, fastened with three diamond stars, the gifts of "—— Well, shall I go on?'

'The triumph of Chilvers!' murmured Godwin. 'I wonder whether the Hon. Bertha is past her fortieth year?'

'A blooming beauty, I daresay. But Lord! how many people it takes to marry a man like Chilvers! How sacred the union must be!—Pray take a paragraph more: "The four bridesmaids—Miss—etc., etc. —wore cream crépon dresses trimmed with turquoise blue velvet, and hats to match. The bridegroom's presents to them were diamond and ruby brooches."'

'Chilvers *in excelsis!*—So he is no longer at Exeter; has no living, it seems. What does he aim at next, I wonder?'

Earwaker cast meaning glances at his friend.

'I understand you,' said Godwin, at length. 'You mean that this merely illustrates my own ambition. Well, you are right, I confess my shame—and there's an end of it.'

He puffed at his cigar, resuming presently:

'But it would be untrue if I said that I regretted anything. Constituted as I am, there was no other way of learning my real needs and capabilities. Much in the past is hateful to me, but it all had its use. There are men—why, take your own case. You look back on life, no doubt, with calm and satisfaction.'

'Rather, with resignation.'

Godwin let his cigar fall, and laughed bitterly.

'Your resignation has kept pace with life. I was always a rebel. My good qualities—I mean what I

say—have always wrecked me. Now that I haven't to fight with circumstances, they may possibly be made subservient to my happiness.'

'But what form is your happiness to take?'

'Well, I am leaving England. On the Continent I shall make no fixed abode, but live in the places where cosmopolitan people are to be met. I shall make friends; with money at command, one may hope to succeed in that. Hotels, boarding-houses, and so on, offer the opportunities. It sounds oddly like the project of a swindler, doesn't it? There's the curse I can't escape from! Though my desires are as pure as those of any man living, I am compelled to express myself as if I were about to do something base and underhand. Simply because I have never had a social place. I am an individual merely; I belong to no class, town, family, club'——

'Cosmopolitan people,' mused Earwaker. 'Your ideal is transformed.'

'As you know. Experience only could bring that about. I seek now only the free, intellectual people—men who have done with the old conceptions—women who'——

His voice grew husky, and he did not complete the sentence.

'I shall find them in Paris, Rome.—Earwaker, think of my being able to speak like this! No day-dreams, but actual sober plans, their execution to begin in a day or two. Paris, Rome! And a month ago I was a hopeless slave in a vile manufacturing town.—I wish it were possible for me to pray for the soul of that poor dead woman. I don't speak to you of her; but do you imagine I am brutally forgetful of her to whom I owe all this?'

'I do you justice,' returned the other, quietly.

'I believe you can and do.'

'How grand it is to go forth as I am now going!'

Godwin resumed, after a long pause. 'Nothing to hide, no shams, no pretences. Let who will inquire about me. I am an independent Englishman, with so and so much a year. In England I have one friend only—that is you. The result, you see, of all these years' savage striving to knit myself into the social fabric.'

'Well, you will invite me some day to your villa at Sorrento,' said Earwaker, encouragingly.

'That I shall!' Godwin's eyes flashed with imaginative delight. 'And before very long. Never to a home in England!'

'By-the-bye, a request. I have never had your portrait. Sit before you leave London.'

'No. I'll send you one from Paris—it will be better done.'

'But I am serious. You promise?'

'You shall have the thing in less than a fortnight.'

The promise was kept. Earwaker received an admirable photograph, which he inserted in his album with a curious sense of satisfaction. A face by which every intelligent eye must be arrested; which no two observers would interpret in the same way.

'His mate must be somewhere,' thought the man of letters, 'but he will never find her.'