

the heads of the big outer public, but the Baileys with a certain show of justice claimed to have set it going in the channels that took it to him—if as a matter of fact it was taken to him. But then it was their habit to make claims of that sort. They certainly did their share to keep “efficient” going. Altiora’s highest praise was “thoroughly efficient.” We were to be a “thoroughly efficient” political couple of the “new type.” She explained us to herself and Oscar, she explained us to ourselves, she explained us to the people who came to her dinners and afternoons until the world was highly charged with explanation and expectation, and the proposal that I should be the Liberal candidate for the Kinghamstead Division seemed the most natural development in the world.

I was full of the ideal of hard restrained living and relentless activity, and throughout a beautiful November at Venice, where chiefly we spent our honeymoon, we turned over and over again and discussed in every aspect our conception of a life tremendously focussed upon the ideal of social service.

Most clearly there stands out a picture of ourselves talking in a gondola on our way to Torcella. Far away behind us the smoke of Murano forms a black stain upon an immense shining prospect of smooth water, water as unruffled and luminous as the sky above, a mirror on which rows of posts and distant black high-stemmed, swan-necked boats with their minutely clear swinging gondoliers, float aerially. Remote and low before us rises the little tower of our destination. Our men swing together and their oars swirl leisurely through the water, bump back in the rowlocks, splash sharply

and go swishing back again. Margaret lies back on cushions, with her face shaded by a holland parasol, and I sit up beside her.

"You see," I say, and in spite of Margaret's note of perfect acquiescence I feel myself reasoning against an indefinable antagonism, "it is so easy to fall into a slack way with life. There may seem to be something priggish in a meticulous discipline, but otherwise it is so easy to slip into indolent habits—and to be distracted from one's purpose. The country, the world, wants men to serve its constructive needs, to work out and carry out plans. For a man who has to make a living the enemy is immediate necessity; for people like ourselves it's—it's the constant small opportunity of agreeable things."

"Frittering away," she says, "time and strength."

"That is what I feel. It's so pleasant to pretend one is simply modest, it looks so foolish at times to take oneself too seriously. We've *got* to take ourselves seriously."

She endorses my words with her eyes.

"I feel I can do great things with life."

"I *know* you can."

"But that's only to be done by concentrating one's life upon one main end. We have to plan our days, to make everything subserve our scheme."

"I feel," she answers softly, "we ought to give—every hour."

Her face becomes dreamy. "I *want* to give every hour," she adds.

§ 2.

That holiday in Venice is set in my memory like a little artificial lake in uneven confused country, as something very bright and skylike, and discontinuous with all about it. The faded quality of the very sunshine of that season, the mellow discoloured palaces and places, the huge, time-ripened paintings of departed splendours, the whispering, nearly noiseless passage of hearse-black gondolas, for the horrible steam launch had not yet ruined Venice, the stilled magnificences of the depopulated lagoons, the universal autumn, made me feel altogether in recess from the teeming uproars of reality. There was not a dozen people all told, no Americans and scarcely any English, to dine in the big cavern of a dining-room, with its vistas of separate tables, its distempered walls and its swathed chandeliers. We went about seeing beautiful things, accepting beauty on every hand, and taking it for granted that all was well with ourselves and the world. It was ten days or a fortnight before I became fretful and anxious for action; a long tranquillity for such a temperament as mine.

Our pleasures were curiously impersonal, a succession of shared æsthetic appreciation threads all that time. Our honeymoon was no exultant coming together, no mutual shout of "*you!*" We were almost shy with one another, and felt the relief of even a picture to help us out. It was entirely in my conception of things that I should be very watchful not to shock or distress Margaret or press the sensuous note. Our love-making had much of the tepid smoothness of the lagoons. We talked in delicate innuendo of what should be glorious

freedoms. Margaret had missed Verona and Venice in her previous Italian journey—fear of the mosquito had driven her mother across Italy to the westward route—and now she could fill up her gaps and see the Titians and Paul Veroneses she already knew in colourless photographs, the Carpaccios, (the St. George series delighted her beyond measure,) the Basaitis and that great statue of Bartolomeo Colleoni that Ruskin praised.

But since I am not a man to look at pictures and architectural effects day after day, I did watch Margaret very closely and store a thousand memories of her. I can see her now, her long body drooping a little forward, her sweet face upraised to some discovered familiar masterpiece and shining with a delicate enthusiasm. I can hear again the soft cadences of her voice murmuring commonplace comments, for she had no gift of expressing the shapeless satisfaction these things gave her.

Margaret, I perceived, was a cultivated person, the first cultivated person with whom I had ever come into close contact. She was cultivated and moral, and I, I now realise, was never either of these things. She was passive, and I am active. She did not simply and naturally look for beauty but she had been incited to look for it at school, and took perhaps a keener interest in books and lectures and all the organisation of beautiful things than she did in beauty itself; she found much of her delight in being guided to it. Now a thing ceases to be beautiful to me when some finger points me out its merits. Beauty is the salt of life, but I take my beauty as a wild beast gets its salt, as a constituent of the meal. . . .

And besides, there was that between us that should have seemed more beautiful than any picture. . . .

So we went about Venice tracking down pictures and spiral staircases and such-like things, and my brains were busy all the time with such things as a comparison of Venice and its nearest modern equivalent, New York, with the elaboration of schemes of action when we returned to London, with the development of a theory of Margaret.

Our marriage had done this much at least, that it had fused and destroyed those two independent ways of thinking about her that had gone on in my mind hitherto. Suddenly she had become very near to me, and a very big thing, a sort of comprehensive generalisation behind a thousand questions, like the sky or England. The judgments and understandings that had worked when she was, so to speak, miles away from my life, had now to be altogether revised. Trifling things began to matter enormously, that she had a weak and easily fatigued back, for example, or that when she knitted her brows and stammered a little in talking, it didn't really mean that an exquisite significance struggled for utterance.

We visited pictures in the mornings chiefly. In the afternoon, unless we were making a day-long excursion in a gondola, Margaret would rest for an hour while I prowled about in search of English newspapers, and then we would go to tea in the Piazza San Marco and watch the drift of people feeding the pigeons and going into the little doors beneath the sunlit arches and domes of Saint Mark's. Then perhaps we would stroll on the Piazzetta, or go out into the sunset in a gondola. Mar-

garet became very interested in the shops that abound under the colonnades and decided at last to make an extensive purchase of table glass. "These things," she said, "are quite beautiful, and far cheaper than anything but the most ordinary looking English ware." I was interested in her idea, and a good deal charmed by the delightful qualities of tinted shape, slender handle and twisted stem. I suggested we should get not simply tumblers and wineglasses but bedroom waterbottles, fruit- and sweet-dishes, water-jugs, and in the end we made quite a business-like afternoon of it.

I was beginning now to long quite definitely for events. Energy was accumulating in me, and worrying me for an outlet. I found the *Times* and the *Daily Telegraph* and the other papers I managed to get hold of, more and more stimulating. I nearly wrote to the former paper one day in answer to a letter by Lord Grimthorpe—I forget now upon what point. I chafed secretly against this life of tranquil appreciations more and more. I found my attitudes of restrained and delicate affection for Margaret increasingly difficult to sustain. I surprised myself and her by little gusts of irritability, gusts like the catpaws before a gale. I was alarmed at these symptoms.

One night when Margaret had gone up to her room, I put on a light overcoat, went out into the night and prowled for a long time through the narrow streets, smoking and thinking. I returned and went and sat on the edge of her bed to talk to her.

"Look here, Margaret," I said; "this is all very well, but I'm restless."

"Restless!" she said with a faint surprise in her voice.

"Yes. I think I want exercise. I've got a sort of feeling—I've never had it before—as though I was getting fat."

"My dear!" she cried.

"I want to do things;—ride horses, climb mountains, take the devil out of myself."

She watched me thoughtfully.

"Couldn't we *do* something?" she said.

"Do what?"

"I don't know. Couldn't we perhaps go away from here soon—and walk in the mountains—on our way home."

I thought. "There seems to be no exercise at all in this place."

"Isn't there some walk?"

"I wonder," I answered. "We might walk to Chioggia perhaps, along the Lido." And we tried that, but the long stretch of beach fatigued Margaret's back, and gave her blisters, and we never got beyond Malamocco. . . .

A day or so after we went out to those pleasant black-robed, bearded Armenians in their monastery at Saint Lazzaro, and returned towards sundown. We fell into silence. "*Più lento*," said Margaret to the gondolier, and released my accumulated resolution.

"Let us go back to London," I said abruptly.

Margaret looked at me with surprised blue eyes.

"This is beautiful beyond measure, you know," I said, sticking to my point, "but I have work to do."

She was silent for some seconds. "I had forgotten," she said.

"So had I," I sympathised, and took her hand. "Suddenly I have remembered."

She remained quite still. "There is so much to be done," I said, almost apologetically.

She looked long away from me across the lagoon and at last sighed, like one who has drunk deeply, and turned to me.

"I suppose one ought not to be so happy," she said. "Everything has been so beautiful and so simple and splendid. And clean. It has been just With You—the time of my life. It's a pity such things must end. But the world is calling you, dear. . . . I ought not to have forgotten it. I thought you were resting—and thinking. But if you are rested.—Would you like us to start to-morrow?"

She looked at once so fragile and so devoted that on the spur of the moment I relented, and we stayed in Venice four more days.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HOUSE IN WESTMINSTER.

§ I.

MARGARET had already taken a little house in Radnor Square, Westminster, before our marriage, a house that seemed particularly adaptable to our needs as public-spirited efficient; it had been very pleasantly painted and papered under Margaret's instructions, white paint and clean open purples and green predominating, and now we set to work at once upon the interesting business of arranging and—with our Venetian glass as a beginning—furnishing it. We had been fairly fortunate with our wedding presents, and for the most part it was open to us to choose just exactly what we would have and just precisely where we would put it.

Margaret had a sense of form and colour altogether superior to mine, and so quite apart from the fact that it was her money equipped us, I stood aside from all these matters and obeyed her summons to a consultation only to endorse her judgment very readily. Until everything was settled I went every day to my old rooms in Vincent Square and worked at a series of papers that were originally intended for the *Fortnightly Review*, the papers that afterwards became my fourth book, "New Aspects of Liberalism."

I still remember as delightful most of the circumstances of getting into 79, Radnor Square. The thin flavour of indecision about Margaret disappeared altogether in a shop; she had the precisest ideas of what she wanted, and the devices of the salesman did not sway her. It was very pleasant to find her taking things out of my hands with a certain masterfulness, and showing the distinctest determination to make a house in which I should be able to work in that great project of "doing something for the world."

"And I do want to make things pretty about us," she said. "You don't think it wrong to have things pretty?"

"I want them so."

"*Altiora* has things hard."

"*Altiora*," I answered, "takes a pride in standing ugly and uncomfortable things. But I don't see that they help her. Anyhow they won't help me."

So Margaret went to the best shops and got everything very simple and very good. She bought some pictures very well indeed; there was a little Sussex landscape, full of wind and sunshine, by Nicholson, for my study, that hit my taste far better than if I had gone out to get some such expression for myself.

"We will buy a picture just now and then," she said, "sometimes—when we see one."

I would come back through the January mire or fog from Vincent Square to the door of 79, and reach it at last with a quite childish appreciation of the fact that its solid Georgian proportions and its fine brass furnishings belonged to *my* home; I would use my latch-key

and discover Margaret in the warm-lit, spacious hall with a partially opened packing-case, fatigued but happy, or go up to have tea with her out of the right tea things, "come at last," or be told to notice what was fresh there. It wasn't simply that I had never had a house before, but I had really never been, except in the most transitory way, in any house that was nearly so delightful as mine promised to be. Everything was fresh and bright, and softly and harmoniously toned. Downstairs we had a green dining-room with gleaming silver, dark oak, and English colour-prints; above was a large drawing-room that could be made still larger by throwing open folding doors, and it was all carefully done in greys and blues, for the most part with real Sheraton supplemented by Sheraton so skilfully imitated by an expert Margaret had discovered as to be indistinguishable except to a minute scrutiny. And for me, above this and next to my bedroom, there was a roomy study, with specially thick stair-carpet outside and thick carpets in the bedroom overhead and a big old desk for me to sit at and work between fire and window, and another desk specially made for me by that expert if I chose to stand and write, and open bookshelves and bookcases and every sort of convenient fitting. There were electric heaters beside the open fire, and everything was put for me to make tea at any time—electric kettle, infuser, biscuits and fresh butter, so that I could get up and work at any hour of the day or night. I could do no work in this apartment for a long time, I was so interested in the perfection of its arrangements. And when I brought in my books and papers from Vincent Square, Margaret seized upon all

the really shabby volumes and had them re-bound in a fine official-looking leather.

I can remember sitting down at that desk and looking round me and feeling with a queer effect of surprise that after all even a place in the Cabinet, though infinitely remote, was nevertheless in the same large world with these fine and quietly expensive things.

On the same floor Margaret had a "den," a very neat and pretty den with good colour-prints of Botticelli and Carpaccios, and there was a third apartment for sectarial purposes should the necessity for them arise, with a severe-looking desk equipped with patent files. And Margaret would come fitting into the room to me, or appear noiselessly standing, a tall gracefully drooping form, in the wide open doorway. "Is everything right, dear?" she would ask.

"Come in," I would say, "I'm sorting out papers."

She would come to the hearthrug.

"I mustn't disturb you," she would remark.

"I'm not busy yet."

"Things are getting into order. Then we must make out a time-table as the Baileys do, and *begin!*"

Altiora came in to see us once or twice, and a number of serious young wives known to Altiora called and were shown over the house, and discussed its arrangements with Margaret. They were all tremendously keen on efficient arrangements.

"A little pretty," said Altiora, with the faintest disapproval, "still——"

It was clear she thought we should grow out of that.

From the day of our return we found other people's houses open to us and eager for us. We went out of

London for week-ends and dined out, and began discussing our projects for reciprocating these hospitalities. As a single man unattached, I had had a wide and miscellaneous social range, but now I found myself falling into place in a set. For a time I acquiesced in this. I went very little to my clubs, the Climax and the National Liberal, and participated in no bachelor dinners at all. For a time, too, I dropped out of the garrulous literary and journalistic circles I had frequented. I put up for the Reform, not so much for the use of the club as a sign of serious and substantial political standing. I didn't go up to Cambridge, I remember, for nearly a year, so occupied was I with my new adjustments.

The people we found ourselves among at this time were people, to put it roughly, of the Parliamentary candidate class, or people already actually placed in the political world. They ranged between very considerable wealth and such a hard, bare independence as old Willersley and the sister who kept house for him possessed. There were quite a number of young couples like ourselves, a little younger and more artless, or a little older and more established. Among the younger men I had a sort of distinction because of my Cambridge reputation and my writing, and because, unlike them, I was an adventurer and had won and married my way into their circles instead of being naturally there. They couldn't quite reckon upon what I should do; they felt I had reserves of experience and incalculable traditions. Close to us were the Cramptons, Willie Crampton, who has since been Postmaster-General, rich and very important in Rockshire, and his younger brother Edward, who has specialised in history and be-

(come one of those unimaginative men of letters who are the glory of latter-day England. Then there was Lewis, farther towards Kensington, where his cousins the Solomons and the Hartsteins lived, a brilliant representative of his race, able, industrious and invariably uninspired, with a wife a little in revolt against the racial tradition of feminine servitude and inclined to the suffragette point of view, and Bunting Harblow, an old blue, and with an erratic disposition well under the control of the able little cousin he had married. I had known all these men, but now (with *Altiora* floating angelically in benediction) they opened their hearts to me and took me into their order. They were all like myself, prospective Liberal candidates, with a feeling that the period of wandering in the wilderness of opposition was drawing near its close. They were all tremendously keen upon social and political service, and all greatly under the sway of the ideal of a simple, strenuous life, a life finding its satisfactions in political achievements and distinctions. The young wives were as keen about it as the young husbands, Margaret most of all, and I—whatever elements in me didn't march with the attitudes and habits of this set were very much in the background during that time.

We would give little dinners and have evening gatherings at which everything was very simple and very good, with a slight but perceptible austerity, and there was more good fruit and flowers and less perhaps in the way of savouries, patties and entrées than was customary. Sherry we banished, and Marsala and liqueurs, and there was always good home-made lemonade available. No men waited, but very expert parlour-

maids. Our meat was usually Welsh mutton—I don't know why, unless that mountains have ever been the last refuge of the severer virtues. And we talked politics and books and ideas and Bernard Shaw (who was a department by himself and supposed in those days to be ethically sound at bottom), and mingled with the intellectuals—I myself was, as it were, a promoted intellectual.

The Cramptons had a tendency to read good things aloud on their less frequented receptions, but I have never been able to participate submissively in this hyper-digestion of written matter, and generally managed to provoke a disruptive debate. We were all very earnest to make the most of ourselves and to be and do, and I wonder still at times, with an unassuaged perplexity, how it is that in that phase of utmost earnestness I have always seemed to myself to be most remote from reality.

§ 2.

I look back now across the detaching intervention of sixteen crowded years, critically and I fancy almost impartially, to those beginnings of my married life. I try to recall something near to their proper order the developing phases of relationship. I am struck most of all by the immense unpremeditated, generous-spirited insincerities upon which Margaret and I were building.

It seems to me that here I have to tell perhaps the commonest experience of all among married educated people, the deliberate, shy, complex effort to fill the yawning gaps in temperament as they appear, the sustained, failing attempt to bridge abysses, level barriers,

evade violent pressures. I have come these latter years of my life to believe that it is possible for a man and woman to be absolutely real with one another, to stand naked souled to each other, unashamed and unafraid, because of the natural all-glorifying love between them. It is possible to love and be loved untroubling, as a bird flies through the air. But it is a rare and intricate chance that brings two people within sight of that essential union, and for the majority marriage must adjust itself on other terms. Most coupled people never really look at one another. They look a little away to preconceived ideas. And each from the first days of love-making *hides* from the other, is afraid of disappointing, afraid of offending, afraid of discoveries in either sense. They build not solidly upon the rock of truth, but upon arches and pillars and queer provisional supports that are needed to make a common foundation, and below in the imprisoned darknesses, below the fine fabric they sustain together begins for each of them a cavernous hidden life. Down there things may be prowling that scarce ever peep out to consciousness except in the grey half-light of sleepless nights, passions that flash out for an instant in an angry glance and are seen no more, starved victims and beautiful dreams bricked up to die. For the most of us there is no jail delivery of those inner depths, and the life above goes on to its honourable end.

I have told how I loved Margaret and how I came to marry her. Perhaps already unintentionally I have indicated the quality of the injustice our marriage did us both. There was no kindred between us and no understanding. We were drawn to one another by the

unlikeness of our quality, by the things we misunderstood in each other. I know a score of couples who have married in that fashion.

Modern conditions and modern ideas, and in particular the intenser and subtler perceptions of modern life, press more and more heavily upon a marriage tie whose fashion comes from an earlier and less discriminating time. When the wife was her husband's subordinate, meeting him simply and uncritically for simple ends, when marriage was a purely domestic relationship, leaving thought and the vivid things of life almost entirely to the unencumbered man, mental and temperamental incompatibilities mattered comparatively little. But now the wife, and particularly the loving childless wife, unpremeditatedly makes a relentless demand for a complete association, and the husband exacts unthought of delicacies of understanding and co-operation. These are stupendous demands. People not only think more fully and elaborately about life than they ever did before, but marriage obliges us to make that ever more accidented progress a three-legged race of carelessly assorted couples. . . .

Our very mental texture was different. I was tough-minded, to use the phrase of William James, primary and intuitive and illogical; she was tender-minded, logical, refined and secondary. She was loyal to pledge and persons, sentimental and faithful; I am loyal to ideas and instincts, emotional and scheming. My imagination moves in broad gestures; hers was delicate with a real dread of extravagance. My quality is sensuous and ruled by warm impulses; hers was discriminating and essentially inhibitory. I like the facts of the case and

to mention everything; I like naked bodies and the jolly smells of things. She abounded in reservations, in circumlocutions and evasions, in keenly appreciated secondary points. Perhaps the reader knows that Tintoretto in the National Gallery, the Origin of the Milky Way. It is an admirable test of temperamental quality. In spite of my early training I have come to regard that picture as altogether delightful; to Margaret it has always been "needlessly offensive." In that you have our fundamental breach. She had a habit, by no means rare, of damning what she did not like or find sympathetic in me on the score that it was not my "true self," and she did not so much accept the universe as select from it and do her best to ignore the rest. And also I had far more initiative than had she. This is no catalogue of rights and wrongs, or superiorities and inferiorities; it is a catalogue of differences between two people linked in a relationship that constantly becomes more intolerant of differences.

This is how we stood to each other, and none of it was clear to either of us at the outset. To begin with, I found myself reserving myself from her, then slowly apprehending a jarring between our minds and what seemed to me at first a queer little habit of misunderstanding in her. . . .

It did not hinder my being very fond of her. . . .

Where our system of reservation became at once most usual and most astounding was in our personal relations. It is not too much to say that in that regard we never for a moment achieved sincerity with one another during the first six years of our life together. It goes even deeper than that, for in my effort to realise

the ideal of my marriage I ceased even to attempt to be sincere with myself. I would not admit my own perceptions and interpretations. I tried to fit myself to her thinner and finer determinations. There are people who will say with a note of approval that I was learning to conquer myself. I record that much without any note of approval. . . .

For some years I never deceived Margaret about any concrete fact nor, except for the silence about my earlier life that she had almost forced upon me, did I hide any concrete fact that seemed to affect her, but from the outset I was guilty of immense spiritual concealments, my very marriage was based, I see now, on a spiritual subterfuge; I hid moods from her, pretended feelings. . . .

§ 3.

The interest and excitement of setting up a house, of walking about it from room to room and from floor to floor, or sitting at one's own dinner-table and watching one's wife control conversation with a pretty, timid resolution, of taking a place among the secure and free people of our world, passed almost insensibly into the interest and excitement of my Parliamentary candidature for the Kinghamstead Division, that shapeless chunk of agricultural midland between the Great Western and the North Western railways. I was going to "take hold" at last, the Kinghamstead Division was my appointed handle. I was to find my place in the rather indistinctly sketched constructions that were implicit in the minds of all our circle. The precise place I had to fill and the precise functions I had to discharge were not

as yet very clear, but all that, we felt sure, would become plain as things developed.

A few brief months of vague activities of "nursing" gave place to the excitements of the contest that followed the return of Mr. Campbell-Bannerman to power in 1905. So far as the Kinghamstead Division was concerned it was a depressed and tepid battle. I went about the constituency making three speeches that were soon threadbare, and an odd little collection of people worked for me; two solicitors, a cheap photographer, a democratic parson, a number of dissenting ministers, the Mayor of Kinghamstead, a Mrs. Bulger, the widow of an old Chartist who had grown rich through electric traction patents, Sir Roderick Newton, a Jew who had bought Calersham Castle, and old Sir Graham Rivers, that sturdy old soldier, were among my chief supporters. We had headquarters in each town and village, mostly there were empty shops we leased temporarily, and there at least a sort of fuss and a coming and going were maintained. The rest of the population stared in a state of suspended judgment as we went about the business. The country was supposed to be in a state of intellectual conflict and deliberate decision, in history it will no doubt figure as a momentous conflict. Yet except for an occasional flare of bill-sticking or a bill in a window or a placard-plastered motor-car or an argumentative group of people outside a public-house or a sluggish movement towards the schoolroom or village hall, there was scarcely a sign that a great empire was revising its destinies. Now and then one saw a canvasser on a doorstep. For the most part people went about their business with an entirely irresponsible con-

fidence in the stability of the universe. At times one felt a little absurd with one's flutter of colours and one's air of saving the country.

My opponent was a quite undistinguished Major-General who relied upon his advocacy of Protection, and was particularly anxious we should avoid "personalities" and fight the constituency in a gentlemanly spirit. He was always writing me notes, apologising for excesses on the part of his supporters, or pointing out the undesirability of some course taken by mine.

My speeches had been planned upon broad lines, but they lost touch with these as the polling approached. To begin with I made a real attempt to put what was in my mind before the people I was to supply with a political voice. I spoke of the greatness of our empire and its destinies, of the splendid projects and possibilities of life and order that lay before the world, of all that a resolute and constructive effort might do at the present time. "We are building a state," I said, "secure and splendid, we are in the dawn of the great age of mankind." Sometimes that would get a solitary "Ear! 'ear!" Then having created, as I imagined, a fine atmosphere, I turned upon the history of the last Conservative administration and brought it into contrast with the wide occasions of the age; discussed its failure to control the grasping financiers in South Africa, its failure to release public education from sectarian squabbles, its misconduct of the Boer War, its waste of the world's resources. . . .

It soon became manifest that my opening and my general spaciousness of method bored my audiences a good deal. The richer and wider my phrases the

thinner sounded my voice in these non-resonating gatherings. Even the platform supporters grew restive unconsciously, and stirred and coughed. They did not recognise themselves as mankind. Building an empire, preparing a fresh stage in the history of humanity, had no appeal for them. They were mostly everyday, toiling people, full of small personal solitudes, and they came to my meetings, I think, very largely as a relaxation. This stuff was not relaxing. They did not think politics was a great constructive process, they thought it was a kind of dog-fight. They wanted fun, they wanted spice, they wanted hits, they wanted also a chance to say "Ear, 'ear!" in an intelligent and honourable manner and clap their hands and drum with their feet. The great constructive process in history gives so little scope for clapping and drumming and saying "Ear, 'ear!" One might as well think of hounding on the solar system.

So after one or two attempts to lift my audiences to the level of the issues involved, I began to adapt myself to them. I cut down my review of our imperial outlook and destinies more and more, and developed a series of hits and anecdotes and—what shall I call them?—"crudifications" of the issue. My helpers congratulated me on the rapid improvement of my platform style. I ceased to speak of the late Prime Minister with the respect I bore him, and began to fall in with the popular caricature of him as an artful rabbit-witted person intent only on keeping his leadership, in spite of the vigorous attempts of Mr. Joseph Chamberlain to oust him therefrom. I ceased to qualify my statement that Protection would make food

dearer for the agricultural labourer. I began to speak of Mr. Alfred Lyttelton as an influence at once insane and diabolical, as a man inspired by a passionate desire to substitute manacled but still criminal Chinese for honest British labourers throughout the world. And when it came to the mention of our own kindly leader, of Mr. John Burns or anyone else of any prominence at all on our side I fell more and more into the intonation of one who mentions the high gods. And I had my reward in brighter meetings and readier and readier applause.

One goes on from phase to phase in these things.

"After all," I told myself, "if one wants to get to Westminster one must follow the road that leads there," but I found the road nevertheless rather unexpectedly distasteful. "When one gets there," I said, "then it is one begins."

But I would lie awake at nights with that sore throat and headache and fatigue which come from speaking in ill-ventilated rooms, and wondering how far it was possible to educate a whole people to great political ideals. Why should political work always rot down to personalities and personal appeals in this way? Life is, I suppose, to begin with and end with a matter of personalities, from personalities all our broader interests arise and to personalities they return. All our social and political effort, all of it, is like trying to make a crowd of people fall into formation. The broader lines appear, but then come a rush and excitement and irrelevancy, and forthwith the incipient order has vanished and the marshals must begin the work over again!

My memory of all that time is essentially confusion. There was a frightful lot of tiresome locomotion in it; for the Kinghamstead Division is extensive, abounding in ill-graded and badly metalled cross-roads and vicious little hills, and singularly unpleasing to the eye in a muddy winter. It is sufficiently near to London to have undergone the same process of ill-regulated expansion that made Bromstead the place it is. Several of its overgrown villages have developed strings of factories and sidings along the railway lines, and there is an abundance of petty villas. There seemed to be no place at which one could take hold of more than this or that element of the population. Now we met in a meeting-house, now in a Masonic Hall or Drill Hall; I also did a certain amount of open-air speaking in the dinner hour outside gas-works and groups of factories. Some special sort of people was, as it were, secreted in response to each special appeal. One said things carefully adjusted to the distinctive limitations of each gathering. Jokes of an incredible silliness and shallowness drifted about us. Our advisers made us declare that if we were elected we would live in the district, and one hasty agent had bills printed, "If Mr. Remington is elected he will live here." The enemy obtained a number of these bills and stuck them on outhouses, pigstyes, dog-kennels; you cannot imagine how irksome the repetition of that jest became. The vast drifting indifference in between my meetings impressed me more and more. I realised the vagueness of my own plans as I had never done before I brought them to the test of this experience. I was perplexed by the riddle of just how far I was, in any sense of

the word, taking hold at all, how far I wasn't myself flowing into an accepted groove.

Margaret was troubled by no such doubts. She was clear I had to go into Parliament on the side of Liberalism and the light, as against the late Government and darkness. Essential to the memory of my first contest, is the memory of her clear bright face, very resolute and grave, helping me consciously, steadfastly, with all her strength. Her quiet confidence, while I was so dissatisfied, worked curiously towards the alienation of my sympathies. I felt she had no business to be so sure of me. I had moments of vivid resentment at being thus marched towards Parliament.

I seemed now always to be discovering alien forces of character in her. Her way of taking life diverged from me more and more. She sounded amazing, independent notes. She bought some particularly costly furs for the campaign that roused enthusiasm whenever she appeared. She also made me a birthday present in November of a heavily fur-trimmed coat and this she would make me remove as I went onto the platform, and hold over her arm until I was ready to resume it. It was fearfully heavy for her and she liked it to be heavy for her. That act of servitude was in essence a towering self-assertion. I would glance sideways while some chairman floundered through his introduction and see the clear blue eye with which she regarded the audience, which existed so far as she was concerned merely to return me to Parliament. It was a friendly eye, provided they were not silly or troublesome. But it kindled a little at the hint of a hostile question. After we had come so far and taken so much trouble!

She constituted herself the dragoman of our political travels. In hotels she was serenely resolute for the quietest and the best, she rejected all their proposals for meals and substituted a severely nourishing dietary of her own, and even in private houses she astonished me by her tranquil insistence upon special comforts and sustenance. I can see her face now as it would confront a hostess, a little intent, but sweetly resolute and assured.

Since our marriage she had read a number of political memoirs, and she had been particularly impressed by the career of Mrs. Gladstone. I don't think it occurred to her to compare and contrast my quality with that of Mrs. Gladstone's husband. I suspect her of a deliberate intention of achieving parallel results by parallel methods. I was to be Gladstonised. Gladstone it appeared used to lubricate his speeches with a mixture—if my memory serves me right—of egg beaten up in sherry, and Margaret was very anxious I should take a leaf from that celebrated book. She wanted, I know, to hold the glass in her hand while I was speaking.

But here I was firm. "No," I said, very decisively, "simply I won't stand that. It's a matter of conscience. I shouldn't feel—democratic. I'll take my chance of the common water in the carafe on the chairman's table."

"I *do* wish you wouldn't," she said, distressed. . . .

It was absurd to feel irritated; it was so admirable of her, a little childish, infinitely womanly and devoted and fine—and I see now how pathetic. But I could not afford to succumb to her. I wanted to follow my own leading, to see things clearly, and this reassuring pose of a high destiny, of an almost terribly efficient pursuit of a fixed end when as a matter of fact I had a very

doubtful end and an aim as yet by no means fixed, was all too seductive for dalliance. . . .

§ 4.

And into all these things with the manner of a trifling and casual incident comes the figure of Isabel Rivers. My first impressions of her were of a rather ugly and ungainly, extraordinarily interesting schoolgirl with a beautiful quick flush under her warm brown skin, who said and did amusing and surprising things. When first I saw her she was riding a very old bicycle downhill with her feet on the fork of the frame—it seemed to me to the public danger, but afterwards I came to understand the quality of her nerve better—and on the third occasion she was for her own private satisfaction climbing a tree. On the intervening occasion we had what seems now to have been a long sustained conversation about the political situation and the books and papers I had written.

I wonder if it was.

What a delightful mixture of child and grave woman she was at that time, and how little I reckoned on the part she would play in my life! And since she has played that part, how impossible it is to tell now of those early days! Since I wrote that opening paragraph to this section my idle pen has been, as it were, playing by itself and sketching faces on the blotting pad—one impish wizened visage is oddly like little Bailey—and I have been thinking cheek on fist amidst a limitless wealth of memories. She sits below me on the low wall under the olive-trees with our little child in her arms. She is now the central fact in my life. It still seems a little incredible that that should

be so. She has destroyed me as a politician, brought me to this belated re-beginning of life. When I sit down and try to make her a girl again, I feel like the Arabian fisherman who tried to put the genius back into the pot from which it had spread gigantic across the skies. . . .

I have a very clear vision of her rush downhill past our labouring ascendant car—my colours fluttered from handle-bar and shoulder-knot—and her waving hand and the sharp note of her voice. She cried out something, I don't know what, some greeting.

"What a pretty girl!" said Margaret.

Parvill, the cheap photographer, that industrious organiser for whom by way of repayment I got those magic letters, that knighthood of the underlings, "J. P." was in the car with us and explained her to us. "One of the best workers you have," he said. . . .

And then after a toilsome troubled morning we came, rather cross from the strain of sustained amiability, to Sir Graham Rivers' house. It seemed all softness and quiet—I recall dead white panelling and oval mirrors horizontally set and a marble fireplace between white marble-blind Homer and marble-blind Virgil, very grave and fine—and how Isabel came in to lunch in a shapeless thing like a blue smock that made her bright quick-changing face seem yellow under her cloud of black hair. Her stepsister was there, Miss Gamer, to whom the house was to descend, a well-dressed lady of thirty, amiably disavowing responsibility for Isabel in every phrase and gesture. And there was a very pleasant doctor, an Oxford man, who seemed on excellent terms with everyone. It was manifest that he

was in the habit of sparring with the girl, but on this occasion she wasn't sparring and refused to be teased into a display in spite of the taunts of either him or her father. She was, they discovered with rising eyebrows, shy. It seemed an opportunity too rare for them to miss. They proclaimed her enthusiasm for me in a way that brought a flush to her cheek and a look into her eye between appeal and defiance. They declared she had read my books, which I thought at the time was exaggeration, their dry political quality was so distinctly not what one was accustomed to regard as schoolgirl reading. Miss Gamer protested to protect her, "When once in a blue moon Isabel is well-behaved. . . .!"

Except for these attacks I do not remember much of the conversation at table; it was, I know, discursive and concerned with the sort of topographical and social and electioneering fact natural to such a visit. Old Rivers struck me as a delightful person, modestly unconscious of his doubly-earned V. C. and the plucky defence of Kardin-Bergat that won his baronetcy. He was that excellent type, the soldier radical, and we began that day a friendship that was only ended by his death in the hunting-field three years later. He interested Margaret into a disregard of my plate and the fact that I had secured the illegal indulgence of Moselle. After lunch we went for coffee into another low room, this time brown panelled and looking through French windows on a red-walled garden, graceful even in its winter desolation. And there the conversation suddenly picked up and became good. It had fallen to a pause, and the doctor, with an air of definitely throw-

ing off a mask and wrecking an established tranquillity, remarked: "Very probably you Liberals will come in, though I'm not sure you'll come in so mightily as you think, but what you'll do when you do come in passes my comprehension."

"There's good work sometimes," said Sir Graham, "in undoing."

"You can't govern a great empire by amending and repealing the Acts of your predecessors," said the doctor.

There came that kind of pause that happens when a subject is broached too big and difficult for the gathering. Margaret's blue eyes regarded the speaker with quiet disapproval for a moment, and then came to me in the not too confident hope that I would snub him out of existence with some prompt rhetorical stroke. A voice spoke out of the big armchair.

"We'll do things," said Isabel.

The doctor's eye lit with the joy of the fisherman who strikes his fish at last. "What will you do?" he asked her.

"Everyone knows we're a mixed lot," said Isabel.

"Poor old chaps like me!" interjected the general.

"But that's not a programme," said the doctor.

"But Mr. Remington has published a programme," said Isabel.

The doctor cocked half an eye at me.

"In some review," the girl went on. "After all, we're not going to elect the whole Liberal party in the Kinghamstead Division. I'm a Remington-ite!"

"But the programme," said the doctor, "the programme——"

"In front of Mr. Remington!"

"Scandal always comes home at last," said the doctor. "Let him hear the worst."

"I'd like to hear," I said. "Electioneering shatters convictions and enfeebles the mind."

"Not mine," said Isabel stoutly. "I mean——. Well, anyhow I take it Mr. Remington stands for constructing a civilised state out of this muddle."

"*This* muddle," protested the doctor with an appeal of the eye to the beautiful long room and the ordered garden outside the bright clean windows.

"Well, *that* muddle, if you like! There's a slum within a mile of us already. The dust and blacks get worse and worse, Sissie?"

"They do," agreed Miss Gamer.

"Mr. Remington stands for construction, order, education, discipline."

"And you?" said the doctor.

"I'm a good Remington-ite."

"Discipline!" said the doctor.

"Oh!" said Isabel. "At times one has to be—Napoleonic. They want to libel me, Mr. Remington. A political worker can't always be in time for meals, can she? At times one has to make—splendid cuts."

Miss Gamer said something indistinctly.

"Order, education, discipline," said Sir Graham. "Excellent things! But I've a sort of memory—in my young days—we talked about something called liberty."

"Liberty under the law," I said, with an unexpected approving murmur from Margaret, and took up the defence. "The old Liberal definition of liberty was a

trifle uncritical. Privilege and legal restrictions are not the only enemies of liberty. An uneducated, underbred, and underfed propertyless man is a man who has lost the possibility of liberty. There's no liberty worth a rap for him. A man who is swimming hopelessly for life wants nothing but the liberty to get out of the water; he'll give every other liberty for it—until he gets out."

Sir Graham took me up and we fell into a discussion of the changing qualities of Liberalism. It was a good give-and-take talk, extraordinarily refreshing after the nonsense and crowding secondary issues of the electioneering outside. We all contributed more or less except Miss Gamer; Margaret followed with knitted brows and occasional interjections. "People won't *see* that," for example, and "It all seems so plain to me." The doctor showed himself clever but unsubstantial and inconsistent. Isabel sat back with her black mop of hair buried deep in the chair looking quickly from face to face. Her colour came and went with her vivid intellectual excitement; occasionally she would dart a word, usually a very apt word, like a lizard's tongue into the discussion. I remember chiefly that a chance illustration betrayed that she had read Bishop Burnet. . . .

After that it was not surprising that Isabel should ask for a lift in our car as far as the Lurky Committee Room, and that she should offer me quite sound advice *en route* upon the intellectual temperament of the Lurky gasworkers. . . .

On the third occasion that I saw Isabel she was, as I have said, climbing a tree—and a very creditable tree—for her own private satisfaction. It was a lapse

from the high seriousness of politics, and I perceived she felt that I might regard it as such and attach too much importance to it. I had some difficulty in reassuring her. And it's odd to note now—it has never occurred to me before—that from that day to this I do not think I have ever reminded Isabel of that encounter.

And after that memory she seems to be flickering about always in the election, an inextinguishable flame; now she flew by on her bicycle, now she dashed into committee rooms, now she appeared on doorsteps in animated conversation with dubious voters; I took every chance I could to talk to her—I had never met anything like her before in the world, and she interested me immensely—and before the polling day she and I had become, in the frankest simplicity, fast friends. . . .

That, I think, sets out very fairly the facts of our early relationship. But it is hard to get it true, either in form or texture, because of the bright, translucent, coloured, and refracting memories that come between. One forgets not only the tint and quality of thoughts and impressions through that intervening haze, one forgets them altogether. I don't remember now that I ever thought in those days of passionate love or the possibility of such love between us. I may have done so again and again. But I doubt it very strongly. I don't think I ever thought of such aspects. I had no more sense of any danger between us, seeing the years and things that separated us, than I could have had if she had been an intelligent bright-eyed bird. Isabel came into my life as a new sort of thing; she didn't join on at all to my previous experiences of womanhood.

They were not, as I have laboured to explain, either very wide or very penetrating experiences, on the whole, "strangled dinginess" expresses them, but I do not believe they were narrower or shallower than those of many other men of my class. I thought of women as pretty things and beautiful things, pretty rather than beautiful, attractive and at times disconcertingly attractive, often bright and witty, but, because of the vast reservations that hid them from me, wanting, subtly and inevitably wanting, in understanding. My idealisation of Margaret had evaporated insensibly after our marriage. The shrine I had made for her in my private thoughts stood at last undisguisedly empty. But Isabel did not for a moment admit of either idealisation or interested contempt. She opened a new sphere of womanhood to me. With her steady amber-brown eyes, her unaffected interest in impersonal things, her upstanding waistless blue body, her energy, decision and courage, she seemed rather some new and infinitely finer form of boyhood than a feminine creature, as I had come to measure femininity. She was my perfect friend. Could I have foreseen, had my world been more wisely planned, to this day we might have been such friends.

She seemed at that time unconscious of sex, though she has told me since how full she was of protesting curiosities and restrained emotions. She spoke, as indeed she has always spoken, simply, clearly, and vividly; schoolgirl slang mingled with words that marked ample voracious reading, and she moved quickly with the free directness of some graceful young animal. She took many of the easy freedoms a man or a sister

might have done with me. She would touch my arm, lay a hand on my shoulder as I sat, adjust the lapel of a breast-pocket as she talked to me. She says now she loved me always from the beginning. I doubt if there was a suspicion of that in her mind those days. I used to find her regarding me with the clearest, steadiest gaze in the world, exactly like the gaze of some nice healthy innocent animal in a forest, interested, enquiring, speculative, but singularly untroubled. . . .

§ 5.

Polling day came after a last hoarse and dingy crescendo. The excitement was not of the sort that makes one forget one is tired out. The waiting for the end of the count has left a long blank mark on my memory, and then everyone was shaking my hand and repeating: "Nine hundred and seventy-six."

My success had been a foregone conclusion since the afternoon, but we all behaved as though we had not been anticipating this result for hours, as though any other figures but nine hundred and seventy-six would have meant something entirely different. "Nine hundred and seventy-six!" said Margaret. "They didn't expect three hundred."

"Nine hundred and seventy-six," said a little short man with a paper. "It means a big turnover. Two dozen short of a thousand, you know."

A tremendous hullaboo began outside, and a lot of fresh people came into the room.

Isabel, flushed but not out of breath, Heaven knows where she had sprung from at that time of night! was

running her hand down my sleeve almost caressingly, with the innocent bold affection of a girl. "Got you in!" she said. "It's been no end of a lark."

"And now," said I, "I must go and be constructive."

"Now you must go and be constructive," she said.

"You've got to live here," she added.

"By Jove! yes," I said. "We'll have to house hunt."

"I shall read all your speeches."

She hesitated.

"I wish I was you," she said, and said it as though it was not exactly the thing she was meaning to say.

"They want you to speak," said Margaret, with something unsaid in her face.

"You must come out with me," I answered, putting my arm through hers, and felt someone urging me to the French windows that gave on the balcony.

"If you think——" she said, yielding gladly.

"Oh, *rather!*" said I.

The Mayor of Kinghamstead, a managing little man with no great belief in my oratorical powers, was sticking his face up to mine.

"It's all over," he said, "and you've won. Say all the nice things you can and say them plainly."

I turned and handed Margaret out through the window and stood looking over the Market-place, which was more than half filled with swaying people. The crowd set up a roar of approval at the sight of us, tempered by a little booing. Down in one corner of the square a fight was going on for a flag, a fight that even the prospect of a speech could not instantly check. "Speech!" cried voices, "Speech!" and then a brief "boo-oo-oo" that was drowned in a cascade of shouts

and cheers. The conflict round the flag culminated in the smashing of a pane of glass in the chemist's window and instantly sank to peace.

"Gentlemen voters of the Kinghamstead Division," I began.

"Votes for Women!" yelled a voice, amidst laughter—the first time I remember hearing that memorable war-cry.

"Three cheers for Mrs. Remington!"

"Mrs. Remington asks me to thank you," I said, amidst further uproar and reiterated cries of "Speech!"

Then silence came with a startling swiftness.

Isabel was still in my mind, I suppose. "I shall go to Westminster," I began. I sought for some compelling phrase and could not find one. "To do my share," I went on, "in building up a great and splendid civilisation."

I paused, and there was a weak gust of cheering, and then a renewal of booing.

"This election," I said, "has been the end and the beginning of much. New ideas are abroad——"

"Chinese labour," yelled a voice, and across the square swept a wildfire of hooting and bawling.

It is one of the few occasions when I quite lost my hold on a speech. I glanced sideways and saw the Mayor of Kinghamstead speaking behind his hand to Parvill. By a happy chance Parvill caught my eye.

"What do they want?" I asked.

"Eh?"

"What do they want?"

"Say something about general fairness—the other side," prompted Parvill, flattered but a little surprised

by my appeal. I pulled myself hastily into a more popular strain with a gross eulogy of my opponent's good taste.

"Chinese labour!" cried the voice again.

"You've given that notice to quit," I answered.

The Market-place roared delight, but whether that delight expressed hostility to Chinamen or hostility to their practical enslavement no student of the General Election of 1906 has ever been able to determine. Certainly one of the most effective posters on our side displayed a hideous yellow face, just that and nothing more. There was not even a legend to it. How it impressed the electorate we did not know, but that it impressed the electorate profoundly there can be no disputing.

§ 6.

Kinghamstead was one of the earliest constituencies fought, and we came back—it must have been Saturday—triumphant but very tired, to our house in Radnor Square. In the train we read the first intimations that the victory of our party was likely to be a sweeping one.

Then came a period when one was going about receiving and giving congratulations and watching the other men arrive, very like a boy who has returned to school with the first batch after the holidays. The London world reeked with the General Election; it had invaded the nurseries. All the children of one's friends had got big maps of England cut up into squares to represent constituencies and were busy sticking gummed blue labels over the conquered red of Unionism that had hitherto submerged the country. And there were

also orange labels, if I remember rightly, to represent the new Labour party, and green for the Irish. I engaged myself to speak at one or two London meetings, and lunched at the Reform, which was fairly tepid, and dined and spent one or two tumultuous evenings at the National Liberal Club, which was in active eruption. The National Liberal became feverishly congested towards midnight as the results of the counting came dropping in. A big green-baize screen had been fixed up at one end of the large smoking-room with the names of the constituencies that were voting that day, and directly the figures came to hand, up they went, amidst cheers that at last lost their energy through sheer repetition, whenever there was record of a Liberal gain. I don't remember what happened when there was a Liberal loss; I don't think that any were announced while I was there.

How packed and noisy the place was, and what a reek of tobacco and whisky fumes we made! Everybody was excited and talking, making waves of harsh confused sound that beat upon one's ears, and every now and then hoarse voices would shout for someone to speak. Our little set was much in evidence. Both the Cramptons were in, Lewis, Bunting Harblow. We gave brief addresses attuned to this excitement and the late hour, amidst much enthusiasm.

"Now we can *do* things!" I said amidst a rapture of applause. Men I did not know from Adam held up glasses and nodded to me in solemn fuddled approval as I came down past them into the crowd again.

Men were betting whether the Unionists would lose more or less than two hundred seats.

"I wonder just what we shall do with it all," I heard one sceptic speculating. . . .

After these orgies I would get home very tired and excited, and find it difficult to get to sleep. I would lie and speculate about what it was we *were* going to do. One hadn't anticipated quite such a tremendous accession to power for one's party. Liberalism was swirling in like a flood. . . .

I found the next few weeks very unsatisfactory and distressing. I don't clearly remember what it was I had expected; I suppose the fuss and strain of the General Election had built up a feeling that my return would in some way put power into my hands, and instead I found myself a mere undistinguished unit in a vast but rather vague majority. There were moments when I felt very distinctly that a majority could be too big a crowd altogether. I had all my work still before me, I had achieved nothing as yet but opportunity, and a very crowded opportunity it was at that. Everyone about me was chatting Parliament and appointments; one breathed distracting and irritating speculations as to what would be done and who would be asked to do it. I was chiefly impressed by what was unlikely to be done and by the absence of any general plan of legislation to hold us all together. I found the talk about Parliamentary procedure and etiquette particularly trying. We dined with the elder Cramptons one evening, and old Sir Edward was lengthily sage about what the House liked, what it didn't like, what made a good impression and what a bad one. "A man shouldn't speak more than twice in his first session, and

not at first on too contentious a topic," said Sir Edward. "No."

"Very much depends on manner. The House hates a lecturer. There's a sort of airy earnestness——"

He waved his cigar to eke out his words.

"Little peculiarities of costume count for a great deal. I could name one man who spent three years living down a pair of spatterdashers. On the other hand—a thing like that—if it catches the eye of the *Punch* man, for example, may be your making."

He went off into a lengthy speculation of why the House had come to like an originally unpopular Irishman named Biggar. . . .

The opening of Parliament gave me some peculiar moods. I began to feel more and more like a branded sheep. We were sworn in in batches, dozens and scores of fresh men, trying not to look too fresh under the inspection of policemen and messengers, all of us carrying new silk hats and wearing magisterial coats. It is one of my vivid memories from this period, the sudden outbreak of silk hats in the smoking-room of the National Liberal Club. At first I thought there must have been a funeral. Familiar faces that one had grown to know under soft felt hats, under bowlers, under liberal-minded wide brims, and above artistic ties and tweed jackets, suddenly met one, staring with the stern gaze of self-consciousness, from under silk hats of incredible glossiness. There was a disposition to wear the hat much too forward, I thought, for a good Parliamentary style.

There was much play with the hats all through; a tremendous competition to get in first and put hats on

coveted seats. A memory hangs about me of the House in the early afternoon, an inhumane desolation inhabited almost entirely by silk hats. The current use of cards to secure seats came later. There were yards and yards of empty green benches with hats and hats and hats distributed along them, resolute-looking top hats, lax top hats with a kind of shadowy grin under them, sensible top hats brim upward, and one scandalous incontinent that had rolled from the front Opposition bench right to the middle of the floor. A headless hat is surely the most soulless thing in the world, far worse even than a skull. . . .

At last, in a leisurely muddled manner we got to the Address; and I found myself packed in a dense elbowing crowd to the right of the Speaker's chair; while the attenuated Opposition, nearly leaderless after the massacre, tilted its brim to its nose and sprawled at its ease amidst its empty benches.

There was a tremendous hullaboo about something, and I craned to see over the shoulder of the man in front. "Order, order, order!"

"What's it about?" I asked.

The man in front of me was clearly no better informed, and then I gathered from a slightly contemptuous Scotchman beside me that it was Chris Robinson had walked between the honourable member in possession of the house and the Speaker. I caught a glimpse of him blushingly whispering about his misadventure to a colleague. He was just that same little figure I had once assisted to entertain at Cambridge, but grey-haired now, and still it seemed with the same knitted muffler

he had discarded for a reckless half-hour while he talked to us in Hatherleigh's rooms.

It dawned upon me that I wasn't particularly wanted in the House, and that I should get all I needed of the opening speeches next day from the *Times*.

I made my way out and was presently walking rather aimlessly through the outer lobby.

I caught myself regarding the shadow that spread itself out before me, multiplied itself in blue tints of various intensity, shuffled itself like a pack of cards under the many lights, the square shoulders, the silk hat, already worn with a parliamentary tilt backward; I found I was surveying this statesmanlike outline with a weak approval. "A *member!*" I felt the little cluster of people that were scattered about the lobby must be saying.

"Good God!" I said in hot reaction, "what am I doing here?"

It was one of those moments infinitely trivial in themselves, that yet are cardinal in a man's life. It came to me with extreme vividness that it wasn't so much that I had got hold of something as that something had got hold of me. I distinctly recall the rebound of my mind. Whatever happened in this Parliament, I at least would attempt something. "By God!" I said, "I won't be overwhelmed. I am here to do something, and do something I will!"

But I felt that for the moment I could not remain in the House.

I went out by myself with my thoughts into the night. It was a chilling night, and rare spots of rain were falling. I glanced over my shoulder at the lit

windows of the Lords. I walked, I remember, westward, and presently came to the Grosvenor Embankment and followed it, watching the glittering black rush of the river and the dark, dimly lit barges round which the water swirled. Across the river was the hunched sky-line of Doulton's potteries, and a kiln flared redly. Dimly luminous trams were gliding amidst a dotted line of lamps, and two little trains crawled into Waterloo station. Mysterious black figures came by me and were suddenly changed to the commonplace at the touch of the nearer lamps. It was a big confused world, I felt, for a man to lay his hands upon.

I remember I crossed Vauxhall Bridge and stood for a time watching the huge black shapes in the darkness under the gas-works. A shoal of coal barges lay indistinctly on the darkly shining mud and water below, and a colossal crane was perpetually hauling up coal into mysterious blacknesses above, and dropping the empty clutch back to the barges. Just one or two minute black featureless figures of men toiled amidst these monster shapes. They did not seem to be controlling them but only moving about among them. These gas-works have a big chimney that belches a lurid flame into the night, a livid shivering bluish flame, shot with strange crimson streaks. . . .

On the other side of Lambeth Bridge broad stairs go down to the lapping water of the river; the lower steps are luminous under the lamps and one treads unwarned into thick soft Thames mud. They seem to be purely architectural steps, they lead nowhere, they have an air of absolute indifference to mortal ends.

Those shapes and large inhuman places—for all of

mankind that one sees at night about Lambeth is minute and pitiful beside the industrial monsters that snort and toil there—mix up inextricably with my memories of my first days as a legislator. Black figures drift by me, heavy vans clatter, a newspaper rough tears by on a motor bicycle, and presently, on the Albert Embankment, every seat has its one or two outcasts huddled together and slumbering.

“These things come, these things go,” a whispering voice urged upon me, “as once those vast unmeaning Saurians whose bones encumber museums came and went rejoicing noisily in fruitless lives.” . . .

Fruitless lives!—was that the truth of it all? . . .

Later I stood within sight of the Houses of Parliament in front of the colonnades of St. Thomas’s Hospital. I leant on the parapet close by a lamp-stand of twisted dolphins—and I prayed!

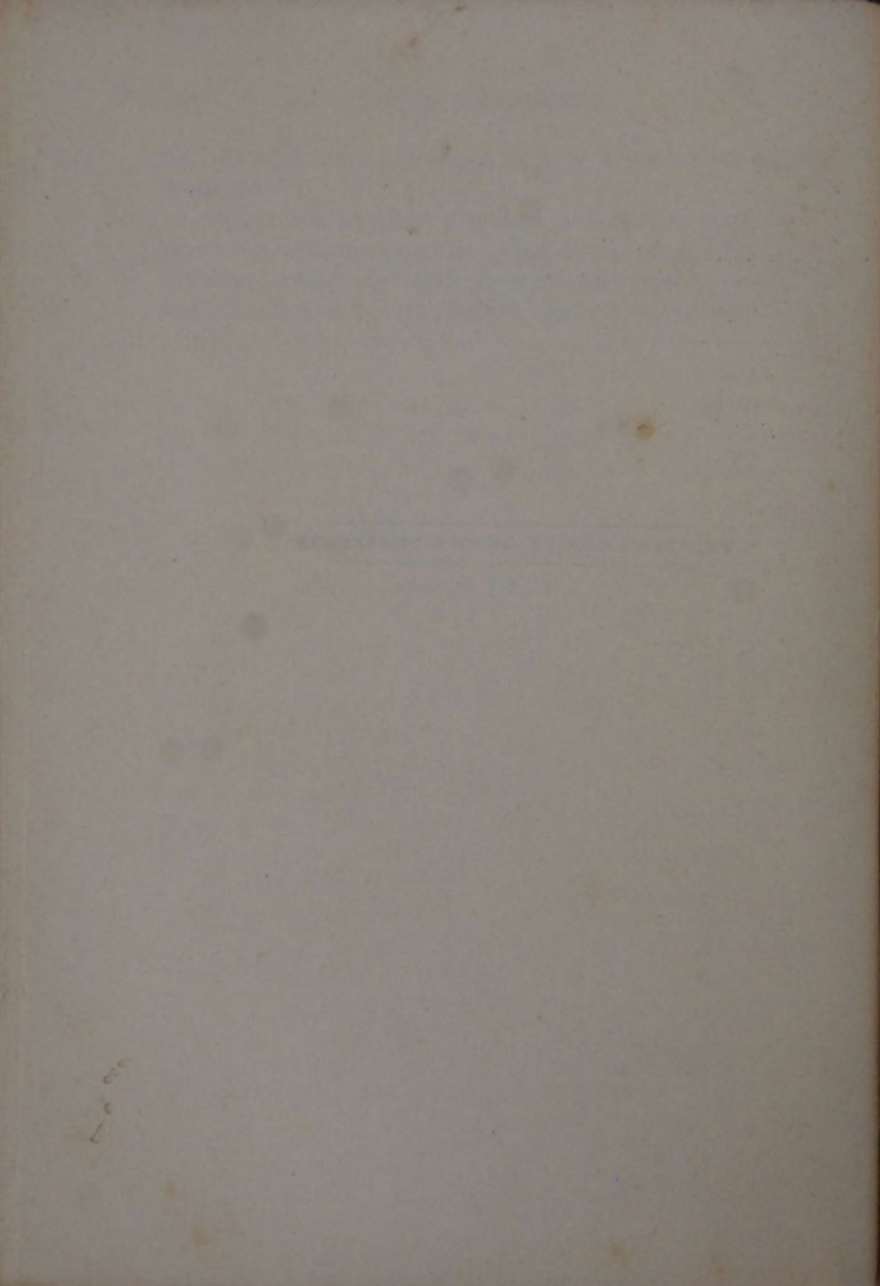
I remember the swirl of the tide upon the water, and how a string of barges presently came swinging and bumping round as high-water turned to ebb. That sudden change of position and my brief perplexity at it, sticks like a paper pin through the substance of my thoughts. It was then I was moved to prayer. I prayed that night that life might not be in vain, that in particular I might not live in vain. I prayed for strength and faith, that the monstrous blundering forces in life might not overwhelm me, might not beat me back to futility and a meaningless acquiescence in existent things. I knew myself for the weakling I was, I knew that nevertheless it was set for me to make such order as I could out of these disorders, and my task cowed

me, gave me at the thought of it a sense of yielding feebleness.

“Break me, O God,” I prayed at last, “disgrace me, torment me, destroy me as you will, but save me from self-complacency and little interests and little successes and the life that passes like the shadow of a dream.”

END OF VOL. I.

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