by the author of THE AWAKENING OF HELENA RICH

Captain Archer's Daughte

by MARGARET DELAND

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DR. LAVENDAR'S PEOPLE

BY

MARGARET DELAND

AUTHOR OF "OLD CHESTER TALES"

ILLUSTRATED BY
LUCIUS HITCHCOCK

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TO
DR. FRANCIS B. HARRINGTON
These Stories are
Dedicated

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THE APOTHEOSIS OF THE REVEREND MR. SPANGLER

I

Miss Ellen Baily kept school in the brick basement of her old frame house on Main Street.

The children used to come up a flagstone path to the side door, and then step down two steps into an entry. Two rooms opened on this entry; in one the children sat at small, battered desks and studied; in the other Miss Baily heard

their lessons, sitting at a table covered with a red cloth, which had a white Grecian fret for a border and smelled of crumbs. On the wall behind her was a faded print of "Belshazzar's Feast"; in those days this was probably the only feasting the room ever saw—although on a thin-legged sideboard there were two decanters (empty) and a silver-wire cake-basket which held always three apples. Both rooms looked out on the garden—the garden and, in fine weather, *Mr. David Baily!* ... Ah, me—what it was, in the dreary stretches of mental arithmetic, to look across the flower-beds and see Mr. David—tall and dark and melancholy—pacing up and down, sometimes with a rake, oftener with empty hands; always with vague, beautiful eyes fixed on some inner vision of heart-broken memory. Miss Ellen's pupils were confident of this vision because of a tombstone in the burial-ground which recorded the death of Maria Hastings, at the romantic age of seventeen; and, as everybody in Old Chester knew, Mr. Baily had been in love with this same seventeen-year-old Maria. To be sure, it was thirty years ago; but that does not make any difference, "*in real love*," as any school-girl can tell you. So, when David Baily paced up and down the garden paths or sat in the sunshine under the big larch we all knew that he was thinking of his bereavement.

In the opinion of the older girls, grief had wrecked Mr. David's life; he had intended to be a clergyman, but had left the theological school because his eyes gave out. "He cried himself nearly blind," the girls told each other with great satisfaction. After that he tried one occupation after another, but somehow failed in each; which was proof of a delicacy of constitution induced by sorrow. Furthermore, he seemed pursued by a cruel fortune—"Fate," the girls called it. Elderly, unromantic Old Chester did not use this fine word, but it admitted pursuing disaster.

For instance: there was the time that David undertook the charge of a private library in Upper Chester, and three months afterwards the owner sold it! Then Mr. Hays found a job for him, and just as he was going to work he was laid up with rheumatism. And again Tom Dilworth got him a place as

assistant book-keeper; and David, after innumerable tangles on his balance-sheet, was obliged to say, frankly, that he had no head for figures. But he was willing to do anything else—"*any* honest work that is not menial," he said, earnestly. And Tom said, why, yes, of course, only he'd be darned if he knew what to suggest. But he added, in conjugal privacy, that David ought to be hided for not turning his hand to something. "Why doesn't he try boot-blacking? Only, I suppose, he'd say he couldn't make the change correctly. He doesn't know whether two and two make five or three—like our Ned."

"Why, they make four, Tom," said Mrs. Dilworth. And Thomas stared at her, and said, "You don't say so!"

There had been no end of such happenings; "and none of them my brother's fault," Miss Ellen told the sympathetic older girls, who glanced sideways at Mr. David and wished that they might die and be mourned as Mr. David mourned Maria.

The fact was, the habit of failure had fastened upon poor David; and in the days when Miss Ellen's school was in its prime (before the new people told our parents that her teaching was absurdly inadequate), he was depending on his sister for his bread-and-butter. That Miss Ellen supported him never troubled the romantic souls of Miss Ellen's pupils any more than it troubled Miss Ellen—or Mr. David. "Why shouldn't she?" the girls would have demanded if any such rudely practical question had been asked; "he is so delicate, *and he has a broken heart!*" So that was how it happened that the pupils were able to have palpitating glimpses of him, walking listlessly about the garden, or dozing in a sunny window over an old magazine, or doing some pottering bit of carpentering for Miss Ellen, but never losing his good looks or the grieved melancholy of his expression.

Miss Ellen had been teaching for twenty years.

It is useless to deny that, unless one has a genius for imparting knowledge, teaching is a drudgery. It was drudgery to Ellen Baily, but she never slighted it on that account. She was conscientious about the number of feet in the highest mountain in the world; she saw to it that her pupils could repeat the sovereigns of England backward. Besides these fundamentals, the older girls had Natural Philosophy every Friday; it was not, perhaps, necessary that young ladies should know that the air was composed of two gases (the girls who had travelled and seen the lighted streets of towns knew what gas was), nor that rubbing a cat's fur the wrong way in the dark would produce electric sparks—such things were not necessary. But they were interesting, and, as Mrs. Barkley said, if they did not go too far and lead to scepticism, they would do no harm. However, Miss Ellen counteracted any sceptical tendencies by reading aloud, every Saturday morning, Bishop Cummings on the Revelation, so that even Dr. Lavendar was not wiser than Miss Ellen's girls as to what St. John meant by "a time, and a time, and a half of a time," or who the four beasts full of eyes before and behind stood for. For accomplishments, there was fine sewing every Wednesday afternoon; and on Mondays, with sharply pointed pencils, we copied trees and houses from neat little prints; also, we had lessons upon the piano-forte, so there was not one of us who, when she left Miss Ellen's, could not play at least three pieces, viz., "The Starlight Valse," "The Maiden's Prayer," and "The Last Rose of Summer."

Ah, well, one may smile. Compared to what girls know nowadays, it is, of course, very absurd. But, all the same, Miss Ellen's girls knew some things of which our girls are ignorant: reverence was one; humility was another; obedience was a third. And poor, uneducated folk (compared with our daughters) that we of Old Chester may be, we are, if I mistake not, glad that we were taught a certain respect for our own language, which, though it makes the tongue of youth to-day almost unintelligible, does give us a joy in the wells of English undefiled which our children do not seem to know; and for this, in our dull Old Chester way, we are not ungrateful. However, this may all be sour

grapes....

At any rate, for twenty painstaking years Miss Ellen's methods fed and clothed Mr. David. Then came the winter of Dr. Lavendar's illness, and the temporary instalment of the Reverend Mr. Spangler, and Ellen Baily realized that there were other things in the world than David's food and clothes.

Dr. Lavendar, cross, unbelieving, protesting, was to be hustled down South by Sam Wright; and the day before he started Mr. Spangler appeared. That was early in February, and Dr. Lavendar was to come back the first of May.

"Not a day sooner," said Sam Wright.

"I'll come when I see fit," said Dr. Lavendar. He didn't believe in this going away, he said. "Home is the best place to be sick in. The truth is, Willy King doesn't want me to die on his hands—it would hurt his business," said Dr. Lavendar, wickedly; "I know him!"

But to Mr. Spangler Dr. Lavendar said other things about Willy, and Sam Wright, too; in fact, about all of them. And he pulled out his big, red silk pocket-handkerchief with a trembling flourish and wiped his eyes. "I don't deserve it," he said. "I'm a dogmatic old fogy, and I won't let the new people have their jimcrackery; and I preach old sermons, and I've had a cold in my head for three months. And yet, look at 'em: A purse, if you please! And Sam Wright is going down with me. Sam ought to be ashamed of himself to waste his time; he's a busy man. No, sir; I don't deserve it. And, if you take my advice, you'll pray the Lord that your people will treat you as you don't deserve."

Mr. Spangler, a tall, lean man, very correctly dressed, who was depended upon in the diocese as a supply, made notes solemnly while Dr. Lavendar talked; but he sighed once or twice, patiently, for the old man was not very helpful. Mr. Spangler wanted to know what Sunday-school teachers could be

relied upon, and whether the choir was very thin-skinned, and which of the vestry had chips on their shoulders.

"None of 'em. I knocked 'em all off, long ago," said Dr. Lavendar. "Don't you worry about that. Speak your mind."

"I have," said Mr. Spangler, coughing delicately, "an iron hand when I once make up my mind in regard to methods; firmness is, I think, a clergyman's duty, and duty, I hope, is my watchword; but I think it best to canvass a matter thoroughly before making up my mind."

"It is generally wise to do so," said Dr. Lavendar, very meekly.

"Of course," Mr. Spangler said, kindly, "you belong to a somewhat older period, and do not, perhaps, realize the value of our modern ways of dealing with a parish—I mean in regard to firmly carrying out one's own ideas. I suppose these good people do pretty much as they please, so far as you are concerned?"

"Perhaps they do," said Dr. Lavendar, very, very meekly.

"So, not wishing to offend, I will ask a few questions: I have heard that the parish is perhaps a little old-fashioned in regard to matters of ritual? I have wondered whether my cassock would be misunderstood?"

"Cassock?" said Dr. Lavendar. "Bless your heart, wear a pea-jacket if it helps you to preach the Word. It will only be for ten Sundays," he added, hopefully.

The Reverend Mr. Spangler smiled at that; and when he smiled one saw that his face, though timid, was kind.

So Dr. Lavendar, growling and scolding, fussing about Danny and his little

blind horse Goliath, and Mr. Spangler's comfort, was bundled off; and Mr. Spangler settled down in the shabby rectory. His iron will led him to preach in his surplice, and it was observed that a silver cross dangled from his black silk fob. "But it's only for ten weeks," said Old Chester, and asked him to tea, and bore with him, and did nothing more severe than smile when he bowed in the creed—smile, and perhaps stand up a little straighter itself.

This, of the real Old Chester. Of course the new people were pleased; and one or two of the younger folk liked it. Miss Ellen Baily was not young, but she liked the surplice better than Dr. Lavendar's black gown and bands, and the sudden sparkle of the cross when Mr. Spangler knelt gave her a pang of pleasure. David, too, was not displeased. To be sure, David was rarely stirred to anything so positive as pleasure. But at least he made no objections to the cross; and he certainly brightened up when, on Saturday afternoon, Mr. Spangler called. He even talked of Gambier, to which he had gone for a year, and of which, it appeared, the clergyman was an alumnus. Miss Ellen had a pile of compositions on the table beside her, and she glanced at one occasionally so that she might not seem to expect any share in the conversation. But, all the same, Mr. Spangler noticed her. He was not drawn to the brother; still, he talked to him about their college, for Mr. Spangler believed that being agreeable was just as much a clergyman's duty as was changing the bookmarks for Advent or Lent; and duty, as Mr. Spangler often said, was his watchword. Furthermore, he was aware that his kindness pleased the silent, smiling woman seated behind the pile of compositions.

It pleased her so much that that night, after David had gone to bed, she went over to Mrs. Barkley's to talk about her caller.

"Well, Ellen Baily," Mrs. Barkley said, briskly, as Miss Baily came into the circle of lamplight by the parlor-table, "so you had a visitor to-day? I saw him, cross and all."

"It was a very small one," Miss Baily protested, "and only silver."

"Would you have had it diamonds?" demanded Mrs. Barkley, in a deep bass. "Oh, well; it doesn't really matter; there are only nine more Sundays. But Sam Wright says he shall mention it when he writes to Dr. Lavendar."

"I suppose Dr. Lavendar saw it before he went away," Ellen said, with some spirit.

"Well, if he doesn't take his religion out in crosses, I suppose it's all right. But he's not a very active laborer in the vineyard. I suppose you know about him?"

"Why, no," Ellen said; "nothing except that he supplies a good deal."

"Supplies? Yes, because his mother left him a house in Mercer, and enough to live on in a small way; so he likes supplying better than taking a charge where he'd have to work hard and couldn't have his comforts."

"Why doesn't he take a charge where he could have his comforts?"

"Can't get the chance," Mrs. Barkley explained, briefly. "Not enough of a preacher. And, besides, he likes his ease in Zion. Rachel Spangler's old house, and her Mary Ann, and his father's library, and—well, the flesh-pots of Mercer!—and supplying, just enough to buy him his ridiculous buttoned-up coats. That's what he likes. I suppose he uses the same old sermons over and over. Doesn't ever have to write a new one. However, he's here, and maybe Old Chester will do him good. Ellen Baily, did you know that we have a new-comer in Old Chester? A widow. I don't like widows. Her name's Smily. Foolish name! She's staying at the Stuffed Animal House. She's Harriet Hutchinson's cousin, and she's come down on her for a visit."

"Maybe she'll make her a present when she goes away," said Ellen,

hopefully.

"Present! She needs to have presents made to her. She hasn't a cent but what her husband's brother gives her. He's a school-teacher, I understand; and you know yourself, Ellen Baily, how much a school-teacher can do in that way?"

Miss Ellen sighed.

"Well," proceeded Mrs. Barkley, "I just thought I'd tell you about her, because if we all invite her to tea, turn about, it will be a relief to Harriet—(she isn't well, that girl; I'm really uneasy about her). And I guess the Smily woman won't object to Old Chester food, either," said Mrs. Barkley, complacently. "I've asked her for Tuesday evening, and I thought I'd throw in Mr. Spangler and get him off my mind."

"David likes him so much," Miss Ellen began.

"Does he?" said Mrs. Barkley. "Well, tell him to come; he can talk to Mr. Spangler. I'm afraid I might hurt the man's feelings if I had to do all the talking. I seem to do that sometimes. Did you ever notice, Ellen, that the truth always hurts people's feelings? But I knew his mother, so I don't want to do anything to wound him. I won't ask you, Ellen; I don't like five at table. But just tell David to come, will you?"

And Miss Baily promised, gratefully. David was not often asked out in Old Chester.

II

The supper at Mrs. Barkley's was a great occasion to David Baily. Right after dinner he went up to the garret, and Ellen heard him shuffling about overhead, moving trunks. After a while he came down, holding something out to his sister.

"Guess I'll wear this," he said, briefly. It was an old black velvet waistcoat worked with small silk flowers, pink and blue and yellow.

"I haven't seen gentlemen wear those waistcoats lately," Miss Ellen said, doubtfully.

Mr. David spread the strange old garment across his narrow breast, and regarded himself in the mirror above the mantel. "Father wore it," he said.

Then he retired to his own room. When he reappeared he wore the waistcoat. His old black frock-coat, shiny on the shoulders and with very full skirts, hung so loose in front that the flowered velvet beneath was not conspicuous; but Mr. David felt its moral support when, at least ten minutes before the proper time, he started for Mrs. Barkley's.

His hostess, putting on her best cap before her mirror, glanced down from her window as he came up the path. "Ellen ought not to have sent him so early," she said, with some irritation. "Emily!" she called, in her deep voice, "just go to the front door and tell Mr. Baily to go home. I'm not ready for him. Or he can sit in the parlor and wait if he wants to. But he can't talk to me."

Emily, a mournful, elderly person, sought, out of regard for her own feelings, to soften her mistress's message; but David instantly retreated to walk up and down the street, keeping his eye on Mrs. Barkley's house, so that he could time his return by the arrival of Mr. Spangler.

"He'll come at the right hour, I presume," he said to himself. Just then he saw Mrs. Smily stepping delicately down the street, her head on one side, and

a soft, unchanging smile on her lips. As they met she minced a little in her step, and said:

"Dear me! I'm afraid I've made a mistake. I'm looking for Mrs. Barkley's residence."

"Mrs. Barkley resides here," said Mr. David, elegantly.

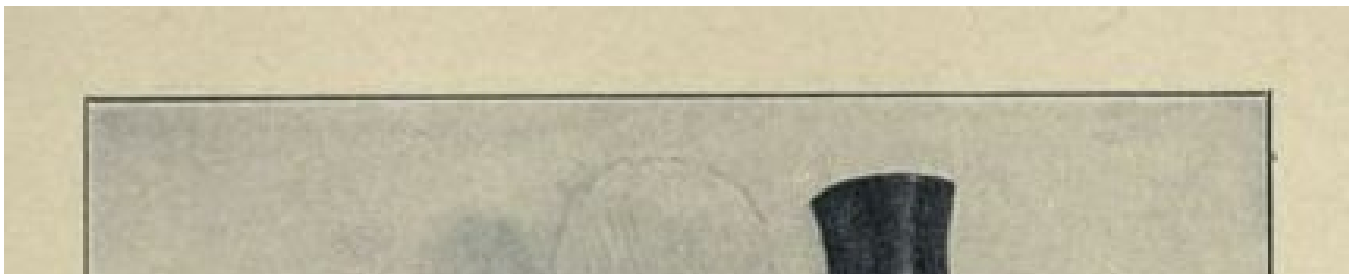
She looked up into his sad, dark eyes with a flurried air. "Dear me," she said, "I fear I am late."

"Oh, not *late*," said poor David. "Perhaps we might walk up and down for a minute longer?"

Mrs. Smily, astonished but flattered, tossed her head, and said, Well, she didn't know about *that*! But, all the same, she turned, and they walked as far as the post-office.

"I'm afraid you are very attentive to the ladies," Mrs. Smily said, coquettishly, when David had introduced himself; and David, who had never heard a flirtatious word (unless from Maria), felt a sudden thrill and a desire to reply in kind. But from lack of experience he could think of nothing but the truth. He had been too early, he said, and had come out to wait for Mr. Spangler—"and you, ma'am," he added, in a polite after-thought. But his hurried emphasis made Mrs. Smily simper more than ever. She shook her finger at him and said:

"Come, come, sir!" And David's head swam.



"DAVID'S HEAD SWAM"

At that moment Mr. Spangler, buttoned to his chin in a black waistcoat, came solemnly along, and, with his protection, David felt he could face Mrs. Barkley.

But, indeed, she met her three guests with condescension and kindness. "They are all fools in their different ways," she said to herself, "but one must be kind to them." So she made Mrs. Smily sit down in the most comfortable chair, and pushed a footstool at her. Then she told Mr. Spangler, good-naturedly, that she supposed he found Old Chester very old-fashioned. "Don't you be trying any candles on us," she threatened him, in a jocular bass. As for David, she paid no attention to him except to remark that she supposed time didn't count with him. But her bushy eyebrows twitched in a kindly smile when she said it. Then she began to talk about Dr. Lavendar's health. "It is a great trial to have him away," she said. "Dear me! I don't know what we will do when the Lord takes him. I wish he might live forever. Clergymen are a poor lot nowadays."

"Why, I heard," said Mrs. Smily, "that he didn't give entire satisfaction."

"What!" cried Mrs. Barkley. "Who has been talking nonsense to you? Some of the new people, I'll be bound."

Mrs. Smily, very much frightened, murmured that no doubt she was mistaken. Wild horses would not have drawn from her that she had heard Annie Shields that was, say that Dr. Lavendar had deliberately advised some one she knew to be bad; and that he had refused to help a very worthy man to study for the ministry; and that the Ferrises said he ought to be tried for heresy (or something) because he married Oscar King to their runaway niece; and that he would not give a child back to its repentant (and perfectly respectable)

mother—"And a mother's claim is the holiest thing on earth," Mrs. Smily said—and that he had encouraged Miss Lydia Sampson in positively *wicked* extravagance. After hearing these things, Mrs. Smily had her opinion of Dr. Lavendar; but that was no reason why she should let Mrs. Barkley snap her head off. So she only murmured that no doubt she had made a mistake.

"I think you have," said Mrs. Barkley, dryly; and rose and marshalled her company in to supper. "She's a perfect fool," she told herself, "but I hope the Lord will give me grace to hold my tongue." Perhaps the Lord gave her too much grace, for, for the rest of the evening, she hardly spoke to Mrs. Smily; she even conversed with David rather than look in her direction.

For the most part the conversation was a polite exchange of views upon harmless topics between Mrs. Barkley and Mr. Spangler, during which Mrs. Smily cheered up and murmured small ejaculations to David Baily. She told him that she was scared nearly to death of the stuffed animals at Miss Harriet's house.

"They make me just scream!" she said.

David protectingly assured her that they were harmless.

"But they are so dreadful!" Mrs. Smily said. "Isn't it strange that my cousin likes to—to do that to animals? It isn't quite ladylike, to my mind."

Mr. Baily thought to himself how ladylike it was in Mrs. Smily to object to taxidermy. He noticed, too, that she ate almost nothing, which also seemed very refined. It occurred to him that such a delicate creature ought not to go home alone; the lane up to Miss Harriet's house was dark with overhanging trees, and, furthermore, half-way up the hill it passed the burial-ground. In a burst of fancy David saw himself near the low wall of the cemetery, protecting Mrs. Smily, who was shivering in her ladylike way at the old head-stones over in the grass. He began (in his own mind) a reassuring conversation: "There are

no such things as spectres, ma'am. I assure you there is no occasion for fear." And at these manly words she would press closer to his side. (And this outside the burial-ground—oh, Maria, Maria!)

But this flight of imagination was not realized, for later Emily announced that Miss Harriet's Augustine had come for Mrs. Smily.

"Did she bring a lantern?" demanded Mrs. Barkley. "That lane is too dark except for young folks."

Augustine had a lantern, and was waiting with it at the front door for her charge; so there was no reason for Mr. David to offer his protection. He and Mr. Spangler went away together, and David twisted his head around several times to watch the spark of light jolting up the hill towards the burial-ground and the Stuffed-Animal House. When the two men said good-night, Mr. Spangler had a glimpse of a quickly opened door and heard an eager voice —"Come in, dear brother. Did you have a delightful evening?"

"How pleasing to be welcomed so affectionately!" said the Reverend Mr. Spangler to himself.

III

The gentle warmth of that welcome lingered persistently in Mr. Spangler's mind.

"I suspect that she *kissed* him," he said to himself; and a little dull red crept into his cheeks.

Miss Ellen, dark-eyed, gentle, with soft lips, made Mr. Spangler suddenly think of a spray of heliotrope warm in the sunshine. "That is a very poetical thought," he said, with a sense of regret that it probably could not be utilized in a sermon. But when he entered the study he banished poetry, because he had a letter to write. It was in answer to an offer of the secretaryship of a church publishing-house in a Western city.

Dr. Lavendar, it appeared, had mentioned Mr. Spangler's name to one Mr. Horatius Brown, stating that in his opinion Mr. Spangler was just the man for the place—"exact, painstaking, conscientious," Mr. Brown quoted in his letter; but forbore to add Dr. Lavendar's further remark that Mr. Spangler would never embarrass the management by an original idea. "He'll pick up pins as faithfully as any man I know," said Dr. Lavendar, "and that's what you religious newspapers want, I believe?" Mr. Spangler was not without a solemn pride in being thus sought out by the ecclesiastical business world, especially when he reflected upon the salary which Mr. Brown was prepared to offer; but acceptance was another matter. To leave his high calling for mere business! A business, too, which would involve exact hours and steady application;—Compared with that, and with the crude, smart bustle of the Western city, the frugal leisure of his placid days in Mercer assumed in his mind the sanctity of withdrawal from the world, and his occasional preaching took on the glow of missionary zeal. "No," said Mr. Spangler, "mercenary considerations do not move me a hair's-breadth." Mr. Spangler did not call his tranquil life in Mercer, his comfortable old house, his good cook, his old friends, his freedom from sermon-writing, mercenary considerations. On the contrary, he assured himself that his "circumstances were far from affluent; but I must endure hardness!" he used to add cheerfully. And very honestly his declination seemed to him something that Heaven would place to his credit. So he wrote to the publishing-house that he had given the proposition his most prayerful consideration, but that he believed that it was his duty to still labor at the sacred desk—and duty was, he hoped, the watchword of his life. And he was Mr. Brown's "obedient servant and brother in Christ—Augustus Spangler."

Then he settled down in Dr. Lavendar's armchair by the fire in the study; but he did not read the ecclesiastical paper which every week fed his narrow and sincere mind. Instead he wondered how often Dr. Lavendar called upon his female parishioners. Would twice in a fortnight be liable to be misunderstood? Mr. Spangler was terribly afraid of being misunderstood. Then he had a flash of inspiration: he ought, as rector, to visit the schools. That was only proper and could not possibly be misunderstood. "For an interest in educational affairs is part of a priest's duty," Mr. Spangler reflected.

If he was right, it must be admitted that Dr. Lavendar was very remiss. So far as we children could remember, he had never visited Miss Ellen's school and listened to recitations and heard us speak our pieces. Whether that was because he did not care enough about us to come, or because he saw us at Collect class and Sunday-school and church, and in the street and at the post-office and at home, until he knew us all by heart, so to speak, may be decided one way or the other; but certainly when Mr. Spangler came, and sat through one morning, and told us stories, and said we made him think of a garden of rosebuds, and took up so much of Miss Ellen's time that she could not hear the mental arithmetic, it was impossible not to institute comparisons. Indeed, some hearts were (for the moment) untrue to Mr. David. When Miss Ellen called on us to speak our pieces, we were so excited and breathless that, for my part, I could not remember the first line of "Bingen on the Rhine," and had to look quickly into the Fourth Reader; but before I could begin, Lydia Wright started in with "Excelsior," and she got all the praise; though I'm sure I—well, never mind! But Dr. Lavendar wouldn't have praised one girl so that all the others wanted to scratch her! All that first half, the pupils, bending over their copy-books, writing, "*Courtesy to inferiors is true gentility*," glanced at the visitor sideways, and if they caught his eye, looked down, blushing to the roots of their hair—which was not frizzled, if you please, or hanging over their eyes like the locks of Skye-terriers, but parted and tied with a neat ribbon bow on the tops of all the small heads. But Mr. Spangler did not look often at the pupils;

instead he conversed in a low voice with Miss Ellen. Nobody could hear what he said, but it must have been very interesting, for when Miss Ellen suddenly looked at the clock she blushed, and brought her hand hurriedly down on the bell on her desk. It was ten minutes after the hour for recess!

For the rest of that day Miss Ellen Baily moved and looked as one in a dream. Her brother, however, did not seem to notice her absent-mindedness. Indeed, he was as talkative as she was silent.

"Sister," he said, as they sat at tea, "I need a new hat. One with a blue band about it might be—ah—becoming."

"Blue is a sweet color," said Miss Ellen, vaguely.

"Mrs. Smily remarked to me that before her affliction made it improper, she was addicted to the color of blue."

"Was she?" Ellen said, absently.

"Don't you think," David said, after a pause, "that my coat is somewhat shabby? You bought it, you may remember, the winter of the long frost."

"Is it?" Miss Ellen said.

"Yes; and the style is obsolete, I think. Not that I am a creature of fashion, but I do not like to be conspicuous in dress."

"You are not that, dear David," Miss Ellen protested. "On Sunday I often think nobody looks as handsome as you."

David blushed. "You are partial, Ellen."

"No, I'm not," cried Miss Ellen, coming out of her reveries. "Only yesterday I heard some one say that you were very fine-looking."

"Who said it?"

"Never mind," Ellen said, gayly.

"Do tell me, sister," he entreated; "that's a good girl."

"It was somebody whose opinion you care a great deal about."

"I think you might tell me," said Mr. David, aggrieved. "Not that I care, because it isn't true, and was only said to please you. People know how to get round you, Ellen. But I'd just like to know."

"Guess," said Miss Ellen.

"Well, was it—Mrs. Smily?"

"Oh, dear, no! It was somebody very important in Old Chester. It was Mrs. Barkley."

"Oh," said Mr. David.

"A compliment from her means so much, you know," Miss Ellen reminded him.

David was silent.

"But all the same," Ellen said, "you do need a coat, dear brother. I'm afraid I've been selfish not to notice it."

Mr. David made no reply.

Miss Ellen beamed at him. "You always look well, in my eyes: but it pleases me to have you well dressed, too."

"Well, then, to please you, I'll dress up," said Mr. David, earnestly.

IV

"Does not Mr. Baily take any part whatever in his sister's work?" Mr. Spangler said. He was calling upon Mrs. Barkley, and the conversation turned upon the guests whom he had met at the tea-party.

"That is a very foolish question," said Mrs. Barkley; "but of course you don't know poor David, or you wouldn't have asked it. David means well, but he has no mind. Still, he has tried, poor fellow." Then she recited the story of David's failures. "There is really nothing that he is capable of doing," she ended, thoughtfully; "though I think, if his eyes hadn't given out, he might have made a good minister. For David is a pious man, and he likes to visit."

A faint red came into Mr. Spangler's cheeks; although he had been in Old Chester nearly a month, he had not yet become acclimated to Mrs. Barkley. The watchword of duty made him call, but he closed her front door behind him with an emphasis which was not dutiful.

"That's done!" he said; and thought to himself how much pleasanter than parochial visits were educational matters.

Mr. Spangler felt their importance so deeply that he spent two more mornings watching Miss Ellen's pupils work out examples on the blackboard and hearing them read, turn about, in the Fourth Reader. In fact, the next month was a pretty happy time for Miss Ellen's girls.

"I skipped to the bottom of the page in 'Catiline's Reply,'" Lydia Wright

said, giggling, "and she never knew it!"

The girls were tremendously interested but not very sympathetic, for "she's so dreadfully old!" they told each other. Had Miss Ellen been Maria's age and had a beau (by this time they called Mr. Spangler Miss Ellen's beau, the impudent little creatures!), how different it would have been! But Miss Ellen was forty. "Did you ever know anything so perfectly absurd?" said the older girls. And the second-class girls said they certainly never did. So when Mr. Spangler came and listened to recitations we poked one another, and put out our tongues behind our Readers, and made ourselves extremely obnoxious—if dear Miss Ellen had had the eyes to see it, which, indeed, she had not. She was very absent in those days; but she did her work faithfully, and saw to David's new coat, and asked Mrs. Smily to tea, not only to help out Miss Harriet at the Stuffed-Animal House, but because David told her a piteous tale of Mrs. Smily's loneliness and general forlornness. David had had it directly from Mrs. Smily herself, and had been greatly moved by it; she had told him that this was a sad and unfriendly world.

"But I am sure your brother-in-law's family is much attached to you?" David said, comfortingly.

Then poor Mrs. Smily suddenly began to cry. "Yes; but I am afraid I can't live at my brother-in-law's any longer. His wife is—is tired of me," said the poor little creature.

David was thunderstruck. "Tired? Of you! Oh, impossible!"

Then she opened her poor foolish heart to him. And David was so touched and interested that he could hardly wait to get home to pour it all into Ellen's ears. Ellen was very sympathetic, and made haste to ask Mrs. Smily to tea; and when she came was as kind and pitiful as only dear, kind Ellen could be. But perhaps she took Mrs. Smily's griefs a little less to heart than she might have done had she heard the tale a month before. Just then she was in the whirl

of Old Chester hospitality; she was asked out three times in one week to meet the Supply!—and by that time the Supply had reached the point of hoping that he was going to meet Miss Ellen.

Yet, as Mr. Spangler reflected, this was hardly prudent on his part. "For I might become interested," he said to himself, and frowned and sighed. Now, as everybody knows, the outcome of "interest" is only justified by a reasonable affluence. "And," Augustus Spangler reminded himself, "my circumstances are not affluent." Indeed, that warm, pleasant old house in Mercer, and Mary Ann, and his books, and those buttoned-up coats needed every penny of his tiny income. "Therefore," said Mr. Spangler, "it is my duty to put this out of my head with an iron hand." But, all the same, Ellen Baily was like a spray of heliotrope.

For a week, the second week in April, while Old Chester softened into a mist of green, and the crown-imperials shook their clean, bitter fragrance over the bare beds in the gardens—for that week Mr. Spangler thought often of his income, but oftener of Miss Ellen. Reason and sentiment wrestled together in his lazy but affectionate heart; and then, with a mighty effort, sentiment conquered....

"It seems," said Mr. Spangler, nervously, "a little premature, but my sojourn in Old Chester is drawing to a close; I shall not tarry more than another fortnight; so I felt, my dear friend, that I must, before seeking other fields of usefulness, tell you what was in my mind—or may I say heart?"

"You are very kind," Ellen Baily said, breathlessly.

.... Mr. Spangler had invited Miss Ellen to walk with him on Saturday afternoon at four. Now, as everybody knows in Old Chester, when a gentleman invites you to walk out with him, you had better make up your mind whether it is to be "yes" or "no" before you start. As for poor Ellen, she did not

have to make up her mind; it was made up for her by unconquerable circumstances. If she should "seek other fields of usefulness," she could not take David with her. It was equally clear that she could not leave him behind her. Where would he find his occasional new coat, or even the hat with the blue band, if there were no school in the basement? Compared to love-making and romance, how sordid are questions about coats! Yet, before starting on that Saturday-afternoon walk, poor, pretty Miss Ellen, tying the strings of her many-times retrimmed bonnet under her quivering chin, asked them, and could find no answer except that if he should "say anything," why, then, she must say "no"; but, of course, he wasn't going to say anything. So she tied her washed and ironed brown ribbons into a neat bow, and started down the street with the Reverend Mr. Spangler.

David Baily, watching them from the gate, ruminated over obvious possibilities. Mrs. Barkley had opened his eyes to the fact that Mr. Spangler "was taking notice," and David was not without a certain family pride in a ministerial proposal. "He'll do it this afternoon," said David; and went pottering back into the empty school-room to mend a bench that Ellen told him needed a nail or two. But the room was still and sunny, and Ellen's chair was comfortable; and sitting there to think about the bench, he nodded once or twice, and then dozed for an hour. When he awoke it seemed best to mend the bench the next day; then, yawning, and staring vacantly out of the window, he saw Mrs. Smily, and it seemed only friendly to go out and tell her (confidentially) what was going to happen.

"It will make quite a difference to you, won't it?" Mrs. Smily said.

"Oh," David said, blankly, "that hadn't occurred to me. However," he added, with a little sigh, "my sister's happiness is my first thought."

Mrs. Smily clasped her hands. "Mr. Baily, I do think you are real noble!" she said.

Mr. David stood very erect. "Oh, you mustn't flatter me, ma'am."

"Mr. Baily, I never flatter," Mrs. Smily said, gravely. "I don't think it's right."

And David thought to himself how noble Mrs. Smily was. Indeed, her nobility was so much in his mind that, strangely enough, he quite forgot Ellen's exciting afternoon. He remembered it the next morning, but when he essayed a little joke and a delicate question, the asperity with which the mild Ellen answered him left him gaping with astonishment. Evidently Mr. Spangler had not spoken. David would have been less (or more) than a human brother if he had not smiled a very little at that. "Ellen expected it," he said to himself. "Well, I did myself, and so did Mrs. Barkley." It never occurred to him that the Reverend Mr. Spangler might also have had expectations which left him disappointed and mortified. Yet when a gentleman of Mr. Spangler's age—one, too, whose income barely suffices for his own comfort, and who, added to this, has had his doubts whether the celibacy of the clergy may not be a sacrament of grace—when such a gentleman does make up his mind to offer himself—to offer himself, moreover, to a lady no longer in her first youth, who is pleasing perhaps to the eye, but not, certainly, excessively beautiful, and whose fortune is merely (and most meritoriously, of course) in her character and understanding—it is a blow to pride to be refused. Mr. Spangler found it hard to labor at the sacred desk that morning; yet no one would have thought it, to see the fervor with which, as Old Chester said, he "went through his performances."

But he read the service, hot at heart and hoping that Miss Baily observed how intensely his attention was fixed on things above. When he stood in the chancel waiting for the collection-plates, and saying, in a curious sing-song, absolutely new to Old Chester, "*Zaccheus stood forth, and said, Behold, Lord*—" his glance, roving over the congregation, rested once on Ellen Baily, and was as carefully impersonal as though she were only a part of the pew in which she sat. Miss Ellen thrilled at that high indifference; it occurred to her that

even had David's circumstances been different, she could scarcely have dared to accept the hand of this high creature.

"—*the half of all my goods*—" said Mr. Spangler. Yes, it was inconceivable, considering what he was offering her, that Ellen Baily could let her brother stand in the way!

All that long, pleasant spring Sunday, Augustus Spangler was very bitter. All that week he was distinctly angry. He said to himself that he was glad that Dr. Lavendar was soon to return; he would, after making his report of the parish, shake the dust of Old Chester from off his feet as witness against Miss Baily, and depart. By the next Sunday he had ceased to be angry, but his pride was still deeply wounded. By Wednesday he had softened to melancholy; he was able to say that it all came from her sense of duty. Unreasonable, of course, but still duty. Then, on Thursday, suddenly, he was startled by a question in his own mind: Was it unreasonable? If she gave up her teaching—"what would that fellow live on?"

That was a very bad moment to the Reverend Mr. Spangler. Pride vanished in honest unhappiness. He began to think again about his income; he had known that to marry a wife meant greater economy; but sacrifices had not seemed too difficult considering that that wife was to be Miss Ellen Baily. But if the wife must be Miss Baily *plus*—"that fellow"!

"It is out of the question," said poor Mr. Spangler, and arose and paced up and down the study. He was very miserable; and the more miserable he became, the more in love he knew himself to be. "But it is madness to think of the matter further," he told himself, sternly—"madness!"

Yet he kept on thinking of it—or of Miss Ellen's dark eyes, and her smile, and the way her hair curled in little rings about her temples. "But it's impossible—impossible!" he said. Then, absently, he made some calculations: To meet the support of David Baily he would have to have an increase of so much in his

income or a decrease of so much in his expenses. "Madness!" said Augustus Spangler, firmly. "But how her eyes crinkle up when she smiles!"

Yet it took another day before the real man conquered. His expenses should be decreased, *and David should live with them*.

Yes, it would mean undeniable pinching; he must give up this small luxury and that; his Mary Ann could not broil his occasional sweetbread; and the occasional new book must be borrowed from the library, not purchased for his own shelves. He must push about to get more supplying. He had meant to come down one step when he got married; well, he would have to come down two—yes, or three. But he would have Miss Baily. And warmed with this tender thought, he sat down, then and there, at nearly midnight, and wrote Miss Ellen a letter. It was a beautiful letter, full of most beautiful sentiments expressed with great elegance and gentility. It appreciated Miss Ellen's devotion to her family, and acknowledged that a sense of duty was a part of the character of a Christian female. It protested that it was far from the Reverend Mr. Spangler to interfere with that sense of duty; on the contrary, he would share it; nay more, he would assist it, for duty was, he hoped, the watchword of his life. If Miss Baily would consent to become his wife, Mr. Baily, he trusted, would make his home with his sister.

Mr. Spangler may have been addicted to petticoats (in his own toilet) and given to candles and other emblems of the Scarlet Woman, but his letter, beneath its stilted phrase, was an honest, manly utterance, and Ellen Baily read it, thrilling with happiness and love.

That was Friday, and she had only time to read those thin, blue pages and thrust them into the bosom of her dress, when it was time to go to school and hear her girls declare that the Amazon was the largest river in South America; but we might have said it was the largest river in Pennsylvania, and Miss Ellen would have gone on smiling at us. At recess we poured out into the garden,

eager to say, "Goodness! do you suppose he's popped?" The older girls were especially excited, but they took their usual furtive look about the garden before sitting down on the steps to eat their luncheons. Alas, He was not there!

"Perhaps," said Lydia Wright, "he has gone to the tomb."

This, for the moment, was deliciously saddening; but, after all, real live love-making, even of very old people, is more fascinating than dead romance. Through the open window we could see Miss Ellen sitting at her desk, writing. There were some sheets of blue paper spread out in front of her, and she would glance at them, and then write a little, and then glance back again, and smile, and write. But she did not look troubled, or "cross," as the girls called it; so we knew it could not be an exercise that she was correcting. But when she came out to us, and said, in a sweet, fluttered voice, "Children, will one of you take this letter to the post-office?" we knew what it meant—for it was addressed to the Reverend Mr. Spangler. How we all ran with it to the post-office!—giggling and palpitating and sighing as our individual temperaments might suggest. In fact, I know one girl who squeezed a tear out of each eye, she was so moved. When we came back, there was Miss Baily still sitting at her desk, her cheek on one hand, her smiling eyes fastened on those sheets of blue paper. "Gracious," said the girls, "what a long recess!" and told each other to be quiet and not remind her to ring the bell.

Then suddenly something happened....

An old carry-all came shambling along the road; there were two people in it, and one of them leaned over from the back seat and said to the driver: "This is my house. Stop here, please." The girls, clustering like pigeons on the sunny doorstep, began to fold up their luncheon-boxes, and look sidewise, with beating hearts, towards the gate—for it was *He*! How graceful he was—how elegant in his manners! Ah, if our mothers had bidden us have manners like Mr. David!—but they never did. They used to say, "Try and behave as politely as

Miss Maria Welwood," or, "I hope you will be as modest in your deportment as Miss Sally Smith." And there was this model before our eyes. It makes my heart beat now to remember how He got out of that rattling old carriage and turned and lifted his hat to a lady inside, and gave her his hand (ah, me!) and held back her skirts as she got out, and bowed again when she reached the ground. She was not much to look at; she was only the lady who was visiting at the Stuffed-Animal House, and she was dressed in black, and her bonnet was on one side. They stood there together in the sunshine, and Mr. David felt slowly in all his pockets; then he turned to us, sitting watching him with beating hearts.

"Little girls," he said—he was near-sighted, and, absorbed as he always was with sorrow, we never expected him to know our names—"little girls, one of you, go in and ask my sister for two coach fares, if you please."

We rose in a body and swarmed back into the school-room—just as Miss Ellen with a start looked at the clock and put out her hand to ring the bell. "Mr. David says, please, ma'am, will you give him money for two coach fares?"

Miss Ellen, rummaging in her pocket for her purse, said: "Yes, my love. Will you take this to my brother?" Just why she followed us as we ran out into the garden with her purse perhaps she hardly knew herself. But as she stood in the doorway, a little uncertain and wondering, Mr. David led the shabby, shrinking lady up to her.

"My dear Ellen," he said, "I have a present for you—a *sister*."

Then the little, shabby lady stepped forward and threw herself on Miss Ellen's shoulder.

"A sister?" Ellen Baily said, bewildered.

"We were married this morning in Upper Chester," said Mr. David, "and I

have brought her home. Now we shall all be so happy!"

V

That evening Dr. Lavendar came home. Of course all the real Old Chester was on hand to welcome him.

When the stage came creaking up to the tavern steps, the old white head was bare, and the broad-brimmed shabby felt hat was waving tremulously in the air.

"Here I am," said Dr. Lavendar, clambering down stiffly from the box-seat. "What mischief have you all been up to?"

There was much laughing and hand-shaking, and Dr. Lavendar, blinking very hard, and flourishing his red silk pocket-handkerchief, clapped Mr. Spangler on the shoulder.

"Didn't I tell you about 'em? Didn't I tell you they were the best people going? But we mustn't let 'em know it; makes 'em vain," said Dr. Lavendar, with great show of secrecy. "And look here, Sam Wright! You fellows may congratulate yourselves. Spangler here has had a fine business offer made him, haven't you, Mr. Spangler? and it's just your luck that you got him to supply for you before he left this part of the country. A little later he wouldn't have looked at Old Chester. Hey, Spangler?"

"Oh, that's settled," Mr. Spangler said. "I declined—"

"Oh," said Dr. Lavendar, "have you? Well, I'm sorry for 'em."

And Augustus Spangler smiled as heartily as anybody. He had a letter crushed up in his hand; he had read it walking down from the post-office to the tavern, and now he was ready to say that Old Chester was the finest place in the world. He could hardly wait to get Dr. Lavendar to himself in the rectory before telling him his great news and giving him a little three-cornered note from Ellen Baily which had been enclosed in his own letter.

"Well, well, *well*," said Dr. Lavendar.

He had put on a strange dressing-gown of flowered cashmere and his worsted-work slippers, and made room for his shaggy old Danny in his leather chair, and lighted his pipe. "Now tell us the news!" he said. And was all ready to hear about the Sunday-school teachers, and the choir, and Sam Wright's Protestantism, and many other important things. But not at all:—

"*I'm engaged to be married.*"

"Well, well, well," said Dr. Lavendar, blinking and chuckling with pleasure; then he read Ellen's little note. "I had to tell you myself," Ellen wrote him, "because I am so happy." And then there were a dozen lines in which her heart overflowed to this old friend. "Dear child, dear child," he murmured to himself. To no one but Dr. Lavendar—queer, grizzled, wrinkled old Dr. Lavendar, with never a romance or a love-affair that anybody had ever heard of—could Miss Ellen have showed her heart. Even Mr. Spangler did not know that heart as Dr. Lavendar did when he finished Ellen's little letter.—And Dr. Lavendar didn't tell. "I am so happy," said Miss Ellen. Dr. Lavendar may have looked at Mr. Spangler and wondered at the happiness. But, after all, wonder, on somebody's part, is a feature of every engagement. And if the wonder is caused only by the man's coat, and not by his character, why be distressed about it? Mr. Spangler was an honest man; if his mind was narrow, it was at least sincere; if his heart was timid, it was very kind; if his nature was lazy, it was clean and harmless. So why shouldn't Ellen Baily love him? And why

shouldn't Dr. Lavendar bubble over with happiness in Ellen's happiness?

"She's the best girl in the world," he told Mr. Spangler. "I congratulate you. She's a good child—a good child."

Mr. Spangler agreed, in a somewhat solemn manner.

"But David—how about David?"

"My house shall always be open to Mrs. Spangler's relatives," said Mr. Spangler, with Christian pride.

"You are a good fellow, Spangler," Dr. Lavendar said; and listened, chuckling, to Mr. Spangler's awkward and correct expressions of bliss. For indeed he was very happy, and talked about Miss Ellen's virtues (which so eminently qualified her to become his wife), as fatuously as any lover could.

"Hi, you, Danny," said Dr. Lavendar, after half an hour of it, "stop growling."

"There's somebody at the door," said Augustus Spangler, and went into the entry to see who it was. He came back with a letter, which he read, standing by the table; then he sat down and looked white. Dr. Lavendar, joyously, was singing to himself:

'"Ten-cent Jimmy and his minions
Cannot down the Woolly Horse.'

"Spangler, we must drink to your very good health and prospects. Let's have Mary bring the glasses."

"I fear," said Mr. Spangler—he stopped, his voice unsteady. "I regret—"

"Hullo!" said Dr. Lavendar, looking at him over his spectacles; "what's

wrong?"

"I'm extremely sorry to say," said poor Mr. Spangler, "that—it can't be."

"A good glass of wine," said Dr. Lavendar, "never hurt—"

"I refer," said Mr. Spangler, sighing, "to my relations with Miss Ellen Baily."

Dr. Lavendar looked at him blankly.

"I have just received a letter," the poor man went on, "in which she informs me that it can never be." His lip trembled, but he held himself very straight and placed the letter in his breast-pocket with dignity.

"Spangler, what are you talking about?"

"It appears," said Mr. Spangler, "that her brother—"

"Fiddlesticks!" said Dr. Lavendar. "Has Ellen started up some fantastic conscientiousness? Spangler, women's consciences are responsible for much unhappiness in this world. But I won't have it in my parish! I'll manage Ellen; trust me." He pulled at his pipe, which had gone out in these moments of agitation. "I tell you, sir," he said, striking a match on the bottom of his chair, "these saintly, self-sacrificing women do a fine work for the devil, if they only knew it, bless their hearts."

"You misapprehend," said Mr. Spangler, wretchedly; and then told Miss Ellen's news. It was brief enough, this last letter; there was no blame of David; indeed, he had displayed, Miss Baily said, "a true chivalry; but of course—" "Of course," said Mr. Spangler.

But Dr. Lavendar broke out so fiercely that Danny squeaked and jumped down out of the chair. "Upon my word; upon my word, Spangler, what were you thinking of to let it go on? If I had been at home, it would never—upon my

word!" This was one of the times that Dr. Lavendar felt the limitations of his office in regard to language. Mr. Spangler, his elbows on his knees, his chin on hands, was staring miserably at the floor.

"I shall, I trust, meet it in the proper spirit," he said.

Dr. Lavendar nodded. "Of course," he said. "Fortunately, she is dealing with a man who has backbone—perhaps."

Mr. Spangler sighed. "I regret to say that her presence in her school under the circumstances does seem imperative."

Dr. Lavendar lighted his pipe. "Do you mean on account of money, Spangler?"

"The support of Mr. David Baily and this—this *female*, must be met, I suppose, by Miss Baily's school."

"You are not so situated that you—" began Dr. Lavendar, delicately.

"My circumstances," said Augustus Spangler, "are not affluent. I have my residence in Mercer; and I supply, as you know. But my income barely suffices for one. Four—would be out of the question."

Dr. Lavendar looked at Ellen's little, happy note, lying half open on the table. "Poor old jack-donkey of a David!" he groaned.

"His selfishness," said Augustus Spangler, between his teeth, his voice suddenly trembling with anger, "is perfectly incomprehensible to me—perfectly incomprehensible! I endeavor always to exercise charity in judging any human creature; but—really, *really*!"

"It isn't selfishness as much as silliness. David hasn't mind enough to be

deliberately selfish. The poor fellow never thought. He never has thought. Ellen has always done the thinking for the family. Well, the harm's done. But, Spangler—" the old man stopped and glanced sharply at the forlorn and angry man opposite him. Yes, he certainly seemed very unhappy;—and as for Ellen! Dr. Lavendar could not bear that thought. "Spangler, I'll stand by you. I won't let her offer you up as well as herself. There must be some way out."

Mr. Spangler shook his head hopelessly. "The support of four persons on my small stipend is impossible."

"Spangler, my boy!" said Dr. Lavendar, suddenly, "there is a way out. What an old fool I am not to have thought of it! My dear fellow"—Dr. Lavendar leaned over and tapped Mr. Spangler's knee, chuckling aloud—"*that secretaryship*!"

"Secretaryship?" Mr. Spangler repeated, vaguely.

"You declined it? I know. But I don't believe Brown's got a man yet. I heard from him on another matter, yesterday, and he didn't say he had. Anyway, it's worth trying for. We can telegraph him to-morrow," said Dr. Lavendar, excitedly.

Mr. Spangler stared at him in bewilderment. "But," he said, breathlessly, "I —I don't think—I fear I am not fit." He felt as if caught in a sudden wind; his face grew red with agitation. "I declined it!" he ended, gasping.

"Fit?" said Dr. Lavendar. "My dear man, what fitness is needed? There's nothing to it, Spangler, I assure you." Dr. Lavendar was very much in earnest; he sat forward on the edge of his chair and gesticulated with his pipe. "Don't be too modest, my boy."

"Business entails such responsibilities," Mr. Spangler began, in a frightened voice.

"Oh, but this is mere routine," Dr. Lavendar interrupted; "they want a clergyman—somebody with tact. There's a good deal of church politics in it, I suppose, and they've got to have somebody who would never step on anybody's toes."

"I would never do that," said Mr. Spangler, earnestly, "but—"

"No," said Dr. Lavendar, abruptly, his voice changing—"no, Spangler, you never would." Then he was silent for a moment, pulling on his pipe, wondering perhaps, in spite of himself, at Ellen. "No, you never would. You see, you are just the man for the place. Brown said they wanted somebody who was presentable; he said they didn't need any particular abil—I mean any particular business ability."

"But," said Mr. Spangler, "to give up my sacred calling—"

"Spangler, come now! you don't 'call' very loudly, do you? There, my dear boy, let an old fellow have his joke. I merely mean you don't preach as often as if you had a regular parish. And you can supply, you know, there just as well as here."

"The Master's service is my first consideration," said Augustus Spangler.

Dr. Lavendar looked at him over his spectacles. "Mr. Spangler, the Christian business-man serves the Master just as well as we do."

"I should wish to reflect," said Mr. Spangler.

"Of course."

"Miss Baily would, I fear, object to going so far away."

"If the place is still open, I'll manage Ellen," said Dr. Lavendar; but he

looked at Mr. Spangler narrowly. "And your own entreaties will, of course, weigh with her if you show determination. I think you told me you were pretty determined?"

"I have," said Mr. Spangler, "an iron will; but that would not justify me in insisting if Miss Baily—" His voice trailed off; it rose before him—the far-off, bustling city, the office, the regular hours, the people whose toes must not be stepped upon, the letters to write and read, the papers to file, all the exact minutiae the position involved. And his comfortable old house? his leisure? his ease? And Mary Ann? Mary Ann would never consent to go so far! "I—I really—" he began.

Dr. Lavendar frowned. "Mr. Spangler, I would not seem to urge you. Ellen is too dear to us for that. But if you appreciate her as I suppose you do—"

"I do indeed!" broke in poor Augustus Spangler, fervently.

"The way is probably open to you."

"But—" said Mr. Spangler, and then broke out, with marked agitation; "I—I really don't see how I could possibly—" Yet even as he spoke he thought of Ellen's sweet eyes. "Good Heavens!" said Mr. Spangler, passionately; "what shall I do?"

But Dr. Lavendar was silent. Mr. Spangler got up and began to walk about.

"My affection and esteem," he said, almost weeping, "are unquestioned. But there are other considerations."

Dr. Lavendar said nothing.

"It is a cruel situation," said Mr. Spangler.

Dr. Lavendar looked down at his pipe.

There was a long silence. Augustus Spangler walked back and forth. Dr. Lavendar said never a word.

"A man must consider his own fitness for such a position," Mr. Spangler said, pleadingly.

"Perhaps," Dr. Lavendar observed, mildly, "Ellen's affections are not very deeply engaged? It will be better so."

"But they are!" cried Mr. Spangler. "I assure you that they are! And I—I was so happy," said the poor man; and sniffed suddenly, and tried to find the pocket in his coat-tails.

Dr. Lavendar looked at him out of the corner of his eye.

Mr. Spangler stood stock-still; he opened and shut his hands, his lips were pressed hard together. He seemed almost in bodily pain, for a slight moisture stood out on his forehead. He was certainly in spiritual pain. The Ideal of Sacrifice was being born in Mr. Spangler's soul. His mild, kind, empty face grew almost noble; certainly it grew very solemn.

"Dr. Lavendar," he said, in a low voice, "*I will do it*."

Dr. Lavendar was instantly on his feet; there was a grip of the hand, and, for a moment, no words.

"I'll telegraph Mr. Brown," said Mr. Spangler, breathlessly.

"So will I!" said Dr. Lavendar.

Mr. Spangler was scarlet with heroism. "It means giving up my house and my very congenial surroundings, and I fear Mary Ann will feel too old to accompany me; but with—with Ellen!"

"She's worth six Mary Anns, whoever Mary Ann may be," said Dr. Lavendar.

"You may have thought me hesitant," said Mr. Spangler, "but I felt that I must weigh the matter thoroughly."

"Why, certainly, man. It was your duty to think what was best for Ellen."

"Exactly," Mr. Spangler said, getting his breath again, and beginning to feel very happy. "And duty is, I hope, my watchword; but I had to reflect," he ended, a little uncomfortably.

But Dr. Lavendar would not let him be uncomfortable. They sat down again, and Dr. Lavendar filled another pipe, and until long after midnight they talked things over—the allowance to be made to David and his bride, the leasing of the house in Mercer, the possible obduracy of Mary Ann, and, most of all, the fine conduct of the Reverend Mr. Spangler.

But when they had said good-night, Dr. Lavendar sat awhile longer by his fireside, his pipe out, his old white head on his breast.

"The minute I get back," he said to himself after a while, sheepishly—"the minute I get back I poke my finger into somebody else's pie. But I think 'twas right: Ellen loves him; and he's not a bad man.—And Brown don't want brains."

Then he chuckled and got up, and blew out the lamp.

THE NOTE

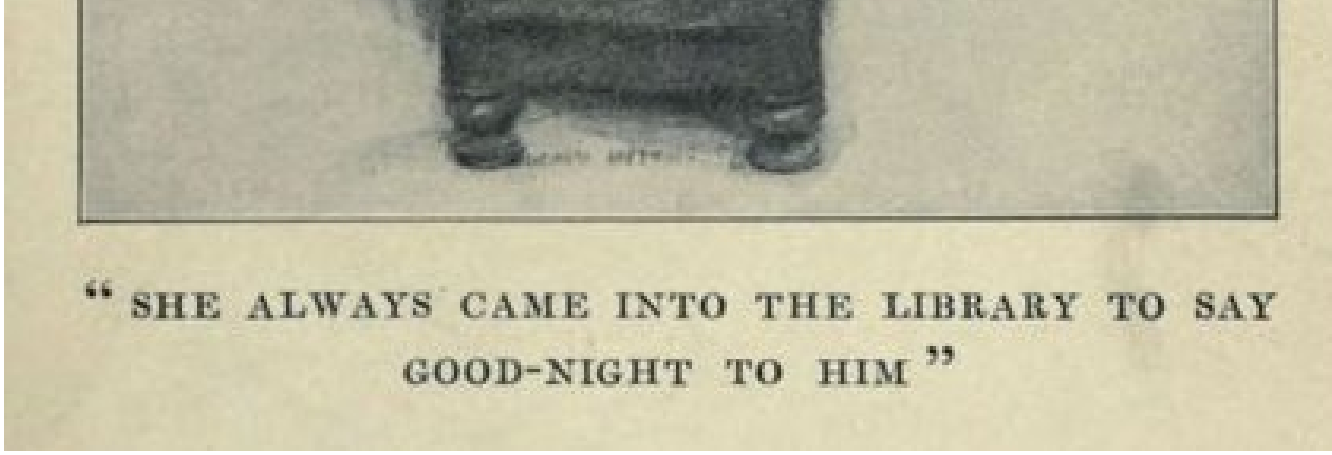
I

Of course everybody in Old Chester knew that there was something queer about Mary Gordon's marriage—not the mere fact of the man, queer as he was; for, to Old Chester's ideas, he was very queer.... A "travelling-man," to begin with—and the Gordons had a line of scholars and professional men behind them—a drummer, if you please. In theory, Old Chester was religiously democratic; it plumed itself upon its Christian humility, and every Sunday it publicly acknowledged that Old Chesterians were like the rest of humanity to the extent of being miserable sinners. But, all the same, that Mary Gordon should marry a "person" of that sort—

"Dear me!" said Old Chester.

However, travelling-men may be worthy; they need not necessarily use perfumery or put pomade upon their shiny, curly, black hair. But Mr. Algernon Keen was obviously not worthy, and he was saturated with perfumery, and his black, curly hair was sleek with oil. Furthermore, he was very handsome: his lips were weak and pouting and red; his eyes liquid and beautiful; his plump cheeks slightly pink. One may believe that such physical characteristics do not imply moral qualities; but only youth has such a belief. When one has lived a little while in the world, one comes to know that a human soul prisoned in such pretty flesh is piteously hampered. Yet Mary Gordon, meeting this poor creature by chance, fell deeply in love with him. Of course such falling in love was queer—it was inexplainable; for Mary was a nice girl—not, of course, of the caliber of some Old Chester girls; she had not the mind of Alice Gray nor the conscience of Sally Smith; but she was a quiet, biddable, good child—at

least so far as anybody knew. But nobody knew much about her. In the first place, the Gordons lived just far enough out of Old Chester to miss its neighborliness. Mary was not often seen in town, and in her own home her brother Alex's loud personality crushed her into a colorless silence. Her father did not crush her—he merely did not notice her; but he was fond of her—at least he had the habit of indifferent affection. She always came into the library to say good-night to him; and he, sitting by the fire in a big, winged chair, a purple silk handkerchief spread over his white locks, to keep off possible draughts, would turn his cheek up to her mechanically; but the soft touch of her lips never made him lift his eyes from his book. She never kissed Alex good-night; she was openly afraid of him. Alex was rude to her and made her wait on him, throwing her a curt "thank you" once in a while, generally coupled with some sarcastic reference to her slowness or stupidity—for, indeed, the child was both slow and stupid. Perhaps, had she been loved— But no one can tell now how that would have been. At any rate, there was a pathetic explanation of loneliness to account for the fact that she was drawn to this Algernon Keen, who had nothing to recommend him except a cheap and easy kindliness that cost him no effort and was bestowed on everybody.



"SHE ALWAYS CAME INTO THE LIBRARY TO SAY GOOD-NIGHT TO HIM"

"SHE ALWAYS CAME INTO THE LIBRARY TO SAY GOOD-NIGHT TO HIM"

Of course the two men, her father and brother, refused to consider Keen as Mary's suitor at all. Alex nearly had a fit over it; in his rage and mortification he took all Old Chester into his confidence. He went to the Tavern—this was the day after Mary had, trembling and crying, told her little love affair to her father and begged his consent—Alex went to the Tavern and ordered the snickering, perfumed youth out of town.

"Well, I guess not," said Algy. "This town doesn't belong to you, does it?"

Alex stammered with passion: "If—if you dare to address Miss Gordon again, I'll—I'll—I'll horsewhip you," he said, his pale eyes bulging from his crimsoning face.

"I guess Mary has a right to let me talk to her if she wants to; this is a free country," the other blustered. And Alex, loudly, on the Tavern steps, cursed him for a skunk, a— Well, Old Chester was never able to quote Alex. He came to his senses after this dreadful exhibition of himself, and was horribly mortified. But post-mortification cannot undo the deed, and before night everybody in Old Chester knew that Mary Gordon had fallen in love with —"the person who brings samples to Tommy Dove's apothecary shop."

Old Chester was truly sorry for Mary; "for," as Mrs. Barkley said, "love's

love, whether it's suitable or not; and Mary has such a lonely life, poor child! Well, it will take time for her to get over it."

It seemed to take a good deal of time. That winter she grew pale and was often ill. The poor little thing seemed to creep into her shell to brood over her blighted hopes. Once she was downright sick for a week, and Mr. Gordon sent for William King. Willy said at first that Mary had something on her mind (which certainly Mary's family did not need to be told).

"I believe she's thinking about that scoundrel yet," said Alex. "But she has just got to understand that we'll never allow it, Willy. You may as well make that clear to her, and let her get over her moping."

William King looked thoughtful and said he would call again.

However, any of us Old Chester girls could have enlightened the doctor. "Mary was pining away for her lover;" that was all there was to it. But the lover never appeared, being engaged in offering samples of pomade and perfumery to apothecary stores in other regions. And then, suddenly, the queer thing happened....

The *Globe* announced: "Married—by Dr. Lavendar, Mary Gordon to Algernon Keen"—and the date, which was the night before.

"*What!*" said Old Chester at the breakfast-table, and gaped out of its windows to see Mary, crying very much, get into the stage, not at her father's house, but at the Tavern door, if you please, and drive away with the Person. What did it mean? "Was Alex at home? Did he consent?" demanded Old Chester; for Alex had been away from home for a week. By noon it was decided that Alex had consented; for it came out that he had returned to Old Chester the previous afternoon, and with him, shrinking into the corner of the stage, was Mr. Algy Keen.

"Get out," Alex said to him when the stage drew up at the Gordon house. The man got out, shambling and stumbling, with a furtive look over his shoulder, for Alex Gordon walked behind him to the front door, his right hand gripped upon his walking-stick, his left clinched at his side.

"He kep' just behind the feller," the stage-driver told Van Horn at the Tavern afterwards—"just behind him, like as if he was afraid the feller'd run away from him. But the feller, he stopped right at the steps, and he turned around, and he says, 'Mind you,' he says (mad as a hatter)—'mind you,' he says, 'I'm not *brought*, I've *come*';—whatever that means," the stage-driver ruminated.

So much Old Chester knew the day after Mary Gordon's wedding. And it naturally sought to know a little more.

"I suppose her father feels it very much?" ventured Mrs. Barkley to Dr. Lavendar.

"Any man feels the marriage of his only girl," said Dr. Lavendar, briefly. And Mrs. Barkley held her tongue. But Mrs. Drayton, who was just then anxious about her soul and found it necessary to consult Dr. Lavendar as to the unpardonable sin—Mrs. Drayton was not so easily squelched. "My Jean says that the Gordon's Rachel told her that Alex brought the man into the house by the ear, and then sent her for you, running, and—"

"She didn't bring me into the house by the ear," said Dr. Lavendar.

"But why, do you suppose, was it all so sudden?" said Mrs. Drayton; "it almost looks—"

"How do you know it was sudden?" said Dr. Lavendar.

"Well, my Jean said—"

"It may have been sudden to Jean," said the old man; "possibly Mary had not taken Jean into her confidence. Some folks don't confide in servants, you know."

But Mrs. Drayton was proof against so delicate a thrust. "Well, I only hope she won't repent at her leisure;—if there's nothing but haste to repent of. If there's anything else—"

"I'll say good-day, Mrs. Drayton," interrupted Dr. Lavendar; "and as for your question about the unpardonable sin, ma'am, why, just be ready to forgive other folks and you needn't be afraid of the unpardonable sin for yourself."

He took his hat and stick and went thumping down-stairs. In the hall he met William King going up to see the invalid, and said, with a gasp: "Willy, my boy, a good, honest murderer is easier to deal with than some milder kinds of wrong-doing."

"Dr. Lavendar," said William, "I'd rather have a patient with small-pox than treat some lighter ills that I could name."

As for Mrs. Drayton, she told her daughter that Dr. Lavendar was very unspiritual, and did not understand the distress of a sensitive temperament. "Even the slightest error fills me with remorse," said Mrs. Drayton. "Dear me! I should think Mary Gordon would know what remorse is—for, of course, there is only one thing to think."

II

Old Chester thought the one thing. No evasions of Dr. Lavendar's, no miserable silence on the part of the disgraced father and the infuriated brother, could banish that one thought. But nothing definite was known. "Although," as everybody said to everybody else, "of course, Dr. Lavendar knows the whole thing, and probably Willy King does, too." If they did, they kept their knowledge to themselves. But Dr. Lavendar went often to the Gordon house that winter. "They're pretty lonely, those two men," he told Willy once—perhaps six months afterwards.

"Would either of them have softened if the baby had lived, do you think, sir?" William said. And Dr. Lavendar shook his head.

"Perhaps her father might. But Alex will never forgive her, I'm afraid."

And Alex never did forgive her—not even when she died, as, happily, she did six or seven years later. She died; and life closed over the miserable little tragedy as water closes, rippling, over some poor, broken thing flung into its depths.

"*Thank God!*" Alex said, when he heard she was gone.

"You may thank God for her," Dr. Lavendar said, turning upon him sternly, "but ask mercy for yourself, because this door of opportunity is shut upon you forever."

Dr. Lavendar had brought them the news. They did not ask how it had come to him; it was enough to hear it. The two men, Mary's father and brother, listened while he told them, briefly: "She died yesterday. The funeral will be to-morrow, at twelve."

"Thank God!" Alex said, hoarsely, and lifted his hand and cursed the man who had dishonored them.

And Dr. Lavendar turned upon him in solemn anger. "Your opportunity is gone—so far as she is concerned. There yet remains, however, the poor, foolish sinner whom she loved—"

"Damn him!" said Alex.

"—*and who loved her.*"

Old Mr. Gordon dropped his face in his hands and groaned.

"Who loved her," Dr. Lavendar repeated.

"For that, at least, he cannot be indifferent to us, whatever he has made us suffer."

Neither of his listeners spoke. It was growing dark in the long room, walled to the ceiling with books and lighted only by a fire sputtering in the grate. Mr. Gordon, sitting in his big, winged chair close to the hearth, said, after a long pause: "You said—to-morrow, Edward? Where?"

"In Mercer. I shall go up on the morning stage."

Again the silence fell. Alex got up and walked to the window and looked out. "Why didn't you bring Danny in, Dr. Lavendar?" he said, carelessly; "the little brute will freeze out there in your buggy. I'll call him in." He turned to leave the room, and then stopped.

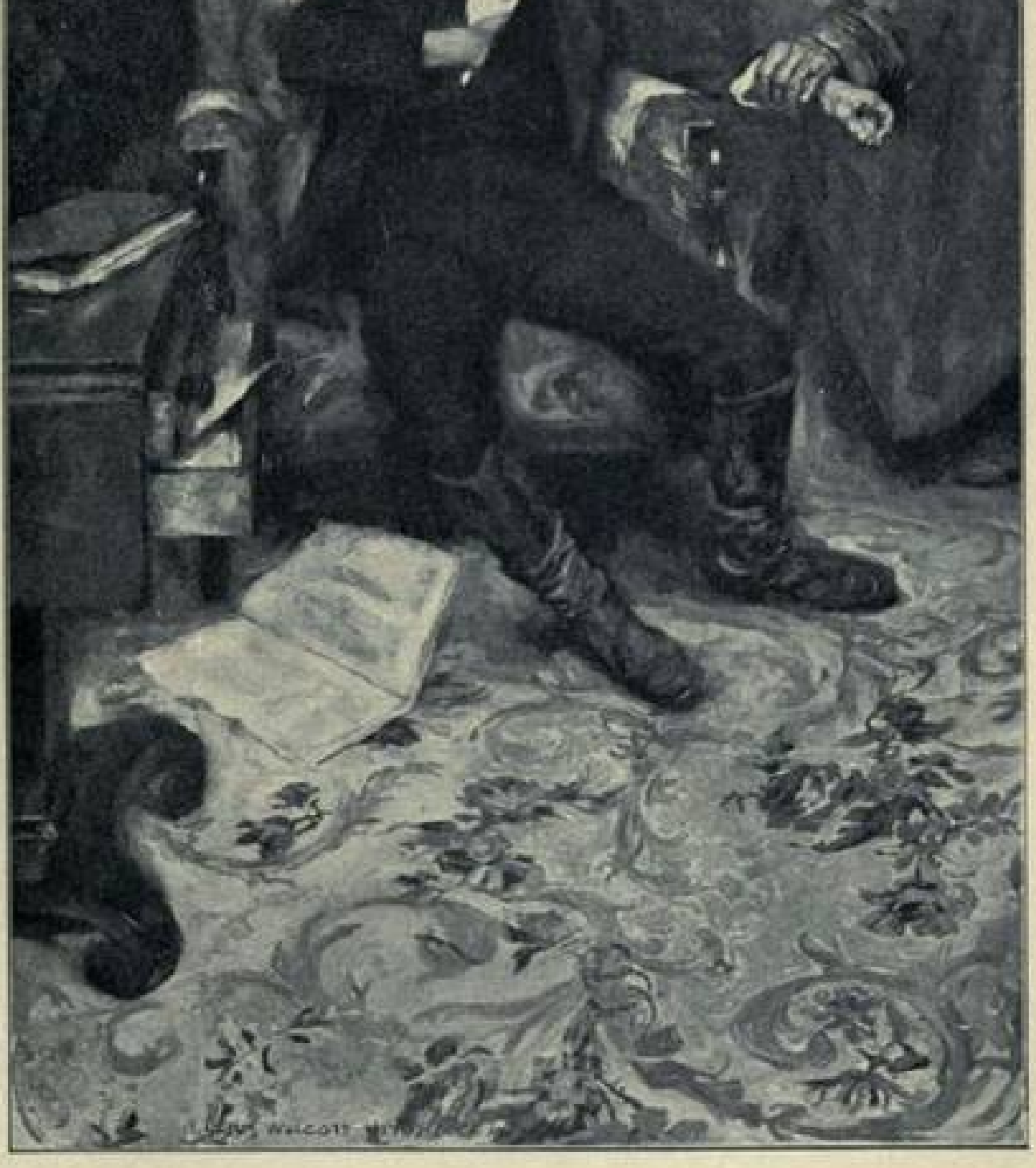
"Alexander, *sit down*," said Dr. Lavendar.

Alex sat down with involuntary quickness; then he threw his legs out in front of him and thrust his hands down into his pockets. "Dr. Lavendar, this is our affair. I'm obliged to you for your kind intentions; but this is our affair. You've told your news, and we have listened respectfully—if I should say gladly you

might be shocked. So I only say respectfully. But you have spoken; we have listened. That is all there is to it. The thing is finished. The book is closed. I say thank God! I don't know what my father says. If he takes my advice, for I've been a good son to him; I never gave him any cause to be ashamed;—if he takes my advice, he'll forget the whole affair. That's what I mean to do. The book is closed. I shall never think of it again." He got up and walked about with affectation of vast indifference.

"Alex, you will probably never think of anything else," Dr. Lavendar said, half pitifully; and then, sternly, again: "I can't make you accept the opportunity that still is open to you; but I will point it out to you: Come up to Mercer to-morrow with your father and me."

"Mercer!" the younger man cried out, furiously; "you mean to see her buried? To dance on her grave and pull the man out and spit in his face and—" He stopped, his face suddenly purpling, his light eyes staring and rolling; then he stumbled and jerked himself together, and lurched forward into a chair, breathing loudly. The two old men, trembling with horror, ran to him. "Oh, Edward," John Gordon said—"oh, Edward, why did you rouse him? He can't speak of it, he can't think of it. Alex—there!—we'll say no more about it."



" LURCHED FORWARD INTO A CHAIR, BREATHING LOUDLY "

"LURCHED FORWARD INTO A CHAIR, BREATHING LOUDLY"

Alex stared at them with glassy eyes, in silence; his father kept bemoaning himself and imploring his old friend to say no more. "You won't speak of it again, Edward? He goes out of his head with rage. Promise me not to speak of

it any more."

"No, John; no," Dr. Lavendar said, sadly; and as Alex's eyes cleared into bewildered consciousness, the old minister stood a little aside while the father helped the son to his feet and led him away. When he came back, shuffling feebly down the long, darkening room, Dr. Lavendar was still sitting by the fire. "He's quiet now; I—I think he's ashamed. I hope so. But he won't come out of his room."

Dr. Lavendar nodded.

John Gordon spread his purple handkerchief over his white locks, with shaking hands, and then sat down, tumbling back in his chair in a forlorn heap. "Edward," he said, feebly, "tell me about it. It was on Thursday? Had she been sick long?" Then, in a low voice, "She—didn't lack for comforts?"

"No; I think not. The man was as tender with her as—as you might have been. She was sick—I mean in bed—two weeks. She had been ailing for a long time; you remember I spoke to you about it about a month ago. And again last week."

"You—saw her?"

"Yes."

"More than once?"

"Oh, many times," Dr. Lavendar said, simply; "many times, of course."

John Gordon put out his hand; Dr. Lavendar shook it silently. Then suddenly the old man broke out, in weak, complaining anger: "He wouldn't let me write to her. I would have sent her some money. He wouldn't hear of it. He was awful, Edward. I—I didn't dare."

Dr. Lavendar was silent. It had grown so dark that he could not see the father's face. Suddenly, from behind the leafless trees at the foot of the garden, a smouldering yellow glow of sunset broke across the gloom of the room, and touched the purple cowl and the veined hands covering the aged face. Dr. Lavendar sighed.

"What can I do, Edward? I can't go to-morrow. You see I can't."

"Yes, you can, John."

"He would die; he'd have another attack. His heart is bad, Edward."

"Oh, I'm afraid it is, I'm afraid it is. But John, you do your duty. Never mind Alex's heart. That isn't your affair."

"Oh, I couldn't possibly go—not possibly," the father protested, nervously.

The glow died out. The room grew dusk and then dark. Mr. Gordon got up and reached to the mantel-shelf for a spill. "Mary used to make the spills for me," he said, vaguely. "Now our Rachel does it, and she doesn't half bend the end over." He lighted the spill, the little flame flickering upon his poor old face peering out from under his purple handkerchief. "Oh, Alex ought not to be so hard. I would go with you to-morrow, Edward, but I can't, you know. I can't." Then, with a shaking hand, he took off the ground-glass globe and lighted the tall lamp that stood among a litter of papers on the library-table. "You see how it is, Edward, don't you? I can't possibly go."

"You will be sorry if you don't, John."

"I'll be sorry anyhow," he burst out. "I'm always sorry. I've been sorry all my life. My children are my sorrow."

III

Algy Keen, his face swollen with crying, his black hair limp and uncurled, sat on the edge of the bed in the back room of a dingy Mercer lodging-house. The windows had been left open after Mary had been taken away, so that the room was cold; and there were still two chairs facing each other,—a certain distance apart. The room was in dreary order, and there was the scent of flowers in the chill air. The bed was tumbled, for the forlorn man had dropped down upon it to rest. But he was too tired to rest, and was sitting up again, dangling his stockinged feet on the shabby carpet and talking to Dr. Lavendar. He snuffled, and his poor, weak lips shook, and he rubbed the back of his trembling hand across his nose. Algy had had broken nights for a fortnight, and the last three days and nights of Mary's life he had almost no sleep at all; these two days when she lay dead in their bare room he had slept and wept and slept again; and now, when he and Dr. Lavendar had come back from the funeral, he sat on the edge of the bed and whimpered with weakness and grief.

"Well, sir, she was a good girl," he said. "I don't care what anybody says, she was a good girl. I ain't saying that things was just right, to begin with. But that wasn't Mary's fault. No; she was a good girl. And her folks treated her bad. They'd always treated her mean bad. My goodness! if they'd 'a' let me come to see her respectable, as you would any of your lady friends, 'stead of skulkin' 'round—... *I can't stand the smell of those flowers*," he broke out, in a high, crying voice; "I left them all out there at the cemetery, and I smell them here—I smell them here," he moaned, trembling.

"I like to smell them," Dr. Lavendar said. "They mean the old friendship for Mary. Mrs. King sent them. She's our doctor's wife in Old Chester. She always liked Mary."

"I don't see how she could help it," Algy said, his face crumpling with tears. "Well, she was a good girl. And she was a good wife, sir, too. I tell you, you never saw a better wife. I used to come home tired, and there'd be my slippers out for me. Yes, sir; she never missed it. And she was always pleasant, too; you mayn't call just being pleasant, religion, but I—"

"I do," Dr. Lavendar interposed.

"Well, so do I," Algy said, his face lightening a little. "I call it a better religion than her folks showed. Well, now, sir, I loved Mary"—he stopped and cried, openly—"I loved her (I didn't need that hell-hound of a brother to come after me)—yes, I was just as fond of her; and yet there was times when I come home at night—not—not quite—well, maybe a little—you know?"

"Yes," said Dr. Lavendar.

"But, my God, sir, Mary was pleasant. It isn't every woman that would be pleasant then, is it?"

"No, it isn't, Algy."

"Course, next day she'd tell me I done wrong. (She never told me so at the time—Mary had sense.) And I always said: 'Well, yes, Mary, that's so. And I'll never do it again.' But she was pleasant. Course I don't mean she was lively. She used to remember—well, that we'd made a mistake. *You* know? And she used to kind a brood on it. She talked to you considerably about it, I guess. She said you comforted her. She said you said that maybe her—her mistake had brought her to be kind o' more religious—saved her, as you might say."

"I said that she had come to know her Saviour through His forgiveness."

"I don't think Mary needed any forgiveness," the poor husband said, with

tearful resentment; "I think her folks needed it."

"I'm sorry for them," Dr. Lavendar said. "They have got to remember that they might have been kinder. That's a hard thing to have to remember."

The young man nodded. "I hope they'll remember it, hard!"

"They will," said Dr. Lavendar, sighing.

"I spent my last cent on Mary," Algernon rambled on. "I got her a good coffin—a stylish coffin. The plate was solid silver. The man wanted me to take a plated one. I says 'no,' I says; 'I don't get plated things for my wife if it takes my last cent.' Well, it just about took it. But I don't care. Her people threw her off, and I did for her. I spent my last cent."

"You took her from them in the first place, Algernon," the old minister said. "Don't forget that you sinned."

"Well, you said she was forgiven," the other broke out, angrily. "I guess God's more easy than some people."

"He is."

"Well, then," Algy said, resentfully; "what's the use of talking?"

Dr. Lavendar was silent.

"I don't begrudge a cent I spent on her," Algy went on. "I had laid by $1140 to set up a place of my own here in Mercer. At least, it wasn't me; I'm not one to save much; it was Mary did it. But these last eight months have taken it all, 'cause I 'ain't done hardly any work; couldn't be away from her on the road, you know; so we had to live on that money. I could 'a' got a cheaper coffin; but I wouldn't. As for the doctor, I got the best in town. I don't believe in

economizing on your wife. And I paid him. I paid him $204 yesterday morning, though it seems high, considering he didn't cure her. But I wasn't going to let Mary get buried owing the doctor. And I paid for the coffin. 'Spot cash,' I says to the man, 'make it spot cash, and name your figure.' He took off $17. Well, how much do you suppose I've got left now, Dr. Lavendar, out of $1140? Just $23, sir. I don't care; I don't begrudge Mary a cent. I thought the coffin looked handsome, didn't you?—*Oh, I wish somebody had 'a' moved those chairs when we were gone!*" he cried, his voice shrill and breaking.

Dr. Lavendar got up and pushed one of the chairs back against the wall and brought the other to Algy's side. The young man laid his hand on it and began to cry.

IV

"No, I suppose you don't care to hear about it, John. But I want to tell you; so I guess you'll listen to please me?"

John Gordon said nothing.

"It isn't a long story," Dr. Lavendar said, and told him briefly of the funeral. When he ended there was silence. Then, "John," Dr. Lavendar said.

"Yes, Edward."

"The man is in need."

"What's that to me?" the other burst out.

"Much," said Dr. Lavendar; "it gives you a chance."

"You mean a chance to give him some money?" said the other. "Good God! To pay the scoundrel for what he did to us? Edward, you don't understand human nature."

"He spent his last cent making Mary comfortable, John. She told me so herself."

"I will never give that—creature one penny of my clean money."

Dr. Lavendar said nothing.

The older man bent forward, shivering, and stirred the fire. The coal broke into sputtering fragments and the flames roared up into the soot. "Alex would never listen to giving him any money."

"Don't ask him to listen to it. Haven't you got your own check-book?"

"Let him rot. That's what Alex says."

"I don't believe it's what you say, John, because he was good to Mary;—and you were not."

Mr. Gordon groaned.

"Well, I won't give him anything; I'll lend it, possibly."

Dr. Lavendar frowned and got up.

Mr. Gordon put out a trembling, detaining hand.

"Edward, you don't understand.... How much do you want for him?"

"He had saved about $1200 to go into some business. It's all gone."

"Well, I won't give it to him," the other repeated, with feeble sharpness; "I'll lend it—to please you."

"I'm sorry you haven't a better motive."

John Gordon got up and went over to his library-table and fumbled about in one of the drawers for his check-book. "I'm a fool," he said, fretfully; "I don't know but what I'm worse. Lending money to— But you say he was good to her? Poor Mary! Oh!" he ended, half to himself, "I don't know why Alex is so hard." Then he took his quill and began to scrawl his check. "I'd rather see him starve," he said.

"No, you wouldn't," Dr. Lavendar said, calmly.

"Well, there! Take it! Get a receipt."

"Johnny, think better of it."

"You needn't take it if you don't want to," the other said, sullenly.

Dr. Lavendar took it, and John Gordon called after him,

"You won't tell Alex?"

Dr. Lavendar shook his head and sighed. As he drove home he said to himself that a loan was better than nothing. "But, Danny, my boy," he added, "what a chance he had! Well, he'll take it yet—he'll take it yet. The trouble with me, Daniel, is, I'm in too much of a hurry to make folks good. I must reform."

Danny blinked a grave agreement, and Dr. Lavendar, dropping his shortcomings joyfully from his mind, began to sing to himself:

"Oh! what has caused this great commotion—motion—motion
Our country through?"

When, however, a day or two later, Dr. Lavendar went up to Mercer to take the check to Algernon Keen, he found to his astonishment that it was not so easy to secure to his old friend even the smaller and meaner opportunity of lending, much less giving.

At first, Algernon looked at him open-mouthed. "*Him*—offering to lend money to—?" His astonishment robbed him of words. Then into his poor, shallow face came the first keen touch of shame. But instantly he was ashamed of his shame,—ashamed, like so many of us strange human creatures, of the stirring of God within him. He didn't want their dirty money, he said. They thought themselves so good, they couldn't stomach Mary. Well, then, they were too good for him to touch their money. His voice shook with angry grief. His bitterness was genuine, even though he used it to hide that first regenerative pang of shame. No; Dr. Lavendar could take their money back to them. "I spent my last cent, just about, on Mary," he said; "and I didn't begrudge it, either."

"I'm sure you didn't begrudge it."

Algy's weak mouth shook and his eyes filled; he turned away and stared out of the window. "He better have offered to lend her some money than me," he said. "I bet he's glad she's dead."

(Dr. Lavendar thought of Alex.) "He wants to help you now for her sake," he said.

"I don't want his money," the younger man insisted, brokenly; "he let her die."

"I think that it would please her to have you take it."

"I don't want to be under obligations to those people," Algernon said, doggedly.

"If Mr. Gordon has your note, it's business."

Algy hesitated. "I suppose he thinks I'd never pay it back?"

"If he takes your note, it looks as if he expected to be repaid."

"It's treating me white, I'll say that," Algernon said. And again his face reddened slowly to his forehead and he would not meet Dr. Lavendar's eye. "But I don't want their favors," he cried, threateningly.

"It's business, if you give your note," Dr. Lavendar repeated. "Come, Algernon, let her father do something for her sake. And as for you—it's a chance to play the man; don't you see that?"

Algy caught his breath. "Damn!—if I borrowed his money I'd pay it—I'd pay it, if it took the blood out of me."

"I will make your feeling clear to him," Dr. Lavendar said. "Let's make out the note now, Algy."

The old man got up and hunted about for pen and paper. "Here's a prescription blank," he said; "that will do." An ink-bottle stood on the narrow mantel-shelf, a rusty pen corroding in its thickening depths; but Dr. Lavendar, in a very small, shaky old hand, managed to scrawl that "Algernon Keen, for value received, promised to pay to John Gordon—"

—"in a year," Algy broke in; "I ain't going to have it run but a year—and put

in the interest, sir. I'll have no favors from 'em. I'll pay interest; I'll pay six per cent.—like anybody else would."

—"and interest on same," Dr. Lavendar added. "Now, you sign here, Algy. There! that will please Mary."

"Oh, my!" said Algernon, his poor, red-rimmed eyes filling—"oh, my! my! what will I do without her?"

V

The next day Dr. Lavendar carried the note back to old John Gordon, who took it, his mouth tightening, and glanced at it in silence. Then he shuffled over to a safe in the corner of his library and pulled out a japanned tin box. Dr. Lavendar watched him fumble with the combination lock, holding the box up to catch the light, and shaking it a little until the lid clicked open. "He'll never pay it," John Gordon said.

"He'll try to," Dr. Lavendar said; "but it's doubtful, of course. He's a sickly fellow, and he hasn't much gumption. But if there's any good in him, your trusting him will bring it out."

"There isn't any good in him," the other said, violently.

And that was the last they said about it; for the time Algernon Keen dropped out of their lives.

He set up his little store in Mercer, and struggled along, advertising his samples of perfumery and pomade upon his own person; trying to drink a little

less, for Mary's sake; whimpering with loneliness and sick-headache in his grimy room in the hotel where Mary had died; and never forgetting for a day that promise to pay on the back of the prescription paper in John Gordon's possession. But when the year came round, on the 2d of December, he had not a cent in hand to meet his obligation. And that was why Dr. Lavendar heard of him again. Would the doctor—this on perfumed paper, ruled, and with gilt edges—would the doctor "ask him if he would extend?" Algernon could pay the interest now; but that was all he could do. He wasn't in very good shape, he said. He'd been in the hospital for a month, and had had to hire a salesman. "I guess he cheated me; he was a kind of fancy talker, and got me to let him buy some stock; he got off his slice, I bet." That was the reason, Algy said, that he could not make any payment on the principal. But he was going to introduce a new article for the lips (no harmful drugs in it), called Rosebloom—first-class thing; and he expected he'd do first rate with it. And in another year he'd surely pay that note. It hung over him, he said, like a ton. "I guess he don't want it paid any more than I want to pay it," Algy ended, simply.

Of course Dr. Lavendar asked for an extension, and got it, though John Gordon's lip curled. "I never expected to hear from him or his note again," he said. "Probably his honesty won't last over another year."

Dr. Lavendar went up to Mercer to see Algy, and they talked things over in the store between the calls of two customers. Algy's hair was sleek and curly as before, for business is business; but he looked draggled and forlorn; his color had gone and he was thinner, and there were lines on his forehead, and his bright, hazel eyes, kind and shallow as those of some friendly animal, had come into their human birthright of worry. "It's this note that takes the spunk out of me," he said. "If I could only get it paid! Then I'd hire a house and have the shop in front. I've thought some I'd get married, too. It's hard on your digestion living in one of these here cheap hotels. But I can't get over thinking of Mary. I don't seem to relish other ladies. I suppose they're all right; but Mary was so pleasant." And his eyes reddened. "And, anyway, it would cost

more to keep a wife, and I don't propose to spend money that way. *He's* treated me white, I'll say that for him; and I propose to show him—Dr. Lavendar, I haven't drunk too much only three times in the last year—honest, I haven't. I thought you'd think that would please Mary?"

"I'm sure it does," said Dr. Lavendar.

"I suppose you think," the drummer said, sheepishly, "that it was pretty darned foolish to drop three times?"

"I think pretty soon it won't be even three times," Dr. Lavendar declared; "but it's hard work; I know it is."

Algernon looked at him eagerly. "You know how it is yourself, maybe?"

"Well, I never happened to want to take too much," Dr. Lavendar said, gently; "if I had, it would have been hard, I'm sure."

"Well, you bet," Algy told him, knowingly. Then they talked the business over, and Dr. Lavendar clapped Algy on the shoulder and said he believed he'd have that house and shop yet. "Rosebloom may be a gold-mine," said Dr. Lavendar. Then he gave Algy some advice about the window display, and suggested a little gas-jet on the counter where gentlemen might light their cigars; and he told Algy what brand he smoked himself, and recommended it, in spite of its price. Algy smacked his thigh at that, and said Dr. Lavendar had the making of a smart business man in him. Indeed, Algy felt so cheered that he opened his show-case and displayed a box of his new cosmetic.

"Look here, doctor," he said, earnestly; "I'll give you a box. Yes—yes! I will. I'd just as lief as not. You maybe wouldn't want to use it yourself; gentlemen don't, often. But give it to one of your lady friends. Do, now, doctor. It don't cost me much of anything—and I'm sure you've been kind to me."

And Dr. Lavendar accepted the lip-salve, and thanked Algy warmly; then he said that the picture on the lid of the tight-waisted lady was very striking.

"That's so!" cried Algy. "She's a beauty. She makes me think of Mary."

Algernon had presented Dr. Lavendar with a cigar, and the old minister was smoking it in great comfort, his feet on the base of a rusty, melon-shaped iron stove; Algy was leaning back against the counter, his elbows on the show-case behind him. "Dr. Lavendar," he said, looking at the toe of his boot, "I—got something on my mind."

"Well, off with it, quick as you can."

"I've been thinking about the Day of Judgment."

"Ho!" said Dr. Lavendar.

"Well, sir, I get to thinking: if everybody's sins are to be read out loud before all the world—standing up, rows and rows and rows of 'em. Can't see the end of 'em—so many. I kind a' hate to think that Mary might hear—things about me."

"Well, Keen," said Dr. Lavendar, slowly, "I don't believe it will be that way." He hesitated a little. After all, it is a risk to take away even a false belief, unless you can put a true one in its place.

Algy stopped looking at the toe of his boot. "*What!*" said he.

"Now just look at it," said Dr. Lavendar. "Who would be the better for that kind of publicity? Good people wouldn't like it; it would pain them. You say yourself that Mary wouldn't like to hear that you did wrong three times."

"No; she wouldn't," Algernon said.

"Wicked people might enjoy it," Dr. Lavendar ruminated, "but—"

—"but God don't cater to the wicked?" Algy finished, quickly.

"That's just it," said Dr. Lavendar. "He doesn't. But I tell you what it is, Algy, it is painful enough to just have your Saviour tell you your sins when you're sitting all alone—or, maybe, lying awake in the dark; that's a dreadful time to hear them. It's worse than having rows of people listening."

Algernon nodded. "Maybe you're right," he said, sighing.

The birth of a soul is a painful process. But when he went away Dr. Lavendar's eyes were full of hope.

And he grew more hopeful when, as the next year came round and Algernon again asked for extension, he was able to carry back, not only the note and the interest to John Gordon, but a payment of $24. What that $24 meant of self-denial and perseverance Dr. Lavendar knew almost as well as Algy himself.

"I don't know whether you meant it, John," he said, as the old man took the note and locked it up in the japanned box—"I don't know that it was your intention, but I believe the responsibility of debt is going to make a man of Mary's husband."

"Debt doesn't generally work that way," Mr. Gordon said.

"No; it doesn't. But He maketh the wrath of man to praise Him, once in a while, Johnny."

"It's nothing to me. I'm done with him."

"'If the court knows itself, which it think it do,'" said Dr. Lavendar,

chuckling, "you're just beginning with him."

"I'd rather have him decent, if that's what you mean. But I despise him."

"I don't," said Dr. Lavendar. "I tell you, John, we're poor, limited critters, you and I. We felt that no good could possibly come out of Nazareth. I must confess that when I got you to send him that money I was thinking more of the benefit to you than any effect it might have on him. I thought he didn't amount to two cents. To my shame I say it. But I was blind as a bat; the Lord had sent him a great experience—*Mary's death*. Well, it was like a clap of thunder on a dark night; the lightning showed up a whole landscape I didn't know. There was honesty; and there was perseverance; and there was love, mind you, most of all. Love! I tell you, Johnny, only the Lord knows what is lying in the darkness of human nature. In fact," said Dr. Lavendar, reflectively, "as I get older there is nothing more constantly astonishing to me than the goodness of the Bad;—unless it is the badness of the Good. But that's not so pleasant. No, sir; I don't despise Mr. Keen."

Nor did he despise Algy when the note had to be extended still again, although again Algy was ready not only with the interest, but with $37.50 of the principal.

VI

As Algernon struggled along with Rosebloom and cheap cigars and bright red and green perfumed soaps, the debt was lessened and lessened; and the back of the note was almost covered with extensions, yet only $317 had been paid off. In spite of himself John Gordon grew interested; he would not have

admitted it for the world, but he wanted to hear about Dr. Lavendar's annual visits to Mercer; and Dr. Lavendar used to drive out to smoke a pipe with him and tell him what Algy had said and done. One day—it was seven years after the note had been drawn—a clear, heartless winter day, with a cold, high wind that made the old minister look so blue that John Gordon mixed a glass of whiskey-and-water and made him drink it before they began to talk—that day Mr. Gordon went so far as to ask a question about Algy. "Has he given you anything more for your complexion, Edward?" he said, with a faint grin.

"He gave me a smelling-bottle this time. I handed it over to Mary, and told her not to let me get a sniff of it; and she said, 'Sakes! it's beautiful!' But I'll tell you something he said, Johnny: he said that his debt to you was a millstone round his neck. And yet the truth is, it's a life-buoy!"

John Gordon looked at the soiled, crumpled paper, with its dates of extensions, and smiled grimly. "Well, I won't deprive him of his life-buoy."

"The store is doing pretty well," Dr. Lavendar went on—and stopped, because Alex entered.

"Whose store is doing pretty well," he asked, civilly enough—for Alex.

"Algernon Keen's," said Dr. Lavendar.

Alex's face changed; he looked from one to the other of the old men by the fire, and he saw his father's hand open and close nervously. But he restrained himself until their visitor had gone. He even went out into the sharp, bright wind and unhitched Dr. Lavendar's little blind horse Goliath, backing the buggy close to the steps and helping the old man in with what politeness he could muster. Then he hurried back into the library to his father.

"I should like to know, sir," he said, standing up with his back to the fire, his legs, in their big, mud-stained top-boots, wide apart, his hands under his coat-

tails—"I should like to know, sir, why Dr. Lavendar sees fit to refer to a subject which is most offensive to us?" He fixed his motionless, pale eyes on his father, shrinking back in the winged chair.

"I don't know—I don't know," said John Gordon. Then, suddenly, he put out his hand and caught at the crumpled note on the table beside him and put it in his pocket. Instantly suspicion flamed into Alex's eyes. His face turned dully red, almost purple. He made a step forward as though to interpose and grasp at the paper, restrained himself, and said, with laborious politeness:

"If that is a note, sir—I thought I saw indorsements of interest—sha'n't I put it into the safe for you?"

"I won't trouble you, Alex."

Alex stood silent; then suddenly he struck the table with his fist: "My God! I believe you've been lending money to that—to that—"

Mr. Gordon began to shake very much.

"Did Dr. Lavendar presume to ask you to lend money to—to—"

Mr. Gordon passed his hand over his lips; then he said, faintly, "No; he didn't."

Alex, like a boat brought suddenly up into the wind, stammered uncertainly. "Oh; I—I—thought—" And then suspicion broke out again. "Has the creature asked you for a loan?"

"No," Mr. Gordon said.

And Alex gaped at him, silenced. Yet he was certain that that strip of paper had some connection with Algernon Keen. "I beg your pardon," he said; "I

thought for an instant that you were dickering with the man who seduced your daughter. I am sure I beg your pardon for the thought," he ended, with elaborate and ironical courtesy, for his father's obvious agitation assured him that he was right. "I only felt that if it was his note, it must be kept carefully—carefully." He smiled in a deadly way he had, and opened and shut his hand as though he would close it on the hilt of a knife. "But, of course, I was mistaken. You would press it if you had his note—although 'sue a beggar.' And, besides, if we had got as far as lending him money, we would be asking him to dinner next."

Mr. Gordon cringed.

"So I beg your pardon," Alex ended, sardonically.

"Very well—very well," his father said; and got up and began to potter about among his books, as much as to say that the subject was ended.

"It *is* a note," Alex said to himself, and smiled.... So far the creature had gone scot-free. In these days of lawfully accepted dishonor revenge is not talked about. But perhaps it would come to his hand. Not the revenge of the instincts—not the shedding of blood, man fashion; but the revenge of inflicting misery. Not much of a revenge, of course, but the best that he could get. And so he smiled to himself....

He said no more at the time; but months later his father realized that the incident was not forgotten when Alex said, suddenly, sneering: "So your son-in-law is prospering in his business? I saw his establishment to-day in Mercer. If he owes you any money he will be able to pay cash. I congratulate you, sir."

Old Mr. Gordon made no reply. He was very feeble that autumn. Willy King told Alex that another attack of bronchitis would be the end. "He can't stand it," said Dr. King. "I'd take him South, Alex, if I were you."

Alex did not like to leave his mill in Upper Chester, but, as he told Willy, he was a good son, and always did his duty to his father. "I play dominoes with him every night," he said;—so he would take the old man South, though to go and come would keep him from business almost a week.

It was then that John Gordon told Dr. Lavendar that Alex suspected him of lending money to Mr. Keen. "And if I die," he said, "Alex will squeeze the poor devil—he'll squeeze him till he ruins him. I—I suppose I'm a great fool, but I almost thought maybe, sometime, I'd destroy that note, Edward?"

Dr. Lavendar chuckled: "I knew you'd come to it, Johnny; but—" he stopped and ruminated. "You've come to it; so that's all right. But do you know—I don't believe he can do without it quite yet awhile."

"Poor devil!" John Gordon said again, kindly. "Well, I'll let him gnaw on it awhile longer. I suppose he'll want another extension?"

"Probably," said Dr. Lavendar. "He is just holding his own this year; he will be able to pay the interest, he told me, but not very much more."

Extension was necessary, as Dr. Lavendar had foreseen; and when he wrote to Mr. Gordon about it the old man replied in obvious fear of his son. The note was in his safe, he said; Edward knew where it was; it was in the japanned box. "But I don't care to ask Alex to get it," he explained. "He doesn't know of its existence; so I'll give you power of attorney to see to it. You'd better just have Ezra Barkley put it in shape for you, because it will be necessary to go up to the house and open the safe to get it and put it back again. Alex is never at home until late in the afternoon, but Rachel is there and will let you in. You'll find some very good Monongahela in the chimney closet." Then he added the combinations of the locks on the safe and the japanned box.

"Stick that in, Ezra, will you, about going up to the house?" Dr. Lavendar said.

And Ezra stuck it in solemnly, and then held his pen between his teeth and blotted his paper. "It is estimated," he observed, through his shut teeth, "that the amount of ink used in the United States of America, in signatures to wills, since the year when the independence of the colonies was declared, would be sufficient in bulk to float a—"

"Well, Ezra," said Dr. Lavendar, chuckling, "this paper seems rather liberal. Suppose I take some cash out of the safe to repair the roof of the vestry? It leaks like a sieve."

"Your construction of liberality is at fault, sir," Mr. Ezra corrected him, gently; "this paper defines just exactly what you may do, up to the moment when the principal reclaims the paper—or dies."

"Well, I hope he won't reclaim it, or die, either, till he gets an affair we are both interested in patched up," Dr. Lavendar said; then he listened politely while Mr. Ezra told him how many times the word "ink" occurred in Holy Writ.

Dr. Lavendar went away with his power of attorney in his pocket. And when he sent it to John Gordon to sign, he seemed to take it for granted that he and Mr. Gordon were equally interested in the development and well-being of Mary's husband. He said in his letter such things as, "You'll make a man of him yet;" and, "Your patience has given the best elements in him time to come out." Dr. Lavendar had a perfectly unreasonable way of imputing good motives to people; the consequence was he was not very much astonished when they displayed goodness. He was not astonished when, some two months later, another letter came from old Mr. Gordon, saying that on the whole he thought the note had better not run any longer. "I am going to forgive him his debt," Mary's father wrote, in a feeble scrawl; "and I'll be obliged to you if you will go

up to my house and get that note and send it to me. I'm pretty shaky on my pins, and I don't want to run risks, so I wish you'd tear the signature out and burn it before you mail the note. I'll send it along to Mr. Keen. I mean to write to him and tell him I think he is honest, anyway. The fact is, I half respect the poor fellow. It's been a long winter, and I can't say I'm much better. Willy King doesn't know everything. These doctors are too confoundedly ready to send a man away from home. I should have been just as well off in Old Chester. *Be sure and destroy that signature*."

Dr. Lavendar read this letter joyfully, but without surprise. "I'm glad he didn't take my advice and let it go on any longer," he said to himself; "I guess I'U risk the effect on Algy now."

Then he wondered if there would be any danger of meeting Alex if he went up to the house right after dinner. "I can't manage it this morning," he said to himself. "I've got to go and see Mrs. Drayton. Well, I wish the Lord would see fit to cure her—or something."

So he went plodding out into a still, gray February day, and called on Mrs. Drayton, and stopped at the post-office to hear the news, and then went home to his dinner. "Ye're not going out *again*?" his Mary cried, in shrill remonstrance, when in the afternoon she saw him muffle himself up for the drive out into the country; "it's beginning to snow!"

"I am," said Dr. Lavendar; "and see you have a good supper for me when I get back." He got into his buggy, buttoning the apron up in front of him, for it was a wet snow. He had on a shabby old fur cap, which he pulled well down over his forehead, furrowed by other people's sins and troubles; but his eyes peered from under it as bright and happy as a squirrel's.

His little blind horse pulled slowly and comfortably up the hill, stopping to get his breath on a shaky bridge over a run. In the silence of the snow Dr.

Lavendar did not hear the stage coming down the hill until it was almost on the bridge; then he had to pull over to let it pass. As he did so the single passenger inside rapped on the window, and then opened it and thrust his head out, calling to the driver to stop.

"Dr. Lavendar! you have heard, I suppose? Very sad. A great shock. Of course I'm going on at once to bring the body back. It is difficult to get off at this season, but a son has a sacred duty." Alex's pale eyes were bulging from his red, excited face.

"What news?" Dr. Lavendar said. "You don't mean—Alex! John isn't—your father isn't—"

"My father is dead," Alex said, with ponderous solemnity. "It is a great grief, of course; but I trust I shall be properly resigned. His age rendered such an event not altogether unexpected."

Dr. Lavendar could not speak; but as the stage-driver began to gather up his reins from the steaming backs of his horses, he said, brokenly: "Wait—wait. Tell me about it, Alex; your father and I have been friends all our lives." Alex told him briefly: He had just had a despatch; his father had died that morning; he had been less well for a fortnight. "I had a letter from him this morning," Alex said, "in which he referred to his health—"

"So had I—so had I."

"I cannot get back with the body for six days—three to go, three to come," Alex said, "but I will be obliged if you will arrange for the obsequies next Thursday."

"Yes, yes. I will make any arrangements for you," Dr. Lavendar said. He took out his big red silk pocket-handkerchief and blew his nose with a trembling flourish. "We were boys together; your father was the big boy, you

know; I was the youngster. But we were great friends. Alex, I am afraid my own grief has made me forgetful of yours; but you have had a loss, my boy—a great loss."

"Very much so—very much so," Alex agreed, with a proper sigh, and pulled up the window of the stage, then lowered it abruptly: "Oh, Dr. Lavendar, are you going on as far up as—as *my* house?"

"As *your* house?" Dr. Lavendar repeated. "Oh—oh yes; I didn't understand. Yes, I am."

"Would it inconvenience you," Alex said, "to stop there? I am going to ask Mr. Ezra Barkley to come up at once and put seals on various things. I am the sole executor, as well as the heir, of course; but I sha'n't be able to attend to things for a week; and the forms of law must be observed. If you could be on hand when Barkley is there—not that I do not trust him."

Dr. Lavendar stared at him blankly; for an intelligent man, Alex was sometimes a great fool. But he only nodded gravely, and said he would stop at the house and wait for Mr. Ezra; Alex signed to the driver, and the stage went rolling noiselessly on into the storm. When, at the foot of the hill, Alex glanced back through the little oblong of bubbly glass in the leather curtain of the coach, he saw Dr. Lavendar's buggy standing motionless where he had passed it on the bridge; then the snow hid it.

Under the bridge the creek ran swiftly between edges of ice that here and there had caught a dipping branch and held it prisoner, or had spread in agate curves—snow white, clear black, faint white again—around a stone in mid-stream. On the black current, silent except for a murmurous rush of bubbles under the ice, the snowflakes melted instantly, myriads of them—hurrying, hurrying, hurrying; then, as they touched the water, gone. Dr. Lavendar, in the buggy, sat looking down at them:

"*In an instant—in the twinkling of an eye, we shall be changed.*" ...

"He was my oldest friend." ("Was": with what an awful promptitude the mind adjusts itself to "he *was*"!) Yet as he sat there, peering out over the top of the apron and making, heavily, those plans familiar to every clergyman, Dr. Lavendar did not really believe that the plans were for Johnny. The snow fell with noiseless steadiness; the top of the buggy was white; thimbles of down heaped themselves on the hubs, tumbling off when the horse moved restlessly a step forward or backed a little and stamped. Suddenly Goliath shook himself, for the snow was cold upon his shaggy back, and the harness clattered and the shafts rattled. Dr. Lavendar drew a long breath. "G'on!" he said. And Goliath went on with evident relief. He knew the road well, and turned in at the Gordon gateway, as a matter of course. When he stopped at the front steps, the door opened and Rachel stood there, her eyes red.

"Sam will take him round to the stable, sir," she said, as Sam shambled out from the back of the house to stand at Goliath's head. "Oh, my! sir; I suppose you've heard?"

"Yes, Rachel; I've heard," the old man said, unbuttoning the apron and climbing out. Rachel took his hand and wept audibly. "I knew he'd never come back; he was marked for death. I've lived here eighteen years, and I always said it was a privilege to work for a gentleman like him."

"Yes—yes," he said, kindly. He was plainly agitated, and Rachel saw that he was trembling.

"Course you feel it, sir, being about of an age," she said, sympathetically. "Dr. Lavendar, sir, won't you have a glass of something?" With the hospitality of an old servant, she would have opened the little closet in the chimney-breast, but he checked her.

"Not yet; not now, Rachel. Leave me here awhile by myself, my girl. I'll come out to the kitchen and see you before I go. When Mr. Barkley comes, ask him to step into the library."

"Yes, sir," Rachel said, obediently; and went away sniffling and sighing.

Dr. Lavendar stood looking about him at the emptiness of the room: the winged chair, with the purple silk handkerchief hanging over the back; the table heaped with books; the fire drowsing in the grate; the old safe in the corner by the window. Outside, the snow drove past, blotting the landscape. Ezra would probably arrive within a half-hour; he had better get the note before he came. Then there need be no explanations.

When Mr. Ezra came in he found the old minister sitting by the fire, quite calm again, and even cheerful. "Yes," he said, in answer to the lawyer's very genteel expressions of sympathy—"yes, I'll miss him. We were boys together. He used to call me Bantam. I hadn't thought of it for years."

"Nicknames," said Mr. Ezra, "were used by the ancients as long ago as 300 B.C."

"Well, I'm not as ancient as 300 B.C.," said Dr. Lavendar, "but I called him Storkey; I can't imagine why, for he was only an inch and a half taller; he always said it was two inches, but it wasn't. It was an inch and a half."

"We are here," said Mr. Ezra, pulling off his gloves and coughing politely, "for indeed a solemn and an affecting task. It is my duty, sir, to seal the effects of the deceased, so that they may be delivered, intact, to the executor."

Dr. Lavendar nodded.

"In all my professional career I have never happened to be called upon for this especial duty. It is quite unusual. But Alex seemed to think it necessary.

Alex is a good son."

"So he says," said Dr. Lavendar.

"Are you aware, sir," proceeded Mr. Ezra, producing from his bag the paraphernalia of his office, "that such is the incredible celerity of bees (belonging to the *Hymenoptera*) that they can within twenty-four hours manufacture four thousand cells in the comb? This interesting fact is suggested by the use of wax for sealing."

Dr. Lavendar watched him in a silence so deep that he hardly heard the harmless stream of statistics; but at last he was moved to say, with his kind, old smile, "How *can* you know so many things, Ezra?"

"In my profession," Mr. Ezra explained, "it is necessary to keep the mind up to the greatest agility; I, therefore, exercise it frequently in matters of memory." He lit a candle and held his wax sputtering in the flame. "I recall," he said, "with painful interest, that at one of our recent meetings I had the honor of drawing the power of attorney for you, from the deceased."

"So you did," said Dr. Lavendar.

"Did you ever reflect," said Mr. Barkley, "that should that power be used after the death of the donor, to carry out a wish of said donor, expressed an hour, nay, a moment, before the instant of dissolution—such act would be an offence in the eye of the law?"

"I've always thought the law ought to put on spectacles, Ezra," said Dr. Lavendar; "it has mighty poor eyesight once in a while."

Mr. Barkley was shocked. "The law, Lavendar, is the deepest expression of the human sense of justice!"

"But, Ezra," Dr. Lavendar said, suddenly attentive, "that is very interesting. I remember you referred to the lapsing of the power of attorney when you made out that paper for me; but I didn't quite understand. Do you mean that carrying out, now, directions given before the death of my old friend would be against the law? Suppose he had asked me—last week, perhaps, to destroy—well, say that old account-book there on the table, couldn't I do it to-day?"

"Dr. Lavendar, you do not, I fear, apprehend the majesty of the law! Why," said Mr. Ezra, standing up, very straight and solemn, "such a deed—"

"But suppose I didn't want—suppose Johnny didn't want, for reasons of his own, to have anybody—say, even his executor—see that account-book; suppose it might be put to some bad purpose—used to injure some third person (of course that is an absurd supposition, but it will do for an illustration); if he had asked me last week to destroy it, do you mean to say, Ezra, I couldn't destroy it to-day?—just because he happened to die this morning!"

"My dear sir," said Mr. Ezra, "such conduct on your part would be perilously near a criminal offence."

Dr. Lavendar whistled. "Well, Ezra, I won't destroy it."

"I hope not, sir—I hope not, indeed," cried Mr. Ezra.

Dr. Lavendar laughed; he had the impulse to turn round and wink at Johnny, to take him into the joke. But it was only for an instant, and his face fell quickly into puzzled lines.

"A moment's reflection," Mr. Ezra continued, "will convince you, Dr. Lavendar, that the aforesaid account-book is now the property, not of the deceased, but of the estate. Its destruction would be the destruction of property belonging to the heirs. Furthermore, your belief that the herein before mentioned account-book might be put to an improper use, for the injury of a

third person—such belief would no more justify you in destroying it than would your belief in its unfairness towards said third person justify you in destroying a will."

Dr. Lavendar thrust out his lower lip and stared at him, frowning. "Yes," he said, slowly—"yes; I see. I did not quite understand. But I see."

Mr. Ezra solemnly began to pour forth a stream of statistics; he referred to the case of Buckley vs. Grant, and even mentioned chapter and page of *Purdon's Digest* where Dr. Lavendar could find further enlightenment. Dr. Lavendar may have listened, but he made no comment; he sat staring silently at the old purple handkerchief on the top of John's chair.

When Mr. Ezra had finished his work and his statistics, the two men shook hands; then Dr. Lavendar said good-bye to Rachel and climbed into his buggy, buttoning the apron high up in front of him; the lawyer mounted his horse, and they plodded off into the snow, single file. But Dr. Lavendar's eyes, under his old fur cap, had lost their squirrel-like brightness....

So Algy's note belonged to the estate; and the estate belonged to Alex; and Alex was the executor. And upon Alex Gordon his father's intentions in regard to Algy's note would make no more impression than the flakes of snow on running water. A vision of Alex's mean and cruel mouth, his hard, light eyes, motionless as a snake's in his purpling face, made Dr. Lavendar wince. The note—the poor, shabby, worn note,—that stood for the best there was in Algy, that stood for perseverance and honesty and courage; the note, which had weighed so heavily that he had had to stand up in his pitiful best manhood to bear it: the note that John had meant to "forgive"—Alex would use to humiliate and torture and destroy. Under the pressure which he would bring to bear that note would be poor Algy's financial, and perhaps his moral, ruin. "And if I had not objected, John would have cancelled it," Dr. Lavendar thought, frowning and blinking under his fur cap. He saw the smoking flax

quenched, the bruised reed broken; he saw Algy turning venomously upon his enemy—for he knew him well enough to know that his code of defence would not include any conventional delicacy; he saw the new and hardly won integrity crumbling under the assault of Alex's legal wickedness. Dr. Lavendar groaned to himself. Alex could, lawfully, murder Algernon Keen's soul.

When Mary saw the old minister come into the house she was much displeased. "There, now, look at him," she scolded; "white as a sheet. What did I tell you? I'll bet ye he won't eat them corn dodgers, and I never made 'em finer."

It must be admitted that Mary was right. Dr. Lavendar did not eat much supper. He went shuffling back to his study, Danny slinking at his heels; but for once he did not notice his little, grizzled friend. When he got into his flowered cashmere dressing-gown and put on his slippers and stirred his fire, he sat a long time with his pipe in his hand, forgetting to light it. When he did light it, it went out, unnoticed. Once Danny tried to scramble into his chair, but, receiving no encouragement, curled up on the rug. The fire burned low and smouldered into ashes; just one sullen, red coal blinked in a corner of the grate; Dr. Lavendar watched this red spot fixedly for a long time. Indeed, it was well on towards twelve before he suddenly reached over for the bellows and a couple of sticks, and, bending down, stirred and blew until the sticks caught and the cinders began to sparkle under the ashes. This disturbed Danny, who sat up, displeased and yawning. But when at last the flames broke out, sputtering and snapping, and caught a piece of paper—a shabby, creased piece of paper covered with dates—caught it, ran over it, curling it into brittle blackness, and then whirled it, a flimsy, crumbling ghost, up the chimney, Dr. Lavendar's face shone with a light that was not only from the fire.

"Ha, Danny, you scoundrel," he said, cheerfully, "I guess you are *particeps*

criminis!"

Then he went over to his study-table and rooted about for a thin, shabby, blue book, over which he pored for some time, stopping once or twice to make some calculations on the back of an envelope, then turning to the book again. He covered the envelope with his small, neat figuring, and turned it over to begin on the other side—and started: "Johnny's letter!" he said. But when the calculations were made, the rest was easy enough: first, his check-book and his pen. (At the check he looked with some pride. "Daniel," he said, "look at that, sir. You never saw so much money in your life; and neither did I—over my own signature.") Next, a letter to Alex Gordon:

"MY DEAR ALEXANDER,—I owe your father's estate to the amount of the enclosed check. No papers exist in regard to it, as the matter was between ourselves. I will ask you for a receipt. Yours truly,

"EDWARD LAVENDAR."

THE GRASSHOPPER AND THE ANT

I

When William Rives and Lydia Sampson quarrelled and broke their

engagement, Old Chester said that they were lucky to fall out two weeks before their wedding-day instead of two weeks after it. Of course, Old Chester said many other things: it said it had always known they could never get along. William, who had very little money, was careful and thrifty, as every young man ought to be; Lydia, who was fairly well off, was lavish and no housekeeper. "What could you expect?" demanded Old Chester. Old Chester never knew exactly what the trouble between them had been, for they kept their own counsel; but it had its suspicions: it had something to do with William's father's will. By some legal quibble the Orphan's Court awarded to William a piece of property which everybody knew old Mr. Rives supposed he had left to his daughter Amanda. Lydia thought (at least Old Chester thought she thought) that William would, as a matter of course, at once turn the field over to his sister. But William did no such thing. And, after all, why should he? The field was his; the law allowed it, the Court awarded it. Why should he present a field to Amanda? Old Chester said this thoughtfully, looking at William with a sort of respectful regret. Very likely Lydia's regret was not respectful. Lydia was always so outspoken. However, it was all surmise. About the time that Amanda did not get the field the engagement was broken —and you can put two and two together if you like. As for Old Chester, it said that it pitied poor, dear Lydia; and it was no wonder William left town after the rupture, because, naturally, he would be ashamed to show his face. But then it also said it pitied poor, dear William, and it should think Lydia would be ashamed to show her face; for, of course, her obstinacy made the trouble— and a young female ought not to be obstinate, ought not, in fact, to have opinions on such matters. Legal affairs, said Old Chester, should be left to the gentlemen. In fact, Old Chester said every possible thing for and against them both; but gradually, as years passed, conflicting opinions settled down to the "poor Lydia" belief.

This was, probably, for two reasons: first, because William had never seen fit to come back to Old Chester, and that, quite apart from his conduct to his

lady-love, was a reason for distrust; and, secondly, Lydia had, somehow, become Old Chester's one really poor person—that is, in a genteel walk of life. After the crumbling of the Sampson fortune, Old Chester had to plan for Lydia, and take care of her, and give her its "plain sewing"; so, naturally, William was reprobated. Besides, she may have quarrelled and broken her engagement two weeks before her wedding, but all these years afterwards she had been faithful to the memory of Love! Old Chester knew this, for the simple reason that Miss Lydia, during all these years, had kept in her sitting-room a picture of William Rives, adorned with a sprig of box; furthermore, it knew (Heaven knows how!) that she kissed this slender, tight-waisted picture every night before she went to bed. Of course, Old Chester softened! Lydia may have broken her engagement and all that, but she kept his picture, and she kissed it every night. "But he ought to be ashamed of himself," said Old Chester—"that is, if he is alive." Then it added, reflectively, that he must be dead, for he had never returned to Old Chester. Yet as time went on people forgot even to disapprove of William; they had enough to do to take care of poor Lydia, "for she is certainly very poor—and very peculiar," said Old Chester, sighing.

"Peculiar!" said Martha King; "I call it something worse than peculiar to spend money that ought to go towards rent on a present for Rachel King's Anna. She gave that child a picture-book. I'm sure *I* can't afford to go round giving children picture-books. I told her so flatly and frankly. And then it was so trying, because, right on top of my scolding, she gave me a present—a cup all painted with roses, and marked 'Friendship's Gift,' in gilt. I didn't want it; I could have shaken her," Mrs. King ended, helplessly.

It was not only Martha whose patience was tried by Miss Lydia; the experience was common to all Old Chester. Even Dr. Lavendar had felt the human impulse to shake her. When he had, very delicately, asked "as an old friend, the privilege of assisting her," it was exasperating to have a lamp-shade made of six porcelain intaglios set in a tin frame come to him the next day, with the "respectful compliments of L.S." But somehow, when, beaming at him from

under her shabby bonnet, Miss Lydia had asked him if he liked that preposterous shade, he could not speak his mind,—at least to her. He spoke it mildly to Mrs. Barkley. "We must restrain her; she brought me $2 for Zenanna Missions yesterday."

"What did you do?" Mrs. Barkley said, sympathetically.

"I made her take it back. I pointed out that her first duty was to her landlord."

"Her landlord has some duties to her," Mrs. Barkley said, angrily. "The stairs are just crumbling to pieces, and that chimney is dreadful. She says that Davis said the flue would have to be rebuilt, and maybe the whole chimney. He couldn't be sure about that, but he thought it probable. He said it would cost $100 to put all the things in repair—floor and roof and everything. But he would do it for $85, considering. He thinks the flue has broken down inside somehow. She might burn up some night; and then," said Mrs. Barkley, in a deep bass, "how would that Smith person feel?"

"He says," Dr. Lavendar explained, "that by the terms of the lease the tenant is to make repairs."

Mrs. Barkley snorted. "And how is poor Lydia to make repairs? She hasn't two cents to bless herself with. I told him so."

Mrs. Barkley's face grew very red at the recollection of her interview with Mr. Smith (he was one of the new Smiths, of course). "I don't mix philanthropy and business," he had said; "the lease says the tenant shall make repairs. And, besides, I do not wish to be more attractive than I am. With that chimney, some other landlord may win her affections. Without it, she will never desert Mr. Micawber."

"I am not acquainted with your friend Mr. Micawber," said Mrs. Barkley,

"neither, I am sure, is Miss Sampson; and if you will allow me to say so, sir, we do not in Old Chester consider it delicate to refer to the affections of an unmarried female."

Upon which Mr. Smith laughed immoderately. (None of the new people had any manners.)

"So there is no use asking him to do anything," Mrs. Barkley told Dr. Lavendar.

"The only thing I can think of," the old minister said, "is that we all join together and give her the price Davis named, as a present."

"Eighty-five dollars!" Mrs. Barkley exclaimed, startled; "that's a good deal of money—"

"Well, yes; it is. But something has got to be done."

"And to take up a collection for Lydia! It's—charity."

"It isn't taking up a collection," Dr. Lavendar protested, stoutly. "And it isn't charity. Miss Lydia's friends have a right to make her a present if they feel like it."

Mrs. Barkley agreed, doubtfully.

"Mrs. Dale would contribute, I'm sure," said Dr. Lavendar. "And perhaps the Miss Ferises."

"I wouldn't like to ask them."

"Don't ask 'em. Offer them the chance."

"No," Mrs. Barkley insisted; "they've no right. They are not really her friends. Lydia doesn't call them by their first names." But she went away very much encouraged and full of this project of a present for poor Lydia, who, happily, had no idea that she was "poor" Lydia. She was not poor to herself

(except, of course, in purse, which is a small matter). She lived in a shabby and dilapidated cottage at the Smith gates, and every month squeezed out a few dollars rent to Mr. Smith; she was sorry for the Smiths, for they were new people; but she always spoke kindly to them, for she never looked down on anybody. So, as far as position went, she was not "poor." She had no relations living, but she called all Old Chester of her generation by its first name; so, as to friendship, there was nothing "poor" about her. And, most of all, she was not "poor," but very rich, in her capacity for interest.

Now, no one who has an interest is poor; and Miss Lydia had a hundred interests. A hundred? She had as many interests as there were people in the world or joys or sorrows in Old Chester; so she was really very rich.... Of course, there are different degrees of this sort of wealth: there are folk who have to manufacture their interests; with deliberation they are philanthropic or artistic or intellectual, or even, if hard put to it, they are amused. Such persons may be said to be in fairly comfortable circumstances, although they live anxiously and rather meagrely, because they know well that when interest gives out they are practically without the means to support life. Below this manufacturing class come the really destitute—the poor creatures who do not care vitally for anything and who are without the spiritual muscle to manufacture an interest. These pathetic folk are occasionally made self-supporting by a catastrophe—grief or even merely some uncomfortable surgery in regard to their bank account may give them a poor kind of interest; but too often they exist miserably—sometimes, with every wish gratified, helplessly poor. Above the manufacturing class comes the aristocracy, to which Miss Lydia Sampson belonged, the class which is positively rolling in wealth. Every morning these favored creatures arise with a zest for living. You hear them singing before breakfast; at the table they are full of eager questions: Is it going to rain? No; it is a fair day; delightful!—for it might have rained. And the sun will bring up the crocuses. And this was the day a neighbor was to go to town. Will she go? When will she come back? How pleasant that the day is pleasant! And it will

be good for the sick people, too. And the moment the eager, simple mind turns to its fellows, sick or well, the field of interest widens to the sky-line of souls. To sorrow in the sorrows of Tom and Dick and Harry and their wives, to rejoice in their joys—what is better than that? And then, all one's own affairs are so vital: the record of the range of the thermometer, the question of turning or not turning an alpaca skirt, the working out of a game of solitaire—these things are absorbing experiences.

No wonder we who are poor, or even we who work hard at philanthropy or art or responsibility to manufacture our little interests—no wonder we envy such sky-blue natures. Certainly there were persons in Old Chester who envied Miss Lydia; at least, they envied her her unfailing joyousness—but they never envied her her empty purse. Which was like envying a rose its color, but despising the earth from which by some divine chemistry the color came.

Miss Lydia's eyes might smart from the smoke puffing out into her room, but she was able to laugh at the sight of her bleared visage in the narrow mirror over the mantel. Nor did the fact that the mirror was mottled and misty with age, the frame tarnished almost to blackness, cause her the slightest pang. What difference does it make in this world of life and death and joy and sorrow, if things are shabby? The fact is, the secret of happiness is the *sense of proportion*; eliminate, by means of that sense, trouble about the unimportant, and we would all be considerably happier than kings. Miss Lydia possessed this heaven-born sense, as well as the boundless wealth of interest (for to him that hath shall be given). "I don't want to brag," she used to say, "but I've got my health and my friends; so what on earth more do I want?" And one hesitated to point out a little thing like a shabby mirror, or even a smoky chimney. When the chimney smoked, Miss Lydia merely took her rocking-chair and her sewing out into a small room that served as a kitchen—and then what difference did the smoking make?

And as it turned out, one shadowy April day, it was the best thing she could

have done, because, when Dr. Lavendar dropped in to see her, she could make him a cup of tea at once, without having to leave him alone. She was a little, bustling figure, rather dusty and moth-eaten, with a black frizette, always a little to one side, and eager, gentle, blue eyes.

"What's the news?" she said. She had given Dr. Lavendar an apple, and put on the kettle, and taken up her hemming.

"I never saw anybody so fond of sewing," the old man ruminated, eating his apple. "I believe you'd sew in your grave."

"I believe I would. Dear me! I am so sorry for the poor women who don't like to sew. Amelia Dilworth told me that Mrs. Neddy can't bear to take a needle in her hand. So Milly does Ned's mending just as she did before he was married."

"Aren't you sorry for the poor men that don't like to sew?" Dr. Lavendar said, looking about for a place to deposit his core—("Oh, drop it on the floor; I'll sweep it up sometime," Miss Lydia told him; but he disposed of it by eating it).

"Well, as for sewing," said Miss Lydia, "it's my greatest pleasure. Why, when I get settled down to sew, my mind roves over the whole earth. I don't want to brag, but I don't believe anybody enjoys herself more than I do when I'm sewing. If you won't tell, I'll tell you something, Dr. Lavendar."

"I won't tell."

"Well, then: Sunday used to be an awful day to me. I couldn't sew, and so I couldn't think. And I really couldn't go to church all day. So I just bought some beautiful, fine nainsook and cut out my shroud. And I work on that Sundays, because a shroud induces serious thoughts."

"I should think it might," said Dr. Lavendar.

"You don't think it's wrong, do you?" she asked, anxiously; and added, joyously, "I'm embroidering the whole front. I declare I don't know what I'll do when I get it done."

"Embroider the whole back."

"Well, yes. I can do that," Miss Lydia assented. "There! there's your tea."

Dr. Lavendar took his tea and stirred it thoughtfully. "Miss Lydia," he said, and looked hard at the tea, "what do you suppose? Mr. William Rives—" Dr. Lavendar stopped and drank some tea. "How many years ago was it that he went away from Old Chester? I don't exactly remember."

"It was thirty-one years ago," she said; she put down her own cup of tea and stared at him. "What were you going to say about him, sir?"

"Well, only," said Dr. Lavendar, scraping the sugar from the bottom of his cup, "only that—"

"There! my goodness! I'll give you another lump," cried Miss Lydia; "don't wear my spoon out. What about him, sir?"

Dr. Lavendar explained that he had come back on the stage from Mercer the night before with a strange gentleman—"stout man," Dr. Lavendar said, "with a black wig. I was rooting about in my pocket-book for a stamp—I wanted to post a letter just as we were leaving Mercer; and this gentleman very politely offered me one. I took it. Then I looked at him, and there was something familiar about him. I asked him if we had not met before, and he told me who he was. He has changed a good deal."

Miss Lydia drank her tea excitedly. "Where is he going to stay? Is he well?

Has he come back rich?" She hoped so. William was so industrious, he deserved to be rich. She ran into the smoky front room and brought out his picture, regarding it with affectionate interest. "Did you know I was engaged to him, years ago, Dr. Lavendar? We thought it best to part. But—" She stopped and looked at the picture, and a little color came into her face. But in another moment she was chattering her birdlike questions.

"I declare," Dr. Lavendar said, at last, "you are the youngest person of my acquaintance."

Miss Lydia laughed. "I hope you don't think it's wrong to be young?" she said.

"Wrong?" said Dr. Lavendar; "it's wrong not to be young. I'd be ashamed not to be young. My body's old, but that's not my fault. I'm not to blame for an old body, but I would be to blame for an old soul. An old soul is a shameful thing. Mind, now, don't let me catch you getting old!"

And then he said good-bye, and left her sitting by the stove. She turned her skirt back over her knees to keep it from scorching and held the picture in her left hand and warmed the palm of the right; then in her right hand and warmed the left. Then she put it down on her knees and warmed both hands and smiled.

II

When Mrs. Barkley heard the news of the wanderer's return, she hurried to Dr. Lavendar's study. "Do you suppose we need go on with the present?" she demanded, excitedly.

"Why not?" said Dr. Lavendar.

Mrs. Barkley looked conscious. "I only thought, perhaps—maybe—Mr. Rives—"

"William Rives's presence in Old Chester won't improve draughts, will it?" Dr. Lavendar said, crossly. And that was all she could get out of him.

Meantime, Old Chester began to kill the fatted calf. Mr. Rives liked fatted calves; and, furthermore, he had prudently arranged with Van Horne at the Tavern for a cash credit for each meal at which he was not present. "For why," he had said, reasonably enough, "should I pay for what I don't get?" So he went cheerfully wherever he was bidden. Old Chester approved of him as a guest, for, though talkative, he was respectful in his demeanor, and he did not, so Old Chester said, "put on airs." He was very stout, and he wore a black wig that curled all around the back of his neck; his eyes were somewhat dull, but occasionally they glanced out keenly over his fat cheeks. He had a very small mouth and a slight, perpetual smile that gave his face a rather kindly look, and his voice was mild and soft.

He had come back rich (his shabby clothes to the contrary); "and poor Lydia is so poor," said Old Chester; "perhaps—" and then it paused and smiled, and added that "it would be strange, after all these years, *if*—"

When somebody said something like this to Dr. Lavendar he grew very cross. "Preposterous!" he said. "I should feel it my duty to prevent anything so dreadful."

And there were romantic hearts in Old Chester who were displeased with him for this remark. Mrs. Drayton said it showed that he could not understand love; "though he can't be blamed for that, as he never married. Still," said Mrs. Drayton, "he ought to have married. I don't want to make any accusations, *but*

I always look with suspicion on an unmarried gentleman." Mrs. Barkley did not go as far as that, but she did say to herself that Dr. Lavendar was unromantic. "Dear me!" she confided to Jane Jay—"if anything *should* happen! Well, I'd be glad to do anything I could to bring it about."

And Mrs. Barkley, who had not only the courage but the audacity of her convictions, invited the parted lovers to tea, so they met for the first time at her house. Mrs. Barkley was the last person one would accuse of being romantic, and yet Dr. Lavendar saw fit to stop at her door that morning and say, "Matches are dangerous playthings, ma'am!" and Mrs. Barkley grew very red, and said that she couldn't imagine what he meant.

However, the party went off well enough. Miss Jane Jay, who made a conscious fourth, expected some quiverings and blushings; but that was because she was young—comparatively. If she had been older she would have known better. Age, with shamefaced relief, has learned the solvent quality of Time. It is this quality which makes possible the contemplation of certain embarrassing heavenly reunions—where explanations of consolation must be made.... Thirty-one years of days, days full of personal concerns and interests, had blurred and softened and finally almost blotted out that one fierce day of angry parting; those thirty-one years of days had made this man and woman able to meet with a sort of calm, good-natured interest in each other. Miss Lydia—her black frizette over one smiling eye, her hands encased in white cotton gloves, a new ribbon at the throat of her very old alpaca—called him "William," with the most commonplace friendliness. He began with "Miss Sampson," but ended before supper was over with her first name, and even, once, just as they were going home, with "Lydy," at which she did start and blink for an instant, and Jane Jay thought a faint color came into her cheek. However, he did not offer to walk home with her, but bowed politely at Mrs. Barkley's gate, and would have betaken himself to the Tavern had not Mrs. Barkley, when he was half-way across the street, called after him. There was a flutter of uncertainty in her voice, for those words of Dr. Lavendar's (which she

did not understand) "stuck," she said to herself, "in her crop." Mr. Rives came back and paused in the moonlight, looking up at Mrs. Barkley standing in the doorway. "I should be pleased, sir," she said, "to have a few words with you."

"Certainly, ma'am," said Mr. Rives, in his soft voice, and followed her into the parlor.

"Sit down," said Mrs. Barkley.

William Rives sat down thoughtfully. A tall lamp on the heavy, claw-footed table emitted a feeble light through its ground-glass globe, and Mrs. Barkley stared at it a moment, as though for inspiration; then she said, in a deep bass: "Mr. Rives, I thought you might be interested in a certain little project. Some of us have thought that we would collect—a—a small sum—"

Mr. Rives bowed; his smiling lips suddenly shut tight.

"Perhaps you have not heard that our old friend Lydia Sampson is in reduced circumstances; and some of us thought that a small present of money —

"Ah—" said Mr. Rives.

Mrs. Barkley felt the color come up into her face at that small, cold sound. "Lydia is very poor," she blurted out.

"Really?" murmured Mr. Rives, with embarrassment; and fell to stroking his beaver hat carefully. Then he added that he deeply regretted Mrs. Barkley's information.

"I knew you would," she said, in a relieved voice. "Lydia is a dear girl. So kind and so uncomplaining! And—and faithful in her affections, William."

"Ah!" said Mr. Rives again; his smile never changed, but his eyes were keen.

"Yes," Mrs. Barkley said, boldly. "Why, William—I don't know that I ought to tell you, but do you remember a sketch of yourself that you gave her in—in other days? William, she has kept it ever since. It hangs in her parlor, (horrid, smoky room!) And she keeps a sprig of fresh box stuck in the frame."

"Really?" said Mr. Rives; and his face grew a little redder.

"That's all," Mrs. Barkley said, abruptly. "Now go. I just thought I'd mention it."

"Yes," said Mr. Rives; then added that it was a beautiful night, and politely bowed himself out.

"But he didn't say anything about giving anything," Mrs. Barkley told Dr. Lavendar the next day. And whatever romantic hopes she may have had withered under the blighting touch of such indifference.

III

Mrs. Barkley's hopes withered and then revived; for as she climbed the hill to the Stuffed-Animal House a day or two later whom should she see wandering through the graveyard (of all places!) but Lydia and William. "Of course, I pretended not to see them," she told Harriet Hutchinson, "but I believe they've begun to take notice."

They had not seen her; the graveyard was on the crest of the hill, and the

road lay below the bank and the stone wall, wherein were set two or three iron doors streaked and eaten with rust, each with its name and its big ring-bolt. There was a bleached fringe of dead grass along the top of the wall, but the bank above was growing green in the April sunshine. There were many trees in this older part of the cemetery, and even now, when the foliage was hardly more than a mist, the tombs and low mounds and old headstones were dappled with light shadows. Miss Lydia and William had met here, by some chance; and Mrs. Barkley, climbing the road before it dipped below the bank, had caught sight of them just where the slope broke into sunshine beyond the trees. Behind them, leaning sidewise over a sunken grave, was a slate headstone, its base deep in a thatch of last year's grass; there were carved cherubs on the corners, and the inscription was blurred with lichen. A still older tomb, a slab of granite on four pedestals, made a seat for Miss Lydia. She had been deciphering its crumbling inscription:

"Mr. Amos Sm ... Sr.
Born 1734
Die ... May 7th, 1802
Aged 68

"Base body, thou art faint and weak—
(How the sweet moments roll!)
A mortal paleness on thy cheek,
But glory in thy soul!"

William, reading it, had remarked that he thought people lived longer nowadays. "Don't you?" he added, anxiously.

"We live long enough," Miss Lydia said. "I don't want to live too long."

"You can't live too long," he told her, with his sharp smile.

Miss Lydia laughed and looked down at the crumbling stone. "I think sixty-eight was just about long enough. I'm like Dr. Lavendar; he says he 'wants to get up from the banquet of life *still hungry*.' That's the way I feel. I don't want to lose my appetite for life by getting too much of it."

"I couldn't get too much," Mr. Rives said, nervously. "Let us proceed. This place is—is not cheerful. I like cheerfulness. You always seem cheerful, Lydy?"

"Course I am," she said, getting up. "Why shouldn't I be? I haven't a care in the world."

"You don't say so!" said William Rives. "I was under the impression that your circumstances—"

"My circumstances?" said Miss Lydia. "Bless you! I haven't any. Father didn't leave much of anything. I had $2000, but Cousin Robinson invested it and lost it. He felt so badly, I was just distressed about him."

"He should have been prosecuted!" Mr. Rives said, angrily.

Miss Lydia shook her head in horrified protest, but she beamed at him from under her black frizette, grateful for his sympathy.

"I remember," he said, thoughtfully, "that you were always light-hearted. I recall your once telling me that you began to sing as soon as you got up in the morning."

"Oh yes," Miss Lydia said, simply. "I always sing the morning hymn. You know the morning hymn, William?

> '"Awake, my soul, and with the sun
> Thy daily course of duty run—'"

William nodded. "Vocal exercises (if in tune and not too loud) are always cheerful," he said.

Gossiping thus of simple things, they walked back to Lydia's house and sat down in her parlor. There William told her, with a sort of whimper, that his health was bad. "I sent for Willy King—he is so young, he ought not to charge the full fee. I remember him as a very impudent boy," Mr. Rives said, growing red at some memory of William's youth; "however, he seems a respectable young man."

"Oh, indeed he is," said Miss Lydia; "he is a dear, good boy. I hope he is doing you good?" she ended, with eager kindness.

"Yes, I think so," he said, anxiously. And then he gave his symptoms with a detail that made poor Miss Lydia get very red. "And I don't sleep very well," he ended, sighing. "Willy told me to try repeating the kings of England backward, but I couldn't remember them; so it didn't do any good."

"When I don't sleep," said Miss Lydia, "I just count my blessings. That's a splendid thing to do, because you fall asleep before you get to the end of 'em."

William sighed. "The kings of England was a foolish prescription; yet I paid Willy $1.50 for that call. Still, I must say I think he is doing me good; but he recommends many expensive things—perhaps because he is young. He wished me to hire a vehicle and drive every day. Now just think of the expense of such a thing! I suggested to him that instead of hiring a conveyance, I would go out with him in his buggy whenever he calls. He is a very young man to treat an important case," William ended, sighing. Then he asked Lydia about her health, with an exactness which she thought very kind.

"Yes, I'm always well; and *so* sorry for the poor people who are sick," she

said.

"You are a good nurse, aren't you, Lydy?" he asked.

"I'm always glad when I can do anything for a sick person. I'm so sorry for 'em," Miss Lydia said, kindly.

"And you are economical, aren't you, Lydy?" Mr. Rives inquired, in his mild voice, "and not fond of dress?"

"Bless you!" said Lydia, "how can I be anything but economical? And as for being fond of dress—I'm fond of my old dresses, William."

"That is an excellent trait," said William Rives, solemnly. Then, catching sight of his own portrait—the slim, anæmic young person in a stock and tight-waisted coat, with very small feet and very large hat, he got up to look at it. "I —have changed a little," he said, doubtfully.

"It's more becoming to be heavier," Miss Lydia said. And this remark gave him such obvious satisfaction that when he went away his perpetual smile had deepened into positive heartiness.

It was after this talk that he finally added his offering to the "Present" which just then was occupying Old Chester's attention. "And how much do you suppose I got out of him?" Mrs. Barkley asked Dr. Lavendar. "*$1.50!*"

However, other friends were more liberal, and by the end of May the $85 (grown now into the round sum of $100) was ready for Miss Lydia. A little silk bag, with a scrap of paper twisted about its ribbon drawing-string, was thrust one evening by an unknown hand into Miss Lydia's door. In it were twenty five-dollar gold pieces. "From old friends," Dr. Lavendar had written on the scrap of paper.

"Sha'n't we say—'for repairs'?" Mrs. Barkley asked, doubtfully.

"No," Dr. Lavendar declared; "I'd rather say 'to buy curl-papers.' Of course she'll use it for repairs; but we mustn't dictate."

Nobody saw Miss Lydia gasp when she opened the bag, and sit down, and then cry and laugh, but probably every friendly heart in Old Chester was busy imagining the scene, for every friend had contributed. They had all done it in their different ways—and how character confesses itself in this matter of giving! ... Mrs. Dale, who gave the largest sum, did it with calm, impersonal kindness. Martha King said that she had so many calls upon her charity that she couldn't give much, but was glad to do what she could. Miss Harriet Hutchinson said it was a first-rate idea, and she was obliged to Mrs. Barkley for letting her have a hand in it; as for Mrs. Drayton, she said it was a great trial not to contribute, but she could not do so conscientiously. "*I* make such things a matter of prayer," she said; "some do not. I do not judge them. I never judge any one. But I take all such matters to the Throne of Grace, and as a result I feel that such things are injurious to a poor person, and so I must deny myself the pleasure of charity."

William Rives said that he would be pleased to contribute, and Mrs. Barkley had a moment of intense excitement when she read his check—$150. But her emotion only lasted until she put on her spectacles.

And yet, when Lydia, sitting at the kitchen table, wiped her eyes and counted her gold by the light of a candle in a hooded candlestick, she felt, somehow, William's hand in it. For, by this time, William's friendliness was beyond any question. He came to see her every other day, and he told her all his symptoms and talked of his loneliness and forlornness until they were both moved to tears.

"Poor William!" she said, her eyes overflowing with sympathy. "Well, I'm

glad you have plenty of money, anyhow. It would be hard to be poor and have bad health, too."

"But I haven't plenty of money," William said, with agitation. "How did you get such an idea? I haven't!"

And then Miss Lydia was sorrier for him than ever. "Although," she said, cheerfully, "poverty is the last thing to worry about. Look at me. I don't want to brag, but I'm always contented, and I'll tell you why: *I don't want things*. Don't want things, and then you're not unhappy without 'em."

"Oh, Lydy, that's so true," Mr. Rives said, earnestly. "I'm so glad you feel that way." And he began to call every day.

"It's plain to be seen what's going to happen," said Mrs. Barkley, excitedly, and whispered her hopes (in secret) to almost everybody in Old Chester—except Dr. Lavendar. He became very ill-tempered the moment she approached the subject. But she was jocose, in a deep bass, to Miss Lydia herself; and Miss Lydia did not pretend to misunderstand. She reddened and laughed; but her eyes were not clear; there was a puzzled look at the back of them. Still, when she sat and looked at her gold the puzzle lightened, and her face, under her black frizette—in her excitement fallen sidewise over one ear—softened almost to tears. "William is kind," she said to herself.

And, indeed, at that very moment William was referring to her in most kindly terms. He was sitting in Mrs. Barkley's gloomy parlor, on the edge of the horse-hair sofa, and Mrs. Barkley was regarding him with romantic interest. "I have been much saddened, ma'am," he was saying, "to observe the destitution of Miss Lydia Sampson."

Mrs. Barkley beamed. Was he going to do something, after all? She spoke in an amiable bass, twitching her heavy eyebrows. "Our little gift, which has

gone to her to-night, will make her more comfortable. I could wish it had been larger," she ended, and looked sidewise at Mr. Rives, who bowed and regretted that it was not larger. He then coughed behind his hand.

"Mrs. Barkley, I wish to approach a subject of some delicacy."

("He *is* going to do something," she thought, excitedly; "or perhaps he means marriage!")

"Mrs. Barkley, in past years there were passages of affection between Miss Sampson and myself" (Mrs. Barkley bowed; her heart began to glow with that warmth which stirs the oldest of us at the sight of a lover).

"We were younger in those days, ma'am," William said, in his soft voice.

"Oh no!" she protested, politely. "Why, you are very well preserved, I'm sure."

"Yes," said William, "I am. Yet I am not as young as I once was."

This drifting away from Miss Lydia disturbed Mrs. Barkley. She lowered her chin and glared at him over her spectacles, saying, in a rumbling bass: "Neither is Lydia; and it's hard for her to be destitute in her old age."

"Just so," Mr. Rives said, eagerly—"exactly. She is not as young as she once was, which, for many reasons, is desirable. But I think she is healthy?"

"Why, yes," Mrs. Barkley admitted; "but I don't know that that makes it easier to be poor."

"But I infer that poverty has taught her economy?" William Rives said.

"Yes; but poverty is a hard teacher."

"But thorough—thorough!" said Mr. Rives; "and some people will learn of no other."

Mrs. Barkley was growing impatient; she gave up marriage and thought of a pension.

"Yes," said William; "she is economical, and has good health, and is fond of old clothes, and is kind-hearted, and doesn't have any wants. Excellent traits—excellent. I have looked very carefully at the items of expense in regard to a housekeeper or nurse."

Mrs. Barkley stared at him in bewilderment. Was he going to offer Lydia a position as housekeeper? She was fairly dizzy with this seesaw of possibilities; and she was perplexed, too, for, after all, badly as Lydia needed assistance, propriety must be considered, and certainly this housekeeping project was of doubtful propriety. "Because you know you are neither of you very old," she explained.

Mr. Rives looked disturbed. "Yes, we are," he said, sharply. "Quite old enough. I would not wish a youthful wife, for—many reasons. There might be—results, which would interfere with my comfort. No, Lydia is no longer young; yet she is sufficiently robust to make me extremely comfortable." The light was breaking slowly on Mrs. Barkley. Her face flushed; she sat up very straight and tapped the table with her thimble. "The expense of an extra person is not very considerable, is it?" Mr. Rives said, doubtfully. "It was in regard to this that I wished to consult you."

"Not more than the wages of a housekeeper or a nurse," Mrs. Barkley said, in a restrained voice.

"Exactly!" cried Mr. Rives—"granted that her health is good."

Mrs. Barkley opened and closed her lips. Her impulse to show him the

door battled with her common-sense. After all, it would mean a home for Lydia; it would mean comfort and ease and absence from worry—plus, of course, Mr. Rives. But if Lydia liked him, that wouldn't make any difference. And she must like him—her faithfulness to the picture proved it—and he was an agreeable person; amiable, too, Mrs. Barkley thought, for he always smiled when he spoke.

"Would you live in Old Chester?" she managed to say, after a pause.

"Yes."

"You would build, I suppose?" Mrs. Barkley said, trying, in the confusion of her thoughts, to make time.

"No," Mr. Rives said; "we would reside in Lydia's present abode."

"*In Lydia's house*? You couldn't!—why, it would be impossible!"

Mrs. Barkley, her mouth open with astonishment, saw, suddenly, that this project was not comfort plus William, but William minus comfort. "You couldn't! The chimney in the parlor is dreadful; it smokes whenever the wind is from the west."

"But, as I understand, Lydia has been provided with the means of mending the chimney?" William said, anxiously.

At this the rein broke. Mrs. Barkley rose, tapping the table with alarming loudness and glaring down at her guest. "William Rives, I have been a perfect fool. But you are worse—you are a mean person. I'd rather live with a murderer than a mean man!"

" MRS. BARKLEY ROSE, TAPPING THE TABLE WITH ALARMING LOUDNESS "

"MRS. BARKLEY ROSE, TAPPING THE TABLE WITH ALARMING LOUDNESS"

Mr. Rives was unmoved. His little, steely smile never wavered; he rose also, bowed, and said: "Possibly Miss Sampson does not agree with you. I will bid you good-night, ma'am."

"I was a perfect fool," she said again, as the door closed softly behind him.

But William Rives was no fool.... He said to himself that it behooved him to see Miss Lydia before Mrs. Barkley had a chance to impart to her those impolite views regarding himself. And that was why, as she was still sitting at her kitchen table, twinkling with happiness over the kindness of her world and piling her gold pieces in a little leaning tower, William knocked at the door.

Miss Lydia threw an apron over the small, glittering heap and ran to let her caller in. When she saw who it was she whipped off the apron to display her wealth; the tears stood in her eyes, and her happy heart burst into words: "How good people are! Just think—$100! Why, it takes my breath away—"

"It is a large sum of money," William said, solemnly, touching the gold with respectful fingers. "I would suggest a bank until you pay for the mending of your chimney. And you will get some interest if you defer payment for ninety days."

"Mending my chimney?" Miss Lydia said, thoughtfully. "Well—that wouldn't take nearly all this."

William's face brightened. "You are right to be prudent, Lydia," he said. "I

admire prudence in a female; but still, masons and carpenters—in fact, all persons of that sort,—are—thieves!" Then he coughed delicately. "Lydia," he said, "I—I have been thinking—"

"Yes?" said Miss Lydia, calmly.

"We are so situated—each alone, that perhaps we might—we might, ah—marry—to our mutual advantage?"

"*Marry?*"

"Yes," William said, earnestly; "I should be pleased to marry, Lydy. I need a home. My health is not very good, and I need a home. You need a home, also."

"Indeed I don't!" she said; "I've got a home, thank you."

"I haven't," William said; and Lydia's blue eyes softened. "I am not very strong," he said ("though I see no reason why I should not live to old age); but I want a home. Won't you take me, Lydy?"

Miss Lydia frowned and sighed. "I am very well satisfied as I am," she said; "but perhaps that is a selfish way to look at it."

"Yes, it is," he told her, earnestly; "and you didn't use to be selfish, Lydia."

Miss Lydia sighed again. "I suppose I could make you comfortable, William."

"Do take me, Lydy," he entreated.

And somehow or other, before she quite knew it, she had consented.

As soon as the word was spoken, William arose with alacrity. "I don't like

to be out in the night air," he said, "so I'll say good-night, Lydy. And, Lydy—shall we, for the moment, keep this to ourselves?"

"Oh yes," said Miss Lydia, getting very red, "I'd rather, for the present." Then, smiling and friendly, she went out with him, bare-headed, to the gate. There William hesitated, swallowed once, rubbed his hands nervously, and then suddenly gave her a kiss.

Miss Lydia Sampson jumped. "Oh!" she said; and again, "*Oh!*"

And then she ran back into the house, her eyes wet and shining, her face flushed to her forehead. She sat down by the table and put her hands over her eyes; she laughed, in a sort of sob, and her breath came quickly.

"I hadn't thought of it—that way," she whispered to herself. And somehow, as she sat there by her kitchen table, she began to think of it that way—Miss Lydia was very young! ... Oh, she would try and make him happy; she would try and be more orderly; she would try to be good, since her Heavenly Father had given back to her the old happiness.

And that night she did not bid the picture good-night.

Mr. Rives was himself not without emotion. It was many years, he reflected, since his lips had touched those of a female, and the experience was agreeable—so agreeable that he wished to repeat it as soon as possible; and, furthermore, he felt anxious to know that Lydia had put the gold in a safe place. But when he called the next day he was a little late, because, as he explained to Miss Lydia, he had had to wait for the mail. She met him with a new look in her innocent, eager eyes, and her face was shy and red. As she sat sewing, listening vaguely, she would glance at him now and then, as if, until now, she had not seen him since that day of parting, thirty-one years ago—the thirty-one years which had blotted Amanda's field from her memory. The old happiness,

like a tide long withdrawn, was creeping back, rising and rising, until it was overflowing in her eyes. This puffy gentleman, with his tight, smiling mouth, was the William of her youth—and she had never known it until last night! She had thought of him during the last month or two only as an old friend who needed the care which her kind heart prompted her to give; and lo! suddenly he was the lover who would care for her.

"I was sorry, my dear Lydia, to be late," said Mr. Rives, in his soft voice; "I was detained by waiting for the mail."

Miss Lydia said, brightly, that it didn't matter.

"But it was worth waiting for," William assured her. "I have done a good piece of business. (Not that it will make me richer; I have so many obligations to meet!) But it was a fortunate stroke."

"That is good," said Miss Lydia.

"A female in a distant city, where I own a poor little bit of real estate—nothing of any value, Lydia; I am a poor man—"

"That's no difference," she told him, softly.

"—this female, a widow, and foolish (as widows always are)," William said, with a little giggle, "asked me to sell her a house I owned. She wished, for some reason, to purchase in that locality. I named the market price. I did so, by letter, a fortnight ago. I believe she thought it high; but that was her affair. She would have to sell certain securities to purchase it, she said. But as I wrote her—'my dear madam, that's your business.'" Mr. Rives laughed a little. Miss Lydia looked up, smiling and interested. "Yes," said Mr. Rives—"I didn't urge it. I never urge, because then I can't be blamed if things go wrong. But I held my price. That is always good policy—not to drop a dollar on price. So she's bought it. She made a payment yesterday to bind the sale. Not that I feel any

richer, for I must immediately apply the money to the purchase of other things."

"That's nice," Miss Lydia said.

"I guess it is," William agreed; "I happen to know that a boiler factory is to be erected on the rear lot."

"But will she like that—the poor widow?" Miss Lydia said.

Mr. Rives laughed comfortably. "Ah, Lydy, my dear, in business we do not ask such questions before making a sale. *I* like it. In three months that bit of property will have shrunk to an eighth of its selling price to-day." Mr. Rives's eyes twinkled with satisfaction.

"But—*William!*" said Miss Lydia. Suddenly she grew pale. "William," she said, "it seems to me you ought to have told the poor widow."

"Lydia, a lady cannot understand business," William said, with kindly condescension, but with a slight impatience. "Don't you see, if I had told her, she would not have made the purchase?"

Miss Lydia was silent, stroking the gathers of her cambric with a shaking needle. Then she said, in a low voice, "I suppose she wouldn't."

William nodded encouragingly. "You'll learn, Lydia. A married lady learns much of business methods through her husband. Though they don't profit by it, I notice; widows are always foolish. Not that—that you will be likely to be—to be foolish," he ended, hastily, frowning very much.

Lydia went on sewing in silence. The color did not come back into her face, which caused William to ask her anxiously how she was.

"You are sure you are healthy, Lydia, aren't you?" he said.

Miss Lydia, without looking at him, said she was. When he had gone, she stopped sewing and glanced about her in a frightened way; then she put her hands over her eyes and drew in her breath, and once she shivered. She sat there for a long time. After a while she got up and went over to the picture of Mr. William Rives and stood looking at it; and as she looked her poor, terrified eyes quieted into tears and she straightened the bit of box with a tender hand, and then she suddenly bent down and kissed the slim gentleman behind the misty glass.

The next day when she met her lover she was cheerful enough. It was at the front door of the Tavern; Dr. Lavendar was there, too, waiting for the morning stage for Mercer.

"Well! well! So I am going to have company, am I?" he said, for Miss Lydia was waiting for it, too. Her bonnet was on one side, her shabby jacket, fading from black to green on the shoulders, was split at the elbow seams, and the middle finger of each glove was worn through; but her eyes were shining with pleasure.

"Yes," she said, nodding; "I'm going."

Her presence seemed to be a surprise to Mr. Rives, who had strayed forth from the breakfast-room to see the stage start.

"You are going to Mercer?" he said, his small smile fading into an astonished question.

"Yes," Miss Lydia said, laughing, and suddenly she gave a little jump of happiness. "I haven't been to Mercer for nine years. Oh, dear! isn't it just delightful!"

"But, why?" William persisted, in an amazed aside.

"Oh, that's the secret!" cried Miss Lydia, clambering into the stage; "you'll know sometime."

"I suppose you wish to arrange for the alterations of your house?" William said; "but considering the stage fares back and forth— Oh, there is Dr. Lavendar."

He came round to the other side of the stage, smiling very much. "Well, sir, good-morning! good-morning, sir!"

"Hello," Dr. Lavendar said.

Mr. Rives rubbed his hands. "I—I was about to say, Dr. Lavendar—that little matter between us—it's of no importance, of course; quite at your convenience, sir; I don't mean to press you—but at your convenience, sir."

"What are you talking about?" Dr. Lavendar said, with a puzzled blink.

"Well," William said, smiling, "there's no haste, only I thought I'd just remind you. I'm always business-like myself; and that little matter of accommodation —"

Dr. Lavendar stared at him. "I am afraid I'm a stupid old fellow; I don't understand."

The stage-driver gathered up his reins; Miss Lydia nodded joyously on the back seat, the two other passengers frowned at the delay; so William Rives made haste to explain: "Merely, sir, the stamp I had the pleasure of lending you. But pray don't incommode yourself; I merely remind you; it's of no—"

Dr. Lavendar pulled out his shabby leather pocket-book, his hands fairly trembling with haste, and produced the stamp; then he pulled the door to, and as the stage sagged forward and went tugging up the hill, he turned his

astonished eyes on Miss Lydia. She had grown very pale, but she said nothing, only looking out of the window and rubbing her little cotton gloves hard together.

"Would you have asked him for a receipt?" Dr. Lavendar said, under his breath, chuckling. But when she tried to answer him, there was something in her face that turned Dr. Lavendar grave.

The stage jolted on; the two other passengers chatted, then one fell asleep and the other read an almanac. Suddenly Miss Lydia turned sharply round. "It just kills me!" she said.

"Nonsense!" Dr. Lavendar told her. "He is a man of business, and I'm a forgetful old codger. I knew William, and I ought to have remembered."

But Miss Lydia's face had fallen into such drawn and anxious lines that Dr. Lavendar had to do his best to cheer her. He began to ask questions: How long was it since she had been in Mercer? Was she going to call on friends? Was she going to shop? "I believe you ladies always want to shop?" said Dr. Lavendar, kindly. And somehow Miss Lydia brightened up. Yes; she was going to shop! It was a secret: she couldn't tell Dr. Lavendar yet, but he should know about it first of all. She was so happy, so important, so excited, that her pain at William's business-like ways seemed forgotten; and when in Mercer they separated at the Stage House, she went bustling off into the sunshine, waving a shabby cotton glove at him, and crying, "I haven't a minute to lose!"

Dr. Lavendar stood still and shook his head. "Pity," he said—"pity, pity. But I suppose it can't be helped. There's no use telling William about her; he must see it. And there's no use telling her about William; she must see it. No—no use. But it's a pity—a pity." Which shows that Dr. Lavendar had reached that degree of wisdom which knows that successful interference in love affairs must come from the inside, not from the outside.

He did not see Miss Lydia again until they met in the afternoon at the Stage House, and for a minute he did not recognize her. She came running and panting, laden with bundles, to the coach door. Indeed, she was so hurried that one of her innumerable packages, a long, slim bundle, slipped from her happy, weary arms, and, hitting the iron drop-step, crashed into fragments and splashed her dress with its contents. "Oh! that's one of my bottles of Catawba," said Miss Lydia. "Dear, dear! Well, never mind; I'll order another."

The fragrance of the wine soaking her gloves and the front of her faded dress, filled the stage (in which they were the only passengers), and Miss Lydia joyously licked the two bare finger-tips. "Too bad!" she said; "but accidents will happen."

Dr. Lavendar helped her pile her bundles on the front seat, and then he unhooked the swinging strap so that certain parcels could be put on the middle bench. Miss Lydia leaned back with a happy sigh. "The rest will come down to-morrow," she said.

"The *rest*?" said Dr. Lavendar.

"Oh, I've just got to tell somebody!" she said. "Promise you won't tell?"

"I won't tell," he assured her.

"Well," said Miss Lydia, "look here—do you see that?" She tore a little hole in a long, flat package, and Dr. Lavendar saw a gleam of blue. "That's a dress. Yes, a blue silk dress—for myself. I'm afraid it was selfish to get a thing just for myself, but that and a pair of white kid gloves and some lace are all I did get; and I've wanted a silk dress, a blue silk dress, ever since I got poor."

Dr. Lavendar looked at her and at the hole in the package, and at her again. "Lydia!" he said, "is it possible that you—? *Lydia!*" he ended, speechless with

consternation.

"The other things are all for the party."

"The—party?"

"Presents!" she said, rubbing her hands. "Oh, dear! I'm so tired! And I'm so happy! Oh, nobody was ever so happy. The party (that's the secret) is to be next Thursday a week; that gives me time to make my dress. I ordered the cake in Mercer. All pink-and-white icing—perfectly lovely! And I have a present for everybody. Here's a work-basket for Martha King. And I have a bird-cage and a canary for dear Willy (that is to come down to-morrow; I really couldn't carry everything). And I've got a knitted shawl for Maria Welwood, and a cloak for her dear Rose—that was rather expensive, but it's always cheap to get the best. And a cornelian breast-pin for Alice Gray. And a Roman sash for poor little Mary Gordon; she seems to me such a forlorn child—no mother, and that rough Alex for a brother. And—well; oh, dear! I'm so excited I can hardly remember—a book for Mr. Ezra; a book for Mrs. Dale. Books are safe presents, don't you think?"

Dr. Lavendar groaned.

"And a picture for Rachel King—that's it; that square bundle. So pretty!—a little girl saying her prayers; sweet!—it's like her Anna. And a box of candy for Sally Smith's little brothers; and a pair of agate cuff-buttons for Sally—" She was moving her packages about as she checked them off, and she looked round at Dr. Lavendar with a sigh of pure joy. He could not speak his distracted thought.

"Oh, you mustn't see that," she cried, suddenly pushing a certain package under the others with great show of secrecy; and Dr. Lavendar groaned again. "I think a party with presents for everybody will be very unusual, don't you?"

she asked, heaping her bundles up carefully; two more fingers had burst through her cotton gloves, and as she leaned forward a button snapped off her jacket. "I don't want to brag," she said, "but I think it will be as nice a party as we have ever had in Old Chester."

"But, Lydia, my dear," Dr. Lavendar said, gently, "I am afraid it is extravagant, isn't it, to try to give us all so much pleasure? And is a blue silk frock very—well, serviceable, I believe, you ladies call it?"

"No, indeed it isn't," she said, with sudden, pathetic passion. "*That's why I got it*. I never, since I was a girl, have had anything that wasn't serviceable."

"But," Dr. Lavendar said, "I rather hoped you would see your way clear to making your house a little more comfortable?"

"Why, but I'm perfectly comfortable," she assured him; "and even if I was not, I'd rather, just for once in my life, have my party and give my presents. Oh, just once in a lifetime! I'd rather," she said, and her eyes snapped with joy —"I'd rather have next Thursday night, and my house as it is, than just comfort all the rest of my days. Comfort! What's comfort?"

"Well, Lydia, it's a good deal to some of us," Dr. Lavendar said. And then his eyes narrowed. "Lydia, my dear—does Mr. Rives know about this?"

Miss Lydia, counting her packages over, said, absently, "No; it is to be a surprise to William."

"If I am not mistaken," said Dr. Lavendar, "it will be a very great surprise to William."

And then he fell into troubled thought; but as he thought his face brightened. It brightened so much that by the time they reached Old Chester he was as joyously excited about the party as was Miss Lydia herself, who made him a

thousand confidences about her dress and her presents and the food which would be offered to her guests. His joyousness had not abated when, the next morning, Mrs. Barkley presented herself, breathless, at the Rectory.

"I think," said she, in an awful bass, sitting up very straight and glaring at Dr. Lavendar, "that this is the most terrible thing that ever happened."

"There are worse things," said Dr. Lavendar.

"*I* know of nothing worse," Mrs. Barkley said, with dreadful composure. "You may. You know what the unregenerate human heart may do. I do not. This is the worst. What will people say? What will Mrs. Dale say? It must be stopped! She ran in this morning and told me in confidence. She came, she said, to know if she could borrow my teaspoons next Thursday week. I said she could, of course; but I suppose I looked puzzled; I couldn't imagine—then she confessed. She said you knew, but no one else. Then, before I came to my senses, she ran out. I came here at once to say that you must stop it."

"In the first place," said Dr. Lavendar, thrusting his hands down into his dressing-gown pockets, "I couldn't stop it. In the second place, I haven't the right to stop it. And in the third place, I wouldn't stop it if I could."

"Dr. Lavendar!"

"I am delighted with the plan. We need gayety in Old Chester; *I think we'll get it*. I hope she'll have Uncle Davy in, with his fiddle, and we'll have a reel. Mrs. Barkley, will you do me the honor?"

It came over Mrs. Barkley, with a sudden chill, that there was something the matter with Dr. Lavendar.

"I have calculated," said the old minister, chuckling, "that Miss Lydia has in hand, at present, about $1.75 of our $100. This sum I trust she will give to

Foreign Missions. The need is great. I shall bring it to her attention."

"Dr. Lavendar," said Mrs. Barkley; and paused.

"Ma'am?"

"I don't understand you, sir."

Dr. Lavendar looked at her and smiled.

IV

And so the night of Old Chester's festivity approached. Miss Lydia's invitations were delivered the morning of the day, but a rumor of the party was already in the air. There had been some shakings of the head and one or two frowns. "It will cost her at least $3," said Martha King, "and she could get a new bonnet with that."

"It's her way of thanking us for her present," said the doctor, "and a mighty nice way, too. I'm going. I'll wear my white waistcoat."

Mrs. Drayton said, calmly, that it was dishonest. "The money was given to her for one purpose. To ask people to tea, and have even only cake and lemonade, is spending it for another purpose. It will cost her at least $4.50. Not a large sum, compared with the whole amount donated in charity. But the principle is the same. I always look for the principle—it is a Christian's duty. And I could not face my Maker if I ever failed in duty."

Then Mrs. Dale's comment ran from lip to lip: "Miss Lydia has a right to do

as she pleases with her own; if she invites me to tea, I shall go with pleasure."

When the rumor reached William Rives's ears he turned pale, but he made no comment. "But I came to ask you about it, Lydy," he said. This was Wednesday evening, and William stood at the front door; Miss Lydia was on the step above him. "I won't ask you to come in, William," she said, "I'm so busy—if you'll excuse me."

"I am always gratified," said William, "when a female busies herself in household affairs, so I will not interrupt you. I came for two purposes: first, to inquire when you intend to begin the improvements upon your house; and, secondly, to say that I hope I am in error in regard to this project of a supper that I hear you are to give."

"Why?" said Lydia.

"Because," William said, with his sharp, neat smile, "a supper is not given without expense. Though I approve of hospitality, and make a point of accepting it, yet I am always conscious that it costs money. I cannot but calculate, as I see persons eating and drinking, the amount of money thus consumed, and I often wonder at my hosts. I say to myself, as I observe a guest drink a cup of tea, 'Two cents.' Such thoughts (which must present themselves to every practical man) are painful. And such a supper as I hear you mean to give would involve many cups of tea."

"Twenty-seven," said Miss Lydia.

"And is there to be cake also?" said William, breathlessly.

"There is," said Miss Lydia; "a big one, with a castle in pink-and-white icing on it—beautiful!"

William was stricken into silence; then he said, shaking his head, "Do you

really mean it, Lydy?"

"I do, William."

Mr. Rives sighed.

"Well," he said—"well, I regret it. But, Lydy, we might utilize the occasion? Refreshment is always considered genteel at a marriage. Why not combine your supper with our wedding? We can be married to-morrow night. Dr. Lavendar is coming, I presume? I can get the license in the morning."

Miss Lydia was silent; the color came into her face, and she put her hand up to her lips in a frightened way. "Oh, I—don't know," she faltered. "I—I am not—not ready—"

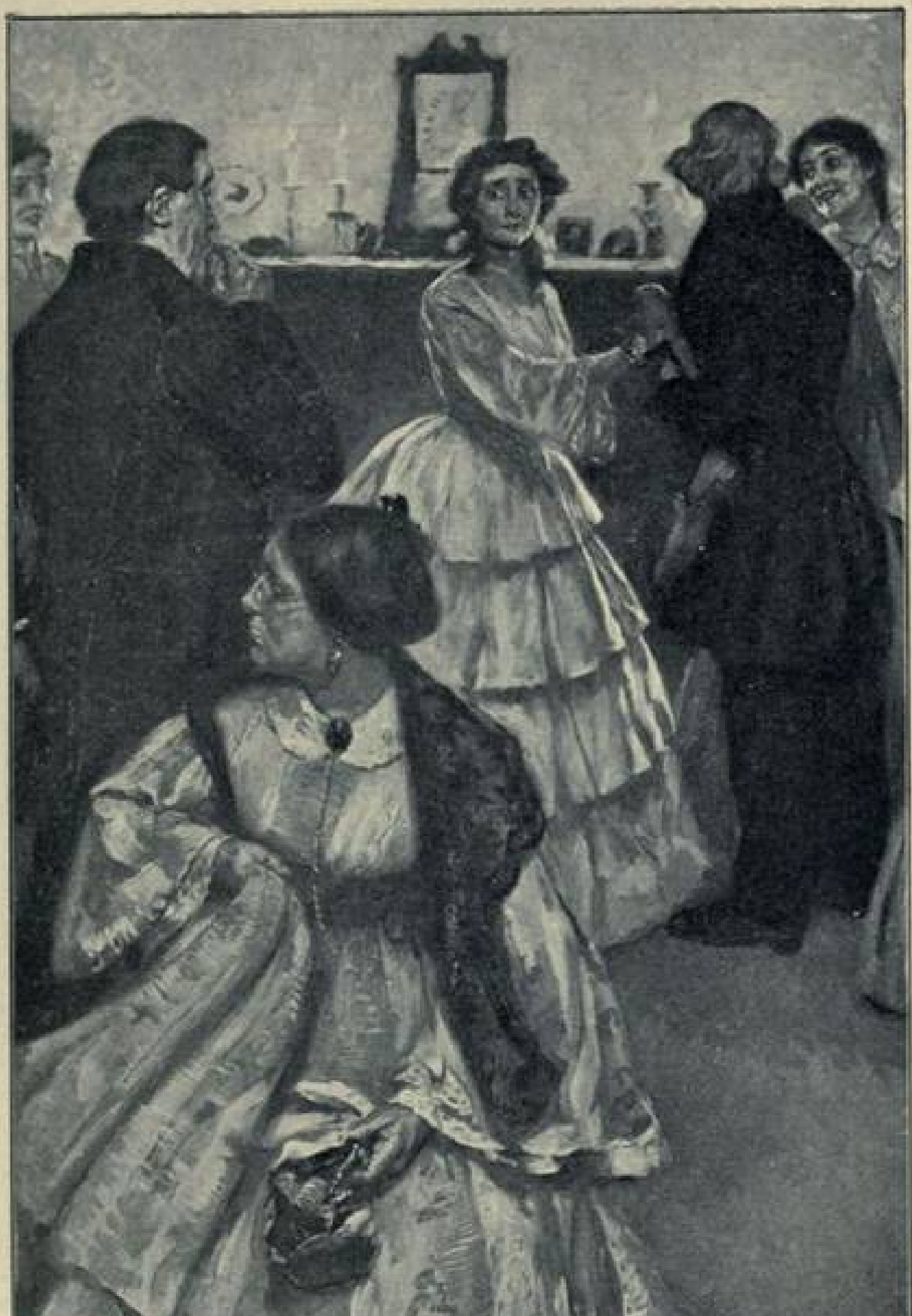
"Oh," William urged, "never mind about being ready; I should be the last to wish you to go to any of the foolish expense of dress customary on such occasions. Yes, Lydy, it is an opportunity. Do agree, my dear; we will save money by it."

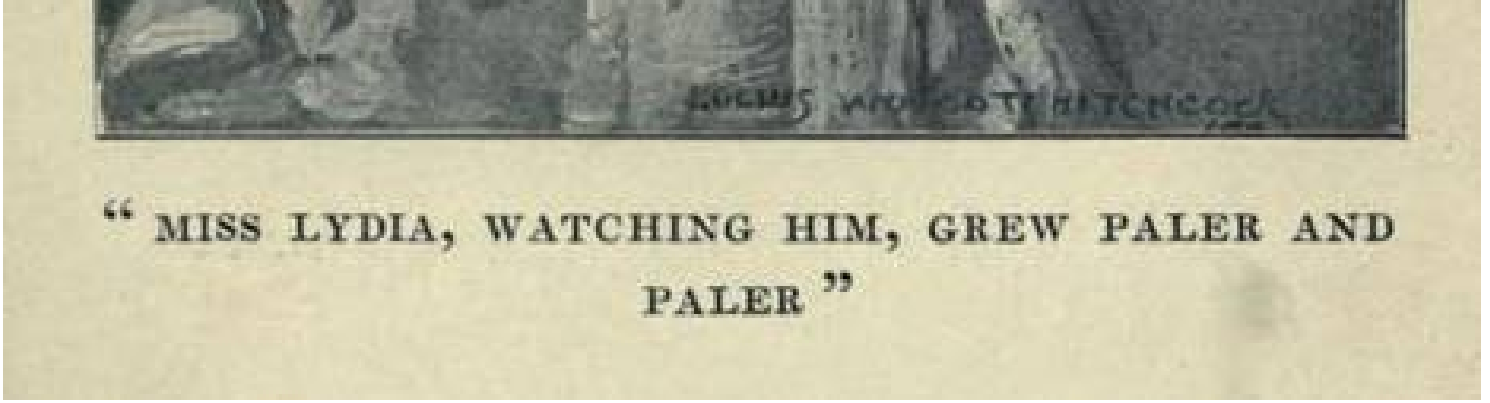
Miss Lydia drew in her breath; she was very pale; then suddenly she nodded. "Well, yes," she said. "I will, if you want to, William. Yes, I will."

"I will communicate with Dr. Lavendar," said Mr. Rives, joyfully, "and ask him to hold himself in readiness, but not to speak of it outside." Miss Lydia nodded, and, closing the door, went back to her engrossing affairs. Presents and a party and a wedding—no wonder the poor little soul was white and dizzy with excitement!

Long will Old Chester remember that occasion: The little house, lighted from garret to cellar; candles in every possible spot; flowers all about; the mantel-piece heaped with bundles; William King's bird-cage hanging in the window; Uncle Davy's fiddle twanging in the kitchen; and Miss Lydia in front

of the smoky fireplace, banked now with larkspurs and peonies—Miss Lydia in a light, bright blue silk dress trimmed with lace; Miss Lydia in white kid gloves, buttoned with one button at the wrist, and so tight that the right glove split across the back when she began to shake hands. Oh, it was a great moment.... No wonder she was pale with excitement! ... She was very pale when William Rives arrived—arrived, and stood dumfounded!—staring at Miss Lydia; staring at the packages which were now finding their way into astonished hands; staring at the refreshment-table between the windows, at the great, frosted cake, at the bottles of Catawba, at Mrs. Barkley's spoons stuck into tall glasses of wine jelly. Mr. Rives stood staring at these things, his small eyes starting out upon his purpling cheeks, and as he stared, Miss Lydia, watching him, grew paler and paler.





" MISS LYDIA, WATCHING HIM, GREW PALER AND PALER "

"MISS LYDIA, WATCHING HIM, GREW PALER AND PALER"

Then, suddenly, William, stealthily, step by step, began to back out of the room. In the doorway he shouldered Mrs. Barkley, and, wheeling, turned upon her a ferocious face:

"*And I contributed $1.50—*"

But as he retreated and retreated, the color returned to Miss Lydia's cheek. She had almost stopped breathing as he stood there; but when he finally disappeared, she broke out into the full joyousness of the occasion. The opening of each present was like a draught of wine to her, the astounded or angry thanks went to her head; she rubbed her hands until the left glove split also; and then Uncle Davy's fiddle began in good earnest, and she bustled about, running and laughing, and arranging partners for the reel.

Yes, it was a great occasion. Old Chester talked of it for months; not even William Rives's most unexpected and unexplainable departure the next day on the morning stage could divert the appalled, excited, disapproving interest that lasted the year out. Not even Miss Lydia's continued faithfulness to the portrait, which had condoned so many offences in the past, could soften Old Chester's very righteous indignation. There were, it must be admitted, one or two who professed that they did not share the disapproval of all right-thinking persons; one was, if you please, Mr. Smith! (He was one of the new Smiths, so one might expect anything from him.) He had not been invited to the party, but when he heard of it he roared with most improper mirth.

"Well done!" he said. "By Jove! what a game old party. Well done! The money was champagne on an empty stomach; of course, she got drunk. It would have been cheaper to have bought a bottle of the genuine article and shut herself up for twenty-four hours. Well, it's worth the cost of a new chimney. I'll put her repairs through, Dr. Lavendar—unless you want to get up another present?" And then he roared again. Very ill-bred man he was.

Dr. Lavendar said that there would not be another present. He said Miss Lydia had a right, in his opinion, to spend her money as she chose; but there would not be another present.

And then he walked home, blinking and smiling. "Smith's a good fellow," he said to himself, "if he is one of the new folks. But what I'd like to know is: *did Lydia think $100 a low price?*"

AMELIA

I

The exception that proved Old Chester's rule as to the subjection of Youth was found in the household of Mr. Thomas Dilworth.

When the Dilworth children (at least the two girls) hung about their father when he came home at night or teased and scolded and laughed at him at their

friendly breakfast-table, an observer might have thought himself miles away from Old Chester and its well-brought-up Youth. The way those girls talk to Thomas Dilworth! "Where will it end?" said Old Chester, solemnly. For instance, the annual joke in the Dilworth family was that father had been in love with mother for as many years as she was old, less so many minutes.

Now, imagine Old Chester children indulging in such familiarities!

Yet on Mrs. Dilworth's birthday this family witticism was always in order:

"Father, how long have you been mother's beau?"

And Thomas, rosy, handsome, looking at least ten years younger than his Amelia, would say: "Well, let's see: forty-one years" (or two or three, as the case might be), "eleven months, twenty-nine days, twenty-three hours, and forty minutes; she was twenty minutes old when I first laid eyes on her, and during those twenty minutes I was heart-whole."

But Mrs. Dilworth, smiling vaguely behind her coffee-cups, would protest: "I never heard anything about it, Tom, until you were sixteen."

And then the girls would declare that they must be told just what father said when he was sixteen and mother was twelve. But Thomas drew the line at that. "Come! come! you mustn't talk about love-making. As for marrying, I don't mean to let you girls get married at all. And Ned here had better not let me catch him thinking of such nonsense until he's twenty-five. He can get married (if I like the girl) when he is twenty-eight."

"You got married at twenty-two, sir," Edwin demurred.

"If you can find a woman like your mother, you can get married at twenty-two. But you can't. They don't make 'em any more. So you've got to wait. And remember, I've decided not to let Mary and Nancy get married, ever. I don't

propose to bring up a brace of long-legged girls, and clothe 'em and feed 'em and pay their doctors' bills, and then, just as they get old enough to amount to anything and quit being nuisances, hand 'em over to another fellow. No, sir! You've got to stay at home with me. Do you understand?"

The girls screamed at this, and flung themselves upon him to kiss him and pull his hair.

No wonder Old Chester was shocked.

Yet, in spite of such happenings, Thomas and Amelia Dilworth were of the real Old Chester. They were not tainted with *newness*—that sad dispensation of Providence which had to be borne by such people as the Macks or the Hayeses, or those very rich (but really worthy) Smiths. The Dilworths were not new; yet their three children had the training—or the lack of training—that made the Hayes children and their kind a subject for Old Chester's prayers.

"Who can say what the result of Milly Dilworth's negligence will be?" Mrs. Drayton said, sighing, to Dr. Lavendar; who only reminded her that folks didn't gather thistles of figs—generally speaking.

But in spite of Dr. Lavendar's optimism, it was a queer household, according to Old Chester lights.... In the first place, the father and mother were more unlike than is generally considered to be matrimonially safe. Amelia was a dear, good soul, but, as Miss Helen Hayes said once, "with absolutely no mind"; while Thomas Dilworth was eminently level-headed, although very fond (so Mrs. Drayton said) of female society. And it must be admitted that Thomas had more than once caused his Milly a slight pang by such fondness. But at least he was never conscious that he had done so—and Milly never told him. (But Mrs. Drayton said that that was something she could not forgive in a married gentleman. "My dear husband," said Mrs. Drayton, "has never wandered from me, even in imagination.") Added to conjugal incongruity was

this indifference on the part of Thomas and his wife to the training of the children. The three young Dilworths were allowed to grow up exactly as they pleased. It had worked well enough with Mary and Nancy, who were good girls, affectionate and sensible—so sensible that Nancy, when she was eighteen, had practically taken the housekeeping out of her mother's hands; and Mary, at sixteen, looked out for herself and her affairs most successfully. With Edwin the Dilworth system had not been so satisfactory. He was conceited (though that is only to be expected of the male creature at nineteen) and rather selfish; and he had an unlovely reserve, in which he was strikingly unlike his father, who overflowed with confidences. This, and other unlikeness, was, no doubt, the reason that there were constant small differences between them. And Mrs. Dilworth—vague, gentle soul!—was somehow unable to smooth the differences over as successfully as most mothers do.

Now, smoothing things over is practically a profession to mothers of families. But Milly Dilworth had never succeeded in it. In the first place, she had no gift of words; the more she felt, the more inexpressive she became; but, worst of all, she had, poor woman, not the slightest sense of humor. Now, in dealing with husbands and children (especially with husbands), though you have the tongues of men—which are thought to be more restrained than those of women—and though you have the gift of prophecy (a common gift of wives) and understand all mysteries—say, of housekeeping—and though you give your body to be used up and worn out for their sakes, yet all these things profit you nothing if you have no sense of humor. And Milly Dilworth had none.

That was why she could not understand.

She loved, in her tender, undemonstrative way, her shy, unpractical, secretive Edwin and her two capable girls; she loved, with the single, silent passion of her soul, her generous, selfish, light-hearted Tom, who took her wordless worship as unconsciously and simply as he took the air he breathed; she loved them all. But she did not pretend to understand them. Thus she stood

always a little aside, watching and loving, and wondering sometimes in her simple way; but often suffering, as people with no sense of humor are apt to suffer. Dear, dull, gentle Milly! No one could remember a harsh word of hers, or mean deed, or a little judgment. No wonder Dr. Lavendar felt confident that there would be no thistles in her household.

Thomas Dilworth had the same comfortable conviction, especially in regard to his girls. "Now, Milly, honestly," he used to say, "apart from the fact that they are ours, don't you really think they are the nicest girls in Old Chester?"

Milly would admit, in her brief way, that they were good children.

"And Edwin means all right," the father would assure himself; and then add that he couldn't understand their boy—"at least, I suppose he's ours? Willy King says so. I have thought perhaps he was a changeling, put into the cradle the first day."

"But, Tom," Milly would protest, anxiously, "Neddy couldn't be a changeling. He was never out of my sight for the first week—not even to be taken out of the room to be shown to people. Besides, he has your chin and my eyes."

"Well, if you really think so?" Thomas would demur. And Mrs. Dilworth always said, earnestly, that she was sure of it.

Still, in spite of eyes and chin, Ned's unpracticalness was an anxiety to his father, and his uncommunicativeness a constant irritation. Thomas himself was ready to share anything he possessed, money or opinions or hopes, with any friend, almost with any acquaintance. "I don't want to know anybody's business," he used to say; "I'm not inquisitive, Milly; you know I'm not. But I hate hiding things! Why shouldn't he say where he's going when he goes out in the evening? Sneaking off, as if he were ashamed."

"He just doesn't think of it," the mother would say, trying to smooth it over.

"Well, he ought to think of it," the father would grumble, eager to be smoothed.

But Milly found it harder to reconcile her husband to their boy's indifference to business than to his reserves.

"He sees fit to look down on the hardware trade," Tom told his wife, angrily. "'Well, sir,' I said to him the other day, 'it's given you your bread-and-butter for nineteen years; yes—and your fiddle, too, and your everlasting music lessons.' And I'll tell you what, Milly, a man who looks down on his business will find his business looking down on him. And it's a good business—it's a darned good business. If Ned doesn't have the sense to see it, he had better go and play his fiddle and hold out his hat for pennies."

Milly looked anxiously sympathetic.

"I don't know what is going to become of him," Thomas went on. "When you come to provide for three out of the hardware business, nobody gets very much."

Mrs. Dilworth was silent.

"I was talking about him to Dr. Lavendar yesterday, and he said: 'Oh, he'll fall in love one of these days, and he'll see that fiddling won't buy his wife her shoe-strings; then he'll take to the hardware business,' Dr. Lavendar said. It's all very well to talk about his falling in love and taking to business; but if he falls in love, I'll have another mouth to fill. And maybe more," he added, grimly.

"Not for a year, anyway," his wife said, hopefully. "And, besides, I don't think Neddy's thinking of such a thing."

"I hope not, at his age."

"You were engaged when you were nineteen."

"My dear, I wasn't Ned."

Mrs. Dilworth was silent.

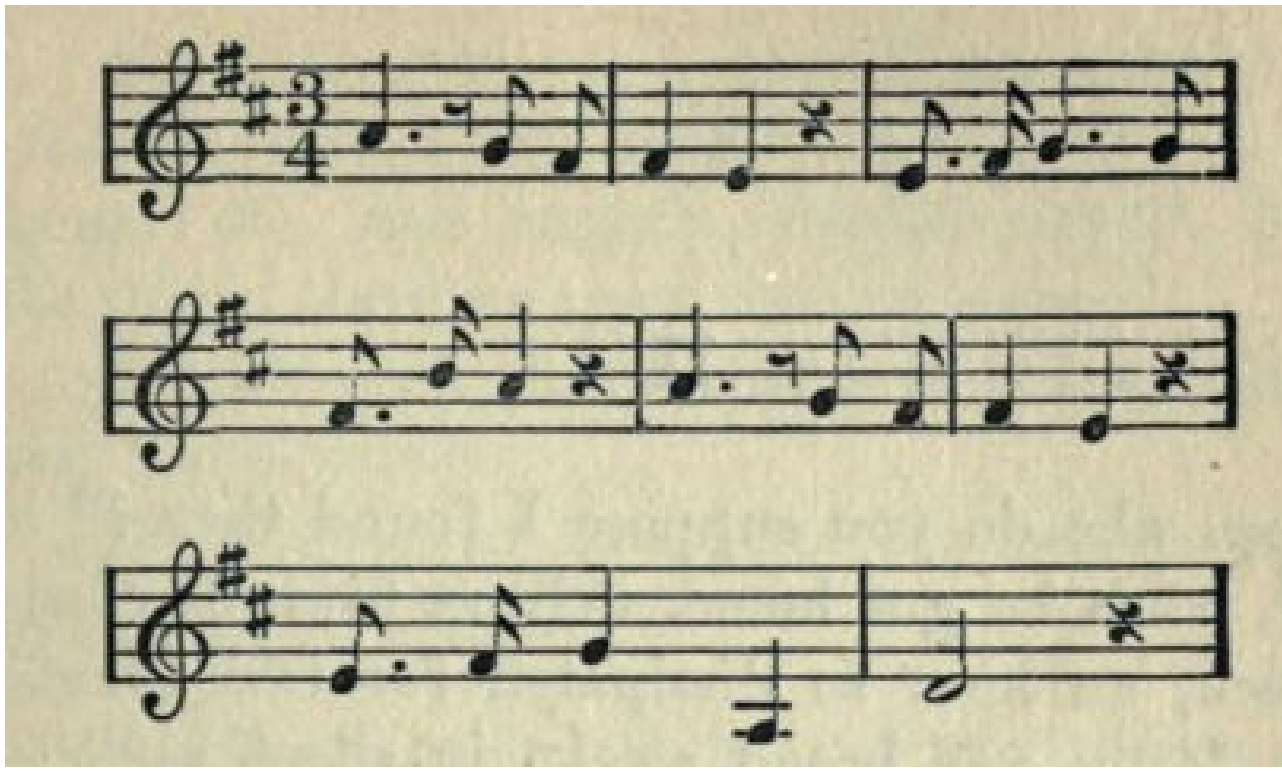
"The Packards telegraphed to-day that they wouldn't take that reaper," Tom Dilworth said.

Milly seemed to search for words of sympathy, but before she found them Tom began to talk of something else; he never waited for his wife's replies, or, indeed, expected them. He was so constituted that he had to have a listener; and during all their married life she had listened. When she replied, she was a sounding-board, echoing back his own opinions; when she was silent, he took her silence to mean agreement. Tom used to say that his Milly wasn't one of the smart kind; he didn't like smartness in a woman, anyway; but she had darned good sense;—for, like the rest of us, Thomas Dilworth had a deep belief in the intelligence of the people who agreed with him....

"I have a great mind," he rambled on, "to go up to the Hayeses'. You know that note is due on the 15th, and I believe I'll have to ask him to extend it. I hate to do it, but Packard has upset my calculations, and I'll have to get an extension, or else sell something out; and just now I don't like to do that."

"Very well," she said. It was her birthday—the one day in the year that her Thomas remembered that he had been in love with her for so many years, months, days, hours, minutes—a fact she never for one day in the year forgot. But she could no more have reminded him of the day than she could have flown. She was constitutionally inexpressive.

Tom began to whistle:



but broke off to say, "Well, since you advise it, I'll see Hayes"; then he gave her a kiss, and immediately forgot her—as completely as he had forgotten his supper or any other comfortable and absolutely necessary thing. Then he lighted his cigar and started for the Hayeses'.

II

"And who do you suppose I found there?" he said, when he got home, well on towards eleven o'clock, an hour so dissipated for Old Chester that Milly was broad awake in silent anxiety. "Why, Ned, if you please! He was talking to Hayes's daughter Helen. She seems a mighty nice girl, Milly. I packed young Edwin off at nine; he was boring Miss Helen to death. Boys have no sense about such things. Can't you give him a hint that women of twenty-five don't care for little boys' talk? By-the-way, she talks mighty well herself. After I

settled my business with Hayes, we got to discussing the President's letter; she had just read it."

"Do you mean to say *that the President has written to Helen Hayes*?" cried Mrs. Dilworth, sitting up in bed in her astonishment.

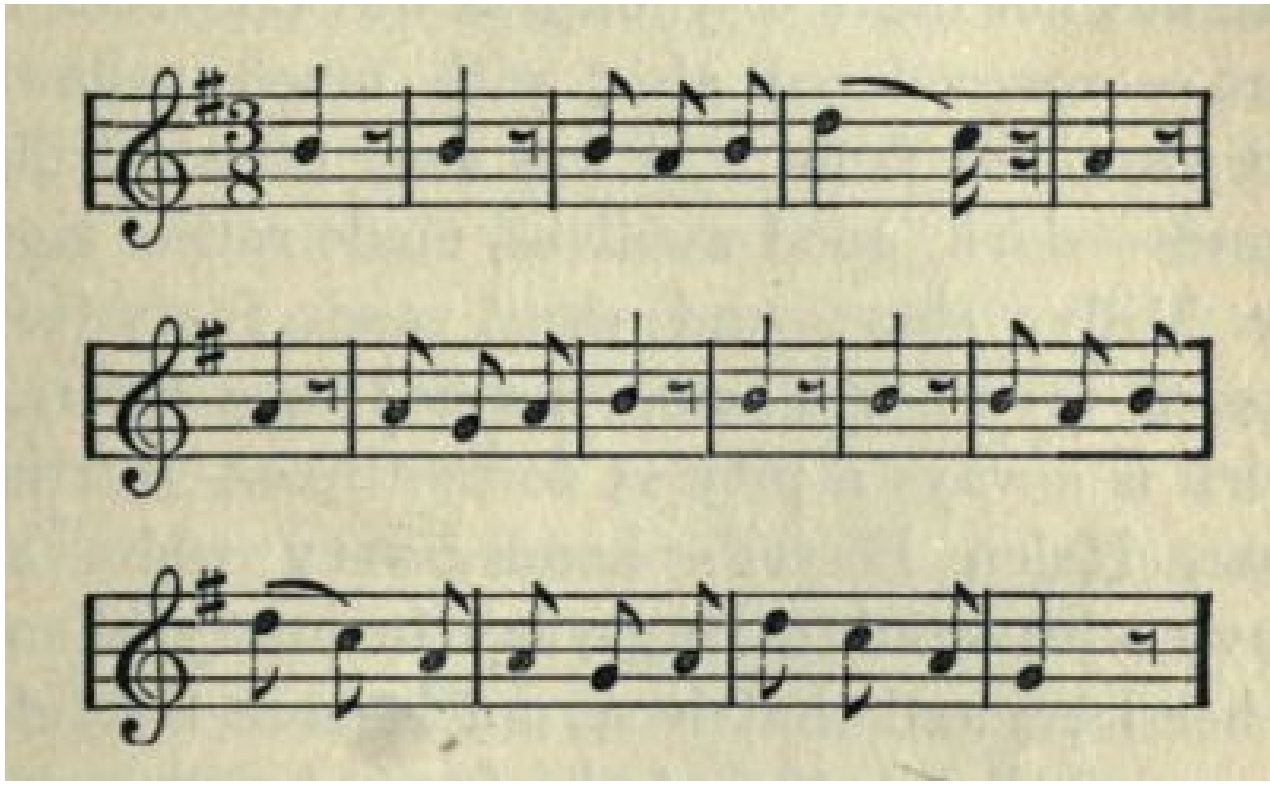
Thomas roared, and began to pull his boots. "Why, they are regular correspondents! Didn't you know it?"

"No! I hadn't the slightest idea—Tom, you're joking?"

"My dear, you can't think I am capable of joking? But, Milly, look here, I'll tell you one thing: she was mighty sensible about Ned. She thinks there's a good deal to him—"

"I don't need Helen Hayes to tell me that," said Ned's mother.

Tom, who never paused for his wife's reply, was whistling joyfully:



Helen Hayes had been very comforting to him; he had protested, when Ned reluctantly departed, that a boy never knew when to clear out; and Miss Helen had pouted, and said Ned shouldn't be scolded; "I wouldn't let him 'clear out'—so there!" Few women of thirty-two can be cunning successfully, but Tom thought Miss Helen very cunning. "I just perfectly love to hear him talk about his music," she said.

"He can't talk about anything else," Ned's father said. "That's the trouble with him."

"The trouble with him? Why, that's the beauty of him," said Miss Hayes, with enthusiasm; and Thomas said to himself that she was a mighty good-looking girl. The rose-colored lamp-shade cast a soft light on a face that was not quite so young as was the frock she wore—rose-colored also, with much yellowish lace down the front. It was very unlike Milly's dresses—dark, good woollens, made rather tight, for Milly, short and stout and forty-three, aspired (for her Thomas's sake) to a figure,—which is always a pity at forty-three. Furthermore, Helen Hayes's hands, very white and heavy with shining rings, lay in lovely idleness in her lap; and that is so much more restful in a woman's hands than to be fussing with sewing "or everlasting darning," Thomas thought. In fact, what with her lovely idleness and her praise of his boy, Tom Dilworth thought he had rarely seen so pleasing a young woman. "Though she's not so very young, after all; she must be twenty-five," he told his wife.

"She'll never see thirty again."

"Well, she's a mighty nice girl," Thomas said.

Except to look pretty, Miss Helen Hayes had done nothing to produce this impression, for she had contradicted Mr. Dilworth up and down about Ned.

"He has genius, you know."

"You mean his fiddle?" Tom said, incredulously.

"I mean his music. We'll hear of him one of these days."

"I don't care much whether we ever hear from his music," he said, "but I wish I could hear that he was applying himself to business."

"Business!" cried Helen Hayes. "What is business compared to Art?"

Thomas looked over at Mr. Hayes in astonishment, for in those days, in Old Chester, this particular sort of talk had not been heard; the older man sneered and changed his cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other. Miss Hayes did not get much sympathy from her family. But she went on with pretty dogmatism:

"You see, in a man like your son—"

"A man! He's only twenty, my dear young lady."

"In a *man*, sir! like your son—genius is the thing to consider; and you owe it to the world to let genius have its fullest play. Don't bring Pegasus down to plough Old Chester cornfields. Why, it seems to me," said Helen Hayes, "that he ought to be allowed to just soar. We common folk ought to do the ploughing."

"Thunder an' guns!" said Tom Dilworth.

"I don't care if he can't be sure that two and two make four," cried Miss Helen (Thomas, bubbling into aggrieved confidence on this sore subject, had alleged this against his son); "he can put four notes together that open the gates of heaven. And he'll distinguish himself in music, because his father's son is bound to have tremendous perseverance and energy."

Old Mr. Hayes snorted and spat into the fire; but Miss Helen's look when she said "his father's son" made Mr. Thomas Dilworth simper.

"That girl has sense," he said to himself as he walked home at a quarter to eleven. But he only told Mrs. Dilworth that she had better hint to Ned to be a little more backward in coming forward. "That Hayes girl is nice to him on our account," said Tom, "but he needn't bore her to death. Milly, why don't you have one of those pink wrappers? She had one on to-night. Loose, you know, and trimmed down the front."

"A wrapper isn't very suitable for company," Mrs. Dilworth said, briefly. "It didn't matter with you, because you're an old married man; but she oughtn't to go round in wrappers when Neddy's there."

"Why, it was a sort of party dress—all lace and stuff. I wish you had one like it. As for Ned, he's a babe; and her wrapper thing was perfectly proper, of course. Can't you ask her for the pattern?"

And then Thomas went to sleep and dreamed of a large order for galvanized buckets; but his Milly lay awake a long time, wondering how she could get a pink dress; pleased, in her silent way, that Tom should be thinking about her clothes; but with a slow resentment gathering in her heart that Helen Hayes's clothes should have suggested his thought.

"And pink isn't my color," she thought, a vision of her own mild, red face rising in her mind. Still, a fresh pink lawn—"that's always pretty," Milly Dilworth said to herself, earnestly.

III

Tom Dilworth's boy was a curious *sport* from the family stock. He did, indeed, look down on the hardware business, but not much more than on any business, although galvanized utensils were perhaps a little more hideous than most things. Business in itself did not interest him. Money-making was sordid folly, he said; because, "What do you want money for? Isn't it to buy food and clothes and shelter? Well, you can't eat more food than enough; you can only wear one suit of clothes at a time; and an eight-foot cell is all the shelter that is necessary."

"Eight-foot—*grandmother!*" his father would retort; "you'll inventory that lot of spades, young man, and dry up."

And Ned, with shrinking hands and ears that shuddered at the hideous screech of scraping shovels, would make out his inventory with loathing. His mother was not impatient or contemptuous with him—she could not have been that to any one; she simply could not understand what he meant when he spouted upon the folly of wealth (for, like most shy people, he occasionally burst into orations upon his theories), or when he set off some fireworks of scepticism borrowed from Mr. Ezra Barkley, or undertook (when Thomas was not present) to prove his father's politics entirely wrong. On such occasions Nancy would say, "Oh, Ned, *do* be quiet!" and Mary would yawn openly. As for his music, nobody cared about it, except, perhaps, his mother. "But I must say, Neddy, I like a tune," she would say, mildly, after Edwin had tucked his violin under his chin and poured out all his young soul in what was a true and simple passion.

"A tune!" poor Ned said, and groaned. "Mother, I wish you wouldn't call me that ridiculous name."

"I'll try not to, Neddy, dear," she would promise, anxiously; and Ned would groan again.

With such a family circle, one can fancy what it was to the lad when quite by accident he found a friend. It was the summer that he was twenty, that once, coming back in the stage with him from Mercer, Miss Helen Hayes showed a keen interest in something he said; then she asked a question or two; and when, hesitating, waiting for the laugh which did not come, he began to talk, she listened. Oh, the joy of finding a listener! She looked at him, as they sat on the slippery leather seat of the old stage, with soft, intelligent eyes, her slightly faded prettiness giving a touch of charm to the high and flattering gravity of her manner. When she asked him to bring his violin sometime and play to her, the boy could almost have wept with joy. He made haste to work off several of his dearest and most shocking phrases, which she took with deep seriousness: A whale's throat is not large enough to swallow a man—therefore the Biblical account is false, etc., etc. "In fact," said Ned, "if I could have a half-hour's straight conversation with Dr. Lavendar, I could prove to him the falsity of most of the Old Testament."

Helen Hayes was shocked; she regretted Mr. Dilworth's scepticism with almost tearful warmth; yet she realized that a powerful mind must search for truth, above all. She wished, however, that he would read such and such a book. "I can't argue with you myself," she said—"you are far too clever for my poor little reasoning powers."

It was in April that Edwin entered into this experience of feminine sympathy; and by mid-summer, at the time when Mr. Thomas Dilworth also found Miss Helen Hayes so remarkably intelligent, the boy was absorbed in his new emotion of friendship. He never spoke of it at home, hence his father's astonishment at finding him at the Hayeses'. And when, a week later, he found him a second time, Tom Dilworth was much perplexed.

"I dropped in on my way back from the store," he told his wife, "and there was that boy. I said to Miss Helen that she really must not let him bother her. I told her he was a blatherskite, and she must just tell him to dry up if he talked

too much."

"Tom, I don't think you ought to talk that way about Neddy," Mrs. Dilworth said. "He's a dear boy."

"He may be a dear boy, but he is a great donkey," Ned's father said, dryly; "and I think it is very good in Helen Hayes to put up with him. I can see she does it on my account. Milly, why don't you ask her to come to supper, sometime? I like to talk to her; she's got brains, that girl. And she's good-looking, too. Ask her to tea, and have waffles and fried chicken, and some of that fluffy pink stuff the children are so fond of, for dessert."

"She's not much of a child," said Mrs. Dilworth, her face growing slowly red. "She's thirty-two if she's a day."

"My dear, she has aged rapidly; you said thirty a month ago. I like the pink stuff myself, and I'm nearly fifty. I bet the Hayeses don't have anything better at their house."

Milly softened at that. Where is the middle-aged housekeeper who does not soften at being told that her pink stuff is better than anything the Hayeses can produce? Yet Tom's talk of Miss Helen's brains pierced through her vagueness and bit into her heart and mind; and she could not forget that he had called the girl good-looking. "Girl!" said Mrs. Dilworth. She was standing before the small swinging glass on her high bureau, looking at herself critically; then she slipped back and locked her door; then took a hand-glass and stood sidewise to look again. Her hair was drawn tightly from her temples and twisted into a hard knot at the back of her head; she remembered that the Hayes girl wore high rats, which were very fashionable, and had a large curl at one side of her waterfall. "But it's pinned on," Milly said to herself; "anyway, mine's my own." Then she pulled her cap farther forward (in those days mothers of families began to wear caps when they were thirty) and looked in the glass again: Helen

Hayes did not have a double chin. "She's a skinny thing," Milly said to herself. Yet she knew, bitterly, that she would rather be skinny than see those cruel lines, like gathers on a drawing-string, puckering the once round neck below the chin. And her forehead: she wondered whether if, every day, she stroked it forty-two times, she could smooth out the wrinkles?—those wrinkles that stood for the tender and anxious thought of all her married life! She had heard of getting rid of wrinkles in that way. "It would take a good deal of time," she thought, doubtfully. Still, she might try it—with the door locked. These reflections did not, however, interfere with the invitation which Thomas had suggested.

Milly had her opinion of a middle-aged woman who wore wrappers in public; but if Tom wanted her and her wrappers, he should have them. He should have anything in the world he desired, if she could procure it. Had he desired Miss Hayes hashed on toast, Milly would have done her best to set the dainty dish before her king. And no doubt poor Miss Helen in this form would have given Mrs. Dilworth more personal satisfaction than did her presence at Tom's side (for the invitation was promptly accepted) in some trailing white thing, her eyes fixed on her host's face, intent, apparently, upon any word he might utter. Watching that absorbed and flattering gaze, Milly grew more and more silent. She heard their eager talk, and her mild eyes grew round and full of pain with the sense of being left out; for Miss Hayes, though patient with her hostess, and even kind in a condescending way, hardly spoke to her. Once when, her heart up in her throat, Mrs. Dilworth ventured a comment, it seemed only to amuse Thomas and his guest—and she did not know why.

"This morning," Tom said, "I was h'isting up a big bunch of galvanized buckets to our loft with a fall and tackle, and all of a sudden the strap slipped, and the whole caboodle just whanged down on the pavement—"

"O-o-o-o!" said Helen Hayes, putting her hands over her ears with dramatic girlishness.

"It was terrific, and just at that moment up came Dr. Lavendar. Well, of course I couldn't express my feelings—"

"Poor Mr. Dilworth!"

"—he came up, and gave me a rap with his stick. 'Thomas,' he said (you know how his eyes twinkle!)—'Thomas, this is the most profane silence I ever heard.'"

Everybody laughed, except Milly and Edwin, the latter remarking that he didn't see anything funny in that. At which Miss Hayes said to him, under her breath, "Oh, you superior people are so contemptuous of our frivolity!" And Ned blushed with satisfaction, and murmured, "Why, no; I'm not superior, I'm sure."

As for Milly, with obvious effort and getting very red, she said that she didn't see how silence could be profane. "As long as you didn't say anything, you conquered your spirit," she added, faintly.

And then they all (except Edwin) laughed again. After that she made no attempt to be taken into the gayety about her, but her heart burned within her. The next morning at breakfast some words struggled out: "You'd think she was a young thing, she laughs so. And she's nearly thirty-five."

"How time flies!" said Tom, chuckling. And then, to everybody's astonishment, the mute Edwin spoke up, and said that as for age it was a matter of the soul and not of the body. "Some people are always young," said Edwin. "Dr. Lavendar is, and you are, father—"

"Thank you, grave and reverend seignior."

"—and mother," continued the candid youth, "has always been old. Haven't

you, mother?"

"True, for you, my boy," said the father; "your mother has the wisdom of the family."

Milly Dilworth's face grew dully red to the roots of her hair; a wave of anger rose up in her inarticulate heart. They called her old, these two. She could hardly see her plate for tears.

Edwin, however, was so thrilled by the elegance of his sentiment that he was eager to repeat it to Miss Hayes; but, somehow, he always had difficulty in introducing the subject of age. When he did succeed in getting in his little speech, she said that he impressed her very much when he said things like that. "Your insight is wonderful," she murmured, looking at him with something like awe in her eyes. (Miss Helen was never cunning with Ned.)

"I guess you're the only person that thinks so," Ned said; "at home they're always making fun of me."

"My friend," she said, gravely, "what else can you expect? You are an eagle in a pigeon's nest. I don't mean to criticise your family, but you know as well as I that you are—different. You are an inspiration to me," she ended. And Ned blushed with joy.

It certainly is inspiring to be told you are an inspiration.... Mr. Thomas Dilworth did not blush when he learned that mentally he was the most stimulating person that Miss Hayes had ever met; but he had an agreeable consciousness of his superiority, which he made no effort to conceal from his wife. He never made any effort to conceal anything from Milly, not even that fondness for female society which Mrs. Drayton had deplored.

And by-and-by Milly's tears began to lie very near the surface. They never gathered and fell, but perhaps they dropped one by one on her heart, leaving

their imprint of patiently accepted pain. At this time she thought of her own mental deficiencies very constantly. Her mind had no flexibility, and she reached conclusions only by toilsome processes; but once reached, they were apt to be permanent. Her slow reasoning at this time led her to conclude that her Thomas was not to blame because he admired some one who was cleverer than she. "Why, he'd be foolish not to," she thought, sadly.

But this eminently reasonable conclusion did not save Mrs. Dilworth from turning white and red with misery, when, for instance, her husband observed that he had had to take down two bars of the Gordon fence, so that Miss Hayes could go home across lots. Then Thomas chuckled, and added that Helen Hayes was the brightest woman he knew.

He did not go on to tell of his walk in the October dusk, and Miss Helen's arch appeal to him for instruction on a certain political point on which she was ignorant. Thomas had instructed her so fully and volubly, while she looked at him with her reverent gaze, that it had grown dark; and that was why he had to take her home across lots. Thomas had not mentioned these details; he merely said he thought Miss Helen Hayes a bright woman—the brightest, to be exact, that he knew. And yet his Milly went into the kitchen pantry and hid her face in the roller behind the door and sobbed.

Well, of course! It's very absurd. A fat, wordless woman, who ought to be darning her children's stockings, it's very absurd for her to be weeping into a roller because her man, who has loved her for forty-three years, eleven months, twenty-nine days, twenty-three hours, and forty minutes—her man, to whom she is as absolutely necessary as his old slippers or his shabby old easy-chair—because this man does not think her the brightest woman he knows. But absurd as it is, it is suffering.

The woman of faithful heart who has been left behind mentally by her husband is a tragic figure, even if she is at the same time a little ridiculous—

poor soul! Her futile, panting efforts to catch up; her brave, pitiful blunders; her antics of imitation; her foolish pink lawn frocks—of course they are funny; but the midnight tears are not funny, nor the prinking (behind locked doors), nor the tightened dresses, nor the stealthy reading to "improve the mind"—that poor, anxious, limited mind which knows only its duty to its dearest and best. These things mean the pain—a hopeless pain—of the recognition of limitations. What did it matter that once a year Tom announced that he had loved his Amelia for so many years, months, days, hours, and minutes?—He did not talk to her about the President's letter! But he talked to Helen Hayes about it. And yet she was a pale thing. "She never had my color," poor Milly thought; "and they say she doesn't get along well at home. And she's no housekeeper. Mrs. Hayes herself told me she was just real useless about the house. I can't understand it."

Of course she could not understand it. What feminine mind ever understood why uselessness attracts a sensible man? It is so foolish that even the most foolish woman cannot explain it.

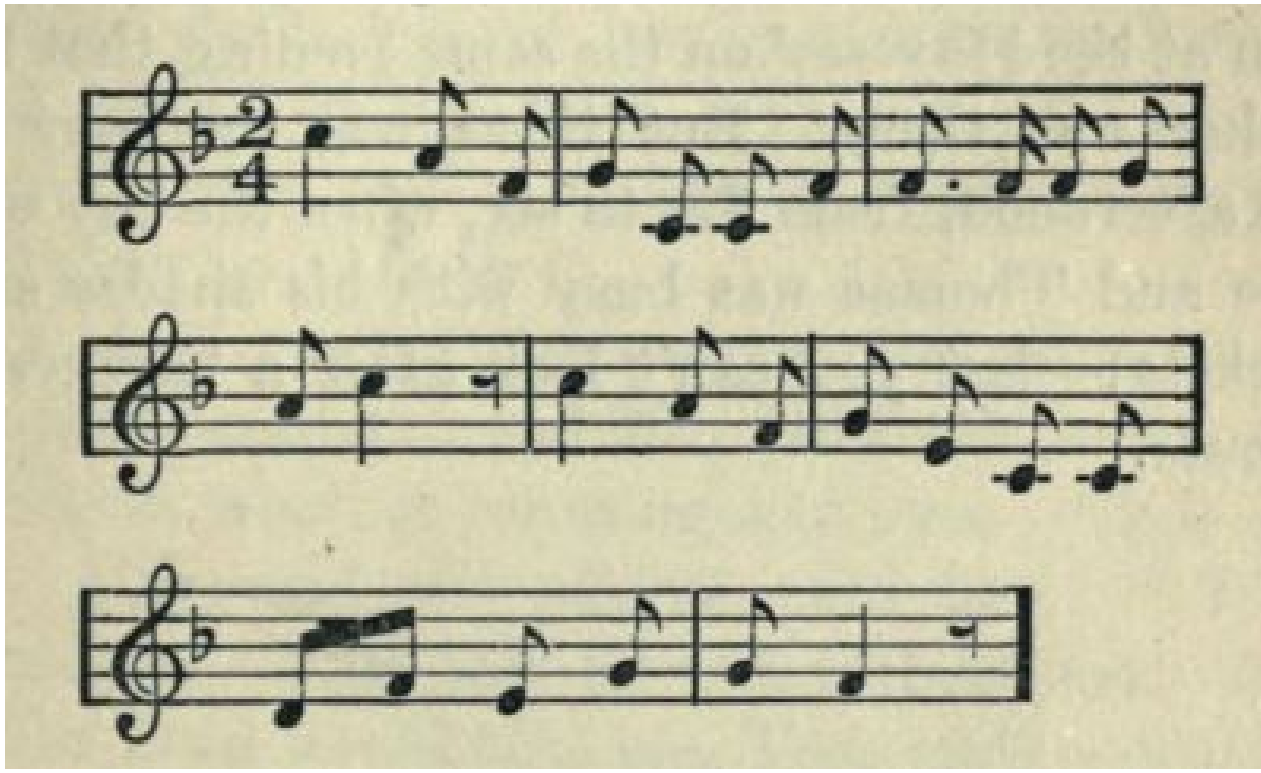
As the autumn closed in on Old Chester, nobody in the family noticed Milly Dilworth's heavier look and deeper silence. Tom himself was more talkative than usual; business had been good, and he was going to get something handsome out of a deal he had gone into with Hayes. This took him often to the Hayeses' house; and after the two men had had their talk, Miss Helen was to be found at the parlor fireside, very arch and eager with questions, but most of all so respectful of Tom's opinions. His Amelia was respectful of his opinions, too, but in such a different way. Perhaps just at this time Thomas Dilworth pitied himself a little—the middle-aged husband does pity himself once in a while. Perhaps he sighed—certainly he whistled. There is no doubt that Mrs. Drayton would have felt he was wandering from his Amelia—at least in imagination. And yet Tom was as settled and grounded in love for his middle-aged wife as he ever had been.

This, however, cannot be understood by those who do not know that the male creature, good and honest and faithful as he may be, is at heart a Mormon.

"I declare," Tom said, coming home at twelve o'clock at night—"I declare I feel younger."

Milly was silent.

Then Tom began to whistle:



Then he broke off to say that he didn't think that Helen Hayes was over-happy at home. "The Hayeses are commonplace people, and she is very superior. I guess they don't get along well."

Milly thought to herself that when a girl didn't get along with her own mother it didn't speak well for the girl; but she did not say so.

But Thomas went on to declare that he didn't know what to make of Ned.

"Hanging round the Hayeses till I'm ashamed of him! Why doesn't he know better? I never bored a woman to death when I was his age." And his wife thought, in heavy silence, that there were other people who hung round the Hayeses.

However, Thomas made his feeling so clear to his son that during the winter Ned was never seen at the Hayeses' on the same evening that his father was there. But there was an hour in the afternoon, from five to six, when the boy was free and Thomas was busy with his spades and buckets;—but you can't look after a boy every minute.

IV

Poor Amelia, in her bedroom, in the chilly December dusk, sopped her eyes with cold water and looked in the glass. "I *mustn't* cry any more," she said to herself, despairingly—"they're so red now!"

A door opened down-stairs, and there was a burst of laughter; and Mrs. Dilworth, in the cold twilight, went on sopping her eyes. Tom and the girls evidently didn't need her. "They could get along just as well without me. And if the Lord would take me, Tom could—could—so he could—"

Her soul was dumb, even to itself; but she knew what it was that Tom "could" do.

And she knew it without bitterness. Like every other woman whose love for her husband has in it the maternal element (and most good women's love has this element), she had always felt that if she died Thomas ought to marry again; but this simple creature went one ahead of that rather elementary feeling, and

specified: she was willing to have him marry *her*.

"If the Lord would only remove me," said poor Milly, looking miserably in the glass at her plump figure, which showed no indications of removal. Her eyes were hopelessly red; she didn't see how she could possibly go down to supper. But of course she had to go down. The mother of a family and the mistress of one servant must go down to supper, no matter what the condition of her eyes may be. She slunk into her seat behind her teacups, and scarcely dared to look about her noisy, hungry circle, still less at her Thomas, who was smiling to himself, but who did not share his amusement with his family. Still, when he suddenly said something about the refreshment of talking to intelligent people, it was not hard to guess the direction of his thoughts. "It sharpens your brains up," said Thomas. "I was going to suggest, Milly, that you should ask Helen Hayes to tea again; but she's got company; and when they leave she's going off to make a visit to some of her relations, she tells me."

Amelia's mild lips tightened silently. So they had been together again. Her hand shook as she poured out another cup of tea for her Thomas, who took that moment to say, with all a husband's candor, that she was getting fatter than ever. "I thought you were starving yourself to get thin, Milly?" he said, smiling. Milly smiled, too, faintly; but she was saying to herself: "What did they talk about? How long were they together? Oh, if I could only be taken away!"

It would be interesting to follow the processes of a mind like Mrs. Dilworth's: how did a wife and mother of children reach the point of feeling that her family would be better off without her? Anybody in Old Chester could have told her such a belief was folly, and wicked folly at that. But it seemed just plain reason to Milly Dilworth: "I'm not necessary to anybody. Thomas likes somebody younger. He can't marry her because I'm alive; he could marry her (and she would be good to the children) if I were not here. But I *am*!" she would end, hopelessly.

Morning after morning, as she went about her household duties, or when before tea she sat in her little, old rocking-chair, mending the family stockings, she used to break herself against the hopelessness of the situation: She was there; and unless the Lord would remove her (any other sort of removal was impossible to her devout imagination) Tom could not have what he wanted—yes, and needed, too. For it was at this period that Mrs. Dilworth recognized, what most wives of men do recognize at one time or another, that although being a wife and mother is the only vocation of a married woman, being a husband and father is only one of many vocations of a married man. Hence the companionship of an eminently worthy wife is almost never enough for the male creature. When this harsh truth burst upon Milly, she wiped her eyes on the stocking she was mending and groaned aloud. But she did not rail against the fact, nor did she attempt to deny it; wherein she showed a superfeminine intelligence. She only said to herself that Thomas could not have what he wanted while she was alive; yet she couldn't, it seemed, die, although she was so miserable that she didn't know how she lived! It was at this point that she began to make wild schemes to relieve the situation: Suppose she asked that Hayes girl to come and make them a visit? But no—a man wants more than to just look at a pretty girl across the table. Suppose she went away herself and made a visit, and asked Miss Helen Hayes to come and keep house for her? (Like all good wives, Milly had no hesitation in offering up another woman to the pleasure of her lord.) No; people would talk about Tom if she did that.... The amount of it was, poor Milly, although she did not know it, was really planning that Thomas should have two wives at the same time—and, dear me! how that would simplify things! There would be the old, sensible, matter-of-fact wife to mend his stockings and order his good dinner and nurse him through the indigestion consequent upon the dinner—the old, anxious wife, who has had the children and reared them, who has planned and economized and toiled with him, who has borne the burden and heat of the day at his side—the prosaic wife, who gives, unasked, such good advice. Every one will admit that this elderly person has been, and (to a limited degree) still is, a

necessity to every Thomas. But sometimes Thomas thinks, in his simple way, that it would be pleasant to have the luxuries as well as the necessities of life; to have, for instance, a young wife—a pretty wife, clever and light-hearted and gayly tyrannical; a wife who never knew enough to advise anybody, who should be a relaxation and a refreshment, *and just a little bit of a fool*; for, as every intelligent (unmarried) woman knows, men like fools; feminine fools. Of course the trouble is that if you supply a wife for two sides of a man's character—for utility, so to speak, and for diversion—he may, not unreasonably, demand that every side and angle and facet of his jewel-like nature have its own feminine setting. That was probably Solomon's idea. Well, well! the time is not yet for this reasonable arrangement; and it is possible that trade in galvanized buckets will never warrant its extensive existence.

But all this is very frivolous compared to the reality of this poor woman's pain, a pain that finally evolved a plan which, although less picturesque than the harem, was of the same grade in the eye of the law, though, curiously enough, not in her own eye. She could not, as she expressed it to herself, be dead, so that her Thomas might have his wish; *but he could think she was dead.*

When this extraordinary idea came into Milly Dilworth's head, she felt as one imprisoned in darkness who sees, far off, the glimmer of daylight. He "could think she was dead!" And if he thought so, of course there could be nothing wrong in his marrying "*her*." (Miss Hayes's moral status did not enter into Milly's calculations.)

The light in her darkness dazzled poor Milly at first, and the way was not clear. It took two weeks of further thought to decide upon the step, and then to evolve its details; but one need not go into them as Milly did.... As she sat at her work, day after day, she thought her plan out slowly and toilsomely. At first she kept balking at the enormity of it. Then some chance word would betray Tom's admiration for brains, and she would beat and spur her mind up to her project again.... And at last she accepted it.... Once accepted, the thing was

settled. Her mind had about as much flexibility as a bar of lead, and there was no changing it. It only remained to decide upon the details. This she did slowly and painfully. Each step was planned, each contingency arranged for.

And by-and-by the day came to act.

The night before, at supper, Mrs. Dilworth, her hands stumbling among her teacups, said, faintly, "I'm going over to the other side of the river to-morrow to order some chickens from Mrs. Kensy."

"That Kensy house is right by the railroad station," Ned said, scowling; "I don't believe she has any hens."

"Yes, she has, Neddy," said Mrs. Dilworth.

Edwin frowned blackly. "I do wish you wouldn't call me by that absurd name, mother."

"I keep forgetting, Neddy dear."

Edwin held up his hands despairingly.

"What are you two people talking about?" demanded Thomas.

"I'm going to walk over, across the ice, to the Bend, to-morrow," said Milly.

"Walk!" her husband protested. "What do you walk for? It's cold as Greenland on the ice, and, besides, they were cutting at the pool by the Bend; you don't want to go that way, Milly. Take the stage round."

Mrs. Dilworth crumbled a piece of bread with shaking fingers, and said

nothing.

"What time are you going, mother?" inquired Edwin.

"In the afternoon, about four."

"Why, you went there only two days ago," Edwin said, irritably. "I saw you on the back road carting a big bundle."

"It would have been more to the point if you'd done the carting for your mother," Tom Dilworth said, sharply.

His wife paled suddenly at that word about a bundle, but the subject was not pursued. Edwin said, grumbling, that he didn't see what possessed his mother to choose such an hour. "It's too dark for a lady to be out," Edwin protested.

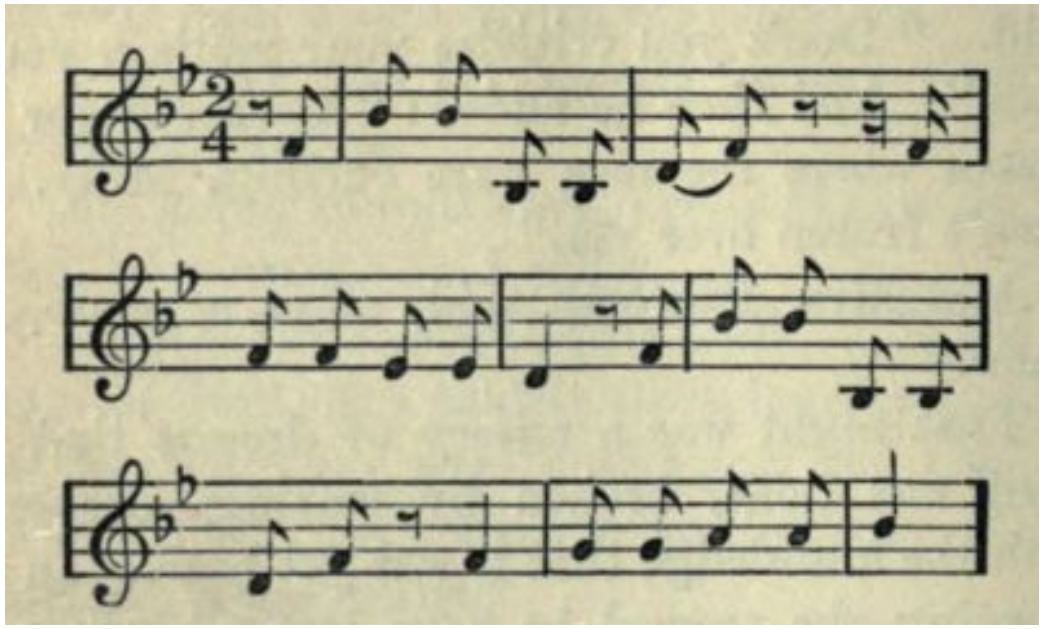
"Too dark for a—*grandmother*!" his father said. "Don't you criticise your mother, young man." And then he added: "Look out for the places where the men were cutting, Milly. It hasn't frozen over yet."

And Mrs. Dilworth said, after a pause, "I know."

That night was a misery of dreams that the deed was done, broken by wakings desperate with the knowledge that it was yet to do. In the morning she seemed to have lost all power of words; she bore her husband's reproaches that Ned was late for breakfast; she went about her household duties; she watched the girls start for school (she did not kiss them; demonstrations of affection had never been possible to this dumb breast; but she stared after them with haggard eyes); and through it all she hardly uttered a word; when she did speak, it seemed as though she had to break, by agonizing effort, some actual lock upon her lips. When the girls had gone she looked about for her eldest; but Ned was not to be found. "I never knew him to go to the store before

breakfast," she thought, miserably. His father, pulling on his coat in the hall, said that Ned was getting industrious to go to his work so early! His wife was silent.

When he started, whistling cheerfully,



she watched him from the window, straining her eyes until he was out of sight. Then she went up-stairs to her bedroom, and, opening his closet door, leaned her head against one of his coats, trembling very much.

Afterwards she wandered about the house in aimless, restless waiting for Ned.

In the course of the morning Tom sent over to inquire why the boy had not come to the store. Milly told the messenger to tell Mr. Dilworth that Mr. Edwin was not at home. "Say I thought he was at the store," she said. "I'll give him his father's message when he comes in to dinner." But he did not come in to dinner; and minute by minute the afternoon ticked itself away. She had said to herself that she must start about four, before Nancy and Mary got home from school. "It must be so that it would be dark when I was coming back," she reminded herself. "If I leave here at four, and get my bundle from Mrs. Kensy at five, it would be pretty dark by the time I would be going home. Mrs. Kensy will tell them that it was dark."

At four Edwin had not appeared; Milly, having no imagination, had no anxiety; she merely gave up, patiently, the hope of a wordless good-bye. But she kept looking for him; and when she finally put on her things, she paused and turned back to the window, to look once more towards Old Chester; but there was no sign of Ned. It did not occur to her to postpone her plan; her mind, run into the mould of sacrifice, had hardened into rigidity. So at last, miserably, the tears running down her face, she stepped out into the cold and went down through the garden to the river. There she turned and looked back,

with dumb passion in her eyes; the firelight was winking from the parlor windows and all the warm commonplace of life seemed to beckon her. She put her muff up to wipe her eyes, but she made no prayer or farewell; her silence had reached her soul by that time.

"THERE SHE TURNED AND LOOKED BACK"

"THERE SHE TURNED AND LOOKED BACK"

It was very cold; the ice was rough, and the wind had blown the dry snow about in light drifts and ripples, so that walking was not difficult. She trudged out, up towards the Bend, skirting the place where the men had been cutting. They had gone home now, and the ice about the black, open space of water was quite deserted. The wind came keenly down the river, blowing an eddy of snow before it; the bleak sky lay like lead over the woods along the shore. There was not a house in sight. Amelia Dilworth looked furtively about her; then she bent down and scraped at the snow on the edge of the ice, as one might do who, in the water, was struggling for a hold upon it. After that, for a long time, she stood there, looking dumbly at the current running, black and silent, between the edges of the ice. At last, her hand over her mouth to check some inarticulate lament, she stooped again, and put her little black muff on the broken snow close to the water.

When she reached Mrs. Kensy's she was quite calm. She said briefly that she had come to order some chickens; "—and I'll take that bundle I asked you to keep for me."

The woman brought it, and Milly tucked her fingers through the stout strings she had tied so carefully a few days before. When she would open it in the woods, and put on the new dress and shawl and the heavy veil that it held, and then, in the dark, take the half-past-five train, no one would know that Thomas Dilworth's wife had fled away into another State. They would find the muff, and they would think—there would be only one thing to think.

"I want the chickens for Sunday," she said; "please send them over on Saturday." Then it came into her mind with a little gush of happiness that she would pay for them on the spot, instead of having the bill sent to Tom, as was her custom; she had drawn a sum of money from the bank a fortnight ago—a small sum, but her own; now it was all in her purse; she would buy Tom's Sunday dinner out of her little fund. Except to leave him, it was the last thing she would ever do for him.

She put her hand into her pocket—and chilled all over. Then stood blankly looking at the woman; then plunged her hand down again into her pocket; then exclaimed under her breath; then tore her bag open and fumbled distractedly among brushes and night-gown and slippers; then pulled her pocket wrong side out with trembling fingers.

"*My purse!*" she said, breathlessly. Then she searched everything again.

"It ain't any difference," Mrs. Kensy protested.

"I must have left it at home. I can't go back for it. It is too late."

"What for?" said Mrs. Kensy.

"The—the train."

"Oh, you was going on, was you?" Mrs. Kensy said. "Well, I can let you have the price of a ticket a little ways."

But Mrs. Dilworth, with shaking hands, pulled everything out of her bag, shook her skirts, fumbled in the bosom of her dress, ran out and searched the garden-path, strained her eyes across the snow on the river—all in vain. "Oh, my!" she said, faintly.

"But I can lend you the price of a ticket, ma'am," Mrs. Kensy said again.

"No matter," Mrs. Dilworth said, dully. "I'll go home."

Even as she spoke she heard the train tooting faintly far up the valley. She sat down, feeling suddenly sick.

V

There was nothing to do but to go home. She remembered now how in her agitated watching for her son she had put her purse down on the corner of her bureau—and left it there. Yes; there was nothing to do but go back. "I can start to-morrow," she said to herself. But in the sick reaction of the moment she knew that she could never start again; her purpose had been shattered by the blow. She took her bundle—the bundle that meant flight and disguise and self-sacrifice, and that stood for the shrewdness which is so characteristic of the kind of stupidity which forgets the purse—and went stumbling down in the darkness to the river. She said to herself that she must get her muff; and she thought heavily that it would be pretty hard to carry so many things across the

ice. She was numb with the shock of interrupted ecstasy. She could not feel even mortification—only fatigue. She was so tired that, seeing in the darkness a hurrying figure approaching her, she did not recognize her husband until he was almost upon her.

"*Milly*? My God! Milly!"

He had her muff in his hand, and as he reached her he caught at her shoulder and shook her roughly. "Milly—I thought—I thought—" He stammered with agitation. "I found this muff, and I thought it was yours; and Neddy's gone, too, and I thought—both of you—"

"Neddy *gone*?" she repeated, dully.

She stood still on the ice, trying to get her wits together.

"He's disappeared. He isn't in town. He went out early this morning. To skate, I suppose. Nora saw him from her window; at about six, she says. And this open water"—she felt him quiver at her side—"and then this muff—"

"No!" she said. "I—I made a mistake." She did not take in the words about Ned.

"But where is he? Nobody's seen him. I suppose I'm a fool, but I'm uneasy. I came to meet you because I thought you might know. But when I saw this muff—it is yours, Milly, isn't it?—I got into a panic about you, too."

"Why," she said—"it's mine; yes. I—I left it—I suppose. Neddy wasn't with me. Did you think he was with me? I don't understand," she ended, bewildered.

"He hasn't been at home all day," her husband said, "nor in town, either." And then he repeated the story, while she looked at him, slow understanding dawning in her eyes.

"Neddy—gone! Where?"

"But that's what I don't know," the father said.

And his wife, dazed still, but awake to the trouble in his voice, began to comfort him, alarm rising slowly in her own heart like an icy wave.

"Maybe he went to see somebody in Upper Chester?"

"But he doesn't know anybody at Upper Chester. Of course it's possible. Only—you gave me such a fright, Milly!" Mrs. Dilworth put her hand over her mouth and trembled. "However, I guess he's all right, as you say. I guess we'll find him at home when we get back. It's lucky I came to meet you, because I can lug your things for you. How did you drop your muff, dear? Here, take it; your hands must be cold. Oh, Milly, you gave me an awful fright—it was right on the very edge of the ice; those confounded cutters hadn't put up any ropes. You do really think there's no reason to be uneasy about Ned?"

"No," she said. Her knees shook; she had to pause to swallow before she spoke. Oh, what if he should find her out? As she trudged along at his side in the cold darkness she said to herself, with a sickening sense of apprehension, that if he found her out she should die. Then as her mind cleared she tried in her brief way to encourage him about their boy; yet, as they drew nearer home and she saw again the firelit windows, she began to awaken to the situation: Neddy had gone out to skate; at six, did Nora say? Of course he might have stopped to see somebody in Upper Chester; only Neddy never went to see anybody anywhere—except (Amelia Dilworth had forgotten her!)—except that Hayes girl—and she wasn't at home. Yes, it was strange; and worrying, perhaps. But she only repeated, as they went hurrying up to the back door, that she was sure Neddy was all right. But she held her breath to listen for his voice haranguing his sisters in the sitting-room. Instead, the two girls came running out to meet them.

"Oh, father, did you find Ned? Oh, here's mother; she'll know where he is."

"Mother, I'm sort of scared about him," Mary whispered.

"He's gone to see some friend," the mother said, and her brevity, so agonizing to her, seemed to reassure the others.

"He hasn't any friend except Miss Helen Hayes," Nancy said, "and she went away last week."

"Maybe he's gone to hunt her up," Mary said, giggling, and her father told her to be quiet.

"It's thoughtless in him to be so late. But your mother isn't worried, so I guess we needn't be. Your mother says there is not the slightest cause for anxiety, and she knows."

"Come to supper," Amelia said, her heart sinking; and the commonplace suggestion cheered them all, although Tom Dilworth did not like to lose the assurance of his wife's presence, even to have her go up-stairs to take off her bonnet, and went with her, saying again, decidedly, that there was, as she said, no possible reason for uneasiness, and that he himself hadn't a particle of anxiety. "But I'll give that boy a piece of my mind for worrying you so. Why, Milly, what a fat pocket-book! Where did you get so much money, my dear? I didn't know the hardware trade was so prosperous. Look here, Milly—it is pretty late, honestly?"

She took her purse out of his hands, her own trembling. For a moment she could not speak, and leaned forward to look into the swinging glass and make pretence of untying a knot in her bonnet-strings. "Oh, he'll come home soon," she said.

In spite of assurances, the tea-table was not very cheerful—the girls stopped short in the middle of a sentence to listen for a step on the porch. Tom got up twice to look out of the window. Mrs. Dilworth thought she heard the gate slam, and held her breath; but no Ned appeared. The evening was endlessly long. Tom pretended to read his newspaper, and kept his eye on one spot for five minutes at a time. At ten he packed the girls off to bed; at eleven he was walking up and down the room; at twelve he told his wife to go to bed; but somehow or other he went himself, while she sat up, "to let the boy in."

You can make excuses for this sort of lateness up to a certain point; but it is curious that at about 2.30 in the morning the excuses all give out. Tom Dilworth got up and dressed. "Something has happened, Milly," he said, brokenly. His wife put her arms around him, trying to comfort him.

"If Miss Hayes was only at home," she said, "maybe she would have some idea of his plans. He might have told her. And she could tell us what to do."

"Who?" said Tom—"that Hayes girl? Maybe so. I hadn't thought of her. No, I don't believe she'd be any help. She hasn't got much sense in that kind of way."

Such ages and ages was Milly away from her great experience of jealousy that she felt no relief at this bald betrayal. Together they went out onto the porch, listening, and straining their eyes. The moon was just going down; it was very cold; far off a dog barked. But there was no human sound. The two haggard people went shivering back into the hall, where a candle burned dimly in the glass bell hanging at the foot of the stairs.

"Something has certainly happened," Tom said again. "Oh, Milly, you are always so calm and I go all to pieces." He leaned his elbow against the wall and hid his face in his arm. His wife heard him groan.

"And—I've been hard on him sometimes," he said.

She took his hand and kissed it silently.

Poor Tom went to pieces more than once in the days that followed—dreadful days of panic and despair. Old Chester, aroused at daybreak by the terrified father, decided at once that the boy was drowned; but everybody stood ready to help the stricken parents with hopeful words to the contrary, words which rang as hollow to Thomas and his wife as to the well-meaning liars.

It was on Wednesday that he had disappeared. On Friday they dragged the river through the open holes; on Saturday, blew up the ice and dragged all the way down to the second bend. That night Nancy and Mary crept away to cry in their own room; Tom sat with his head buried in his arms; his wife knelt beside him, touching him sometimes with a quiet hand, but never speaking. Dr. Lavendar came in and put his hand on Tom's shoulder for a minute, and then went away. The firelight slipped flickering about the room; sometimes the coal in the grate snapped and chuckled, and a spurt of flame shone on the two suddenly aged faces. And then into the silent room came, with hurried, shamefaced triumph—Edwin.

"I—I'm afraid you've been anxious—"

"He ought to have written," said another voice, breathless and uncertain, and breaking into nervous laughter. "It is naughty in him to have forgotten. I—I told him so."

Thomas Dilworth lifted his head and stared, silently; but his wife broke out

into wild laughter and streaming tears; she ran and threw herself on Edwin's breast, her throat strangling with sobs.

"Oh—she's found Neddy! She has brought him back to us!—she has found him! Oh, Miss Hayes, God bless you—God bless you! Oh, where did you find him?"

Miss Hayes opened her lips—then bit the lower one, and stood, scarlet.

"I meant to write," Edwin began to explain—"of course I meant to write, but —"

"Oh, dear Mrs. Dilworth," Helen's fluttering voice took up the excuse, "you must forgive him"—she came as though to put her arms about Ned's mother. "After all, a bridegroom, you know—"

Milly lifted her head from Edwin's shoulder and gaped at her.

"Bridegroom?"

Thomas Dilworth got on his feet and swore. Miss Helen Hayes—or, no; Mrs. Edwin Dilworth—came and hung upon his arm.

"THOMAS DILWORTH GOT ON HIS FEET AND SWORE"

"THOMAS DILWORTH GOT ON HIS FEET AND SWORE"

"You won't mind very much? You'll forgive him? We couldn't tell, because—because papa would have interfered; but I knew your dear, kind heart. Mrs. Dilworth, I have so revered Mr. Dilworth!—that was one reason I said *yes*. You'll let me be your little girl, Mr. Dilworth?"

"Little—*grandmother*!" said Tom Dilworth; and burst into a roar of laughter; then stopped, and said through his set teeth to his son, "You scoundrel!"

"Thomas—don't!" the mother entreated. "He has come back."

"He'd better have stayed away!" Thomas said, furiously, in all the anger of suddenly relieved pain.

"Oh, dear Mrs. Dilworth," Helen murmured, "forgive us! He ought to have written—I ought to have reminded him. But—*you* understand? I know you do. Just these first beautiful days, one forgets everything."

"Well, I tell you I meant to write," Ned persisted, doggedly. "But mother put me all out by going over to the Bend in the afternoon. I was going to take that train, and of course I couldn't; Kensy's house is right there by the station. And I had to take the morning train instead; and it put me all out. I had to get up so early I forgot to take any clothes," he added, resentfully. "It wasn't my fault."

"Not your fault?" his father said, and then turned to his wife, almost with a sob. "Milly, can he be our boy, this sneak?"

"Yes; yes, he is, Tom; indeed he is, dear. And he just forgot; he didn't mean anything wrong." Milly was almost voluble, and she was crying hard. And then she looked at the woman who had brought him back—the faded, anxious, simpering woman, who for once had no words ready. Milly looked at her, and suddenly opened her arms and took her son's elderly wife to her heart. "Oh, you poor woman," she said, "how unhappy you must have been at home!"

Helen looked at her blankly, then dropped her head down on the kind shoulder, and Milly felt her quiver.

"She's fifty!" Tom said, trembling with anger. "How the devil a son of mine can be such a jack—"

"Tom, dear! there now, *don't*," the mother said; "he's at home. Just think; he's at home! and we thought—we thought—" Her voice broke. "We'll all love you, Miss Hayes—I mean Helen," she whispered to the sobbing woman.

Then, with a sort of gasp, she put her daughter-in-law's arms aside gently, and went over and kissed her husband.

As for Thomas Dilworth, after the first shock of anger and mortification had passed, and the young couple had finally settled themselves upon the disgusted bounty of the respective fathers, he used to whistle incessantly a certain song much in vogue at the time:

"I hanker
To spank her,
Now I'm her papa!"

"AN EXCEEDING HIGH MOUNTAIN"

I

Robert Gray's first wife, Alys (Old Chester had hard work to swallow her name; "but it's better than any of your silly 'ie's,'" said Old Chester)—this first Mrs. Gray was a good deal of a trial to everybody. She was not only "new," but foreign; not only foreign, but indifferent to Old Chester. Indeed, it took all Old Chester's politeness and Christian forbearance to invite Mrs. Robert Gray to tea—with the certainty that the invitation would be declined. She was an English girl whom Robert met somewhere in Switzerland—a heavy-eyed, silent creature, certainly a very beautiful woman, but most inefficient and sickly; and there were so many nice, sensible girls in Old Chester! (However, there is no use saying things like that: as if a man ever married a girl because she was sensible!)

Yet young Gray certainly needed a sensible wife; his wealth was limited to character and good manners, plus a slender income as tutor in the Female Academy in Upper Chester. Excellent things, all; but a wife with sense (and money) would have been an agreeable addition to his circumstances. Whereas, this very beautiful English girl was a penniless governess, left stranded in Germany by an employer, who had, apparently, got tired of her. Robert Gray had met the poor, frightened creature, who was taking her wandering way back to England, and married her, frantic with rage at the way she had been treated. When he brought her home, he was so madly in love that he probably did not half appreciate Old Chester's patience with her queer ways. But the fact was, that for the few months she lived, she was so miserable that Old Chester could not help being patient, and forgiving her her half-sullen indifference, and her silence, and her distaste for life—even in Old Chester!

For in spite of Robert's adoration, in spite of all the ready friendliness about her, in spite of the birth of a baby girl, she seemed, as it were, to turn her face

to the wall. She died when the child was about a week old. Died, the doctor said, only because, so far as he could see, she did not care to live.

"You ought to try to get better for the baby's sake," said Miss Rebecca Jones, who had come in to help nurse her. And the poor girl frowned and shook her head, the heavy, white lids falling over her dark eyes.

"I don't like it."

And Rebecca (who had too much good sense to be shocked by the vagaries of a sick woman) said, decidedly: "Oh, you'll learn to like her. Come, now, just try!"

But she did not seem to try; even though Robert, kneeling with his arm under her pillow, holding her languid hand to his lips, said, sobbing, "Oh, Alys, Alys—for God's sake—don't leave me—"

Then she opened her beautiful eyes and looked at him solemnly. "Robert," she said, "I am sorry. I am—sorry. I—am—"

"What for, precious?" he entreated; "sorry for what? to leave me? Oh, Alys, then live, live, dear!"

"I—am—" she began; and then her voice trailed into eternity.

Miss Rebecca Jones hung about the house for a few days, to make the poor gentleman comfortable; then he was left alone with the child (purchased at so dreadful a cost) and one servant, and his daily work of teaching the polite languages at the Female Academy. Miss Rebecca's hard face softened whenever she thought of him; but all she could do for him was to go often to see the poor seven-months baby—which seemed for a time inclined to follow its mother.

Now it must be understood at once that Rebecca Jones was not a schemer, or a mean or vulgar woman. She was merely a hard-headed, honest-hearted product of years of public-school teaching, with a passion for truth and no grace in telling it. She was sorry for Mr. Gray, and sorry for the poor baby, who was being allowed, she said to herself, to grow up every which way; and sorry for the comfortless house left to the care of what she called "an uneducated servant-girl." So, after school, and on Saturday mornings, she used

to go over to Mr. Gray's house and bustle about to the bettering of several things. Indeed, old Mr. Jones told her more than once that he didn't know what that there widower would do without her. And Rebecca said, truthfully enough, that she didn't know, either. And when she said it her heart warmed with something more than pity.

As for Robert Gray, dazed and absent, trying to do his duty at the Academy during the day, and coming home at night to look blankly at his child, he, too, did not know what he would have done that first year without Miss Rebecca's efficient kindness. He was so centred in his grief, and also of so gentle a nature, that he took the kindness as simply as a child might have done. Like many another sweet-minded man, he had not the dimmest idea of the possible effect of his rather courtly manner and his very delicate courtesy upon a woman of slightly different class, whose life had been starved of everything romantic or beautiful. He became to sharp-tongued Miss Rebecca Jones a vision of romance; and, somehow, quite suddenly, about eighteen months after his wife's death, he discovered that he was going to marry her. In his startled astonishment, he realized that he had himself led up to her avowal of willingness by some talk about her kindness. Perhaps she had misunderstood his words; if she had, Robert Gray was not the man to offer an explanation.... However, after the first shock of being accepted, he was gently explicit:

"I realize that the child ought to have the care of a good woman, and therefore I—"

"I'll do my duty by her," Rebecca said.

"I want her brought up to love and reverence her mother. I want her brought up to be like her. It is for the child's sake that I—I marry again. I speak thus frankly, Miss Rebecca, because I so entirely respect you that I could not be anything but frank."

Rebecca's square face flushed over the high cheek-bones to the gaunt forehead and the sparse hair; then her eyes looked passionately into his. "I understand. Yes; I understand. And I will be good to your child, Mr. Gray."

And so he married her; and, when you come to think of it, it was a very sensible thing to do. Even Old Chester said he was very sensible. A man of thirty, with a baby—of course he ought to marry again! "But why on earth," said Old Chester, "when there are so many girls of his own class!—not but

what Rebecca Jones is a very worthy person."

Meanwhile, Rebecca, with hard conscientiousness, set herself to bring the child up. She trained her, and disciplined her, and made a painful point of talking to her about the first Mrs. Gray, according to her promise to teach her to "love and reverence her mother." The discipline sometimes made Robert Gray wince; but it was wise, and never unkind; so he never interfered;—but he left the room when it was going on. Once he said, nervously:

"I scarcely think, Mrs. Gray, that it is necessary to be quite so severe?"

"She must be made a good child," Rebecca answered.

"I am not afraid that she will not be a good child," Robert Gray said; "she is her mother's daughter."

"Well, she is her father's daughter, too," Rebecca declared, briefly. And her husband, shrinking, said:

"Light is stronger than darkness; Alice's mother was a creature of light. I am not afraid of her inheritance of darkness."

As for Rebecca, she went away and shut herself up in the garret. "'Creature of light!'" she said, sitting on the floor under the rafters, and leaning her head on an old horsehair-covered trunk wherein were packed away Mr. Gray's winter flannels—"well, I am a good wife to him, if I ain't a 'creature of light.'"

Yes, she was a good wife.... How carefully she put his flannels away in May; how prudently she planned his food; how she managed to make the two ends of his little income meet—yes, and lap over, so that every summer he could go away from her for a two months' vacation in the woods! Not once did he find a button lacking; not once had he put on a clean pair of stockings and then pulled them off because of a hole in the heel. Can our lords say as much, my mistresses? I trow not! Yes, a good wife: that lovely being who left the world with a faint, unfinished regret upon her pitiful lips could never have made him so comfortable.

Indeed, the whole household revolved upon Robert's comfort. Every domestic arrangement had reference to his well-being. That he did not become intolerably selfish was not Rebecca's fault, for, like many good wives, she was

absolutely without conscience in the matter of self-sacrifice; but Robert escaped spiritual corruption, thanks to his own very gentle nature and his absolute unconsciousness of the situation. Perhaps, too, Rebecca's tongue mitigated the spoiling process. She never spared him what she considered to be the truth about himself or Alice. But her truthfulness stopped here; she spared the dead, perforce. For what could she say ill of that beautiful creature whose only wrong-doing lay in dying? But she knew, with shame, that she would have liked to speak ill of her—in which reprehensible impulse to remove a fellow-being from a pedestal, Rebecca showed herself singularly like the rest of us.

In this bleak air of unselfishness and truth-telling, Robert Gray became more and more aloof. Gradually he retreated quite into his past, doing his daily work at the Academy—where successive classes of young ladies adored him for his gentle manners and his mild, brown eyes—and living very harmlessly with his memories, which he kept fresh and fragrant by sharing them with Alys's daughter, who, it must be admitted, being young and human, was not always intensely interested; but Rebecca had trained her too well for Alice ever to show any weariness. Robert kept his little collection of pictures and photographs of his first wife shut behind the curtained doors of an old secretary. If his second wife found him standing, his hands clasped behind him, his eyes wandering from one lovely presentment to another, he never displayed an embarrassed consciousness, but he shut the doors. He accepted Rebecca's devotion respectfully; he was never impolite, still less unkind; in fact, in all their married life he had never, she used to tell herself, spoken unkindly save once; and then his words were nothing more dreadful than, "We will not discuss it, if you please, Mrs. Gray." At first he had, very gently, made some grammatical suggestions; and she had profited by them, though, being a true Pennsylvanian, she never mastered "shall" and "will," nor did she lose the Pennsylvania love for the word 'just'; to the end of her days, Rebecca was 'just tired out'; or 'just real glad'; or 'just as busy as could be.' Grammar, however, was as far as Robert Gray went in any personal relation. He addressed her, in his courteous voice (always a little timidly), as "Mrs. Gray"; and he kept as much as possible out of her way. Meantime, Rebecca (remembering why he had married her) did her duty by the child, and never failed to mention, in her hard voice, that Alice must try to grow up like her mother.

"Make me a good girl," Alice used to say in her sleepy prayers every night —"make me a good girl, like my dear mother." Once, of her own accord, the

child added, "And make me pretty like her, too." Rebecca, listening to the little figure at her knee, said, sternly, when Alice got up and began to climb into the big four-poster:

"Don't be vain. Don't ask God for foolish things. Beauty is foolish and favor is deceitful. Just ask Him to make you as good as your mother was."

And, indeed, it must be admitted that the child did not inherit her mother's wonderful beauty. At first her father had expected it; he used to take liberties with his Horace, and say:

"O filia pulchra matre pulchriore."

But as Alice grew older, Robert Gray had to admit that the dead woman had taken her beauty away with her. The child had just a pleasant face; eyes that were gray or blue, as it happened; a commonplace nose, and uncompromisingly red hair. In those days red hair was thought to be a mortifying affliction, and poor, plain Alice shed many tears over the rough, handsome shock of hair that broke into curls about her forehead and all around the nape of her pretty, white neck.

II

But in spite of red hair, and what Old Chester religiously believed to be its accompanying temper, Alice Gray was a lovable girl, and at twenty, behold, she had a lover; indeed, she had more than one (not counting Dr. Lavendar); but Alice never gave a thought to anybody but Luther Metcalf. Luther was a good boy, Old Chester said; but added that he would never set the river on fire.

Certainly he did not use his incendiary opportunity; he had a small printing-office, and he owned and edited Old Chester's weekly newspaper, the *Globe*; but neither the news nor the editorial page ever startled or displeased the oldest or the youngest inhabitant. The *Globe* confined itself to carefully accredited

cuttings from exchanges; it had a Poet's Corner, and it gave, politely, any Old Chester news that could be found; besides this, it devoted the inner sheet to discreet advertisements, widely spaced to take up room. All Old Chester subscribed for it, and spoke of it respectfully, because it was a newspaper; and snubbed its editor, because he was one of its own boys—and without snubbing boys are so apt to put on airs! Poor Luther was never tempted to put on airs; he was too hard-worked and too anxious about his prospects. He and Alice were to get married when he and the *Globe* were out of debt; for his father had left him a mortgage on the office building, as well as an unpaid-for press. When Luther was particularly low-spirited, he used to tell Alice it would take him five years to pay his debts; and, to tell the truth, that was an optimistic estimate, for the *Globe* and the printing-office together did very little more than pay the interest on the notes and Luther's board.

So, when they became engaged, waiting was what they looked forward to, for, of course, Robert Gray could not help them; it was all Rebecca could do to stretch his salary to cover the expenses of their own household. But the two young people were happy enough, except when Luther talked about five years of waiting.

"We've been engaged two years already," he said, moodily; "I don't want to be another case of Andrew Steele."

"I'm not afraid," Alice said. "Why, if you get the new job press, and get that Mercer work, think how much that will help!"

"Well," Luther said, "yes; but if I get the press, there's another debt. And if I don't get it, I can't get the work; so there it is. A vicious circle."

This question of the purchase of a new press, before the old press had been paid for, was a very serious and anxious one. "I wish father could help," Alice said—they were walking home from Wednesday-evening lecture, loitering in the moonlight, and wishing the way were twice as long.

"Oh, I wouldn't think of such a thing," the young man declared; "we'll pull out somehow. He's gone off to the woods, hasn't he?"

"Yes, he went this morning; he's so pleased to get away! He won't be back till the Academy opens."

"I suppose he hates to leave you, though," Lute said.

"Yes, but I can see that the getting away is a great relief. I keep his pictures dusted, and take the flowers up to the cemetery for him; so he knows things are not neglected."

"But," Luther said, thoughtfully, "I think she's sorry to have him go?"

"Oh yes; sorry, I suppose," Alice admitted. "She's fond of him—in her way."

"Then why—" Luther began.

"My dear, she's *jealous* of my mother."

"Oh, Alice!"

"Well, you know," Alice explained, "my mother was so beautiful—and poor Mrs. Gray! But I must say, Lute, she's the justest person I know. She's always told me that my mother was perfect. And of course she was; but when you're jealous, it isn't so easy to acknowledge things like that."

"But I don't see how you can be jealous of the dead," Luther ruminated.

"Oh, *I* do! I could be jealous of some girl who was dead, if you'd loved her, Lute." And then the boy put his arm round her, and they kissed each other there in the shadows of the locust-trees overhanging a garden wall. "I'm so glad there isn't anybody, dead or alive," Alice said, happily; "though I'd rather have her alive than dead. If she were alive, you'd have quarrelled with her, and stopped loving her. But if she were dead, she would keep on being perfect. Yes; I'd rather marry a man who had been—been *divorced*," said Alice, lowering her voice, because the word was hardly considered proper in Old Chester, "than a man whose wife was dead, because he would always be thinking what an angel she was and what a sinner I was."

"He would think you were an angel," the boy told her, blushing at his own fervency.

But the fervency died on his ardent young lips when they got into the house and sat decorously in the parlor with Mrs. Gray. Rebecca was sewing, her hard, square face a little harder than usual. Mr. Gray had gone away on that

annual fishing-trip—gone, with a look of relief growing in his eyes even as he stepped into the stage and pulled the door to behind him; pulled it hurriedly, as though he feared she would follow. Then, baring his head politely, he had looked out of the window and said:

"Good-bye. You will send for me should you, by any chance, need me. I trust you will be very well."

"I don't know that I have ever had to interrupt your fishing-trip with any of my needs," Rebecca had answered, briefly. She spoke only the truth; she never had interfered with any pleasure of his; and yet Robert Gray had winced, as if he had not liked her words. Now, alone, in the parlor, darning his stockings, she wondered why. She never said anything but the simple truth; but he looked at her sometimes as a dog looks who expects a blow. He was truthful himself, but he never seemed to care much to hear the truth, she thought, heavily. Once he told her that truth was something more than a statement of fact. The statement of a fact may be a lie, he had said, smiling whimsically; and Rebecca used to wonder how a fact could be a lie? She recalled the time when, with brief accuracy, she had mentioned to him in what condition of ragged neglect she had found his wardrobe after the "creature of light" had left him; and how he had seemed to shrink not from the shiftless dead, but from her. And she remembered painfully that one unkindness: She had told him that, to her mind, not even the weakness of death was quite an excuse for saying you didn't like your own baby; and he had said, with a terrible look, "We will not discuss it, if you please, Mrs. Gray." She had never spoken of it again; but his look had burned into her poor, narrow, sore mind; she thought of it now, moodily, as she sat alone, her heart following him on his journey. If his first wife had only not been so perfect, she said to herself, she could have borne it better; if she had had a bad temper, even, it would have been something. But she had often heard Robert tell Alice that her mother had an "angelic temper." Rebecca wished humbly she herself could be pleasanter. "I don't feel unpleasant inside; but I seem to talk so," she thought, helplessly. She was thinking of this when the two young people came in; and looking up over her spectacles, she said, coldly:

"Did you remember to wipe your feet, Luther? You are careless about that. Alice, I found a flower on my daphne; you can carry the pot up to the cemetery when you go."

"Yes, ma'am," Alice said. She took up her sewing (for Rebecca would not have idle hands about); sometimes she glanced at Luther, sitting primly in the corner of the sofa, and once caught his eye and smiled; but there were no sheep's-eyes or sweet speeches. They were Old Chester young people, and such things would have been considered improper; just as sitting by themselves would have been thought not only indecorous, but selfish.

"Oh, Alice," Luther said, suddenly, "I meant to ask you; wasn't your mother's name spelled 'Alys'?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Well, it's such an unusual name that it struck my attention when I saw it in the paper."

"What about it?" Alice asked. "Oh, dear, why didn't father spell me 'Alys' instead of 'Alice'? It's so much prettier!"

"Prettiness isn't everything; and 'Alice' is a sensible name," Rebecca said. "Don't criticise your father."

"It was an advertisement in one of the *Globe's* exchanges," Luther explained. "I was scissoring things, and the name caught my eye. It was information wanted. Of course it's just a coincidence, but it's queer, because—here it is," said the editor of the *Globe*, fumbling in his pocket. "I cut it out and meant to show it to you, but I forgot." Then he read, slowly, "*Information wanted of one Alys Winton—*"

"Why, but Winton was my mother's name!" cried Alice.

"*—one Alys Winton, who married sometime in 1845; husband thought to be an American, name unknown. She (or a child of hers, born in 1846) is requested to communicate with Amos Hughes, Attorney at Law,*" etc.

Alice stared, open-mouthed. "Why, Lute!" she said—"why, but that must be my mother!"

Lute shook his head. "I don't think there's anything in it. Do you, Mrs. Gray?"

"Might be," she said, briefly.

Alice took the crumpled cutting, and holding it under the lamp, read it through to herself. "But, Lute, really and truly," she said, "it is queer. Perhaps some of my mother's rich relations have left her a fortune! Then we could pay off the mortgage. Only I'm afraid my mother hadn't any rich relations—or poor ones, either. I never heard of any. Did you, Mrs. Gray?"

"No," Rebecca said.

"She was a governess, you know, Lute, in some horrid English family; the wife didn't like her, and she discharged my poor little mother; then the family went off and left her all alone in Germany. Perfectly abominable!"

"Don't be unjust, Alice; you don't know anything about it," Mrs. Gray said. "She was very young. Perhaps she couldn't teach the children to suit their parents. Though it was unkind to leave her unprovided for," she added, with painful fairness.

"I guess it was!" cried Alice. "Oh, how angry father gets when he talks about it! He says she was in such terror, poor little thing, when he met her. And yet she was very forgiving, father says. He says she wrote and told the gentleman that she was married. *I* wouldn't have. I'd have let him think I'd starved, so he would have suffered remorse—the wretch!"

"I hope you would not have been so foolish or so selfish," her step-mother said.

"You see, she had no relations to turn to," Alice explained to Luther; "if father hadn't come, dear knows what would have become of her."

"I suppose she could have earned an honest living, like anybody else," Mrs. Gray said.

"Well, anyway," Alice said, thoughtfully, "this advertisement is queer. She had no relations that father ever heard of; but there might be some one. What do you think, Mrs. Gray?"

"There might be," Rebecca said. She thought to herself that it was very probable; that first wife had brought Robert Gray beauty and love; it only needed that she should bring him money to make it all perfect. In her bleak

mind a window of imagination suddenly opened, and she had a vision of what wealth would mean to her husband, coming as a gift from those dead hands. She set her lips, and said: "Better find out about it, Luther. Write to the man and say that a person of that name before her marriage, died here in Old Chester, leaving a child—and don't keep your hands in your pockets; it's bad manners."

"Do you really think it is worth while, ma'am?" Luther said, incredulously.

"Of course it is," said Alice. "Suppose it should be some inheritance? Such things do happen."

"In story-books," Lute said.

"Well, then I'd like to be in a story-book," Alice said, sighing. "Just think, Lute, we might pay for the press and pay off the mortgage!"

"Golly!" said Lute.

Then they fell to making all sorts of plans, gayly, each tripping the other up with the prosaic reminder of improbability.

"Or, if it *should* be anything," Luther said, "it won't be more than $100."

"Well, that's something; it will meet two monthly payments on the press."

"It will pay for a diamond-ring for you," Lute said.

"Nonsense! We'll buy father a horse."

"And who will buy the oats?" Rebecca said.

"I could give you a big oleander, Mrs. Gray," Alice told her, smiling.

"You could put the money in the bank, like a sensible girl," Rebecca said, severely. "Don't speak of this outside, either of you. Mr. Gray wouldn't wish his wife's name talked about."

"And don't let's write anything about it to him," Alice said; "let's have it a surprise!—if there is anything in it; only, of course, there isn't anything," she ended, sighing. "But you might write to the man, Lute."

"Of course there isn't anything," Lute agreed, sensibly. "I'll write if you want me to; but I wouldn't build on it, Ally," he said, as he got up to go. And when he paused a minute in the darkness on the porch, he added, softly, "If you get rich, maybe you won't want a poor printer?"

And she laughed, and said, "Maybe I won't!"

Then he kissed her just under her left ear, and said, "Money isn't everything, Ally."

III

Money isn't everything, but it has so much to do with most things that even a dim, story-book vision of it stirred Alice's imagination. Luther, having no imagination, dismissed the vision from his mind after writing a letter to "Amos Hughes, Attorney at Law." Indeed, Luther had more practical things to think of than possible legacies, poor fellow. His balance-sheet for that month of June was very dark. More than once, after the office was closed for the day, he sat at his desk in his shirt-sleeves, hot and tired and grimy, poring over his ledger by the light of a swinging lamp. Alice grew worried about his pallor and the hollows in his cheeks; but there was nothing she could do, though she chafed against her helplessness to help, and revolved all sorts of schemes in her impractical girl-mind. Indeed, she went so far as to pour out her heart to Dr. Lavendar, in the hope that he could make some suggestion. She found the old man sitting in the wistaria arbor near his beehives, smoking peacefully, and throwing sticks to Danny, who needed exercise and scrambled after them into the tall grass, bringing them back with fatiguing alacrity.

"Look here, sir," said Dr. Lavendar, "don't find 'em so quick. I'm worn out pitching them."

Then Alice Gray came down between the box borders and said she wanted his advice; and Dr. Lavendar, glancing up at her, saw an uncertain lip and heard a catch in her voice; whereupon he told her to give Danny a run. "The scoundrel has kept me working for the last half-hour," he complained.

When she came back, flushed and laughing, and sat down on the arbor step, her voice was quite steady; so he listened placidly to her story.

"You want to get some work to help Lute, do you, good-for-nothing?"

"Yes," Alice said, eagerly. "Oh, Dr. Lavendar, *can* you think of anything? I wanted to go into the office and learn to set type, but Mrs. Gray—"

"Well?"

"Mrs. Gray said I had better learn to keep house economically. She said father wouldn't like it."

"Mrs. Gray would always think first of what your father would like."

Alice scratched lines in the gravel with one of Danny's sticks. "I suppose she would," she admitted.

"And what did Lute say?"

"Oh, he wouldn't listen to it. But I thought maybe you could make him, Dr. Lavendar?"

"I?" said Dr. Lavendar. "No, thank you. Do you think I'd rob the boy?"

"Rob him?"

"Of his self-respect; a boy wants to stand on his own legs; he doesn't want a girl propping him up. You let Lute alone. He'll manage. And you're young yet, anyhow. It won't hurt ye to wait. Mrs. Gray is right. You learn to be as good a housekeeper as she is; and though you mayn't put money into Lute's pocket before you're married, you'll not be taking it out after you're married."

Alice sighed. "Oh, I wish I could help Lute; I wish I had a lot of money."

"A lot of sense is better," Dr. Lavendar said, chuckling. "Oh, you women! You steal a man's unselfishness and self-respect, and you put it down to love. Love? You're a pack of thieves, the lot of you. You ought to be prosecuted. I'd do it, if I had time. Hey, Danny! bite her; she's like all the rest of 'em."

Alice hugged him, and defended herself. "You're just an old bachelor; you

don't appreciate us."

"Appreciate ye? I appreciate you. Maybe that's why I'm an old bachelor."

But though he discouraged Alice's projects for assisting Luther, Dr. Lavendar went plodding up the printing-office stairs the next morning. Luther, emerging from behind a press, brightened at the sight of his caller, and ushered him into a small closet which he called his private office; and when Dr. Lavendar asked him to print some more missionary-meeting notices, he said he would put them in at cost price.

"Don't you do it!" said Dr. Lavendar, thumping the floor with his umbrella. "Look here; I'll have to teach you the first principles of business: make your profit—and don't go to 'pauperizing the Church,' sir. There's too much of that sort of thing," he added, with reminiscent crossness. "Some scalawag of a bookseller wrote and offered to sell me books at thirty-three per cent. discount because I was a parson. There's no more reason why a parson should get a discount than a policeman. I told him so. I tell you so. Print those slips, and *print 'em better than you did the last lot*! Do you hear that? You forgot a comma on the second line. How's business, Lute?"

Lute's face fell. Then they talked things over, to the boy's great comfort; and at the end of the talk Lute straightened his shoulders and drew a good breath.

"By George! sir, if hanging on does it, I'll hang on—" he stopped, and looked round, in answer to a knock. "Well?" he said, impatiently. But the gentleman who stood in the doorway was not rebuffed.

"Are you Mr. Metcalf, the editor of the *Globe*?"

"Yes, sir," said Luther.

"I called in relation to an advertisement"—Luther was instantly alert, and Dr. Lavendar, scenting a customer, was about to withdraw—"an advertisement in a New York paper, requesting information of a certain person—"

"What!" cried Luther. "I had forgotten all about it."

"My name is Carter. I am from the office of Mr. Amos Hughes. Messrs. Pritchett, Carver, and Pritchett, Solicitors at Law, of London, are our

principals. The advertisement was in relation to a person called Alys Winton."

Luther, stumbling in his astonishment over his words, began to explain. "Mrs. Gray is dead," he ended. "And Alice is her daughter; isn't she, Dr. Lavendar? She asked me to write to you."

"Well, well; this is very interesting," said Dr. Lavendar. "I hope your object in seeking to obtain information is to benefit this young lady? She's one of my children."

Mr. Carter, still standing in the doorway, smiled, and said, "Do I understand that this Miss Alice is the daughter of the person named Alys Winton?"

"Yes," said Dr. Lavendar. "You can easily satisfy yourself on that point by consulting my parish records."

"And her mother is the lady you advertised for!" cried Luther. The boy was red with excitement. It was just as Alice said—a story-book. And they could get married right away! For it would be a lot of money—perhaps $5000; people in England didn't advertise for information of a person dead for twenty-two years for any small amount; well, even if it were $4000, they could get married; even if it were $3000. "How m—" he began, and stopped; of course that was not a proper question. "Alice's mother is the lady you advertised about," he said, lamely.

"Well, that does not follow, young gentleman; but the coincidence of the name was of sufficient interest for our firm to feel that I might, perhaps, just look into it. There may be dozens of Alys Wintons, you know."

"Oh," said Luther, so blankly that Dr. Lavendar laughed.

"Perhaps before beginning at the beginning you might save time by looking at the end," he said to the lawyer. "If you will step over to my church, you will see that our little Alice here is the daughter of Mr. Robert Gray and a lady named Alys Winton."

"A very good idea, sir. You, I infer, are a clergyman in this place? Ah, yes; just so. Lavendar? Ah, yes. I shall be pleased to look at the records, as you suggest, sir."

Luther, rather abashed, longing to accompany them, stood waiting for an invitation. But none came. Dr. Lavendar went pounding down the stairs, followed by Mr. Carter, and Lute heard them talking about the roughness of the road from Mercer over which Mr. Carter had come on the morning stage.

"Confound the road!" said Lute to himself. "Hi! Davidson! I'm going out. The first page is all made up; you can close up the fourth." Then he dashed down the creaking stairs and out into the hot sunshine. He had a glimpse up the street of the church, and Dr. Lavendar bending down fumbling with the key of the vestry door; it was evident that Luther's presence was not considered necessary. "I don't care," the boy said to himself, joyously, and started at a swinging pace out over the hill. "I'll be the one to tell her, anyhow!" His face was all aglow. As he hurried along he made calculations as to the rent of the little house. To be sure, he was reckoning on Alice's money; but the boy was so honest, and so in love, that he had no mean self-consciousness of that kind. "*We can get married!*" He had no room for any other thought.

Mrs. Gray was sitting on the back porch shelling pease; there was a grape trellis running out from the porch roof, and under it the shadows lay cool and pleasant on the damp flagstones. Rebecca, absorbed in the lulling snap of pods, looked up, frowning, at the noisy interruption, for the young man burst in, breathless, swinging his cap, his eyes shining.

"Oh, Mrs. Gray, where's Alice? Oh, my, such news! I never was so excited in my life!"

"That is not saying much," Rebecca told him; "you've not had a very exciting life. Alice is in the dining-room. Alice! come out here. Here's Luther. He says he never was so excited in his life; and I hope he won't be again, for he has upset my bucket of pods."

Luther, full of apologies, began to pick them up. "I'm so sorry, but I was so dreadfully excited—"

"Dreadful is a large word," Rebecca said. "I doubt whether either you or I have ever seen anything 'dreadful' in our lives. Don't exaggerate, Luther."

"Yes, ma'am," Lute said. "Oh, there's Alice! *Alice!*" He stood up, his hands full of pods, his face red. "Oh, Alice, what do you suppose has happened? You'll never guess!"

"The advertisement man!" cried Alice. Luther's face fell a little, and he laughed.

"Well, you're pretty smart. Yes, it is—"

"*What?*" said Rebecca Gray. As for Alice, she whirled out on the cool flags and jumped up and down.

"Oh, Lute, tell us—tell us! What does he say? Has he sent some money? Oh, how much is it? Oh, Lute, we'll pay for the press. Lute, is it—is it $1000? Tell us; hurry, hurry!"

Upon which Lute began to subside. "Well, it isn't quite—I mean, he didn't —he hasn't said just exactly how much. I mean, of course, I suppose, it isn't certain; but I'm sure there isn't a particle of doubt; only—"

"Now, Lute, begin at the beginning and tell us." Alice sat down breathlessly beside her step-mother, and began mechanically to shell the pease.

"Don't," Rebecca said; "I will do my own work. You'd better get your table-cloth and finish that darning." Her face had grown quite pale; she saw the fabric of her life crumbling at the base; if, through that first wife, money should come into the family, what use for her patient economies? What use for her existence? That first wife, yet more perfect, would crowd her further from her husband's life. In her heart, used to the long, dull ache of unloved years, rose up a murderous hatred of the dead woman. At first she hardly heard Luther's story, but as it went on she began to listen and the pain in her tightened throat of unshed tears lessened. It might not be. As this Mr. Carter said, there might be dozens of Alys Wintons. Her hands, motionless after the first shock, went at their work again.

"You're the daughter of a lady of that name," she said, coldly; "but she may not be the lady they want. Better not count on it." Alice looked rather blank for a moment; and then she burst into even more than Luther's confidence.

"Do you suppose it will be $2000? Oh, Lute, just think, we'll pay for the new press right down!"

"No, we won't, either," Lute said, stoutly. "I'm not going to let you spend your money on printing-presses."

"Nonsense!" Alice cried, laughing and stamping her foot.

Rebecca frowned and looked at her over her glasses. "Don't be unlady-like, Alice."

"No, 'm," Alice said; and then she laughed at her own excitement; "it may be only $100."

"It may be nothing at all," Rebecca Gray said, and got up and took her pan and bucket and went into the house. It seemed to her that if she had to hear any more of Alys Winton she would speak out and say some dreadful thing about her. But what could she say with any kind of truth? What could she say ill of that poor creature, so beloved and so harmless? For, after all, though a woman ought to see that a man's buttons are sewed on, you can't say that mere shiftlessness is a sin. Besides, she was sick for those few months. "Perhaps if my health hadn't been good, I would have been careless myself," Rebecca thought, with painful justice. But she went up-stairs to her own room and locked the door. She felt sure that it was as Alice and Luther said: there would be money, and she would be of still less consequence to her husband; for what did Robert Gray, nervously polite, really care for her economies and her good housekeeping?

"Not *that*!" she said to herself, bitterly.

IV

"You will stay and have dinner with me," Dr. Lavendar had told the lawyer, hospitably, "and then Goliath and I will take you up the hill to Mr. Gray's house."

And so, in the early afternoon, Goliath brought Mr. Carter to the Grays' door. Alice, who was on the porch, insisted that Dr. Lavendar should come in, too; she leaned into the buggy to whisper, joyously, "If it is anything nice, I want you to hear it."

But for once Dr. Lavendar did not laugh and give her a kiss and call her his good-for-nothing; he got out silently, and followed Mr. Carter into the parlor, where Luther and Mrs. Gray were awaiting them. There was a tense feeling of expectation in the air. The two young people were together on the sofa, smiling and laughing, with small, whispered jokes of presses and diamond-rings and mortgages. Rebecca sat by the table, her worn hands in a trembling grip in her lap; she sat very upright, and was briefer and curter than ever, and she looked most of the time at the floor.

"You have been informed of my errand, madam?" said Mr. Carter. "It is unfortunate that Mr. Gray is not at home, but perhaps you may be able to give us some information on certain points, which will at least instruct me as to whether the facts in the case warrant further reference to him for confirmation. I will ask a few questions, if you please?"

"Go on," Rebecca said.

"The late Mrs. Gray, the mother of this young lady," said Mr. Carter—"do you happen to know her nationality?"

"English."

"Ah, yes. Just so. And do you know the date of her marriage to Mr. Gray?"

Rebecca gave it.

"If any facts in regard to her occur to you—" the lawyer began.

"I've heard Mr. Gray say that she was a governess in the family of a Mr. Urquhart," Rebecca said; and added, "They discharged her in Berlin."

Mr. Carter, glancing at a memorandum, his face keen with interest, said, eagerly, "Pray proceed, madam."

"I don't know much more; Mr. Gray met her in Interlaken. They were married three weeks afterwards."

"Ah, Switzerland? That explains; there was no record of a marriage at the Embassy. Can you tell me anything of the parentage of the lady?"

"Her father's name was George Winton," Alice broke in, "and they lived in a

place called Medfield. He was a clergyman. Her mother's name was Alys, too. Father has a prayer-book belonging to my grandmother; it has her name in it, and my mother's. Would you like to see it, sir?",

"Exceedingly," Mr. Carter said; and while Alice ran to get the book, he studied his memorandum so closely that no one dared to ask him a question, if, indeed, any one wanted to. Rebecca had answered him dully, looking out of the window part of the time, part of the time at the floor. Dr. Lavendar, on the other side of the room, his hands on the head of his cane, sat silently staring down at the carpet, his face heavy and rather stern. Lute, radiant, twirled his cap in his hands, and resolutely held his tongue.

Alice, as she handed the prayer-book to Mr. Carter, stopped on her way back to Luther and squeezed Dr. Lavendar's hand. "Isn't it wonderful?" she whispered; and he shook his head a little impatiently.

"Go and sit down, my dear," he said.

Mr. Carter, glancing at the name on the flyleaf, looked at his notes again and then at Alice, "And this young lady—can she give me the date of her birth?"

There was a little laugh, and Luther and Alice gave it together, eagerly.

There were two or three more questions, and then Mr. Carter folded his memorandum and slipped it within its rubber band with a snap; then he smiled. Rebecca looked at him drearily. "Of course," he said, addressing himself to her, "a question of identity cannot be decided offhand; it is necessary to have certain affidavits which the surviving husband of the deceased (who is asserted to be the person in question) would be obliged, legally, to furnish. I think, however, that I am not going beyond the line of discretion and propriety if I say that *if* Mr. Robert Gray can produce such proofs (which I think I am not unwarranted in saying I believe he can)—*if* he can, then this young lady is the heir to a very considerable fortune. I think, in point of fact, I have the right to say that, if (as I have said before) these proofs are forthcoming, the amount to be paid to the daughter of Alys Winton is £5000."

Rebecca Gray put her hand to her mouth and stared blindly at the floor. Dr. Lavendar thrust out his lower lip and frowned. As for Alice, she laughed aloud, then burst out crying.

"Oh, *Lute*!" she said, tremulously; and, somehow, the two children found themselves holding hands. "It's—it's so much!" she faltered.

"Five thousand pounds is—is $25,000!" the boy said, turning pale. There was a pause; no one seemed to know just what to say. Then Lute, suddenly: "Is it your mother's father that left it to you, Alice?"

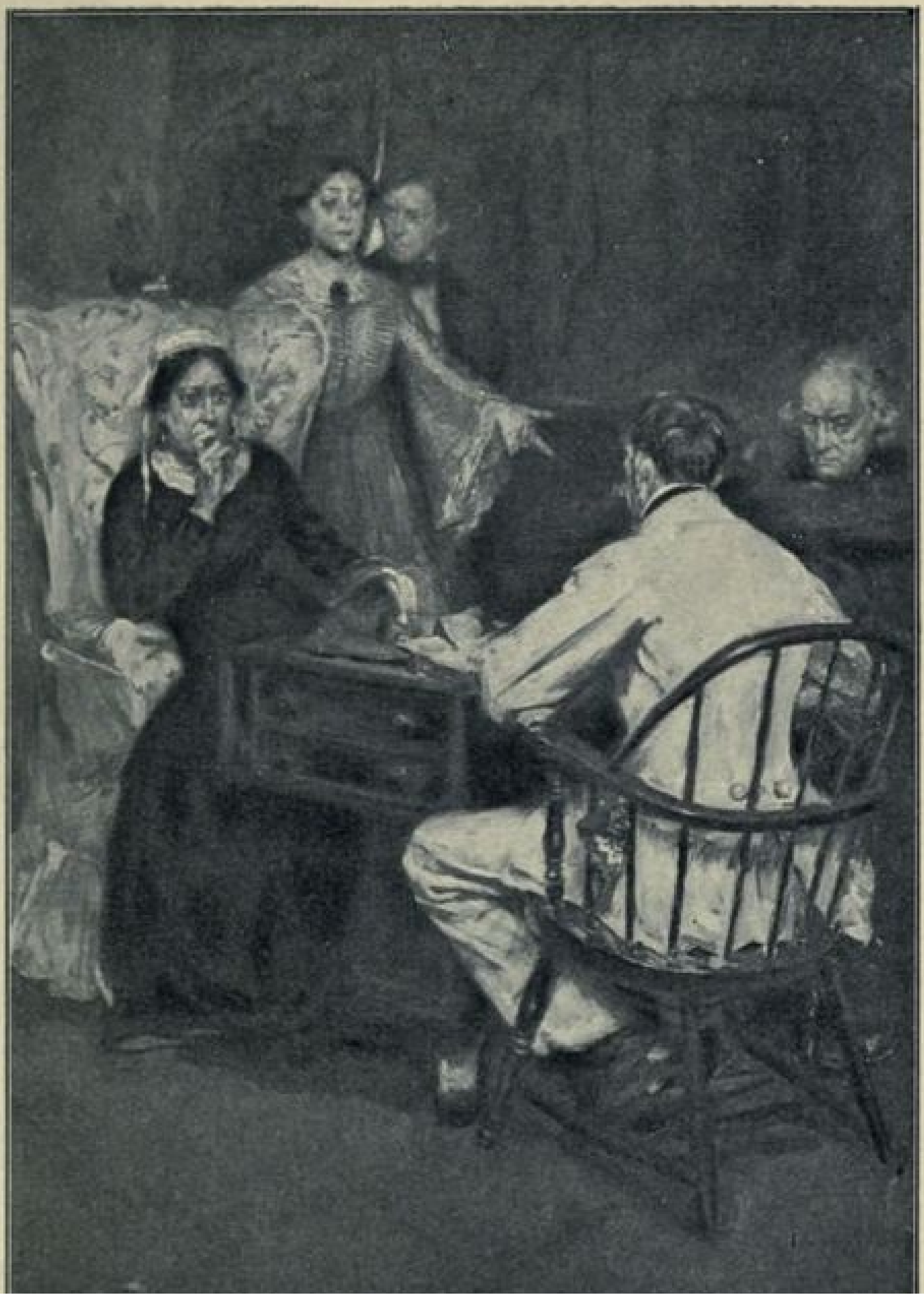
She turned to Mr. Carter, drawing in her breath like a child. "Is it?"

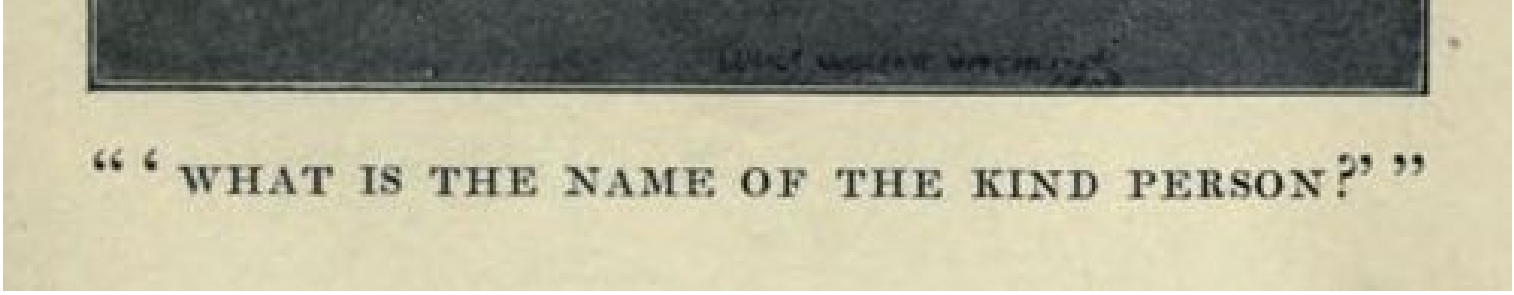
"Ah—no," he answered, briefly.

"But I didn't know my mother had any relations?" Alice said, in a dazed way; "I thought father said—I'm sure he said—she hadn't any relations? Perhaps—perhaps it is a mistake, after all?"

"The testator was not a relative of the Alys Winton in question," Mr. Carter said. He glanced uneasily at Dr. Lavendar, who lifted his head and looked at him searchingly. "It will be best to make further explanations to Mr. Gray," Mr. Carter said, hurriedly.

"But who has left the money to me—if it is to me?" Alice said, bewildered. "Can't I ask that? What is the name of the kind person? I think I might ask that."





"'WHAT IS THE NAME OF THE KIND PERSON?'"

"'WHAT IS THE NAME OF THE KIND PERSON?'"

"The name of the testator was Urquhart," Mr. Carter said, "but—but, you know, my dear young lady, the identity is not yet legally authenticated; so—therefore—perhaps—I think, Dr. Lavendar, I had best go now? I think you mentioned that the stage leaves at four?"

"Urquhart?" Alice said; "the man who was so unkind? Oh, Lute, I suppose he repented. Oh, how astonished father will be! He'll have to forgive him now."

"It's a pretty late repentance," Luther said, with a chuckle; "and how did he know about you, Alice? I don't see why he should leave you money, even if he was a brute to your mother. Still," said the boy, gayly, "I guess we won't complain?"

"Gracious!" cried Alice, "that is queer. Well, he *was* a kind person!"

Rebecca Gray stared, frowning, at the lawyer. "He knew—this Urquhart—that she had a child?" she said, slowly.

Mr. Carter was gathering up his papers. "Yes," he said—"yes; he—knew it."

"What?" said Rebecca, in a very low voice—"*what?*"

"In view of the fact that, legally, the matter is still undecided," Mr. Carter said, hurriedly, "perhaps we need not take this point up? At all events, not here."

"Sir," said Rebecca, "why does Mr. Urquhart leave £5000 to Robert Gray's

daughter?"

"He was sorry he was unkind to my mother," Alice said, her voice quivering. ("Oh, Lute, $25,000!")

"Alice," her step-mother said, in a loud, harsh voice, "you had better leave the room. Luther, go with Alice, please."

The two young people, bewildered, got up with blank faces, and with obvious reluctance obeyed. "But why should I be sent out, Lute?" Alice said, hotly, when they were in the hall. "It's my money—if I'm the person."

Luther stopped, and stood, frowning. On the boy's open, honest face came a perplexed look. But Alice said again, in injured tones, that she didn't know what Mrs. Gray meant. In the parlor the three elders looked at each other in silence. Mrs. Gray had risen, and stood leaning forward, her trembling hands flat on the table.

"I don't—understand," she said.

"Mr. Carter," said Dr. Lavendar, "certain remarks of yours on our way up here made me apprehensive. I see that my friend, Mrs. Gray, is also—apprehensive. I would suggest that you have a few words with her alone. I will leave you."

"No," Rebecca said; "hear the end of it." Her hard face was red and hot. "Why does Mr. Urquhart leave the child of Robert Gray £5000? Why?"

"It is as I think you surmise, madam," John Carter said, gravely.

Rebecca recoiled, with a broken exclamation of horror.

Dr. Lavendar drew in his breath. "Oh, my poor Robert!" he said.

"It is so stated in the will," the lawyer went on; "there is no disguising it; nor,

as far as I can see, can it be hidden from the legatee. The directions for finding this heir make the thing explicit. The testator states that he received information of the expected birth of his child *after* the marriage of the person in question, who did not mention her married name—hence our difficulty in tracing her."

Rebecca, her eyes narrowing into a cruel smile, sat down and rocked backward and forward in her chair.

"Dreadful—dreadful—dreadful!" she said, aloud, exultantly.

V.

The last quarter of an hour, packed with tragic revelation, lost Mr. Carter the stage.

"I hope you will put up at the Rectory, sir," Dr. Lavendar said, as they drove away from Robert Gray's door.

"I thank you, sir," said Mr. Carter.

Then they fell into silence—Mr. Carter from politeness, Dr. Lavendar from horror. He was going back in his memory with painful effort; but it was all very vague.... He had hardly known her; she had been ill for those months that she had been in Old Chester, and she had made it very clear that she did not care to see people. He thought of her beautiful, sullen face; of Robert Gray's passionate devotion; of Old Chester's silent disapproval.... He groaned to himself, and John Carter looked at him sidewise.

After supper at the Rectory, they sat down to smoke in heavy silence; Mr. Carter respected the old man's distress, but wondered if he should not have been more comfortable with Van Horn at the Tavern. The glowing July day

had darkened into rainy night, with a grumble of thunder back among the hills; but in the midst of a sudden downpour they heard footsteps on the path, and then some one pushed open the hall door, and flapped a wet umbrella on the steps before entering. A minute later Luther Metcalf stood, hesitating, on the study threshold.

"Dr. Lavendar—"

The old man got up hurriedly. "Yes, Lute. Come into the dining-room. You will excuse me, sir?" he said to Mr. Carter. He put his hand on Lute's arm, in a friendly grip, for there was a break in the boy's voice.

"I know about it," Lute said. They sat down at the dining-room table; Lute swallowed hard, and pulled with trembling fingers at his hatband; he did not lift his eyes. "And—and I want you to tell her not to take it."

"How is she, Lute?"

"I haven't seen her. She wouldn't come down-stairs. She sent me a little note," Luther said, taking it out of his breast-pocket, and then putting it back again tenderly. "'Course I won't pay any attention to it."

"Saying she'd release you, I suppose?"

"Yes; but that's nothing. I'll make her understand the minute I see her. But, Dr. Lavendar, I don't want that—that money!" the boy ended, almost with a sob. "I want you to tell her not to take it."

Dr. Lavendar was silent.

"At first I thought—I couldn't help thinking—we could get married right off. We could get married and have a home of our own; you know, we'd be rich people with all that money. And I suppose, honestly, that as things are now, there's no chance of our getting married for a good while. But I—I tell you

what, sir. I'd rather never get married than—than touch that money!"

Dr. Lavendar nodded.

"You won't let her, sir? You'll make her give it back?"

"My dear boy, I can't 'make' Alice do anything. The money is hers."

"Oh, but Dr. Lavendar, won't you go and talk to her? It may be a temptation to her, just as it was to me, for a minute. We could just make the office hum, sir. We could put it right on its feet; we could have a real Daily. I know she'll think of that. *I* just thought we could get married. But Alice will think about helping the office, and me."

"Of course the money would bring ease to her father—" Dr. Lavendar stopped abruptly.

"Oh, my *God*!" Lute said, and dropped his head on his arms.

"Bring ease to—to the family," Dr. Lavendar ended lamely.

"You know Mr. Gray won't touch it," Lute burst out; "and I can't let Alice, either. Dr. Lavendar, I thought maybe you'd let me hitch Goliath up and drive you out to the house?"

"Not to-night, Lute. Alice has got to be alone. Poor child, poor child! Yes; we've all of us got to meet the devil alone. Temptation is a lonely business, Lute. To-morrow I'll go, of course. Did you answer her note?"

"Oh yes; right off. I just said, 'Don't be foolish,' and—and some other things. I didn't tell her we mustn't take the money, because I hadn't thought of it then. Mrs. Gray said she wouldn't come out of her room. Oh, just think of her, all by herself!" Luther bent over and fumbled with his shoelace; when he looked up, Dr. Lavendar pretended not to see his eyes.

When the boy went away, Dr. Lavendar went back to the study and asked John Carter some legal questions: Suppose he had not found this child, what would have become of the money? Suppose the child should now decline to take it, what then?

"Well," said Mr. Carter, smiling, "as a remote contingency, I suppose I might reply that it would revert to the residuary estate. But did you ever know anybody decline £5000, Dr. Lavendar?"

"Never knew anybody who had the chance," Dr. Lavendar said; "but there's no telling what human critters will do."

"They won't do that," said John Carter.

What a long night it was, of rain and wind and dreadful thought! ... Rebecca had told Alice, with kindness, but with such a grip upon herself lest exultation should tremble in her voice, that she seemed harsher than ever. Then she told Lute. He pleaded that Alice would speak to him, and Mrs. Gray had gone to the girl's room and bidden her come down-stairs.

"Come, Alice. You must control yourself. Come down and talk to Luther."

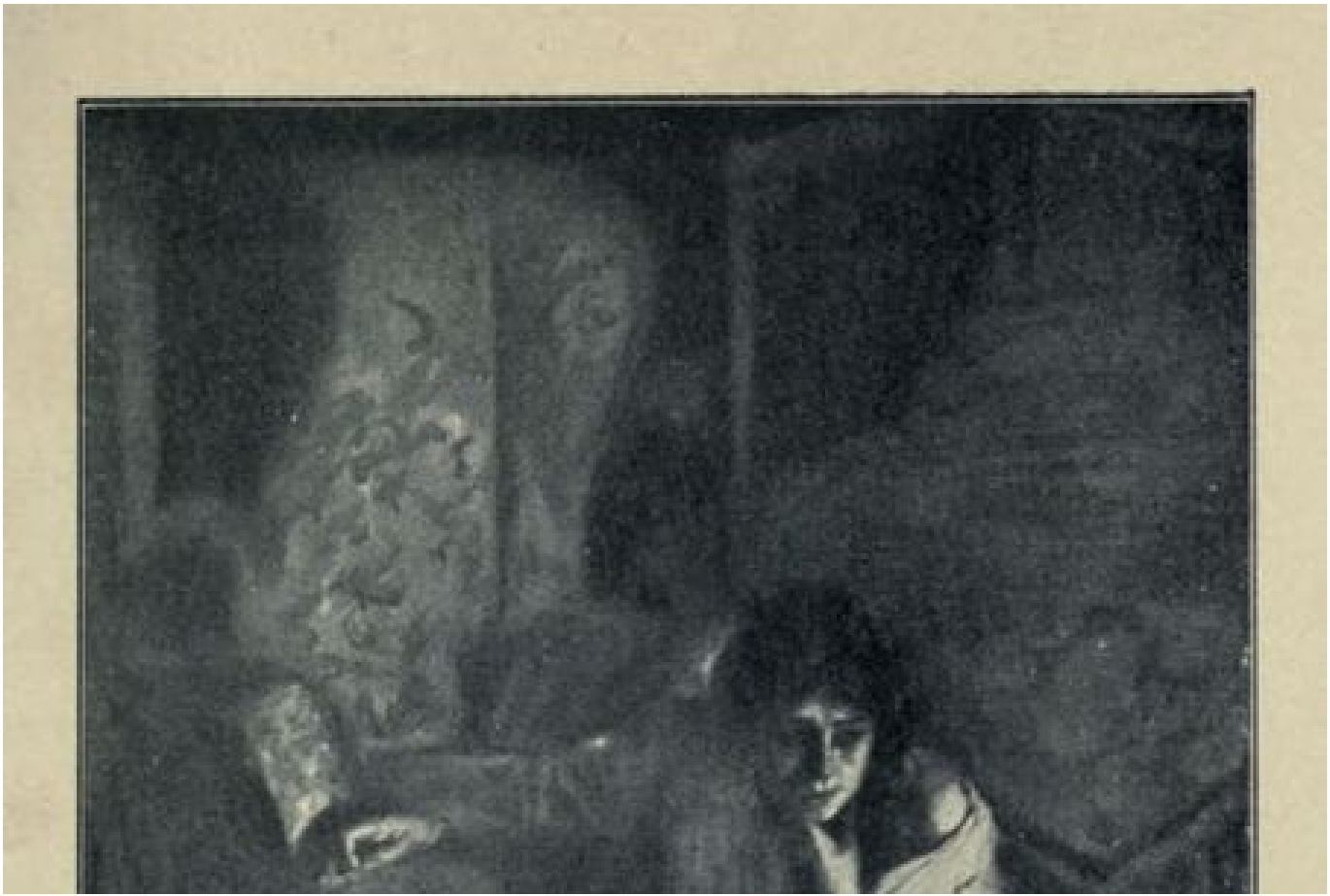
Alice shook her head. "I'll—write him a note."

Mrs. Gray carried the note back to Lute, and brought up the answer, which Alice read silently. Rebecca watched her; and then, with an effort, she said:

"Alice, remember we are not to judge. We don't understand. We must not judge. Good-night." She opened the door, and then looked at the child, seated, speechless, with blank eyes, on the edge of the bed. "Good-night, Alice. I—I'm sorry for you, poor girl!" and she came back hastily and kissed her.

At that, even in her daze of horror, a glimmer of astonishment came into

Alice's face. But she did not look up or speak. When it grew dark, she began mechanically to get ready for bed; she knelt down, as usual, at the big chintz-covered winged chair and began to say her prayers, her mind blind as to her own words: "Bless dear father—" Then she cried out, suddenly and dreadfully, and covered her poor, shamed head with her arms, and prayed no more. Then came a long fit of crying, and then a dreary calm. Afterwards, as the night shut in with rain and rumble of thunder, the shame lightened a little, for, though she could not read it in the darkness, she held Lute's little note against her lips and kissed it, and cried over it, and said his words over to herself, and felt that at any rate there was one bright spot in it all: Lute would never have any more anxieties. Of Robert Gray she thought pitifully, but with not much understanding. Oh, dreadful, dreadful! But he had loved his wife so much (so the child thought) he would surely forgive her. Not knowing how little forgiveness counts for when a star goes out. Sometimes, sitting there on the floor, listening to the rain, she slept; then woke, with a numb wonder, which darkened into cruel understanding. *Shame; shame*—but Lute wouldn't be worried any more; Lute would be rich.



"SHE KNELT DOWN, AS USUAL, AT THE BIG CHINTZ-COVERED WINGED CHAIR"

"SHE KNELT DOWN, AS USUAL, AT THE BIG CHINTZ-COVERED WINGED CHAIR"

So the night passed....

Rebecca Gray did not sleep. When the house was still she went up-stairs, eager to be alone. She shut her bedroom door softly; then she put her brass candlestick on the high bureau and looked about her.... Everything seemed strange. Here was her old-fashioned bed with its four mahogany posts like four slender obelisks; there was the fine darn in the valance of the tester; the worn strip of carpet on which she had knelt every night for all these twenty years; it

was all the same, but it was all different, all unfamiliar. The room was suddenly the room where that woman had died; the old four-poster was the bed of that heartbreaking night, with sheets rumpling under a wandering hand and pillows piled beneath a beautiful, dying head; not her own bed, smooth and decorous and neat, with her own fine darn in the tester valance. She did not know the room as it was now; she did not know herself; nor Robert; nor that—that —*that woman*. She sat down, suddenly a little faint with the effort of readjusting a belief of twenty-two years. "She was a wicked woman," she said, out loud; and her astounded face stared back at her from the dim mirror over the mantel-piece. After a while she got up and began to walk back and forth; sometimes she drew a deep breath; once she laughed. "A wicked woman!" ... Now he would know. Now he would see. And he would loathe her. He would hate her. He would—her lip drooped suddenly from its fierce, unconscious smile; he would—suffer. Yes; suffer, of course. But that couldn't be helped. Just at first he would suffer. Then he would hate her so much that he would not suffer. Not suffer? It came over her with a pang that there is no suffering so dreadful as that which comes with hating. However, she could not help that. Truth was truth! All the years of her hungry wifehood rose up, eager for revenge; her mind went hurriedly, with ecstasy, over the contrast; her painful, patient, conscientious endeavor to do her best for him. Her self-sacrifice, her actual deprivations—"I haven't had a new bonnet for—for four years!" she thought; and her lip quivered at the pitifulness of so slight a thing. But it was the whole tenor of her life. *She* had no vacations in the mountains; she would have liked new valances, but she spent hours in darning her old ones to save his money; she had turned her black silk twice; she had only had two black silks in twenty years. All the great things she had done, all the petty things she had suffered, rose up in a great wave of merit before her; and against it—what? Hideous deceit! Oh, how he would despise the creature! Then she winced; he would—suffer? Well, she couldn't help that. It was the truth, and he had got to face it. She was walking up and down, whispering to herself, a sobbing laugh on her lips, when suddenly, as she passed the mirror, she had a dim, crazy vision of herself that struck her motionless. A moment later she took the candle, and with one hand clutching for support at the high mantel-shelf—for

her knees were shaking under her—held it close to the glass and peered into the black depths. Her pale, quivering face, ravaged with tears, stared back at her, like some poor ghost more ugly even than in life. "*A wicked woman.*" Yes—yes—yes; and he would have to know it. But when he knew it, what then? If his eyes opened to sin, would they open to—

"I have tried to make him comfortable," she said, faintly.

Suddenly she put the candle down and sank into a chair, covering her face with her poor, gaunt hands....

And so the night passed.... The dawn was dim and rainy. It was about four o'clock that Alice, sitting on the floor, sleeping heavily, her head on the cushion of the chair, started, bewildered, at the noise of the opening door. Rebecca, in her gray dressing-gown, one hand shielding the flare of her candle, came abruptly into the room.

"Alice," she said, harshly, and stopped by the empty bed; then her eyes found the figure on the floor ("you ought to be in bed"), she said, in a brief aside; then: "Alice, I've been thinking it over. You can't take that money."

"I don't understand," Alice said, confused with sleep and tears.

"You can't take that money. If you do, your father would have to know. And he never must—he never must."

Alice pulled herself up from the floor and sat down in her big chair. "Not take the money?" she said, in a dazed way; "but it's mine."

"That's why you needn't take it. Thank God it was left to you, not just to 'her heirs.' Alice, I've gone all over it. I—I wanted you to take it"—Rebecca's voice broke; "yes, I—did."

"Well, it's mine," Alice repeated, bewildered.

Rebecca struck her hands together. "Yours not to take! Don't you see? You can save your father."

Alice, cringing, dropped her head on her breast with a broken word.

"Don't be a fool," the older woman said, trembling. "He's been your father ever since you were born. And it would be a pretty return for his love to tell him—"

Alice burst out crying; her step-mother softened.

"I am sorry for you, you poor girl. But, oh, Alice, think, *think* of your father!" She clasped her hands and stood, trembling; she took a step forward, almost as if she would kneel.

"If he would feel so dreadfully," Alice said, at last, "why—we needn't tell him where the money comes from."

"Now, Alice, that is absurd. Of course he would know. He would have to know. A girl doesn't inherit £5000 without her father's knowing where it comes from. And, anyway, Mr. Carter said that Mr. Gray would have to make a statement and swear to it. Of course he would—know."

"Do you mean you don't want me to have it at all?" Alice said, blankly.

"I've just explained it to you," Rebecca said, her voice harsh with anxiety. "You *can't* have it."

"But it's my money; I have a right to it. And it would make all the difference in the world to Lute. If he is going to take a girl—like me, he ought to have the money, anyhow."

"And kill your father?" Rebecca said. "Alice! Don't you see, he must go on believing that she is"—her voice grew suddenly tender—"that she is 'a creature of light?'"

"I want Lute to have the money," Alice said.

"Alice!" the other exclaimed, with dismay, "don't you think of your father at all? And—for your mother's sake."

Alice was silent; then, in a hard voice, "I don't like her."

"Oh!" Rebecca cried, and shivered. There was a pause; then she said, faintly, "For your own sake?"

Alice looked up sullenly. "Nobody need know; we would only say it had been left to—her. Nobody would know."

Suddenly, as she spoke, despite the plain face and the red hair, Alice looked like her mother. Rebecca stepped back with a sort of shock. Alice, crying a little, got up and began to pull down her hair and braid it, with unsteady fingers. Her step-mother watched her silently; then she turned to go away; then came back swiftly, the tears running down her face.

"Oh, Alice, it is my fault! I've had you twenty-two years, and yet you are like— See, Alice, child; give her a chance to be kind to him, in you. Oh, I—I don't know how to say it; I mean, let her have a chance! Oh—don't you see what I mean? She said she was sorry!" All the harshness had melted out of Rebecca's face; she was nothing but gentleness, the tears falling down her cheeks, her voice broken with love. "Alice, be good, dear. Be good. Be good. And I—I *will* be pleasanter, Alice; I'll try, indeed; I'll try—"

VI

"Well," said Mr. Amos Hughes, a week later, in the cool dusk of Dr.

Lavendar's study, just before tea, "this is a most extraordinary situation, sir!"

"Will ye have a pipe?" said Dr. Lavendar, hospitably.

John Carter, his feet well apart, his back to the fireless grate, his hands thrust down into his pockets, said, looking over at his partner:

"Amos, Dr. Lavendar once remarked to me that there was no telling what human critters would do."

Dr. Lavendar chuckled.

"Very true," Amos Hughes admitted, putting one fat knee over the other; "but I must say that I never before knew a human critter throw away £5000."

"I'm sorry you haven't had better acquaintances," said Dr. Lavendar. "I have. I'm not in the least surprised at this child's behavior. Mr. Carter, are you looking for anything? You'll find a decanter on the sideboard in the next room, sir. This is a pretty good world, Mr. Amos Hughes; I've lived in it longer than you have, so you'll take my word for it. It's a pretty good old world, and Miss Alice Gray has simply decided to do the natural and proper thing. Why, what else could she do?"

"I could mention at least one other thing," said Mr. Carter.

"Extraordinary situation! but I suppose the residuary legatees won't make any objection," murmured Amos Hughes.

Dr. Lavendar rapped on the table with the bowl of his pipe. "My dear sir, would you have a girl, for a paltry £5000, break her father's heart?"

"Her father?"

"Mr. Gray would not, in my judgment, survive such a revelation," said Dr. Lavendar, stiffly.

"May I ask one question?" John Carter said.

"G'on," said Dr. Lavendar.

"What I would like to know is: How did you bring Miss Gray to look at the thing in this way?"

"I didn't bring her," said Dr. Lavendar, indignantly; "her Heavenly Father brought her. Look here, sir; this business of the law is all very well, and necessary, I suppose, in its way, but let me tell you, it's a dangerous business. You see so much of the sin of human nature that you get to thinking human nature has got to sin. You are mistaken, sir; it has got to be decent. We are the children of God, sir. I beg that you'll remember that—and then you won't be surprised when a child like our Alice does the right thing. Surprise is confession, Mr. Carter."

Mr. Carter laughed, and apologized as best he could for his view of human nature; and Dr. Lavendar was instantly amicable and forgiving. He took Mr. Amos Hughes's warning, that he should, as a matter of duty, lay very clearly before the young lady the seriousness of what she proposed to do, and not until he had exhausted every argument would he permit her to sign the papers of release which (as a matter of precaution) he had prepared. "She's of age," said Amos Hughes, "and nobody can say that she has not a right to refuse to proceed further in the matter. But I shall warn her."

"'Course, man," said Dr. Lavendar; "that's your trade."

And so the evening came, and the three men went up to Robert Gray's house.

It was a long evening. More than once Dr. Lavendar trembled as he saw the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them spread before his child's eyes. But he said no word, and once, sternly, he laid his hand on Rebecca's arm to check some word of hers.

"Let her alone," he said.

It was eleven o'clock before there came a moment of solemn silence. Alice bent over a paper, which John Carter had read aloud to her, and signed her name. Luther and Rebecca and Dr. Lavendar witnessed the signature. Then Rebecca Gray took the girl in her arms.

"That young man has got something to him," Mr. Amos Hughes said, as they went back to the Rectory.

"If you could put some printing in his way, it would be a favor to me," said Dr. Lavendar.

"I shouldn't wonder if I could," the lawyer said.

"The girl is a fine creature, poor child," said Mr. Carter.

"Gentlemen," said Dr. Lavendar, "they are both good children, and they have behaved well; but there's somebody else, let me tell you!"

However, he did not tell them. Perhaps he kept his opinion for Robert Gray's ears, for once he said, smiling, in Rebecca's presence:

"Robert, this wife of yours is a noble woman."

Mr. Gray, a little surprised, said, politely, looking with kind eyes at Rebecca, "Mrs. Gray is a very good wife, sir."

And Rebecca went up and hid herself in the garret and cried with joy.

AT THE STUFFED-ANIMAL HOUSE

I

Willy King's buggy, splashed to the top of the hood with mud and sagging sidewise on its worn old springs, came pulling up the hill past the burial-ground. The doctor himself, curled in one corner, rested a leg on the dash-board and hung his reins on the hook over his head. He was very sleepy, for he had been up until three with an old woman who thought she was sick, and he had been routed out of bed again at five because she told her family that she was going to die. William King was not given to sarcasm, but he longed to say to the waiting relatives, "There is no hope!—she'll live." Instead, he looked seriously sympathetic and kept his thoughts to himself. When he got home to breakfast, his wife told him how foolish he was to take so much trouble. "There's nothing the matter with Mrs. Drayton," said Mrs. King; "and I should tell her so, flatly and frankly. It would do her good."

William said that he would like another cup of coffee.

"It wouldn't be good for you," said his Martha; "you are drinking too much coffee. You can have shells if you want to. Shall I have some shells warmed up?"

William said "No," and went trudging off to his office; and then, at ten, started on his round of calls, his old buggy still unwashed from the morning jaunt to the hypochondriac's death-bed. The day was still and sunny, the road quite deserted and full of pleasant shadows under the May foliage. But the sleepy doctor saw it all through half-closed eyes, and yawned, and rested one

plump leg on the dash-board, and let the reins hang swaying from the hook in the roof of the bug-pry. Then, suddenly, his mare stopped and William opened his eyes.

"Caught you napping, Willy!" said a loud, hearty voice. And the doctor sat up and drew his leg in and laughed.

"Well, Miss Harriet, how do you know but what I was worrying over a case?"

"Much worrying you do, young man!" She sat down on a log on the road-bank and smiled at him. She was a big, vigorous woman with a fresh, brown face and a keen, kind eye. She had a gun in her hand, and a rabbit's white tail stuck out of the hunting-wallet slung over her shoulder. She had broken through the underbrush on the hill-side just as Willy's buggy jogged into the shadow of a sycamore that stretched its mottled arms over the deserted road.

"Willy," she went on, in her loud, cheerful voice, "do you doctor-men smile at one another when you meet, like the Augurs, because you fool us so easily with your big words? You call a scratched finger an 'abrasion of the epidermis'—and then you send a bill. And, bless me! what a serious air you put on at a minute's notice!—I saw you pull your leg in, Willy. Come, now; you were in my Sunday-school class—why don't you just admit to me that that piercing look over your eye-glasses is one of the tricks of the trade? I won't tell."

William King chuckled. "You just get a touch of lumbago, Miss Harriet, and you'll believe in my tricks."

"Lumbago!" said his reviler. "Not I; a day's shooting would cure it quicker than a barrel of your pills."

"Been shooting this morning?"

"No; I set a trap in Dawson's hollow." She pulled out the rabbit and held it up. "Not a bone broken. Handsome, isn't he? Poor little thing!"

William looked at the soft, furry creature, limp in the big brown hand, with critical appreciation. "Yes, beautiful. Miss Annie didn't find him, to let him out?"

The hunter's face changed to amused impatience. "Willy, she opened three traps last week. And she was so shrewd about it; you would never believe how clever she is. Of course it's no use to scold."

"Of course not. What excuse does she make?"

"Oh, just the same thing: 'Sister, it hurts me to think they can't get out.'"

"Poor thing!" said the doctor.

"I have tried to make her promise not to interfere with the traps. You know, if I could once get a promise out of her I would be all right; Annie never broke a promise in her life. But she is too shrewd to be led into it. She always says, 'I'm the oldest, and you mustn't order me round.' It would be funny if it weren't so provoking."

"Poor thing!" said the doctor again.

"She follows me and takes the bait out of the traps once in a while; but she prefers to let things go. And she is certainly wonderfully bright about it," Miss Harriet said. "Now, why can't she be sensible in other things?"

"Well, you know she has always been about twelve; it's the young head on old shoulders."

"I must tell you her last performance," Miss Harriet said. "You know that picture of Aunt Gordon that hung in the dining-room? Dreadful thing! I never saw the poor woman, but I believe she wasn't quite as ugly as that portrait, though Alex looks just like her, Dr. Lavendar says; and Alex is dreadfully ugly,

with those pale eyes of his. Well, I happened to say—it was last Tuesday, at tea, and Matty Barkley was there: 'That picture of Aunt Gordon is awful! I can't bear it.' Of course I never thought of it again, until I came home the next day—and what do you suppose?"

Willy began to grin.

"Yes! she had got up on a chair, if you please, and cut it out of the frame and slashed it all to pieces."

"Well done!" said Willy King, slapping his thigh.

"No such thing. It was ugly, but it was a family portrait."

"What did she say?"

"Oh, she had her excuse.... Willy, I can't understand her mind; it is so unreasonably reasonable: 'Sister, you said you couldn't bear it, so what was the use of having it?' After all, that was sense, William."

"So it was," said the doctor, and unhooked his reins and nodded. "Well," he said—

But Miss Harriet laughed awkwardly. "Wait a minute, can't you? It won't kill anybody to do without a pill for five minutes."

"Well, no, I suppose it won't," William admitted; "but with a view to getting home in time for dinner—"

"Oh, let Martha wait. Willy, you are the meekest being—let her wait. Tell her you'll have your dinner when you're good and ready."

"Martha is only concerned on my own account," the loyal William protested.

"Well, I'm not going to keep you long," his old friend said, roughly; "I—I just want to ask you a question." Her face grew suddenly a dull red. "Not that I believe in your pills and potions—just please remember that. But I suppose you do know a little something."

"I could diagnose a scratched finger," said the doctor, meekly.

"Well—" she said, and looked at the lock of her rifle; "there's nothing in the world the matter with me, but—"

"You don't look like a confirmed invalid," the doctor assured her.

"No!—do I?" she said, eagerly. "I really am very well, William—very well. Dear me, when I get home after a round of my traps (when Annie hasn't teased me by letting things out) and eat a good dinner, and sit down with a taxidermy magazine, I—I wouldn't thank King George to be my uncle. Yes, I am *very* well."

Her emphasis had in it a certain agitation that caught the doctor's eye. "Your out-of-door life is calculated to keep you well," he said.

Miss Harriet got up and thrust the rabbit back into the pouch at her side. "Of course; and, anyhow, I'm not the sick kind. Imagine me shut up between four walls! I should be like Sterne's starling. Do you remember?—'I want to get out, I want to get out.' No, there's nothing the matter with me. Absolutely nothing."

She did look very well, the big, brown woman, towering up at the road-side, with her rifle in her hand and the good color in her cheeks and lips. Yet her eyes had a worn look, William thought. "Pain somewhere," said the doctor to himself.

"You know, I don't believe in your pills and truck," she insisted, frowning.

"Of course not," he assured her easily. "Come, now, Miss Harriet, what's

wrong?"

"Nothing, I tell you," she said, sharply; and then, with impatient brevity, she spoke of some special discomfort which had annoyed her. "It began about six months ago."

"Probably you've taken cold," William King said, and then he asked a question or two. She answered with irritable flippancy:

"Now don't put on airs, Willy. There's no use trying to impress me; I know you. Remember, you were in my Sunday-school class."

"Why didn't you make a better boy of me, then? You had your chance. Miss Harriet, would you mind coming into my office and just letting me look you over? Come, now, why shouldn't I get a job out of you for once? Here you tackle me on the road-side and get an opinion for nothing."

She chuckled, but retorted that she hated doctors and their offices. "I'm not that Drayton cat," she said, "always wanting a doctor to fuss over me. No, you can give me a pill right here—though I haven't a bit of faith in it."

"I wouldn't waste a good pill on you," the doctor defended himself. "You've got to come and see me."

But when she had promised to come, and William, slapping a rein down on the mare's flank, was jogging along under the sycamore branches, he did not fall into his pleasant drowse again. "She looks so well," he said to himself, "she must be all right—"

II

Miss Harriet's house, called by Old Chester children 'The Stuffed-Animal House," was on the hill-road a stone's-throw beyond the burial-ground. It was of weather-worn brick, and its white lintels, carved in thin festoons of fruit and flowers, were nearly hidden by ivy that stretched dark figures over the marble, and, thickening with the years across the tops of the windows, made the rooms within dim with wavering leaf shadows. A brick path, damp and faintly green with moss, ran down to a green gate set in a ragged privet hedge that was always dusty and choked with dead twigs. The house itself was so shaded by horse-chestnuts that grass refused to grow in the door-yard. A porch shadowed the front door, which opened into a dark, square hall, full of dim figures that hung from the ceiling and stood in cases against the walls. A dusty crocodile stretched overhead, almost the width of the hall; a shark, with varnished belly splitting a little under one fin and showing a burst of cotton, lurked in a dim corner; over the parlor door a great snake, coiled about a branch, looked down with glittering, yellow eyes; and along the walls were cases of very beautiful birds, their plumage dulled now, for it was forty years since Miss Harriet's father had made his collection. But all around the hall were glistening eyes that stared and stared, until sometimes an Old Chester child, clinging to a mother's protecting hand, felt sure they moved, and that in another moment the crocodile's jaws would snap together, or the eagle's wings would flap horribly in the darkness.

Yet there was an awful joy to Old Chester youth in being allowed to accompany a mother when she made a polite call on Miss Harriet. This hall, that was dark and still and full of the smell of dead fur and feathers and some acrid preservative, had all the fascination of horror. If we were very good we were allowed to walk from case to case with old Miss Annie, while our mothers sat in the parlor and talked to Miss Harriet. Miss Annie could not tell us much of the creatures in the cases, and for all she used to laugh and giggle just as we did, she never really knew how to play that the hall was a desert island and the wild beasts were lurking in the forest to fall upon us.

"It isn't a forest, it's our front hall," Miss Annie would say; "and you must do

what I tell you, because I'm the oldest, and I don't want to play desert island. But I'll show you my chickens," she would add, with eager politeness.

Sometimes, if Miss Annie were not in the room, we would hear Miss Harriet tell some story about her mischievousness, and our mothers would sigh and smile and say, "Poor dear!" Our mothers never said "poor dear!" about us when we did such things. If one of us Old Chester children had spoken out in church as Miss Harriet said Miss Annie did once, and told Dr. Lavendar that he was telling a story when he read in the morning lesson that the serpent talked to Eve—"because," said Miss Annie, "snakes can't talk"—if we had done such a dreadful thing, we should have been taken home and whipped and sent to bed without any supper, and probably the whole of the third chapter of Genesis to learn by heart. We should not have been "poor things!" This was very confusing to Old Chester youth until we grew older and understood. Then, instead of being puzzled, we shrunk a little and stayed close to our mothers, listening to Miss Harriet's stories of Miss Annie with strange interest and repulsion, or staring furtively at the little old woman, who laughed often and had a way of running about like a girl, and of smoothing back her gray hair from her temples with a fluttering gesture, and of putting up her lip and crying when she was angry or frightened or when she saw anything being hurt. Miss Annie could never bear to see anything hurt; she would not let us kill spiders, and she made us walk in the grass instead of on the brick path, because the ants came up between the bricks, and she was afraid we would step on them.

"Annie is very kind-hearted," Miss Harriet used to tell our mothers. "She can't bear my traps."

Miss Harriet's traps were her passion; her interest in taxidermy had come to her from her father, and though she had not been able to add anything of real value to Mr. Hutchinson's collection, her work was thoroughly well done; and she even made a fair sum of money each year by sending her squirrels and doves to town for the Christmas trade.

But more important than the money was the wholesome out-of-door life her

little business entailed, which had given her her vigorous body and sane mind. She needed both to live with this gray-haired woman, whose mind was eleven or twelve years old. It was not a bad mind for eleven or twelve, Willy King used to say. Old Miss Annie had a sort of crude common-sense; she could reason and determine as well as any other twelve-year-old child—indeed, with an added shrewdness of experience that sixty years of bodily age made inevitable. She knew, innocently, much of life that other children were guarded from knowing; she knew death, too, but with no horror—perhaps as we were meant to know it—something as natural as life itself, and most of all as a release from pain. For old Annie knew pain and feared it as only the body in which the soul is not awake can fear it. She wept at the sight of blood and moaned when she heard a squirrel squeak in the trap; she shivered with passionate expectation of relief when Miss Harriet's kindly chloroform brought peace to fluttering wings or beating claws. When some soft, furry creature, hurt in the trap, relaxed into happy sleep in the thick, sweet smell that came out of Miss Harriet's big bottle, Miss Annie would laugh for joy, the tears of misery still wet upon her wrinkled cheeks.

"Don't come into my shop," Miss Harriet used to say, laughing and impatient, when Miss Annie would follow her into the room in the barn where she did her work—"don't come in here, and then you won't see things that hurt your feelings."

But Annie, smoothing her hair back from her temples with a curious, girlish gesture, would only shake her head and sidle closer to her sister, the young, guileless eyes in the withered face full of protest and appeal. Her horror of pain lost Miss Harriet many a fine specimen; for, in her pity for the trapped creatures, Annie, noiselessly, like some Indian hunter, used to follow on her sister's footsteps through the woods, lifting the baits out of the traps, or if she found a snared creature unhurt, letting it go, and then creeping home, frightened at Miss Harriet's anger, which, if she discovered the old child's naughtiness, fell like a thunderbolt, and then cleared into patient amusement, as a black shower brightens into sunshine. The big, kind woman with a man's mind could not be

angry at this poor creature; so she did her duty by her and tried not to think about her. She went her way, and set her traps, and prepared her few specimens, brushing Annie or any other annoyance aside with careless good-nature.

"Don't think about unpleasant things," she used to say, in her loud, cheerful voice. "The trouble with you doctors and ministers," she told Dr. Lavendar, "is that you make people think about their insides. It's stomachs with Willy and souls with you. Nobody ought to know that they have a stomach or a soul. I don't. A tree don't. And there isn't an oak in Old Chester that isn't pleasanter than Mrs. Drayton. Yet she's always fussing about her insides—spiritual and material."

"It's when you don't have 'em that you fuss," Dr. Lavendar said; "the trouble isn't too much soul, it's too little. And I guess it's the same with stomachs."

"Then you say Mrs. Drayton has no soul?" Miss Harriet said, pleasantly.

"I never said anything of the sort," said Dr. Lavendar.

As for Miss Harriet, she went on to Willy King's office, prepared, as usual, to make him as uncomfortable as she could. But she never put Willy out. Her flings at his profession tickled him immensely, and if now and then the good, honest William practised, as Miss Harriet said, a few of the tricks of his trade, he was not averse to sharing their humor with some one who could appreciate it.

"So you have that Drayton cat on your hands again?" Miss Harriet said, plumping herself down in William's own chair in front of his office table so that she could pick up and examine what she called his "riffraff." ("Do open your windows, William. I don't see how you can be so shut up. Po-o-o! how can people live so much in-doors?")

"Well," said William, doing as he was bid, "she enjoys my visits and I enjoy

her checks. I don't complain."

"That's like the profession," said Miss Harriet; "you put your hands in our pockets whenever you get a chance. Well, you'll get nothing out of my pocket, William, for there's nothing in it."

"Miss Harriet," said William, chuckling—"you won't tell anybody, will you? But Mrs.—well, I won't name names; that's not professional—"

"Call her a 'Female,'" said Miss Harriet.

"Well, a Female sent for me on Tuesday, in a dreadful hurry; I must come, 'right off! quick!' I was just sitting down to breakfast, but of course I ran—"

"Martha must have been pleased?"

"I ran; and arrived, winded. There was—the Female, at *her* breakfast. 'Oh,' she said, 'doctor, the baby has slept right through from six last night, and he hasn't wakened up yet. I am afraid there is something the matter with his little brain.'"

"William, if you didn't say that there was something the matter with *her* little brain—"

"I didn't," William said, grimly, "because she hasn't any. Now, Miss Harriet, let's talk about yourself; it's pleasanter."

"Oh, there was not the slightest occasion to come to see you. But I said I would, and here I am. I suppose you'll send me a bill as long as my arm. Do you have a system of charges, Willy? So much for a look over your glasses? So much for that solemn cough? I suppose you grade all your tricks. Now work off the most expensive ones on me; I propose to get the worth of my money, young man."

"Thought you said you weren't going to pay any bills?" William reminded

her; and then refused to be side-tracked any longer, but asked question after question, bringing her up once or twice with a sharp turn. "Don't joke now, please, Miss Harriet. Be as exact as you can. Is this condition thus, or so—?" And when he got through with his questions, he took up the joking rather heavily.

"You're so faithless about pills," he said, "that I'm not going to give you any."

"What! no pills?" said Miss Harriet.

William King laughed awkwardly. "Not a pill! I don't see any condition which warrants them: but—"

"What did I tell you? There's nothing the matter, and you just dragged me here to give your office a busy look."

"I didn't suppose you'd see through it," said Willy King. "But, Miss Harriet, I—I don't feel *quite* satisfied. I—do you know I've a great mind to get a man in Mercer to look you over? I want you to go up with me to-morrow and see him."

"Nonsense!"

"No, truly," he said; "I am not satisfied, Miss Harriet."

"But what do you mean?" she insisted, sharply. "There's nothing the matter with me. You said yourself I didn't need any medicine. Give me some opiate to stop this—this discomfort when it comes on, and I'll be all right."

"You can't bear opiates," he said, bluntly; "your heart won't stand them. Don't you remember the time you broke your ankle and I tried morphine—a baby dose—to give you some relief? You gave me a scare, I can tell you."

Miss Harriet was silent. Then: "I've known my heart wasn't right for two years. But—"

"Oh, your heart doesn't give me any concern—if you don't take liberties with it. Perhaps it isn't quite as good as it was thirty years ago, but—"

"Ah, I lost it to you then, Willy. You were a sweet little fellow when you came into my class. Do you remember once when—"

"Miss Harriet, you've got to go to Mercer with me to-morrow," William King interrupted, quietly. "I hope there's nothing much out of the way. I hope not. I—I believe not. But I'm not sure. We'll go up and see Greylord and find out. He'll give you some pills, maybe," he ended, and laughed and got up. "Now I'm off to the cat, Miss Harriet."

And Miss Harriet, to her astonishment, found herself dismissed before she had made the boy tell her what he was afraid of. "He *is* a boy," she said to herself. "Of course he wouldn't be apt to know what was the matter. I ought to have gone to see some Mercer man to begin with. I remember when Willy was born."

III

When they came out of the Mercer doctor's door William King's fresh face had gone white, but Miss Harriet walked smiling. At the foot of the steps the doctor paused and stood an instant leaning on the hand-rail, as though for support and to get his breath. Miss Harriet looked at him with concern. "Why, Willy!" she said.

"Miss Harriet," William said, hoarsely, "he may be mistaken. It's perfectly possible that he is mistaken."

"I guess not, Willy," she said, simply. "Come, now, don't be such a wet

string." She struck him a friendly blow on the shoulder that made the doctor take a quick step forward to keep his balance; but it gave him the grip upon himself that for a single instant he had lost.

"And, anyhow," he said, "even if he is right, it may not develop. I've known a case where it was checked for two years; and then the patient died of small-pox."

"Pleasant alternative," said Miss Harriet; she was smiling, her face full of color, her shoulders back, her head up. "Come, Willy, let's have a spree. Here we are for a day, and Martha's at home. We'll have a good dinner, and we'll do something interesting. *Hurrah!*" said Harriet Hutchinson.

And the doctor could do no less than fall into step at that martial note and march at her side proudly. And by some spiritual contagion his courage met hers like the clash of swords. They went to get their good dinner, and Miss Harriet ate it with appetite. Afterwards she declared they would go to the circus. "It's in town; I saw the tents. I haven't been to a circus for forty years," she said; "but I know just how the pink lemonade tastes. You've got to treat, Willy."

"I'll throw in pea-nuts," said William King; and with that they left the restaurant and went sauntering along the hot, grimy street in the direction of the open lots beyond the blast-furnaces, where, under a deep June sky, dazzling even though it was smudged by coils of smoke, were stretched the circus tents, brave with flags and slapping and billowing in a joyous wind. William King held on to his hat and looked at the great, white clouds, domed and shining, piled all along the west. "We'll get a shower, I'm afraid, Miss Harriet."

"Well, take a pill, Willy, and then it won't hurt you," she told him, with a laugh that belonged to the sun and wind, to the flags whipping out on their halyards and the signs of the side-shows bellying from their guy-ropes, to the blare of music and the eager circus crowd—that crowd that never changes with changing generations. Still there is the old man gaping with excited eyes;

still the lanky female in spectacles; the cross elder sister afraid of crushing her fresh skirts; the little boy absorbed in thought; the little girl who would like to ride on the Shetland pony when the clown offers any miss in the audience an opportunity. We know them all, and doubtless they know us, the patronizing, amused on-lookers, who suddenly become as eager and absorbed as any graybeard or child in the crowd. We know the red boxes, too, where men with hard faces and wearied eyes shout mechanically the same words of vociferous invitation to the side-shows. Children, pulled along by their elders, would stop, open-mouthed, before these men; but somehow they never see the wild man or the fat lady. Ah, the regret for the unseen side-shows!—the lady with the snakes; the skeleton man; the duel between the educated hyena and his trainer —that hyena of whom the man in the red box speaks with such convincing enthusiasm. "*I have been*," cries the strident voice—"*I have been connected with circuses all my life—all my life, ladies and gentlemen!—and I give you my sacred word of honor that this is the most magnificent specimen of the terrible grave-robbing hyena that I have ever seen!*" Why did we never see that hyena? Why, why did we always hurry on to the main tent? It is the pang that even paradise must know, of the lost experience of earth—or perhaps of hell.

"We ought to see the fat lady," said Dr. King.

"I'm afraid we'll be late," Miss Harriet objected, eagerly.

So they pushed on with the impatient, good-natured crowd. The smell of tan-bark and matted pelts and stale pea-nut shells came in a gust as they jostled under the flap of the outer tent and found themselves inside the circle of gilded cages. "Shall we go right in and get our seats?" William said.

"What! and not look at the animals? Willy, you're crazy. I want to feed the elephants. Why, there are a lot of them, six or seven."

So they trudged around the ring, their feet sinking deep into the loose, trampled earth. Miss Harriet poked the monkeys clinging to the grating of their

car, with her big umbrella, and examined the elephant's hide with professional interest. "Imagine curing that proboscis," she said. And then they stopped in front of a miserable, magnificent lion, turning, turning, turning in a cage hardly more than his own length. Miss Harriet drew in her breath. "It's being trapped that is so awful, Willy. The consciousness that *you can't get out*. It isn't the—the pain of it; it's being trapped."

William King, looking at the poor tawny creature of the desert and free winds and life that dealt death with passion, blinked suddenly behind his glasses. "But you trap things yourself," he protested, a moment afterwards.

"Oh, but I don't keep 'em trapped; I kill 'em," she defended herself. "I couldn't keep things shut up. I'd be as bad as Annie if I saw any living creature that wasn't free to get out-of-doors." And then she pushed on to the next cage, and the next; then suddenly feared that they would not get good seats if they wasted any more time among the animals. "For we won't have any reserved doings," she said. "I want to sit on those boards that I sat on forty years ago."

She was as excited as she might have been forty years ago; and pushed ahead into the big tent, dragging William by the hand, and climbing up tier after tier, to get a good view of the ring. When they sat down, she made haste to spread open the flimsy pink sheet of the programme with its pale type, and read to William, in a loud, ecstatic voice, just what was going to happen:

"*Display No. 1. Gigantic Pageantric Prelude—presenting Equitational Exercises, Hippo-dramatical Revivals, Pachydermical Aggregations—the only terpsichorean Pachyderms ever taught to tread the mazes of the Quadrille.*

"*Display No. 2. Claire St. Jeal and her company—the loveliest daughters of Italy, and world-famous bareback equestriennes—*"

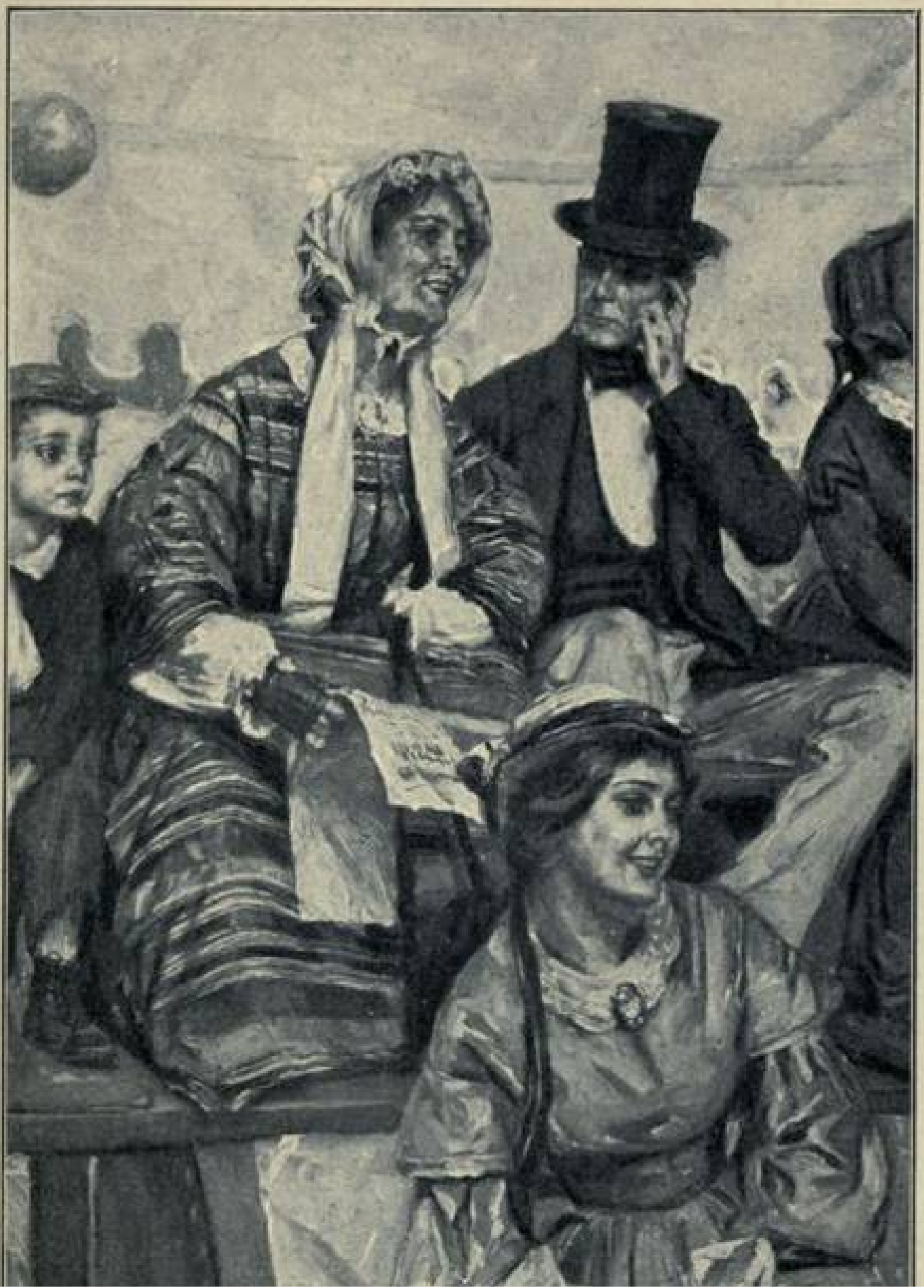
"You are sure you are not getting tired?" William King interrupted.

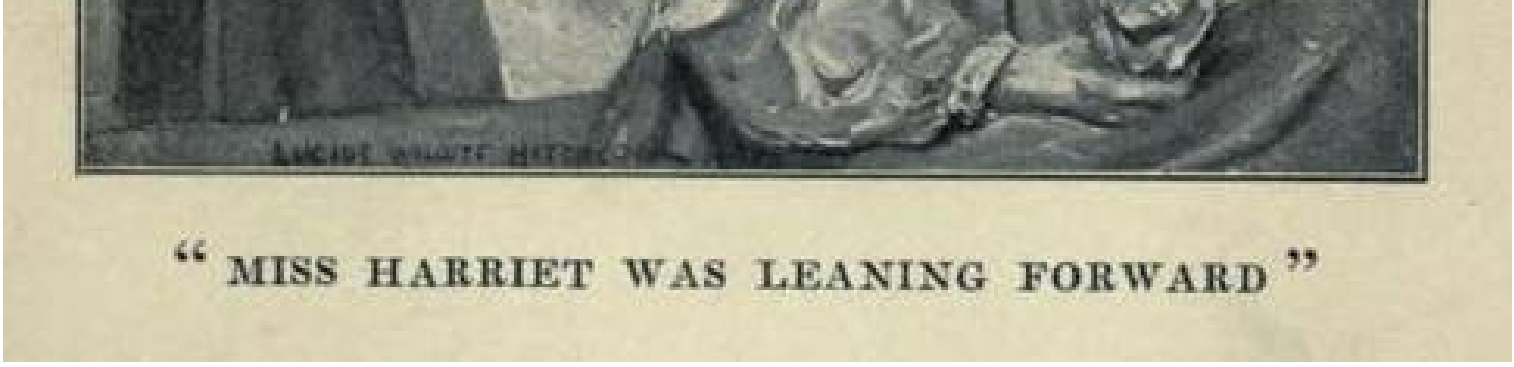
"Tired?" she repeated, scornfully. "William, as Matty Barkley would say, you are a perfect fool. Why should I be tired? I feel first rate—never better. I wouldn't thank King George to be my uncle! I've wanted to come to the circus for years. Willy, what will your wife say?"

"Nothing," said William, significantly.

At which Miss Harriet laughed until the tears stood in her eyes. "William, you have more sense than I gave you credit for. But I am not sure that, as your Sunday-school teacher, I ought not to tell you to confess. Hullo! look what's coming."

Flare of banners! Prancing horses! Roman soldiers in rumbling gold-and-crimson chariots! Elephants bearing, throned upon their backs, goddesses of liberty and queens of beauty! Miss Harriet was leaning forward, her lips parted with excitement. William King looked at her and drew in his breath.





"MISS HARRIET WAS LEANING FORWARD"

"MISS HARRIET WAS LEANING FORWARD"

"'Not more than six months;' God grant not!—I wish it might not be more than two."

"Willy, read what comes next," she said, shoving the programme at him; "I can't stop looking."

The canvas was darkening a little overhead, so that William had to put on his glasses and hold the printed sheet at arm's-length to decipher the blurred, smudged text sufficiently to say that "Mademoiselle Orinda, Queen of the Flying Trapeze, would give her marv—"

"William—what shall I do about Annie?" Miss Harriet said.

"You know we will all take care of Miss Annie," he said, tenderly; "and—"

"Oh, Willy, there's the red lemonade," she interrupted, standing up and beckoning with her crumpled programme. "Did you ever see so deadly a drink? You forgot the pea-nuts," she reminded him, reproachfully. And when William secured his hot, brown-paper bag, she ate the pea-nuts and watched the changing wonders of the ring with intent eyes. She laughed aloud at the clown's endeavors to ride a kicking donkey, and when the educated dogs carried one another about in a wheelbarrow she applauded generously. "They are wonderful!" she said.

William King looked at her keenly; it was all real. Miss Harriet was

incapable of pretence.

The brilliant day, that had showed between lacings of the tent like strings of sapphires, had dimmed and dimmed; and by-and-by, unnoticed at first, there was the drip of rain. Here and there an umbrella was raised, and once or twice a bedraggled man or woman led out a reluctant child—'For I ain't a-goin' to have you catch your death of cold for no trained elephants," a mother said, decidedly, pulling a whining boy from beside Miss Harriet.

"Perhaps," ventured the doctor, "we really ought to go. I can't have you 'catch your death of cold,' Miss Harriet."

"I won't die of a cold, William," she said, her eyes narrowing.

And William swore at himself under his breath, but said, with clumsy jocularity: "Well, not if I can help it. But I don't know why you should be so sure; it might give you bronchitis for a year."

"I won't have bronchitis for a year," Miss Harriet said, gazing at the clowns.

And William King swore at himself again.

The rain increased to a downpour; little streams at first dripped, then poured, upon the thinning benches. The great centre pole was streaming wet; the clown stood in a puddle, and the red triangle on his chalk-white forehead melted into a pink smear.

"Really, Miss Harriet," William said, anxiously, "I'm afraid—"

"If you're afraid for yourself, I'll go," she said; "but we ought to wait for the grand concert. (Ah! there's the man with the red balloons. If you had a half-dozen children, Willy, as you ought to have, I'd buy him out.) Well, are you sugar or salt, to be so scared of a drop of rain?"

She did not look afraid of rain herself when she got up and pushed past the scattered spectators, her hair glistening with drops, her cheeks red, her eyes clear. "William," she said, when they got outside and were hurrying along to catch the stage for Old Chester—"William, that has done me good. I feel superbly. Do you know, I haven't had an instant's pain since I first spoke of the thing to you? That's three days entirely free. Why, such a thing hasn't happened in—in three months. Just think of that—entirely free. William, I'll cheat you doctor-men yet." She looked at him with glowing courage. "I feel so well," she said.

She held out her hand, there in the rain on the black cinder-path, and William King struck his into it with a sort of shout.

"Hurrah!" he said, as she had said when they had come out from hearing the sentence in the Mercer doctor's office.

The long ride home in the stage, in which they were the only passengers, was perhaps a descending scale.... At first they talked of the circus. "I liked the man and the bear best," William said.

"Oh, he wasn't as fine as that beautiful lady in pink petticoats who rode the fat, white horse. Did you ever see a horse with so broad a back, Willy? Why, I could have ridden him myself."

"He would need a broad back," William said; and Miss Harriet told him to hold his tongue and not be impudent. The rain was pattering on the roof and streaming down the windows, and in the dark, damp cavern of the stage they could not see each other's face very well; but the stretches of tense silence in the circus talk made William King's heart beat heavily, although he burst out gayly that the afternoon had brought back his youth. "Miss Harriet, when you were a child, didn't you always want to poke around under the seats when it was over and find things? William Rives once found five cents. But William would find five cents in the Desert of Sahara. I never had his luck, but I was

confident that watches were dropped freely by the spectators."

"Of course," cried Miss Harriet. "Or diamond-rings. My fancy led me towards diamond-rings. But I suppose you never knew the envy of the ladies' clothes? Dear me—those petticoats!"

"The ring-master's boots were very bitter to me; but my greatest desire was —"

"Willy," Miss Harriet said, hoarsely, "I don't want anybody to know."

"Of course not," William King said. "Why should they? We may hold this thing at bay for—"

"We will hold it at bay," she said, with passion. "I will! I *will*! Do you hear me?"

Willy King murmured something inarticulately; his eyes suddenly smarted.

The ride to Old Chester seemed to him interminable; and when, after wandering snatches of talk about the circus, the stage at last drew up at the green gate in Miss Harriet's privet hedge, his nerves were tense and his face haggard with fatigue.

At home, at his belated supper-table, his good Martha was very severe with him. "You oughtn't to allow yourself to get so tired; it's wrong. You could just as well as not have ordered your things by mail. I must say, William, flatly and frankly, that a doctor ought to have more sense. I hope there was nobody in the stage you knew to talk you to death?"

"Miss Harriet came down," William said, "but she hadn't much to say."

"I suppose she went to buy some of her horrid supplies?" Martha said. "I can't understand that woman—catching things in traps. How would she like to

be caught in a trap? I asked her once—because I am always perfectly frank with people. 'How would you like to be caught in a trap, Miss Harriet?' I said. And she said, 'Oh, Annie would let me out.' You never can get a straight answer out of Harriet Hutchinson."

"My dear, I'll take another cup of tea. Stronger, please."

"My dear, strong tea isn't good for you," Martha said.

IV

When Miss Harriet woke the next morning the blue June day was flooding her room. At first she could not remember.... What was the something behind her consciousness? It came in an instant. "*Trapped*," she said, aloud, and turned her head to see Miss Annie at her bedside.

"What is trapped, sister?" said Miss Annie, her little old face crumpling with distress.

"I am," Harriet said; and laughed at the absurdity of telling Annie in such a fashion. But of course there was no use in telling Annie. She couldn't understand, and all that there was for her to know, the ultimate fact, she would find out soon enough. The younger sister felt a sick distaste of dealing with this poor mind; she wanted to be kind to Annie; she had always wanted to be kind to her—but she didn't want her round, that was all. And so she sent her off, patiently and not ungently: "Don't bother me, Annie, that's a good girl. No—I don't want any roses; take them away. No—I don't want to look at pictures. You go away now, that's a good girl."

And the wrinkled child obeyed meekly. But she told the deaf Augustine that Harriet was cross. "I'm the oldest, and she oughtn't to order me round," she whimpered.

Poor Miss Annie was constantly being told to be a good girl and go away, in the days that followed—days, to Miss Harriet, of that amazement and self-concentration which belong to such an experience as hers. There had been no leading up to this knowledge that had come to her—no gradual preparation of apprehension or suspicion. The full speed of living had come, *crash!* against the fact of dying. The recoil, the pause, the terrible astonishment of that moment when Life, surging ahead with all his banners flying, flings himself in an instant against the immovable face of Death—leaves the soul dazed by the shock—dazed, and unbelieving. "*It cannot be.*" That is the first clear thought. It is impossible; there is a mistake somewhere. A day ago, an hour ago, Death was lying hidden far, far off in the years. Sometime, of course, he would arrive—solemn, inevitable, but beneficent, or at least serene. He would send soft warnings before him—faint tollings of fatigue, vague mists of sunset shadows. The soul will be ready for him when he comes then; will even welcome him, for after a while Life grows a little tired and is ready to grasp that cool hand and rest. We all know how to meet Death then, with dignity and patience. But to meet him to-morrow—to-day, even, when we are full of our own business, of our own urgent affairs—the mere interruption of it is maddening. Across the solemnity of the thought comes with grotesque incongruity an irritated consciousness of the *inconvenience* of dying.

As for Harriet Hutchinson—"I don't believe it," she said to herself, that first morning. And then, breathlessly, "Why, I can't—die!"

She was not afraid, as one counts fear, but she was absorbed; for there is a dreadful and curiously impersonal interest in the situation that takes possession of the mind in moments like this. No wonder she could not think about Annie. She could not think about anything except that that man in Mercer had said that

in a very short time—

"Why, but it's perfectly ridiculous!" she told herself; "it *can't* be. I'm not sick —"

As she lay there in her bed that morning, after she had sent Miss Annie away, she lifted her hand—a large hand, with strong, square fingers, brown with weather and rough with her work, and looked at it curiously. It was a little thin—she had not noticed that before; but there it was, eager, vital, quick to grip and hold, life in every line. And it would be—still? No; she did not believe it. And, besides, it couldn't be, it mustn't be. She had a hundred things to do. She must do them; she couldn't suddenly—*stop*. Life surged up in a great wave of passionate determination. She got up, eager to go on living, and to deny, deny, deny! It was the old human experience which is repeated and repeated until Life can learn the fulfilment of Death. Poor Life, beaten by the whips of pain, it takes so long sometimes to learn its lesson!

In those weeks that followed—weeks of refusal, and then struggle, and then acceptance, and last of all adjustment—Miss Harriet found old Annie's companionship almost intolerable. She was very unreasonable with her, very harsh even; but all she asked was solitude, and solitude Annie would not give. She ran at her sister's heels like a dog; sat looking at her with frightened eyes in the bad hours that came with relentlessly increasing frequency; came whimpering to her bedside on those exhausted mornings when Harriet would scourge her poor body onto its feet and announce that she was going out. "These four walls smother me," she used to say; "I must get out-of-doors."

Sometimes it seemed as if the big, kind nature that had borne the pin-pricks so patiently all these years had reached the breaking-point, and another day or another hour of poor old Annie's foolish love would cause it to burst out in frantic anger:

"It hurts, sister?"

"Yes, Annie; but never mind. If I could only get out-of-doors I wouldn't mind."

"Oh, sister, don't let it hurt."

"Can't help it, Annie. Now, don't think about it, that's a good girl. Maybe I can get out to-morrow a little while."

"But I can't bear it."

"Got to, my dear. Come, now, run away. Go and see your chickens."

"Sister, I can't bear it."

"Annie, you drive me wild. Augustine—oh, she can't hear. *Augustine!* you must take Miss Annie away. Annie, if you say another word—"

"I'm the oldest and I have a right to talk. Why don't you smell your big bottle? When the squirrels smell it they are not hurt."

"Well, I'm not a squirrel. Annie, if you stay another minute, I'll—I'll— Oh, for Heaven's sake, let me alone!"

She could stand it, she told herself, if she was alone. For though she finally accepted the fact, her own weakness she could not accept. "I am ashamed," she told William King, angrily.

"But there's nothing to be ashamed of," Willy King protested, in his kind way. "Dear Miss Harriet—"

"Hold your tongue. Nothing to be ashamed of? I guess if your body had put your soul in a corner, with its face to the wall—I guess you'd be ashamed. Yesterday I—I— Well, never mind. But my body got me down, I tell you—

got my soul down. Isn't that something to be ashamed of? Don't be an ass, William. I'm ashamed."

It was this consciousness of her own weakness that made her hold herself aloof from her friends.

In those days people did not have trained nurses; they nursed one another. It was not skilful nursing; it frequently was not wise, as we count wisdom to-day; but it was very tender and loving, and it was very bracing. In these softer times, when we run so easily to relief from pain, we do not feel the presence of the professional nurse a check upon our weakness; if we suffer, we are willing that this skilful, noiseless machine, who will know exactly how to relieve us, shall see the suffering. We are neither mortified nor humiliated by our lack of endurance or of courage. But in Old Chester, when we were ill, and some friend or relative came to sit by our bedside, we had—for their sakes—to make an effort to control ourselves. If the effort failed, our souls blushed. Miss Harriet would not run the risk of failure; her body, as she said, got the better of her soul when she was alone; it should not have the chance to humiliate her publicly; so, roughly, she refused the friendly assistance so eagerly offered: "Thank you; Augustine can look after me. I don't want anybody. And besides, I'm perfectly comfortable. (William, I won't have anybody. Do you understand? It's bad enough to disgrace myself in my own eyes; I won't have Matty Barkley sit and look on.)"

And William King put people off as well as he could: "I go in two or three times a day, just to say how do you do; and Miss Annie is about and can bring her anything she needs. And Augustine is very faithful. Of course, she is deaf as a post, but she seems to know what Miss Harriet wants."

So the situation was accepted. "Here I am," she told the doctor, grimly, "dying like a rat in a hole. If I could only get out-of-doors!—or if I had anything to do!—I think it's the having nothing to do that is the worst. But I'll tell you one thing, Willy—I won't be pitied. Don't have people mourning over

me, or pretending that I'm going to get well. They know better, and so do I."

Those who dared to pity her or who ventured some futile friendly lie about recovery were met by the fiercest impatience. "How do I feel? Very well, thank you. And if I didn't, I hope I wouldn't say so. I hope I'm well enough bred not to ask or answer questions about feelings. There is nothing in the world so vulgar," she said, and braced herself to one or another imprudence that grieved and worried all the kind hearts that stood by, eager to show their love.

"It breaks my heart to see her, and there's nothing anybody can do for her," Mrs. Barkley told Dr. Lavendar, snuffling and wiping her eyes. "She positively turned Rachel King out of the house; and Maria Welwood cried her eyes out yesterday because she was so sharp with her when Maria said she was sorry she had had a bad night and hoped she'd soon feel better."

The old man nodded silently. "Poor Miss Harriet!" he said.

"Don't say 'poor Miss Harriet!' to her. Dr. Lavendar, Harriet and I have been friends since we were put into short dresses—and she spoke to me to-day in a way—! Well, of course, I shall go back; but I was ready to say I wouldn't. And she treats poor old Annie outrageously."

Dr. Lavendar nodded again. He himself had seen her several times, but she had never let him be personal: "Was Mrs. Drayton still gossiping about her soul?" "Wasn't it nearly time to get a new carpet for the chancel?" etc., etc. It was her way of defending herself—and Dr. Lavendar understood. So he only brought her his kindly gossip or his church news, and he never looked at her mournfully; but neither did he ever once refer to a possible recovery—that poor, friendly pretence that so tries the soul absorbed in its own solemn knowledge!

But in the afternoon, after his talk with Mrs. Barkley, the old man went

plodding up the hill to the Stuffed-Animal House, with tender and relentless purpose in his face. It was a serene September day, full of pulsing light and fragrant with the late mowing. William King's mare was hitched to a post by the green gate in the hedge, and the doctor was giving her a handful of grass as Dr. Lavendar came up. "How is Miss Harriet, Willy?" the old man said.

William climbed into the buggy and flicked with his whip at the ironweed by the road-side. "Oh—about the same. Dr. Lavendar, it's cruel—it's cruel!"

"What's cruel, William?"

"I can't give her any opiate—to amount to anything."

"Why?"

"Her heart."

"But you can't let her suffer!"

"If I stopped the suffering," the doctor said, laconically, "it would be murder."

"You mean—"

"Depressants, to amount to anything, would kill her."

Dr. Lavendar looked up into the sky silently. Willy King gathered up the reins. "And Annie?" Dr. Lavendar said.

"She is just a poor, frantic child. I can't make her understand why Miss Harriet shouldn't have two powders, when one 'sugar,' as she calls it, gives her a little comfort for a little while. She says, 'Harriet wouldn't let a squirrel stay hurt.' Miss Harriet says she told her the other day that she wasn't a squirrel; but it didn't seem to make any difference to Miss Annie. She has a queer elemental

reasonableness about her, hasn't she? Well, I must go. Dr. Lavendar, I—I hope you won't mind if I say that perhaps—I mean she doesn't want anybody to refer to—to anything religious."

"William," said the old man, mildly, "if you can mention anything which is not religious to a woman who is going to die within a very few weeks, I will consider it."

And William King had the grace to blush and stammer something about Miss Harriet's hating anything personal. Dr. Lavendar listened silently; then he went on up the path to the Stuffed-Animal House. Old Miss Annie let him into the darkened hall, a burst of western sunshine flooding in behind him and making the grim, dead creatures dart out of their shadows for a moment, and sink back into them again when the door was shut. The old child had been crying, for Miss Harriet had turned her out of her room, and so he had to sit there in the hall, under the shark, and try to comfort her and bid her go out and see her chickens. But for once Miss Annie would not be diverted:

"Harriet wants to go out-of-doors, and she can't. And she is hurt; and Willy King won't give her sugar in a paper to stop the hurting. He is wicked."

"By-and-by," said Dr. Lavendar, "Harriet will fall asleep and not be hurt any more."

"Not till she is dead," Miss Annie said; "Augustine told me so."

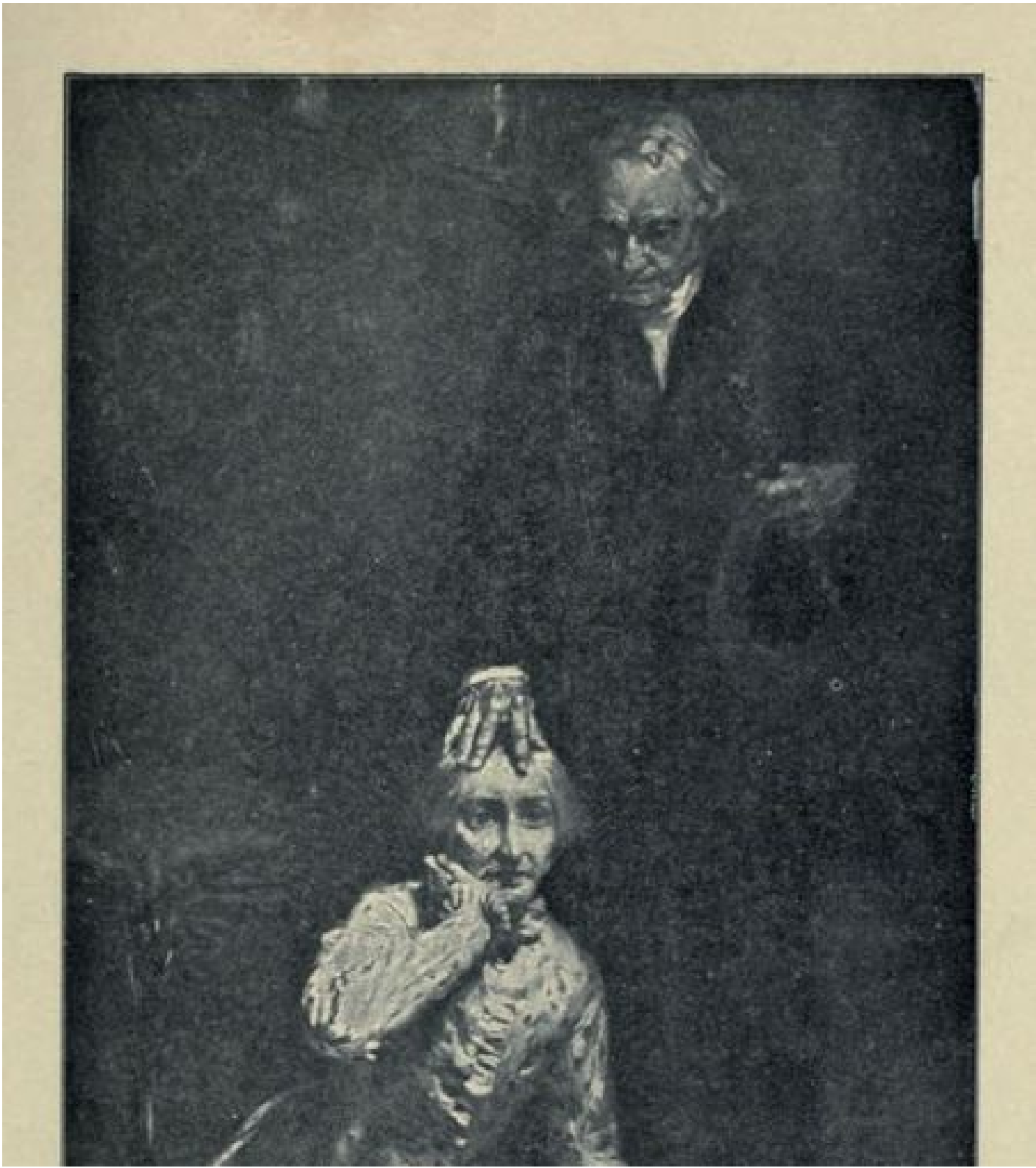
"I meant that," Dr. Lavendar said, stroking the poor, gray head grovelling against his knee.

"Then why didn't you say so? It is a story to say sleep when you mean dead."

"I ought to have said dead," he acknowledged, gently, "so that you could

understand. But I want you to remember that death is a happy sleep. Will you remember that?"

"A happy sleep," Miss Annie repeated; "yes; I will remember. *A happy sleep.*" She lifted her head from his knee and smiled. "I'll go and see my chickens," she said.



"'A HAPPY SLEEP,' MISS ANNIE REPEATED"

"'A HAPPY SLEEP,' MISS ANNIE REPEATED"

And Dr. Lavendar took his way up-stairs, past the cases of birds, to Miss Harriet's room. She received him with elaborate cheerfulness.

As for Dr. Lavendar, he lost no time in pretence. "Miss Harriet," he said, "I am not going to stay and talk and tire you. You've seen people enough to-day —"

"I'm not tired in the least."

"But I have a word to say to you."

She looked at him angrily. "I would rather not talk about myself, Dr. Lavendar, please."

"I don't want to talk about yourself," he said.

Her face cleared a little. "That's a relief. I was afraid you were going to talk to me about 'preparing,' and so forth."

A sudden smile twinkled into Dr. Lavendar's old eyes. "My dear Miss Harriet, you've been 'preparing' for fifty years—or is it fifty-one? I've lost count, Harriet. No; you haven't got anything to do about dying; dying is not your business. In fact, I sometimes think it never is our business. Our business is living. Dying is God's affair."

"I haven't any business, that's the worst of it," Miss Harriet said, bitterly. "I've nothing to do—nothing to do but just lie here and wait. I don't mind dying; but to be here in this trap, waiting. And I've always been so busy, I don't know how to do nothing."

"That's what I wanted to say to you. There is something you can do. In fact, there's something you must do."

"Something I must do?" Miss Harriet said, puzzled.

"My dear friend, you must meet this affliction; you can't escape; we can't save you from it. But there is one thing you can do: you can try to spare the pain of it to other people. Set yourself, Miss Harriet, to make it as easy as you can for those who stand by."

Harriet Hutchinson looked at him in amazement. No pity? No condolences? Nothing but the high charge to spare others. "You mean my temper?" she said at last, slowly.

"Yes," said Dr. Lavendar.

Miss Harriet blushed hotly. "It is bad; I know it's bad. But—"

"Mine would be worse," said Dr. Lavendar, thoughtfully. "But look out for it, Harriet. It's getting ahead of you."

Miss Harriet nodded. "You're right."

"You see, when you are out of temper it shows you are suffering; and that's hard for us to bear—not the temper, of course, but the knowledge. So you've got to spare us, Harriet. Understand?"

"I understand."

"It will be hard work for you," he said, cheerfully; and somehow the words meant, not pity, but "*Shoulder arms!*"

For an instant they gazed, eye to eye—the woman devoured by pain, the old man with his calm demand; and then the soul of her rose with a shout. What! there was something left for her to do? She need not merely sit still and die? She need not wait idly for the end? It was a splendid summons to the mind—a challenge to the body that had dogged and humiliated the soul, that had wrung from her good-humored courage irritability and unjust anger, that had dragged her pride in the dust of shame, yes, even—even (alone, and in the dark), but even of tears.

"*Make it as easy as possible for those that stand by.*"

Some might say that that austere command was the lash of the whip; but to Miss Harriet it was the rod and the staff. The Spartan old man had suddenly revealed to her that as long as the body does not compel the soul, there is no shame. As long as she could hold her tongue, she said to herself, she need not be ashamed. Let the body whimper as it may, if the soul is silent it is master. Miss Harriet saw before her, not humiliation and idleness and waiting, but fierce struggle.... And it was a struggle. It was no easy thing to be amiable when good Maria Welwood wept over her; or when Martha King told her, flatly and frankly, that she was doing very wrong not to make more effort to eat; or even when Mrs. Dale hoped that she had made her peace with Heaven.

"Heaven had better try to make its peace with me, considering," said Miss Harriet, grimly; but when she saw how she had shocked Mrs. Dale, she made

haste to apologize. "I didn't mean it, of course. But I am nervous, and say things to let off steam." Such an admission meant much from Miss Harriet, and it certainly soothed Mrs. Dale.

But most of all, Harriet Hutchinson forbade her body to dictate to her soul when Miss Annie hung whimpering about her with frantic persistence of pity. Never in all their years together had Miss Harriet shown such tenderness to Annie as now, when the poor old child's mere presence was maddening to her. For Annie could think of nothing but the pain which could not be hidden, and her incessant entreaty was that it should be stopped. "Wouldn't you rather be dead, sister?"

"Yes, Annie."

"Well, then, be dead."

"I can't, Annie. Now let us talk of something else. Tell me what the black hen did when the speckled hen stole her nest."

Annie joyously told her story, as she had told it dozens of times before; while Harriet Hutchinson turned her face to the wall. Annie sat on her heels on the floor beside the bed, rocking back and forth, and talking: "And so the speckled hen flew off. Sister, I'll get you your big bottle?"

No answer.

"Sister, don't you want to smell the bottle?"

"No, Annie. No—no—*no*! Oh, Annie, don't you want to go and see your chickens?"

"Why not?"

"Because it wouldn't be right, Annie."

"Why wouldn't it be right, sister?"

"Because," said Harriet Hutchinson—"because I suppose that's one of the things that would 'make it harder for those that stand by.'"

"I don't understand," poor old Annie said, timidly.

"Well, Annie, that's the only reason I know of. Oh, Annie, Annie! it is the only reason there is; it is the root of its being wrong." ... And then the long moan. When Miss Annie heard that sound she shivered all over; it was the elemental protest of the flesh, which cannot understand the regal and unconquered soul.

Those were hard days for Willy King, what with his affection and his sympathy and his daily struggles with Miss Annie; "for she is frantic," he told Dr. Lavendar. They were walking up the hill together in the late afternoon. Miss Harriet had sent for the old man, on whom now she leaned even more than on William King, for Dr. Lavendar gave her granite words instead of Willy's tenderer sympathy. "She insists that I shall give Miss Harriet something —'stuff out of Harriet's bottle,' she says. I suppose she means chloroform. I wish to God I could."

"God will do His own work, William."

"Yes, sir; but it's such a waste—this courage that fairly breaks our hearts."

"Waste! William, what are you talking about? We are every one of us richer for it. I told her so yesterday."

"Well," said William King, thoughtfully, "perhaps so; in this case we are richer, I admit. But suppose it were a baby that was suffering—or a dog? Only, we wouldn't let the dog suffer. Dr. Lavendar, one of these days—you and I won't live to see it, but one of these days—"

"There is Miss Annie now," said Dr. Lavendar. "Why—look at her!"

The old woman came fluttering down the path towards the green gate in the privet hedge; she was smoothing her hair back from her temples, with her strange, girlish gesture, and she was smiling, but there was a new and solemn age in her face that made the two men look at each other, startled and wondering.

"Dr. Lavendar! Willy!" she said, her voice breaking with joy, "Harriet is dead—oh, Harriet is dead!"

They stopped short in the pathway. "What—what?" stammered William King.

"Oh, Harriet is dead!" the old woman said; "and I'm so happy." She came and leaned on the closed gate at the foot of the path, smiling up into their faces. "She isn't hurt any more. Oh, I can breathe, I can breathe, now," said Miss Annie, laying her withered hands upon her throat and drawing a deep breath.

"When?" said the doctor.

"Oh, just a little while ago. As soon as she got dead I opened the windows and let the air blow in; she likes the wind when she isn't hurt."

William King said, suddenly, "*My God!*" and turned and ran up the path, into the house, into the room, where, indeed, there was no more hurting.

"Annie," Dr. Lavendar said, "were you with her?"

"Yes," Miss Annie said. "Harriet was hurt very much. But when she smelled her bottle she stopped being hurt."

Dr. Lavendar leaned against the gate, his breath wavering; then he sat down

on the grass, and rested his forehead on his hands clasped on the top of his stick. He was unable to speak. Miss Annie came out into the road and looked at him curiously. After a while he said, feebly, "Annie, tell me about it."

"Willy wouldn't give Harriet sugar in a paper to stop the hurting. And Harriet said she couldn't get her bottle. She said it would be wrong for her to get it."

Dr. Lavendar lifted his head with a quick gesture of relief. "What! Harriet, didn't get it herself?"

"Oh no," Miss Annie said. "I got it. And I went into Harriet's room. Harriet's eyes were shut, and she was—was moaning," said Miss Annie, shivering. "So I put some stuff out of the bottle on a towel and held it for Harriet to smell. And Harriet opened her eyes and looked frightened, and she said, 'No, no!' And I said, 'Yes; I'm the oldest and you must do what I say.' And she said, 'Augustine! Augustine!' But Augustine can't hear. And I held it down and I said, 'You won't be hurt any more.' And Harriet pushed it away and said 'No.' And then she shut her eyes. And after a while she didn't say anything more. And I held it, oh, a long time. And then I looked, and Harriet's eyes were shut. And now she's dead! And it doesn't hurt any more. You come and look at her, and you'll see it doesn't hurt any more. Now she wouldn't thank King George to be her uncle! Oh, she's dead," said Miss Annie, nodding her head and laughing; "a happy sleep." She was standing there in the dusty road in front of him, telling the story, her hands behind her, rocking slightly backward and forward, like a child repeating a lesson. The long afternoon shadows stretched from the trees across the road, and, swaying lightly, flecked her gray head with sunshine.

"Annie," said Dr. Lavendar, "come here and sit beside me."

She came, happily enough, and let him take her hand and hold it, patting it softly for a moment before he spoke.

"Annie, it was not right to give Harriet the stuff out of the bottle; our Heavenly Father stops the hurting when He thinks best. So it does not please Him for us to do it when we think best."

"But Willy gave Harriet one sugar in a paper, and that stopped it a little," Miss Annie said, puzzled; "and if he stopped it a little, why shouldn't it all be stopped?" The obvious logic of the poor mind admitted of no answer—certainly no argument.

Dr. Lavendar said, gravely, stroking the hand, as wrinkled as his own: "It was not right, my child. You will believe me when I say so? And I do not want any one to know that you did a thing that was not right. So I want you to promise me now that you will not tell any one that you did it. Will you promise me?"

"Willy knows it, I guess," Miss Annie said.

Dr. Lavendar was silent. Just what had William heard her say? Only that Miss Harriet was "dead." "I am pretty sure that Willy doesn't know it," he said, slowly. "And I am quite sure he would prefer not to know it; so you mustn't tell him. But you can't understand about that, Annie. You'll just have to believe me. Will you promise me?"

"Why, yes," Miss Annie said, indifferently, smiling up at the moving leaves. "Oh, Harriet isn't hurt now!"

Dr. Lavendar trembled with anxiety. "I want a solemn promise, Annie. What do the children do when they make a solemn promise?"

Miss Annie was instantly interested. "Why, they cross their breast and say 'honest and true'; don't you know?" ...

"Well, then," said Dr. Lavendar, slowly, "you will make a promise to me in

that way." He stood up and took her hand, his face very pale. "Promise me that never, so long as you live, will you tell any one—any one, Annie—that you made Harriet fall asleep by giving her the big bottle to smell. Now, make the promise, Annie."

Miss Annie slowly crossed her breast. "I promise," she said, in a low voice; her eyes, widening with awe, were fixed on his face. "I promise:

"Honest and true,
Black and black and blue,
Lay me down
And cut me in two—

if I do."

"*Amen!*" said Dr. Lavendar; and took off his hat, and stood looking up into the sky, his lip trembling. "Father," he said, "I don't even say 'forgive her!' She is Thy little child." And then they stood for a moment hand in hand in the sunny silence.

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