

EPILOGUE:

CONTAINING SELECTIONS FROM THE CORRESPONDENCE OF MISS GRACE ROSEBERRY AND MR. HORACE HOLMCROFT; TO WHICH ARE ADDED EXTRACTS FROM THE DIARY OF THE REVEREND JULIAN GRAY.

I.

From MR. HORACE HOLMCROFT to MISS GRACE ROSEBERRY.

"I HASTEN to thank you, dear Miss Roseberry, for your last kind letter, received by yesterday's mail from Canada. Believe me, I appreciate your generous readiness to pardon and forget what I so rudely said to you at a time when the arts of an adventuress had blinded me to the truth. In the grace which has forgiven me I recognize the inbred sense of justice of a true lady. Birth and breeding can never fail to assert themselves: I believe in them, thank God, more firmly than ever.

"You ask me to keep you informed of the progress of Julian Gray's infatuation, and of the course of conduct pursued toward him by Mercy Merrick.

"If you had not favored me by explaining your object, I might have felt some surprise at receiving from a lady in your position such a request as this. But the motives by which you describe yourself as being actuated are beyond dispute. The existence of Society, as you truly say, is threatened by the present lamentable prevalence of Liberal ideas throughout the length and breadth of the land. We can only hope to protect ourselves against impostors interested in gaining a position among persons of our rank by becoming in some sort (unpleasant as it may be) familiar with the arts by which imposture too frequently succeeds. If we wish to know to what daring lengths cunning can go, to what pitiable self-delusion credulity can consent, we must watch the proceedings--even while we shrink from them--of a Mercy Merrick and a Julian Gray.

"In taking up my narrative again where my last letter left off, I must venture to set you right on one point.

"Certain expressions which have escaped your pen suggest to me that you blame Julian Gray as the cause of Lady Janet's regrettable visit to the

Refuge the day after Mercy Merrick had left her house. This is not quite correct. Julian, as you will presently see, has enough to answer for without being held responsible for errors of judgment in which he has had no share. Lady Janet (as she herself told me) went to the Refuge of her own free-will to ask Mercy Merrick's pardon for the language which she had used on the previous day. 'I passed a night of such misery as no words can describe'--this, I assure you, is what her ladyship really said to me--'thinking over what my vile pride and selfishness and obstinacy had made me say and do. I would have gone down on my knees to beg her pardon if she would have let me. My first happy moment was when I won her consent to come and visit me sometimes at Mablethorpe House.'

"You will, I am sure, agree with me that such extravagance as this is to be pitied rather than blamed. How sad to see the decay of the faculties with advancing age! It is a matter of grave anxiety to consider how much longer poor Lady Janet can be trusted to manage her own affairs. I shall take an opportunity of touching on the matter delicately when I next see her lawyer.

"I am straying from my subject. And--is it not strange?--I am writing to you as confidentially as if we were old friends.

"To return to Julian Gray. Innocent of instigating his aunt's first visit to the Refuge, he is guilty of having induced her to go there for the second time the day after I had dispatched my last letter to you. Lady Janet's object on this occasion was neither more nor less than to plead her nephew's cause as humble suitor for the hand of Mercy Merrick. Imagine the descent of one of the oldest families in England inviting an adventuress in a Refuge to honor a clergyman of the Church of England by becoming his wife! In what times do we live! My dear mother shed tears of shame when she heard of it. How you would love and admire my mother!

"I dined at Mablethorpe House, by previous appointment, on the day when Lady Janet returned from her degrading errand.

"Well?' I said, waiting, of course, until the servant was out of the room.

"Well,' Lady Janet answered, 'Julian was quite right.'

"Quite right in what?'

"In saying that the earth holds no nobler woman than Mercy Merrick.'

"Has she refused him again?'

"She has refused him again.'

"Thank God! I felt it fervently, and I said it fervently. Lady Janet laid down her knife and fork, and fixed one of her fierce looks on me.

"It may not be your fault, Horace,' she said, 'if your nature is incapable of comprehending what is great and generous in other natures higher than yours. But the least you can do is to distrust your own capacity of appreciation. For the future keep your opinions (on questions which you don't understand) modestly to yourself. I have a tenderness for you for your father's sake; and I take the most favorable view of your conduct toward Mercy Merrick. I humanely consider it the conduct of a fool.' (Her own words, Miss Roseberry. I assure you once more, her own words.) 'But don't trespass too far on my indulgence--don't insinuate again that a woman who is good enough (if she died this night) to go to heaven, is not good enough to be my nephew's wife.'

"I expressed to you my conviction a little way back that it was doubtful whether poor Lady Janet would be much longer competent to manage her own affairs. Perhaps you thought me hasty then? What do you think now?

"It was, of course, useless to reply seriously to the extraordinary reprimand that I had received. Besides, I was really shocked by a decay of principle which proceeded but too plainly from decay of the mental powers. I made a soothing and respectful reply, and I was favored in return with some account of what had really happened at the Refuge. My mother and my sisters were disgusted when I repeated the particulars to them. You will be disgusted too.

"The interesting penitent (expecting Lady Janet's visit) was, of course, discovered in a touching domestic position! She had a foundling baby asleep on her lap; and she was teaching the alphabet to an ugly little vagabond girl whose acquaintance she had first made in the street. Just the sort of artful tableau vivant to impose on an old lady--was it not?

"You will understand what followed, when Lady Janet opened her matrimonial negotiation. Having perfected herself in her part, Mercy Merrick, to do her justice, was not the woman to play it badly. The most magnanimous sentiments flowed from her lips. She declared that her future life was devoted to acts of charity, typified, of course, by the foundling infant and the ugly little girl. However she might personally suffer, whatever might be the sacrifice of her own feelings--observe how artfully this was put, to

insinuate that she was herself in love with him!--she could not accept from Mr. Julian Gray an honor of which she was unworthy. Her gratitude to him and her interest in him alike forbade her to compromise his brilliant future by consenting to a marriage which would degrade him in the estimation of all his friends. She thanked him (with tears); she thanked Lady Janet (with more tears); but she dare not, in the interests of his honor and his happiness, accept the hand that he offered to her. God bless and comfort him; and God help her to bear with her hard lot!

"The object of this contemptible comedy is plain enough to my mind. She is simply holding off (Julian, as you know, is a poor man) until the influence of Lady Janet's persuasion is backed by the opening of Lady Janet's purse. In one word--Settlements! But for the profanity of the woman's language, and the really lamentable credulity of the poor old lady, the whole thing would make a fit subject for a burlesque.

"But the saddest part of the story is still to come.

"In due course of time the lady's decision was communicated to Julian Gray. He took leave of his senses on the spot. Can you believe it?--he has resigned his curacy! At a time when the church is thronged every Sunday to hear him preach, this madman shuts the door and walks out of the pulpit. Even Lady Janet was not far enough gone in folly to abet him in this. She remonstrated, like the rest of his friends. Perfectly useless! He had but one answer to everything they could say: 'My career is closed.' What stuff!

"You will ask, naturally enough, what this perverse man is going to do next. I don't scruple to say that he is bent on committing suicide. Pray do not be alarmed! There is no fear of the pistol, the rope, or the river. Julian is simply courting death--within the limits of the law.

"This is strong language, I know. You shall hear what the facts are, and judge for yourself.

"Having resigned his curacy, his next proceeding was to offer his services, as volunteer, to a new missionary enterprise on the West Coast of Africa. The persons at the head of the mission proved, most fortunately, to have a proper sense of their duty. Expressing their conviction of the value of Julian's assistance in the most handsome terms, they made it nevertheless a condition of entertaining his proposal that he should submit to examination by a competent medical man. After some hesitation he consented to this. The doctor's report was conclusive. In Julian's present state of health the climate of West Africa would in all probability kill him in

three months' time.

"Foiled in his first attempt, he addressed himself next to a London Mission. Here it was impossible to raise the question of climate, and here, I grieve to say, he has succeeded.

"He is now working--in other words, he is now deliberately risking his life--in the Mission to Green Anchor Fields. The district known by this name is situated in a remote part of London, near the Thames. It is notoriously infested by the most desperate and degraded set of wretches in the whole metropolitan population, and it is so thickly inhabited that it is hardly ever completely free from epidemic disease. In this horrible place, and among these dangerous people, Julian is now employing himself from morning to night. None of his old friends ever see him. Since he joined the Mission he has not even called on Lady Janet Roy.

"My pledge is redeemed--the facts are before you. Am I wrong in taking my gloomy view of the prospect? I cannot forget that this unhappy man was once my friend, and I really see no hope for him in the future. Deliberately self-exposed to the violence of ruffians and the outbreak of disease, who is to extricate him from his shocking position? The one person who can do it is the person whose association with him would be his ruin--Mercy Merrick. Heaven only knows what disasters it may be my painful duty to communicate to you in my next letter!

"You are so kind as to ask me to tell you something about myself and my plans.

"I have very little to say on either head. After what I have suffered--my feelings trampled on, my confidence betrayed--I am as yet hardly capable of deciding what I shall do. Returning to my old profession--to the army--is out of the question, in these leveling days, when any obscure person who can pass an examination may call himself my brother officer, and may one day, perhaps, command me as my superior in rank. If I think of any career, it is the career of diplomacy. Birth and breeding have not quite disappeared as essential qualifications in that branch of the public service. But I have decided nothing as yet.

"My mother and sisters, in the event of your returning to England, desire me to say that it will afford them the greatest pleasure to make your acquaintance. Sympathizing with me, they do not forget what you too have suffered. A warm welcome awaits you when you pay your first visit at our house. Most truly yours,

"HORACE HOLMCROFT."

II.

From MISS GRACE ROSEBERRY to MR. HORACE HOLMCROFT.

"DEAR MR. HOLMCROFT--I snatch a few moments from my other avocations to thank you for your most interesting and delightful letter. How well you describe, how accurately you judge! If Literature stood a little higher as a profession, I should almost advise you--but no! if you entered Literature, how could you associate with the people whom you would be likely to meet?

"Between ourselves, I always thought Mr. Julian Gray an overrated man. I will not say he has justified my opinion. I will only say I pity him. But, dear Mr. Holmcroft, how can you, with your sound judgment, place the sad alternatives now before him on the same level? To die in Green Anchor Fields, or to fall into the clutches of that vile wretch--is there any comparison between the two? Better a thousand times die at the post of duty than marry Mercy Merrick.

"As I have written the creature's name, I may add--so as to have all the sooner done with the subject--that I shall look with anxiety for your next letter. Do not suppose that I feel the smallest curiosity about this degraded and designing woman. My interest in her is purely religious. To persons of my devout turn of mind she is an awful warning. When I feel Satan near me--it will be such a means of grace to think of Mercy Merrick!

"Poor Lady Janet! I noticed those signs of mental decay to which you so feelingly allude at the last interview I had with her in Mablethorpe House. If you can find an opportunity, will you say that I wish her well, here and hereafter? and will you please add that I do not omit to remember her in my prayers?

"There is just a chance of my visiting England toward the close of the autumn. My fortunes have changed since I wrote last. I have been received as reader and companion by a lady who is the wife of one of our high judicial functionaries in this part of the world. I do not take much interest in him; he is what they call a 'self-made man.' His wife is charming. Besides being a person of highly intellectual tastes, she is greatly her husband's superior--as you will understand when I tell you that she is related to the

Gommerys of Pommery; not the Pommerys of Gommery, who (as your knowledge of our old families will inform you) only claim kindred with the younger branch of that ancient race.

"In the elegant and improving companionship which I now enjoy I should feel quite happy but for one drawback. The climate of Canada is not favorable to my kind patroness, and her medical advisers recommend her to winter in London. In this event, I am to have the privilege of accompanying her. Is it necessary to add that my first visit will be paid at your house? I feel already united by sympathy to your mother and your sisters. There is a sort of freemasonry among gentlewomen, is there not? With best thanks and remembrances, and many delightful anticipations of your next letter, believe me, dear Mr. Holmcroft,

"Truly yours,

"GRACE ROSEBERRY."

III.

From MR. HORACE HOLMCROFT to MISS GRACE ROSEBERRY.

"MY DEAR MISS ROSEBERRY--Pray excuse my long silence. I have waited for mail after mail, in the hope of being able to send you some good news at last. It is useless to wait longer. My worst forebodings have been realized: my painful duty compels me to write a letter which will surprise and shock you.

"Let me describe events in their order as they happened. In this way I may hope to gradually prepare your mind for what is to come.

"About three weeks after I wrote to you last, Julian Gray paid the penalty of his headlong rashness. I do not mean that he suffered any actual violence at the hands of the people among whom he had cast his lot. On the contrary, he succeeded, incredible as it may appear, in producing a favorable impression on the ruffians about him. As I understand it, they began by respecting his courage in venturing among them alone; and they ended in discovering that he was really interested in promoting their welfare. It is to the other peril, indicated in my last letter, that he has fallen a victim--the peril of disease. Not long after he began his labors in the district fever broke out. We only heard that Julian had been struck down by the epidemic when

it was too late to remove him from the lodging that he occupied in the neighborhood. I made inquiries personally the moment the news reached us. The doctor in attendance refused to answer for his life.

"In this alarming state of things poor Lady Janet, impulsive and unreasonable as usual, insisted on leaving Mablethorpe House and taking up her residence near her nephew.

"Finding it impossible to persuade her of the folly of removing from home and its comforts at her age, I felt it my duty to accompany her. We found accommodation (such as it was) in a river-side inn, used by ship-captains and commercial travelers. I took it on myself to provide the best medical assistance, Lady Janet's insane prejudices against doctors impelling her to leave this important part of the arrangements entirely in my hands.

"It is needless to weary you by entering into details on the subject of Julian's illness.

"The fever pursued the ordinary course, and was characterized by the usual intervals of delirium and exhaustion succeeding each other. Subsequent events, which it is, unfortunately, necessary to relate to you, leave me no choice but to dwell (as briefly as possible) on the painful subject of the delirium. In other cases the wanderings of fever-stricken people present, I am told, a certain variety of range. In Julian's case they were limited to one topic. He talked incessantly of Mercy Merrick. His invariable petition to his medical attendants entreated them to send for her to nurse him. Day and night that one idea was in his mind, and that one name on his lips.

"The doctors naturally made inquiries as to this absent person. I was obliged (in confidence) to state the circumstances to them plainly.

"The eminent physician whom I had called in to superintend the treatment behaved admirably. Though he has risen from the lower order of the people, he has, strange to say, the instincts of a gentleman. He thoroughly understood our trying position, and felt all the importance of preventing such a person as Mercy Merrick from seizing the opportunity of intruding herself at the bedside. A soothing prescription (I have his own authority for saying it) was all that was required to meet the patient's case. The local doctor, on the other hand, a young man (and evidently a red-hot radical), proved to be obstinate, and, considering his position, insolent as well. 'I have nothing to do with the lady's character, and with your opinion of it,' he said to me. 'I have only, to the best of my judgment, to point out to you the likeliest means of saving the patient's life. Our art is at the end of its

resources. Send for Mercy Merrick, no matter who she is or what she is. There is just a chance--especially if she proves to be a sensible person and a good nurse--that he may astonish you all by recognizing her. In that case only, his recovery is probable. If you persist in disregarding his entreaties, if you let the delirium go on for four-and-twenty hours more, he is a dead man.'

"Lady Janet was, most unluckily, present when this impudent opinion was delivered at the bedside.

"Need I tell you the sequel? Called upon to choose between the course indicated by a physician who is making his five thousand a year, and who is certain of the next medical baronetcy, and the advice volunteered by an obscure general practitioner at the East End of London, who is not making his five hundred a year--need I stop to inform you of her ladyship's decision? You know her; and you will only too well understand that her next proceeding was to pay a third visit to the Refuge.

"Two hours later--I give you my word of honor I am not exaggerating--Mercy Merrick was established at Julian's bedside.

"The excuse, of course, was that it was her duty not to let any private scruples of her own stand in the way, when a medical authority had declared that she might save the patient's life. You will not be surprised to hear that I withdrew from the scene. The physician followed my example--after having written his soothing prescription, and having been grossly insulted by the local practitioner's refusing to make use of it. I went back in the doctor's carriage. He spoke most feelingly and properly. Without giving any positive opinion, I could see that he had abandoned all hope of Julian's recovery. 'We are in the hands of Providence, Mr. Holmcroft;' those were his last words as he set me down at my mother's door.

"I have hardly the heart to go on. If I studied my own wishes, I should feel inclined to stop here.

"Let me, at least, hasten to the end. In two or three days' time I received my first intelligence of the patient and his nurse. Lady Janet informed me that he had recognized her. When I heard this I felt prepared for what was to come. The next report announced that he was gaining strength, and the next that he was out of danger. Upon this Lady Janet returned to Mablethorpe House. I called there a week ago--and heard that he had been removed to the sea-side. I called yesterday--and received the latest information from her ladyship's own lips. My pen almost refuses to write it.

Mercy Merrick has consented to marry him!

"An outrage on Society--that is how my mother and my sisters view it; that is how you will view it too. My mother has herself struck Julian's name off her invitation-list. The servants have their orders, if he presumes to call: 'Not at home.'

"I am unhappily only too certain that I am correct in writing to you of this disgraceful marriage as of a settled thing. Lady Janet went the length of showing me the letters--one from Julian, the other from the woman herself. Fancy Mercy Merrick in correspondence with Lady Janet Roy! addressing her as 'My dear Lady Janet,' and signing, 'Yours affectionately!'

"I had not the patience to read either of the letters through. Julian's tone is the tone of a Socialist; in my opinion his bishop ought to be informed of it. As for her she plays her part just as cleverly with her pen as she played it with her tongue. 'I cannot disguise from myself that I am wrong in yielding.... Sad forebodings fill my mind when I think of the future.... I feel as if the first contemptuous look that is cast at my husband will destroy my happiness, though it may not disturb him.... As long as I was parted from him I could control my own weakness, I could accept my hard lot. But how can I resist him after having watched for weeks at his bedside; after having seen his first smile, and heard his first grateful words to me while I was slowly helping him back to life?'

"There is the tone which she takes through four closely written pages of nauseous humility and clap-trap sentiment! It is enough to make one despise women. Thank God, there is the contrast at hand to remind me of what is due to the better few among the sex. I feel that my mother and my sisters are doubly precious to me now. May I add, on the side of consolation, that I prize with hardly inferior gratitude the privilege of corresponding with you?

"Farewell for the present. I am too rudely shaken in my most cherished convictions, I am too depressed and disheartened, to write more. All good wishes go with you, dear Miss Roseberry, until we meet.

"Most truly yours,

"HORACE HOLMCROFT."

IV.

Extracts from the DIARY of THE REVEREND JULIAN GRAY.

FIRST EXTRACT.

...."A month to-day since we were married! I have only one thing to say: I would cheerfully go through all that I have suffered to live this one month over again. I never knew what happiness was until now. And better still, I have persuaded Mercy that it is all her doing. I have scattered her misgivings to the winds; she is obliged to submit to evidence, and to own that she can make the happiness of my life.

"We go back to London to-morrow. She regrets leaving the tranquil retirement of this remote sea-side place--she dreads change. I care nothing for it. It is all one to me where I go, so long as my wife is with me."

SECOND EXTRACT.

"The first cloud has risen. I entered the room unexpectedly just now, and found her in tears.

"With considerable difficulty I persuaded her to tell me what had happened. Are there any limits to the mischief that can be done by the tongue of a foolish woman? The landlady at my lodgings is the woman, in this case. Having no decided plans for the future as yet, we returned (most unfortunately, as the event has proved) to the rooms in London which I inhabited in my bachelor days. They are still mine for six weeks to come, and Mercy was unwilling to let me incur the expense of taking her to a hotel. At breakfast this morning I rashly congratulated myself (in my wife's hearing) on finding that a much smaller collection than usual of letters and cards had accumulated in my absence. Breakfast over, I was obliged to go out. Painfully sensitive, poor thing, to any change in my experience of the little world around me which it is possible to connect with the event of my marriage, Mercy questioned the landlady, in my absence, about the diminished number of my visitors and my correspondents. The woman seized the opportunity of gossiping about me and my affairs, and my wife's quick perception drew the right conclusion unerringly. My marriage has decided certain wise heads of families on discontinuing their social relations with me. The facts, unfortunately, speak for themselves. People who in former years habitually called upon me and invited me--or who, in the event

of my absence, habitually wrote to me at this season--have abstained with a remarkable unanimity from calling, inviting, or writing now.

"It would have been sheer waste of time--to say nothing of its also implying a want of confidence in my wife--if I had attempted to set things right by disputing Mercy's conclusion. I could only satisfy her that not so much as the shadow of disappointment or mortification rested on my mind. In this way I have, to some extent, succeeded in composing my poor darling. But the wound has been inflicted, and the wound is felt. There is no disguising that result. I must face it boldly.

"Trifling as this incident is in my estimation, it has decided me on one point already. In shaping my future course I am now resolved to act on my own convictions--in preference to taking the well-meant advice of such friends as are still left to me.

"All my little success in life has been gained in the pulpit. I am what is termed a popular preacher--but I have never, in my secret self, felt any exultation in my own notoriety, or any extraordinary respect for the means by which it has been won. In the first place, I have a very low idea of the importance of oratory as an intellectual accomplishment. There is no other art in which the conditions of success are so easy of attainment; there is no other art in the practice of which so much that is purely superficial passes itself off habitually for something that claims to be profound. Then, again, how poor it is in the results which it achieves! Take my own case. How often (for example) have I thundered with all my heart and soul against the wicked extravagance of dress among women--against their filthy false hair and their nauseous powders and paints! How often (to take another example) have I denounced the mercenary and material spirit of the age--the habitual corruptions and dishonesties of commerce, in high places and in low! What good have I done? I have delighted the very people whom it was my object to rebuke. 'What a charming sermon!' 'More eloquent than ever!' 'I used to dread the sermon at the other church--do you know, I quite look forward to it now.' That is the effect I produce on Sunday. On Monday the women are off to the milliners to spend more money than ever; the city men are off to business to make more money than ever--while my grocer, loud in my praises in his Sunday coat, turns up his week-day sleeves and adulterates his favorite preacher's sugar as cheerfully as usual!

"I have often, in past years, felt the objections to pursuing my career which are here indicated. They were bitterly present to my mind when I resigned my curacy, and they strongly influence me now.

"I am weary of my cheaply won success in the pulpit. I am weary of society as I find it in my time. I felt some respect for myself, and some heart and hope in my works among the miserable wretches in Green Anchor Fields. But I can not, and must not, return among them: I have no right, now, to trifle with my health and my life. I must go back to my preaching, or I must leave England. Among a primitive people, away from the cities--in the far and fertile West of the great American continent--I might live happily with my wife, and do good among my neighbors, secure of providing for our wants out of the modest little income which is almost useless to me here. In the life which I thus picture to myself I see love, peace, health, and duties and occupations that are worthy of a Christian man. What prospect is before me if I take the advice of my friends and stay here? Work of which I am weary, because I have long since ceased to respect it; petty malice that strikes at me through my wife, and mortifies and humiliates her, turn where she may. If I had only myself to think of, I might defy the worst that malice can do. But I have Mercy to think of--Mercy, whom I love better than my own life! Women live, poor things, in the opinions of others. I have had one warning already of what my wife is likely to suffer at the hands of my 'friends'--Heaven forgive me for misusing the word! Shall I deliberately expose her to fresh mortifications?--and this for the sake of returning to a career the rewards of which I no longer prize? No! We will both be happy--we will both be free! God is merciful, Nature is kind, Love is true, in the New World as well as the Old. To the New World we will go!"

THIRD EXTRACT.

"I hardly know whether I have done right or wrong. I mentioned yesterday to Lady Janet the cold reception of me on my return to London, and the painful sense of it felt by my wife.

"My aunt looks at the matter from her own peculiar point of view, and makes light of it accordingly. 'You never did, and never will, understand Society, Julian,' said her ladyship. 'These poor stupid people simply don't know what to do. They are waiting to be told by a person of distinction whether they are, or are not, to recognize your marriage. In plain English, they are waiting to be led by Me. Consider it done. I will lead them.'

"I thought my aunt was joking. The event of to-day has shown me that she is terribly in earnest. Lady Janet has issued invitations for one of her grand balls at Mablethorpe House; and she has caused the report to be circulated everywhere that the object of the festival is 'to celebrate the marriage of Mr. and Mrs. Julian Gray!'

"I at first refused to be present. To my amazement, however, Mercy sides with my aunt. She reminds me of all that we both owe to Lady Janet; and she has persuaded me to alter my mind. We are to go to the ball--at my wife express request!

"The meaning of this, as I interpret it, is that my poor love is still pursued in secret by the dread that my marriage has injured me in the general estimation. She will suffer anything, risk anything, believe anything, to be freed from that one haunting doubt. Lady Janet predicts a social triumph; and my wife's despair--not my wife's conviction--accepts the prophecy. As for me, I am prepared for the result. It will end in our going to the New World, and trying Society in its infancy, among the forests and the plains. I shall quietly prepare for our departure, and own what I have done at the right time--that is to say, when the ball is over."

FOURTH EXTRACT.

"I have met with the man for my purpose--an old college friend of mine, now partner in a firm of ship-owners, largely concerned in emigration.

"One of their vessels sails for America, from the port of London, in a fortnight, touching at Plymouth. By a fortunate coincidence, Lady Janet's ball takes place in a fortnight. I see my way.

"Helped by the kindness of my friend, I have arranged to have a cabin kept in reserve, on payment of a small deposit. If the ball ends (as I believe it will) in new mortifications for Mercy--do what they may, I defy them to mortify me--I have only to say the word by telegraph, and we shall catch the ship at Plymouth.

"I know the effect it will have when I break the news to her, but I am prepared with my remedy. The pages of my diary, written in past years, will show plainly enough that it is not she who is driving me away from England. She will see the longing in me for other work and other scenes expressing itself over and over again long before the time when we first met."

FIFTH EXTRACT.

"Mercy's ball dress--a present from kind Lady Janet--is finished. I was allowed to see the first trial, or preliminary rehearsal, of this work of art. I don't in the least understand the merits of silk and lace; but one thing I know--my wife will be the most beautiful woman at the ball.

"The same day I called on Lady Janet to thank her, and encountered a new revelation of the wayward and original character of my dear old aunt.

"She was on the point of tearing up a letter when I went into her room. Seeing me, she suspended her purpose and handed me the letter. It was in Mercy's handwriting. Lady Janet pointed to a passage on the last page. 'Tell your wife, with my love,' she said, 'that I am the most obstinate woman of the two. I positively refuse to read her, as I positively refuse to listen to her, whenever she attempts to return to that one subject. Now give me the letter back.' I gave it back, and saw it torn up before my face. The 'one subject' prohibited to Mercy as sternly as ever is still the subject of the personation of Grace Roseberry! Nothing could have been more naturally introduced, or more delicately managed, than my wife's brief reference to the subject. No matter. The reading of the first line was enough. Lady Janet shut her eyes and destroyed the letter--Lady Janet is determined to live and die absolutely ignorant of the true story of 'Mercy Merrick.' What unanswerable riddles we are! Is it wonderful if we perpetually fail to understand one another?"

SIXTH EXTRACT.

"The morning after the ball.

"It is done and over. Society has beaten Lady Janet. I have neither patience nor time to write at length of it. We leave for Plymouth by the afternoon express.

"We were rather late in arriving at the ball. The magnificent rooms were filling fast. Walking through them with my wife, she drew my attention to a circumstance which I had not noticed at the time. 'Julian,' she said, 'look round among the lades, and tell me if you see anything strange.' As I looked round the band began playing a waltz. I observed that a few people only passed by us to the dancing-room. I noticed next that of those few fewer still were young. At last it burst upon me. With certain exceptions (so rare as to prove the rule), there were no young girls at Lady Janet's ball. I took Mercy at once back to the reception-room. Lady Janet's face showed that she, too, was aware of what had happened. The guests were still arriving. We received the men and their wives, the men and their mothers, the men and their grandmothers--but, in place of their unmarried daughters, elaborate excuses, offered with a shameless politeness wonderful to see. Yes! This was how the matrons in high life had got over the difficulty of meeting Mrs. Julian Gray at Lady Janet's house.

"Let me do strict justice to every one. The ladies who were present showed

the needful respect for their hostess. They did their duty--no, overdid it, is perhaps the better phrase.

"I really had no adequate idea of the coarseness and rudeness which have filtered their way through society in these later times until I saw the reception accorded to my wife. The days of prudery and prejudice are days gone by. Excessive amiability and excessive liberality are the two favorite assumptions of the modern generation. To see the women expressing their liberal forgetfulness of my wifely misfortunes, and the men their amiable anxiety to encourage her husband; to hear the same set phrases repeated in every room--'So charmed to make your acquaintance, Mrs. Gray; so much obliged to dear Lady Janet for giving us this opportunity!--Julian, old man, what a beautiful creature! I envy you; upon my honor, I envy you!'--to receive this sort of welcome, emphasized by obtrusive hand-shakings, sometimes actually by downright kissings of my wife, and then to look round and see that not one in thirty of these very people had brought their unmarried daughters to the ball, was, I honestly believe, to see civilized human nature in its basest conceivable aspect. The New World may have its disappointments in store for us, but it cannot possibly show us any spectacle so abject as the spectacle which we witnessed last night at my aunt's ball.

"Lady Janet marked her sense of the proceeding adopted by her guests by leaving them to themselves. Her guests remained and supped heartily notwithstanding. They all knew by experience that there were no stale dishes and no cheap wines at Mablethorpe House. They drank to the end of the bottle, and they ate to the last truffle in the dish.

"Mercy and I had an interview with my aunt upstairs before we left. I felt it necessary to state plainly my resolution to leave England. The scene that followed was so painful that I cannot prevail on myself to return to it in these pages. My wife is reconciled to our departure; and Lady Janet accompanies us as far as Plymouth--these are the results. No words can express my sense of relief, now that it is all settled. The one sorrow I shall carry away with me from the shores of England will be the sorrow of parting with dear, warm-hearted Lady Janet. At her age it is a parting for life.

"So closes my connection with my own country. While I have Mercy by my side I face the unknown future, certain of carrying my happiness with me, go where I may. We shall find five hundred adventurers like ourselves when we join the emigrant ship, for whom their native land has no occupation and no home. Gentlemen of the Statistical Department, add two more to the number of social failures produced by England in the year of our Lord

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eighteen hundred and seventy-one--Julian Gray and Mercy Merrick."

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