

CHAPTER X.

IN THE GALLERY OF OLD IRON.

As one goes into the South Kensington Art Museum from the Brompton Road, the Gallery of Old Iron is overhead to the right. But the way thither is exceedingly devious and not to be revealed to everybody, since the young people who pursue science and art thereabouts set a peculiar value on its seclusion. The gallery is long and narrow and dark, and set with iron gates, iron-bound chests, locks, bolts and bars, fantastic great keys, lamps, and the like, and over the balustrade one may lean and talk of one's finer feelings and regard Michael Angelo's horned Moses, or Trajan's Column (in plaster) rising gigantic out of the hall below and far above the level of the gallery. And here, on a Wednesday afternoon, were Lewisham and Miss Heydinger, the Wednesday afternoon immediately following that paper upon Socialism, that you saw announced on the notice-board in the hall.

The paper had been an immense success, closely reasoned, delivered with a disciplined emotion, the redoubtable Smithers practically converted, the reply after the debate methodical and complete, and it may be there were symptoms of that febrile affection known to the vulgar as "swelled 'ed." Lewisham regarded Moses and spoke of his future. Miss Heydinger for the most part watched his face.

"And then?" said Miss Heydinger.

"One must bring these views prominently before people. I believe still in pamphlets. I have thought ..." Lewisham paused, it is to be hoped through modesty.

"Yes?" said Miss Heydinger.

"Well--Luther, you know. There is room, I think, in Socialism, for a Luther."

"Yes," said Miss Heydinger, imagining it. "Yes--that would be a grand way."

So it seemed to many people in those days. But eminent reformers have been now for more than seven years going about the walls of the Social Jericho, blowing their own trumpets and shouting--with such small result beyond incidental displays of ill-temper within, that it is hard to recover the fine hopefulness of those departed days.

"Yes," said Miss Heydinger. "That would be a grand way."

Lewisham appreciated the quality of personal emotion in her voice. He turned his face towards her, and saw unstinted admiration in her eyes. "It would be a great thing to do," he said, and added, quite

modestly, "if only one could do it."

"You could do it."

"You think I could?" Lewisham blushed vividly--with pleasure.

"I do. Certainly you could set out to do it. Even to fail hopelessly would be Great. Sometimes ..."

She hesitated. He looked expectation. "I think sometimes it is greater even to fail than to succeed."

"I don't see that," said the proposed Luther, and his eyes went back to the Moses. She was about to speak, and changed her mind.

Contemplative pause.

"And then, when a great number of people have heard of your views?" she said presently.

"Then I suppose we must form a party and ... bring things about."

Another pause--full, no doubt, of elevated thoughts.

"I say," said Lewisham quite suddenly. "You do put--well--courage into a chap. I shouldn't have done that Socialism paper if it hadn't been

for you." He turned round and stood leaning with his back to the Moses, and smiling at her. "You do help a fellow," he said.

That was one of the vivid moments of Miss Heydinger's life. She changed colour a little. "Do I?" she said, standing straight and awkward and looking into his face, "I'm ... glad."

"I haven't thanked you for your letters," said Lewisham, "And I've been thinking ..."

"Yes?"

"We're first-rate friends, aren't we? The best of friends."

She held out her hand and drew a breath. "Yes," she said as they gripped. He hesitated whether to hold her hand. He looked into her eyes, and at that moment she would have given three-quarters of the years she had still to live, to have had eyes and features that could have expressed her. Instead, she felt her face hard, the little muscles of her mouth twitching insubordinate, and fancied that her self-consciousness made her eyes dishonest.

"What I mean," said Lewisham, "is--that this will go on. We're always going to be friends, side by side."

"Always. Just as I am able to help you--I will help you. However I can

help you, I will."

"We two," said Lewisham, gripping her hand.

Her face lit. Her eyes were for a moment touched with the beauty of simple emotion. "We two," she said, and her lips trembled and her throat seemed to swell. She snatched her hand back suddenly and turned her face away. Abruptly she walked towards the end of the gallery, and he saw her fumbling for her handkerchief in the folds of the green and black dress.

She was going to cry!

It set Lewisham marvelling--this totally inappropriate emotion.

He followed her and stood by her. Why cry? He hoped no one would come into the little gallery until her handkerchief was put away.

Nevertheless he felt vaguely flattered. She controlled herself, dashed her tears away, and smiled bravely at him with reddened eyes. "I'm sorry," she said, gulping.

"I am so glad," she explained.

"But we will fight together. We two. I can help you. I know I can help you. And there is such Work to be done in the world!"

"You are very good to help me," said Lewisham, quoting a phrase from what he had intended to say before he found out that he had a hold upon her emotions.

"No!

"Has it ever occurred to you," she said abruptly, "how little a woman can do alone in the world?"

"Or a man," he answered after a momentary meditation.

So it was Lewisham enrolled his first ally in the cause of the red tie--of the red tie and of the Greatness that was presently to come. His first ally; for hitherto--save for the indiscretion of his mural inscriptions--he had made a secret of his private ambitions. In that now half-forgotten love affair at Whortley even, he had, in spite of the considerable degree of intimacy attained, said absolutely nothing about his Career.