CHAPTER THE SEVENTH

IDEALS AND A REALITY

Part 1

And now for some weeks Ann Veronica was to test her market value in the world. She went about in a negligent November London that had become very dark and foggy and greasy and forbidding indeed, and tried to find that modest but independent employment she had so rashly assumed. She went about, intent-looking and self-possessed, trim and fine, concealing her emotions whatever they were, as the realities of her position opened out before her. Her little bed-sitting-room was like a lair, and she went out from it into this vast, dun world, with its smoke-gray houses, its glaring streets of shops, its dark streets of homes, its orange-lit windows, under skies of dull copper or muddy gray or black, much as an animal goes out to seek food. She would come back and write letters, carefully planned and written letters, or read some book she had fetched from Mudie's--she had invested a half-guinea with Mudie's--or sit over her fire and think.

Slowly and reluctantly she came to realize that Vivie Warren was what is called an "ideal." There were no such girls and no such positions. No work that offered was at all of the quality she had vaguely postulated

for herself. With such qualifications as she possessed, two chief channels of employment lay open, and neither attracted her, neither seemed really to offer a conclusive escape from that subjection to mankind against which, in the person of her father, she was rebelling. One main avenue was for her to become a sort of salaried accessory wife or mother, to be a governess or an assistant schoolmistress, or a very high type of governess-nurse. The other was to go into business--into a photographer's reception-room, for example, or a costumer's or hat-shop. The first set of occupations seemed to her to be altogether too domestic and restricted; for the latter she was dreadfully handicapped by her want of experience. And also she didn't like them. She didn't like the shops, she didn't like the other women's faces; she thought the smirking men in frock-coats who dominated these establishments the most intolerable persons she had ever had to face. One called her very distinctly "My dear!"

Two secretarial posts did indeed seem to offer themselves in which, at least, there was no specific exclusion of womanhood; one was under a Radical Member of Parliament, and the other under a Harley Street doctor, and both men declined her proffered services with the utmost civility and admiration and terror. There was also a curious interview at a big hotel with a middle-aged, white-powdered woman, all covered with jewels and reeking of scent, who wanted a Companion. She did not think Ann Veronica would do as her companion.

And nearly all these things were fearfully ill-paid. They carried no

more than bare subsistence wages; and they demanded all her time and energy. She had heard of women journalists, women writers, and so forth; but she was not even admitted to the presence of the editors she demanded to see, and by no means sure that if she had been she could have done any work they might have given her. One day she desisted from her search and went unexpectedly to the Tredgold College. Her place was not filled; she had been simply noted as absent, and she did a comforting day of admirable dissection upon the tortoise. She was so interested, and this was such a relief from the trudging anxiety of her search for work, that she went on for a whole week as if she was still living at home. Then a third secretarial opening occurred and renewed her hopes again: a position as amanuensis--with which some of the lighter duties of a nurse were combined--to an infirm gentleman of means living at Twickenham, and engaged upon a great literary research to prove that the "Faery Queen" was really a treatise upon molecular chemistry written in a peculiar and picturesquely handled cipher.

Part 2

Now, while Ann Veronica was taking these soundings in the industrial sea, and measuring herself against the world as it is, she was also making extensive explorations among the ideas and attitudes of a number of human beings who seemed to be largely concerned with the world as it

ought to be. She was drawn first by Miss Miniver, and then by her own natural interest, into a curious stratum of people who are busied with dreams of world progress, of great and fundamental changes, of a New Age that is to replace all the stresses and disorders of contemporary life.

Miss Miniver learned of her flight and got her address from the Widgetts. She arrived about nine o'clock the next evening in a state of tremulous enthusiasm. She followed the landlady half way up-stairs, and called up to Ann Veronica, "May I come up? It's me! You know--Nettie Miniver!" She appeared before Ann Veronica could clearly recall who Nettie Miniver might be.

There was a wild light in her eye, and her straight hair was out demonstrating and suffragetting upon some independent notions of its own. Her fingers were bursting through her gloves, as if to get at once into touch with Ann Veronica. "You're Glorious!" said Miss Miniver in tones of rapture, holding a hand in each of hers and peering up into Ann Veronica's face. "Glorious! You're so calm, dear, and so resolute, so serene!

"It's girls like you who will show them what We are," said Miss Miniver; "girls whose spirits have not been broken!"

Ann Veronica sunned herself a little in this warmth.

"I was watching you at Morningside Park, dear," said Miss Miniver. "I am

getting to watch all women. I thought then perhaps you didn't care, that you were like so many of them. NOW it's just as though you had grown up suddenly."

She stopped, and then suggested: "I wonder--I should love--if it was anything I said."

She did not wait for Ann Veronica's reply. She seemed to assume that it must certainly be something she had said. "They all catch on," she said. "It spreads like wildfire. This is such a grand time! Such a glorious time! There never was such a time as this! Everything seems so close to fruition, so coming on and leading on! The Insurrection of Women! They spring up everywhere. Tell me all that happened, one sister-woman to another."

She chilled Ann Veronica a little by that last phrase, and yet the magnetism of her fellowship and enthusiasm was very strong; and it was pleasant to be made out a heroine after so much expostulation and so many secret doubts.

But she did not listen long; she wanted to talk. She sat, crouched together, by the corner of the hearthrug under the bookcase that supported the pig's skull, and looked into the fire and up at Ann Veronica's face, and let herself go. "Let us put the lamp out," she said; "the flames are ever so much better for talking," and Ann Veronica agreed. "You are coming right out into life--facing it all."

Ann Veronica sat with her chin on her hand, red-lit and saying little, and Miss Miniver discoursed. As she talked, the drift and significance of what she was saying shaped itself slowly to Ann Veronica's apprehension. It presented itself in the likeness of a great, gray, dull world--a brutal, superstitious, confused, and wrong-headed world, that hurt people and limited people unaccountably. In remote times and countries its evil tendencies had expressed themselves in the form of tyrannies, massacres, wars, and what not; but just at present in England they shaped as commercialism and competition, silk hats, suburban morals, the sweating system, and the subjection of women. So far the thing was acceptable enough. But over against the world Miss Miniver assembled a small but energetic minority, the Children of Light--people she described as "being in the van," or "altogether in the van," about whom Ann Veronica's mind was disposed to be more sceptical.

Everything, Miss Miniver said, was "working up," everything was "coming on"--the Higher Thought, the Simple Life, Socialism, Humanitarianism, it was all the same really. She loved to be there, taking part in it all, breathing it, being it. Hitherto in the world's history there had been precursors of this Progress at great intervals, voices that had spoken and ceased, but now it was all coming on together in a rush. She mentioned, with familiar respect, Christ and Buddha and Shelley and Nietzsche and Plato. Pioneers all of them. Such names shone brightly in the darkness, with black spaces of unilluminated emptiness about them, as stars shine in the night; but now--now it was different; now it was

dawn--the real dawn.

"The women are taking it up," said Miss Miniver; "the women and the common people, all pressing forward, all roused."

Ann Veronica listened with her eyes on the fire.

"Everybody is taking it up," said Miss Miniver. "YOU had to come in. You couldn't help it. Something drew you. Something draws everybody. From suburbs, from country towns--everywhere. I see all the Movements. As far as I can, I belong to them all. I keep my finger on the pulse of things."

Ann Veronica said nothing.

"The dawn!" said Miss Miniver, with her glasses reflecting the fire like pools of blood-red flame.

"I came to London," said Ann Veronica, "rather because of my own difficulty. I don't know that I understand altogether."

"Of course you don't," said Miss Miniver, gesticulating triumphantly with her thin hand and thinner wrist, and patting Ann Veronica's knee. "Of course you don't. That's the wonder of it. But you will, you will. You must let me take you to things--to meetings and things, to conferences and talks. Then you will begin to see. You will begin to see

it all opening out. I am up to the ears in it all--every moment I can spare. I throw up work--everything! I just teach in one school, one good school, three days a week. All the rest--Movements! I can live now on fourpence a day. Think how free that leaves me to follow things up! I must take you everywhere. I must take you to the Suffrage people, and the Tolstoyans, and the Fabians."

"I have heard of the Fabians," said Ann Veronica.

"It's THE Society!" said Miss Miniver. "It's the centre of the intellectuals. Some of the meetings are wonderful! Such earnest, beautiful women! Such deep-browed men!... And to think that there they are making history! There they are putting together the plans of a new world. Almos light-heartedly. There is Shaw, and Webb, and Wilkins the author, and Toomer, and Doctor Tumpany--the most wonderful people! There you see them discussing, deciding, planning! Just think--THEY ARE MAKING A NEW WORLD!"

"But ARE these people going to alter everything?" said Ann Veronica.

"What else can happen?" asked Miss Miniver, with a little weak gesture at the glow. "What else can possibly happen--as things are going now?"

Part 3

Miss Miniver let Ann Veronica into her peculiar levels of the world with so enthusiastic a generosity that it seemed ingratitude to remain critical. Indeed, almost insensibly Ann Veronica became habituated to the peculiar appearance and the peculiar manners of the people "in the van." The shock of their intellectual attitude was over, usage robbed it of the first quaint effect of deliberate unreason. They were in many respects so right; she clung to that, and shirked more and more the paradoxical conviction that they were also somehow, and even in direct relation to that rightness, absurd.

Very central in Miss Miniver's universe were the Goopes. The Goopes were the oddest little couple conceivable, following a fruitarian career upon an upper floor in Theobald's Road. They were childless and servantless, and they had reduced simple living to the finest of fine arts. Mr. Goopes, Ann Veronica gathered, was a mathematical tutor and visited schools, and his wife wrote a weekly column in New Ideas upon vegetarian cookery, vivisection, degeneration, the lacteal secretion, appendicitis, and the Higher Thought generally, and assisted in the management of a fruit shop in the Tottenham Court Road. Their very furniture had mysteriously a high-browed quality, and Mr. Goopes when at home dressed simply in a pajama-shaped suit of canvas sacking tied with brown ribbons, while his wife wore a purple djibbah with a richly embroidered yoke. He was a small, dark, reserved man, with a large inflexible-looking convex forehead, and his wife was very pink and

high-spirited, with one of those chins that pass insensibly into a full, strong neck. Once a week, every Saturday, they had a little gathering from nine till the small hours, just talk and perhaps reading aloud and fruitarian refreshments--chestnut sandwiches buttered with nut tose, and so forth--and lemonade and unfermented wine; and to one of these symposia Miss Miniver after a good deal of preliminary solicitude, conducted Ann Veronica.

She was introduced, perhaps a little too obviously for her taste, as a girl who was standing out against her people, to a gathering that consisted of a very old lady with an extremely wrinkled skin and a deep voice who was wearing what appeared to Ann Veronica's inexperienced eye to be an antimacassar upon her head, a shy, blond young man with a narrow forehead and glasses, two undistinguished women in plain skirts and blouses, and a middle-aged couple, very fat and alike in black, Mr. and Mrs. Alderman Dunstable, of the Borough Council of Marylebone. These were seated in an imperfect semicircle about a very copper-adorned fireplace, surmounted by a carved wood inscription:

"DO IT NOW."

And to them were presently added a roguish-looking young man, with reddish hair, an orange tie, and a fluffy tweed suit, and others who, in Ann Veronica's memory, in spite of her efforts to recall details, remained obstinately just "others."

The talk was animated, and remained always brilliant in form even when it ceased to be brilliant in substance. There were moments when Ann Veronica rather more than suspected the chief speakers to be, as school-boys say, showing off at her.

They talked of a new substitute for dripping in vegetarian cookery that Mrs. Goopes was convinced exercised an exceptionally purifying influence on the mind. And then they talked of Anarchism and Socialism, and whether the former was the exact opposite of the latter or only a higher form. The reddish-haired young man contributed allusions to the Hegelian philosophy that momentarily confused the discussion. Then Alderman Dunstable, who had hitherto been silent, broke out into speech and went off at a tangent, and gave his personal impressions of quite a number of his fellow-councillors. He continued to do this for the rest of the evening intermittently, in and out, among other topics. He addressed himself chiefly to Goopes, and spoke as if in reply to long-sustained inquiries on the part of Goopes into the personnel of the Marylebone Borough Council. "If you were to ask me," he would say, "I should say Blinders is straight. An ordinary type, of course--"

Mrs. Dunstable's contributions to the conversation were entirely in the form of nods; whenever Alderman Dunstable praised or blamed she nodded twice or thrice, according to the requirements of his emphasis. And she seemed always to keep one eye on Ann Veronica's dress. Mrs. Goopes disconcerted the Alderman a little by abruptly challenging the roguish-looking young man in the orange tie (who, it seemed, was the

assistant editor of New Ideas) upon a critique of Nietzsche and Tolstoy that had appeared in his paper, in which doubts had been cast upon the perfect sincerity of the latter. Everybody seemed greatly concerned about the sincerity of Tolstoy.

Miss Miniver said that if once she lost her faith in Tolstoy's sincerity, nothing she felt would really matter much any more, and she appealed to Ann Veronica whether she did not feel the same; and Mr. Goopes said that we must distinguish between sincerity and irony, which was often indeed no more than sincerity at the sublimated level.

Alderman Dunstable said that sincerity was often a matter of opportunity, and illustrated the point to the fair young man with an anecdote about Blinders on the Dust Destructor Committee, during which the young man in the orange tie succeeded in giving the whole discussion a daring and erotic flavor by questioning whether any one could be perfectly sincere in love.

Miss Miniver thought that there was no true sincerity except in love, and appealed to Ann Veronica, but the young man in the orange tie went on to declare that it was quite possible to be sincerely in love with two people at the same time, although perhaps on different planes with each individual, and deceiving them both. But that brought Mrs. Goopes down on him with the lesson Titian teaches so beautifully in his "Sacred and Profane Love," and became quite eloquent upon the impossibility of any deception in the former.

Then they discoursed on love for a time, and Alderman Dunstable, turning back to the shy, blond young man and speaking in undertones of the utmost clearness, gave a brief and confidential account of an unfounded rumor of the bifurcation of the affections of Blinders that had led to a situation of some unpleasantness upon the Borough Council.

The very old lady in the antimacassar touched Ann Veronica's arm suddenly, and said, in a deep, arch voice:

"Talking of love again; spring again, love again. Oh! you young people!"

The young man with the orange tie, in spite of Sisyphus-like efforts on the part of Goopes to get the topic on to a higher plane, displayed great persistence in speculating upon the possible distribution of the affections of highly developed modern types.

The old lady in the antimacassar said, abruptly, "Ah! you young people, you young people, if you only knew!" and then laughed and then mused in a marked manner; and the young man with the narrow forehead and glasses cleared his throat and asked the young man in the orange tie whether he believed that Platonic love was possible. Mrs. Goopes said she believed in nothing else, and with that she glanced at Ann Veronica, rose a little abruptly, and directed Goopes and the shy young man in the handing of refreshments.

But the young man with the orange tie remained in his place, disputing whether the body had not something or other which he called its legitimate claims. And from that they came back by way of the Kreutzer Sonata and Resurrection to Tolstoy again.

So the talk went on. Goopes, who had at first been a little reserved, resorted presently to the Socratic method to restrain the young man with the orange tie, and bent his forehead over him, and brought out at last very clearly from him that the body was only illusion and everything nothing but just spirit and molecules of thought. It became a sort of duel at last between them, and all the others sat and listened--every one, that is, except the Alderman, who had got the blond young man into a corner by the green-stained dresser with the aluminum things, and was sitting with his back to every one else, holding one hand over his mouth for greater privacy, and telling him, with an accent of confidential admission, in whispers of the chronic struggle between the natural modesty and general inoffensiveness of the Borough Council and the social evil in Marylebone.

So the talk went on, and presently they were criticising novelists, and certain daring essays of Wilkins got their due share of attention, and then they were discussing the future of the theatre. Ann Veronica intervened a little in the novelist discussion with a defence of Esmond and a denial that the Egoist was obscure, and when she spoke every one else stopped talking and listened. Then they deliberated whether Bernard Shaw ought to go into Parliament. And that brought them to vegetarianism

and teetotalism, and the young man in the orange tie and Mrs. Goopes had a great set-to about the sincerity of Chesterton and Belloc that was ended by Goopes showing signs of resuming the Socratic method.

And at last Ann Veronica and Miss Miniver came down the dark staircase and out into the foggy spaces of the London squares, and crossed Russell Square, Woburn Square, Gordon Square, making an oblique route to Ann Veronica's lodging. They trudged along a little hungry, because of the fruitarian refreshments, and mentally very active. And Miss Miniver fell discussing whether Goopes or Bernard Shaw or Tolstoy or Doctor Tumpany or Wilkins the author had the more powerful and perfect mind in existence at the present time. She was clear there were no other minds like them in all the world.

Part 4

Then one evening Ann Veronica went with Miss Miniver into the back seats of the gallery at Essex Hall, and heard and saw the giant leaders of the Fabian Society who are re-making the world: Bernard Shaw and Toomer and Doctor Tumpany and Wilkins the author, all displayed upon a platform. The place was crowded, and the people about her were almost equally made up of very good-looking and enthusiastic young people and a great variety of Goopes-like types. In the discussion there was the oddest

mixture of things that were personal and petty with an idealist devotion that was fine beyond dispute. In nearly every speech she heard was the same implication of great and necessary changes in the world--changes to be won by effort and sacrifice indeed, but surely to be won. And afterward she saw a very much larger and more enthusiastic gathering, a meeting of the advanced section of the woman movement in Caxton Hall, where the same note of vast changes in progress sounded; and she went to a soiree of the Dress Reform Association and visited a Food Reform Exhibition, where imminent change was made even alarmingly visible. The women's meeting was much more charged with emotional force than the Socialists'. Ann Veronica was carried off her intellectual and critical feet by it altogether, and applauded and uttered cries that subsequent reflection failed to endorse. "I knew you would feel it," said Miss Miniver, as they came away flushed and heated. "I knew you would begin to see how it all falls into place together."

It did begin to fall into place together. She became more and more alive, not so much to a system of ideas as to a big diffused impulse toward change, to a great discontent with and criticism of life as it is lived, to a clamorous confusion of ideas for reconstruction--reconstruction of the methods of business, of economic development, of the rules of property, of the status of children, of the clothing and feeding and teaching of every one; she developed a quite exaggerated consciousness of a multitude of people going about the swarming spaces of London with their minds full, their talk and gestures full, their very clothing charged with the suggestion of the urgency of

this pervasive project of alteration. Some indeed carried themselves, dressed themselves even, rather as foreign visitors from the land of "Looking Backward" and "News from Nowhere" than as the indigenous Londoners they were. For the most part these were detached people: men practising the plastic arts, young writers, young men in employment, a very large proportion of girls and women--self-supporting women or girls of the student class. They made a stratum into which Ann Veronica was now plunged up to her neck; it had become her stratum.

None of the things they said and did were altogether new to Ann Veronica, but now she got them massed and alive, instead of by glimpses or in books--alive and articulate and insistent. The London backgrounds, in Bloomsbury and Marylebone, against which these people went to and fro, took on, by reason of their gray facades, their implacably respectable windows and window-blinds, their reiterated unmeaning iron railings, a stronger and stronger suggestion of the flavor of her father at his most obdurate phase, and of all that she felt herself fighting against.

She was already a little prepared by her discursive reading and discussion under the Widgett influence for ideas and "movements," though temperamentally perhaps she was rather disposed to resist and criticise than embrace them. But the people among whom she was now thrown through the social exertions of Miss Miniver and the Widgetts--for Teddy and Hetty came up from Morningside Park and took her to an eighteen-penny dinner in Soho and introduced her to some art students, who were also

Socialists, and so opened the way to an evening of meandering talk in a studio--carried with them like an atmosphere this implication, not only that the world was in some stupid and even obvious way WRONG, with which indeed she was quite prepared to agree, but that it needed only a few pioneers to behave as such and be thoroughly and indiscriminately "advanced," for the new order to achieve itself.

When ninety per cent. out of the ten or twelve people one meets in a month not only say but feel and assume a thing, it is very hard not to fall into the belief that the thing is so. Imperceptibly almost Ann Veronica began to acquire the new attitude, even while her mind still resisted the felted ideas that went with it. And Miss Miniver began to sway her.

The very facts that Miss Miniver never stated an argument clearly, that she was never embarrassed by a sense of self-contradiction, and had little more respect for consistency of statement than a washerwoman has for wisps of vapor, which made Ann Veronica critical and hostile at their first encounter in Morningside Park, became at last with constant association the secret of Miss Miniver's growing influence. The brain tires of resistance, and when it meets again and again, incoherently active, the same phrases, the same ideas that it has already slain, exposed and dissected and buried, it becomes less and less energetic to repeat the operation. There must be something, one feels, in ideas that achieve persistently a successful resurrection. What Miss Miniver would have called the Higher Truth supervenes.

Yet through these talks, these meetings and conferences, these movements and efforts, Ann Veronica, for all that she went with her friend, and at times applauded with her enthusiastically, yet went nevertheless with eyes that grew more and more puzzled, and fine eyebrows more and more disposed to knit. She was with these movements--akin to them, she felt it at times intensely--and yet something eluded her. Morningside Park had been passive and defective; all this rushed about and was active, but it was still defective. It still failed in something. It did seem germane to the matter that so many of the people "in the van" were plain people, or faded people, or tired-looking people. It did affect the business that they all argued badly and were egotistical in their manners and inconsistent in their phrases. There were moments when she doubted whether the whole mass of movements and societies and gatherings and talks was not simply one coherent spectacle of failure protecting itself from abjection by the glamour of its own assertions. It happened that at the extremest point of Ann Veronica's social circle from the Widgetts was the family of the Morningside Park horse-dealer, a company of extremely dressy and hilarious young women, with one equestrian brother addicted to fancy waistcoats, cigars, and facial spots. These girls wore hats at remarkable angles and bows to startle and kill; they liked to be right on the spot every time and up to everything that was it from the very beginning and they rendered their conception of Socialists and all reformers by the words "positively frightening" and "weird." Well, it was beyond dispute that these words did convey a certain quality of the Movements in general amid which Miss Miniver

disported herself. They WERE weird. And yet for all that--

It got into Ann Veronica's nights at last and kept her awake, the perplexing contrast between the advanced thought and the advanced thinker. The general propositions of Socialism, for example, struck her as admirable, but she certainly did not extend her admiration to any of its exponents. She was still more stirred by the idea of the equal citizenship of men and women, by the realization that a big and growing organization of women were giving form and a generalized expression to just that personal pride, that aspiration for personal freedom and respect which had brought her to London; but when she heard Miss Miniver discoursing on the next step in the suffrage campaign, or read of women badgering Cabinet Ministers, padlocked to railings, or getting up in a public meeting to pipe out a demand for votes and be carried out kicking and screaming, her soul revolted. She could not part with dignity. Something as yet unformulated within her kept her estranged from all these practical aspects of her beliefs.

"Not for these things, O Ann Veronica, have you revolted," it said; "and this is not your appropriate purpose."

It was as if she faced a darkness in which was something very beautiful and wonderful as yet unimagined. The little pucker in her brows became more perceptible.

Part 5

In the beginning of December Ann Veronica began to speculate privately upon the procedure of pawning. She had decided that she would begin with her pearl necklace. She spent a very disagreeable afternoon and evening--it was raining fast outside, and she had very unwisely left her soundest pair of boots in the boothole of her father's house in Morningside Park--thinking over the economic situation and planning a course of action. Her aunt had secretly sent on to Ann Veronica some new warm underclothing, a dozen pairs of stockings, and her last winter's jacket, but the dear lady had overlooked those boots.

These things illuminated her situation extremely. Finally she decided upon a step that had always seemed reasonable to her, but that hitherto she had, from motives too faint for her to formulate, refrained from taking. She resolved to go into the City to Ramage and ask for his advice. And next morning she attired herself with especial care and neatness, found his address in the Directory at a post-office, and went to him.

She had to wait some minutes in an outer office, wherein three young men of spirited costume and appearance regarded her with ill-concealed curiosity and admiration. Then Ramage appeared with effusion, and ushered her into his inner apartment. The three young men exchanged

expressive glances.

The inner apartment was rather gracefully furnished with a thick, fine Turkish carpet, a good brass fender, a fine old bureau, and on the walls were engravings of two young girls' heads by Greuze, and of some modern picture of boys bathing in a sunlit pool.

"But this is a surprise!" said Ramage. "This is wonderful! I've been feeling that you had vanished from my world. Have you been away from Morningside Park?"

"I'm not interrupting you?"

"You are. Splendidly. Business exists for such interruptions. There you are, the best client's chair."

Ann Veronica sat down, and Ramage's eager eyes feasted on her.

"I've been looking out for you," he said. "I confess it."

She had not, she reflected, remembered how prominent his eyes were.

"I want some advice," said Ann Veronica.

"Yes?"

"You remember once, how we talked--at a gate on the Downs? We talked about how a girl might get an independent living."

"Yes, yes."

"Well, you see, something has happened at home."

She paused.

"Nothing has happened to Mr. Stanley?"

"I've fallen out with my father. It was about--a question of what I might do or might not do. He--In fact, he--he locked me in my room. Practically."

Her breath left her for a moment.

"I SAY!" said Mr. Ramage.

"I wanted to go to an art-student ball of which he disapproved."

"And why shouldn't you?"

"I felt that sort of thing couldn't go on. So I packed up and came to London next day."

"To a friend?"

"To lodgings--alone."

"I say, you know, you have some pluck. You did it on your own?"

Ann Veronica smiled. "Quite on my own," she said.

"It's magnificent!" He leaned back and regarded her with his head a little on one side. "By Jove!" he said, "there is something direct about you. I wonder if I should have locked you up if I'd been your father. Luckily I'm not. And you started out forthwith to fight the world and be a citizen on your own basis?" He came forward again and folded his hands under him on his desk.

"How has the world taken it?" he asked. "If I was the world I think I should have put down a crimson carpet, and asked you to say what you wanted, and generally walk over me. But the world didn't do that."

"Not exactly."

"It presented a large impenetrable back, and went on thinking about something else."

"It offered from fifteen to two-and-twenty shillings a week--for drudgery."

"The world has no sense of what is due to youth and courage. It never has had."

"Yes," said Ann Veronica. "But the thing is, I want a job."

"Exactly! And so you came along to me. And you see, I don't turn my back, and I am looking at you and thinking about you from top to toe."

"And what do you think I ought to do?"

"Exactly!" He lifted a paper-weight and dabbed it gently down again. "What ought you to do?"

"I've hunted up all sorts of things."

"The point to note is that fundamentally you don't want particularly to do it."

"I don't understand."

"You want to be free and so forth, yes. But you don't particularly want to do the job that sets you free--for its own sake. I mean that it doesn't interest you in itself."

"I suppose not."

"That's one of our differences. We men are like children. We can get absorbed in play, in games, in the business we do. That's really why we do them sometimes rather well and get on. But women--women as a rule don't throw themselves into things like that. As a matter of fact it isn't their affair. And as a natural consequence, they don't do so well, and they don't get on--and so the world doesn't pay them. They don't catch on to discursive interests, you see, because they are more serious, they are concentrated on the central reality of life, and a little impatient of its--its outer aspects. At least that, I think, is what makes a clever woman's independent career so much more difficult than a clever man's."

"She doesn't develop a specialty." Ann Veronica was doing her best to follow him.

"She has one, that's why. Her specialty is the central thing in life, it is life itself, the warmth of life, sex--and love."

He pronounced this with an air of profound conviction and with his eyes on Ann Veronica's face. He had an air of having told her a deep, personal secret. She winced as he thrust the fact at her, was about to answer, and checked herself. She colored faintly.

"That doesn't touch the question I asked you," she said. "It may be true, but it isn't quite what I have in mind."

"Of course not," said Ramage, as one who rouses himself from deep preoccupations And he began to question her in a business-like way upon the steps she had taken and the inquiries she had made. He displayed none of the airy optimism of their previous talk over the downland gate. He was helpful, but gravely dubious. "You see," he said, "from my point of view you're grown up--you're as old as all the goddesses and the contemporary of any man alive. But from the--the economic point of view you're a very young and altogether inexperienced person."

He returned to and developed that idea. "You're still," he said, "in the educational years. From the point of view of most things in the world of employment which a woman can do reasonably well and earn a living by, you're unripe and half-educated. If you had taken your degree, for example."

He spoke of secretarial work, but even there she would need to be able to do typing and shorthand. He made it more and more evident to her that her proper course was not to earn a salary but to accumulate equipment. "You see," he said, "you are like an inaccessible gold-mine in all this sort of matter. You're splendid stuff, you know, but you've got nothing ready to sell. That's the flat business situation."

He thought. Then he slapped his hand on his desk and looked up with the air of a man struck by a brilliant idea. "Look here," he said, protruding his eyes; "why get anything to do at all just yet? Why, if

you must be free, why not do the sensible thing? Make yourself worth a decent freedom. Go on with your studies at the Imperial College, for example, get a degree, and make yourself good value. Or become a thorough-going typist and stenographer and secretarial expert."

"But I can't do that."

"Why not?"

"You see, if I do go home my father objects to the College, and as for typing--"

"Don't go home."

"Yes, but you forget; how am I to live?"

"Easily. Easily.... Borrow.... From me."

"I couldn't do that," said Ann Veronica, sharply.

"I see no reason why you shouldn't."

"It's impossible."

"As one friend to another. Men are always doing it, and if you set up to be a man--"

"No, it's absolutely out of the question, Mr. Ramage." And Ann Veronica's face was hot.

Ramage pursed his rather loose lips and shrugged his shoulders, with his eyes fixed steadily upon her. "Well anyhow--I don't see the force of your objection, you know. That's my advice to you. Here I am. Consider you've got resources deposited with me. Perhaps at the first blush--it strikes you as odd. People are brought up to be so shy about money. As though it was indelicate--it's just a sort of shyness. But here I am to draw upon. Here I am as an alternative either to nasty work--or going home."

"It's very kind of you--" began Ann Veronica.

"Not a bit. Just a friendly polite suggestion. I don't suggest any philanthropy. I shall charge you five per cent., you know, fair and square."

Ann Veronica opened her lips quickly and did not speak. But the five per cent. certainly did seem to improve the aspect of Ramage's suggestion.

"Well, anyhow, consider it open." He dabbed with his paper-weight again, and spoke in an entirely indifferent tone. "And now tell me, please, how you eloped from Morningside Park. How did you get your luggage out of the house? Wasn't it--wasn't it rather in some respects--rather a lark?

It's one of my regrets for my lost youth. I never ran away from anywhere with anybody anywhen. And now--I suppose I should be considered too old. I don't feel it.... Didn't you feel rather EVENTFUL--in the train--coming up to Waterloo?"

Part 6

Before Christmas Ann Veronica had gone to Ramage again and accepted this offer she had at first declined.

Many little things had contributed to that decision. The chief influence was her awakening sense of the need of money. She had been forced to buy herself that pair of boots and a walking-skirt, and the pearl necklace at the pawnbrokers' had yielded very disappointingly. And, also, she wanted to borrow that money. It did seem in so many ways exactly what Ramage said it was--the sensible thing to do. There it was--to be borrowed. It would put the whole adventure on a broader and better footing; it seemed, indeed, almost the only possible way in which she might emerge from her rebellion with anything like success. If only for the sake of her argument with her home, she wanted success. And why, after all, should she not borrow money from Ramage?

It was so true what he said; middle-class people WERE ridiculously

squeamish about money. Why should they be?

She and Ramage were friends, very good friends. If she was in a position to help him she would help him; only it happened to be the other way round. He was in a position to help her. What was the objection?

She found it impossible to look her own diffidence in the face. So she went to Ramage and came to the point almost at once.

"Can you spare me forty pounds?" she said.

Mr. Ramage controlled his expression and thought very quickly.

"Agreed," he said, "certainly," and drew a checkbook toward him.

"It's best," he said, "to make it a good round sum.

"I won't give you a check though--Yes, I will. I'll give you an uncrossed check, and then you can get it at the bank here, quite close by.... You'd better not have all the money on you; you had better open a small account in the post-office and draw it out a fiver at a time. That won't involve references, as a bank account would--and all that sort of thing. The money will last longer, and--it won't bother you."

He stood up rather close to her and looked into her eyes. He seemed to

be trying to understand something very perplexing and elusive. "It's jolly," he said, "to feel you have come to me. It's a sort of guarantee of confidence. Last time--you made me feel snubbed."

He hesitated, and went off at a tangent. "There's no end of things I'd like to talk over with you. It's just upon my lunch-time. Come and have lunch with me."

Ann Veronica fenced for a moment. "I don't want to take up your time."

"We won't go to any of these City places. They're just all men, and no one is safe from scandal. But I know a little place where we'll get a little quiet talk."

Ann Veronica for some indefinable reason did not want to lunch with him, a reason indeed so indefinable that she dismissed it, and Ramage went through the outer office with her, alert and attentive, to the vivid interest of the three clerks. The three clerks fought for the only window, and saw her whisked into a hansom. Their subsequent conversation is outside the scope of our story.

"Ritter's!" said Ramage to the driver, "Dean Street."

It was rare that Ann Veronica used hansoms, and to be in one was itself eventful and exhilarating. She liked the high, easy swing of the thing over its big wheels, the quick clatter-patter of the horse, the passage

of the teeming streets. She admitted her pleasure to Ramage.

And Ritter's, too, was very amusing and foreign and discreet; a little rambling room with a number of small tables, with red electric light shades and flowers. It was an overcast day, albeit not foggy, and the electric light shades glowed warmly, and an Italian waiter with insufficient English took Ramage's orders, and waited with an appearance of affection. Ann Veronica thought the whole affair rather jolly. Ritter sold better food than most of his compatriots, and cooked it better, and Ramage, with a fine perception of a feminine palate, ordered Vero Capri. It was, Ann Veronica felt, as a sip or so of that remarkable blend warmed her blood, just the sort of thing that her aunt would not approve, to be lunching thus, tete-a-tete with a man; and yet at the same time it was a perfectly innocent as well as agreeable proceeding.

They talked across their meal in an easy and friendly manner about Ann Veronica's affairs. He was really very bright and clever, with a sort of conversational boldness that was just within the limits of permissible daring. She described the Goopes and the Fabians to him, and gave him a sketch of her landlady; and he talked in the most liberal and entertaining way of a modern young woman's outlook. He seemed to know a great deal about life. He gave glimpses of possibilities. He roused curiosities. He contrasted wonderfully with the empty showing-off of Teddy. His friendship seemed a thing worth having....

But when she was thinking it over in her room that evening vague and

baffling doubts came drifting across this conviction. She doubted how she stood toward him and what the restrained gleam of his face might signify. She felt that perhaps, in her desire to play an adequate part in the conversation, she had talked rather more freely than she ought to have done, and given him a wrong impression of herself.

Part 7

That was two days before Christmas Eve. The next morning came a compact letter from her father.

"MY DEAR DAUGHTER," it ran,--"Here, on the verge of the season of forgiveness I hold out a last hand to you in the hope of a reconciliation. I ask you, although it is not my place to ask you, to return home. This roof is still open to you. You will not be taunted if you return and everything that can be done will be done to make you happy.

"Indeed, I must implore you to return. This adventure of yours has gone on altogether too long; it has become a serious distress to both your aunt and myself. We fail altogether to understand your motives in doing what you are doing, or, indeed, how you are managing to do it, or what

you are managing on. If you will think only of one trifling aspect--the inconvenience it must be to us to explain your absence--I think you may begin to realize what it all means for us. I need hardly say that your aunt joins with me very heartily in this request.

"Please come home. You will not find me unreasonable with you.

"Your affectionate

"FATHER."

Ann Veronica sat over her fire with her father's note in her hand. "Queer letters he writes," she said. "I suppose most people's letters are queer. Roof open--like a Noah's Ark. I wonder if he really wants me to go home. It's odd how little I know of him, and of how he feels and what he feels."

"I wonder how he treated Gwen."

Her mind drifted into a speculation about her sister. "I ought to look up Gwen," she said. "I wonder what happened."

Then she fell to thinking about her aunt. "I would like to go home," she cried, "to please her. She has been a dear. Considering how little he lets her have."

The truth prevailed. "The unaccountable thing is that I wouldn't go home to please her. She is, in her way, a dear. One OUGHT to want to please her. And I don't. I don't care. I can't even make myself care."

Presently, as if for comparison with her father's letter, she got out Ramage's check from the box that contained her papers. For so far she had kept it uncashed. She had not even endorsed it.

"Suppose I chuck it," she remarked, standing with the mauve slip in her hand--"suppose I chuck it, and surrender and go home! Perhaps, after all, Roddy was right!

"Father keeps opening the door and shutting it, but a time will come--

"I could still go home!"

She held Ramage's check as if to tear it across. "No," she said at last; "I'm a human being--not a timid female. What could I do at home? The other's a crumple-up--just surrender. Funk! I'll see it out."