CHAPTER THE SEVENTH

LADY HARMAN LEARNS ABOUT HERSELF

§1

So it was that the great and long incubated quarrel between Lady Harman and her husband broke into active hostilities.

In spite of my ill-concealed bias in favour of Lady Harman I have to confess that she began this conflict rashly, planlessly, with no equipment and no definite end. Particularly I would emphasize that she had no definite end. She had wanted merely to establish a right to go out by herself occasionally, exercise a certain choice of friends, take on in fact the privileges of a grown-up person, and in asserting that she had never anticipated that the participation of the household would be invoked, or that a general breach might open between herself and her husband. It had seemed just a definite little point at issue, but at Sir Isaac's angry touch a dozen other matters that had seemed safely remote, matters she had never yet quite properly thought about, had been drawn into controversy. It was not only that he drew in things from outside; he evoked things within herself. She discovered she was disposed to fight not simply to establish certain liberties for herself but also--which had certainly not been in her mind before--to keep her husband away from herself. Something latent in the situation had

surprised her with this effect. It had arisen out of the quarrel like a sharpshooter out of an ambuscade. Her right to go out alone had now only the value of a mere pretext for far more extensive independence. The ultimate extent of these independences, she still dared not contemplate.

She was more than a little scared. She wasn't prepared for so wide a revision of her life as this involved. She wasn't at all sure of the rightfulness of her position. Her conception of the marriage contract at that time was liberal towards her husband. After all, didn't she owe obedience? Didn't she owe him a subordinate's co-operation? Didn't she in fact owe him the whole marriage service contract? When she thought of the figure of him in his purple-striped pyjamas dancing in a paroxysm of exasperation, that sense of responsibility which was one of her innate characteristics reproached her. She had a curious persuasion that she must be dreadfully to blame for provoking so ridiculous, so extravagant an outbreak....

§2

She heard him getting up tumultuously and when she came down,--after a brief interview with her mother who was still keeping her room,--she found him sitting at the breakfast-table eating toast and marmalade in a greedy malignant manner. The tentative propitiations of his proposal to make things up had entirely disappeared, he was evidently in a far profounder rage with her than he had been overnight. Snagsby too, that

seemly domestic barometer, looked extraordinarily hushed and grave. She made a greeting-like noise and Sir Isaac scrunched "morning" up amongst a crowded fierce mouthful of toast. She helped herself to tea and bacon and looking up presently discovered his eye fixed upon her with an expression of ferocious hatred....

He went off in the big car, she supposed to London, about ten and she helped her mother to pack and depart by a train a little after midday. She made a clumsy excuse for not giving that crisp little trifle of financial assistance she was accustomed to, and Mrs. Sawbridge was anxiously tactful about the disappointment. They paid a visit of inspection and farewell to the nursery before the departure. Then Lady Harman was left until lunch to resume her meditation upon this unprecedented breach that had opened between her husband and herself. She was presently moved to write a little note to Lady Beach-Mandarin expressing her intention of attending a meeting of the Social Friends and asking whether the date was the following Wednesday or Thursday. She found three penny stamps in the bureau at which she wrote and this served to remind her of her penniless condition. She spent some time thinking out the possible consequences of that. How after all was she going to do things, with not a penny in the world to do them with?

Lady Harman was not only instinctively truthful but also almost morbidly honourable. In other words, she was simple-minded. The idea of a community of goods between husband and wife had never established itself in her mind, she took all Sir Isaac's presents in the spirit in which he

gave them, presents she felt they were on trust, and so it was that with a six-hundred pound pearl necklace, a diamond tiara, bracelets, lockets, rings, chains and pendants of the most costly kind--there had been a particularly beautiful bracelet when Millicent was born, a necklace on account of Florence, a fan painted by Charles Conder for Annette and a richly splendid set of old Spanish jewellery--yellow sapphires set in gold--to express Sir Isaac's gratitude for the baby--with all sorts of purses, bags, boxes, trinkets and garments, with a bedroom and morning-room rich in admirable loot, and with endless tradespeople willing to give her credit it didn't for some time occur to her that there was any possible means of getting pocket-money except by direct demand from Sir Isaac. She surveyed her balance of two penny stamps and even about these she felt a certain lack of negotiable facility.

She thought indeed that she might perhaps borrow money, but there again her paralyzing honesty made her recoil from the prospect of uncertain repayment. And besides, from whom could she borrow?...

It was on the evening of the second day that a chance remark from Peters turned her mind to the extensive possibilities of liquidation that lay close at hand. She was discussing her dinner dress with Peters, she wanted something very plain and high and unattractive, and Peters, who disapproved of this tendency and was all for female wiles and propitiations, fell into an admiration of the pearl necklace. She thought perhaps by so doing she might induce Lady Harman to wear it, and if she wore it Sir Isaac might be a little propitiated, and if Sir Isaac

was a little propitiated it would be much more comfortable for Snagsby and herself and everyone. She was reminded of a story of a lady who sold one and substituted imitation pearls, no one the wiser, and she told this to her mistress out of sheer garrulousness. "But if no one found out," said Lady Harman, "how do you know?"

"Not till her death, me lady," said Peters, brushing, "when all things are revealed. Her husband, they say, made it a present of to another lady and the other lady, me lady, had it valued...."

Once the idea had got into Lady Harman's head it stayed there very obstinately. She surveyed the things on the table before her with a slightly lifted eyebrow. At first she thought the idea of disposing of them an entirely dishonourable idea, and if she couldn't get it out of her head again at least she made it stand in a corner. And while it stood in a corner she began putting a price for the first time in her life first upon this coruscating object and then that. Then somehow she found herself thinking more and more whether among all these glittering possessions there wasn't something that she might fairly regard as absolutely her own. There were for example her engagement ring and, still more debateable, certain other pre-nuptial trinkets Sir Isaac had given her. Then there were things given her on her successive birthdays. A birthday present of all presents is surely one's very own? But selling is an extreme exercise of ownership. Since those early schooldays when she had carried on an unprofitable traffic in stamps she had never sold anything--unless we are to reckon that for once and for all she had sold

herself.

Concurrently with these insidious speculations Lady Harman found herself trying to imagine how one sold jewels. She tried to sound Peters by taking up the story of the necklace again. But Peters was uninforming. "But where," asked Lady Harman, "could such a thing be done?"

"There are places, me lady," said Peters.

"But where?"

"In the West End, me lady. The West End is full of places--for things of that sort. There's scarcely anything you can't do there, me lady--if only you know how."

That was really all that Peters could impart.

"How does one sell jewels?" Lady Harman became so interested in this side of her perplexities that she did a little lose sight of those subtler problems of integrity that had at first engaged her. Do jewellers buy jewels as well as sell them? And then it came into her head that there were such things as pawnshops. By the time she had thought about pawnshops and tried to imagine one, her original complete veto upon any idea of selling had got lost to sight altogether. Instead there was a growing conviction that if ever she sold anything it would be a certain sapphire and diamond ring which she didn't like and never

wore that Sir Isaac had given her as a birthday present two years ago. But of course she would never dream of selling anything; at the utmost she need but pawn. She reflected and decided that on the whole it would be wiser not to ask Peters how one pawned. It occurred to her to consult the Encyclopædia Britannica on the subject, but though she learnt that the Chinese pawnshops must not charge more than three per cent. per annum, that King Edward the Third pawned his jewels in 1338 and that Father Bernardino di Feltre who set up pawnshops in Assisi and Padua and Pavia was afterward canonized, she failed to get any very clear idea of the exact ritual of the process. And then suddenly she remembered that she knew a finished expert in pawnshop work in the person of Susan Burnet. Susan could tell her everything. She found some curtains in the study that needed replacement, consulted Mrs. Crumble and, with a view to economizing her own resources, made that lady send off an urgent letter to Susan bidding her come forthwith.

§3

It has been said that Fate is a plagiarist. Lady Harman's Fate at any rate at this juncture behaved like a benevolent plagiarist who was also a little old-fashioned. This phase of speechless hostility was complicated by the fact that two of the children fell ill, or at least seemed for a couple of days to be falling ill. By all the rules of British sentiment, this ought to have brought about a headlong reconciliation at the tumbled bedside. It did nothing of the sort; it

merely wove fresh perplexities into the tangled skein of her thoughts.

On the day after her participation in that forbidden lunch Millicent, her eldest daughter, was discovered with a temperature of a hundred and one, and then Annette, the third, followed suit with a hundred. This carried Lady Harman post haste to the nursery, where to an unprecedented degree she took command. Latterly she had begun to mistrust the physique of her children and to doubt whether the trained efficiency of Mrs. Harblow the nurse wasn't becoming a little blunted at the edges by continual use. And the tremendous quarrel she had afoot made her keenly resolved not to let anything go wrong in the nursery and less disposed than she usually was to leave things to her husband's servants. She interviewed the doctor herself, arranged for the isolation of the two flushed and cross little girls, saw to the toys and amusements which she discovered had become a little flattened and disused by the servants' imperatives of tidying up and putting away, and spent the greater part of the next two days between the night and day nurseries.

She was a little surprised to find how readily she did this and how easily the once entirely authoritative Mrs. Harblow submitted. It was much the same surprise that growing young people feel when they reach some shelf that has hitherto been inaccessible. The crisis soon passed. At his first visit the doctor was a little doubtful whether the Harman nursery wasn't under the sway of measles, which were then raging in a particularly virulent form in London; the next day he inclined to the view that the trouble was merely a feverish cold, and before night this

second view was justified by the disappearance of the "temperatures" and a complete return to normal conditions.

But as for that hushed reconciliation in the fevered presence of the almost sacrificial offspring, it didn't happen. Sir Isaac merely thrust aside the stiff silences behind which he masked his rage to remark: "This is what happens when wimmen go gadding about!"

That much and glaring eyes and compressed lips and emphasizing fingers and then he had gone again.

Indeed rather than healing their widening breach this crisis did much to spread it into strange new regions. It brought Lady Harman to the very verge of realizing how much of instinct and how much of duty held her the servant of the children she had brought into the world, and how little there mingled with that any of those factors of pride and admiration that go to the making of heroic maternal love. She knew what is expected of a mother, the exalted and lyrical devotion, and it was with something approaching terror that she perceived that certain things in these children of hers she hated. It was her business she knew to love them blindly; she lay awake at night in infinite dismay realizing she did nothing of the sort. Their weakness held her more than anything else, the invincible pathos of their little limbs in discomfort so that she was ready to die she felt to give them ease. But so she would have been held, she was assured, by the little children of anybody if they had fallen with sufficient helplessness into her care.

Just how much she didn't really like her children she presently realized when in the feeble irascibility of their sickness they fell quarrelling. They became--horrid. Millicent and Annette being imprisoned in their beds it seemed good to Florence when she came back from the morning's walk, to annex and hide a selection of their best toys. She didn't take them and play with them, she hid them with an industrious earnestness in a box window-seat that was regarded as peculiarly hers, staggering with armfuls across the nursery floor. Then Millicent by some equally mysterious agency divined what was afoot and set up a clamour for a valued set of doll's furniture, which immediately provoked a similar outcry from little Annette for her Teddy Bear. Followed woe and uproar. The invalids insisted upon having every single toy they possessed brought in and put upon their beds; Florence was first disingenuous and then surrendered her loot with passionate howlings. The Teddy Bear was rescued from Baby after a violent struggle in which one furry hind leg was nearly twisted off. It jars upon the philoprogenitive sentiment of our time to tell of these things and still more to record that all four, stirred by possessive passion to the profoundest depths of their beings, betrayed to an unprecedented degree in their little sharp noses, their flushed faces, their earnest eyes, their dutiful likeness to Sir Isaac. He peeped from under Millicent's daintily knitted brows and gestured with Florence's dimpled fists. It was as if God had tried to make him into four cherubim and as if in spite of everything he was working through.

Lady Harman toiled to pacify these disorders, gently, attentively, and with a faint dismay in her dark eyes. She bribed and entreated and marvelled at mental textures so unlike her own. Baby was squared with a brand new Teddy Bear, a rare sort, a white one, which Snagsby went and purchased in the Putney High Street and brought home in his arms, conferring such a lustre upon the deed that the lower orders, the very street-boys, watched him with reverence as he passed. Annette went to sleep amidst a discomfort of small treasures and woke stormily when Mrs. Harblow tried to remove some of the spikier ones. And Lady Harman went back to her large pink bedroom and meditated for a long time upon these things and tried to remember whether in her own less crowded childhood with Georgina, either of them had been quite so inhumanly hard and grasping as these feverish little mites in her nursery. She tried to think she had been, she tried to think that all children were such little distressed lumps of embittered individuality, and she did what she could to overcome the queer feeling that this particular clutch of offspring had been foisted upon her and weren't at all the children she could now imagine and desire,--gentle children, sweet-spirited children....

§4

Susan Burnet arrived in a gusty mood and brought new matter for Lady Harman's ever broadening consideration of the wifely position. Susan, led by a newspaper placard, had discovered Sir Isaac's relations to the

International Bread and Cake Stores.

"At first I thought I wouldn't come," said Susan. "I really did. I couldn't hardly believe it. And then I thought, 'it isn't her. It can't be her!' But I'd never have dreamt before that I could have been brought to set foot in the house of the man who drove poor father to ruin and despair.... You've been so kind to me...."

Susan's simple right-down mind stopped for a moment with something very like a sob, baffled by the contradictions of the situation.

"So I came," she said, with a forced bright smile.

"I'm glad you came," said Lady Harman. "I wanted to see you. And you know, Susan, I know very little--very little indeed--of Sir Isaac's business."

"I quite believe it, my lady. I've never for one moment thought you----I don't know how to say it, my lady."

"And indeed I'm not," said Lady Harman, taking it as said.

"I knew you weren't," said Susan, relieved to be so understood.

And the two women looked perplexedly at one another over the neglected curtains Susan had come to "see to," and shyness just snatched back Lady

Harman from her impulse to give Susan a sisterly kiss. Nevertheless Susan who was full of wise intuitions felt that kiss that was never given, and in the remote world of unacted deeds returned it with effusion.

"But it's hard," said Susan, "to find one's own second sister mixed up in a strike, and that's what it's come to last week. They've struck, all the International waitresses have struck, and last night in Piccadilly they were standing on the kerb and picketing and her among them. With a crowd cheering.... And me ready to give my right hand to keep that girl respectable!"

And with a volubility that was at once tumultuous and effective, Susan sketched in the broad outlines of the crisis that threatened the dividends and popularity of the International Bread and Cake Stores. The unsatisfied demands of that bright journalistic enterprise, The London Lion, lay near the roots of the trouble. The London Lion had stirred it up. But it was only too evident that The London Lion had merely given a voice and form and cohesion to long smouldering discontents.

Susan's account of the matter had that impartiality which comes from intellectual incoherence, she hadn't so much a judgment upon the whole as a warring mosaic of judgments. It was talking upon Post Impressionist lines, talking in the manner of Picasso. She had the firmest conviction that to strike against employment, however ill-paid or badly

conditioned, was a disgraceful combination of folly, ingratitude and general wickedness, and she had an equally strong persuasion that the treatment of the employees of the International Bread and Cake Stores was such as no reasonably spirited person ought to stand. She blamed her sister extremely and sympathized with her profoundly, and she put it all down in turn to The London Lion, to Sir Isaac, and to a small round-faced person called Babs Wheeler, who appeared to be the strike leader and seemed always to be standing on tables in the branches, or clambering up to the lions in Trafalgar Square, or being cheered in the streets.

But there could be no mistaking the quality of Sir Isaac's "International" organization as Susan's dabs of speech shaped it out. It was indeed what we all of us see everywhere about us, the work of the base energetic mind, raw and untrained, in possession of the keen instruments of civilization, the peasant mind allied and blended with the Ghetto mind, grasping and acquisitive, clever as a Norman peasant or a Jew pedlar is clever, and beyond that outrageously stupid and ugly. It was a new view and yet the old familiar view of her husband, but now she saw him not as little eager eyes, a sharp nose, gaunt gestures and a leaden complexion, but as shops and stores and rules and cash registers and harsh advertisements and a driving merciless hurry to get--to get anything and everything, money, monopoly, power, prominence, whatever any other human being seemed to admire or seemed to find desirable, a lust rather than a living soul. Now that her eyes were at last opened Lady Harman, who had seen too little heretofore, now saw too much; she

saw all that she had not seen, with an excess of vision, monstrous, caricatured. Susan had already dabbed in the disaster of Sir Isaac's unorganized competitors going to the wall--for charity or the state to neglect or bandage as it might chance--the figure of that poor little "Father," moping hopelessly before his "accident" symbolized that; and now she gave in vivid splotches of allusion, glimpses of the business machine that had replaced those shattered enterprises and carried Sir Isaac to the squalid glory of a Liberal honours list,--the carefully balanced antagonisms and jealousies of the girls and the manageresses, those manageresses who had been obliged to invest little bunches of savings as guarantees and who had to account for every crumb and particle of food stock that came to the branch, and the hunt for cases and inefficiency by the inspectors, who had somehow to justify a salary of two hundred a year, not to mention a percentage of the fines they inflicted.

"There's all that business of the margarine," said Susan. "Every branch gets its butter under weight,--the water squeezes out,--and every branch has over weight margarine. Of course the rules say that mixing's forbidden and if they get caught they go, but they got to pay-in for that butter, and it's setting a snare for their feet. People who've never thought to cheat, when they get it like that, day after day, they cheat, my lady.... And the girls get left food for rations. There's always trouble, it's against what the rules say, but they get it. Of course it's against the rules, but what can a manageress do?--if the waste doesn't fall on them, it falls on her. She's tied there with her

savings.... Such driving, my lady, it's against the very spirit of God. It makes scoffers point. It makes people despise law and order. There's Luke, he gets bitterer and bitterer; he says that it's in the Word we mustn't muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn, but these Stores, he says, they'd muzzle the ox and keep it hungry and make it work a little machine, he says, whenever it put down its head in the hope of finding a scrap...."

So Susan, bright-eyed, flushed and voluble, pleading the cause of that vague greatness in humanity that would love, that would loiter, that would think, that would if it could give us art, delight and beauty, that turns blindly and stumblingly towards joy, towards intervals, towards the mysterious things of the spirit, against all this sordid strenuousness, this driving destructive association of hardfisted peasant soul and Ghetto greed, this fool's "efficiency," that rules our world to-day.

Then Susan lunged for a time at the waitress life her sister led. "She has 'er 'ome with us, but some--they haven't homes."

"They make a fuss about all this White Slave Traffic," said Susan, "but if ever there were white slaves it's the girls who work for a living and keep themselves respectable. And nobody wants to make an example of the men who get rich out of them...."

And after some hearsay about the pressure in the bake-houses and the

accidents to the van-men, who worked on a speeding-up system that Sir Isaac had adopted from an American business specialist, Susan's mental discharge poured out into the particulars of the waitresses' strike and her sister's share in that. "She would go into it," said Susan, "she let herself be drawn in. I asked her never to take the place. Better Service, I said, a thousand times. I begged her, I could have begged her on my bended knees...."

The immediate cause of the strike it seemed was the exceptional disagreeableness of one of the London district managers. "He takes advantage of his position," repeated Susan with face aflame, and Lady Harman was already too wise about Susan's possibilities to urge her towards particulars....

Now as Lady Harman listened to all this confused effective picturing of the great catering business which was the other side of her husband and which she had taken on trust so long, she had in her heart a quite unreasonable feeling of shame that she should listen at all, a shyness, as though she was prying, as though this really did not concern her. She knew she had to listen and still she felt beyond her proper jurisdiction. It is against instinct, it is with an enormous reluctance that women are bringing their quick emotions, their flashing unstable intelligences, their essential romanticism, their inevitable profound generosity into the world of politics and business. If only they could continue believing that all that side of life is grave and wise and admirably managed for them they would. It is not in a day or a

generation that we shall un-specialize women. It is a wrench nearly as violent as birth for them to face out into the bleak realization that the man who goes out for them into business, into affairs, and returns so comfortably loaded with housings and wrappings and trappings and toys, isn't, as a matter of fact, engaged in benign creativeness while he is getting these desirable things.

§5

Lady Harman's mind was so greatly exercised by Susan Burnet's voluminous confidences that it was only when she returned to her own morning room that she recalled the pawning problem. She went back to Sir Isaac's study and found Susan with all her measurements taken and on the very edge of departure.

"Oh Susan!" she said.

She found the matter a little difficult to broach. Susan remained in an attitude of respectful expectation.

"I wanted to ask you," said Lady Harman and then broke off to shut the door. Susan's interest increased.

"You know, Susan," said Lady Harman with an air of talking about commonplace things, "Sir Isaac is very rich and--of course--very

generous.... But sometimes one feels, one wants a little money of one's own."

"I think I can understand that, my lady," said Susan.

"I knew you would," said Lady Harman and then with a brightness that was slightly forced, "I can't always get money of my own. It's difficult--sometimes."

And then blushing vividly: "I've got lots of things.... Susan, have you ever pawned anything?"

And so she broached it.

"Not since I got fairly into work," said Susan; "I wouldn't have it. But when I was little we were always pawning things. Why! we've pawned kettles!..."

She flashed three reminiscences.

Meanwhile Lady Harman produced a little glittering object and held it between finger and thumb. "If I went into a pawnshop near here," she said, "it would seem so odd.... This ring, Susan, must be worth thirty or forty pounds. And it seems so silly when I have it that I should really be wanting money...."

Susan displayed a peculiar reluctance to handle the ring. "I've never," she said, "pawned anything valuable--not valuable like that. Suppose--suppose they wanted to know how I had come by it."

"It's more than Alice earns in a year," she said. "It's----" she eyed the glittering treasure; "it's a queer thing for me to have."

A certain embarrassment arose between them. Lady Harman's need of money became more apparent. "I'll do it for you," said Susan, "indeed I'll do it. But----There's one thing----"

Her face flushed hotly. "It isn't that I want to make difficulties. But people in our position--we aren't like people in your position. It's awkward sometimes to explain things. You've got a good character, but people don't know it. You can't be too careful. It isn't sufficient--just to be honest. If I take that----If you were just to give me a little note--in your handwriting--on your paper--just asking me----I don't suppose I need show it to anyone...."

"I'll write the note," said Lady Harman. A new set of uncomfortable ideas was dawning upon her. "But Susan----You don't mean that anyone, anyone who's really honest--might get into trouble?"

"You can't be too careful," said Susan, manifestly resolved not to give our highly civilized state half a chance with her.

§6

The problem of Sir Isaac and just what he was doing and what he thought he was doing and what he meant to do increased in importance in Lady Harman's mind as the days passed by. He had an air of being malignantly up to something and she could not imagine what this something could be. He spoke to her very little but he looked at her a great deal. He had more and more of the quality of a premeditated imminent explosion....

One morning she was standing quite still in the drawing-room thinking over this now almost oppressive problem of why the situation did not develop further with him, when she became aware of a thin flat unusual book upon the small side table near the great armchair at the side of the fire. He had been reading that overnight and it lay obliquely--it might almost have been left out for her.

She picked it up. It was The Taming of the Shrew in that excellent folio edition of Henley's which makes each play a comfortable thin book apart. A curiosity to learn what it was had drawn her husband to English Literature made her turn over the pages. The Taming of the Shrew was a play she knew very slightly. For the Harmans, though deeply implicated like most other rich and striving people in plans for honouring the immortal William, like most other people found scanty leisure to read him.

As she turned over the pages a pencil mark caught her eye. Thence words were underlined and further accentuated by a deeply scored line in the margin.

"But for my bonny Kate, she must with me.
Nay; look not big, nor stamp, nor stare, nor fret;
I will be master of what is mine own:
She is my goods, my chattels; she is my house,
She is my household stuff, my field, my barn,
My horse, my ox, my ass, my any thing:
And here she stands, touch her whoever dare;
I'll bring mine action on the proudest He,
That stops my way in Padua."

With a slightly heightened colour, Lady Harman read on and presently found another page slashed with Sir Isaac's approval....

Her face became thoughtful. Did he mean to attempt--Petruchio? He could never dare. There were servants, there were the people one met, the world.... He would never dare....

What a strange play it was! Shakespear of course was wonderfully wise, the crown of English wisdom, the culminating English mind,--or else one might almost find something a little stupid and clumsy.... Did women nowadays really feel like these Elizabethan wives who talked--like girls, very forward girls indeed, but girls of sixteen?...

She read the culminating speech of Katherine and now she had so forgotten Sir Isaac she scarcely noted the pencil line that endorsed the immortal words.

"Thy husband is thy Lord, thy Life, thy Keeper,
Thy Head, thy Sovereign; one who cares for thee,
And for thy maintenance commits his body
To painful labour both by sea and land,
To watch the night in storms, the day in cold,
While thou liest warm at home, secure and safe;
And craves no other tribute at thy hands
But love, fair looks, and true obedience;
Too little payment for so great a debt.
Such duty as the Subject owes the Prince,
Even such a woman oweth to her husband;
And when she is froward, peevish, sullen, sour,
And not obedient to his honest will,
What is she but a foul contending Rebel
And graceless traitor to her loving Lord?
I am ashamed that women are so simple
To offer war, where they should kneel for peace;

* * * * *

My mind has been as big as one of yours,

My heat as great; my reason, haply, more,
To bandy word for word and frown for frown.
But now I see our lances are but straws;
Our strength is weak, our weakness past compare,
Seeming that most which we indeed least are...."

She wasn't indignant. Something in these lines took hold of her protesting imagination.

She knew that so she could have spoken of a man.

But that man,--she apprehended him as vaguely as an Anglican bishop apprehends God. He was obscured altogether by shadows; he had only one known characteristic, that he was totally unlike Sir Isaac. And the play was false she felt in giving this speech to a broken woman. Such things are not said by broken women. Broken women do no more than cheat and lie. But so a woman might speak out of her unconquered wilfulness, as a queen might give her lover a kingdom out of the fullness of her heart.

§7

The evening after his wife had had this glimpse into Sir Isaac's mental processes he telephoned that Charterson and Horatio Blenker were coming home to dinner with him. Neither Lady Charterson nor Mrs. Blenker were to be present; it was to be a business conversation and not a social

occasion, and Lady Harman he desired should wear her black and gold with just a touch of crimson in her hair. Charterson wanted a word or two with the flexible Horatio on sugar at the London docks, and Sir Isaac had some vague ideas that a turn might be given to the public judgment upon the waitresses' strike, by a couple of Horatio's thoughtful yet gentlemanly articles. And in addition Charterson seemed to have something else upon his mind; he did not tell as much to Sir Isaac but he was weighing the possibilities of securing a controlling share in the Daily Spirit, which simply didn't know at present where it was upon the sugar business, and of installing Horatio's brother, Adolphus, as its editor. He wanted to form some idea from Horatio of what Adolphus might expect before he approached Adolphus.

Lady Harman wore the touch of crimson in her hair as her husband had desired, and the table was decorated simply with a big silver bowl of crimson roses. A slight shade of apprehension in Sir Isaac's face changed to approval at the sight of her obedience. After all perhaps she was beginning to see the commonsense of her position.

Charterson struck her as looking larger, but then whenever she saw him he struck her as looking larger. He enveloped her hand in a large amiable paw for a minute and asked after the children with gusto. The large teeth beneath his discursive moustache gave him the effect of a perennial smile to which his asymmetrical ears added a touch of waggery. He always betrayed a fatherly feeling towards her as became a man who was married to a handsome wife old enough to be her mother. Even when he

asked about the children he did it with something of the amused knowingness of assured seniority, as if indeed he knew all sorts of things about the children that she couldn't as yet even begin to imagine. And though he confined his serious conversation to the two other men, he would ever and again show himself mindful of her and throw her some friendly enquiry, some quizzically puzzling remark. Blenker as usual treated her as if she were an only very indistinctly visible presence to whom an effusive yet inattentive politeness was due. He was clearly nervous almost to the pitch of jumpiness. He knew he was to be spoken to about the sugar business directly he saw Charterson, and he hated being spoken to about the sugar business. He had his code of honour. Of course one had to make concessions to one's proprietors, but he could not help feeling that if only they would consent to see his really quite obvious gentlemanliness more clearly it would be better for the paper, better for the party, better for them, far better for himself. He wasn't altogether a fool about that sugar; he knew how things lay. They ought to trust him more. His nervousness betrayed itself in many little ways. He crumbled his bread constantly until, thanks to Snagsby's assiduous replacement, he had made quite a pile of crumbs, he dropped his glasses in the soup--a fine occasion for Snagsby's sang-froid--and he forgot not to use a fish knife with the fish as Lady Grove directs and tried when he discovered his error to replace it furtively on the table cloth. Moreover he kept on patting the glasses on his nose--after Snagsby had whisked his soup plate away, rescued, wiped and returned them to him--until that feature glowed modestly at such excesses of attention, and the soup and sauces and

things bothered his fine blond moustache unusually. So that Mr. Blenker what with the glasses, the napkin, the food and the things seemed as restless as a young sparrow. Lady Harman did her duties as hostess in the quiet key of her sombre dress, and until the conversation drew her out into unexpected questionings she answered rather than talked, and she did not look at her husband once throughout the meal.

At first the talk was very largely Charterson. He had no intention of coming to business with Blenker until Lady Harman had given place to the port and the man's nerves were steadier. He spoke of this and that in the large discursive way men use in clubs, and it was past the fish before the conversation settled down upon the topic of business organization and Sir Isaac, a little warmed by champagne, came out of the uneasily apprehensive taciturnity into which he had fallen in the presence of his wife. Horatio Blenker was keenly interested in the idealization of commercial syndication, he had been greatly stirred by a book of Mr. Gerald Stanley Lee's called Inspired Millionaires which set out to show just what magnificent airs rich men might give themselves, and he had done his best to catch its tone and to find Inspired Millionaires in Sir Isaac and Charterson and to bring it to their notice and to the notice of the readers of the Old Country Gazette. He felt that if only Sir Isaac and Charterson would see getting rich as a Great Creative Act it would raise their tone and his tone and the tone of the Old Country Gazette tremendously. It wouldn't of course materially alter the methods or policy of the paper but it would make them all feel nobler, and Blenker was of that finer clay that

does honestly want to feel nobler. He hated pessimism and all that criticism and self-examination that makes weak men pessimistic, he wanted to help weak men and be helped himself, he was all for that school of optimism that would have each dunghill was a well-upholstered throne, and his nervous, starry contributions to the talk were like patches of water ranunculuses trying to flower in the overflow of a sewer.

Because you know it is idle to pretend that the talk of Charterson and Sir Isaac wasn't a heavy flow of base ideas; they hadn't even the wit to sham very much about their social significance. They cared no more for the growth, the stamina, the spirit of the people whose lives they dominated than a rat cares for the stability of the house it gnaws. They wanted a broken-spirited people. They were in such relations wilfully and offensively stupid, and I do not see why we people who read and write books should pay this stupidity merely because it is prevalent even the mild tribute of an ironical civility. Charterson talked of the gathering trouble that might lead to a strike of the transport workers in London docks, and what he had to say, he said,--he repeated it several times--was, "Let them strike. We're ready. The sooner they strike the better. Devonport's a Man and this time we'll beat 'em...."

He expanded generally on strikes. "It's a question practically whether we are to manage our own businesses or whether we're to have them managed for us. Managed I say!..."

"They know nothing of course of the details of organization," said Blenker, shining with intelligence and looking quickly first to the right and then to the left. "Nothing."

Sir Isaac broke out into confirmatory matter. There was an idea in his head that this talk might open his wife's eyes to some sense of the magnitude of his commercial life, to the wonder of its scale and quality. He compared notes with Charterson upon a speeding-up system for delivery vans invented by an American specialist and it made Blenker flush with admiration and turn as if for sympathy to Lady Harman to realize how a modification in a tailboard might mean a yearly saving in wages of many thousand pounds. "The sort of thing they don't understand," he said. And then Sir Isaac told of some of his own little devices. He had recently taken to having the returns of percentage increase and decrease from his various districts printed on postcards and circulated monthly among the district managers, postcards endorsed with such stimulating comments in red type as "Well done Cardiff!" or "What ails Portsmouth?"--the results had been amazingly good; "neck and neck work," he said, "everywhere"--and thence they passed to the question of confidential reports and surprise inspectors. Thereby they came to the rights and wrongs of the waitress strike.

And then it was that Lady Harman began to take a share in the conversation.

She interjected a question. "Yes," she said suddenly and her

interruption was so unexpected that all three men turned their eyes to her. "But how much do the girls get a week?"

"I thought," she said to some confused explanations by Blenker and Charterson, "that gratuities were forbidden."

Blenker further explained that most of the girls of the class Sir Isaac was careful to employ lived at home. Their income was "supplementary."

"But what happens to the others who don't live at home, Mr. Blenker?" she asked.

"Very small minority," said Mr. Blenker reassuring himself about his glasses.

"But what do they do?"

Charterson couldn't imagine whether she was going on in this way out of sheer ignorance or not.

"Sometimes their fines make big unexpected holes in their week's pay," she said.

Sir Isaac made some indistinct remark about "utter nonsense."

"It seems to me to be driving them straight upon the streets."

The phrase was Susan's. Its full significance wasn't at that time very clear to Lady Harman and it was only when she had uttered it that she realized from Horatio Blenker's convulsive start just what a blow she had delivered at that table. His glasses came off again. He caught them and thrust them back, he seemed to be holding his nose on, holding his face on, preserving those carefully arranged features of himself from hideous revelations; his free hand made weak movements with his dinner napkin. He seemed to be holding it in reserve against the ultimate failure of his face. Charterson surveyed her through an immense pause open-mouthed; then he turned his large now frozen amiability upon his host. "These are Awful questions," he gasped, "rather beyond Us don't you think?" and then magnificently; "Harman, things are looking pretty Queer in the Far East again. I'm told there are chances--of revolution--even in Pekin...."

Lady Harman became aware of Snagsby's arm and his steady well-trained breathing beside her as, tenderly almost but with a regretful disapproval, he removed her plate....

§8

If Lady Harman had failed to remark at the time the deep impression her words had made upon her hearers, she would have learnt it later from the extraordinary wrath in which Sir Isaac, as soon as his guests had

departed, visited her. He was so angry he broke the seal of silence he had set upon his lips. He came raging into the pink bedroom through the paper-covered door as if they were back upon their old intimate footing. He brought a flavour of cigars and manly refreshment with him, his shirt front was a little splashed and crumpled and his white face was variegated with flushed patches.

"What ever d'you mean," he cried, "by making a fool of me in front of those fellers?... What's my business got to do with you?"

Lady Harman was too unready for a reply.

"I ask you what's my business got to do with you? It's my affair, my side. You got no more right to go shoving your spoke into that than--anything. See? What do you know of the rights and wrongs of business? How can you tell what's right and what isn't right? And the things you came out with--the things you came out with! Why Charterson--after you'd gone Charterson said, she doesn't know, she can't know what she's talking about! A decent woman! a lady! talking of driving girls on the street. You ought to be ashamed of yourself! You aren't fit to show your face.... It's these damned papers and pamphlets, all this blear-eyed stuff, these decadent novels and things putting narsty thoughts, narsty dirty thoughts into decent women's heads. It ought to be rammed back down their throats, it ought to be put a stop to!"

Sir Isaac suddenly gave way to woe. "What have I done?" he cried, "what have I done? Here's everything going so well! We might be the happiest of couples! We're rich, we got everything we want.... And then you go harbouring these ideas, fooling about with rotten people, taking up with Socialism----Yes, I tell you--Socialism!"

His moment of pathos ended. "NO?" he shouted in an enormous voice.

He became white and grim. He emphasized his next words with a shaken finger.

"It's got to end, my lady. It's going to end sooner than you expect. That's all!..."

He paused at the papered door. He had a popular craving for a vivid curtain and this he felt was just a little too mild.

"It's going to end," he repeated and then with great violence, with almost alcoholic violence, with the round eyes and shouting voice and shaken fist and blaspheming violence of a sordid, thrifty peasant enraged, "it's going to end a Damned Sight sooner than you expect."