CHAPTER THE EIGHTH

SIR ISAAC AS PETRUCHIO

§1

Twice had Sir Isaac come near to betraying the rapid and extensive preparations for the subjugation of his wife, that he hid behind his silences. He hoped that their estrangement might be healed by a certain display of strength and decision. He still refused to let himself believe that all this trouble that had arisen between them, this sullen insistence upon unbecoming freedoms of intercourse and movement, this questioning spirit and a gaucherie of manner that might almost be mistaken for an aversion from his person, were due to any essential evil in her nature; he clung almost passionately to the alternative that she was the victim of those gathering forces of discontent, of that interpretation which can only be described as decadent and that veracity which can only be called immodest, that darken the intellectual skies of our time, a sweet thing he held her still though touched by corruption, a prey to "idees," "idees" imparted from the poisoned mind of her sister, imbibed from the carelessly edited columns of newspapers, from all too laxly censored plays, from "blear-eyed" bookshow he thanked the Archbishop of York for that clever expressive epithet!--from the careless talk of rashly admitted guests, from the very atmosphere of London. And it had grown clearer and clearer to him that his duty to

himself and the world and her was to remove her to a purer, simpler air, beyond the range of these infections, to isolate her and tranquillize her and so win her back again to that acquiescence, that entirely hopeless submissiveness that had made her so sweet and dear a companion for him in the earlier years of their married life. Long before Lady Beach-Mandarin's crucial luncheon, his deliberate foreseeing mind had been planning such a retreat. Black Strand even at his first visit had appeared to him in the light of a great opportunity, and the crisis of their quarrel did but release that same torrential energy which had carried him to a position of Napoleonic predominance in the world of baking, light catering and confectionery, into the channels of a scheme already very definitely formed in his mind.

His first proceeding after the long hours of sleepless passion that had followed his wife's Hampton Court escapade, had been to place himself in communication with Mr. Brumley. He learnt at Mr. Brumley's club that that gentleman had slept there overnight and had started but a quarter of an hour before, back to Black Strand. Sir Isaac in hot pursuit and gathering force and assistance in mid flight reached Black Strand by midday.

It was with a certain twinge of the conscience that Mr. Brumley perceived his visitor, but it speedily became clear that Sir Isaac had no knowledge of the guilty circumstances of the day before. He had come to buy Black Strand--incontinently, that was all. He was going, it became clear at once, to buy it with all its fittings and furnishings as

it stood, lock, stock and barrel. Mr. Brumley, concealing that wild elation, that sense of a joyous rebirth, that only the liquidation of nearly all one's possessions can give, was firm but not excessive. Sir Isaac haggled as a wave breaks and then gave in and presently they were making a memorandum upon the pretty writing-desk beneath the traditional rose Euphemia had established there when Mr. Brumley was young and already successful.

This done, and it was done in less than fifteen minutes, Sir Isaac produced a rather crumpled young architect from the motor-car as a conjurer might produce a rabbit from a hat, a builder from Aleham appeared astonishingly in a dog-cart--he had been summoned by telegram--and Sir Isaac began there and then to discuss alterations, enlargements and, more particularly, with a view to his nursery requirements, the conversion of the empty barn into a nursery wing and its connexion with the house by a corridor across the shrubbery.

"It will take you three months," said the builder from Aleham. "And the worst time of the year coming."

"It won't take three weeks--if I have to bring down a young army from London to do it," said Sir Isaac.

"But such a thing as plastering----"

"We won't have plastering."

"There's canvas and paper, of course," said the young architect.

"There's canvas and paper," said Sir Isaac. "And those new patent building units, so far as the corridor goes. I've seen the ads."

"We can whitewash 'em. They won't show much," said the young architect.

"Oh if you do things in that way," said the builder from Aleham with bitter resignation....

§2

The morning dawned at last when the surprise was ripe. It was four days after Susan's visit, and she was due again on the morrow with the money that would enable her employer to go to Lady Viping's now imminent dinner. Lady Harman had had to cut the Social Friends' meeting altogether, but the day before the surprise Agatha Alimony had come to tea in her jobbed car, and they had gone together to the committee meeting of the Shakespear Dinner Society. Sir Isaac had ignored that defiance, and it was an unusually confident and quite unsuspicious woman who descended in a warm October sunshine to the surprise. In the breakfast-room she discovered an awe-stricken Snagsby standing with his plate-basket before her husband, and her husband wearing strange unusual tweeds and gaiters,--buttoned gaiters, and standing a-straddle,--unusually

a-straddle, on the hearthrug.

"That's enough, Snagsby," said Sir Isaac, at her entrance. "Bring it all."

She met Snagsby's eye, and it was portentous.

Latterly Snagsby's eye had lost the assurance of his former days. She had noted it before, she noted it now more than ever; as though he was losing confidence, as though he was beginning to doubt, as though the world he had once seemed to rule grew insecure beneath his feet. For a moment she met his eye; it might have been a warning he conveyed, it might have been an appeal for sympathy, and then he had gone. She looked at the table. Sir Isaac had breakfasted acutely.

In silence, among the wreckage and with a certain wonder growing, Lady Harman attended to her needs.

Sir Isaac cleared his throat.

She became aware that he had spoken. "What did you say, Isaac?" she asked, looking up. He seemed to have widened his straddle almost dangerously, and he spoke with a certain conscious forcefulness.

"We're going to move out of this house, Elly," he said. "We're going down into the country right away."

She sat back in her chair and regarded his pinched and determined visage.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"I've bought that house of Brumley's,--Black Strand. We're going to move down there--now. I've told the servants.... When you've done your breakfast, you'd better get Peters to pack your things. The big car's going to be ready at half-past ten."

Lady Harman reflected.

"To-morrow evening," she said, "I was going out to dinner at Lady Viping's."

"Not my affair--seemingly," said Sir Isaac with irony. "Well, the car's going to be ready at half-past ten."

"But that dinner----!"

"We'll think about it when the time comes."

Husband and wife regarded each other.

"I've had about enough of London," said Sir Isaac. "So we're going to

shift the scenery. See?"

Lady Harman felt that one might adduce good arguments against this course if only one knew of them.

Sir Isaac had a bright idea. He rang.

"Snagsby," he said, "just tell Peters to pack up Lady Harman's things...."

"Well!" said Lady Harman, as the door closed on Snagsby. Her mind was full of confused protest, but she had again that entirely feminine and demoralizing conviction that if she tried to express it she would weep or stumble into some such emotional disaster. If now she went upstairs and told Peters not to pack----!

Sir Isaac walked slowly to the window, and stood for a time staring out into the garden.

Extraordinary bumpings began overhead in Sir Isaac's room. No doubt somebody was packing something....

Lady Harman realized with a deepening humiliation that she dared not dispute before the servants, and that he could. "But the children----" she said at last.

"I've told Mrs. Harblow," he said, over his shoulder. "Told her it was a bit of a surprise." He turned, with a momentary lapse into something like humour. "You see," he said, "it is a bit of a surprise."

"But what are you going to do with this house?"

"Lock it all up for a bit.... I don't see any sense in living where we aren't happy. Perhaps down there we shall manage better...."

It emerged from the confusion of Lady Harman's mind that perhaps she had better go to the nursery, and see how things were getting on there. Sir Isaac watched her departure with a slightly dubious eye, made little noises with his teeth for a time, and then went towards the telephone.

In the hall she found two strange young men in green aprons assisting the under-butler to remove the hats and overcoats and such-like personal material into a motor-van outside. She heard two of the housemaids scurrying upstairs. "'Arf an hour," said one, "isn't what I call a proper time to pack a box in."

In the nursery the children were disputing furiously what toys were to be taken into the country.

Lady Harman was a very greatly astonished woman. The surprise had been entirely successful.

§3

It has been said, I think, by Limburger, in his already cited work, that nothing so excites and prevails with woman as rapid and extensive violence, sparing and yet centring upon herself, and certainly it has to be recorded that, so far from being merely indignant, and otherwise a helplessly pathetic spectacle, Lady Harman found, though perhaps she did not go quite so far as to admit to herself that she found, this vehement flight from the social, moral, and intellectual contaminations of London an experience not merely stimulating but entertaining. It lifted her delicate eyebrows. Something, it may have been a sense of her own comparative immobility amid this sudden extraordinary bustle of her home, put it into her head that so it was long ago that Lot must have bundled together his removable domesticities.

She made one attempt at protest. "Isaac," she said, "isn't all this rather ridiculous----"

"Don't speak to me!" he answered, waving her off. "Don't speak to me! You should have spoken before, Elly. Now,--things are happening."

The image of Black Strand as, after all, a very pleasant place indeed returned to her. She adjudicated upon the nursery difficulties, and then went in a dreamlike state of mind to preside over her own more personal packing. She found Peters exercising all that indecisive helplessness

which is characteristic of ladies' maids the whole world over.

It was from Peters she learnt that the entire household, men and maids together, was to be hurled into Surrey. "Aren't they all rather surprised?" asked Lady Harman.

"Yes, m'm," said Peters on her knees, "but of course if the drains is wrong the sooner we all go the better."

(So that was what he had told them.)

A vibration and a noise of purring machinery outside drew the lady to the window, and she discovered that at least four of the large motor-vans from the International Stores were to co-operate in the trek. There they were waiting, massive and uniform. And then she saw Snagsby in his alpaca jacket running towards the house from the gates. Of course he was running only very slightly indeed, but still he was running, and the expression of distress upon his face convinced her that he was being urged to unusual and indeed unsuitable tasks under the immediate personal supervision of Sir Isaac.... Then from round the corner appeared the under butler or at least the legs of him going very fast, under a pile of shirt boxes and things belonging to Sir Isaac. He dumped them into the nearest van and heaved a deep sigh and returned houseward after a remorseful glance at the windows.

A violent outcry from baby, who, with more than her customary violence

was making her customary morning protest against being clad, recalled Lady Harman from the contemplation of these exterior activities....

The journey to Black Strand was not accomplished without misadventure; there was a puncture near Farnham, and as Clarence with a leisurely assurance entertained himself with the Stepney, they were passed first by the second car with the nursery contingent, which went by in a shrill chorus, crying, "We-e-e shall get there first, We-e-e shall get there first," and then by a large hired car all agog with housemaids and Mrs. Crumble and with Snagsby, as round and distressed as the full moon, and the under butler, cramped and keen beside the driver. There followed the leading International Stores car, and then the Stepney was on and they could hasten in pursuit....

And at last they came to Black Strand, and when they saw Black Strand it seemed to Lady Harman that the place had blown out a huge inflamed red cheek and lost its pleasant balance altogether. "Oh!" she cried.

It was the old barn flushed by the strain of adaptation to a new use, its comfortable old wall ruptured by half a dozen brilliant new windows, a light red chimney stack at one end. From it a vividly artistic corridor ran to the house and the rest of the shrubbery was all trampled and littered with sheds, bricks, poles and material generally. Black Strand had left the hands of the dilettante school and was in the grip of those vigorous moulding forces that are shaping our civilization to-day.

The jasmine wig over the porch had suffered a strenuous clipping; the door might have just come out of prison. In the hall the Carpaccio copies still glowed, but there were dust sheets over most of the furniture and a plumber was moving his things out with that eleventh hour reluctance so characteristic of plumbers. Mrs. Rabbit, a little tearful, and dressed for departure very respectably in black was giving the youngest and least experienced housemaid a faithful history of Mr. Brumley's earlier period. "'Appy we all was," said Mrs. Rabbit, "as Birds in a Nest."

Through the windows two of the Putney gardeners were busy replacing Mr. Brumley's doubtful roses by recognized sorts, the right sorts....

"I've been doing all I can to make it ready for you," said Sir Isaac at his wife's ear, bringing a curious reminiscence of the first home-coming to Putney into her mind.

§4

"And now," said Sir Isaac with evident premeditation and a certain deliberate amiability, "now we got down here, now we got away a bit from all those London things with nobody to cut in between us, me and you can have a bit of a talk, Elly, and see what it's all about."

They had lunched together in the little hall-dining room,--the children had had a noisily cheerful picnic in the kitchen with Mrs. Harblow, and now Lady Harman was standing at the window surveying the ravages of rose replacement.

She turned towards him. "Yes," she said. "I think--I think we can't go on like this."

"I can't," said Sir Isaac, "anyhow."

He too came and stared at the rose planting.

"If we were to go up there--among the pine woods"--he pointed with his head at the dark background of Euphemia's herbaceous borders--"we shouldn't hear quite so much of this hammering...."

Husband and wife walked slowly in the afternoon sunlight across the still beautiful garden. Each was gravely aware of an embarrassed incapacity for the task they had set themselves. They were going to talk things over. Never in their lives had they really talked to each other clearly and honestly about anything. Indeed it is scarcely too much to say that neither had ever talked about anything to anyone. She was too young, her mind was now growing up in her and feeling its way to conscious expression, and he had never before wanted to express himself. He did now want to express himself. For behind his rant and fury Sir Isaac had been thinking very hard indeed during the last three weeks

about his life and her life and their relations; he had never thought so much about anything except his business economics. So far he had either joked at her, talked "silly" to her, made, as they say, "remarks," or vociferated. That had been the sum of their mental intercourse, as indeed it is the sum of the intercourse of most married couples. His attempt to state his case to her had so far always flared into rhetorical outbreaks. But he was discontented with these rhetorical outbreaks. His dispositions to fall into them made him rather like a nervous sepia that cannot keep its ink sac quiet while it is sitting for its portrait. In the earnestness of his attempt at self-display he vanished in his own outpourings.

He wanted now to reason with her simply and persuasively. He wanted to say quietly impressive and convincing things in a low tone of voice and make her abandon every possible view except his view. He walked now slowly meditating the task before him, making a faint thoughtful noise with his teeth, his head sunken in the collar of the motor overcoat he wore because of a slight cold he had caught. And he had to be careful about colds because of his constitutional defect. She too felt she had much to say. Much too she had in her mind that she couldn't say, because this strange quarrel had opened unanticipated things for her; she had found and considered repugnances in her nature she had never dared to glance at hitherto....

Sir Isaac began rather haltingly when they had reached a sandy, ant-infested path that ran slantingly up among the trees. He affected a

certain perplexity. He said he did not understand what it was his wife was "after," what she "thought she was doing" in "making all this trouble"; he wanted to know just what it was she wanted, how she thought they ought to live, just what she considered his rights were as her husband and just what she considered were her duties as his wife--if, that is, she considered she had any duties. To these enquiries Lady Harman made no very definite reply; their estrangement instead of clearing her mind had on the whole perplexed it more, by making her realize the height and depth and extent of her possible separation from him. She replied therefore with an unsatisfactory vagueness; she said she wanted to feel that she possessed herself, that she was no longer a child, that she thought she had a right to read what she chose, see what people she liked, go out a little by herself, have a certain independence--she hesitated, "have a certain definite allowance of my own."

"Have I ever refused you money?" cried Sir Isaac protesting.

"It isn't that," said Lady Harman; "it's the feeling----"

"The feeling of being able to--defy--anything I say," said Sir Isaac with a note of bitterness. "As if I didn't understand!"

It was beyond Lady Harman's powers to express just how that wasn't the precise statement of the case.

Sir Isaac, reverting to his tone of almost elaborate reasonableness, expanded his view that it was impossible for husband and wife to have two different sets of friends;--let alone every other consideration, he explained, it wasn't convenient for them not to be about together, and as for reading or thinking what she chose he had never made any objection to anything unless it was "decadent rot" that any decent man would object to his womanfolk seeing, rot she couldn't understand the drift of--fortunately. Blear-eyed humbug.... He checked himself on the verge of an almost archiepiscopal outbreak in order to be patiently reasonable again. He was prepared to concede that it would be very nice if Lady Harman could be a good wife and also an entirely independent person, very nice, but the point was--his tone verged on the ironical--that she couldn't be two entirely different people at the same time.

"But you have your friends," she said, "you go away alone----"

"That's different," said Sir Isaac with a momentary note of annoyance. "It's business. It isn't that I want to."

Lady Harman had a feeling that they were neither of them gaining any ground. She blamed herself for her lack of lucidity. She began again, taking up the matter at a fresh point. She said that her life at present wasn't full, that it was only half a life, that it was just home and marriage and nothing else; he had his business, he went out into the world, he had politics and--"all sorts of things"; she hadn't these

interests; she had nothing in the place of them----

Sir Isaac closed this opening rather abruptly by telling her that she should count herself lucky she hadn't, and again the conversation was suspended for a time.

"But I want to know about these things," she said.

Sir Isaac took that musingly.

"There's things go on," she said; "outside home. There's social work, there's interests----Am I never to take any part--in that?"

Sir Isaac still reflected.

"There's one thing," he said at last, "I want to know. We'd better have it out--now."

But he hesitated for a time.

"Elly!" he blundered, "you aren't--you aren't getting somehow--not fond of me?"

She made no immediate reply.

"Look here!" he said in an altered voice. "Elly! there isn't something

below all this? There isn't something been going on that I don't know?"

Her eyes with a certain terror in their depths questioned him.

"Something," he said, and his face was deadly white--"Some other man, Elly?"

She was suddenly crimson, a flaming indignation.

"Isaac!" she said, "what do you mean? How can you ask me such a thing?"

"If it's that!" said Sir Isaac, his face suddenly full of malignant force, "I'll----But I'd kill you...."

"If it isn't that," he went on searching his mind; "why should a woman get restless? Why should she want to go away from her husband, go meeting other people, go gadding about? If a woman's satisfied, she's satisfied. She doesn't harbour fancies.... All this grumbling and unrest. Natural for your sister, but why should you? You've got everything a woman needs, husband, children, a perfectly splendid home, clothes, good jewels and plenty of them, respect! Why should you want to go out after things? It's mere spoilt-childishness. Of course you want to wander out--and if there isn't a man----"

He caught her wrist suddenly. "There isn't a man?" he demanded.

"Isaac!" she protested in horror.

"Then there'll be one. You think I'm a fool, you think I don't know anything all these literary and society people know. I do know. I know that a man and a woman have got to stick together, and if you go straying--you may think you're straying after the moon or social work or anything--but there's a strange man waiting round the corner for every woman and a strange woman for every man. Think I've had no temptations?... Oh! I know, I know. What's life or anything but that? and it's just because we've not gone on having more children, just because we listened to all those fools who said you were overdoing it, that all this fretting and grumbling began. We've got on to the wrong track, Elly, and we've got to get back to plain wholesome ways of living. See? That's what I've come down here for and what I mean to do. We've got to save ourselves. I've been too--too modern and all that. I'm going to be a husband as a husband should. I'm going to protect you from these idees--protect you from your own self.... And that's about where we stand, Elly, as I make it out."

He paused with the effect of having delivered himself of long premeditated things.

Lady Harman essayed to speak. But she found that directly she set herself to speak she sobbed and began weeping. She choked for a moment. Then she determined she would go on, and if she must cry, she must cry.

She couldn't let a disposition to tears seal her in silence for ever.

"It isn't," she said, "what I expected--of life. It isn't----"

"It's what life is," Sir Isaac cut in.

"When I think," she sobbed, "of what I've lost----"

"Lost!" cried Sir Isaac. "Lost! Oh come now, Elly, I like that. What!--lost. Hang it! You got to look facts in the face. You can't deny----Marrying like this,--you made a jolly good thing of it."

"But the beautiful things, the noble things!"

"What's beautiful?" cried Sir Isaac in protesting scorn. "What's noble? ROT! Doing your duty if you like and being sensible, that's noble and beautiful, but not fretting about and running yourself into danger. You've got to have a sense of humour, Elly, in this life----" He created a quotation. "As you make your bed--so shall you lie."

For an interval neither of them spoke. They crested the hill, and came into view of that advertisement board she had first seen in Mr. Brumley's company. She halted, and he went a step further and halted too. He recalled his ideas about the board. He had meant to have them all altered but other things had driven it from his mind....

"Then you mean to imprison me here," said Lady Harman to his back. He turned about.

"It isn't much like a prison. I'm asking you to stay here--and be what a wife should be."

"I'm to have no money."

"That's--that depends entirely on yourself. You know that well enough."

She looked at him gravely.

"I won't stand it," she said at last with a gentle deliberation.

She spoke so softly that he doubted his hearing. "What?" he asked sharply.

"I won't stand it," she repeated. "No."

"But--what can you do?"

"I don't know," she said, after a moment of grave consideration.

For some moments his mind hunted among possibilities.

"It's me that's standing it," he said. He came closely up to her. He

seemed on the verge of rhetoric. He pressed his thin white lips together. "Standing it! when we might be so happy," he snapped, and shrugged his shoulders and turned with an expression of mournful resolution towards the house again. She followed slowly.

He felt that he had done all that a patient and reasonable husband could do. Now--things must take their course.

§5

The imprisonment of Lady Harman at Black Strand lasted just one day short of a fortnight.

For all that time except for such interludes as the urgent needs of the strike demanded, Sir Isaac devoted himself to the siege. He did all he could to make her realize how restrainedly he used the powers the law vests in a husband, how little he forced upon her the facts of marital authority and wifely duty. At times he sulked, at times he affected a cold dignity, and at times a virile anger swayed him at her unsubmissive silences. He gave her little peace in that struggle, a struggle that came to the edge of physical conflict. There were moments when it seemed to her that nothing remained but that good old-fashioned connubial institution, the tussle for the upper hand, when with a feminine horror she felt violence shouldering her shoulder or contracting ready to grip her wrist. Against violence she doubted her strength, was filled with a

desolating sense of yielding nerve and domitable muscle. But just short of violence Sir Isaac's spirit failed him. He would glower and bluster, half threaten, and retreat. It might come to that at last but at present it had not come to that.

She could not understand why she had neither message nor sign from Susan Burnet, but she hid that anxiety and disappointment under her general dignity.

She spent as much time with the children as she could, and until Sir Isaac locked up the piano she played, and was surprised to find far more in Chopin than she had ever suspected in the days when she had acquired a passable dexterity of execution. She found, indeed, the most curious things in Chopin, emotional phrases, that stirred and perplexed and yet pleased her....

The weather was very fine and open that year. A golden sunshine from October passed on into November and Lady Harman spent many of these days amidst the pretty things the builder from Aleham had been too hurried to desecrate, dump, burn upon, and flatten into indistinguishable mire, after the established custom of builders in gardens since the world began. She would sit in the rockery where she had sat with Mr. Brumley and recall that momentous conversation, and she would wander up the pine-wood slopes behind, and she would spend long musing intervals among Euphemia's perennials, thinking sometimes, and sometimes not so much thinking as feeling the warm tendernesses of nature and the perplexing

difficulties of human life. With an amused amazement Lady Harman reflected as she walked about the pretty borders and the little patches of lawn and orchard that in this very place she was to have realized an imitation of the immortal "Elizabeth" and have been wise, witty, gay, defiant, gallant and entirely successful with her "Man of Wrath." Evidently there was some temperamental difference, or something in her situation, that altered the values of the affair. It was clearly a different sort of man for one thing. She didn't feel a bit gay, and her profound and deepening indignation with the alternative to this stagnation was tainted by a sense of weakness and incapacity.

She came very near surrender several times. There were afternoons of belated ripened warmth, a kind of summer that had been long in the bottle, with a certain lassitude in the air and a blue haze among the trees, that made her feel the folly of all resistances to fate. Why, after all, shouldn't she take life as she found it, that is to say, as Sir Isaac was prepared to give it to her? He wasn't really so bad, she told herself. The children--their noses were certainly a little sharp, but there might be worse children. The next might take after herself more. Who was she to turn upon her appointed life and declare it wasn't good enough? Whatever happened the world was still full of generous and beautiful things, trees, flowers, sunset and sunrise, music and mist and morning dew.... And as for this matter of the sweated workers, the harshness of the business, the ungracious competition, suppose if instead of fighting her husband with her weak powers, she persuaded him. She tried to imagine just exactly how he might be persuaded....

She looked up and discovered with an extraordinary amazement Mr. Brumley with eager gestures and a flushed and excited visage hurrying towards her across the croquet lawn.

§6

Lady Viping's dinner-party had been kept waiting exactly thirty-five minutes for Lady Harman. Sir Isaac, with a certain excess of zeal, had intercepted the hasty note his wife had written to account for her probable absence. The party was to have centred entirely upon Lady Harman, it consisted either of people who knew her already, or of people who were to have been specially privileged to know her, and Lady Viping telephoned twice to Putney before she abandoned hope. "It's disconnected," she said, returning in despair from her second struggle with the great public service. "They can't get a reply."

"It's that little wretch," said Lady Beach-Mandarin. "He hasn't let her come. I know him."

"It's like losing a front tooth," said Lady Viping, surveying her table as she entered the dining-room.

"But surely--she would have written," said Mr. Brumley, troubled and disappointed, regarding an aching gap to the left of his chair, a gap

upon which a pathetic little card bearing Lady Harman's name still lay obliquely.

Naturally the talk tended to centre upon the Harmans. And naturally Lady Beach-Mandarin was very bold and outspoken and called Sir Isaac quite a number of vivid things. She also aired her views of the marriage of the future, which involved a very stringent treatment of husbands indeed. "Half his property and half his income," said Lady Beach-Mandarin, "paid into her separate banking account."

"But," protested Mr. Brumley, "would men marry under those conditions?"

"Men will marry anyhow," said Lady Beach-Mandarin, "under any conditions."

"Exactly Sir Joshua's opinion," said Lady Viping.

All the ladies at the table concurred and only one cheerful bachelor barrister dissented. The other men became gloomy and betrayed a distaste for this general question. Even Mr. Brumley felt a curious faint terror and had for a moment a glimpse of the possibilities that might lie behind the Vote. Lady Beach-Mandarin went bouncing back to the particular instance. At present, she said, witness Lady Harman, women were slaves, pampered slaves if you will, but slaves. As things were now there was nothing to keep a man from locking up his wife, opening all her letters, dressing her in sack-cloth, separating her from her

children. Most men, of course, didn't do such things, they were amenable to public opinion, but Sir Isaac was a jealous little Ogre. He was a gnome who had carried off a princess....

She threw out projects for assailing the Ogre. She would descend to-morrow morning upon the Putney house, a living flamboyant writ of Habeas Corpus. Mr. Brumley, who had been putting two and two together, was abruptly moved to tell of the sale of Black Strand. "They may be there," he said.

"He's carried her off," cried Lady Beach-Mandarin on a top note. "It might be the eighteenth century for all he cares. But if it's Black Strand,--I'll go to Black Strand...."

But she had to talk about it for a week before she actually made her raid, and then, with an instinctive need for an audience, she took with her a certain Miss Garradice, one of those mute, emotional nervous spinsters who drift detachedly, with quick sudden movements, glittering eyeglasses, and a pent-up imminent look, about our social system. There is something about this type of womanhood--it is hard to say--almost as though they were the bottled souls of departed buccaneers grown somehow virginal. She came with Lady Beach-Mandarin quietly, almost humorously, and yet it was as if the pirate glittered dimly visible through the polished glass of her erect exterior.

"Here we are!" said Lady Beach-Mandarin, staring astonished at the once

familiar porch. "Now for it!"

She descended and assailed the bell herself and Miss Garradice stood beside her with the light of combat in her eyes and glasses and cheeks.

"Shall I offer to take her for a drive!"

"Let's," said Miss Garradice in an enthusiastic whisper. "Right away! For ever."

"I will," said Lady Beach-Mandarin, and nodded desperately.

She was on the point of ringing again when Snagsby appeared.

He stood with a large obstructiveness in the doorway. "Lady 'Arman, my lady" he said with a well-trained deliberation, "is not a Tome."

"Not at home!" queried Lady Beach-Mandarin.

"Not a Tome, my lady," repeated Snagsby invincibly.

"But--when will she be at home?"

"I can't say, my lady."

"Is Sir Isaac----?"

"Sir Isaac, my lady, is not a Tome. Nobody is a Tome, my lady."

"But we've come from London!" said Lady Beach-Mandarin.

"I'm very sorry, my lady."

"You see, I want my friend to see this house and garden."

Snagsby was visibly disconcerted. "I 'ave no instructions, my lady," he tried.

"Oh, but Lady Harman would never object----"

Snagsby's confusion increased. He seemed to be wanting to keep his face to the visitors and at the same time glance over his shoulder. "I will," he considered, "I will enquire, my lady." He backed a little, and seemed inclined to close the door upon them. Lady Beach-Mandarin was too quick for him. She got herself well into the open doorway. "And of whom are you going to enquire?"

A large distress betrayed itself in Snagsby's eye. "The 'ousekeeper," he attempted. "It falls to the 'ousekeeper, my lady."

Lady Beach-Mandarin turned her face to Miss Garradice, shining in support. "Stuff and nonsense," she said, "of course we shall come in."

And with a wonderful movement that was at once powerful and perfectly lady-like this intrepid woman--"butted" is not the word--collided herself with Snagsby and hurled him backward into the hall. Miss Garradice followed closely behind and at once extended herself in open order on Lady Beach-Mandarin's right. "Go and enquire," said Lady Beach-Mandarin with a sweeping gesture of her arm. "Go and enquire."

For a moment Snagsby surveyed the invasion with horror and then fled precipitately into the recesses of the house.

"Of course they're at home!" said Lady Beach-Mandarin. "Fancy that--that--that navigable--trying to shut the door on us!"

For a moment the two brightly excited ladies surveyed each other and then Lady Beach-Mandarin, with a quickness of movement wonderful in one so abundant, began to open first one and then another of the various doors that opened into the long hall-living room. At a peculiar little cry from Miss Garradice she turned from a contemplation of the long low study in which so much of the Euphemia books had been written, to discover Sir Isaac behind her, closely followed by an agonized Snagsby.

"A-a-a-a-h!" she cried, with both hands extended, "and so you've come in, Sir Isaac! That's perfectly delightful. This is my friend Miss Garradice, who's dying to see anything you've left of poor Euphemia's garden. And how is dear Lady Harman?"

For some crucial moments Sir Isaac was unable to speak and regarded his visitors with an expression that was unpretendingly criminal.

Then he found speech. "You can't," he said. "It--can't be managed." He shook his head; his lips were whitely compressed.

"But all the way from London, Sir Isaac!"

"Lady Harman's ill," lied Sir Isaac. "She mustn't be disturbed. Everything has to be kept quiet. See? Not even shouting. Not even ordinarily raised voices. A voice like yours--might kill her. That's why Snagsby here said we were not at home. We aren't at home--not to anyone."

Lady Beach-Mandarin was baffled.

"Snagsby," said Sir Isaac, "open that door."

"But can't I see her--just for a moment?"

Sir Isaac's malignity had softened a little at the prospect of victory. "Absolutely impossible," he said. "Everything disturbs her, every tiny thing. You----You'd be certain to."

Lady Beach-Mandarin looked at her companion and it was manifest that she was at the end of her resources. Miss Garradice after the fashion of

highly strung spinsters suddenly felt disappointed in her leader. It wasn't, her silence intimated, for her to offer suggestions.

The ladies were defeated. When at last that stiff interval ended their dresses rustled doorward, and Sir Isaac broke out into the civilities of a victor....

It was only when they were a mile away from Black Strand that fluent speech returned to Lady Beach-Mandarin. "The little--Crippen," she said. "He's got her locked up in some cellar.... Horrid little face he has! He looked like a rat at bay."

"I think perhaps if we'd done differently," said Miss Garradice in a tone of critical irresponsibility.

"I'll write to her. That's what I'll do," said Lady Beach-Mandarin contemplating her next step. "I'm really--concerned. And didn't you feel--something sinister. That butler-man's expression--a kind of round horror."

That very evening she told it all--it was almost the trial trip of the story--to Mr. Brumley....

Sir Isaac watched their departure furtively from the study window and then ran out to the garden. He went right through into the pine woods beyond and presently, far away up the slopes, he saw his wife loitering

down towards him, a gracious white tallness touched by a ray of sunlight--and without a suspicion of how nearly rescue had come to her.

§7

So you see under what excitement Mr. Brumley came down to Black Strand.

Luck was with him at first and he forced the defence with ridiculous ease.

"Lady Harman, sir, is not a Tome," said Snagsby.

"Ah!" said Mr. Brumley, with all the assurance of a former proprietor, "then I'll just have a look round the garden," and was through the green door in the wall and round the barn end before Snagsby's mind could function. That unfortunate man went as far as the green door in pursuit and then with a gesture of despair retreated to the pantry and began cleaning all his silver to calm his agonized spirit. He could pretend perhaps that Mr. Brumley had never rung at the front door at all. If not----

Moreover Mr. Brumley had the good fortune to find Lady Harman quite unattended and pensive upon the little seat that Euphemia had placed for the better seeing of her herbaceous borders.

"Lady Harman!" he said rather breathlessly, taking both her hands with an unwonted assurance and then sitting down beside her, "I am so glad to see you. I came down to see you--to see if I couldn't be of any service to you."

"It's so kind of you to come," she said, and her dark eyes said as much or more. She glanced round and he too glanced round for Sir Isaac.

"You see," he said. "I don't know.... I don't want to be impertinent.... But I feel--if I can be of any service to you.... I feel perhaps you want help here. I don't want to seem to be taking advantage of a situation. Or making unwarrantable assumptions. But I want to assure you--I would willingly die--if only I could do anything.... Ever since I first saw you."

He said all this in a distracted way, with his eyes going about the garden for the possible apparition of Sir Isaac, and all the time his sense of possible observers made him assume an attitude as though he was engaged in the smallest of small talk. Her colour quickened at the import of his words, and emotion, very rich and abundant emotion, its various factors not altogether untouched perhaps by the spirit of laughter, lit her eyes. She doubted a little what he was saying and yet she had anticipated that somehow, some day, in quite other circumstances, Mr. Brumley might break into some such strain.

"You see," he went on with a quality of appeal in his eyes, "there's so

little time to say things--without possible interruption. I feel you are in difficulties and I want to make you understand----We----Every beautiful woman, I suppose, has a sort of right to a certain sort of man. I want to tell you--I'm not really presuming to make love to you--but I want to tell you I am altogether yours, altogether at your service. I've had sleepless nights. All this time I've been thinking about you. I'm quite clear, I haven't a doubt, I'll do anything for you, without reward, without return, I'll be your devoted brother, anything, if only you'll make use of me...."

Her colour quickened. She looked around and still no one appeared. "It's so kind of you to come like this," she said. "You say things--But I have felt that you wanted to be brotherly...."

"Whatever I can be," assured Mr. Brumley.

"My situation here," she said, her dark frankness of gaze meeting his troubled eyes. "It's so strange and difficult. I don't know what to do. I don't know--what I want to do...."

"In London," said Mr. Brumley, "they think--they say--you have been taken off--brought down here--to a sort of captivity."

"I have," admitted Lady Harman with a note of recalled astonishment in her voice.

"If I can help you to escape----!"

"But where can I escape?"

And one must admit that it is a little difficult to indicate a correct refuge for a lady who finds her home intolerable. Of course there was Mrs. Sawbridge, but Lady Harman felt that her mother's disposition to lock herself into her bedroom at the slightest provocation made her a weak support for a defensive fight, and in addition that boarding-house at Bournemouth did not attract her. Yet what other wall in all the world was there for Lady Harman to set her back against? During the last few days Mr. Brumley's mind had been busy with the details of impassioned elopements conducted in the most exalted spirit, but now in the actual presence of the lady these projects did in the most remarkable manner vanish.

"Couldn't you," he said at last, "go somewhere?" And then with an air of being meticulously explicit, "I mean, isn't there somewhere, where you might safely go?"

(And in his dreams he had been crossing high passes with her; he had halted suddenly and stayed her mule. In his dream because he was a man of letters and a poet it was always a mule, never a train de luxe. "Look," he had said, "below there,--Italy!--the country you have never seen before.")

"There's nowhere," she answered.

"Now where?" asked Mr. Brumley, "and how?" with the tone and something of the gesture of one who racks his mind. "If you only trust yourself to me----Oh! Lady Harman, if I dared ask it----"

He became aware of Sir Isaac walking across the lawn towards them....

The two men greeted each other with a reasonable cordiality. "I wanted to see how you were getting on down here," said Mr. Brumley, "and whether there was anything I could do for you."

"We're getting on all right," said Sir Isaac with no manifest glow of gratitude.

"You've altered the old barn--tremendously."

"Come and see it," said Sir Isaac. "It's a wing."

Mr. Brumley remained seated. "It was the first thing that struck me, Lady Harman. This evidence of Sir Isaac's energy."

"Come and look over it," Sir Isaac persisted.

Mr. Brumley and Lady Harman rose together.

"One's enough to show him that," said Sir Isaac.

"I was telling Lady Harman how much we missed her at Lady Viping's, Sir Isaac."

"It was on account of the drains," Sir Isaac explained. "You can't--it's foolhardy to stay a day when the drains are wrong, dinners or no dinners."

"You know I was extremely sorry not to come to Lady Viping's. I hope you'll tell her. I wrote."

But Mr. Brumley didn't remember clearly enough to make any use of that.

"Everybody naturally is sorry on an occasion of that sort," said Sir Isaac. "But you come and see what we've done in that barn. In three weeks. They couldn't have got it together in three months ten years ago. It's--system."

Mr. Brumley still tried to cling to Lady Harman.

"Have you been interested in this building?" he asked.

"I still don't understand the system of the corridor," she said, rising a little belatedly to the occasion. "I will come."

Sir Isaac regarded her for a moment with a dubious expression and then began to explain the new method of building with large prepared units and shaped pieces of reinforced concrete instead of separate bricks that Messrs. Prothero & Cuthbertson had organized and which had enabled him to create this artistic corridor so simply. It was a rather uncomfortable three-cornered conversation. Sir Isaac addressed his exposition exclusively to Mr. Brumley and Mr. Brumley made repeated ineffectual attempts to bring Lady Harman, and Lady Harman made repeated ineffectual attempts to bring herself, into a position in the conversation.

Their eyes met, the glow of Mr. Brumley's declarations remained with them, but neither dared risk any phrase that might arouse Sir Isaac's suspicions or escape his acuteness. And when they had gone through the new additions pretty thoroughly--the plumbers were still busy with the barn bathroom--Sir Isaac asked Mr. Brumley if there was anything more he would like to see. In the slight pause that ensued Lady Harman suggested tea. But tea gave them no opportunity of resuming their interrupted conversation, and as Sir Isaac's invincible determination to shadow his visitor until he was well off the premises became more and more unmistakable,--he made it quite ungraciously unmistakable,--Mr. Brumley's inventiveness failed. One thing came to him suddenly, but it led to nothing of any service to him.

"But I heard you were dangerously ill, Lady Harman!" he cried. "Lady Beach-Mandarin called here----"

"But when?" asked Lady Harman, astonished over the tea-things.

"But you know she called!" said Mr. Brumley and looked in affected reproach at Sir Isaac.

"I've not been ill at all!"

"Sir Isaac told her."

"Told her I was ill!"

"Dangerously ill. That you couldn't bear to be disturbed."

"But when, Mr. Brumley?"

"Three days ago."

They both looked at Sir Isaac who was sitting on the music stool and eating a piece of tea-cake with a preoccupied air. He swallowed and then spoke thoughtfully--in a tone of detached observation. Nothing but a slight reddening of the eyes betrayed any unusual feeling in him.

"It's my opinion," he said, "that that old lady--Lady Beach-Mandarin I mean--doesn't know what she's saying half the time. She says--oh! remarkable things. Saying that for example!"

"But did she call on me?"

"She called. I'm surprised you didn't hear. And she was all in a flurry for going on.... Did you come down, Mr. Brumley, to see if Lady Harman was ill?"

"That weighed with me."

"Well,--you see she isn't," said Sir Isaac and brushed a stray crumb from his coat....

Mr. Brumley was at last impelled gateward and Sir Isaac saw him as far as the high-road.

"Good-bye!" cried Mr. Brumley with excessive amiability.

Sir Isaac with soundless lips made a good-bye like gesture.

"And now," said Sir Isaac to himself with extreme bitterness, "now to see about getting a dog."

"Bull mastiff?" said Sir Isaac developing his idea as he went back to Lady Harman. "Or perhaps a Thoroughly Vicious collie?"

"How did that chap get in?" he demanded. "What had he got to say to

you?"

"He came in--to look at the garden," said Lady Harman. "And of course he wanted to know if I had been well--because of Lady Viping's party. And I suppose because of what you told Lady Beach-Mandarin."

Sir Isaac grunted doubtfully. He thought of Snagsby and of all the instructions he had given Snagsby. He turned about and went off swiftly and earnestly to find Snagsby....

Snagsby lied. But Sir Isaac was able to tell from the agitated way in which he was cleaning his perfectly clean silver at that unseasonable hour that the wretched man was lying.

§8

Quite a number of words came to the lips of Mr. Brumley as he went unwillingly along the pleasant country road that led from Black Strand to the railway station. But the word he ultimately said showed how strongly the habits of the gentlemanly littérateur prevailed in him.
It was the one inevitable word for his mood,--"Baffled!"

Close upon its utterance came the weak irritation of the impotent man.
"What the devil?" cried Mr. Brumley.

Some critical spirit within him asked him urgently why he was going to the station, what he thought he was doing, what he thought he had done, and what he thought he was going to do. To all of which questions Mr. Brumley perceived he had no adequate reply.

Earlier in the day he had been inspired by a vague yet splendid dream of large masterful liberations achieved. He had intended to be very disinterested, very noble, very firm, and so far as Sir Isaac was concerned, a trifle overbearing. You know now what he said and did. "Of course if we could have talked for a little longer," he said. From the stormy dissatisfaction of his retreat this one small idea crystallized, that he had not talked enough without disturbance to Lady Harman. The thing he had to do was to talk to her some more. To go on with what he had been saying. That thought arrested his steps. On that hypothesis there was no reason whatever why he should go on to the station and London. Instead----He stopped short, saw a convenient gate ahead, went to it, seated himself upon its topmost rail and attempted a calm survey of the situation. He had somehow to continue that conversation with Lady Harman.

Was it impossible to do that by going back to the front door of Black Strand? His instinct was against that course. He knew that if he went back now openly he would see nobody but Sir Isaac or his butler. He must therefore not go back openly. He must go round now and into the pine-woods at the back of Black Strand; thence he must watch the garden and find his opportunity of speaking to the imprisoned lady. There was

something at once attractively romantic and repellently youthful about this course of action. Mr. Brumley looked at his watch, then he surveyed the blue clear sky overhead, with just one warm tinted wisp of cloud. It would be dark in an hour and it was probable that Lady Harman had already gone indoors for the day. Might it be possible after dark to approach the house? No one surely knew the garden so well as he.

Of course this sort of thing is always going on in romances; in the stories of that last great survivor of the Stevensonian tradition, H.B. Marriot Watson, the heroes are always creeping through woods, tapping at windows, and scaling house-walls, but Mr. Brumley as he sat on his gate became very sensible of his own extreme inexperience in such adventures. And yet anything seemed in his present mood better than going back to London.

Suppose he tried his luck!

He knew of course the lie of the land about Black Strand very well indeed and his harmless literary social standing gave him a certain freedom of trespass. He dropped from his gate on the inner side and taking a bridle path through a pine-wood was presently out upon the moorland behind his former home. He struck the high-road that led past the Staminal Bread Board and was just about to clamber over the barbed wire on his left and make his way through the trees to the crest that commanded the Black Strand garden when he perceived a man in a velveteen coat and gaiters strolling towards him. He decided not to leave the road

until he was free from observation. The man was a stranger, an almost conventional gamekeeper, and he endorsed Mr. Brumley's remark upon the charmingness of the day with guarded want of enthusiasm. Mr. Brumley went on for some few minutes, then halted, assured himself that the stranger was well out of sight and returned at once towards the point where high-roads were to be left and adventure begun. But he was still some yards away when he became aware of that velveteen-coated figure approaching again. "Damn!" said Mr. Brumley and slacked his eager paces. This time he expressed a view that the weather was extremely mild. "Very," said the man in velveteen with a certain lack of respect in his manner.

It was no good turning back again. Mr. Brumley went on slowly, affected to botanize, watched the man out of sight and immediately made a dash for the pine-woods, taking the barbed wire in a manner extremely detrimental to his left trouser leg. He made his way obliquely up through the trees to the crest from which he had so often surveyed the shining ponds of Aleham. There he paused to peer back for that gamekeeper--whom he supposed in spite of reason to be stalking him--to recover his breath and to consider his further plans. The sunset was very fine that night, a great red sun was sinking towards acutely outlined hill-crests, the lower nearer distances were veiled in lavender mists and three of the ponds shone like the fragments of a shattered pink topaz. But Mr. Brumley had no eye for landscape....

About two hours after nightfall Mr. Brumley reached the railway station.

His trousers and the elbow of his coat bore witness to a second transit of the barbed-wire fence in the darkness, he had manifestly walked into a boggy place and had some difficulty in recovering firm ground and he had also been sliding in a recumbent position down a bank of moist ferruginous sand. Moreover he had cut the palm of his left hand. There was a new strange stationmaster who regarded him without that respect to which he had grown accustomed. He received the information that the winter train service had been altered and that he would have to wait forty-five minutes for the next train to London with the resignation of a man already chastened by misfortune and fatigue. He went into the waiting-room and after a vain search for the poker--the new stationmaster evidently kept it in a different place--sat down in front of an irritatingly dull fire banked up with slack, and nursed his damaged hand and meditated on his future plans.

His plans were still exactly in the state in which they had been when Sir Isaac parted from him at the gate of Black Strand. They remained in the same state for two whole days. Throughout all that distressing period his general intention of some magnificent intervention on behalf of Lady Harman remained unchanged, it produced a number of moving visions of flights at incredible speeds in (recklessly hired) motor-cars of colossal power,--most of the purchase money for Black Strand was still uninvested at his bank--of impassioned interviews with various people, of a divorce court with a hardened judge congratulating the manifestly quite formal co-respondent on the moral beauty of his behaviour, but it evolved no sort of concrete practicable detail upon

which any kind of action might be taken. And during this period of indecision Mr. Brumley was hunted through London by a feverish unrest. When he was in his little flat in Pont Street he was urged to go to his club, when he got to his club he was urged to go anywhere else, he called on the most improbable people and as soon as possible fled forth again, he even went to the British Museum and ordered out a lot of books on matrimonial law. Long before that great machine had disgorged them for him he absconded and this neglected, this widowed pile of volumes still standing to his account only came back to his mind in the middle of the night suddenly and disturbingly while he was trying to remember the exact words he had used in his brief conversation with Lady Harman....

§9

Two days after Mr. Brumley's visit Susan Burnet reached Black Strand. She too had been baffled for a while. For some week or more she couldn't discover the whereabouts of Lady Harman and lived in the profoundest perplexity. She had brought back her curtains to the Putney house in a large but luggable bundle, they were all made and ready to put up, and she found the place closed and locked, in the charge of a caretaker whose primary duty it was to answer no questions. It needed several days of thought and amazement, and a vast amount of "I wonder," and "I just would like to know," before it occurred to Susan that if she wrote to Lady Harman at the Putney address the letter might be forwarded. And

even then she almost wrecked the entire enterprise by mentioning the money, and it was by a quite exceptional inspiration that she thought after all it was wiser not to say that but to state that she had finished the curtains and done everything (underlined) that Lady Harman had desired. Sir Isaac read it and tossed it over to his wife. "Make her send her bill," he remarked.

Whereupon Lady Harman set Mrs. Crumble in motion to bring Susan down to Black Strand. This wasn't quite easy because as Mrs. Crumble pointed out they hadn't the slightest use for Susan's curtains there, and Lady Harman had to find the morning light quite intolerable in her bedroom--she always slept with window wide open and curtains drawn back--to create a suitable demand for Susan's services. But at last Susan came, too humbly invisible for Sir Isaac's attention, and directly she found Lady Harman alone in the room with her, she produced a pawn ticket and twenty pounds. "I 'ad to give all sorts of particulars," she said. "It was a job. But I did it...."

The day was big with opportunity, for Sir Isaac had been unable to conceal the fact that he had to spend the morning in London. He had gone up in the big car and his wife was alone, and so, with Susan upstairs still deftly measuring for totally unnecessary hangings, Lady Harman was able to add a fur stole and a muff and some gloves to her tweed gardening costume, walk unchallenged into the garden and from the garden into the wood and up the hillside and over the crest and down to the high-road and past that great advertisement of Staminal Bread and so for

four palpitating miles, to the railway station and the outer world.

She had the good fortune to find a train imminent,--the twelve-seventeen. She took a first-class ticket for London and got into a compartment with another woman because she felt it would be safer.

§10

Lady Harman reached Miss Alimony's flat at half-past three in the afternoon. She had lunched rather belatedly and uncomfortably in the Waterloo Refreshment Room and she had found out that Miss Alimony was at home through the telephone. "I want to see you urgently," she said, and Miss Alimony received her in that spirit. She was hatless but she had a great cloud of dark fuzzy hair above the grey profundity of her eyes and she wore an artistic tea-gown that in spite of a certain looseness at neck and sleeve emphasized the fine lines of her admirable figure. Her flat was furnished chiefly with books and rich oriental hangings and vast cushions and great bowls of scented flowers. On the mantel-shelf was the crystal that amused her lighter moments and above it hung a circular allegory by Florence Swinstead, very rich in colour, the Awakening of Woman, in a heavy gold frame. Miss Alimony conducted her guest to an armchair, knelt flexibly on the hearthrug before her, took up a small and elegant poker with a brass handle and a spear-shaped service end of iron and poked the fire.

The service end came out from the handle and fell into the grate. "It always does that," said Miss Alimony charmingly. "But never mind." She warmed both hands at the blaze. "Tell me all about it," she said, softly.

Lady Harman felt she would rather have been told all about it. But perhaps that would follow.

"You see," she said, "I find----My married life----"

She halted. It was very difficult to tell.

"Everyone," said Agatha, giving a fine firelit profile, and remaining gravely thoughtful through a little pause.

"Do you mind," she asked abruptly, "if I smoke?"

When she had completed her effect with a delicately flavoured cigarette, she encouraged Lady Harman to proceed.

This Lady Harman did in a manner do. She said her husband left her no freedom of mind or movement, gave her no possession of herself, wanted to control her reading and thinking. "He insists----" she said.

"Yes," said Miss Agatha sternly blowing aside her cigarette smoke. "They all insist."

"He insists," said Lady Harman, "on seeing all my letters, choosing all my friends. I have no control over my house or my servants, no money except what he gives me."

"In fact you are property."

"I'm simply property."

"A harem of one. And all that is within the provisions of the law!"

"How any woman can marry!" said Miss Agatha, after a little interval. "I sometimes think that is where the true strike of the sex ought to begin. If none of us married! If we said all of us, 'No,--definitely--we refuse this bargain! It is a man-made contract. We have had no voice in it. We decline.' Perhaps it will come to that. And I knew that you, you with that quiet beautiful penetration in your eyes would come to see it like that. The first task, after the vote is won, will be the revision of that contract. The very first task of our Women Statesmen...."

She ceased and revived her smouldering cigarette and mused blinking through the smoke. She seemed for a time almost lost to the presence of her guest in a great daydream of womanstatecraft.

"And so," she said, "you've come, as they all come,--to join us."

"Well," said Lady Harman in a tone that made Agatha turn eyes of surprise upon her.

"Of course," continued Lady Harman, "I suppose--I shall join you; but as a matter of fact you see, what I've done to-day has been to come right away.... You see I am still in my garden tweeds.... There it was down there, a sort of stale mate...."

Agatha sat up on her heels.

"But my dear!" she said, "you don't mean you've run away?"

"Yes,--I've run away."

"But--run away!"

"I sold a ring and got some money and here I am!"

"But--what are you going to do?"

"I don't know. I thought you perhaps--might advise."

"But--a man like your husband! He'll pursue you!"

"If he knows where I am, he will," said Lady Harman.

"He'll make a scandal. My dear! are you wise? Tell me, tell me exactly, why have you run away? I didn't understand at all--that you had run away."

"Because," began Lady Harman and flushed hotly. "It was impossible," she said.

Miss Alimony regarded her deeply. "I wonder," she said.

"I feel," said Lady Harman, "if I stayed, if I gave in----I mean after--after I had once--rebelled. Then I should just be--a wife--ruled, ordered----"

"It wasn't your place to give in," said Miss Alimony and added one of those parliament touches that creep more and more into feminine phraseology; "I agree to that--nemine contradicente. But--I wonder...."

She began a second cigarette and thought in profile again.

"I think, perhaps, I haven't explained, clearly, how things are," said Lady Harman, and commenced a rather more explicit statement of her case. She felt she had not conveyed and she wanted to convey to Miss Alimony that her rebellion was not simply a desire for personal freedom and autonomy, that she desired these things because she was becoming more and more aware of large affairs outside her home life in which she ought

to be not simply interested but concerned, that she had been not merely watching the workings of the business that made her wealthy, but reading books about socialism, about social welfare that had stirred her profoundly.... "But he won't even allow me to know of such things," she said....

Miss Alimony listened a little abstractedly.

Suddenly she interrupted. "Tell me," she said, "one thing.... I confess," she explained, "I've no business to ask. But if I'm to advise----If my advice is to be worth anything...."

"Yes?" asked Lady Harman.

"Is there----Is there someone else?"

"Someone else?" Lady Harman was crimson.

"On your side!"

"Someone else on my side?"

"I mean--someone. A man perhaps? Some man that you care for? More than you do for your husband?..."

"I can't imagine," whispered Lady Harman, "anything----" And left

her sentence unfinished. Her breath had gone. Her indignation was profound.

"Then I can't understand why you should find it so important to come away."

Lady Harman could offer no elucidation.

"You see," said Miss Alimony, with an air of expert knowledge, "our case against our opponents is just exactly their great case against us. They say to us when we ask for the Vote, 'the Woman's Place is the Home.' 'Precisely,' we answer, 'the Woman's Place is the Home. Give us our Homes!' Now your place is your home--with your children. That's where you have to fight your battle. Running away--for you it's simply running away."

"But----If I stay I shall be beaten." Lady Harman surveyed her hostess with a certain dismay. "Do you understand, Agatha? I can't go back."

"But my dear! What else can you do? What had you thought?"

"You see," said Lady Harman, after a little struggle with that childish quality in her nerves that might, if it wasn't controlled, make her eyes brim. "You see, I didn't expect you quite to take this view. I thought perhaps you might be disposed----If I could have stayed with you here, only for a little time, I could have got some work or something----"

"It's so dreadful," said Miss Alimony, sitting far back with the relaxation of infinite regrets. "It's dreadful."

"Of course if you don't see it as I do----"

"I can't," said Miss Alimony. "I can't."

She turned suddenly upon her visitor and grasped her knees with her shapely hands. "Oh let me implore you! Don't run away. Please for my sake, for all our sakes, for the sake of Womanhood, don't run away! Stay at your post. You mustn't run away. You must not. If you do, you admit everything. Everything. You must fight in your home. It's your home. That is the great principle you must grasp,--it's not his. It's there your duty lies. And there are your children--your children, your little ones! Think if you go--there may be a fearful fuss--proceedings. Lawyers--a search. Very probably he will take all sorts of proceedings. It will be a Matrimonial Case. How can I be associated with that? We mustn't mix up Women's Freedom with Matrimonial Cases. Impossible! We dare not! A woman leaving her husband! Think of the weapon it gives our enemies. If once other things complicate the Vote,--the Vote is lost. After all our self-denial, after all our sacrifices.... You see! Don't you see?...

"Fight!" she summarized after an eloquent interval.

"You mean," said Lady Harman,--"you think I ought to go back."

Miss Alimony paused to get her full effect. "Yes," she said in a profound whisper and endorsed it, "Oh so much so!--yes."

"Now?"

"Instantly."

For an interval neither lady spoke. It was the visitor at last who broke the tension.

"Do you think," she asked in a small voice and with the hesitation of one whom no refusal can surprise; "you could give me a cup of tea?"

Miss Alimony rose with a sigh and a slow unfolding rustle. "I forgot," she said. "My little maid is out."

Lady Harman left alone sat for a time staring at the fire with her eyes rather wide and her eyebrows raised as though she mutely confided to it her infinite astonishment. This was the last thing she had expected. She would have to go to some hotel. Can a woman stay alone at an hotel? Her heart sank. Inflexible forces seemed to be pointing her back to home--and Sir Isaac. He would be a very triumphant Sir Isaac, and she'd not have much heart left in her.... "I won't go back," she whispered to herself. "Whatever happens I won't go back...."

Then she became aware of the evening newspaper Miss Alimony had been reading. The headline, "Suffrage Raid on Regent Street," caught her eye. A queer little idea came into her head. It grew with tremendous rapidity. She put out a hand and took up the paper and read.

She had plenty of time to read because her hostess not only got the tea herself but went during that process to her bedroom and put on one of those hats that have contributed so much to remove the stigma of dowdiness from the suffrage cause, as an outward and visible sign that she was presently ceasing to be at home....

Lady Harman found an odd fact in the report before her. "One of the most difficult things to buy at the present time in the West End of London," it ran, "is a hammer...."

Then a little further: "The magistrate said it was impossible to make discriminations in this affair. All the defendants must have a month's imprisonment...."

When Miss Alimony returned Lady Harman put down the paper almost guiltily.

Afterwards Miss Alimony recalled that guilty start, and the still more guilty start that had happened, when presently she went out of the room again and returned with a lamp, for the winter twilight was upon them.

Afterwards, too, she was to learn what had become of the service end of her small poker, the little iron club, which she missed almost as soon as Lady Harman had gone....

Lady Harman had taken that grubby but convenient little instrument and hidden it in her muff, and she had gone straight out of Miss Alimony's flat to the Post Office at the corner of Jago Street, and there, with one simple effective impact, had smashed a ground-glass window, the property of His Majesty King George the Fifth. And having done so, she had called the attention of a youthful policeman, fresh from Yorkshire, to her offence, and after a slight struggle with his incredulity and a visit to the window in question, had escorted him to the South Hampsmith police-station, and had there made him charge her. And on the way she explained to him with a newfound lucidity why it was that women should have votes.

And all this she did from the moment of percussion onward, in a mood of exaltation entirely strange to her, but, as she was astonished to find, by no means disagreeable. She found afterwards that she only remembered very indistinctly her selection of the window and her preparations for the fatal blow, but that the effect of the actual breakage remained extraordinarily vivid upon her memory. She saw with extreme distinctness both as it was before and after the breakage, first as a rather irregular grey surface, shining in the oblique light of a street lamp, and giving pale phantom reflections of things in the street, and then as it was after her blow. It was all visual impression in her memory; she

could not recollect afterwards if there had been any noise at all. Where there had been nothing but a milky dinginess a thin-armed, irregular star had flashed into being, and a large triangular piece at its centre, after what seemed an interminable indecision, had slid, first covertly downward, and then fallen forward at her feet and shivered into a hundred fragments....

Lady Harman realized that a tremendous thing had been done--irrevocably. She stared at her achievement open-mouthed. The creative lump of iron dropped from her hand. She had a momentary doubt whether she had really wanted to break that window at all; and then she understood that this business had to be seen through, and seen through with neatness and dignity; and that wisp of regret vanished absolutely in her concentration upon these immediate needs.

§11

Some day, when the arts of the writer and illustrator are more closely blended than they are to-day, it will be possible to tell of all that followed this blow, with an approach to its actual effect. Here there should stand a page showing simply and plainly the lower half of the window of the Jago Street Post Office, a dark, rather grimy pane, reflecting the light of a street lamp--and broken. Below the pane would come a band of evilly painted woodwork, a corner of letter-box, a foot or so of brickwork, and then the pavement with a dropped lump of

iron. That would be the sole content of this page, and the next page would be the same, but very slightly fainter, and across it would be printed a dim sentence or so of explanation. The page following that would show the same picture again, but now several lines of type would be visible, and then, as one turned over, the smashed window would fade a little, and the printed narrative, still darkened and dominated by it, would nevertheless resume. One would read on how Lady Harman returned to convince the incredulous young Yorkshireman of her feat, how a man with a barrow-load of bananas volunteered comments, and how she went in custody, but with the extremest dignity, to the police-station. Then, with some difficulty, because that imposed picture would still prevail over the letterpress, and because it would be in small type, one would learn how she was bailed out by Lady Beach-Mandarin, who was clearly the woman she ought to have gone to in the first place, and who gave up a dinner with a duchess to entertain her, and how Sir Isaac, being too torn by his feelings to come near her spent the evening in a frantic attempt to keep the whole business out of the papers. He could not manage it. The magistrate was friendly next morning, but inelegant in his friendly expedients; he remanded Lady Harman until her mental condition could be inquired into, but among her fellow-defendants--there had been quite an epidemic of window-smashing that evening--Lady Harman shone pre-eminently sane. She said she had broken this window because she was assured that nothing would convince people of the great dissatisfaction of women with their conditions except such desperate acts, and when she was reminded of her four daughters she said it was precisely the thought of how they too would grow up to womanhood that

had made her strike her blow. The statements were rather the outcome of her evening with Lady Beach-Mandarin than her own unaided discoveries, but she had honestly assimilated them, and she expressed them with a certain simple dignity.

Sir Isaac made a pathetic appearance before the court, and Lady Harman was shocked to see how worn he was with distress at her scandalous behaviour. He looked a broken man. That curious sense of personal responsibility, which had slumbered throughout the Black Strand struggle, came back to her in a flood, and she had to grip the edge of the dock tightly to maintain her self-control. Unaccustomed as he was to public speaking, Sir Isaac said in a low, sorrow-laden voice, he had provided himself with a written statement dissociating himself from the views his wife's rash action might seem to imply, and expressing his own opinions upon woman's suffrage and the relations of the sexes generally, with especial reference to contemporary literature. He had been writing it most of the night. He was not, however, permitted to read this, and he then made an unstudied appeal for the consideration and mercy of the court. He said Lady Harman had always been a good mother and a faithful wife; she had been influenced by misleading people and bad books and publications, the true significance of which she did not understand, and if only the court would regard this first offence leniently he was ready to take his wife away and give any guarantee that might be specified that it should not recur. The magistrate was sympathetic and kindly, but he pointed out that this window-breaking had to be stamped out, and that it could only be stamped out by refusing any such

exception as Sir Isaac desired. And so Sir Isaac left the court widowed for a month, a married man without a wife, and terribly distressed.

All this and more one might tell in detail, and how she went to her cell, and the long tedium of her imprisonment, and how deeply Snagsby felt the disgrace, and how Miss Alimony claimed her as a convert to the magic of her persuasions, and many such matters--there is no real restraint upon a novelist fully resolved to be English and Gothic and unclassical except obscure and inexplicable instincts. But these obscure and inexplicable instincts are at times imperative, and on this occasion they insist that here must come a break, a pause, in the presence of this radiating gap in the Postmaster-General's glass, and the phenomenon of this gentle and beautiful lady, the mother of four children, grasping in her gloved hand, and with a certain amateurishness, a lumpish poker-end of iron.

We make the pause by ending the chapter here and by resuming the story at a fresh point--with an account of various curious phases in the mental development of Mr. Brumley.