The second day opened rather dully for Benham. There was not an idea left in his head about anything in the world. It was--SOLID. He walked through Bramley and Godalming and Witley and so came out upon the purple waste of Hindhead. He strayed away from the road and found a sunny place of turf amidst the heather and lay down and slept for an hour or so. He arose refreshed. He got some food at the Huts Inn on the Hindhead crest and went on across sunlit heathery wildernesses variegated by patches of spruce and fir and silver birch. And then suddenly his mental inanition was at an end and his thoughts were wide and brave again. He was astonished that for a moment he could have forgotten that he was vowed to the splendid life.

"Continence by preoccupation;" he tried the phrase....

"A man must not give in to fear; neither must he give in to sex. It's the same thing really. The misleading of instinct."

This set the key of his thought throughout the afternoon--until Amanda happened to him.

CHAPTER THE THIRD ~~ AMANDA

1

Amanda happened to Benham very suddenly.

From Haslemere he had gone on to further heaths and gorse beyond Liphook, and thence he had wandered into a pretty district beset with Hartings. He had found himself upon a sandy ridge looking very beautifully into a sudden steep valley that he learnt was Harting Coombe; he had been through a West Harting and a South Harting and read finger-posts pointing to others of the clan; and in the evening, at the foot of a steep hill where two roads met, he sat down to consider whether he should go back and spend the night in one of the two kindly-looking inns of the latter place or push on over the South Downs towards the unknown luck of Singleton or Chichester. As he sat down two big retrievers, black and brown, came headlong down the road. The black carried a stick, the brown disputed and pursued. As they came abreast of him the foremost a little relaxed his hold, the pursuer grabbed at it, and in an instant the rivalry had flared to rage and a first-class dogfight was in progress.

Benham detested dog-fights. He stood up, pale and distressed. "Lie down!" he cried. "Shut up, you brutes!" and was at a loss for further action.

Then it was Amanda leapt into his world, a light, tall figure of a girl, fluttering a short petticoat. Hatless she was, brown, flushed, and her dark hair tossing loose, and in a moment she had the snarling furious dogs apart, each gripped firmly by its collar. Then with a wriggle black was loose and had closed again. Inspired by the best traditions of chivalry Benham came to her assistance. He was not expert with dogs. He grasped the black dog under its ear. He was bitten in the wrist, rather in excitement than malice, and with a certain excess of zeal he was strangling the brute before you could count ten.

Amanda seized the fallen stick and whacked the dog she held, reasonably but effectively until its yelps satisfied her. "There!" she said pitching her victim from her, and stood erect again. She surveyed the proceedings of her helper for the first time.

"You needn't," she said, "choke Sultan anymore."

"Ugh!" she said, as though that was enough for Sultan. And peace was restored.

"I'm obliged to you. But--... I say! He didn't bite you, did he? Oh, SULTAN!"

Sultan tried to express his disgust at the affair. Rotten business. When a fellow is fighting one can't be meticulous. And if people come interfering. Still--SORRY! So Sultan by his code of eye and tail.

"May I see?... Something ought to be done to this...."

She took his wrist in her hand, and her cheek and eyelashes came within a foot of his face.

Some observant element in his composition guessed, and guessed quite accurately, that she was nineteen....

2

She had an eyebrow like a quick stroke of a camel's-hair brush, she had a glowing face, half childish imp, half woman, she had honest hazel eyes, a voice all music, a manifest decision of character. And he must have this bite seen to at once. She lived not five minutes away. He must come with her.

She had an aunt who behaved like a mother and a mother who behaved like a genteel visitor, and they both agreed with Amanda that although Mr. Walter Long and his dreadful muzzles and everything did seem to have stamped out rabies, yet you couldn't be too careful with a dog bite. A dog bite might be injurious in all sorts of ways--particularly Sultan's bite. He was, they had to confess, a dog without refinement, a coarse-minded omnivorous dog. Both the elder ladies insisted upon

regarding Benham's wound as clear evidence of some gallant rescue of Amanda from imminent danger--"she's always so RECKLESS with those dogs," as though Amanda was not manifestly capable of taking care of herself; and when he had been Listerined and bandaged, they would have it that he should join them at their supper-dinner, which was already prepared and waiting. They treated him as if he were still an undergraduate, they took his arrangements in hand as though he was a favourite nephew. He must stay in Harting that night. Both the Ship and the Coach and Horses were excellent inns, and over the Downs there would be nothing for miles and miles....

The house was a little long house with a verandah and a garden in front of it with flint-edged paths; the room in which they sat and ate was long and low and equipped with pieces of misfitting good furniture, an accidental-looking gilt tarnished mirror, and a sprinkling of old and middle-aged books. Some one had lit a fire, which cracked and spurted about cheerfully in a motherly fireplace, and a lamp and some candles got lit. Mrs. Wilder, Amanda's aunt, a comfortable dark broad-browed woman, directed things, and sat at the end of the table and placed Benham on her right hand between herself and Amanda. Amanda's mother remained undeveloped, a watchful little woman with at least an eyebrow like her daughter's. Her name, it seemed, was Morris. No servant appeared, but two cousins of a vague dark picturesqueness and with a stamp of thirty upon them, the first young women Benham had ever seen dressed in djibbahs, sat at the table or moved about and attended to the simple needs of the service. The reconciled dogs were in the room and shifted inquiring noses from one human being to another.

Amanda's people were so easy and intelligent and friendly, and Benham after his thirty hours of silence so freshly ready for human association, that in a very little while he could have imagined he had known and trusted this household for years. He had never met such people before, and yet there was something about them that seemed familiar--and then it occurred to him that something of their easy-going freedom was to be found in Russian novels. A photographic enlargement of somebody with a vegetarian expression of face and a special kind of slouch hat gave the atmosphere a flavour of Socialism, and a press and tools and stamps and pigments on an oak table in the corner suggested some such socialistic art as bookbinding. They were clearly 'advanced' people. And Amanda was tremendously important to them, she was their light, their pride, their most living thing. They focussed on her. When he talked to them all in general he talked to her in particular. He felt that some introduction of himself was due to these welcoming people. He tried to give it mixed with an itinerary and a sketch of his experiences. He praised the heather country and Harting Coombe and the Hartings. He told them that London had suddenly become intolerable--"In the spring sunshine."

"You live in London?" said Mrs. Wilder.

Yes. And he had wanted to think things out. In London one could do no thinking--

"Here we do nothing else," said Amanda.

"Except dog-fights," said the elder cousin.

"I thought I would just wander and think and sleep in the open air. Have you ever tried to sleep in the open air?"

"In the summer we all do," said the younger cousin. "Amanda makes us. We go out on to the little lawn at the back."

"You see Amanda has some friends at Limpsfield. And there they all go out and camp and sleep in the woods."

"Of course," reflected Mrs. Wilder, "in April it must be different."

"It IS different," said Benham with feeling; "the night comes five hours too soon. And it comes wet." He described his experiences and his flight to Shere and the kindly landlord and the cup of coffee. "And after that I thought with a vengeance."

"Do you write things?" asked Amanda abruptly, and it seemed to him with a note of hope.

"No. No, it was just a private puzzle. It was something I couldn't get straight."

"And you have got it straight?" asked Amanda.

"I think so."

"You were making up your mind about something?"

"Amanda DEAR!" cried her mother.

"Oh! I don't mind telling you," said Benham.

They seemed such unusual people that he was moved to unusual confidences. They had that effect one gets at times with strangers freshly met as though they were not really in the world. And there was something about Amanda that made him want to explain himself to her completely.

"What I wanted to think about was what I should do with my life."

"Haven't you any WORK--?" asked the elder cousin.

"None that I'm obliged to do."

"That's where a man has the advantage," said Amanda with the tone of profound reflection. "You can choose. And what are you going to do with your life?"

"Amanda," her mother protested, "really you mustn't!"

"I'm going round the world to think about it," Benham told her.

"I'd give my soul to travel," said Amanda.

She addressed her remark to the salad in front of her.

"But have you no ties?" asked Mrs. Wilder.

"None that hold me," said Benham. "I'm one of those unfortunates who needn't do anything at all. I'm independent. You see my riddles. East and west and north and south, it's all my way for the taking. There's not an indication."

"If I were you," said Amanda, and reflected. Then she half turned herself to him. "I should go first to India," she said, "and I should shoot, one, two, three, yes, three tigers. And then I would see Farukhabad Sikri--I was reading in a book about it yesterday--where the jungle grows in the palaces; and then I would go right up the Himalayas, and then, then I would have a walking tour in Japan, and then I would sail in a sailing ship down to Borneo and Java and set myself up as a Ranee--... And then I would think what I would do next."

"All alone, Amanda?" asked Mrs. Wilder.

"Only when I shoot tigers. You and mother should certainly come to Japan."

"But Mr. Benham perhaps doesn't intend to shoot tigers, Amanda?" said

Amanda's mother.

"Not at once. My way will be a little different. I think I shall go first through Germany. And then down to Constantinople. And then I've some idea of getting across Asia Minor and Persia to India. That would take some time. One must ride."

"Asia Minor ought to be fun," said Amanda. "But I should prefer India because of the tigers. It would be so jolly to begin with the tigers right away."

"It is the towns and governments and peoples I want to see rather than tigers," said Benham. "Tigers if they are in the programme. But I want to find out about--other things."

"Don't you think there's something to be found out at home?" said the elder cousin, blushing very brightly and speaking with the effort of one who speaks for conscience' sake.

"Betty's a Socialist," Amanda said to Benham with a suspicion of apology.

"Well, we're all rather that," Mrs. Wilder protested.

"If you are free, if you are independent, then don't you owe something to the workers?" Betty went on, getting graver and redder with each word.

"It's just because of that," said Benham, "that I am going round the world."

3

He was as free with these odd people as if he had been talking to Prothero. They were--alert. And he had been alone and silent and full of thinking for two clear days. He tried to explain why he found Socialism at once obvious and inadequate....

Presently the supper things got themselves put away and the talk moved into a smaller room with several armchairs and a fire. Mrs. Wilder and the cousins and Amanda each smoked a cigarette as if it were symbolical, and they were joined by a grave grey-bearded man with a hyphenated name and slightly Socratic manner, dressed in a very blue linen shirt and collar, a very woolly mustard-coloured suit and loose tie, and manifestly devoted to one of those branches of exemplary domestic decoration that grow upon Socialist soil in England. He joined Betty in the opinion that the duty of a free and wealthy young man was to remain in England and give himself to democratic Socialism and the abolition of "profiteering." "Consider that chair," he said. But Benham had little feeling for the craftsmanship of chairs.

Under cross-examination Mr. Rathbone-Sanders became entangled and prophetic. It was evident he had never thought out his "democratic," he had rested in some vague tangle of idealism from which Benham now set himself with the zeal of a specialist to rout him. Such an argument sprang up as one meets with rarely beyond the happy undergraduate's range. Everybody lived in the discussion, even Amanda's mother listened visibly. Betty said she herself was certainly democratic and Mrs. Wilder had always thought herself to be so, and outside the circle round the fire Amanda hovered impatiently, not quite sure of her side as yet, but eager to come down with emphasis at the first flash of intimation.

She came down vehemently on Benham's.

And being a very clear-cutting personality with an instinct for the material rendering of things, she also came and sat beside him on the little square-cornered sofa.

"Of course, Mr. Rathbone-Sanders," she said, "of course the world must belong to the people who dare. Of course people aren't all alike, and dull people, as Mr. Benham says, and spiteful people, and narrow people have no right to any voice at all in things...."

In saying this she did but echo Benham's very words, and all she said and did that evening was in quick response to Benham's earnest expression of his views. She found Benham a delightful novelty. She liked to argue because there was no other talk so lively, and she had perhaps a lurking intellectual grudge against Mr. Rathbone-Sanders that made her welcome an ally. Everything from her that night that even verges upon the notable has been told, and yet it sufficed, together with something in the clear, long line of her limbs, in her voice, in her general physical quality, to convince Benham that she was the freest, finest, bravest spirit that he had ever encountered.

In the papers he left behind him was to be found his perplexed endeavours to explain this mental leap, that after all his efforts still remained unexplained. He had been vividly impressed by the decision and courage of her treatment of the dogs; it was just the sort of thing he could not do. And there was a certain contagiousness in the petting admiration with which her family treated her. But she was young and healthy and so was he, and in a second mystery lies the key of the first. He had fallen in love with her, and that being so whatever he needed that instantly she was. He needed a companion, clean and brave and understanding....

In his bed in the Ship that night he thought of nothing but her before he went to sleep, and when next morning he walked on his way over the South Downs to Chichester his mind was full of her image and of a hundred pleasant things about her. In his confessions he wrote, "I felt there was a sword in her spirit. I felt she was as clean as the wind."

Love is the most chastening of powers, and he did not even remember now that two days before he had told the wind and the twilight that he would certainly "roll and rollick in women" unless there was work for him to do. She had a peculiarly swift and easy stride that went with him in his thoughts along the turf by the wayside halfway and more to Chichester. He thought always of the two of them as being side by side. His imagination became childishly romantic. The open down about him with its scrub of thorn and yew became the wilderness of the world, and through it they went--in armour, weightless armour--and they wore long swords. There was a breeze blowing and larks were singing and something, something dark and tortuous dashed suddenly in headlong flight from before their feet. It was an ethical problem such as those Mrs. Skelmersdale nursed in her bosom. But at the sight of Amanda it had straightened out--and fled....

And interweaving with such imaginings, he was some day to record, there were others. She had brought back to his memory the fancies that had been aroused in his first reading of Plato's REPUBLIC; she made him think of those women Guardians, who were the friends and mates of men. He wanted now to re-read that book and the LAWS. He could not remember if the Guardians were done in the LAWS as well as in the REPUBLIC. He wished he had both these books in his rucksack, but as he had not, he decided he would hunt for them in Chichester. When would he see Amanda again? He would ask his mother to make the acquaintance of these very interesting people, but as they did not come to London very much it might be some time before he had a chance of seeing her again.

And, besides, he was going to America and India. The prospect of an exploration of the world was still noble and attractive; but he realized it would stand very much in the way of his seeing more of Amanda. Would it be a startling and unforgivable thing if presently he began to write to her? Girls of that age and spirit living in out-of-the-way villages have been known to marry....

Marriage didn't at this stage strike Benham as an agreeable aspect of Amanda's possibilities; it was an inconvenience; his mind was running in the direction of pedestrian tours in armour of no particular weight, amidst scenery of a romantic wildness....

When he had gone to the house and taken his leave that morning it had seemed quite in the vein of the establishment that he should be received by Amanda alone and taken up the long garden before anybody else appeared, to see the daffodils and the early apple-trees in blossom and the pear-trees white and delicious.

Then he had taken his leave of them all and made his social tentatives. Did they ever come to London? When they did they must let his people know. He would so like them to know his mother, Lady Marayne. And so on with much gratitude.

Amanda had said that she and the dogs would come with him up the hill, she had said it exactly as a boy might have said it, she had brought him up to the corner of Up Park and had sat down there on a heap of stones and watched him until he was out of sight, waving to him when he looked

back. "Come back again," she had cried.

In Chichester he found a little green-bound REPUBLIC in a second-hand book-shop near the Cathedral, but there was no copy of the LAWS to be found in the place. Then he was taken with the brilliant idea of sleeping the night in Chichester and going back next day via Harting to Petersfield station and London. He carried out this scheme and got to South Harting neatly about four o'clock in the afternoon. He found Mrs. Wilder and Mrs. Morris and Amanda and the dogs entertaining Mr. Rathbone-Sanders at tea, and they all seemed a little surprised, and, except Mr. Rathbone-Sanders, they all seemed pleased to see him again so soon. His explanation of why he hadn't gone back to London from Chichester struck him as a little unconvincing in the cold light of Mr. Rathbone-Sanders' eye. But Amanda was manifestly excited by his return, and he told them his impressions of Chichester and described the entertainment of the evening guest at a country inn and suddenly produced his copy of the REPUBLIC. "I found this in a book-shop," he said, "and I brought it for you, because it describes one of the best dreams of aristocracy there has ever been dreamt."

At first she praised it as a pretty book in the dearest little binding, and then realized that there were deeper implications, and became grave and said she would read it through and through, she loved such speculative reading.

She came to the door with the others and stayed at the door after they had gone in again. When he looked back at the corner of the road to

Petersfield she was still at the door and waved farewell to him.

He only saw a light slender figure, but when she came back into the sitting-room Mr. Rathbone-Sanders noted the faint flush in her cheek and an unwonted abstraction in her eye.

And in the evening she tucked her feet up in the armchair by the lamp and read the REPUBLIC very intently and very thoughtfully, occasionally turning over a page.

5

When Benham got back to London he experienced an unwonted desire to perform his social obligations to the utmost.

So soon as he had had some dinner at his club he wrote his South Harting friends a most agreeable letter of thanks for their kindness to him. In a little while he hoped he should see them again. His mother, too, was most desirous to meet them.... That done, he went on to his flat and to various aspects of life for which he was quite unprepared.

But here we may note that Amanda answered him. Her reply came some four days later. It was written in a square schoolgirl hand, it covered three sheets of notepaper, and it was a very intelligent essay upon the

REPUBLIC of Plato. "Of course," she wrote, "the Guardians are inhuman, but it was a glorious sort of inhumanity. They had a spirit--like sharp knives cutting through life."

It was her best bit of phrasing and it pleased Benham very much. But, indeed, it was not her own phrasing, she had culled it from a disquisition into which she had led Mr. Rathbone-Sanders, and she had sent it to Benham as she might have sent him a flower.

6

Benham re-entered the flat from which he had fled so precipitately with three very definite plans in his mind. The first was to set out upon his grand tour of the world with as little delay as possible, to shut up this Finacue Street establishment for a long time, and get rid of the soul-destroying perfections of Merkle. The second was to end his ill-advised intimacy with little Mrs. Skelmersdale as generously and cheerfully as possible. The third was to bring Lady Marayne into social relations with the Wilder and Morris MENAGE at South Harting. It did not strike him that there was any incompatibility among these projects or any insurmountable difficulty in any of them until he was back in his flat.

The accumulation of letters, packages and telephone memoranda upon his

desk included a number of notes and slips to remind him that both Mrs. Skelmersdale and his mother were ladies of some determination. Even as he stood turning over the pile of documents the mechanical vehemence of the telephone filled him with a restored sense of the adverse will in things. "Yes, mam," he heard Merkle's voice, "yes, mam. I will tell him, mam. Will you keep possession, mam." And then in the doorway of the study, "Mrs. Skelmersdale, sir. Upon the telephone, sir."

Benham reflected with various notes in his hand. Then he went to the telephone.

"You Wicked Boy, where have you been hiding?"

"I've been away. I may have to go away again."

"Not before you have seen me. Come round and tell me all about it."

Benham lied about an engagement.

"Then to-morrow in the morning."... Impossible.

"In the afternoon. You don't WANT to see me." Benham did want to see her.

"Come round and have a jolly little evening to-morrow night. I've got some more of that harpsichord music. And I'm dying to see you. Don't you understand?"

Further lies. "Look here," said Benham, "can you come and have a talk in Kensington Gardens? You know the place, near that Chinese garden. Paddington Gate...."

The lady's voice fell to flatness. She agreed. "But why not come to see me HERE?" she asked.

Benham hung up the receiver abruptly.

He walked slowly back to his study. "Phew!" he whispered to himself. It was like hitting her in the face. He didn't want to be a brute, but short of being a brute there was no way out for him from this entanglement. Why, oh! why the devil had he gone there to lunch?...

He resumed his examination of the waiting letters with a ruffled mind. The most urgent thing about them was the clear evidence of gathering anger on the part of his mother. He had missed a lunch party at Sir Godfrey's on Tuesday and a dinner engagement at Philip Magnet's, quite an important dinner in its way, with various promising young Liberals, on Wednesday evening. And she was furious at "this stupid mystery. Of course you're bound to be found out, and of course there will be a scandal."... He perceived that this last note was written on his own paper. "Merkle!" he cried sharply.

"Yessir!"

Merkle had been just outside, on call.

"Did my mother write any of these notes here?" he asked.

"Two, sir. Her ladyship was round here three times, sir."

"Did she see all these letters?"

"Not the telephone calls, sir. I 'ad put them on one side. But.... It's a little thing, sir."

He paused and came a step nearer. "You see, sir," he explained with the faintest flavour of the confidential softening his mechanical respect, "yesterday, when 'er ladyship was 'ere, sir, some one rang up on the telephone--"

"But you, Merkle--"

"Exactly, sir. But 'er ladyship said 'I'LL go to that, Merkle,' and just for a moment I couldn't exactly think 'ow I could manage it, sir, and there 'er ladyship was, at the telephone. What passed, sir, I couldn't 'ear. I 'eard her say, 'Any message?' And I FANCY, sir, I 'eard 'er say, 'I'm the 'ousemaid,' but that, sir, I think must have been a mistake, sir."

"Must have been," said Benham. "Certainly--must have been. And the call you think came from--?"

"There again, sir, I'm quite in the dark. But of course, sir, it's usually Mrs. Skelmersdale, sir. Just about her time in the afternoon. On an average, sir...."

7

"I went out of London to think about my life."

It was manifest that Lady Marayne did not believe him.

"Alone?" she asked.

"Of course alone."

"STUFF!" said Lady Marayne.

She had taken him into her own little sitting-room, she had thrown aside gloves and fan and theatre wrap, curled herself comfortably into the abundantly cushioned corner by the fire, and proceeded to a mixture of cross-examination and tirade that he found it difficult to make head against. She was vibrating between distressed solicitude and resentful anger. She was infuriated at his going away and deeply concerned at what could have taken him away. "I was worried," he said. "London is too

crowded to think in. I wanted to get myself alone."

"And there I was while you were getting yourself alone, as you call it, wearing my poor little brains out to think of some story to tell people. I had to stuff them up you had a sprained knee at Chexington, and for all I knew any of them might have been seeing you that morning. Besides what has a boy like you to worry about? It's all nonsense, Poff."

She awaited his explanations. Benham looked for a moment like his father.

"I'm not getting on, mother," he said. "I'm scattering myself. I'm getting no grip. I want to get a better hold upon life, or else I do not see what is to keep me from going to pieces--and wasting existence. It's rather difficult sometimes to tell what one thinks and feels--"

She had not really listened to him.

"Who is that woman," she interrupted suddenly, "Mrs. Fly-by-Night, or some such name, who rings you up on the telephone?"

Benham hesitated, blushed, and regretted it.

"Mrs. Skelmersdale," he said after a little pause.

"It's all the same. Who is she?"

"She's a woman I met at a studio somewhere, and I went with her to one of those Dolmetsch concerts."

He stopped.

Lady Marayne considered him in silence for a little while. "All men," she said at last, "are alike. Husbands, sons and brothers, they are all alike. Sons! One expects them to be different. They aren't different. Why should they be? I suppose I ought to be shocked, Poff. But I'm not. She seems to be very fond of you."

"She's--she's very good--in her way. She's had a difficult life...."

"You can't leave a man about for a moment," Lady Marayne reflected. "Poff, I wish you'd fetch me a glass of water."

When he returned she was looking very fixedly into the fire. "Put it down," she said, "anywhere. Poff! is this Mrs. Helter-Skelter a discreet sort of woman? Do you like her?" She asked a few additional particulars and Benham made his grudging admission of facts. "What I still don't understand, Poff, is why you have been away."

"I went away," said Benham, "because I want to clear things up."

"But why? Is there some one else?"

"No."

"You went alone? All the time?"

"I've told you I went alone. Do you think I tell you lies, mother?"

"Everybody tells lies somehow," said Lady Marayne. "Easy lies or stiff ones. Don't FLOURISH, Poff. Don't start saying things like a moral windmill in a whirlwind. It's all a muddle. I suppose every one in London is getting in or out of these entanglements--or something of the sort. And this seems a comparatively slight one. I wish it hadn't happened. They do happen."

An expression of perplexity came into her face. She looked at him. "Why do you want to throw her over?"

"I WANT to throw her over," said Benham.

He stood up and went to the hearthrug, and his mother reflected that this was exactly what all men did at just this phase of a discussion. Then things ceased to be sensible.

From overhead he said to her: "I want to get away from this complication, this servitude. I want to do some--some work. I want to get my mind clear and my hands clear. I want to study government and the big business of the world."

"And she's in the way?"

He assented.

"You men!" said Lady Marayne after a little pause. "What queer beasts you are! Here is a woman who is kind to you. She's fond of you. I could tell she's fond of you directly I heard her. And you amuse yourself with her. And then it's Gobble, Gobble, Gobble, Great Work, Hands Clear, Big Business of the World. Why couldn't you think of that before, Poff? Why did you begin with her?"

"It was unexpected...."

"STUFF!" said Lady Marayne for a second time. "Well," she said, "well. Your Mrs. Fly-by-Night,--oh it doesn't matter!--whatever she calls herself, must look after herself. I can't do anything for her. I'm not supposed even to know about her. I daresay she'll find her consolations. I suppose you want to go out of London and get away from it all. I can help you there, perhaps. I'm tired of London too. It's been a tiresome season. Oh! tiresome and disappointing! I want to go over to Ireland and travel about a little. The Pothercareys want us to come. They've asked us twice...."

Benham braced himself to face fresh difficulties. It was amazing how different the world could look from his mother's little parlour and from the crest of the North Downs.

"But I want to start round the world," he cried with a note of acute

distress. "I want to go to Egypt and India and see what is happening in the East, all this wonderful waking up of the East, I know nothing of the way the world is going--..."

"India!" cried Lady Marayne. "The East. Poff, what is the MATTER with you? Has something happened--something else? Have you been having a love affair?--a REAL love affair?"

"Oh, DAMN love affairs!" cried Benham. "Mother!--I'm sorry, mother! But don't you see there's other things in the world for a man than having a good time and making love. I'm for something else than that. You've given me the splendidest time--..."

"I see," cried Lady Marayne, "I see. I've bored you. I might have known I should have bored you."

"You've NOT bored me!" cried Benham.

He threw himself on the rug at her feet. "Oh, mother!" he said, "little, dear, gallant mother, don't make life too hard for me. I've got to do my job, I've got to find my job."

"I've bored you," she wept.

Suddenly she was weeping with all the unconcealed distressing grief of a disappointed child. She put her pretty be-ringed little hands in front of her face and recited the accumulation of her woes.

"I've done all I can for you, planned for you, given all my time for you and I've BORED you."

"Mother!"

"Don't come near me, Poff! Don't TOUCH me! All my plans. All my ambitions. Friends--every one. You don't know all I've given up for you...."

He had never seen his mother weep before. Her self-abandonment amazed him. Her words were distorted by her tears. It was the most terrible and distressing of crises....

"Go away from me! How can you help me? All I've done has been a failure! Failure! Failure!"

8

That night the silences of Finacue Street heard Benham's voice again. "I must do my job," he was repeating, "I must do my job. Anyhow...."

And then after a long pause, like a watchword and just a little unsurely: "Aristocracy...."

The next day his resolution had to bear the brunt of a second ordeal. Mrs. Skelmersdale behaved beautifully and this made everything tormentingly touching and difficult. She convinced him she was really in love with him, and indeed if he could have seen his freshness and simplicity through her experienced eyes he would have known there was sound reason why she should have found him exceptional. And when his clumsy hints of compensation could no longer be ignored she treated him with a soft indignation, a tender resentment, that left him soft and tender. She looked at him with pained eyes and a quiver of the lips. What did he think she was? And then a little less credibly, did he think she would have given herself to him if she hadn't been in love with him? Perhaps that was not altogether true, but at any rate it was altogether true to her when she said it, and it was manifest that she did not for a moment intend him to have the cheap consolation of giving her money. But, and that seemed odd to Benham, she would not believe, just as Lady Marayne would not believe, that there was not some other woman in the case. He assured her and she seemed reassured, and then presently she was back at exactly the same question. Would no woman ever understand the call of Asia, the pride of duty, the desire for the world?

One sort of woman perhaps....

It was odd that for the first time now, in the sunshine of Kensington Gardens, he saw the little gossamer lines that tell that thirty years and more have passed over a face, a little wrinkling of the eyelids, a little hardening of the mouth. How slight it is, how invisible it

has been, how suddenly it appears! And the sunshine of the warm April afternoon, heightened it may be by her determined unmercenary pose, betrayed too the faintest hint of shabbiness in her dress. He had never noticed these shadows upon her or her setting before and their effect was to fill him with a strange regretful tenderness....

Perhaps men only begin to love when they cease to be dazzled and admire. He had thought she might reproach him, he had felt and feared she might set herself to stir his senses, and both these expectations had been unjust to her he saw, now that he saw her beside him, a brave, rather ill-advised and unlucky little struggler, stung and shamed. He forgot the particulars of that first lunch of theirs together and he remembered his mother's second contemptuous "STUFF!"

Indeed he knew now it had not been unexpected. Why hadn't he left this little sensitive soul and this little sensitive body alone? And since he hadn't done so, what right had he now to back out of their common adventure? He felt a sudden wild impulse to marry Mrs. Skelmersdale, in a mood between remorse and love and self-immolation, and then a sunlit young woman with a leaping stride in her paces, passed across his heavens, pointing to Asia and Utopia and forbidding even another thought of the banns....

"You will kiss me good-bye, dear, won't you?" said Mrs. Skelmersdale, brimming over. "You will do that."

He couldn't keep his arm from her little shoulders. And as their lips

touched he suddenly found himself weeping also....

His spirit went limping from that interview. She chose to stay behind in her chair and think, she said, and each time he turned back she was sitting in the same attitude looking at him as he receded, and she had one hand on the chair back and her arm drawn up to it. The third time he waved his hat clumsily, and she started and then answered with her hand. Then the trees hid her....

This sex business was a damnable business. If only because it made one hurt women....

He had trampled on Mrs. Skelmersdale, he had hurt and disappointed his mother. Was he a brute? Was he a cold-blooded prig? What was this aristocracy? Was his belief anything more than a theory? Was he only dreaming of a debt to the men in the quarry, to the miners, to the men in the stokeholes, to the drudges on the fields? And while he dreamt he wounded and distressed real living creatures in the sleep-walk of his dreaming....

So long as he stuck to his dream he must at any rate set his face absolutely against the establishment of any further relations with women.

Unless they were women of an entirely different type, women hardened and tempered, who would understand.

So Benham was able to convert the unfortunate Mrs. Skelmersdale into a tender but for a long time an entirely painful memory. But mothers are not so easily disposed of, and more particularly a mother whose conduct is coloured deeply by an extraordinary persuasion of having paid for her offspring twice over. Nolan was inexplicable; he was, Benham understood quite clearly, never to be mentioned again; but somehow from the past his shadow and his legacy cast a peculiar and perplexing shadow of undefined obligation upon Benham's outlook. His resolution to go round the world carried on his preparations rapidly and steadily, but at the same time his mother's thwarted and angry bearing produced a torture of remorse in him. It was constantly in his mind, like the suit of the importunate widow, that he ought to devote his life to the little lady's happiness and pride, and his reason told him that even if he wanted to make this sacrifice he couldn't; the mere act of making it would produce so entirely catastrophic a revulsion. He could as soon have become a croquet champion or the curate of Chexington church, lines of endeavour which for him would have led straightly and simply to sacrilegious scandal or manslaughter with a mallet.

There is so little measure in the wild atonements of the young that it was perhaps as well for the Research Magnificent that the remorses of this period of Benham's life were too complicated and scattered for a

cumulative effect. In the background of his mind and less subdued than its importance could seem to warrant was his promise to bring the Wilder-Morris people into relations with Lady Marayne. They had been so delightful to him that he felt quite acutely the slight he was putting upon them by this delay. Lady Marayne's moods, however, had been so uncertain that he had found no occasion to broach this trifling matter, and when at last the occasion came he perceived in the same instant the fullest reasons for regretting it.

"Ah!" she said, hanging only for a moment, and then: "you told me you were alone!"...

Her mind leapt at once to the personification of these people as all that had puzzled and baffled her in her son since his flight from London. They were the enemy, they had got hold of him.

"When I asked you if you were alone you pretended to be angry," she remembered with a flash. "You said, 'Do I tell lies?'"

"I WAS alone. Until-- It was an accident. On my walk I was alone."

But he flinched before her accusing, her almost triumphant, forefinger.

From the instant she heard of them she hated these South Harting people unrestrainedly. She made no attempt to conceal it. Her valiant bantam spirit caught at this quarrel as a refuge from the rare and uncongenial ache of his secession. "And who are they? What are they? What sort of

people can they be to drag in a passing young man? I suppose this girl of theirs goes out every evening--Was she painted, Poff?"

She whipped him with her questions as though she was slashing his face. He became dead-white and grimly civil, answering every question as though it was the sanest, most justifiable inquiry.

"Of course I don't know who they are. How should I know? What need is there to know?"

"There are ways of finding out," she insisted. "If I am to go down and make myself pleasant to these people because of you."

"But I implore you not to."

"And five minutes ago you were imploring me to! Of course I shall."

"Oh well!--well!"

"One has to know SOMETHING of the people to whom one commits oneself, surely."

"They are decent people; they are well-behaved people."

"Oh!--I'll behave well. Don't think I'll disgrace your casual acquaintances. But who they are, what they are, I WILL know...."

On that point Lady Marayne was to score beyond her utmost expectations.

"Come round," she said over the telephone, two mornings later. "I've something to tell you."

She was so triumphant that she was sorry for him. When it came to telling him, she failed from her fierceness.

"Poff, my little son," she said, "I'm so sorry I hardly know how to tell you. Poff, I'm sorry. I have to tell you--and it's utterly beastly."

"But what?" he asked.

"These people are dreadful people."

"But how?"

"You've heard of the great Kent and Eastern Bank smash and the Marlborough Building Society frauds eight or nine years ago?"

"Vaguely. But what has that to do with them?"

"That man Morris."

She stopped short, and Benham nodded for her to go on.

"Her father," said Lady Marayne.

"But who was Morris? Really, mother, I don't remember."

"He was sentenced to seven years--ten years--I forget. He had done all sorts of dreadful things. He was a swindler. And when he went out of the dock into the waiting-room-- He had a signet ring with prussic acid in it--..."

"I remember now," he said.

A silence fell between them.

Benham stood quite motionless on the hearthrug and stared very hard at the little volume of Henley's poetry that lay upon the table.

He cleared his throat presently.

"You can't go and see them then," he said. "After all--since I am going abroad so soon--... It doesn't so very much matter."

10

To Benham it did not seem to be of the slightest importance that Amanda's father was a convicted swindler who had committed suicide.

Never was a resolved and conscious aristocrat so free from the hereditary delusion. Good parents, he was convinced, are only an advantage in so far as they have made you good stuff, and bad parents are no discredit to a son or daughter of good quality. Conceivably he had a bias against too close an examination of origins, and he held that the honour of the children should atone for the sins of the fathers and the questionable achievements of any intervening testator. Not half a dozen rich and established families in all England could stand even the most conventional inquiry into the foundations of their pride, and only a universal amnesty could prevent ridiculous distinctions. But he brought no accusation of inconsistency against his mother. She looked at things with a lighter logic and a kind of genius for the acceptance of superficial values. She was condoned and forgiven, a rescued lamb, re-established, notoriously bright and nice, and the Morrises were damned. That was their status, exclusion, damnation, as fixed as colour in Georgia or caste in Bengal. But if his mother's mind worked in that way there was no reason why his should. So far as he was concerned, he told himself, it did not matter whether Amanda was the daughter of a swindler or the daughter of a god. He had no doubt that she herself had the spirit and quality of divinity. He had seen it.

So there was nothing for it in the failure of his mother's civilities but to increase his own. He would go down to Harting and take his leave of these amiable outcasts himself. With a certain effusion. He would do this soon because he was now within sight of the beginning of his world tour. He had made his plans and prepared most of his equipment. Little remained to do but the release of Merkle, the wrappering and locking up

of Finacue Street, which could await him indefinitely, and the buying of tickets. He decided to take the opportunity afforded by a visit of Sir Godfrey and Lady Marayne to the Blights, big iron people in the North of England of so austere a morality that even Benham was ignored by it. He announced his invasion in a little note to Mrs. Wilder. He parted from his mother on Friday afternoon; she was already, he perceived, a little reconciled to his project of going abroad; and contrived his arrival at South Harting for that sunset hour which was for his imagination the natural halo of Amanda.

"I'm going round the world," he told them simply. "I may be away for two years, and I thought I would like to see you all again before I started."

That was quite the way they did things.

The supper-party included Mr. Rathbone-Sanders, who displayed a curious tendency to drift in between Benham and Amanda, a literary youth with a Byronic visage, very dark curly hair, and a number of extraordinarily mature chins, a girl-friend of Betty's who had cycled down from London, and who it appeared maintained herself at large in London by drawing for advertisements, and a silent colourless friend of Mr. Rathbone-Sanders. The talk lit by Amanda's enthusiasm circled actively round Benham's expedition. It was clear that the idea of giving some years to thinking out one's possible work in the world was for some reason that remained obscure highly irritating to both Mr. Rathbone-Sanders and the Byronic youth. Betty too regarded it as levity when there was "so much to be

done," and the topic whacked about and rose to something like a wrangle, and sat down and rested and got up again reinvigorated, with a continuity of interest that Benham had never yet encountered in any London gathering. He made a good case for his modern version of the Grand Tour, and he gave them something of his intellectual enthusiasm for the distances and views, the cities and seas, the multitudinous wide spectacle of the world he was to experience. He had been reading about Benares and North China. As he talked Amanda, who had been animated at first, fell thoughtful and silent. And then it was discovered that the night was wonderfully warm and the moon shining. They drifted out into the garden, but Mr. Rathbone-Sanders was suddenly entangled and drawn back by Mrs. Wilder and the young woman from London upon some technical point, and taken to the work-table in the corner of the dining-room to explain. He was never able to get to the garden.

Benham found himself with Amanda upon a side path, a little isolated by some swaggering artichokes and a couple of apple trees and so forth from the general conversation. They cut themselves off from the continuation of that by a little silence, and then she spoke abruptly and with the quickness of a speaker who has thought out something to say and fears interruption: "Why did you come down here?"

"I wanted to see you before I went."

"You disturb me. You fill me with envy."

"I didn't think of that. I wanted to see you again."

"And then you will go off round the world, you will see the Tropics, you will see India, you will go into Chinese cities all hung with vermilion, you will climb mountains. Oh! men can do all the splendid things. Why do you come here to remind me of it? I have never been anywhere, anywhere at all. I never shall go anywhere. Never in my life have I seen a mountain. Those Downs there--look at them!--are my highest. And while you are travelling I shall think of you--and think of you...."

"Would YOU like to travel?" he asked as though that was an extraordinary idea.

"Do you think EVERY girl wants to sit at home and rock a cradle?"

"I never thought YOU did."

"Then what did you think I wanted?"

"What DO you want?"

She held her arms out widely, and the moonlight shone in her eyes as she turned her face to him.

"Just what you want," she said; "--THE WHOLE WORLD!

"Life is like a feast," she went on; "it is spread before everybody and nobody must touch it. What am I? Just a prisoner. In a cottage garden.

Looking for ever over a hedge. I should be happier if I couldn't look. I remember once, only a little time ago, there was a cheap excursion to London. Our only servant went. She had to get up at an unearthly hour, and I--I got up too. I helped her to get off. And when she was gone I went up to my bedroom again and cried. I cried with envy for any one, any one who could go away. I've been nowhere--except to school at Chichester and three or four times to Emsworth and Bognor--for eight years. When you go"--the tears glittered in the moonlight--"I shall cry. It will be worse than the excursion to London.... Ever since you were here before I've been thinking of it."

It seemed to Benham that here indeed was the very sister of his spirit. His words sprang into his mind as one thinks of a repartee. "But why shouldn't you come too?" he said.

She stared at him in silence. The two white-lit faces examined each other. Both she and Benham were trembling.

"COME TOO?" she repeated.

"Yes, with me."

"But--HOW?"

Then suddenly she was weeping like a child that is teased; her troubled eyes looked out from under puckered brows. "You don't mean it," she said. "You don't mean it."

And then indeed he meant it.

"Marry me," he said very quickly, glancing towards the dark group at the end of the garden. "And we will go together."

He seized her arm and drew her to him. "I love you," he said. "I love your spirit. You are not like any one else."

There was a moment's hesitation.

Both he and she looked to see how far they were still alone.

Then they turned their dusky faces to each other. He drew her still closer.

"Oh!" she said, and yielded herself to be kissed. Their lips touched, and for a moment he held her lithe body against his own.

"I want you," he whispered close to her. "You are my mate. From the first sight of you I knew that...."

They embraced--alertly furtive.

Then they stood a little apart. Some one was coming towards them. Amanda's bearing changed swiftly. She put up her little face to his, confidently and intimately.

"Don't TELL any one," she whispered eagerly shaking his arm to emphasize her words. "Don't tell any one--not yet. Not for a few days...."

She pushed him from her quickly as the shadowy form of Betty appeared in a little path between the artichokes and raspberry canes.

"Listening to the nightingales?" cried Betty.

"Yes, aren't they?" said Amanda inconsecutively.

"That's our very own nightingale!" cried Betty advancing. "Do you hear it, Mr. Benham? No, not that one. That is a quite inferior bird that performs in the vicarage trees...."

11

When a man has found and won his mate then the best traditions demand a lyrical interlude. It should be possible to tell, in that ecstatic manner which melts words into moonshine, makes prose almost uncomfortably rhythmic, and brings all the freshness of every spring that ever was across the page, of the joyous exaltation of the happy lover. This at any rate was what White had always done in his novels hitherto, and what he would certainly have done at this point had he had

the telling of Benham's story uncontrolledly in his hands. But, indeed, indeed, in real life, in very truth, the heart has not this simplicity. Only the heroes of romance, and a few strong simple clean-shaven Americans have that much emotional integrity. (And even the Americans do at times seem to an observant eye to be putting in work at the job and keeping up their gladness.) Benham was excited that night, but not in the proper bright-eyed, red-cheeked way; he did not dance down the village street of Harting to his harbour at the Ship, and the expression in his eyes as he sat on the edge of his bed was not the deep elemental wonder one could have wished there, but amazement. Do not suppose that he did not love Amanda, that a rich majority of his being was not triumphantly glad to have won her, that the image of the two armour-clad lovers was not still striding and flourishing through the lit wilderness of his imagination. For three weeks things had pointed him to this. They would do everything together now, he and his mate, they would scale mountains together and ride side by side towards ruined cities across the deserts of the World. He could have wished no better thing. But at the same time, even as he felt and admitted this and rejoiced at it, the sky of his mind was black with consternation....

It is remarkable, White reflected, as he turned over the abundant but confused notes upon this perplexing phase of Benham's development that lay in the third drawer devoted to the Second Limitation, how dependent human beings are upon statement. Man is the animal that states a case. He lives not in things but in expressed ideas, and what was troubling Benham inordinately that night, a night that should have been devoted to purely blissful and exalted expectations, was the sheer impossibility of

stating what had happened in any terms that would be tolerable either to Mrs. Skelmersdale or Lady Marayne. The thing had happened with the suddenness of a revelation. Whatever had been going on in the less illuminated parts of his mind, his manifest resolution had been merely to bid South Harting good-bye-- And in short they would never understand. They would accuse him of the meanest treachery. He could see his mother's face, he could hear her voice saying, "And so because of this sudden infatuation for a swindler's daughter, a girl who runs about the roads with a couple of retrievers hunting for a man, you must spoil all my plans, ruin my year, tell me a lot of pretentious stuffy lies...." And Mrs. Skelmersdale too would say, "Of course he just talked of the world and duty and all that rubbish to save my face...."

It wasn't so at all.

But it looked so frightfully like it!

Couldn't they realize that he had fled out of London before ever he had seen Amanda? They might be able to do it perhaps, but they never would. It just happened that in the very moment when the edifice of his noble resolutions had been ready, she had stepped into it--out of nothingness and nowhere. She wasn't an accident; that was just the point upon which they were bound to misjudge her; she was an embodiment. If only he could show her to them as she had first shown herself to him, swift, light, a little flushed from running but not in the least out of breath, quick as a leopard upon the dogs.... But even if the improbable opportunity arose, he perceived it might still be impossible to produce the Amanda

he loved, the Amanda of the fluttering short skirt and the clear enthusiastic voice. Because, already he knew she was not the only Amanda. There was another, there might be others, there was this perplexing person who had flashed into being at the very moment of their mutual confession, who had produced the entirely disconcerting demand that nobody must be told. Then Betty had intervened. But that sub-Amanda and her carneying note had to be dealt with on the first occasion, because when aristocrats love they don't care a rap who is told and who is not told. They just step out into the light side by side....

"Don't tell any one," she had said, "not for a few days...."

This sub-Amanda was perceptible next morning again, flitting about in the background of a glad and loving adventuress, a pre-occupied Amanda who had put her head down while the real Amanda flung her chin up and contemplated things on the Asiatic scale, and who was apparently engaged in disentangling something obscure connected with Mr. Rathbone-Sanders that ought never to have been entangled....

"A human being," White read, "the simplest human being, is a clustering mass of aspects. No man will judge another justly who judges everything about him. And of love in particular is this true. We love not persons but revelations. The woman one loves is like a goddess hidden in a shrine; for her sake we live on hope and suffer the kindred priestesses that make up herself. The art of love is patience till the gleam returns...."

Sunday and Monday did much to develop this idea of the intricate complexity of humanity in Benham's mind. On Monday morning he went up from the Ship again to get Amanda alone and deliver his ultimatum against a further secrecy, so that he could own her openly and have no more of the interventions and separations that had barred him from any intimate talk with her throughout the whole of Sunday. The front door stood open, the passage hall was empty, but as he hesitated whether he should proclaim himself with the knocker or walk through, the door of the little drawing-room flew open and a black-clad cylindrical clerical person entirely unknown to Benham stumbled over the threshold, blundered blindly against him, made a sound like "MOO" and a pitiful gesture with his arm, and fled forth....

It was a curate and he was weeping bitterly....

Benham stood in the doorway and watched a clumsy broken-hearted flight down the village street.

He had been partly told and partly left to infer, and anyhow he was beginning to understand about Mr. Rathbone-Sanders. That he could dismiss. But--why was the curate in tears?

He found Amanda standing alone in the room from which this young man had fled. She had a handful of daffodils in her hand, and others were scattered over the table. She had been arranging the big bowl of flowers in the centre. He left the door open behind him and stopped short with the table between them. She looked up at him--intelligently and calmly. Her pose had a divine dignity.

"I want to tell them now," said Benham without a word of greeting.

"Yes," she said, "tell them now."

They heard steps in the passage outside. "Betty!" cried Amanda.

Her mother's voice answered, "Do you want Betty?"

"We want you all," answered Amanda. "We have something to tell you...."

"Carrie!" they heard Mrs. Morris call her sister after an interval, and her voice sounded faint and flat and unusual. There was the soft hissing of some whispered words outside and a muffled exclamation. Then Mrs. Wilder and Mrs. Morris and Betty came into the room. Mrs. Wilder came first, and Mrs. Morris with an alarmed face as if sheltering behind her. "We want to tell you something," said Amanda.

"Amanda and I are going to marry each other," said Benham, standing in front of her.

For an instant the others made no answer; they looked at each other.

"BUT DOES HE KNOW?" Mrs. Morris said in a low voice.

Amanda turned her eyes to her lover. She was about to speak, she seemed to gather herself for an effort, and then he knew that he did not want to hear her explanation. He checked her by a gesture.

"I KNOW," he said, and then, "I do not see that it matters to us in the least."

He went to her holding out both his hands to her.

She took them and stood shyly for a moment, and then the watchful gravity of her face broke into soft emotion. "Oh!" she cried and seized his face between her hands in a passion of triumphant love and kissed him.

And then he found himself being kissed by Mrs. Morris.

She kissed him thrice, with solemnity, with thankfulness, with relief, as if in the act of kissing she transferred to him precious and entirely incalculable treasures.