# BOOK THE SECOND: MARGARET

## CHAPTER THE FIRST ~~ MARGARET IN STAFFORDSHIRE

### 1

I must go back a little way with my story. In the previous book I have described the kind of education that happens to a man of my class nowadays, and it has been convenient to leap a phase in my experience that I must now set out at length. I want to tell in this second hook how I came to marry, and to do that I must give something of the atmosphere in which I first met my wife and some intimations of the forces that went to her making. I met her in Staffordshire while I was staying with that uncle of whom I have already spoken, the uncle who sold my father's houses and settled my mother in Penge. Margaret was twenty then and I was twenty-two.

It was just before the walking tour in Switzerland that opened up so much of the world to me. I saw her once, for an afternoon, and circumstances so threw her up in relief that I formed a very vivid memory of her. She was in the sharpest contrast with the industrial world about her; she impressed me as a dainty blue flower might do, come upon suddenly on a clinker heap. She remained in my mind at once a

perplexing interrogation and a symbol….

But first I must tell of my Staffordshire cousins and the world that served as a foil for her.

2

I first went to stay with my cousins when I was an awkward youth of sixteen, wearing deep mourning for my mother. My uncle wanted to talk things over with me, he said, and if he could, to persuade me to go into business instead of going up to Cambridge.

I remember that visit on account of all sorts of novel things, but chiefly, I think, because it was the first time I encountered anything that deserves to be spoken of as wealth. For the first time in my life I had to do with people who seemed to have endless supplies of money, unlimited good clothes, numerous servants; whose daily life was made up of things that I had hitherto considered to be treats or exceptional extravagances. My cousins of eighteen and nineteen took cabs, for instance, with the utmost freedom, and travelled first-class in the local trains that run up and down the district of the Five Towns with an entire unconsciousness of the magnificence, as it seemed to me, of such a proceeding.

The family occupied a large villa in Newcastle, with big lawns before it and behind, a shrubbery with quite a lot of shrubs, a coach house and stable, and subordinate dwelling-places for the gardener and the coachman. Every bedroom contained a gas heater and a canopied brass bedstead, and had a little bathroom attached equipped with the porcelain baths and fittings my uncle manufactured, bright and sanitary and

stamped with his name, and the house was furnished throughout with chairs and tables in bright shining wood, soft and prevalently red Turkish carpets, cosy corners, curtained archways, gold-framed landscapes, overmantels, a dining-room sideboard like a palace with a large Tantalus, and electric light fittings of a gay and expensive quality. There was a fine billiard-room on the ground floor with three comfortable sofas and a rotating bookcase containing an excellent collection of the English and American humorists from THREE MEN IN A BOAT to the penultimate Mark Twain. There was also a conservatory opening out of the dining-room, to which the gardener brought potted flowers in their season....

My aunt was a little woman with a scared look and a cap that would get over one eye, not very like my mother, and nearly eight years her junior; she was very much concerned with keeping everything nice, and unmercifully bullied by my two cousins, who took after their father and followed the imaginations of their own hearts. They were tall, dark, warmly flushed girls handsome rather than pretty. Gertrude, the eldest and tallest, had eyes that were almost black; Sibyl was of a stouter build, and her eyes, of which she was shamelessly proud, were dark blue. Sibyl's hair waved, and Gertrude's was severely straight. They treated me on my first visit with all the contempt of the adolescent girl for a boy a little younger and infinitely less expert in the business of life than herself. They were very busy with the writings of notes and certain mysterious goings and comings of their own, and left me very much to my own devices. Their speech in my presence was full of unfathomable

allusions. They were the sort of girls who will talk over and through an uninitiated stranger with the pleasantest sense of superiority.

I met them at breakfast and at lunch and at the half-past six o'clock high tea that formed the third chief meal of the day. I heard them rattling off the compositions of Chaminade and Moskowski, with great decision and effect, and hovered on the edge of tennis foursomes where it was manifest to the dullest intelligence that my presence was unnecessary. Then I went off to find some readable book in the place, but apart from miscellaneous popular novels, some veterinary works, a number of comic books, old bound volumes of THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS and a large, popular illustrated History of England, there was very little to be found. My aunt talked to me in a casual feeble way, chiefly about my mother's last illness. The two had seen very little of each other for many years; she made no secret of it that the ineligible qualities of my father were the cause of the estrangement. The only other society in the house during the day was an old and rather decayed Skye terrier in constant conflict with what were no doubt imaginary fleas. I took myself off for a series of walks, and acquired a considerable knowledge of the scenery and topography of the Potteries.

It puzzled my aunt that I did not go westward, where it was country-side and often quite pretty, with hedgerows and fields and copses and flowers. But always I went eastward, where in a long valley industrialism smokes and sprawls. That was the stuff to which I turned by nature, to the human effort, and the accumulation and jar of men's

activities. And in such a country as that valley social and economic relations were simple and manifest. Instead of the limitless confusion of London's population, in which no man can trace any but the most slender correlation between rich and poor, in which everyone seems disconnected and adrift from everyone, you can see here the works, the potbank or the ironworks or what not, and here close at hand the congested, meanly-housed workers, and at a little distance a small middle-class quarter, and again remoter, the big house of the employer. It was like a very simplified diagram--after the untraceable confusion of London.

I prowled alone, curious and interested, through shabby back streets of mean little homes; I followed canals, sometimes canals of mysteriously heated waters with ghostly wisps of steam rising against blackened walls or a distant prospect of dustbin-fed vegetable gardens, I saw the women pouring out from the potbanks, heard the hooters summoning the toilers to work, lost my way upon slag heaps as big as the hills of the south country, dodged trains at manifestly dangerous level crossings, and surveyed across dark intervening spaces, the flaming uproar, the gnome-like activities of iron foundries. I heard talk of strikes and rumours of strikes, and learnt from the columns of some obscure labour paper I bought one day, of the horrors of the lead poisoning that was in those days one of the normal risks of certain sorts of pottery workers. Then back I came, by the ugly groaning and clanging steam train of that period, to my uncle's house and lavish abundance of money and more or less furtive flirtations and the tinkle of Moskowski and Chaminade.

It was, I say, diagrammatic. One saw the expropriator and the expropriated--as if Marx had arranged the picture. It was as jumbled and far more dingy and disastrous than any of the confusions of building and development that had surrounded my youth at Bromstead and Penge, but it had a novel quality of being explicable. I found great virtue in the word "exploitation."

There stuck in my mind as if it was symbolical of the whole thing the twisted figure of a man, whose face had been horribly scalded--I can't describe how, except that one eye was just expressionless white--and he ground at an organ bearing a card which told in weak and bitterly satirical phrasing that he had been scalded by the hot water from the tuyeres of the blast furnace of Lord Pandram's works. He had been scalded and quite inadequately compensated and dismissed. And Lord Pandram was worth half a million.

That upturned sightless white eye of his took possession of my imagination. I don't think that even then I was swayed by any crude melodramatic conception of injustice. I was quite prepared to believe the card wasn't a punctiliously accurate statement of fact, and that a case could be made out for Lord Pandram. Still there in the muddy gutter, painfully and dreadfully, was the man, and he was smashed and scalded and wretched, and he ground his dismal hurdygurdy with a weary arm, calling upon Heaven and the passer-by for help, for help and some sort of righting--one could not imagine quite what. There he was as a fact, as a by-product of the system that heaped my cousins with trinkets

and provided the comic novels and the abundant cigars and spacious billiard-room of my uncle's house. I couldn't disconnect him and them.

My uncle on his part did nothing to conceal the state of war that existed between himself and his workers, and the mingled contempt and animosity he felt from them.

3

Prosperity had overtaken my uncle. So quite naturally he believed that every man who was not as prosperous as he was had only himself to blame. He was rich and he had left school and gone into his father's business at fifteen, and that seemed to him the proper age at which everyone's education should terminate. He was very anxious to dissuade me from going up to Cambridge, and we argued intermittently through all my visit.

I had remembered him as a big and buoyant man, striding destructively about the nursery floor of my childhood, and saluting my existence by slaps, loud laughter, and questions about half herrings and half eggs subtly framed to puzzle and confuse my mind. I didn't see him for some years until my father's death, and then he seemed rather smaller, though still a fair size, yellow instead of red and much less radiantly aggressive. This altered effect was due not so much to my own changed perspectives, I fancy, as to the facts that he was suffering for continuous cigar smoking, and being taken in hand by his adolescent daughters who had just returned from school.

During my first visit there was a perpetual series of--the only word is rows, between them and him. Up to the age of fifteen or thereabouts, he had maintained his ascendancy over them by simple old-fashioned physical chastisement. Then after an interlude of a year it had dawned upon them

that power had mysteriously departed from him. He had tried stopping their pocket money, but they found their mother financially amenable; besides which it was fundamental to my uncle's attitude that he should give them money freely. Not to do so would seem like admitting a difficulty in making it. So that after he had stopped their allowances for the fourth time Sybil and Gertrude were prepared to face beggary without a qualm. It had been his pride to give them the largest allowance of any girls at the school, not even excepting the granddaughter of Fladden the Borax King, and his soul recoiled from this discipline as it had never recoiled from the ruder method of the earlier phase. Both girls had developed to a high pitch in their mutual recriminations a gift for damaging retort, and he found it an altogether deadlier thing than the power of the raised voice that had always cowed my aunt. Whenever he became heated with them, they frowned as if involuntarily, drew in their breath sharply, said: "Daddy, you really must not say--" and corrected his pronunciation. Then, at a great advantage, they resumed the discussion....

My uncle's views about Cambridge, however, were perfectly clear and definite. It was waste of time and money. It was all damned foolery. Did they make a man a better business man? Not a bit of it. He gave instances. It spoilt a man for business by giving him "false ideas." Some men said that at college a man formed useful friendships. What use were friendships to a business man? He might get to know lords, but, as my uncle pointed out, a lord's requirements in his line of faience were little greater than a common man's. If college introduced him to hotel

proprietors there might be something in it. Perhaps it helped a man into Parliament, Parliament still being a confused retrogressive corner in the world where lawyers and suchlike sheltered themselves from the onslaughts of common-sense behind a fog of Latin and Greek and twaddle and tosh; but I wasn't the sort to go into Parliament, unless I meant to be a lawyer. Did I mean to be a lawyer? It cost no end of money, and was full of uncertainties, and there were no judges nor great solicitors among my relations. "Young chaps think they get on by themselves," said my uncle. "It isn't so. Not unless they take their coats off. I took mine off before I was your age by nigh a year."

We were at cross purposes from the outset, because I did not think men lived to make money; and I was obtuse to the hints he was throwing out at the possibilities of his own potbank, not willfully obtuse, but just failing to penetrate his meaning. Whatever City Merchants had or had not done for me, Flack, Topham and old Gates had certainly barred my mistaking the profitable production and sale of lavatory basins and bathroom fittings for the highest good. It was only upon reflection that it dawned upon me that the splendid chance for a young fellow with my uncle, "me, having no son of my own," was anything but an illustration for comparison with my own chosen career.

I still remember very distinctly my uncle's talk,--he loved to speak "reet Staffordshire"--his rather flabby face with the mottled complexion that told of crude ill-regulated appetites, his clumsy gestures--he kept emphasising his points by prodding at me with his finger--the ill-worn,

costly, grey tweed clothes, the watch chain of plain solid gold, and soft felt hat thrust back from his head. He tackled me first in the garden after lunch, and then tried to raise me to enthusiasm by taking me to his potbank and showing me its organisation, from the dusty grinding mills in which whitened men worked and coughed, through the highly ventilated glazing room in which strangely masked girls looked ashamed of themselves,--"They'll risk death, the fools, to show their faces to a man," said my uncle, quite audibly--to the firing kilns and the glazing kilns, and so round the whole place to the railway siding and the gratifying spectacle of three trucks laden with executed orders.

Then we went up a creaking outside staircase to his little office, and he showed off before me for a while, with one or two subordinates and the telephone.

"None of your Gas," he said, "all this. It's Real every bit of it. Hard cash and hard glaze."

"Yes," I said, with memories of a carelessly read pamphlet in my mind, and without any satirical intention, "I suppose you MUST use lead in your glazes?"

Whereupon I found I had tapped the ruling grievance of my uncle's life. He hated leadless glazes more than he hated anything, except the benevolent people who had organised the agitation for their use. "Leadless glazes ain't only fit for buns," he said. "Let me tell you, my

boy--"

He began in a voice of bland persuasiveness that presently warmed to anger, to explain the whole matter. I hadn't the rights of the matter at all. Firstly, there was practically no such thing as lead poisoning. Secondly, not everyone was liable to lead poisoning, and it would be quite easy to pick out the susceptible types--as soon as they had it--and put them to other work. Thirdly, the evil effects of lead poisoning were much exaggerated. Fourthly, and this was in a particularly confidential undertone, many of the people liked to get lead poisoning, especially the women, because it caused abortion. I might not believe it, but he knew it for a fact. Fifthly, the work-people simply would not learn the gravity of the danger, and would eat with unwashed hands, and incur all sorts of risks, so that as my uncle put it: "the fools deserve what they get." Sixthly, he and several associated firms had organised a simple and generous insurance scheme against lead-poisoning risks. Seventhly, he never wearied in rational (as distinguished from excessive, futile and expensive) precautions against the disease. Eighthly, in the ill-equipped shops of his minor competitors lead poisoning was a frequent and virulent evil, and people had generalised from these exceptional cases. The small shops, he hazarded, looking out of the cracked and dirty window at distant chimneys, might be advantageously closed....

"But what's the good of talking?" said my uncle, getting off the table on which he had been sitting. "Seems to me there'll come a time when a

master will get fined if he don't run round the works blowing his girls noses for them. That's about what it'll come to."

He walked to the black mantelpiece and stood on the threadbare rug, and urged me not to be misled by the stories of prejudiced and interested enemies of our national industries.

"They'll get a strike one of these days, of employers, and then we'll see a bit," he said. "They'll drive Capital abroad and then they'll whistle to get it back again."...

He led the way down the shaky wooden steps and cheered up to tell me of his way of checking his coal consumption. He exchanged a ferocious greeting with one or two workpeople, and so we came out of the factory gates into the ugly narrow streets, paved with a peculiarly hard diapered brick of an unpleasing inky-blue colour, and bordered with the mean and squalid homes of his workers. Doors stood open and showed grimy interiors, and dirty ill-clad children played in the kennel.

We passed a sickly-looking girl with a sallow face, who dragged her limbs and peered at us dimly with painful eyes. She stood back, as partly blinded people will do, to allow us to pass, although there was plenty of room for us.

I glanced back at her.

"THAT'S ploombism," said my uncle casually.

"What?" said I.

"Ploombism. And the other day I saw a fool of a girl, and what d'you think? She'd got a basin that hadn't been fired, a cracked piece of biscuit it was, up on the shelf over her head, just all over glaze, killing glaze, man, and she was putting up her hand if you please, and eating her dinner out of it. Got her dinner in it!

"Eating her dinner out of it," he repeated in loud and bitter tones, and punched me hard in the ribs.

"And then they comes to THAT--and grumbles. And the fools up in Westminster want you to put in fans here and fans there--the Longton fools have.... And then eating their dinners out of it all the time!"...

At high tea that night--my uncle was still holding out against evening dinner--Sibyl and Gertrude made what was evidently a concerted demand for a motor-car.

"You've got your mother's brougham," he said, "that's good enough for you." But he seemed shaken by the fact that some Burslem rival was launching out with the new invention. "He spoils his girls," he remarked. "He's a fool," and became thoughtful.

Afterwards he asked me to come to him into his study; it was a room with a writing-desk and full of pieces of earthenware and suchlike litter, and we had our great row about Cambridge.

"Have you thought things over, Dick?" he said.

"I think I'll go to Trinity, Uncle," I said firmly. "I want to go to Trinity. It is a great college."

He was manifestly chagrined. "You're a fool," he said.

I made no answer.

"You're a damned fool," he said. "But I suppose you've got to do it. You could have come here--That don't matter, though, now... You'll have your time and spend your money, and be a poor half-starved clergyman, mucking about with the women all the day and afraid to have one of your own ever, or you'll be a schoolmaster or some such fool for the rest of your life. Or some newspaper chap. That's what you'll get from Cambridge. I'm half a mind not to let you. Eh? More than half a mind...."

"You've got to do the thing you can," he said, after a pause, "and likely it's what you're fitted for."

4

I paid several short visits to Staffordshire during my Cambridge days, and always these relations of mine produced the same effect of hardness. My uncle's thoughts had neither atmosphere nor mystery. He lived in a different universe from the dreams of scientific construction that filled my mind. He could as easily have understood Chinese poetry. His motives were made up of intense rivalries with other men of his class and kind, a few vindictive hates springing from real and fancied slights, a habit of acquisition that had become a second nature, a keen love both of efficiency and display in his own affairs. He seemed to me to have no sense of the state, no sense and much less any love of beauty, no charity and no sort of religious feeling whatever. He had strong bodily appetites, he ate and drank freely, smoked a great deal, and occasionally was carried off by his passions for a "bit of a spree" to Birmingham or Liverpool or Manchester. The indulgences of these occasions were usually followed by a period of reaction, when he was urgent for the suppression of nudity in the local Art Gallery and a harsh and forcible elevation of the superficial morals of the valley. And he spoke of the ladies who ministered to the delights of his jolly-dog period, when he spoke of them at all, by the unprintable feminine equivalent. My aunt he treated with a kindly contempt and considerable financial generosity, but his daughters tore his heart; he was so proud of them, so glad to find them money to spend, so resolved to own them, so instinctively jealous of every man who came near them.

My uncle has been the clue to a great number of men for me. He was an illuminating extreme. I have learnt what not to expect from them through him, and to comprehend resentments and dangerous sudden antagonisms I should have found incomprehensible in their more complex forms, if I had not first seen them in him in their feral state.

With his soft felt hat at the back of his head, his rather heavy, rather mottled face, his rationally thick boots and slouching tweed-clad form, a little round-shouldered and very obstinate looking, he strolls through all my speculations sucking his teeth audibly, and occasionally throwing out a shrewd aphorism, the intractable unavoidable ore of the new civilisation.

Essentially he was simple. Generally speaking, he hated and despised in equal measure whatever seemed to suggest that he personally was not the most perfect human being conceivable. He hated all education after fifteen because he had had no education after fifteen, he hated all people who did not have high tea until he himself under duress gave up high tea, he hated every game except football, which he had played and could judge, he hated all people who spoke foreign languages because he knew no language but Staffordshire, he hated all foreigners because he was English, and all foreign ways because they were not his ways. Also he hated particularly, and in this order, Londoner's, Yorkshiremen, Scotch, Welch and Irish, because they were not "reet Staffordshire," and he hated all other Staffordshire men as insufficiently "reet." He wanted

to have all his own women inviolate, and to fancy he had a call upon every other woman in the world. He wanted to have the best cigars and the best brandy in the world to consume or give away magnificently, and every one else to have inferior ones. (His billiard table was an extra large size, specially made and very inconvenient.) And he hated Trade Unions because they interfered with his autocratic direction of his works, and his workpeople because they were not obedient and untiring mechanisms to do his bidding. He was, in fact, a very naive, vigorous human being. He was about as much civilised, about as much tamed to the ideas of collective action and mutual consideration as a Central African negro.

There are hordes of such men as he throughout all the modern industrial world. You will find the same type with the slightest modifications in the Pas de Calais or Rhenish Prussia or New Jersey or North Italy. No doubt you would find it in New Japan. These men have raised themselves up from the general mass of untrained, uncultured, poorish people in a hard industrious selfish struggle. To drive others they have had first to drive themselves. They have never yet had occasion nor leisure to think of the state or social life as a whole, and as for dreams or beauty, it was a condition of survival that they should ignore such cravings. All the distinctive qualities of my uncle can be thought of as dictated by his conditions; his success and harshness, the extravagances that expressed his pride in making money, the uncongenial luxury that sprang from rivalry, and his self-reliance, his contempt for broad views, his contempt for everything that he could not understand.

His daughters were the inevitable children of his life. Queer girls they were! Curiously "spirited" as people phrase it, and curiously limited. During my Cambridge days I went down to Staffordshire several times. My uncle, though he still resented my refusal to go into his business, was also in his odd way proud of me. I was his nephew and poor relation, and yet there I was, a young gentleman learning all sorts of unremunerative things in the grandest manner, "Latin and mook," while the sons of his neighhours, not nephews merely, but sons, stayed unpolished in their native town. Every time I went down I found extensive changes and altered relations, and before I had settled down to them off I went again. I don't think I was one person to them; I was a series of visitors. There is a gulf of ages between a gaunt schoolboy of sixteen in unbecoming mourning and two vividly self-conscious girls of eighteen and nineteen, but a Cambridge "man" of two and twenty with a first and good tennis and a growing social experience, is a fair contemporary for two girls of twenty-three and twenty-four.

A motor-car appeared, I think in my second visit, a bottle-green affair that opened behind, had dark purple cushions, and was controlled mysteriously by a man in shiny black costume and a flat cap. The high tea had been shifted to seven and rechristened dinner, but my uncle would not dress nor consent to have wine; and after one painful experiment, I gathered, and a scene, he put his foot down and prohibited any but high-necked dresses.

"Daddy's perfectly impossible," Sybil told me.

The foot had descended vehemently! "My own daughters!" he had said, "dressed up like--"--and had arrested himself and fumbled and decided to say--"actresses, and showin' their fat arms for every fool to stare at!" Nor would he have any people invited to dinner. He didn't, he had explained, want strangers poking about in his house when he came home tired. So such calling as occurred went on during his absence in the afternoon.

One of the peculiarities of the life of these ascendant families of the industrial class to which wealth has come, is its tremendous insulations. There were no customs of intercourse in the Five Towns. All the isolated prosperities of the district sprang from economising, hard driven homes, in which there was neither time nor means for hospitality. Social intercourse centred very largely upon the church or chapel, and the chapels were better at bringing people together than the Establishment to which my cousins belonged. Their chief outlet to the wider world lay therefore through the acquaintances they had formed at school, and through two much less prosperous families of relations who lived at Longton and Hanley. A number of gossiping friendships with old school mates were "kept up," and my cousins would "spend the afternoon" or even spend the day with these; such occasions led to other encounters and interlaced with the furtive correspondences and snatched meetings that formed the emotional thread of their lives. When the billiard table had been new, my uncle had taken to asking in a few approved friends for

an occasional game, but mostly the billiard-room was for glory and the girls. Both of them played very well. They never, so far as I know, dined out, and when at last after bitter domestic conflicts they began to go to dances, they went with the quavering connivance of my aunt, and changed into ball frocks at friends' houses on the way. There was a tennis club that formed a convenient afternoon rendezvous, and I recall that in the period of my earlier visits the young bloods of the district found much satisfaction in taking girls for drives in dog-carts and suchlike high-wheeled vehicles, a disposition that died in tangled tandems at the apparition of motor-car's.

My aunt and uncle had conceived no plans in life for their daughters at all. In the undifferentiated industrial community from which they had sprung, girls got married somehow, and it did not occur to them that the concentration of property that had made them wealthy, had cut their children off from the general social sea in which their own awkward meeting had occurred, without necessarily opening any other world in exchange. My uncle was too much occupied with the works and his business affairs and his private vices to philosophise about his girls; he wanted them just to keep girls, preferably about sixteen, and to be a sort of animated flowers and make home bright and be given things. He was irritated that they would not remain at this, and still more irritated that they failed to suppress altogether their natural interest in young men. The tandems would be steered by weird and devious routes to evade the bare chance of his bloodshot eye. My aunt seemed to have no ideas whatever about what was likely to happen to her children. She had indeed

no ideas about anything; she took her husband and the days as they came.

I can see now the pathetic difficulty of my cousins' position in life; the absence of any guidance or instruction or provision for their development. They supplemented the silences of home by the conversation of schoolfellows and the suggestions of popular fiction. They had to make what they could out of life with such hints as these. The church was far too modest to offer them any advice. It was obtruded upon my mind upon my first visit that they were both carrying on correspondences and having little furtive passings and seeings and meetings with the mysterious owners of certain initials, S. and L. K., and, if I remember rightly, "the R. N." brothers and cousins, I suppose, of their friends. The same thing was going on, with a certain intensification, at my next visit, excepting only that the initials were different. But when I came again their methods were maturer or I was no longer a negligible quantity, and the notes and the initials were no longer flaunted quite so openly in my face.

My cousins had worked it out from the indications of their universe that the end of life is to have a "good time." They used the phrase. That and the drives in dog-carts were only the first of endless points of resemblance between them and the commoner sort of American girl. When some years ago I paid my first and only visit to America I seemed to recover my cousins' atmosphere as soon as I entered the train at Euston. There were three girls in my compartment supplied with huge decorated cases of sweets, and being seen off by a company of friends, noisily

arch and eager about the "steamer letters" they would get at Liverpool; they were the very soul-sisters of my cousins. The chief elements of a good time, as my cousins judged it, as these countless thousands of rich young women judge it, are a petty eventfulness, laughter, and to feel that you are looking well and attracting attention. Shopping is one of its leading joys. You buy things, clothes and trinkets for yourself and presents for your friends. Presents always seemed to be flying about in that circle; flowers and boxes of sweets were common currency. My cousins were always getting and giving, my uncle caressed them with parcels and cheques. They kissed him and he exuded sovereigns as a stroked APHIS exudes honey. It was like the new language of the Academy of Lagado to me, and I never learnt how to express myself in it, for nature and training make me feel encumbered to receive presents and embarrassed in giving them. But then, like my father, I hate and distrust possessions.

Of the quality of their private imagination I never learnt anything; I suppose it followed the lines of the fiction they read and was romantic and sentimental. So far as marriage went, the married state seemed at once very attractive and dreadfully serious to them, composed in equal measure of becoming important and becoming old. I don't know what they thought about children. I doubt if they thought about them at all. It was very secret if they did.

As for the poor and dingy people all about them, my cousins were always ready to take part in a Charitable Bazaar. They were unaware of any

economic correlation of their own prosperity and that circumambient poverty, and they knew of Trade Unions simply as disagreeable external things that upset my uncle's temper. They knew of nothing wrong in social life at all except that there were "Agitators." It surprised them a little, I think, that Agitators were not more drastically put down. But they had a sort of instinctive dread of social discussion as of something that might breach the happiness of their ignorance....

5

My cousins did more than illustrate Marx for me; they also undertook a stage of my emotional education. Their method in that as in everything else was extremely simple, but it took my inexperience by surprise.

It must have been on my third visit that Sybil took me in hand. Hitherto I seemed to have seen her only in profile, but now she became almost completely full face, manifestly regarded me with those violet eyes of hers. She passed me things I needed at breakfast--it was the first morning of my visit--before I asked for them.

When young men are looked at by pretty cousins, they become intensely aware of those cousins. It seemed to me that I had always admired Sybil's eyes very greatly, and that there was something in her temperament congenial to mine. It was odd I had not noted it on my previous visits.

We walked round the garden somewhen that morning, and talked about Cambridge. She asked quite a lot of questions about my work and my ambitions. She said she had always felt sure I was clever.

The conversation languished a little, and we picked some flowers for the house. Then she asked if I could run. I conceded her various starts and we raced up and down the middle garden path. Then, a little breathless,

we went into the new twenty-five guinea summer-house at the end of the herbaceous border.

We sat side by side, pleasantly hidden from the house, and she became anxious about her hair, which was slightly and prettily disarranged, and asked me to help her with the adjustment of a hairpin. I had never in my life been so near the soft curly hair and the dainty eyebrow and eyelid and warm soft cheek of a girl, and I was stirred--

It stirs me now to recall it.

I became a battleground of impulses and inhibitions.

"Thank you," said my cousin, and moved a little away from me.

She began to talk about friendship, and lost her thread and forgot the little electric stress between us in a rather meandering analysis of her principal girl friends.

But afterwards she resumed her purpose.

I went to bed that night with one proposition overshadowing everything else in my mind, namely, that kissing my cousin Sybil was a difficult, but not impossible, achievement. I do not recall any shadow of a doubt whether on the whole it was worth doing. The thing had come into my existence, disturbing and interrupting its flow exactly as a fever does.

Sybil had infected me with herself.

The next day matters came to a crisis in the little upstairs sitting-room which had been assigned me as a study during my visit. I was working up there, or rather trying to work in spite of the outrageous capering of some very primitive elements in my brain, when she came up to me, under a transparent pretext of looking for a book.

I turned round and then got up at the sight of her. I quite forget what our conversation was about, but I know she led me to believe I might kiss her. Then when I attempted to do so she averted her face.

"How COULD you?" she said; "I didn't mean that!"

That remained the state of our relations for two days. I developed a growing irritation with and resentment against cousin Sybil, combined with an intense desire to get that kiss for which I hungered and thirsted. Cousin Sybil went about in the happy persuasion that I was madly in love with her, and her game, so far as she was concerned, was played and won. It wasn't until I had fretted for two days that I realised that I was being used for the commonest form of excitement possible to a commonplace girl; that dozens perhaps of young men had played the part of Tantalus at cousin Sybil's lips. I walked about my room at nights, damning her and calling her by terms which on the whole she rather deserved, while Sybil went to sleep pitying "poor old Dick!"

"Damn it!" I said, "I WILL be equal with you."

But I never did equalise the disadvantage, and perhaps it's as well, for I fancy that sort of revenge cuts both people too much for a rational man to seek it....

"Why are men so silly?" said cousin Sybil next morning, wriggling back with down-bent head to release herself from what should have been a compelling embrace.

"Confound it!" I said with a flash of clear vision. "You STARTED this game."

"Oh!"

She stood back against a hedge of roses, a little flushed and excited and interested, and ready for the delightful defensive if I should renew my attack.

"Beastly hot for scuffling," I said, white with anger. "I don't know whether I'm so keen on kissing you, Sybil, after all. I just thought you wanted me to."

I could have whipped her, and my voice stung more than my words.

Our eyes met; a real hatred in hers leaping up to meet mine.

"Let's play tennis," I said, after a moment's pause.

"No," she answered shortly, "I'm going indoors."

"Very well."

And that ended the affair with Sybil.

I was still in the full glare of this disillusionment when Gertrude awoke from some preoccupation to an interest in my existence. She developed a disposition to touch my hand by accident, and let her fingers rest in contact with it for a moment,--she had pleasant soft hands;--she began to drift into summer houses with me, to let her arm rest trustfully against mine, to ask questions about Cambridge. They were much the same questions that Sybil had asked. But I controlled myself and maintained a profile of intelligent and entirely civil indifference to her blandishments.

What Gertrude made of it came out one evening in some talk--I forget about what--with Sybil.

"Oh, Dick!" said Gertrude a little impatiently, "Dick's Pi."

And I never disillusioned her by any subsequent levity from this theory of my innate and virginal piety.

6

It was against this harsh and crude Staffordshire background that I think I must have seen Margaret for the first time. I say I think because it is quite possible that we had passed each other in the streets of Cambridge, no doubt with that affectation of mutual disregard which was once customary between undergraduates and Newnham girls. But if that was so I had noted nothing of the slender graciousness that shone out so pleasingly against the bleaker midland surroundings.

She was a younger schoolfellow of my cousins', and the step-daughter of Seddon, a prominent solicitor of Burslem. She was not only not in my cousins' generation but not in their set, she was one of a small hardworking group who kept immaculate note-books, and did as much as is humanly possible of that insensate pile of written work that the Girls' Public School movement has inflicted upon school-girls. She really learnt French and German admirably and thoroughly, she got as far in mathematics as an unflinching industry can carry any one with no great natural aptitude, and she went up to Bennett Hall, Newnham, after the usual conflict with her family, to work for the History Tripos.

There in her third year she made herself thoroughly ill through overwork, so ill that she had to give up Newnham altogether and go abroad with her stepmother. She made herself ill, as so many girls do in those university colleges, through the badness of her home and school

training. She thought study must needs be a hard straining of the mind. She worried her work, she gave herself no leisure to see it as a whole, she felt herself not making headway and she cut her games and exercise in order to increase her hours of toil, and worked into the night. She carried a knack of laborious thoroughness into the blind alleys and inessentials of her subject. It didn't need the badness of the food for which Bennett Hall is celebrated and the remarkable dietary of nocturnal cocoa, cakes and soft biscuits with which the girls have supplemented it, to ensure her collapse. Her mother brought her home, fretting and distressed, and then finding her hopelessly unhappy at home, took her and her half-brother, a rather ailing youngster of ten who died three years later, for a journey to Italy.

Italy did much to assuage Margaret's chagrin. I think all three of them had a very good time there. At home Mr. Seddon, her step-father, played the part of a well-meaning blight by reason of the moods that arose from nervous dyspepsia. They went to Florence, equipped with various introductions and much sound advice from sympathetic Cambridge friends, and having acquired an ease in Italy there, went on to Siena, Orvieto, and at last Rome. They returned, if I remember rightly, by Pisa, Genoa, Milan and Paris. Six months or more they had had abroad, and now Margaret was back in Burslem, in health again and consciously a very civilised person.

New ideas were abroad, it was Maytime and a spring of abundant flowers--daffodils were particularly good that year--and Mrs. Seddon

celebrated her return by giving an afternoon reception at short notice, with the clear intention of letting every one out into the garden if the weather held.

The Seddons had a big old farmhouse modified to modern ideas of comfort on the road out towards Misterton, with an orchard that had been rather pleasantly subdued from use to ornament. It had rich blossoming cherry and apple trees. Large patches of grass full of nodding yellow trumpets had been left amidst the not too precisely mown grass, which was as it were grass path with an occasional lapse into lawn or glade. And Margaret, hatless, with the fair hair above her thin, delicately pink face very simply done, came to meet our rather too consciously dressed party,--we had come in the motor four strong, with my aunt in grey silk. Margaret wore a soft flowing flowered blue dress of diaphanous material, all unconnected with the fashion and tied with pretty ribbons, like a slenderer, unbountiful Primavera.

It was one of those May days that ape the light and heat of summer, and I remember disconnectedly quite a number of brightly lit figures and groups walking about, and a white gate between orchard and garden and a large lawn with an oak tree and a red Georgian house with a verandah and open French windows, through which the tea drinking had come out upon the moss-edged flagstones even as Mrs. Seddon had planned.

The party was almost entirely feminine except for a little curate with a large head, a good voice and a radiant manner, who was obviously

attracted by Margaret, and two or three young husbands still sufficiently addicted to their wives to accompany them. One of them I recall as a quite romantic figure with abundant blond curly hair on which was poised a grey felt hat encircled by a refined black band. He wore, moreover, a loose rich shot silk tie of red and purple, a long frock coat, grey trousers and brown shoes, and presently he removed his hat and carried it in one hand. There were two tennis-playing youths besides myself. There was also one father with three daughters in anxious control, a father of the old school scarcely half broken in, reluctant, rebellious and consciously and conscientiously "reet Staffordshire." The daughters were all alert to suppress the possible plungings, the undesirable humorous impulses of this almost feral guest. They nipped his very gestures in the bud. The rest of the people were mainly mothers with daughters--daughters of all ages, and a scattering of aunts, and there was a tendency to clotting, parties kept together and regarded parties suspiciously. Mr. Seddon was in hiding, I think, all the time, though not formally absent.

Matters centred upon the tea in the long room of the French windows, where four trim maids went to and fro busily between the house and the clumps of people seated or standing before it; and tennis and croquet were intermittently visible and audible beyond a bank of rockwork rich with the spikes and cups and bells of high spring.

Mrs. Seddon presided at the tea urn, and Margaret partly assisted and partly talked to me and my cousin Sibyl--Gertrude had found a disused

and faded initial and was partnering him at tennis in a state of gentle revival--while their mother exercised a divided chaperonage from a seat near Mrs. Seddon. The little curate, stirring a partially empty cup of tea, mingled with our party, and preluded, I remember, every observation he made by a vigorous resumption of stirring.

We talked of Cambridge, and Margaret kept us to it. The curate was a Selwyn man and had taken a pass degree in theology, but Margaret had come to Gaylord's lecturers in Trinity for a term before her breakdown, and understood these differences. She had the eagerness of an exile to hear the old familiar names of places and personalities. We capped familiar anecdotes and were enthusiastic about Kings' Chapel and the Backs, and the curate, addressing himself more particularly to Sibyl, told a long confused story illustrative of his disposition to reckless devilry (of a pure-minded kindly sort) about upsetting two canoes quite needlessly on the way to Grantchester.

I can still see Margaret as I saw her that afternoon, see her fresh fair face, with the little obliquity of the upper lip, and her brow always slightly knitted, and her manner as of one breathlessly shy but determined. She had rather open blue eyes, and she spoke in an even musical voice with the gentlest of stresses and the ghost of a lisp. And it was true, she gathered, that Cambridge still existed. "I went to Grantchester," she said, "last year, and had tea under the apple-blossom. I didn't think then I should have to come down." (It was that started the curate upon his anecdote.)

"I've seen a lot of pictures, and learnt a lot about them--at the Pitti and the Brera,--the Brera is wonderful--wonderful places,--but it isn't like real study," she was saying presently.... "We bought bales of photographs," she said.

I thought the bales a little out of keeping.

But fair-haired and quite simply and yet graciously and fancifully dressed, talking of art and beautiful things and a beautiful land, and with so much manifest regret for learning denied, she seemed a different kind of being altogether from my smart, hard, high-coloured, black-haired and resolutely hatted cousin; she seemed translucent beside Gertrude. Even the little twist and droop of her slender body was a grace to me.

I liked her from the moment I saw her, and set myself to interest and please her as well as I knew how.

We recalled a case of ragging that had rustled the shrubs of Newnham, and then Chris Robinson's visit--he had given a talk to Bennett Hall also--and our impression of him.

"He disappointed me, too," said Margaret.

I was moved to tell Margaret something of my own views in the matter of

social progress, and she listened--oh! with a kind of urged attention, and her brow a little more knitted, very earnestly. The little curate desisted from the appendices and refuse heaps and general debris of his story, and made himself look very alert and intelligent.

"We did a lot of that when I was up in the eighties," he said. "I'm glad Imperialism hasn't swamped you fellows altogether."

Gertrude, looking bright and confident, came to join our talk from the shrubbery; the initial, a little flushed and evidently in a state of refreshed relationship, came with her, and a cheerful lady in pink and more particularly distinguished by a pink bonnet joined our little group. Gertrude had been sipping admiration and was not disposed to play a passive part in the talk.

"Socialism!" she cried, catching the word. "It's well Pa isn't here. He has Fits when people talk of socialism. Fits!"

The initial laughed in a general kind of way.

The curate said there was socialism AND socialism, and looked at Margaret to gauge whether he had been too bold in this utterance. But she was all, he perceived, for broad-mindness, and he stirred himself (and incidentally his tea) to still more liberality of expression. He said the state of the poor was appalling, simply appalling; that there were times when he wanted to shatter the whole system, "only," he said,

turning to me appealingly, "What have we got to put in its place?"

"The thing that exists is always the more evident alternative," I said.

The little curate looked at it for a moment. "Precisely," he said explosively, and turned stirring and with his head a little on one side, to hear what Margaret was saying.

Margaret was saying, with a swift blush and an effect of daring, that she had no doubt she was a socialist.

"And wearing a gold chain!" said Gertrude, "And drinking out of eggshell! I like that!"

I came to Margaret's rescue. "It doesn't follow that because one's a socialist one ought to dress in sackcloth and ashes."

The initial coloured deeply, and having secured my attention by prodding me slightly with the wrist of the hand that held his teacup, cleared his throat and suggested that "one ought to be consistent."

I perceived we were embarked upon a discussion of the elements. We began an interesting little wrangle one of those crude discussions of general ideas that are dear to the heart of youth. I and Margaret supported one another as socialists, Gertrude and Sybil and the initial maintained an anti-socialist position, the curate attempted a cross-bench position

with an air of intending to come down upon us presently with a casting vote. He reminded us of a number of useful principles too often overlooked in argument, that in a big question like this there was much to be said on both sides, that if every one did his or her duty to every one about them there would be no difficulty with social problems at all, that over and above all enactments we needed moral changes in people themselves. My cousin Gertrude was a difficult controversialist to manage, being unconscious of inconsistency in statement and absolutely impervious to reply. Her standpoint was essentially materialistic; she didn't see why she shouldn't have a good time because other people didn't; they would have a good time, she was sure, if she didn't. She said that if we did give up everything we had to other people, they wouldn't very likely know what to do with it. She asked if we were so fond of work-people, why we didn't go and live among them, and expressed the inflexible persuasion that if we HAD socialism, everything would be just the same again in ten years' time. She also threw upon us the imputation of ingratitude for a beautiful world by saying that so far as she was concerned she didn't want to upset everything. She was contented with things as they were, thank you.

The discussion led in some way that I don't in the least recall now, and possibly by abrupt transitions, to a croquet foursome in which Margaret involved the curate without involving herself, and then stood beside me on the edge of the lawn while the others played. We watched silently for a moment.

"I HATE that sort of view," she said suddenly in a confidential undertone, with her delicate pink flush returning.

"It's want of imagination," I said.

"To think we are just to enjoy ourselves," she went on; "just to go on dressing and playing and having meals and spending money!" She seemed to be referring not simply to my cousins, but to the whole world of industry and property about us. "But what is one to do?" she asked. "I do wish I had not had to come down. It's all so pointless here. There seems to be nothing going forward, no ideas, no dreams. No one here seems to feel quite what I feel, the sort of need there is for MEANING in things. I hate things without meaning."

"Don't you do--local work?"

"I suppose I shall. I suppose I must find something. Do you think--if one were to attempt some sort of propaganda?"

"Could you--?" I began a little doubtfully.

"I suppose I couldn't," she answered, after a thoughtful moment. "I suppose it would come to nothing. And yet I feel there is so much to be done for the world, so much one ought to be doing.... I want to do something for the world."

I can see her now as she stood there with her brows nearly frowning, her blue eyes looking before her, her mouth almost petulant. "One feels that there are so many things going on--out of one's reach," she said.

I went back in the motor-car with my mind full of her, the quality of delicate discontent, the suggestion of exile. Even a kind of weakness in her was sympathetic. She told tremendously against her background. She was, I say, like a protesting blue flower upon a cinder heap. It is curious, too, how she connects and mingles with the furious quarrel I had with my uncle that very evening. That came absurdly. Indirectly Margaret was responsible. My mind was running on ideas she had revived and questions she had set clamouring, and quite inadvertently in my attempt to find solutions I talked so as to outrage his profoundest feelings....

7

What a preposterous shindy that was!

I sat with him in the smoking-room, propounding what I considered to be the most indisputable and non-contentious propositions conceivable--until, to my infinite amazement, he exploded and called me a "damned young puppy."

It was seismic.

"Tremendously interesting time," I said, "just in the beginning of making a civilisation."

"Ah!" he said, with an averted face, and nodded, leaning forward over his cigar.

I had not the remotest thought of annoying him.

"Monstrous muddle of things we have got," I said, "jumbled streets, ugly population, ugly factories--"

"You'd do a sight better if you had to do with it," said my uncle, regarding me askance.

"Not me. But a world that had a collective plan and knew where it meant to be going would do a sight better, anyhow. We're all swimming in a flood of ill-calculated chances--"

"You'll be making out I organised that business down there--by chance--next," said my uncle, his voice thick with challenge.

I went on as though I was back in Trinity.

"There's a lot of chance in the making of all great businesses," I said.

My uncle remarked that that showed how much I knew about businesses. If chance made businesses, why was it that he always succeeded and grew while those fools Ackroyd and Sons always took second place? He showed a disposition to tell the glorious history of how once Ackroyd's overshadowed him, and how now he could buy up Ackroyd's three times over. But I wanted to get out what was in my mind.

"Oh!" I said, "as between man and man and business and business, some of course get the pull by this quality or that--but it's forces quite outside the individual case that make the big part of any success under modern conditions. YOU never invented pottery, nor any process in pottery that matters a rap in your works; it wasn't YOUR foresight that joined all England up with railways and made it possible to organise production on an altogether different scale. You really at the utmost can't take credit for much more than being the sort of man who happened

to fit what happened to be the requirements of the time, and who happened to be in a position to take advantage of them--"

It was then my uncle cried out and called me a damned young puppy, and became involved in some unexpected trouble of his own.

I woke up as it were from my analysis of the situation to discover him bent over a splendid spittoon, cursing incoherently, retching a little, and spitting out the end of his cigar which he had bitten off in his last attempt at self-control, and withal fully prepared as soon as he had cleared for action to give me just all that he considered to be the contents of his mind upon the condition of mine.

Well, why shouldn't I talk my mind to him? He'd never had an outside view of himself for years, and I resolved to stand up to him. We went at it hammer and tongs! It became clear that he supposed me to be a Socialist, a zealous, embittered hater of all ownership--and also an educated man of the vilest, most pretentiously superior description. His principal grievance was that I thought I knew everything; to that he recurred again and again....

We had been maintaining an armed truce with each other since my resolve to go up to Cambridge, and now we had out all that had accumulated between us. There had been stupendous accumulations....

The particular things we said and did in that bawling encounter matter

nothing at all in this story. I can't now estimate how near we came to fisticuffs. It ended with my saying, after a pungent reminder of benefits conferred and remembered, that I didn't want to stay another hour in his house. I went upstairs, in a state of puerile fury, to pack and go off to the Railway Hotel, while he, with ironical civility, telephoned for a cab.

"Good riddance!" shouted my uncle, seeing me off into the night.

On the face of it our row was preposterous, but the underlying reality of our quarrel was the essential antagonism, it seemed to me, in all human affairs, the antagonism between ideas and the established method, that is to say, between ideas and the rule of thumb. The world I hate is the rule-of-thumb world, the thing I and my kind of people exist for primarily is to battle with that, to annoy it, disarrange it, reconstruct it. We question everything, disturb anything that cannot give a clear justification to our questioning, because we believe inherently that our sense of disorder implies the possibility of a better order. Of course we are detestable. My uncle was of that other vaster mass who accept everything for the thing it seems to be, hate enquiry and analysis as a tramp hates washing, dread and resist change, oppose experiment, despise science. The world is our battleground; and all history, all literature that matters, all science, deals with this conflict of the thing that is and the speculative "if" that will destroy it.

But that is why I did not see Margaret Seddon again for five years.

## CHAPTER THE SECOND ~~ MARGARET IN LONDON

### 1

I was twenty-seven when I met Margaret again, and the intervening five years had been years of vigorous activity for me, if not of very remarkable growth. When I saw her again, I could count myself a grown man. I think, indeed, I counted myself more completely grown than I was. At any rate, by all ordinary standards, I had "got on" very well, and my ideas, if they had not changed very greatly, had become much more definite and my ambitions clearer and bolder.

I had long since abandoned my fellowship and come to London. I had published two books that had been talked about, written several articles, and established a regular relationship with the WEEKLY REVIEW and the EVENING GAZETTE. I was a member of the Eighty Club and learning to adapt the style of the Cambridge Union to larger uses. The London world had opened out to me very readily. I had developed a pleasant variety of social connections. I had made the acquaintance of Mr.

Evesham, who had been attracted by my NEW RULER, and who talked about it and me, and so did a very great deal to make a way for me into the company of prominent and amusing people. I dined out quite frequently. The glitter and interest of good London dinner parties became a common experience. I liked the sort of conversation one got at them extremely, the little glow of duologues burning up into more general discussions, the closing-in of the men after the going of the women, the sage, substantial masculine gossiping, the later resumption of effective talk with some pleasant woman, graciously at her best. I had a wide range of houses; Cambridge had linked me to one or two correlated sets of artistic and literary people, and my books and Mr. Evesham and opened to me the big vague world of "society." I wasn't aggressive nor particularly snobbish nor troublesome, sometimes I talked well, and if I had nothing interesting to say I said as little as possible, and I had a youthful gravity of manner that was liked by hostesses. And the other side of my nature that first flared through the cover of restraints at Locarno, that too had had opportunity to develop along the line London renders practicable. I had had my experiences and secrets and adventures among that fringe of ill-mated or erratic or discredited women the London world possesses. The thing had long ago ceased to be a matter of magic or mystery, and had become a question of appetites and excitement, and among other things the excitement of not being found out.

I write rather doubtfully of my growing during this period. Indeed I find it hard to judge whether I can say that I grew at all in any real sense of the word, between three and twenty and twenty-seven. It seems

to me now to have been rather a phase of realisation and clarification. All the broad lines of my thought were laid down, I am sure, by the date of my Locarno adventure, but in those five years I discussed things over and over again with myself and others, filled out with concrete fact forms I had at first apprehended sketchily and conversationally, measured my powers against my ideals and the forces in the world about me. It was evident that many men no better than myself and with no greater advantages than mine had raised themselves to influential and even decisive positions in the worlds of politics and thought. I was gathering the confidence and knowledge necessary to attack the world in the large manner; I found I could write, and that people would let me write if I chose, as one having authority and not as the scribes. Socially and politically and intellectually I knew myself for an honest man, and that quite without any deliberation on my part this showed and made things easy for me. People trusted my good faith from the beginning--for all that I came from nowhere and had no better position than any adventurer.

But the growth process was arrested, I was nothing bigger at twenty-seven than at twenty-two, however much saner and stronger, and any one looking closely into my mind during that period might well have imagined growth finished altogether. It is particularly evident to me now that I came no nearer to any understanding of women during that time. That Locarno affair was infinitely more to me than I had supposed. It ended something--nipped something in the bud perhaps--took me at a stride from a vague, fine, ignorant, closed world of emotion to intrigue

and a perfectly definite and limited sensuality. It ended my youth, and for a time it prevented my manhood. I had never yet even peeped at the sweetest, profoundest thing in the world, the heart and meaning of a girl, or dreamt with any quality of reality of a wife or any such thing as a friend among womanhood. My vague anticipation of such things in life had vanished altogether. I turned away from their possibility. It seemed to me I knew what had to be known about womankind. I wanted to work hard, to get on to a position in which I could develop and forward my constructive projects. Women, I thought, had nothing to do with that. It seemed clear I could not marry for some years; I was attractive to certain types of women, I had vanity enough to give me an agreeable confidence in love-making, and I went about seeking a convenient mistress quite deliberately, some one who should serve my purpose and say in the end, like that kindly first mistress of mine, "I've done you no harm," and so release me. It seemed the only wise way of disposing of urgencies that might otherwise entangle and wreck the career I was intent upon.

I don't apologise for, or defend my mental and moral phases. So it was I appraised life and prepared to take it, and so it is a thousand ambitious men see it to-day....

For the rest these five years were a period of definition. My political conceptions were perfectly plain and honest. I had one constant desire ruling my thoughts. I meant to leave England and the empire better ordered than I found it, to organise and discipline, to build up a

constructive and controlling State out of my world's confusions. We had, I saw, to suffuse education with public intention, to develop a new better-living generation with a collectivist habit of thought, to link now chaotic activities in every human affair, and particularly to catch that escaped, world-making, world-ruining, dangerous thing, industrial and financial enterprise, and bring it back to the service of the general good. I had then the precise image that still serves me as a symbol for all I wish to bring about, the image of an engineer building a lock in a swelling torrent--with water pressure as his only source of power. My thoughts and acts were habitually turned to that enterprise; it gave shape and direction to all my life. The problem that most engaged my mind during those years was the practical and personal problem of just where to apply myself to serve this almost innate purpose. How was I, a child of this confusion, struggling upward through the confusion, to take hold of things? Somewhere between politics and literature my grip must needs be found, but where? Always I seem to have been looking for that in those opening years, and disregarding everything else to discover it.

2

The Baileys, under whose auspices I met Margaret again, were in the sharpest contrast with the narrow industrialism of the Staffordshire world. They were indeed at the other extreme of the scale, two active self-centred people, excessively devoted to the public service. It was natural I should gravitate to them, for they seemed to stand for the maturer, more disciplined, better informed expression of all I was then urgent to attempt to do. The bulk of their friends were politicians or public officials, they described themselves as publicists--a vague yet sufficiently significant term. They lived and worked in a hard little house in Chambers Street, Westminster, and made a centre for quite an astonishing amount of political and social activity.

Willersley took me there one evening. The place was almost pretentiously matter-of-fact and unassuming. The narrow passage-hall, papered with some ancient yellowish paper, grained to imitate wood, was choked with hats and cloaks and an occasional feminine wrap. Motioned rather than announced by a tall Scotch servant woman, the only domestic I ever remember seeing there, we made our way up a narrow staircase past the open door of a small study packed with blue-books, to discover Altiora Bailey receiving before the fireplace in her drawing-room. She was a tall commanding figure, splendid but a little untidy in black silk and red beads, with dark eyes that had no depths, with a clear hard voice that had an almost visible prominence, aquiline features and straight

black hair that was apt to get astray, that was now astray like the head feathers of an eagle in a gale. She stood with her hands behind her back, and talked in a high tenor of a projected Town Planning Bill with Blupp, who was practically in those days the secretary of the local Government Board. A very short broad man with thick ears and fat white hands writhing intertwined behind him, stood with his back to us, eager to bark interruptions into Altiora's discourse. A slender girl in pale blue, manifestly a young political wife, stood with one foot on the fender listening with an expression of entirely puzzled propitiation. A tall sandy-bearded bishop with the expression of a man in a trance completed this central group.

The room was one of those long apartments once divided by folding doors, and reaching from back to front, that are common upon the first floors of London houses. Its walls were hung with two or three indifferent water colours, there was scarcely any furniture but a sofa or so and a chair, and the floor, severely carpeted with matting, was crowded with a curious medley of people, men predominating. Several were in evening dress, but most had the morning garb of the politician; the women were either severely rational or radiantly magnificent. Willersley pointed out to me the wife of the Secretary of State for War, and I recognised the Duchess of Clynes, who at that time cultivated intellectuality. I looked round, identifying a face here or there, and stepping back trod on some one's toe, and turned to find it belonged to the Right Hon. G. B. Mottisham, dear to the PUNCH caricaturists. He received my apology with that intentional charm that is one of his most delightful traits,

and resumed his discussion. Beside him was Esmeer of Trinity, whom I had not seen since my Cambridge days....

Willersley found an ex-member of the School Board for whom he had affinities, and left me to exchange experiences and comments upon the company with Esmeer. Esmeer was still a don; but he was nibbling, he said, at certain negotiations with the TIMES that might bring him down to London. He wanted to come to London. "We peep at things from Cambridge," he said.

"This sort of thing," I said, "makes London necessary. It's the oddest gathering."

"Every one comes here," said Esmeer. "Mostly we hate them like poison--jealousy--and little irritations--Altiora can be a horror at times--but we HAVE to come."

"Things are being done?"

"Oh!--no doubt of it. It's one of the parts of the British machinery--that doesn't show.... But nobody else could do it.

"Two people," said Esmeer, "who've planned to be a power--in an original way. And by Jove! they've done it!"

I did not for some time pick out Oscar Bailey, and then Esmeer

showed him to me in elaborately confidential talk in a corner with a distinguished-looking stranger wearing a ribbon. Oscar had none of the fine appearance of his wife; he was a short sturdy figure with a rounded protruding abdomen and a curious broad, flattened, clean-shaven face that seemed nearly all forehead. He was of Anglo-Hungarian extraction, and I have always fancied something Mongolian in his type. He peered up with reddish swollen-looking eyes over gilt-edged glasses that were divided horizontally into portions of different refractive power, and he talking in an ingratiating undertone, with busy thin lips, an eager lisp and nervous movements of the hand.

People say that thirty years before at Oxford he was almost exactly the same eager, clever little man he was when I first met him. He had come up to Balliol bristling with extraordinary degrees and prizes captured in provincial and Irish and Scotch universities--and had made a name for himself as the most formidable dealer in exact fact the rhetoricians of the Union had ever had to encounter. From Oxford he had gone on to a position in the Higher Division of the Civil Service, I think in the War Office, and had speedily made a place for himself as a political journalist. He was a particularly neat controversialist, and very full of political and sociological ideas. He had a quite astounding memory for facts and a mastery of detailed analysis, and the time afforded scope for these gifts. The later eighties were full of politico-social discussion, and he became a prominent name upon the contents list of the NINETEENTH CENTURY, the FORTNIGHTLY and CONTEMPORARY chiefly as a half sympathetic but frequently very damaging critic of the socialism of that

period. He won the immense respect of every one specially interested in social and political questions, he soon achieved the limited distinction that is awarded such capacity, and at that I think he would have remained for the rest of his life if he had not encountered Altiora.

But Altiora Macvitie was an altogether exceptional woman, an extraordinary mixture of qualities, the one woman in the world who could make something more out of Bailey than that. She had much of the vigour and handsomeness of a slender impudent young man, and an unscrupulousness altogether feminine. She was one of those women who are waiting in--what is the word?--muliebrity. She had courage and initiative and a philosophical way of handling questions, and she could be bored by regular work like a man. She was entirely unfitted for her sex's sphere. She was neither uncertain, coy nor hard to please, and altogether too stimulating and aggressive for any gentleman's hours of ease. Her cookery would have been about as sketchy as her handwriting, which was generally quite illegible, and she would have made, I feel sure, a shocking bad nurse. Yet you mustn't imagine she was an inelegant or unbeautiful woman, and she is inconceivable to me in high collars or any sort of masculine garment. But her soul was bony, and at the base of her was a vanity gaunt and greedy! When she wasn't in a state of personal untidiness that was partly a protest against the waste of hours exacted by the toilet and partly a natural disinclination, she had a gypsy splendour of black and red and silver all her own. And somewhen in the early nineties she met and married Bailey.

I know very little about her early years. She was the only daughter of Sir Deighton Macvitie, who applied the iodoform process to cotton, and only his subsequent unfortunate attempts to become a Cotton King prevented her being a very rich woman. As it was she had a tolerable independence. She came into prominence as one of the more able of the little shoal of young women who were led into politico-philanthropic activities by the influence of the earlier novels of Mrs. Humphry Ward--the Marcella crop. She went "slumming" with distinguished vigour, which was quite usual in those days--and returned from her experiences as an amateur flower girl with clear and original views about the problem--which is and always had been unusual. She had not married, I suppose because her standards were high, and men are cowards and with an instinctive appetite for muliebrity. She had kept house for her father by speaking occasionally to the housekeeper, butler and cook her mother had left her, and gathering the most interesting dinner parties she could, and had married off four orphan nieces in a harsh and successful manner. After her father's smash and death she came out as a writer upon social questions and a scathing critic of the Charity Organisation Society, and she was three and thirty and a little at loose ends when she met Oscar Bailey, so to speak, in the CONTEMPORARY REVIEW. The lurking woman in her nature was fascinated by the ease and precision with which the little man rolled over all sorts of important and authoritative people, she was the first to discover a sort of imaginative bigness in his still growing mind, the forehead perhaps carried him off physically, and she took occasion to meet and subjugate him, and, so soon as he had sufficiently recovered from his abject

humility and a certain panic at her attentions, marry him.

This had opened a new phase in the lives of Bailey and herself. The two supplemented each other to an extraordinary extent. Their subsequent career was, I think, almost entirely her invention. She was aggressive, imaginative, and had a great capacity for ideas, while he was almost destitute of initiative, and could do nothing with ideas except remember and discuss them. She was, if not exact, at least indolent, with a strong disposition to save energy by sketching--even her handwriting showed that--while he was inexhaustibly industrious with a relentless invariable calligraphy that grew larger and clearer as the years passed by. She had a considerable power of charming; she could be just as nice to people--and incidentally just as nasty--as she wanted to be. He was always just the same, a little confidential and SOTTO VOCE, artlessly rude and egoistic in an undignified way. She had considerable social experience, good social connections, and considerable social ambition, while he had none of these things. She saw in a flash her opportunity to redeem his defects, use his powers, and do large, novel, rather startling things. She ran him. Her marriage, which shocked her friends and relations beyond measure--for a time they would only speak of Bailey as "that gnome"--was a stroke of genius, and forthwith they proceeded to make themselves the most formidable and distinguished couple conceivable. P. B. P., she boasted, was engraved inside their wedding rings, Pro Bono Publico, and she meant it to be no idle threat. She had discovered very early that the last thing influential people will do is to work. Everything in their lives tends to make them dependent upon a

supply of confidently administered detail. Their business is with the window and not the stock behind, and in the end they are dependent upon the stock behind for what goes into the window. She linked with that the fact that Bailey had a mind as orderly as a museum, and an invincible power over detail. She saw that if two people took the necessary pains to know the facts of government and administration with precision, to gather together knowledge that was dispersed and confused, to be able to say precisely what had to be done and what avoided in this eventuality or that, they would necessarily become a centre of reference for all sorts of legislative proposals and political expedients, and she went unhesitatingly upon that.

Bailey, under her vigorous direction, threw up his post in the Civil Service and abandoned sporadic controversies, and they devoted themselves to the elaboration and realisation of this centre of public information she had conceived as their role. They set out to study the methods and organisation and realities of government in the most elaborate manner. They did the work as no one had ever hitherto dreamt of doing it. They planned the research on a thoroughly satisfying scale, and arranged their lives almost entirely for it. They took that house in Chambers Street and furnished it with severe economy, they discovered that Scotch domestic who is destined to be the guardian and tyrant of their declining years, and they set to work. Their first book, "The Permanent Official," fills three plump volumes, and took them and their two secretaries upwards of four years to do. It is an amazingly good book, an enduring achievement. In a hundred directions the history and

the administrative treatment of the public service was clarified for all time....

They worked regularly every morning from nine to twelve, they lunched lightly but severely, in the afternoon they "took exercise" or Bailey attended meetings of the London School Board, on which he served, he said, for the purposes of study--he also became a railway director for the same end. In the late afternoon Altiora was at home to various callers, and in the evening came dinner or a reception or both.

Her dinners and gatherings were a very important feature in their scheme. She got together all sorts of interesting people in or about the public service, she mixed the obscurely efficient with the ill-instructed famous and the rudderless rich, got together in one room more of the factors in our strange jumble of a public life than had ever met easily before. She fed them with a shameless austerity that kept the conversation brilliant, on a soup, a plain fish, and mutton or boiled fowl and milk pudding, with nothing to drink but whisky and soda, and hot and cold water, and milk and lemonade. Everybody was soon very glad indeed to come to that. She boasted how little her housekeeping cost her, and sought constantly for fresh economies that would enable her, she said, to sustain an additional private secretary. Secretaries were the Baileys' one extravagance, they loved to think of searches going on in the British Museum, and letters being cleared up and precis made overhead, while they sat in the little study and worked together, Bailey with a clockwork industry, and Altiora in splendid flashes between

intervals of cigarettes and meditation. "All efficient public careers," said Altiora, "consist in the proper direction of secretaries."

"If everything goes well I shall have another secretary next year," Altiora told me. "I wish I could refuse people dinner napkins. Imagine what it means in washing! I dare most things.... But as it is, they stand a lot of hardship here."

"There's something of the miser in both these people," said Esmeer, and the thing was perfectly true. For, after all, the miser is nothing more than a man who either through want of imagination or want of suggestion misapplies to a base use a natural power of concentration upon one end. The concentration itself is neither good nor evil, but a power that can be used in either way. And the Baileys gathered and reinvested usuriously not money, but knowledge of the utmost value in human affairs. They produced an effect of having found themselves--completely. One envied them at times extraordinarily. I was attracted, I was dazzled--and at the same time there was something about Bailey's big wrinkled forehead, his lisping broad mouth, the gestures of his hands and an uncivil preoccupation I could not endure....

3

Their effect upon me was from the outset very considerable.

Both of them found occasion on that first visit of mine to talk to me about my published writings and particularly about my then just published book THE NEW RULER, which had interested them very much. It fell in indeed so closely with their own way of thinking that I doubt if they ever understood how independently I had arrived at my conclusions. It was their weakness to claim excessively. That irritation, however, came later. We discovered each other immensely; for a time it produced a tremendous sense of kindred and co-operation.

Altiora, I remember, maintained that there existed a great army of such constructive-minded people as ourselves--as yet undiscovered by one another.

"It's like boring a tunnel through a mountain," said Oscar, "and presently hearing the tapping of the workers from the other end."

"If you didn't know of them beforehand," I said, "it might be a rather badly joined tunnel."

"Exactly," said Altiora with a high note, "and that's why we all want to find out each other...."

They didn't talk like that on our first encounter, but they urged me to lunch with them next day, and then it was we went into things. A woman Factory Inspector and the Educational Minister for New Banksland and his wife were also there, but I don't remember they made any contribution to the conversation. The Baileys saw to that. They kept on at me in an urgent litigious way.

"We have read your book," each began--as though it had been a joint function. "And we consider--"

"Yes," I protested, "I think--"

That was a secondary matter.

"They did not consider," said Altiora, raising her voice and going right over me, "that I had allowed sufficiently for the inevitable development of an official administrative class in the modern state."

"Nor of its importance," echoed Oscar.

That, they explained in a sort of chorus, was the cardinal idea of their lives, what they were up to, what they stood for. "We want to suggest to you," they said--and I found this was a stock opening of theirs--"that from the mere necessities of convenience elected bodies MUST avail themselves more and more of the services of expert officials. We have

that very much in mind. The more complicated and technical affairs become, the less confidence will the elected official have in himself. We want to suggest that these expert officials must necessarily develop into a new class and a very powerful class in the community. We want to organise that. It may be THE power of the future. They will necessarily have to have very much of a common training. We consider ourselves as amateur unpaid precursors of such a class."...

The vision they displayed for my consideration as the aim of public-spirited endeavour, seemed like a harder, narrower, more specialised version of the idea of a trained and disciplined state that Willersley and I had worked out in the Alps. They wanted things more organised, more correlated with government and a collective purpose, just as we did, but they saw it not in terms of a growing collective understanding, but in terms of functionaries, legislative change, and methods of administration....

It wasn't clear at first how we differed. The Baileys were very anxious to win me to co-operation, and I was quite prepared at first to identify their distinctive expressions with phrases of my own, and so we came very readily into an alliance that was to last some years, and break at last very painfully. Altiora manifestly liked me, I was soon discussing with her the perplexity I found in placing myself efficiently in the world, the problem of how to take hold of things that occupied my thoughts, and she was sketching out careers for my consideration, very much as an architect on his first visit sketches houses, considers

requirements, and puts before you this example and that of the more or less similar thing already done....

4

It is easy to see how much in common there was between the Baileys and me, and how natural it was that I should become a constant visitor at their house and an ally of theirs in many enterprises. It is not nearly so easy to define the profound antagonism of spirit that also held between us. There was a difference in texture, a difference in quality. How can I express it? The shapes of our thoughts were the same, but the substance quite different. It was as if they had made in china or cast iron what I had made in transparent living matter. (The comparison is manifestly from my point of view.) Certain things never seemed to show through their ideas that were visible, refracted perhaps and distorted, but visible always through mine.

I thought for a time the essential difference lay in our relation to beauty. With me beauty is quite primary in life; I like truth, order and goodness, wholly because they are beautiful or lead straight to beautiful consequences. The Baileys either hadn't got that or they didn't see it. They seemed at times to prefer things harsh and ugly. That puzzled me extremely. The esthetic quality of many of their proposals, the "manners" of their work, so to speak, were at times as dreadful as--well, War Office barrack architecture. A caricature by its exaggerated statements will sometimes serve to point a truth by antagonising falsity and falsity. I remember talking to a prominent museum official in need of more public funds for the work he had in

hand. I mentioned the possibility of enlisting Bailey's influence.

"Oh, we don't want Philistines like that infernal Bottle-Imp running us," he said hastily, and would hear of no concerted action for the end he had in view. "I'd rather not have the extension.

"You see," he went on to explain, "Bailey's wanting in the essentials."

"What essentials?" said I.

"Oh! he'd be like a nasty oily efficient little machine for some merely subordinate necessity among all my delicate stuff. He'd do all we wanted no doubt in the way of money and powers--and he'd do it wrong and mess the place for ever. Hands all black, you know. He's just a means. Just a very aggressive and unmanageable means. This isn't a plumber's job...."

I stuck to my argument.

"I don't LIKE him," said the official conclusively, and it seemed to me at the time he was just blind prejudice speaking....

I came nearer the truth of the matter as I came to realise that our philosophies differed profoundly. That isn't a very curable difference,--once people have grown up. Theirs was a philosophy devoid of FINESSE. Temperamentally the Baileys were specialised, concentrated, accurate, while I am urged either by some Inner force or some entirely

assimilated influence in my training, always to round off and shadow my outlines. I hate them hard. I would sacrifice detail to modelling always, and the Baileys, it seemed to me, loved a world as flat and metallic as Sidney Cooper's cows. If they had the universe in hand I know they would take down all the trees and put up stamped tin green shades and sunlight accumulators. Altiora thought trees hopelessly irregular and sea cliffs a great mistake.... I got things clearer as time went on. Though it was an Hegelian mess of which I had partaken at Codger's table by way of a philosophical training, my sympathies have always been Pragmatist. I belong almost by nature to that school of Pragmatism that, following the medieval Nominalists, bases itself upon a denial of the reality of classes, and of the validity of general laws. The Baileys classified everything. They were, in the scholastic sense--which so oddly contradicts the modern use of the word "Realists." They believed classes were REAL and independent of their individuals. This is the common habit of all so-called educated people who have no metaphysical aptitude and no metaphysical training. It leads them to a progressive misunderstanding of the world. It was a favourite trick of Altiora's to speak of everybody as a "type"; she saw men as samples moving; her dining-room became a chamber of representatives. It gave a tremendously scientific air to many of their generalisations, using "scientific" in its nineteenth-century uncritical Herbert Spencer sense, an air that only began to disappear when you thought them over again in terms of actuality and the people one knew....

At the Baileys' one always seemed to be getting one's hands on the very

strings that guided the world. You heard legislation projected to affect this "type" and that; statistics marched by you with sin and shame and injustice and misery reduced to quite manageable percentages, you found men who were to frame or amend bills in grave and intimate exchange with Bailey's omniscience, you heard Altiora canvassing approaching resignations and possible appointments that might make or mar a revolution in administrative methods, and doing it with a vigorous directness that manifestly swayed the decision; and you felt you were in a sort of signal box with levers all about you, and the world outside there, albeit a little dark and mysterious beyond the window, running on its lines in ready obedience to these unhesitating lights, true and steady to trim termini.

And then with all this administrative fizzle, this pseudo-scientific administrative chatter, dying away in your head, out you went into the limitless grimy chaos of London streets and squares, roads and avenues lined with teeming houses, each larger than the Chambers Street house and at least equally alive, you saw the chaotic clamour of hoardings, the jumble of traffic, the coming and going of mysterious myriads, you heard the rumble of traffic like the noise of a torrent; a vague incessant murmur of cries and voices, wanton crimes and accidents bawled at you from the placards; imperative unaccountable fashions swaggered triumphant in dazzling windows of the shops; and you found yourself swaying back to the opposite conviction that the huge formless spirit of the world it was that held the strings and danced the puppets on the Bailey stage....

Under the lamps you were jostled by people like my Staffordshire uncle out for a spree, you saw shy youths conversing with prostitutes, you passed young lovers pairing with an entire disregard of the social suitability of the "types" they might blend or create, you saw men leaning drunken against lamp-posts whom you knew for the "type" that will charge with fixed bayonets into the face of death, and you found yourself unable to imagine little Bailey achieving either drunkenness or the careless defiance of annihilation. You realised that quite a lot of types were underrepresented in Chambers Street, that feral and obscure and altogether monstrous forces must be at work, as yet altogether unassimilated by those neat administrative reorganisations.

5

Altiora, I remember, preluded Margaret's reappearance by announcing her as a "new type."

I was accustomed to go early to the Baileys' dinners in those days, for a preliminary gossip with Altiora in front of her drawing-room fire. One got her alone, and that early arrival was a little sign of appreciation she valued. She had every woman's need of followers and servants.

"I'm going to send you down to-night," she said, "with a very interesting type indeed--one of the new generation of serious gals. Middle-class origin--and quite well off. Rich in fact. Her step-father was a solicitor and something of an ENTREPRENEUR towards the end, I fancy--in the Black Country. There was a little brother died, and she's lost her mother quite recently. Quite on her own, so to speak. She's never been out into society very much, and doesn't seem really very anxious to go.... Not exactly an intellectual person, you know, but quiet, and great force of character. Came up to London on her own and came to us--someone had told her we were the sort of people to advise her--to ask what to do. I'm sure she'll interest you."

"What CAN people of that sort do?" I asked. "Is she capable of investigation?"

Altiora compressed her lips and shook her head. She always did shake her head when you asked that of anyone.

"Of course what she ought to do," said Altiora, with her silk dress pulled back from her knee before the fire, and with a lift of her voice towards a chuckle at her daring way of putting things, "is to marry a member of Parliament and see he does his work.... Perhaps she will. It's a very exceptional gal who can do anything by herself--quite exceptional. The more serious they are--without being exceptional--the more we want them to marry."

Her exposition was truncated by the entry of the type in question.

"Well!" cried Altiora turning, and with a high note of welcome, "HERE you are!"

Margaret had gained in dignity and prettiness by the lapse of five years, and she was now very beautifully and richly and simply dressed. Her fair hair had been done in some way that made it seem softer and more abundant than it was in my memory, and a gleam of purple velvet-set diamonds showed amidst its mist of little golden and brown lines. Her dress was of white and violet, the last trace of mourning for her mother, and confessed the gracious droop of her tall and slender body. She did not suggest Staffordshire at all, and I was puzzled for a moment to think where I had met her. Her sweetly shaped mouth with the slight obliquity of the lip and the little kink in her brow were

extraordinarily familiar to me. But she had either been prepared by Altiora or she remembered my name. "We met," she said, "while my step-father was alive--at Misterton. You came to see us"; and instantly I recalled the sunshine between the apple blossom and a slender pale blue girlish shape among the daffodils, like something that had sprung from a bulb itself. I recalled at once that I had found her very interesting, though I did not clearly remember how it was she had interested me.

Other guests arrived--it was one of Altiora's boldly blended mixtures of people with ideas and people with influence or money who might perhaps be expected to resonate to them. Bailey came down late with an air of hurry, and was introduced to Margaret and said absolutely nothing to her--there being no information either to receive or impart and nothing to do--but stood snatching his left cheek until I rescued him and her, and left him free to congratulate the new Lady Snape on her husband's K. C. B.

I took Margaret down. We achieved no feats of mutual expression, except that it was abundantly clear we were both very pleased and interested to meet again, and that we had both kept memories of each other. We made that Misterton tea-party and the subsequent marriages of my cousins and the world of Burslem generally, matter for quite an agreeable conversation until at last Altiora, following her invariable custom, called me by name imperatively out of our duologue. "Mr. Remington," she said, "we want your opinion--" in her entirely characteristic effort to

get all the threads of conversation into her own hands for the climax that always wound up her dinners. How the other women used to hate those concluding raids of hers! I forget most of the other people at that dinner, nor can I recall what the crowning rally was about. It didn't in any way join on to my impression of Margaret.

In the drawing-room of the matting floor I rejoined her, with Altiora's manifest connivance, and in the interval I had been thinking of our former meeting.

"Do you find London," I asked, "give you more opportunity for doing things and learning things than Burslem?"

She showed at once she appreciated my allusion to her former confidences. "I was very discontented then," she said and paused. "I've really only been in London for a few months. It's so different. In Burslem, life seems all business and getting--without any reason. One went on and it didn't seem to mean anything. At least anything that mattered.... London seems to be so full of meanings--all mixed up together."

She knitted her brows over her words and smiled appealingly at the end as if for consideration for her inadequate expression, appealingly and almost humorously.

I looked understandingly at her. "We have all," I agreed, "to come to

London."

"One sees so much distress," she added, as if she felt she had completely omitted something, and needed a codicil.

"What are you doing in London?"

"I'm thinking of studying. Some social question. I thought perhaps I might go and study social conditions as Mrs. Bailey did, go perhaps as a work-girl or see the reality of living in, but Mrs. Bailey thought perhaps it wasn't quite my work."

"Are you studying?"

"I'm going to a good many lectures, and perhaps I shall take up a regular course at the Westminster School of Politics and Sociology. But Mrs. Bailey doesn't seem to believe very much in that either."

Her faintly whimsical smile returned. "I seem rather indefinite," she apologised, "but one does not want to get entangled in things one can't do. One--one has so many advantages, one's life seems to be such a trust and such a responsibility--"

She stopped.

"A man gets driven into work," I said.

"It must be splendid to be Mrs. Bailey," she replied with a glance of envious admiration across the room.

"SHE has no doubts, anyhow," I remarked.

"She HAD," said Margaret with the pride of one who has received great confidences.

## 6

"You've met before?" said Altiora, a day or so later.

I explained when.

"You find her interesting?"

I saw in a flash that Altiora meant to marry me to Margaret.

Her intention became much clearer as the year developed. Altiora was systematic even in matters that evade system. I was to marry Margaret, and freed from the need of making an income I was to come into politics--as an exponent of Baileyism. She put it down with the other

excellent and advantageous things that should occupy her summer holiday. It was her pride and glory to put things down and plan them out in detail beforehand, and I'm not quite sure that she did not even mark off the day upon which the engagement was to be declared. If she did, I disappointed her. We didn't come to an engagement, in spite of the broadest hints and the glaring obviousness of everything, that summer.

Every summer the Baileys went out of London to some house they hired or borrowed, leaving their secretaries toiling behind, and they went on working hard in the mornings and evenings and taking exercise in the open air in the afternoon. They cycled assiduously and went for long walks at a trot, and raided and studied (and incidentally explained themselves to) any social "types" that lived in the neighbourhood. One invaded type, resentful under research, described them with a dreadful aptness as Donna Quixote and Sancho Panza--and himself as a harmless windmill, hurting no one and signifying nothing. She did rather tilt at things. This particular summer they were at a pleasant farmhouse in level country near Pangbourne, belonging to the Hon. Wilfrid Winchester, and they asked me to come down to rooms in the neighbourhood--Altiora took them for a month for me in August--and board with them upon extremely reasonable terms; and when I got there I found Margaret sitting in a hammock at Altiora's feet. Lots of people, I gathered, were coming and going in the neighbourhood, the Ponts were in a villa on the river, and the Rickhams' houseboat was to moor for some days; but these irruptions did not impede a great deal of duologue between Margaret and myself.

Altiora was efficient rather than artistic in her match-making. She sent us off for long walks together--Margaret was a fairly good walker--she exhumed some defective croquet things and incited us to croquet, not understanding that detestable game is the worst stimulant for lovers in the world. And Margaret and I were always getting left about, and finding ourselves for odd half-hours in the kitchen-garden with nothing to do except talk, or we were told with a wave of the hand to run away and amuse each other.

Altiora even tried a picnic in canoes, knowing from fiction rather than imagination or experience the conclusive nature of such excursions. But there she fumbled at the last moment, and elected at the river's brink to share a canoe with me. Bailey showed so much zeal and so little skill--his hat fell off and he became miraculously nothing but paddle-clutching hands and a vast wrinkled brow--that at last he had to be paddled ignominiously by Margaret, while Altiora, after a phase of rigid discretion, as nearly as possible drowned herself--and me no doubt into the bargain--with a sudden lateral gesture of the arm to emphasise the high note with which she dismissed the efficiency of the Charity Organisation Society. We shipped about an inch of water and sat in it for the rest of the time, an inconvenience she disregarded heroically. We had difficulties in landing Oscar from his frail craft upon the ait of our feasting,--he didn't balance sideways and was much alarmed, and afterwards, as Margaret had a pain in her back, I took him in my canoe, let him hide his shame with an ineffectual but not positively harmful

paddle, and towed the other by means of the joined painters. Still it was the fault of the inadequate information supplied in the books and not of Altiora that that was not the date of my betrothal.

I find it not a little difficult to state what kept me back from proposing marriage to Margaret that summer, and what urged me forward at last to marry her. It is so much easier to remember one's resolutions than to remember the moods and suggestions that produced them.

Marrying and getting married was, I think, a pretty simple affair to Altiora; it was something that happened to the adolescent and unmarried when you threw them together under the circumstances of health, warmth and leisure. It happened with the kindly and approving smiles of the more experienced elders who had organised these proximities. The young people married, settled down, children ensued, and father and mother turned their minds, now decently and properly disillusioned, to other things. That to Altiora was the normal sexual life, and she believed it to be the quality of the great bulk of the life about her.

One of the great barriers to human understanding is the wide temperamental difference one finds in the values of things relating to sex. It is the issue upon which people most need training in charity and imaginative sympathy. Here are no universal standards at all, and indeed for no single man nor woman does there seem to be any fixed standard, so much do the accidents of circumstances and one's physical phases affect one's interpretations. There is nothing in the whole range of sexual

fact that may not seem supremely beautiful or humanly jolly or magnificently wicked or disgusting or trivial or utterly insignificant, according to the eye that sees or the mood that colours. Here is something that may fill the skies and every waking hour or be almost completely banished from a life. It may be everything on Monday and less than nothing on Saturday. And we make our laws and rules as though in these matters all men and women were commensurable one with another, with an equal steadfast passion and an equal constant duty....

I don't know what dreams Altiora may have had in her schoolroom days, I always suspected her of suppressed and forgotten phases, but certainly her general effect now was of an entirely passionless worldliness in these matters. Indeed so far as I could get at her, she regarded sexual passion as being hardly more legitimate in a civilised person than--let us say--homicidal mania. She must have forgotten--and Bailey too. I suspect she forgot before she married him. I don't suppose either of them had the slightest intimation of the dimensions sexual love can take in the thoughts of the great majority of people with whom they come in contact. They loved in their way--an intellectual way it was and a fond way--but it had no relation to beauty and physical sensation--except that there seemed a decree of exile against these things. They got their glow in high moments of altruistic ambition--and in moments of vivid worldly success. They sat at opposite ends of their dinner table with so and so "captured," and so and so, flushed with a mutual approval. They saw people in love forgetful and distraught about them, and just put it down to forgetfulness and distraction. At any rate Altiora manifestly

viewed my situation and Margaret's with an abnormal and entirely misleading simplicity. There was the girl, rich, with an acceptable claim to be beautiful, shiningly virtuous, quite capable of political interests, and there was I, talented, ambitious and full of political and social passion, in need of just the money, devotion and regularisation Margaret could provide. We were both unmarried--white sheets of uninscribed paper. Was there ever a simpler situation? What more could we possibly want?

She was even a little offended at the inconclusiveness that did not settle things at Pangbourne. I seemed to her, I suspect, to reflect upon her judgment and good intentions.

## 7

I didn't see things with Altiora's simplicity.

I admired Margaret very much, I was fully aware of all that she and I might give each other; indeed so far as Altiora went we were quite in agreement. But what seemed solid ground to Altiora and the ultimate footing of her emasculated world, was to me just the superficial covering of a gulf--oh! abysses of vague and dim, and yet stupendously significant things.

I couldn't dismiss the interests and the passion of sex as Altiora did. Work, I agreed, was important; career and success; but deep unanalysable instincts told me this preoccupation was a thing quite as important; dangerous, interfering, destructive indeed, but none the less a dominating interest in life. I have told how flittingly and uninvited it came like a moth from the outer twilight into my life, how it grew in me with my manhood, how it found its way to speech and grew daring, and led me at last to experience. After that adventure at Locarno sex and the interests and desires of sex never left me for long at peace. I went on with my work and my career, and all the time it was like--like someone talking ever and again in a room while one tries to write.

There were times when I could have wished the world a world all of men, so greatly did this unassimilated series of motives and curiosities hamper me; and times when I could have wished the world all of women. I seemed always to be seeking something in women, in girls, and I was never clear what it was I was seeking. But never--even at my coarsest--was I moved by physical desire alone. Was I seeking help and fellowship? Was I seeking some intimacy with beauty? It was a thing too formless to state, that I seemed always desiring to attain and never attaining. Waves of gross sensuousness arose out of this preoccupation, carried me to a crisis of gratification or disappointment that was clearly not the needed thing; they passed and left my mind free again for a time to get on with the permanent pursuits of my life. And then presently this solicitude would have me again, an irrelevance as it

seemed, and yet a constantly recurring demand.

I don't want particularly to dwell upon things that are disagreeable for others to read, but I cannot leave them out of my story and get the right proportions of the forces I am balancing. I was no abnormal man, and that world of order we desire to make must be built of such stuff as I was and am and can beget. You cannot have a world of Baileys; it would end in one orderly generation. Humanity is begotten in Desire, lives by Desire.

"Love which is lust, is the Lamp in the Tomb;
Love which is lust, is the Call from the Gloom."

I echo Henley.

I suppose the life of celibacy which the active, well-fed, well-exercised and imaginatively stirred young man of the educated classes is supposed to lead from the age of nineteen or twenty, when Nature certainly meant him to marry, to thirty or more, when civilisation permits him to do so, is the most impossible thing in the world. We deal here with facts that are kept secret and obscure, but I doubt for my own part if more than one man out of five in our class satisfies that ideal demand. The rest are even as I was, and Hatherleigh and Esmeer and all the men I knew. I draw no lessons and offer no

panacea; I have to tell the quality of life, and this is how it is. This is how it will remain until men and women have the courage to face the facts of life.

I was no systematic libertine, you must understand; things happened to me and desire drove me. Any young man would have served for that Locarno adventure, and after that what had been a mystic and wonderful thing passed rapidly into a gross, manifestly misdirected and complicating one. I can count a meagre tale of five illicit loves in the days of my youth, to include that first experience, and of them all only two were sustained relationships. Besides these five "affairs," on one or two occasions I dipped so low as the inky dismal sensuality of the streets, and made one of those pairs of correlated figures, the woman in her squalid finery sailing homeward, the man modestly aloof and behind, that every night in the London year flit by the score of thousands across the sight of the observant....

How ugly it is to recall; ugly and shameful now without qualification! Yet at the time there was surely something not altogether ugly in it--something that has vanished, some fine thing mortally ailing.

One such occasion I recall as if it were a vision deep down in a pit, as if it had happened in another state of existence to someone else. And yet it is the sort of thing that has happened, once or twice at least, to half the men in London who have been in a position to make it possible. Let me try and give you its peculiar effect. Man or woman, you

ought to know of it.

Figure to yourself a dingy room, somewhere in that network of streets that lies about Tottenham Court Road, a dingy bedroom lit by a solitary candle and carpeted with scraps and patches, with curtains of cretonne closing the window, and a tawdry ornament of paper in the grate. I sit on a bed beside a weary-eyed, fair-haired, sturdy young woman, half undressed, who is telling me in broken German something that my knowledge of German is at first inadequate to understand....

I thought she was boasting about her family, and then slowly the meaning came to me. She was a Lett from near Libau in Courland, and she was telling me--just as one tells something too strange for comment or emotion--how her father had been shot and her sister outraged and murdered before her eyes.

It was as if one had dipped into something primordial and stupendous beneath the smooth and trivial surfaces of life. There was I, you know, the promising young don from Cambridge, who wrote quite brilliantly about politics and might presently get into Parliament, with my collar and tie in my hand, and a certain sense of shameful adventure fading out of my mind.

"Ach Gott!" she sighed by way of comment, and mused deeply for a moment before she turned her face to me, as to something forgotten and remembered, and assumed the half-hearted meretricious smile.

"Bin ich eine hubsche?" she asked like one who repeats a lesson.

I was moved to crave her pardon and come away.

"Bin ich eine hubsche?" she asked a little anxiously, laying a detaining hand upon me, and evidently not understanding a word of what I was striving to say.

8

I find it extraordinarily difficult to recall the phases by which I passed from my first admiration of Margaret's earnestness and unconscious daintiness to an intimate acquaintance. The earlier encounters stand out clear and hard, but then the impressions become crowded and mingle not only with each other but with all the subsequent developments of relationship, the enormous evolutions of interpretation and comprehension between husband and wife. Dipping into my memories is like dipping into a ragbag, one brings out this memory or that, with no intimation of how they came in time or what led to them and joined them together. And they are all mixed up with subsequent associations, with sympathies and discords, habits of intercourse, surprises and disappointments and discovered misunderstandings. I know only that always my feelings for Margaret were complicated feelings, woven of many and various strands.

It is one of the curious neglected aspects of life how at the same time and in relation to the same reality we can have in our minds streams of thought at quite different levels. We can be at the same time idealising a person and seeing and criticising that person quite coldly and clearly, and we slip unconsciously from level to level and produce all sorts of inconsistent acts. In a sense I had no illusions about Margaret; in a sense my conception of Margaret was entirely poetic illusion. I don't think I was ever blind to certain defects of hers, and

quite as certainly they didn't seem to matter in the slightest degree. Her mind had a curious want of vigour, "flatness" is the only word; she never seemed to escape from her phrase; her way of thinking, her way of doing was indecisive; she remained in her attitude, it did not flow out to easy, confirmatory action.

I saw this quite clearly, and when we walked and talked together I seemed always trying for animation in her and never finding it. I would state my ideas. "I know," she would say, "I know."

I talked about myself and she listened wonderfully, but she made no answering revelations. I talked politics, and she remarked with her blue eyes wide and earnest: "Every WORD you say seems so just."

I admired her appearance tremendously but--I can only express it by saying I didn't want to touch her. Her fair hair was always delectably done. It flowed beautifully over her pretty small ears, and she would tie its fair coilings with fillets of black or blue velvet that carried pretty buckles of silver and paste. The light, the faint down on her brow and cheek was delightful. And it was clear to me that I made her happy.

My sense of her deficiencies didn't stand in the way of my falling at last very deeply in love with her. Her very shortcomings seemed to offer me something....

She stood in my mind for goodness--and for things from which it seemed to me my hold was slipping.

She seemed to promise a way of escape from the deepening opposition in me between physical passions and the constructive career, the career of wide aims and human service, upon which I had embarked. All the time that I was seeing her as a beautiful, fragile, rather ineffective girl, I was also seeing her just as consciously as a shining slender figure, a radiant reconciliation, coming into my darkling disorders of lust and impulse. I could understand clearly that she was incapable of the most necessary subtleties of political thought, and yet I could contemplate praying to her and putting all the intricate troubles of my life at her feet.

Before the reappearance of Margaret in my world at all an unwonted disgust with the consequences and quality of my passions had arisen in my mind. Among other things that moment with the Lettish girl haunted me persistently. I would see myself again and again sitting amidst those sluttish surroundings, collar and tie in hand, while her heavy German words grouped themselves to a slowly apprehended meaning. I would feel again with a fresh stab of remorse, that this was not a flash of adventure, this was not seeing life in any permissible sense, but a dip into tragedy, dishonour, hideous degradation, and the pitiless cruelty of a world as yet uncontrolled by any ordered will.

"Good God!" I put it to myself, "that I should finish the work those

Cossacks had begun! I who want order and justice before everything! There's no way out of it, no decent excuse! If I didn't think, I ought to have thought!"...

"How did I get to it?"... I would ransack the phases of my development from the first shy unveiling of a hidden wonder to the last extremity as a man will go through muddled account books to find some disorganising error....

I was also involved at that time--I find it hard to place these things in the exact order of their dates because they were so disconnected with the regular progress of my work and life--in an intrigue, a clumsy, sensuous, pretentious, artificially stimulated intrigue, with a Mrs. Larrimer, a woman living separated from her husband. I will not go into particulars of that episode, nor how we quarrelled and chafed one another. She was at once unfaithful and jealous and full of whims about our meetings; she was careless of our secret, and vulgarised our relationship by intolerable interpretations; except for some glowing moments of gratification, except for the recurrent and essentially vicious desire that drew us back to each other again, we both fretted at a vexatious and unexpectedly binding intimacy. The interim was full of the quality of work delayed, of time and energy wasted, of insecure precautions against scandal and exposure. Disappointment is almost inherent in illicit love. I had, and perhaps it was part of her recurrent irritation also, a feeling as though one had followed something fine and beautiful into a net--into bird lime! These furtive

scuffles, this sneaking into shabby houses of assignation, was what we had made out of the suggestion of pagan beauty; this was the reality of our vision of nymphs and satyrs dancing for the joy of life amidst incessant sunshine. We had laid hands upon the wonder and glory of bodily love and wasted them....

It was the sense of waste, of finely beautiful possibilities getting entangled and marred for ever that oppressed me. I had missed, I had lost. I did not turn from these things after the fashion of the Baileys, as one turns from something low and embarrassing. I felt that these great organic forces were still to be wrought into a harmony with my constructive passion. I felt too that I was not doing it. I had not understood the forces in this struggle nor its nature, and as I learnt I failed. I had been started wrong, I had gone on wrong, in a world that was muddled and confused, full of false counsel and erratic shames and twisted temptations. I learnt to see it so by failures that were perhaps destroying any chance of profit in my lessons. Moods of clear keen industry alternated with moods of relapse and indulgence and moods of dubiety and remorse. I was not going on as the Baileys thought I was going on. There were times when the blindness of the Baileys irritated me intensely. Beneath the ostensible success of those years, between twenty-three and twenty-eight, this rottenness, known to scarcely any one but myself, grew and spread. My sense of the probability of a collapse intensified. I knew indeed now, even as Willersley had prophesied five years before, that I was entangling myself in something that might smother all my uses in the world. Down there among those

incommunicable difficulties, I was puzzled and blundering. I was losing my hold upon things; the chaotic and adventurous element in life was spreading upward and getting the better of me, over-mastering me and all my will to rule and make.... And the strength, the drugging urgency of the passion!

Margaret shone at times in my imagination like a radiant angel in a world of mire and disorder, in a world of cravings, hot and dull red like scars inflamed....

I suppose it was because I had so great a need of such help as her whiteness proffered, that I could ascribe impossible perfections to her, a power of intellect, a moral power and patience to which she, poor fellow mortal, had indeed no claim. If only a few of us WERE angels and freed from the tangle of effort, how easy life might be! I wanted her so badly, so very badly, to be what I needed. I wanted a woman to save me. I forced myself to see her as I wished to see her. Her tepidities became infinite delicacies, her mental vagueness an atmospheric realism. The harsh precisions of the Baileys and Altiora's blunt directness threw up her fineness into relief and made a grace of every weakness.

Mixed up with the memory of times when I talked with Margaret as one talks politely to those who are hopelessly inferior in mental quality, explaining with a false lucidity, welcoming and encouraging the feeblest response, when possible moulding and directing, are times when I did indeed, as the old phrase goes, worship the ground she trod on. I was

equally honest and unconscious of inconsistency at each extreme. But in neither phase could I find it easy to make love to Margaret. For in the first I did not want to, though I talked abundantly to her of marriage and so forth, and was a little puzzled at myself for not going on to some personal application, and in the second she seemed inaccessible, I felt I must make confessions and put things before her that would be the grossest outrage upon the noble purity I attributed to her.

9

I went to Margaret at last to ask her to marry me, wrought up to the mood of one who stakes his life on a cast. Separated from her, and with the resonance of an evening of angry recriminations with Mrs. Larrimer echoing in my mind, I discovered myself to be quite passionately in love with Margaret. Last shreds of doubt vanished. It has always been a feature of our relationship that Margaret absent means more to me than Margaret present; her memory distils from its dross and purifies in me. All my criticisms and qualifications of her vanished into some dark corner of my mind. She was the lady of my salvation; I must win my way to her or perish.

I went to her at last, for all that I knew she loved me, in passionate self-abasement, white and a-tremble. She was staying with the Rockleys at Woking, for Shena Rockley had been at Bennett Hall with her and they had resumed a close intimacy; and I went down to her on an impulse, unheralded. I was kept waiting for some minutes, I remember, in a little room upon which a conservatory opened, a conservatory full of pots of large mauve-edged, white cyclamens in flower. And there was a big lacquer cabinet, a Chinese thing, I suppose, of black and gold against the red-toned wall. To this day the thought of Margaret is inseparably bound up with the sight of a cyclamen's back-turned petals.

She came in, looking pale and drooping rather more than usual. I

suddenly realised that Altiora's hint of a disappointment leading to positive illness was something more than a vindictive comment. She closed the door and came across to me and took and dropped my hand and stood still. "What is it you want with me?" she asked.

The speech I had been turning over and over in my mind on the way vanished at the sight of her.

"I want to talk to you," I answered lamely.

For some seconds neither of us said a word.

"I want to tell you things about my life," I began.

She answered with a scarcely audible "yes."

"I almost asked you to marry me at Pangbourne," I plunged. "I didn't. I didn't because--because you had too much to give me."

"Too much!" she echoed, "to give you!" She had lifted her eyes to my face and the colour was coming into her cheeks.

"Don't misunderstand me," I said hastily. "I want to tell you things, things you don't know. Don't answer me. I want to tell you."

She stood before the fireplace with her ultimate answer shining through

the quiet of her face. "Go on," she said, very softly. It was so pitilessly manifest she was resolved to idealise the situation whatever I might say. I began walking up and down the room between those cyclamens and the cabinet. There were little gold fishermen on the cabinet fishing from little islands that each had a pagoda and a tree, and there were also men in boats or something, I couldn't determine what, and some obscure sub-office in my mind concerned itself with that quite intently. Yet I seem to have been striving with all my being to get words for the truth of things. "You see," I emerged, "you make everything possible to me. You can give me help and sympathy, support, understanding. You know my political ambitions. You know all that I might do in the world. I do so intensely want to do constructive things, big things perhaps, in this wild jumble.... Only you don't know a bit what I am. I want to tell you what I am. I'm complex.... I'm streaked."

I glanced at her, and she was regarding me with an expression of blissful disregard for any meaning I was seeking to convey.

"You see," I said, "I'm a bad man."

She sounded a note of valiant incredulity.

Everything seemed to be slipping away from me. I pushed on to the ugly facts that remained over from the wreck of my interpretation. "What has held me back," I said, "is the thought that you could not possibly understand certain things in my life. Men are not pure as women are. I

have had love affairs. I mean I have had affairs. Passion--desire. You see, I have had a mistress, I have been entangled--"

She seemed about to speak, but I interrupted. "I'm not telling you," I said, "what I meant to tell you. I want you to know clearly that there is another side to my life, a dirty side. Deliberately I say, dirty. It didn't seem so at first--"

I stopped blankly. "Dirty," I thought, was the most idiotic choice of words to have made.

I had never in any tolerable sense of the word been dirty.

"I drifted into this--as men do," I said after a little pause and stopped again.

She was looking at me with her wide blue eyes.

"Did you imagine," she began, "that I thought you--that I expected--"

"But how can you know?"

"I know. I do know."

"But--" I began.

"I know," she persisted, dropping her eyelids. "Of course I know," and nothing could have convinced me more completely that she did not know.

"All men--" she generalised. "A woman does not understand these temptations."

I was astonished beyond measure at her way of taking my confession. ...

"Of course," she said, hesitating a little over a transparent difficulty, "it is all over and past."

"It's all over and past," I answered.

There was a little pause.

"I don't want to know," she said. "None of that seems to matter now in the slightest degree."

She looked up and smiled as though we had exchanged some acceptable commonplaces. "Poor dear!" she said, dismissing everything, and put out her arms, and it seemed to me that I could hear the Lettish girl in the background--doomed safety valve of purity in this intolerable world--telling something in indistinguishable German--I know not what nor why....

I took Margaret in my arms and kissed her. Her eyes were wet with tears.

She clung to me and was near, I felt, to sobbing.

"I have loved you," she whispered presently, "Oh! ever since we met in Misterton--six years and more ago."

## CHAPTER THE THIRD ~~ MARGARET IN VENICE

### 1

There comes into my mind a confused memory of conversations with Margaret; we must have had dozens altogether, and they mix in now for the most part inextricably not only with one another, but with later talks and with things we discussed at Pangbourne. We had the immensest anticipations of the years and opportunities that lay before us. I was now very deeply in love with her indeed. I felt not that I had cleaned up my life but that she had. We called each other "confederate" I remember, and made during our brief engagement a series of visits to the various legislative bodies in London, the County Council, the House of Commons, where we dined with Villiers, and the St. Pancras Vestry, where we heard Shaw speaking. I was full of plans and so was she of the way in which we were to live and work. We were to pay back in public service whatever excess of wealth beyond his merits old Seddon's economic advantage had won for him from the toiling people in the potteries. The end of the Boer War was so recent that that blessed word "efficiency" echoed still in people's minds and thoughts. Lord Roseberry in a memorable oration had put it into the heads of the big outer public, but the Baileys with a certain show of justice claimed to have set it going in the channels that took it to him--if as a matter of fact it was taken

to him. But then it was their habit to make claims of that sort. They certainly did their share to keep "efficient" going. Altiora's highest praise was "thoroughly efficient." We were to be a "thoroughly efficient" political couple of the "new type." She explained us to herself and Oscar, she explained us to ourselves, she explained us to the people who came to her dinners and afternoons until the world was highly charged with explanation and expectation, and the proposal that I should be the Liberal candidate for the Kinghamstead Division seemed the most natural development in the world.

I was full of the ideal of hard restrained living and relentless activity, and throughout a beautiful November at Venice, where chiefly we spent our honeymoon, we turned over and over again and discussed in every aspect our conception of a life tremendously focussed upon the ideal of social service.

Most clearly there stands out a picture of ourselves talking in a gondola on our way to Torcella. Far away behind us the smoke of Murano forms a black stain upon an immense shining prospect of smooth water, water as unruffled and luminous as the sky above, a mirror on which rows of posts and distant black high-stemmed, swan-necked boats with their minutely clear swinging gondoliers, float aerially. Remote and low before us rises the little tower of our destination. Our men swing together and their oars swirl leisurely through the water, hump back in the rowlocks, splash sharply and go swishing back again. Margaret lies back on cushions, with her face shaded by a holland parasol, and I sit

up beside her.

"You see," I say, and in spite of Margaret's note of perfect acquiescence I feel myself reasoning against an indefinable antagonism, "it is so easy to fall into a slack way with life. There may seem to be something priggish in a meticulous discipline, but otherwise it is so easy to slip into indolent habits--and to be distracted from one's purpose. The country, the world, wants men to serve its constructive needs, to work out and carry out plans. For a man who has to make a living the enemy is immediate necessity; for people like ourselves it's--it's the constant small opportunity of agreeable things."

"Frittering away," she says, "time and strength."

"That is what I feel. It's so pleasant to pretend one is simply modest, it looks so foolish at times to take one's self too seriously. We've GOT to take ourselves seriously."

She endorses my words with her eyes.

"I feel I can do great things with life."

"I KNOW you can."

"But that's only to be done by concentrating one's life upon one main end. We have to plan our days, to make everything subserve our scheme."

"I feel," she answers softly, "we ought to give--every hour."

Her face becomes dreamy. "I WANT to give every hour," she adds.

## 2

That holiday in Venice is set in my memory like a little artificial lake in uneven confused country, as something very bright and skylike, and discontinuous with all about it. The faded quality of the very sunshine of that season, the mellow discoloured palaces and places, the huge, time-ripened paintings of departed splendours, the whispering, nearly noiseless passage of hearse-black gondolas, for the horrible steam launch had not yet ruined Venice, the stilled magnificences of the depopulated lagoons, the universal autumn, made me feel altogether in recess from the teeming uproars of reality. There was not a dozen people all told, no Americans and scarcely any English, to dine in the big cavern of a dining-room, with its vistas of separate tables, its distempered walls and its swathed chandeliers. We went about seeing beautiful things, accepting beauty on every hand, and taking it for granted that all was well with ourselves and the world. It was ten days or a fortnight before I became fretful and anxious for action; a long tranquillity for such a temperament as mine.

Our pleasures were curiously impersonal, a succession of shared aesthetic appreciation threads all that time. Our honeymoon was no exultant coming together, no mutual shout of "YOU!" We were almost shy with one another, and felt the relief of even a picture to help us out. It was entirely in my conception of things that I should be very watchful not to shock or distress Margaret or press the sensuous note. Our love-making had much of the tepid smoothness of the lagoons. We talked in delicate innuendo of what should be glorious freedoms. Margaret had missed Verona and Venice in her previous Italian journey--fear of the mosquito had driven her mother across Italy to the westward route--and now she could fill up her gaps and see the Titians and Paul Veroneses she already knew in colourless photographs, the Carpaccios, (the St. George series delighted her beyond measure,) the Basaitis and that great statue of Bartolomeo Colleoni that Ruskin praised.

But since I am not a man to look at pictures and architectural effects day after day, I did watch Margaret very closely and store a thousand memories of her. I can see her now, her long body drooping a little forward, her sweet face upraised to some discovered familiar masterpiece and shining with a delicate enthusiasm. I can hear again the soft cadences of her voice murmuring commonplace comments, for she had no gift of expressing the shapeless satisfaction these things gave her.

Margaret, I perceived, was a cultivated person, the first cultivated

person with whom I had ever come into close contact. She was cultivated and moral, and I, I now realise, was never either of these things. She was passive, and I am active. She did not simply and naturally look for beauty but she had been incited to look for it at school, and took perhaps a keener interest in books and lectures and all the organisation of beautiful things than she did in beauty itself; she found much of her delight in being guided to it. Now a thing ceases to be beautiful to me when some finger points me out its merits. Beauty is the salt of life, but I take my beauty as a wild beast gets its salt, as a constituent of the meal....

And besides, there was that between us that should have seemed more beautiful than any picture....

So we went about Venice tracking down pictures and spiral staircases and such-like things, and my brains were busy all the time with such things as a comparison of Venice and its nearest modern equivalent, New York, with the elaboration of schemes of action when we returned to London, with the development of a theory of Margaret.

Our marriage had done this much at least, that it had fused and destroyed those two independent ways of thinking about her that had gone on in my mind hitherto. Suddenly she had become very near to me, and a very big thing, a sort of comprehensive generalisation behind a thousand questions, like the sky or England. The judgments and understandings that had worked when she was, so to speak, miles away from my life,

had now to be altogether revised. Trifling things began to matter enormously, that she had a weak and easily fatigued back, for example, or that when she knitted her brows and stammered a little in talking, it didn't really mean that an exquisite significance struggled for utterance.

We visited pictures in the mornings chiefly. In the afternoon, unless we were making a day-long excursion in a gondola, Margaret would rest for an hour while I prowled about in search of English newspapers, and then we would go to tea in the Piazza San Marco and watch the drift of people feeding the pigeons and going into the little doors beneath the sunlit arches and domes of Saint Mark's. Then perhaps we would stroll on the Piazzetta, or go out into the sunset in a gondola. Margaret became very interested in the shops that abound under the colonnades and decided at last to make an extensive purchase of table glass. "These things," she said, "are quite beautiful, and far cheaper than anything but the most ordinary looking English ware." I was interested in her idea, and a good deal charmed by the delightful qualities of tinted shape, slender handle and twisted stem. I suggested we should get not simply tumblers and wineglasses but bedroom waterbottles, fruit- and sweet-dishes, water-jugs, and in the end we made quite a business-like afternoon of it.

I was beginning now to long quite definitely for events. Energy was accumulating in me, and worrying me for an outlet. I found the TIMES and the DAILY TELEGRAPH and the other papers I managed to get hold of, more

and more stimulating. I nearly wrote to the former paper one day in answer to a letter by Lord Grimthorpe--I forget now upon what point. I chafed secretly against this life of tranquil appreciations more and more. I found my attitudes of restrained and delicate affection for Margaret increasingly difficult to sustain. I surprised myself and her by little gusts of irritability, gusts like the catspaws before a gale. I was alarmed at these symptoms.

One night when Margaret had gone up to her room, I put on a light overcoat, went out into the night and prowled for a long time through the narrow streets, smoking and thinking. I returned and went and sat on the edge of her bed to talk to her.

"Look here, Margaret," I said; "this is all very well, but I'm restless."

"Restless!" she said with a faint surprise in her voice.

"Yes. I think I want exercise. I've got a sort of feeling--I've never had it before--as though I was getting fat."

"My dear!" she cried.

"I want to do things;--ride horses, climb mountains, take the devil out of myself."

She watched me thoughtfully.

"Couldn't we DO something?" she said.

Do what?

"I don't know. Couldn't we perhaps go away from here soon--and walk in the mountains--on our way home."

I thought. "There seems to be no exercise at all in this place."

"Isn't there some walk?"

"I wonder," I answered. "We might walk to Chioggia perhaps, along the Lido." And we tried that, but the long stretch of beach fatigued Margaret's back, and gave her blisters, and we never got beyond Malamocco....

A day or so after we went out to those pleasant black-robed, bearded Armenians in their monastery at Saint Lazzaro, and returned towards sundown. We fell into silence. "PIU LENTO," said Margaret to the gondolier, and released my accumulated resolution.

"Let us go back to London," I said abruptly.

Margaret looked at me with surprised blue eyes.

"This is beautiful beyond measure, you know," I said, sticking to my point, "but I have work to do."

She was silent for some seconds. "I had forgotten," she said.

"So had I," I sympathised, and took her hand. "Suddenly I have remembered."

She remained quite still. "There is so much to be done," I said, almost apologetically.

She looked long away from me across the lagoon and at last sighed, like one who has drunk deeply, and turned to me.

"I suppose one ought not to be so happy," she said. "Everything has been so beautiful and so simple and splendid. And clean. It has been just With You--the time of my life. It's a pity such things must end. But the world is calling you, dear.... I ought not to have forgotten it. I thought you were resting--and thinking. But if you are rested.--Would you like us to start to-morrow?"

She looked at once so fragile and so devoted that on the spur of the moment I relented, and we stayed in Venice four more days.

## CHAPTER THE FOURTH ~~ THE HOUSE IN WESTMINSTER

### 1

Margaret had already taken a little house in Radnor Square, Westminster, before our marriage, a house that seemed particularly adaptable to our needs as public-spirited efficients; it had been very pleasantly painted and papered under Margaret's instructions, white paint and clean open purples and green predominating, and now we set to work at once upon the interesting business of arranging and--with our Venetian glass as a beginning--furnishing it. We had been fairly fortunate with our wedding presents, and for the most part it was open to us to choose just exactly what we would have and just precisely where we would put it.

Margaret had a sense of form and colour altogether superior to mine, and so quite apart from the fact that it was her money equipped us, I stood aside from all these matters and obeyed her summons to a consultation only to endorse her judgment very readily. Until everything was settled I went every day to my old rooms in Vincent Square and worked at a series of papers that were originally intended for the FORTNIGHTLY REVIEW, the papers that afterwards became my fourth book, "New Aspects of Liberalism."

I still remember as delightful most of the circumstances of getting into 79, Radnor Square. The thin flavour of indecision about Margaret disappeared altogether in a shop; she had the precisest ideas of what she wanted, and the devices of the salesman did not sway her. It was very pleasant to find her taking things out of my hands with a certain masterfulness, and showing the distinctest determination to make a house in which I should be able to work in that great project of "doing something for the world."

"And I do want to make things pretty about us," she said. "You don't think it wrong to have things pretty?"

"I want them so."

"Altiora has things hard."

"Altiora," I answered, "takes a pride in standing ugly and uncomfortable things. But I don't see that they help her. Anyhow they won't help me."

So Margaret went to the best shops and got everything very simple and very good. She bought some pictures very well indeed; there was a little Sussex landscape, full of wind and sunshine, by Nicholson, for my study, that hit my taste far better than if I had gone out to get some such expression for myself.

"We will buy a picture just now and then," she said, "sometimes--when we see one."

I would come back through the January mire or fog from Vincent Square to the door of 79, and reach it at last with a quite childish appreciation of the fact that its solid Georgian proportions and its fine brass furnishings belonged to MY home; I would use my latchkey and discover Margaret in the warm-lit, spacious hall with a partially opened packing-case, fatigued but happy, or go up to have tea with her out of the right tea things, "come at last," or be told to notice what was fresh there. It wasn't simply that I had never had a house before, but I had really never been, except in the most transitory way, in any house that was nearly so delightful as mine promised to be. Everything was fresh and bright, and softly and harmoniously toned. Downstairs we had a green dining-room with gleaming silver, dark oak, and English colour-prints; above was a large drawing-room that could be made still larger by throwing open folding doors, and it was all carefully done in greys and blues, for the most part with real Sheraton supplemented by Sheraton so skilfully imitated by an expert Margaret had discovered as to be indistinguishable except to a minute scrutiny. And for me, above this and next to my bedroom, there was a roomy study, with specially thick stair-carpet outside and thick carpets in the bedroom overhead and a big old desk for me to sit at and work between fire and window, and another desk specially made for me by that expert if I chose to stand and write, and open bookshelves and bookcases and every sort of convenient fitting. There were electric heaters beside the open fire,

and everything was put for me to make tea at any time--electric kettle, infuser, biscuits and fresh butter, so that I could get up and work at any hour of the day or night. I could do no work in this apartment for a long time, I was so interested in the perfection of its arrangements. And when I brought in my books and papers from Vincent Square, Margaret seized upon all the really shabby volumes and had them re-bound in a fine official-looking leather.

I can remember sitting down at that desk and looking round me and feeling with a queer effect of surprise that after all even a place in the Cabinet, though infinitely remote, was nevertheless in the same large world with these fine and quietly expensive things.

On the same floor Margaret had a "den," a very neat and pretty den with good colour-prints of Botticellis and Carpaccios, and there was a third apartment for sectarial purposes should the necessity for them arise, with a severe-looking desk equipped with patent files. And Margaret would come flitting into the room to me, or appear noiselessly standing, a tall gracefully drooping form, in the wide open doorway. "Is everything right, dear?" she would ask.

"Come in," I would say, "I'm sorting out papers."

She would come to the hearthrug.

"I mustn't disturb you," she would remark.

"I'm not busy yet."

"Things are getting into order. Then we must make out a time-table as the Baileys do, and BEGIN!"

Altiora came in to see us once or twice, and a number of serious young wives known to Altiora called and were shown over the house, and discussed its arrangements with Margaret. They were all tremendously keen on efficient arrangements.

"A little pretty," said Altiora, with the faintest disapproval, "still--"

It was clear she thought we should grow out of that. From the day of our return we found other people's houses open to us and eager for us. We went out of London for week-ends and dined out, and began discussing our projects for reciprocating these hospitalities. As a single man unattached, I had had a wide and miscellaneous social range, but now I found myself falling into place in a set. For a time I acquiesced in this. I went very little to my clubs, the Climax and the National Liberal, and participated in no bachelor dinners at all. For a time, too, I dropped out of the garrulous literary and journalistic circles I had frequented. I put up for the Reform, not so much for the use of the club as a sign of serious and substantial political standing. I didn't go up to Cambridge, I remember, for nearly a year, so occupied was I

with my new adjustments.

The people we found ourselves among at this time were people, to put it roughly, of the Parliamentary candidate class, or people already actually placed in the political world. They ranged between very considerable wealth and such a hard, bare independence as old Willersley and the sister who kept house for him possessed. There were quite a number of young couples like ourselves, a little younger and more artless, or a little older and more established. Among the younger men I had a sort of distinction because of my Cambridge reputation and my writing, and because, unlike them, I was an adventurer and had won and married my way into their circles instead of being naturally there. They couldn't quite reckon upon what I should do; they felt I had reserves of experience and incalculable traditions. Close to us were the Cramptons, Willie Crampton, who has since been Postmaster-General, rich and very important in Rockshire, and his younger brother Edward, who has specialised in history and become one of those unimaginative men of letters who are the glory of latter-day England. Then there was Lewis, further towards Kensington, where his cousins the Solomons and the Hartsteins lived, a brilliant representative of his race, able, industrious and invariably uninspired, with a wife a little in revolt against the racial tradition of feminine servitude and inclined to the suffragette point of view, and Bunting Harblow, an old blue, and with an erratic disposition well under the control of the able little cousin he had married. I had known all these men, but now (with Altiora floating angelically in benediction) they opened their hearts to me and took

me into their order. They were all like myself, prospective Liberal candidates, with a feeling that the period of wandering in the wilderness of opposition was drawing near its close. They were all tremendously keen upon social and political service, and all greatly under the sway of the ideal of a simple, strenuous life, a life finding its satisfactions in political achievements and distinctions. The young wives were as keen about it as the young husbands, Margaret most of all, and I--whatever elements in me didn't march with the attitudes and habits of this set were very much in the background during that time.

We would give little dinners and have evening gatherings at which everything was very simple and very good, with a slight but perceptible austerity, and there was more good fruit and flowers and less perhaps in the way of savouries, patties and entrees than was customary. Sherry we banished, and Marsala and liqueurs, and there was always good home-made lemonade available. No men waited, but very expert parlourmaids. Our meat was usually Welsh mutton--I don't know why, unless that mountains have ever been the last refuge of the severer virtues. And we talked politics and books and ideas and Bernard Shaw (who was a department by himself and supposed in those days to be ethically sound at bottom), and mingled with the intellectuals--I myself was, as it were, a promoted intellectual.

The Cramptons had a tendency to read good things aloud on their less frequented receptions, but I have never been able to participate submissively in this hyper-digestion of written matter, and generally

managed to provoke a disruptive debate. We were all very earnest to make the most of ourselves and to be and do, and I wonder still at times, with an unassuaged perplexity, how it is that in that phase of utmost earnestness I have always seemed to myself to be most remote from reality.

2

I look back now across the detaching intervention of sixteen crowded years, critically and I fancy almost impartially, to those beginnings of my married life. I try to recall something near to their proper order the developing phases of relationship. I am struck most of all by the immense unpremeditated, generous-spirited insincerities upon which Margaret and I were building.

It seems to me that here I have to tell perhaps the commonest experience of all among married educated people, the deliberate, shy, complex effort to fill the yawning gaps in temperament as they appear, the sustained, failing attempt to bridge abysses, level barriers, evade violent pressures. I have come these latter years of my life to believe that it is possible for a man and woman to be absolutely real with one another, to stand naked souled to each other, unashamed and unafraid, because of the natural all-glorifying love between them. It is possible to love and be loved untroubling, as a bird flies through the air. But it is a rare and intricate chance that brings two people within sight of that essential union, and for the majority marriage must adjust itself on other terms. Most coupled people never really look at one another. They look a little away to preconceived ideas. And each from the first days of love-making HIDES from the other, is afraid of disappointing, afraid of offending, afraid of discoveries in either sense. They build not solidly upon the rock of truth, but upon arches and pillars and

queer provisional supports that are needed to make a common foundation, and below in the imprisoned darknesses, below the fine fabric they sustain together begins for each of them a cavernous hidden life. Down there things may be prowling that scarce ever peep out to consciousness except in the grey half-light of sleepless nights, passions that flash out for an instant in an angry glance and are seen no more, starved victims and beautiful dreams bricked up to die. For the most of us there is no jail delivery of those inner depths, and the life above goes on to its honourable end.

I have told how I loved Margaret and how I came to marry her. Perhaps already unintentionally I have indicated the quality of the injustice our marriage did us both. There was no kindred between us and no understanding. We were drawn to one another by the unlikeness of our quality, by the things we misunderstood in each other. I know a score of couples who have married in that fashion.

Modern conditions and modern ideas, and in particular the intenser and subtler perceptions of modern life, press more and more heavily upon a marriage tie whose fashion comes from an earlier and less discriminating time. When the wife was her husband's subordinate, meeting him simply and uncritically for simple ends, when marriage was a purely domestic relationship, leaving thought and the vivid things of life almost entirely to the unencumbered man, mental and temperamental incompatibilities mattered comparatively little. But now the wife, and particularly the loving childless wife, unpremeditatedly makes a

relentless demand for a complete association, and the husband exacts unthought of delicacies of understanding and co-operation. These are stupendous demands. People not only think more fully and elaborately about life than they ever did before, but marriage obliges us to make that ever more accidented progress a three-legged race of carelessly assorted couples....

Our very mental texture was different. I was rough-minded, to use the phrase of William James, primary and intuitive and illogical; she was tender-minded, logical, refined and secondary. She was loyal to pledge and persons, sentimental and faithful; I am loyal to ideas and instincts, emotional and scheming. My imagination moves in broad gestures; her's was delicate with a real dread of extravagance. My quality is sensuous and ruled by warm impulses; hers was discriminating and essentially inhibitory. I like the facts of the case and to mention everything; I like naked bodies and the jolly smells of things. She abounded in reservations, in circumlocutions and evasions, in keenly appreciated secondary points. Perhaps the reader knows that Tintoretto in the National Gallery, the Origin of the Milky Way. It is an admirable test of temperamental quality. In spite of my early training I have come to regard that picture as altogether delightful; to Margaret it has always been "needlessly offensive." In that you have our fundamental breach. She had a habit, by no means rare, of damning what she did not like or find sympathetic in me on the score that it was not my "true self," and she did not so much accept the universe as select from it and do her best to ignore the rest. And also I had far more initiative than

had she. This is no catalogue of rights and wrongs, or superiorities and inferiorities; it is a catalogue of differences between two people linked in a relationship that constantly becomes more intolerant of differences.

This is how we stood to each other, and none of it was clear to either of us at the outset. To begin with, I found myself reserving myself from her, then slowly apprehending a jarring between our minds and what seemed to me at first a queer little habit of misunderstanding in her....

It did not hinder my being very fond of her....

Where our system of reservation became at once most usual and most astounding was in our personal relations. It is not too much to say that in that regard we never for a moment achieved sincerity with one another during the first six years of our life together. It goes even deeper than that, for in my effort to realise the ideal of my marriage I ceased even to attempt to be sincere with myself. I would not admit my own perceptions and interpretations. I tried to fit myself to her thinner and finer determinations. There are people who will say with a note of approval that I was learning to conquer myself. I record that much without any note of approval....

For some years I never deceived Margaret about any concrete fact nor, except for the silence about my earlier life that she had almost forced

upon me, did I hide any concrete fact that seemed to affect her, but from the outset I was guilty of immense spiritual concealments, my very marriage was based, I see now, on a spiritual subterfuge; I hid moods from her, pretended feelings....

3

The interest and excitement of setting-up a house, of walking about it from room to room and from floor to floor, or sitting at one's own dinner table and watching one's wife control conversation with a pretty, timid resolution, of taking a place among the secure and free people of our world, passed almost insensibly into the interest and excitement of my Parliamentary candidature for the Kinghamstead Division, that shapeless chunk of agricultural midland between the Great Western and the North Western railways. I was going to "take hold" at last, the Kinghamstead Division was my appointed handle. I was to find my place in the rather indistinctly sketched constructions that were implicit in the minds of all our circle. The precise place I had to fill and the precise functions I had to discharge were not as yet very clear, but all that, we felt sure, would become plain as things developed.

A few brief months of vague activities of "nursing" gave place to the excitements of the contest that followed the return of Mr. Camphell-Bannerman to power in 1905. So far as the Kinghamstead Division was concerned it was a depressed and tepid battle. I went about the constituency making three speeches that were soon threadbare, and an odd little collection of people worked for me; two solicitors, a cheap photographer, a democratic parson, a number of dissenting ministers, the Mayor of Kinghamstead, a Mrs. Bulger, the widow of an old Chartist who had grown rich through electric traction patents, Sir Roderick Newton,

a Jew who had bought Calersham Castle, and old Sir Graham Rivers, that sturdy old soldier, were among my chief supporters. We had headquarters in each town and village, mostly there were empty shops we leased temporarily, and there at least a sort of fuss and a coming and going were maintained. The rest of the population stared in a state of suspended judgment as we went about the business. The country was supposed to be in a state of intellectual conflict and deliberate decision, in history it will no doubt figure as a momentous conflict. Yet except for an occasional flare of bill-sticking or a bill in a window or a placard-plastered motor-car or an argumentative group of people outside a public-house or a sluggish movement towards the schoolroom or village hall, there was scarcely a sign that a great empire was revising its destinies. Now and then one saw a canvasser on a doorstep. For the most part people went about their business with an entirely irresponsible confidence in the stability of the universe. At times one felt a little absurd with one's flutter of colours and one's air of saving the country.

My opponent was a quite undistinguished Major-General who relied upon his advocacy of Protection, and was particularly anxious we should avoid "personalities" and fight the constituency in a gentlemanly spirit. He was always writing me notes, apologising for excesses on the part of his supporters, or pointing out the undesirability of some course taken by mine.

My speeches had been planned upon broad lines, but they lost touch with

these as the polling approached. To begin with I made a real attempt to put what was in my mind before the people I was to supply with a political voice. I spoke of the greatness of our empire and its destinies, of the splendid projects and possibilities of life and order that lay before the world, of all that a resolute and constructive effort might do at the present time. "We are building a state," I said, "secure and splendid, we are in the dawn of the great age of mankind." Sometimes that would get a solitary "'Ear! 'ear!" Then having created, as I imagined, a fine atmosphere, I turned upon the history of the last Conservative administration and brought it into contrast with the wide occasions of the age; discussed its failure to control the grasping financiers in South Africa, its failure to release public education from sectarian squabbles, its misconduct of the Boer War, its waste of the world's resources....

It soon became manifest that my opening and my general spaciousness of method bored my audiences a good deal. The richer and wider my phrases the thinner sounded my voice in these non-resonating gatherings. Even the platform supporters grew restive unconsciously, and stirred and coughed. They did not recognise themselves as mankind. Building an empire, preparing a fresh stage in the history of humanity, had no appeal for them. They were mostly everyday, toiling people, full of small personal solicitudes, and they came to my meetings, I think, very largely as a relaxation. This stuff was not relaxing. They did not think politics was a great constructive process, they thought it was a kind of dog-fight. They wanted fun, they wanted spice, they wanted hits,

they wanted also a chance to say "'Ear', 'ear!" in an intelligent and honourable manner and clap their hands and drum with their feet. The great constructive process in history gives so little scope for clapping and drumming and saying "'Ear, 'ear!" One might as well think of hounding on the solar system.

So after one or two attempts to lift my audiences to the level of the issues involved, I began to adapt myself to them. I cut down my review of our imperial outlook and destinies more and more, and developed a series of hits and anecdotes and--what shall I call them?--"crudifications" of the issue. My helper's congratulated me on the rapid improvement of my platform style. I ceased to speak of the late Prime Minister with the respect I bore him, and began to fall in with the popular caricature of him as an artful rabbit-witted person intent only on keeping his leadership, in spite of the vigorous attempts of Mr. Joseph Chamberlain to oust him therefrom. I ceased to qualify my statement that Protection would make food dearer for the agricultural labourer. I began to speak of Mr. Alfred Lyttelton as an influence at once insane and diabolical, as a man inspired by a passionate desire to substitute manacled but still criminal Chinese for honest British labourers throughout the world. And when it came to the mention of our own kindly leader, of Mr. John Burns or any one else of any prominence at all on our side I fell more and more into the intonation of one who mentions the high gods. And I had my reward in brighter meetings and readier and readier applause.

One goes on from phase to phase in these things.

"After all," I told myself, "if one wants to get to Westminster one must follow the road that leads there," but I found the road nevertheless rather unexpectedly distasteful. "When one gets there," I said, "then it is one begins."

But I would lie awake at nights with that sore throat and headache and fatigue which come from speaking in ill-ventilated rooms, and wondering how far it was possible to educate a whole people to great political ideals. Why should political work always rot down to personalities and personal appeals in this way? Life is, I suppose, to begin with and end with a matter of personalities, from personalities all our broader interests arise and to personalities they return. All our social and political effort, all of it, is like trying to make a crowd of people fall into formation. The broader lines appear, but then come a rush and excitement and irrelevancy, and forthwith the incipient order has vanished and the marshals must begin the work over again!

My memory of all that time is essentially confusion. There was a frightful lot of tiresome locomotion in it; for the Kinghamstead Division is extensive, abounding in ill-graded and badly metalled cross-roads and vicious little hills, and singularly unpleasing to the eye in a muddy winter. It is sufficiently near to London to have undergone the same process of ill-regulated expansion that made Bromstead the place it is. Several of its overgrown villages have

developed strings of factories and sidings along the railway lines, and there is an abundance of petty villas. There seemed to be no place at which one could take hold of more than this or that element of the population. Now we met in a meeting-house, now in a Masonic Hall or Drill Hall; I also did a certain amount of open-air speaking in the dinner hour outside gas-works and groups of factories. Some special sort of people was, as it were, secreted in response to each special appeal. One said things carefully adjusted to the distinctive limitations of each gathering. Jokes of an incredible silliness and shallowness drifted about us. Our advisers made us declare that if we were elected we would live in the district, and one hasty agent had bills printed, "If Mr. Remington is elected he will live here." The enemy obtained a number of these bills and stuck them on outhouses, pigstyes, dog-kennels; you cannot imagine how irksome the repetition of that jest became. The vast drifting indifference in between my meetings impressed me more and more. I realised the vagueness of my own plans as I had never done before I brought them to the test of this experience. I was perplexed by the riddle of just how far I was, in any sense of the word, taking hold at all, how far I wasn't myself flowing into an accepted groove.

Margaret was troubled by no such doubts. She was clear I had to go into Parliament on the side of Liberalism and the light, as against the late Government and darkness. Essential to the memory of my first contest, is the memory of her clear bright face, very resolute and grave, helping me consciously, steadfastly, with all her strength. Her quiet confidence, while I was so dissatisfied, worked curiously towards the alienation

of my sympathies. I felt she had no business to be so sure of me. I had moments of vivid resentment at being thus marched towards Parliament.

I seemed now always to be discovering alien forces of character in her. Her way of taking life diverged from me more and more. She sounded amazing, independent notes. She bought some particularly costly furs for the campaign that roused enthusiasm whenever she appeared. She also made me a birthday present in November of a heavily fur-trimmed coat and this she would make me remove as I went on to the platform, and hold over her arm until I was ready to resume it. It was fearfully heavy for her and she liked it to be heavy for her. That act of servitude was in essence a towering self-assertion. I would glance sideways while some chairman floundered through his introduction and see the clear blue eye with which she regarded the audience, which existed so far as she was concerned merely to return me to Parliament. It was a friendly eye, provided they were not silly or troublesome. But it kindled a little at the hint of a hostile question. After we had come so far and taken so much trouble!

She constituted herself the dragoman of our political travels. In hotels she was serenely resolute for the quietest and the best, she rejected all their proposals for meals and substituted a severely nourishing dietary of her own, and even in private houses she astonished me by her tranquil insistence upon special comforts and sustenance. I can see her face now as it would confront a hostess, a little intent, but sweetly resolute and assured.

Since our marriage she had read a number of political memoirs, and she had been particularly impressed by the career of Mrs. Gladstone. I don't think it occurred to her to compare and contrast my quality with that of Mrs. Gladstone's husband. I suspect her of a deliberate intention of achieving parallel results by parallel methods. I was to be Gladstonised. Gladstone it appeared used to lubricate his speeches with a mixture--if my memory serves me right--of egg beaten up in sherry, and Margaret was very anxious I should take a leaf from that celebrated book. She wanted, I know, to hold the glass in her hand while I was speaking.

But here I was firm. "No," I said, very decisively, "simply I won't stand that. It's a matter of conscience. I shouldn't feel--democratic. I'll take my chance of the common water in the carafe on the chairman's table."

"I DO wish you wouldn't," she said, distressed.

It was absurd to feel irritated; it was so admirable of her, a little childish, infinitely womanly and devoted and fine--and I see now how pathetic. But I could not afford to succumb to her. I wanted to follow my own leading, to see things clearly, and this reassuring pose of a high destiny, of an almost terribly efficient pursuit of a fixed end when as a matter of fact I had a very doubtful end and an aim as yet by no means fixed, was all too seductive for dalliance....

4

And into all these things with the manner of a trifling and casual incident comes the figure of Isabel Rivers. My first impressions of her were of a rather ugly and ungainly, extraordinarily interesting schoolgirl with a beautiful quick flush under her warm brown skin, who said and did amusing and surprising things. When first I saw her she was riding a very old bicycle downhill with her feet on the fork of the frame--it seemed to me to the public danger, but afterwards I came to understand the quality of her nerve better--and on the third occasion she was for her own private satisfaction climbing a tree. On the intervening occasion we had what seems now to have been a long sustained conversation about the political situation and the books and papers I had written.

I wonder if it was.

What a delightful mixture of child and grave woman she was at that time, and how little I reckoned on the part she would play in my life! And since she has played that part, how impossible it is to tell now of those early days! Since I wrote that opening paragraph to this section my idle pen has been, as it were, playing by itself and sketching faces

on the blotting pad--one impish wizened visage is oddly like little Bailey--and I have been thinking cheek on fist amidst a limitless wealth of memories. She sits below me on the low wall under the olive trees with our little child in her arms. She is now the central fact in my life. It still seems a little incredible that that should be so. She has destroyed me as a politician, brought me to this belated rebeginning of life. When I sit down and try to make her a girl again, I feel like the Arabian fisherman who tried to put the genius back into the pot from which it had spread gigantic across the skies....

I have a very clear vision of her rush downhill past our labouring ascendant car--my colours fluttered from handle-bar and shoulder-knot--and her waving hand and the sharp note of her voice. She cried out something, I don't know what, some greeting.

"What a pretty girl!" said Margaret.

Parvill, the cheap photographer, that industrious organiser for whom by way of repayment I got those magic letters, that knighthood of the underlings, "J. P." was in the car with us and explained her to us. "One of the best workers you have," he said....

And then after a toilsome troubled morning we came, rather cross from the strain of sustained amiability, to Sir Graham Rivers' house. It seemed all softness and quiet--I recall dead white panelling and oval mirrors horizontally set and a marble fireplace between white

marble-blind Homer and marble-blind Virgil, very grave and fine--and how Isabel came in to lunch in a shapeless thing like a blue smock that made her bright quick-changing face seem yellow under her cloud of black hair. Her step-sister was there, Miss Gamer, to whom the house was to descend, a well-dressed lady of thirty, amiably disavowing responsibility for Isabel in every phrase and gesture. And there was a very pleasant doctor, an Oxford man, who seemed on excellent terms with every one. It was manifest that he was in the habit of sparring with the girl, but on this occasion she wasn't sparring and refused to be teased into a display in spite of the taunts of either him or her father. She was, they discovered with rising eyebrows, shy. It seemed an opportunity too rare for them to miss. They proclaimed her enthusiasm for me in a way that brought a flush to her cheek and a look into her eye between appeal and defiance. They declared she had read my books, which I thought at the time was exaggeration, their dry political quality was so distinctly not what one was accustomed to regard as schoolgirl reading. Miss Gamer protested to protect her, "When once in a blue moon Isabel is well-behaved....!"

Except for these attacks I do not remember much of the conversation at table; it was, I know, discursive and concerned with the sort of topographical and social and electioneering fact natural to such a visit. Old Rivers struck me as a delightful person, modestly unconscious of his doubly-earned V. C. and the plucky defence of Kardin-Bergat that won his baronetcy. He was that excellent type, the soldier radical, and we began that day a friendship that was only ended by his death in the

hunting-field three years later. He interested Margaret into a disregard of my plate and the fact that I had secured the illegal indulgence of Moselle. After lunch we went for coffee into another low room, this time brown panelled and looking through French windows on a red-walled garden, graceful even in its winter desolation. And there the conversation suddenly picked up and became good. It had fallen to a pause, and the doctor, with an air of definitely throwing off a mask and wrecking an established tranquillity, remarked: "Very probably you Liberals will come in, though I'm not sure you'll come in so mightily as you think, but what you do when you do come in passes my comprehension."

"There's good work sometimes," said Sir Graham, "in undoing."

"You can't govern a great empire by amending and repealing the Acts of your predecessors," said the doctor.

There came that kind of pause that happens when a subject is broached too big and difficult for the gathering. Margaret's blue eyes regarded the speaker with quiet disapproval for a moment, and then came to me in the not too confident hope that I would snub him out of existence with some prompt rhetorical stroke. A voice spoke out of the big armchair.

"We'll do things," said Isabel.

The doctor's eye lit with the joy of the fisherman who strikes his fish at last. "What will you do?" he asked her.

"Every one knows we're a mixed lot," said Isabel.

"Poor old chaps like me!" interjected the general.

"But that's not a programme," said the doctor.

"But Mr. Remington has published a programme," said Isabel.

The doctor cocked half an eye at me.

"In some review," the girl went on. "After all, we're not going to elect the whole Liberal party in the Kinghamstead Division. I'm a Remington-ite!"

"But the programme," said the doctor, "the programme--"

"In front of Mr. Remington!"

"Scandal always comes home at last," said the doctor. "Let him hear the worst."

"I'd like to hear," I said. "Electioneering shatters convictions and enfeebles the mind."

"Not mine," said Isabel stoutly. "I mean--Well, anyhow I take it Mr.

Remington stands for constructing a civilised state out of this muddle."

"THIS muddle," protested the doctor with an appeal of the eye to the beautiful long room and the ordered garden outside the bright clean windows.

"Well, THAT muddle, if you like! There's a slum within a mile of us already. The dust and blacks get worse and worse, Sissie?"

"They do," agreed Miss Gamer.

"Mr. Remington stands for construction, order, education, discipline."

"And you?" said the doctor.

"I'm a good Remington-ite."

"Discipline!" said the doctor.

"Oh!" said Isabel. "At times one has to be--Napoleonic. They want to libel me, Mr. Remington. A political worker can't always be in time for meals, can she? At times one has to make--splendid cuts."

Miss Gamer said something indistinctly.

"Order, education, discipline," said Sir Graham. "Excellent things!

But I've a sort of memory--in my young days--we talked about something called liberty."

"Liberty under the law," I said, with an unexpected approving murmur from Margaret, and took up the defence. "The old Liberal definition of liberty was a trifle uncritical. Privilege and legal restrictions are not the only enemies of liberty. An uneducated, underbred, and underfed propertyless man is a man who has lost the possibility of liberty. There's no liberty worth a rap for him. A man who is swimming hopelessly for life wants nothing but the liberty to get out of the water; he'll give every other liberty for it--until he gets out."

Sir Graham took me up and we fell into a discussion of the changing qualities of Liberalism. It was a good give-and-take talk, extraordinarily refreshing after the nonsense and crowding secondary issues of the electioneering outside. We all contributed more or less except Miss Gamer; Margaret followed with knitted brows and occasional interjections. "People won't SEE that," for example, and "It all seems so plain to me." The doctor showed himself clever but unsubstantial and inconsistent. Isabel sat back with her black mop of hair buried deep in the chair looking quickly from face to face. Her colour came and went with her vivid intellectual excitement; occasionally she would dart a word, usually a very apt word, like a lizard's tongue into the discussion. I remember chiefly that a chance illustration betrayed that she had read Bishop Burnet....

After that it was not surprising that Isabel should ask for a lift in our car as far as the Lurky Committee Room, and that she should offer me quite sound advice EN ROUTE upon the intellectual temperament of the Lurky gasworkers.

On the third occasion that I saw Isabel she was, as I have said, climbing a tree--and a very creditable tree--for her own private satisfaction. It was a lapse from the high seriousness of politics, and I perceived she felt that I might regard it as such and attach too much importance to it. I had some difficulty in reassuring her. And it's odd to note now--it has never occurred to me before--that from that day to this I do not think I have ever reminded Isabel of that encounter.

And after that memory she seems to be flickering about always in the election, an inextinguishable flame; now she flew by on her bicycle, now she dashed into committee rooms, now she appeared on doorsteps in animated conversation with dubious voters; I took every chance I could to talk to her--I had never met anything like her before in the world, and she interested me immensely--and before the polling day she and I had become, in the frankest simplicity, fast friends....

That, I think, sets out very fairly the facts of our early relationship. But it is hard to get it true, either in form or texture, because of the bright, translucent, coloured, and refracting memories that come between. One forgets not only the tint and quality of thoughts and impressions through that intervening haze, one forgets them altogether.

I don't remember now that I ever thought in those days of passionate love or the possibility of such love between us. I may have done so again and again. But I doubt it very strongly. I don't think I ever thought of such aspects. I had no more sense of any danger between us, seeing the years and things that separated us, than I could have had if she had been an intelligent bright-eyed bird. Isabel came into my life as a new sort of thing; she didn't join on at all to my previous experiences of womanhood. They were not, as I have laboured to explain, either very wide or very penetrating experiences, on the whole, "strangled dinginess" expresses them, but I do not believe they were narrower or shallower than those of many other men of my class. I thought of women as pretty things and beautiful things, pretty rather than beautiful, attractive and at times disconcertingly attractive, often bright and witty, but, because of the vast reservations that hid them from me, wanting, subtly and inevitably wanting, in understanding. My idealisation of Margaret had evaporated insensibly after our marriage. The shrine I had made for her in my private thoughts stood at last undisguisedly empty. But Isabel did not for a moment admit of either idealisation or interested contempt. She opened a new sphere of womanhood to me. With her steady amber-brown eyes, her unaffected interest in impersonal things, her upstanding waistless blue body, her energy, decision and courage, she seemed rather some new and infinitely finer form of boyhood than a feminine creature, as I had come to measure femininity. She was my perfect friend. Could I have foreseen, had my world been more wisely planned, to this day we might have been such friends.

She seemed at that time unconscious of sex, though she has told me since how full she was of protesting curiosities and restrained emotions. She spoke, as indeed she has always spoken, simply, clearly, and vividly; schoolgirl slang mingled with words that marked ample voracious reading, and she moved quickly with the free directness of some graceful young animal. She took many of the easy freedoms a man or a sister might have done with me. She would touch my arm, lay a hand on my shoulder as I sat, adjust the lapel of a breast-pocket as she talked to me. She says now she loved me always from the beginning. I doubt if there was a suspicion of that in her mind those days. I used to find her regarding me with the clearest, steadiest gaze in the world, exactly like the gaze of some nice healthy innocent animal in a forest, interested, inquiring, speculative, but singularly untroubled....

5

Polling day came after a last hoarse and dingy crescendo. The excitement was not of the sort that makes one forget one is tired out. The waiting for the end of the count has left a long blank mark on my memory, and then everyone was shaking my hand and repeating: "Nine hundred and seventy-six."

My success had been a foregone conclusion since the afternoon, but we all behaved as though we had not been anticipating this result for hours, as though any other figures but nine hundred and seventy-six would have meant something entirely different. "Nine hundred and seventy-six!" said Margaret. "They didn't expect three hundred."

"Nine hundred and seventy-six," said a little short man with a paper. "It means a big turnover. Two dozen short of a thousand, you know."

A tremendous hullaboo began outside, and a lot of fresh people came into the room.

Isabel, flushed but not out of breath, Heaven knows where she had sprung from at that time of night! was running her hand down my sleeve almost caressingly, with the innocent bold affection of a girl. "Got you in!" she said. "It's been no end of a lark."

"And now," said I, "I must go and be constructive."

"Now you must go and be constructive," she said.

"You've got to live here," she added.

"By Jove! yes," I said. "We'll have to house hunt."

"I shall read all your speeches."

She hesitated.

"I wish I was you," she said, and said it as though it was not exactly the thing she was meaning to say.

"They want you to speak," said Margaret, with something unsaid in her face.

"You must come out with me," I answered, putting my arm through hers, and felt someone urging me to the French windows that gave on the balcony.

"If you think--" she said, yielding gladly

"Oh, RATHER!" said I.

The Mayor of Kinghamstead, a managing little man with no great belief in my oratorical powers, was sticking his face up to mine.

"It's all over," he said, "and you've won. Say all the nice things you can and say them plainly."

I turned and handed Margaret out through the window and stood looking over the Market-place, which was more than half filled with swaying people. The crowd set up a roar of approval at the sight of us, tempered by a little booing. Down in one corner of the square a fight was going on for a flag, a fight that even the prospect of a speech could not instantly check. "Speech!" cried voices, "Speech!" and then a brief "boo-oo-oo" that was drowned in a cascade of shouts and cheers. The conflict round the flag culminated in the smashing of a pane of glass in the chemist's window and instantly sank to peace.

"Gentlemen voters of the Kinghamstead Division," I began.

"Votes for Women!" yelled a voice, amidst laughter--the first time I remember hearing that memorable war-cry.

"Three cheers for Mrs. Remington!"

"Mrs. Remington asks me to thank you," I said, amidst further uproar and reiterated cries of "Speech!"

Then silence came with a startling swiftness.

Isabel was still in my mind, I suppose. "I shall go to Westminster," I began. I sought for some compelling phrase and could not find one. "To do my share," I went on, "in building up a great and splendid civilisation."

I paused, and there was a weak gust of cheering, and then a renewal of booing.

"This election," I said, "has been the end and the beginning of much. New ideas are abroad--"

"Chinese labour," yelled a voice, and across the square swept a wildfire of booting and bawling.

It is one of the few occasions when I quite lost my hold on a speech. I glanced sideways and saw the Mayor of Kinghamstead speaking behind his hand to Parvill. By a happy chance Parvill caught my eye.

"What do they want?" I asked.

"Eh?"

"What do they want?"

"Say something about general fairness--the other side," prompted Parvill, flattered but a little surprised by my appeal. I pulled myself hastily into a more popular strain with a gross eulogy of my opponent's good taste.

"Chinese labour!" cried the voice again.

"You've given that notice to quit," I answered.

The Market-place roared delight, but whether that delight expressed hostility to Chinamen or hostility to their practical enslavement no student of the General Election of 1906 has ever been able to determine. Certainly one of the most effective posters on our side displayed a hideous yellow face, just that and nothing more. There was not even a legend to it. How it impressed the electorate we did not know, but that it impressed the electorate profoundly there can be no disputing.

6

Kinghamstead was one of the earliest constituencies fought, and we came back--it must have been Saturday--triumphant but very tired, to our house in Radnor Square. In the train we read the first intimations that the victory of our party was likely to be a sweeping one.

Then came a period when one was going about receiving and giving congratulations and watching the other men arrive, very like a boy who has returned to school with the first batch after the holidays. The London world reeked with the General Election; it had invaded the nurseries. All the children of one's friends had got big maps of England cut up into squares to represent constituencies and were busy sticking gummed blue labels over the conquered red of Unionism that had hitherto submerged the country. And there were also orange labels, if I remember rightly, to represent the new Labour party, and green for the Irish. I engaged myself to speak at one or two London meetings, and lunched at the Reform, which was fairly tepid, and dined and spent one or two tumultuous evenings at the National Liberal Club, which was in active eruption. The National Liberal became feverishly congested towards midnight as the results of the counting came dropping in. A big green-baize screen had been fixed up at one end of the large smoking-room with the names of the constituencies that were voting that day, and directly the figures came to hand, up they went, amidst cheers that at last lost their energy through sheer repetition, whenever there

was record of a Liberal gain. I don't remember what happened when there was a Liberal loss; I don't think that any were announced while I was there.

How packed and noisy the place was, and what a reek of tobacco and whisky fumes we made! Everybody was excited and talking, making waves of harsh confused sound that beat upon one's ears, and every now and then hoarse voices would shout for someone to speak. Our little set was much in evidence. Both the Cramptons were in, Lewis, Bunting Harblow. We gave brief addresses attuned to this excitement and the late hour, amidst much enthusiasm.

"Now we can DO things!" I said amidst a rapture of applause. Men I did not know from Adam held up glasses and nodded to me in solemn fuddled approval as I came down past them into the crowd again.

Men were betting whether the Unionists would lose more or less than two hundred seats.

"I wonder just what we shall do with it all," I heard one sceptic speculating....

After these orgies I would get home very tired and excited, and find it difficult to get to sleep. I would lie and speculate about what it was we WERE going to do. One hadn't anticipated quite such a tremendous accession to power for one's party. Liberalism was swirling in like a

flood....

I found the next few weeks very unsatisfactory and distressing. I don't clearly remember what it was I had expected; I suppose the fuss and strain of the General Election had built up a feeling that my return would in some way put power into my hands, and instead I found myself a mere undistinguished unit in a vast but rather vague majority. There were moments when I felt very distinctly that a majority could be too big a crowd altogether. I had all my work still before me, I had achieved nothing as yet but opportunity, and a very crowded opportunity it was at that. Everyone about me was chatting Parliament and appointments; one breathed distracting and irritating speculations as to what would be done and who would be asked to do it. I was chiefly impressed by what was unlikely to be done and by the absence of any general plan of legislation to hold us all together. I found the talk about Parliamentary procedure and etiquette particularly trying. We dined with the elder Cramptons one evening, and old Sir Edward was lengthily sage about what the House liked, what it didn't like, what made a good impression and what a bad one. "A man shouldn't speak more than twice in his first session, and not at first on too contentious a topic," said Sir Edward. "No."

"Very much depends on manner. The House hates a lecturer. There's a sort of airy earnestness--"

He waved his cigar to eke out his words.

"Little peculiarities of costume count for a great deal. I could name one man who spent three years living down a pair of spatterdashers. On the other hand--a thing like that--if it catches the eye of the PUNCH man, for example, may be your making."

He went off into a lengthy speculation of why the House had come to like an originally unpopular Irishman named Biggar....

The opening of Parliament gave me some peculiar moods. I began to feel more and more like a branded sheep. We were sworn in in batches, dozens and scores of fresh men, trying not to look too fresh under the inspection of policemen and messengers, all of us carrying new silk hats and wearing magisterial coats. It is one of my vivid memories from this period, the sudden outbreak of silk hats in the smoking-room of the National Liberal Club. At first I thought there must have been a funeral. Familiar faces that one had grown to know under soft felt hats, under bowlers, under liberal-minded wide brims, and above artistic ties and tweed jackets, suddenly met one, staring with the stern gaze of self-consciousness, from under silk hats of incredible glossiness. There was a disposition to wear the hat much too forward, I thought, for a good Parliamentary style.

There was much play with the hats all through; a tremendous competition to get in first and put hats on coveted seats. A memory hangs about me of the House in the early afternoon, an inhumane desolation inhabited

almost entirely by silk hats. The current use of cards to secure seats came later. There were yards and yards of empty green benches with hats and hats and hats distributed along them, resolute-looking top hats, lax top hats with a kind of shadowy grin under them, sensible top bats brim upward, and one scandalous incontinent that had rolled from the front Opposition bench right to the middle of the floor. A headless hat is surely the most soulless thing in the world, far worse even than a skull....

At last, in a leisurely muddled manner we got to the Address; and I found myself packed in a dense elbowing crowd to the right of the Speaker's chair; while the attenuated Opposition, nearly leaderless after the massacre, tilted its brim to its nose and sprawled at its ease amidst its empty benches.

There was a tremendous hullaboo about something, and I craned to see over the shoulder of the man in front. "Order, order, order!"

"What's it about?" I asked.

The man in front of me was clearly no better informed, and then I gathered from a slightly contemptuous Scotchman beside me that it was Chris Robinson had walked between the honourable member in possession of the house and the Speaker. I caught a glimpse of him blushingly whispering about his misadventure to a colleague. He was just that same little figure I had once assisted to entertain at Cambridge, but

grey-haired now, and still it seemed with the same knitted muffler he had discarded for a reckless half-hour while he talked to us in Hatherleigh's rooms.

It dawned upon me that I wasn't particularly wanted in the House, and that I should get all I needed of the opening speeches next day from the TIMES.

I made my way out and was presently walking rather aimlessly through the outer lobby.

I caught myself regarding the shadow that spread itself out before me, multiplied itself in blue tints of various intensity, shuffled itself like a pack of cards under the many lights, the square shoulders, the silk hat, already worn with a parliamentary tilt backward; I found I was surveying this statesmanlike outline with a weak approval. "A MEMBER!" I felt the little cluster of people that were scattered about the lobby must be saying.

"Good God!" I said in hot reaction, "what am I doing here?"

It was one of those moments infinitely trivial in themselves, that yet are cardinal in a man's life. It came to me with extreme vividness that it wasn't so much that I had got hold of something as that something had got hold of me. I distinctly recall the rebound of my mind. Whatever happened in this Parliament, I at least would attempt something. "By

God!" I said, "I won't be overwhelmed. I am here to do something, and do something I will!"

But I felt that for the moment I could not remain in the House.

I went out by myself with my thoughts into the night. It was a chilling night, and rare spots of rain were falling. I glanced over my shoulder at the lit windows of the Lords. I walked, I remember, westward, and presently came to the Grosvenar Embankment and followed it, watching the glittering black rush of the river and the dark, dimly lit barges round which the water swirled. Across the river was the hunched sky-line of Doulton's potteries, and a kiln flared redly. Dimly luminous trams were gliding amidst a dotted line of lamps, and two little trains crawled into Waterloo station. Mysterious black figures came by me and were suddenly changed to the commonplace at the touch of the nearer lamps. It was a big confused world, I felt, for a man to lay his hands upon.

I remember I crossed Vauxhall Bridge and stood for a time watching the huge black shapes in the darkness under the gas-works. A shoal of coal barges lay indistinctly on the darkly shining mud and water below, and a colossal crane was perpetually hauling up coal into mysterious blacknesses above, and dropping the empty clutch back to the barges. Just one or two minute black featureless figures of men toiled amidst these monster shapes. They did not seem to be controlling them but only moving about among them. These gas-works have a big chimney that belches a lurid flame into the night, a livid shivering bluish flame, shot with

strange crimson streaks....

On the other side of Lambeth Bridge broad stairs go down to the lapping water of the river; the lower steps are luminous under the lamps and one treads unwarned into thick soft Thames mud. They seem to be purely architectural steps, they lead nowhere, they have an air of absolute indifference to mortal ends.

Those shapes and large inhuman places--for all of mankind that one sees at night about Lambeth is minute and pitiful beside the industrial monsters that snort and toil there--mix up inextricably with my memories of my first days as a legislator. Black figures drift by me, heavy vans clatter, a newspaper rough tears by on a motor bicycle, and presently, on the Albert Embankment, every seat has its one or two outcasts huddled together and slumbering.

"These things come, these things go," a whispering voice urged upon me, "as once those vast unmeaning Saurians whose bones encumber museums came and went rejoicing noisily in fruitless lives."...

Fruitless lives!--was that the truth of it all?...

Later I stood within sight of the Houses of Parliament in front of the colonnades of St Thomas's Hospital. I leant on the parapet close by a lamp-stand of twisted dolphins--and I prayed!

I remember the swirl of the tide upon the water, and how a string of barges presently came swinging and bumping round as high-water turned to ebb. That sudden change of position and my brief perplexity at it, sticks like a paper pin through the substance of my thoughts. It was then I was moved to prayer. I prayed that night that life might not be in vain, that in particular I might not live in vain. I prayed for strength and faith, that the monstrous blundering forces in life might not overwhelm me, might not beat me back to futility and a meaningless acquiescence in existent things. I knew myself for the weakling I was, I knew that nevertheless it was set for me to make such order as I could out of these disorders, and my task cowed me, gave me at the thought of it a sense of yielding feebleness.

"Break me, O God," I prayed at last, "disgrace me, torment me, destroy me as you will, but save me from self-complacency and little interests and little successes and the life that passes like the shadow of a dream."

## BOOK THE THIRD: THE HEART OF POLITICS

### CHAPTER THE FIRST ~~ THE RIDDLE FOR THE STATESMAN