CHAPTER THE EIGHTH

FULL MOON

Section 1

Sir Richmond had talked in the moonlight and shadows of having found such happiness as he could not have imagined. But when he awoke in the night that happiness had evaporated. He awoke suddenly out of this love dream that had lasted now for nearly four days and he awoke in a mood of astonishment and dismay.

He had thought that when he parted from Dr. Martineau he had parted also from that process of self-exploration that they had started together, but now he awakened to find it established and in full activity in his mind. Something or someone, a sort of etherealized Martineau-Hardy, an abstracted intellectual conscience, was demanding what he thought he was doing with Miss Grammont and whither he thought he was taking her, how he proposed to reconcile the close relationship with her that he was now embarked upon with, in the first place, his work upon and engagements with the Fuel Commission, and, in the second place, Martin Leeds. Curiously enough Lady Hardy didn't come into the case at all. He had done his utmost to keep Martin Leeds out of his head throughout the development of this affair. Now in an unruly and determined way that was extremely characteristic of her she seemed resolute to break in.

She appeared as an advocate, without affection for her client but without any hostility, of the claims of Miss Grammont to be let alone. The elaborate pretence that Sir Richmond had maintained to himself that he had not made love to Miss Grammont, that their mutual attraction had been irresistible and had achieved its end in spite of their resolute and complete detachment, collapsed and vanished from his mind. He admitted to himself that driven by a kind of instinctive necessity he had led their conversation step by step to a realization and declaration of love, and that it did not exonerate him in the least that Miss Grammont had been quite ready and willing to help him and meet him half way. She wanted love as a woman does, more than a man does, and he had steadily presented himself as a man free to love, able to love and loving.

"She wanted a man to love, she wanted perfected fellowship, and you have made her that tremendous promise. That was implicit in your embrace. And how can you keep that promise?"

It was as if Martin spoke; it was her voice; it was the very quality of her thought.

"You belong to this work of yours, which must needs be interrupted or abandoned if you take her. Whatever is not mortgaged to your work is mortgaged to me. For the strange thing in all this is that you and I love one another--and have no power to do otherwise. In spite of all this.

"You have nothing to give her but stolen goods," said the shadow of Martin. "You have nothing to give anyone personally any more....

"Think of the love that she desires and think of this love that you can give....

"Is there any new thing in you that you can give her that you haven't given me? You and I know each other very well; perhaps I know YOU too well. Haven't you loved me as much as you can love anyone? Think of all that there has been between us that you are ready now, eager now to set aside and forget as though it had never been. For four days you have kept me out of your mind in order to worship her. Yet you have known I was there--for all you would not know. No one else will ever be so intimate with you as I am. We have quarrelled together, wept together, jested happily and jested bitterly. You have spared me not at all. Pitiless and cruel you have been to me. You have reckoned up all my faults against me as though they were sins. You have treated me at times unlovingly--never was lover treated so unlovingly as you have sometimes treated me. And yet I have your love--as no other woman can ever have it. Even now when you are wildly in love with this girl's freshness and boldness and cleverness I come into your mind by right and necessity."

"She is different," argued Sir Richmond.

"But you are the same," said the shadow of Martin with Martin's

unsparing return. "Your love has never been a steadfast thing. It comes and goes like the wind. You are an extravagantly imperfect lover. But I have learnt to accept you, as people accept the English weather.... Never in all your life have you loved, wholly, fully, steadfastly--as people deserve to be loved--not your mother nor your father, not your wife nor your children, nor me, nor our child, nor any living thing. Pleasant to all of us at times--at times bitterly disappointing. You do not even love this work of yours steadfastly, this work to which you sacrifice us all in turn. You do not love enough. That is why you have these moods and changes, that is why you have these lassitudes. So it is you are made....

"And that is why you must not take this brave young life, so much simpler and braver than your own, and exalt it--as you can do--and then fail it, as you will do...."

Sir Richmond's mind and body lay very still for a time.

"Should I fail her?..."

For a time Martin Leeds passed from the foreground of his mind.

He was astonished to think how planless, instinctive and unforeseeing his treatment of Miss Grammont had been. It had been just a blind drive to get hold of her and possess her....

Suddenly his passion for her became active in its defence again.

"But is there such a thing as a perfect love? Is YOURS a perfect love, my dear Martin, with its insatiable jealousy, its ruthless criticism? Has the world ever seen a perfect lover yet? Isn't it our imperfection that brings us together in a common need? Is Miss Grammont, after all, likely to get a more perfect love in all her life than this poor love of mine? And isn't it good for her that she should love?"

"Perfect love cherishes. Perfect love foregoes."

Sir Richmond found his mind wandering far away from the immediate question. "Perfect love," the phrase was his point of departure. Was it true that he could not love passionately and completely? Was that fundamentally what was the matter with him? Was that perhaps what was the matter with the whole world of mankind? It had not yet come to that power of loving which makes action full and simple and direct and unhesitating. Man upon his planet has not grown up to love, is still an eager, egotistical and fluctuating adolescent. He lacks the courage to love and the wisdom to love. Love is here. But it comes and goes, it is mixed with greeds and jealousies and cowardice and cowardly reservations. One hears it only in snatches and single notes. It is like something tuning up before the Music begins.... The metaphor altogether ran away with Sir Richmond's half dreaming mind. Some day perhaps all life would go to music.

Love was music and power. If he had loved enough he need never have drifted away from his wife. Love would have created love, would have tolerated and taught and inspired. Where there is perfect love there is neither greed nor impatience. He would have done his work calmly. He would have won his way with his Committee instead of fighting and quarrelling with it perpetually....

"Flimsy creatures," he whispered. "Uncertain health. Uncertain strength. A will that comes and goes. Moods of baseness. Moods of utter beastliness.... Love like April sunshine. April?..."

He dozed and dreamt for a time of spring passing into a high summer sunshine, into a continuing music, of love. He thought of a world like some great playhouse in which players and orchestra and audience all co-operate in a noble production without dissent or conflict. He thought he was the savage of thirty thousand years ago dreaming of the great world that is still perhaps thirty thousand years ahead. His effort to see more of that coming world than indistinct and cloudy pinnacles and to hear more than a vague music, dissolved his dream and left him awake again and wrestling with the problem of Miss Grammont.

Section 2

The shadow of Martin stood over him, inexorable. He had to release Miss Grammont from the adventure into which he had drawn her. This decision stood out stern-and inevitable in his mind with no conceivable

alternative.

As he looked at the task before him he began to realize its difficulty. He was profoundly in love with her, he was still only learning how deeply, and she was not going to play a merely passive part in this affair. She was perhaps as deeply in love with him....

He could not bring himself to the idea of confessions and disavowals. He could not bear to think of her disillusionment. He felt that he owed it to her not to disillusion her, to spoil things for her in that fashion. "To turn into something mean and ugly after she has believed in me.... It would be like playing a practical joke upon her. It would be like taking her into my arms and suddenly making a grimace at her.... It would scar her with a second humiliation...."

Should he take her on to Bath or Exeter to-morrow and contrive by some sudden arrival of telegrams that he had to go from her suddenly? But a mere sudden parting would not end things between them now unless he went off abruptly without explanations or any arrangements for further communications. At the outset of this escapade there had been a tacit but evident assumption that it was to end when she joined her father at Falmouth. It was with an effect of discovery that Sir Richmond realized that now it could not end in that fashion, that with the whisper of love and the touching of lips, something had been started that would go on, that would develop. To break off now and go away without a word would leave a raw and torn end, would leave her perplexed and perhaps even

more humiliated with an aching mystery to distress her. "Why did he go? Was it something I said?--something he found out or imagined?"

Parting had disappeared as a possible solution of this problem. She and he had got into each other's lives to stay: the real problem was the terms upon which they were to stay in each other's lives. Close association had brought them to the point of being, in the completest sense, lovers; that could not be; and the real problem was the transmutation of their relationship to some form compatible with his honour and her happiness. A word, an idea, from some recent reading floated into Sir Richmond's head. "Sublimate," he whispered. "We have to sublimate this affair. We have to put this relationship upon a Higher Plane."

His mind stopped short at that.

Presently his voice sounded out of the depths of his heart. "God! How I loathe the Higher Plane!....

"God has put me into this Higher Plane business like some poor little kid who has to wear irons on its legs."

"I WANT her.... Do you hear, Martin? I want her."

As if by a lightning flash he saw his car with himself and Miss Grammont--Miss Seyffert had probably fallen out--traversing Europe and

Asia in headlong flight. To a sunlit beach in the South Seas....

His thoughts presently resumed as though these unmannerly and fantastic interruptions had not occurred.

"We have to carry the whole affair on to a Higher Plane--and keep it there. We two love one another--that has to be admitted now. (I ought never to have touched her. I ought never to have thought of touching her.) But we two are too high, our aims and work and obligations are too high for any ordinary love making. That sort of thing would embarrass us, would spoil everything.

"Spoil everything," he repeated, rather like a small boy who learns an unpalatable lesson.

For a time Sir Richmond, exhausted by moral effort, lay staring at the darkness.

"It has to be done. I believe I can carry her through with it if I can carry myself. She's a finer thing than I am.... On the whole I am glad it's only one more day. Belinda will be about.... Afterwards we can write to each other.... If we can get over the next day it will be all right. Then we can write about fuel and politics--and there won't be her voice and her presence. We shall really SUBLIMATE.... First class idea--sublimate!.... And I will go back to dear old Martin who's all alone there and miserable; I'll be kind to her and play my part and tell

her her Carbuncle scar rather becomes her.... And in a little while I shall be altogether in love with her again.

"Queer what a brute I've always been to Martin."

"Queer that Martin can come in a dream to me and take the upper hand with me.

"Queer that NOW--I love Martin."

He thought still more profoundly. "By the time the Committee meets again I shall have been tremendously refreshed."

He repeated:--"Put things on the Higher Plane and keep them there. Then go back to Martin. And so to the work. That's it...."

Nothing so pacifies the mind as a clear-cut purpose. Sir Richmond fell asleep during the fourth recapitulation of this programme.

Section 3

When Miss Grammont appeared at breakfast Sir Richmond saw at once that she too had had a restless night. When she came into the little long breakfast room of the inn with its brown screens and its neat white tables it seemed to him that the Miss Grammont of his nocturnal speculations, the beautiful young lady who had to be protected and

managed and loved unselfishly, vanished like some exorcised intruder. Instead was this real dear young woman, who had been completely forgotten during the reign of her simulacrum and who now returned completely remembered, familiar, friendly, intimate. She touched his hand for a moment, she met his eyes with the shadow of a smile in her own.

"Oranges!" said Belinda from the table by the window. "Beautiful oranges."

She had been preparing them, poor Trans-atlantic exile, after the fashion in which grape fruits are prepared upon liners and in the civilized world of the west. "He's getting us tea spoons," said Belinda, as they sat down.

"This is realler England than ever," she said. "I've been up an hour. I found a little path down to the river bank. It's the greenest morning world and full of wild flowers. Look at these."

"That's lady's smock," said Sir Richmond. "It's not really a flower; it's a quotation from Shakespeare."

"And there are cowslips!"

"CUCKOO BUDS OF YELLOW HUE. DO PAINT THE MEADOWS WITH DELIGHT. All the

English flowers come out of Shakespeare. I don't know what we did before his time."

The waiter arrived with the tea spoons for the oranges.

Belinda, having distributed these, resumed her discourse of enthusiasm for England. She asked a score of questions about Gloucester and Chepstow, the Severn and the Romans and the Welsh, and did not wait for the answers. She did not want answers; she talked to keep things going. Her talk masked a certain constraint that came upon her companions after the first morning's greetings were over.

Sir Richmond as he had planned upstairs produced two Michelin maps. "To-day," he said, "we will run back to Bath--from which it will be easy for you to train to Falmouth. We will go by Monmouth and then turn back through the Forest of Dean, where you will get glimpses of primitive coal mines still worked by two men and a boy with a windlass and a pail. Perhaps we will go through Cirencester. I don't know. Perhaps it is better to go straight to Bath. In the very heart of Bath you will find yourselves in just the same world you visited at Pompeii. Bath is Pompeii overlaid by Jane Austen's England."

He paused for a moment. "We can wire to your agents from here before we start and we can pick up their reply at Gloucester or Nailsworth or even Bath itself. So that if your father is nearer than we suppose--But I think to-morrow afternoon will be soon enough for Falmouth, anyhow."

He stopped interrogatively.

Miss Grammont's face was white. "That will do very well," she said.

Section 4.

They started, but presently they came to high banks that showed such masses of bluebells, ragged Robin, great stitchwort and the like that Belinda was not to be restrained. She clamoured to stop the car and go up the bank and pick her hands full, and so they drew up by the roadside and Sir Richmond and Miss Grammont sat down near the car while Belinda carried her enthusiastic onslaught on the flowers up the steep bank and presently out of earshot.

The two lovers said unheeded things about the flowers to each other and then fell silent. Then Miss Grammont turned her head and seemed deliberately to measure her companion's distance. Evidently she judged her out of earshot.

"Well," said Miss Grammont in her soft even voice. "We love one another. Is that so still?"

"I could not love you more."

"It wasn't a dream?"

"No."

"And to-morrow we part?"

He looked her in the eyes. "I have been thinking of that all night," he said at last.

"I too."

"And you think--?"

"That we must part. Just as we arranged it when was it? Three days or three ages ago? There is nothing else in the world to do except for us to go our ways.... I love you. That means for a woman--It means that I want to be with you. But that is impossible.... Don't doubt whether I love you because I say--impossible...."

Sir Richmond, faced with his own nocturnal decision, was now moved to oppose it flatly. "Nothing that one can do is impossible."

She glanced again at Belinda and bent down towards him. "Suppose," she said, "you got back into that car with me; suppose that instead of going on as we have planned, you took me away. How much of us would go?"

"You would go," said Sir Richmond, "and my heart."

"And this work of yours? And your honour? For the honour of a man in this New Age of yours will be first of all in the work he does for the world. And you will leave your work to be just a lover. And the work that I might do because of my father's wealth; all that would vanish too. We should leave all of that, all of our usefulness, all that much of ourselves. But what has made me love you? Just your breadth of vision, just the sense that you mattered. What has made you love me? Just that I have understood the dream of your work. All that we should have to leave behind. We should specialize, in our own scandal. We should run away just for one thing. To think, by sharing the oldest, simplest, dearest indulgences in the world, that we had got each other. When really we had lost each other, lost all that mattered...."

Her face was flushed with the earnestness of her conviction. Her eyes were bright with tears. "Don't think I don't love you. It's so hard to say all this. Somehow it seems like going back on something--something supreme. Our instincts have got us.... Don't think I'd hold myself from you, dear. I'd give myself to you with both hands. I love you--When a woman loves--I at any rate--she loves altogether. But this thing--I am convinced--cannot be. I must go my own way, the way I have to go. My father is the man, obstinate, more than half a savage. For me--I know it--he has the jealousy of ten husbands. If you take me--If our secret becomes manifest--If you are to take me and keep me, then his life and your life will become wholly this Feud, nothing but this Feud. You have to fight him anyhow--that is why I of all people must keep out of

the quarrel. For him, it would be an immense excitement, full of the possibility of fierce satisfactions; for you, whether you won me or lost me, it would be utter waste and ruin."

She paused and then went on:--"And for me too, waste and ruin. I shall be a woman fought over. I shall be fought over as dogs fight over a bone. I shall sink back to the level of Helen of Troy. I shall cease to be a free citizen, a responsible free person. Whether you win me or lose me it will be waste and ruin for us both. Your Fuel Commission will go to pieces, all the wide, enduring work you have set me dreaming about will go the same way. We shall just be another romantic story.... No!"

Sir Richmond sat still, a little like a sullen child, she thought. "I hate all this," he said slowly. "I didn't think of your father before, and now I think of him it sets me bristling for a fight. It makes all this harder to give up. And yet, do you know, in the night I was thinking, I was coming to conclusions, very like yours. For quite other reasons. I thought we ought not to--We have to keep friends anyhow and hear of each other?"

"That goes without saying."

"I thought we ought not to go on to be lovers in any way that Would affect you, touch you too closely.... I was sorry--I had kissed you."

"Not I. No. Don't be sorry for that. I am glad we have fallen in love,

more glad than I have been of anything else in my life, and glad we have spoken plainly.... Though we have to part. And--"

Her whisper came close to him. "For a whole day yet, all round the clock twice, you and I have one another."

Miss Seyffert began speaking as soon as she was well within earshot.

"I don't know the name of a single one of these flowers," she cried, "except the bluebells. Look at this great handful I've gotten! Springtime in Italy doesn't compare with it, not for a moment."

Section 5

Because Belinda Seyffert was in the dicky behind them with her alert interest in their emotions all too thinly and obviously veiled, it seemed more convenient to Sir Richmond and Miss Grammont to talk not of themselves but of Man and Woman and of that New Age according to the prophet Martineau, which Sir Richmond had partly described and mainly invented and ascribed to his departed friend. They talked anthropologically, philosophically, speculatively, with an absurd pretence of detachment, they sat side by side in the little car, scarcely glancing at one another, but side by side and touching each other, and all the while they were filled with tenderness and love and hunger for one another.

In the course of a day or so they had touched on nearly every phase in the growth of Man and Woman from that remote and brutish past which has left its traces in human bones mingled with the bones of hyaenas and cave bears beneath the stalagmites of Wookey Hole near Wells. In those nearly forgotten days the mind of man and woman had been no more than an evanescent succession of monstrous and infantile imaginations. That brief journey in the west country had lit up phase after phase in the long teaching and discipline of man as he had developed depth of memory and fixity of purpose out of these raw beginnings, through the dreaming childhood of Avebury and Stonehenge and the crude boyhood of ancient wars and massacres. Sir Richmond recalled those phases now, and how, as they had followed one another, man's idea of woman and woman's idea of man had changed with them, until nowadays in the minds of civilized men brute desire and possession and a limitless jealousy had become almost completely overlaid by the desire for fellowship and a free mutual loyalty. "Overlaid," he said. "The older passions are still there like the fires in an engine." He invented a saying for Dr. Martineau that the Man in us to-day was still the old man of Palaeolithic times, with his will, his wrath against the universe increased rather than diminished. If to-day he ceases to crack his brother's bones and rape and bully his womenkind, it is because he has grown up to a greater game and means to crack this world and feed upon its marrow and wrench their secrets from the stars.

And furthermore it would seem that the prophet Martineau had declared that in this New Age that was presently to dawn for mankind, jealousy

was to be disciplined even as we had disciplined lust and anger; instead of ruling our law it was to be ruled by law and custom. No longer were the jealousy of strange peoples, the jealousy of ownership and the jealousy of sex to determine the framework of human life. There was to be one peace and law throughout the world, one economic scheme and a universal freedom for men and women to possess and give themselves.

"And how many generations yet must there be before we reach that Utopia?" Miss Grammont asked.

"I wouldn't put it at a very great distance."

"But think of all the confusions of the world!"

"Confusions merely. The world is just a muddle of states and religions and theories and stupidities. There are great lumps of disorderly strength in it, but as a whole it is a weak world. It goes on by habit. There's no great idea in possession and the only possible great idea is this one. The New Age may be nearer than we dare to suppose."

"If I could believe that!"

"There are many more people think as we do than you suppose. Are you and I such very strange and wonderful and exceptional people?"

"No. I don't think so."

"And yet the New World is already completely established in our hearts. What has been done in our minds can be done in most minds. In a little while the muddled angry mind of Man upon his Planet will grow clear and it will be this idea that will have made it clear. And then life will be very different for everyone. That tyranny of disorder which oppresses every life on earth now will be lifted. There will be less and less insecurity, less and less irrational injustice. It will be a better instructed and a better behaved world. We shall live at our ease, not perpetually anxious, not resentful and angry. And that will alter all the rules of love. Then we shall think more of the loveliness of other people because it will no longer be necessary to think so much of the dangers and weaknesses and pitifulliesses of other people. We shall not have to think of those who depend upon us for happiness and selfrespect. We shall not have to choose between a wasteful fight for a personal end or the surrender of our heart's desire."

"Heart's desire," she whispered. "Am I indeed your heart's desire?"

Sir Richmond sank his head and voice in response.

"You are the best of all things. And I have to let you go."

Sir Richmond suddenly remembered Miss Seyffert and half turned his face towards her. Her forehead was just visible over the hood of the open coupe. She appeared to be intelligently intent upon the scenery. Then he

broke out suddenly into a tirade against the world. "But I am bored by this jostling unreasonable world. At the bottom of my heart I am bitterly resentful to-day. This is a world of fools and brutes in which we live, a world of idiotic traditions, imbecile limitations, cowardice, habit, greed and mean cruelty. It is a slum of a world, a congested district, an insanitary jumble of souls and bodies. Every good thing, every sweet desire is thwarted--every one. I have to lead the life of a slum missionary, a sanitary inspector, an underpaid teacher. I am bored. Oh God! how I am bored! I am bored by our laws and customs. I am bored by our rotten empire and its empty monarchy. I am bored by its parades and its flags and its sham enthusiasms. I am bored by London and its life, by its smart life and by its servile life alike. I am bored by theatres and by books and by every sort of thing that people call pleasure. I am bored by the brag of people and the claims of people and the feelings of people. Damn people! I am bored by profiteers and by the snatching they call business enterprise. Damn every business man! I am bored by politics and the universal mismanagement of everything. I am bored by France, by Anglo-Saxondom, by German self-pity, by Bolshevik fanaticism. I am bored by these fools' squabbles that devastate the world. I am bored by Ireland, Orange and Green. Curse the Irish--north and south together! Lord! how I HATE the Irish from Carson to the last Sinn Feiner! And I am bored by India and by Egypt. I am bored by Poland and by Islam. I am bored by anyone who professes to have rights. Damn their rights! Curse their rights! I am bored to death by this year and by last year and by the prospect of next year. I am bored--I am horribly bored--by my work. I am bored by every sort of renunciation. I want to

live with the woman I love and I want to work within the limits of my capacity. Curse all Hullo! Damn his eyes!--Steady, ah! The spark!... Good! No skid."

He had come round a corner at five and twenty miles an hour and had stopped his spark and pulled up neatly within a yard of the fore-wheel of a waggon that was turning in the road so as to block the way completely.

"That almost had me....

"And now you feel better?" said Miss Grammont.

"Ever so much," said Sir Richmond and chuckled.

The waggoner cleared the road and the car started up again.

For a minute or so neither spoke.

"You ought to be smacked hard for that outbreak,--my dear," said Miss Grammont.

"I ought--MY dear. I have no right to be ill-tempered. We two are among the supremely fortunate ones of our time. We have no excuse for misbehaviour. Got nothing to grumble at. Always I am lucky. THAT--with the waggon--was a very near thing. God spoils us.

"We two," he went on, after a pause, "are among the most fortunate people alive. We are both rich and easily rich. That gives us freedoms few people have. We have a vision of the whole world in which we live. It's in a mess--but that is by the way. The mass of mankind never gets enough education to have even a glimpse of the world as a whole. They never get a chance to get the hang of it. It is really possible for us to do things that will matter in the world. All our time is our own; all our abilities we are free to use. Most people, most intelligent and educated people, are caught in cages of pecuniary necessity; they are tied to tasks they can't leave, they are driven and compelled and limited by circumstances they can never master. But we, if we have tasks, have tasks of our own choosing. We may not like the world, but anyhow we are free to do our best to alter it. If I were a clerk in Hoxton and you were a city typist, then we MIGHT swear."

"It was you who swore," smiled Miss Grammont.

"It's the thought of that clerk in Hoxton and that city typist who really keep me at my work. Any smacking ought to come from them. I couldn't do less than I do in the face of their helplessness. Nevertheless a day will come--through what we do and what we refrain from doing when there will be no bound and limited clerks in Hoxton and no captive typists in the city. And nobody at all to consider."

"According to the prophet Martineau," said Miss Grammont.

"And then you and I must contrive to be born again."

"Heighho!" cried Miss Grammont. "A thousand years ahead! When fathers are civilized. When all these phanton people who intervene on your side--no! I don't want to know anything about them, but I know of them by instinct--when they also don't matter."

"Then you and I can have things out with each other--THOROUGHLY," said Sir Richmond, with a surprising ferocity in his voice, charging the little hill before him as though he charged at Time.

Section 6

They had to wait at Nailsworth for a telegram from Mr. Grammont's agents; they lunched there and drove on to Bath in the afternoon. They came into the town through unattractive and unworthy outskirts, and only realized the charm of the place after they had garaged their car at the Pulteney Hotel and walked back over the Pulteney Bridge to see the Avon with the Pump Room and the Roman Baths. The Pulteney they found hung with pictures and adorned with sculpture to an astonishing extent; some former proprietor must have had a mania for replicas and the place is eventful with white marble fauns and sylphs and lions and Caesars and Queen Victorias and packed like an exhibition with memories of Rome, Florence, Milan, Paris, the National Gallery and the Royal Academy, amidst which splendours a competent staff administers modern comforts

with an old-fashioned civility. But round and about the Pulteney one has still the scenery of Georgian England, the white, faintly classical terraces and houses of the days of Fielding, Smollett, Fanny Burney and Jane Austen, the graceful bridge with the bright little shops full of "presents from Bath"; the Pump Room with its water drinkers and a fine array of the original Bath chairs.

Down below the Pump Room our travellers explored the memories of the days when the world was Latin from York to the Tigris, and the Corinthian capital flourished like a weed from Bath to Baalbek. And they considered a little doubtfully the seventeenth century statue of Bladud, who is said to have been healed by the Bath waters and to have founded the city in the days when Stonehenge still flourished, eight hundred years before the Romans came.

In the afternoon Miss Seyffert came with Sir Richmond and Miss Grammont and was very enthusiastic about everything, but in the evening after dinner it was clear that her role was to remain in the hotel. Sir Richmond and Miss Grammont went out into the moonlit gloaming; they crossed the bridge again and followed the road beside the river towards the old Abbey Church, that Lantern of the West. Away in some sunken gardens ahead of them a band was playing, and a cluster of little lights about the bandstand showed a crowd of people down below dancing on the grass. These little lights, these bobbing black heads and the lilting music, this little inflamed Centre of throbbing sounds and ruddy illumination, made the dome of the moonlit world about it seem very vast

and cool and silent. Our visitors began to realize that Bath could be very beautiful. They went to the parapet above the river and stood there, leaning over it elbow to elbow and smoking cigarettes. Miss Grammont was moved to declare the Pulteney Bridge, with its noble arch, its effect of height over the swirling river, and the cluster of houses above, more beautiful than the Ponte Vecchio at Florence. Down below was a man in waders with a fishing-rod going to and fro along the foaming weir, and a couple of boys paddled a boat against the rush of the water lower down the stream.

"Dear England!" said Miss Grammont, surveying this gracious spectacle. "How full it is of homely and lovely and kindly things!"

"It is the home we come from."

"You belong to it still."

"No more than you do. I belong to a big overworking modern place called London which stretches its tentacles all over the world. I am as much a home-coming tourist as you are. Most of this western country I am seeing for the first time."

She said nothing for a space. "I've not a word to say to-night," she said. "I'm just full of a sort of animal satisfaction in being close to you.... And in being with you among lovely things.... Somewhere--Before we part to-night--...."

"Yes?" he said to her pause, and his face came very near to hers.

"I want you to kiss me."

"Yes," he said awkwardly, glancing over his shoulder, acutely aware of the promenaders passing close to them.

"It's a promise?"

"Yes."

Very timidly and guiltily his hand sought hers beside it and gripped it and pressed it. "My dear!" he whispered, tritest and most unavoidable of expressions. It was not very like Man and Woman loving upon their Planet; it was much more like the shy endearments of the shop boys and work girls who made the darkling populous about them with their silent interchanges.

"There are a thousand things I want to talk about to you," she said. "After we have parted to-morrow I shall begin to think of them. But now--every rational thing seems dissolved in this moonlight...."

Presently she made an effort to restore the intellectual dignity of their relationship.

"I suppose I ought to be more concerned tonight about the work I have to do in the world and anxious for you to tell me this and that, but indeed I am not concerned at all about it. I seem to have it in outline all perfectly clear. I mean to play a man's part in the world just as my father wants me to do. I mean to win his confidence and work with him--like a partner. Then some day I shall be a power in the world of fuel. And at the same time I must watch and read and think and learn how to be the servant of the world.... We two have to live like trusted servants who have been made guardians of a helpless minor. We have to put things in order and keep them in order against the time when Man--Man whom we call in America the Common Man--can take hold of his world--"

"And release his servants," said Sir Richmond.

"All that is perfectly clear in my mind. That is what I am going to live for; that is what I have to do."

She stopped abruptly. "All that is about as interesting to-night--in comparison with the touch of your dear fingers--as next month's railway time-table."

But later she found a topic that could hold their attention for a time.

"We have never said a word about religion," she said.

Sir Richmond paused for a moment. "I am a godless man," he said. "The stars and space and time overwhelm my imagination. I cannot imagine anything above or beyond them."

She thought that over. "But there are divine things," she said.

"YOU are divine.... I'm not talking lovers' nonsense," he hastened to add. "I mean that there is something about human beings--not just the everyday stuff of them, but something that appears intermittently--as though a light shone through something translucent. If I believe in any divinity at all it is a divinity revealed to me by other people--And even by myself in my own heart.

"I'm never surprised at the badness of human beings," said Sir Richmond; "seeing how they have come about and what they are; but I have been surprised time after time by fine things.... Often in people I disliked or thought little of.... I can understand that I find you full of divine quality, because I am in love with you and all alive to you. Necessarily I keep on discovering loveliness in you. But I have seen divine things in dear old Martineau, for example. A vain man, fussy, timid--and yet filled with a passion for truth, ready to make great sacrifices and to toil tremendously for that. And in those men I am always cursing, my Committee, it is astonishing at times to discover what streaks of goodness even the really bad men can show.... But one can't make use of just anyone's divinity. I can see the divinity in Martineau but it leaves me cold. He tired me and bored me.... But I live on you. It's

only through love that the God can reach over from one human being to another. All real love is a divine thing, a reassurance, a release of courage. It is wonderful enough that we should take food and drink and turn them into imagination, invention and creative energy; it is still more wonderful that we should take an animal urging and turn it into a light to discover beauty and an impulse towards the utmost achievements of which we are capable. All love is a sacrament and all lovers are priests to each other. You and I--"

Sir Richmond broke off abruptly. "I spent three days trying to tell this to Dr. Martineau. But he wasn't the priest I had to confess to and the words wouldn't come. I can confess it to you readily enough...."

"I cannot tell," said Miss Grammont, "whether this is the last wisdom in life or moonshine. I cannot tell whether I am thinking or feeling; but the noise of the water going over the weir below is like the stir in my heart. And I am swimming in love and happiness. Am I awake or am I dreaming you, and are we dreaming one another? Hold my hand--hold it hard and tight. I'm trembling with love for you and all the world.... If I say more I shall be weeping."

For a long time they stood side by side saying not a word to one another.

Presently the band down below and the dancing ceased and the little lights were extinguished. The silent moon seemed to grow brighter and

larger and the whisper of the waters louder. A crowd of young people flowed out of the gardens and passed by on their way home. Sir Richmond and Miss Grammont strolled through the dispersing crowd and over the Toll Bridge and went exploring down a little staircase that went down from the end of the bridge to the dark river, and then came back to their old position at the parapet looking upon the weir and the Pulteney Bridge. The gardens that had been so gay were already dark and silent as they returned, and the streets echoed emptily to the few people who were still abroad.

"It's the most beautiful bridge in the world," said Miss Grammont, and gave him her hand again.

Some deep-toned clock close by proclaimed the hour eleven.

The silence healed again.

"Well?" said Sir Richmond.

"Well?" said Miss Grammont smiling very faintly.

"I suppose we must go out of all this beauty now, back to the lights of the hotel and the watchful eyes of your dragon."

"She has not been a very exacting dragon so far, has she?"

"She is a miracle of tact."

"She does not really watch. But she is curious--and very sympathetic."

"She is wonderful."....

"That man is still fishing," said Miss Grammont.

For a time she peered down at the dark figure wading in the foam below as though it was the only thing of interest in the world. Then she turned to Sir Richmond.

"I would trust Belinda with my life," she said. "And anyhow--now--we need not worry about Belinda."

Section 7

At the breakfast table it was Belinda who was the most nervous of the three, the most moved, the most disposed to throw a sacramental air over their last meal together. Her companions had passed beyond the idea of separation; it was as if they now cherished a secret satisfaction at the high dignity of their parting. Belinda in some way perceived they had become different. They were no longer tremulous lovers; they seemed sure of one another and with a new pride in their bearing. It would have pleased Belinda better, seeing how soon they were to be torn apart, if they had not made quite such excellent breakfasts. She even suspected

them of having slept well. Yet yesterday they had been deeply stirred. They had stayed out late last night, so late that she had not heard them come in. Perhaps then they had passed the climax of their emotions. Sir Richmond, she learnt, was to take the party to Exeter, where there would be a train for Falmouth a little after two. If they started from Bath about nine that would give them an ample margin of time in which to deal with a puncture or any such misadventure.

They crested the Mendips above Shepton Mallet, ran through Tilchester and Ilminster into the lovely hill country about Up-Ottery and so to Honiton and the broad level road to Exeter. Sir Richmond and Miss Grammont were in a state of happy gravity; they sat contentedly side by side, talking very little. They had already made their arrangements for writing to one another. There was to be no stream of love-letters or protestations. That might prove a mutual torment. Their love was to be implicit. They were to write at intervals about political matters and their common interests, and to keep each other informed of their movements about the world.

"We shall be working together," she said, speaking suddenly out of a train of thought she had been following, "we shall be closer together than many a couple who have never spent a day apart for twenty years."

Then presently she said: "In the New Age all lovers will have to be accustomed to meeting and parting. We women will not be tied very much by domestic needs. Unless we see fit to have children. We shall be going

about our business like men; we shall have world-wide businesses--many of us--just as men will....

"It will be a world full of lovers' meetings."

"Some day--somewhere--we two will certainly meet again."

"Even you have to force circumstances a little," said Sir Richmond.

"We shall meet," she said, "without doing that."

"But where?" he asked unanswered....

"Meetings and partings," she said. "Women will be used to seeing their lovers go away. Even to seeing them go away to other women who have borne them children and who have a closer claim on them."

"No one--" began Sir Richmond, startled.

"But I don't mind very much. It's how things are. If I were a perfectly civilized woman I shouldn't mind at all. If men and women are not to be tied to each other there must needs be such things as this."

"But you," said Sir Richmond. "I at any rate am not like that. I cannot bear the thought that YOU--"

"You need not bear it, my dear. I was just trying to imagine this world that is to be. Women I think are different from men in their jealousy. Men are jealous of the other man; women are jealous for their man--and careless about the other woman. What I love in you I am sure about. My mind was empty when it came to you and now it is full to overflowing. I shall feel you moving about in the same world with me. I'm not likely to think of anyone else for a very long time.... Later on, who knows? I may marry. I make no vows. But I think until I know certainly that you do not want me any more it will be impossible for me to marry or to have a lover. I don't know, but that is how I believe it will be with me. And my mind feels beautifully clear now and settled. I've got your idea and made it my own, your idea that we matter scarcely at all, but that the work we do matters supremely. I'll find my rope and tug it, never fear. Half way round the world perhaps some day you will feel me tugging."

"I shall feel you're there," he said, "whether you tug or not...."

"Three miles left to Exeter," he reported presently.

She glanced back at Belinda.

"It is good that we have loved, my dear," she whispered. "Say it is good."

"The best thing in all my life," he said, and lowered his head and voice to say: "My dearest dear."

"Heart's desire--still--?"

"Heart's delight.... Priestess of life.... Divinity."

She smiled and nodded and suddenly Belinda, up above their lowered heads, accidentally and irrelevantly, no doubt, coughed.

At Exeter Station there was not very much time to spare after all. Hardly had Sir Richmond secured a luncheon basket for the two travellers before the train came into the station. He parted from Miss Grammont with a hand clasp. Belinda was flushed and distressed at the last but her friend was quiet and still. "Au revoir," said Belinda without conviction when Sir Richmond shook her hand.

Section 8.

Sir Richmond stood quite still on the platform as the train ran out of the station. He did not move until it had disappeared round the bend. Then he turned, lost in a brown study, and walked very slowly towards the station exit.

"The most wonderful thing in my life," he thought. "And already--it is unreal.

"She will go on to her father whom she knows ten thousand times more

thoroughly than she knows me; she will go on to Paris, she will pick up all the threads of her old story, be reminded of endless things in her life, but never except in the most casual way of these days: they will be cut off from everything else that will serve to keep them real; and as for me--this connects with nothing else in my life at all.... It is as disconnected as a dream.... Already it is hardly more substantial than a dream....

"We shall write letters. Do letters breathe faster or slower as you read them?

"We may meet.

"Where are we likely to meet again?... I never realized before how improbable it is that we shall meet again. And if we meet?...

"Never in all our lives shall we be really TOGETHER again. It's over--With a completeness....

"Like death."

He came opposite the bookstalls and stopped short and stared with unseeing eyes at the display of popular literature. He was wondering now whether after all he ought to have let her go. He experienced something of the blank amazement of a child who has burst its toy balloon. His golden globe of satisfaction in an instant had gone. An irrational sense

of loss was flooding every other feeling about V.V. If she had loved him truly and altogether could she have left him like this? Neither of them surely had intended so complete a separation. He wanted to go back and recall that train.

A few seconds more, he realized, and he would give way to anger. Whatever happened that must not happen. He pulled himself together. What was it he had to do now? He had not to be angry, he had not even to be sorry. They had done the right thing. Outside the station his car was waiting.

He went outside the station and stared at his car. He had to go somewhere. Of course! down into Cornwall to Martin's cottage. He had to go down to her and be kind and comforting about that carbuncle. To be kind?... If this thwarted feeling broke out into anger he might be tempted to take it out of Martin. That at any rate he must not do. He had always for some inexplicable cause treated Martin badly. Nagged her and blamed her and threatened her. That must stop now. No shadow of this affair must lie on Martin.... And Martin must never have a suspicion of any of this....

The image of Martin became very vivid in his mind. He thought of her as he had seen her many times, with the tears close, fighting with her back to the wall, with all her wit and vigour gone, because she loved him more steadfastly than he did her. Whatever happened he must not take it out of Martin. It was astonishing how real she had become now--as V.V.

became a dream. Yes, Martin was astonishingly real. And if only he could go now and talk to Martin--and face all the facts of life with her, even as he had done with that phantom Martin in his dream....

But things were not like that.

He looked to see if his car was short of water or petrol; both needed replenishing, and so he would have to go up the hill into Exeter town again. He got into his car and sat with his fingers on the electric starter.

Martin! Old Friend! Eight days were still left before the Committee met again, eight days for golden kindness. He would distress Martin by no clumsy confession. He would just make her happy as she loved to be made happy.... Nevertheless. Nevertheless....

Was it Martin who failed him or he who failed Martin?

Incessant and insoluble dispute. Well, the thing now was to go to Martin.... And then the work!

He laughed suddenly.

"I'll take it out of the damned Commission. I'll make old Rumford Brown sit up."

He was astonished to find himself thinking of the affairs of the Commission with a lively interest and no trace of fatigue. He had had his change; he had taken his rest; he was equal to his task again already. He started his engine and steered his way past a van and a waiting cab.

"Fuel," he said.