

CHAPTER X

The remains of Henrietta Trefusis were interred in Highgate Cemetery the day before Christmas Eve. Three noblemen sent their carriages to the funeral, and the friends and clients of Mr. Jansenius, to a large number, attended in person. The bier was covered with a profusion of costly Bowers. The undertaker, instructed to spare no expense, provided long-tailed black horses, with black palls on their backs and black plumes upon their foreheads; coachmen decorated with scarves and jack-boots, black hammercloths, cloaks, and gloves, with many hired mourners, who, however, would have been instantly discharged had they presumed to betray emotion, or in any way overstep their function of walking beside the hearse with brass-tipped batons in their hands.

Among the genuine mourners were Mr. Jansenius, who burst into tears at the ceremony of casting earth on the coffin; the boy Arthur, who, preoccupied by the novelty of appearing in a long cloak at the head of a public procession, felt that he was not so sorry as he ought to be when he saw his papa cry; and a cousin who had once asked Henrietta to marry him, and who now, full of tragic reflections, was enjoying his despair intensely.

The rest whispered, whenever they could decently do so, about a strange omission in the arrangements. The husband of the deceased was absent. Members of the family and intimate friends were told by Daniel Jansenius that the widower had acted in a blackguard way, and that the Janseniuses did not care two-pence whether he came or stayed at home; that, but for the indecency of the thing, they were just as glad that he was keeping away. Others, who had no claim to be privately informed, made inquiries of the undertaker's foreman, who said he understood the gentleman objected to large funerals. Asked why, he said he supposed it was on the ground of expense. This being met by a remark that Mr. Trefusis was very wealthy, he added that he had been told so, but believed the money had not come from the lady; that people seldom cared to go to a great expense for a funeral unless they came into something good by the death; and that some parties the more they had the more they grugged. Before the funeral guests dispersed, the report spread by Mr. Jansenius's brother had got mixed with the views of the foreman, and had given rise to a story of Trefusis expressing joy at his wife's death with frightful oaths in her father's house whilst she lay dead there, and refusing to pay a farthing of her debts or funeral expenses.

Some days later, when gossip on the subject was subsiding, a fresh scandal revived it. A literary friend of Mr. Jansenius's helped him to compose an epitaph, and added to it a couple of pretty and touching stanzas, setting forth that Henrietta's character had been one of rare sweetness and virtue, and that her friends would never cease to sorrow for her loss. A tradesman who described himself as a "monumental mason" furnished a book of tomb designs, and Mr. Jansenius selected a highly ornamental one, and proposed to defray half the cost of its erection. Trefusis objected that the epitaph was untrue, and said that he did not see why tombstones should be privileged to publish false statements. It was reported that he had followed up his former misconduct by calling his father-in-law a liar, and that he had ordered a common tombstone from some cheap-jack at the East-end. He had, in fact, spoken contemptuously of the monumental tradesman as an "exploiter" of labor, and had asked a young working mason, a member of the International Association, to design a monument for the gratification of Jansenius.

The mason, with much pains and misgiving, produced an original design. Trefusis approved of it, and resolved to have it executed by the hands of the designer. He hired a sculptor's studio, purchased blocks of marble of the dimensions and quality described to him by the mason, and invited him to set to work forthwith.

Trefusis now encountered a difficulty. He wished to pay the mason the just value of his work, no more and no less. But this he could not ascertain. The only available standard was the market price, and this he rejected as being fixed by competition among capitalists who could only secure profit by obtaining from their workmen more products than they paid them for, and could only tempt customers by offering a share of the unpaid-for part of the products as a reduction in price. Thus he found that the system of withholding the indispensable materials for production and subsistence from the laborers, except on condition of their supporting an idle

class whilst accepting a lower standard of comfort for themselves than for that idle class, rendered the determination of just ratios of exchange, and consequently the practice of honest dealing, impossible. He had at last to ask the mason what he would consider fair payment for the execution of the design, though he knew that the man could no more solve the problem than he, and that, though he would certainly ask as much as he thought he could get, his demand must be limited by his poverty and by the competition of the monumental tradesman. Trefusis settled the matter by giving double what was asked, only imposing such conditions as were necessary to compel the mason to execute the work himself, and not make a profit by hiring other men at the market rate of wages to do it.

But the design was, to its author's astonishment, to be paid for separately. The mason, after hesitating a long time between two-pounds-ten and five pounds, was emboldened by a fellow-workman, who treated him to some hot whiskey and water, to name the larger sum. Trefusis paid the money at once, and then set himself to find out how much a similar design would have cost from the hands of an eminent Royal Academician. Happening to know a gentleman in this position, he consulted him, and was informed that the probable cost would be from five hundred to one thousand pounds. Trefusis expressed his opinion that the mason's charge was the more reasonable, somewhat to the indignation of his artist friend, who reminded him of the years which a Royal Academician has to spend in acquiring his skill. Trefusis mentioned that the apprenticeship of a mason was quite as long, twice as laborious, and not half so pleasant. The artist now began to find Trefusis's Socialistic views, with which he had previously fancied himself in sympathy, both odious and dangerous. He demanded whether nothing was to be allowed for genius. Trefusis warmly replied that genius cost its possessor nothing; that it was the inheritance of the whole race incidentally vested in a single individual, and that if that individual employed his monopoly of it to extort money from others, he deserved nothing better than hanging. The artist lost his temper, and suggested that if Trefusis could not feel that the prerogative of art was divine, perhaps he could understand that a painter was not such a fool as to design a tomb for five pounds when he might be painting a portrait for a thousand. Trefusis retorted that the fact of a man paying a thousand pounds for a portrait proved that he had not earned the money, and was therefore either a thief or a beggar. The common workman who sacrificed sixpence from his week's wages for a cheap photograph to present to his sweet heart, or a shilling for a pair of chromolithographic pictures or delft figures to place on his mantelboard, suffered greater privation for the sake of possessing a work of art than the great landlord or shareholder who paid a thousand pounds, which he was too rich to miss, for a portrait that, like Hogarth's Jack Sheppard, was only interesting to students of criminal physiognomy. A lively quarrel ensued, Trefusis denouncing the folly of artists in fancying themselves a priestly caste when they were obviously only the parasites and favored slaves of the moneyed classes, and his friend (temporarily his enemy) sneering bitterly at levellers who were for levelling down instead of levelling up. Finally, tired of disputing, and remorseful for their acrimony, they dined amicably together.

The monument was placed in Highgate Cemetery by a small band of workmen whom Trefusis found out of employment. It bore the following inscription:

THIS IS THE MONUMENT OF HENRIETTA JANSENIUS WHO WAS BORN ON THE 26TH JULY, 1856, MARRIED TO SIDNEY TREFUSIS ON THE 23RD AUGUST, 1875, AND WHO DIED ON THE 21ST DECEMBER IN THE SAME YEAR.

Mr. Jansenius took this as an insult to his daughter's memory, and, as the tomb was much smaller than many which had been erected in the cemetery by families to whom the Janseniuses claimed superiority, cited it as an example of the widower's meanness. But by other persons it was so much admired that Trefusis hoped it would ensure the prosperity of its designer. The contrary happened. When the mason attempted to return to his ordinary work he was informed that he had contravened trade usage, and that his former employers would have nothing more to say to him. On applying for advice and assistance to the trades-union of which he was a member he received the same reply, and was further reproached for treachery to his fellow-workmen. He returned to Trefusis to say that the tombstone job had ruined him. Trefusis, enraged, wrote an argumentative letter to the "Times," which was not inserted, a sarcastic one to the trades-union, which did no good, and a

fierce one to the employers, who threatened to take an action for libel. He had to content himself with setting the man to work again on mantelpieces and other decorative stone-work for use in house property on the Trefusis estate. In a year or two his liberal payments enabled the mason to save sufficient to start as an employer, in which capacity he soon began to grow rich, as he knew by experience exactly how much his workmen could be forced to do, and how little they could be forced to take. Shortly after this change in his circumstances he became an advocate of thrift, temperance, and steady industry, and quitted the International Association, of which he had been an enthusiastic supporter when dependent on his own skill and taste as a working mason.

During these occurrences Agatha's school-life ended. Her resolution to study hard during another term at the college had been formed, not for the sake of becoming learned, but that she might become more worthy of Smilash; and when she learned the truth about him from his own lips, the idea of returning to the scene of that humiliation became intolerable to her. She left under the impression that her heart was broken, for her smarting vanity, by the law of its own existence, would not perceive that it was the seat of the injury. So she bade Miss Wilson adieu; and the bee on the window pane was heard no more at Alton College.

The intelligence of Henrietta's death shocked her the more because she could not help being glad that the only other person who knew of her folly with regard to Smilash (himself excepted) was now silenced forever. This seemed to her a terrible discovery of her own depravity. Under its influence she became almost religious, and caused some anxiety about her health to her mother, who was puzzled by her unwonted seriousness, and, in particular, by her determination not to speak of the misconduct of Trefusis, which was now the prevailing topic of conversation in the family. She listened in silence to gossiping discussions of his desertion of his wife, his heartless indifference to her decease, his violence and bad language by her deathbed, his parsimony, his malicious opposition to the wishes of the Janseniuses, his cheap tombstone with the insulting epitaph, his association with common workmen and low demagogues, his suspected connection with a secret society for the assassination of the royal family and blowing up of the army, his atheistic denial, in a pamphlet addressed to the clergy, of a statement by the Archbishop of Canterbury that spiritual aid alone could improve the condition of the poor in the East-end of London, and the crowning disgrace of his trial for seditious libel at the Old Bailey, where he was condemned to six months' imprisonment; a penalty from which he was rescued by the ingenuity of his counsel, who discovered a flaw in the indictment, and succeeded, at great cost to Trefusis, in getting the sentence quashed. Agatha at last got tired of hearing of his misdeeds. She believed him to be heartless, selfish, and misguided, but she knew that he was not the loud, coarse, sensual, and ignorant brawler most of her mother's gossips supposed him to be. She even felt, in spite of herself, an emotion of gratitude to the few who ventured to defend him.

Preparation for her first season helped her to forget her misadventure. She "came out" in due time, and an extremely dull season she found it. So much so, that she sometimes asked herself whether she should ever be happy again. At the college there had been good fellowship, fun, rules, and duties which were a source of strength when observed and a source of delicious excitement when violated, freedom from ceremony, toffee making, flights on the banisters, and appreciative audiences for the soldier in the chimney.

In society there were silly conversations lasting half a minute, cool acquaintanceships founded on such half-minutes, general reciprocity of suspicion, overcrowding, insufficient ventilation, bad music badly executed, late hours, unwholesome food, intoxicating liquors, jealous competition in useless expenditure, husband-hunting, flirting, dancing, theatres, and concerts. The last three, which Agatha liked, helped to make the contrast between Alton and London tolerable to her, but they had their drawbacks, for good partners at the dances, and good performances at the spiritless opera and concerts, were disappointingly scarce. Flirting she could not endure; she drove men away when they became tender, seeing in them the falsehood of Smilash without his wit. She was considered rude by the younger gentlemen of her circle. They discussed her bad manners among themselves, and agreed to punish her by not asking her to dance. She thus got rid, without knowing why, of the attentions she cared for least (she retained a schoolgirl's cruel contempt for "boys"), and enjoyed herself as best she could with such of the older or more sensible men as were not intolerant of girls.

At best the year was the least happy she had ever spent. She repeatedly alarmed her mother by broaching projects of becoming a hospital nurse, a public singer, or an actress. These projects led to some desultory studies. In order to qualify herself as a nurse she read a handbook of physiology, which Mrs. Wylie thought so improper a subject for a young lady that she went in tears to beg Mrs. Jansenius to remonstrate with her unruly girl. Mrs. Jansenius, better advised, was of opinion that the more a woman knew the more wisely she was likely to act, and that Agatha would soon drop the physiology of her own accord. This proved true. Agatha, having finished her book by dint of extensive skipping, proceeded to study pathology from a volume of clinical lectures. Finding her own sensations exactly like those described in the book as symptoms of the direst diseases, she put it by in alarm, and took up a novel, which was free from the fault she had found in the lectures, inasmuch as none of the emotions it described in the least resembled any she had ever experienced.

After a brief interval, she consulted a fashionable teacher of singing as to whether her voice was strong enough for the operatic stage. He recommended her to study with him for six years, assuring her that at the end of that period--if she followed his directions--she should be the greatest singer in the world. To this there was, in her mind, the conclusive objection that in six years she should be an old woman. So she resolved to try privately whether she could not get on more quickly by herself. Meanwhile, with a view to the drama in case her operatic scheme should fail, she took lessons in elocution and gymnastics. Practice in these improved her health and spirits so much that her previous aspirations seemed too limited. She tried her hand at all the arts in succession, but was too discouraged by the weakness of her first attempts to persevere. She knew that as a general rule there are feeble and ridiculous beginnings to all excellence, but she never applied general rules to her own case, still thinking of herself as an exception to them, just as she had done when she romanced about Smilash. The illusions of adolescence were thick upon her.

Meanwhile her progress was creating anxieties in which she had no share. Her paroxysms of exhilaration, followed by a gnawing sense of failure and uselessness, were known to her mother only as "wildness" and "low spirits," to be combated by needlework as a sedative, or beef tea as a stimulant. Mrs. Wylie had learnt by rote that the whole duty of a lady is to be graceful, charitable, helpful, modest, and disinterested whilst awaiting passively whatever lot these virtues may induce. But she had learnt by experience that a lady's business in society is to get married, and that virtues and accomplishments alike are important only as attractions to eligible bachelors. As this truth is shameful, young ladies are left for a year or two to find it out for themselves; it is seldom explicitly conveyed to them at their entry into society. Hence they often throw away capital bargains in their first season, and are compelled to offer themselves at greatly reduced prices subsequently, when their attractions begin to stale. This was the fate which Mrs. Wylie, warned by Mrs. Jansenius, feared for Agatha, who, time after time when a callow gentleman of wealth and position was introduced to her, drove him brusquely away as soon as he ventured to hint that

his affections were concerned in their acquaintanceship. The anxious mother had to console herself with the fact that her daughter drove away the ineligible as ruthlessly as the eligible, formed no unworldly attachments, was still very young, and would grow less coy as she advanced in years and in what Mrs. Jansenius called sense.

But as the seasons went by it remained questionable whether Agatha was the more to be congratulated on having begun life after leaving school or Henrietta on having finished it.