## CHAPTER XV

Erskine soon found plenty of themes for his newly begotten cynicism. Gertrude's manner towards him softened so much that he, believing her heart given to his rival, concluded that she was tempting him to make a proposal which she had no intention of accepting. Sir Charles, to whom he told what he had overheard in the avenue, professed sympathy, but was evidently pleased to learn that there was nothing serious in the attentions Trefusis paid to Agatha. Erskine wrote three bitter sonnets on hollow friendship and showed them to Sir Charles, who, failing to apply them to himself, praised them highly and showed them to Trefusis without asking the author's permission. Trefusis remarked that in a corrupt society expressions of dissatisfaction were always creditable to a writer's sensibility; but he did not say much in praise of the verse.

"Why has he taken to writing in this vein?" he said. "Has he been disappointed in any way of late? Has he proposed to Miss Lindsay and been rejected?"

"No," said Sir Charles surprised by this blunt reference to a subject they had never before discussed. "He does not intend to propose to Miss Lindsay."

"But he did intend to."

"He certainly did, but he has given up the idea."

"Why?" said Trefusis, apparently disapproving strongly of the renunciation.

Sir Charles shrugged his shoulders and did not reply.

"I am sorry to hear it. I wish you could induce him to change his mind. He is a nice fellow, with enough to live on comfortably, whilst he is yet what is called a poor man, so that she could feel perfectly disinterested in marrying him. It will do her good to marry without making a pecuniary profit by it; she will respect herself the more afterwards, and will neither want bread and butter nor be ashamed of her husband's origin, in spite of having married for love alone. Make a match of it if you can. I take an interest in the girl; she has good instincts."

Sir Charles's suspicion that Trefusis was really paying court to Agatha returned after this conversation, which he repeated to Erskine, who, much annoyed because his poems had been shown to a reader of Blue Books, thought it only a blind for Trefusis's design upon Gertrude. Sir Charles pooh-poohed this view, and the two friends were sharp with one another in discussing it. After dinner, when the ladies had left them, Sir Charles, repentant and cordial, urged Erskine to speak to Gertrude without troubling himself as to the sincerity of Trefusis. But Erskine, knowing himself ill able to brook a refusal, was loth to expose himself to o

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"If you had heard the tone of her voice when she asked him whether he was in earnest, you would not talk to me like this," he said despondently. "I wish he had never come here."

"Well, that, at least, was no fault of mine, my dear fellow," said Sir Charles. "He came among us against my will. And now that he appears to have been in the right--legally--about the field, it would look like spite if I cut him. Besides, he really isn't a bad man if he would only let the women alone."

"If he trifles with Miss Lindsay, I shall ask him to cross the Channel, and have a shot at him."

"I don't think he'd go," said Sir Charles dubiously. "If I were you, I would try my luck with Gertrude at once. In spite of what you heard, I don't believe she would marry a man of his origin. His money gives him an

advantage, certainly, but Gertrude has sent richer men to the rightabout."

"Let the fellow have fair play," said Erskine. "I may be wrong, of course; all men are liable to err in judging themselves, but I think I could make her happier than he can."

Sir Charles was not so sure of that, but he cheerfully responded, "Certainly. He is not the man for her at all, and you are. He knows it, too."

"Hmf!" muttered Erskine, rising dejectedly. "Let's go upstairs."

"By-the-bye, we are to call on him to-morrow, to go through his house, and his collection of photographs. Photographs! Ha, ha" Damn his house!" said Erskine.

Next day they went together to Sallust's House. It stood in the midst of an acre of land, waste except a little kitchen garden at the rear. The lodge at the entrance was uninhabited, and the gates stood open, with dust and fallen leaves heaped up against them. Free ingress had thus been afforded to two stray ponies, a goat, and a tramp, who lay asleep in the grass. His wife sat near, watching him.

"I have a mind to turn back," said Sir Charles, looking about him in disgust. " The place is scandalously neglected. Look at that rascal asleep within full view of the windows."

"I admire his cheek," said Erskine. "Nice pair of ponies, too."

Sallust's House was square and painted cinnamon color. Beneath the cornice was a yellow frieze with figures of dancing children, imitated from the works of Donatello, and very unskilfully executed. There was a meagre portico of four columns, painted red, and a plain pediment, painted yellow. The colors, meant to match those of the walls, contrasted disagreeably with them, having been applied more recently, apparently by a color-blind artist. The door beneath the portico stood open. Sir Charles rang the bell, and an elderly woman answered it; but before they could address her, Trefusis appeared, clad in a painter's jacket of white jean. Following him in, they found that the house was a hollow square, enclosing a courtyard with a bath sunk in the middle, and a fountain in the centre of the bath. The courtyard, formerly open to the sky, was now roofed in with dusty glass; the nymph that had once poured out the water of the fountain was barren and mutilated; and the bath was partly covered in with loose boards, the exposed part accommodating a heap of coals in one corner, a heap of potatoes in another, a beer barrel, some old carpets, a tarpaulin, and a broken canoe. The marble pavement extended to the outer walls of the house, and was roofed in at the sides by the upper stories,which were supported by fluted stone columns, much stained and chipped. The staircase, towards which Trefusis led his visitors, was a broad one at the end opposite the door, and gave access to a gallery leading to the upper rooms.

"This house was built in 11780 by an ancestor of my mother," said Trefusis. "He passed for a man of exquisite taste. He wished the place to be maintained forever--he actually used that expression in his will--as the family seat, and he collected a fine library here, which I found useful, as all the books came into my hands in good condition, most of them with the leaves uncut. Some people prize uncut copies of old editions; a dealer gave me three hundred and fifty pounds for a lot of them. I came into possession of a number of family fetishes--heirlooms, as they are called. There was a sword that one of my forbears wore at Edgehill and other battles in Charles the First's time. We fought on the wrong side, of course, but the sword fetched thirty-five shillings nevertheless. You will hardly believe that I was offered one hundred and fifty pounds for a gold cup worth about twenty-five, merely because Queen Elizabeth once drank from it. This is my study. It was designed for a banqueting hall."

They entered a room as long as the wall of the house, pierced on one side by four tall windows, between which square pillars, with Corinthian capitals supporting the cornice, were half sunk in the wall. There were

similar pillars on the opposite side, but between them, instead of windows, were arched niches in which stood life-size plaster statues, chipped, broken, and defaced in an extraordinary fashion. The flooring, of diagonally set narrow boards, was uncarpeted and unpolished. The ceiling was adorned with frescoes, which at once excited Sir Charles's interest, and he noted with indignation that a large portion of the painting at the northern end had been destroyed and some glass roofing inserted. In another place bolts had been driven in to support the ropes of a trapeze and a few other pieces of gymnastic apparatus. The walls were whitewashed, and at about four feet from the ground a dark band appeared, produced by pencil memoranda and little sketches scribbled on the whitewash. One end of the apartment was unfurnished, except by the gymnastic apparatus, a photographer's camera, a ladder in the corner, and a common deal table with oil cans and paint pots upon it. At the other end a comparatively luxurious show was made by a large bookcase, an elaborate combination of bureau and writing desk, a rack with a rifle, a set of foils, and an umbrella in it, several folio albums on a table, some comfortable chairs and sofas, and a thick carpet under foot. Close by, and seeming much out of place, was a carpenter's bench with the usual implements and a number of boards of various thicknesses.

"This is a sort of comfort beyond the reach of any but a rich man," said Trefusis, turning and surprising his visitors in the act of exchanging glances of astonishment at his taste. " I keep a drawing-room of the usual kind for receiving strangers with whom it is necessary to be conventional, but I never enter it except on such occasions. What do you think of this for a study?"

"On my soul, Trefusis, I think you are mad," said Sir Charles. "The place looks as if it had stood a siege. How did you manage to break the statues and chip the walls so outrageously?"

Trefusis took a newspaper from the table and said, "Listen to this:

'In spite of the unfavorable nature of the weather, the sport of the Emperor and his guests in Styria has been successful. In three days 52 chamois and 79 stags and deer fell to 19 single-barrelled rifles, the Emperor allowing no more on this occasion.'

"I share the Emperor's delight in shooting, but I am no butcher, and do not need the royal relish of blood to my sport. And I do not share my ancestors' taste in statuary. Hence--" Here Trefusis opened a drawer, took out a pistol, and fired at the Hebe in the farthest niche.

"Well done!" said Erskine coolly, as the last fragment of Hebe's head crumbled at the touch of the bullet.

"Very fruitlessly done," said Trefusis. "I am a good shot, but of what use is it to me? None. I once met a gamekeeper who was a Methodist. He was a most eloquent speaker, but A bad shot. If he could have swapped talents with me I would have given him ten thousand pounds to boot willingly, although he would have profited as much as I by the exchange alone. I have no more desire or need to be a good shot than to be king of England, or owner of a Derby winner, or anything else equally ridiculous, and yet I never missed my aim in my life--thank blind fortune for nothing!"

"King of England!" said Erskine, with a scornful laugh, to show Trefusis that other people were as liberty-loving as he. "Is it not absurd to hear a nation boasting of its freedom and tolerating a king?"

"Oh, hang your republicanism, Chester!" said Sir Charles, who privately held a low opinion of the political side of the Patriot Martyrs.

"I won't he put down on that point," said Erskine. "I admire a man that kills a king. You will agree with me there, Trefusis, won't you?"

"Certainly not," said Trefusis. "A king nowadays is only a dummy put up to draw your fire off the real oppressors of society, and the fraction of his salary that he can spend as he likes is usually far too small for his

risk, his trouble, and the condition of personal slavery to which he is reduced. What private man in England is worse off than the constitutional monarch? We deny him all privacy; he may not marry whom he chooses, consort with whom he prefers, dress according to his taste, or live where he pleases. I don't believe he may even eat or drink what he likes best; a taste for tripe and onions on his part would provoke a remonstrance from the Privy Council. We dictate everything except his thoughts and dreams, and even these he must keep to himself if they are not suitable, in our opinion, to his condition. The work we impose on him has all the hardship of mere task work; it is unfruitful, incessant, monotonous, and has to be transacted for the most part with nervous bores. We make his kingdom a treadmill to him, and drive him to and fro on the face of it. Finally, having taken everything else that men prize from him, we fall upon his character, and that of every person to whom he ventures to show favor. We impose enormous expenses on him, stint him, and then rail at his parsimony. We use him as I use those statues--stick him up in the place of honor for our greater convenience in disfiguring and abusing him. We send him forth through our crowded cities, proclaiming that he is the source of all good and evil in the nation, and he, knowing that many people believe it, knowing that it is a lie, and that he is powerless to shorten the working day by one hour, raise wages one penny, or annul the smallest criminal sentence, however unjust it may seem to him; knowing that every miner in the kingdom can manufacture dynamite, and that revolvers are sold for seven and sixpence apiece; knowing that he is not bullet proof, and that every king in Europe has been shot at in the streets; he must smile and bow and maintain an expression of gracious enjoyment whilst the mayor and corporation inflict upon him the twaddling address he has heard a thousand times before. I do not ask you to be loyal, Erskine; but I expect you, in common humanity, to sympathize with the chief figure in the pageant, who is no more accountable for the manifold evils and abominations that exist in his realm than the Lord Mayor is accountable for the thefts of the pickpockets who follow his show on the ninth of November."

Sir Charles laughed at the trouble Trefusis took to prove his case, and said soothingly, "My dear fellow, kings are used to it, and expect it, and like it."

"And probably do not see themselves as I see them, any more than common people do," assented Trefusis.

"What an exquisite face!" exclaimed Erskine suddenly, catching sight of a photograph in a rich gold and coral frame on a miniature easel draped with ruby velvet. Trefusis turned quickly, so evidently gratified that Sir Charles hastened to say, "Charming!" Then, looking at the portrait, he added, as if a little startled, "It certainly is an extraordinarily attractive face."

"Years ago," said Trefusis, "when I saw that face for the first time, I felt as you feel now."

Silence ensued, the two visitors looking at the portrait, Trefusis looking at them.

"Curious style of beauty," said Sir Charles at last, not quite so assuredly as before.

Trefusis laughed unpleasantly. "Do you recognize the artist--the enthusiastic amateur--in her?" he said, opening another drawer and taking out a bundle of drawings, which he handed to be examined.

"Very clever. Very clever indeed," said Sir Charles. "I should like to meet the lady."

"I have often been on the point of burning them," said Trefusis; "but there they are, and there they are likely to remain. The portrait has been much admired."

"Can you give us an introduction to the original, old fellow?" said Erskine.

"No, happily. She is dead."

Disagreeably shocked, they looked at him for a moment with aversion. Then Erskine, turning with pity and

disappointment to the picture, said, "Poor girl! Was she married?"

"Yes. To me."

"Mrs. Trefusis!" exclaimed Sir Charles. "Ah! Dear me!"

Erskine, with proof before him that it was possible for a beautiful girl to accept Trefusis, said nothing.

"I keep her portrait constantly before me to correct my natural amativeness. I fell in love with her and married her. I have fallen in love once or twice since but a glance at my lost Hetty has cured me of the slightest inclination to marry."

Sir Charles did not reply. It occurred to him that Lady Brandon's portrait, if nothing else were left of her, might be useful in the same way.

"Come, you will marry again one of these days," said Erskine, in a forced tone of encouragement.

"It is possible. Men should marry, especially rich men. But I assure you I have no present intention of doing so."

Erskine's color deepened, and he moved away to the table where the albums lay.

"This is the collection of photographs I spoke of," said Trefusis, following him and opening one of the books. "I took many of them myself under great difficulties with regard to light--the only difficulty that money could not always remove. This is a view of my father's house--or rather one of his houses. It cost seventy-five thousand pounds."

"Very handsome indeed," said Sir Charles, secretly disgusted at being invited to admire a photograph, such as house agents exhibit, of a vulgarly designed country house, merely because it had cost seventy-five thousand pounds. The figures were actually written beneath the picture.

"This is the drawing-room, and this one of the best bedrooms. In the right-hand corner of the mount you will see a note of the cost of the furniture, fittings, napery, and so forth. They were of the most luxurious description."

"Very interesting," said Sir Charles, hardly disguising the irony of the comment.

"Here is a view--this is the first of my own attempts--of the apartment of one of the under servants. It is comfortable and spacious, and solidly furnished."

"So I perceive."

"These are the stables. Are they not handsome?"

"Palatial. Quite palatial."

"There is every luxury that a horse could desire, including plenty of valets to wait on him. You are noting the figures, I hope. There is the cost of the building and the expenditure per horse per annum."

"I see."

"Here is the exterior of a house. What do you think of it?"

"It is rather picturesque in its dilapidation."

"Picturesque! Would you like to live in it?"

"No," said Erskine. "I don't see anything very picturesque about it. What induced you to photograph such a wretched old rookery?"

"Here is a view of the best room in it. Photography gives you a fair idea of the broken flooring and patched windows, but you must imagine the dirt and the odor of the place. Some of the stains are weather stains, others came from smoke and filth. The landlord of the house holds it from a peer and lets it out in tenements. Three families occupied that room when I photographed it. You will see by the figures in the corner that it is more profitable to the landlord than an average house in Mayfair. Here is the cellar, let to a family for one and sixpence a week, and considered a bargain. The sun never shines there, of course. I took it by artificial light. You may add to the rent the cost of enough bad beer to make the tenant insensible to the filth of the place. Beer is the chloroform that enables the laborer to endure the severe operation of living; that is why we can always assure one another over our wine that the rascal's misery is due to his habit of drinking. We are down on him for it, because, if he could bear his life without beer, we should save his beer-money--get him for lower wages. In short, we should be richer and he soberer. Here is the yard; the arrangements are indescribable. Seven of the inhabitants of that house had worked for years in my father's mill. That is, they had created a considerable part of the vast sums of money for drawing your attention to which you were disgusted with me just now."

"Not at all," said Sir Charles faintly.

"You can see how their condition contrasts with that of my father's horses. The seven men to whom I have alluded, with three hundred others, were thrown destitute upon the streets by this." (Here he turned over a leaf and displayed a photograph of an elaborate machine.) "It enabled my father to dispense with their services, and to replace them by a handful of women and children. He had bought the patent of the machine for fifty pounds from the inventor, who was almost ruined by the expenses of his ingenuity, and would have sacrificed anything for a handful of ready money. Here is a portrait of my father in his masonic insignia. He believed that freemasons generally get on in the world, and as the main object of his life was to get on, he joined them, and wanted me to do the same. But I object to pretended secret societies and hocus pocus, and would not. You see what he was--a portly, pushing, egotistical tradesman. Mark the successful man, the merchant prince with argosies on every sea, the employer of thousands of hands, the munificent contributor to public charities, the churchwarden, the member of parliament, and the generous patron of his relatives his self-approbation struggling with the instinctive sense of baseness in the money-hunter, the ignorant and greedy filcher of the labor of others, the seller of his own mind and manhood for luxuries and delicacies that he was too lowlived to enjoy, and for the society of people who made him feel his inferiority at every turn."

"And the man to whom you owe everything you possess," said Erskine boldly.

"I possess very little. Everything he left me, except a few pictures, I spent long ago, and even that was made by his slaves and not by him. My wealth comes day by day fresh from the labor of the wretches who live in the dens I have just shown you, or of a few aristocrats of labor who are within ten shillings a week of being worse off. However, there is some excuse for my father. Once, at an election riot, I got into a free fight. I am a peaceful man, but as I had either to fight or be knocked down and trampled upon, I exchanged blows with men who were perhaps as peacefully disposed as I. My father, launched into a free competition (free in the sense that the fight is free: that is, lawless)--my father had to choose between being a slave himself and enslaving others. He chose the latter, and as he was applauded and made much of for succeeding, who dare blame him? Not I. Besides, he did something to destroy the anarchy that enabled him to plunder society with impunity. He furnished me, its enemy, with the powerful weapon of a large fortune. Thus our system of organizing industry sometimes hatches the eggs from which its destroyers break. Does Lady Brandon wear

much lace?"

"I--No; that is--How the deuce dO I know, Trefusis? What an extraordinary question!"

"This is a photograph of a lace school. It was a filthy room, twelve feet square. It was paved with brick, and the children were not allowed to wear their boots, lest the lace should get muddy. However, as there were twenty of them working there for fifteen hours a day--all girls--they did not suffer much from cold. They were pretty tightly packed--may be still, for aught I know. They brought three or four shillings a week sometimes to their fond parents; and they were very quick-fingered little creatures, and stuck intensely to their work, as the overseer always hit them when they looked up or--"

"Trefusis," said Sir Charles, turning away from the table, "I beg your pardon, but I have no appetite for horrors. You really must not ask me to go through your collection. It is no doubt very interesting, but I can't stand it. Have you nothing pleasant to entertain me with?"

"Pooh! you are squeamish. However, as you are a novice, let us put off the rest until you are seasoned. The pictures are not all horrible. Each book refers to a different country. That one contains illustrations of modern civilization in Germany, for instance. That one is France; that, British India. Here you have the United States of America, home of liberty, theatre of manhood suffrage, kingless and lordless land of Protection, Republicanism, and the realized Radical Programme, where all the black chattel slaves were turned into wage-slaves (like my father's white fellows) at a cost of 800,000 lives and wealth incalculable. You and I are paupers in comparison with the great capitalists of that country, where the laborers fight for bones with the Chinamen, like dogs. Some of these great men presented me with photographs of their yachts and palaces, not anticipating the use to which I would put them. Here are some portraits that will not harrow your feelings. This is my mother, a woman of good family, every inch a lady. Here is a Lancashire lass, the daughter of a common pitman. She has exactly the same physical characteristics as my well-born mother--the same small head, delicate features, and so forth; they might be sisters. This villainous-looking pair might be twin brothers, except that there is a trace of good humor about the one to the right. The good-humored one is a bargee on the Lyvern Canal. The other is one of the senior noblemen of the British Peerage. They illustrate the fact that Nature, even when perverted by generations of famine fever, ignores the distinctions we set up between men. This group of men and women, all tolerably intelligent and thoughtful looking, are so-called enemies of society--Nihilists, Anarchists, Communards, members of the International,and so on. These other poor devils, worried, stiff, strumous, awkward, vapid, and rather coarse, with here and there a passably pretty woman, are European kings, queens, grand-dukes, and the like. Here are ship-captains, criminals, poets, men of science, peers, peasants, political economists, and representatives of dozens of degrees. The object of the collection is to illustrate the natural inequality of man, and the failure of our artificial inequality to correspond with it."

"It seems to me a sort of infernal collection for the upsetting of people's ideas," said Erskine. "You ought to label it 'A Portfolio of Paradoxes.'"

"In a rational state of society they would be paradoxes; but now the time gives them proof--like Hamlet's paradox. It is, however, a collection of facts; and I will give no fanciful name to it. You dislike figures, don't you?"

"Unless they are by Phidias, yes."

"Here are a few, not by Phidias. This is the balance sheet of an attempt I made some years ago to carry out the idea of an International Association of Laborers--commonly known as THE International--or union of all workmen throughout the world in defence of the interests of labor. You see the result. Expenditure, four thousand five hundred pounds. Subscriptions received from working-men, twenty-two pounds seven and ten pence halfpenny. The British workmen showed their sense of my efforts to emancipate them by accusing me of making a good thing out of the Association for my own pocket, and by mobbing and stoning me twice. I

now help them only when they show some disposition to help themselves. I occupy myself partly in working out a scheme for the reorganization of industry, and partly in attacking my own class, women and all, as I am attacking you."

"There is little use in attacking us, I fear," said Sir Charles.

"Great use," said Trefusis confidently. "You have a very different opinion of our boasted civilization now from that which you held when I broke your wall down and invited those Land Nationalization zealots to march across your pleasure ground. You have seen in my album something you had not seen an hour ago, and you are consequently not quite the same man you were an hour ago. My pictures stick in the mind longer than your scratchy etchings, or the leaden things in which you fancy you see tender harmonies in gray. Erskine's next drama may be about liberty, but its Patriot Martyrs will have something better to do than spout balderdash against figure-head kings who in all their lives never secretly plotted as much dastardly meanness, greed, cruelty, and tyranny as is openly voted for in London by every half-yearly meeting of dividend-consuming vermin whose miserable wage-slaves drudge sixteen hours out of the twenty-four."

"What is going to be the end of it all?" said Sir Charles, a little dazed.

"Socialism or Smash. Socialism if the race has at last evolved the faculty of coordinating the functions of a society too crowded and complex to be worked any longer on the old haphazard private-property system. Unless we reorganize our society socialistically--humanly a most arduous and magnificent enterprise, economically a most simple and sound one--Free Trade by itself will ruin England, and I will tell you exactly how. When my father made his fortune we had the start of all other nations in the organization of our industry and in our access to iron and coal. Other nations bought our products for less than they must have spent to raise them at home, and yet for so much more than they cost us, that profits rolled in Atlantic waves upon our capitalists. When the workers, by their trades-unions, demanded a share of the luck in the form of advanced wages, it paid better to give them the little they dared to ask than to stop gold-gathering to fight and crush them. But now our customers have set up in their own countries improved copies of our industrial organization, and have discovered places where iron and coal are even handier than they are by this time in England. They produce for themselves, or buy elsewhere, what they formerly bought from us. Our profits are vanishing, our machinery is standing idle, our workmen are locked out. It pays now to stop the mills and fight and crush the unions when the men strike, no longer for an advance, but against a reduction. Now that these unions are beaten, helpless, and drifting to bankruptcy as the proportion of unemployed men in their ranks becomes greater, they are being petted and made much of by our class; an infallible sign that they are making no further progress in their duty of destroying us. The small capitalists are left stranded by the ebb; the big ones will follow the tide across the water, and rebuild their factories where steam power, water power, labor power, and transport are now cheaper than in England, where they used to be cheapest. The workers will emigrate in pursuit of the factory, but they will multiply faster than they emigrate, and be told that their own exorbitant demand for wages is driving capital abroad, and must continue to do so whilst there is a Chinaman or a Hindoo unemployed to underbid them. As the British factories are shut up, they will be replaced by villas; the manufacturing districts will become fashionable resorts for capitalists living on the interest of foreign investments; the farms and sheep runs will be cleared for deer forests. All products that can in the nature of things be manufactured elsewhere than where they are consumed will be imported in payment of deer-forest rents from foreign sportsmen, or of dividends due to shareholders resident in England, but holding shares in companies abroad, and these imports will not be paid for by ex ports, because rent and interest are not paid for at all--a fact which the Free Traders do not yet see, or at any rate do not mention, although it is the key to the whole mystery of their opponents. The cry for Protection will become wild, but no one will dare resort to a demonstrably absurd measure that must raise prices before it raises wages, and that has everywhere failed to benefit the worker. There will be no employment for anyone except in doing things that must be done on the spot, such as unpacking and distributing the imports, ministering to the proprietors as domestic servants, or by acting, preaching, paving, lighting, housebuilding, and the rest; and some of these, as the capitalist comes to regard ostentation as vulgar, and to enjoy a simpler life, will employ fewer and fewer people. A vast

proletariat, beginning with a nucleus of those formerly employed in export trades, with their multiplying progeny, will be out of employment permanently. They will demand access to the land and machinery to produce for themselves. They will be refused. They will break a few windows and be dispersed with a warning to their leaders. They will burn a few houses and murder a policeman or two, and then an example will be made of the warned. They will revolt, and be shot down with machine-guns--emigrated--exterminated anyhow and everyhow; for the proprietary classes have no idea of any other means of dealing with the full claims of labor. You yourself, though you would give fifty pounds to Jansenius's emigration fund readily enough, would call for the police, the military, and the Riot Act, if the people came to Brandon Beeches and bade you turn out and work for your living with the rest. Well, the superfluous proletariat destroyed, there will remain a population of capitalists living on gratuitous imports and served by a disaffected retinue. One day the gratuitous imports will stop in consequence of the occurrence abroad of revolution and repudiation, fall in the rate of interest, purchase of industries by governments for lump sums, not reinvestable, or what not. Our capitalist community is then thrown on the remains of the last dividend, which it consumes long before it can rehabilitate its extinct machinery of production in order to support itself with its own hands. Horses, dogs, cats, rats, blackberries, mushrooms, and cannibalism only postpone--"

"Ha! ha! ha!" shouted Sir Charles. "On my honor, I thought you were serious at first, Trefusis. Come, confess, old chap; it's all a fad of yours. I half suspected you of being a bit of a crank." And he winked at Erskine.

"What I have described to you is the inevitable outcome of our present Free Trade policy without Socialism. The theory of Free Trade is only applicable to systems of exchange, not to systems of spoliation. Our system is one of spoliation, and if we don't abandon it, we must either return to Protection or go to smash by the road I have just mapped. Now, sooner than let the Protectionists triumph, the Cobden Club itself would blow the gaff and point out to the workers that Protection only means compelling the proprietors of England to employ slaves resident in England and therefore presumably--though by no means necessarily--Englishmen. This would open the eyes of the nation at last to the fact that England is not their property. Once let them understand that and they would soon make it so. When England is made the property of its inhabitants collectively, England becomes socialistic. Artificial inequality will vanish then before real freedom of contract; freedom of competition, or unhampered emulation, will keep us moving ahead; and Free Trade will fulfil its promises at last."

"And the idlers and loafers," said Erskine. "What of them?"

"You and I, in fact," said Trefusis, "die of starvation, I suppose, unless we choose to work, or unless they give us a little out-door relief in consideration of our bad bringing-up."

"Do you mean that they will plunder us?" said Sir Charles.

"I mean that they will make us stop plundering them. If they hesitate to strip us naked, or to cut our throats if we offer them the smallest resistance, they will show us more mercy than we ever showed them. Consider what we have done to get our rents in Ireland and Scotland, and our dividends in Egypt, if you have already forgotten my photographs and their lesson in our atrocities at home. Why, man, we murder the great mass of these toilers with overwork and hardship; their average lifetime is not half as long as ours. Human nature is the same in them as in us. If we resist them, and succeed in restoring order, as we call it, we will punish them mercilessly for their insubordination, as we did in Paris in 1871, where, by-the-bye, we taught them the folly of giving their enemies quarter. If they beat us, we shall catch it, and serve us right. Far better turn honest at once and avert bloodshed. Eh, Erskine?"

Erskine was considering what reply he should make, when Trefusis disconcerted him by ringing a bell. Presently the elderly woman appeared, pushing before her an oblong table mounted on wheels, like a barrow.

"Thank you," said Trefusis, and dismissed her. "Here is some good wine, some good water, some good fruit,

and some good bread. I know that you cling to wine as to a good familiar creature. As for me, I make no distinction between it and other vegetable poisons. I abstain from them all. Water for serenity, wine for excitement. I, having boiling springs of excitement within myself, am never at a loss for it, and have only to seek serenity. However," (here he drew a cork), "a generous goblet of this will make you feel like gods for half an hour at least. Shall we drink to your conversion to Socialism?"

Sir Charles shook his head.

"Come, Mr. Donovan Brown, the great artist, is a Socialist, and why should not you be one?"

"Donovan Brown!" exclaimed Sir Charles with interest. "Is it possible? Do you know him personally?"

"Here are several letters from him. You may read them; the mere autograph of such a man is interesting."

Sir Charles took the letters and read them earnestly, Erskine reading over his shoulder.

"I most cordially agree with everything he says here," said Sir Charles. "It is quite true, quite true."

"Of course you agree with us. Donovan Brown's eminence as an artist has gained me one recruit, and yours as a baronet will gain me some more."

"But--"

"But what?" said Trefusis, deftly opening one of the albums at a photograph of a loathsome room.

"You are against that, are you not? Donovan Brown is against it, and I am against it. You may disagree with us in everything else, but there you are at one with us. Is it not so?"

"But that may be the result of drunkenness, improvidence, or--"

"My father's income was fifty times as great as that of Donovan Brown. Do you believe that Donovan Brown is fifty times as drunken and improvident as my father was?"

"Certainly not. I do not deny that there is much in what you urge. Still, you ask me to take a rather important step."

"Not a bit of it. I don't ask you to subscribe to, join, or in any way pledge yourself to any society or conspiracy whatsoever. I only want your name for private mention to cowards who think Socialism right, but will not say so because they do not think it respectable. They will not be ashamed of their convictions when they learn that a baronet shares them. Socialism offers you something already, you see; a good use for your hitherto useless title."

Sir Charles colored a little, conscious that the example of his favorite painter had influenced him more than his own conviction or the arguments of Trefusis.

"What do you think, Chester?" he said. "Will you join?"

"Erskine is already committed to the cause of liberty by his published writings," said Trefusis. "Three of the pamphlets on that shelf contain quotations from 'The Patriot Martyrs.'"

Erskine blushed, flattered by being quoted; an attention that had been shown him only once before, and then by a reviewer with the object of proving that the Patriot Martyrs were slovenly in their grammar.

"Come!" said Trefusis. "Shall I write to Donovan Brown that his letters have gained the cordial assent and sympathy of Sir Charles Brandon?"

"Certainly, certainly. That is, if my unknown name would be of the least interest to him."

"Good," said Trefusis, filling his glass with water. "Erskine, let us drink to our brother Social Democrat."

Erskine laughed loudly, but not heartily. "What an ass you are, Brandon!" he said. "You, with a large landed estate, and bags of gold invested in railways, calling yourself a Social Democrat! Are you going to sell out and distribute--to sell all that thou hast and give to the poor?"

"Not a penny," replied Trefusis for him promptly. "A man cannot be a Christian in this country. I have tried it and found it impossible both in law and in fact. I am a capitalist and a landholder. I have railway shares, mining shares, building shares, bank shares, and stock of most kinds; and a great trouble they are to me. But these shares do not represent wealth actually in existence; they are a mortgage on the labor of unborn generations of laborers, who must work to keep me and mine in idleness and luxury. If I sold them, would the mortgage be cancelled and the unborn generations released from its thrall? No. It would only pass into the hands of some other capitalist, and the working class would be no better off for my self-sacrifice. Sir Charles cannot obey the command of Christ; I defy him to do it. Let him give his land for a public park; only the richer classes will have leisure to enjoy it. Plant it at the very doors of the poor, so that they may at last breathe its air, and it will raise the value of the neighboring houses and drive the poor away. Let him endow a school for the poor, like Eton or Christ's Hospital, and the rich will take it for their own children as they do in the two instances I have named. Sir Charles does not want to minister to poverty, but to abolish it. No matter how much you give to the poor, everything except a bare subsistence wage will be taken from them again by force. All talk of practicing Christianity, or even bare justice, is at present mere waste of words. How can you justly reward the laborer when you cannot ascertain the value of what he makes, owing to the prevalent custom of stealing it? I know this by experience. I wanted to pay a just price for my wife's tomb, but I could not find out its value, and never shall. The principle on which we farm out our national industry to private marauders, who recompense themselves by black-mail, so corrupts and paralyzes us that we cannot be honest even when we want to. And the reason we bear it so calmly is that very few of us really want to."

"I must study this question of value," said Sir Charles dubiously, refilling his goblet. "Can you recommend me a good book on the subject?"

"Any good treatise on political economy will do," said Trefusis. "In economics all roads lead to Socialism, although in nine cases out of ten, so far, the economist doesn't recognize his destination, and incurs the malediction pronounced by Jeremiah on those who justify the wicked for reward. I will look you out a book or two. And if you will call on Donovan Brown the next time you are in London, he will be delighted, I know. He meets with very few who are capable of sympathizing with him from both his points of view--social and artistic."

Sir Charles brightened on being reminded of Donovan Brown. "I shall esteem an introduction to him a great honor," he said. "I had no idea that he was a friend of yours."

"I was a very practical young Socialist when I first met him," said Trefusis. "When Brown was an unknown and wretchedly poor man, my mother, at the petition of a friend of his, charitably bought one of his pictures for thirty pounds, which he was very glad to get. Years afterwards, when my mother was dead, and Brown famous, I was offered eight hundred pounds for this picture, which was, by-the-bye, a very bad one in my opinion. Now, after making the usual unjust allowance for interest on thirty pounds for twelve years or so that had elapsed, the sale of the picture would have brought me in a profit of over seven hundred and fifty pounds, an unearned increment to which I had no righteous claim. My solicitor, to whom I mentioned the matter, was of opinion that I might justifiably pocket the seven hundred and fifty pounds as reward for my mother's

benevolence in buying a presumably worthless picture from an obscure painter. But he failed to convince me that I ought to be paid for my mother's virtues, though we agreed that neither I nor my mother had received any return in the shape of pleasure in contemplating the work, which had deteriorated considerably by the fading of the colors since its purchase. At last I went to Brown's studio with the picture, and told him that it was worth nothing to me, as I thought it a particularly bad one, and that he might have it back again for fifteen pounds, half the first price. He at once told me that I could get from any dealer more for it than he could afford to give me; but he told me too that I had no right to make a profit out of his work, and that he would give me the original price of thirty pounds. I took it, and then sent him the man who had offered me the eight hundred. To my discomfiture Brown refused to sell it on any terms, because he considered it unworthy of his reputation. The man bid up to fifteen hundred, but Brown held out; and I found that instead of putting seven hundred and seventy pounds into his pocket I had taken thirty out of it. I accordingly offered to return the thirty pieces. Brown, taking the offer as an insult, declined all further communication with me. I then insisted on the matter being submitted to arbitration, and demanded fifteen hundred pounds as the full exchange value of the picture. All the arbitrators agreed that this was monstrous, whereupon I contended that if they denied my right to the value in exchange, they must admit my right to the value in use. They assented to this after putting off their decision for a fortnight in order to read Adam Smith and discover what on earth I meant by my values in use and exchange. I now showed that the picture had no value in use to me, as I disliked it, and that therefore I was entitled to nothing, and that Brown must take back the thirty pounds. They were glad to concede this also to me, as they were all artist friends of Brown, and wished him not to lose money by the transaction, though they of course privately thought that the picture was, as I described it, a bad one. After that Brown and I became very good friends. He tolerated my advances, at first lest it should seem that he was annoyed by my disparagement of his work. Subsequently he fell into my views much as you have done."

"That is very interesting," said Sir Charles. "What a noble thing--refusing fifteen hundred pounds! He could ill afford it, probably."

"Heroic--according to nineteenth century notions of heroism. Voluntarily to throw away a chance of making money! that is the ne plus ultra of martyrdom. Brown's wife was extremely angry with him for doing it."

"It is an interesting story--or might be made so," said Erskine. "But you make my head spin with your confounded exchange values and stuff. Everything is a question of figures with you."

"That comes of my not being a poet," said Trefusis. "But we Socialists need to study the romantic side of our movement to interest women in it. If you want to make a cause grow, instruct every woman you meet in it. She is or will one day be a wife, and will contradict her husband with scraps of your arguments. A squabble will follow. The son will listen, and will be set thinking if he be capable of thought. And so the mind of the people gets leavened. I have converted many young women. Most of them know no more of the economic theory of Socialism than they know of Chaldee; but they no longer fear or condemn its name. Oh, I assure you that much can be done in that way by men who are not afraid of women, and who are not in too great a hurry to see the harvest they have sown for."

"Take care. Some of your lady proselytes may get the better of you some day. The future husband to be contradicted may be Sidney Trefusis. Ha! ha! ha!" Sir Charles had emptied a second large goblet of wine, and was a little flushed and boisterous.

"No," said Trefusis, "I have had enough of love myself, and am not likely to inspire it. Women do not care for men to whom, as Erskine says, everything is a question of figures. I used to flirt with women; now I lecture them, and abhor a man-flirt worse than I do a woman one. Some more wine? Oh, you must not waste the remainder of this bottle."

"I think we had better go, Brandon," said Erskine, his mistrust of Trefusis growing. "We promised to be back before two."

"So you shall," said Trefusis. "It is not yet a quarter past one. By-the-bye, I have not shown you Donovan Brown's pet instrument for the regeneration of society. Here it is. A monster petition praying that the holding back from the laborer of any portion of the net value produced by his labor be declared a felony. That is all."

Erskine nudged Sir Charles, who said hastily, "Thank you, but I had rather not sign anything."

"A baronet sign such a petition!" exclaimed Trefusis. "I did not think of asking you. I only show it to you as an interesting historical document, containing the autographs of a few artists and poets. There is Donovan Brown's for example. It was he who suggested the petition, which is not likely to do much good, as the thing cannot be done in any such fashion However, I have promised Brown to get as many signatures as I can; so you may as well sign it, Erskine. It says nothing in blank verse about the holiness of slaying a tyrant, but it is a step in the right direction. You will not stick at such a trifle--unless the reviews have frightened you. Come, your name and address."

Erskine shook his head.

"Do you then only commit yourself to revolutionary sentiments when there is a chance of winning fame as a poet by them?"

"I will not sign, simply because I do not choose to," said Erskine warmly.

"My dear fellow," said Trefusis, almost affectionately, "if a man has a conscience he can have no choice in matters of conviction. I have read somewhere in your book that the man who will not shed his blood for the liberty of his brothers is a coward and a slave. Will you not shed a drop of ink--my ink, too--for the right of your brothers to the work of their hands? I at first sight did not care to sign this petition, because I would as soon petition a tiger to share his prey with me as our rulers to relax their grip of the stolen labor they live on. But Donovan Brown said to me, 'You have no choice. Either you believe that the laborer should have the fruit of his labor or you do not. If you do, put your conviction on record, even if it should be as useless as Pilate's washing his hands.' So I signed."

"Donovan Brown was right," said Sir Charles. "I will sign." And he did so with a flourish.

"Brown will be delighted," said Trefusis. "I will write to him to-day that I have got another good signature for him."

"Two more," said Sir Charles. "You shall sign, Erskine; hang me if you shan't! It is only against rascals that run away without paying their men their wages."

"Or that don't pay them in full," observed Trefusis, with a curious smile. "But do not sign if you feel uncomfortable about it."

"If you don't sign after me, you are a sneak, Chester," said Sir Charles.

"I don't know what it means," said Erskine, wavering. "I don't understand petitions."

"It means what it says; you cannot be held responsible for any meaning that is not expressed in it," said Trefusis. "But never mind. You mistrust me a little, I fancy, and would rather not meddle with my petitions; but you will think better of that as you grow used to me. Meanwhile, there is no hurry. Don't sign yet."

"Nonsense! I don't doubt your good faith," said Erskine, hastily disavowing suspicions which he felt but could not account for. "Here goes!" And he signed.

"Well done!" said Trefusis. "This will make Brown happy for the rest of the month."

"It is time for us to go now," said Erskine gloomily.

"Look in upon me at any time; you shall be welcome," said Trefusis. "You need not stand upon any sort of ceremony."

Then they parted; Sir Charles assuring Trefusis that he had never spent a more interesting morning, and shaking hands with him at considerable length three times. Erskine said little until he was in the Riverside Road with his friend, when he suddenly burst out:

"What the devil do you mean by drinking two tumblers of such staggering stuff at one o'clock in the day in the house of a dangerous man like that? I am very sorry I went into the fellow's place. I had misgivings about it, and they have been fully borne out."

"How so?" said Sir Charles, taken aback.

"He has overreached us. I was a deuced fool to sign that paper, and so were you. It was for that that he invited us."

"Rubbish, my dear boy. It was not his paper, but Donovan Brown's."

"I doubt it. Most likely he talked Brown into signing it just as he talked us. I tell you his ways are all crooked, like his ideas. Did you hear how he lied about Miss Lindsay?"

"Oh, you were mistaken about that. He does not care two straws for her or for anyone."

"Well, if you are satisfied, I am not. You would not be in such high spirits over it if you had taken as little wine as I."

"Pshaw! you're too ridiculous. It was capital wine. Do you mean to say I am drunk?"

"No. But you would not have signed if you had not taken that second goblet. If you had not forced me--I could not get out of it after you set the example--I would have seen him d--d sooner than have had anything to do with his petition."

"I don't see what harm can come of it," said Sir Charles, braving out some secret disquietude.

"I will never go into his house again," said Erskine moodily. "We were just like two flies in a spider's web."

Meanwhile, Trefusis was fulfilling his promise to write to Donovan Brown.

"Sallust's House.

"Dear Brown: I have spent the forenoon angling for a couple of very young fish, and have landed them with more trouble than they are worth. One has gaudy scales: he is a baronet, and an amateur artist, save the mark. All my arguments and my little museum of photographs were lost on him; but when I mentioned your name, and promised him an introduction to you, he gorged the bait greedily. He was half drunk when he signed; and I should not have let him touch the paper if I had not convinced myself beforehand that he means well, and that my wine had only freed his natural generosity from his conventional cowardice and prejudice. We must get his name published in as many journals as possible as a signatory to the great petition; it will draw on others as your name drew him. The second novice, Chichester Erskine, is a young poet. He will not be of

much use to us, though he is a devoted champion of liberty in blank verse, and dedicates his works to Mazzini, etc. He signed reluctantly. All this hesitation is the uncertainty that comes of ignorance;they have not found out the truth for themselves, and are afraid to trust me, matters having come to the pass at which no man dares trust his fellow.

"I have met a pretty young lady here who might serve you as a model for Hypatia. She is crammed with all the prejudices of the peerage, but I am effecting a cure. I have set my heart on marrying her to Erskine, who, thinking that I am making love to her on my own account, is jealous. The weather is pleasant here, and I am having a merry life of it, but I find myself too idle. Etc., etc., etc."