GEORGE GISSING

THE UNCLASSED

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Gissing G.

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I
SCHOOL

There was strange disorder in Miss Rutherford's schoolroom, wont to be the abode of decorum. True, it was the gathering-time after the dinner-hour, and Miss Rutherford herself was as yet out of sight; but things seemed to be going forward of a somewhat more serious kind than a game of romps among the children. There were screams and sobbings, hysterical cries for help; some of the little girls were crowding round an object in one corner of the room, others appeared to be getting as far away from it as possible, hiding their pale faces in their hands, or looking at one another with terrified eyes. At length one more thoughtful than the rest sped away out of the room, and stood at the bottom of the stairs, calling out her teacher's name as loud as she could. A moment, and Miss Rutherford came hastening down, with alarmed aspect, begging to be told what was the matter. But the summoner had turned and fled at the first sight of the lady's garments. Miss Rutherford darted into the schoolroom, and at once there was quietness, save for half-choked sobs here and there, and a more ominous kind of moaning from the crowded corner.

"Gracious goodness, children, what is it? Who's that lying on the floor? Harriet Smales! What *ever* has happened?"

The cluster of children had fallen aside, exposing a strange picture. On the ground lay a girl of twelve, her face deadly pale, save in the places where it was dabbled with fresh blood, which still streamed from a gash on the right side of her forehead. Her eyes were half opened; she was just recovering consciousness; a moan came from her at intervals. She had for support the lap and arms of a little girl, perhaps two years younger than herself. Heedless of the flowing blood, this child was pressing her pale cheek against that of the wounded one, whose name she kept murmuring in pitiful accents, mixed with endearing epithets. So unconscious was she of all around, that the falling back of the other children did not cause her to raise her eyes; neither was she aware of Miss Rutherford's first exclamations, nor yet of the question which was next addressed to her by the horrified schoolmistress.

"How did it happen? Some of you run at once for a doctor—Dr. Williams in Grove Road—Oh, quick!—Ida Starr, how *did* it happen?"

Ida did not move, but seemed to tighten her embrace. The other pupils all looked fearfully hither and thither, but none ventured to speak.

"Ida!" repeated Miss Rutherford, dropping on her knees by the two, and beginning to wipe away some of the blood with her handkerchief. "Speak, child! Has some one gone for the doctor? How was it done?"

The face at length turned upon the questioner was almost as ghastly and red-stained as that it had been pressed against. But it had become self-controlled; the dark eyes looked straight forward with an expression marvellously full of meaning in one so young; the lips did not tremble as they spoke.

"I did it, Miss Rutherford. I have killed Harriet. I, and nobody else."

"You? How, child?"

"I killed her with the slate, Miss Rutherford; this slate, look."

She pointed to a slate without a frame which lay on the floor. There were sums worked on the uppermost side, and the pencil-marks were half obliterated. For a moment the schoolmistress's amazement held her motionless, but fresh and louder moans recalled her to the immediate necessities of the case. She pushed Ida Starr aside, and, with the help of a servant-girl who had by this time

appeared in the room, raised the sufferer into a chair, and began to apply what remedies suggested themselves. The surgeon, whom several of the children had hastened to seek, only lived a few yards away, and his assistant was speedily present. Harriet Smales had quite recovered consciousness, and was very soon able to give her own account of the incident. After listening to her, Miss Rutherford turned to the schoolchildren, who were now seated in the usual order on benches, and spoke to them with some degree of calm.

"I am going to take Harriet home. Lucy Wood, you will please to see that order is preserved in my absence; I shall only be away twenty minutes, at the most. Ida Starr, you will go up into my sitting-room, and remain there till I come to you. All take out your copy-books; I shall examine the lines written whilst I am away."

The servant, who had been despatched for a cab, appeared at the door. Harriet Smales was led out. Before leaving the house, Miss Rutherford whispered to the servant an order to occupy herself in the sitting-room, so as to keep Ida Starr in sight.

Miss Rutherford, strict disciplinarian when her nerves were not unstrung, was as good as her promise with regard to the copy-books. She had returned within the twenty minutes, and the first thing she did was to walk along all the benches, making a comment here, a correction there, in another place giving a word of praise. Then she took her place at the raised desk whence she was wont to survey the little room.

There were present thirteen pupils, the oldest of them turned fifteen, the youngest scarcely six. They appeared to be the daughters of respectable people, probably of tradesmen in the neighbourhood. This school was in Lisson Grove, in the north-west of London; a spot not to be pictured from its name by those ignorant of the locality; in point of fact a dingy street, with a mixture of shops and private houses. On the front door was a plate displaying Miss Rutherford's name,—nothing more. That lady herself was middle-aged, grave at all times, kindly, and, be it added, fairly competent as things go in the world of school. The room was rather bare, but the good fire necessitated by the winter season was not wanting, and the plain boarding of the floor showed itself no stranger to scrubbings. A clock hanging on the wall ticked very loudly in the perfect stillness as the schoolmistress took her seat.

She appeared to examine a book for a few moments, then raised her head, looked at the faces before her with a troubled expression, and began to speak.

"I wish to know who can give me any account of the way in which Harriet Smales received her hurt. Stop! Hands only, please. And only those raise their hands who actually saw the blow struck, and overheard *all* that led to it. You understand, now? One, two, three—seven altogether, that is quite enough. Those seven will wait in the room at four o'clock till the others have all gone. Now I will give the first class their sums."

The afternoon passed Very slowly to teacher and pupils alike. When the clock struck four, work was put away with more than the usual noise and hurry. Miss Rutherford seemed for a time to be on the point of making some new address to the school before the children departed, but eventually she decided to keep silence, and the dismissal was got over as quickly as possible. The seven witnesses remained, solemnly seated at their desks, all anxious-looking.

"Lucy Wood," Miss Rutherford began, when the door was closed and quiet, "you are the eldest. Please tell me all you can of this sad affair."

There was one of the seven faces far more discomposed than the rest, a sweet and spiritual little countenance; it was tear-stained, red-eyed; the eager look, the trembling lips spoke some intimate cause of sympathy. Before the girl addressed had time to begin her answer, this other, one would have said in spite of herself, intervened with an almost agonised question.

"Oh, Miss Rutherford, is Harriet really dead?"

"Hush, hush!" said the lady, with a shocked look. "No, my dear, she is only badly hurt."

"And she really won't die?" pleaded the child, with an instant brightening of look.

"Certainly not, certainly not. Now be quiet, Maud, and let Lucy begin."

Lucy, a sensible and matter-of-fact girl, made a straightforward narration, the facts of which were concurred in by her companions. Harriet Smales, it seemed, had been exercising upon Ida for some days her utmost powers of irritation, teasing her, as Lucy put it, "beyond all bearing." The cause of this was not unknown in the school, and Miss Rutherford remembered the incident from which the malice dated. Harriet had copied a sum in class from Ida's slate—she was always copying from somebody—and the teacher, who had somehow detected her, asked Ida plainly whether such was not the case. Ida made no reply, would not speak, which of course was taken as confirmatory evidence, and the culprit had accordingly received an imposition. Her spleen, thus aroused, Harriet vented upon the other girl, who, she maintained, ought to have stoutly denied the possibility of the alleged deceit, and so have saved her. She gave poor Ida no rest, and her persecution had culminated this afternoon; she began to "call Ida's mother names," the result of which was that the assailed one suddenly snatched up her slate, and, in an uncontrollable fit of passion, struck her tormentor a blow with it upon the forehead.

"What did she call Ida's mother?" inquired Miss Rutherford, all at once changing her look curiously.

"She called her a bad woman."

"Was that all?"

"No, please, Miss Rutherford," put in Maud eagerly. "She said she got her living in the streets. And it isn't true. Ida's mother's a lady, and doesn't sell things in the streets!"

The teacher looked down and was silent.

"I don't think I need ask any more questions," she said presently. "Run away home all of you. What is it, my dear?"

Maud, she was about eleven, and small for her age, had remained behind, and was looking anxiously up into Miss Rutherford's face.

"May I wait for Ida, please," she asked, "and—and walk home with her? We go the same way."

"Not to-night, dear; no, not to-night. Ida Starr is in disgrace. She will not go home just yet. Run away, now, there's a good girl."

Sadly, sadly was the command obeyed, and very slowly did Maud Enderby walk along the streets homeward, ever turning back to see whether perchance Ida might not be behind her.

Miss Rutherford ascended to her sitting-room. The culprit was standing in a corner with her face to the wall.

"Why do you stand so?" asked the teacher gravely, but not very severely.

"I thought you'd want me to, Miss Rutherford."

"Come here to me, child."

Ida had clearly been crying for a long time, and there was still blood on her face. She seemed to have made up her mind that the punishment awaiting her must be dreadful, and she resolved to bear it humbly. She came up, still holding her hands behind her, and stood with downcast eyes. The hair which hung down over her shoulders was dark brown, her eye-brows strongly marked, the eyes themselves rather deep-set. She wore a pretty plum-coloured dress, with a dainty little apron in front; her whole appearance bespeaking a certain taste and love of elegance in the person who had the care of her.

"You will be glad to hear," said Miss Rutherford, "that Harriet's hurt is not as serious as we feared at first. But she will have to stay at home for some days."

There was no motion, or reply.

"Do you know that I am quite afraid of you, Ida? I had no idea that you were so passionate. Had you no thought what harm you might do when you struck that terrible blow?"

But Ida could not converse; no word was to be got from her.

"You must go home now," went on the schoolmistress after a pause, "and not come back till I send for you. Tell your mother just what you have done, and say that I will write to her about you. You understand what I say, my child?"

The punishment had come upon her. Nothing worse than this had Ida imagined; nay, nothing so bad. She drew in her breath, her fingers wreathed themselves violently together behind her back. She half raised her face, but could not resolve to meet her teacher's eyes. On the permission to go being repeated, she left the room in silence, descended the stairs with the slow steps of an old person, dressed herself mechanically, and went out into the street. Miss Rutherford stood for some time in profound and troubled thought, then sighed as she returned to her usual engagements.

The following day was Saturday, and therefore a half-holiday. After dinner, Miss Rutherford prepared herself for walking, and left home. A quarter of an hour brought her to a little out-of-the-way thoroughfare called Boston Street, close to the west side of Regent's Park, and here she entered a chemist's shop, over which stood the name Smales. A middle-aged man of very haggard and feeble appearance stood behind the counter, and his manner to the lady as she addressed him was painfully subservient. He spoke very little above a whisper, and as though suffering from a severe sore throat, but it was his natural voice.

"She's better, I thank you, madam; much better, I hope and believe; yes, much better."

He repeated his words nervously, rubbing his hands together feverishly the while, and making his eye-brows go up and down in a curious way.

"Might I see her for a few moments?"

"She would be happy, madam, very happy: oh yes, I am sure, very happy if—if you would have the kindness to come round, yes, round here, madam, and—and to excuse our poor sitting-room. Thank you, thank you. Harriet, my dear, Miss Rutherford has had the great, the very great, goodness to visit you—to visit you personally—yes. I will leave you, if—if you please—h'm, yes."

He shuffled away in the same distressingly nervous manner, and closed the door behind him. The schoolmistress found herself in a dark little parlour, which smelt even more of drugs than the shop itself. The window looked out into a dirty back-yard, and was almost concealed with heavy red curtains. As the eyes got accustomed to the dimness, one observed that the floor was covered with very old oil-cloth, and that the articles of furniture were few, only the most indispensable, and all very shabby. Everything seemed to be dusty and musty. The only approach to an ornament was a framed diploma hanging over the mantelpiece, certifying that John Alfred Smales was a duly qualified pharmaceutical chemist. A low fire burned in the grate, and before it, in a chair which would probably have claimed the title of easy, sat the girl Harriet Smales, her head in bandages.

She received Miss Rutherford rather sulkily, and as she moved, groaned in a way which did not seem the genuine utterance of pain. After a few sympathetic remarks, the teacher began to touch upon the real object of her visit.

"I have no intention of blaming you, Harriet; I should not speak of this at all, if it were not necessary. But I must ask you plainly what reason you had for speaking of Ida Starr's mother as they say you did. Why did you say she was a bad woman?"

"It's only what she is," returned Harriet sullenly, and with much inward venom.

"What do you mean by that? Who has told you anything about her?"

Only after some little questioning the fact was elicited that Harriet owed her ideas on the subject to a servant girl in the house, whose name was Sarah.

"What does Sarah say, then?" asked Miss Rutherford.

"She says she isn't respectable, and that she goes about with men, and she's only a common street-woman," answered the girl, speaking evidently with a very clear understanding of what these accusations meant. The schoolmistress looked away with a rather shocked expression, and thought a little before speaking again.

"Well, that's all I wanted to ask you, Harriet," she said. "I won't blame you, but I trust you will do as I wish, and never say such things about any one again, whoever may tell you. It is our duty never to speak ill of others, you know; least of all when we know that to do so will be the cause of much pain and trouble. I hope you will very soon be able to come back again to us. And now I will say good-bye."

In the shop Miss Rutherford renewed to the chemist her sincere regret for what had taken place.

"Of course I cannot risk the recurrence of such a thing," she said. "The child who did it will not return to me, Mr. Smales."

Mr. Smales uttered incoherent excuses, apologies, and thanks, and shufflingly escorted the lady to his shop-door.

Miss Rutherford went home in trouble. She did not doubt the truth of what Harriet Smales had told her, for she herself had already entertained uneasy suspicions, dating indeed from the one interview she had had with Mrs. Starr, when Ida was first brought to the school, and deriving confirmation from a chance meeting in the street only a few days ago. It was only too plain what she must do, and the necessity grieved her. Ida had not shown any especial brilliancy at her books, but the child's character was a remarkable one, and displayed a strength which might eventually operate either for good or for evil. With careful training, it seemed at present very probable that the good would predominate. But the task was not such as the schoolmistress felt able to undertake, bearing in mind the necessity of an irreproachable character for her school if it were to be kept together at all. The disagreeable secret had begun to spread; all the children would relate the events of yesterday in their own homes; to pass the thing over was impossible. She sincerely regretted the step she must take, and to which she would not have felt herself driven by any ill-placed prudery of her own. On Monday morning it must be stated to the girls that Ida Starr had left.

In the meantime, it only remained to write to Mrs. Starr, and make known this determination. Miss Rutherford thought for a little while of going to see Ida's mother, but felt that this would be both painful and useless. It was difficult even to write, desirous as she was of somehow mitigating the harshness of this sentence of expulsion. After half-an-hour spent in efforts to pen a suitable note, she gave up the attempt to write as she would have wished, and announced the necessity she was under in the fewest possible words.

CHAPTER II
MOTHER AND CHILD

Ida Starr, dismissed by the schoolmistress, ran quickly homewards. She was unusually late, and her mother would be anxious. Still, when she came within sight of the door, she stopped and stood panting. How should she tell of her disgrace? It was not fear that made her shrink from repeating Miss Rutherford's message; nor yet shame, though she would gladly have hidden herself away somewhere in the dark from every eye; her overwhelming concern was for the pain she knew she was going to cause one who had always cherished her with faultless tenderness,—tenderness which it had become her nature to repay with a child's unreflecting devotion.

Her home was in Milton Street. On the front-door was a brass-plate which bore the inscription: "Mrs. Ledward, Dressmaker;" in the window of the ground-floor was a large card announcing that "Apartments" were vacant. The only light was one which appeared in the top storey, and there Ida knew that her mother was waiting for her, with tea ready on the table as usual. Mrs. Starr was seldom at home during the child's dinner-hour, and Ida had not seen her at all to-day. For it was only occasionally that she shared her mother's bedroom; it was the rule for her to sleep with Mrs. Ledward, the landlady, who was a widow and without children. The arrangement had held ever since Ida could remember; when she had become old enough to ask for an explanation of this, among other singularities in their mode of life, she was told that her mother slept badly, and must have the bed to herself.

But the night had come on, and every moment of delay doubtless increased the anxiety she was causing. Ida went up to the door, stood on tiptoe to reach the knocker, and gave her usual two distinct raps. Mrs. Ledward opened the door to her in person; a large woman, with pressed lips and eyes that squinted very badly; attired, however, neatly, and looking as good-natured as a woman who was at once landlady and dressmaker could be expected to look.

"How 's 't you're so late?" she asked, without looking at the child; her eyes, as far as one could guess, fixed upon the houses opposite, her hands in the little pocket on each side of her apron. "Your mother's poorly."

"Oh, then I shall sleep with her to-night?" exclaimed Ida, forgetting her trouble for the moment in this happy foresight.

"Dessay," returned Mrs. Ledward laconically.

Ida left her still standing in the doorway, and ran stairs. The chamber she went into—after knocking and receiving permission to enter, according to the rule which had been impressed upon her —was a tolerably-furnished bedroom, which, with its bright fire, tasteful little lamp, white coverlets and general air of fresh orderliness, made a comfortable appearance. The air was scented, too, with some pleasant odour of a not too pungent kind. But the table lacked one customary feature; no tea was laid as it was wont to be at this hour. The child gazed round in surprise. Her mother was in bed, lying back on raised pillows, and with a restless, half-pettish look on her face.

"Where have you been?" she asked querulously, her voice husky and feeble, as if from a severe cold. "Why are you so late?"

Ida did not answer at once, but went straight to the bed and offered the accustomed kiss. Her mother waved her off.

"No, no; don't kiss me. Can't you see what a sore throat I've got? You might catch it. And I haven't got you any tea," she went on, her face growing to a calmer expression as she gazed at the child "Ain't I a naughty mother? But it serves you half right for being late. Come and kiss me; I don't think it's catching. No, perhaps you'd better not."

But Ida started forward at the granted leave, and kissed her warmly.

"There now," went on the hoarse voice complainingly, "I shouldn't wonder if you catch it, and we shall both be laid up at once. Oh, Ida, I do feel that poorly, I do! It's the draught under the door; what else can it be? I do, I do feel that poorly!"

She began to cry miserably. Ida forgot all about the tale she had to tell; her own eyes overflowed in sympathy. She put her arm under her mother's neck, and pressed cheek to cheek tenderly.

"Oh, how hot you are, mother! Shall I get you a cup of tea, dear? Wouldn't it make your throat better?"

"Perhaps it would; I don't know. Don't go away, not just yet. You'll have to be a mother to me to-night, Ida. I almost feel I could go to sleep, if you held me like that."

She closed her eyes, but only for a moment, then started up anxiously.

"What am I thinking about! Of course you want your tea."

"No, no; indeed I don't, mother."

"Nonsense; of course you do. See, the kettle is on the hob, and I think it's full. Go away; you make me hotter. Let me see you get your tea, and then perhaps it'll make me feel I could drink a cup. There, you've put your hair all out of order; let me smooth it. Don't trouble to lay the cloth; just use the tray; it's in the cupboard."

Ida obeyed, and set about the preparations. Compare her face with that which rested sideways upon the pillows, and the resemblance was as strong as could exist between two people of such different ages: the same rich-brown hair, the same strongly-pencilled eye-brows; the deep-set and very dark eyes, the fine lips, the somewhat prominent jaw-bones, alike in both. The mother was twenty-eight, the daughter ten, yet the face on the pillow was the more childish at present. In the mother's eyes was a helpless look, a gaze of unintelligent misery, such as one could not conceive on Ida's countenance; her lips, too, were weakly parted, and seemed trembling to a sob, whilst sorrow only made the child close hers the firmer. In the one case a pallor not merely of present illness, but that wasting whiteness which is only seen on faces accustomed to borrow artificial hues; in the other, a healthy pearl-tint, the gleamings and gradations of a perfect complexion. The one a child long lost on weary, woeful ways, knowing, yet untaught by, the misery of desolation; the other a child still standing upon the misty threshold of unknown lands, looking around for guidance, yet already half feeling that the sole guide and comforter was within.

It was strange that talk which followed between mother and daughter. Lotty Starr (that was the name of the elder child, and it became her much better than any more matronly appellation), would not remain silent, in spite of the efforts it cost her to speak, and her conversation ran on the most trivial topics. Except at occasional moments, she spoke to Ida as to one of her own age, with curious neglect of the relationship between them; at times she gave herself up to the luxury of feeling like an infant dependent on another's care; and cried just for the pleasure of being petted and consoled. Ida had made up her mind to leave her disclosure till the next morning; impossible to grieve her mother with such shocking news when she was so poorly. Yet the little girl with difficulty kept a cheerful countenance; as often as a moment's silence left her to her own reflections she was reminded of the heaviness of heart which made speaking an effort. To bear up under the secret thought of her crime and its consequences required in Ida Starr a courage different alike in quality and degree from that of which children are ordinarily capable. One compensation alone helped her; it was still early in the evening, and she knew there were before her long hours to be spent by her mother's side.

"Do you like me to be with you, mother?" she asked, when a timid question had at length elicited assurance of this joy. "Does it make you feel better?"

"Yes, yes. But it's my throat, and you can't make that better; I only wish you could. But you are a comfort to me, for all that; I don't know what I should do without you. Oh, I sha'n't be able to speak a word soon, I sha'n't!"

"Don't, don't talk, dear. I'll talk instead, and you listen. Don't you think, mother dear, I could —could always sleep with you? I wouldn't disturb you; indeed, indeed I wouldn't! You don't know

how quiet I lie. If I'm wakeful ever I seem to have such a lot to think about, and I lie so still and quiet, you can't think. I never wake Mrs. Led ward, indeed. Do let me, mother; just try me!"

Lotty broke out into passionate weeping, wrung her hands, and hid her face in the pillow. Ida was terrified, and exerted every effort to console this strange grief. The outburst only endured a minute or two, however; then a mood of vexed impatience grew out of the anguish and despair, and Lotty pushed away the child fretfully.

"I've often told you, you can't, you mustn't bother me. There, there; you don't mean any harm, but you put me out, bothering me, Ida. Tell me, what do you think about when you lay awake? Don't you think you'd give anything to get off to sleep again? I know I do; I can't bear to think; it makes my head ache so."

"Oh, I like it. Sometimes I think over what I've been reading, in the animal book, and the geography-book; and—and then I begin my wishing-thoughts. And oh, I've such lots of wishing-thoughts, you couldn't believe!"

"And what are the wishing-thoughts about?" inquired the mother, in a matter-of-fact way.

"I often wish I was grown up. I feel tired of being a child; I want to be a woman. Then I should know so much more, and I should be able to understand all the things you tell me I can't now. I don't care for playing at games and going to school."

"You'll be a woman soon enough, Ida," said Lotty, with a quiet sadness unusual in her. "But go on; what else?"

"And then I often wish I was a boy. It must be so much nicer to be a boy. They're stronger than girls, and they know more. Don't you wish I was a boy, mother?"

"Yes, I do, I often do!" exclaimed Lotty. "Boys aren't such a trouble, and they can go out and shift for themselves."

"Oh, but I won't be a trouble to you," exclaimed Ida. "When I'm old enough to leave school—"

She interrupted herself, for the moment she had actually forgotten the misfortune which had come upon her. But her mother did not observe the falling of her countenance, nor yet the incomplete sentence.

"Ida, have I been a bad mother to you?" Lotty sobbed out presently. "If I was to die, would you be sorry?"

"Mother!"

"I've done my best, indeed I've done my best for yon! How many mothers like me would have brought you up as I've done? How many, I'd like to know? And some day you'll hate me; oh yes, you will! Some day you'll wish to forget all about me, and you'll never come to see where I'm buried, and you'll get rid of everything that could remind you of me. How I wish I'd never been born!"

Ida had often to comfort her mother in the latter's fits of low spirits, but had never heard such sad words as these before. The poor child could say nothing in reply; the terrible thought that she herself was bringing new woes to be endured almost broke her heart. She clung about her mother's neck and wept passionately.

Lotty shortly after took a draught from a bottle which the child reached out of a drawer for her, and lay pretty still till drowsiness came on. Ida undressed and crept to her side. They had a troubled night, and, when the daylight came again, Lotty was no better. Ida rose in anguish of spirit, torturing herself to find a way of telling what must be told. Yet she had another respite; her mother said that, as it was Saturday, she might as well stay away from school and be a little nurse. And the dull day wore through; the confession being still postponed.

But by the last post at night came Miss Rutherford's letter. Ida was still sitting up, and Lotty had fallen into a doze, when the landlady brought the letter upstairs. The child took it in, answered an inquiry about her mother in a whisper, and returned to the bedside. She knew the handwriting on the envelope. The dreaded moment had come.

She must have stood more than a quarter of an hour, motionless, gazing on her mother's face, conscious of nothing but an agonised expectation of seeing the sleeper's eyes open. They did open at length, and quickly saw the letter.

"It's from Miss Rutherford, mother," said Ida, her own voice sounding very strange to herself.

"Oh, is it?" said Lotty, in the hoarse whisper which was all she could command "I suppose she wants to know why you didn't go. Read it to me."

Ida read, and, in reading, suffered as she never did again throughout her life.

> "DEAR MRS. STARR,—I am very sorry to have to say that Ida must not return to school. I had better leave the explanation to herself; she is truthful, and will tell you what has compelled me to take this step. I grieve to lose her, but have really no choice.—I am, yours truly,
> *H. RUTHERFORD."*

No tears rose; her voice was as firm as though she had been reading in class; but she was pale and cold as death.

Lotty rose in bed and stared wildly.

"What have you done, child?—what ever have you done? Is—is it anything—about *me*."

"I hit Harriet Smales with a slate, and covered her all over with blood, and I thought I'd killed her."

She could not meet her mother's eyes; stood with head hung down, and her hands clasped behind her.

"What made you do it?" asked Lotty in amazement.

"I couldn't help it, mother; she—she said you were a bad woman."

Ida had raised her eyes with a look of love and proud confidence. Lotty shrank before her, clutched convulsively at the bed-clothes, then half raised herself and dashed her head with fearful violence against the wall by which the bed stood. She fell back, half stunned, and lay on the pillows, whilst the child, with outstretched hands, gazed horror-struck. But in a moment Ida had her arms around the distraught woman, pressing the dazed head against her breast. Lotty began to utter incoherent self-reproaches, unintelligible to her little comforter; her voice had become the merest whisper; she seemed to have quite exhausted herself. Just now there came a knock at the door, and Ida was relieved to see Mrs. Ledward, whose help she begged. In a few minutes Lotty had come to herself again, and whispered that she wished to speak to the landlady alone. The latter persuaded Ida to go downstairs for a while, and the child, whose tears had begun to flow, left the room, sobbing in anguish.

"Ain't you better then?" asked the woman, with an apparent effort to speak in a sympathetic tone which did not come easily to her.

"I'm very bad," whispered the other, drawing her breath as if in pain.

"Ay, you've got a bad cold, that's what it is. I'll make you some gruel presently, and put some rum in it. You don't take care of yourself: I told you how it 'ud be when you came in with those wringin' things on, on Thursday night."

"They've found out about me at the school," gasped Lotty, with a despairing look, "and Ida's got sent away."

"She has? Well, never mind, you can find another, I suppose. I can't see myself what she wants with so much schoolin', but I suppose you know best about your own affairs."

"Oh, I feel that bad! If I get over this, I'll give it up—God help me, I will! I'll get my living honest, if there's any way. I never felt so bad as I do now."

"Pooh!" exclaimed the woman. "Wait a bit till you get rid of your sore throat, and you'll think different. Poorly people gets all sorts o' fancies. Keep a bit quiet now, and don't put yourself out so."

"What are we to do? I've only got a few shillings—"

"Well, you'll have money again some time, I suppose. You don't suppose I'll turn you out in the streets? Write to Fred on Monday, and he'll send you something."

They talked till Lotty exhausted herself again, then Ida was allowed to re-enter the room. Mrs. Ledward kept coming and going till her own bed-time, giving what help and comfort she could in her hard, half-indifferent way. Another night passed, and in the morning Lotty seemed a little better. Her throat was not so painful, but she breathed with difficulty, and had a cough. Ida sat holding her mother's hand. It was a sunny morning, and the bells of neighbouring churches began to ring out clearly on the frosty air.

"Ida," said the sick woman, raising herself suddenly, "get me some note-paper and an envelope out of the box; and go and borrow pen and ink, there's a good child."

The materials were procured, and, with a great effort, Lotty managed to arrange herself so as to be able to write. She covered four pages with a sad scrawl, closed the envelope, and was about to direct it, but paused.

"The bells have stopped," she said, listening. "It's half-past eleven. Put on your things, Ida."

The child obeyed, wondering.

"Give me my purse out of the drawer. See, there's a shilling. Now, say this after me: Mr. Abra'm Woodstock, Number—, St. John Street Road."

Ida repeated the address.

"Now, listen, Ida. You put this letter in your pocket; you go down into the Mary'bone road; you ask for a 'bus to the Angel. When you get to the Angel, you ask your way to Number—, St. John Street Road; it isn't far off. Knock at the door, and ask if Mr. Abra'm Woodstock is in. If he is, say you want to see him, and then give him this letter,—into his own hands, and nobody else's. If he isn't in, ask when he will be, and, if it won't be long, wait."

Ida promised, and then, after a long gaze, her mother dropped back again on the pillow, and turned her face away. A cough shook her for a few moments. Ida waited.

"Well, ain't you gone?" asked Lotty faintly.

"Kiss me, mother."

They held each other in a passionate embrace, and then the child went away.

She reached Islington without difficulty, and among the bustling and loitering crowd which obstructs the corner at the Angel, found some one to direct her to the street she sought. She had to walk some distance down St. John Street Road, in the direction of the City, before discovering the house she desired to find. When she reached it, it proved to be a very dingy tenement, the ground-floor apparently used as offices; a much-worn plate on the door exhibited the name of the gentleman to whom her visit was, with his professional description added. Mr. Woodstock was an accountant.

She rang the bell, and a girl appeared. Yes, Mr. Woodstock was at home. Ida was told to enter the passage, and wait.

A door at her right hand as she entered was slightly ajar, and voices could be heard from the other side of it. One of these voices very shortly raised itself in a harsh and angry tone, and Ida could catch what was said.

"Well, Mr. What's-your-name, I suppose I know my own business rather better than you can teach me. It's pretty clear you've been doing your best for some time to set the people against me, and I'm damned if I'll have it! You go to the place on religious pretences, and what your real object may be I don't know; but I do know one thing, and that is, I won't have you hanging about any longer. I'll meet you there myself, and if it's a third-floor window you get pitched out of, well, it won't be my fault. Now I don't want any more talk with you. This is most folks' praying-time; I wonder you're not at it. It's *my* time for writing letters, and I'd rather have your room than your company. I'm a plain-spoken man, you see, a man of business, and I don't mince matters. To come and dictate to me about the state of my houses and of my tenants ain't a business-like proceeding, and you'll excuse me if I don't take it kindly. There's the door, and good morning to you!"

The door opened, and a young man, looking pale and dismayed, came out quickly, and at once left the house. Behind him came the last speaker. At the sight of the waiting child he stood still, and the expression of his face changed from sour annoyance to annoyed surprise.

"Eh? Well?" he exclaimed, looking closely at Ida, his eye-brows contracting.

"I have a letter for Mr. Abra'm Woodstock, sir."

"Well, give it here. Who's it from?"

"Mrs. Starr, sir."

"Who's Mrs. Starr? Come in here, will you?"

His short and somewhat angry tone was evidently in some degree the result of the interview that had just closed, but also pretty clearly an indication of his general manner to strangers. He let the child pass him, and followed her into the room with the letter in his hand. He did not seem able to remove his eyes from her face. Ida, on her side, did not dare to look up at him. He was a massively built, grey-headed man of something more than sixty. Everything about him expressed strength and determination, power alike of body and mind. His features were large and heavy, but the forehead would have become a man of strong intellect; the eyes were full of astonishing vital force, and the chin was a physiognomical study, so strikingly did its moulding express energy of character. He was clean-shaven, and scarcely a seam or wrinkle anywhere broke the hard, smooth surface of his visage, its complexion clear and rosy as that of a child.

Still regarding Ida, he tore open the envelope. At the sight of the writing he, not exactly started, but moved his head rather suddenly, and again turned his eyes upon the messenger.

"Sit down," he said, pointing to a chair. The room was an uncomfortable office, with no fire. He himself took a seat deliberately at a desk, whence he could watch Ida, and began to read. As he did so, his face remained unmoved, but he looked away occasionally, as if to reflect.

"What's your name?" he asked, when he had finished, beginning, at the same time, to tear the letter into very small pieces, which he threw into a waste-paper basket.

"Ida, sir,—Ida Starr."

"Starr, eh?" He looked at her very keenly, and, still looking, and still tearing up the letter, went on in a hard, unmodulated voice. "Well, Ida Starr, it seems your mother wants to put you in the way of earning your living." The child looked up in fear and astonishment. "You can carry a message? You'll say to your mother that I'll undertake to do what I can for you, on one condition, and that is that she puts you in my hands and never sees you again."

"Oh, I can't leave mother!" burst from the child's lips involuntarily, her horror overcoming her fear of the speaker.

"I didn't ask you if you could," remarked Mr. Woodstock, with something like a sneer, tapping the desk with the fingers of his right hand. "I asked whether you could carry a message. Can you, or not?"

"Yes, I can," stammered Ida.

"Then take *that* message, and tell your mother it's all I've got to say. Run away."

He rose and stood with his hands behind him, watching her. Ida made what haste she could to the door, and sped out into the street.

CHAPTER III
ANTECEDENTS

It would not have been easy to find another instance of a union of keen intellect and cold heart so singular as that displayed in the character of Abraham Woodstock. The man s life had been strongly consistent from the beginning; from boyhood a powerful will had borne him triumphantly over every difficulty, and in each decisive instance his will had been directed by a shrewd intelligence which knew at once the strength of its own resources and the multiplied weaknesses of the vast majority of men. In the pursuit of his ends he would tolerate no obstacle which his strength would suffice to remove. In boyhood and early manhood the exuberance of his physical power was wont to manifest itself in brutal self-assertion. At school he was the worst kind of bully, his ferociousness tempered by no cowardice. Later on, he learned that a too demonstrative bearing would on many occasions interfere with his success in life; he toned down his love of muscular victory, and only allowed himself an outbreak every now and then, when he felt he could afford the indulgence. Put early into an accountant's office, and losing his father about the same time (the parent, who had a diseased heart, was killed by an outburst of fury to which Abraham gave way on some trivial occasion), he had henceforth to fight his own battle, and showed himself very capable of winning it. In many strange ways he accumulated a little capital, and the development of commercial genius put him at a comparatively early age on the road to fortune. He kept to the business of an accountant, and by degrees added several other distinct callings. He became a lender of money in several shapes, keeping both a loan-office and a pawnbroker's shop. In middle age he frequented the race-course, but, for sufficient reasons, dropped that pursuit entirely before he had turned his fiftieth year. As a youth he had made a good thing of games of skill, but did not pursue them as a means of profit when he no longer needed the resource.

He married at the age of thirty. This, like every other step he took, was well planned; his wife brought him several thousand pounds, being the daughter of a retired publican with whom Woodstock had had business relations.

Two years after his marriage was born his first and only child, a girl whom they called Lotty. Lotty, as she grew up, gradually developed an unfortunate combination of her parents' qualities; she had her mother's weakness of mind, without her mother's moral sense, and from her father she derived an ingrained stubbornness, which had nothing in common with strength of character. Doubly unhappy was it that she lost her mother so early; the loss deprived her of gentle guidance during her youth, and left her without resource against her father's coldness or harshness. The result was that the softer elements of her character unavoidably degenerated and found expression in qualities not at all admirable, whilst her obstinacy grew the ally of the weakness from which she had most to fear.

Lotty was sent to a day-school till the age of thirteen, then had to become her father's housekeeper. Her friends were very few, none of them likely to be of use to her. Left very much to her own control, she made an acquaintance which led to secret intimacy and open disaster. Rather than face her father with such a disclosure, she left home, and threw herself upon the mercy of the man who had assisted her to go astray. He was generous enough to support her for about a year, during which time her child was born. Then his help ceased.

The familiar choice lay before her—home again, the streets, or starvation. Hardship she could not bear; the second alternative she shrank from on account of her child; she determined to face her father. For him she had no affection, and knew that he did not love her; only desperation could drive her back. She came one Sunday evening, found Mr. Woodstock at home, and, without letting the servant say who was come, went up and entered his presence, the child in her arms. Abraham rose and looked at her calmly. Her disappearance had not troubled him, though he had exerted himself to discover why and whither she was gone, and her return did not visibly affect him. She was a

rebel against his authority—so he viewed the matter—and consequently quite beyond the range of his sympathies. He listened to all she had to say, beheld unmoved her miserable tears, and, when she became silent, coolly delivered his ultimatum. For her he would procure a situation, whereby she could earn her living, and therewith his relations to her would end; the child he would put into other hands and have it cared for, but Lotty would lose sight of it for ever. The girl hesitated, but the maternal instinct was very strong in her; the little one began to cry, as if fearing separation from its mother; she decided to refuse.

"Then I shall go on the streets!" she exclaimed passionately. "There's nothing else left for me."

"You can go where you please," returned Abraham.

She tried to obtain work, of course fruitlessly. She got into debt with her landlady, and only took the fatal step when at length absolutely turned adrift.

That was not quite ten years gone by; she was then but eighteen. Let her have lost her child, and she would speedily have fallen into the last stages of degradation. But the little one lived. She had called it Ida, a name chosen from some tale in the penny weeklies, which were the solace of her misery. She herself took the name of Starr, also from a page of fiction.

Balancing the good and evil of this life in her dark little mind, Lotty determined that one thing there was for which it was worth while to make sacrifices, one end which she felt strong enough to keep persistently in view. Ida should be brought up "respectably"—it was her own word; she should be kept absolutely free from the contamination of her mother's way of living; nay, should, when the time came, go to school, and have good chances. And at the end of all this was a far-off hope, a dim vision of possibilities, a vague trust that her daughter might perchance prove for her a means of returning to that world of "respectability" from which she was at present so hopelessly shut out. She would keep making efforts to get into an honest livelihood as often as an occasion presented itself; and Ida should always live with "respectable" people, cost what it might.

The last resolution was only adhered to for a few months. Lotty could not do without her little one, and eventually brought it back to her own home. It is not an infrequent thing to find little children living in disorderly houses. In the profession Lotty had chosen there are, as in all professions, grades and differences. She was by no means a vicious girl, she had no love of riot for its own sake; she would greatly have preferred a decent mode of life, had it seemed practicable. Hence she did not associate herself with the rank and file of abandoned women; her resorts were not the crowded centres; her abode was not in the quarters consecrated to her business. In all parts of London there are quiet by-streets of houses given up to lodging-letting, wherein are to be found many landladies, who, good easy souls, trouble little about the private morals of their lodgers, so long as no positive disorder comes about and no public scandal is occasioned. A girl who says that she is occupied in a workroom is never presumed to be able to afford the luxury of strict virtue, and if such a one, on taking a room, says that "she supposes she may have friends come to see her?" the landlady will understand quite well what is meant, and will either accept or refuse her for a lodger as she sees good. To such houses as these Lotty confined herself. After some three or four years of various experiences, she hit upon the abode in Milton Street, and there had dwelt ever since. She got on well with Mrs. Ledward, and had been able to make comfortable arrangements for Ida. The other lodgers in the house were generally very quiet and orderly people, and she herself was quite successful in arranging her affairs so as to create no disturbance. She had her regular *clientele*; she frequented the roads about Regent's Park and Primrose Hill; and she supported herself and her child.

Ida Starr's bringing up was in no respect inferior to that she would have received in the home of the average London artisan or small tradesman. At five years old she had begun to go to school; Mrs. Ledward's daughter, a girl of seventeen, took her backwards and forwards every day. At this school she remained three years and a half; then her mother took her away, and put her under the care of Miss Rutherford, a better teacher. When at home, she either amused herself in Lotty's room, or, when that was engaged, made herself comfortable with Mrs. Ledward's family, with one or other

of whom she generally passed the night. She heard no bad language, saw nothing improper, listened to no worse conversation than any of the other children at Miss Rutherford's. Even at her present age of ten it never occurred to her to inquire how her mother supported herself. The charges brought by Harriet Smales conveyed to her mind no conception of their true meaning; they were to her mere general calumnies of vague application. Her mother "bad," indeed! If so, then what was the meaning of goodness? For poor Lotty's devotion to the child had received its due reward herein, that she was loved as purely and intensely as any most virtuous parent could hope to be; so little regard has nature for social codes, so utterly is she often opposed to all the precepts of respectability. This phrase of Harriet's was the very first breathing against her mother's character that Ida had ever heard. Lotty had invented fables, for the child's amusement, about her own earlier days. The legend was, that her husband had died about a year after marriage. Of course Ida implicitly believed all this. Her mind contained pictures of a beautiful little house just outside London in which her mother had once lived, and her imagination busied itself with the time when they would both live in just that same way. She was going to be a teacher, so it had been decided in confidential chats, and would one day have a school of her own. In such a future Lotty herself really believed. The child seemed to her extraordinarily clever, and in four more years she would be as old as a girl who had assisted with the little ones in the first school she went to. Lotty was ambitious. Offers of Mrs. Ledward to teach Ida dressmaking, she had put aside; it was not good enough.

Yet Ida was not in reality remarkable either for industry or quickness in learning. At both schools she had frequently to be dealt with somewhat severely. Ability she showed from time to time, but in application she was sadly lacking. Books were distasteful to her, more even than to most children; she learned sometimes by listening to the teacher, but seldom the lessons given her to prepare. At home there were no books to tempt her to read for herself; her mother never read, and would not have known how to set about giving her child a love for such occupation, even had she deemed it needful. And yet Ida always seemed to have abundance to think about; she would sit by herself for hours, without any childlike employment, and still not seem weary. When asked what her thoughts ran upon, she could not give very satisfactory answers; she was always rather slow in expressing herself, and never chattered, even to her mother. One queer and most unchildlike habit she had, which, as if thinking it wrong, she only indulged when quite alone; she loved to sit before a looking-glass and gaze into her own face. At such times her little countenance became very sad without any understood reason.

The past summer had been to her a time of happiness, for there had come comparatively little bad weather, and sunshine was like wine to Ida. The proximity of the park was a great advantage. During the weeks of summer holiday, she spent whole days wandering about the large, grassy tracts by herself, rejoicing in the sensation of freedom from task-work. If she were especially in luck, a dog would come and play about her, deserting for a minute its lawful master or mistress, and the child would roll upon the grass in delighted sport. Or she would find out a warm, shady nook quite near to the borders of the Zoological Gardens, and would lie there with ear eager to catch the occasional sounds from the animals within. The roar of the lion thrilled her with an exquisite trembling; the calls of the birds made her laugh with joy. Once, three years ago, her mother had taken her to Hastings for a week, and when she now caught the cry of the captive sea-gulls, it brought back marvellous memories of the ocean flashing in the sun, of the music of breakers, of the fresh smell of the brine.

Now there had come upon her the first great grief. She had caused her mother bitter suffering, and her own heart was filled with a commensurate pain. Had she been a little older she would already have been troubled by another anxiety; for the last two years her mother's health had been falling away; every now and then had come a fit of illness, and at other times Lotty suffered from a depression of spirits which left her no energy to move about. Ida knew that her mother was often unhappy, but naturally could not dwell long on this as soon as each successive occasion had passed away. Indeed, in her heart, she almost welcomed such times, since she was then allowed to sleep upstairs, one of her

greatest joys. Lotty was only too well aware of the physical weakness which was gaining upon her. She was mentally troubled, moreover. Ida was growing up; there would come a time, and that very shortly, when it would be necessary either for them to part, or else for herself to change her mode of life. Indeed, she had never from the first quite lost sight of her intention to seek for an honest means of support; and of late years the consciousness of her hopeless position had grown to an ever-recurring trouble. She knew the proposed step was in reality impossible to her, yet she persistently thought and talked of it. To Mrs. Ledward she confided at least once a week, generally when she paid her rent, her settled intention to go and find work of some kind in the course of the next two or three days; till at length this had become a standing joke with the landlady, who laughed merrily as often as the subject was mentioned. Lotty had of late let her thoughts turn to her father, whom she had never seen since their parting. Not with any affection did she think of him, but, in her despairing moments, it seemed to her impossible that he should still refuse aid if she appealed to him for it. Several times of late she had been on the point of putting her conviction to the test. She had passed his house from time to time, and knew that he still lived there. Perhaps the real reason of her hesitation was, not fear of him, but a dread, which she would not confess to herself, lest he should indeed prove obdurate, and so put an end to her last hope. For what would become of her and of Ida if her health absolutely failed? The poor creature shrank from the thought in horror. The hope connected with her father grew more and more strong. But it needed some very decided crisis to bring her to the point of overcoming all the apprehensions which lay in the way of an appeal to the stern old man. This crisis had arrived. The illness which was now upon her she felt to be more serious than any she had yet suffered. Suppose she were to die, and Ida to be left alone in the world. Even before she heard of the child's dismissal from school she had all but made up her mind to write to her father, and the shock of that event gave her the last impulse. She wrote a letter of pitiful entreaty. Would he help her to some means of earning a living for herself and her child? She could not part from Ida. Perhaps she had not long to live, and to ask her to give up her child would be too cruel. She would do anything, would go into service, perform the hardest and coarsest toil. She told him how Ida had been brought up, and implored his pity for the child, who at all events was innocent.

When Ida reached home from her visit to the City, she saw her mother risen and sitting by the fire. Lotty had found the suspense insupportable as she lay still, and, though the pains in her chest grew worse and the feeling of lassitude was gaining upon her, she had half-dressed, and even tried to move about. Just before the child's appearance, she seemed to have sunk into something of a doze on her chair, for, as the door opened, she started and looked about her in doubt.

"Where have you been so long?" she asked impatiently.

"I got back as quickly as I could, mother," said Ida, in some surprise.

"Got back? Is school over?"

"From the—the place you sent me to, mother."

"What am I thinking of!" exclaimed Lotty, starting to consciousness. "Come here, and tell me. Did you see—see him, Ida? Mr. Woodstock, you know."

"Yes, mother," began the child, with pale face, "and he—he said I was to tell you—"

She burst into tears, and flew to her mother's neck.

"Oh, you won't send me away from you, mother dear? I can't go away from you!"

Lotty felt she knew what this meant. Fear and trouble wrought with her physical weakness to drive her almost distracted. She sprang up, caught the child by the shoulders, and shook her as if in anger.

"Tell me, can't you?" she cried, straining her weak voice. "What did he say? Don't be a little fool! Can't the child speak?"

She fell back again, seized with a cough which choked her. Ida stayed her sobbing, and looked on in terror. Her mother motioned constantly to her to proceed.

"The gentleman said," Ida continued, with calm which was the result of extreme self-control, "that he would take me; but that you were never to see me again."

"Did he say anything else about me?" whispered Lotty.

"No, nothing else."

"Go—go and tell him you'll come,—you'll leave me."

Ida stood in anguish, speechless and motionless. All at once her mother seemed to forget what she was saying, and sat still, staring into the fire. Several times she shivered. Her hands lay listlessly on her lap; she breathed with difficulty.

Shortly afterwards, the landlady came into the room. She was alarmed at Lotty's condition. Her attempts to arouse the sick woman to consciousness were only partly successful. She went downstairs again, and returned with another woman, a lodger in the house. These two talked together in low tones. The result of their colloquy was that Mrs. Ledward dressed Lotty as well as she could, whilst the other left the house and returned with a cab.

"We're going to take your mother to the hospital," said Mrs. Ledward to the child. "You wait here till we come back, there's a good girl. Now, hold up a bit, Lotty; try and walk downstairs. That's better, my girl."

Ida was left alone.

CHAPTER IV
CHRISTMAS IN TWO HOMES

When Ida Starr was dismissed from school it wanted but a few days to the vacations. The day which followed her mother's removal to the hospital was Christmas Eve. For two hours on the afternoon of Christmas Day, Ida sat in silence by the bedside in the ward, holding her mother's hand. The patient was not allowed to speak, seemed indeed unable to do so. The child might not even kiss her. The Sister and the nurse looked pityingly at Ida when they passed by, and, when the visitors' time was at an end, and she had to rise and go, the Sister put an orange into her hand, and spoke a few hopeful words.

Night was setting in as she walked homewards; it was cold, and the sky threatened snow. She had only gone a few yards, when there came by a little girl of her own age, walking with some one who looked like a nurse-maid. They were passing; but all at once the child sprang to Ida's side with a cry of recognition. It was little Maud Enderby.

"Where have you been, Ida? Where are you going? Oh, I'm so glad; I wanted so to see you. Miss Rutherford told us you'd left school, and you weren't coming back again. Aren't you really? And sha'n't I see you?"

"I don't know, I think not," said Ida. In her premature trouble she seemed so much older than her friend.

"I told Miss Rutherford you weren't to blame," went on Maud eagerly. "I told her it was Harriet's own fault, and how shockingly she'd behaved to you. I expect you'll come back again after the holidays, don't you?"

Ida shook her head, and said nothing.

"But I shall see you again?" pleaded the little maid. "You know we're always going to be friends, aren't we? Who shall I tell all my dreams to, if I lose you?"

Dreams, in the literal sense of the word. Seldom a week went by, but Maud had some weird vision of the night to recount to her friend, the meaning of which they would together try to puzzle out; for it was an article of faith with both that there were meanings to be discovered, and deep ones.

Ida promised that she would not allow herself to be lost to her friend, and they kissed, and went their several ways.

Throughout the day the door of Mr. Smales's shop had been open, though the shutters were up. But at nightfall it was closed, and the family drew around the tea-table in the parlour which smelt so of drugs. It was their only sitting-room, for as much of the house as could be was let to another family. Besides Mr. Smales and his daughter Harriet, there sat at the table a lad of about thirteen, with a dark, handsome face, which had something of a foreign cast His eyes gleamed at all times with the light of a frank joyousness; he laughed with the unrestraint of a perfectly happy nature. His countenance was capable, too, of a thoughtfulness beyond his years, a gravity which seemed to come of high thoughts or rich imagination. He bore no trace of resemblance to either the chemist or his daughter, yet was their relative. Mr. Smales had had a sister, who at an early age became a public singer, and so far prospered as to gain some little distinction in two or three opera seasons. Whilst thus engaged, she made the acquaintance of an Italian, Casti by name, fell in love with him, and subsequently followed him to Italy. Her courage was rewarded, for there she became the singer's wife. They travelled for two years, during which time a son was born to them. The mother's health failed; she was unable henceforth to travel with her husband, and, after living in Rome for nearly four years, she died there. The boy was shortly brought back to England by his father, and placed in the care of Mr. Smales, on the understanding that a sum of money should be paid yearly for his support and education. From that day to the present nothing more had been heard of Signor Casti, and all the care of his sister's

child had fallen upon poor Smales, who was not too well provided with means to support his own small household. However, he had not failed in the duty, and Julian (his name had been Englished) was still going to school at his uncle's expense. It was by this time understood that, on leaving school, he should come into the shop, and there qualify himself for the business of a chemist.

Had it not been for Julian, the back parlour would have seen but little cheerfulness to-night. Mr. Smales himself was always depressed in mind and ailing in body. Life had proved too much for him; the burden of the recurring daylight was beyond his strength. There was plainly no lack of kindliness in his disposition, and this never failed to come strongly into his countenance as often as he looked at Harriet. She was his only child. Her mother had died of consumption early in their married life, and it was his perpetual dread lest he should discover in Harriet a disposition to the same malady.

His fears had but too much stimulus to keep them alive. Harriet had passed through a sickly childhood, and was growing up with a feeble constitution. Body and mind were alike unhealthy. Of all the people who came in contact with her, her father alone was blind to her distorted sense of right, her baseless resentments, her malicious pleasures, her depraved intellect. His affection she repaid with indifference. At present, the only person she appeared to really like was the servant Sarah, a girl of vicious character.

Harriet had suffered more from Ida's blow than had at first appeared likely. The wound would not heal well, and she had had several feverish nights. For her convenience, the couch had been drawn up between the fire and the table; and, reclining here, she every now and then threw out a petulant word in reply to her father's or Julian's well-meant cheerfulness. But for the boy, the gloomy silence would seldom have been broken. He, however, was full to-night of a favourite subject, and kept up a steady flow of bright narrative. At school he was much engaged just now with the history of Rome, and it was his greatest delight to tell the listeners at home the glorious stories which were his latest acquisitions. All to-day he had been reading Plutarch. The enthusiasm with which he spoke of these old heroes and their deeds went beyond mere boyish admiration of valour and delight in bloodshed; he seemed to be strongly sensible of the real features of greatness in these men's lives, and invested his stories with a glow of poetical colour which found little appreciation in either of his hearers.

"And I was born in Rome, wasn't I, uncle?" he exclaimed at last. "*I* am a Roman; *Romanus sum*!"

Then he laughed with his wonted bright gleefulness. It was half in jest, but for all that there was a genuine warmth on his cheek, and lustre in his fine eyes.

"Some day I will go to Rome again," he said, "and both of you shall go with me. We shall see the Forum and the Capitol! Sha'n't you shout when you see the Capitol, uncle?"

Poor Smales only smiled sadly and shook his head. It was a long way from Marylebone to Rome; greater still the distance between the boy's mind and that of his uncle.

Sarah took Harriet to bed early. Julian had got hold of his Plutarch again, and read snatches of it aloud every now and then. His uncle paid no heed, was sunk in dull reverie. When they had sat thus for more than an hour, Mr. Smales began to exhibit a wish to talk.

"Put the book away, and draw up to the fire, my boy," he said, with as near an approach to heartiness as he was capable of. "It's Christmas time, and Christmas only comes once a year."

He rubbed his palms together, then began to twist the corners of his handkerchief.

"Well, Julian," he went on, leaning feebly forward to the fire, "a year more school, I suppose, and then—business; what?"

"Yes, uncle."

The boy spoke cheerfully, but yet not in the same natural way as before.

"I wish I could afford to make you something better, my lad; you ought to be something better by rights. And I don't well know what you'll find to do in this little shop. The business might be better; yes, might be better. You won't have much practice in dispensing, I'm afraid, unless things improve. It is mostly hair-oil,—and the patent medicines. It's a poor look-out for you, Julian."

There was a silence.

"Harriet isn't quite well yet, is she?" Smales went on, half to himself.

"No, she looked poorly to-night."

"Julian," began the other, but paused, rubbing his hands more nervously than ever.

"Yes, uncle?"

"I wonder what 'ud become of her if I—if I died now? You're growing up, and you're a clever lad; you'll soon be able to shift for yourself. But what'll Harriet do? If only she had her health. And I shall have nothing to leave either her or you, Julian,—nothing,—nothing! She'll have to get her living somehow. I must think of some easy business for her, I must. She might be a teacher, but her head isn't strong enough, I fear. Julian—"

"Yes, uncle?"

"You—you are old enough to understand things, my boy," went on his uncle, with quavering voice. "Suppose, after I'm dead and gone, Harriet should want help. She won't make many friends, I fear, and she'll have bad health. Suppose she was in want of any kind,—you'd stand by her, Julian, wouldn't you? You'd be a friend to her,—always?"

"Indeed I would, uncle!" exclaimed the boy stoutly.

"You promise me that, Julian, this Christmas night?—you promise it?"

"Yes, I promise, uncle. You've always been kind and good to me, and see if I'm not the same to Harriet."

His voice trembled with generous emotion.

"No, I sha'n't see it, my boy," said Smales, shaking his head drearily; "but the promise will be a comfort to me at the end, a comfort to me. You're a good lad, Julian!"

Silence came upon them again.

In the same district, in one of a row of semi-detached houses standing in gardens, lived Ida's little friend, Maud Enderby, with her aunt, Miss Bygrave, a lady of forty-two or forty-three. The rooms were small and dark; the furniture sparse, old-fashioned, and much worn; there were no ornaments in any of the rooms, with the exception of a few pictures representing the saddest incidents in the life of Christ. On entering the front door you were oppressed by the chill, damp atmosphere, and by a certain unnatural stillness. The stairs were not carpeted, but stained a dark colour; a footfall upon them, however light, echoed strangely as if from empty chambers above. There was no sign of lack of repair; perfect order and cleanliness wherever the eye penetrated; yet the general effect was an unspeakable desolation.

Maud Enderby, on reaching home after her meeting with Ida, entered the front parlour, and sat down in silence near the window, where faint daylight yet glimmered. The room was without fire. Over the mantelpiece hung an engraving of the Crucifixion; on the opposite wall were the Agony in the Garden, and an Entombment; all after old masters. The centre table, a few chairs, and a small sideboard were the sole articles of furniture. The table was spread with a white cloth; upon it were a loaf of bread, a pitcher containing milk, two plates, and two glasses.

Maud sat in the cold room for a quarter of an hour; it became quite dark. Then was heard a soft footstep descending the stairs; the door opened, and a lady came in, bearing a lighted lamp, which she stood upon the table. She was tall, very slender, and with a face which a painter might have used to personify the spiritual life. Its outlines were of severe perfection; its expression a confirmed grief, subdued by, and made subordinate to, the consciousness of an inward strength which could convert suffering into triumph. Her garment was black, of the simplest possible design. In looking at Maud, as the child rose from the chair, it was scarcely affection that her eyes expressed, rather a grave compassion. Maud took a seat at the table without speaking; her aunt sat down over against her. In perfect silence they partook of the milk and the bread. Miss Bygrave then cleared the table with her own hands, and took the things out of the room. Maud still kept her place. The child's manner was not at all constrained; she was evidently behaving in her wonted way. Her eyes wandered about the

room with rather a dreamy gaze, and, as often as they fell upon her aunt's face, became very serious, though in no degree expressive of fear or even awe.

Miss Bygrave returned, and seated herself near the little girl; then remained thoughtful for some minutes. The breath from their lips was plainly visible on the air. Maud almost shivered now and then, but forced herself to suppress the impulse. Her aunt presently broke the silence, speaking in a low voice, which had nothing of tenderness, but was most impressive in its earnest calm.

"I wish to speak to you before you go upstairs, Maud; to speak of things which you cannot understand fully as yet, but which you are old enough to begin to think about."

Maud was surprised. It was the first time that her aunt had ever addressed her in this serious way. She was used to being all but ignored, though never in a manner which made her feel that she was treated unkindly. There was nothing like confidence between them; only in care for her bodily wants did Miss Bygrave fill the place of the mother whose affection the child had never known. Maud crossed her hands on her lap, and looked up with respectful attention upon her pale sweet little face.

"Do you wonder at all," Miss Bygrave went on, "why we never spend Christmas like your friends do in their homes, with eating and drinking and all sorts of merriment?"

"Yes, aunt, I do."

It was evidently the truth, and given with the simple directness which characterised the child.

"You know what Christmas Day means, Maud?"

"It is the day on which Christ was born."

"And for what purpose did Christ come as a child on earth?"

Maud thought for a moment. She had never had any direct religious teaching; all she knew of these matters was gathered from her regular attendance at church. She replied in a phrase which had rested in her mind, though probably conveying little if any meaning to her.

"He came to make us free from sin."

"And so we should rejoice at His coming. But would it please Him, do you think, to see us showing our joy by indulging in those very sins from which He came to free us?"

Maud looked with puzzled countenance.

"Is it a sin to like cake and sweet things, aunt?"

The gravity of the question brought a smile to Miss Bygrave's close, strong lips.

"Listen, Maud," she said, "and I will tell you what I mean. For you to like such things is no sin, as long as you are still too young to have it explained to you why you should overcome that liking. As I said, you are now old enough to begin to think of more than a child's foolishness, to ask yourself what is the meaning of the life which has been given you, what duties you must set before yourself as you grow up to be a woman. When once these duties have become clear to you, when you understand what the end of life is, and how you should seek to gain it, then many things become sinful which were not so before, and many duties must be performed which previously you were not ready for."

Miss Bygrave spoke with effort, as if she found it difficult to express herself in sufficiently simple phraseology. Speaking, she did not look at the child; and, when the pause came, her eyes were still fixed absently on the picture above the mantelpiece.

"Keep in mind what I shall tell you," she proceeded with growing solemnity, "and some day you will better understand its meaning than you can now. The sin which Christ came to free us from was—fondness for the world, enjoyment of what we call pleasure, desire for happiness on earth. He Himself came to set us the example of one to whom the world was nothing, who could put aside every joy, and make His life a life of sorrows. Even that was not enough. When the time had come, and He had finished His teaching of the disciples whom He chose, He willingly underwent the most cruel of all deaths, to prove that His teaching had been the truth, and to show us that we must face any most dreadful suffering rather than desert what we believe to be right."

She pointed to the crucified figure, and Maud followed the direction of her hand with awed gaze.

"And this," said Miss Bygrave, "is why I think it wrong to make Christmas a time of merriment. In the true Christian, every enjoyment which comes from the body is a sin. If you feel you *like* this or that, it is a sign that you must renounce it, give it up. If you feel fond of life, you must force yourself to hate it; for life is sin. Life is given to us that we may conquer ourselves. We are placed in the midst of sin that we may struggle against its temptations. There is temptation in the very breath you draw, since you feel a dread if it is checked. You must live so as to be ready at any moment to give up your life with gladness, as a burden which it has been appointed you to bear for a time. There is temptation in the love you feel for those around you; it makes you cling to life; you are tempted to grieve if you lose them, whereas death is the greatest blessing in the gift of God. And just because it is so, we must not snatch at it before our time; it would be a sin to kill ourselves, since that would be to escape from the tasks set us. Many pleasures would seem to be innocent, but even these it is better to renounce, since for that purpose does every pleasure exist. I speak of the pleasures of the world. One joy there is which we may and must pursue, the joy of sacrifice. The more the body suffers, the greater should be the delight of the soul; and the only moment of perfect happiness should be that when the world grows dark around us, and we feel the hand of death upon our hearts."

She was silent, and both sat in the cold room without word or motion.

CHAPTER V
POSSIBILITIES

Christmas passed, and the beginning of the New Year drew nigh. And, one morning, as Mr. Woodstock was glancing up and down the pages of a ledger, a telegram was delivered to him. It was from a hospital in the north-west of London. "Your daughter is dying, and wishes to see you. Please come at once."

Lotty's ailment had declared itself as pneumonia. She was frequently delirious, and the substance of her talk at such times led the attendant Sister to ask her, when reason returned, whether she did not wish any relative to be sent for. Lotty was frightened, but, as long as she was told that there was still hope of recovery, declined to mention any name. The stubborn independence which had supported her through these long years asserted itself again, as a reaction after her fruitless appeal; at moments she felt that she could die with her lips closed, and let what might happen to her child. But when she at length read upon the faces of those about her that her fate hung in the balance, and when she saw the face of little Ida, come there she knew not how, looking upon her from the bedside, then her purpose yielded, and in a whisper she told her father's address, and begged that he might be apprised of her state.

Abraham Woodstock arrived at the hospital, but to no purpose. Lotty had lost her consciousness. He waited for some hours; there was no return of sensibility. When it had been long dark, and he had withdrawn from the ward for a little, he was all at once hastily summoned back. He stood by the bedside, his hands behind his back, his face set in a hard gaze upon the pale features on the pillow. Opposite to him stood the medical man, and a screen placed around the bed shut them off from the rest of the ward. All at once Lotty's eyes opened. It seemed as though she recognised her father, for a look of surprise came to her countenance. Then there was a gasping for breath, a struggle, and the eyes saw no more, for all their staring.

Mr. Woodstock left the hospital. At the first public-house he reached he entered and drank a glass of whisky. The barman had forgotten the piece of lemon, and was rewarded with an oath considerably stronger than the occasion seemed to warrant. Arrived at certain cross-ways, Mr. Woodstock paused. His eyes were turned downwards; he did not seem dubious of his way, so much as in hesitation as to a choice of directions. He took a few steps hither, then back; began to wend thither, and again turned. When he at length decided, his road brought him to Milton Street, and up to the door on which stood the name of Mrs. Ledward.

He knocked loudly, and the landlady herself opened.

"A Mrs. Starr lived here, I believe?" he asked.

"She does live here, sir, but she's in the orspital at present, I'm sorry to say."

"Is her child at home?"

"She is, sir."

"Let me see her, will you? In some room, if you please."

Mrs. Ledward's squinting eyes took shrewd stock of this gentleman, and, with much politeness, she showed him into her own parlour. Then she summoned Ida from upstairs, and, the door being closed upon the two, she held her ear as closely as possible to the keyhole.

Ida recognised her visitor with a start, and drew back a little. There were both fear and dislike in her face, fear perhaps predominating.

"You remember coming to see me," said Mr. Woodstock, looking down upon the child, and a trifle askance.

"Yes, sir," was Ida's reply.

"I have just been at the hospital. Your mother is dead."

His voice gave way a little between the first and the last letter of the last word. Perhaps the sound was more to his ear than the thought had been to his mind. Perhaps, also, he felt when it was too late that he ought to have made this announcement with something more of preparation. Ida's eyes were fixed upon his face, and seemed expanding as they gazed; her lips had parted; she was the image of sudden dread. He tried to look away from her, but somehow could not. Then two great tears dropped upon her cheeks, and her mouth began to quiver. She put her hands up to her face, and sobbed as a grown woman might have done.

Mr. Woodstock turned away for a minute, and fingered a china ornament on the mantelpiece. He heard the sobs forcibly checked, and, when there was silence, again faced his grandchild.

"You'll be left all alone now, you see," he said, his voice less hard. "I was a friend of your mother's, and I'll do what I can for you. You'd better come with me to my house."

Ida looked at him in surprise, tempered with indignation.

"If you were a friend of mother's," she said, "why did you want to take me away from her and never let her see me again?"

"Well, you've nothing to do with that," said Abraham roughly. "Go and put your things on, and come with me."

"No," replied Ida firmly. "I don't want to go with you."

"What you want has nothing to do with it. You will do as I tell you."

Abraham felt strangely in this interview. It was as though time were repeating itself, and he was once more at issue with his daughter's childish wilfulness.

Ida did not move.

"Why won't you come?" asked Mr. Woodstock sharply.

"I don't want to," was Ida's answer.

"Look here, then," said the other, after a brief consideration. "You have the choice, and you're old enough to see what it means. You can either come with me and be well cared for, or stay here and shift as best you can; now, be sharp and make up your mind."

"I don't wish to go with you, I'll stay here and do my best."

"Very well."

Mr. Woodstock whistled a bar of an air, stepped from the room, and thence out into the streets.

It was not his intention really to go at once. Irritation had made it impossible for him to speak longer with the child; he would walk the length of the street and return to give her one more chance. Distracted in purpose as he had never been in his life before, he reached Marylebone Road; rain was just beginning to fall, and he had no umbrella with him. He stood and looked back. Ida once out of his sight, that impatient tenderness which her face inspired failed before the recollection of her stubbornness. She had matched her will with his, as bad an omen as well could be. What was the child to him, or he to her? He did not feel capable of trying to make her like him; what good in renewing the old conflicts and upsetting the position of freedom he had attained? Doubtless she inherited a fatal disposition. In his mind lurked the foreknowledge that he might come to be fond of this little outcast, but Woodstock was incapable as yet of understanding that love must and will be its own reward. The rain fell heavier, and at this moment an omnibus came up. He hailed it, saying to himself that he would think the matter over and come back on the morrow. The first part of his purpose he fulfilled; but to Milton Street he never returned.

As soon as he had left the house, Mrs. Ledward bounced into the room where Ida stood.

"You little idjot!" she exclaimed. "What do you mean by refusing a offer like that!—Why, the gentleman's your own father."

"My father!" repeated Ida, in scornful astonishment. "My father died when I was a baby. Mother's told me so often."

"If you believe all your mother told you,—Well, well, you have been a little wooden-head. What made you behave like that to him?—Where does he live, eh?"

"I don't know."

"You do know. Why, I heard him say you'd been to see him. And what are you going to do, I'd like to know? You don't expect me to keep you, I s'pose. Tell me at once where the gentleman lives, and let me take you there. The idea of your turning against your own father!"

"He's *not* my father!" cried Ida passionately. "My father is dead; and now mother's dead, and I'm alone." She turned and went from the room, weeping bitterly.

CHAPTER VI
AN ADVERTISEMENT

In a morning newspaper of March 187—, that is to chapter, appeared a singular advertisement.

"WANTED, human companionship. A young man of four-and-twenty wishes to find a congenial associate of about his own age. He is a student of ancient and modern literatures, a free-thinker in religion, a lover of art in all its forms, a hater of conventionalism. Would like to correspond in the first instance. Address O. W., City News Rooms, W.C."

An advertisement which, naturally, might mean much or little, might be the outcome of an idle whim, or the despairing cry of a hungry heart. It could not be expected to elicit many replies; and brought indeed but one.

Behind the counter of a chemist's shop in Oxford Street there served, day after day, a young assistant much observed of female customers. The young man was handsome, and not with that vulgar handsomeness which is fairly common among the better kind of shop-walkers and counter-keepers. He had rather long black hair, which arranged itself in silky ripples about a face of perfectly clear, though rather dark, complexion. When he smiled, as he frequently did, the effect was very pleasant. He spoke, too, with that musical intonation which is always more or less suggestive of musical thought. He did not seem by any means ideally adapted to the place he occupied here, yet filled it without suspicion of constraint or uneasiness: there was nothing in him to make one suppose that he had ever been accustomed to a better sphere of life.

He lived in the house above the shop, and had done so for about two years; previously he had held a like position in a more modest establishment. His bed-room, which had to serve him as sitting-room also during his free hours, gave indications of a taste not ordinarily found in chemists' assistants. On the walls were several engravings of views in Rome, ancient and modern; and there were two bookcases filled with literature which had evidently known the second-hand stall,—most of the Latin poets, a few Italian books, and some English classics. Not a trace anywhere of the habits and predilections not unfairly associated with the youth of the shop, not even a pipe or a cigar-holder. It was while sitting alone here one evening, half musing, half engaged in glancing over the advertisements in a paper two days old, that the assistant had been attracted by the insertion just quoted. He read and re-read it, became more thoughtful, sighed slightly. Then he moved to the table and took some note-paper out of a writing-case. Still he seemed to be in doubt, hesitated in pressing a pen against his thumb-nail, was on the point of putting the note-paper away again. Ultimately, however, he sat down to write. He covered four pages with a letter, which he then proceeded deliberately to correct and alter, till he had cut it down by about half. Then came another period of doubt before he decided to make a fair copy. But it was finally made, and the signature at the foot was: Julian Casti.

He went out at once to the post.

Two days later he received a reply, somewhat longer than his own epistle. The writer was clearly keeping himself in a tentative attitude. Still, he wrote something about his own position and his needs. He was a teacher in a school in South London, living in lodgings, with his evenings mostly unoccupied. His habits, he declared, were Bohemian. Suppose, by way of testing each other's dispositions, they were to interchange views on some book with which both were likely to be acquainted: say, Keats's poems? In conclusion, the "O. W." of the advertisement signed himself Osmond Waymark.

The result was that, a week after, Casti received an invitation to call on Waymark, at the latter's lodgings in Walcot Square, Kennington. He arrived on a Saturday evening, just after eight o'clock. The house he sought proved to be one of very modest appearance; small, apparently not too clean, generally uninviting. But a decent-looking woman opened the door, and said that Mr. Waymark would

be found in response to a knock at the first-floor front. The visitor made his way up the dark, narrow stair-case, and knocked as bidden. A firm voice summoned him to enter.

From a seat by a table which was placed as near as possible to a very large fire rose a young man whose age might have been either twenty-three or twenty-six. Most people would have inclined to give him the latter figure. He was rather above the average stature, and showed well-hung limbs, with a habit of holding himself which suggested considerable toughness of sinews; he moved gracefully, and with head well held up. His attire spoke sedentary habits; would have been decidedly shabby, but for its evident adaptation to easy-chair and fireside. The pure linen and general tone of cleanliness were reassuring; the hand, too, which he extended, was soft, delicate, and finely formed. The head was striking, strongly individual, set solidly on a rather long and shapely neck; a fine forehead, irregular nose, rather prominent jaw-bones, lips just a little sensual, but speaking good-humour and intellectual character. A heavy moustache; no beard. Eyes dark, keen, very capable of tenderness, but perhaps more often shrewdly discerning or cynically speculative. One felt that the present expression of genial friendliness was unfamiliar to the face, though it by no means failed in pleasantness. The lips had the look of being frequently gnawed in intense thought or strong feeling. In the cheeks no healthy colour, but an extreme sallowness on all the features. Smiling, he showed imperfect teeth. Altogether, a young man upon whom one felt it difficult to pronounce in the earlier stages of acquaintance; whose intimacy but few men would exert themselves to seek; who in all likelihood was chary of exhibiting his true self save when secure of being understood.

Julian Casti was timid with strangers; his eyes fell before the other's look, and he shook hands without speaking. The contrast in mere appearance between the two was very pronounced; both seemed in some degree to be aware of it. Waymark seemed more rugged than in ordinary companionship; the slightly effeminate beauty of Casti, and his diffident, shyly graceful manners, were more noticeable than usual. Waymark inspected his visitor closely and directly; the latter only ventured upon one or two quick side glances. Yet the results were, on the whole, mutually satisfactory.

Julian's eyes glistened at the sight of two goodly bookcases, reaching from floor to ceiling. There were, too, pictures of other than the lodging-house type; engraved heads of the great in art and science, and a few reproductions in pencil or chalk of known subjects, perchance their possessor's own work. On the table lay traces of literary occupation, sheets of manuscript, open books, and the like. On another table stood a tray, with cups and saucers. A kettle was boiling on the fire.

Waymark helped the conversation by offering a cup of coffee, which he himself made.

"You smoke, I hope?" he asked, reaching some cigars from the mantelpiece.

Julian shook his head, with a smile.

"No? How on earth do you support existence?—At all events, you don't, as the railway-carriage phrase has it, object to smoking?"

"Not at all. I like the scent, but was never tempted to go further."

Waymark filled his pipe, and made himself comfortable in a low cane-bottom chair, which had stood folded-up against the wall. Talk began to range over very various topics, Waymark leading the way, his visitor only gradually venturing to take the initiative. Theatres were mentioned, but Julian knew little of them; recent books, but with these he had small acquaintance; politics, but in these he had clearly no interest.

"That's a point of contact, at all events," exclaimed Waymark. "I detest the very name of Parliament, and could as soon read Todhunter on Conic Sections as the reports of a debate. Perhaps you're a mathematician?" This with a smile.

"By no means," was the reply. "In fact," Casti went on, "I'm afraid you begin to think my interests are very narrow indeed. My opportunities have been small. I left a very ordinary school at fourteen, and what knowledge I have since got has come from my own efforts. I am sure the profit from our intercourse would be entirely on my side. I have the wish to go in for many things, however, —"

"Oh," broke in the other, "don't suppose that I am a scholar in any sense of the word, or a man of more than average culture. My own regular education came to an end pretty much at the same age, and only a certain stubbornness has forced me into an intellectual life, if you can call it so. Not much intellect required in my every-day business, at all events. The school in which I teach is a fair type of the middle-class commercial 'academy;' the headmaster a nincompoop and charlatan, my fellow-assistants poor creatures, who must live, I suppose,—though one doesn't well understand why. I had always a liking for Greek and Latin and can make shift to read both in a way satisfactory to myself, though I dare say it wouldn't go for much with college examiners. Then, as for my scribbling, well, it has scarcely yet passed the amateur stage. It will some day; simply because I've made up my mind that it shall; but as yet I haven't got beyond a couple of weak articles in weak magazines, and I don't exactly feel sure of my way. I rather think we shall approach most nearly in our taste for poetry. I liked much what you had to say about Keats. It decided me that we ought to go on."

Julian looked up with a bright smile.

"What did you think at first of my advertisement, eh?" cried Waymark, with a sudden burst of loud laughter. "Queer idea, wasn't it?"

"It came upon me curiously. It was so like a frequent thought of my own actually carried out."

"It was? You have felt that same desperate need of congenial society?"

"I have felt it very strongly indeed. I live so very much alone, and have always done so. Fortunately I am of a very cheerful disposition, or I might have suffered much. The young fellows I see every day haven't much intellect, it must be confessed. I used to try to get them under the influence of my own enthusiasms, but they didn't seem to understand me. They care only for things which either repel me, or are utterly without interest."

"Ha! you understand what that means!" Waymark had risen from his low chair, and stood with his back to the fire. His eyes had a new life, and he spoke in a strong, emphatic way which suited well with his countenance. "You know what it is to have to do exclusively with fools and brutes, to rave under the vile restraints of Philistine surroundings? Then you can form some notion of the state I was in when I took the step of writing that advertisement; I was, I firmly believe, on the verge of lunacy! For two or three days I had come back home from the school only to pace up and down the room in an indescribable condition. I get often like that, but this time things seemed reaching a head. Why, I positively cried with misery, absurd as it may sound. My blood seemed too hot, seemed to be swelling out the veins beyond endurance. As a rule I get over these moods by furious walking about the streets half through the night, but I couldn't even do that. I had no money to go in for dissipation: that often helps me. Every book was loathsome to me. My landlady must have overheard something, for she came in and began a conversation about God knows what; I fear I mortally offended her; I could have pitched the poor old woman out of the window! Heavens, how did I get through those nights?"

"And the fit has passed?" inquired Julian when the other ceased.

"The Lord be praised; yes!" Waymark laughed half-scornfully. "There came an editor's note, accepting a thing that had been going from magazine to magazine for three months. This snatched me up into furious spirits. I rushed out to a theatre, drank more than was good for me, made a fool of myself in general,—and then received your letter. Good luck never comes singly."

Julian had watched the strange workings of Waymark's face with close interest. When the latter suddenly turned his eyes, as if to see the effect of all his frankness, Casti coloured slightly and looked away, but with a look of friendly sympathy.

"Do I shock you?" asked the other. "Do you think me rather too much of an animal, for all my spiritual longings?"

"Certainly not, I can well understand you, I believe."

The conversation passed to quieter things. Julian seemed afraid of saying too much about his own experiences, but found opportunities of showing his acquaintance with English poetry, which was quite as extensive as that of his new friend, excepting in the case of a few writers of the day, whom

he had not been able to procure. He had taught himself Italian, too, and had read considerably in that language. He explained that his father was an Italian, but had died when he himself was still an infant.

"You have been in Italy?" asked Waymark, with interest.

A strange look came over Julian's features, a look at once bright and melancholy; his fine eyes gleamed as was their wont eight years ago, in the back-parlour in Boston Street, when he was telling tales from Plutarch.

"Not," he said, in a low voice charged with feeling, "since I was three years old.—You will think it strange, but I don't so much long for the modern Italy, for the beautiful scenery and climate, not even for the Italy of Raphael, or of Dante. I think most of classical Italy. I am no scholar, but I love the Latin writers, and can forget myself for hours, working through Livy or Tacitus. I want to see the ruins of Rome; I want to see the Tiber, the Clitumnus, the Aufidus, the Alban Hills, Lake Trasimenus,—a thousand places! It is strange how those old times have taken hold upon me. The mere names in Roman history make my blood warm.—And there is so little chance that I shall ever be able to go there; so little chance."

Waymark had watched the glowing face with some surprise.

"Why, this is famous!" he exclaimed. "We shall suit each other splendidly. Who knows? We may see Italy together, and look back upon these times of miserable struggle. By the by, have you ever written verses?"

Julian reddened, like a girl.

"I have tried to," he said.

"And do still?"

"Sometimes."

"I thought as much. Some day you shall let me hear them; won't you? And I will read you some of my own. But mine are in the savage vein, a mere railing against the universe, altogether too furious to be anything like poetry; I know that well enough. I have long since made up my mind to stick to prose; it is the true medium for a polemical egotist. I want to find some new form of satire; I feel capabilities that way which shall by no means rust unused. It has pleased Heaven to give me a splenetic disposition, and some day or other I shall find the tongue."

It was midnight before Julian rose to leave, and he was surprised when he discovered how time had flown. Waymark insisted on his guest's having some supper before setting out on his walk home; he brought out of a cupboard a tin of Australian mutton, which, with bread and pickles, afforded a very tolerable meal after four hours' talk. They then left the house together, and Waymark accompanied his friend as far as Westminster Bridge.

"It's too bad to have brought you so far at this hour," said Julian, as they parted.

"Oh, it is my hour for walking," was the reply. "London streets at night are my element. Depend upon it, Rome was poor in comparison!"

He went off laughing and waving his hand.

CHAPTER VII
BETWEEN OLD AND NEW

Julian Casti's uncle had been three years dead. It was well for him that he lived no longer; his business had continued to dwindle, and the last months of the poor man's life were embittered by the prospect of inevitable bankruptcy. He died of an overdose of some opiate, which the anguish of sleeplessness brought him into the habit of taking. Suicide it might have been, yet that was scarcely probable; he was too anxious on his daughter's account to abandon her in this way, for certainly his death could be nothing to her profit. Julian was then already eighteen, and quickly succeeded in getting a situation. Harriet Smales left London, and went to live with her sole relative, except Julian, an aunt who kept a stationer's shop in Colchester. She was taught the business, and assisted her aunt for more than two years, when, growing tired of the life of a country town, she returned to London, and succeeded in getting a place at a stationer's in Gray's Inn Road. This was six months ago. Having thus established herself, she wrote to Julian, and told him where she was.

Julian never forgot the promise he had made to his uncle that Christmas night, eight years ago, when he was a lad of thirteen. Harriet he had always regarded as his sister, and never yet had he failed in brotherly duty to her. When the girl left Colchester, she was on rather bad terms with her aunt, and the latter wrote to Julian, saying that she knew nothing of Harriet's object in going to London, but that it was certainly advisable that some friend should be at hand, if possible, to give her advice; though advice (she went on to say) was seldom acceptable to Harriet. This letter alarmed Julian, as it was the first he had heard of his cousin's new step; the letter from herself at the end of a week's time greatly relieved him, and he went off as soon as possible to see her. He found her living in the house where she was engaged, apparently with decent people, and moderately contented; more than this could never be said of the girl. Since then, he had seen her at least once every week. Sometimes he visited her at the shop; when the weather was fine, they spent the Sunday afternoon in walking together. Harriet's health seemed to have improved since her return to town. Previously, as in her childhood, she had always been more or less ailing. From both father and mother she had inherited an unhealthy body; there was a scrofulous tendency in her constitution, and the slightest casual ill-health, a cold or any trifling accident, always threatened her with serious results. She was of mind corresponding to her body; restless, self-willed, discontented, sour-tempered, querulous. She certainly used no special pains to hide these faults from Julian, perhaps was not herself sufficiently conscious of them, but the young man did not seem to be repelled by her imperfections; he invariably treated her with gentle forbearance, pitied her sufferings, did many a graceful little kindness in hope of pleasing her.

The first interview between Julian and Waymark was followed by a second a few days after, when it was agreed that they should spend each Sunday evening together in Kennington; Julian had no room in which he could well receive visitors. The next Sunday proved fine; Julian planned to take Harriet for a walk in the afternoon, then, after accompanying her home, to proceed to Walcot Square. As was usual on these occasions, he was to meet his cousin at the Holborn end of Gray's Inn Road, and, as also was the rule, Harriet came some twenty minutes late. Julian was scrupulously punctual, and waiting irritated him not a little, but he never allowed himself to show his annoyance. There was always the same kind smile on his handsome face, and the pressure of his hand was warm.

Harriet Smales was about a year younger than her cousin. Her dress showed moderately good taste, with the usual fault of a desire to imitate an elegance which she could not in reality afford. She wore a black jacket, fur-trimmed, over a light grey dress; her black straw hat had a few flowers in front. Her figure was good and her movements graceful; she was nearly as tall as Julian. Her face, however, could not be called attractive; it was hollow and of a sickly hue, even the lips scarcely red. Grey eyes, beneath which were dark circles, looked about with a quick, suspicious glance; the eye-

brows made almost a straight line. The nose was of a coarse type, the lips heavy and indicative of ill-temper. The disagreeable effect of these lineaments was heightened by a long scar over her right temple; she evidently did her best to conceal it by letting her hair come forward very much on each side, an arrangement in itself unsuited to her countenance.

"I think I'm going to leave my place," was her first remark to-day, as they turned to walk westward. She spoke in a dogged way with which Julian was familiar enough, holding her eyes down, and, as she walked, swinging her arms impatiently.

"I hope not," said her cousin, looking at her anxiously. "What has happened?"

"Oh, I don't know; it's always the same; people treat you as if you was so much dirt. I haven't been accustomed to it, and I don't see why I should begin now. I can soon enough get a new shop."

"Has Mrs. Ogle been unkind to you?"

"Oh, I don't know, and I don't much care. You're expected to slave just the same, day after day, whether you're feeling well or not."

This indirect and querulous mode of making known her grievances was characteristic of the girl. Julian bore with it very patiently.

"Haven't you been feeling well?" he asked, with the same kindness.

"Well, no, I haven't. My head fairly splits now, and this sun isn't likely to make it any better."

"Let us cross to the shady side."

"'Twon't make any difference; I can't run to get out of the way of horses."

Julian was silent for a little.

"Why didn't you write to me in the week?" she asked presently. "I'm sure it would be a relief to hear from somebody sometimes. It's like a year from one Sunday to another."

"Did I promise to write? I really didn't remember having done so; I'm very sorry. I might have told you about a new friend I've got."

Harriet looked sharply into his face. Julian had made no mention of Waymark on the preceding Sunday; it had been a rainy day, and they had only spent a few minutes together in the parlour which Mrs. Ogle, the keeper of the shop, allowed them to use on these occasions.

"What sort of a friend?" the girl inquired rather sourly.

"A very pleasant fellow, rather older than myself; I made his acquaintance by chance."

Julian avoided reference to the real circumstances. He knew well the difficulty of making Harriet understand them.

"We are going to see each other every Sunday," he went on.

"Then I suppose you'll give up coming for me?"

"Oh no, not at all. I shall see him at night always, after I have left you."

"Where does he live?"

"Rather far off; in Kennington."

"What is he?"

"A teacher in a school. I hope to get good from being with him; we're going to read together, and so on. I wish you could find some pleasant companion of the same kind, Harriet; you wouldn't feel so lonely."

"I dare say I'm better off without anybody. I shouldn't suit them. It's very few people I do suit, or else people don't suit me, one or the other. What's his name, your new friend's?"

"Waymark."

"And he lives in Kennington? Whereabouts?"

"In Walcot Square. I don't think you know that part, do you?"

"What number?"

Julian looked at her with some surprise. He found her eyes fixed with penetrating observation upon his face. He mentioned the number, and she evidently made a mental note of it. She was silent for some minutes.

"I suppose you'll go out at nights with him?" was her next remark.

"It is scarcely likely. Where should we go to?"

"Oh, I don't know, and I don't suppose it matters much, to me."

"You seem vexed at this, Harriet. I'm very sorry. Really, it's the first friend I've ever had. I've often felt the need of some such companionship."

"I'm nobody?" she said, with a laugh, the first today.

Julian's face registered very perfectly the many subtle phases of thought and emotion which succeeded each other in his mind. This last remark distressed him for a moment; he could not bear to hurt another's feelings.

"Of course I meant male friend," he said quickly. "You are my sister."

"No, I'm not," was the reply; and, as she spoke, Harriet glanced sideways at him in a particularly unpleasant manner. She herself meant it to be pleasant.

"Oh yes, you are, Harriet," he insisted good-humouredly. "We've been brother and sister ever since we can remember, haven't we?"

"But we aren't really, for all that," said the girl, looking away. "Well, now you've got somebody else to take you up, I know very well I shall see less of you. You'll be making excuses to get out of the rides when the summer comes again."

"Pray don't say or think anything of the kind, Harriet," urged Julian with feeling. "I should not think of letting anything put a stop to our picnics. It will soon be getting warm enough to think of the river, won't it? And then, if you would like it, there is no reason why my friend shouldn't come with us, sometimes."

"Oh, nonsense! Why, you'd be ashamed to let him know me."

"Ashamed! How can you possibly think so? But you don't mean it; you are joking."

"I'm sure I'm not. I should make mistakes in talking, and all sorts of things. You don't think much of me, as it is, and that would make you like me worse still."

She tossed her head nervously, and swung her arms with the awkward restlessness which always denoted some strong feeling in her.

"Come, Harriet, this is too bad," Julian exclaimed, smiling. "Why, I shall have to quarrel with you, to prove that we're good friends."

"I wish you *would* quarrel with me sometimes," said the girl, laughing in a forced way. "You take all my bad-temper always just in the same quiet way. I'd far rather you fell out with me. It's treating me too like a child, as if it didn't matter how I went on, and I wasn't anything to you."

Of late, Harriet had been getting much into the habit of this ambiguous kind of remark when in her cousin's company. Julian noticed it, and it made him a trifle uneasy. He attributed it, however, to the girl's strangely irritable disposition, and never failed to meet such outbreaks with increased warmth and kindness of tone. To-day, Harriet's vagaries seemed to affect him somewhat unusually. He became silent at times, and then tried to laugh away the unpleasantness, but the laughter was not exactly spontaneous. At length he brought back the conversation to the point from which it had started, and asked if she had any serious intention of leaving Mrs. Ogle.

"I'm tired of being ordered about by people!" Harriet exclaimed. "I know I sha'n't put up with it much longer. I only wish I'd a few pounds to start a shop for myself."

"I heartily wish I had the money to give you," was Julian's reply.

"Don't you save anything at all?" asked his cousin, with affected indifference.

"A little; very little. At all events, I think we shall be able to have our week at the seaside when the time comes. Have you thought where you'd like to go to?"

"No; I haven't thought anything about it. What time shall you get back home to-night?"

"Rather late, I dare say. We sit talking and forget the time. It may be after twelve o'clock."

Harriet became silent again. They reached Hyde Park, and joined the crowds of people going in all directions about the walks. Harriet had always a number of ill-natured comments to make on

the dress and general appearance of people they passed. Julian smiled, but with no genuine pleasure. As always, he did his best to lead the girl's thoughts away from their incessant object, herself.

They were back again at the end of Gray's Inn Road by half-past four.

"Well, I won't keep you," said Harriet, with the sour smile. "I know you're in a hurry to be off. Are you going to walk?"

"Yes; I can do it in about an hour."

The girl turned away without further leave-taking, and Julian walked southwards with a troubled face.

Waymark expected him to tea. At this, their third meeting, the two were already on very easy terms. Waymark did the greater share of the talking, for Julian was naturally of fewer words; from the beginning it was clear that the elder of the friends would have the initiative in most things. Waymark unconsciously displayed something of that egoism which is inseparable from force of character, and to the other this was far from disagreeable; Julian liked the novel sensation of having a strong nature to rely upon. Already he was being led by his natural tendency to hero-worship into a fervid admiration for his friend.

"What have you' been doing with yourself this fine day?" Waymark asked, as they sat down to table.

"I always spend Sunday afternoon with a cousin of mine," replied Julian, with the unhesitating frankness which was natural to him.

"Male or female?"

"Female." There was a touch of colour on his face as he met the other's eye, and he continued rather quickly. "We lived together always as children, and were only separated at my uncle's death, three years ago. She is engaged at a stationer's shop."

"What is a fellow to do to get money?" Waymark exclaimed, when his pipe was well alight. "I'm growing sick of this hand-to-mouth existence. Now if one had a bare competency, what glorious possibilities would open out. The vulgar saying has it that 'time is money;' like most vulgar sayings putting the thing just the wrong way about. 'Money is time,' I prefer to say; it means leisure, and all that follows. Why don't you write a poem on Money, Casti? I almost feel capable of it myself. What can claim precedence, in all this world, over hard cash? It is the fruitful soil wherein is nourished the root of the tree of life; it is the vivifying principle of human activity. Upon it luxuriate art, letters, science; rob them of its sustenance, and they droop like withering leaves. Money means virtue; the lack of it is vice. The devil loves no lurking-place like an empty purse. Give me a thousand pounds to-morrow, and I become the most virtuous man in England. I satisfy all my instincts freely, openly, with no petty makeshifts and vile hypocrisies. To scorn and revile wealth is the mere resource of splenetic poverty. What cannot be purchased with coin of the realm? First and foremost, freedom. The moneyed man is the sole king; the herds of the penniless are but as slaves before his footstool. He breathes with a sense of proprietorship in the whole globe-enveloping atmosphere; for is it not in his power to inhale it wheresoever he pleases? He puts his hand in his pocket, and bids with security for every joy of body and mind; even death he faces with the comforting consciousness that his defeat will only coincide with that of human science. He buys culture, he buys peace of mind, he buys love. —You think not! I don't use the word cynically, but in very virtuous earnest. Make me a millionaire, and I will purchase the passionate devotion of any free-hearted woman the world contains!"

Waymark's pipe had gone out; he re-lit it, with the half-mocking smile which always followed upon any more vehement utterance.

"That I am poor," he went on presently, "is the result of my own pigheadedness. My father was a stock-broker, in anything but flourishing circumstances. He went in for some cursed foreign loan or other,—I know nothing of such things,—and ruined himself completely. He had to take a subordinate position, and died in it. I was about seventeen then, and found myself alone in the world. A friend of my father's, also a city man, Woodstock by name, was left my guardian. He wanted me

to begin a business career, and, like a fool, I wouldn't hear of it. Mr. Woodstock and I quarrelled; he showed himself worthy of his name, and told me plainly that, if I didn't choose to take his advice, I must shift for myself. That I professed myself perfectly ready to do; I was bent on an intellectual life, forsooth; couldn't see that the natural order of things was to make money first and be intellectual afterwards. So, lad as I was, I got a place as a teacher, and that's been my business ever since."

Waymark threw himself back and laughed carelessly. He strummed a little with his fingers on the arm of the chair, and resumed:

"I interested myself in religion and philosophy; I became an aggressive disciple of free-thought, as it is called. Radicalism of every kind broke out in me, like an ailment. I bought cheap free-thought literature; to one or two papers of the kind I even contributed. I keep these effusions carefully locked up, for salutary self-humiliation at some future day, when I shall have grown conceited. Nay, I went further. I delivered lectures at working-men's clubs, lectures with violent titles. One, I remember, was called 'The Gospel of Rationalism.' And I was enthusiastic in the cause, with an enthusiasm such as I shall never experience again. Can I imagine myself writing and speaking such things now-a-days? Scarcely: yet the spirit remains, it is only the manifestations which have changed. I am by nature combative; I feel the need of attacking the cherished prejudices of society; I have a joy in outraging what are called the proprieties. And I wait for my opportunity, which has yet to come."

"How commonplace my life has been, in comparison," said Julian, after an interval of thoughtfulness.

"Your nature, I believe, is very pure, and therefore very happy. *I* am what Browning somewhere calls a 'beast with a speckled hide,' and happiness, I take it, I shall never know."

Julian could begin to see that his friend took something of a pleasure in showing and dwelling upon the worst side of his own character.

"You will be happy," he said, "when you once find your true work, and feel that you are doing it well."

"But the motives, the motives!—Never mind, I've talked enough of myself for one sitting. Don't think I've told you everything. Plenty more confessions to come, when time and place shall serve. Little by little you will get to know me, and by then will most likely have had enough of me."

"That is not at all likely; rather the opposite."

When they left the house together, shortly after eleven, Julian's eye fell upon the dark figure of a girl, standing by a gas-lamp on the opposite side of the way. The figure held his gaze. Waymark moved on, and he had to follow, but still looked back. The girl had a veil half down upon her face; she was gazing after the two. She moved, and the resemblance to Harriet was so striking that Julian again stopped. As he did so, the figure turned away, and walked in the opposite direction, till it was lost in the darkness.

Julian went on, and for a time was very silent.

CHAPTER VIII
ACADEMICAL

The school in which Osmond Waymark taught was situated in "a pleasant suburb of southern London" (Brixton, to wit); had its "spacious playground and gymnasium" (the former a tolerable back-yard, the latter a disused coach-house); and, as to educational features, offered, at the choice of parents and guardians, either the solid foundation desirable for those youths predestined to a commercial career, or the more liberal training adapted to minds of a professional bias. Anything further in the way of information was to be obtained by applying to the headmaster, Dr. Tootle.

At present the number of resident pupils was something under forty. The marvel was how so many could be accommodated in so small a house. Two fair-sized bedrooms, and a garret in which the servants could not be persuaded to sleep, served as dormitories for the whole school; the younger children sleeping two together.

Waymark did not reside on the premises. For a stipulated sum of thirteen pounds per quarter he taught daily from nine till five, with an interval of an hour and a half at dinner-time, when he walked home to Walcot Square for such meal as the state of his exchequer would allow. Waymark occupied a prominent place in Dr. Tootle's prospectus. As Osmond Waymark, B.A.,—the degree was a *bona fide* one, of London University,—he filled the position of Senior Classical Master; anonymously he figured as a teacher of drawing and lecturer on experimental chemistry. The other two masters, resident, were Mr. O'Gree and Herr Egger; the former, teacher of mathematics, assistant classical master, and professor of gymnastics; the latter, teacher of foreign languages, of music, and of dancing. Dr. Tootle took upon himself the English branches, and, of course, the arduous duty of general superintendence. He was a very tall, thin, cadaverous, bald-headed man. Somehow or other he had the reputation of having, at an earlier stage in his career, grievously over-exerted his brain in literary labour; parents were found, on the whole, ready to accept this fact as an incontestable proof of the doctor's fitness to fill his present office, though it resulted in entire weeks of retreat from the school-room under the excuse of fearful headaches. The only known product of the literary toil which had had such sad results was a very small English Grammar, of course used in the school, and always referred to by the doctor as "my little compendium."

Now and then, Waymark sought refuge from the loneliness of his room in a visit to his colleagues at the Academy. The masters' sitting-room was not remarkable for cosiness, even when a fire burnt in the grate and the world of school was for the time shut out. The floor was uncarpeted, the walls illustrated only with a few maps and diagrams. There was a piano, whereon Herr Egger gave his music lessons. Few rooms in existence could have excelled this for draughts; at all times there came beneath the door a current of wind which pierced the legs like a knife; impossible to leave loose papers anywhere with a chance of finding them in the same place two minutes after.

When Waymark entered this evening, he found his colleagues seated together in silence. Mr. Philip O'Gree—"fill-up" was his own pronunciation of the name—would have been worse than insignificant in appearance, but for the expression of good-humour and geniality which possessed his irregular features. He was red-headed, and had large red whiskers.

Herr Egger was a gentleman of very different exterior. Tall, thick, ungainly, with a very heavy, stupid face, coarse hands, outrageous lower extremities. A mass of coal-black hair seemed to weigh down his head. His attire was un-English, and, one might suspect, had been manufactured in some lonely cottage away in the remote Swiss valley which had till lately been the poor fellow's home. Dr. Tootle never kept his foreign masters long. His plan was to get hold of some foreigner without means, and ignorant of English, who would come and teach French or German in return for mere board and lodging; when the man had learnt a little English, and was in a position to demand a salary, he was

dismissed, and a new professor obtained. Egger had lately, under the influence of some desperate delusion, come to our hospitable clime in search of his fortune. Of languages he could not be said to know any; his French and his German were of barbarisms all compact; English as yet he could use only in a most primitive manner. He must have been the most unhappy man in all London. Finding himself face to face with large classes of youngsters accustomed to no kind of discipline, in whom every word he uttered merely excited outrageous mirth, he was hourly brought to the very verge of despair. Constitutionally he was lachrymose; tears came from him freely when distress had reached a climax, and the contrast between his unwieldy form and this weakness of demeanour supplied inexhaustible occasion for mirth throughout the school. His hours of freedom were spent in abysmal brooding.

Waymark entered in good spirits. At the sight of him, Mr. O'Gree started from the fireside, snatched up the poker, brandished it wildly about his head, and burst into vehement exclamations.

"Ha! ha! you've come in time, sir; you've come in time to hear my resolution. I can't stand ut any longer; I won't stand ut a day longer! Mr. Waymark, you're a witness of the outrageous way in which I'm treated in this academy—the way in which I'm treated both by Dr. Tootle and by Mrs. Tootle. You were witness of his insulting behaviour this very afternoon. He openly takes the side of the boys against me; he ridicules my accent; he treats me as no gentleman can treat another, unless one of them's no gentleman at all! And, Mr. Waymark, I won't stand ut!"

Mr. O'Gree's accent was very strong indeed, especially in his present mood. Waymark listened with what gravity he could command.

"You're quite right," he said in reply. "Tootle's behaviour was especially scandalous to-day. I should certainly take some kind of notice of it."

"Notuss, sir, notuss! I'll take that amount of notuss of it that all the metropoluss shall hear of my wrongs. I'll assault 'um, sir; I'll assault 'um in the face of the school,—the very next time he dares to provoke me! I'll rise in my might, and smite his bald crown with his own ruler! I'm not a tall man, Mr. Waymark, but I can reach his crown, and that he shall be aware of before he knows ut. He sets me at naught in my own class, sir; he pooh-poohs my mathematical demonstrations, sir; he encourages my pupils in insubordination! And Mrs. Tootle! Bedad, if I don't invent some device for revenging myself on that supercilious woman. The very next time she presumes to address me disrespectfully at the dinner-table, sir, I'll rise in my might, sir,—see if I don't!—and I'll say to her, 'Mrs. Tootle, ma'am, you seem to forget that I'm a gentleman, and have a gentleman's susceptibilities. When I treat *you* with disrespect, ma'am, pray tell me of ut, and I'll inform you you speak an untruth!'"

Waymark smiled, with the result that the expression of furious wrath immediately passed from his colleague's countenance, giving place to a broad grin.

"Waymark, look here!" exclaimed the Irishman, snatching up a piece of chalk, and proceeding to draw certain outlines upon a black-board. "Here's Tootle, a veritable Goliath;—here's me, as it were David. Observe; Tootle holds in his hand his 'little compendium,' raised in haughty superciliousness. Observe me with the ruler!—I am on tiptoe; I am taking aim; there is wrath in every sinew of my arrum! My arrum descends on the very centre of Tootle's bald pate—"

"Mr. O'Gree!"

The tableau was most effective. Unnoticed by either the Irishman or Waymark, the door had opened behind them, and there had appeared a little red-faced woman, in slatternly dress. It was Mrs. Tootle. She had overheard almost the whole of O'Gree's vivid comment upon his graphic illustration, in silence, until at length she could hold her peace no longer, and gave utterance to the teacher's name in a voice which trembled with rage and mortification.

"Mr. O'Gree! Are you aware of my presence, sir?"

The chalk dropped from O'Gree's fingers, but otherwise his attitude remained unaltered; struck motionless with horror, he stood pointing to the drawing on the board, his face pale, his eyes fascinated by those of Mrs. Tootle. The latter went on in a high note.

"Well, sir, as soon as you have had enough of your insulting buffoonery, perhaps you will have the goodness to attend to me, and to your duty! What do you mean by allowing the dormitories to get into this state of uproar? There's been a pillow-fight going on for the last half-hour, and you pay no sort of attention; the very house is shaking?"

"I protest I had not heard a sound, ma'am, or I should have—"

"Perhaps you hear nothing now, sir,—and the doctor suffering from one of his very worst headaches, utterly unable to rest even if the house were perfectly quiet!"

O'Gree darted to the door, past Mrs. Tootle, and was lost to sight. There was indeed a desperate uproar in the higher regions of the house. In a moment the noise increased considerably. O'Gree had rushed up without a light, and was battling desperately in the darkness with a score of pillow-fighters, roaring out threats the while at the top of his voice. Mrs. Tootle retired from the masters' room with much affectation of dignity, leaving the door open behind her.

Waymark slammed it to, and turned with a laugh to the poor Swiss.

"In low spirits to-night, I'm afraid, Mr. Egger?"

Egger let his chair tilt forward, rose slowly, drew a yellow handkerchief from his mouth and wiped his eyes with it, then exclaimed, in the most pitiful voice—

"Mr. Waymark, I have made my possible!—I can no more!"

It was his regular phrase on these occasions; Waymark had always much ado to refrain from laughter when he heard it repeated, but he did his best to be seriously sympathetic, and to attempt consolation in such German as was at his command. Egger's despondency only increased, and he wept afresh to hear accents which were intelligible to him. Mr. O'Gree re-entered the room, and the Swiss retired to his corner.

Philip was hot with excitement and bodily exertion; he came in mopping his forehead, and, without turning to Waymark, stood with eyes fixed on the chalk caricatures. Very gradually he turned round. Waymark was watching him, on his face an expression of subdued mirth. Their looks met, and both exploded in laughter.

"Bedad, my boy," exclaimed O'Gree, "I'm devilish sorry! I wouldn't have had it happen for a quarter's salary,—though I sadly need a new pair of breeches. She's a supercilious cat-o-mountain, and she loses no opportunity of insulting me, but after all she's a woman."

"By-the-by, Waymark," he added in a moment, "what a stunner the new governess is! You're a lucky dog, to sit in the same room with her. What's her name, I say?"

"Miss Enderby. You've seen her, have you?"

"I caught a glimpse of her as she came downstairs; it was quite enough; she floored me. She's never been out of my thoughts for a minute since I saw her. 'I love her, I love her, and who shall dare, to chide me for loving that teacher fair!'"

"Well, yes," said Waymark, "she has a tolerable face; seems to me a long way too good to be teaching those unlicked cubs. The dragon wasn't too civil to her, though it was the first day."

"Not civil to her? If I were present, and heard that woman breathe the slightest incivility, I'd—"

He broke off in the midst of his vehemence with a startled look towards the door.

"Mr. Egger," he exclaimed, "a song; I beg, a song. Come, I'll lead off.

'Miss Enderby hath a beaming eye'—

Bah! I'm not in voice to-night."

Egger was persuaded to sit down to the piano. It was a mournful instrument, reduced to discordant wheeziness by five-finger exercises, but the touch of the Swiss could still evoke from it some kind of harmony. He sang a Volkslied, and in a way which showed that there was poetry in the man's nature, though his outward appearance gave so little promise of it. His voice was very fair, and well suited to express the tender pathos of these inimitable melodies. Waymark always enjoyed this singing; his eyes brightened, and a fine emotion played about his lips. And as he walked along the dark ways to his lodgings, Egger's voice was still in his ears—

"*Der Mensch wenn er fortgeht, der kommt nimmermefr*."

"Heaven be thanked, no!" the young man said to himself.

Poverty was his familiar companion, and had been so for years. His rent paid each week, there often remained a sum quite insufficient for the absolute necessities of existence; for anything more, he had to look to chance pupils in the evenings, and what little he could earn with his pen. He wrote constantly, but as yet had only succeeded in getting two articles printed. Then, it was a necessity of his existence to mix from time to time in the life of the town, and a stroll into the Strand after nightfall inevitably led to the expenditure of whatever cash his pocket contained. He was passionately found of the theatre; the lights about the open entrance drew him on irresistibly, and if, as so often, he had to choose between a meal and a seat in the gallery, the meal was sacrificed. Hunger, indeed, was his normal state; semi-starvation, alternating with surfeits of cheap and unwholesome food, brought about an unhealthy condition of body. Often he returned to Walcot Square from his day-long drudgery, and threw himself upon the bed, too exhausted to light a fire and make his tea,—for he was his own servant in all things except the weekly cleaning-out of the room. Those were dark hours, and they had to be struggled through in solitude.

Weary as he was he seldom went to bed before midnight, sometimes long after, for he clung to those few hours of freedom with something like savage obstinacy; during this small portion of each day at least, he would possess his own soul, be free to think and read. Then came the penalty of anguish unutterable when the morning had to be faced. These dark, foggy February mornings crushed him with a recurring misery which often drove him to the verge of mania. His head throbbing with the torture of insufficient sleep, he lay in dull half-conscious misery till there was no longer time to prepare breakfast, and he had to hasten off to school after a mouthful of dry bread which choked him. There had been moments when his strength failed, and he found his eyes filling with tears of wretchedness. To face the hideous drudgery of the day's teaching often cost him more than it had cost many men to face the scaffold. The hours between nine and one, the hours between half-past two and five, Waymark cursed them minute by minute, as their awful length was measured by the crawling hands of the school-clock. He tried sometimes, in mere self-defence, to force himself into an interest in his work, that the time might go the quicker; but the effort was miserably vain. His senses reeled amid the din and rattle of classes where discipline was unknown and intelligence almost indiscoverable. Not seldom his temper got the better even of sick lassitude; his face at such times paled with passion, and in ungoverned fury he raved at his tormentors. He awed them, too, but only for the moment, and the waste of misery swallowed him up once more.

Was this to be his life?—he asked himself. Would this last for ever?

For some reason, the morning after the visit to the masters' room just spoken of found him in rather better spirits than usual. Perhaps it was that he had slept fairly well; a gleam of unwonted sunshine had doubtless something to do with it. Yet there was another reason, though he would scarcely admit it to himself. It was the day on which he gave a drawing-lesson to Dr. Tootle's two eldest children. These drawing-lessons were always given in a room upstairs, which was also appropriated to the governess who came every morning to teach three other young Tootles, two girls and a boy, the latter considered not yet old enough to go into the school. On the previous day, Waymark had been engaged in the room for half an hour touching up some drawings of boys in the school, which were about to be sent home. He knew that he should find a fresh governess busy with the children, the lady hitherto employed having gone at a moment's notice after a violent quarrel with Mrs. Tootle, an incident which had happened not infrequently before. When he entered the room, he saw a young woman seated with her back to him, penning a copy, whilst the children jumped and rioted about her in their usual fashion. The late governess had been a mature person of features rather serviceable than handsome; that her successor was of a different type appeared sufficiently from the fair round head, the gracefully bended neck, the perfect shoulders, the slight, beautiful form. Waymark took his place and waited with some curiosity till she moved. When she did so, and, rising, suddenly became aware

of his presence, there was a little start on both sides; Miss Enderby—so Waymark soon heard her called by the pupils—had not been aware, owing to the noise, of a stranger's entrance, and Waymark on his side was so struck with the face presented to him. He had expected, at the most, a pretty girl of the commonplace kind: he saw a countenance in which refinement was as conspicuous as beauty. She was probably not more than eighteen or nineteen. In speaking with the children she rarely if ever smiled, but exhibited a gentle forbearance which had something touching in it; it was almost as though she appealed for gentleness in return, and feared a harsh word or look.

"That's Mr. Waymark," cried out Master Percy Tootle, when his overquick eyes perceived that the two had seen each other. "He's our drawing-master. Do you like the look of him?"

Miss Enderby reddened, and laid her hand on the boy's arm, trying to direct his attention to a book. But the youngster shook off her gentle touch, and looked at his brothers and sisters with a much too knowing grin. Waymark had contented himself with a slight bow, and at once bent again over his work.

Very shortly the two eldest children, both girls, came in, and with them their mother. The latter paid no attention to Waymark, but proceeded to cross-examine the new governess as to her methods of teaching, her experience, and so on, in the coarse and loud manner which characterised Mrs. Tootle.

"You'll find my children clever," said Mrs. Tootle, "at least, that has been the opinion of all their teachers hitherto. If they don't make progress, it certainly will not be their own fault. At the same time, they are high-spirited, and require to be discreetly managed. This, as I previously informed you, must be done without the help of punishment in any shape; I disapprove of those methods altogether. Now let me hear you give them a lesson in geography."

Waymark retired at this juncture; he felt that it would be nothing less than cruelty to remain. The episode, however, had lightened his day with an interest of a very unusual kind. And so it was that, on the following morning, not only the gleam of watery sunshine, but also the thought of an hour to be spent in the presence of that timid face, brought him on his way to the school with an unwonted resignation. Unfortunately his drawing lessons were only given on two mornings in the week. Still, there would be something in future to look forward to, a novel sensation at The Academy.

CHAPTER IX
THE COUSINS

Harriet Smales had left home in a bad temper that Sunday afternoon, and when she came back to tea, after her walk with Julian, her state of mind did not appear to have undergone any improvement. She took her place at the tea-table in silence. She and Mrs. Ogle were alone this evening; the latter's husband—he was a journeyman printer, and left entirely in his wife's hands the management of the shop in Gray's Inn Road—happened to be away. Mrs. Ogle was a decent, cheerful woman, of motherly appearance. She made one or two attempts to engage Harriet in conversation, but, failing, subsided into silence, only looking askance at the girl from time to time. When she had finished her tea and bread-and-butter, Harriet coughed, and, without facing her companion, spoke in rather a cold way.

"I may be late back to-night, Mrs. Ogle. You won't lock the door?"

"I sha'n't go to bed till eleven myself," was the reply.

"But it may be after twelve when I get back."

"Where are you going to, Harriet?"

"If you must know always, Mrs. Ogle, I'm going to see my friend in Westminster."

"Well, it ain't no business of mine, my girl," returned the woman, not unkindly, "but I think it's only right I should have some idea where you spend your nights. As long as you live in my house, I'm responsible for you, in a way."

"I don't want any one to be responsible for me, Mrs. Ogle."

"Maybe not, my girl. But young people ain't always the best judges of what's good for them, and what isn't. I don't think your cousin 'ud approve of your being out so late. I shall sit up for you, and you mustn't be after twelve."

It was said very decidedly. Harriet made no reply, but speedily dressed and went out. She took an omnibus eastward, and sought a neighbourhood which most decently dressed people would have been chary of entering after nightfall, or indeed at any other time, unless compelled to do so. The girl found the object of her walk in a dirty little public-house at the corner of two foul and narrow by-ways. She entered by a private door, and passed into a parlour, which was behind the bar.

A woman was sitting in the room, beguiling her leisure with a Sunday paper. She was dressed with vulgar showiness, and made a lavish display of jewellery, more or less valuable. Eight years ago she was a servant in Mr. Smales's house, and her name was Sarah. She had married in the meanwhile, and become Mrs. Sprowl.

She welcomed her visitor with a friendly nod, but did not rise.

"I thought it likely you'd look in, as you missed larst week. How's things goin' in your part o' the world?"

"Very badly," returned Harriet, throwing off her hat and cloak, and going to warm her hands and feet at the fire. "It won't last much longer, that's the truth of it."

"Eh well, it's all in a life; we all has our little trials an' troubles, as the sayin' is."

"How's the baby?" asked Harriet looking towards a bundle of wrappers which lay on a sofa.

"I doubt it's too good for this world," returned the mother, grinning in a way which made her ugly face peculiarly revolting. "Dessay it'll join its little brother an' sister before long. Mike put it in the club yes'day."

The burial-club, Mrs. Sprowl meant, and Harriet evidently understood the allusion.

"Have you walked?" went on the woman, doubling up her paper, and then throwing it aside. "Dessay you could do with somethin' to take the cold orff yer chest.—Liz," she called out to some one behind the bar, with which the parlour communicated by an open door; "two Irish!"

The liquor was brought. Presently some one called to Mrs. Sprowl, who went out. Leaning on the counter, in one of the compartments, was something which a philanthropist might perhaps have had the courage to claim as a human being; a very tall creature, with bent shoulders, and head seeming to grow straight out of its chest; thick, grizzled hair hiding almost every vestige of feature, with the exception of one dreadful red eye, its fellow being dead and sightless. He had laid on the counter, with palms downward as if concealing something, two huge hairy paws. Mrs. Sprowl seemed familiar with the appearance of this monster; she addressed him rather bad-temperedly, but otherwise much as she would have spoken to any other customer.

"No, you don't, Slimy! No, you don't! What you have in this house you pay for in coppers, so you know. Next time I catch you tryin' to ring the changes, I'll have you run in, and then you'll get a warm bath, which you wouldn't partic'lar care for."

The creature spoke, in hoarse, jumbled words, not easy to catch unless you listened closely.

"If you've any accusion to make agin me, Mrs. Sprowl, p'r'aps you'll wait till you can prove it. I want change for arf a suvrin: ain't that straight, now?"

"Straight or not, you won't get no change over this counter, so there you've the straight tip. Now sling yer 'ook, Slimy, an' get it somewhere else."

"If you've any accusion to make—"

"Hold yer noise!—What's he ordered, Liz?"

"Pot o' old six," answered the girl.

"Got sixpence, Slimy?"

"No, I ain't, Mrs. Sprowl," muttered the creature. "I've got arf a suvrin."

"Then go an' get change for it. Now, once more, sling yer 'ook."

The man moved away, sending back a horrible glare from his one fiery eyeball.

Mrs. Sprowl re-entered the parlour.

"I wish you'd take me on as barmaid, Sarah," Harriet said, when she had drunk her glass of spirits.

"Take you on?" exclaimed the other, with surprise. "Why, have you fallen out with your cousin? I thought you was goin' to be married soon."

"I didn't say for sure that I was; I only said I might be. Any way it won't be just yet, and I'm tired of my place in the shop."

"Don't you be a fool, Harriet," said the other, with genial frankness. "You're well enough off. You stick where you are till you get married. You wouldn't make nothin' at our business; 'tain't all sugar an' lemon, an' sittin' drinkin' twos o' whisky till further orders. You want a quiet, easy business, you do, an' you've got it. If you keep worritin' yerself this way, you won't never make old bones, an' that's the truth. You wait a bit, an' give yer cousin a chance to arst you,—if that's what you're troublin' about."

"I've given him lots o' chances," said Harriet peevishly.

"Eh well, give him lots more, an' it'll all come right. We're all born, but we're not buried.—Hev' another Irish?"

Harriet allowed herself to be persuaded to take another glass.

When the clock pointed to half-past nine, she rose and prepared to depart. She had told Mrs. Sprowl that she would take the 'bus and go straight home; but something seemed to have led her to alter her purpose, for she made her way to Westminster Bridge, and crossed the river. Then she made some inquiries of a policeman, and, in consequence, got into a Kennington omnibus. Very shortly she was set down close by Walcot Square. She walked about till, with some difficulty in the darkness, she had discovered the number at which Julian had told her his friend lived. The house found, she began to pace up and down on the opposite pavement, always keeping her eyes fixed on the same door. She was soon shivering in the cold night air, and quickened her walk. It was rather more than an hour before the door she was watching at length opened, and two friends came out together. Harriet

followed them as closely as she could, until she saw that she herself was observed. Thereupon she walked away, and, by a circuit, ultimately came back into the main road, where she took a 'bus going northwards.

Harriet's cousin, when alone of an evening, sat in his bedroom, the world shut out, his thoughts in long past times, rebuilding the ruins of a fallen Empire.

When he was eighteen, the lad had the good luck to light upon a cheap copy of Gibbon in a second-hand book-shop. It was the first edition; six noble quarto volumes, clean and firm in the old bindings. Often he had turned longing eyes upon newer copies of the great book, but the price had always put them beyond his reach. That very night he solemnly laid open the first volume at the first page, propping it on a couple of meaner books, and, after glancing through the short Preface, began to read with a mind as devoutly disposed as that of any pious believer poring upon his Bible. "In the second century of the Christian AEra, the empire of Rome comprehended the fairest part of the earth, and the most civilised portion of mankind. The frontiers of that extensive monarchy were guarded by ancient renown and disciplined valour." With what a grand epic roll, with what anticipations of solemn music, did the noble history begin! Far, far into the night Julian turned over page after page, thoughtless of sleep and the commonplace duties of the morrow.

Since then he had mastered his Gibbon, knew him from end to end, and joyed in him more than ever. Whenever he had a chance of obtaining any of the writers, ancient or modern, to whom Gibbon refers, he read them and added to his knowledge. About a year ago, he had picked up an old Claudian, and the reading of the poet had settled him to a task which he had before that doubtfully sought. He wanted to write either a poem or a drama on some subject taken from the "Decline and Fall," and now, with Claudian's help, he fixed upon Stilicho for his hero. The form, he then decided, should be dramatic. Upon "Stilicho" he had now been engaged for a year, and to-night he is writing the last words of the last scene. Shortly after twelve he has finished it, and, throwing down his pen, he paces about the room with enviable feelings.

He had not as yet mentioned to Waymark the work he was engaged upon, though he had confessed that he wrote verses at times. He wished to complete it, and then read it to his friend. It was now only the middle of the week, and though he had decided previously to wait till his visit to Walcot Square next Sunday before saying a word about "Stilicho," he could not refrain now from hastily penning a note to Waymark, and going out to post it at once.

When the day came, the weather would not allow the usual walk with Harriet, and Julian could not help feeling glad that it was so. He was too pre-occupied to talk in the usual way with the girl, and he knew how vain it would be to try and make her understand his state of mind. Still, he went to see her as usual, and sat for an hour in Mrs. Ogle's parlour. At times, throughout the week, he had thought of the curious resemblance between Harriet and the girl he had noticed on leaving Waymark's house last Sunday, and now he asked her, in a half-jesting way, whether it had really been she.

"How could it be?" said Harriet carelessly. "I can't be in two places at once."

"Did you stay at home that evening?"

"No,—not all the evening."

"What friends are they you go to, when you are out at night, Harriet?"

"Oh, some relations of the Colchester people.—I suppose you've been spending most of your time in Kennington since Sunday?"

"I haven't left home. In fact, I've been very busy. I've just finished some work that has occupied me for nearly a year."

After all, he could not refrain from speaking of it, though he had made up his mind not to do so.

"Work? What work?" asked Harriet, with the suspicious look which came into her grey eyes whenever she heard something she could not understand.

"Some writing. I've written a play."

"A play? Will it be acted?"

"Oh no, it isn't meant for acting."

"What's the good of it then?"

"It's written in verse. I shall perhaps try to get it published."

"Shall you get money for it?"

"That is scarcely likely. In all probability I shall not be able to get it printed at all."

"Then what's the good of it?" repeated Harriet, still suspicious, and a little contemptuous.

"It has given me pleasure, that's all."

Julian was glad when at length he could take his leave. Waymark received him with a pleased smile, and much questioning.

"Why did you keep it such a secret? I shall try my hand at a play some day or other, but, as you can guess, the material will scarcely be sought in Gibbon. It will be desperately modern, and possibly not altogether in accordance with the views of the Lord Chamberlain. What's the time? Four o'clock. We'll have a cup of coffee and then fall to. I'm eager to hear your 'deep-chested music,' your 'hollow oes and aes.'"

The reading took some three hours; Waymark smoked a vast number of pipes the while, and was silent till the close. Then he got up from his easy-chair, took a step forward, and held out his hand. His face shone with the frankest enthusiasm. He could not express himself with sufficient vehemence. Julian sat with the manuscript rolled up in his hands, on his face a glow of delight.

"It's very kind of you to speak in this way," he faltered at length.

"Kind! How the deuce should I speak? But come, we will have this off to a publisher's forthwith. Have you any ideas for the next work?"

"Yes; but so daring that they hardly bear putting into words."

"Try the effect on me."

"I have thought," said Julian, with embarrassment, "of a long poem—an Epic. Virgil wrote of the founding of Rome; her dissolution is as grand a subject. It would mean years of preparation, and again years in the writing. The siege and capture of Rome by Alaric—what do you think?"

"A work not to be raised from the heat of youth, or the vapours of wine. But who knows?"

There was high talk in Walcot Square that evening. All unknown to its other inhabitants, the poor lodging-house was converted into a temple of the Muses, and harmonies as from Apollo's lyre throbbed in the hearts of the two friends. The future was their inexhaustible subject, the seed-plot of strange hopes and desires. They talked the night into morning, hardly daunted when perforce they remembered the day's work.

CHAPTER X
THE WAY OUT

The ruling spirit of the Academy was Mrs. Tootle. Her husband's constitutional headache, and yet more constitutional laziness, left to her almost exclusively the congenial task of guiding the household, and even of disciplining the school. In lesson-time she would even flit about the classrooms, and not scruple to administer sharp rebukes to a teacher whose pupils were disorderly, the effect of this naturally being to make confusion worse confounded. The boys of course hated her with the hatred of which schoolboys alone are capable, and many a practical joke was played at her expense, not, however, with impunity. Still more pronounced, if possible, was the animus entertained against Mrs. Tootle's offspring, and it was upon the head of Master Felix that the full energy of detestation concentrated itself. He was, in truth, as offensive a young imp as the soil of a middle-class boarding-school could well produce. If Mrs. Tootle ruled the Academy, he in turn ruled Mrs. Tootle, and on all occasions showed himself a most exemplary autocrat. His position, however, as in the case of certain other autocratic rulers, had its disadvantages; he could never venture to wander out of earshot of his father or mother, who formed his body-guard, and the utmost prudence did not suffice to protect him from an occasional punch on the head, or a nip in a tender part, meant probably as earnest of more substantial kindnesses to be conferred upon him at the very earliest opportunity.

To poor Egger fell the unpleasant duty of instructing these young Tootles in the elements of the French language. For that purpose he went up every morning to the class-room on the first floor, and for a while relieved Miss Enderby of her charge. With anguish of spirit he felt the approach of the moment which summoned him to this dread duty, for, in addition to the lively spite of Master Felix and the other children, he had to face the awful superintendence of Mrs. Tootle herself; who was invariably present at these lessons. Mrs. Tootle had somehow conceived the idea that French was a second mother-tongue to her, and her intercourse with Mr. Egger was invariably carried on in that language. Now this was a refinement of torture, seeing that it was often impossible to gather a meaning from her remarks, whilst to show any such difficulty was to incur her most furious wrath. Egger trembled when he heard the rustle of her dress outside, the perspiration stood on his forehead as he rose and bowed before her.

"Bon jour, Monsieur," she would come in exclaiming. "Quel un beau matin! Vous trouverez les jeunes dames et messieurs en bons esprits ce matin."

The spirits of Master Felix had manifested themselves already in his skilfully standing a book upright on the teacher's chair, so that when Egger subsided from his obeisance he sat down on a sharp edge and was thrown into confusion.

"Monsieur Felix," cried his mother, "que faites-vous la?—Les jeunes messieurs anglais sont plus spirituels que les jeunes messieurs suisses, n'est ce pas, Monsieur Egger?"

"En effet, madame," muttered the teacher, nervously arranging his books.

"Monsieur Egger," exclaimed Mrs. Tootle, with a burst of good humour, "est-ce vrai ce qu'on dit que les Suisses sont si excessivement sujets a etre *chez-malades*?"

The awful moment had come. What on earth did *chez-malades* mean? Was he to answer yes or no? In his ignorance of her meaning, either reply might prove offensive. He reddened, fidgeted on his chair, looked about him with an anguished mute appeal for help. Mrs. Tootle repeated her question with emphasis and a change of countenance which he knew too well. The poor fellow had not the tact to appear to understand, and, as he might easily have done, mystify her by some idiomatic remark. He stammered out his apologies and excuses, with the effect of making Mrs. Tootle furious.

Then followed a terrible hour, at the end of which poor Egger rushed down to the Masters' Room, covered his head with his hands and wept, regardless of the boy strumming his exercises on

the piano. Waymark shortly came in to summon him to some other class, whereupon he rose, and, with gestures of despair, groaned out—

"Let me, let me!—I have made my possible; I can no more!"

Waymark alone feared neither Mrs. Tootle nor her hopeful son, and, in turn, was held in some little awe by both of them. The lady had at first tried the effect of interfering in his classes, as she did in those of the other masters, but the result was not encouraging.

"Don't you think, Mr. Waymark," she had said one day, as she walked through the school-room and paused to listen to our friend's explanation of some rule in English grammar; "don't you think it would be better to confine yourself to the terms of the doctor's little compendium? The boys are used to it."

"In this case," replied Waymark calmly, "I think the terms of the compendium are rather too technical for the fourth class."

"Still, it is customary in this school to use the compendium, and it has never yet been found unsatisfactory. Whilst you are discoursing at such length, I observe your class gets very disorderly."

Waymark looked at her, but kept silence. Mrs. Tootle stood still.

"What are you waiting for, Mr. Waymark?" she asked sharply.

"Till your presence has ceased to distract the boys' attention, Mrs. Tootle," was the straightforward reply.

The woman was disconcerted, and, as Waymark preserved his calm silence, she had no alternative but to withdraw, after giving him a look not easily forgotten.

But there was another person whose sufferings under the tyranny of mother and children were perhaps keenest of all. Waymark had frequent opportunities of observing Miss Enderby under persecution, and learned to recognise in her the signs of acutest misery. Many times he left the room, rather than add to her pain by his presence; very often it was as much as he could do to refrain from taking her part, and defending her against Mrs. Tootle. He had never been formally introduced to Miss Enderby, and during several weeks held no kind of communication with her beyond a "good morning" when he entered the room and found her there. The first quarter of a year was drawing to a close when there occurred the first conversation between them. Waymark had been giving some of the children their drawing-lesson, whilst the governess taught the two youngest. The class-time being over, the youngsters all scampered off. For a wonder, Mrs. Tootle was not present, and Waymark seized the opportunity to exchange a word with the young lady.

"I fear your pupils give you dreadful trouble," he said, as he stood by the window pointing a pencil.

She started at being spoken to.

"They are full of life," she replied, in the low sad voice which was natural to her.

"Which would all seem to be directed towards shortening that of others," said Waymark, with a smile.

"They are intelligent," the governess ventured to suggest, after a silence. "It would be a pleasure to teach them if they—if they were a little more orderly."

"Certainly. If their parents had only common sense—"

He stopped. A flush had risen to the girl's face, and a slight involuntary motion of her hand seemed to warn him. The reason was that Mrs. Tootle stood in the doorway, to which he had his back turned. Miss Enderby said a quick "good morning" and left him.

He was taking up some papers, preparatory to leaving the room, when he noticed that the governess had left behind her a little book in which she was accustomed to jot down lessons for the children. He took it up and examined it. On the first page was written "Maud Enderby, South Bank, Regent's Park." He repeated the name to himself several times. Then he smiled, recalling the way in which the governess had warned him that Mrs. Tootle could overhear what he said. Somehow, this slight gesture of the girl's had seemed to bring them closer to each other; there was an unpremeditated

touch of intimacy in the movement, which it pleased him to think of. This was by no means the first time that he had stood with thoughts busied about her, but the brief exchange of words and what had followed gave something of a new complexion to his feelings. Previously he had been interested in her; her striking features had made him wonder what was the history which their expression concealed; but her extreme reticence and the timid coldness of her look had left his senses unmoved. Now he all at once experienced the awakening of quite a new interest; there had been something in her eyes as they met his which seemed to desire sympathy; he was struck with the possibilities of emotion in the face which this one look had revealed to him. Her situation seemed, when he thought of it, to affect him more strongly than hitherto; he felt that it would be more difficult henceforth to maintain his calmness when he saw her insulted by Mrs. Tootle or disrespectfully used by the children.

Nor did the new feelings subside as rapidly as they had arisen. At home that night he was unable to settle to his usual occupations, and, as a visit to his friends in the Masters' Room would have been equally distasteful, he rambled about the streets and so tired himself. His duties did not take him up to the children's classroom on the following morning, but he invented an excuse for going there, and felt rewarded by the very faint smile and the inclination of the head with which Miss Enderby returned his "good morning." Day after day, he schemed to obtain an opportunity of speaking with her again, and he fancied that she herself helped to remove any chances that might have occurred. Throughout his lessons, his attention remained fixed upon her; he studied her face intently, and was constantly discovering in it new meanings. When she caught his eyes thus busy with her, she evinced, for a moment, trouble and uneasiness; he felt sure that she arranged her seat so as to have her back to him more frequently than she had been accustomed to do. Her work appeared to him to be done with less self-forgetfulness than formerly; the rioting and impertinence of the children seemed to trouble her more; she bore Mrs. Tootle's interference with something like fear. Once, when Master Felix had gone beyond his wonted licence, in his mother's absence, Waymark went so far as to call him to order. As soon as he had spoken, the girl looked up at him in a startled way, and seemed silently to beg him to refrain. All this only strengthened the influence she exercised upon Waymark.

Since the climax of wretchedness which had resulted in his advertisement and the forming of Julian Casti's acquaintance, a moderate cheerfulness had possessed him. Now he once more felt the clouds sinking about him, was aware of many a threatening portent, the meaning whereof he too well understood. There had been a week or two of prevailing bad weather, a state of things which always wrought harmfully upon him; his thoughts darkened under the dark sky, and the daily downpour of rain sapped his energies. It was within a few days of Easter, but the prospect of a holiday had no effect upon him. Night after night he lay in fever and unrest. He felt as though some voice were calling upon him to undertake a vaguely hazardous enterprise which yet he knew not the nature of.

On one of these evenings, Mr. O'Gree announced to him that Miss Enderby was going to give up her position at the end of the quarter. Philip had gathered this from a conversation heard during the day between Dr. Tootle and his wife.

"The light of my life will be gone out," exclaimed O'Gree, "when I am no longer able to catch a glimpse of her as she goes past the schoolroom door. And I've never even had a chance of speaking to her. You know the tale of Raleigh and Queen Elizabeth. Suppose I were to rush out and throw my top-coat on the muddy door-step, just as she's going out; d'ye think she'd say thank you?"

"Probably," muttered Waymark, without knowing what he said. It was Mr. O'Gree's habit to affect this violent devotion to each new governess in turn, but Waymark did not seem to find the joke amusing at present.

"Bedad, I'll do it then! Or, rather, I would, if I'd two top-coats. Hang it! There's no behaving like a gentleman on twenty-five pounds a year."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.