

AUGUST STRINDBERG

MARRIED

August Strindberg

Married

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=36365654

Married:

Содержание

INTRODUCTION	4
ASRA	8
LOVE AND BREAD	54
COMPELLED TO	72
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	81

August Strindberg

Married

INTRODUCTION

These stories originally appeared in two volumes, the first in 1884, the second in 1886. The latter part of the present edition is thus separated from the first part by a lapse of two years.

Strindberg's views were continually undergoing changes. Constancy was never a trait of his. He himself tells us that opinions are but the reflection of a man's experiences, changing as his experiences change. In the two years following the publication of the first volume, Strindberg's experiences were such as to exercise a decisive influence on his views on the woman question and to transmute his early predisposition to woman-hating from a passive tendency to a positive, active force in his character and writing.

Strindberg's art in *Married* is of the propagandist, of the fighter for a cause. He has a lesson to convey and he makes frankly for his goal without attempting to conceal his purpose under the gloss of "pure" art. He chooses the story form in preference to the treatise as a more powerful medium to drive home his ideas. That the result has proved successful is due to the happy admixture in Strindberg of thinker and artist. His artist's

sense never permitted him to distort or misrepresent the truth for the sake of proving his theories. In fact, he arrived at his theories not as a scholar through the study of books, but as an artist through the experience of life. When life had impressed upon him what seemed to him a truth, he then applied his intellect to it to bolster up that truth. Hence it is that, however opinionated Strindberg may at times seem, his writings carry that conviction which we receive only when the author reproduces' truths he has obtained first-hand from life. One-sided he may occasionally be in *Married*, especially in the later stories, but rarely unfaithful. His manner is often to throw such a glaring searchlight upon one spot of life that all the rest of it stays in darkness; but the places he does show up are never unimportant or trivial. They are well worth seeing with Strindberg's brilliant illumination thrown upon them.

August Strindberg has left a remarkably rich record of his life in various works, especially in his autobiographical series of novels. He was born in 1849 in Stockholm. His was a sad childhood passed in extreme poverty. He succeeded in entering the University of Upsala in 1867, but was forced for a time on account of lack of means to interrupt his studies. He tried his fortune as schoolmaster, actor, and journalist and made an attempt to study medicine. All the while he was active in a literary way, composing his first plays in 1869. In 1874 he obtained a position in the Royal Library, where he devoted himself to scientific studies, learned Chinese in order

to catalogue the Chinese manuscripts, and wrote an erudite monograph which was read at the Academy of Inscriptions in Paris.

His first important literary productions were the drama *Master Olof* (1878) and the novel *The Red Room* (1879). Disheartened by the failure of *Master Olof*, he gave up literature for a long time. When he returned to it, he displayed an amazing productivity. Work followed work in quick succession—novels, short stories, dramas, histories, historical studies, and essays. *The Swedish People* is said to be the most popular book in Sweden next to the Bible. The mere enumeration of his writings would occupy more than two pages. His versatility led him to make researches in physics and chemistry and natural science and to write on those subjects.

Through works like *The Red Room*, *Married*, and the dramas *The Father* and *Miss Julia*, Strindberg attached himself to the naturalistic school of literature. Another period of literary inactivity followed, during which he passed through a mental crisis akin to insanity. When he returned to the writing of novels and dramas he was no longer a naturalist, but a symbolist and mystic. Among the plays he composed in this style are *To Damascus*, *The Dream Play*, and *The Great Highway*.

Strindberg married three times, divorced his first two wives, but separated amicably from the third. He died in 1913. The vast demonstration at his funeral, attended by the laboring classes as well as by the “upper” classes, proved that, in spite of the

antagonisms he had aroused, Sweden unanimously awarded him the highest place in her literature.

THOMAS SELTZER.

ASRA

He had just completed his thirteenth year when his mother died. He felt that he had lost a real friend, for during the twelve months of her illness he had come to know her personally, as it were, and established a relationship between them which is rare between parents and children. He was a clever boy and had developed early; he had read a great many books besides his schoolbooks, for his father, a professor of botany at the Academy of Science, possessed a very good library. His mother, on the other hand, was not a well-educated woman; she had merely been head housekeeper and children's nurse in her husband's house. Numerous births and countless vigils (she had not slept through a single night for the last sixteen years), had exhausted her strength, and when she became bedridden, at the age of thirty-nine, and was no longer able to look after her house, she made the acquaintance of her second son; her eldest boy was at a military school and only at home during the week ends. Now that her part as mother of the family was played to the end and nothing remained of her but a poor invalid, the old-fashioned relationship of strict discipline, that barrier between parents and children, was superseded. The thirteen-year-old son was almost constantly at her bedside, reading to her whenever he was not at school or doing home lessons. She had many questions to ask and he had a great deal to explain, and therefore all those

distinguishing marks erected by age and position vanished, one after the other: if there was a superior at all, it was the son. But the mother, too, had much to teach, for she had learnt her lessons in the school of life; and so they were alternately teacher and pupil. They discussed all subjects. With the tact of a mother and the modesty of the other sex she told her son all he ought to know of the mystery of life. He was still innocent, but he had heard many things discussed by the boys at school which had shocked and disgusted him. The mother explained to him all she could explain; warned him of the greatest danger to a young man, and exacted a promise from him never to visit a house of ill-fame, not even out of curiosity, because, as she pointed out, in such a case no man could ever trust himself. And she implored him to live a temperate life, and turn to God in prayer whenever temptation assaulted him.

His father was entirely devoted to science, which was a sealed book to his wife. When the mother was already on the point of death, he made a discovery which he hoped would make his name immortal in the scientific world. He discovered, on a rubbish heap, outside the gates of Stockholm, a new kind of goose-foot with curved hairs on the usually straight-haired calyx. He was in communication with the Berlin Academy of Sciences, and the latter was even now considering the advisability of including the new variety in the "Flora Germanica"; he was daily expecting to hear whether or not the Academy had decided to immortalise his name by calling the plant *Chenopodium Wennerstroemianum*.

At his wife's death-bed he was absentminded, almost unkind, for he had just received an answer in the affirmative, and he fretted because neither he nor his wife could enjoy the great news. She thought only of heaven and her children. He could not help realising that to talk to her now of a calyx with curved hairs would be the height of absurdity; but, he justified himself, it was not so much a question of a calyx with straight or curved hairs, as of a scientific discovery; and, more than that, it was a question of his future and the future of his children, for their father's distinction meant bread for them.

When his wife died on the following evening, he cried bitterly; he had not shed a tear for many years. He was tortured by remorse, remembered even the tiniest wrong he had ever done her, for he had been, on the whole, an exemplary husband; his indifference, his absent-mindedness of the previous day, filled him with shame and regret, and in a moment of blankness he realised all the pettishness and selfishness of his science which, he had imagined, was benefiting mankind. But these emotions were short-lived; if you open a door with a spring behind it, it will close again immediately. On the following morning, after he had drawn up an announcement of her death for the papers, he wrote a letter of thanks to the Berlin Academy of Sciences. After that he resumed his work.

When he came home to dinner, he longed for his wife, so that he might tell her of his success, for she had always been his truest friend, the only human being who had never been

jealous or envious. Now he missed this loyal companion on whose approval he could count as a matter of course; never once had she contradicted him, for since he never told her more than the practical result of his researches, there was no room for argument. For a moment the thought occurred to him that he might make friends with his son; but they knew each other too little; their relationship was that of officer and private soldier. His superior rank did not permit him to make advances; moreover, he regarded the boy with suspicion, because the latter possessed a keener intellect and had read a number of new books which were unknown to him; occasionally it even happened that the father, the professor, plainly revealed his ignorance to his son, the school-boy. In such cases the father was either compelled to dismiss the argument, with a few contemptuous remarks to "these new follies," or peremptorily order the school-boy to attend to his lessons. Once or twice, in self-defence, the son had produced one or other of his school-books; the professor had lost his temper and wished the new school-books to hell.

And so it came about that the father devoted himself to his collections of dried plants and the son went his own way.

They lived in a quiet street to the left of the Observatory, in a small, one-storey house, built of bricks, and surrounded by a large garden; the garden was once the property of the Horticultural Society, and had come into the professor's possession by inheritance. But since he studied descriptive botany, and took no interest in the much more interesting

subjects of the physiology and morphology of plants, a science which was as good as unknown in his youth, he was practically a stranger to living nature. He allowed the garden with its many splendours to become a wilderness, and finally let it to a gardener on condition that he and his children should be allowed certain privileges. The son used the garden as a park and enjoyed its beauty as he found it, without taking the trouble to try and understand it scientifically.

One might compare the boy's character to an ill-proportioned compensation pendulum; it contained too much of the soft metal of the mother, not enough of the hard metal of the father. Friction and irregular oscillations were the natural consequences. Now he was full of sentiment, now hard and sceptical. His mother's death affected him beyond words. He mourned her deeply, and she always lived in his memory as the personification of all that was good and great and beautiful.

He wasted the summer following her death in brooding and novel-reading. Grief, and to no small extent idleness, had shaken his whole nervous system and quickened his imagination. His tears had been like warm April showers falling on fruit trees, wakening them to a precocious burgeoning: but alas! only too often the blossoms are doomed to wither and perish in a frosty May night, before the fruit has had time to set.

He was fifteen years old and had therefore arrived at the age when civilised man attains to manhood and is ripe to give life to a new generation, but is prevented from doing so by his inability

to maintain a family. Consequently he was about to begin the ten years' martyrdom which a young man is called upon to endure in the struggle against an overwhelming force of nature, before he is in a position to fulfil her laws.

It is a warm afternoon about Whitsuntide. The appletrees are gorgeous in their white splendour which nature has showered all over them with a profuse hand. The breeze shakes the crowns and fills the air with pollen; a part of it fulfils its destination and creates new life, a part sinks to the ground and dies. What is a handful of pollen more or less in the inexhaustible store-house of nature! The fertilised blossom casts off its delicate petals which flutter to the ground and wither; they decay in the rain and are ground to dust, to rise again through the sap and re-appear as blossoms, and this time, perhaps, to become fruit. But now the struggle begins: those which a kind fate has placed on the sunny side, thrive and prosper; the seed bud swells, and if no frost intervenes, the fruit, in due time, will set. But those which look towards the North, the poor things which grow in the shadow of the others and never see the sun, are predestined to fade and fall off; the gardener rakes them together and carts them to the pigsty.

Behold the apple-tree now, its branches laden with half-ripe fruit, little, round, golden apples with rosy cheeks. A fresh struggle begins: if all remain alive, the branches will not be able to bear their weight, the tree will perish. A gale shakes the branches. It requires firm stems to hold on. Woe to the

weaklings! they are condemned to destruction.

A fresh danger! The apple-weevil appears upon the scene. It, too, has to maintain life and to fulfil a duty towards its progeny. The grub eats its way through the fruit to the stem and the apple falls to the ground. But the dainty beetle chooses the strongest and soundest for its brood, otherwise too many of the strong ones would be allowed to live, and competition would become over-keen.

The hour of twilight, the gathering dusk, arouses the passionate instincts of the beast-world. The night-crow crouches on the newly-dug flower-bed to lure its mate. Which of the eager males shall carry the prize? Let them decide the question!

The cat, sleek and warm, fresh from her evening milk, steals away from her corner by the hearth and picks her way carefully among daffodils and lilies, afraid lest the dew make her coat damp and ragged before her lover joins her. She sniffs at the young lavender and calls. Her call is answered by the black tom-cat which appears, broad-backed like a marten, on the neighbour's fence; but the gardener's tortoise-shell approaches from the cow-shed and the fight begins. Handfuls of the rich, black soil are flying about in all directions, and the newly-planted radishes and spinach plants are roughly awakened from their quiet sleep and dreams of the future. The stronger of the two remains in possession of the field, and the female awaits complacently the frenetic embraces of the victor. The vanquished flies to engage in a new struggle in which, perhaps, victory will

smile on him.

Nature smiles, content, for she knows of no other sin than the sin against her law; she is on the side of the strong for her desire is for strong children, even though she should have to kill the “eternal ego” of the insignificant individual. And there is no prudery, no hesitation, no fear of consequences, for nature has plenty of food for all her children—except mankind.

After supper he went for a walk in the garden while his father sat down at his bed-room window to smoke a pipe and read the evening paper. He strolled along the paths, revelling in the delicious odours which a plant only exhales when it is in full bloom, and which is the finest and strongest extract of etheric oils, containing in a condensed form the full strength of the individual, destined to become the representative of the species. He listened to the nuptial song of the insects above the lime trees, which rings in our ears like a funeral dirge: he heard the purring call of the night-crow; the ardent mewing of the cat, which sounds as if death, and not life, were wooing; the humming note of the dung-beetle, the fluttering of the large moths, the thin peeping of the bats.

He stopped before a bed of narcissus, gathered one of the while, starry flowers, and inhaled its perfume until he felt the blood hammering in his temples. He had never examined this flower minutely. But during the last term they had read Ovid’s story of Narcissus. He had not discovered a deeper meaning in the legend. What did it mean, this story of a youth who,

from unrequited love, turned his ardour upon himself and was consumed by the flame when he fell in love with his own likeness seen in a well? As he stood, examining the white, cup-shaped petals, pale as the cheeks of an invalid with fine red lines such as one may see in the faces of consumptives when a pitiless cough forces the blood into the extremest and tiniest blood-vessels, he thought of a school-fellow, a young aristocrat, who was a midshipman now; he looked like that.

When he had inhaled the scent of the flower for some time, the strong odour of cloves disappeared and left but a disagreeable, soapy smell which made him feel sick.

He sauntered on to where the path turned to the right and finally lost itself in an avenue planted on both sides with elm-trees whose branches had grown together and formed an arch overhead. In the semi-darkness, far down the perspective, he could see a large green swing, suspended by ropes, slowly moving backwards and forwards. A girl stood on the back board, gently swinging herself by bending her knees and throwing her body forward, while she clung, with arms raised high above her head, to the ropes at her side. He recognised the gardener's daughter, a girl who had been confirmed last Easter and had just begun to wear long skirts. To-night, however, she was dressed in one of her old dresses which barely reached to her ankles.

The sight of the young man embarrassed her, for she remembered the shortness of her skirt, but she nevertheless remained on the swing. He advanced and looked at her.

"Go away, Mr. Theodore," said the girl, giving the swing a vigorous push.

"Why should I?" answered the youth, who felt the draught of her fluttering skirts on his throbbing temples.

"Because I want you to," said the girl.

"Let me come up, too, and I'll swing you, Gussie," pleaded Theodore, springing on to the board.

Now he was standing on the swing, facing her. And when they rose into the air, he felt her skirts flapping against his legs, and when they descended, he bent over her and looked into her eyes which were brilliant with fear and enjoyment. Her thin cotton blouse fitted tightly and showed every line of her young figure; her smiling lips were half-open, displaying two rows of sound white teeth, which looked as if they would like to bite or kiss him.

Higher and higher rose the swing, until it struck the topmost branches of the maple. The girl screamed and fell forward, into his arms; he was pushed over, on to the seat. The trembling of the soft warm body which nestled closely in his arms, sent an electric shock through his whole nervous system; a black veil descended before his eyes and he would have let her go if her left shoulder had not been tightly pressed against his right arm.

The speed of the swing slackened. She rose and sat on the seat facing him. And thus they remained with downcast eyes, not daring to look one another in the face.

When the swing stopped, the girl slipped off the seat and ran away as if she were answering a call. Theodore was left

alone. He felt the blood surging in his veins. It seemed to him that his strength was redoubled. But he could not grasp what had happened. He vaguely conceived himself as an electrophor whose positive electricity, in discharging, had combined with the negative. It had happened during a quite ordinary, to all appearances chaste, contact with a young woman. He had never felt the same emotion in wrestling, for instance, with his school-fellows in the play-ground. He had come into contact with the opposite polarity of the female sex and now he knew what it meant to be a man. For he was a man, not a precocious boy, kicking over the traces; he was a strong, hardy, healthy youth.

As he strolled along, up and down the garden paths, new thoughts formed in his brain. Life looked at him with graver eyes, he felt conscious of a sense of duty. But he was only fifteen years old. He was not yet confirmed and many years would have to elapse before he would be considered an independent member of the community, before he would be able to earn a living for himself, let alone maintain a wife and family. He took life seriously, the thought of light adventures never occurred to him. Women were to him something sacred, his opposite pole, the supplement and completion of himself. He was mature now, bodily and mentally, fit to enter the arena of life and fight his way. What prevented him from doing so? His education, which had taught him nothing useful; his social position, which stood between him and a trade he might have learned. The Church, which had not yet received his vow of loyalty to her priests;

the State, which was still waiting for his oath of allegiance to Bernadotte and Nassau; the School, which had not yet trained him sufficiently to consider him ripe for the University; the secret alliance of the upper against the lower classes. A whole mountain of follies lay on him and his young strength. Now that he knew himself to be a man, the whole system of education seemed to him an institution for the mutilation of body and soul. They must both be mutilated before he could be allowed to enter the harem of the world, where manhood is considered a danger; he could find no other excuse for it. And thus he sank back into his former state of immaturity. He compared himself to a celery plant, tied up and put under a flower-pot so as to make it as white and soft as possible, unable to put forth green leaves in the sunshine, flower, and bear seed.

Wrapped in these thoughts he remained in the garden until the clock on the nearest church tower struck ten. Then he turned towards the house, for it was bed-time. But the front door was locked. The house-maid, a petticoat thrown over her nightgown, let him in. A glimpse of her bare shoulders roused him from his sentimental reveries; he tried to put his arm round her and kiss her, for at the moment he was conscious of nothing but her sex. But the maid had already disappeared, shutting the door with a bang. Overwhelmed with shame he opened his window, cooled his head in a basin of cold water and lighted his lamp.

When he had got into bed, he took up a volume of Arndt's *Spiritual Voices of the Morning*, a book which had belonged to

his mother; he read a chapter of it every evening to be on the safe side, for in the morning his time was short. The book reminded him of the promise of chastity given to his mother on her death-bed, and he felt a twinge of conscience. A fly which had singed its wings on his lamp, and was now buzzing round the little table by his bedside, turned his thoughts into another channel; he closed the book and lit a cigarette. He heard his father take off his boots in the room below, knock out his pipe against the stove, pour out a glass of water and get ready to go to bed. He thought how lonely he must be since he had become a widower. In days gone by he had often heard the subdued voices of his parents through the thin partition, in intimate conversation on matters on which they always agreed; but now no voice was audible, nothing but the dead sounds which a man makes in waiting upon himself, sounds which one must put side by side, like the figures in a rebus, before one can understand their meaning.

He finished his cigarette, blew out the lamp and said the Lord's Prayer in an undertone, but he got no farther than the fifth petition. Then he fell asleep.

He awoke from a dream in the middle of the night. He had dreamt that he held the gardener's daughter in his arms. He could not remember the circumstances, for he was quite dazed, and fell asleep again directly.

On the following morning he was depressed and had a headache. He brooded over the future which loomed before him threateningly and filled him with dread. He realised with a pang

how quickly the summer was passing, for the end of the summer meant the degradation of school-life. Every thought of his own would be stifled by the thoughts of others; there was no advantage in being able to think independently; it required a fixed number of years before one could reach one's goal. It was like a journey on a good's train; the engine was bound to remain for a certain time in the stations, and when the pressure of the steam became too strong, from want of consumption of energy, a waste-pipe had to be opened. The Board had drawn up the time-table and the train was not permitted to arrive at the stations before its appointed time. That was the principal thing which mattered.

The father noticed the boy's pallor, but he put it down to grief over his mother's death.

Autumn came and with it the return to school. Theodore, by dint of much novel-reading during the summer, and coming in this way, as it were, in constant contact with grown-up people and their problems and struggles, had come to look upon himself as a grown-up member of society. Now the masters treated him with familiarity, the boys took liberties which compelled him to repay them in kind. And this educational institution, which was to ennoble him and make him fit to take his place in the community, what did it teach him? How did it ennoble him? The compendiums, one and all, were written under the control of the upper classes, for the sole purpose of forcing the lower classes to look up to their betters. The schoolmasters frequently reproached their pupils with ingratitude and impressed on them

their utter inability to realise, even faintly, the advantage they enjoyed in receiving an education which so many of their poorer fellow-creatures would always lack. No, indeed, the boys were not sophisticated enough to see through the gigantic fraud and its advantages.

But did they ever find true joy, real pleasure in the subjects of their studies for their own sakes? Never! Therefore the teachers had to appeal incessantly to the lower passions of their pupils, to ambition, self-interest, material advantages.

What a miserable make-believe school was! Not one of the boys believed that he would reap any benefit from repeating the names and dates of hated kings in their proper sequence, from learning dead languages, proving axioms, defining “a matter of course,” and counting the anthers of plants and the joints on the hindlegs of insects, to knowing the end no more about them than their Latin names. How many long hours were wasted in the vain attempt to divide an angle into three equal sections, a thing which can be done so easily in a minute in an *unscientific* (that is to say practical) way by using a graduator.

How they scorned everything practical! His sisters, who were taught French from Ollendorf’s grammar, were able to speak the language after two years’ study; but the college boys could not say a single sentence after six. Ollendorf was a name which they pronounced with pity and contempt. It was the essence of all that was stupid.

But when his sister asked for an explanation and enquired

whether the purpose of spoken language was not the expression of human thought, the young sophist replied with a phrase picked up from one of the masters who in his turn had borrowed it from Talleyrand. Language was invented to hide one's thoughts. This, of course, was beyond the horizon of a young girl (how well men know how to hide their shortcomings), but henceforth she believed her brother to be tremendously learned, and stopped arguing with him.

And was there not even a worse stumbling-block in aesthetics, delusive and deceptive, casting a veil of borrowed splendour and sham beauty over everything? They sang of "The Knights' Vigil of Light." What knights' vigil? With patents of nobility and students' certificates; false testimonials, as they might have told themselves. Of light? That was to say of the upper classes who had the greatest interest in keeping the lower classes in darkness, a task in which they were ably assisted by church and school. "And onward, onward, on the path of light!"

Things were always called by the wrong name. And if it so happened that a light-bearer arose from the lower classes, everybody was ready and prepared to extinguish his torch. Oh! youthful, healthy host of fighters! How healthy they were, all these young men, enervated by idleness, unsatisfied desires and ambitions, who scorned every man who had not the means to pay for a University education! What splendid liars they were, the poets of the upper classes! Were they the deceivers or the deceived?

What was the usual subject of the young men's conversation? Their studies? Never! Once in a way, perhaps, they would talk of certificates. No, their conversation was of things obscene; of appointments with women; of billiards and drink; of certain diseases which they had heard discussed by their elder brothers. They lounged about in the afternoon and "held the reviews," and the best informed of them knew the name of the officer and could tell the others where his mistress lived.

Once two members of the "Knights' Vigil of Light," had dined in the company of two women on the terrace of a high-class restaurant in the Zoological Gardens. For this offence they were expelled from school. They were punished for their naïveté, not because their conduct was considered vicious, for a year after they passed their examinations and went to the University, gaining in this way a whole year; and when they had completed their studies at Upsala, they were attached to the Embassy in one of the capitals of Europe, to represent the United Kingdoms of Sweden and Norway.

In these surroundings Theodore spent the best part of his youth. He had seen through the fraud, but was compelled to acquiesce! Again and again he asked himself the question: What can I do? There was no answer. And so he became an accessory and learned to hold his tongue.

His confirmation appeared to him to be very much on a level with his school experience. A young minister, an ardent pietist, was to teach him in four months Luther's Catechism, regardless

of the fact that he was well versed in theology, exegesis and dogmatics, besides having read the New Testament in Greek. Nevertheless the strict pietism, which demanded absolute truth in thought and action, could not fail to make a great impression on him.

When the catechumens were assembled for the first time, Theodore found himself quite unexpectedly surrounded by a totally different class of boys to whom he had been used at school. When he entered the assembly-room he was met by the stare of something like a hundred inimical eyes. There were tobacco binders, chimney sweeps, apprentices of all trades. They were on bad terms and freely abused one another, but this enmity between the different trades was only superficial; however much they quarrelled, they yet held together. He seemed to breathe a strangely stifling atmosphere; the hatred with which they greeted him was not unmixed with contempt, the reverse of a certain respect or envy. He looked in vain for a friend, for a companion, like-minded, dressed as he was. There was not a single one. The parish was poor, the rich people sent their children to the German church which was then the fashion. It was in the company of the children of the people, the lower classes, that he was to approach the altar, as their equal. He asked himself what it was that separated him from these boys? Were they not, bodily, endowed with the same gifts as he? No doubt, for every one of them earned his living, and some of them helped to keep their parents. Were they less gifted, mentally? He did not think so, for

their remarks gave evidence of keen powers of observation; he would have laughed at many of their witty remarks if he had not been conscious of his superior caste. There was no definite line of demarcation between him and the fools who were his school-fellows. But there was a line here. Was it the shabby clothes, the plain faces, the coarse hands, which formed the barrier? Partly, he thought. Their plainness, especially, repulsed him. But were they worse than others because they were plain?

He was carrying a foil, as he had a fencing lesson later on. He put it in a corner of the room, hoping that it would escape attention. But it had been seen already. Nobody knew what kind of a thing it really was, but everybody recognised it as a weapon of some sort. Some of the boldest busied themselves about the corner, so as to have a look at it. They fingered the covering of the handle, scratched the guard with their nails, bent the blade, handled the small leather ball. They were like hares sniffing at a gun which had been lost in the wood. They did not understand its use, but they knew it for something inimical, something with a hidden meaning. Presently a belt-maker's apprentice, whose brother was in the Life Guards, joined the inquisitive throng and at once decided the question: "Can't you see that it is a sword, you fools?" he shouted, with a look at Theodore. It was a respectful look, but a look which also hinted at a secret understanding between them, which, correctly interpreted, meant: You and I understand these things! But a young rope-maker, who had once been a trumpeter in a military band, considered this giving of a

verdict without consulting him a personal slight and declared that he “would be hanged if it wasn’t a rapier!” The consequence was a fight which transformed the place into a bear-garden, dense with dust and re-echoing with screams and yells.

The door opened and the minister stood on the threshold. He was a pale young man, very thin, with watery blue eyes and a face disfigured by a rash. He shouted at the boys. The wild beasts ceased fighting. He began talking of the precious blood of Christ and the power of the Evil One over the human heart. After a little while he succeeded in inducing the hundred boys to sit down on the forms and chairs. But now he was quite out of breath and the atmosphere was thick with dust. He glanced at the window and said in a faint voice: “Open the sash!” This request re-awakened the only half-subdued passions. Twenty-five boys made a rush for the window and tried to seize the window cord.

“Go to your places at once!” screamed the minister, stretching out his hand for his cane.

There was a momentary silence during which the minister tried to think of a way of having the sash raised without a fight.

“You,” he said at last to a timid little fellow, “go and open the window!”

The small boy went to the window and tried to disentangle the window cord. The others looked on in breathless silence, when suddenly a big lad, in sailor’s clothes, who had just come home on the brig *Carl Johan*, lost patience.

“The devil take me if I don’t show you what a lad can do,” he

shouted, throwing off his coat and jumping on the window sill; there was a flash from his cutlass and the rope was cut.

"Cable's cut!" he laughed, as the minister with a hysterical cry, literally drove him to his seat.

"The rope was so entangled that there was nothing for it but to cut it," he assured him, as he sat down.

The minister was furious. He had come from a small town in the provinces and had never conceived the possibility of so much sin, so much wickedness and immorality. He had never come into contact with lads so far advanced on the road to damnation. And he talked at great length of the precious blood of Christ.

Not one of them understood what he said, for they did not realise that they had fallen, since they had never been different. The boys received his words with coldness and indifference.

The minister rambled on and spoke of Christ's precious wounds, but not one of them took his words to heart, for not one of them was conscious of having wounded Christ. He changed the subject and spoke of the devil, but that was a topic so familiar to them that it made no impression. At last he hit on the right thing. He began to talk of their confirmation which was to take place in the coming spring. He reminded them of their parents, anxious that their children should play a part in the life of the community; when he went on to speak of employers who refused to employ lads who had not been confirmed, his listeners became deeply interested at once, and every one of them understood the great importance of the coming ceremony. Now he was sincere,

and the young minds grasped what he was talking about; the noisiest among them became quiet.

The registration began. What a number of marriage certificates were missing! How could the children come to Christ when their parents had not been legally married? How could they approach the altar when their fathers had been in prison? Oh! what sinners they were!

Theodore was deeply moved by the exhibition of so much shame and disgrace. He longed to tear his thoughts away from the subject, but was unable to do so. Now it was his turn to hand in his certificates and the minister read out: son: Theodore, born on such and such a date; parents: professor and knight ... a faint smile flickered like a feeble sunbeam over his face, he gave him a friendly nod and asked: "And how is your dear father?" But when he saw that the mother was dead (a fact of which he was perfectly well aware) his face clouded over. "She was a child of God," he said, as if he were talking to himself, in a gushing, sympathetic, whining voice, but the remark conveyed at the same time a certain reproach against the "dear father," who was only a professor and knight. After that Theodore could go.

When he left the assembly-room he felt that he had gone through an almost impossible experience. Were all those lads really depraved because they used oaths and coarse language, as his companions, his father, his uncle, and all the upper classes did at times? What did the minister mean when he talked of immorality? They were more savage than the spoilt children of

the wealthy, but that was because they were more fully alive. It was unfair to blame them for missing marriage certificates. True, his father had never committed a theft, but there was no necessity for a man to steal if he had an income of six thousand crowns and could please himself. The act would be absurd or abnormal in such a case.

Theodore went back to school realising what it meant "to have received an education"; here nobody was badgered for small faults. As little notice as possible was taken of one's own or one's parent's weaknesses, one was among equals and understood one another.

After school one "held the reviews," sneaked into a cafe and drank a liqueur, and finally went to the fencing-room. He looked at the young officers who treated him as their equal, observed all those young bloods with their supple limbs, pleasant manners and smiling faces, every one of them certain that a good dinner was awaiting him at home, and became conscious of the existence of two worlds: an upper and an under-world. He remembered the gloomy assembly-room and the wretched assembly he had just left with a pang; all their wounds and hidden defects were mercilessly exposed and examined through a magnifying-glass, so that the lower classes might acquire that true humility failing which the upper classes cannot enjoy their amiable weaknesses in peace. And for the first time something jarring had come into this life.

However much Theodore was tossed about between his

natural yearning for the only half-realised temptations of the world, and his newly formed desire to turn his back on this world and his mind heavenwards, he did not break the promise given to his mother. The religious teaching which he and the other catechumens received from the minister in the church, did not fail to impress him deeply. He was often gloomy and wrapped in thought and felt that life was not what it ought to be. He had a dim notion that once upon a time a terrible crime had been committed, which it was now everybody's business to hide by practising countless deceptions; he compared himself to a fly caught in a spider's web: the more it struggled to regain its freedom, the more it entangled itself, until at last it died miserably, strangled by the cruel threads.

One evening—the minister scorned no trick likely to produce an effect on his hard-headed pupils—they were having a lesson in the choir. It was in January. Two gas jets lighted up the choir, illuminating and distorting the marble figures on the altar. The whole of the large church with its two barrel-vaults, which crossed one another, lay in semi-darkness. In the background the shining organ pipes faintly reflected the gas flames; above it the angels blowing their trumpets to summon the sleepers before the judgment seat of their maker, looked merely like sinister, threatening human figures above life size; the cloisters were lost in complete darkness.

The minister had explained the seventh commandment. He had spoken of immorality between married and unmarried

people. He could not explain to his pupils what immorality between husband and wife meant, although he was a married man himself; but on the subject of immorality in all its other aspects he was well-informed. He went on to the subject of self-abuse. As he pronounced the word a rustling sound passed through the rows of young men; they stared at him, with white cheeks and hollow eyes, as if a phantom had appeared in their midst. As long as he kept to the tortures of hell fire, they remained fairly indifferent, but when he took up a book and read to them accounts of youths who had died at the age of twenty-five of consumption of the spine, they collapsed in their seats, and felt as if the floor were giving way beneath them! He told them the story of a young boy who was committed to an asylum at the age of twelve, and died at the age of fourteen, having found peace in the faith of his Redeemer. They saw before their shrinking eyes a hundred corpses, washed and shrouded. "There is but one remedy against this evil," went on the minister, "the precious wounds of Christ." But how this remedy was to be used against sexual precocity, he did not tell them. He admonished them not to go to dances, to shun theatres and gaming-houses, and above all things, to avoid women; that is to say to act in exact contradiction to their inclinations. That this vice contradicts and utterly confounds the pronouncement of the community that a man is not mature until he is twenty-one, was passed over in silence. Whether it could be prevented by early marriages (supposing a means of providing food for all instead of banquets for a few could be

found) remained an open question. The final issue was that one should throw oneself into the arms of Christ, that is to say, go to church, and leave the care of temporal things to the upper classes.

After this admonishment the minister requested the first five on the first form to stay behind. He wished to speak to them in private. The first five looked as if they had been sentenced to death. Their chests contracted; they breathed with difficulty, and a careful observer might have noticed that their hair had risen an inch at the roots and lay over their skulls in damp strands like the hair of a corpse. Their eyes stared from their blanched sockets like two round glass bullets set in leather, motionless, not knowing whether to face the question with a bold front, or hide behind an impudent lie.

After the prayer the hymn of Christ's wounds was sung; to-night it sounded like the singing of consumptives; every now and then it died away altogether, or was interrupted by a dry cough, like the cough of a man who is dying of thirst. Then they began to file out. One of the five attempted to steal away, but the minister called him back.

It was a terrible moment. Theodore who sat on the first form was one of the five. He felt sick at heart. Not because he was guilty of the offence indicated, but because in his heart he considered it an insult to a man thus to have to lay bare the most secret places of his soul.

The other four sat down, as far from each other as they could. The belt-maker's apprentice, who was one of them, tried to make

a joke, but the words refused to come. They saw themselves confronted by the police-court, the prison, the hospital and, in the background, the asylum. They did not know what was going to happen, but they felt instinctively that a species of scourging awaited them. Their only comfort in their distressing situation was the fact that *he*, Mr. Theodore, was one of them. It was not clear to them why that fact should be a comfort, but they knew intuitively that no evil would happen to the son of a professor.

"Come along, Wennerstroem," said the minister, after he had lighted the gas in the vestry.

Wennerstroem went and the door closed behind him. The four remained seated on their forms, vainly trying to discover a comfortable position for their limbs.

After a while Wennerstroem returned, with red eyes, trembling with excitement; he immediately went down the corridor and out into the night.

When he stood in the churchyard which lay silent under a heavy cover of snow, he recapitulated all that had happened in the vestry. The minister had asked him whether he had sinned? No, he had not. Did he have dreams? Yes! He was told that dreams were equally sinful, because they proved that the heart was wicked, and God looked at the heart. "He trieth the heart and reins, and on the last day he will judge every one of us for every sinful thought, and dreams are thoughts. Christ has said: Give me your heart, my son! Go to Him! Pray, pray, pray! Whatsoever is chaste, whatsoever is pure, whatsoever is lovely—that is He. The

alpha and the omega, life and happiness. Chasten the flesh and be strong in prayer. Go in the name of the Lord and sin no more!"

He felt indignant, but he was also crushed. In vain did he struggle to throw off his depression, he had not been taught sufficient common-sense at school to use it as a weapon against this Jesuitical sophistry. It was true, his knowledge of psychology enabled him to modify the statement that dreams are thoughts; dreams are fancies, he mused, creations of the imagination; but God has no regard for words! Logic taught him that there was something unnatural in his premature desires. He could not marry at the age of sixteen, since he was unable to support a wife; but why he was unable to support a wife, although he felt himself to be a man, was a problem which he could not solve. However anxious he might be to get married, the laws of society which are made by the upper classes and protected by bayonets, would prevent him. Consequently nature must have been sinned against in some way, for a man was mature long before he was able to earn a living. It must be degeneracy. His imagination must be degenerate; it was for him to purify it by prayer and sacrifice.

When he arrived home, he found his father and sisters at supper. He was ashamed to sit down with them, for he felt degraded. His father asked him, as usual, whether the date of the confirmation had been fixed. Theodore did not know. He touched no food, pretending that he was not well; the truth was that he did not dare to eat any supper. He went into his bedroom and read an essay by Schartau which the minister had lent him.

The subject was the vanity of reason. And here, just here, where all his hopes of arriving at a clear understanding were centred, the light failed. Reason which he had dared to hope would some day guide him out of the darkness into the light, reason, too, was sin; the greatest of all sins, for it questioned God's very existence, tried to understand what was not meant to be understood. Why *it* was not meant to be understood, was not explained; probably it was because if *it* had been understood the fraud would have been discovered.

He rebelled no longer, but surrendered himself. Before going to bed he read two *Morning Voices* from Arndt, recited the Creed, the Lord's Prayer and the Blessing. He felt very hungry; a fact which he realised with a certain spiteful pleasure, for it seemed to him that his enemy was suffering.

With these thoughts he fell asleep. He awoke in the middle of the night. He had dreamt of a champagne supper in the company of a girl. And the whole terrible evening arose fresh in his memory.

He leapt out of bed with a bound, threw his sheets and blankets on the floor and lay down to sleep on the bare mattress, covering himself with nothing but a thin coverlet. He was cold and hungry, but he must subdue the devil. Again he repeated the Lord's Prayer, with additions of his own. By and by his thoughts grew confused, the strained expression of his features relaxed, a smile softened the expression of his mouth; lovely figures appeared before him, serene and smiling, he heard subdued voices, half-

stifled laughter, a few bars from a waltz, saw sparkling glasses and frank and merry faces with candid eyes, which met his own unabashed; suddenly a curtain was parted in the middle; a charming little face peeped through the red silk draperies, with smiling lips and dancing eyes; the slender throat is bare, the beautiful sloping shoulders look as if they had been modelled by a caressing hand; she holds out her arms and he draws her to his thumping heart.

The clock was striking three. Again he had been worsted in the fight.

Determined to win, he picked up the mattress and threw it out of the bed. Then he knelt on the cold floor and fervently prayed to God for strength, for he felt that he was indeed wrestling with the devil. When he had finished his prayer he lay down on the bare frame, and with a feeling of satisfaction felt the ropes and belting cutting into his arms and shins.

He awoke in the morning in a high fever.

He was laid up for six weeks. When he arose from his bed of sickness, he felt better than he had ever felt before. The rest, the good food and the medicine had increased his strength, and the struggle was now twice as hard. But he continued to struggle.

His confirmation took place in the spring. The moving scene in which the lower classes promise on oath never to interfere with these things which the upper classes consider their privilege, made a lasting impression on him. It didn't trouble him that the minister offered him wine bought from the wine-merchant

Högstedt at sixty-five öre the pint, and wafers from Lettstroem, the baker, at one crown a pound, as the flesh and blood of the great agitator Jesus of Nazareth, who was done to death nineteen hundred years ago. He didn't think about it, for one didn't think in those days, one had emotions.

A year after his confirmation he passed his final examination. The smart little college cap was a source of great pleasure to him; without being actually conscious of it, he felt that he, as a member of the upper classes, had received a charter. They were not a little proud of their knowledge, too, these young men, for the masters had pronounced them "mature." The conceited youths! If at least they had mastered all the nonsense of which they boasted! If anybody had listened to their conversation at the banquet given in their honour, it would have been a revelation to him. They declared openly that they had not acquired five per cent. of the knowledge which ought to have been in their possession; they assured everybody who had ears to listen that it was a miracle that they had passed; the uninitiated would not have believed a word of it. And some of the young masters, now that the barrier between pupil and teacher was removed, and simulation was no longer necessary, swore solemnly, with half-intoxicated gestures, that there was not a single master in the whole school who would not have been plucked. A sober person could not help drawing the conclusion that the examination was like a line which could be drawn at will between upper and lower classes; and then he saw in the miracle nothing but a gigantic fraud.

It was one of the masters who, sipping a glass of punch, maintained that only an idiot could imagine that a human brain could remember at the same time: the three thousand dates mentioned in history; the names of the five thousand towns situated in all parts of the world; the names of six hundred plants and seven hundred animals; the bones in the human body, the stones which form the crust of the earth, all theological disputes, one thousand French words, one thousand English, one thousand German, one thousand Latin, one thousand Greek, half a million rules and exceptions to the rules: five hundred mathematical, physical, geometrical, chemical formulas. He was willing to prove that in order to be capable of such a feat the brain would have to be as large as the cupola of the Observatory at Upsala. Humboldt, he went on to say, finally forgot his tables, and the professor of astronomy at Lund had been unable to divide two whole numbers of six figures each. The newly-fledged undergraduates imagined that they knew six languages, and yet they knew no more than five thousand words at most of the twenty thousand which composed their mother tongue. And hadn't he seen how they cheated? Oh! he knew all their tricks! He had seen the dates written on their finger nails; he had watched them consulting books under cover of their desks, he had heard them whispering to one another! But, he concluded, what is one to do? Unless one closes an eye to these things, the supply of students is bound to come to an end. During the summer Theodore remained at home, spending much of his time in the garden. He

brooded over the problem of his future; what profession was he to choose? He had gained so much insight into the methods of the huge Jesuitical community which, under the name of the upper classes, constituted society, that he felt dissatisfied with the world and decided to enter the Church to save himself from despair. And yet the world beckoned to him. It lay before him, fair and bright, and his young, fermenting blood yearned for life. He spent himself in the struggle and his idleness added to his torments.

Theodore's increasing melancholy and waning health began to alarm his father. He had no doubt about the cause, but he could not bring himself to talk to his son on such a delicate subject.

One Sunday afternoon the Professor's brother who was an officer in the Pioneers, called. They were sitting in the garden, sipping their coffee.

"Have you noticed the change in Theodore?" asked the Professor.

"Yes, his time has come," answered the Captain.

"I believe it has come long ago."

"I wish you'd talk to him, I can't do it."

"If I were a bachelor, I should play the part of the uncle," said the Captain; "as it is, I'll ask Gustav to do it. The boy must see something of life, or he'll go wrong. Hot stuff these Wennerstroems, what?"

"Yes," said the Professor, "I was a man at fifteen, but I had a school-friend who was never confirmed because he was a father at thirteen."

“Look at Gustav! Isn’t he a fine fellow? I’m hanged if he isn’t as broad across the back as an old captain! He’s a handful!”

“Yes,” answered the Professor, “he costs me a lot, but after all, I’d rather pay than see the boy running any risks. I wish you’d ask Gustav to take Theodore about with him a little, just to rouse him.”

“Oh! with pleasure!” answered the Captain.

And so the matter was settled.

One evening in July, when the summer is in its prime and all the blossoms which the spring has fertilised ripen into fruit, Theodore was sitting in his bed-room, waiting. He had pinned a text against his wall. “Come to Jesus,” it said, and it was intended as a hint to the lieutenant not to argue with him when he occasionally came home from barracks for a few minutes. Gustav was of a lively disposition, “a handful,” as his uncle had said. He wasted no time in brooding. He had promised to call for Theodore at seven o’clock; they were going to make arrangements for the celebration of the professor’s birthday. Theodore’s secret plan was to convert his brother, and Gustav’s equally secret intention was to make his younger brother take a more reasonable view of life.

Punctually at seven o’clock, a cab stopped before the house, (the lieutenant invariably arrived in a cab) and immediately after Theodore heard the ringing of his spurs and the rattling of his sword on the stairs.

“Good evening, you old mole,” said the elder brother with

a laugh. He was the picture of health and youth. His highly-polished Hessian boots revealed a pair of fine legs, his tunic outlined the loins of a cart-horse; the golden bandolier of his cartridge box made his chest appear broader and his sword-belt showed off a pair of enormous thighs.

He glanced at the text and grinned, but said nothing.

“Come along, old man, let’s be off to Bellevue! We’ll call on the gardener there and make arrangements for the old man’s birthday. Put on your hat, and come, old chap!”

Theodore tried to think of an excuse, but the brother took him by the arm, put a hat on his head, back to front, pushed a cigarette between his lips and opened the door. Theodore felt like a fish out of water, but he went with his brother.

“To Bellevue!” said the lieutenant to the cab-driver, “and mind you make your thoroughbreds fly!”

Theodore could not help being amused. It would never have occurred to him to address an elderly married man, like the cabman, with so much familiarity.

On the way the lieutenant talked of everything under the sun and stared at every pretty girl they passed.

They met a funeral procession on its return from the cemetery.

“Did you notice that devilish pretty girl in the last coach?” asked Gustav.

Theodore had not seen her and did not want to see her.

They passed an omnibus full of girls of the barmaid type. The lieutenant stood up, unconcernedly, in the public thoroughfare,

and kissed his hands to them. He really behaved like a madman.

The business at Bellevue was soon settled. On their return the cab-driver drove them, without waiting for an order, to "The Equerry," a restaurant where Gustav was evidently well-known.

"Let's go and have something to eat," said the lieutenant, pushing his brother out of the cab.

Theodore was fascinated. He was no abstainer and saw nothing wrong in entering a public-house, although it never occurred to him to do so. He followed, though not without a slight feeling of uneasiness.

They were received in the hall by two girls. "Good evening, little doves," said the lieutenant, and kissed them both on the lips. "Let me introduce you to my learned brother; he's very young and innocent, not at all like me; what do you say, Jossa?"

The girls looked shyly at Theodore, who did not know which way to turn. His brother's language appeared to him unutterably impudent.

On their way upstairs they met a dark-haired little girl, who had evidently been crying; she looked quiet and modest and made a good impression on Theodore.

The lieutenant did not kiss her, but he pulled out his handkerchief and dried her eyes. Then he ordered an extravagant supper.

They were in a bright and pretty room, hung with mirrors and containing a piano, a perfect room for banquetting. The lieutenant opened the piano with his sword, and before Theodore

knew where he was, he was sitting on the music-stool, and his hands were resting on the keyboard.

“Play us a waltz,” commanded the lieutenant, and Theodore played a waltz. The lieutenant took off his sword and danced with Jossa; Theodore heard his spurs knocking against the legs of the chairs and tables. Then he threw himself on the sofa and shouted:

“Come here, ye slaves, and fan me!”

Theodore began to play softly and presently he was absorbed in the music of Gounod’s *Faust*. He did not dare to turn round.

“Go and kiss him,” whispered the brother.

But the girls felt shy. They were almost afraid of him and his melancholy music.

The boldest of them, however, went up to the piano.

“You are playing from the *Freischütz*, aren’t you?” she asked.

“No,” said Theodore, politely, “I’m playing Gounod’s *Faust*.”

“Your brother looks frightfully respectable,” said the little dark one, whose name was Rieke; “he’s different to you, you old villain.”

“Oh! well, he’s going into the Church,” whispered the lieutenant.

These words made a great impression on the girls, and henceforth they only kissed the lieutenant when Theodore’s back was turned, and looked at Theodore shyly and apprehensively, like fowls at a chained mastiff.

Supper appeared, a great number of courses. There were eighteen dishes, not counting the hot ones.

Gustav poured out the liqueurs.

“Your health, you old hypocrite!” he laughed.

Theodore swallowed the liqueur. A delicious warmth ran through his limbs, a thin, warm veil fell over his eyes, he felt ravenous like a starving beast. What a banquet it was! The fresh salmon with its peculiar flavour, and the dill with its narcotic aroma; the radishes which seem to scrape the throat and call for beer; the small beef-steaks and sweet Portuguese onions, which made him think of dancing girls; the fried lobster which smelt of the sea; the chicken stuffed with parsley which reminded him of the gardener, and the first gerkins with their poisonous flavour of verdigris which made such a jolly, crackling sound between his crunching teeth. The porter flowed through his veins like hot streams of lava; they drank champagne after the strawberries; a waitress brought the foaming drink which bubbled in the glasses like a fountain. They poured out a glass for her. And then they talked of all sorts of things.

Theodore sat there like a tree in which the sap is rising. He had eaten a good supper and felt as if a whole volcano was seething in his inside. New thoughts, new emotions, new ideas, new points of view fluttered round his brow like butterflies. He went to the piano and played, he himself knew not what. The ivory keys under his hands were like a heap of bones from which his spirit drew life and melody.

He did not know how long he had been playing, but when he turned, round he saw his brother entering the room. He looked

like a god, radiating life and strength. Behind him came Rieke with a bowl of punch, and immediately after all the girls came upstairs. The lieutenant drank to each one of them separately; Theodore found that everything was as it should be and finally became so bold that he kissed Rieke on the shoulder. But she looked annoyed and drew away from him, and he felt ashamed.

When Theodore found himself alone in his room, he had a feeling as if the whole world were turned upside down. He tore the text from the wall, not because he no longer believed in Jesus, but because its being pinned against the wall struck him as a species of bragging. He was amazed to find that religion sat on him as loosely as a Sunday suit, and he asked himself whether it was not unseemly to go about during the whole week in Sunday clothes. After all he was but an ordinary, commonplace person with whom he was well content, and he came to the conclusion that he had a better chance of living in peace with himself if he lived a simple, unpretentious, unassuming life.

He slept soundly during the night, undisturbed by dreams.

When he arose on the following morning, his pale cheeks looked fuller and there was a new gladness in his heart. He went out for a walk and suddenly found himself in the country. The thought struck him that he might go to the restaurant and look up the girls. He went into the large room; there he found Rieke and Jossa alone, in morning dresses, snubbing gooseberries. Before he knew what he was doing, he was sitting at the table beside them with a pair of scissors in his hand, helping them. They

talked of Theodore's brother and the pleasant evening they had spent together. Not a single loose remark was made. They were just like a happy family; surely he had fallen in good hands, he was among friends.

When they had finished with the gooseberries, he ordered coffee and invited the girls to share it with him. Later on the proprietress came and read the paper to them. He felt at home.

He repeated his visit. One afternoon he went upstairs, to look for Rieke. She was sewing a seam. Theodore asked her whether he was in her way. "Not at all," she replied, "on the contrary." They talked of his brother who was away at camp, and would be away for another two months. Presently he ordered some punch and their intimacy grew.

On another occasion Theodore met her in the Park. She was gathering flowers. They both sat down in the grass. She was wearing a light summer dress, the material of which was so thin that it plainly revealed her slight girlish figure. He put his arms round her waist and kissed her. She returned his kisses and he drew her to him in a passionate embrace; but she tore herself away and told him gravely that if he did not behave himself she would never meet him again.

They went on meeting one another for two months. Theodore had fallen in love with her. He had long and serious conversations with her on the most sacred duties of life, on love, on religion, on everything, and between-whiles he spoke to her of his passion. But she invariably confounded him with his own arguments.

Then he felt ashamed of having harboured base thoughts of so innocent a girl, and finally his passion was transformed into admiration for this poor little thing, who had managed to keep herself unspotted in the midst of temptation.

He had given up the idea of going into the Church; he determined to take the doctor's degree and—who knows—perhaps marry Rieke. He read poetry to her while she did needlework. She let him kiss her as much as he liked, she allowed him to fondle and caress her; but that was the limit.

At last his brother returned from camp. He immediately ordered a banquet at "The Equerry"; Theodore was invited. But he was made to play all the time. He was in the middle of a waltz, to which nobody danced, when he happened to look round; he was alone. He rose and went into the corridor, passed a long row of doors, and at last came to a bed-room. There he saw a sight which made him turn round, seize his hat and disappear into the darkness.

It was dawn when he reached his own bed-room, alone, annihilated, robbed of his faith in life, in love, and, of course, in women, for to him there was but one woman in the world, and that was Rieke from "The Equerry." On the fifteenth of September he went to Upsala to study theology.

The years passed. His sound common-sense was slowly extinguished by all the nonsense with which he had to fill his brain daily and hourly. But at night he was powerless to resist. Nature burst her bonds and took by force what rebellious man

denied her. He lost his health; all his skull bones were visible in his haggard face, his complexion was sallow and his skin looked damp and clammy; ugly pimples appeared between the scanty locks of his beard. His eyes were without lustre, his hands so emaciated that the joints seemed to poke through the skin. He looked like the illustration to an essay on human vice, and yet he lived a perfectly pure life.

One day the professor of Christian Ethics, a married man with very strict ideas on morality, called on him and asked him pointblank whether he had anything on his conscience; if so, he advised him to make a clean breast of it. Theodore answered that he had nothing to confess, but that he was unhappy. Thereupon the professor exhorted him to watch and pray and be strong.

His brother had written him a long letter, begging him not to take a certain stupid matter too much to heart. He told him that it was absurd to take a girl seriously. His philosophy, and he had always found it answering admirably, was to pay debts incurred and go; to play while one was young, for the gravity of life made itself felt quite soon enough. Marriage was nothing but a civil institution for the protection of the children. There was plenty of time for it.

Theodore replied at some length in a letter imbued with true Christian sentiment, which the lieutenant left unanswered.

After passing his first examination in the spring, Theodore was obliged to spend a summer at Sköfde, in order to undergo the cold water cure. In the autumn he returned to Upsala. His newly-

regained strength was merely so much fresh fuel to the fire.

Matters grew worse and worse. His hair had grown so thin that the scalp was plainly visible. He walked with dragging footsteps and whenever his fellow students met him in the street, they cut him as if he were possessed of all the vices. He noticed it and shunned them in his turn. He only left his rooms in the evening. He did not dare to go to bed at night. The iron which he had taken to excess, had ruined his digestion, and in the following summer the doctors sent him to Karlsbad.

On his return to Upsala, in the autumn, a rumour got abroad, an ugly rumour, which hung over the town like a black cloud. It was as if a drain had been left open and men were suddenly reminded that the town, that splendid creation of civilisation, was built over a sea of corruption, which might at any moment burst its bonds and poison the inhabitants. It was said that Theodore Wennerstroem, in a paroxysm of passion had assaulted one of his friends, and the rumour did not lie.

His father went to Upsala and had an interview with the Dean of the Theological Faculty. The professor of pathology was present. What was to be done? The doctor remained silent. They pressed him for his opinion.

“Since you ask me,” he said, “I must give you an answer; but you know as well as I do that there is but one remedy.”

“And that is?” asked the theologian.

“Need you ask?” replied the doctor.

“Yes,” said the theologian, who was a married man. “Surely,

nature does not require immorality from a man?"

The father said that he quite understood the case, but that he was afraid of making recommendations to his son, on account of the risks the latter would run.

"If he can't take care of himself he must be a fool," said the doctor.

The Dean requested them to continue such an agitating conversation in a more suitable place.... He himself had nothing more to add.

This ended the matter.

Since Theodore was a member of the upper classes the scandal was hushed up. A few years later he passed his final, and was sent by the doctor to Spa. The amount of quinine which he had taken had affected his knees and he walked with two sticks. At Spa he looked so ill that he was a conspicuous figure even in a crowd of invalids.

But an unmarried woman of thirty-five, a German, took compassion on the unhappy man. She spent many hours with him in a lonely summer arbour in the park, discussing the problems of life. She was a member of a big evangelical society, whose object was the raising of the moral standard. She showed him prospectuses for newspapers and magazines, the principal mission of which was the suppression of prostitution.

"Look at me," she said, "I am thirty-five years old and enjoy excellent health! What fools' talk it is to say that immorality is a necessary evil. I have watched and fought a good fight for Christ's

sake.”

The young clergyman silently compared her well-developed figure, her large hips, with his own wasted body.

“What a difference there is between human beings in this world,” was his unspoken comment.

In the autumn the Rev. Theodore Wennerstroem and Sophia Leidschütz, spinster, were engaged to be married.

“Saved!” sighed the father, when the news reached him in his house at Stockholm.

“I wonder how it will end,” thought the brother in his barracks. “I’m afraid that my poor Theodore is ‘one of those Asra who die when they love.’”

Theodore Wennerstroem was married. Nine months after the wedding his wife presented him with a boy who suffered from rickets—another thirteen months and Theodore Wennerstroem had breathed his last.

The doctor who filled up the certificate of death, looked at the fine healthy woman, who stood weeping by the small coffin which contained the skeleton of her young husband of not much over twenty years.

“The plus was too great, the minus too small,” he thought, “and therefore the plus devoured the minus.”

But the father, who received the news of his son’s death on a Sunday, sat down to read a sermon. When he had finished, he fell into a brown study.

“There must be something very wrong with a world where

virtue is rewarded with death,” he thought.

And the virtuous widow, *née* Leidschütz, had two more husbands and eight children, wrote pamphlets on overpopulation and immorality. But her brother-in-law called her a cursed woman who killed her husbands.

The anything but virtuous lieutenant married and was father of six children. He got promotion and lived happily to the end of his life.

LOVE AND BREAD

The assistant had not thought of studying the price of wheat before he called on the major to ask him for the hand of his daughter; but the major had studied it.

“I love her,” said the assistant.

“What’s your salary?” said the old man.

“Well, twelve hundred crowns, at present; but we love one another....”

“That has nothing to do with me; twelve hundred crowns is not enough.”

“And then I make a little in addition to my salary, and Louisa knows that my heart....”

“Don’t talk nonsense! How much in addition to your salary?”

He seized paper and pencil.

“And my feelings....”

“How much in addition to your salary?”

And he drew hieroglyphics on the blotting paper.

“Oh! We’ll get on well enough, if only....”

“Are you going to answer my question or not? How much in addition to your salary? Figures! figures, my boy! Facts!”

“I do translations at ten crowns a sheet; I give French lessons, I am promised proof-correcting....”

“Promises aren’t facts! Figures, my boy! Figures! Look here, now, I’ll put it down. What are you translating?”

“What am I translating? I can’t tell you straight off.”

“You can’t tell me straight off? You are engaged on a translation, you say; can’t you tell me what it is? Don’t talk such rubbish!”

“I am translating Guizot’s *History of Civilisation*, twenty-five sheets.”

“At ten crowns a sheet makes two hundred and fifty crowns. And then?”

“And then? How can I tell beforehand?”

“Indeed, can’t you tell beforehand? But you ought to know. You seem to imagine that being married simply means living together and amusing yourselves! No, my dear boy, there will be children, and children require feeding and clothing.”

“There needn’t be babies directly, if one loves *as we love* one another.”

“How the dickens do you love one another?”

“*As we love* one another.” He put his hand on his waistcoat.

“And won’t there be any children if people love as you love? You must be mad! But you are a decent, respectable member of society, and therefore I’ll give my consent; but make good use of the time, my boy, and increase your income, for hard times are coming. The price of wheat is rising.”

The assistant grew red in the face when he heard the last words, but his joy at the old man’s consent was so great that he seized his hand and kissed it. Heaven knew how happy he was! When he walked for the first time down the street with his future

bride on his arm, they both radiated light; it seemed to them that the passers-by stood still and lined the road in honour of their triumphal march; and they walked along with proud eyes, squared shoulders and elastic steps.

In the evening he called at her house; they sat down in the centre of the room and read proofs; she helped him. "He's a good sort," chuckled the old man. When they had finished, he took her in his arms and said: "Now we have earned three crowns," and then he kissed her. On the following evening they went to the theatre and he took her home in a cab, and that cost twelve crowns.

Sometimes, when he ought to have given a lesson in the evening, he (is there anything a man will not do for love's sake?) cancelled his lesson and took her out for a walk instead.

But the wedding-day approached. They were very busy. They had to choose the furniture. They began with the most important purchases. Louisa had not intended to be present when he bought the bedroom furniture, but when it came to the point she went with him. They bought two beds, which were, of course, to stand side by side. The furniture had to be walnut, every single piece real walnut. And they must have spring mattresses covered with red and white striped tick, and bolsters filled with down; and two eiderdown quilts, exactly alike. Louisa chose blue, because she was very fair.

They went to the best stores. They could not do without a red hanging-lamp and a Venus made of plaster of Paris. Then they

bought a dinner-service; and six dozen differently shaped glasses with cut edges; and knives and forks, grooved and engraved with their initials. And then the kitchen utensils! Mama had to accompany them to see to those.

And what a lot he had to do besides! There were bills to accept, journeys to the banks and interviews with tradespeople and artisans; a flat had to be found and curtains had to be put up. He saw to everything. Of course he had to neglect his work; but once he was married, he would soon make up for it.

They were only going to take two rooms to begin with, for they were going to be frightfully economical. And as they were only going to have two rooms, they could afford to furnish them well. He rented two rooms and a kitchen on the first floor in Government Street, for six hundred crowns. When Louisa remarked that they might just as well have taken three rooms and a kitchen on the fourth floor for five hundred crowns, he was a little embarrassed; but what did it matter if only they loved one another? Yes, of course, Louisa agreed, but couldn't they have loved one another just as well in four rooms at a lower rent, as in three at a higher? Yes, he admitted that he had been foolish, but what *did* it matter so long as they loved one another?

The rooms were furnished. The bed-room looked like a little temple. The two beds stood side by side, like two carriages. The rays of the sun fell on the blue eiderdown quilt, the white, white sheets and the little pillow-slips which an elderly maiden aunt had embroidered with their monogram; the latter consisted of

two huge letters, formed of flowers, joined together in one single embrace, and kissing here and there, wherever they touched, at the corners. The bride had her own little alcove, which was screened off by a Japanese screen. The drawing-room, which was also dining-room, study and morning-room, contained her piano, (which had cost twelve hundred crowns) his writing-table with twelve pigeon-holes, (every single piece of it real walnut) a pier-glass, armchairs; a sideboard and a dining-table. "It looks as if nice people lived here," they said, and they could not understand why people wanted a separate dining-room, which always looked so cheerless with its cane chairs.

The wedding took place on a Saturday. Sunday dawned, the first day of their married life. Oh! what a life it was! Wasn't it lovely to be married! Wasn't marriage a splendid institution! One was allowed one's own way in everything, and parents and relations came and congratulated one into the bargain.

At nine o'clock in the morning their bedroom was still dark. He wouldn't open the shutters to let in daylight, but re-lighted the red lamp which threw its bewitching light on the blue eiderdown, the white sheets, a little crumpled now, and the Venus made of plaster of Paris, who stood there rosy-red and without shame. And the red light also fell on his little wife who nestled in her pillows with a look of contrition, and yet so refreshed as if she had never slept so well in all her life. There was no traffic in the street to-day for it was Sunday, and the church-bells were calling people to the morning service with exulting, eager voices, as if

they wanted all the world to come to church and praise Him who had created men and women.

He whispered to his little bride to shut her eyes so that he might get up and order breakfast. She buried her head in the pillows, while he slipped on his dressing-gown and went behind the screen to dress.

A broad radiant path of sunlight lay on the sitting-room floor; he did not know whether it was spring or summer, autumn or winter; he only knew that it was Sunday!

His bachelor life was receding into the background like something ugly and dark; the sight of his little home stirred his heart with a faint recollection of the home of his childhood, and at the same time held out a glorious promise for the future.

How strong he felt! The future appeared to him like a mountain coming to meet him. He would breathe on it and the mountain would fall down at his feet like sand; he would fly away, far above gables and chimneys, holding his little wife in his arm.

He collected his clothes which were scattered all over the room; he found his white neck-tie hanging on a picture frame; it looked like a big white butterfly.

He went into the kitchen. How the new copper vessels sparkled, the new tin kettles shone! And all this belonged to him and to her! He called the maid who came out of her room in her petticoat. But he did not notice it, nor did he notice that her shoulders were bare. For him there was but one woman in all the world. He spoke to the girl as a father would to his daughter. He

told her to go to the restaurant and order breakfast, at once, a first-rate breakfast. Porter and Burgundy! The manager knew his taste. She was to give him his regards.

He went out of the kitchen and knocked at the bed-room door.

“May I come in?”

There was a little startled scream.

“Oh, no, darling, wait a bit!”

He laid the breakfast table himself. When the breakfast was brought from the restaurant, he served it on her new breakfast set. He folded the dinner napkins according to all the rules of art. He wiped the wine-glasses, and finally took her bridal-bouquet and put it in a vase before her place.

When she emerged from her bed-room in her embroidered morning gown and stepped into the brilliant sunlight, she felt just a tiny bit faint; he helped her into the armchair, made her drink a little liqueur out of a liqueur glass and eat a caviare sandwich.

What fun it all was! One could please oneself when one was married. What would Mama have said if she had seen her daughter drinking liqueurs at this hour of the morning!

He waited on her as if she were still his fiancée. What a breakfast they were having on the first morning after their wedding! And nobody had a right to say a word. Everything was perfectly right and proper, one could enjoy oneself with the very best of consciences, and that was the most delightful part of it all. It was not for the first time that he was eating such a breakfast, but what a difference between then and now! He had been restless

and dissatisfied then; he could not bear to think of it, now. And as he drank a glass of genuine Swedish porter after the oysters, he felt the deepest contempt for all bachelors.

“How stupid of people not to get married! Such selfishness! They ought to be taxed like dogs.”

“I’m sorry for those poor men who haven’t the means to get married,” replied his demure little wife kindly, “for I am sure, if they had the means they would all get married.”

A little pang shot through the assistant’s heart; for a moment he felt afraid, lest he had been a little too venturesome. All his happiness rested on the solution of a financial problem, and if, if.... Pooh! A glass of Burgundy! Now he would work! They should see!

“Game? With cranberries and cucumbers!” The young wife was a little startled, but it was really delicious.

“Lewis, darling,” she put a trembling little hand on his arm, “can we afford it?”

Fortunately she said “we.”

“Pooh! It doesn’t matter for once! Later on we can dine on potatoes and herrings.”

“Can you eat potatoes and herrings?”

“I should think so!”

“When you have been drinking more than is good for you, and expect a beefsteak after the herring?”

“Nonsense! Nothing of the kind! Your health, sweetheart! The game is excellent! So are these artichokes!”

“No, but you are mad, darling! Artichokes at this time of the year! What a bill you will have to pay!”

“Bill! Aren’t they good? Don’t you think that it is glorious to be alive? Oh! It’s splendid, splendid!”

At six o’clock in the afternoon a carriage drove up to the front door. The young wife would have been angry if it had not been so pleasant to loll luxuriously on the soft cushions, while they were being slowly driven to the Deer Park.

“It’s just like lying on a couch,” whispered Lewis.

She playfully hit his fingers with her sunshade. Mutual acquaintances bowed to them from the footpath. Friends waved their hands to him as if they were saying:

“Hallo! you rascal, you have come into a fortune!”

How small the passers-by looked, how smooth the street was, how pleasant their ride on springs and cushions!

Life should always be like that.

It went on for a whole month. Balls, visits, dinners, theatres. Sometimes, of course, they remained at home. And at home it was more pleasant than anywhere else. How lovely, for instance, to carry off one’s wife from her parents’ house, after supper, without saying as much as “by your leave,” put her into a closed carriage, slam the door, nod to her people and say: “Now we’re off home, to our own four walls! And there we’ll do exactly what we like!”

And then to have a little supper at home and sit over it, talking and gossiping until the small hours of the morning.

Lewis was always very sensible at home, at least in theory. One day his wife put him to the test by giving him salt salmon, potatoes boiled in milk and oatmeal soup for dinner. Oh! how he enjoyed it! He was sick of elaborate menus.

On the following Friday, when she again suggested salt salmon for dinner, Lewis came home, carrying two ptarmigans! He called to her from the threshold:

“Just imagine, Lou, a most extraordinary thing happened! A most extraordinary thing!”

“Well, what is it?”

“You’ll hardly believe me when I tell you that I bought a brace of ptarmigans, bought them myself at the market for—guess!”

His little wife seemed more annoyed than curious.

“Just think! One crown the two!”

“I have bought ptarmigans at eightpence the brace; but—” she added in a more conciliatory tone, so as not to upset him altogether, “that was in a very cold winter.”

“Well, but you must admit that I bought them very cheaply.”

Was there anything she would not admit in order to see him happy?

She had ordered boiled groats for dinner, as an experiment. But after Lewis had eaten a ptarmigan, he regretted that he could not eat as much of the groats as he would have liked, in order to show her that he was really very fond of groats. He liked groats very much indeed—milk did not agree with him after his attack of ague. He couldn’t take milk, but groats he would like to see

on his table every evening, every blessed evening of his life, if only she wouldn't be angry with him.

And groats never again appeared on his table.

When they had been married for six weeks, the young wife fell ill. She suffered from headaches and sickness. It could not be anything serious, just a little cold. But this sickness? Had she eaten anything which had disagreed with her? Hadn't all the copper vessels new coatings of tin? He sent for the doctor. The doctor smiled and said it was all right.

"What was all right? Oh! Nonsense! It wasn't possible. How could it have been possible? No, surely, the bed-room paper was to blame. It must contain arsenic. Let us send a piece to the chemist's at once and have it tested."

"Entirely free from arsenic," reported the chemist.

"How strange! No arsenic in the wall papers?"

The young wife was still ill. He consulted a medical book and whispered a question in her ear. "There now! a hot bath!"

Four weeks later the midwife declared that everything was "as it should be."

"As it should be? Well, of course! Only it was somewhat premature!"

But as it could not, be helped, they were delighted. Fancy, a baby! They would be papa and mama! What should they call him? For, of course, it would be a boy. No doubt, it would. But now she had a serious conversation with her husband! There had been no translating or proof-correcting since their marriage. And

his salary alone was not sufficient.

“Yes, they had given no thought to the morrow. But, dear me, one was young only once! Now, however, there would be a change.”

On the following morning the assistant called on an old schoolfriend, a registrar, to ask him to stand security for a loan.

“You see, my dear fellow, when one is about to become a father, one has to consider how to meet increasing expenses.”

“Quite so, old man,” answered the registrar, “therefore I have been unable to get married. But you are fortunate in having the means.”

The assistant hesitated to make his request. How could he have the audacity to ask this poor bachelor to help him to provide the expenses for the coming event? This bachelor, who had not the means to found a family of his own? He could not bring himself to do it.

When he came home to dinner, his wife told him that two gentlemen had called to see him.

“What did they look like? Were they young? Did they wear eye-glasses? Then there was no doubt, they were two lieutenants, old friends of his whom he had met at Vaxholm.”

“No, they couldn’t have been lieutenants; they were too old for that.”

“Then he knew; they were old college friends from Upsala, probably P. who was a lecturer, and O. who was a curate, now. They had come to see how their old pal was shaping as a

husband.”

“No, they didn’t come from Upsala, they came from Stockholm.”

The maid was called in and cross-examined. She thought the callers had been shabbily dressed and had carried sticks.

“Sticks! I can’t make out what sort of people they can have been. Well, we’ll know soon enough, as they said they would call again. But to change the subject, I happened to see a basket of hothouse strawberries at a really ridiculous price; it really is absurd! Just imagine, hothouse strawberries at one and sixpence a basket! And at this time of the year!”

“But, my darling, what is this extravagance to lead to?”

“It’ll be all right. I have got an order for a translation this very day.”

“But you are in debt, Lewis?”

“Trifles! Mere nothings! It’ll be all right when I take up a big loan, presently.”

“A loan! But that’ll be a new debt!”

“True! But there’ll be easy terms! Don’t let’s talk business now! Aren’t these strawberries delicious? What? A glass of sherry with them would be tip-top. Don’t you think so? Lina, run round to the stores and fetch a bottle of sherry, the best they have.”

After his afternoon nap, his wife insisted on a serious conversation.

“You won’t be angry, dear, will you?”

“Angry? I! Good heavens, no! Is it about household expenses?”

“Yes! We owe money at the stores! The butcher is pressing for payment; the man from the livery stables has called for his money; it’s most unpleasant.”

“Is that all? I shall pay them to the last farthing to-morrow. How dare they worry you about such trifles? They shall be paid to-morrow, but they shall lose a customer. Now, don’t let’s talk about it any more. Come out for a walk. No carriage! Well, we’ll take the car to the Deer Park, it will cheer us up.”

They went to the Deer Park. They asked for a private room at the restaurant, and people stared at them and whispered.

“They think we are out on a spree,” he laughed. “What fun! What madness!”

But his wife did not like it.

They had a big bill to pay.

“If only we had stayed at home! We might have bought such a lot of things for the money.”

Months elapsed. The great event was coming nearer and nearer. A cradle had to be bought and baby-clothes. A number of things were wanted. The young husband was out on business all day long. The price of wheat had risen. Hard times were at hand. He could get no translations, no proof-correcting. Men had become materialists. They didn’t spend money on books, they bought food. What a prosaic period we were living in! Ideals were melting away, one after the other, and ptarmigans were not to

be had under two crowns the brace. The livery stables would not provide carriages for nothing for the cab-proprietors had wives and families to support, just as everybody else; at the stores cash had to be paid for goods, Oh! what realists they all were!

The great day had come at last. It was evening. He must run for the midwife. And while his wife suffered all the pangs of childbirth, he had to go down into the hall and pacify the creditors.

At last he held a daughter in his arms. His tears fell on the baby, for now he realised his responsibility, a responsibility which he was unable to shoulder. He made new resolutions. But his nerves were unstrung. He was working at a translation which he seemed unable to finish, for he had to be constantly out on business.

He rushed to his father-in-law, who was staying in town, to bring him the glad news.

“We have a little daughter!”

“Well and good,” replied his father-in-law; “can you support a child?”

“Not at present; for heaven’s sake, help us, father!”

“I’ll tide you over your present difficulties. I can’t do more. My means are only sufficient to support my own family.”

The patient required chickens which he bought himself at the market, and wine at six crowns the bottle. It had to be the very best.

The midwife expected a hundred crowns.

“Why should we pay her less than others? Hasn’t she just received a cheque for a hundred crowns from the captain?”

Very soon the young wife was up again. She looked like a girl, as slender as a willow, a little pale, it was true, but the pallor suited her.

The old man called and had a private conversation with his son-in-law.

“No more children, for the present,” he said, “or you’ll be ruined.”

“What language from a father! Aren’t we married! Don’t we love one another? Aren’t we to have a family?”

“Yes, but not until you can provide for them. It’s all very fine to love one another, but you musn’t forget that you have responsibilities.”

His father-in-law, too, had become a materialist. Oh! what a miserable world it was! A world without ideals!

The home was undermined, but love survived, for love was strong, and the hearts of the young couple were soft. The bailiff, on the contrary, was anything but soft. Distraint was imminent, and bankruptcy threatened. Well, let them distraint then!

The father-in-law arrived with a large travelling coach to fetch his daughter and grand-child. He warned his son-in-law not to show his face at his house until he could pay his debts and make a home for his wife and child. He said nothing to his daughter, but it seemed to him that he was bringing home a girl who had been led astray. It was as if he had lent his innocent child to a

casual admirer and now received her back “dishonoured.” She would have preferred to stay with her husband, but he had no home to offer her.

And so the husband of one year’s standing was left behind to watch the pillaging of his home, if he could call it his home, for he had paid for nothing. The two men with spectacles carted away the beds and bedclothes; the copper kettles and tin vessels; the dinner set, the chandelier and the candlesticks; everything, everything!

He was left alone in the two empty, wretched rooms! If only *she* had been left to him! But what should she do here, in these empty rooms? No, she was better off where she was! She was being taken care of.

Now the struggle for a livelihood began in bitter earnest. He found work at a daily paper as a proof-corrector. He had to be at the office at midnight; at three in the morning his work was done. He did not lose his berth, for bankruptcy had been avoided, but he had lost all chance of promotion.

Later on he is permitted to visit wife and child once a week, but he is never allowed to see her alone. He spends Saturday night in a tiny room, close to his father-in-law’s bedroom. On Sunday morning he has to return to town, for the paper appears on Monday morning.... He says good-bye to his wife and child who are allowed to accompany him as far as the garden gate, he waves his hand to them once more from the furthest hillock, and succumbs to his wretchedness, his misery, his humiliation. And

she is no less unhappy.

He has calculated that it will take him twenty years to pay his debts. And then? Even then he cannot maintain a wife and child. And his prospects? He has none! If his father-in-law should die, his wife and child would be thrown on the street; he cannot venture to look forward to the death of their only support.

Oh! How cruel it is of nature to provide food for all her creatures, leaving the children of men alone to starve! Oh! How cruel, how cruel! that life has not ptarmigans and strawberries to give to all men. How cruel! How cruel!

COMPELLED TO

Punctually at half past nine on a winter evening he appears at the door leading to the glass-roofed verandah of the restaurant. While, with mathematical precision, he takes off his gloves, he peers over his dim spectacles, first to the right, then to the left, to find out whether any of his acquaintances are present. Then he hangs up his overcoat on its special hook, the one to the right of the fireplace. Gustav, the waiter, an old pupil of his, flies to his table and, without waiting for an order, brushes the crumbs off the tablecloth, stirs up the mustard, smooths the salt in the salt-cellar and turns over the dinner napkin. Then he fetches, still without any order, a bottle of Medhamra, opens half a bottle of Union beer and, merely for appearance sake, hands the schoolmaster the bill of fare.

“Crabs?” he asks, more as a matter of form than because there is any need of the question.

“Female crabs,” answers the schoolmaster.

“Large, female crabs,” repeats Gustav, walks to the speaking tube which communicates with the kitchen, and shouts: “Large female crabs for Mr. Blom, and plenty of dill.”

He fetches butter and cheese, cuts two very thin slices of rye-bread, and places them on the schoolmaster’s table. The latter has in the meantime searched the verandah for the evening papers, but has only found the official *Post*. To make up for this very

poor success, he takes the *Daily Journal*, which he had not had time to finish at lunch, and after first opening and refolding the *Post*, and putting it on the top of the bread basket on his left, sits down to read it. He ornaments the rye-bread with geometrical butter hieroglyphics, cuts off a piece of cheese in the shape of a rectangle, fills his liqueur glass three quarters full and raises it to his lips, hesitates as if the little glass contained physic, throws back his head and says: Ugh!

He has done this for twelve years and will continue doing it until the day of his death.

As soon as the crabs, six of them, have been put before him, he examines them as to their sex, and everything being as it should be, makes ready to enjoy himself. He tucks a corner of his dinner napkin into his collar, places two slices of thin bread and cheese by the side of his plate and pours out a glass of beer and half a glass of liqueur. Then he takes the little crab-knife and business begins. He is the only man in Sweden who knows how to eat a crab, and whenever he sees anybody else engaged in the same pursuit, he tells him that he has no idea how to do it. He makes an incision all round the head, and a hole against which he presses his lips and begins to suck.

“This,” he says, “is the best part of the whole animal.”

He severs the thorax from the lower part, puts his teeth to the body and drinks deep draughts; he sucks the little legs as if they were asparagus, eats a bit of dill, and takes a drink of beer and a mouthful of rye-bread. When he has carefully taken the shell

off the claws and sucked even the tiniest tubes, he eats the flesh; last of all he attacks the lower part of the body. When he has eaten three crabs, he drinks half a glass of liqueur and reads the promotions in the *Post*.

He has done this for twelve years and will continue doing it until he dies.

He was just twenty years old when he first began to patronise the restaurant, now he is thirty-two, and Gustav has been a waiter for ten years in the same place. Not one of its frequenters has known the restaurant longer than the school-master, not even the proprietor who took it over eight years ago. He has watched generations of diners come and go; some came for a year, some for two, some for five years; then they disappeared, went to another restaurant, left the town or got married. He feels very old, although he is only thirty-two! The restaurant is his home, for his furnished room is nothing but the place where he sleeps.

It is ten o'clock. He leaves his table and goes to the back room where his grog awaits him. This is the time when the bookseller arrives. They play a game of chess or talk about books. At half-past ten the second violin from the Dramatic Theatre drops in. He is an old Pole who, after 1864, escaped to Sweden, and now makes a living by his former hobby. Both the Pole and the bookseller are over fifty, but they get on with the schoolmaster as if he were a contemporary.

The proprietor has his place behind the counter. He is an old sea captain who fell in love with the proprietress and married her.

She rules in the kitchen, but the sliding panel is always open, so that she can keep an eye on the old man, lest he should take a glass too much before closing time. Not until the gas has been turned out, and the old man is ready to go to bed, is he allowed a nightcap in the shape of a stiff glass of rum and water.

At eleven o'clock the young bloods begin to arrive; they approach the counter diffidently and ask the proprietor in a whisper whether any of the private rooms upstairs are disengaged, and then there is a rustling of skirts in the hall and cautious footsteps are creeping upstairs.

"Well," says the bookseller, who has suddenly found a topic of conversation, "when are you going to be married, Blom, old man?"

"I haven't the means to get married," answered the schoolmaster. "Why don't you take a wife to your bosom yourself?"

"No woman would have me, now that my head looks like an old, leather-covered trunk," says the bookseller. "And, moreover, there's my old Stafva, you know."

Stafva was a legendary person in whom nobody believed. She was the incarnation of the bookseller's unrealised dreams.

"But you, Mr. Potocki?" suggested the schoolmaster.

"He's been married once, that's enough," replies the bookseller.

The Pole nods his head like a metrometer.

"Yes, I was married very happily. Ugh!" he says and finishes his grog.

“Well,” continues the schoolmaster, “if women weren’t such fools, one might consider the matter; but they are infernal fools.”

The Pole nods again and smiles; being a Pole, he doesn’t understand what the word fool means.

“I have been married very happily, ugh!”

“And then there is the noise of the children, and children’s clothes always drying near the stove; and servants, and all day long the smells from the kitchen. No, thank you! And, perhaps, sleepless nights into the bargain.”

“Ugh!” added the Pole, completing the sentence.

“Mr. Potocki says ‘ugh’ with the malice of the bachelor who listens to the complaints of the married man,” remarked the bookseller.

“What did I say?” asks the astonished widower. “Ugh!” says the bookseller, mimicking him, and the conversation degenerates into a universal grinning and a cloud of tobacco smoke.

It is midnight. The piano upstairs, which has accompanied a mixed choir of male and female voices, is silent. The waiter has finished his countless journeys from the speaking tube to the verandah; the proprietor enters into his daybook the last few bottles of champagne which have been ordered upstairs. The three friends rise from their chairs and go home, two to their “virgin couches,” and the bookseller to his Stafva.

When schoolmaster Blom had reached his twentieth year, he was compelled to interrupt his studies at Upsala and accept a post as assistant teacher at Stockholm. As he, in addition, gave

private lessons, he made quite a good income. He did not ask much of life. All he wanted was peace and cleanliness. An elderly lady let him a furnished room and there he found more than a bachelor finds as a rule. She looked after him and was kind to him; she gave him all the tenderness which nature had intended her to bestow on the new generation that was to spring from her. She mended his clothes and looked after him generally. He had lost his mother when he was a little boy and had never been accustomed to gratuitous kindness; therefore he was inclined to look upon her services as an interference with his liberty, but he accepted them nevertheless. But all the same the public house was his real home. There he paid for everything and ran up no bills.

He was born in a small town in the interior of Sweden; consequently he was a stranger in Stockholm. He knew nobody; was not on visiting terms with any of the families and met his acquaintances nowhere but at the public-house. He talked to them freely, but never gave them his confidence, in fact he had no confidence to give. At school he taught the third class and this gave him a feeling of having been stunted in his growth. A very long time ago he had been in the third class himself, had gradually crept up to the seventh, and had spent a few terms at the University; now he had returned to the third; he had been there for twelve years without being moved. He taught the second and third books of Euclid; this was the course of instruction for the whole year. He saw only a fragment of life; a fragment without

beginning or end; the second and third books. In his spare time he read the newspapers and books on archaeology. Archaeology is a modern science, one might almost say a disease of the time. And there is danger in it, for it proves over and over again that human folly has pretty nearly always been the same.

Politics was to him nothing but an interesting game of chess—played for the king, for he was brought up like everybody else; it was an article of faith with him that nothing which happened in the world, concerned him, personally; let those look to it whom God had placed in a position of power. This way of looking at things filled his soul with peace and tranquillity; he troubled nobody and nothing troubled him. When he found, as he did occasionally, that an unusually foolish event had occurred, he consoled himself with the conviction that it could not have been helped. His education had made him selfish, and the catechism had taught him that if everybody did his duty, all things would be well, whatever happened. He did his duty towards his pupils in an exemplary fashion; he was never late; never ill. In his private life, too, he was above reproach; he paid his rent on the day it fell due, never ran up bills at his restaurant, and spent only one evening a week on pleasure. His life glided along like a railway train to the second and, being a clever man, he managed to avoid collisions. He gave no thought to the future; a truly selfish man never does, for the simple reason that the future belongs to him for no longer than twenty or thirty years at the most.

And thus his days passed.

Midsummer morning dawned—radiant and sunny as midsummer morning should be. The schoolmaster was still in bed, reading a book on the Art of Warfare in ancient Egypt, when Miss Augusta came into his room with his breakfast. She had put on his tray some slices of saffron bread, in honour of the festival, and on his dinner-napkin lay a spray of elder blossoms. On the previous night she had decorated his room with branches of the birch-tree, put clean sand and some cowslips in the spittoon, and a bunch of lilies-of-the-valley on the dressing table.

“Aren’t you going to make an excursion to-day, sir?” she asked, glancing at the decorations, anxious for a word of thanks or approval.

But Mr. Blom had not even noticed the decorations, and therefore he answered dryly:

“Haven’t you realised yet that I never make excursions? I hate elbowing my way through a crowd, and the noise of the children gets on my nerves.”

“But surely you won’t stay in town on such a lovely day! You’ll at least go to the Deer Park?”

“That would be the very last place I should go to, especially to-day, when it will be crowded. Oh! no, I’m better off in town, and I wish to goodness that this holiday nuisance would be stopped.”

“There are plenty of people who say that there aren’t half enough holidays these days when everybody has to work so hard,” said the old woman in a conciliatory tone. “But is there anything else you wish, sir? My sister and I are making an excursion by

steamer, and we shan't be back until ten o'clock to-night."

"I hope you'll enjoy yourselves, Miss Augusta. I want nothing, and am quite able to look after myself. The caretaker can do my room when I have gone out."

Miss Augusta left him alone with his breakfast. When he had eaten it, he lit a cigar and remained in bed with his *Egyptian Warfare*. The open window shook softly in the southern breeze. At eight o'clock the bells, large and small, of the nearest church began to ring, and those of the other churches of Stockholm, St. Catherine's, St. Mary's and St. Jacob's, joined in; they tinkled and jingled, enough to make a heathen tear his hair in despair. When the church bells stopped, a military band on the bridge of a steamer began to play a set of quadrilles from *The Weak Point*

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.