

Dowling Richard

Under St Paul's: A Romance



Richard Dowling

Under St Paul's: A Romance

«Public Domain»

Dowling R.

Under St Paul's: A Romance / R. Dowling — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

Part the First.	5
CHAPTER I.	5
CHAPTER II.	9
CHAPTER III.	12
CHAPTER IV.	16
CHAPTER V.	19
CHAPTER VI.	22
CHAPTER VII.	26
CHAPTER VIII.	30
CHAPTER IX.	33
CHAPTER X.	35
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	42

Dowling Richard

Under St Paul's: A Romance

Part the First.

SATURN SHALL BE KING

CHAPTER I.

SHE AND HE

"Roast beef, roast pork, mutton pie, or hash?" Ah, I thought so! When we last met-for we have met three or four times, if I am not mistaken-we were more familiar with those words than good Mrs Barclay's hospitable inquiry. Have you been much around since we sat at that boarding-house mahogany in New York? The beautiful head was raised, the brilliant face was turned to the speaker, the dark eyes were fixed upon his face, and the girl answered, with good-humoured ease, – 'Yes, I have travelled a good deal since we met at New York last year.' 'Ah, so have I!' said the thin, dark, restless young man opposite her, who had spoken first. The company had been only a few minutes seated at the Sunday dinner of Mrs Barclay's private hotel, situate in Peter's Row, hard by the Cathedral of St Paul's, London. 'I have been,' continued the lank, dark-faced man, speaking with assurance and rapidity, 'all over the States, all over Canada, in Spain and Algiers, since. I am going to India and China; and then I am going-' He paused. She smiled. 'Where?' 'Into a gas retort, to get cremated.' 'How horrible!' cried white-haired Mrs Barclay, from the head of the table. 'How dreadful!' cried the other ladies, four in number. The girl laughed. 'Alive?' she asked. 'Alive, of course! There is no fun in going anywhere when one is dead.' 'Do you speak from experience?' she asked. 'No-observation. Look at all the mutton-headed, numskull, leaden-blooded, dead dolts you find crawling through life everywhere you go, and particularly in England; you don't mean to say they have any fun, do you?' The girl laughed again, a low soft laugh, that fell upon the ear like a message of comfort. 'Pray, sir,' said a solid-looking man at the foot of the table, 'is your knowledge of England so large that you are able to describe the character of the people in such flattering terms?' 'I have been about a good deal in England; altogether a couple of years. But, my dear sir, you are not to judge by time alone; you must take into account the capacity of the observer as well. Now I am very quick at observing.' 'So I perceive,' said the other, at which there was a faint titter. The dark man did not heed the interruption, beyond smiling a good-humoured welcome to the slight repartee, and went on. 'I am a cosmopolite. I belong to the family of man. My native country is the earth; and I have been a good bit over my native country. This is my tenth visit to London. I have been three weeks in London this time.' Looking across the table at the dark-eyed girl, he said, – 'I do think it was a fair specimen of observation that I knew you when you came into the room. You arrived this morning, I believe?' 'I arrived last night.' It seemed she could not speak without smiling. 'Stop. I have a memory for facts as well as for faces. I can recall your name. Taking into account all the people I have met since, I do think it good to be able to recall your name. Your name is Irish-O'Connor.' 'No, Scotch-Gordon.' 'Ah! And your Christian name is Italian-Luigia.' 'No, French-Marie.' There was a general laugh. 'Wonderfully accurate!' said the gentleman at the foot of the table. 'Well,' said the dark man, 'I admit I am not good at names, but I am at facts. Now, I remember that in New York you had a maid.' 'I have her still. She goes everywhere with me. She is Irish. Her name is O'Connor-Judith O'Connor.' 'I knew there was something Irish and O'Connorish about you. She has black hair and dark eyes, and a pert nose and pert manner.' 'Yes; but it would not be prudent for you to say these things about her nose

and her manner to herself.' 'I'm not very prudent, but I know that. Let me see if I cannot remember something more of you. You are a kind of specimen woman of humanity.' The broad-chested, good-looking, fair-haired young man sitting beside the speaker involuntarily laid down his spoon in his soup-plate, stole a glance at the traveller by his side, and then a still more quiet glance at the dark-eyed girl opposite. She caught his eyes and turned hers full upon him. He looked down, took up his spoon, and resumed his dinner. 'The more of such specimens the pleasanter the world would be,' said the man at the foot of the table, bending gallantly. 'I did not mean to be complimentary, Miss Gordon. I never do,' protested the traveller. 'In this case, sir, you could not help it.' The fair-haired man looked frankly and freely at the last speaker. When he withdrew his glance, he found the eyes of the girl fixed on him with a smile of protest against the civil speeches of the man at the foot. 'I meant,' said the thin man, 'that you represent many nations. I remember, at least, all about that. Your father was Scotch, your mother a French Canadian; you were born in India, and brought up in Australia. Is not that so?' 'Yes.' 'No fish, thank you. I never eat fish. I was born at sea; and people born at sea never eat fish. I have some reason for remembering these facts connected with you, for I too am a mixum-getherum lot. My father was a pirate, or something of that kind. I am a parishioner of Stepney, a place which has never yet had the honour of seeing me. I have no dread of being moved on to my parish, for I know I shall end my days by being blown from a gun for piratical practices on the high seas. Before that happens, I hope, Miss Gordon, to have the pleasure of meeting you often, for you are as great a cosmopolitan as myself. Do you intend remaining here long?' 'Some months, perhaps.' 'Ah, I had intended clearing out of this hole in a week or so; but what you have told me may alter my mind.' 'That from the gentleman who *never* pays compliments,' said the solid-looking man at the foot of the table. 'By-the-way,' he continued, 'I can't make out Miss Gordon to be a cosmopolitan. It seems to me she is wonderfully British; one of the United Kingdoms, our two greatest colonies, and our vast dependency seem to me to make up a very good British woman.' The face of the girl grew grave for a moment. She turned fully to the man at the foot, and said, in a quiet, impressive voice, – 'I am glad you think me British. I should be sorry to be thought anything else, for my father lost his life in India under the British flag.' The fair young man put down his knife and fork, and looked across the table at the girl. He cleared his throat, grew red in the face, cleared his throat again, dropped his eyes to his plate, grew still redder, and resumed eating his fish. The last remark of the talkative man killed the conversation, and no more was said during the dinner than a few feeble sentences by the ladies on the merits of the sermons they had heard in the forenoon. When the ladies had retired, the gentlemen drew chairs to the fire to smoke. The cosmopolitan and the fair-haired good-looking Saxon sat as at dinner. The former pulled out a case, and offered a cigar to the Saxon. 'Thank you,' said the latter; 'I do not smoke.' 'Ah, my dear sir, if you had cooled your heels on as many capitals and glaciers and deserts and decks of vessels as I, you would not despise the weed. You are a new arrival here?' 'I came last night.' 'Perhaps you are a friend of the beautiful Miss Gordon?' 'No. I never saw her until to-day.' 'Where did you come from?' 'Stratford-on-Avon.' 'Ah, Shakespeare's town! I've been there. Shakespeare was no end of a poet; but it was a cursedly dull place to be born in. I daresay he ran away from the dulness of it. Do you find it dull?' 'Well, I-I have had very little experience of anywhere else. I have lived in it all my life.' 'Yes; but you've run about now and then? You've paddled through the mud of other places, and had your chance of frost-bite or sunstroke in other latitudes?' The fair young man smiled. 'You have been about a good deal?' said he. 'Yes.' 'And seen many strange sights?' 'Well, yes.' 'The strangest of all is now here. You will scarcely believe me when I say I am eight-and-twenty years of age, and I have never been fifty miles from my native town in all my life until now.' 'God bless my soul!' The traveller sprang to his feet. 'God bless my soul! Sir, let us shake hands. We must be friends. My name is William Nevill. What is yours?' 'Mine is George Osborne.' 'My dear Osborne, this is the happiest moment of my life. Some Roman swell once offered a beautiful bound edition of the poets to anyone who would invent a new pleasure. By living your twenty-eight years within your fifty-mile radius, and then meeting me, you

have invented a new pleasure with a vengeance. How do you feel?' 'I feel quite well, thank you.' 'I am astonished at that. How a fellow can feel well who has been all his life tethered with a fifty-mile rope to the family house-tree, I cannot understand. Bless my soul! I am glad to meet you. Sit down, and let us have a chat. Just fancy: I, who have been everywhere, meeting you, who have been nowhere, and meeting you just as you have broken cover for the first time! Well, they say extremes meet. To think a rolling-stone like me, and a stick-in-the-mud like you, should meet, is most wonderful. Never fifty miles from home! How do you feel, man?' 'Quite well, thank you.' 'I don't mean your health. You look all right. But don't you want to jump into a galvanic battery, and get telegraphed all over creation in five minutes? Bless my soul!' 'No; London is more than enough for me just now, little as I have seen of it.' 'Bless me, Osborne, let me shake your hand again. If I could only meet a woman like you, I think I should marry her, and settle down with, say, a thousand or two miles of rope.' 'But I should fancy a man with your enormous experience of travel would prefer a wife who could talk over the many places you had seen, and the customs you had observed.' The blue eyes of the speaker were fixed earnestly on the traveller. 'Well, I don't know. It would be a fascinating novelty to have a wife who had never been beyond the village-green. But the thing might grow monotonous after awhile. There was only one woman who ever made me think of settling down. When I speak of settling down, I mean on a continent or two.' 'And what was she?' 'A great go-about, like myself.' 'Like the lady who sat opposite you at dinner, to-day?' The steadfast blue eyes never moved from the face of the other man. Nevill bent his head forward, and said, in a dropped voice, so that the others could not hear, – 'It was she. I thought seriously of staying in New-York, and trying if I could make any impression on her.' 'And why did you not?' The blue eyes now fell to the ground. 'Well, you see, the States, Canada, Spain, and Algiers were all waiting for me.' 'And so you did not make love to her?' 'Couldn't, my dear boy. Hadn't time.' 'And where do you go to from London?' 'India.' 'When?' 'That will depend upon my luck.' 'Your luck with what?' 'Miss Gordon. I think I shall give myself a holiday, and a chance of settling down this time. Come, let us join the ladies.' They reached the drawing-room. Nevill, leaning on the arm of Osborne, walked to where Miss Gordon sat on a couch. When he came in front of her, he said, – 'Allow me, Miss Gordon, to present to you my old and valued friend, Mr Simeon Stylites. He has, to honour your arrival in London, just stepped down from his pillar on which he was born, and where he has spent all his life.' 'A descendant of the saint?' she asked archly. 'No; a descendant of the pillar. But really, Miss Gordon, Mr Osborne is a most remarkable man, and I recommend him to your best consideration. He is the Captain Cook of our time, and the enlightened savages have a savoury treat in store for them.' 'A great traveller?' she asked, with a look of interest. 'No. But his is the best performance on record at staying at home.' 'Really!' with a soft laugh. She held out her hand frankly to him. 'I am glad to meet someone who is not travel-worn, and tired of half the world.' 'This is the first time Mr Osborne has ever been fifty miles from home, and his home is a small town in the Midlands, Stratford-on-Avon.' 'I am delighted to have met you,' she said, looking him full in the face with those marvellous dark eyes. 'Do you know, Mr Osborne, you were going to say something to me at dinner, and you did not? And I should like to know what it was.' He stood for a moment mute. *She* curious to know what *he* had been about to say! It flushed him, and made the blood at his wrists tingle. It confused his head, and took his intellect away. He stammered out, – 'I really cannot remember. Something not worth your thinking of.' His face was now pale. Nevill observed the change. 'My dear Osborne, you look ill. Run to the front door for a moment and the air will put you right. Shall I go with you?' 'No, thank you. It is nothing.' After a few minutes' silence, he said, – 'I think I shall take a stroll.' 'Do,' said Nevill heartily; 'that is what will fix you up. Run off.' When he had gone, Miss Gordon said to Nevill, – 'Your friend must be ill. I am afraid he must suffer much, for he forgot me when leaving.' 'No one who has once seen you could ever forget you, Miss Gordon,' said Nevill, by way of beginning the attack. 'That is a humdrum compliment,' said she. 'You must be more original, or I shall find you dull.' George Osborne walked, he knew not whither. He felt dazed and dull. At last

he paused on a bridge. He stood awhile and thought. Then he said to himself, – 'What perfume of romance have I drunk that she should make me mad?'

CHAPTER II. A LESSON IN FLIRTATION

The Sunday dinner at Mrs Barclay's was early, and when George Osborne found himself for the first time in his life with the Thames beneath his feet, it was a little after three o'clock. 'What an amazing thing it is to be in London for the first time, and with the knowledge of eight-and-twenty years! Those who are born in London never fathom its depths, its influence, its strength, its significance, its import. 'Those who come to London young are cowed at first by its proportions, become familiar with half one district, and treat all other districts into which accident may drag them as pagan regions beyond the pale of the true civilisation. 'But I confront London for the first time in the mature years of youth, with book knowledge of all its wonders, and a feeling of brotherhood for it. Greater England is my father, but this London is my most beloved sister, of whom I am proud. 'The universe, hung by God in the viewless vault of space, and man are the most wonderful of His disclosed works, and I bow down in worship before the creator of these miracles. This London, the noblest monument of man, was reared by the hands of my brothers of Greater Britain. I am their fellow, their equal. We it was who did it. 'Under Him whom I adore, nothing fills me with such emotions of worship as the spirit of this great concrete empire, of which London is the sign-manual on earth. 'In the still meadowlands around Stratford, I have led a quiet if not a blameless life. Now and then I have been here and there-Birmingham, Coventry, Wolverhampton, Leamington, Warwick, Oxford, Lichfield, Burton, Leicester; but all put together do not equal London. If I have kept away from this town until now, it was from no want of opportunities to visit it. I might have come any month. But I did not wish to come until I could stay. I deliberately did not avail myself of the opportunities I enjoyed. I studied the place afar off. I might have often come to London, but I did not. I kept aloof. I wished not to see it with my bodily eyes until I had qualified to appreciate it; just as I deferred reading Shakespeare until I thought I should be able to understand him. 'I know all the things around me. This is Blackfriars Bridge, that is Waterloo Bridge, that is the Temple, that is Somerset House, that is St Paul's. I have revered their spirits from afar. To-day their spirits have taken shape, and I am among the saintly shrines of my imagination. I have revered beauty from afar. To-day I have drunk a potion and am mad. 'Am I in love? Not I. I have a splendid madness upon me. I do not want her. I do not want her love. I want only the image as I see it. He may marry her if he will. I shall never try. I have her image, and neither tyrant nor thief can take that away from me. I make her high-priestess in the temple of my dreams. She is too sacred for me to touch. As I see her now, her image is immortal, immutable. In a few years she will change. I place my goddess with the unalterable deities of the ideal. She shall never be other to me than she is. I shall marry some day, I suppose; but I shall never marry her. The emotions which lead men to marriage have no connection with what I now feel. While I am under the spell of her presence I shall enjoy this madness. When she is gone I shall live in the light of a memory. 'I shall stay in London. I shall take chambers and live alone, that is, unless I marry. I shall lead my old life, read by night, and wander about by day. This money, into which I have just come, will yield me fifteen hundred a year; and, married or single, I shall be able to live comfortably on that. I shall live in London and cherish my image, and when I die I hope I may be found no worse than my fellow-man, and may fall within the mercy of God and the pity of my Saviour; for I must not let the little money, or London, or this wonder at the hotel turn my head and darken up my heart against the great matter of life. What fools men are to throw away the great object of all this life, either with carelessness or deliberation! No, no. I shall, I hope, retain my taste for books, and the simple faith in which I was brought up-and her image for ever.' He turned away from the parapet and crossed to the Surrey side. 'There is no great hurry,' he mused, 'for my leaving Barclay's. I can stay there a few weeks, until I get more accustomed to the crush and uproar of all London. 'Can it be Sunday? Can this be the day of rest in the capital of the British Empire?

I can scarcely believe it. Here are shops open, cabs and tramcars trading just as on any other day. While I stood on the bridge I saw the steamboats crowded with people. Sunday! why, it is more like a fair! You only want the booths and the jugglers to make it a mop. I wonder these things are not stopped. All this traffic is surely against the law. It is bad in itself, and worse as an example. It ought to be stopped. It could be stopped by law, and it ought to be stopped. Why is it not stopped? 'This is Blackfriars Road. It leads into St George's Circus. I know from maps, but how different these places are from what I fancied. 'Gordon. Yes, the name is Scotch, and Marie is French. I wonder what religion she is. She has a maid, an Irish maid. The Irish are Roman Catholics, the maid is sure to be a Roman Catholic. The chances are the mistress is too, for her mother was a French Canadian. Or stop, are the French Canadians Huguenots or not? That I don't know. 'When she ceases to speak I always hear music; and when the music stops the air seems to listen for more. I wonder does such a beauty know how she fills the veins with wonder and joy? No, no. She could not know and carry her head in that way. She would have more consideration for those whose fate it is to see her a little while and lose her for ever. Because, of course, when she leaves London, I shall never see her again. Of course not. 'It is getting dusk; I had better go back, or I shall grow confused presently. It is cold. What an idiot I was to come without an overcoat! Why did I come at all? Why did I leave that warm room and that wonderful presence? Because the presence was too much for me. 'It is chilly. 'Here is the Thames again. I did not notice it much when I went over it awhile ago. Down there it flows from Westminster Bridge to meet all the other waters of the world. This is a main road to the ocean. I have seen only lanes and byways of water before, and never the sea. This is an imperial highway to the sea-the most important piece of water in the world, except the Jordan. The Amazon, the Mississippi, ay, all the watery plains of the Pacific, are nothing to man compared with this highway, from which set out the fleets of Britain. This river is the type of commerce, the symbol of enterprise; its shores are the gateway through which pass the riches and the sea-power of the greatest nation.' He left the bridge. 'I wonder is that girl still sitting where I left her? Is she sitting on that couch still, or has she left the room? How commonplace the room would be without her! All the things would look cold and cheerless. I have been in that room only once, and yet I know it would look mean and paltry without her. But when she is there everything gathers splendour from her, commonplace things are lifted up and made partakers of her glory. 'I in love with her! No more than the Straits of Dover are with Homer.' The cold began to pinch him a little, and letting go his musings, he walked rapidly back to the hotel. Without thinking of where he went, he walked into the drawing-room. By this time it was almost dark, but the gas had not yet been lighted. At first Osborne thought he was alone, but before he had reached the middle of the room that voice came to him, saying, – 'Oh, Mr Osborne, I am so glad you have come back to flirt with me. I have been doing my best to fall in love with Mr Nevill, but I couldn't. So I sent him away.' He could not have mistaken that voice. He could not mistake her voice, but he must have mistaken the words. What, his divinity speak thus! Monstrous! 'Shall I light the gas for you, Miss Gordon?' he asked, in a cold, formal tone. 'Yes, turn up the gas for *us*. You can bear the gaslight, he can't. Thank you. Now come over here and sit down and amuse me. Don't get a hassock at my feet, and say you want to worship me. It is all very well to worship solemn people, but I am not a bit solemn, and I want to be amused. Mr Nevill wanted to worship me and I sent him away.' 'I am afraid you will find me less amusing than Mr Nevill.' Why, it wasn't the feet of the idol alone, but the whole of the idol was clay! What clay! What glorious clay! Was ever so frivolous a spirit in so splendid a mould? 'Nonsense! Come and sit down here. Not on a hassock, but on a good stout oak chair. That one will answer. Come nearer-nearer still. That will do.' She was more flippant than Nevill. Why had he come back? Why had he not gone on and found some other place to stay at and there preserve his ideal? It was cruel, too cruel. Now he could never conjure up the image of her who sat before him, without hearing, not the music he had listened to that day at dinner, but these disenchanting, discordant, flippant words. What a magnificent creature she was! 'Well,' she said, fixing those dark eyes on him, 'where have you been since?' 'I have been out taking my first

daylight look at London.' 'And how do you like it?' 'I think London is the most wonderful place in the world.' 'The most wonderful place in the world for dulness?' 'No; for everything that is great and noble and significant.' 'Whe-ew!' A whistle! A lady whistling! A lady whistling at the idea of London being great and august! Well, he might expect anything now. No doubt she smoked. 'Now, look here, Mr Osborne.' He wondered she didn't call him simple 'Osborne.' 'Now look here, Mr Osborne, take this London Sunday and this very day as a specimen of dulness. What could be more satisfactory? I don't know what you did before dinner. I go in to dinner, I sit down. A man opposite me makes a remark; everyone stares. I say something, another man says something, Mr Nevill says something more. You try to say something, and choke and say nothing. Then four ladies give us scraps of sermons we had grown tired of as children. We come into the drawing-room, we go to sleep, and are waked up by you and Mr Nevill coming back. You walk over, stare at me in a most frightful manner, and rush away. Mr Nevill tries to make love to me, and fails. The other ladies go away to lie down or get ready for church, and I am left here alone until you turn up. When you do look in, you are as cheerful as a mute at a funeral. Now, tell me, Mr Osborne, is not that stupid?' Osborne felt rather disappointed she did not wind up with 'Damn it all, Georgie, old man, but this is infernally slow; let's go liquor-up and have a weed.' Nothing she could say or do now would surprise him. She was no longer an enigma or a mystery, but an ascertained certainty, a denounced deception. He said, simply and sadly, – 'You know, Miss Gordon, we Anglo-Saxons are a stupid race.' 'But there are exceptions.' 'You will not find many in the *pure* Anglo-Saxon blood.' Bowing slightly. 'Things are much altered when, through the matter-of-fact Anglo-Saxon veins, flows brighter and livelier blood.' 'You are not stupid,' she said. 'I approve of the dull ways you have been finding fault with.' 'Ah, that is acquired stupidity, not natural. I did not say you are intelligent, but you are intellectual, intensely intellectual, and poetic. You always look at the glorified side of things. You are a poet.' He stared at her. He forgot everything, and stared at her. When he recovered himself he replied nervously, hesitatingly, diffidently, – 'I-I assure you, Miss Gordon, I never wrote a line of poetry in my life-never even thought of such a thing.' 'It isn't necessary a poet should write poetry. He may think it.' 'But I assure you I have never even thought a line of poetry in my life.' 'Yes, you have. You thought poetry to-day at dinner, and were too shy to speak it.' Again he forgot everything, and stared. A criminal caught red-handed could not have been more amazed with fear. He had never been accused of poetry before, and her words were like heartless revellers who broke into the sanctuary of his soul, tore from it his most sacred secret, and set it up in the marketplace to be jeered at by all the town. She laughed softly. 'There is no witchery in it. I told you you were not intelligent, but you were intellectual. I am not intellectual, but I am intelligent. You are intellectual and a poet. I am intelligent, and I found you out.'

CHAPTER III. IN THE CHURCHYARD

'As you people live here in England,' said Nevill, next morning at breakfast, 'this meal is the gloomiest, dinner is the solemnest, and supper is the sleepest of the day. I can always understand a man being gloomy in the morning, but why people should be solemn at dinner and sleepy at supper I never could make out. The only way I can come near accounting for a man being solemn at dinner is because it is the most expensive meal of the day, and there is no way in the world so good for knocking the fun out of John Bull as to bleed him. But why people should look sleepy at supper licks me hollow!' 'Perhaps, sir,' said the solid-looking man, 'it is because the people *are* sleepy.' 'From what I know of Mr Nevill,' said Miss Gordon, 'I don't think he will be satisfied with a straightforward answer like that.' 'This very straightforwardness is the curse of the English character,' answered Nevill. 'To tell the plain truth, right out, is the impulse of a savage. To conceal all that is unpleasant, because it may give pain to others, is the perfection of culture. Why on earth should straightforwardness or any other virtue come stamping on my corns? I know, for instance, that my nose is not Roman. But that is no reason why Mr Straightforwardness should come and say to me, "Sir, you have a snub nose, not to say a cocked nose." No, Miss Gordon; give me the man who uses his wits to make those around him pleasant.' 'Do you,' asked Miss Gordon, 'practise what you preach?' 'In a humble way,' with a bow. 'And do you think you are adding to the pleasure of a company of English men and women, by attacking the character of the whole nation?' 'Undoubtedly.' 'But how?' 'A lady who has been a great traveller like you, Miss Gordon, must know that all our pleasures, or nearly all, are derived from thinking of other people or things; all our pains arise from thinking of ourselves. A comedy, a tragedy, a marriage, or an execution amuses us equally, because it makes us forget ourselves. But when we are compelled to think of ourselves by debt or pain, we are no longer happy. The debt or pain of other people is a source of diversion to us.' 'But, sir,' said the solid-looking man, 'I can't see how that is a reply to Miss Gordon's question.' 'It is not a direct reply, I own. But you may, sir, deduce the reply from it.' 'I confess I can't.' 'Well, you are an Englishman. I attack your race. That takes your mind off yourself by making it turn towards your race, and making you individually hate me.' 'That is not an ordinary theory.' 'Ordinary theories are, sir, never sound.' 'Mr Nevill,' said Miss Gordon, 'you are a great traveller.' 'Yes, I have been about a bit; but I'm not old, and I intend doing better before I die.' 'Are you a good linguist?' 'No. Don't speak a word of any language but English.' 'There is a general theory that linguists have prominent eyes. Now you have no talent for languages, and your eyes are not prominent.' There was a general laugh, in which he joined. 'Don't you think, sir,' said the solid-looking man, 'that when foreigners are travelling in out-of-the-way places, where they can find no one who speaks their language, they are grossly imposed on by the hotel-keepers?' 'I daresay many are imposed upon; but I, never.' 'And,' said Miss Gordon vivaciously, 'how do you manage to escape?' 'My mode is one few would care to adopt; but it is most effectual: 'Before I make signs to them I want the bill, I become erratic for awhile. Then I show them I wish to pay. Then I become moody. When they hand me the bill, I take out a revolver, and begin chanting the multiplication in English. I have tried cursing and swearing at them, but nothing is half so good as the multiplication chanted in a low voice. The effect is weird and confounding. They don't know whether I am going to shoot one of them or myself; they don't know whether I am sane or mad. They are sure of only one thing—that they wish I'd go. When I have treated them to about ten minutes of this, I put the revolver in my pocket, and tender them what I think fair. If they show hesitation, I go back to my old device, and starve them out.' 'You are joking,' said Mrs Barclay, from behind the tea-urn. 'Not at all, Mrs Barclay; and if there are any irregularities in your account, I'll treat you to a specimen of my method. If you have a doubt of the matter, ask Mr Osborne. He has seen me do the thing a thousand times.' Miss Gordon smiled, and said, — 'As Mr Nevill never met Mr Osborne until yesterday, I don't think

you need, Mrs Barclay, be in great dread, if you cannot believe without his evidence.' 'What are you going to do to-day, Osborne?' asked Nevill. 'I think I shall spend the day in St Paul's.' 'Spend the day in St Paul's! Why, bless my soul, man, you don't mean to say they have still the power of doing that sort of thing here?' 'What sort of thing?' asked Osborne. 'The power of sending a man to a church for a whole day. Are you to sit on a stool of repentance, with a white sheet around you and a lighted candle in your hand?' 'Do you really intend spending a whole day over St Paul's?' asked Miss Gordon, with a look of interest. 'I do,' answered Osborne. Mrs Barclay glanced at the girl, and asked, – 'Would you like to go?' 'Very much indeed.' 'Then perhaps you will take her, Mr Osborne?' He grew red and uncomfortable, and stammered out, – 'Certainly, with great pleasure.' 'What! Miss Gordon!' cried Nevill, in amazement. 'You promised me last night to come and have a look at Brighton with me to-day!' 'I prefer going to St Paul's.' 'And you break your agreement with me?' 'Yes.' With a sigh and a laugh close together. 'Upon my word, that is too bad. I never was so badly treated in all my life. Aren't you ashamed of yourself?' 'Not in the least; because, you see, I prefer going to St Paul's. I should be very much ashamed of going to Brighton when I wanted to go to St Paul's, and could go.' 'Miss Gordon, may I ask you how old you are?' 'Certainly. I am four-and-twenty. Why do you ask?' 'What a remarkable woman you will be when you are forty-eight?' 'In what way do you think I shall be remarkable?' 'In strength of mind, and all that. Tell me, do you go in for woman's rights?' 'I think women ought not to be fools.' 'Why?' 'Because it is ridiculous to be a fool.' 'But fools are often more happy than wise people.' 'Yes; but happiness is a brute quality, and I care for nothing but intellect.' Nevill shook his head, and laughed good-humouredly. 'Miss Gordon, take my word for it, you will be an ornament to the woman's rights' platform before you are fifty years of age.' While this dialogue was going on George Osborne thought to himself: 'What an awkward position she places me in! I would much sooner be alone. Then this rattle-pated Nevill is certain to think this is of my contrivance, and that, too, in the face of his confiding to me he was going to make love to her. He will surely consider me a dishonourable man; and certainly I have no intention of being dishonourable, and no wish to be considered dishonourable, and no wish to be with her. 'Fancy one of my sisters, fancy my sweetheart, if there were such a person, behaving in this bold way! Absolutely asking a strange man to take her to a place, in the face of another arrangement with a second strange man to go to another place! I never heard of such a thing in all my life. It is scandalous. It is indelicate. It is improper. I have told her I intended spending all day in the cathedral; but I need not go till late, and I will come away at dusk. I wonder will she talk and laugh loud, and *whistle* in the church, and disgrace herself?' He raised his eyes wistfully to her face. She was smiling at Nevill. Such an intoxicating smile. 'Yes, physically she is perfect; spiritually she is monstrous. She is Dead-Sea fruit. She is no woman. She is neither man nor woman, but a monstrous development of over-quick civilisation. She is the most beautiful being I have ever seen.' When breakfast was over he threw himself into an easy-chair, and thought, as he took up *The Times*, – 'I shall sit here for an hour or an hour and a half before starting.' He had not read a column when a foot approached him, and a soft voice said, – 'Well, Mr Osborne, I am ready.' He looked up and saw her standing before him dressed for walking. He did not notice anything she wore but the hat. It was velvet, a full vermilion, with black lace. Such a hat would catch the eye at any distance. It was shamefully bright. No sister of his, no sweetheart of his, should ever wear such a brazen thing. Why, all the people would stare at her! Ah, and well they might stare too, and stare till dark, and find no blemish in that oval face, that rounded, lithe figure. How at a second look the bold colour in the hat triumphed over one's repugnance! He would not dare to let his sister or his sweetheart wear such a thing; they were, or would be, dear to him, and this woman was a mere stranger; in a few days she would pass away out of his sight for ever. Meanwhile, the hat suited the face, and the face suited-heaven. 'Do you like my hat?' she asked, as he rose. 'It is very striking.' 'But do you think it is too violent?' 'No. It is daring-and successful.' 'I am glad you like it. I put it on expressly for you.' 'For me! How could you tell I should like it?' 'Oh, very simply. You are a very transparent man.' 'But how did you find out I should like such a hat?' 'Well, you know that there

are two kinds of ways of looking at a picture. The man who has a good eye for drawing looks at a picture bit by bit. The man who has a good eye for colour looks at the picture vaguely. You looked at the pictures here vaguely. Then I knew you had colour. My portrait has never been painted; but they tell me when I wear this hat I am a painting after one Giovanni Bellini, in Venice. Bellini's colour is always right; so a good copy of his ought to be right. I always have a hat like this with me, and when I want to be peculiarly killing I put it on. Does that explain all?' 'May I ask why you wish to be particularly-' He paused. He did not like to use her own word, and he did not like to rebuke her by using another. 'Killing to-day.' She finished the sentence for him. 'Because I am going out with a very handsome man, and I hate playing second fiddle.' She had taken his breath away, and he stared at her in silent wonder. What was she really? There was one obvious answer-the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. 'Come,' she said, briskly, 'we are losing time, and I am in a hurry to be there.' When they got out, she took his arm without his offering it. After a while she stopped at the window of a furniture shop, to admire a sideboard. 'What a beautiful sideboard!' she exclaimed. 'Yes,' he said, 'it is very handsome.' 'And what a beautiful pair!' 'Pair of what?' 'Of human beings in the glass.' He raised his eyes and saw the reflection of a tall, squarely-made, light-haired man, with square-cut face and pale, broad forehead, and by the man's side a tall, beautiful woman, after the Giovanni Bellini. 'Are you always so candid, Miss Gordon?' he asked, gravely. 'Yes,' she answered. 'It saves time, and it keeps men from making love or being impertinent. I have been a good deal about, and no man has ever dared to be impertinent to me. If you like, I'll tell you now all about myself; where and when I was born, where I have spent my time, how I was brought up, how I was educated, all about my family and fortune, my likes and dislikes, and my love-secrets.' Once more he stared at her. There was something confounding in finding one's-self so close to such a spirit in such a body. Mentally he drew back from her. That a young and beautiful woman such as she should offer to him, an utter stranger, the record of her inner thought, was distressing. Not for all the world would he lift a corner of the veil. This was a new power of torture. It was distressing to think that girl by his side was willing at any moment to throw aside the padding and expose to his view the bare skeleton of her individuality. He answered, 'I am not at all, not in the least, curious.' 'Then why, if you are not in the least curious, did you ask me if I was always so candid?' This puzzled him. He did not know what to say. He looked at her and smiled vacantly. She saw his predicament, and said, in her offhand way, – 'Well, there, don't bother to answer; I am not in the least curious.' There was a long pause. She broke it with, – 'Do you know, I can be awfully well-behaved when I like.' 'I am sure you are always well-behaved,' he said, warmly. 'Oh, but I mean stupid, and dull, and proper, like you.' He smiled a little sadly and said nothing. 'Oh, but I can; and I mean to be stupid, and dull, and proper, like you all day.' 'Why?' he asked, looking in perplexity at her. 'Same reason as for the hat; because you are stupid, and dull, and proper, and I hate to play second fiddle.' They walked on in silence until they arrived at the cathedral. 'Service is going on,' said Osborne, in the porch. 'Would you like to attend portion of it?' 'No. Take me round and let me look at the shops. I do not go to church.' 'You are a Roman Catholic, no doubt?' 'No. I was brought up in the Church of England; but I have given up going to church. I am not profane enough to treat the service as a spectacle or a musical performance, and I am not sincere enough to treat it on higher grounds.' 'I am exceedingly sorry to hear you say so.' 'I have worn off most of my faith with travel and change.' 'Then I would recommend you to rest from travel and change until your faith comes back again.' He had paused and was looking down earnestly into her face. An accent of solicitude in the man's voice arrested the girl's attention. For the first time her face was turned to his without a smile, and she looked up gravely to him. She spoke, after a short pause, – 'What you say interests me more than you might think, for I am not nearly so happy or quiet in my mind as when I went-' she pointed to the cathedral, in the shadow of which they were standing. 'Nor will you ever be. So long as we are in the great hurry and bustle of life, we do not feel the necessity strong upon us. But each one of us has to go out of life alone. That is the terrible thought-alone. The future is of the utmost consequence to us. It can be made as valid a certainty as this great church under which we

stand. Look up, and think of that church alone. That noble pile is the symbol of a nation's faith. All over the world St Paul's is known. It is the loftiest point in all these miles that make up London. Four millions of Christian men and women are clustered round its feet, draw breath and kneel in worship in sight of its cross. This is the greatest church built by the most practical race. When we consider that the most practical race on earth built this monument of faith, the opinion of the individual ought to be hushed before such a proof of devotion. Sceptics, scientists, and voluptuaries may rail as they will, there is the great fact hung by our nation between London and heaven.' He had forgotten whom he was speaking to. He looked down, coloured quickly, and said, – 'I beg your pardon, Miss Gordon; I forgot you wished to see the shops. Let us go.' She did not move. She was looking up with a new sweet gravity in her face. 'I don't care about the shops. The things are all faded. Let us walk round the cathedral; I want to have a good look at it.' The expression of her face changed. She sighed, and a soft light of hopefulness came into her eyes. It was a quiet light, like the morning light in a wood. 'You look your loveliest now,' he said. He thought, – 'Mad or drunk, or mad and drunk, what can I do?' 'You will take me round the cathedral?' 'Yes, when the service is over.' 'And you will tell me all about it?' 'Yes, as far as I know,' he answered. 'Mad or drunk, no matter which,' he thought. 'And you will treat me as a woman capable of respecting things that deserve respect?' 'Certainly.' He was not paying attention to what she was saying, his whole being was centred upon what she was looking. Mentally he said, – 'Drunk or mad, or-love? No matter!' 'Fools have made me flippant,' she said. 'And nature has made you divine.' 'Mr Osborne?' 'Yes.' 'Suppose I made up my mind to take a rest, and think seriously of serious things, would you advise me to settle in the country or town?' He stopped suddenly, raised his right arm, and made a slow gesture round. 'What place can you find better than here?' Throwing up his arm to its full height from his shoulder, he added, – 'Under St Paul's?'

CHAPTER IV. 'OH, PERHAPS.'

'O'CONNOR, you are to do my hair plain to-day,' said the mistress dreamily, as she sat before her glass. 'Plain, miss! Plain!' exclaimed the maid, in astonishment. 'Are you going to sit in your room all day?' 'No. I am going down to breakfast, and after breakfast I am going to see Westminster Abbey,' said Miss Gordon, with a sigh. 'I will wear my light-blue silk. O'Connor groaned. 'And my pearl-grey hat with the blue feathers.' O'Connor sat down and looked uneasily at her mistress. After a few seconds she asked, – 'And wouldn't you like to put green paint on your eyebrows and a blue stripe down your nose?' 'Come, O'Connor, and do my hair, or I shall be late.' 'I'll have no hand, act, or part in it,' said the maid quietly, as she folded her arms and stared with scrupulous sincerity at the window. 'Come at once, I say, O'Connor; no more nonsense. You really must learn to do what I tell you at once, or you and I shall part.' For a moment the maid remained immovable. Suddenly she rose to her feet, turned round, and placed herself between her mistress and the glass, and said excitedly, – 'I often helped to make you look what you are-the loveliest lady I ever saw. And I will not now help you to make a fool of yourself. You know your hair plain does not suit you; you know that dress you never wore, for it does not suit you; you know that hat only made you laugh when you put it on. You can dress as you like and do your hair as you like; but if you think I'll do what you say, you're mistaken.' 'O'Connor, I will have no more of your impertinent nonsense. Do what I tell you!' 'Is that the way you treat me after all I've done for you? Give me what you owe me and I'll go back to Cork.' 'Leave the room at once!' cried Miss Gordon excitedly. 'Not till you give me my money,' replied the girl vehemently, at the same time holding out her hand. 'Leave the room, I say, at once. How dare you stay when I tell you to go?' 'I am waiting for my money. I want to go back to Cork before you disgrace me.' 'O'Connor, I will take no further notice of you. Your conduct is unpardonable. Go, or I shall have to ring the bell.' 'Ring the bell! Ring the bell! Is that what you say after all I've done and suffered for you, and all the outlandish victuals I have eaten, and all the outlandish gibberishes I have listened to-is that my thanks?' 'If you don't go at once, I'll ring.' 'Pay me my money and I'll go.' Miss Gordon rose and went towards the bell. 'Pay me my money, or I'll call in the police.' Miss Gordon rang the bell. All at once the manner of the maid changed. Her lips trembled, she put her hand before her face, walked towards the door, and left the room sobbing. The chambermaid appeared in a few minutes. To her Miss Gordon said, – 'I shall be late for the table d'hôte breakfast. Get me a little for myself in about three-quarters of an hour.' When the chambermaid came down to the kitchen she found Judith O'Connor moving about the place restlessly. 'What did my mistress ring for?' asked Judith. 'To say she'd want breakfast for herself in three-quarters of an hour.' 'She did not say anything else?' 'No.' Judith sat down and sighed. In a few moments she said to the chambermaid, – 'Isn't my missis beautiful?' 'She is.' 'The most beautiful lady you ever saw here?' 'We've had no one so good-looking lately.' 'You never had,' said Judith firmly. 'Oh yes; there's Mrs Loftus.' 'Yes, I know what Mrs Loftus is like, all frills and tuckers, and frizzed hair and paint.' 'Mrs Loftus didn't wear frills or tuckers; she wears her hair flat: and as to paint, well, I never saw any sign of it about her. Did you?' 'No; and I don't want to see Mrs Loftus, or any other missis but my own. Mrs Loftus may be a very handsome lady-and I am sure she is when you say it-but there isn't a finer missis in all England than mine.' 'How do you mean? Mrs Barclay is as good a missis as any servant could have.' 'Yes; but my missis doesn't know she's a missis at all.' As Miss Gordon had predicted, she was late for breakfast that morning. All the guests had left the table, and Mrs Barclay had risen and gone out of the room. Two gentlemen were seated on the couch farthest from the table, looking at newspapers. As Miss Gordon entered, each lowered his newspaper, looked at the girl for a moment, and resumed reading without breaking silence. One was the solid-looking gentleman, the other George Osborne. The light in the room was dull. Miss Gordon, too, kept silence. Her breakfast was soon over; she rose and left the room. In a few

minutes the solid-looking man went out also, and George Osborne was left to himself. He looked at the clock on the chimney-piece. He looked at his watch. He put away *The Times*, and walked slowly up and down the room. He sat down, took up *The Times* again, and thought resolutely to himself, – 'I'll read a column, and make myself think of it. That will pass away the minutes until she comes. It is sickening to be looking at the door every time it opens, and see the way blocked by commonplace people seeking something or other, or expressing wonder as to what they shall have for dinner.' The door opened twice, but he kept his resolution. It was hard to be obliged to look down at this white sheet and these dark words, and try to fix the mind on the dreary drone of a leading article, when raising the eyes might reveal to him a feast of colour and a charm of grace that would make the heart rich and life a poem. The door opened a third time. A light, swift footstep approached where he sat. He deliberately waited to finish reading the sentence before looking up. He had been in haste as long as there was doubt; now that he was certain he delayed. He had been a poor man, anxiously expecting wealth; now he was opulent, and squandered recklessly to convince himself his fortune was real. He could feel the beauty of her presence surrounding him and intoxicating him. The moment he raised his eyes he started to his feet with an exclamation of displeased surprise. 'Miss Gordon! Miss Gordon, pray excuse me! I did not recognise you until now. You have altered your appearance so-' 'So much for the worse,' she concluded the sentence, smiling. 'Well, I cannot say I see an improvement.' 'I did not intend you should think it an improvement.' 'Why?' he asked, contracting his brows, and looking at her in a puzzled way. 'You said yesterday you wanted to look your best; you say you do not want to look your best to-day, although-' He paused. She added, – 'Although I am going out with you to-day also. Well, I have altered my mind since. I am jealous of that hat and dress and tunic. You did nothing yesterday but stare at my hat.' 'Miss Gordon-' 'Silence! You did nothing, I say, yesterday, but stare at my hat, and I won't have that. I have put on all the most hideous things in my baggage, to see if you will give poor me a look to-day.' 'I not look at *you*?' he cried. 'What do you mean?' He did not know what he meant by asking this question. He did not care what he meant. He meant nothing at all, but to look at that warm young face now, and lose his mind in the alluring depths of those dark soft eyes. 'Mad or drunk or love,' he thought. 'God keep me thus a little while, and I shall die content.' 'What are you looking at now?' she asked. 'At you,' he answered. 'Ah,' she laughed, 'is this to compensate for your neglect yesterday?' 'It would compensate me,' he said, 'for a whole life of labour and pain.' 'Let us go,' she said, 'or you will be proposing to me, and I am weary of that kind of thing-that is, unless you have a great novelty. I am glad you intend to be better behaved to-day than yesterday, and give *me* some of your attention. But do you know even to-day you have not said good-morning to me? I change my dress and do up my hair in a different way from yesterday, and when I come down to breakfast you do not know me. Then when you do recognise me, you do not even hold out your hand and say good-morning. Ah, it is all very well when I remind you of it,' she added, placing her hand in his. Why, why was she flippant when he wanted to be calm and quiet, or rash and mad-anything but flippant? Why did she undo the spell of her beauty by the triviality of her words and ways? Such words and ways profaned the sanctuary of her loveliness as riot would a church. He not take her hand! If he dared, he would hold it and place it on his breast, and cover it with both his hands, and cherish it there for ever. Or cherish it until he could no longer hold it, but let it go to clasp that marvel to his breast, and cry into her ear the passion that shook him. She took her hand away and said briskly, – 'I think it's time for us to go if we are to walk along the Embankment and do the Abbey.' They left Mrs Barclay's and moved south. 'Mind,' she said, as she took his arm and they turned out of Peter's Row, 'I am not going to be dull and stupid and proper to-day, like you.' 'Why not to-day?' he asked, with a weary smile. This struggle was trying. 'It is only when I wear my prettiest things I can afford to be proper. You can't expect me to be a guy and a frump at the same time. It's not reasonable of you to expect that of me.' 'I assure you I do not expect it of you.' 'Then what *do* you expect of me?' 'A little mercy,' he said, looking gravely, sadly at her. 'Well, let us have a truce. It won't last long, I know. Tell me, which do you prefer me, as a guy or a frump?' 'I have not thought

of it.' 'Look and think, and tell me.' 'I think I prefer the grey sober style of yesterday.' 'And the hat?' 'And the Bellini hat.' 'Do you intend taking me out to see any tombs or vaults, or crypts or catacombs, or anything lively tomorrow?' 'You will make me very happy if you will let me.' 'Very good. I want to try another experiment.' 'With what view?' he asked wearily. 'With a view to getting your opinion. You are the only poet I ever met, and I am curious to know what poets think.' 'You have already got more than my opinion; you have got all my-' 'What!' she exclaimed, interrupting him. 'On the Thames Embankment, before luncheon, and with the thermometer at ten degrees of frost! I never heard of such a thing. As you are a poet I'll forgive you this time. But the next time you want to say anything pretty or sentimental to me, be more careful. You are a poet, and ought to know you should not make love except when the birds are singing and the flowers blowing. The only thing that's blowing here is the east wind and the penny steamer. For shame, sir!' 'But when the flowers have come, you will have gone away?' Silence. 'You will have gone away, Miss Gordon?' Silence. 'Will you not?' 'Oh, perhaps.'

CHAPTER V. FROM WESTMINSTER TO THE CRITERION

'Is not coming in here,' he whispered to her, when they had been a few minutes in the Abbey, 'like listening to a prayer for man that must be heard.' 'Yes,' she whispered back; 'it may be heard, but it can't be seen. Why don't they clean the windows?' 'It is, you know, the spirit of the Gothic to be gloomy. You, of course, also know the gloom is increased by the legends on the glass,' he whispered. He had never whispered to her, nor she to him, before. What new delight lurked in these whispers? It was that she or he was for the first time deliberately limiting to one what the other had to say. He was speaking to her, and to her only; she to him, and to him only, as though they had gone out of the general bustle of a ballroom into the seclusion of a grotto. 'But,' she said, 'it was all very well for folk of the dark ages to keep out the light with tall gawky windows and stained glass. They could not read, and they had no costumes worth looking at. If I were at the head of affairs here, I should take down all this blinking, blinking glass, widen the windows, and let plenty of the wholesome sunlight in.' He said nothing. He turned away and sighed. What she would sweep away he would guard with his life. The poetry, the romance, the depth of historical tone, were indebted for much to the narrow high windows and dim light. He and she were not getting on nearly as pleasantly as they might in that grotto of whispers. How sadly different to-day was from yesterday! She had been then so silent and unobtrusive. She had let him talk to her in St Paul's as he loved best to talk, as he had talked to his mother and sisters often, but never until that day to any strange woman. 'I know it's not poetical. I am not a bit poetical, although I like to hear a poet talk, for I think one should know all the weaknesses of human nature. Don't you agree with me?' 'Yes,' he said; 'certainly.' 'So poetry is a weakness of human nature to her mind,' he thought bitterly. 'Poetry, the perfume of earth, the odour that sanctifies man; poetry, which is at the base of every noble emotion in human nature; and this poetry a weakness of human nature! I am sorry I came out with her to-day.' 'Mr Osborne.' He looked down. Her face was turned up to his. His eyes met hers. 'And what place on all earth could I choose, if not that by her side?' he asked himself helplessly. Aloud he said merely, 'Yes.' 'You are not nearly so amusing as yesterday. If you keep on this dreary, woebegone look, I shall walk away and leave you to your musings. Why are you so silent?' 'I have a different audience to-day, and I am not clever enough for it.' 'I don't want you to be clever. I hate clever men. They are always too stuck-up and smart. You're not a bit clever.' 'I really don't know what to say or do. This is not a good place to discuss such subjects. Shall we leave, and talk the matter over as we walk round the Abbey?' 'No, no. I want to go over this place with you. We will drop that subject if you wish, and stay here. Tell me about the place.' 'I don't know what to say. I am afraid I shall not find anything likely to please you.' 'I don't want you to talk with a view to pleasing me. I hate a man who does. I want you to say things that I shall demolish.' 'What am I to speak of?' 'This place. Tell me what was your first feeling on coming in.' 'I thought I should like to have been born in the time of the Medicis, when there were only two thoughts in days of peace-religion and the arts.' 'Do you mean you would like to have been born under the Medicis, in Italy?' 'Yes; in Florence or Venice. Venice by preference.' 'But the religion of Venice was not the religion you now hold.' 'No; but it was the best religion of those days; and if I had lived and died then, I should most likely never have felt any perplexity.' 'Oh, then you have felt perplexities?' 'Yes, now and then. Not in essentials, but in small matters; and perplexities of this kind wear one down.' She looked at him with scornful compassion for a few seconds, and then said, – 'You are very young; you are no more than fourteen or fifteen. I can see what your fate will be.' 'Can you? What?' 'Rome.' He looked at her with quick trouble in his eyes. 'I have often wondered if there is any danger of that.' 'As sure as your name is George Osborne, that is what your fate will be.' He shrank back from her. 'I think I should rather die,' he whispered, 'than desert the pure simple faith I was brought up in.' 'Then,' she said, with a bright smile, 'it will be with you as it was with the Italian patriots, a case of *Roma o*

morte.' She sang the last words under her breath, to the air of the 'Inno Nazionale.' He looked around in horror, to ascertain if anyone had heard her. No one was near. 'Pray, Miss Gordon, don't sing. The people here have great ideas of the sanctity of this place, and anything like a profanation would be badly received.' 'Then take me away from this place. I am not good enough to be here.' He looked down at her. The expression of alarm and reproach faded from his eyes, to be succeeded by one of wonder, followed by that yearning regard of unperfected love. When he spoke, his voice was thick. 'You not good enough to be here that are beautiful enough for heaven!' 'Come,' she said, archly, 'if I may not sing, you shall not bow down and worship a graven image here. I have had plenty of heavy matters; and as for compliments, he must be a very original man who pays me one I have not had already. I see a lot of names I know about here. Is this the Poets' Corner?' He shook himself, and glanced to either side. 'Yes, this is the Poets' Corner.' 'I daresay it is not the only corner the poets were ever in.' 'I think it is. I do not know that they were buried elsewhere, and have been shifted to this place.' She looked and shook her head at him, and sighed comically. 'Now,' she said, 'what name of all those here do you think most of?' 'Edmund Spenser.' 'Have you read the "Faerie Queene" right through?' 'Not quite through, but almost.' 'I can't bear him.' 'Can't bear Spenser! Why, he is one of the richest poets of all! He is the laureate of the forest. I am astonished to hear you say you don't like Spenser.' 'The allegory is killing.' 'Do you think so? His handling of it is masterful.' 'Well, I don't think so, that's all.' 'You remember what you said yesterday about resting from travel for awhile, and giving your mind to serious matters?' 'Yes, but to-day I am not quite sure of it.' He looked at her wistfully, painfully. She turned away from him. 'Has my staying or going anything to do with the Poets' Corner or the tomb of Spenser?' 'It recalls a favourite stanza at the end of the first book, which is the legend of the "Knight of the Red Cross, or Holiness." It runs: "Now strike your sails, ye jolly mariners, for we be come unto a quiet road, where we must land some of our passengers, and light this weary vessel of her load. Here she awhile may make her safe abode, till she repaired have her tackles spent and wants supplied; and then again abroad on the long voyage whereto she is bent; well may she speed and finish her intent!" The ashes of the man who, three hundred years ago, wrote the lines that figure forth your spiritual position of to-day lie here. Three centuries he is behind the Great Veil. He says himself; "But after death the trial is to come when best shall be to them that lived best." Three centuries ago he foreshadowed the position you stand in to-day. Three centuries ago he foreshadowed more than this; he foreshadowed the charms of a woman, and sang: "Upon her eyelids many graces sate, under the shadow of her even brows." He knew of other things too-sweet things. He tells us, "Sweet is the love that comes alone with willingness?" Do you believe in this sweet love that comes alone with willingness?' She shook her head archly, looked up and whispered, – 'This is not a good place to discuss such subjects. Shall we go out and talk the matter over as we walk round the Abbey?' His face, which had been flushed, grew grey and sad. 'Will you laugh at everything, Miss Gordon?' 'Yes, until someone convinces me of the value of tears.' He turned away. 'Come,' he said, 'I have never been here before; but you find the place dull, this sanctuary for memories, this incense of worship. Come away.' 'I am not so much tired of the place as of the guide.' 'Then by all means let us go back. I am most unfortunate if I am the cause of dulness in you; for I am sure, under average circumstances, you could not fail to be interested in this place. Let us go back, I beg.' She dropped her brows slightly over her eyes and looked fixedly at him for awhile. 'What new surprise and disappointment are in store for me?' he thought. 'What unexpected onslaught is she going to make on my esteem for her? How beautiful she is in this unbecoming wear! fine feathers may make fine birds, but plain ones cannot mar her.' 'Are you hungry?' she asked, still keeping her careful eyes upon him. He started. Had she, with her wonderful sharpness, seen some shadow on his face, betraying a want of which he was unconscious? Most marvellous of women! What keen penetration! He said, – 'May I ask you why?' 'Because your reply interests me.' 'In what way?' He looked confounded. How on earth could it matter to her whether he was or was not hungry? 'Because I am. I am tired of tombs and sermons. Come away, get a hansom, and take me to the Criterion and give me a cosy luncheon. I

am tired of graves. Do, please.' She said this in a low, rich, tender, pleading voice. Suddenly a smile came over his face. 'The first smile to-day,' she murmured complainingly; 'and that because I have told him I am hungry!' with a shadowy smile. 'No,' he answered; 'but because physical causes have broken down the hardness of your manner, and restored your womanhood.' 'And,' she asked, turning weary eyes upon him, 'do you think nothing but physical causes could break down the hardness of my manner and restore my womanhood?' 'Mad and drunk, and love though it is,' he thought, 'I cannot take her in my arms here.' He said, 'I do not know. What do you think?' 'I am not at present capable of thought. It is half-past two, and I am desperately hungry; that is all I am sure of now, as far as my thoughts go.' Nothing more was said until they had got into the open air. 'Ah,' she sighed, 'what a relief!' 'But, though you have got out of the church, you still have the gloomy spectre by your side.' 'Yes, but you look quite jovial in the air compared to the figure you cut as expounder of monumental jokes. Then, too, you have undertaken, I infer (you were as careful as a lawyer not to commit yourself to words) you have undertaken to give me a luncheon in a cheerful place. As with you, this is my first visit to London; and although I have not seen the Criterion, from what I have heard, I have formed the conclusion it bears little or no resemblance to Westminster Abbey.' 'I wish you were always as you now are,' he said, as he handed her into the hansom. 'What!' she cried, in amazement, 'famished?' 'No,' he answered. 'I mean in your present semi-serious, non-aggressive humour.' 'But would it not be enough for you if I kept my temper for the few hours we shall be together?' 'No.' He was looking fixedly at her, and she demurely at him, as they drove rapidly up Whitehall. 'Why?' 'I cannot tell you that now.' 'But perhaps I may never come out with you again.' 'Then I shall keep my secret as an inducement to make you come.' 'What! Could you tolerate me again?' 'Again! Again! Ay, for ever and ever!' 'Mr Osborne!' 'I know! I know! But what can I do? I know I never met you until a few days ago. But what good is that to me? I cannot help myself! will you help me?' 'How can I help you?' 'By telling me you are not offended.' 'I am not offended.' 'And by permitting me to hope you will let me renew this subject on a more fitting occasion.' 'In an omnibus, or on the saloon deck of a penny steamboat?' 'For God's sake don't laugh at me, Miss Gordon!' Above the noise of the traffic her ear caught something in his voice that made her start and raise her eyes. She held out her hand to him frankly, and said, – 'No, Mr Osborne, I will not laugh at you. I have been very thoughtless. And you are not to say anything more to me of this subject for awhile.' 'How long?' 'A month.' 'And during that month you will stay where you are now staying, and you will let me see you often, and be with you, and speak to you, and hear of you, and hear you, and touch your hand-now and then?' 'Yes.' 'And do you think there is likely to be any reason for hope?' 'Now,' she said, 'the subject is closed for a month. Let it rest. The cab has stopped. This must be the Criterion.'

CHAPTER VI. AT THE CRITERION

Osborne helped his companion out of the hansom, and took the number of it, and paid the driver. When they turned their backs upon the street and walked towards the hall, he offered her his arm. She took it, with a quiet smile, remarking, while she kept her eyes fixed upon the causeway, – 'Only yesterday you were displeased when I took your arm, and now you offer it quickly.' 'But there is a great difference between this day and yesterday.' 'Do you really think so? Well, I did not notice it; but now you call my attention to it, I do think it is colder.' He drew up, and looked reproachfully into her face. 'Miss Gordon, you promised not to laugh at me.' 'And you promised to say nothing more of what has passed for a month.' At that moment the driver of the cab stood in front of Osborne, and dropping the brass butt of his whip within an inch of Osborne's toes, said, in a tone of insolent menace, 'No, you don't, my blooming lad! No, *you* don't!' 'What is the matter? Get out of the way,' quietly, firmly. 'No, I won't! Why did you take the number of my cab?' 'That is my own affair,' answered Osborne, growing confused and crimson. A crowd collected, and two policemen were sailing slowly down upon the scene. 'It's something of my affair as well,' said the driver vehemently. 'I'm not a-going to be hauled up for any of your tricks and plants. I'm only a poor man, and it isn't right and just. Pay me my honest fare.' 'I shall give you no more,' said Osborne, becoming still more confused. 'What is wrong?' asked a man of the driver. 'I took him and the lady up at Broad Sanctuary,' explained the driver to the crowd; 'and I drove them here, and he takes the number of my cab, and slips a sovereign into my hand, and walks away without asking for his change.' He held out his open hand with the yellow sovereign shining in the middle of his dirty palm like the sun through a London fog. 'But I know his game. He wants me to drive off, and then he'd have me lagged for his blooming change; and I with a wife and family of children looking to me!' 'Shame!' cried the crowd. 'I intended the sovereign for you,' said Osborne, more composedly. 'Please let me pass.' 'Oh, did you, sir? Thank you, sir,' said the man, touching his hat to Osborne and Miss Gordon. 'Much obliged to you, and I'll drink the lady's health and your own.' He backed to his cab, looked at them as they entered the hall, and said confidentially to the off-wheel, 'You don't often pick up a fare like that about the Abbey. You get your half-crown, and maybe a crown now and then. I didn't see they was spoons at first. I'm not half sharp enough for picking up a living in this world, I ain't. You never know what luck you are going to get out of the railway stations; but out of the Abbey a sovereign for a shilling! Well, I'm blown!' When they were in the vestibule Miss Gordon turned to Osborne, and said, – 'Why did you take that man's number, and why did you give him a sovereign?' 'You told me the other evening I was a poet. I mean to try to be a poet now and then; and the first thing I shall write will be "A Sonnet to Hansom Cab No. 1136." Does that answer both questions?' 'Yes; but the sovereign was extravagant. 'But poets are never prudent; and when a poet falls in-' 'A hansom.' They had gained the dining-room and sat down. 'When a poet falls in a hansom, why, you cannot expect him to peddle like a second-hand-clothes dealer.' 'Still I think the sovereign too much. How much a year have you?' 'About fifteen hundred, out of money recently left me,' he answered. He thought: 'What other girl in all the world would ask a man such a question under the circumstances?' 'Oh, I did not think you had so much! A bachelor with fifteen hundred a year ought not to wear such clumsy clothes and such long hair. You must get your hair shortened, wear a dark-blue frock-coat made by a good man, and an Oxford-blue tie. Blue suits you. I don't insist on patent-leather boots and gaiters, but they make an improvement. Your dress and hair led me to think you had not more than four or five hundred a year. You'd look very well in evening dress. All you light-bearded, high-foreheaded, square-faced, light-haired men look well in evening dress. My horror is a dark man-a man with black hair, a low forehead, heavy eyebrows, and black hair all over his face-in an open waistcoat and tailed coat. He looks as if the black of his coat had crawled up his poll and run down his face.' 'Will you have some potato?' 'No, thank you. I never eat

potato with sole. The idea is barbarous. Have you never observed that potato and sole are very like in flavour? They are, and the idea of drowning two delicate flavours in one another is atrocious. It would be like helping seakale and vegetable-marrow as fish and vegetable. The art of eating is in its infancy.' There was a long silence, 'All the world is made of my joy,' thought Osborne. 'This great room, these bright tables, these polite waiters-all are made of my joy. My joy lifts the desolation of winter from the land, and floods the world with the warm level sunshine of evening. My joy, my glory, my fate, my love! My Jove! What were all the argosies of Hamburg or of Venice compared to you? What are all the riches of London compared to you? The value of riches is in spending them; this joy I have neither diminishes nor changes. It builds heavens above the skies, and glorifies the sordid things of earth.' 'Are you aware you are attracting a good deal of attention towards us?' she asked, breaking in suddenly on his thoughts. 'Good gracious, no! How?' he exclaimed, in great discomfiture. 'By staring at me in that way.' 'I beg your pardon. I am sorry. Pray forgive me?' 'I do not mind it in the least. I am used to being stared at, and don't mind it a bit; but I thought you would not like it.' 'I am very much obliged to you for telling me. I promise you not to do it again.' 'Oh, I don't mind it at all! I rather like it.' 'Rather like being stared at, so as to attract the attention of a common room like this! You are not serious?' 'Perfectly,' she said, with a placid smile. 'But what earthly pleasure can it give you to have a number of eyes fixed upon you?' 'Did you ever notice that people are disposed to stare at a pretty woman?' 'Certainly. That goes without saying.' 'When a handsome man and woman, like you and me, are in a public place like this, people cannot help staring.' 'I wish you would give up saying such things.' 'All I have said is quite true. Well, when there are a good-looking man and woman in a room like this, and all the people are looking at them, if the man lifts his head and looks round, all the men drop their eyes, because they do not wish to displease the man by staring at his companion; if the woman looks up, all the women drop their heads, because they do not wish to let her see how they envy her.' 'Envy her! How can you say such an uncharitable thing, Miss Gordon?' he asked, with an expression of serious disturbance on his face. 'Ah,' she sighed, 'you are very young! Wait until you are as old as I am, and you will know what I have said is true. You may take my word for it in the meantime.' She looked lazily around her, and when she had completed a survey of the room, she said, 'I do feel so much better than when I was in that chilly Abbey. Don't you?' 'I feel much happier. But you must not hold such very unpleasant views of your sex. I reverence it, and I must teach you to think as I think.' 'I wish you could. It is much more pleasant to think well than to think poorly of people. But what are you to do when you are sure you are right?' 'Keep your mind still open to conviction.' 'I do. There is no one in the world less bigoted than I.' 'I know very few women. The few I do know are, I am sure, above such a feeling of vulgar jealousy.' 'I congratulate you if it is so. It may be, perhaps, that you have had no opportunity of getting at the real character of women. You may not have been brought close enough to them for a long enough time.' 'I am perfectly sure,' he said gravely; 'you, for instance, are incapable of such a paltry sentiment.' 'You are quite right. But I am an exception, a very rare exception.' 'And why are you an exception? What is the cause of your being an exception?' 'Because,' she said, with deliberation, 'the homage of no man has up to this interested me; and I always feel quite independent of men; and if I do flirt it is only because I have not an amusing book, or a liking to play and sing, or fine castles to build in the air.' He looked at her with pain mingled with astonishment. 'I don't like you to say such things. There is an ungentleness about them that does not become you. I wish you would adopt a more sober style. Believe me, all the world cannot be wrong and you right; and nearly all the world-all the wisdom of the world, at all events-is against you.' 'But am I to be a hypocrite, or am I to be what I am?' 'You should try to be what you ought to be.' 'Conventional?' 'Well, I would rather see you conventional than as you are. Conventionalism is the accumulated tradition of vast experience; and anyone who throws it over runs a great risk of falling into ways he has no knowledge of, and through which he can find no guide.' Osborne was scarcely looking at her as he spoke. She was looking at him intently, with all the faculties of her nature fixed on him. 'Do you know,' she said, 'you are talking awful rubbish? But you look your

best when you maunder.' He started, coloured, glanced around him hastily, and taking up the bill of fare, said, – 'I am the worst of caterers, Miss Gordon. What sweet do you like? Will you look at the bill and select?' She turned her grave, sweet eyes upon him, and whispered softly, – 'If you please, Mr Osborne, as this must serve for my dinner, I should like a small piece of joint. I have had only one tiny piece of sole and a little soup since breakfast, and it's now nearly four o'clock.' 'Good gracious, I must have been dreaming! Waiter!' 'You look very well asleep.' Osborne said to the waiter, 'Roast beef.' 'When the waiter has brought the beef are you likely to fall asleep again?' 'I thought you said I talked nonsense.' 'Yes, you did. But I don't mind what you say. I like to look at you when you talk that kind of rubbish. It's like seeing a panorama to music. You look at the panorama, and don't mind the music a bit.' His eyes dwelt on her with a wistful sadness. She was looking like a woman whose heart would melt at the first touch of enthusiasm or love, and she was talking like a machine. How was this? What could it mean? What could cause the antagonism between the spirit in the eyes and the spirit in the words? He shook his head sadly, and was silent awhile. She spoke again, – 'You told me you had sisters: how many?' 'Two,' he answered wearily, keeping his glance on the cloth. He thought, 'How different they are from you! How shocked they would be to see any girl act and speak as you do! And yet-and yet I-I have asked this woman to be my wife, and in a month I shall know whether she will or not! They never could endure her. They would not walk with her, or sit with her. They would be horrified at every trait in her character. What am I doing? What have I done? Two days ago I told myself I did not want her or her love, and I have proposed to her to-day! What is the matter with me? I used to be a firm man; now I am as fickle as the wind. Perhaps she will refuse me after all. There is one thing certain, whether I marry her or not, I can never introduce her at home.' 'Busy on that sonnet to No. 1136?' He raised his face quickly. She was smiling gently, confidentially at him. This 1136 was a lover's joke, a lover's secret, the first of the kind he had ever had. What a warmth ran through all his nature, at the thought of having a secret with the owner of that soft figure, the owner of that beautiful face, and with the spirit of those dark eyes! They two, she and he, intimate already; bound round by a secret; separated from all the rest of the world by a trivial secret! They two in the innermost bowers of personality! What affluence and prodigality of happiness! What rich tumult! What bewildering joy! 'Ah,' he said, looking at her with eyes dancing with happiness, 'I must think of that sonnet.' 'But were you not thinking of it when I spoke?' 'No.' 'Pray, of what were you thinking behind that gloomy face?' 'I was thinking of my sisters.' 'Are they so very, very dreadful, that when you think of them you must look like a bankrupt gambler coming from the gaming-table?' 'No. They are considered good-looking. Miss Gordon-' 'You must not say that.' 'What?' 'What you were going to say. I saw it on your face, and you have promised not to speak of the matter for a month. I want to talk to you about your sisters. Are they like you?' 'Kate, the elder, is like me.' 'Fair and handsome?' 'She is fair.' 'How old is she?' 'Twenty-four.' 'Ah, my age! And what is your other sister like?' 'Alice is dark.' The girl paused awhile and kept her eyes fixed on the table. She raised her finger for his attention, and said, 'I shall be a month in London. I don't like any of the women at Mrs Barclay's. I am not likely to like any of them. The probability is, no chance arrival will be better than the set now there. Write to-night and ask your sister Kate up for a month.' She raised her eyes to his and looked into his face. He was in dismay. 'She-she would not come!' he cried hastily. 'Why?' 'I know she would not come. She has been more home-staying than I.' 'All the more reason why she should come up now. You don't intend keeping her in a place like Stratford all her life?' 'There would not be the least use in my asking her.' 'You decline to write?' 'I know it would be in vain.' 'Then I will write to-night to her, asking her to come up and stay with me.' 'You, Miss Gordon! You! You would not dream of doing such a thing!' cried Osborne, in terror. 'I'm not a poet, and I never dream except in sleep. If you will not write for your sister to-night, I will.' 'But what would she think of it? She would not come. Of course she would not leave home.' 'I shall try. Once I have fully decided upon anything I never bother about detail.' 'If you do this I should be greatly displeased; I, who want to be so close a friend of yours.' 'Then why do you refuse so small a favour? It is my *first* request.' She uttered the

latter sentence with her eyes turned into his, and all the beauty of her face gathered into a smile for him. She laid an emphasis on the word *first*. Oh, delicious significance of that emphasis! It meant that other requests were to follow. Requests of her to him now would mean hope. Think of having the right to hold her for ever to his breast. What a hope! She was giving him encouragement. There could be no doubt that, by asking him for favours and wishing to know his sister, she did not intend to treat his suit lightly. If he finally declined to write, and she wrote, his mother and sisters would not hear her name mentioned again; they would be cruelly shocked. What had he been thinking a while ago about his sisters and her? Never mind now. Who could look at that face and see that smile and hear that voice asking for a *first* favour and deny it? He spoke, – 'Even if I do write I am almost sure she will not come.' 'But you must write in a way that will leave no option. Your mother will not object.' 'If I fail?' 'You must not fail. You must not fail to obtain the first favour I ask. Promise me you will succeed.' 'I will do my best' 'Now pay the bill and let us go.' As he was handing her into a hansom, he said, 'May I ask you why you are so anxious my sister should come up?' 'That is my affair,' she whispered to him, as she curled herself up daintily in the corner.

CHAPTER VII.

FROM STRATFORD TO PETER'S ROW

'I am sure, mother, I cannot understand what he wants of me in London. He knows I do not like going about, and the idea of living in a hotel is hateful. What can he want of me?' On the round, pale, sweet face of the girl there was a look of perplexity and pain as she raised her soft hazel eyes to her mother's, when Mrs Osborne had finished reading the letter addressed by her son to her daughter Kate. 'My dear Kate,' said the stout, silver-haired matron, laying down her gold-rimmed spectacles on the open page of her son's letter, and fixing her mild, contented eyes on her elder daughter, 'we know George has always good reasons for what he does and says, and I think we need not fear he is wrong in this case. He says he wants you in London very particularly, and no doubt he does. Now, if he wants you very particularly, of course you will go.' 'But, mother, I do not like to go. I'd much rather not. What can he want me for?' The old woman took up the letter and spectacles again, set her spectacles on her nose, and read the letter from beginning to end. When she had finished she sat silent awhile, swinging her spectacles with one hand and keeping the letter open on the table before her with the other. 'He does not,' she said, 'give any reason for his wishing you to go to London; but, no doubt, Kate, he feels lonely and strange in that great place where he has no friends, and it may be he wants to give the place a look of home by having you with him. George is a good son and a good brother; and when we were not nearly so well off as we are now, he stood by us and denied himself many luxuries and amusements young men look for, in order that we might have everything in reason we could desire. So that altogether, Kate, you ought not to make any objection to going.' The soft hazel eyes of the girl were cast down upon the cloth. She said nothing for a few seconds, and then, in a tone of profound resignation, only, – 'If I must I must.' 'I wish he had asked me to go,' said Alice, "little Alice" as they called her. 'I wouldn't say no, or take five minutes to make up my mind. There's no one spooning me.' The elder girl blushed and did not raise her eyes. 'Alice,' said Mrs Osborne severely, 'I have forbidden you to speak in a light manner of such matters. If any gentleman, such as Mr Garvage, should offer attentions to Kate, that is nothing to be ashamed of in her or him; for he comes of an honourable family, who have lived at Chatsley Manor for many generations, and honoured the Church and supported the State; for they always have been Conservatives-staunch Conservatives. Alice, you must not. I tell you once for all, you must not. Attend to me! "Spoonings!" What abominable slang! When I was your age I should as soon have thought of jumping out of the window as of using such vile language.' 'Kate wouldn't a bit mind jumping out of the window if Mr Garvage was below.' 'Be silent, Alice! How dare you say such things!' Kate looked up in distress and said, – 'But I assure you, mother, there is nothing at all in what Alice says. Mr Garvage has never said anything that a most distant acquaintance might not say.' 'He carried your umbrella all the way home from church last Sunday, and he kissed the handle before he gave it back to you.' 'Oh, Alice, how can you say such things! He did not kiss the handle, mother; he only put it to his lips idly. Alice, you know very well I do not like Mr Garvage. I have told her so, mother, a hundred times, and she is speaking of him now only to annoy me.' 'There now, old Kitty, don't get cross with little Alice. Little Alice won't be naughty any more. Little Alice is sure her big sister will be delighted to get away to London from the persecutions of Mr Garvage.' Indeed, mother, you must not mind what Alice says. I am quite indifferent to Mr Garvage, and he can have nothing to do with my going or staying.' 'Alice, dear,' said Mrs Osborne, in a tone of rebuke, 'I wish you would be more collected and staid. Well, Kate, what do you propose doing?' 'Really I don't see anything for it but to go. I am sure he must have good reason for asking me.' 'So am I,' said Mrs Osborne. 'Maybe he has met an awfully nice fellow there, Kate,' said the younger girl, looking up with an expression of infantile simplicity. 'And maybe, Kate, he thought Mr Garvage was not nice enough. I will say Mr Garvage's feet are against him. Mother, how do you account for Mr Garvage's feet and hands? You told me Conservatives had always small

feet and hands.' Mrs Osborne disregarded the last speech of her younger daughter, and, turning to the elder, asked, – 'And when do you think you will be ready to go? He says he wishes you to stay for a few weeks.' 'In a couple of days. I need not go to Birmingham for what I may want; I can get them in London.' 'Ah, Kittie,' cried Alice plaintively, 'I wish I was going to London with you. Think of buying things in London! Kittie, I won't say another nasty thing to you if you only get George to ask me up next time. I know you are the elder and ought to go first. But won't you make him take me? Tell him I am quite reformed, and that I am as demure as a lamb. If he likes, I'll hold his hand when we go out together. I have four pounds ten saved up in my workbox, and I know there are lots of things in London I want desperately. Kittie, won't you get him to ask me?' 'I'll try, little Alice,' answered Kate. The third day from that Kate Osborne was on her way from Stratford to London. She wondered George had not offered to come for her. She did not know the fascination which bound him with bands of steel to London. She disliked travelling alone. She had no desire to see London. She would have been quite content to live her life on the banks of the gentle Avon, and sink into her eternal rest soothed by the soft ripple of the river. She was shy and domestic and home-loving. She delighted most in calm routine and placid ways. Never had she wished to adventure on the troubled waters of life. George was quiet and home-loving like her, but he had at heart a speculative turn she did not own. He had always intended going to London. She had never thought of it, and now she was going against her inclination. To be among strangers, to be stared at by them, hustled about by them, was her horror. She did not like to meet people whom she did not know. A request that anyone might be introduced to her filled her with uneasiness. And yet here she was now travelling alone to the city where the most people were gathered under one roof of smoke, and where there was but one face, George's, she had ever to her knowledge seen before! George was at the terminus to meet her. When he had handed her out he asked her with a smile how she was. 'I am a little frightened, George,' she said timidly, and without an answering smile. 'By what?' he asked uneasily. He wished his sister to like everything and every person in London, especially one person, a girl the very opposite of pale still Kate. 'The idea of being here.' 'That will wear away in a few days, and you will feel as much at home as at Stratford.' 'Oh, George, never! How can you say such a thing? I hope you have not already grown to like this place as well as home. It can't be that in a week you have put this place in the stead of our home?' she asked pathetically. She loved this brother with all her heart and soul, and it hurt her to hear him speak so lightly of that home sanctified by so many memories. He had, when speaking, thought little of London or home. He had thought of only one thing, that girl. He had in a few days grown to like that girl better than anything on earth. In the silent watches of night, when he was alone, and walked up and down his room, intoxicated with the memory of her beauty, he would not, he feared in his inner heart, have bartered her for anything the world contained, for anything the next world might offer. She-she-she only! What music of praise and love and incommunicable ecstasy floated round him when he saw her approaching! What perfumes of all the South flowed in upon him when he heard her speak! What wild visions and splendid castles sprang up before the eyes of his spirit when he touched her hand! This love could not be opposed to the Spirit of God. It must be of the Spirit of God, for it had brought with it charity and greatness. It had deposed the lesser and crowned the ideal man. It had robed mankind in a new radiance. It had dignified human action and sentiment. Things belonging to the tame routine of every-day life had drawn importance from the fact that they might aid or please or be necessary to her-to her! As he and his sister drove to Mrs Barclay's in the cab little was said. She felt dazed and repelled by the great city, by the knowledge that she would have to remain in it for what seemed to her a long time, and by an undefined dread, a vague presentiment of evil, arising insensibly in her mind from what he had said about growing to like London as much as home. He was too uneasy for conversation. Carried away by an infatuation, he had written for his sister at the request of Miss Gordon. Now his sister had arrived, they were driving to the hotel, and what explanation could he give his sister of his wish for her presence in London? Then how would these two girls get on? His heart sank when he came to consider that question. It seemed to him there

was no chance of the two agreeing. Kate had no acquaintance with the world; Miss Gordon had had no home but the world. Kate had never met intimately anyone at all like Miss Gordon. His sister would be sure to think his sweetheart intolerably bold. Then again Kate would undoubtedly find out in a few hours, before this time to-morrow, how matters stood. Already some of Mrs Barclay's other guests had begun to be sly, and ready with quiet smiles full of meaning. What would be the outcome of all this? Here he paused for awhile in his thought. When he resumed it was with the passionate cry in his heart, 'There can, there shall, there must be but one outcome from all this: she and I shall never part!' The fire had taken complete hold, and the building must burn down. 'If,' he again thought fervently, 'Marie Gordon will have me, no power on earth shall keep us asunder.' Nothing more was said in the cab. Kate was stunned and dulled by the racket of even the quiet northern squares through which they passed, and he sat brooding over the image of his worship. How would she and Kate get on? No two styles could possibly be more opposed. Marie would think Kate dull and proper and stupid and tell her so; and Kate, gentle Kate, would feel hurt, and the two would give up all thought of friendship. Well, he had tried his best to prevent Kate's coming. Now that she was here, nothing could be done but allow matters to take their course. In about half-an-hour they arrived at Mrs Barclay's, and were received by the lady of the house in the drawing-room. Osborne introduced his sister to the landlady, and then looked round the room hastily. The only other person present was Nevill, who had been turning over the leaves of an album at the end of the room farthest from where Mrs Barclay sat. Upon hearing the words 'my sister' uttered by Osborne, Nevill rose hastily to his feet and approached the group at the other end, saying, while he came, – 'As an old friend of George's, may I hope to have the honour of an introduction to his sister?' Osborne was somewhat taken aback and confused. He had expected her to be there, and instead of her he had found this irrepressible Nevill. This was the last man staying in the house he should wish his sister to meet so early. Nevill would be sure to frighten gentle retiring Kate out of her wits. There was, however, no alternative but to introduce them. He did so in a bungling, hesitating manner. 'I am delighted to meet you, Miss Osborne. You have just come from Stratford-on-Avon. Take my advice, and never go there again.' 'Why?' she faltered, casting a frightened look at her brother, whose eye she did not catch; he was watching the door. 'What can the meaning of all this be?' she thought. 'This man tells me he is an old friend of George's. Nevill-I never heard his name before. An old friend of George's, whose name I have never heard! And yet it was more surprising of George to say that in a little time I should grow to like London as well as home. Now, here is this strange, ill-favoured man telling me never to go back to Stratford. What can have happened to George? This is like a conspiracy.' 'Because it is an intolerably dull, stupid, dead-and-buried sort of place. It's all very well for a dead poet; but no misfortune on earth could compel me to live there. Nothing.' 'I am sorry you do not like it,' was all she said, and she was not conscious of saying that. She had a dead dull feeling, and would have given all the world to get into a cab, wrap herself up closely so as to keep the very air of London from her, drive back to the railway station, and get into a train for home. If she were at home she could steal away to her own room and cry. Neither in this room nor in any other in London could she cry. Tears could not relieve in a strange room, where nothing had ever witnessed your smiles or your tears before, which had no memory of you, no connection with your history. In the meantime this plain-looking dark-faced man was rattling on in a shocking and distressing manner, and George stood by seemingly unconscious of her presence. His eyes were on the door every five seconds. When she had arrived at the London railway station, she had shrunk from it as a place that put a barrier between her and her home. Now she looked on it with yearning eyes; it had ceased to be a barrier, and had become the link between her and the peaceful past. In the midst of her isolation of spirit and her distress, she became conscious of the approach of someone. She grew conscious that someone was standing over her, and that George was speaking to the newest stranger. But she did not realise what was taking place until she heard George say 'My sister.' Miss Osborne raised her eyes, and looked long into the face bending over her. There was a light of home in those dark eyes. There was a manner of sympathy on that young face. There was a

touch of sisterhood in that bending figure. Insensibly Miss Osborne rose, and stretched out her hand to the other girl. 'You look very tired,' said Miss Gordon, in her low, rich, melodious voice. 'I am a little.' 'I should,' said Mrs Barclay, 'have asked Miss Osborne to go to her room before this, but the smoke has not yet cleared away. The flue was cold, and it smoked. Will you go to another room and take off your hat, and have a cup of tea sent up to you, Miss Osborne?' 'Come to mine,' said the soft voice. The two girls were standing face to face, looking earnestly at one another. 'Thank you, I will,' answered Miss Osborne. Still holding her by the hand, Miss Gordon led her out of the room. When they had gone, Nevill turned to Osborne and said, – 'She is very beautiful.' 'Very.' 'Is she strong?' 'I hope so. I think so,' uneasily, with a questioning look. 'But she is so pale.' 'Pale? Pale? You must be mistaken.' 'Never less likely to be mistaken in all my life.' 'Of whom are you speaking?' 'Your sister.' The two men stood staring mutely into one another's eyes.

CHAPTER VIII.

SUNRISE

When Miss Gordon and Miss Osborne came down to the drawing-room again they found only the two men there. 'What are you going to do to-day, Osborne?' asked Nevill, after a few minutes. 'I really don't know. Miss Gordon, could you suggest something? Here we are, four idle people, in this big place. What shall we do?' 'I do not care. What would you suggest, Miss Osborne?' 'I should prefer staying in to-day. I feel strange.' 'Then let us stay in, by all means,' said Nevill eagerly. 'You look tired; you want a rest. Let us all stay in. It is a beastly, damp, dull British day. No one but a numskulled Englishman would consent to live through such weather as you have here. Even Englishmen would not consent to live here only for the purpose of making money. What do you say, Miss Gordon? About a plan for to-day?' 'I thought you were going to Salisbury.' 'Too late now. I am willing to make one of your party, if you will allow me.' 'I am sure we shall be very glad to have you, if you are so good as to join us, Mr Nevill,' said George quickly. For many reasons two pairs of people were much better than three people in a group. Nevill would no doubt tire out Kate; but better this than that Marie should shock his timid fair sister. But this indoor scheme did not suit Osborne; and yet when a stranger saw signs of fatigue in his sister, and suggested she should rest, how could he do anything but accede? 'Let me see,' said Nevill; 'let me see. It's now past three. It will be dark in a short time. These January days earn their bread as easily as the honest British working-man wants to earn his. Nature set a bad example in starting these eight-hour days. But, as I was saying, let me see if I can suggest a programme. Suppose we stay in, and chat and play and sing and look at pictures for a few hours, and then dine, and after dinner drive off to the Albert Hall, where there is a concert to-night? Now, I don't say that is a brilliant programme; it's sound, sound as British courage.' Nevill's programme was adopted, and the four sat from the daylight into the twilight, and from the twilight into dark, chatting; now of this, now of that, never keeping very long to the one point. The two men did most of the talking; Osborne lent the heavier, and Nevill the lighter. Miss Gordon said singularly little, and Miss Osborne almost nothing at all. But they omitted one feature of Nevill's programme, they had no singing. Each had thoughts he or she might not utter. Osborne was mentally bowed down before the only earthly shrine at which he worshipped. Nevill congratulated himself upon not having gone to Salisbury, and made up his mind that Miss Osborne was not as strong as open-air exercise and a little rousing up would make her. Osborne and Miss Gordon were getting on very nicely. All right. Two of a trade never agree. Miss Gordon thought how noble he looked! How simple and sincere he was! What a compliment it was to have such an intellect stooping down to her! And how she yearned for the peace of faith such as he dwelt in! Miss Osborne thought how beautiful this dark girl, how homely and tender-minded and sweet of thought. How handsome George was; and did that plain-looking man rattle on always as now? Upon those four people and the thoughts they kept within their breasts, upon the four millions of people around and the thoughts they kept within their breasts, the darkness of night descended. For sixteen hours all London, its cities, its towns, its villages, would be buried in the vault of winter night. For eight of these hours the vast majority of those four millions of souls would be buried in sleep, deceived by dreams. When morning once more came, what changes of fortune while London had slept! The first post, the first telegrams, would bring joy and misery to thousands. Before breakfast, many who had had no warning of evil, would have to think of the mourning they could afford out of resources sadly diminished during night by death. The morning mail would bring the dearest letter man ever gets, that one with Yes from his beloved. Where affluence was to-night bankruptcy would be to-morrow. Where penury had pinched, and poverty had degraded, thither by the light of day wealth would be borne. Between this and then one hundred and twenty Londoners would pass away for ever, and one hundred and ninety-six be born into the great horde camped under St Paul's. What a motley horde it is! Here is a native of every civilised and semi-civilised nation

on earth, and many of the barbarous peoples are represented. What a hideous collection of swarthy scoundrelism in the regions lying east-about Catherine Street, Lower East Street, Smithfield, High Street, Wapping and Wapping Wall! And much of what is not swarthy and foreign there is lower still. Here are Mongolians, Negroes, Hottentots, and Malays hearsed in sleep. Here is Newgate Prison, with a sufficient variety of criminals to colonise Pandemonium, with a sufficient variety of tongues to confound the builders of a new Babel. Over the water rest factories of all kinds, silent by night, trembling with noise and travail by day. Around these factories are crowded working-men, thieves, and scum of the vilest kind. Beyond that belt is a region of poor shops; and beyond, all reaching out to touch the green fields, lie pleasant villas where men, sufficiently good as men go, sleep, where women of spotless purity dream blameless dreams. Westward repose those who own the riches which are for expense. Here are coronets embroidered upon the hangings of the beds. Here is ambition, restless and insatiable, ambition not of the moneygrubbing kind, but for place, position, power. The East and the West are the latest to sleep. One is kept awake by orgies and broils, the other by pleasure and aspirations. The orgies of the East have in the West developed into decorous balls and receptions. The taproom and the bar of the East have been changed into the ballroom and club of the West. The rude broilers of the East have in the progress of time been developed into the political and financial speculators of the West. From East to West is from primitive means to civilised means of defeating someone or gaining something you cannot freely get. North lie the couches of the liberal arts, professions, and of commerce once again. It is the region of new men-of men whose father's names were unknown to Londoners. These are the ardent workers. They have not succeeded to a heritage of mere muscle and ignorance like the men in the East. They have not come into entailed properties or established historic business firms like the men in the West. They have made their own way in the world. When they grow older and richer they may drift West. The North invents, the South supplies the tools, the East the hands, the West the patrons and critics of the work, while out of the yellow heart of the city comes the gold, the incentive to the North, South, and East. As St Paul's is the spiritual centre of London, the bank is the commercial centre. All the moneyed eyes of the Empire are fixed on that unsightly block of building in Threadneedle Street. If it had any pretensions to architectural beauty or grace-if it had a dome, or a campanile, or a minaret, or anything less tame than its dull, dreary, uninformed walls-that characteristic feature would be looked upon all over the world as the symbol of England's wealth, as the dome, ball, and cross of St Paul's are regarded as the insignia of the Anglo-Saxon race. Night had settled down on the City for hours. The men hunted by men drew easier breath. Bailiffs had ceased from troubling, policemen were almost at rest. The pursued and the pursuers had lain down to snatch a brief respite from terrors or business. The black silence between day and day lay like a weight upon the camp under the dome of the vast fane. In Peter's Row not a sound could be heard save now and then the faint mutter of a far-off cab or the bark of a distant dog. The lights in the dining-room where supper had been served were out. All the guests and servants had long since retired to their rooms. All the servants and most of the guests had gone to rest. The back of the hotel commanded a view of the cathedral. One of the finest sights in London is the sun rising behind St. Paul's while you are high at the western side. There is something triumphant and terrible in the sight. It seems as if the cathedral would crumble away, and disclose in the fiery core of dawn the intolerable Judgment Seat. But by night, when there is no moon, and one is near enough to be impressed by the stupendous proportions of the building, and yet far enough away to yield it grandeur in losing detail, the feeling is one of melancholy. The dome seems a buoy set to mark the site where millions of men have been overwhelmed by darkness and drowned, because of their rejection of spiritual light. In the back of the hotel two people were still awake, a man and a woman. The man was in his bedroom. His gas was turned up. He was sitting astride a chair and, contrary to the rules of the house, smoking a cigar. His arms were folded on the back of his chair, his chin rested on his arms. His face at the best was not handsome. This attitude made it almost repulsive. His thoughts ran: "By Jove, didn't she look well! Never seen anything like it in my life, and I've seen

a few good-looking girls. Miss Gordon wasn't in it with her, and Miss G. isn't a bad-looking girl. But that beautiful, pale, sad, round face, and her eyes-her soft sad eyes! As some fellow put it, she 'is as pure as the saints on high, and never was saint so fair.' But I'm not a poet. I don't think like a poet; I don't look like a poet; I don't eat or drink like a poet. I suppose, as there is the seed of every disease in man, there's the seed of poetry in me. Where they put the blessed seed I don't know. What's the good of a seed that's in some cupboard if you don't know which, and when only four out of eight of the keys you have fit the locks? It's discouraging. I suppose every fellow thinks of poetry when he sees a face like hers. I wonder if a member of the London board of actuaries saw a face like that, what kind of poetry would he think of. Maybe he wouldn't think of poetry at all. Perhaps he'd try to estimate the superficial area of her face, allowing of course for the eyes. If I knew any figure-painter, I think I'd ask him to paint her and me as Psyche and Adonis. I'd get up an appropriate expression like this," he said to himself, throwing away the butt of his cigar, contorting his face until he was positively hideous, and then approaching the glass with a burlesque mincing gait. When he saw his reflection in the glass he laughed aloud. Then he undressed, put out the light, and went to bed. The woman still was up. She sat by the window of her bedroom. Her eyes were fixed on the cloudlike mass of St. Paul's towering above her. She was not thinking of St. Paul's. She was not thinking of London. She was not thinking of George Osborne. She had been to a concert that night, and she had heard a song often heard and sung by her before. It was a well-known song, a well-known air. It had never touched her until to-night. The music had reached some range of feeling, or emotion, or spirituality, of which she had had no previous acquaintance. While she listened she was conscious of some mighty upheaval of her nature. She saw all her past life by a new light, and she shrank back from the vague possibilities of what was to come. She could understand nothing of this change. She heard the rumble of some noble thought, but could not figure to her mind its appearance. She knew something great was at hand. She could not think of lying down. She must wait for what was coming, be it what it might. Hours went by, and still she did not move. Still she had the words of that refrain, the tone of the singer's voice, the rumble of the approaching revelation. Yet the revelation did not come. Hours again went by without change. She was unconscious of fatigue, unconscious there was cause for fatigue, unconscious of everything but the powers that kept her spell-bound. At last the east grew slowly grey. She marked this, and then came her first thought outside the tyranny that possessed her, – 'I shall not go down early.' The light broadened in the east. Gradually the gates of the morning were opened, and through their chinks great beams of pale-yellow light set themselves across the sky, and stood up like the fingers of a fan. Gradually these beams changed to orange, and then to crimson, and just where they converged, and forming the centre of their base, stood out in vague purple the shadow of St Paul's. All at once something seemed to strike her. She rose hastily to her feet, muttering, – 'How august! The dome is like the Head, the sunbeams form the aureola.' All at once to the great apparition before her came the words which had haunted her all night, *Miserere nobis*.' For a moment she shook. Her face, lighted up by the blazing east, was perplexed, perturbed, contorted. All at once it lost the look of conflict. An expression of infinite supplication settled upon it, and raising her clasped hands to Heaven, she fell upon her knees and sang out in a low broken voice, – '*Miserere nobis!*'

CHAPTER IX. AFTER THE DAWN

'Miss Gordon! Miss Gordon, child, what have you been doing to yourself? What have you been doing?' 'I sat up late last night, O'Connor. What o'clock is it?' 'Sat up late! Why, you haven't been in bed at all. The bed isn't tossed. It's eight o'clock. What made you sit up last night? Why, there's your colour all gone!' 'Yes, the colour is gone out of the sky, O'Connor. I sat and watched all night, and then at dawn the colour came behind the dome, and all at once something burst upon me. It was like the conversion of Paul. I feel as if I had been received back into peace and quietness. But I am tired still-tired still, and I want to rest.' 'Then let me help you to take off your things, child, and lie down for a few hours. I'll bring you some tea and toast. Let me help you to lie down and rest yourself.' 'I am resting; I have been resting ever since dawn.' 'Resting! A nice way you rest yourself, on a straight-backed cane chair! Come, let me help you to take off your things.' 'No, O'Connor, I shall not lie down now. I thought in the night I should not go to breakfast, but I have changed my mind.' 'Maybe you'd like to go down to breakfast as you are, miss?' 'How do you mean?' 'Pale as a ghost, and in that low dress.' 'I don't care about my cheeks. Of course I must change the dress.' 'You don't care about your cheeks, miss! Well, then, I do; and you must not go down as you are. You must go to bed.' 'O'Connor!' 'Miss!' 'Help me to change. I'll wear that russet.' 'I'll have neither hand, act, nor part in it. You must go to bed. If you don't go of your own free will, I'll ask Mrs Barclay to send for a doctor. You ought to be ashamed of yourself!' 'O'Connor, I desire you to do what I tell you at once.' 'Miss Gordon, I'm not joking. I'll have no hand, act, or part in it!' 'O'Connor, I will not have this everlasting stubbornness on your part. It is more than I can bear. Get me that russet morning-gown.' 'You won't have me, Miss Gordon? Very well. You know what you have to do if you won't have me, Miss Gordon. Pay me my wages, and let me go back to Cork. Cork is good enough for me. You're a lady, a real lady, and I never said anything else of you, to your face or behind your back. Cork mightn't be to your liking; but it's good enough for the like of me; so pay me and let me go.' 'How many more of these tiresome scenes are we to have before we part?' 'Pay me my money, and this will be the last. Give me what you owe me, and I'll put the salt sea between you and me. I'm not good enough for the grandeur of London and foreign places; but Cork will be proud to have me, and it's good enough for me; so if it's pleasing to you I'll go.' 'It is not pleasing to me you should go. And it is not pleasing to me you should lose your temper, O'Connor.' 'Lose my temper! There's for you! Lose my temper! Why, was it I offered to go down to breakfast after being up all night and looking like a ghost, instead of going to bed and resting until the roses came back again? Do I ever want to put on dresses that make me look a fright? Do I ever open my window of winter nights, and sit at it for hours? Do I ever give all my good stockings to a lying beggar, and wear my old darned ones a month longer? Do I ever forget to complain about the boots cutting my French thirty-shilling shoes? Temper, indeed! Well, if they can't stand my temper in foreign places they can in Cork.' 'O'Connor, I have not been to bed all night. I do not feel very strong now, and this is too much for me.' 'Eh?' 'I do not feel strong.' 'Then, child, why don't you lie down?' 'I want you, O'Connor, not to cross me to-day. I am not very strong now, and I have had great trouble.' 'Not well, and in great trouble! Child, child, why didn't you say that before? Trouble, trouble! Tell me all about it, child.' 'I don't know that I can. It didn't seem trouble at the time; but now I feel as if I had had a great deal of trouble lately.' 'Through me, child? Is it through my wilful and foolish ways? You ought to be used to them now. Sure you know I wouldn't vex you for all the world, only to do you good.' 'No, no, no! it isn't you, O'Connor, but myself. I have been the cause of a great deal of trouble to myself.' 'In what way, child? I'll pin a collar on the russet before you put it on. I'll be ready with it in a minute. Tell me all.' 'You are a good Roman Catholic, O'Connor!' 'I don't know about the good; but I was brought up a Catholic, and I am a Catholic still.' 'And you never have been anything else?' 'No, never, miss. But what has that to do with your trouble?

You don't want me to turn? You don't think I haven't a proper respect for my mistress because she is not the same as myself?' 'No, no. But then, O'Connor, you cannot understand my trouble. I was brought up in the Church-the Church of England-but of late years I have not gone, as you know, to any place of worship. I did not do it out of silliness, or even out of want of faith; but being a good deal in places where no Church of England service was to be found, I began to think going of no great consequence, and in the end I thought it of no consequence at all.' 'And what trouble are you in now?' 'Well, something has happened, and it has all come back to me at once; and I feel greatly distressed when I think of the years I have neglected such a serious matter.' 'And is this sorrow the trouble you speak of? There's the russet gown all right now, child.' 'Thank you, O'Connor. Yes, it is.' 'But if you are sorry for it all now, aren't you taught as well as we that you'll be let off?' 'Yes. But that is not enough. I am not only sorry, but I am horrified also. It is so dreadful, O'Connor, to think of the horrid, wicked life I have led.' 'Horrid, wicked life, indeed! Horrid, wicked life! Why, when you die, they ought, if they knew their manners, to put you in the litany of the saints. They must have very little to do with their time if they can bring up anything against you, child. And even if they did find one little fault, I am sure-and I know you better than anyone, – that all the poisoned impudence you have taken from me, and all the goodness you have done for me, would not only clear you, but that they could make a very good saint out of the leavings.' 'Yes, but I feel so tired.' 'Well then, child, don't go down to breakfast, but let me bring some up to you.' 'I don't mean that kind of tired. I mean tired in my mind. Tired of all that has been, of all my old frivolous ways and my thoughtlessness.' 'Faith, and your ways were very becoming, at least so a great lot of gentlemen thought. Now that you have taken to serious ways, maybe you'll end by marrying a parson.' 'I could not endure a parson.' 'Even if he was like Mr Osborne?' 'Mr Osborne! What made you think of Mr Osborne?' 'Oh, I don't know. You seem to like him well enough; and if he only had a white choker, I daresay you'd like him better.' 'I should not.' 'Well then, you're giving that young man a very good chance of breaking his heart, anyway.' 'O'Connor, what do you mean?' 'Oh, it's all very fine for you to let on you don't know. You have been all over London with him, and the blind would see he worships the ground under your feet. You never carried on like this before.' 'O'Connor, I cannot allow you to say such things. You have no right to say such things. I have a great respect for Mr Osborne, and I have taken a great fancy to his lovely sister. He is a very wise man-' 'And a very good-looking young man too. Now you have taken a serious notion, and are going about so much with Mr Osborne, I shouldn't be a bit surprised if you went off to church with him to St Paul's next Sunday. There, you may go down now. That's the bell. You are a regular fright, but you're the best I can make of you.'

CHAPTER X. AN IDLE DAY

All at the breakfast-table remarked Miss Gordon's pallor. Osborne was shocked by it. Mrs Barclay exclaimed, 'What is the matter with you, Miss Gordon? You look as if you had had no sleep.' 'I have had no sleep,' she said gravely, as she sat down. 'No sleep! What was the matter? Are you not well?' 'I am quite well, thank you. I did not feel sleepy. I couldn't sleep. That is all.' 'Bless my soul!' cried Nevill. 'Miss Gordon, what an extraordinary thing to find a great traveller like you cannot sleep! I can scarcely believe it. I thought travellers were commanders-in-chief of sleep. I have never yet been beaten by sleep. I've slept in every conceivable place, and in every conceivable circumstances you could think of. Attitude is nothing to me. You hear of people composing themselves to sleep. I never do anything of the kind. I think I should like to sleep, and before I have taken the unnecessary precaution of closing my eyes, I've got a nightmare. I have slept in the tops of a ship. I have slept soaking in six inches of brine in a salt-mine. I have slept on the prairie, and in the tender of a railway engine. I have slept in a museum with one of the Pharaohs. I've had a good eight hours on the demonstration-table of a dissecting-room with an intact subject. I've slept in wigwams, and I've slept in the nobbiest beds they make up in 'Frisco. I've slept in the stokehole of a steamboat, and up to my neck in the crevasse of a glacier. I can doze while I'm diving under water, or while I am riding a steeplechase. Bless my soul, to think a great traveller like you could not sleep!' She looked him full in the face as she said, – 'I am not travelling now. Perhaps that may account for my sleeplessness.' 'Not travelling! Well, if you split hairs you may say you are not at the moment travelling. You are not at the moment in motion. But you are to all intents and purposes travelling.' 'But suppose I do not at this moment consider myself a traveller. Suppose, although I have gone about a good deal in the past, I have formed no resolution of continuing to move about, would you, Mr Nevill, still consider me entitled to all the privileges of a traveller to sleep?' 'The case does not apply. You have not given up the road. Have you?' 'That is an indirect answer.' Then for one brief instant she glanced at Osborne, and looked back at Nevill again. 'Ah, who can tell what any of us shall not do some day?' 'What do you intend to do to-day, Miss Gordon?' asked Mrs Barclay from the head of the table. 'I intend staying indoors to-day. I have a lot of tidying and putting away to do, and I want to make a list of a few things I require.' Osborne looked across the table reproachfully at her. She did not raise her eyes to his. What a change had taken place in this girl during the past twelve hours! When he said good-night to her after the concert her eyes were full of soft fire, her cheek glowed, her voice was like a caress. Now her eyes were weary, her colour gone, her voice full of suffering. What could have happened to his darling-his idol? She was perfect still, but something had been lost. How was this? Perfection meant the possession of all the constituent parts. Here was perfection still, and yet something was missing. Then he put the matter poetically to himself. 'Yesterday I saw this perfect landscape by sunlight. I am now looking at it by moonlight. It remains perfect under either light. Which do I prefer it by? I cannot say. I am more familiar with the fuller light. Which is the lovelier I cannot tell. What does she mean by saying she will stay indoors all day? She promised me I should see her and be with her all the month. She is not going to break her word, and rob my life for a whole day of all it now has in the world? I cannot, I will not endure that. What should I do all day long without her? I could rest neither in nor out of doors. Can she not get her maid to do this wretched drudgery for her? I envy any person or place that takes away from me any particle of her time. How is it to be with us? How is it to be with me? If I cannot bear the loss of her now for a few hours, how could I endure to lose her altogether? No, no, no; I cannot, I must not lose her altogether. Nothing shall take her from me. She must be mine, mine, mine! O glorious hope, bold certainty, essential bliss!' Nevill burst in with 'Now, can anything be more provoking than the position in which you have placed us, Miss Gordon? Here is Miss Osborne, the very embodiment of amiability, who has declared she will enter into no scheme

until you are consulted; here is Mr Osborne, the very embodiment of amiability, has declared he will enter into no scheme until you are consulted; and here am I, the very embodiment of amiability, who have declared I will wait until you come down, and abide by your decision. And when you do come down, your decision is to convert your room into a kind of nunnery, and hide yourself behind its blinds. For sordid selfishness, I never heard of a meaner programme.' She smiled faintly. 'What am I to do? I have had no sleep. You all tell me I am looking like a ghost. I do not feel lively. I should be a drag on any party. What better can I do than be stupid all to myself?' 'But if you resolve to be stupid all to yourself, you interfere with our arrangements, and impose stupidity upon us. What do you say, Miss Osborne?' 'I really don't know,' said Miss Osborne softly, across the table. Here the conversation paused for awhile. Miss Osborne wished most heartily this talkative man would not address her. Eating in public was new and unpleasant to her. She felt very uncomfortable even when let alone. But when this flippant, empty-headed man drew attention to her, she wished the ground would open and swallow her up. She liked Miss Gordon very much, but she was growing to dislike this sallow-faced, plain-looking, profane man. Although she was homely-minded and quiet, she was not stupid or unobservant, and already she had perceived her brother George was more attentive to Miss Gordon, and more interested in her presence and movements, than she had ever seen him in the presence or movements of any other woman. When undisturbed her mind was sensible and prudent. In the present case she saw no cause for alarm or uneasiness with respect to George. He was quite old enough to marry. He had sufficient means. His family were independent of him. Her mother, she, and her sister were moderately provided for. If the girl were suited to him, and he liked her, and there was no reasonable objection to the girl, why should he not marry her? She had not only taken no objection to Miss Gordon, but had conceived a strong predisposition in her favour. They had had a little chat together the day before, in which Marie had briefly and simply related the chief events of her life, and confessed that, notwithstanding the life of change and excitement she had led, she was fascinated by nothing so much as the uneventful peaceful routine of English country life. Whatever qualities this girl may have lacked, she had such a straightforward spirit in her eyes, and such a straightforward manner in her speech, no one could dream of calling in question the absolute and literal truth of what she said. Her mistakes hitherto had been on the side of excessive candour. She had, as she told Osborne, adopted that form of manner to protect herself. But with Kate she had no need of it. She, the lonely wandering girl, with a deep-buried passionate worship for all noble and great things, had talked freely and simply to the fair-faced simple-minded Kate Osborne. Long roaming through the world had taught Marie many useful things. Among these were a quick discernment of those she should like and those she should not. When first she saw George Osborne she was prepossessed in his favour. He was different from any other man she had met. Indian adventurers and Australian colonists are different classes. But both are active, each is in the midst of struggles and ambitions. What a contrast to these pushing discontented men the calm George Osborne presented! She had been all her life out of quiet England. She had been in the hurry of new lands or the swagger of military rule. Here she was now in the busiest, the most bustling city in the world; and here in this house, at that table, she met an English gentleman of the pastoral type. He was as subdued as night at sea, and as free from self-assertion as dreams. He was chivalric and simple, with a reverential clinging to the faith and traditions which make history beautiful. He had not approached her with confidence or bold admiring glances. He had not put out his best side. He had drawn near her in a timid, bashful, whole-hearted way. He had forgotten himself and thought only of her. She saw through him at a glance, for she examined him closely before she had felt anything more than curiosity. He was the first man of a poetic temperament she had ever met. She had hitherto treated men scornfully, because she could not respect any she had encountered. She knew she was beautiful, but all the men she had hitherto met who strove to make an impression on her had dwelt altogether on her beauty. All the other men had languished and spoken only rhapsody and hyperbole. Her nature was too candid and too clear to be imposed upon by such means. How differently had George Osborne approached her! In fact she

had, so to speak, made the first advances. When he first clearly betrayed to her that his admiration transcended the limits of ordinary admiration, and that he took an interest in herself, how different had been his course from the ways of other men! He had spoken gravely, seriously to her. He had expressed disapproval of her opinion on important matters; he had lectured her and shown no fear of injuring her good opinion of him by plain talking. He had come to her altogether, as a whole, as a man, not as a wooer only. The other men had tried to impress her by flattery, or by exhibiting themselves in their most pleasing light. He had told her of herself no more than she knew to be true—that she was handsome. He had not put aside the less serious or grave or unenticing characteristics. He was an honest, simple gentleman, who owned no arts, and had fallen in love with her. He was the unmistakable reply to a life-long yearning for something that was true and noble and honourable and just. He owned all these qualities. There was only one being on earth she had previously cared for, and that was Judith O'Connor. Judith was about her own age, but she always treated her mistress as a child. She had been in her employment for many years. The maid rebelled once a week, if not oftener, against her mistress. She was insolent almost beyond endurance at such times. Yet the mistress did not tell the maid to go; for down under this rage and insolence was a devotion, a loyalty no assault of circumstances could shake; and that devotion and loyalty Marie Gordon prized above all her other possessions. She could trust O'Connor as she could trust herself. O'Connor was more jealous of the welfare of her mistress than the mistress herself. When the maid's temper broke loose, and she petulantly demanded to be released from service, the mistress never heeded the rash words, but looked through them and below them, and saw the faithfulness and loyalty, and was conscious of no emotion in her own mind but that O'Connor was stupid and boring her, and that the maid must leave the room. She had spent all her life among frivolous people. All her life she had secretly worshipped intellect and solid acquirements. She had lead a life of ceaseless motion because she wished to keep her mind occupied by change, not from any natural love of new scenes. The one great hope of her life had been that some day she might settle down quietly where country lanes abounded, and you were awoke of summer mornings by the crack of the early carrier's whip or the crow of the barn-door cock. He had come upon her the embodiment of her dreams. She had fought against the fascination hour after hour, but hour after hour he had gained upon her heart. Here was the placid English gentleman, full of high honour, lofty chivalry, and poetic enthusiasm. Here, too, was this sincere man, the loyal citizen, the firm Christian. Here was a man up to whom a woman might look with pride, upon whom she might lean with confidence. Some of his words spoken in the Abbey had taken root in her soul and were bearing delicious fruit. A few of the lines of Spenser had remained with her intact: – 'For we be come into a quiet road.' Yes, to be with him was to enjoy contact with the great ocean of life, and yet to be free from all the dangers of traffic on the waters. When she touched his hand or his arm ever so slightly, peace and serenity descended upon her like a soothing dew. She never had been in love. Was she in love now? Was this love, or was there a deeper, a sweeter depth of feeling? She did not know. This was very sweet. She had done her best to tantalise him. That was only assaying the gold. Now she had found it unalloyed, she need question it no more. 'Sweet is the love that comes alone with willingness.' What could be sweeter? Nothing. Did other girls feel as she did when they were loved? If so, what happiness there must be in the world! No doubt it looked romantic that she should think she was in love with a man whom she had not seen a fortnight ago. But why need it look romantic? Suppose it did look romantic, what then? Was romance a sin? Who ever laid down a rule that romance was wrong, except sharp-nosed old maids and prosy fathers? What was the difference between falling in love in a week and taking a whole year about it? Romance was delightful. Love was beautiful. What could be better than to combine romance and love? Wasn't it out of a combination of romance and love that most of the noblest actions of men and women had sprung? Besides, after all, the thing was not romantic. There was nothing at all romantic about the circumstances under which they had met. There was nothing very extraordinary in a young man and young woman exchanging looks across the early dinner-table of a London hotel. There was nothing very unusual in a young

man fresh from home getting red in the face when he wanted to say something civil to a pretty girl. A visit to St Paul's Cathedral, Westminster Abbey, the Criterion, the Albert Hall, and a few other things, were not astonishing adventures for even our very matter-of-fact days. No doubt very few men proposed in hansom cabs. But that was because a hansom cab was essentially a nonromantic place for proposing. Call it romance if you like. What difference did it make whether you called it romance and it was romance, or you called it romance and it wasn't romance, or you didn't call it romance? It was just as desirable whether you called it one thing or another or nothing, so long as it was delightful. She had told him he must wait a month for an answer. Now she was sorry she had not said a fortnight. What was the good of keeping him in suspense a month? It was cruel, barbarous. She should not do anything of the kind. She'd just put him at rest at once. That wasn't the correct thing to do, she knew. But she didn't care a bit about being correct. What was the good of being correct at his expense? She had by this time made up her mind she loved him, and would marry him. She might as well tell him so at once. She wasn't likely to change her mind or heart in another fortnight. Why should she not put things right at once? He would not mistake her, or take her up wrongly. He had a high chivalric nature, and would understand her motive. When she told him, what would he do? Kiss her. Kiss her! He, the man who a fortnight ago she had never seen, kiss her who had never been kissed by a man since she was a child! Kiss her! It wasn't, of course, necessary he should kiss her, but she supposed he would. She shouldn't like it a bit. It would be so strange to allow him to kiss her without shrieking or trying to run away. She supposed there was nothing for it but to submit. But it would seem so strange. How complete should be her happiness and their love! She, who had been such a gadabout, would settle down. They should live in his own town. She would try and be as good as ever she could. She'd learn housekeeping and rear poultry. She'd try and be pious and collected like him. He should write poetry, and she would mind the fowls. Poetry and poultry. Then when the sonnets and the cocks and hens had gone to roost, George would give her his arm, and take her out for a nice quiet walk and nice sensible talk. She'd tell him all about the cocks and the hens, and he'd talk to her about the hunt and the House of Commons and the poor-rates and Shakespeare, which were, she believed, the subjects educated country gentlemen usually spoke to their wives- Wife! When Marie Gordon first came upon this word she arrested her headlong thought, and, with a vivid blush, drew back from the visions she had been contemplating. There was something sudden, awful, in coming all at once upon the most important word in the vocabulary of life. She mentally reproved herself for dealing so lightly with serious matters; and, rousing herself from the long abstraction in which she had lain, she devoted her attention to the ordinary events of the breakfast-table. Nevill was still rattling on, and Miss Osborne looking at him in stupefied wonder. When breakfast was over, Osborne went to Marie and said, – 'Surely you don't intend staying within all this lovely day?' 'Yes, I do,' she answered, with a quiet smile. 'But,' he urged, 'you remember your promise that for the month-' 'Yes, I recollect. I am afraid I shall break that promise in more ways than one.' He started, and looked anxiously, eagerly at her. 'What do you mean?' 'I cannot tell you now.' 'When will you tell me? I shall be most uneasy until I hear.' 'This evening, perhaps.' 'Shall I have to wait so long?' 'There will be no opportunity sooner.' 'But is what I am to hear good or bad? You cannot do less than answer that question.' She looked into his eyes, and, with a half-roguish smile, answered, – 'That will depend on whether you are what I fancy you to be, or not.' 'If I am what you fancy, shall I be pleased with what you have to tell me?' 'I think so. You must not ask me any more now. Your sister and I will stay in all day, and you and Mr Nevill are to go somewhere. Go to some man's place, for we want you to take us to all the places we may go to; and, of course, if you two selfish men go to a place we may see, you will not make a second visit merely to bring us. Mr Nevill,' she called aloud. Nevill was standing at the farther end of the room talking to Miss Osborne. 'Since we are not to be favoured with the society of you or Miss Gordon to-day, I'll answer for Mr Osborne.' Turning to Osborne, he said, – 'I'll tell you what we will do. Go to the meeting of the Prehistoric Society. Have you ever been at one?' 'No.' 'Then you shall come with me. I have never been at one, but I know all about them. Do you take any

interest in science?' 'Very little.' 'Nonsense! How extraordinary! An intellectual man like you take no interest in science? I can scarcely believe you! Science is the only thing worth thinking of now. Not take an interest in science! Why, science was invented by the nineteenth century, and it will invent the world of the twentieth.' 'I am greatly afraid,' said Osborne gravely, 'it has already invented more than is good for man or the world.' 'What! Do you mean to say telephones and express trains, fresh American meat and electric lights, and gas and gutta-percha and lucifer-matches and hair-brushing by machinery have been injurious to man? What nonsense! I own we are not to congratulate ourselves on gunpowder and ordnance and paraffin oil.' 'I am not speaking of material improvements, or of what science has done for the arts. I am thinking how it has in many cases unfortunately inflicted more grave injury than would outweigh all the benefits it has conferred.' 'You are speaking wonderfully like a book, Osborne, but I haven't the ghost of an idea what you are alluding to.' 'I am alluding to religion.' 'Oh!' cried Nevill lightly. 'Was it that? I did not think of that. Of course, you know there are people of all ways of thinking on such matters. You are no bigot.' 'No, not in the least. Bigotry is cowardice, and I hope I have the courage of my convictions. I hope I shall always have the courage of my convictions, and that they will always be what they are now.' He spoke earnestly, with a slight flush on his face. When he had finished speaking he turned his head away from Nevill and sought Miss Gordon with his eyes. What a marvellous change! The pallor had left, the eyes were once more bright and full of depth. Her head was bent forward and she was looking at him with all the old charm of her beauty in her face. What could that expression mean? Could it possibly be that she was looking on with interest and approval at the side he was taking? Could she be doing this? She who had a few days before told him she took no interest in such things, and preferred looking at shop windows in St Paul's Churchyard to attending service in the Cathedral? A few moments ago she had said words which led him to hope she had some pleasant communication to make to him. Was it that she had already made up her mind to be less frivolous? That would be splendid news indeed. Oh, if he could only lead this girl to such a goal and win her, the bank of his good fortune would have paid him the least shred of happiness he should ask. 'I am glad to hear you are no bigot, Osborne. I hate a bigot. I am not a religious man, but I am not a bigoted Nothing. I don't want to burn every man who does not agree with me. From the announcement of the business set down for the Prehistoric to-day, I am most anxious to be present. The Prehistoric is not religious. It isn't, you know, Miss Osborne, profane. Now, while I am no bigot, there is one thing I hate, and that is profanity. If a man believes a certain thing, let him respect it, and not try to lower it or make fun of it. If a man doesn't believe a certain thing, he should let it alone.' 'What is this place you are going to?' asked Miss Gordon, with animation. 'Oh, it's scientific.' 'Isn't that a vague description? What goes on there?' 'They read papers and exhibit specimens.' 'Specimens of what?' 'Of prehistoric man, you know.' 'But I don't know. What do you mean by "prehistoric man"?' 'Man who lived so long ago that he doesn't know anything about himself.' 'You will go, Mr Osborne, and bring us back a full account of what this dreadful Prehistoric Society is like?' Miss Gordon smiled brightly, and tossed her head gaily. 'I will go, of course. I am not afraid the Prehistoric or any other society of mere men can very seriously affect my mind on any matter of faith. It is the province of men of science to be scientific. It is the province of theologians to be theological. But you cannot pit one against the other, any more than you can pit a star against an idea.' The men prepared to leave. Having drawn Miss Osborne's arm within her own, Miss Gordon led the other girl after the men into the hall. 'We shall be back in time to take you to the Holborn for dinner,' said Nevill, as he helped Osborne to get on his overcoat. The two girls, still arm-in-arm, followed the two men out to the door. Peter's Row had but one entrance, and was as quiet as a country lane. The two men went out on the doorstep, and stood there to say adieu. Still keeping the arm of Miss Osborne under her own, Miss Gordon led the fair girl out until they too stood on the steps of the hotel. Nevill paused to light a cigar. Marie smiled at Osborne, and said, – 'Take care you don't come back a disciple of this dreadful Mr Nevill.' Osborne smiled back. 'I do not think there is much reason to fear,' he said. 'I promise you I will not attempt to make a

convert,' said Nevill, as he shook himself into his overcoat and took Osborne's arm. Arm-in-arm the two young men walked briskly down Peter's Row. Arm-in-arm the two girls watched them as they went. When the men reached the end of the Row, about a hundred yards from where the girls stood, they turned round and lifted their hats. The girls waved farewells. As the four stood thus confronting one another for a moment, a more striking contrast could not easily be found. The face of Nevill was dark and restless and discontented. The fair white face of Osborne was illumined by the light of love and a smile of great affection and delicacy as his eyes fell on the girl of his worship. Miss Gordon had completely shaken off the effects of her vigil, and was radiant with health and beauty and happiness. Miss Osborne was grave and timorous. She looked paler than usual, and waved her hand to her brother in a dull dead way. In a moment the men disappeared. Although the day was cold, the two girls stood a few minutes bareheaded at the door after the men had gone out of sight. 'I don't see why George should go to such places.' 'But there is no harm, dear. It's only all about bones, and stone arrowheads, and things not worth thinking of.' 'But if things of the kind are not worth thinking of, how is it people do think so much about them?' 'Because people are mostly fools. Your brother is no fool. You are not afraid of him? You do not fear he'll take to science, and give up poetry and going to church?' She put the question playfully. 'No. But when people are settled in their minds on important things of this kind, what occasion have they to go to such places? What interest can such places have for them?' 'Men are all the same. If you tell them there is danger anywhere, there they are sure to go. I never can understand this. If anyone tells me there's a wicked bull in a certain field, I try to keep away from it as far as I can. Tell a man the same thing, and, first of all, he won't take your word for it; he must see if there is a bull in that field. If he find a bull, he'll climb upon the fence to see if the bull is really wicked, and end up by getting down in the field to see if the bull is fully as wicked as has been said. Then he generally gets gored.' 'But I don't want those scientific bulls to gore George.' 'Your brother! You really don't fancy for a moment they could create any serious impression on him? He is one of the most sincere men I ever met. I think the most sincere.' 'Ah, yes. But when he left home I thought no man in the world could love his home more. Yet he is only a few days in London, when he seems to think more of London than the place in which he has spent all his life.' She smiled, as she saw the other blush slightly and cast down her eyes. 'Perhaps it was not London alone that fascinated him. You see, his very honesty and sincerity are in his way. Once he makes up his mind to a thing, he never for a moment thinks of consequences.' 'But I am sure he is in religious matters as firm as a rock.' 'I am sure he is; but why should he go to places such as this?' 'Well, I suppose I am to blame in a little way,' said Marie, dropping her head still lower. 'I sat up all night, thinking over matters of this kind, and at dawn I saw something in the sky, and heard something that made me pray. Your brother it was, Kate dear, who turned my eyes to such things one day as we stood under St Paul's. I did not feel equal to-day to the society of men. So I thought, if you would allow me, I would spend a long quiet day with you, and have a quiet talk with you, Kate; for I liked you better than any other girl I met when I saw you first.' 'And I, Marie, too, liked you better than any other girl I ever met. Of course, I can see how things are. You and I are friends, no matter how short a time we have known each other.' The girls turned into the house, and sought Marie's room. When they were there, Kate said, – 'I am dull and stupid. But I have a sister at home who is more lively. You would not think we are related so closely.' She put her arms round the girl, and continued, 'I love George, Marie, with all my heart, and it would break my heart if anything went wrong with him. I think it would kill me if anything went wrong with him now. Tell me, dear—for you see I know how matters are—is anything settled yet?' 'No.' 'But, Marie, I am likely to have another, a second sister?' 'You do not want her?' 'I want anything that is good for George.' 'And you don't think you'd dislike me when you know me better?' 'I am sure I should not.' 'Then I'll tell him when he comes home from that horrid Preraphaelite Club, or whatever you call it, to which I've sent him. I'll tell him.' 'What will you tell him?' 'That—that,' she threw her arms around Kate's neck, and buried her face in Kate's bosom, 'that you want me for a sister, and that I want you for a sister, oh, so badly, so badly!'—she wept passionately for a moment. She sobbed in a

few minutes-'and then maybe he'll not go to any of those awful places with that dreadful Mr Nevill again. Kate, I'll try to keep him away, and make him do all your good self would wish. Don't blame me for what happened to-day. I shall feel wretched until I see him again.'

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.