Allen Grant

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Содержание

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PREFACE

It is with some little trepidation that I venture to submit to the critical world this small collection of short stories. I feel that in doing so I owe some apology both to my readers and to the regular story-tellers. Being by trade a psychologist and scientific journeyman, I have been bold enough at times to stray surreptitiously and tentatively from my proper sphere into the flowery fields of pure fiction. Some of these my divarications from the strict path of sterner science, however, having been already publicly performed under the incognito of "J. Arbuthnot Wilson," have been so far condoned by generous and kindly critics that I am emboldened to present them to the judgment of readers under a more permanent form, and even to dispense with the convenient cloak of a pseudonym, under which one can always so easily cover one's hasty retreat from an untenable position. I can only hope that my confession will be accepted in partial extenuation of this culpable departure from the good old rule, "Ne sutor ultra crepidam;" and that older hands at the craft of story-telling will pardon an amateur novice his defective workmanship on the general plea of his humble demeanour.

I may perhaps also venture to plead in self-defence that though these stories do not profess to be anything more than mere short sensational tales, I have yet endeavoured to give to most of them some slight tinge of scientific or psychological import and meaning. "The Reverend John Creedy," for example, is a study from within of a singular persistence of hereditary character, well known to all students of modern anthropological papers and reports. Members of barbarous or savage races, trained for a time in civilized habits, are liable at any moment to revert naturally to their primitive condition, especially under the contagious influence of companionship with persons of their own blood, and close subjection to the ancestral circumstances. The tale which I have based upon several such historical instances in real life endeavours briefly to hint at the modes of feeling likely to accompany such a relapse into barbarism in an essentially fine and sensitive savage nature. To most European readers, no doubt, such a sheer fall from the pinnacle of civilization to the nethermost abysses of savagery, would seem to call for the display of no other emotion than pure disgust and aversion; but those who know intimately the whole gamut of the intensely impressionable African mind will be able to treat its temptations and its tendencies far more sympathetically. In "The Curate of Churnside," again, I have tried to present a psychical analysis of a temperament not uncommon among the cultured class of the Italian Renaissance, and less rare than many people will be inclined to imagine among the colder type

of our own emancipated and cultivated classes. The union of high intellectual and æsthetic culture with a total want of moral sensibility is a recognized fact in many periods of history, though our own age is singularly loth to admit of its possibility in its own contemporaries. In "Ram Das of Cawnpore," once more, I have attempted to depict a few circumstances of the Indian Mutiny as they must naturally have presented themselves to the mind and feelings of a humble native actor in that great and terrible drama. Accustomed ourselves to looking always at the massacres and reprisals of the Mutiny from a purely English point of view, we are liable to forget that every act of the mutineers and their aiders or abettors must have been fully justified in their own eyes, at the moment at least, as every act of every human being always is to his own inner personality. In his conscience of conscience, no man ever really believes that under given circumstances he could conceivably have acted otherwise than he actually did. If he persuades himself that he does really so believe, then he shows himself at once to be a very poor introspective psychologist. "The Child of the Phalanstery," to take another case, is a more ideal effort to realize the moral conceptions of a community brought up under a social and ethical environment utterly different from that by which we ourselves are now surrounded. In like manner, almost all the stories (except the lightest among them) have their germ or prime motive in some scientific or quasi-scientific idea; and this narrow link which thus connects them at bottom with my more habitual sphere of work must serve as my excuse to

the regular story-tellers for an otherwise unwarrantable intrusion upon their private preserves. I trust they will forgive me on this plea for my trespass on their legitimate domains, and allow me to occupy in peace a little adjacent corner of unclaimed territory, which lies so temptingly close beside my own small original freehold.

I should add that "The Reverend John Creedy," "The Curate of Churnside," "Dr. Greatrex's Engagement," and "The Backslider," have already appeared in the *Cornhill Magazine*; while "The Foundering of the *Fortuna*" was first published in *Longman's Magazine*. The remainder of the tales comprised in this volume have seen the light originally in the pages of *Belgravia*. I have to thank the courtesy of the publishers and editors of those periodicals for kind permission to reprint them here.

G. A.
The Nook, Dorking,
October 12, 1884.

THE REVEREND JOHN CREEDY

I

"On Sunday next, the 14th inst., the Reverend John Creedy, B.A., of Magdalen College, Oxford, will preach in Walton Magna Church, on behalf of the Gold Coast Mission." Not a very startling announcement that, and yet, simple as it looks, it stirred Ethel Berry's soul to its inmost depths. For Ethel had been brought up by her Aunt Emily to look upon foreign missions as the one thing on earth worth living for and thinking about, and the Reverend John Creedy, B.A., had a missionary history of his own, strange enough even in these strange days of queer juxtapositions between utter savagery and advanced civilization.

"Only think," she said to her aunt, as they read the placard on the schoolhouse-board, "he's a real African negro, the vicar says, taken from a slaver on the Gold Coast when he was a child, and brought to England to be educated. He's been to Oxford and got a degree; and now he's going out again to Africa to convert his own people. And he's coming down to the vicar's to stay on Wednesday."

"It's my belief," said old Uncle James, Aunt Emily's brother, the superannuated skipper, "that he'd much better stop in England for ever. I've been a good bit on the Coast myself in my

time, after palm oil and such, and my opinion is that a nigger's a nigger anywhere, but he's a sight less of a nigger in England than out yonder in Africa. Take him to England, and you make a gentleman of him: send him home again, and the nigger comes out at once in spite of you."

"Oh, James," Aunt Emily put in, "how can you talk such unchristianlike talk, setting yourself up against missions, when we know that all the nations of the earth are made of one blood?"

"I've always lived a Christian life myself, Emily," answered Uncle James, "though I have cruised a good bit on the Coast, too, which is against it, certainly; but I take it a nigger's a nigger whatever you do with him. The Ethiopian cannot change his skin, the Scripture says, nor the leopard his spots, and a nigger he'll be to the end of his days; you mark my words, Emily."

On Wednesday, in due course, the Reverend John Creedy arrived at the vicarage, and much curiosity there was throughout the village of Walton Magna that week to see this curious new thing, a coal-black parson. Next day, Thursday, an almost equally unusual event occurred to Ethel Berry, for, to her great surprise, she got a little note in the morning inviting her up to a tennis party at the vicarage the same afternoon. Now, though the vicar called on Aunt Emily often enough, and accepted her help readily for school feasts and other village festivities of the milder sort, the Berrys were hardly up to that level of society which is commonly invited to the parson's lawn tennis parties. And the reason why Ethel was asked on this particular Thursday must be traced to a

certain pious conspiracy between the vicar and the secretary of the Gold Coast Evangelistic Society. When those two eminent missionary advocates had met a fortnight before at Exeter Hall, the secretary had represented to the vicar the desirability of young John Creedy's taking to himself an English wife before his departure. "It will steady him, and keep him right on the Coast," he said, "and it will give him importance in the eyes of the natives as well." Whereto the vicar responded that he knew exactly the right girl to suit the place in his own parish, and that by a providential conjunction she already took a deep interest in foreign missions. So these two good men conspired in all innocence of heart to sell poor Ethel into African slavery; and the vicar had asked John Creedy down to Walton Magna on purpose to meet her.

That afternoon Ethel put on her pretty sateen and her witching little white hat, with two natural dog-roses pinned on one side, and went pleased and proud up to the vicarage. The Reverend John Creedy was there, not in full clerical costume, but arrayed in tennis flannels, with only a loose white tie beneath his flap collar to mark his newly acquired spiritual dignity. He was a comely looking negro enough, full-blooded, but not too broad-faced nor painfully African in type; and when he was playing tennis his athletic quick limbs and his really handsome build took away greatly from the general impression of an inferior race. His voice was of the ordinary Oxford type, open, pleasant, and refined, with a certain easy-going air of natural gentility, hardly marred

by just the faintest tinge of the thick negro blur in the broad vowels. When he talked to Ethel – and the vicar's wife took good care that they should talk together a great deal – his conversation was of a sort that she seldom heard at Walton Magna. It was full of London and Oxford, of boat-races at Iffley and cricket matches at Lord's; of people and books whose very names Ethel had never heard – one of them was a Mr. Mill, she thought, and another a Mr. Aristotle – but which she felt vaguely to be one step higher in the intellectual scale than her own level. Then his friends, to whom he alluded casually, not like one who airs his grand acquaintances, were such very distinguished people. There was a real live lord, apparently, at the same college with him, and he spoke of a young baronet whose estate lay close by, as plain "Harrington of Christchurch," without any "Sir Arthur" – a thing which even the vicar himself would hardly have ventured to do. She knew that he was learned, too; as a matter of fact he had taken a fair second class in Greats at Oxford; and he could talk delightfully of poetry and novels. To say the truth, John Creedy, in spite of his black face, dazzled poor Ethel, for he was more of a scholar and a gentleman than anybody with whom she had ever before had the chance of conversing on equal terms.

When Ethel turned the course of talk to Africa, the young parson was equally eloquent and fascinating. He didn't care about leaving England for many reasons, but he would be glad to do something for his poor brethren. He was enthusiastic about missions; that was a common interest; and he was so anxious

to raise and improve the condition of his fellow-negroes that Ethel couldn't help feeling what a noble thing it was of him thus to sacrifice himself, cultivated gentleman as he was, in an African jungle, for his heathen countrymen. Altogether, she went home from the tennis-court that afternoon thoroughly overcome by John Creedy's personality. She didn't for a moment think of falling in love with him – a certain indescribable race-instinct set up an impassable barrier against that – but she admired him and was interested in him in a way that she had never yet felt with any other man.

As for John Creedy, he was naturally charmed with Ethel. In the first place, he would have been charmed with any English girl who took so much interest in himself and his plans, for, like all negroes, he was frankly egotistical, and delighted to find a white lady who seemed to treat him as a superior being. But in the second place, Ethel was really a charming, simple English village lassie, with sweet little manners and a delicious blush, who might have impressed a far less susceptible man than the young negro parson. So, whatever Ethel felt, John Creedy felt himself truly in love. And after all, John Creedy was in all essentials an educated English gentleman, with the same chivalrous feelings towards a pretty and attractive girl that every English gentleman ought to have.

On Sunday morning Aunt Emily and Ethel went to the parish church, and the Reverend John Creedy preached the expected sermon. It was almost his first – sounded like a trial trip, Uncle

James muttered – but it was undoubtedly what connoisseurs describe as an admirable discourse. John Creedy was free from any tinge of nervousness – negroes never know what that word means – and he spoke fervently, eloquently, and with much power of manner about the necessity for a Gold Coast Mission. Perhaps there was really nothing very original or striking in what he said, but his way of saying it was impressive and vigorous. The negro, like many other lower races, has the faculty of speech largely developed, and John Creedy had been noted as one of the readiest and most fluent talkers at the Oxford Union debates. When he enlarged upon the need for workers, the need for help, the need for succour and sympathy in the great task of evangelization, Aunt Emily and Ethel forgot his black hands, stretched out open-palmed towards the people, and felt only their hearts stirred within them by the eloquence and enthusiasm of that appealing gesture.

The end of it all was, that instead of a week John Creedy stopped for two months at Walton Magna, and during all that time he saw a great deal of Ethel. Before the end of the first fortnight he walked out one afternoon along the river-bank with her, and talked earnestly of his expected mission.

"Miss Berry," he said, as they sat to rest awhile on the parapet of the little bridge by the weeping willows, "I don't mind going to Africa, but I can't bear going all alone. I am to have a station entirely by myself up the Ancobra river, where I shall see no other Christian face from year's end to year's end. I wish I could

have had some one to accompany me."

"You will be very lonely," Ethel answered. "I wish indeed you could have some companionship."

"Do you really?" John Creedy went on. "It is not good for man to live alone; he wants a helpmate. Oh, Miss Ethel, may I venture to hope that perhaps, if I can try to deserve you, you will be mine?"

Ethel started in dismay. Mr. Creedy had been very attentive, very kind, and she had liked to hear him talk and had encouraged his coming, but she was hardly prepared for this. The nameless something in our blood recoiled at it. The proposal stunned her, and she said nothing but "Oh, Mr. Creedy, how can you say such a thing?"

John Creedy saw the shadow on her face, the unintentional dilatation of her delicate nostrils, the faint puckering at the corner of her lips, and knew with a negro's quick instinct of face-reading what it all meant. "Oh, Miss Ethel," he said, with a touch of genuine bitterness in his tone, "don't you, too, despise us. I won't ask you for any answer now; I don't want an answer. But I want you to think it over. Do think it over, and consider whether you can ever love me. I won't press the matter on you. I won't insult you by importunity, but I will tell you just this once, and once for all, what I feel. I love you, and I shall always love you, whatever you answer me now. I know it would cost you a wrench to take me, a greater wrench than to take the least and the unworthiest of your own people. But if you can only get over that first wrench,

I can promise earnestly and faithfully to love you as well as ever woman yet was loved. Don't say anything now," he went on, as he saw she was going to open her mouth again: "wait and think it over; pray it over; and if you can't see your way straight before you when I ask you this day fortnight "yes or no," answer me "no," and I give you my word of honour as a gentleman I will never speak to you of the matter again. But I shall carry your picture written on my heart to my grave."

And Ethel knew that he was speaking from his very soul.

When she went home, she took Aunt Emily up into her little bedroom, over the porch where the dog-roses grew, and told her all about it. Aunt Emily cried and sobbed as if her heart would break, but she saw only one answer from the first. "It is a gate opened to you, my darling," she said: "I shall break my heart over it, Ethel, but it is a gate opened." And though she felt that all the light would be gone out of her life if Ethel went, she worked with her might from that moment forth to induce Ethel to marry John Creedy and go to Africa. Poor soul, she acted faithfully up to her lights.

As for Uncle James, he looked at the matter very differently. "Her instinct is against it," he said stoutly, "and our instincts wasn't put in our hearts for nothing. They're meant to be a guide and a light to us in these dark questions. No white girl ought to marry a black man, even if he *is* a parson. It ain't natural: our instinct is again it. A white man may marry a black woman if he likes: I don't say anything again him, though I don't say I'd do it

myself, not for any money. But a white woman to marry a black man, why, it makes our blood rise, you know, 'specially if you've happened to have cruised worth speaking of along the Coast."

But the vicar and the vicar's wife were charmed with the prospect of success, and spoke seriously to Ethel about it. It was a call, they thought, and Ethel oughtn't to disregard it. They had argued themselves out of those wholesome race instincts that Uncle James so rightly valued, and they were eager to argue Ethel out of them too. What could the poor girl do? Her aunt and the vicar on the one hand, and John Creedy on the other, were too much between them for her native feelings. At the end of the fortnight John Creedy asked her his simple question "yes or no," and half against her will she answered "yes." John Creedy took her hand delicately in his and fervidly kissed the very tips of her fingers; something within him told him he must not kiss her lips. She started at the kiss, but she said nothing. John Creedy noticed the start, and said within himself, "I shall so love and cherish her that I will make her love me in spite of my black skin." For with all the faults of his negro nature, John Creedy was at heart an earnest and affectionate man, after his kind.

And Ethel really did, to some extent, love him already. It was such a strange mixture of feeling. From one point of view he was a gentleman by position, a clergyman, a man of learning and of piety; and from this point of view Ethel was not only satisfied, but even proud of him. For the rest, she took him as some good Catholics take the veil, from a sense of the call. And so, before

the two months were out, Ethel Berry had married John Creedy, and both started together at once for Southampton, on their way to Axim. Aunt Emily cried, and hoped they might be blessed in their new work, but Uncle James never lost his misgivings about the effect of Africa upon a born African. "Instincts is a great thing," he said, with a shake of his head, as he saw the West Coast mail steam slowly down Southampton Water, "and when he gets among his own people his instincts will surely get the better of him, as safe as my name is James Berry."

II

The little mission bungalow at Butabué, a wooden shed neatly thatched with fan palms, had been built and garnished by the native catechist from Axim and his wife before the arrival of the missionaries, so that Ethel found a habitable dwelling ready for her at the end of her long boat journey up the rapid stream of the Ancobra. There the strangely matched pair settled down quietly enough to their work of teaching and catechizing, for the mission had already been started by the native evangelist, and many of the people were fairly ready to hear and accept the new religion. For the first ten or twelve months Ethel's letters home were full of praise and love for dear John. Now that she had come to know him well, she wondered she had ever feared to marry him. No husband was ever so tender, so gentle, so considerate. He nursed her in all her little ailments like a woman; she leaned on him as a wife leans on the strong arm of her husband. And then he was so clever, so wise, so learned. Her only grief was that she feared she was not and would never be good enough for him. Yet it was well for her that they were living so entirely away from all white society at Butabué, for there she had nobody with whom to contrast John but the half-clad savages around them. Judged by the light of that startling contrast, good John Creedy, with his cultivated ways and gentle manners, seemed like an Englishman indeed.

John Creedy, for his part, thought no less well of his Ethel. He was tenderly respectful to her; more distant, perhaps, than is usual between husband and wife, even in the first months of marriage, but that was due to his innate delicacy of feeling, which made him half unconsciously recognize the depth of the gulf that still divided them. He cherished her like some saintly thing, too sacred for the common world. Yet Ethel was his helper in all his work, so cheerful under the necessary privations of their life, so ready to put up with bananas and cassava balls, so apt at kneading plantain paste, so willing to learn from the negro women all the mysteries of mixing agadey, cankey, and koko pudding. No tropical heat seemed to put her out of temper; even the horrible country fever itself she bore with such gentle resignation. John Creedy felt in his heart of hearts that he would willingly give up his life for her, and that it would be but a small sacrifice for so sweet a creature.

One day, shortly after their arrival at Butabué, John Creedy began talking in English to the catechist about the best way of setting to work to learn the native language. He had left the country when he was nine years old, he said, and had forgotten all about it. The catechist answered him quickly in a Fantee phrase. John Creedy looked amazed and started.

"What does he say?" asked Ethel.

"He says that I shall soon learn if only I listen; but the curious thing is, Ethie, that I understand him."

"It has come back to you, John, that's all. You are so quick at

languages, and now you hear it again you remember it."

"Perhaps so," said the missionary, slowly, "but I have never recalled a word of it for all these years. I wonder if it will all come back to me."

"Of course it will, dear," said Ethel; "you know, things come to you so easily in that way. You almost learned Portuguese while we were coming out from hearing those Benguela people."

And so it did come back, sure enough. Before John Creedy had been six weeks at Butabué, he could talk Fantee as fluently as any of the natives around him. After all, he was nine years old when he was taken to England, and it was no great wonder that he should recollect the language he had heard in his childhood till that age. Still, he himself noticed rather uneasily that every phrase and word, down to the very heathen charms and prayers of his infancy, came back to him now with startling vividness and without an effort.

Four months after their arrival John saw one day a tall and ugly negro woman, in the scanty native dress, standing near the rude market-place where the Butabué butchers killed and sold their reeking goat-meat. Ethel saw him start again, and with a terrible foreboding in her heart, she could not help asking him why he started. "I can't tell you, Ethie," he said, piteously; "for heaven's sake don't press me. I want to spare you." But Ethel would hear. "Is it your mother, John?" she asked hoarsely.

"No, thank heaven, not my mother, Ethie," he answered her, with something like pallor on his dark cheek, "not my mother;

but I remember the woman."

"A relative?"

"Oh, Ethie, don't press me. Yes, my mother's sister. I remember her years ago. Let us say no more about it." And Ethel, looking at that gaunt and squalid savage woman, shuddered in her heart and said no more.

Slowly, as time went on, however, Ethel began to notice a strange shade of change coming over John's ideas and remarks about the negroes. At first he had been shocked and distressed at their heathendom and savagery, but the more he saw of it the more he seemed to find it natural enough in their position, and even in a sort of way to sympathize with it or apologize for it. One morning, a month or two later, he spoke to her voluntarily of his father. He had never done so in England. "I can remember," he said, "he was a chief, a great chief. He had many wives, and my mother was one. He was beaten in War by Kola, and I was taken prisoner. But he had a fine palace at Kwantah, and many fan-bearers." Ethel observed with a faint terror that he seemed to speak with pride and complacency of his father's chieftaincy. She shuddered again and wondered. Was the West African instinct getting the upper hand in him over the Christian gentleman?

When the dries were over, and the koko-harvest gathered, the negroes held a grand feast. John had preached in the open air to some of the market people in the morning, and in the evening he was sitting in the hut with Ethel, waiting till the catechist and his wife should come in to prayers, for they carried out their

accustomed ceremony decorously, even there, every night and morning. Suddenly they heard the din of savage music out of doors, and the noise of a great crowd laughing and shouting down the street. John listened, and listened with deepening attention. "Don't you hear it, Ethie?" he cried. "It's the tom-toms. I know what it means. It's the harvest battle-feast!"

"How hideous!" said Ethel, shrinking back.

"Don't be afraid, dearest," John said, smiling at her. "It means no harm. It's only the people amusing themselves." And he began to keep time to the tom-toms rapidly with the palms of his hands.

The din drew nearer, and John grew more evidently excited at every step. "Don't you hear, Ethie?" he said again. "It's the Salonga. What inspiriting music! It's like a drum and fife band; it's like the bagpipes; it's like a military march. By Jove, it compels one to dance!" And he got up as he spoke, in English clerical dress (for he wore clerical dress even at Butabué), and began capering in a sort of hornpipe round the tiny room.

"Oh, John, don't," cried Ethel. "Suppose the catechist were to come in!"

But John's blood was up. "Look here," he said excitedly, "it goes like this. Here you hold your matchlock out; here you fire; here you charge with cutlasses; here you hack them down before you; here you hold up your enemy's head in your hands, and here you kick it off among the women. Oh, it's grand!" There was a terrible light in his black eyes as he spoke, and a terrible trembling in his clenched black hands.

"John," cried Ethel, in an agony of horror, "it isn't Christian, it isn't human, it isn't worthy of you. I can never, never love you if you do such a thing again."

In a moment John's face changed and his hand fell as if she had stabbed him. "Ethie," he said in a low voice, creeping back to her like a whipped spaniel, "Ethie, my darling, my own soul, my beloved; what have I done! Oh, heavens, I will never listen to the accursed thing again. Oh, Ethie, for heaven's sake, for mercy's sake, forgive me!"

Ethel laid her hand, trembling, on his head. John sank upon his knees before her, and bowed himself down with his head between his arms, like one staggered and penitent. Ethel lifted him gently, and at that moment the catechist and his wife came in. John stood up firmly, took down his Bible and Prayer-book, and read through evening prayer at once in his usual impressive tone. In one moment he had changed back again from the Fantee savage to the decorous Oxford clergyman.

It was only a week later that Ethel, hunting about in the little storeroom, happened to notice a stout wooden box carefully covered up. She opened the lid with some difficulty, for it was fastened down with a native lock, and to her horror she found inside it a surreptitious keg of raw negro rum. She took the keg out, put it conspicuously in the midst of the storeroom, and said nothing. That night she heard John in the jungle behind the yard, and looking out, she saw dimly that he was hacking the keg to pieces vehemently with an axe. After that he was even kinder and

tenderer to her than usual for the next week, but Ethel vaguely remembered that once or twice before, he had seemed a little odd in his manner, and that it was on those days that she had seen gleams of the savage nature peeping through. Perhaps, she thought, with a shiver, his civilization was only a veneer, and a glass of raw rum or so was enough to wash it off.

Twelve months after their first arrival, Ethel came home very feverish one evening from her girls' school, and found John gone from the hut. Searching about in the room for the quinine bottle, she came once more upon a rum-keg, and this time it was empty. A nameless terror drove her into the little bedroom. There, on the bed, torn into a hundred shreds, lay John Creedy's black coat and European clothing. The room whirled around her, and though she had never heard of such a thing before, the terrible truth flashed across her bewildered mind like a hideous dream. She went out, alone, at night, as she had never done before since she came to Africa, into the broad lane between the huts which constituted the chief street of Butabué. So far away from home, so utterly solitary among all those black faces, so sick at heart with that burning and devouring horror! She reeled and staggered down the street, not knowing how or where she went, till at the end, beneath the two tall date-palms, she saw lights flashing and heard the noise of shouts and laughter. A group of natives, men and women together, were dancing and howling round a dancing and howling negro. The central figure was dressed in the native fashion, with arms and legs bare, and he was shouting a loud song

at the top of his voice in the Fantee language, while he shook a tom-tom. There was a huskiness as of drink in his throat, and his steps were unsteady and doubtful. Great heavens! could that reeling, shrieking black savage be John Creedy?

Yes, instinct had gained the day over civilization; the savage in John Creedy had broken out; he had torn up his English clothes and, in West African parlance, "had gone Fantee." Ethel gazed at him, white with horror – stood still and gazed, and never cried nor fainted, nor said a word. The crowd of negroes divided to right and left, and John Creedy saw his wife standing there like a marble figure. With one awful cry he came to himself again, and rushed to her side. She did not repel him, as he expected; she did not speak; she was mute and cold like a corpse, not like a living woman. He took her up in his strong arms, laid her head on his shoulder, and carried her home through the long line of thatched huts, erect and steady as when he first walked up the aisle of Walton Magna church. Then he laid her down gently on the bed, and called the wife of the catechist. "She has the fever," he said in Fantee. "Sit by her."

The catechist's wife looked at her, and said, "Yes; the yellow fever."

And so she had. Even before she saw John the fever had been upon her, and that awful revelation had brought it out suddenly in full force. She lay unconscious upon the bed, her eyes open, staring ghastlily, but not a trace of colour in her cheek nor a sign of life upon her face.

John Creedy wrote a few words on a piece of paper, which he folded in his hand, gave a few directions in Fantee to the woman at the bedside, and then hurried out like one on fire into the darkness outside.

III

It was thirty miles through the jungle, by a native trackway, to the nearest mission station at Effuenta. There were two Methodist missionaries stationed there, John Creedy knew, for he had gone round by boat more than once to see them. When he first came to Africa he could no more have found his way across the neck of the river fork by that tangled jungle track than he could have flown bodily over the top of the cocoa palms; but now, half naked, barefooted, and inspired with an overpowering emotion, he threaded his path through the darkness among the creepers and lianas of the forest in true African fashion. Stooping here, creeping on all fours there, running in the open at full speed anon, he never once stopped to draw breath till he had covered the whole thirty miles, and knocked in the early dawn at the door of the mission hut at Effuenta.

One of the missionaries opened the barred door cautiously. "What do you want?" he asked in Fantee of the bare-legged savage, who stood crouching by the threshold.

"I bring a message from Missionary John Creedy," the bare-legged savage answered, also in Fantee. "He wants European clothes."

"Has he sent a letter?" asked the missionary.

John Creedy took the folded piece of paper from his palm. The missionary read it. It told him in a few words how the

Butabué people had pillaged John's hut at night and stolen his clothing, and how he could not go outside his door till he got some European dress again.

"This is strange," said the missionary. "Brother Felton died three days ago of the fever. You can take his clothes to Brother Creedy, if you will."

The bare-limbed savage nodded acquiescence. The missionary looked hard at him, and fancied he had seen his face before, but he never even for a moment suspected that he was speaking to John Creedy himself.

A bundle was soon made of dead Brother Felton's clothes, and the bare-limbed man took it in his arms and prepared to run back again the whole way to Butabué.

"You have had nothing to eat," said the lonely missionary. "Won't you take something to help you on your way?"

"Give me some plantain paste," answered John Creedy. "I can eat it as I go." And when they gave it him he forgot himself for the moment, and answered, "Thank you" in English. The missionary stared, but thought it was only a single phrase that he had picked up at Butabué, and that he was anxious, negro-fashion, to air his knowledge.

Back through the jungle, with the bundle in his arms, John Creedy wormed his way once more, like a snake or a tiger, never pausing or halting on the road till he found himself again in the open space outside the village of Butabué. There he stayed awhile, and behind a clump of wild ginger, he opened the bundle

and arrayed himself once more from head to foot in English clerical dress. That done, too proud to slink, he walked bold and erect down the main alley, and quietly entered his own hut. It was high noon, the baking high noon of Africa, as he did so.

Ethel lay unconscious still upon the bed. The negro woman crouched, half asleep after her night's watching, at the foot. John Creedy looked at his watch, which stood hard by on the little wooden table. "Sixty miles in fourteen hours," he said aloud. "Better time by a great deal than when we walked from Oxford to the White Horse, eighteen months since." And then he sat down silently by Ethel's bedside.

"Has she moved her eyes?" he asked the negress.

"Never, John Creedy," answered the woman. Till last night she had always called him "Master."

He watched the lifeless face for an hour or two. There was no change in it till about four o'clock; then Ethel's eyes began to alter their expression. He saw the dilated pupils contract a little, and know that consciousness was gradually returning.

In a moment more she looked round at him and gave a little cry. "John," she exclaimed, with a sort of awakening hopefulness in her voice, "where on earth did you get those clothes?"

"These clothes?" he answered softly. "Why, you must be wandering in your mind, Ethie dearest, to ask such a question now. At Standen's, in the High at Oxford, my darling." And he passed his black hand gently across her loose hair.

Ethel gave a great cry of joy. "Then it was a dream, a horrid

dream, John, or a terrible mistake? Oh, John, say it was a dream!"

John drew his hand across his forehead slowly. "Ethie darling," he said, "you are wandering, I'm afraid. You have a bad fever. I don't know what you mean."

"Then you didn't tear them up, and wear a Fantee dress, and dance with a tom-tom down the street? Oh, John!"

"Oh, Ethel! No. What a terrible delirium you must have had!"

"It is all well," she said. "I don't mind if I die now." And she sank back exhausted into a sort of feverish sleep.

"John Creedy," said the black catechist's wife solemnly, in Fantee, "you will have to answer for that lie to a dying woman with your soul!"

"*My* soul!" cried John Creedy passionately, smiting both breasts with his clenched fists. "*My* soul! Do you think, you negro wench, I wouldn't give my poor, miserable, black soul to eternal torments a thousand times over, if only I could give her little white heart one moment's forgetfulness before she dies?"

For five days longer Ethel lingered in the burning fever, sometimes conscious for a minute or two, but for the most part delirious or drowsy all the time. She never said another word to John about her terrible dream, and John never said another word to her. But he sat by her side and tended her like a woman, doing everything that was possible for her in the bare little hut, and devouring his full heart with a horrible gnawing remorse too deep for pen or tongue to probe and fathom. For civilization with John Creedy was really at bottom far more than a mere veneer;

though the savage instincts might break out with him now and again, such outbursts no more affected his adult and acquired nature than a single bump supper or wine party at college affects the nature of many a gentle-minded English lad. The truest John Creedy of all was the gentle, tender, English clergyman.

As he sat by her bedside sleepless and agonized, night and day for five days together, one prayer only rose to his lips time after time: "Heaven grant she may die!" He had depth enough in the civilized side of his soul to feel that that was the only way to save her from a lifelong shame. "If she gets well," he said to himself, trembling, "I will leave this accursed Africa at once. I will work my way back to England as a common sailor, and send her home by the mail with my remaining money. I will never inflict my presence upon her again, for she cannot be persuaded, if once she recovers, that she did not see me, as she did see me, a bare-limbed heathen Fantee brandishing a devilish tom-tom. But I shall get work in England – not a parson's; that I can never be again – but clerk's work, labourer's work, navvy's work, anything! Look at my arms: I rowed five in the Magdalen eight: I could hold a spade as well as any man. I will toil, and slave, and save, and keep her still like a lady, if I starve for it myself, but she shall never see my face again, if once she recovers. Even then it will be a living death for her, poor angel! There is only one hope – Heaven grant she may die!"

On the fifth day she opened her eyes once. John saw that his prayer was about to be fulfilled. "John," she said feebly – "John,

tell me, on your honour, it was only my delirium."

And John, raising his hand to heaven, *splendide mendax*, answered in a firm voice, "I swear it."

Ethel smiled and shut her eyes. It was for the last time.

Next morning, John Creedy – tearless, but parched and dry in the mouth, like one stunned and unmanned – took a pickaxe and hewed out a rude grave in the loose soil near the river. Then he fashioned a rough coffin from twisted canes with his own hands, and in it he reverently placed the sacred body. He allowed no one to help him or come near him – not even his fellow-Christians, the catechist and his wife: Ethel was too holy a thing for their African hands to touch. Next he put on his white surplice, and for the first and only time in his life he read, without a quaver in his voice, the Church of England burial service over the open grave. And when he had finished he went back to his desolate hut, and cried with a loud voice of utter despair, "The one thing that bound me to civilization is gone. Henceforth I shall never speak another word of English. I go to my own people." So saying, he solemnly tore up his European clothes once more, bound a cotton loin-cloth round his waist, covered his head with dirt, and sat fasting and wailing piteously, like a broken-hearted child, in his cabin.

Nowadays, the old half-caste Portuguese rum-dealer at Butabué can point out to any English pioneer who comes up the river which one, among a crowd of dilapidated negroes who lie basking in the soft dust outside his hut, was once the Reverend

John Creedy, B.A., of Magdalen College, Oxford.

DR. GREATREX'S ENGAGEMENT

Everybody knows by name at least the celebrated Dr. Greatrex, the discoverer of that abstruse molecular theory of the interrelations of forces and energies. He is a comparatively young man still, as times go, for a person of such scientific distinction, for he is now barely forty; but to look at his tall, spare, earnest figure, and his clear-cut, delicate, intellectual face, you would scarcely imagine that he had once been the hero of a singularly strange and romantic story. Yet there have been few lives more romantic than Arthur Greatrex's, and few histories stranger in their way than this of his engagement. After all, why should not a scientific light have a romance of his own as well as other people?

Fifteen years ago Arthur Greatrex, then a young Cambridge fellow, had just come up to begin his medical studies at a London hospital. He was tall in those days, of course, but not nearly so slender or so pale as now; for he had rowed seven in his college boat, and was a fine, athletic young man of the true English university pattern. Handsome, too, then and always, but with a more human-looking and ordinary handsomeness when he was young than in these latter times of his scientific eminence. Indeed, any one who met Arthur Greatrex at that time would merely have noticed him as a fine, intelligent young English gentleman, with a marked taste for manly sports, and a decided opinion of his own about most passing matters of public interest.

Already, even in those days, the young medical student was very deeply engaged in recondite speculations on the question of energy. His active mind, always dwelling upon wide points of cosmical significance, had hit upon the germ of that great revolutionary idea which was afterwards to change the whole course of modern physics. But, as often happens with young men of twenty-five, there was another subject which divided his attention with the grand theory of his life: and that subject was the pretty daughter of his friend and instructor, Dr. Abury, the eminent authority on the treatment of the insane. In all London you couldn't have found a sweeter or prettier girl than Hetty Abury. Young Greatrex thought her clever, too; and, though that is perhaps saying rather too much, she was certainly a good deal above the average of ordinary London girls in intellect and accomplishments.

"They say, Arthur," she said to him on the day after their formal engagement, "that the course of true love never did run smooth; and yet it seems somehow as if ours was wonderfully smoothed over for us by everybody and everything. I am the happiest and proudest girl in all the world to have won the love of such a man as you for my future husband."

Arthur Greatrex stroked the back of her white little hand with his, and answered gently, "I hope nothing will ever arise to make the course of our love run any the rougher; for certainly we do seem to have every happiness laid out most temptingly before us. It almost feels to me as if my paradise had been too easily won,

and I ought to have something harder to do before I enter it."

"Don't say that, Arthur," Hetty put in hastily. "It sounds too much like an evil omen."

"You superstitious little woman!" the young doctor replied with a smile. "Talking to a scientific man about signs and portents!" And he kissed her wee hand tenderly, and went home to his bachelor lodging with that strange exhilaration in heart and step which only the ecstasy of first love can ever bring one.

"No," he thought to himself, as he sat down in his own easy-chair, and lighted his cigar; "I don't believe any cloud can ever arise between me and Hetty. We have everything in our favour – means to live upon, love for one another, a mutual respect, kind relations, and hearts that were meant by nature each for the other. Hetty is certainly the very sweetest little girl that ever lived; and she's as good as she's sweet, and as loving as she's beautiful. What a dreadful thing it is for a man in love to have to read up medicine for his next examination!" and he took a medical book down from the shelf with a sigh, and pretended to be deeply interested in the diagnosis of scarlet fever till his cigar was finished. But, if the truth must be told, the words really swam before him, and all the letters on the page apparently conspired together to make up but a single name a thousand times over – Hetty, Hetty, Hetty, Hetty. At last he laid the volume down as hopeless, and turned dreamily into his bedroom, only to lie awake half the night and think perpetually on that one theme of Hetty.

Next day was Dr. Abury's weekly lecture on diseases of the

brain and nervous system; and Arthur Greatrex, convinced that he really must make an effort, went to hear it. The subject was one that always interested him; and partly by dint of mental attention, partly out of sheer desire to master the matter, he managed to hear it through, and even take in the greater part of its import. As he left the room to go down the hospital stairs, he had his mind fairly distracted between the premonitory symptoms of insanity and Hetty Abury. "Was there ever such an unfortunate profession as medicine for a man in love?" he asked himself, half angrily. "Why didn't I go and be a parson or a barrister, or anything else that would have kept me from mixing up such incongruous associations? And yet, when one comes to think of it, too, there's no particular natural connection after all between 'Chitty on Contract' and dearest Hetty."

Musing thus, he turned to walk down the great central staircase of the hospital. As he did so, his attention was attracted for a moment by a singular person who was descending the opposite stair towards the same landing. This person was tall and not ill-looking; but, as he came down the steps, he kept pursing up his mouth and cheeks into the most extraordinary and hideous grimaces; in fact, he was obviously making insulting faces at Arthur Greatrex. Arthur was so much preoccupied at the moment, however, that he hardly had time to notice the eccentric stranger; and, as he took him for one of the harmless lunatic patients in the mental-diseases ward, he would have passed on without further observing the man but for an odd circumstance

which occurred as they both reached the great central landing together. Arthur happened to drop the book he was carrying from under his arm, and instinctively stooped to pick it up. At the same moment the grimacing stranger dropped his own book also, not in imitation, but by obvious coincidence, and stooped to pick it up with the self-same gesture. Struck by the oddity of the situation, Arthur turned to look at the curious patient. To his utter horror and surprise, he discovered that the man he had been observing was his own reflection.

In one second the real state of the case flashed like lightning across his bewildered brain. There was no opposite staircase, as he knew very well, for he had been down those steps a hundred times before: nothing but a big mirror, which reflected and doubled the one-sided flight from top to bottom. It was only his momentary preoccupation which had made him for a minute fall into the obvious delusion. The man whom he saw descending towards him was really himself, Arthur Greatrex.

Even so, he did not at once grasp the full strangeness of the scene he had just witnessed. It was only as he turned to descend again that he caught another glimpse of himself in the big mirror, and saw that he was still making the most horrible and ghastliest grimaces – grimaces such as he had never seen equalled save by the monkeys at the Zoo, and (horridest thought of all!) by the worst patients in the mental-disease ward. He pulled himself up in speechless horror, and looked once more into the big mirror. Yes, there was positively no mistaking the fact: it was he, Arthur

Greatrex, fellow of Catherine's, who was making these hideous and meaningless distortions of his own countenance.

With a terrible effort of will he pulled his face quite straight again, and assumed his usual grave and quiet demeanour. For a full minute he stood looking at himself in the glass; and then, fearful that some one else would come and surprise him, he hurried down the remaining steps, and rushed out into the streets of London. Which way he turned he did not know or care; all he knew was that he was repressing by sheer force of muscular strain a deadly impulse to pucker up his mouth and draw down the corners of his lips into one-sided grimaces. As he passed down the streets, he watched his own image faintly reflected in the panes of the windows, and saw that he was maintaining outward decorum, but only with a conscious and evident struggle. At one doorstep a little child was playing with a kitten; Arthur Greatrex, who was a naturally kindly man, looked down at her and smiled, in spite of his preoccupation: instead of smiling back, the child uttered a scream of terror, and rushed back into the house to hide her face in her mother's apron. He felt instinctively that, in place of smiling, he had looked at the child with one of his awful faces. It was horrible, unendurable, and he walked on through the streets and across the bridges, pulling himself together all the time, till at last, half-unconsciously, he found himself near Pimlico, where the Aburys were then living.

Looking around him, he saw that he had come nearly to the corner where Hetty's little drawing-room faced the road. The

accustomed place seemed to draw him off for a moment from thinking of himself, and he remembered that he had promised Hetty to come in for luncheon. But dare he go in such a state of mind and body as he then found himself in? Well, Hetty would be expecting him; Hetty would be disappointed if he didn't come; he certainly mustn't break his engagement with dear little Hetty. After all, he began to say to himself, what was it but a mere twitching of his face, probably a slight nervous affection? Young doctors are always nervous about themselves, they say; they find all their own symptoms accurately described in all the text-books. His face wasn't twitching now, of that he was certain; the nearer he got to Hetty's, the calmer he grew, and the more he was conscious he could relax his attention without finding his muscles were playing tricks upon him. He would turn in and have luncheon, and soon forgot all about it.

Hetty saw him coming, and ran lightly to open the door for him, and as he took his seat beside her at the table, he forgot straightway his whole trouble, and found himself at once in Paradise once more. All through lunch they talked about other things – happy plans for the future, and the small prettinesses that lovers find so perennially delightful; and long before Arthur went away the twitching in his face had altogether ceased to trouble him. Once or twice, indeed, in the course of the afternoon he happened to glance casually at the looking-glass above the drawing-room fireplace (those were the pre-Morrisian days when overmantels as yet were not), and he saw to his great

comfort that his face was resting in its usual handsome repose and peacefulness. A bright, earnest, strong face it was, with all the promise of greatness already in it; and so Hetty thought as she looked up at it from the low footstool where she sat by his side, and half whispered into his ear the little timid confidences of early betrothal.

Five o'clock tea came all too soon, and then Arthur felt he must really be going and must get home to do a little reading. On his way, he fancied once he saw a street boy start in evident surprise as he approached him, but it might be fancy; and when the street boy stuck his tongue into the corner of his cheek and uttered derisive shouts from a safe distance, Arthur concluded he was only doing after the manner of his kind out of pure gratuitous insolence. He went home to his lodgings and sat down to an hour's work; but after he had read up several pages more of "Stuckey on Gout," he laid down the book in disgust, and took out Helmholtz and Joule instead, indulging himself with a little desultory reading in his favourite study of the higher physics.

As he read and read the theory of correlation, the great idea as to the real nature of energy, which had escaped all these learned physicists, and which was then slowly forming itself in his own mind, grew gradually clearer and clearer still before his mental vision. Helmholtz was wrong here, because he had not thoroughly appreciated the disjunctive nature of electric energy; Joule was wrong here, because he had failed to understand the real antithesis between potential and kinetic. He laid down the

books, paced up and down the room thoughtfully, and beheld the whole concrete theory of interrelation embodying itself visibly before his very eyes. At last he grew fired with the stupendous grandeur of his own conception, seized a quire of foolscap, and sat down eagerly at the table to give written form to the splendid phantom that was floating before him in so distinct a fashion. He would make a great name, for Hetty's sake; and, when he had made it, his dearest reward would be to know that Hetty was proud of him.

Hour after hour he sat and wrote, as if inspired, at his little table. The landlady knocked at the door to tell him dinner was ready, but he would have none of it, he said; let her bring him up a good cup of strong tea and a few plain biscuits. So he wrote and wrote in feverish haste, drinking cup after cup of tea, and turning off page after page of foolscap, till long past midnight. The whole theory had come up so distinctly before his mind's eye, under the exceptional exaltation of first love, and the powerful stimulus of the day's excitement, that he wrote it off as though he had it by heart; omitting only the mathematical calculations, which he left blank, not because he had not got them clearly in his head, but because he would not stop his flying pen to copy them all out then and there at full length, for fear of losing the main thread of his argument. When he had finished, about forty sheets of foolscap lay huddled together on the table before him, written in a hasty hand, and scarcely legible; but they contained the first rough draft and central principle of that immortal work, the "Transcendental

Dynamics."

Arthur Greatrex rose from the table, where his grand discovery was first formulated, well satisfied with himself and his theory, and fully determined to submit it shortly to the critical judgment of the Royal Society. As he took up his bedroom candle, however, he went over to the mantelpiece to kiss Hetty's photograph, as he always did (for even men of science are human) every evening before retiring. He lifted the portrait reverently to his lips, and was just about to kiss it, when suddenly in the mirror before him he saw the same horrible mocking face which had greeted him so unexpectedly that morning on the hospital staircase. It was a face of inhuman devilry; the face of a mediæval demon, a hideous, grinning, distorted ghoul, a very caricature and insult upon the features of humanity. In his dismay he dropped the frame and the photograph, shivering the glass that covered it into a thousand atoms. Summoning up all his resolution, he looked again. Yes, there was no mistaking it: a face was gibing and jeering at him from the mirror with diabolical ingenuity of distorted hideousness; a disgusting face which even the direct evidence of his senses would scarcely permit him to believe was really the reflection of his own features. It was overpowering, it was awful, it was wholly incredible; and, utterly unmanned by the sight, he sank back into his easy-chair and buried his face bitterly between the shelter of his trembling hands.

At that moment Arthur Greatrex felt sure he knew the real

meaning of the horror that surrounded him. He was going mad.

For ten minutes or more he sat there motionless, hot tears boiling up from his eyes and falling silently between his fingers. Then at last he rose nervously from his seat, and reached down a volume from the shelf behind him. It was Prang's "Treatise on the Physiology of the Brain." He turned it over hurriedly for a few pages, till he came to the passage he was looking for.

"Ah, I thought so," he said to himself, half aloud: "'Premonitory symptoms: facial distortions; infirmity of the will; inability to distinguish muscular movements.' Let's see what Prang has to say about it. 'A not uncommon concomitant of these early stages' – Great heavens, how calmly the man talks about losing your reason! – 'is an unconscious or semi-conscious tendency to produce a series of extraordinary facial distortions. At times, the sufferer is not aware of the movements thus initiated; at other times they are quite voluntary, and are accompanied by bodily gestures of contempt or derision for passing strangers.' Why, that's what must have happened with that boy this morning! 'Symptoms of this character usually result from excessive activity of the brain, and are most frequent among mathematicians or scholars who have overworked their intellectual faculties. They may be regarded as the immediate precursors of acute dementia.' Acute dementia! Oh, Hetty! Oh, heavens! What have I done to deserve such a blow as this?"

He laid his face between his hands once more, and sobbed like a broken-hearted child for a few minutes. Then he turned

accidentally towards his tumbled manuscript. "No, no," he said to himself, reassuringly; "I can't be going mad. My brain was never clearer in my life. I couldn't have done a piece of good work like that, bristling with equations and figures and formulas, if my head was really giving way. I seemed to grasp the subject as I never grasped it in my life before. I never worked so well at Cambridge; this is a discovery, a genuine discovery. It's impossible that a man who was going mad could ever see anything so visibly and distinctly as I see that universal principle. Let's look again at what Prang has to say upon that subject."

He turned over the volume a few pages further, and glanced lightly at the contents at the head of each chapter, till at last a few words in the title struck his eye, and he hurried on to the paragraph they indicated, with feverish eagerness. As he did so, these were the words which met his bewildered gaze.

"In certain cases, especially among men of unusual intelligence and high attainments, the exaltation of incipient madness takes rather the guise of a scientific or philosophic enthusiasm. Instead of imagining himself the possessor of untold wealth, or the absolute despot of a servile people, the patient deludes himself with the belief that he has made a great discovery or lighted upon a splendid generalization of the deepest and most universal importance. He sees new truths crowding upon him with the most startling and vivid objectivity. He perceives intimate relations of things which he never before suspected. He destroys at one blow the Newtonian theory of gravitation; he

discovers obvious flaws in the nebular hypothesis of Laplace; he gives a scholar's-mate to Kant in the very fundamental points of the 'Critique of Pure Reason.' The more serious the attack, the more utterly convinced is the patient of the exceptional clearness of his own intelligence at that particular moment. He writes pamphlets whose scientific value he ridiculously over-estimates; and he is sure to be very angry with any one who tries rationally to combat his newly found authority. Mathematical reasoners are specially liable to this form of incipient mental disease, which, when combined with the facial distortions already alluded to in a previous section, is peculiarly apt to terminate in acute dementia."

"Acute dementia again!" Arthur Greatrex cried with a gesture of horror, flinging the book from him as if it were a poisonous serpent. "Acute dementia, acute dementia, acute dementia; nothing but acute dementia ahead of me, whichever way I happen to turn. Oh, this is too horrible! I shall never be able to marry Hetty! And yet I shall never be able to break it to Hetty! Great heavens, that such a phantom as this should have risen between me and paradise only since this very morning!"

In his agony he caught up the papers on which he had written the rough draft of his grand discovery, and crumpled them up fiercely in his fingers. "The cursed things!" he groaned between his teeth, tossing them with a gesture of impatient disgust into the waste-paper basket; "how could I ever have deluded myself into thinking I had hit off-hand upon a grand truth which had escaped

such men as Helmholtz, and Mayer, and Joule, and Thomson! The thing's preposterous upon the very face of it; I must be going mad, indeed, ever to have dreamt of it!"

He took up his candle once more, kissed the portrait in the broken frame with intense fervour a dozen times over, and then went up gloomily into his own bedroom. There he did not attempt to undress, but merely pulled off his boots, lay down in his clothes upon the bed, and hastily blew out the candle. For a long time he lay tossing and turning in unspeakable terror; but at last, after perhaps two hours or so, he fell into a troubled sleep, and dreamed a hideous nightmare, in which somebody or other in shadowy outlines was trying perpetually to tear him away by main force from poor pale and weeping Hetty.

It was daylight when Arthur woke again, and he lay for some time upon his bed, thinking over his last night's scare, which seemed much less serious, as such things always do, now that the sun had risen upon it. After a while his mind got round to the energy question; and, as he thought it over once more, the conviction forced itself afresh upon him that he was right upon the matter after all, and that if he was going mad there was at least method in his madness. So firmly was he convinced upon this point now (though he recognized that that very certainty might be merely a symptom of his coming malady) that he got up hurriedly, before the lodging-house servant came to clean up his little sitting-room, so as to rescue his crumpled foolscap from the waste-paper basket. After that, a bath and breakfast almost

made him laugh at his evening terrors.

All the morning Arthur Greatrex sat down at his table again, working in the algebraical calculations which he had omitted from his paper overnight, and finishing it in full form as if for presentation to a learned society. But he did not mean now to offer it to any society: he had a far deeper and more personal interest in the matter at present than that. He wanted to settle first of all the question whether he was going mad or not. Afterwards, there would be plenty of time to settle such minor theoretical problems as the general physical constitution of the universe.

As soon as he had finished his calculations he took the paper in his hands, and went out with it to make two calls on scientific acquaintances. The first man he called upon was that distinguished specialist, Professor Linklight, one of the greatest authorities of his own day on all questions of molecular physics. Poor man! he is almost forgotten now, for he died ten years ago; and his scientific reputation was, after all, of that flashy sort which bases itself chiefly upon giving good dinners to leading fellows of the Royal Society. But fifteen years ago Professor Linklight, with his cut-and-dried dogmatic notions, and his narrow technical accuracy, was universally considered the principal physical philosopher in all England. To him, then, Arthur Greatrex – a far deeper and clearer thinker – took in all humility the first manuscript of his marvellous discovery; not to ask him whether it was true or not, but to find out whether it was physical science at all or pure insanity. The professor received

him kindly; and when Arthur, who had of course his own reasons for attempting a little modest concealment, asked him to look over a friend's paper for him, with a view to its presentation to the Royal Society, he cheerfully promised to do his best. "Though you will admit, my dear Mr. Greatrex," he said with his blandest smile, "that your friend's manuscript certainly does not err on the side of excessive brevity." From Linklight's, Arthur walked on tremulously to the house of another great scientific magnate, Dr. Warminster, of being the first living authority on the treatment of the insane in the United Kingdom. Before Dr. Warminster, Arthur made no attempt to conceal his apprehensions. He told out all his symptoms and fears without reserve, even exaggerating them a little, as a man is prone to do through over-anxiety not to put too favourable a face upon his own ailments. Dr. Warminster listened attentively and with a gathering interest to all that Arthur told him, and at the end of his account he shook his head gloomily, and answered in a very grave and sympathetic tone.

"My dear Greatrex," he said gently, holding his arm with a kindly pressure, "I should be dealing wrongly with you if I did not candidly tell you that your case gives ground for very serious apprehensions. You are a young man, and with steady attention to curative means and surroundings, it is possible that you may ward off this threatened danger. Society, amusement, relaxation, complete cessation of scientific work, absence, as far as possible, of mental anxiety in any form, may enable you to tide over the turning point. But that there is danger threatened, it would be

unkind and untrue not to warn you. It is very unusual for a patient to consult us in person about these matters. More often it is the friends who notice the coming change; but, as you ask me directly for an opinion, I can't help telling you that I regard your case as not without real cause for the strictest care and for a preventive regimen."

Arthur thanked him for the numerous directions he gave as to things which should be done or things which should be avoided, and hurried out into the street with his brain swimming and reeling. "Absence of mental anxiety!" he said to himself bitterly. "How calmly they talk about mental anxiety! How can I possibly be free from anxiety when I know I may go mad at any moment, and that the blow would kill Hetty outright? For myself, I should not care a farthing; but for Hetty! It is too terrible."

He had not the heart to call at the Aburys' that afternoon, though he had promised to do so; and he tortured himself with the thought that Hetty would think him neglectful. He could not call again while the present suspense lasted; and if his worst fears were confirmed he could never call again, except once, to take leave of Hetty for ever. For, deeply as Arthur Greatrex loved her, he loved her too well ever to dream of marrying her if the possible shadow of madness was to cloud her future life with its perpetual presence. Better she should bear the shock, even if it killed her at once, than that both should live in ceaseless apprehension of that horrible possibility, and should become the parents of children upon whom that hereditary curse might

rest for a lifetime, reflecting itself back with the added sting of conscientious remorse on the father who had brought them into the world against his own clear judgment of right and justice.

Next morning Arthur went round once more to Professor Linklight's. The professor had promised to read through the paper immediately, and give his opinion of its chances for presentation to the Royal Society. He was sitting at his breakfast-table, in his flowered dressing-gown and slippers, when Arthur called upon him, and, with a cup of coffee in one hand, was actually skimming the last few pages through his critical eyeglass as his visitor entered.

"Good-morning, Mr. Greatrex!" he said, with one of his most gracious smiles, indicative of the warm welcome attended by acknowledged wisdom towards rising talent. "You see I have been reading your friend's paper, as I promised. Well, my dear sir, not to put too fine a point upon it, it won't hold water. In fact, it's a mere rigmarole. Excuse my asking you, Greatrex, but have you any idea, my dear fellow, whether your friend is inclined to be a little cracky?"

Arthur swallowed a groan with the greatest difficulty, and answered in as unconcerned a tone as possible, "Well, to tell you the truth, Mr. Linklight, some doubts *have* been cast upon his perfect sanity."

"Ah, I should have thought so," the professor went on in his airiest manner; "I should have thought so. The fact is, this paper is fitter for the *Transactions* of the Colney Hatch Academy than

for those of the Royal Society. It has a delusive outer appearance of physical thinking, but there's no real meaning in it of any sort. It's gassy, unsubstantial, purely imaginative." And the professor waved his hand in the air to indicate its utter gaseousness. "If you were to ask my own opinion about it, I should say it's the sort of thing that might be produced by a young man of some mathematical training with a very superficial knowledge of modern physics, just as he was on the point of lapsing into complete insanity. It's the maddest bit of writing that has ever yet fallen under my critical notice."

"Your opinion is of course conclusive," Arthur answered with unfeigned humility, his eyes almost bursting with the tears he would not let come to the surface. "It will be a great disappointment to my friend, but I have no doubt he will accept your verdict."

"Not a bit of it, my dear sir," the professor put in quickly. "Not a bit of it. These crazy fellows always stick to their own opinions, and think you a perfect fool for disagreeing with them. Mark my words, Mr. Greatrex, your friend will still go on believing, in spite of everything, that his roundabout reasoning upon that preposterous square-root-of-Pi theorem is sound mathematics."

And Arthur, looking within, felt with a glow of horror that the theorem in question seemed to him at that moment more obviously true and certain in all its deductions than it had ever done before since the first day that he conceived it. How very mad he must be after all.

He thanked Professor Linklight as well as he was able for his kindness in looking over the paper, and groped his way blindly through the passage to the front door and out into the square. Thence he staggered home wearily, convinced that it was all over between him and Hetty, and that he must make up his mind forthwith to his horrible destiny.

If he had only known at that moment that forty years earlier Professor Linklight had used almost the same words about Young's theory of undulations, and had since used them about every new discovery from that day to the one on which he then saw him, he might have attached less importance than he actually did to this supposed final proof of his own insanity.

As Arthur entered his lodgings he hung his hat up on the stand in the passage. There was a little strip of mirror in the middle of the stand, and glancing at it casually he saw once more that awful face – his own – distorted and almost diabolical, which he had learnt so soon to hate instinctively as if it were a felon's and a murderer's. He rushed away wildly into his little sitting-room, and flung his manuscript on the table, almost without observing that his friend Freeling, the rising physiologist, was quietly seated on the sofa opposite.

"What's this, Arthur?" Freeling asked, taking it up carelessly and glancing at the title. "You don't mean to say that you've finally written out that splendid idea of yours about the interrelations of energy?"

"Yes, I have, Harry: I have, and I wish to heaven I hadn't, for

it's all mad and silly and foolish and meaningless!"

"If it is, then I'm mad too, my dear fellow, for I think it's the most convincing thing in physics I ever listened to. Let me have the manuscript to look over, and see how you've worked out those beautiful calculations about the square root of Pi, will you?"

"Take the thing, for heaven's sake, and leave me, Harry, for if I'm not left alone I shall break down and cry before you." And as he spoke he buried his head in his arm and sobbed like a woman.

Dr. Freeling knew Arthur was in love, and was aware that people sometimes act very unaccountably under such circumstances; so he did the wisest thing to be done then and there: he grasped his friend's arm gently with his hand, spoke never a word, and, taking up his hat and the manuscript, walked quietly out into the passage. Then he told the landlady to make Mr. Greatrex a strong cup of tea, with a dash of brandy in it, and turned away, leaving Arthur to solitude and his own reflections.

That evening's post brought Arthur Greatrex two letters, which finally completed his utter prostration. The first he opened was from Dr. Abury. He broke the envelope with a terrible misgiving, and read the letter through with a deepening and sickening feeling of horror. It was not he alone, then, who had distorted the secret of his own incipient insanity. Dr. Abury's practised eye had also detected the rising symptoms. The doctor wrote kindly and with evident grief; but there was no mistaking the firm purport of his intentions. Conferring this morning with his professional friend Warminster, a case had been mentioned

to him, without a name, which he at once recognized as Arthur's. He recalled certain symptoms he had himself observed, and his suspicions were thus vividly aroused. Happening accidentally to follow Arthur in the street he was convinced that his surmise was correct, and he thought it his duty both to inform Arthur of the danger that encompassed him, and to assure him that, deeply as it grieved him to withdraw the consent he had so gladly given, he could not allow his only daughter to marry a man bearing on his face the evident marks of an insane tendency. The letter contained much more of regret and condolence; but that was the pith that Arthur Greatrex picked out of it all through the blinding tears, that dimmed his vision.

The second letter was from Hetty. Half guessing its contents, he had left it purposely till the last, and he tore it open now with a fearful sinking feeling in his bosom. It was indeed a heart-broken, heart-breaking letter. What could be the secret which papa would not tell her? Why had not Arthur come yesterday? Why could she never marry him? Why was papa so cruel as not to tell her the reason? He couldn't have done anything in the slightest degree dishonourable, far less anything wicked: of that she felt sure; but, if not, what could be this horrible, mysterious, unknown barrier that was so suddenly raised between them? "Do write, dearest Arthur, and relieve me from this terrible, incomprehensible suspense; do let me know what has happened to make papa so determined against you. I could bear to lose you – at least I could bear it as other women have done – but I

can't bear this awful uncertainty, this awful doubt as to your love or your constancy. For heaven's sake, darling, send me a note somehow! send me a line to tell me you love me. Your heart-broken

"Hetty."

Arthur took his hat, and, unable to endure this agony, set out at once for the Aburys'. When he reached the door, the servant who answered his ring at the bell told him he could not see the doctor; he was engaged with two other doctors in a consultation about Miss Hetty. What was the matter with Miss Hetty, then? What, didn't he know that? Oh, Miss Hetty had had a fit, and Dr. Freeling and Dr. MacKinlay had been called in to see her. Arthur did not wait for a moment, but walked upstairs unannounced, and into the consulting room.

Was it a very serious matter? Yes, Freeling answered, very serious. It seemed Miss Abury had had a great shock – a great shock to her affections – which, he added in a lower voice, "you yourself can perhaps best explain to me. She will certainly have a long illness. Perhaps she may never recover."

"Come out into the conservatory, Harry," said Arthur to his friend. "I can tell you there what it is all about."

In a few words Arthur told him the nature of the shock, but without describing the particular symptoms on which the opinion of his supposed approaching insanity was based. Freeling listened with an incredulous smile, and at the end he said to his friend gently, "My dear Arthur, I wish you had told me all this

before. If you had done so, we might have saved Miss Abury a shock which may perhaps be fatal. You are no more going mad than I am; on the contrary, you're about the sanest and most clear-headed fellow of my acquaintance. But these mad-doctors are always finding madness everywhere. If you had come to me and told me the symptoms that troubled you, I should soon have set you right again in your own opinion. To have gone to Warminster was most unfortunate, but it can't be helped now. What we have to do at present is to take care of Miss Abury."

Arthur shook his head sadly. "Ah," he said, "you don't know the real gravity of the symptoms I am suffering from. I shall tell you all about them some other time. However, as you say, what we have to think about now is Hetty. Can you let me see her? I am sure if I could see her it would reassure her and do her good."

Dr. Abury was at first very unwilling to let Arthur visit Hetty, who was now lying unconscious on the sofa in her own boudoir; but Freeling's opinion that it might possibly do her good at last prevailed with him, and he gave his permission grudgingly.

Arthur went into the room silently and took his seat beside the low couch where the motherless girl was lying. Her face was very white, and her hands pale and bloodless. He took one hand in his: the pulse was hardly perceptible. He laid it down upon her breast, and leaned back to watch for any sign of returning life in her pallid cheek and closed eyelids.

For hours and hours he sat there watching, and no sign came. Dr. Abury sat at the bottom of the couch, watching with him;

and as they watched, Arthur felt from time to time that his face was again twitching horribly. However, he had only thoughts for one thing now: would Hetty die or would she recover? The servants brought them a little cake and wine. They sat and drank in silence, looking at one another, but each absorbed in his own thoughts, and speaking never a word for good or evil.

At last Hetty's eyes opened. Arthur noticed the change first, and took her hand in his gently. Her staring gaze fell upon him for a moment, and she asked feebly, "Arthur, Arthur, do you still love me?"

"Love you, Hetty? With all my heart and soul, as I have always loved you!"

She smiled, and said nothing. Dr. Abury gave her a little wine in a teaspoon, and she drank it quietly. Then she shut her eyes again, but this time she was sleeping.

All night Arthur watched still by the bedside where they put her a little later, and Dr. Abury and a nurse watched with him. In the morning she woke slightly better, and when she saw Arthur still there, she smiled again, and said that if he was with her, she was happy. When Freeling came to inquire after the patient, he found her so much stronger, and Arthur so worn with fear and sleeplessness, that he insisted upon carrying off his friend in his brougham to his own house, and giving him a slight restorative. He might come back at once, he said; but only after he had had a dose of mixture, a glass of brandy and seltzer, and at least a mouthful of something for breakfast.

As Freeling was drawing the cork of the seltzer, Arthur's eye happened to light on a monkey, which was chained to a post in the little area plot outside the consulting-room. Arthur was accustomed to see monkeys there, for Freeling often had invalids from the Zoo to observe side by side with human patients; but this particular monkey fascinated him even in his present shattered state of nerves, because there was a something in its face which seemed strangely and horribly familiar to him. As he looked, he recognized with a feeling of unspeakable aversion what it was of which the monkey reminded him. It was making a series of hideous and apparently mocking grimaces – the very self-same grimaces which he had seen on his own features in the mirror during the last day or two! Horrible idea! He was descending to the level of the very monkeys!

The more he watched, the more absolutely identical the two sets of grimaces appeared to him to be. Could it be fancy or was it reality? Or might it be one more delusion, showing that his brain was now giving way entirely? He rubbed his eyes, steadied his attention, and looked again with the deepest interest. No, he could not be mistaken. The monkey was acting in every respect precisely as he himself had acted.

"Harry," he said, in a low and frightened tone, "look at this monkey. Is he mad? Tell me."

"My dear Arthur," replied his friend, with just a shade of expostulation in his voice, "you have really got madness on the brain at present. No, he isn't mad at all. He's as sane as you are,

and that's saying a good deal, I can assure you."

"But, Harry, you can't have seen what he's doing. He's grimacing and contorting himself in the most extraordinary fashion."

"Well, monkeys often do grimace, don't they?" Harry Freeling answered coolly. "Take this brandy and you'll soon feel better."

"But they don't grimace like this one," Arthur persisted.

"No, not like this one, certainly. That's why I've got him here. I'm going to operate upon him for it under chloroform, and cure him immediately."

Arthur leaped from his seat like one demented. "Operate upon him, cure him!" he cried hastily. "What on earth do you mean, Harry?"

"My dear boy, don't be so excited," said Freeling. "This suspense and sleeplessness have been too much for you. This is antivivisection carried *ad absurdum*. You don't mean to say you object to operations upon a monkey for his own benefit, do you? If I don't cut a nerve, tetanus will finally set in, and he'll die of it in great agony. Drink off your brandy, and you'll feel better after it."

"But, Harry, what's the matter with the monkey? For heaven's sake, tell me!"

Harry Freeling looked at his friend for the first time a little suspiciously. Could Warminster be right after all, and could Arthur really be going mad? It was so ridiculous of him to get into such a state of flurry about the ailments of a tame monkey, and

at such a moment, too! "Well," he answered slowly, "the monkey has got facial distortions due to a slight local paralysis of the inhibitory nerves supplied to the buccal and pharyngeal muscles, with a tendency to end in tetanus. If I cut a small ganglion behind the ear, and exhibit santonin, the muscles will be relaxed; and though they won't act so freely as before, they won't jerk and grimace any longer."

"Does it ever occur in human beings?" Arthur asked eagerly.

"Occur in human beings? Bless my soul, yes! I've seen dozens of cases. Why, goodness gracious, Arthur, it's positively occurring in your own face at this very moment!"

"I know it is," Arthur answered in an agony of suspense. "Do you think this twitching of mine is due to a local paralysis of the inhibitories, such as you speak of?"

"Excuse my laughing, my dear fellow; you really do look so absurdly comical. No, I don't think anything about it. I know it is."

"Then you believe Warminster was wrong in taking it for a symptom of incipient insanity?"

It was Freeling's turn now to jump up in surprise. "You don't mean to tell me, Arthur, that that was the sole ground on which that old fool, Warminster, thought you were going crazy?"

"He didn't see it himself," answered Arthur, with a sigh of unspeakable relief. "I only described it to him, and he drew his inference from what I told him. But the real question is this, Harry: Do you feel quite sure that there's nothing more than that

the matter with me?"

"Absolutely certain, my dear fellow. I can cure you in half an hour. I've done it dozens of times before, and know the thing as well as you know an ordinary case of scarlet fever."

Arthur sighed again. "And perhaps," he said bitterly, "this terrible mistake may cost dear Hetty her life!"

He drank off the brandy, ate a few mouthfuls of food as best he might, and hastened back to the Aburys'. When he got there he learned from the servant that Hetty was at least no worse; and with that negative comfort he had for the moment to content himself.

Hetty's illness was long and serious; but before it was over Freeling was able to convince Dr. Abury of his own and his colleague's error, and to prove by a simple piece of surgery that Arthur's hideous grimaces were due to nothing worse than a purely physical impediment. The operation was quite a successful one; but though Greatrex's face has never since been liable to these curious contortions, the consequent relaxation of the muscles has given his features that peculiarly calm and almost impassive expression which everybody must have noticed upon them at the present day, even in moments of the greatest animation. The difficulty was how to break the cause of the temporary mistake to Hetty, and this they were unable to do until she was to a great extent convalescent. When once the needful explanation was over, and Arthur was able once more to kiss her with perfect freedom from any tinge of suspicion on her part, he

felt that his paradise was at last attained.

A few days before the deferred date fixed for their wedding, Freeling came into the doctor's drawing-room, where Hetty and Arthur were sitting together, and threw a letter with a French official stamp on its face down upon the table. "There," he said, "I find all the members of the Académie des Sciences at Paris are madmen also!"

Hetty smiled faintly, and said with a little earnestness in her tone, "Ah, Dr. Freeling, that subject has been far too serious a one for both of us to make it pleasant jesting."

"Oh, but look here, Miss Abury," said Freeling; "I have to apologise to Arthur for a great liberty I have ventured to take, and I think it best to begin by explaining to you wherein it consisted. The fact is, before you were ill, Arthur had just written a paper on the interrelations of energy, which he showed to that pompous old nincompoop, Professor Linklight. Well, Linklight being one of those men who can never see an inch beyond his own nose, had the incomprehensible stupidity to tell him there was nothing in it. Thereupon your future husband, who is a modest and self-depreciating sort of fellow, was minded to throw it incontinently into the waste-paper basket. But a friend of his, Harry Freeling, who flatters himself that he can see an inch or two beyond his own nose, read it over, and recognized that it was a brilliant discovery. So what does he go and do – here comes in the apologetic matter – but get this memoir quietly translated into French, affix a motto to it, put it in an envelope, and send it in

for the gold medal competition of the Académie. Strange to say, the members of the Académie turned out to be every bit as mad as the author and his friend; for I have just received this letter, addressed to Arthur at my house (which I have taken the further liberty of opening), and it informs me that the Académie decrees its gold medal for physical discovery to M. Arthur Greatrex, of London, which is a subject of congratulation for us three, and a regular slap in the face for pompous old Linklight."

Hetty seized Freeling's two hands in hers. "You have been our good genius, Dr. Freeling," she said with brimming eyes. "I owe Arthur to you; and Arthur owes me to you; and now we both owe you this. What can we ever do to thank you sufficiently?"

Since those days Hetty and Arthur have long been married, and Dr. Greatrex's famous work (in its enlarged form) has been translated into all the civilized languages of the world, as well as into German; but to this moment, happy as they both are, you can read in their faces the lasting marks of that one terrible anxiety. To many of their friends it seemed afterwards a mere laughing matter; but to those two, who went through it, and especially to Arthur Greatrex, it is a memory too painful to be looked back upon even now without a thrill of terrible recollection.

MR. CHUNG

The first time I ever met poor Chung was at one of Mrs. Bouverie Barton's Thursday evening receptions in Eaton Place. Of course you know Mrs. Bouverie Barton, the cleverest literary hostess at this moment living in London. Herself a well-known novelist, she collects around her all the people worth knowing, at her delightful At Homes; and whenever you go there you are sure to meet somebody whose acquaintance is a treasure and an acquisition for your whole after life.

Well, it so happened on one of those enjoyable Thursday evenings that I was sitting on the circular ottoman in the little back room with Miss Amelia Hogg, the famous woman's-rights advocate. Now, if there is a subject on earth which infinitely bores me, that subject is woman's rights; and if there is a person on earth who can make it absolutely unendurable, that person is Miss Amelia Hogg. So I let her speak on placidly in her own interminable manner about the fortunes of the Bill – she always talks as though her own pet Bill were the only Bill now existing on this sublunary planet – and while I interposed an occasional "Indeed" or "Quite so" for form's sake, I gave myself up in reality to digesting the conversation of two intelligent people who sat back to back with us on the other side of the round ottoman.

"Yes," said one of the speakers, in a peculiarly soft silvery voice which contrasted oddly with Miss Hogg's querulous treble,

"his loss is a very severe one to contemporary philosophy. His book on the "Physiology of Perception" is one of the most masterly pieces of analytic work I have ever met with in the whole course of my psychological reading. It was to me, I confess, who approached it fresh from the school of Schelling and Hegel, a perfect revelation of *à posteriori* thinking. I shall never cease to regret that he did not live long enough to complete the second volume."

Just at this point Miss Hogg had come to a pause in her explanation of the seventy-first clause of the Bill, and I stole a look round the corner to see who my philosophic neighbour might happen to be. An Oxford don, no doubt, I said to myself, or a young Cambridge professor, freshly crammed to the throat with all the learning of the Moral Science Tripos.

Imagine my surprise when, on glancing casually at the silvery-voiced speaker, I discovered him to be a full-blown Chinaman! Yes, a yellow-skinned, almond-eyed, Mongolian-featured Chinaman, with a long pigtail hanging down his back, and attired in the official amber silk robe and purple slippers of a mandarin of the third grade, and the silver button. My curiosity was so fully aroused by this strange discovery that I determined to learn something more about so curious a product of an alien civilization; and therefore, after a few minutes, I managed to give Miss Amelia Hogg the slip by drawing in young Harry Farquhar the artist at the hundred-and-twentieth section, and making my way quietly across the room to Mrs. Bouverie Barton.

"The name of that young Chinaman?" our hostess said in answer to my question. "Oh, certainly; he is Mr. Chung, of the Chinese Legation. A most intelligent and well-educated young man, with a great deal of taste for European literature. Introduce you? – of course, this minute." And she led the way back to where my Oriental phenomenon was still sitting, deep as ever in philosophical problems with Professor Woolstock, a spectacled old gentleman of German aspect, who was evidently pumping him thoroughly with a view to the materials for Volume Forty of his forthcoming great work on "Ethnical Psychology."

I sat by Mr. Chung for the greater part of what was left of that evening. From the very first he exercised a sort of indescribable fascination over me. His English had hardly a trace of foreign accent, and his voice was one of the sweetest and most exquisitely modulated that I have ever heard. When he looked at you, his deep calm eyes bespoke at once the very essence of transparent sincerity. Before the evening was over, he had told me the whole history of his education and his past life. The son of a well-to-do Pekin mandarin, of distinctly European tastes, he had early passed all his examinations in China, and had been selected by the Celestial Government as one of the first batch of students sent to Europe to acquire the tongues and the sciences of the Western barbarians. Chung's billet was to England; and here, or in France, he had lived with a few intervals ever since he first came to man's estate. He had picked up our language quickly; had taken a degree at London University; and had made

himself thoroughly at home in English literature. In fact, he was practically an Englishman in everything but face and clothing. His naturally fine intellect had assimilated European thought and European feeling with extraordinary ease, and it was often almost impossible in talking with him to remember that he was not one of ourselves. If you shut your eyes and listened, you heard a pleasant, cultivated, intelligent young Englishman; when you opened them again, it was always a fresh surprise to find yourself conversing with a genuine yellow-faced pig-tailed Chinaman, in the full costume of the peacock's feather.

"You could never go back to live in China?" I said to him inquiringly after a time. "You could never endure life among your own people after so long a residence in civilized Europe?"

"My dear sir," he answered with a slight shudder of horror, "you do not reflect what my position actually is. My Government may recall me any day. I am simply at their mercy, and I must do as I am bidden."

"But you would not like China," I put in.

"Like it!" he exclaimed with a gesture which for a Chinaman I suppose one must call violent. "I should abhor it. It would be a living death. You who have never been in China can have no idea of what an awful misfortune it would be for a man who has acquired civilized habits and modes of thought to live among such a set of more than mediæval barbarians as my countrymen still remain at the present day. Oh no; God grant I may never have to return there permanently, for it would be more than I

could endure. Even a short visit to Pekin is bad enough; the place reeks of cruelty, jobbery, and superstition from end to end; and I always breathe more freely when I have once more got back on to the deck of a European steamer that flies the familiar British flag."

"Then you are not patriotic," I ventured to say.

"Patriotic!" he replied with a slight curl of the lip; "how can a man be patriotic to such a mass of corruption and abomination as our Chinese Government? I can understand a patriotic Russian, a patriotic Egyptian, nay, even a patriotic Turk; but a patriotic Chinaman – why, the very notion is palpably absurd. Listen, my dear sir; you ask me if I could live in China. No, I couldn't; and for the best of all possible reasons – they wouldn't let me. You don't know what the furious prejudice and blind superstition of that awful country really is. Before I had been there three months they would accuse me either of foreign practices or, what comes to much the same thing, of witchcraft; and they would put me to death by one of their most horrible torturing punishments – atrocities which I could not even mention in an English drawing-room. That is the sort of Damocles' sword that is always hanging over the head of every Europeanized Chinaman who returns against his own free will to his native land."

I was startled and surprised. It seemed so natural and simple to be talking under Mrs. Bouverie Barton's big chandelier with this interesting young man, and yet so impossible for a moment to connect him in thought with all the terrible things that one had

read in books about the prisons and penal laws of China. That a graduate of London University, a philosopher learned in all the political wisdom of Ricardo, Mill, and Herbert Spencer, should really be subject to that barbaric code of abominable tortures, was more than one could positively realize. I hesitated a moment, and then I said, "But of course they will never recall you."

"I trust not," he said quietly; "I pray not. Very likely they will let me stop here all my lifetime. I am an assistant interpreter to the Embassy, in which capacity I am useful to Pekin; whereas in any home appointment I would of course be an utter failure, a manifest impossibility. But there is really no accounting for the wild vagaries and caprices of the Vermilion Pencil. For aught I know to the contrary, I might even be recalled to-morrow. If once they suspect a man of European sympathies, their first idea is to cut off his head. They regard it as you would regard the first plague-spot of cholera or small-pox in a great city."

"Heaven forbid that they should ever recall you," I said earnestly; for already I had taken a strong fancy to his strange phenomenon of Western education grafted on an immemorial Eastern stock; and I had read enough of China to know that what he said about his probable fate if he returned there permanently was nothing more than the literal truth. The bare idea of such a catastrophe was too horrible to be realized for a moment in Eaton Place.

As we drove home in our little one-horse brougham that evening, my wife and Effie were very anxious to learn what

manner of man my Chinese acquaintance might really be; and when I told them what a charming person I had found him, they were both inclined rather to laugh at me for my enthusiastic description. Effie, in particular, jeered much at the notion of an intelligent and earnest-minded Chinaman. "You know, Uncle darling," she said in her bewitching way, "all your geese are always swans. Every woman you meet is absolutely beautiful, and every man is perfectly delightful – till Auntie and I have seen them."

"Perfectly true, Effie," I answered; "it is an amiable weakness of mine, after all."

However, before the week was out Effie and Marian between them would have it that I must call upon Chung and ask him to dine with us at Kensington Park Terrace. Their curiosity was piqued, for one thing; and for another thing, they thought it rather the cheese in these days of expansive cosmopolitanism to be on speaking terms with a Chinese *attaché*. "Japanese are cheap," said Effie, "horribly cheap of late years – a perfect drug in the market; but a Chinaman is still, thank Heaven, at a social premium." Now, though I am an obedient enough husband, as husbands go, I don't always accede to Marian's wishes in these matters; but everybody takes it for granted that Effie's will is law. Effie, I may mention parenthetically, is more than a daughter to us, for she is poor Tom's only child; and of course everybody connected with dear Tom is doubly precious to us now, as you may easily imagine. So when Effie had made up her mind that

Chung was to dine with us, the thing was settled; and I called at his rooms and duly invited him, to the general satisfaction of everybody concerned.

The dinner was a very pleasant one, and, for a wonder, Effie and Marian both coincided entirely in my hastily formed opinion of Mr. Chung. His mellow silvery voice, his frank truthful manner, his perfect freedom from self-consciousness, all pleased and impressed those stern critics, and by the end of the evening they were both quite as much taken with his delightful personality as I myself had originally been. One link leads on to another; and the end of it all was that when we went down for our summer villeggiatura to Abbot's Norbury, nothing would please Marian but that Mr. Chung must be invited down as one of our party. He came willingly enough, and for five or six weeks we had as pleasant a time together as any four people over spent. Chung was a perfect encyclopædia of information, while his good humour and good spirits never for a moment failed him under any circumstances whatsoever.

One day we had made up a little private picnic to Norbury Edge, and were sitting together after luncheon under the shade of the big ash tree, when the conversation happened to turn by accident on the small feet of Chinese ladies. I had often noticed that Chung was very reticent about China; he did not like talking about his native country; and he was most pleased and most at home when we treated him most like a European born. Evidently he hated the provincialism of the Flowery Land, and loved to lose

his identity in the wider culture of a Western civilization.

"How funny it will be," said Effie, "to see Mrs. Chung's tiny feet when you bring her to London. I suppose one of these days, on one of your flying visits to Pekin, you will take to yourself a wife in your country?"

"No," Chung answered, with quiet dignity; "I shall never marry – that I have quite decided in my own mind."

"Oh, don't say that," Marian put in quickly; "I hate to hear men say they'll never marry. It is such a terrible mistake. They become so selfish, and frumpish, and old-bachelorish." Dear Marian has a high idea of the services she has rendered to society in saving her own fortunate husband from this miserable and deplorable condition.

"Perhaps so," Chung replied quietly. "No doubt what you say is true as a rule. But, for my own part, I could never marry a Chinawoman; I am too thoroughly Europeanized for that; we should have absolutely no tastes or sympathies in common. You don't know what my countrywomen are like, Mrs. Walters."

"Ah, no," said my wife contemplatively; "I suppose your people are all heathens. Why, goodness gracious, Mr. Chung, if it comes to that, I suppose really you are a heathen yourself!"

Chung parried the question gracefully. "Don't you know," said he, "what Lord Chesterfield answered to the lady who asked him what religion he professed? 'Madam, the religion to which all wise men belong.' 'And what is that?' said she. 'Madam, no wise man ever says.'"

"Never mind Lord Chesterfield," said Effie, smiling, "but let us come back to the future Mrs. Chung. I'm quite disappointed you won't marry a Chinawoman; but at any rate I suppose you'll marry somebody?"

"Well, not a European, of course," Marian put in.

"Oh, of course not," Chung echoed with true Oriental imperturbability.

"Why *of course*?" Effie asked half unconsciously; and yet the very unconsciousness with which she asked the question showed in itself that she instinctively felt the gulf as much as any of us. If Chung had been a white man instead of a yellow one, she would hardly have discussed the question at issue with so much simplicity and obvious innocence.

"Well, I will tell you why," Chung answered. "Because, even supposing any European lady were to consent to become my wife – which is in the first place eminently improbable – I could never think of putting her in the terribly false position that she would have to occupy under existing circumstances. To begin with, her place in English society would be a peculiar and a trying one. But that is not all. You must remember that I am still a subject of the Chinese Empire, and a member of the Chinese Civil Service. I may any day be recalled to China, and of course – I say 'of course' this time advisedly – it would be absolutely impossible for me to take an English wife to Pekin with me. So I am placed in this awkward dilemma. I would never care to marry anybody except a European lady; and to marry a European lady would be an act

of injustice to her which I could never dream of committing. But considering the justifiable contempt which all Europeans rightly feel for us poor John Chinamen, I don't think it probable in any case that the temptation is at all likely to arise. And so, if you please, as the newspapers always put it, 'the subject then dropped.'"

We all saw that Chung was in earnest as to his wish that no more should be said about the matter, and we respected his feelings accordingly; but that evening, as we sat smoking in the arbour after the ladies had retired, I said to him quietly, "Tell me, Chung, if you really dislike China so very much, and are so anxious not to return there, why don't you throw off your allegiance altogether, become a British subject, and settle down among us for good and all?"

"My dear fellow," he said, smiling, "you don't think of the difficulties, I may say the impossibilities, in the way of any such plan as you propose. It is easy enough for a European to throw off his nationality whenever he chooses; it is a very different thing for an Asiatic to do so. Moreover, I am a member of a Legation. My Government would never willingly let me become a naturalized Englishman; and if I tried to manage it against their will they would demand my extradition, and would carry their point, too, as a matter of international courtesy, for one nation could never interfere with the accredited representative of another, or with any of his suite. Even if I were to abscond and get rid of my personality altogether, what would be the use of it?

Nobody in England could find any employment for a Chinaman. I have no property of my own; I depend entirely upon my salary for support; my position is therefore quite hopeless. I must simply let things go their own way, and trust to chance not to be recalled to Pekin."

During all the rest of Chung's visit we let him roam pretty much as he liked about the place, and Effie and I generally went with him. Of course we never for a moment fancied it possible that Effie could conceivably take a fancy to a yellow man like him; the very notion was too preposterously absurd. And yet, just towards the end of his stay with us, it began to strike me uneasily that after all even a Chinaman is human. And when a Chinaman happens to have perfect manners, noble ideas, delicate sensibility, and a chivalrous respect for English ladies, it is perhaps just within the bounds of conceivability that at some odd moments an English girl might for a second partially forget his oblique eyelids and his yellow skin. I was sometimes half afraid that it might be so with Effie; and though I don't think she would ever herself have dreamed of marrying such a man – the physical barrier between the races is far too profound for that – I fancy she occasionally pitied poor Chung's loneliness with that womanly pity which so easily glides into a deeper and closer sentiment. Certainly she felt his isolation greatly, and often hoped he would never really be obliged to go back for ever to that hateful China.

One lovely summer evening, a few days before Chung's

holiday was to end, and his chief at the Embassy expected him back again, Marian and I had gone out for a stroll together, and in coming home happened to walk above the little arbour in the shrubbery by the upper path. A seat let into the hedge bank overhung the summer-house, and here we both sat down silently to rest after our walking. As we did so, we heard Chung's voice in the arbour close below, so near and so clear that every word was quite distinctly audible.

"For the last time in England," he was saying, with a softly regretful cadence in his tone, as we came upon him.

"The *last* time, Mr. Chung!" The other voice was Effie's. "What on earth do you mean by that?"

"What I say, Miss Walters. I am recalled to China; I got the letters of recall the day before yesterday."

"The day before yesterday, and you never told us! Why didn't you let us know before?"

"I did not know you would interest yourselves in my private affairs."

"Mr. Chung!" There was a deep air of reproach in Effie's tone.

"Well, Miss Walters, that is not quite true. I ought not to have said it to friends so kind as you have all shown yourselves to be. No; my real reason was that I did not wish to grieve you unnecessarily, and even now I would not have done so, only – "

"Only – ?"

At this moment I for my part felt we had heard too much. I blushed up to my eyes at the thought that we should have

unwittingly played the spy upon these two innocent young people. I was just going to call out and rush down the little path to them; but as I made a slight movement forward, Marian held my wrist with an imploring gesture, and earnestly put her finger on my lips. I was overborne, and I regret to say I stopped and listened. Marian did not utter a word, but speaking rapidly on her fingers, as we all had learnt to do for poor Tom, she said impressively, "For God's sake, not a sound. This is serious. We must and ought to hear it out." Marian is a very clever woman in these matters; and when she thinks anything a point of duty to poor Tom's girl, I always give way to her implicitly. But I confess I didn't like it.

"Only – ?" Effie had said.

"Only I felt compelled to now. I could not leave without telling you how deeply I had appreciated all your kindness."

"But, Mr. Chung, tell me one thing," she asked earnestly; "why have they recalled you to Pekin?"

"I had rather not tell you."

"I insist."

"Because they are displeased with my foreign tastes and habits, which have been reported to them by some of my fellow-*attachés*."

"But, Mr. Chung, Uncle says there is no knowing what they will do to you. They may kill you on some absurd charge or other of witchcraft or something equally meaningless."

"I am afraid," he answered imperturbably, "that may be the

case. I don't mind at all on my own account – we Chinese are an apathetic race, you know – but I should be sorry to be a cause of grief to any of the dear friends I have made in England."

"Mr. Chung!" This time the tone was one of unspeakable horror.

"Don't speak like that," Chung said quickly. "There is no use in taking trouble at interest. I may come to no harm; at any rate, it will not matter much to any one but myself. Now let us go back to the house. I ought not to have stopped here with you so long, and it is nearly dinner time."

"No," said Effie firmly; "we will not go back. I must understand more about this. There is plenty of time before dinner: and if not, dinner must wait."

"But, Miss Walters, I don't think I ought to have brought you out here, and I am quite sure I ought not to stay any longer. Do return. Your Aunt will be annoyed."

"Bother Aunt! She is the best woman in the world, but I must hear all about this. Mr. Chung, why don't you say you won't go, and stay in England in spite of them?"

Nobody ever disobeys Effie, and so Chung wavered visibly. "I will tell you why," he answered slowly; "because I cannot. I am a servant of the Chinese Government, and if they choose to recall me, I must go."

"But they couldn't enforce their demand."

"Yes, they could. Your Government would give me up."

"But Mr. Chung, couldn't you run away and hide for a while,

and then come out again, and live like an Englishman?"

"No," he answered quietly; "it is quite impossible. A Chinaman couldn't get work in England as a clerk or anything of that sort, and I have nothing of my own to live upon."

There was a silence of a few minutes. Both were evidently thinking it out. Effie broke the silence first.

"Oh, Mr Chung, do you think they will really put you to death?"

"I don't think it; I know it."

"You know it?"

"Yes."

Again a silence, and this time Chung broke it first. "Miss Effie," he said, "one Chinaman more or less in the world does not matter much, and I shall never forgive myself for having been led to grieve you for a moment, even though this is the last time I shall be able to speak to you. But I see you are sorry for me, and now – Chinaman as I am, I must speak out – I can't leave you without having told you all I feel. I am going to a terrible end, and I know it – so you will forgive me. We shall never meet again, so what I am going to say need never cause you any embarrassment in future. That I am recalled does not much trouble me; that I am going to die does not much trouble me; but that I can never, could never possibly have called you my wife, troubles me and cuts me to the very quick. It is the deepest drop in my cup of humiliation."

"I knew it," said Effie, with wonderful composure.

"You knew it?"

"Yes, I knew it. I saw it from the second week you were here; and I liked you for it. But of course it was impossible, so there is nothing more to be said about it."

"Of course," said Chung. "Ah, that terrible *of course*! I feel it; you feel it; we all feel it; and yet what a horrible thing it is. I am so human in everything else, but there is that one impassable barrier between us, and I myself cannot fail to recognize it. I could not even wish you to feel that you could marry a Chinaman."

At that moment – for a moment only – I almost felt as if I could have said to Effie, "Take him!" but the thing was too impossible – a something within us rises against it – and I said nothing.

"So now," Chung continued, "I must go. We must both go back to the house. I have said more than I ought to have said, and I am ashamed of myself for having done so. Yet, in spite of the measureless gulf that parts us, I felt I could not return to China without having told you. Will you forgive me?"

"I am glad you did," said Effie; "it will relieve you."

She stood a minute irresolute, and then she began again: "Mr. Chung, I am too horrified to know what I ought to do. I can't grasp it and take it all in so quickly. If you had money of your own, would you be able to run away and live somehow?"

"I might possibly," Chung answered, "but not probably. A Chinaman, even if he wears European clothing, is too marked a person ever to escape. The only chance would be by going to Mauritius or California, where I might get lost in the crowd."

"But, Mr. Chung, I have money of my own. What can I do? Help me, tell me. I can't let a fellow-creature die for a mere prejudice of race and colour. If I were your wife it would be yours. Isn't it my duty?"

"No," said Chung. "It is more sacrifice than any woman ought to make for any man. You like me, but that is all."

"If I shut my eyes and only heard you, I think I could love you."

"Miss Effie," said Chung suddenly, "this is wrong, very wrong of me. I have let my weakness overcome me. I won't stop any longer. I have done what I ought not to have done, and I shall go this minute. Just once, before I go, shut your eyes and let me kiss the tips of your fingers. Thank you. No, I will not stop," and without another word he was gone.

Marian and I stared at one another in blank horror. What on earth was to be done? All solutions were equally impossible. Even to meet Chung at dinner was terrible. We both knew in our heart of hearts that if Chung had been an Englishman, remaining in heart and soul the very self-same man he was, we would willingly have chosen him for Effie's husband. But a Chinaman! Reason about the prejudice as you like, there it is, a thing not to be got over, and at bottom so real that even the very notion of getting over it is terribly repugnant to our natural instincts. On the other hand, was poor Chung, with his fine delicate feelings, his courteous manners, his cultivated intellect, his English chivalry, to go back among the savage semi-barbarians of Pekin, and to be put to death in Heaven knows what inhuman manner for the

atrocious crime of having outstripped his race and nation? The thing was too awful to contemplate either way.

We walked home together without a word. Chung had taken the lower path; we took the upper one and followed him at a distance. Effie remained behind for a while in the summer-house. I don't know how we managed to dress for dinner, but we did somehow; and when we went down into the little drawing-room at eight o'clock, we were not surprised to hear that Miss Effie had a headache and did not want any dinner that evening. I was more surprised, however, when, shortly before the gong sounded, one of the servants brought me a little twisted note from Chung, written hurriedly in pencil, and sent, she said, by a porter from the railway station. It ran thus: —

> "Dear Mr. Walters,
>
> "Excuse great haste. Compelled to return to town immediately. Shall write more fully to-morrow. Just in time to catch up express.
>
> *"Yours ever,*
>
> *"Chung."*

Evidently, instead of returning to the house, he had gone straight to the station. After all, Chung had the true feelings of a gentleman. He could not meet Effie again after what had passed, and he cut the Gordian knot in the only way possible.

Effie said nothing to us, and we said nothing to Effie, except to show her Chung's note next morning in a casual, off-hand fashion. Two days later a note came for us from the Embassy in

Chung's pretty incisive handwriting. It contained copious excuses for his hasty departure, and a few lines to say that he was ordered back to China by the next mail, which started two days later. Marian and I talked it all over, but we could think of nothing that could be of any use; and after all, we said to one another, poor Chung might be mistaken about the probable fate that was in store for him.

"I don't think," Effie said, when we showed her the letter, "I ever met such a nice man as Mr. Chung. I believe he is really a hero." We pretended not to understand what she could mean by it.

The days went by, and we went back again to the dull round of London society. We heard nothing more of Chung for many weeks; till at last one morning I found a letter on the table bearing the Hong Kong postmark. I opened it hastily. As I supposed, it was a note from Chung. It was written in a very small hand on a tiny square of rice-paper, and it ran as follows: —

"Thien-Shan Prison, Pekin, Dec. 8.

"My dear Friend,

"Immediately on my return here I was arrested on a charge of witchcraft, and of complicity with the Foreign Devils to introduce the Western barbarism into China. I have now been in a loathsome prison in Pekin for three weeks, in the midst of sights and sounds which I dare not describe to you. Already I have suffered more than I can tell; and I have very little doubt that I shall be brought to trial and executed within a few weeks. I write now begging you

not to let Miss Effie hear of this, and if my name happens to be mentioned in the English papers, to keep my fate a secret from her as far as possible. I trust to chance for the opportunity of getting this letter forwarded to Hong Kong, and I have had to write it secretly, for I am not allowed pen, ink, or paper. Thank you much for your very great kindness to me. I am not sorry to die, for it is a mistake for a man to have lived outside the life of his own people, and there was no place left for me on earth. Good-bye.

"Ever yours gratefully,

"Chung."

The letter almost drove me wild with ineffectual remorse and regret. Why had I not tried to persuade Chung to remain in England? Why had I not managed to smuggle him out of the way, and to find him some kind of light employment, such as even a Chinaman might easily have performed? But it was no use regretting now. The impassable gulf was fixed between us; and it was hardly possible even then to realize that this amiable young student, versed in all the science and philosophy of the nineteenth century, had been handed over alive to the tender mercies of a worse than mediæval barbarism and superstition. My heart sank within me, and I did not venture to show the letter even to Marian.

For some weeks the days passed heavily indeed. I could not get Chung out of my mind, and I saw that Effie could not either. We never mentioned his name; but I noticed that Effie had got from Mudie's all the books about China that she could hear of, and that she was reading up with a sort of awful interest all the chapters

that related to Chinese law and Chinese criminal punishments. Poor child, the subject evidently enthralled her with a terrible fascination; and I feared that the excitement she was in might bring on a brain fever.

One morning, early in April, we were all seated in the little breakfast-room about ten o'clock, and Effie had taken up the outside sheet of the *Times*, while I was engaged in looking over the telegrams on the central pages. Suddenly she gave a cry of horror, flung down the paper with a gesture of awful repugnance, and fell from her chair as stiff and white as a corpse. I knew instinctively what had happened, and I took her up in my arms and carried her to her room. After the doctor had come, and Effie had recovered a little from the first shock, I took up the paper from the ground where it lay and read the curt little paragraph which contained the news that seemed to us so terrible: —

"The numerous persons who made the acquaintance of Chung Fo Tsiou, late assistant interpreter to the Chinese Embassy in London, will learn with regret that this unfortunate member of the Civil Service has been accused of witchcraft and executed at Pekin by the frightful Chinese method known as the Heavy Death. Chung Fo Tsiou was well known in London and Paris, where he spent many years of his official life, and attracted some attention by his natural inclination to European society and manners."

Poor Chung! His end was too horrible for an English reader even to hear of it. But Effie knew it all, and I did not wonder that

the news should have affected her so deeply.

Effie was some weeks ill, and at first we almost feared her mind would give way under the pressure. Not that she had more than merely liked poor Chung, but the sense of horror was too great for her easily to cast it off. Even I myself did not sleep lightly for many and many a day after I heard the terrible truth. But while Effie was still ill, a second letter reached us, written this time in blood with a piece of stick, apparently on a scrap of coarse English paper, such as that which is used for wrapping up tobacco. It was no more than this: —

> "Execution to-day. Keep it from Miss Effie. Cannot forgive myself for having spoken to her. Will you forgive me? It was the weakness of a moment: but even Chinamen have hearts. I could not die without telling her. – Chung."

I showed Effie the scrap afterwards – it had come without a line of explanation from Shanghao – and she has kept it ever since locked up in her little desk as a sacred memento. I don't doubt that some of these days Effie will marry; but as long as she lives she will bear the impress of what she has suffered about poor Chung. An English girl could not conceivably marry a Chinaman; but now that Chung is dead, Effie cannot help admiring the steadfastness, the bravery, and the noble qualities of her Chinese lover. It is an awful state of things which sometimes brings the nineteenth century and primitive barbarism into such close and horrible juxtaposition.

THE CURATE OF CHURNSIDE

Walter Dene, deacon, in his faultless Oxford clerical coat and broad felt hat, strolled along slowly, sunning himself as he went, after his wont, down the pretty central lane of West Churnside. It was just the idyllic village best suited to the taste of such an idyllic young curate as Walter Dene. There were cottages with low-thatched roofs, thickly overgrown with yellow stonecrop and pink house-leek; there were trellis-work porches up which the scented dog-rose and the fainter honeysuckle clambered together in sisterly rivalry; there were pargeted gable-ends of Elizabethan farmhouses, quaintly varied with black oak joists and moulded plaster panels. At the end of all, between an avenue of ancient elm trees, the heavy square tower of the old church closed in the little vista – a church with a round Norman doorway and dog-tooth arches, melting into Early English lancets in the aisle, and finishing up with a great Decorated east window by the broken cross and yew tree. Not a trace of Perpendicularity about it anywhere, thank goodness: "for if it were Perpendicular," said Walter Dene to himself often, "I really think, in spite of my uncle, I should have to look out for another curacy."

Yes, it was a charming village, and a charming country; but, above all, it was rendered habitable and pleasurable for a man of taste by the informing presence of Christina Eliot. "I don't think I shall propose to Christina this week after all," thought

Walter Dene as he strolled along lazily. "The most delightful part of love-making is certainly its first beginning. The little tremor of hope and expectation; the half-needless doubt you feel as to whether she really loves you; the pains you take to pierce the thin veil of maidenly reserve; the triumph of detecting her at a blush or a flutter when she sees you coming – all these are delicate little morsels to be rolled daintily on the critical palate, and not to be swallowed down coarsely at one vulgar gulp. Poor child, she is on tenter-hooks of hesitation and expectancy all the time, I know; for I'm sure she loves me now, I'm sure she loves me; but I must wait a week yet: she will be grateful to me for it hereafter. We mustn't kill the goose that lays the golden eggs; we mustn't eat up all our capital at one extravagant feast, and then lament the want of our interest ever afterward. Let us live another week in our first fool's paradise before we enter on the safer but less tremulous pleasures of sure possession. We can enjoy first love but once in a lifetime; let us enjoy it now while we can, and not fling away the chance prematurely by mere childish haste and girlish precipitancy." Thinking which thing, Walter Dene halted a moment by the churchyard wall, picked a long spray of scented wild thyme from a mossy cranny, and gazed into the blue sky above at the graceful swifts who nested in the old tower, as they curved and circled through the yielding air on their evenly poised and powerful pinions.

Just at that moment old Mary Long came out of her cottage to speak with the young parson. "If ye plaze, Maister Dene," she

said in her native west-country dialect, "our Nully would like to zee 'ee. She's main ill to-day, zur, and she be like to die a'most, I'm thinking."

"Poor child, poor child," said Walter Dene tenderly. "She's a dear little thing, Mrs. Long, is your Nellie, and I hope she may yet be spared to you. I'll come and see her at once, and try if I can do anything to ease her."

He crossed the road compassionately with the tottering old grandmother, giving her his helping hand over the kerbstone, and following her with bated breath into the close little sick-room. Then he flung open the tiny casement with its diamond-leaded panes, so as to let in the fresh summer air, and picked a few sprigs of sweet-briar from the porch, which he joined with the geranium from his own button-hole to make a tiny nosegay for the bare bedside. After that, he sat and talked awhile gently in an undertone to pale, pretty little Nellie herself, and went away at last promising to send her some jelly and some soup immediately from the vicarage kitchen.

"She's a sweet little child," he said to himself musingly, "though I'm afraid she's not long for this world now; and the poor like these small attentions dearly. They get them seldom, and value them for the sake of the thoughtfulness they imply, rather than for the sake of the mere things themselves. I can order a bottle of calf's-foot at the grocer's, and Carter can set it in a mould without any trouble; while as for the soup, some tinned mock-turtle and a little fresh stock makes a really capital

mixture for this sort of thing. It costs so little to give these poor souls pleasure, and it is a great luxury to oneself undeniably. But, after all, what a funny trade it is to set an educated man to do! They send us up to Oxford or Cambridge, give us a distinct taste for Æschylus and Catullus, Dante and Milton, Mendelssohn and Chopin, good claret and *olives farcies*, and then bring us down to a country village, to look after the bodily and spiritual ailments of rheumatic old washerwomen! If it were not for poetry, flowers, and Christina, I really think I should succumb entirely under the infliction."

"He's a dear, good man, that he is, is young passon," murmured old Miry Long as Walter disappeared between the elm trees; "and he do love the poor and the zick, the same as if he was their own brother. God bless his zoul, the dear, good vulla, vor all his kindness to our Nully."

Halfway down the main lane Walter came across Christina Eliot. As she saw him she smiled and coloured a little, and held out her small gloved hand prettily. Walter took it with a certain courtly and graceful chivalry. "An exquisite day, Miss Eliot," he said; "such a depth of sapphire in the sky, such a faint undertone of green on the clouds by the horizon, such a lovely humming of bees over the flickering hot meadows! On days like this, one feels that Schopenhauer is wrong after all, and that life is sometimes really worth living."

"It seems to me often worth living," Christina answered; "if not for oneself, at least for others. But you pretend to be more of

a pessimist than you really are, I fancy, Mr. Dene. Any one who finds so much beauty in the world as you do can hardly think life poor or meagre. You seem to catch the loveliest points in everything you look at, and to throw a little literary or artistic reflection over them which makes them even lovelier than they are in themselves."

"Well, no doubt one can increase one's possibilities of enjoyment by carefully cultivating one's own faculties of admiration and appreciation," said the curate thoughtfully; "but, after all, life has only a few chapters that are thoroughly interesting and enthralling in all its history. We oughtn't to hurry over them too lightly, Miss Eliot; we ought to linger on them lovingly, and make the most of their potentialities; we ought to dwell upon them like "linked sweetness long drawn out." It is the mistake of the world at large to hurry too rapidly over the pleasantest episodes, just as children pick all the plums at once out of the pudding. I often think that, from the purely selfish and temporal point of view, the real value of a life to its subject may be measured by the space of time over which he has managed to spread the enjoyment of its greatest pleasures. Look, for example, at poetry, now."

A faint shade of disappointment passed across Christina's face as he turned from what seemed another groove into that indifferent subject; but she answered at once, "Yes, of course one feels that with the higher pleasures at least; but there are others in which the interest of plot is greater, and then one looks

naturally rather to the end. When you begin a good novel, you can't help hurrying through it in order to find out what becomes of everybody at last."

"Ah, but the highest artistic interest goes beyond mere plot interest. I like rather to read for the pleasure of reading, and to loiter over the passages that please me, quite irrespective of what goes before or what comes after; just as you, for your part, like to sketch a beautiful scene for its own worth to you, irrespective of what may happen to the leaves in autumn, or to the cottage roof in twenty years from this. By the way, have you finished that little water-colour of the mill yet? It's the prettiest thing of yours I've ever seen, and I want to look how you've managed the light on your foreground."

"Come in and see it," said Christina. "It's finished now, and, to tell you the truth, I'm very well pleased with it myself."

"Then I know it must be good," the curate answered; "for you are always your own harshest critic." And he turned in at the little gate with her, and entered the village doctor's tiny drawing-room.

Christina placed the sketch on an easel near the window – a low window opening to the ground, with long lithe festoons of faint-scented jasmine encroaching on it from outside – and let the light fall on it aslant in the right direction. It was a pretty and a clever sketch certainly, with more than a mere amateur's sense of form and colour; and Walter Dene, who had a true eye for pictures, could conscientiously praise it for its artistic depth and fulness. Indeed, on that head at least, Walter Dene's veracity

was unimpeachable, however lax in other matters; nothing on earth would have induced him to praise as good a picture or a sculpture in which he saw no real merit. He sat a little while criticizing and discussing it, suggesting an improvement here or an alteration there, and then he rose hurriedly, remembering all at once his forgotten promise to little Nellie. "Dear me," he said, "your daughter's picture has almost made me overlook my proper duties, Mrs. Eliot. I promised to send some jelly and things at once to poor little Nellie Long at her grandmother's. How very wrong of me to let my natural inclinations keep me loitering here, when I ought to have been thinking of the poor of my parish!" And he went out with just a gentle pressure on Christina's hand, and a look from his eyes that her heart knew how to read aright at the first glance of it.

"Do you know, Christie," said her father, "I sometimes fancy when I hear that new parson fellow talk about his artistic feelings, and so on, that he's just a trifle selfish, or at least self-centred. He always dwells so much on his own enjoyment of things, you know."

"Oh no, papa," cried Christina warmly. "He's anything but selfish, I'm sure. Look how kind he is to all the poor in the village, and how much he thinks about their comfort and welfare. And whenever he's talking with one, he seems so anxious to make you feel happy and contented with yourself. He has a sort of little subtle flattery of manner about him that's all pure kindliness; and he's always thinking what he can say or do to please you,

and to help you onward. What you say about his dwelling on enjoyment so much is really only his artistic sensibility. He feels things so keenly, and enjoys beauty so deeply, that he can't help talking enthusiastically about it even a little out of season. He has more feelings to display than most men, and I'm sure that's the reason why he displays them so much. A ploughboy could only talk enthusiastically about roast beef and dumplings; Mr. Dene can talk about everything that's beautiful and sublime on earth or in heaven."

Meanwhile, Walter Dene was walking quickly with his measured tread – the even, regular tread of a cultivated gentleman – down the lane toward the village grocer's, saying to himself as he went, "There was never such a girl in all the world as my Christina. She may be only a country surgeon's daughter – a rosebud on a hedgerow bush – but she has the soul and the eye of a queen among women for all that. Every lover has deceived himself with the same sweet dream, to be sure – how over-analytic we have become nowadays, when I must needs half argue myself out of the sweets of first love! – but then they hadn't so much to go upon as I have. She has a wonderful touch in music, she has an exquisite eye in painting, she has an Italian charm in manner and conversation. I'm something of a connoisseur, after all, and no more likely to be deceived in a woman than I am in a wine or a picture. And next week I shall really propose formally to Christina, though I know by this time it will be nothing more than the merest formality. Her eyes

are too eloquent not to have told me that long ago. It will be a delightful pleasure to live for her, and in order to make her happy. I frankly recognize that I am naturally a little selfish – not coarsely and vulgarly selfish; from that disgusting and piggish vice I may conscientiously congratulate myself that I'm fairly free; but still selfish in a refined and cultivated manner. Now, living with Christina and for Christina will correct this defect in my nature, will tend to bring me nearer to a true standard of perfection. When I am by her side, and then only, I feel that I am thinking entirely of her, and not at all of myself. To her I show my best side; with her, that best side would be always uppermost. The companionship of such a woman makes life something purer, and higher, and better worth having. The one thing that stands in our way is this horrid practical question of what to live upon. I don't suppose Uncle Arthur will be inclined to allow me anything, and I can't marry on my own paltry income and my curacy only. Yet I can't bear to keep Christina waiting indefinitely till some thick-headed squire or other chooses to take it into his opaque brain to give me a decent living."

From the grocer's the curate walked on, carrying the two tins in his hand, as far as the vicarage. He went into the library, sat down by his own desk, and rang the bell. "Will you be kind enough to give those things to Carter, John?" he said in his bland voice; "and tell her to put the jelly in a mould, and let it set. The soup must be warmed with a little fresh stock, and seasoned. Then take them both, with my compliments, to old Mary Long

the washerwoman, for her grandchild. Is my uncle in?"

"No, Master Walter," answered the man – he was always "Master Walter" to the old servants at his uncle's – "the vicar have gone over by train to Churminster. He told me to tell you he wouldn't be back till evening, after dinner."

"Did you see him off, John?"

"Yes, Master Walter. I took his portmantew to the station."

"This will be a good chance, then," thought Walter Dene to himself. "Very well, John," he went on aloud: "I shall write my sermon now. Don't let anybody come to disturb me."

John nodded and withdrew. Walter Dene locked the door after him carefully, as he often did when writing sermons, and then lit a cigar, which was also a not infrequent concomitant of his exegetical labours. After that he walked once or twice up and down the room, paused a moment to look at his parchment-covered Rabelais and Villon on the bookshelf, peered out of the dulled glass windows with the crest in their centre, and finally drew a curious bent iron instrument out of his waistcoat pocket. With it in his hands, he went up quietly to his uncle's desk, and began fumbling at the lock in an experienced manner. As a matter of fact, it was not his first trial of skill in lock-picking; for Walter Dene was a painstaking and methodical man, and having made up his mind that he would get at and read his uncle's will, he took good care to begin by fastening all the drawers in his own bedroom, and trying his prentice hand at unfastening them again in the solitude of his chamber.

After half a minute's twisting and turning, the wards gave way gently to his dexterous pressure, and the lid of the desk lay open before him. Walter Dene took out the different papers one by one – there was no need for hurry, and he was not a nervous person – till he came to a roll of parchment, which he recognized at once as the expected will. He unrolled it carefully and quietly, without any womanish trembling or excitement – "thank Heaven," he said to himself, "I'm above such nonsense as that" – and sat down leisurely to read it in the big, low, velvet-covered study chair. As he did so, he did not forget to lay a notched foot-rest for his feet, and to put the little Japanese dish on the tiny table by his side to hold his cigar ash. "And now," he said, "for the important question whether Uncle Arthur has left his money to me, or to Arthur, or to both of us equally. He ought, of course, to leave at least half to me, seeing I have become a curate on purpose to please him, instead of following my natural vocation to the Bar; but I shouldn't be a bit surprised if he had left it all to Arthur. He's a pig-headed and illogical old man, the vicar; and he can never forgive me, I believe, because, being the eldest son, I wasn't called after him by my father and mother. As if that was my fault! Some people's ideas of personal responsibility are so ridiculously muddled."

He composed himself quietly in the arm-chair, and glanced rapidly at the will through the meaningless preliminaries till he came to the significant clauses. These he read more carefully. "All my estate in the county of Dorset, and the messuage or

tenement known as Redlands, in the parish of Lode, in the county of Devon, to my dear nephew, Arthur Dene," he said to himself slowly: "Oh, this will never do." "And I give and bequeath to my said nephew, Arthur Dene, the sum of ten thousand pounds, three per cent. consolidated annuities, now standing in my name." – "Oh this is atrocious, quite atrocious! What's this?" "And I give and bequeath to my dear nephew, Walter Dene, the residue of my personal estate" – "and so forth. Oh no. That's quite sufficient. This must be rectified. The residuary legatee would only come in for a few hundreds or so. It's quite preposterous. The vicar was always an ill-tempered, cantankerous, unaccountable person, but I wonder he has the face to sit opposite me at dinner after that."

He hummed an air from Schubert, and sat a moment looking thoughtfully at the will. Then he said to himself quietly, "The simplest thing to do would be merely to scrape out or take out with chemicals the name Arthur, substituting the name Walter, and *vice versâ*. That's a very small matter; a man who draws as well as I do ought to be able easily to imitate a copying clerk's engrossing hand. But it would be madness to attempt it now and here; I want a little practice first. At the same time, I mustn't keep the will out a moment longer than is necessary; my uncle may return by some accident before I expect him; and the true philosophy of life consists in invariably minimizing the adverse chances. This will was evidently drawn up by Watson and Blenkiron, of Chancery Lane. I'll write to-morrow and get

them to draw up a will for me, leaving all I possess to Arthur. The same clerk is pretty sure to engross it, and that'll give me a model for the two names on which I can do a little preliminary practice. Besides, I can try the stuff Wharton told me about, for making ink fade on the same parchment. That will be killing two birds with one stone, certainly. And now if I don't make haste I shan't have time to write my sermon."

He replaced the will calmly in the desk, fastened the lock again with a delicate twirl of the pick, and sat down in his arm-chair to compose his discourse for to-morrow's evensong. "It's not a bad bit of rhetoric," he said to himself as he read it over for correction, "but I'm not sure that I haven't plagiarized a little too freely from Montaigne and dear old Burton. What a pity it must be thrown away upon a Churnside congregation! Not a soul in the whole place will appreciate a word of it, except Christina. Well, well, that alone is enough reward for any man." And he knocked off his ash pensively into the Japanese ash-pan.

During the course of the next week Walter practised diligently the art of imitating handwriting. He got his will drawn up and engrossed at Watson and Blenkiron's (without signing it, *bien entendu*); and he spent many solitary hours in writing the two names "Walter" and "Arthur" on the spare end of parchment, after the manner of the engrossing clerk. He also tested the stuff for making the ink fade to his own perfect satisfaction. And on the next occasion when his uncle was safely off the premises for three hours, he took the will once more deliberately

from the desk, removed the obnoxious letters with scrupulous care, and wrote in his own name in place of Arthur's, so that even the engrossing clerk himself would hardly have known the difference. "There," he said to himself approvingly, as he took down quiet old George Herbert from the shelf and sat down to enjoy an hour's smoke after the business was over, "that's one good deed well done, anyhow. I have the calm satisfaction of a clear conscience. The vicar's proposed arrangement was really most unfair; I have substituted for it what Aristotle would have rightly called true distributive justice. For though I've left all the property to myself, by the unfortunate necessity of the case, of course I won't take it all. I'll be juster than the vicar. Arthur shall have his fair share, which is more, I believe, than he'd have done for me; but I hate squalid money-grubbing. If brothers can't be generous and brotherly to one another, what a wretched, sordid little life this of ours would really be!"

Next Sunday morning the vicar preached, and Walter sat looking up at him reflectively from his place in the chancel. A beautiful clear-cut face, the curate's, and seen to great advantage from the doctor's pew, set off by the white surplice, and upturned in quiet meditation towards the elder priest in the pulpit. Walter was revolving many things in his mind, and most of all one adverse chance which he could not just then see his way to minimize. Any day his uncle might take it into his head to read over the will and discover the – ah, well, the rectification. Walter was a man of too much delicacy of feeling even to think of it to

himself as a fraud or a forgery. Then, again, the vicar was not a very old man after all; he might live for an indefinite period, and Christina and himself might lose all the best years of their life waiting for a useless person's natural removal. What a pity that threescore was not the utmost limit of human life! For his own part, like the Psalmist, Walter had no desire to outlive his own highest tastes and powers of enjoyment. Ah, well, well, man's prerogative is to better and improve upon nature. If people do not die when they ought, then it becomes clearly necessary for philosophically minded juniors to help them on their way artificially.

It was an ugly necessity, certainly; Walter frankly recognized that fact from the very beginning, and he shrank even from contemplating it; but there was no other way out of the difficulty. The old man had always been a selfish bachelor, with no love for anybody or anything on earth except his books, his coins, his garden, and his dinner; he was growing tired of all except the last; would it not be better for the world at large, on strict utilitarian principles, that he should go at once? True, such steps are usually to be deprecated; but the wise man is a law unto himself, and instead of laying down the wooden, hard-and-fast lines that make conventional morality so much a rule of thumb, he judges every individual case on its own particular merits. Here was Christina's happiness and his own on the one hand, with many collateral advantages to other people, set in the scale against the feeble remnant of a selfish old man's days on the other. Walter Dene had

a constitutional horror of taking life in any form, and especially of shedding blood; but he flattered himself that if anything of the sort became clearly necessary, he was not the man to shrink from taking the needful measures to ensure it, at any sacrifice of personal comfort.

All through the next week Walter turned over the subject in his own mind; and the more he thought about it, the more the plan gained in definiteness and consistency as detail after detail suggested itself to him. First he thought of poison. That was the cleanest and neatest way of managing the thing, he considered; and it involved the least unpleasant consequences. To stick a knife or shoot a bullet into any sentient creature was a horrid and revolting act; to put a little tasteless powder into a cup of coffee and let a man sleep off his life quietly was really nothing more than helping him involuntarily to a delightful euthanasia. "I wish any one would do as much for me at his age, without telling me about it," Walter said to himself seriously. But then the chances of detection would be much increased by using poison, and Walter felt it an imperative duty to do nothing which would expose Christina to the shock of a discovery. She would not see the matter in the same practical light as he did; women never do; their morality is purely conventional and a wise man will do nothing on earth to shake it. You cannot buy poison without the risk of exciting question. There remained, then, only shooting or stabbing. But shooting makes an awkward noise, and attracts attention at the moment; so the one thing possible was a knife,

unpleasant as that conclusion seemed to all his more delicate feelings.

Having thus decided, Walter Dene proceeded to lay his plans with deliberate caution. He had no intention whatsoever of being detected, though his method of action was simplicity itself. It was only bunglers and clumsy fools who got caught; he knew that a man of his intelligence and ability would not make such an idiot of himself as – well, as common ruffians always do. He took his old American bowie-knife, bought years ago as a curiosity, out of the drawer where it had lain so long. It was very rusty, but it would be safer to sharpen it privately on his own hone and strop than to go asking for a new knife at a shop for the express purpose of enabling the shopman afterwards to identify him. He sharpened it for safety's sake during sermon-hour in the library, with the door locked as usual. It took a long time to get off all the rust, and his arm got quickly tired. One morning as he was polishing away at it, he was stopped for a moment by a butterfly which flapped and fluttered against the dulled window-panes. "Poor thing," he said to himself, "it will beat its feathery wings to pieces in its struggles;" and he put a vase of Venetian glass on top of it, lifted the sash carefully, and let the creature fly away outside in the broad sunshine. At the same moment the vicar, who was strolling with his King Charlie on the lawn, came up and looked in at the window. He could not have seen in before, because of the dulled and painted diamonds.

"That's a murderous-looking weapon, Wally," he said, with a

smile, as his glance fell upon the bowie and hone. "What do you use it for?"

"Oh, it's an American bowie," Walter answered carelessly. "I bought it long ago for a curiosity, and now I'm sharpening it up to help me in carving that block of walnut wood." And he ran his finger lightly along the edge of the blade to test its keenness. What a lucky thing that it was the vicar himself, and not the gardener! If he had been caught by anybody else the fact would have been fatal evidence after all was over. "Méfiez-vous des papillons," he hummed to himself, after Béranger, as he shut down the window. "One more butterfly, and I must give up the game as useless."

Meanwhile, as Walter meant to make a clean job of it – hacking and hewing clumsily was repulsive to all his finer feelings – he began also to study carefully the anatomy of the human back. He took down all the books on the subject in the library, and by their aid discovered exactly under which ribs the heart lay. A little observation of the vicar, compared with the plates in Quain's "Anatomy," showed him precisely at what point in his clerical coat the most vulnerable interstice was situated. "It's a horrid thing to have to do," he thought over and over again as he planned it, "but it's the only way to secure Christina's happiness." And so, by a certain bright Friday evening in August, Walter Dene had fully completed all his preparations.

That afternoon, as on all bright afternoons in summer, the vicar went for a walk in the grounds, attended only by little King

Charlie. He was squire and parson at once in Churnside, and he loved to make the round of his own estate. At a certain gate by Selbury Copse the vicar always halted to rest awhile, leaning on the bar and looking at the view across the valley. It was a safe and lonely spot. Walter remained at home (he was to take the regular Friday evensong) and went into the study by himself. After a while he took his hat, not without trembling, strolled across the garden, and then made the short cut through the copse, so as to meet the vicar by the gate. On his way he heard the noise of the Dennings in the farm opposite, out rabbit-shooting with their guns and ferrets in the warren. His very soul shrank within him at the sound of that brutal sport. "Great heavens!" he said to himself, with a shudder; "to think how I loathe and shrink from the necessity of almost painlessly killing this one selfish old man for an obviously good reason, and those creatures there will go out massacring innocent animals with the aid of a hideous beast of prey, not only without remorse, but actually by way of amusement! I thank Heaven I am not even as they are." Near the gate he came upon his uncle quietly and naturally, though it would be absurd to deny that at that supreme moment even Walter Dene's equable heart throbbed hard, and his breath went and came tremulously. "Alone," he thought to himself, "and nobody near; this is quite providential," using even then, in thought, the familiar phraseology of his profession.

"A lovely afternoon, Uncle Arthur," he said as composedly as he could, accurately measuring the spot on the vicar's coat with

his eye meanwhile. "The valley looks beautiful in this light."

"Yes, a lovely afternoon, Wally, my boy, and an exquisite glimpse down yonder into the churchyard."

As he spoke, Walter half leaned upon the gate beside him, and adjusted the knife behind the vicar's back scientifically. Then, without a word more, in spite of a natural shrinking, he drove it home up to the haft, with a terrible effort of will, at the exact spot on the back that the books had pointed out to him. It was a painful thing to do, but he did it carefully and well. The effect of Walter Dene's scientific prevision was even more instantaneous than he had anticipated. Without a single cry, without a sob or a contortion, the vicar's lifeless body fell over heavily by the side of the gate. It rolled down like a log into the dry ditch beneath. Walter knelt trembling on the ground close by, felt the pulse for a moment to assure himself that his uncle was really dead, and having fully satisfied himself on this all-important point, proceeded to draw the knife neatly out of the wound. He had let it fall in the body, in order to extricate it more easily afterward, and not risk pulling it out carelessly so as to get himself covered needlessly by tell-tale drops of blood, like ordinary clumsy assassins. But he had forgotten to reckon with little King Charlie. The dog jumped piteously upon the body of his master, licked the wound with his tongue, and refused to allow Walter to withdraw the knife. It would be unsafe to leave it there, for it might be recognized. "Minimize the adverse chances," he muttered still; but there was no inducing King

Charlie to move. A struggle might result in getting drops of blood upon his coat, and then, great heavens, what a terrible awakening for Christina! "Oh, Christina, Christina, Christina," he said to himself piteously, "it is for you only that I could ever have ventured to do this hideous thing." The blood was still oozing out of the narrow slit, and saturating the black coat, and Walter Dene with his delicate nerves could hardly bear to look upon it.

At last he summoned up resolution to draw out the knife from the ugly wound, in spite of King Charlie, and as he did so, oh, horror! the little dog jumped at it, and cut his left fore-leg against the sharp edge deep to the bone. Here was a pretty accident indeed! If Walter Dene had been a common heartless murderer he would have snatched up the knife immediately, left the poor lame dog to watch and bleed beside his dead master, and skulked off hurriedly from the mute witness to his accomplished crime. But Walter was made of very different mould from that; he could not find it in his heart to leave a poor dumb animal wounded and bleeding for hours together, alone and untended. Just at first, indeed, he tried sophistically to persuade himself his duty to Christina demanded that he should go away at once, and never mind the sufferings of a mere spaniel; but his better nature told him the next moment that such sophisms were indefensible, and his humane instincts overcame even the profound instinct of self-preservation. He sat down quietly beside the warm corpse. "Thank goodness," he said, with a slight shiver of disgust, "I'm

not one of those weak-minded people who are troubled by remorse. They would be so overcome by terror at what they had done that they would want to run away from the body immediately, at any price. But I don't think I *could* feel remorse. It is an incident of lower natures – natures that are capable of doing actions under one set of impulses, which they regret when another set comes uppermost in turn. That implies a want of balance, an imperfect co-ordination of parts and passions. The perfect character is consistent with itself; shame and repentance are confessions of weakness. For my part, I never do anything without having first deliberately decided that it is the best or the only thing to do; and having so done it, I do not draw back like a girl from the necessary consequences of my own act. No fluttering or running away for me. Still, I must admit that all that blood does look very ghastly. Poor old gentleman! I believe he really died almost without knowing it, and that is certainly a great comfort to one under the circumstances."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.