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CHILDREN OF GIBEON.

BY

WALTER BESANT,

AUTHOR OF "THE REVOLT OF MAN," "DOROTHY FORSTER,"
ETC. ETC.

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PREFACE.

I have learned with pain that the Rev. Freeman Wills, Vicar of St. Agatha's, Shoreditch, has suffered some annoyance by being taken for the Vicar of St. Agatha's, Hoxton, whose church is mentioned in these pages. I deliberately chose the title of St. Agatha because there is no church with that name in Hoxton. Unfortunately I forgot to look through the list of churches in Shoreditch, of which Hoxton is supposed to be a part. I can only say that Mr. Freeman Wills is not the curate of St. Agatha's mentioned once or twice in these pages, nor was his the church which I had in my mind.

W. B.

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CHILDREN OF GIBEON.

PROLOGUE.

PART I.

POLLY-WHICH-IS-MARLA.

"SIT down, Hester, and let us talk. It is seventeen years since you saw me last."

"It isn't the time I grudge, my lady," Hester replied, plunging her bare arms into the soap-suds; "it isn't the time, but the things are promised, and a laundress's word is her work. If she breaks her word, it's leave the things and change the washing. And a lovely drying day."

She spoke with two pins between her lips. People of her walk in life, unless they happen to be Chinamen, always while they are standing at the wash-tub carry two pins in the corner of the mouth—they are not even safety pins; and the practice gives them for the time a curious thickness of speech.

"Let me talk and work at the same time, my lady, though it is such a long, long time since last I set eyes upon you; and a beautiful little creature you were, to be sure. Lor' a me!"

She was a woman of five- or six-and-thirty; country-bred, as you could very easily tell by the rosy hue of her cheek and by its amplitude, by her figure, full and comely, and by her breadth of shoulder. The London air—it is the fog in it, perhaps, or the smoke in it—produces in the second and all succeeding generations, a diminishing effect: it narrows and slopes the shoulders; it contracts the figure, it shortens the stature, and it makes the features small; in fact, it makes the London girl small all over, yet it doth not leave her without charms of her own, as is daily testified by many. This woman was a big woman, looking still as if she was fresh from field and country lane; her forehead was lined, her mouth was drawn—but this might be due to the presence of the two pins; her eyes were limpid and full and in colour brown, something like the eyes of a hare when she is not frightened. They were set and framed in a network of lines and crows'-feet, and when she was alone they had a trick of hardening. This may have been caused by trouble, or perhaps it was only the natural result of the weekly arithmetical exercise peculiar to her profession, and worthy of a Babbage, in which the good woman had to enumerate, divide out, add up and make to come right, all the socks, handkerchiefs, shirts, collars, and cuffs entrusted to her care. As for her features, they were plain and even rugged. A working woman may very naturally acquire, by the age of six-and-thirty, from her life of struggle and work, a very considerable amount of hardness. But with Hester the ruggedness seemed part of the original mould, as if Nature had left the face in the rough without the final stroke of the chisel. I do not think that Hester had ever been

beautiful; but by reason of her hair, which was still plentiful, and of a warm red colour, and her limpid eyes, she may have been in her youth pleasing to look upon. It seems a fond thing to speculate upon the possible beauty of a washerwoman in the vanished days when she was young. But it has a certain interest for us, because she had children with whom we have to do, and it is a melancholy reflection that so little interest is generally taken in the past beauty of a woman, whether she be a washerwoman or a duchess.

As for her expression, it was grave and even sad at times: and when she was hanging out the clothes, or when she was ironing, or whenever there were no pins in her mouth, her lips had a habit of silently monologuising, moving in the manner of one who speaks with great rapidity, but with no audible utterance. What she said in these soliloquies one knows not; perhaps she was rehearsing the weekly returns, as, "Six p'r o' socks, six; ten handkerchiefs, ten; seven shirts, seven," . . . and so on; accuracy in a washerwoman being as desirable as despatch in a dentist. Or in that silent and mysterious way she may have been recalling scenes in her past history. If so, they were not pleasing scenes. Mrs. Monument's face, to those few who can read the history of a life in a face, showed unmistakable signs of trouble; any one who knew the history of that trouble could without difficulty point to individual lines, wrinkles, and crows'-feet directly caused at various stages of it; to most of those who were ignorant of this history, and perhaps too much occupied by their own misfortunes to think much about other people's, the lines about the mouth, the wrinkles in the forehead, the set eyes, and the hardened mouth

conveyed no more meaning than an inscription in cuneiform. It is, in fact, only the novelist, and he only for purposes of his art, who studies the human face when it is past the time of beauty, and strives to read, with the help of what he knows, the emotions and sorrows which have left their mark upon it. It is too often, however, like reading a Greek classic with the help of an English crib, which has lost the charm of language.

"Seventeen years ago, Hester," said Lady Mildred, "I was taken to see your wedding at the village church, and I thought you the most beautiful and the most enviable creature I had ever beheld, in your white dress and your curls."

Hester played with the soap-suds and smiled. Then she frowned at her own foolishness, and then she smiled again. Since Lady Mildred was so good as to say she had once looked like a beautiful woman, it was not for her to contradict her; henceforth the memory of her wedding-day would possess another and a brighter association. But Hester, who was truthful by nature, had never been accustomed to think of herself as beautiful. Plain girls sometimes make their own consolations for themselves—notably, the comfortable assurance that as many plain girls get lovers as pretty girls—but they are never under any illusions as to their own looks. Hester, however, permitted her mind to dwell for a moment on the memory of her ruddy and rosy cheeks and white dress, and on the fashions of the year 1848, and the people in the church, and she smiled again.

As for the day, it was the brightest and warmest day in June ever known, and as for the year, it was

in 1866. The house was one of a small row of little five-roomed cottages, irregular, picturesque, with red-tiled roofs and red brick chimneys; they have now all been pulled down, not because the landlord was one of those who despise old things and love to tear down and destroy, like a First Lord of the Admiralty with the old ships, but because if they had not been pulled down they would have fallen down. Wherefore now, a terrace of little houses with bow-windows, built of grey bricks, all exactly alike and with slate roofs, stands in their place, and those who remember the former cottages fall to weeping when they pass that way. The houses stood in a strange and mysterious place, on the actual and visible marge of London, looking out upon the low green levels with which Hackney Marsh surrounds the river Lea and prohibits the further march of brick. White mists lie over the Marsh in winter afternoons and autumn evenings, and make it ghostly to look upon; but it is a keen and healthy air which sweeps across the plain, a good drying air for linen, and a bracing air for children with strong lungs and sound throats. Each of the cottages stood behind a long narrow strip of garden, which was by some laid out and planted with onions, cabbages, peas, potatoes, and beans, but in more than one case was left fallow, so to speak, dotted here and there with patches of turf, and decorated with bare masts or poles instead of trees, connected by ropes, with hanging linen instead of waving foliage and blossom. It was, in fact, a convenient spot for washerwomen, and Mrs. Monument "did," single-handed, or with only occasional help, for two or three of the first families in Homerton and Hackney, sister suburbs, which melt imperceptibly

into one another, and seem to differ in no other respect than that of magnitude. The fruits of her labour hung, every fine day and all the year round, upon the lines in the garden, and floated in the breeze, bulbous, spherical, wafted this way and that, with the undulations and the graces of a corpulent fairy, across the flower-beds where no flowers ever grew.

Beyond the garden the eye roamed free and unchecked across the Marsh, a bare flat expanse of green turf, cut into irregular shapes by the elevated roads which cross it, deserted in the morning, but in summer evenings and on Sundays covered with the lusty youth of Hackney Wick; beyond the Marsh is the Cut, up and down which go majestically the barges of the river Lea: then more marsh, and then the Lea itself, narrowed by reason of the Cut, with high banks of mud and still tortuous, as if resolved to keep its character to the very end. There are two bridges over it—one a narrow footway of wood, rustic, ancient, not without beauty; the other new and broad for carts and cyclists as well as for those who go afoot. The Marsh is not, it must be confessed, one of the most romantically beautiful spots upon the earth; but it lies open to all the winds of heaven; those who walk across its causeways may perhaps still get ague as they used to do in the brave old days, but at least they are outside the houses, which is a very precious thing to dwellers in Hackney and its sisters. In the eyes of Mrs. Monument the Marsh was chiefly delightful because all the winds which blew across it came to her drying ground fresh and free from smut. Can Hyde Park boast as much?

The cottage contained a kitchen or laundry, with

a red brick floor, looking upon the garden. Here were the wash-tubs, and a boiler, and pattens, and a board to stand upon. Behind it was a sitting-room, or living-room, and above were two bedrooms. Naturally the steam of the tubs filled the whole house and ascended continually unto the heavens like the smoke of Vesta's sacred fire—none of the Monument children except Polly can ever pass the steam of a wash-tub without being instantly transported back to Hackney Marsh and filled with the sense of a universal washing-day, as if the rivers and lakes of the whole world had been turned into hot and steaming soap-suds. Outside the door was a rustic porch grown over with jessamine, and within the porch at the open door stood a young lady. In the year 1866 she was four-and-twenty years of age, and in the eyes of her generation she passed for an extremely beautiful woman; her portrait may be found by the curious adorning any Book of Beauty belonging to that time. She wore a huge crinoline, she carried her hair in a big net, and, after the fashion of her time, she made herself look as short of face and of limb, as dumpy of figure, as nature would allow. When one thinks of that time, and of the truly sinful waste and throwing away of feminine loveliness and grace which went on daily and from year to year, it is not pity that one feels so much as blank wonder that women could be such fools as to disfigure and transform themselves.

As regards Lady Mildred Eldridge, one would have felt a very human pity, because, in addition to her hideous crinoline, she wore widow's weeds, with a vast quantity of that dolorous crape which every husband who truly loves his wife ought to forbid in his will,

"And to think, my lady," said Hester, "of your remembering me after all these years!"

"I remember, Hester, how sorry I was when you left the nursery to get married. It was the first grief of my life."

The woman's face darkened.

"To get married!" she echoed bitterly. "Oh! what fools girls are! Just to get married! To leave a pleasant home full of kind ladies who'd never throw them over, and run into the arms of the first chap who comes along with a smile and promise! If it wasn't for the blessed children, I sometimes wish I had thrown myself into the cold river the morning of my wedding. Perhaps it would have been better for them too." She wrung a handful of linen as if she wished it had been her husband's neck.

"Hester!" The young widow was frightened at her old nurse's vehemence. "Hester! Tell me something about it. And why have you taken your maiden name again?"

"I changed my name to get out of my husband's way; but it was no use."

"Out of his way?"

"Yes, my lady. But never mind about my troubles. And you with your own to bear, and a widow's cap and all at your age, poor dear!"

"I have been married too," Lady Mildred replied calmly, "and I have lost my husband. But about yours, Hester?"

"He is dead," the woman replied, with an obvious effort, as if it pained her so much as to speak of him. "He is dead, and I pray that my children may never hear tell of him!"

"I am sorry. Poor Hester!"

"There are some troubles." She left the wash-tub and sat down, wrapping her apron about her bare arms. "There are some troubles, my lady, that women needn't be ashamed of—such as men are born to as the sparks fly upwards—and there's some troubles that we can't think of, though we must, at times—let alone speak of. Troubles that spoil the lives of innocent children."

"There are, indeed, Hester. If these were yours, I am sorry for you."

"We came up to London," Mrs. Monument went on, "to get work. That's what he called it. Oh, fine work he got! He was a locksmith, and it's a trade which finds out a man's cleverness and leads him into temptations. Whatever his work was, there was always plenty of money, and I was happy. Oh, who could have told beforehand what was going to happen! Then my Joe was born."

"What did happen, Hester?"

"Nothing, my lady," she replied evasively; "only that I went to live by myself with the baby, and took my maiden name, and hoped never to see him again."

"And then?"

"Oh, he found me out. But he is——buried." There was just a slight pause, as if she was not quite certain whether he was actually buried or only dead, and still awaiting that rite, like one of the melancholy ghosts on the shores of Styx; though if they knew what was waiting for them on the other side they would perhaps send up word to their relations not to bury their bodies.

Everybody has remarked the fondness which all

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well-regulated women entertain for a good round solid aphorism. It never loses its freshness for them. Therefore it was natural for Lady Mildred to remark solemnly: "Where there is no escape from evil save by death, it is better that one should die."

"Provided it's the right one," said Hester. "Because, if I'd been took, what in the world would ha' become of the blessed children?"

"Where are your children, Hester? How many of them have you?"

"Polly-which-is-Marla," replied Hester, as if the four words made but one name, "is playing among the linen—bless her!—where she can't come to no more harm than a slap in the cheek from a wet arm or a flapping skirt." She went out into the sunshine and shaded her eyes with her hand, and called, "Polly! Polly! Come to mother!"

Then there came running out from among the hanging clothes a little girl of two years. She was an extraordinarily beautiful child, though her frock was ragged and dirty, and the cap tied round her head had seen long service. Her short brown curls lay over her forehead and pressed out the cap; her deep, mysterious eyes gazed shyly at the visitor; her parted lips made the sweetest rosebud of a mouth. Two years old! This is the age when the infant passes into the child; she is still irresponsible, without morals, and void of any principles whatever; she still possesses the infantine wonder; life is still full of novelty for her; none of the gilding has been rubbed off; she is always making new experiments, and continually breaking out in new directions; she talks a most charming language; she utters the most unexpected sentiments; and she

does the most delightful things. She is a flirt, a jilt, a coquette; she is as unreasonable as the wind; she is as uncertain as the weather; she is a doll, a treasure, a toy, an idol, and a little goddess. Of such there are tens of thousands in this land of ours, and I wonder how many of us have the grace to thank God for them!

"Why, Hester"—Lady Mildred was startled at this miracle of beauty—"your child is an angel; she is a fairy. Are all your children like this one?"

"Three of them are," said Hester. "They take after their father, who was as handsome, though undersized, as he was clever. Cleverness it was which ruined him, and his good looks did him no more good than to make him wicked and false."

"What is her name, Hester?"

"The name, by rights, is Marla, but we call her Polly, because the other is an outlandish name."

"Why did you call her Marla?"

"It was her father's doing. He would have it, and as I'd my choice with Joe and Sam, I had to give way, though I blushed for shame when I told the clergyman at the font."

"Marla! It is an odd name."

"My man, you see, my lady, was fond of his book, and perhaps he found the name in one of the books he was always reading. But there—it doesn't matter now; and I always call her Polly, which is handier and more natural."

"Yes—it is handier. Do you know, Hester"—Lady Mildred had the child in her arms—"it is strange! Do you know that the child is strangely like my own little girl?"

"Why, good gracious!" Hester threw up her arms

in astonishment at her own forgetfulness. "To think that I never even asked your ladyship if you had any of your own! But of course you have. There's the mother in your look, plain to see. Lord! the hunger in a childless woman's eyes!"

"I have only one—a little girl—about this child's age."

"None but a woman with children of her own," Hester continued, "knows how to carry a baby right. Now, to see your ladyship with that little one!"

"Where are your other children? I should like to see them all."

"I've got four more"—Hester forgot her work and the beautiful drying day in her maternal pride—"four more. First there's Joe. He's sixteen now, and tall for his age. Apprenticed to his father's trade, and handsome, though not clever, as his father was, which gives me hopes for him. It's the stupid lads that turn out the steadiest and do the best. After Joe comes Sam, and he's seven, bless his heart! For sturdiness and appetite there isn't his equal."

"Nine years between the first and second?"

"Nine years, my lady. Because my husband—he deserted me, I told you—I came away with little Joe. But he found me out after all those years, and came back to me. And then came Sam. After Sam came Claude."

"Was that name your choosing, Hester?"

"Lord! no, my lady. I should never have thought of such a fine name for my boy. It was his father's choice. He named the boy after some one in his books—Claude something, who, my husband said, was

one of the greatest men who ever lived. But he only seemed to me a rogue and a robber."

"It could not be Claude Duval?" said Lady Mildred at hazard.

"I think that was the name; but I don't rightly remember. When I took the baby to church I could only remember the first name, so he is Claude, and nothing else. He is six now and a beautiful boy—more like his father than me, and as like as two peas to Polly-which-is-Marla. After him comes Melenda, who is five—another heathenish name. But it's his choice, not mine. She's like Sam, not Claude. Just after Polly was born my husband left me again—thank goodness for it."

"Do not let us talk about him, Hester," said Lady Mildred. "It only vexes you."

Just then the children came home from school. First came Sam, a sturdy, red-haired child with bright eyes, and a face painfully like his mother's—chiselled hastily and with just a few strokes, rough but effective; the result being a broad forehead, strong chin, large mouth, and rosy cheeks. After him walked Claude—a pretty boy of six, who had very much the air of a gentleman in disguise, though his clothes were tolerably ragged. Last there came a little red-haired girl of five, exactly like her brother Sam. They emerged from the white curtains of drying linen and stood ranged in line before the porch.

"Here they are, my lady," said their mother, proudly reviewing her family. "This is Melenda, who's as good as gold already, and can be trusted with Polly. This is Sam. Hold up your head, Sam. It would do your ladyship good to hear that boy read. And this

is Claude. He's like his brother Joe and his sister Polly. They all favour their father—in outward looks only, I hope and pray."

Lady Mildred remarked how she kept recurring to her husband, whose memory she so much detested. It was as if he was always in her mind.

"Hester," she said, "do you alone provide for all these children? Is there nobody to help you?"

"Nobody," she replied. "It's terrible hard work, to be sure; and sometimes I wake in the night and think I must break down. And then we shall all have to go to the Union—you can see it from the back of the house—and me and them will be parted."

"Five mouths to be fed! It must take a great deal of washing to find food for so many."

"Yes, my lady. But there, I don't mind hard work. There's worse trouble than that for me to be afraid of—worse than hunger even for the little ones—that I dread day and night."

"Hester," said Lady Mildred, who still had the youngest in her arms, "let me help you. Let me take one of the children off your hands. Lend me this little one."

"Lend you my Polly!"

"Lend her to me, Hester. You can trust her to me. I am not a stranger to you. Let me take the child."

The mother snatched the little girl out of her visitor's arms.

"Part with my flesh and blood!" she cried jealously. "Give you my Polly!"

"If you think it would be for her good."

The woman hugged the child and pressed it closer

to her heart, and shook her head. But the tears came into her eyes.

"There is something on your mind, Hester," Lady Mildred persisted. "No; do not think that I want to know what it is. There is something you remember and something you dread. When you speak of your dead husband you look about you as if you feared he might be standing at your garden gate. Poor Hester! You must have had an unhappy life."

"An unhappy life—yes."

"He is dead and past our blame of it," said Lady Mildred. "Yet something survives. The memory——"

"The memory of it," Hester repeated—"the shame of it, for me and for the children."

"If you let me have the child, I will bring her up in ignorance. She shall have no knowledge of the memory."

"Do you want to make her my young lady's maid?"

"No. She shall be brought up with my daughter—her companion; she shall be educated with her. I will provide for her. As for separation from you"—Lady Mildred remembered that if she was to bring up the child as a young lady, Sam and Melenda and Claude might not, in the course of time, be quite desirable companions—"as for separation, you shall know always how she is going on; when she grows up you shall see her again if you wish it; she shall be told about her parentage nothing more than you please to tell her. Think! You will part from the child, but it will be for her happiness, and one less to work for."

"Oh, my Polly!" cried the mother. "As if I could think it a trouble to work for your dear little mouth!"

"Think of it, Hester. Take a week, a month, to consider."

To Lady Mildred's astonishment, Hester decided on the spot.

"You shall have her, my lady. Oh, to save them from what I dread day and night, I would part with them all. Take her—take her. To save her I would consent never to meet her again till we meet in heaven. Yet—oh, let me keep her just one night—my pretty darling!—to hold her in my arms one night longer."

"Oh, Hester!" said Lady Mildred, moved to tears. "I will be like a mother to her. She shall never be unhappy if I can help it. And as for you and yours, whatever happens, you will have a friend in me and mine."

"Oh, I know—I know. But promise me one thing, my lady. Let the child never learn, whatever happens, unless I tell her—only my boy Joe knows—that my name is only my maiden name; else she'll want to know her father's name. If when she grows up she asks about her mother, tell her that her mother was an honest woman. If she asks about her father, say that he is dead and buried long ago. There are five of them. One of them knows the secret already, but he keeps it close; perhaps the three left with me will find it out, but not Polly—not little Polly-which-is-Marla. God knows I'd never part with her—never—except for that one thing, so long as I'd a finger left to work with."

"She shall be happy," said Lady Mildred, "if I can make her happy. And you shall see her again. Somehow you shall see her. You shall not altogether lose her."

In this way little Polly-which-is-Marla disappeared from Hackney Marsh, and became Valentine or Violet, I know not which—adopted daughter of Lady Mildred Eldridge, and therefore granddaughter of the Earl of Haslemere, Knight of the Garter, and daughter of the late Sir Lancelot Eldridge, Bart., M.P., F.S.A. This was certainly very great promotion, and, if one may say so of a young lady of this tender age, as yet wholly undeserved.

* * * *

"Have I done well, Bertha?" asked Lady Mildred, over the two cribs in which, side by side, the two children were sleeping. Lady Mildred was a woman with many ideas, and Miss Bertha Colquhoun was the friend of her girlhood to whom she communicated them.

"They are curiously alike," said Bertha; "one might almost take them for twin sisters. As for your doing a wise thing, my dear Mildred, Time, the only infallible prophet, will disclose when the hour comes. I shall not give my decision till I hear his opinion. As for your doing an interesting thing, that is undoubted. Tell me, by the way, which is little Trix? I haven't seen her since she was in long clothes; and which is the little washer-woman of Hackney Marsh?"

"Why, nobody knows except myself and my solicitor. I was obliged to tell him. I have changed nurses, and managed so carefully that nobody can so much as guess. The child with the light blue ribbon round its neck is Valentine; the other is Violet. For both of them and for all the world Beatrice is lost, as well as Polly, until October 15, 1885, when Beatrice will come of age."

"Oh!" said Bertha, disappointed at not being

taken into the secret; "then I must wait like all the world, I suppose. But oh, my dear! Poor little Polly-which-is-Marla! Poor child, when she learns the truth!"

PART II.

THE STROKE OF FATE.

FOR eight years longer those strong arms worked without rest or pause over the wash-tub. Time, who possesses an apparently double movement, like a planet, and goes round and about among us while we go straight on, frequently remarked the unchangeable character of this good woman's life, for whom none of his seasons produced either joy or pain, except so far as they brought good or bad drying days. The lines were always up except in rainy weather, and they were always laden, for eight years, during which Mrs. Monument never flagged and never felt weary. In eight years Joe passed from a 'prentice to a workman; at the age of nineteen, like most of his fellows, he took a wife, herself seventeen; by the age of twenty-four he had five children. In eight years Sam advanced from seven to fifteen and became a pupil teacher, being resolved to achieve the position of Board School master. Claude was thirteen, Melenda was eleven, and Polly, of whom from time to time the mother heard the best accounts, was with her sister Valentine, or Violet, ten years of age.

Now, after eight years, Fate suddenly interposed, acting in that decisive manner by which she has always commanded so much respect, and even fear. It

is, in fact, the Oriental style, in which there is no hearing of a case, or pleading, or argument, or jury, or evidence, or court of appeal, or anything at all but the Caliph, the successor to the Prophet—may his soul have peace!—who knows everything, and orders everything, and lo! it is done, whether it be the lopping of a head, or the extermination of a family, or the elevation of a beggar in rags to a purple robe and a seat on a white ass and the post of grand vizier. In this case, as usual, the decree of Fate was final and irresistible. Mrs. Monument began to go blind. First, she became conscious of a curious dimness of vision, whereby the outlines of things were blurred; next she found that this dimness grew upon her; and finally, after the most dreadful apprehensions for the future, she sat down and folded her hands, and made Sam write a letter to Lady Mildred. She had now gone so blind that she could no longer see anything but "men like trees walking"; she would very soon cease to see them at all; then she would get to the end of her money; then, what would happen to the children?

When Lady Mildred came, in response to this letter, she was received, so to speak, by a boy who sat in the porch reading. As for the garden, it looked forlorn without the linen: the posts were there, and the lines, but there was no linen, though a most beautiful drying breeze was blowing over the Marsh from the north-east, and there was a warm sun in the sky. Stranger still, there was no smell or steam of soap-suds in the house, and the stricken worker sat in the inner room, hands crossed, in the patient expectant attitude of the blind.

The boy rose and pulled off his hat. Lady Mildred by this time had quite forgotten the child who, at five years of age, had the air and appearance of the descendant of fifty dukes. His face, however, had altered little; it was now a sharp and rather thin face, marked with a strange refinement and delicacy of outline. We do not generally associate such a face with a laundry. We are wrong, of course; because in every city, court, and on every village green, and wherever humans do congregate, there will always be found some child or children with the face of refinement and sweetness, not in the least like the rough and plain faces round them. A scientific person, I believe, would call them "sports," playfully implying that Nature must have her little distractions, and cannot abide for ever to be trammelled with law and rule. Perhaps, however, the scientific person would be wrong, and there may be nothing in man which is not hereditary, down to the cut of a nostril, the outline of a cheek, or the curve of a lip. If Claude's ancestors in the male line were known, for instance, we might trace every feature the boy possessed to some grandfather or great-grandmother. As for his mother's family, it is very well known indeed, and it is a most ancient and a highly honourable house, seeing that every man in it, from father to son, has, from time immemorial, worn the smock-frock or leather jerkin, driven the plough, fed the pigs, sowed and reaped, and sowed again, and has presently shut his eyes and been laid under a little mound of grass in the acre of the Lord. And as for distinction, why the sons of this House fought at Senlac, where they got defeated, after unheard-of bravery, and at Cressy and Agincourt and

Bosworth Field, and at Blenheim, and at Waterloo and Alma. Claude has every reason to be proud of his ancestors by his mother's side. But he did not get his face from any of them, because their faces, though scrupulously honest and sometimes clean, were never either refined or delicate.

"Please, ma'am, my name is Claude," said the boy, conscious that his name was much finer than Sam's; and indeed it is a very beautiful name, and many a city knight has to put up with one much inferior.

"Claude—yes—I remember you now." Lady Mildred remembered the story of his baptism. Was he really named after Claude Duval? "Let me look at you, boy! You are like your sister—Polly. Does your mother tell you about Polly-which-is-Marla?"

"Oh, yes. A fine lady came and took Polly away. Some day we are to see her again, when she comes home for good. She won't be proud, mother says."

Then Lady Mildred left him and went to see her old nurse. She observed, however, that the boy sat down again and buried his face in his book. "You poor soul!" she said. "Tell me all about yourself, and why didn't you send for me before? And what does the doctor say?"

Presently, after the first outpourings concerning the darkened eyes—"And now," said Lady Mildred, "about your children. Is Joe doing well? And has he turned out quite as stupid as you hoped?"

"Joe's a good workman, and he's in good work at Tottenham with a plumber and house decorator. He would marry at nineteen, like all the rest of them, and now there's five innocent babies, and she two

years younger than himself. But he's a good son always, though he can't help no one but himself."

"And Sam?"

"He's a pupil-teacher, and gets on wonderful. There never was a boy like Sam for getting on. He's made up his mind to rise in the world, and rise he will. Says he shall be master of a Board School before he's satisfied. Think of that for my Sam!"

"Good boy! And then comes Claude—the little fellow outside in the porch."

The mother shook her head.

"I don't know what will come to the boy, nor what trade he will take to. For he thinks about nothing but books and reading. Sam reads, too; but then Sam only reads what he wants, and what will be useful to him. Claude reads everything. Oh, dear, dear! his father was just the same. Always for ever with a book in his hand."

"Boys who read," said Lady Mildred, "often come to great honour. And what about Melenda?"

"She's at school yet. But she gives me a deal of trouble, my lady. I want to get her into good service, in a lady's house. But she won't go. She says all the girls at school are going to be free and independent, and earn their own living by themselves, and so will she. What do they know about it? Give me a good dinner every day, I tell her. That's the first thing. But the girls nowadays are all for freedom, even if they starve with it. There, my lady, that's enough about the children Tell me how my Polly grows, and if she's a good girl, and pretty behaved."

It certainly was a very good thing for the Monument family that it found a friend in Lady Mildred

at this juncture, when, if it had not been for her, the subsequent history of the family would have belonged to the simple annals of the workhouse. As it was, the sympathy of Lady Mildred proved of a very practical kind. First it procured for Mrs. Monument a cottage in an almshouse in the Tottenham Road, where she was near her eldest son Joe, and substantial help besides, so that she would be looked after and "done" for; and, as for Sam, it provided for that boy—though he never knew the fact—the means of continuing his course of study, and enabled him first to become a monitor with five shillings a week and next a pupil-teacher with sixteen shillings a week, and then to go to a training college, and finally to get a place as assistant teacher on ninety pounds a year with a five-pound rise. And as for Melenda, it kept her at school and found her in food and clothes until she refused to stay any more. And as for Claude, I suppose the boy's pretty delicate face and intelligent eyes had something to do with Lady Mildred's kindness to the boy; but she always said it was because she found him a natural lover of learning and devourer of books. At all events, she called him one day and held a very serious conversation with him.

First she asked him what he would like to be.

"I should like," the boy replied, reddening, "to go into a bookseller's shop. There's one in the Victoria Park Road, full of old books, where they want a boy."

"You would not be allowed to read the books. You would only sweep out the shop, put up the shutters, and run on errands."

The boy's face fell. To sit among books seemed to him the height of happiness. But to sit among

books and not be allowed to read them, that would be a fate worse than that of Tantalus.

"You should desire to get on, Claude. The love of reading may help you if you have the other qualities for success. Have you thought of anything else?"

No; he had no other ambitions.

"Now listen. Boys who read and are industrious sometimes get on very well. I fear it may be too late for you to do much, but you can try if you are brave."

What was he to try? Claude looked at her with great eyes of wonder. "I will give you a good education. I will take you away from this place and have you taught as much as you can learn. You shall be educated up to your capacity, whatever that may be." Claude felt himself, as to capacity, like unto the Great Tun of Heidelberg. His colour came and went; his heart beat and he choked. What was this great happiness that was coming to him? "When I learn that you have gone far enough, we will consider what you can do for your living. And remember"—she lifted an admonitory finger—"never pretend to be what you are not. You are the son of a working man and a working woman, though you will wear good broadcloth and go to school with boys who may pretend to look down upon you." Claude wondered what she meant. "As for your mother, you will go to see her whenever you can, and you will not neglect your brothers and your sister. Your future will depend entirely upon your industry and upon your ability. I think you will show ability, at least. If you do, remember that every avenue to success is open to you. That you will not understand at first. Say it to yourself until you do understand it. Say it when you read of any great

man. Never forget it. Though you are a poor lad, you may hope for everything and dare everything. But you must not be afraid to work and to wait; you must not be afraid of fighting or of speaking out. Above all things, work. Do you understand, Claude?"

The boy's heart glowed within him. But he could not answer. His tongue refused to move. He was frightened as well as dazzled at the prospect before him.

"Will you do your best, Claude?" Lady Mildred asked in a kinder voice.

"Oh! yes, yes," said Claude, bursting into tears.

"Your best, my boy. Your hardest and your best. You will either see me or hear from me often. I shall always know exactly what you are doing and how you are getting on. Oh! child, you are too young, yet, and too ignorant, to know what a magnificent chance you are going to have, I pray that you may not throw it away. If you do, the mud into which you fall will be Malebolge itself compared with the mud out of which you have been taken."

The boy understood little of these words except the great fact that he was going to learn unheard-of things; that he was no longer to wander on the Hackney Marsh, dreaming, but he was to work, something as his brother Sam was working, but with other aims, and, as he vaguely understood, with wider aims. He was to work, to fight, to wait, and to hope. In course of time success would be his. I do not know what were his ideas of success. A boy cannot frame or map out for himself a career; but he can feel that something is to be tried for and something won, and he can imagine for himself some of the glorious sensations of victory. Besides, the boy who accustoms him-

self to think of the world as something to be conquered, and of himself as a soldier of the future, has already won half the battle. For him there will be no false modesty. When the time comes, he will step into the front rank as one whose place is there, and that by divine right itself.

BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

AT NINE O'CLOCK.

THERE are many delightful and desirable rooms in London; the Pilgrim who is in Society is continually halting on his way to rest and refresh in these Houses Beautiful. But there can be no more pleasant place than that room in Lady Mildred's town house which the girls had made their own. It was on the ground floor; two windows looked through the foliage of lime, laburnum, and lilac, upon the Park, though with the road between; it had at one end a glass door opening upon a conservatory; it was always filled with the fragrance of flowers; and here the girls kept their own things—their very own—which they prized the most. Valentine had here her favourite piano, with her songs and music; the walls were hung with Violet's pictures, and there were portfolios filled with her sketches; there were cabinets full of treasures collected in their wanderings—things pretty, things ugly, things quaint, things precious, things worthless—memories of Egypt, Greece, Italy, and France and Germany—wherever the English girl is allowed to wander. It is not yet, but very soon it will become, the fashion for her to visit the States and Canada, the isles of the

Pacific, Australia, India, and far Cathay. Therefore the young ladies had nothing from these countries.

About seven o'clock on an evening early in July of the year 1885 the two girls were sitting together in this room, as was not uncommon with them. But it was their wont to be quiet, calm, and restful, as behoves young ladies who believe that life is always to be a long-continued and monotonous happiness in the midst of pretty things and soft cushions. On this occasion, however, they were greatly agitated. One of them, Valentine, was standing; the other, Violet, was sitting at the table. In her hand she held a pencil, and she was rapidly drawing figures on a sheet of paper.

They were about the same age, and that a youthful age; they were dressed exactly alike—they always dressed exactly alike — and for the evening. If a masculine pen may be permitted to indicate the outlines of their dress, leaving details to be filled up by the imagination of experience, they wore a dainty confection of pale blue silk called, I think, surat, which fell in long folds from the waist, and was caught up at one side showing a lace petticoat, which is a pretty old fashion come back again. The throat was a little open but not much, with folds of lace about it, and there was an arrangement of ribbons and loops about the waist. They were dressed well, in fact, yet with the appearance of simplicity. Their hair was of the light brown hue which is so much beloved by the English youth. Violet's was full of curls and curves and twists, which caught the light and scattered it about as a little waterfall in a mountain brook breaks and scatters the sunshine. Valentine's hair was slightly

darker in shade, not curly, but with a wave in it, and in her hair the sunshine lay and rested. They dressed their hair in the same fashion, and that not a common fashion; for it was parted at the side instead of in the middle—or as hairdressers, ignorant of Euclid, say, in the centre; it is a pretty fashion if there is a pretty face for the hair to encircle, otherwise the commoner methods are preferable. Their eyes were blue in colour, but not quite the same shade of blue; for Valentine's were certainly darker than Violet's, and like the hair, they absorbed the light which Violet's received and reflected: in other words, they were deeper and graver eyes. I would not for a moment suggest that they were more beautiful; that is matter for the jealousy of a lover, and nowhere are comparisons more odious than those concerning beauty. Argument on such a subject is purely vexatious and barren, and wastes the time which should be spent in thankful hymns for the precious gift of loveliness. Always those eyes are the most beautiful which belong to the woman one loves at any moment; and, until he meets his fate, a well-regulated young man should always be in love with somebody. The girls' faces were of the oval type, but, which is a most important distinction, of the shorter oval. The longer oval, in fact, is apt to degenerate into narrowness, with perhaps the expression of a bird of prey; while the shorter form allows of strength to the chin and breadth to the forehead and amplitude to the cheek. Venus should have an ample cheek as well as a smiling mouth and kindly, gracious eyes. There may be less capacity for philosophy, but there is more for mathematics, music, and the finer feelings in the shorter

than in the longer oval. A prolonged residence at Newnham would be necessary in order to carry on this delightful investigation to its legitimate end. And one need not here discuss questions on which even novelists, who are the only true philosophers of modern times, and ought to be the only statesmen, might disagree; besides, these girls were neither philosophers nor mathematicians. They were only girls who had been carefully educated at home, and knew a great many accomplishments and arts, had curiously pretty customs and pleasing manners, and practised, without knowing it, the most charming graces. But they knew no political economy, and they were not brought up to consider themselves bound to consider or to solve any social questions at all.

The girls were about the same height—that is to say, they were fairly tall; their carriage and bearing were alike; they looked like sisters, and were taken by strangers for twin sisters. There were, however, certain marked differences between them not immediately apparent which the stranger presently observed. Thus, Valentine was somewhat larger in person than Violet; and as to their voices, Valentine's was rich and full, Violet's was low and sweet. And as to their tastes, Valentine was a musician and a singer, while her sister painted with no mean skill, and drew, if not quite so well as Mr. Du Maurier, yet well enough to delight her friends and to please herself. Yet, which is a very curious thing and only to be accounted for by the fact that everybody knew they were not really sisters, it was universally agreed by all their friends that no one could possibly mistake them for sisters. One of them—there never was any conceal-

ment of this fact—was the only child of the late Sir Lancelot Eldridge, Baronet and Member for the county, who would probably have got in the Cabinet had his party returned to power in time. But they did not, and he was cut off at sixty-five, which is, for a statesman, early manhood, almost the first flush of spring promise. He left a quite young widow, Lady Mildred, daughter of the Earl of Haslemere, to take care of his infant daughter. The other girl—there was never any concealment of this fact either—was nothing in the world but the daughter of a mechanical person of the baser sort, a mere working man. She had been adopted by Lady Mildred, no one knew why, and was brought up with her own child. Her true name, though this was not generally known, was Marla, and she had been formerly known in her own rank of life as Polly, for short. One of them, therefore, was a very considerable heiress, and most desirable in point of family connections; the other had nothing at all, and her connections were presumably most undesirable.

"No one will maintain," said the World, "that the daughter of a working man and the daughter of a gentleman can ever stand upon the same level. Education can refine, but it cannot change base metal into gold."

Yes. Unfortunately there was a complication. No one, not even the girls themselves, knew which of the two was the heiress and which the simple working-man's daughter.

"This," said the World, "is wicked. Lady Mildred will not speak and no one knows, and there are hundreds of men only waiting to know which is which.

Is it right to ignore natural distinctions? Not to know; and it ought to be such a simple thing; and yet it is not possible to tell, and it disturbs all one's ideas. Why the Eldridges have always been remarkable for the beauty of their girls. But these girls are both beautiful. And of course one ought to read old descent in a face. But here both the faces might show long descent. What man would dare to face so terrible an uncertainty? Why he might be marrying into the most dreadful family possible. Was it right, could it be right, of Lady Mildred to take a girl out of the gutter and pretend that she is a lady?

There was once a nymph of surpassing loveliness who offered every one of her suitors a double acrostic, with an alternative: either they guessed it quite correctly without the aid of any dictionary, or if they failed in any one of the lights—it was a frightfully hard acrostic, which wanted both dictionary and encyclopædia and a complete acquaintance with the whole field of classical literature—that suitor was instantly decapitated, and so made way for another. If, on the other hand, he succeeded, this murderous young person bestowed upon him her blood-stained hand. In point of fact, though history passes it over, only one young man ever offered himself. He was the Prize Acrostic Guesser—the champion. They gave him the thing, in neat hendecasyllabics, and while he was reading it they proceeded to erect the scaffold. But in the confusion and excitement which always attends a coming execution he meanly ran away. In the end this princess died unmarried. There was also another young lady, strong and staying as to wind and limb, who offered to run races with her

suitors, on the same terms of death or victory. But Love's Nemesis came upon her too, for no one ever proposed to run with her on those terms, and she presently grew middle-aged and fat, and lamented the days of her beauty and her arrogance, and said that running races was unladylike and ought to have been discouraged long since, and it was wrong of her parents to encourage her. But it was too late, and now she leadeth apes by a chain. Lady Mildred presented herself and her two girls before society when they were twenty years of age, with a conundrum bearing much the same consequences.

She said, in fact, to the whole of the English youth, "Young gentlemen, here are two charming girls. They are natural, fresh, and innocent. I have kept them in the country for twenty years, so that they are healthy both in body and in mind. They are as pretty as most girls; they are accomplished; they are frank and they are good-natured; they are amiable, they are even clever. One is my daughter and the other is not; one is an heiress and the other is not. Fall in love, therefore, if you dare. Offer your hands if you dare. You may win a fortune or draw a blank. You may be grandson-in-law to an earl and son-in-law to a baronet, or you may find yourself surrounded by a troop of cousins with paper caps, aprons, bags of tools, sewing-machines, and with manners which generally accompany those emblems of toil. Is love worth such a risk?"

Apparently it is not in this cold and calculating age. The girls had gone through their first season, and not one man as yet had ventured. This did not disturb them in the least, for they were ignorant of

Lady Mildred's conundrum, and their thoughts were not bent on matrimony.

There was not wanting plenty of curiosity. There are always inquisitive persons whose imaginations are fired with every mystery, and can never rest until they know all about it. Some of these tried questioning Lady Mildred, and were coldly snubbed; some even tried the girls, who froze directly the subject was mentioned. But they learned experience, and presently grew wary and recognised the regulation smile of sympathy and the little laugh of apology with which the mystery was always approached. Some examined the various extant portraits of Sir Lancelot—that at eight years of age, that at twenty, that at forty, and that at sixty—and then furtively compared them with the two girls and sucked thereout no profit to themselves, but only more uncertainty; and others gazed upon Lady Mildred and watched her gestures, her carriage, her little distinctive mannerisms, if she haply had any, and then watched the girls, looking for some little trait in one of them—a turn of the head, a momentary emotion of the face, which might reveal the secret. There were hundreds of these indications. Unfortunately they were as remarkable in one of the girls as in the other. A mother, again, is generally found to show more tenderness towards her own child than to another, but Lady Mildred was tenderness itself towards both the girls; not the least difference could be observed in her manner towards either. Then there is the voice; but here specialists—that is to say, those who remembered Sir Lancelot—differed, because there were some who recognised in Valentine and some in Violet the tones of the late baronet's voice exactly reproduced.

And now the world was waiting. In three months Lady Mildred's daughter would be of age; perhaps the other one as well; but nobody cared about that. It would be impossible then to conceal the thing any longer. The heiress must receive her inheritance; the truth would be known; the parentage of the workman's daughter stand revealed; and the young men could come forward.

"Val," said one of the girls impatiently, "I really do believe that the evening of this day will never come."

"It is much longer than the very longest day of all the year, Violet; my dear, a longer day was never created," Valentine replied. "He belongs to both of us, absolutely and impartially, does he not?"

"That is agreed," Violet replied gravely. "He is our brother—brother to both of us."

"If we are to be proud of him," Valentine went on, "we are to be proud together. He is our own property—the property of both. If we are to be ashamed of him, we will be ashamed together."

"Ashamed of him," Violet repeated. "I suppose he will be like this." She had sketched a workman with a bag of tools in his hand, and a paper cap and an apron—a good-looking young workman. "This is the best chance for us, Val dear. But yet I don't see even in this case that we can be reasonably proud of him, can we?"

"Well," said Valentine, examining the sketch, "you have made him look respectable. Labour has its dignity. Can't we be proud of an intelligent working man?"

"Or he may be like this." She took up another sketch showing the conventional Ælf and 'Arry out for a holiday, arm in arm, roaring and shouting—they are

really very rare, these two, though they certainly can be found. "Or like this;" she showed a young fellow leaning in drunken pose against a lamp-post; "Or——" here she showed a dreadful, smug young man with fat cheeks and curly whiskers, a frock coat and baggy trousers, and a smile—one of those young men who read scientific books, live on temperance principles, and are virtuous—all with ostentation.

"Don't, Violet," said her sister. "Oh, I am sure we shall not be ashamed of him. Mamma would not have asked him to come here if he were like this—or this. But possibly he is a working man—what else can he be? We are only the daughter of one!"

"Perhaps," said Violet, "he may know which of us is his sister by some likeness to his father or his mother or himself."

"Or perhaps he may remember us. We were only two when we were taken from our—other mother; and he is three or four years older; he may remember his little sister."

"No: not after twenty years. But there may be a something—a family squint—but our eyes are straight; some people have hereditary teeth which stick out—but ours don't; or thick lips—but ours are not thick; or great ears which stick up—but yours are small and lie flat, and so do mine. Oh! there must be something, if it is only a disposition to drink."

"And then there would be no secret to tell us on the fifteenth of October. If there is anything, Vi, let us keep it to ourselves."

"I know what I should like to say." Violet sprang to her feet. "I should like to say: Brother—this is Miss Beatrice Eldridge—I am your sister. My name

is Polly—Polly-which-is-Marla." For they had heard so much of the family history.

"And I," said Valentine, "should tell him that you are quite mistaken, because I have always been convinced in my own mind that I am Polly."

"There are moments," said Violet reflectively, "when I feel unheard-of possible depths."

"And there are times," said Valentine, "when I feel inconceivable basenesses."

"Of course, the lower classes do feel depths."

"Of course, my unworthy thoughts are my inheritance."

"Then both of us," said Violet, "must call him brother."

"And he must call us both sister."

"The two together only make one sister. Then I suppose we must let him call us by our Christian name. Fancy a carpenter in an apron addressing you as Valentine! Oh! I shall box his ears."

"Violet"—Valentine dropped her voice and blushed at the thought of the thing. "Brothers—kiss their sisters. It will be dreadful if——"

"No," said Violet, firmly. "Certainly not. No carpenter shall ever kiss me."

"Sooner or later we shall learn the truth. Till then," said Valentine, "the question must not even be raised. Besides, if one hasn't seen one's brother for twenty years, one cannot very well be expected to—oh! Violet, everybody knows the story of the beggar who became a princess, but nobody knows the story of the princess who became a beggar, and put on rags and wandered about with poor people, Do you think she was ever happy, dear?"

"No," said Violet, shuddering, "she was always miserable, and she died young, and of a broken heart."

"I don't know. Perhaps she was a great joy to the poor people, and was able to do all kinds of things for them. I think I could put on the rags, Violet dear."

"You never shall. You in rags!" Violet shuddered again. "But they might be picturesque. You shall put them on, Val dear, and sit to me in them, and I will paint you so, and send the picture, if they will have it, to the Grosvenor."

"Bertha, stay here this evening. I want you to assist at a Family Function which is to take place at nine o'clock."

This was in another room—Lady Mildred's drawing-room—and there were present Lady Mildred herself and Miss Bertha Colquhoun, her old friend. Twenty years had passed over their heads. The former had never married again—the latter had never married at all; as regards the ravages of time, Lady Mildred was no longer young, but she was still comely, and Bertha was of like age, but less comely, because widows wear better than spinsters. It would be unkind to say more.

"What is it, Mildred?"

"I am going, this evening, at length, to make the girls acquainted with their——"

"At last! Oh, Mildred—and you have asked me to learn the truth with them. It is kind of you."

"Acquainted with—their brother."

"Oh! But—pardon me, Mildred—is that necessary? Their brother must be, I suppose, quite a com-

mon man. Is it well to pain the poor girls with such kinds of associations? I thought they—she—had been quite separated from the family."

"You shall answer the questions for yourself at nine o'clock, Bertha. Meantime, remember that it wants little more than three months to the time when my child must learn the truth, because she will attain her twenty-first birthday."

"But why not wait to tell them?"

"Both girls know the story of Polly, but to-day they heard for the first time that there is a brother, and that they are to meet him this evening."

"Poor girls!"

"They are now preparing themselves, I believe, for the reception of a working man."

"Poor dear girls!"

"And they are encouraging each other to receive him kindly. Before the truth is known to them, you see, they will have time to become fully acquainted with the whole of the other family."

"Poor Polly! Oh! Mildred, how could you!"

"Why do you pity Polly? She is as well bred as Beatrice: she is as beautiful. I shall not unmake the gentle breeding, though I take away the gentle birth."

"Still—poor Polly! Will she take her own name?"

"I do not see the necessity. She may just as well remain Valentine—or Violet Eldridge."

"I suppose the brother will come here straight from the public house, pipe and all?"

"Perhaps."

"No doubt he will. Poor girls! It is dreadful for them. After all these years of culture—of course, for one it will be only a little excitement which will

pass in three or four months, and she will be able to reflect that she knew all along that she was Beatrice. But as for the other—I repeat, Mildred, poor Polly! However, you have forgotten one thing."

"What is that?"

"Why in introducing their brother you will betray the secret, because the girls will find out the truth—everybody will find it out—from his likeness to one of them. So I shall be the first to learn the secret after all."

The four ladies dined together, but it was a silent banquet. The girls, for their part, said nothing at all, but looked at each other and at the clock. At half-past eight they adjourned to the drawing-room. The brother was to be introduced at nine. The girls, as the clock drew nearer to the hour, clasped each other by the hand, while Lady Mildred and Bertha fell into silence or only exchanged a word at intervals. And oh! how slowly moved the minutes!

At nine in the evenings of early July it is not dark, but only a little overshadowed, and there is quite light enough to discern faces, which is necessary for conversation. You may talk in the dark, but, as Charles Lamb once remarked, it is inconvenient having to feel your companion's face for the responsive smile. As the clock struck the hour the door was thrown open.

"Mr. Claude Monument!"

The girls caught at each other and gasped. Lady Mildred rose. In the door stood a young man who looked about him with troubled eyes.

"Good Heavens!" Bertha murmured, but I think everybody heard her. "The creature is a gentleman!"

Yes. He had on the outward garb of a gentleman, and he carried himself with the outward bearing of a gentleman. It was a rude thing for Bertha to say, but her mind was full of working men and pipes and aprons and the smell of beer, and she was surprised into rudeness, and she hoped that nobody would notice it. Now, there certainly was never yet in any history or in any country a carpenter or a smith or a working man of any kind who ever had a dress coat to put on unless it was to go out as a waiter in the evening. Could the young man be a waiter?

"My children," said Lady Mildred, taking the young man by the arm, "here is your brother; Claude, this is your sister Valentine and Violet."

"Good Heavens!" cried Bertha for the second time, as she pressed forward and peered curiously into his face. "Why, the man is just like both of them!"

CHAPTER II.

WHICH IS MY SISTER?

Lady Mildred touched Bertha on the arm, and they left the three together.

"Which of you," asked Claude, looking from one to the other, "which of you is my sister?"

The girls held each a hand and gazed into his face with wondering eyes, which met eyes of equal wonder. Neither of them answered, but all those wondering eyes softened and became humid. Is it a small thing, think you, for two girls to be unexpectedly presented with a grown-up brother? And that brother so desirable in outward looks? Is it a small thing for

a young man, especially a young man who has been lifted from the lower to the higher levels, to be presented with a sister who has been similarly transplanted, and to outward seeming has proved equal to the change? To be sure he had already a sister, but she was Melenda, and two brothers, but one was Joe and one was Sam.

Claude saw before him two girls, beautiful exceedingly and strangely alike each other; Nature, as we have already heard, having been so good as to lend a most generous assistance to Lady Mildred. He thought of Melenda. Good Heavens! if one of these was his own sister and the other Lady Mildred's daughter—and the features of both in the soft summer twilight had the same delicacy, their eyes the same purity, their lips the same sweetness—how could one of these girls be his own sister, and the sister of Melenda? The girls, for their part, saw a young man with straight and regular features, broad forehead, resolute lips, and steady, serious eyes—a young man, somewhat slight in figure, but well shaped and of grave expression—and they were overwhelmed. This was their brother, like one of themselves they thought, the child of a London working man. By what arts had he been transformed into a gentleman?

"Which of you," he repeated, "is my sister?"

"We do not know, Claude," said Violet, thinking guiltily of her sketches.

He turned to the other girl.

"We do not know," Valentine repeated.

"You do not know? Lady Mildred told me yesterday that she would give me a sister."

"We do not know," said Violet, for the third

time; "we thought that perhaps you would recognise your sister, or might know her by some likeness to—your father, for instance."

"I do not remember my father. He has been dead a great many years. I have forgotten my sister entirely, and I was never told that Lady Mildred had taken her."

"Claude," said Valentine, "we must both be your sisters."

"I will tell you," said Violet, "Polly's history brought down to this very day. Listen. She was found by Lady Mildred nineteen years ago, and was taken from her playground, which was also the drying yard, for her mother was a washerwoman. I never see linen hanging out to dry without thinking of that day. She was playing hide-and-seek all by herself among the wet sheets, no doubt catching a dreadful cold, when she was found and carried away. She was a pretty child, and curiously like little Beatrice. Well, she was educated with Beatrice, and no difference at all was made between them, and they were called Valentine and Violet, but they knew all along that one was Beatrice and the other was Polly. They had the same masters, they learned the same things, and had the same friends. And now we are grown up and have come out, and people when they don't know the story—but they are very few—think us sisters, and say there is no doubt about our descent from the illustrious house of Eldridge. It would be for some girls awkward to explain, but we are used to it, and now point out without any confusion that one of us is Beatrice Eldridge and the other is Polly—what is the name Claude? I did not quite catch your name, which we have never been told."

"Monument."

"Monument." Violet considered the name for a moment. "Monument. It might have been worse. Monument. Fancy being a Monument! Little Trix has grown into tall Beatrice—we are both exactly the same height. Little Polly has also grown into big Polly, which is short for Marla, her real name—we know that part of the family history too." Claude thought that he could perceive the least possible vein of bitterness under this bright talk, but then he was naturally sensitive about his reception. "Don't forget, Claude," she added, "that we think quite as much about Beatrice as about Polly. Do we not, Val?"

"Quite as much," replied Valentine, gravely; "we must not be ashamed of Beatrice because she has not the same picturesqueness of birth as her sister. Please, Claude, get into the habit of remembering that Violet is really Beatrice, and that I am your very own sister. I am sure of it. Why, I actually remember playing about among the clothes. I think—but I am not quite sure—that I remember the cold I caught."

"She is quite wrong, Claude," Violet interposed. "When I shut my eyes I can really see the wet sheets, and if you want any further proof you will very soon find yourself looking to Valentine for everything which requires the instinctive impulse of generosity."

"Oh! Violet!"

"Is it possible? You do not know?" he repeated.

"We do not know," they assured him together, and for the fourth time.

"Then what are we to do?"

The girls looked at each other and shook their

heads. What were they to do? The situation was embarrassing, but it was what they expected.

"We had made up our minds before you came what we were going to do. You will have to treat us as if we were both your sisters, until you find out which of us it is, and after that we will consider the position again. But," said Violet, clasping her hands, "oh! the joy and comfort of having a brother so promising as you! My dearest Val, think how very, very few brotherless girls like you and me ever get such a chance as a full-grown brother given to them, and a brother too—who—looks," she spoke quite slowly and with a sigh of relief between each word, "who—looks—as—if—we—should—actually—be proud of him."

Claude blushed, but it was growing too late to see that lingering note of youth.

"You might have come home from a desert island, Claude, after you had been wrecked and been given up for lost for nineteen years. But then there would have been a sweetheart waiting for you—they always have a sweet——oh! but perhaps there is——"

"No," said Claude, laughing, "there is not."

"I am very glad, because we shall have you all to ourselves. You might have been brought to us when you were a schoolboy, and then you would have tortured and plagued us. You might have been kept back for another ten years, and then we should have been old women. Oh! it is much better as it is. You will try to like us, won't you?"

"Will you try to like me?" Claude replied, "and not expect too much of me?"

"You will tell us presently"—it was always Violet who continued to talk. She was a little flushed, and

her eyes were brighter than usual, "You will tell us presently," she said, "how is it that you have become a—a gentleman." Then, as if fearing that she might have given pain, she added, "Because sons of working men do not often look and speak like you."

"I will tell you presently," he replied. "Did you think I should come straight from a workshop?"

"This is what Violet drew," said Valentine, showing him the sketches; "we pictured the very worst you see."

"I see," said Claude, laughing. "But the sketches are delightful. May I take them? Thank you. Well, then, let us sit down, and I will tell you all about it."

So they sat down, and he, like Æneas, began his moving tale, and they, like two twin Didos, listened. When he mentioned the trade of his father and the calling of his mother, Violet begged him earnestly not to speak of those things if they were painful to him. He declared, however, and it seemed strange to her, that it was not in the least painful to him to feel that his mother had been a washerwoman. To think of one's own mother earning her bread at a wash-tub!

Claude carried on his narration into his school-days, where he fought his way to the front and won scholarships and prizes.

"I know now," he said, "why Lady Mildred came to see me and why she fired me with ambition. Once she took me to the theatre, and between the acts asked me if I would rather be one of the actors on the stage or the author of the piece or one of the gentlemen in the stalls, because if I wished I could become any one of them. And once she took me into the Park in her carriage and showed me the great people, and asked

me if I wished to be one of them, because I could if I wished. And again she took me to a court of justice, and asked me if I would like to be the counsel pleading in the case, or the judge who heard it, because it depended wholly on myself. And then to a church where there was a bishop preaching, and she asked me if I would like to be a bishop. Always as if the highest was within my reach if I chose. So that I never felt as if the accident of obscure birth was going to be an obstacle in my way. And indeed it has not been any hindrance, so far."

"That was like her," said Valentine, "to fill you with noble ambitions."

"And besides, my mother was no longer a laundress, and I came, no doubt through Lady Mildred's promptings, to think of her courage and steadfast love and the whole life that she gave freely to her children."

"Yes, Claude," said Violet meekly.

"It was through Lady Mildred that I learned to love the hard work which was to be my ladder. I owe everything—everything—to her. And now I owe a sister." He offered, with a little shyness, a hand to each.

"And what are you now, Claude?"

"I am a barrister of the Inner Temple, newly called, and as yet without a brief or a client; but they will come."

"He is a barrister, Val—oh!"

"And I am a Fellow of Trinity."

"Oh! Violet, he is actually a Fellow of Trinity!" They clasped hands of admiration and of joy. Could they have hoped or dreamed of such a thing?

"Now you know all. I am something of a scholar and a good deal of a student. And I have enormous

ambitions, of which I will tell you another time if I may."

"Tell us everything," said Valentine; "do not have any half confidences with us. Tell us all about yourself. It is something only to know what a man's ambitions are. Remember we have some right to your confidences. We are your sisters, Claude."

"You shall have all my confidences. But do not expect too much of me. Do not be disappointed in me. As far as I have gone, it is certainly true that no one could have done much more than I have done. I am Fabri Filius, son of a smith, so entered in the college books. The University is open to all the world, but of course everybody understands that if the son of a working man enters, he should justify his admission."

"You have already justified yours, then," said Valentine. "Oh! Claude, we are proud of you."

"But how am I to justify my admission?" asked Violet. "Because I am also *Fabri Filia*—that is good Latin—the daughter of the smith? Don't shake your head at me, Valentine dear, or I will call you Beatrice at once and for good. You see, Claude, Val and I have double the number of ancestors. For instance, we have four grandfathers instead of two. Two of them used to wear straw round their legs and smock frocks, and they said all day, 'Gee—who! a!' The dear old men! And as for the other two, one tied a beautiful blue garter round his leg, and had a gold collar to hang round his neck, and on grand occasions he put a gold coronet on his head; and the other was a baronet, and lived in a great house, and voted solidly with the Conservatives. This wealth of

grandfathers naturally makes us proud. But you have no share in two of them, poor boy!"

Claude laughed.

"I have tried to persuade myself," he said, "that it makes no difference at all what a man's birth may have been. But of course I don't quite believe it. I am always measuring my own stature with that of my friends, and asking myself if I stand on their level as regards—what constitutes a gentleman. If I do not, forgive me and help me."

"But you do," said Valentine; "of course you do."

"Any man may make himself a scholar and a Fellow of Trinity, and even a great barrister, but I am not certain whether any man may make himself a gentleman. Do you think that after any kind of intellectual success, even the highest, a man may ever be able to say to himself, 'I am a gentleman at last; I have the instincts as well as the training of a gentleman'?"

"You have them already," said Valentine, confidently; "one can see them in your face."

"The family name is Monument," said Violet quietly.

"Quite so," Claude replied; "and the name is associated with memories. Did not Lady Mildred tell you anything about your family?"

"Nothing except my father was a smith and that my own name is Marla or Polly."

"Now tell us," said Valentine, "about the family. Have we any other relations besides yourself, Claude?"

"My dear," said Violet, "should we enquire further than is necessary? There must be cousins by hundreds. But go on, Claude."

"First there is my mother."

"Oh!" both cried out. Then their other mother was living.

"She is blind, and has ceased to work for many years. She is now in an almshouse."

"Claude, you cannot suffer her to stay there."

"She is happier there. Lady Mildred made me promise to let her stay. Do not be ashamed of the almshouse."

"Poor mother!" said Valentine; "blind, and in an almshouse."

"One would much rather have heard," said Violet, "that she was the widow of a retired officer and living nicely in a villa at Southsea. But if she is happy—go on, Claude. Is our father living—in another almshouse?"

"No; he is dead," said Claude gravely. "We ought to be proud of my father. He was clever in his trade; he was sober and industrious; he was honest and respected: what more can one ask of one's father? Joe remembers him well. It is from Joe that I have heard about my father. He was but a working man, but I am proud of him."

"We will be proud of him too," said Valentine, though as yet she saw little room for pride in a father who only possessed the very simple virtues of honesty, industry, and skill. You perceive that she was deplorably ignorant of the world, where we are constantly brought to a standstill and provoked into wrath just by the lack of these very simple qualities.

"Did Polly," Violet continued, "have any other brothers and sisters? She hopes on the whole that she did not, because it is impossible they could all be so nice as you, Claude."

"She had two other brothers and one sister. First there is Joe."

"My brother Joe. It sounds oddly at first. Joe—Joseph—Joe. I think Joseph—no, Joe—is better. We will call him Joe, Val. He is no doubt a working man."

"He is the eldest and is a locksmith, as his father was before him. He is now six-and-thirty years of age, though he looks older."

"Is he—does he—go about with that red handkerchief round his throat that we were talking of?"

"Joe is a smith"—Claude evaded the question—"and he works for a builder and decorator. Of course he looks like what he is—a working man."

"Things are being brought home to us, Val," said Violet. "Go on, Claude."

"He is a good-natured man and he has ten children."

"Ten children? They are our nephews and nieces. The world," said Violet, "is growing wider."

"He married, like most working men, at nineteen. There is one good point about Joe—he is careful of his mother, whom he never forgets."

"And after Joe?"

"Then there is Sam, ten years younger. He is the master of a Board School, and is unmarried. He is clever, and has read and has ideas. In fact he has too many ideas, and he holds them perhaps too strongly."

"Do you see much of your brothers, Claude?"

"No, very little. They think I have no part or lot with them any longer, and Sam resents my trying to turn myself into a gentleman. Perhaps it was absurd to try. He is unfortunately prejudiced against all the people who wear good clothes and have white hands."

"Is Sam like you to look at?"

"No, not in the least. Sam has red hair and is short. He is remarkable to look at, however, because he is always in earnest, and he looks strong."

"I think I shall like Sam," said Valentine, thoughtfully. "He seems more interesting than Joe. Every man ought to be brave and strong."

"Sam is very interesting," said Claude. "Especially when he is in a rage."

"Are there any more?"

"There is only Melenda. She is a seamstress, and she lives with two or three girls who do the same kind of work. She is free and independent, she will receive no advice and will endure no restraint, and she regards me with contempt because I am not a workman. At present I do not exactly know where she is living, because she has ordered me never to see her again. But I can find her out."

"You must find her out," said Valentine.

"In the matter of cousins now," said Violet, with resignation.

"I dare say there are hundreds of cousins, but I do not know of any. The working people of London do not, as a rule, keep up cousinships. A family dropped down into this great city very easily gets scattered and dispersed."

"Perhaps it is as well," said Violet. "Claude, do not despise me. We knew something of all this before, of course, but only in general terms, and thus have become romantic. The plain facts are overwhelming at first. I feel shivery. It is most delightful to have a brother who is a gentleman and has distinguished himself. But—"

"Our other family," said Valentine, "seemed always so far away. And now they have suddenly become so near."

Then there was silence while a man might count twenty.

"They are not really nearer to you than they were before," said Claude. "You have not been taken to see them. You need not seek them out."

"Claude!" said Valentine, reproachfully.

"You tell us we have another mother living, and you say we need not go to see her," said Violet.

"Our own mother—the only one we know," Valentine went on, "has brought you to us. She means by your means to make us known to all our unknown relations. Claude, five or six years ago she wrote us a letter—it was addressed to us both, but it was meant for Polly. 'Close beside us,' she said, 'unknown to us, are those who toil their lives away while we live at ease: they waste and expend themselves in drudgery while we cultivate both minds and soul. Do not forget that one of you belongs to them in a sense which the other does not. If, hereafter, you go among them, remember the old ties, and be full of love and compassion for them, for they are your brothers and sisters. Your brother's sin is your disgrace: your sister's shame is yours.' Violet, you remember that letter?"

"As if I could ever forget it," she replied, gravely.

"You see, Claude," Valentine explained, "the feeling that we are not really sisters has made us more than sisters. One of us is a girl—oh! so humble and so poor—and the other is so rich and so well born. And by this knowledge we are drawn together more closely than if we had been children of the same parents.

Always and all day long, we have Polly with us—Polly-which-is Marla."

"Always with us," said Violet.

"She goes with us wherever we go; we look in each other's eyes and see, reflected there, her image: the shade of Polly is always with us; she has grown up with us; she has been always like us in face and height; but when we try to picture her as she would have been if she had been left among her friends—then Claude, Violet, and I cannot agree."

"I know very well what she would have been," said Violet. "I have seen her in the street. She would have a great lump of hair upon her forehead, and she would wear a grey ulster or a red crossover; she would laugh very loud and she would walk three abreast——"

"Oh, no," said Valentine, "Polly would be dressed like other workgirls, I suppose, but she would be a gentle creature full of sweet and generous thoughts."

"Who would have put them in her mind?" asked Violet. "Do sweet thoughts grow in girls' working rooms? Claude, what do you think? Could Polly be in the least like Valentine?"

It was nearly twelve when Claude left them. They had been sitting without lights at the open window looking across upon the Park. The room was full of moonlight strong enough to suppress the lamp before the house as the electric light puts out the yellow light of gas; their hearts glowed within them; the eyes of the girls were soft with sympathy and newly born love; the young man's pulse beat faster and his cheek burned, as he took their hands.

"Claude," said Valentine, "tell us—always—everything."

"He will," said Violet. "He trusts us already. Oh, Claude, you have made us so happy."

When he was gone, the two girls fell into each other's arms.

"Val," said one. "He is my very own—my brother to myself. But you may love him too."

"Oh, Violet," said the other. "That poor blind woman in the almshouse, who worked so hard. She is, I am sure, she is my mother."

CHAPTER III.

JACK CONYERS.

Some among us—not all—have been young. They will remember how, in one or two supreme moments, they have been carried out of themselves with a joy which can never be felt in its fulness after five-and-twenty—the intoxicating, dazzling joy in the prospect of life-long happiness.

It falls upon one, perhaps, when love has been whispered and returned: perhaps, when the first success has been achieved: more often when some kindly Prophet has foretold to trembling youth the success which his heart desireth. That Prophet shall be regarded ever after with love and gratitude, and a respect unspeakable for his gift of discernment. Why are there so few of them? There ought to be a school of these prophets, their sole duty to prophesy, for every deserving youth, good fortune, distinction, contentment, joy, and wealth, with an eternity of happiness hereafter in the Elysian Fields. Everybody feels capable of deserving, and of perpetually enjoying all these rewards and more.

There never was, in the whole history of mankind, such an occasion for rejoicing as that presented to Claude. It was the greatest thing that had ever happened to him: greater than the first scholarship: greater than his place in the Tripos; greater than his fellowship: greater than his ambition.

Consider; it is a youthful instinct to impart confidence and to expect sympathy: boys, students, undergraduates, young men of every sort, in obedience to this instinct, confide greatly in each other. After examinations passed, degrees obtained, and the college walls exchanged for the wide world, which always turns out to be a coldish kind of place, young men grow less sympathetic with each other and more reticent about themselves; they exercise selection in their confidences; they even abstain altogether from talking about their personal ambitions, just as, about the same time, they cease to speak of poetry, religion, and other things which I suppose they consider too sacred for common speech. Every man makes in his heart an Adytum of the Temple which grows more full as he grows older. Only the priest is by law allowed to enter into this holy of holies, but he generally takes with him a companion, who is always of the other sex—his sister, sweetheart, or wife. The sympathy of sisters, indeed, is always ready to be had for the asking, and perhaps, on that account, like everything else easily attained is less valued than it should be. Many young men, however, prefer the sympathy of other people's sisters, and this also is, to do these young ladies justice, ready as a rule when properly asked for.

Alone among his fellows, Claude had no home circle which could understand him and could follow

his career with interest. Every day since that on which he first left them seemed to separate him more and more from his own people. He had long since left off telling them, because they could not understand it, what he was doing. His mother knew nothing about Cambridge, and had never heard of Trinity, though the fame of every individual fellow of that College, as all the resident fellows know very well, is trumpeted abroad, with mighty blast, from Pole to Pole, and fills the round world with wonder and admiration; he knew few people; it was two years since he had taken his degree, and his old school and college friends were already scattered: among all the millions of women, old and young, which inhabit London and England, there was not one whom he could call either friend or mistress; not one to whom he could open his heart.

He was used to this isolation: it was a necessary part of his position; at school, when other boys got prizes, their mothers and sisters and all their people were present to congratulate them; when he went up to receive his prizes there was not a single person in the room whose eyes softened and whose heart glowed at the sight of his triumph. When he was head boy and carried off no end of prizes, the other boys cheered and some of the spectators remarked audibly upon his singular beauty—for it was a comely lad—and he went home to his boarding-house with a cartload of books and an aching heart because of his loneliness. Even Joe, brother Joe, the plumber's man, in his working-dress, would have been something. At Trinity he won an entrance scholarship and afterwards a University scholarship and a City Company's scholarship, and with these helps paid his own college expenses easily,

and there was no one to say, "Well done!"—not even Lady Mildred, who contented herself with an expression of satisfaction, and when he concluded his student course with a fellowship, reminded him, in the days of his first pride, and just as if anybody who chose could be a Fellow of Trinity, that this was nothing more than the first step. Young men, she added, may show promise by taking University distinctions, but they are by themselves of little importance. Claude must take care not to think that anything real had been achieved. Not one single person in the world to whom he could open his heart.

And now he had a sister—two sisters—one rolled out into two—both as beautiful as the day and as sweet as the roses in June, and they were proud of him. For the first time in his life he realised how well he had already done, since he could make two such girls proud of him; and he wondered how he could possibly have done it, alone, and without a single word of congratulation and encouragement on the lonely hard road he had travelled.

He stalked along the crowded pavement seeing no one, his head full of these thoughts, his chin in the air. A hand was laid on his shoulder.

Claude pulled himself together and took the other hand which was held out.

"You in London, Jack?"

"Yes. I am in London. I have been here for two or three weeks. Come to my chambers—they are close by—and let us talk."

Claude was not inclined to talk about anything except perhaps about Valentine and Violet, but he followed his friend.

"Where have you been for the last two years?"

"I have been travelling—studying—sketching. One must travel, you know."

The chambers were furnished after the modern fashion: there were cabinets with china: there were water colours: there was glass: there were skins and rugs; they were clearly rooms belonging to a man of taste.

The name of Jack goes with almost any kind of character. It suits a soldier or a statesman: a poet or a mechanician: a prince or a pauper: a hero or a humbug. It requires only one quality—that its possessor must be accepted on his own terms by his contemporaries: not that he must necessarily be popular, but he must be believed in. When Jack Conyers, in his first term, announced himself as one of the coming men, the lads about him accepted him on trust. He *was* the coming man—his manners rather than his words or his acts proved it. He had, to justify these pretensions, a good name and a good presence to begin with; he did nothing actively to encourage or to justify the belief, except perhaps that he understood the power of Silence; he did not chatter, as many young men do, but when he spoke, it was slowly and quietly, as if what he had to say was worth hearing; nor was he like so many young men carried away by any enthusiasms of the hour, and he was always critical. Also, he did not laugh much, though he understood and practised the fine and subtle art of smiling, an art in which women generally excel; but Jack Conyers excelled all women. It was not exactly known who and what were his people, but it was understood that he was of good family; he had the appearance and man-

ner of one who has money; he did not court intimacies; he dressed well, and he seemed to know London. Reading for the Senate House was, he said, narrowing to the mind which desires culture more than scholarship; therefore, he took an ordinary degree; he had a piano in his rooms, and played and sang a little; he also painted and sketched a good deal, and it was supposed that his career, of which he spoke continually, though vaguely, was to be connected in some way with Art.

In appearance he was of the middle height and thin. He wore a *pince-nez*: his features were regular and delicate; his eyes were good, though rather hard, as if always on guard; his mouth was well formed, but the lips were too full, and his forehead was high and narrow. Not an effeminate-looking man, but evidently one who desired to appear refined and studied attitude as well as dress, and his surroundings as well as his manners. If he had been asked what he most desired to convey in his appearance he would have confessed—if he did confess—that he wished to look like a young man who is going to succeed. Claude was one of the men of his own standing who believed in him. Some there were, I regret to say, who scoffed at the name of Conyers.

The room was lit by a shaded lamp. Upon the mantel-shelf there stood three small portraits side by side. They were oil sketches, and represented three girls' faces, all evidently painted by the same hand.

"You are looking at those heads," said Jack Conyers. "They are portraits—such as they are—of three women"—he sighed—"three women—poor things!—who were so good as to complete my education."

"How did they do that?"

"By letting me fall in love with them. A man, I have discovered, cannot be a finished artist without a full personal experience of passion. How can he express what he has never felt? Yet, for an artist, Love should be a memory rather than a living thing, and therefore each experience should be short. This was a French girl, vivacious, full of *espièglerie;* this was an Italian, the mere creature of passion; this a Roumanian. Woman, as mistress or as wife, in the boudoir or the salon, should form part of every Career."

Pelham or the great D'Orsay could have said no more. Claude, however, asked no more questions about the portraits, though doubtless there was a whole chapter belonging to each.

"And what are you going to do?"

"I have taken a studio and I am going to begin my Work."

It seemed rather a drop for the vagueness of coming greatness to take the concrete and even common form of a studio.

"As for my success——"

"Of course you will succeed," said Claude.

"I do not know. The common success—the adulation of the crowd—does not attract me. I shall never stoop to paint half a dozen pictures in a year. Perhaps one in four or five, or even ten years. The picture which I have in my mind has been growing for at least five years, during which I have filled my soul with it. The subject has been part of myself. Claude——" he raised his finger impressively; "it will be, I am assured, a great picture; there will be in it, at least, the whole soul of the artist."

Claude murmured indistinctly something to the effect that a picture with a soul in it would be indeed worthy of his friend's reputation.

"Hitherto the picture, as it exists in my mind, has been incomplete for want of one face. But I have found it at last. I discovered it in a People's concert where I was made to sing by Lady Aldeburgh—a concert somewhere near a place they call Shoreditch; after the concert I talked to the girl who owns the face, which is as yet sadly incomplete; she is ignorant but apparently open to emotions. I shall get that girl. I shall take her away from her belongings and cultivate her face. Everything shall be sacrificed to the cultivation of the face. She wants to be well fed and kept in soft silk and made dainty with fancy dresses and idleness and pretty things, and then that face will grow and develop like a rosebud. At present, I admit, it is imperfect, but it is a possibility, and it will make my picture. The eyes are there, already, and they are full of possible poetry and passion."

He spoke with something nearly approaching enthusiasm.

"Can't you paint her without wanting to take her from her people?"

"No, I want her taken away altogether from the place where she lives. She must be placed wholly under artistic influence—she must be mine—my model—the slave of Art."

"Wouldn't it be better, perhaps, for the girl's reputation for her to stay where she is?"

"Philistine! I want her in the interests of Art. She is needed. One can't stop to think about the reputation of a girl in comparison with——"

"Don't, Jack. My own relations, you know, are somewhere about those levels, and they have reputations which they seem to value even more than the interests of Art."

Jack hastened to change the subject. When you touch on the reputation of a man's possible sisters you tread on dangerous ground.

"I saw you coming out of Lady Mildred Eldridge's, but you walked so fast that I could not overtake you for ever so long. She is a friend of yours?"

"Yes, my best friend."

"I met them in Florence last winter. I was able to be of some little service to them—one of the girls sketches cleverly. They are both, in fact, pleasing."

"Thank you," said Claude, with a conscious blush; "one of them is my sister."

"What?" Jack Conyers started in his chair and dropped his cigarette. "What? One of them your sister?" He knew, like all the world, the history of the two girls in general terms, how one was an heiress and the other the daughter of a working-man. "One of them your sister? My dear fellow, they are both—allow me to say it—both most beautiful and accomplished young ladies. You are a lucky man, and I congratulate you. Which of them is it?"

"I do not know which. My sister was adopted by Lady Mildred nineteen years ago, and the secret has been kept ever since."

"But you will find out. This is not the kind of thing which is kept hidden. There must be some points of resemblance; your father for instance——"

"He is dead, and my mother is blind."

"At all events you are sure to find out before long."

"I dare say I shall, or else I shall be told."

"It is rather like the end of a Latin comedy."

"Yet it is only the beginning of an English comedy. You know my history, Conyers. Everybody does. When men meet me for the first time they whisper to each other, 'Son of a working man, you know.' I do not hear the words, but I read them in their eyes. That is nothing. But I have been rather a lonely man——"

"Naturally," said Conyers, trying to look as if he entirely sympathised with him, "naturally." But he was thinking which of the two girls more nearly resembled his friend.

"And I can hardly try to make you understand what a tremendous thing it is to have a sister at last —a sister who takes an interest and—and—even a pride in one."

"Well," said Jack, "for my own part I never wanted any brothers and sisters. They divide the money and they give all kinds of trouble. But from your point of view no doubt you are right. It must be a bore not to have any belongings."

Claude laughed and prepared to go.

"I have belongings, to be sure, but not of the kind which you would understand."

"That is very conceivable, and I am very sorry for you. I find any other class than our own impossible to talk with and uninteresting to study. Well, I am very glad we met to-night, my dear boy. Come often —come as often as you can, and tell me when you have found your sister. Let me share your secret. Valentine or Violet—I knew that they were assumed names. Tell me when you have found out which of them it is."

"Certainly I will. Good-night."

Jack Conyers, left alone, prepared for himself and drank a lemon squash. Then he sat down and meditated with a mixture of gloom and hope in his countenance. When a young man leaves the University at two-and-twenty, resolved upon distinction and yet uncertain which path to choose—when he wanders about for two years purposeless—when he returns determined upon a career in Art, as painters arrogantly call their profession, as if a novelist or a poet is not also an artist—when, further, he remembers that Art is not always lucrative—that one may have to wait long before making a name, and that meanwhile no money is coming in—when, lastly, there will arise at midnight spectres of doubt which point the finger and say, "Yah! you will never succeed, even by a trick"—when, at the same time, one has conceived a way, a trick, by which to take the town by storm and has actually found the face with which to do it—there is room for the play of a good deal of mixed emotion.

Presently he saw a letter lying on his table. He took it up and looked at the handwriting and tore it open.

"My dear Jack"—he read it quickly as if to get through it and have done with it—"you have been back three weeks and you have not been to see me. Very well. Sooner or later I suppose you will come. I can wait, my dear boy. I know very well why you said you loved me, and I know all about your money matters. Go on. Within six months you will hang up your hat in my hall and be happy ever after. I shall have the money, but you shall have full liberty and a handsome allowance. I am not in the least jealous,

because I am always certain of the person whom alone you love—go look at him in the glass. When you have found out that you cannot get on without me, you will repent of your negligence and come. When we settle down we will give dinners, and you shall play at being a distinguished man and I at being the appreciative and devoted wife, and we shall suit each other very well. I saw your sisters the other day. If I were you I would sometimes call upon them. Good-night, my Jack. Your affectionate Alicia."

Jack read this letter through. Then he burned it, because every word was true, and truth is best hidden in a well or behind the bars of the fireplace.

"If I could find out somehow, through Claude, which of them it is," he thought, "and if I could do this without his knowing, I should have such a chance as might make me free of Alicia yet. She always had the most disgustingly coarse way of putting things, and she's getting coarser every day."

Jack's Cambridge bed-maker, who loves reminiscences almost as much as an old statesman, maintains that Mr. Conyers, though a liberal gentleman, and one who kept a deal of company, was of the sort which thinks of nobody but theirselves. Bed-makers have great experience of young men, and their opinions should be received with weight.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HAVEN OF REST.

I SHOULD like to sing a song of Almshouses—not so much of those great havens of rest with their spacious courts and old chapels and broad gardens which are

scattered about this realm of England, as of the London almshouses. They vary from the poor little half-dozen cottages in a row—like Lady Came's, which are so small that the residents are elected by competitive measurement, character not being so much an object as smallness of stature—to the new and stately palaces such as those at Wood Green, or the old and dignified college such as that beyond Greenwich Hospital, or that of Morden, beside Blackheath; and in wealth, from a little endowment of four shillings a week and a two-roomed cottage for four old women, to an annuity of forty pounds a year, with lodgings, coals, and light for as many old men. There are quiet and peaceful almshouses even though they stand beside noisy thoroughfares. Could anything be sweeter and more peaceful than Amyas's Houses, lying lost and forgotten behind Old Street? or than Beeman's at the back of the Kingsland Road, or the Trinity Almshouses in the midst of Whitechapel? And there are others which seem as if all the noise of the street must perpetually beat about the ears of the unhappy residents. There are some with a chapel and a chaplain and some with a chapel but no chaplain. There is a school attached to some, as at the Milburn Hospice in the Stamford Hill Road; there is a garden with some, as at Trinity Hospital, Greenwich; and a fair court with others, as at Emmanuel, Westminster. In some the almsfolk look cheerful and happy, their anxieties being ended; in others they are gloomy and grumpy, as if all their troubles were to come; in some the people are always walking about, talking with their friends, chirruping with each other, and basking in the sun; while in others there is never anybody to be seen, and the old people

are all hiding in their beds. In a song of Almshouses, all these things and many more could be explained.

On a certain Saturday afternoon last July, a day when the sun was hot, the sky clear, and the breeze cool; when all the old men of all the almshouses between Shoreditch on the South and Tottenham on the North were out in the sun, and all the old ladies were out in the shade—for behold! this is the way of the world: the old men seek the sun because it is the source of heat, which is strength, and women seek the shade, where they can watch the sunshine and admire heat and strength—there sat in the chapel at Lilly's, which was open, one of the almswomen. She occupied the square pew, where there are cushions. She was not old, being no more than sixty or so, which is young for a colleger at Lilly's, but she looked old because her hair was so very white and she sat so very still. Her eyes were closed, so that you might have thought her asleep. But she was not asleep—she was blind.

Close beside her, on one of the benches of the four long pews, her feet up, her back against the wall, sat a young girl of fifteen or so, reading a story book. She was a pretty girl, with delicate features of the London type, very capable of a quick repartee and not unaccustomed to a rough joke. The two sat in perfect silence because the old lady had been taking her afternoon nap and still felt restful, and the girl was absorbed in the book.

Lilly's is a venerable but not a splendid foundation. The name of its founder, Josiah Lilly, citizen and pewterer, is commemorated on a stone tablet let into the pediment above the great door in the middle. It

consists of a single row of cottages in dull red brick, each containing two rooms, one above and one below, with a kitchen or washhouse behind. In most of the windows, which are old-fashioned, with diamond panes set in lead, there is a geranium, and in some there is a neat white blind half down, as the respectable classes of London love to have it. If any that runs will lift his eyes to read, he may observe, all round London, wherever the neat little cottage prevails, that the blinds are always half down. It is the first assertion of respectability, the first step towards gentility. The negro, with a skin like a crocodile for hardness, buys him a mosquito curtain when he intends to soar; the London housewife, when she first develops ambitions, hangs out the blind half mast down, as a kind of flag, and why one knoweth not. Nobody is more respectable than an old almswoman, so that the white blind thus adjusted is not uncommon. In front of the cottages is a narrow stone pavement, which makes a convenient walk on fine mornings, and there is a good-sized oblong patch of ground laid out as a vegetable garden, with potatoes and cabbages. It is separated from the road by a low brick wall having a wicket-gate in the middle. There are five cottages on either side of a great door under the pediment, which opens into quite the smallest chapel in this realm of England. It has a window with a semicircular head, a door nearly of its own width, a reading desk and railed communion table, a square pew painted white with cushions and hassocks, and four long pews, also painted white and without cushions, and all of the kind which exasperates ecclesiastics, who would, if they could, take them away and substitute open benches, and so destroy the cha-

racter of the little chapel. Nobody, outside Lilly's, knows whether there is a chaplain on the Foundation, or if service is ever held in it, or if it is only maintained as a place of meditation and repose.

The old blind woman was Mrs. Monument. How she got into the almshouses is not known, but Lady Mildred may be suspected of a helping hand. As a general rule it is almost as hard for a poor woman to get into an almshouse as for a rich man to get into the kingdom of heaven. Not for want of qualified persons, for of such there is never any lack, but by reason of the pushing, fighting, and shoving over every vacancy. However she was in, and had been in for thirteen years, enjoying a time of perfect rest and quiet, though she was only separated from the noisy world by a low brick wall, and from absolute indigence by her cottage, her ten shillings a week, and such additions as were made by Lady Mildred, as, for instance, the attendance of her granddaughter, the girl who sat reading in the long pew, and found waiting on her grandmother a much easier way of life than any enjoyed by her friends. It was indeed a time of great peace which had come to this poor woman; of physical repose; of content and restfulness, which had settled upon her heart like the sunshine which poured this afternoon into the open door of the little temple, broadening as the sun sloped westward. She wanted nothing; her boys had turned out steady, and her daughters were respectable. To thank the Lord for the respectability of one's daughters seldom occurs to the class where this quality is assumed; but there are other circles where it is hoped for but not always found. She sat in the chapel because it was

cool there, and, though only a few feet from the door where the hurrying footsteps and the roll of vehicles and the jingling of the tram, there clung about the place, as about every place of worship, however small and mean, a sense of peace and safety, like the Glory of the Lord about His House.

I know not how long she had been sitting there, but most likely since her dinner—an event which at Lilly's is of much less importance than it is at the Mansion House. That function was usually celebrated at one o'clock, and now it was four. She had taken her nap and was quite awake, as one could tell by the movement of her fingers. The blind sit long and patiently; they are not great talkers, but they think continually. Conceited persons who read many books secretly believe that nobody can think who does not read. As if the book of experience ever passed through the printing press! As if every old woman has not got enough out of her own life to occupy her thoughts for another hundred and fifty years! Why! this old woman had been young and therefore comely; she had been a bride and a mother; she had known grievous trouble, with the helpless shame of a bad husband; she had worked single-handed to support her children; they were grown up now and doing well; she had no anxiety about them or about her own daily bread; she was growing old but without pain; her world was in darkness; her life was ended save for the things which might happen to the children and for whatever pains and bodily disease might presently fall upon herself. To feel and to understand that nothing remains in life; that everything has been enjoyed or endured; that the work is all

done; that there will be no more wages, no more promotion, no more hopes, no more rewards, no more failures; that there remains only the short downward slope which may be perhaps taken with a run and a leap—this alone must be a very serious and awful thing, though it is the common lot, and therefore, one fain would think, cannot be bad for man. Yet one would pray for a little breathing time, a short space between work and the End, in which, the tools laid down, one may fold the hands, recover and gather together scattered and long-forgotten thoughts, and meditate upon things beyond. Therefore I have always regarded with peculiar envy and admiration those to whom it is granted to spend their latter years in an almshouse. One cannot, I am sure, meditate profitably in the crowd of a workhouse.

Except that Mrs. Monument's once brown hair was now white, and her once white hands were now brown, she was unchanged since she left off her work. Her face was ruddy still—a clean, honest face with the history of the past written in deep lines and puckered crow's feet. She wore a gown of brown stuff, with a white cap and a white apron. And she sat quite composed and still, wrapped in her meditations or her memories. The girl with her feet up in the long pew was as still as herself, and if one was so accustomed to the road as not to hear its noise, the chapel was as silent as a West Indian Forest. There was a foolish bee who came buzzing about the chapel in search of flowers, and finding none, got angry, and so forgot how he came in. Presently he saw the sunshine pouring in through the open door and flew out, and the place was quiet again. Next Mrs. Monument perceived that

two of her fellow lodgers were walking along the flags in front of the cottages—she knew the footsteps and concluded that certain rheumatic pains were better; and then she heard something which caused her to start and sit upright, and brought a glow to her cheek and brightness to her lips.

"Rhoder!" she cried, "that's my boy's step. It's your uncle Claude. Get up, girl, and bring him here."

Then she waited in joyful expectation. There were other footsteps, whose she knew not. But she rose and left the pew and stood in the doorway.

"Mother," said Claude, kissing her.

"My son," she replied, lightly passing her hand over his face, "I did not expect you to-day. Who is with you? I heard girls' steps. Are you keeping company at last, Claude?"

"They are—two young ladies, mother, come to see you."

"Two young ladies! Well, ask them to the house. Rhoda, you go before and put out the chairs."

Claude led his mother to her cottage at the end of the row. There were three chairs in the sitting-room. The old lady took one—the arm-chair by the fire-place—and the two girls the others. Rhoda stood beside her grandmother gazing curiously at the visitors.

"Mother," said Claude, "you remember your little Polly?"

"Remember my dear Polly? Why, Claude, as if I could forget her!"

"We have not talked much about her lately, have we?"

"Have you seen her, Claude?" She caught his arm. "Oh! have you seen her? Lady Mildred told

me you were not to see her till the time came. Tell me—what is she like?"

"I have seen her, mother. She is grown a tall and beautiful girl. She has the manners and the education of a lady. You will never regret that you gave her up."

"It was to save her from a terrible danger, my dear. I said to myself, 'Surely if one of these can be spared, I ought to spare her.' So I let her go."

"And this danger—is it over?" Claude thought she meant possible loss of work, poverty, out-door relief, or the Union, which he remembered as among the bogies of his childhood.

"You are all grown up now. If what I feared were to happen—but it never can—it would not be quite so bad for you now. Sam is a great man, and you're doing something for yourself, and Melenda's in steady work—oh! yes, you could not be tempted."

"Since the danger is over, then, mother,"—Claude took her hand again—"would you like to see your Polly again?"

She clutched his hand. "Claude," she said, "you have brought her. But I promised Lady Mildred——"

"Lady Mildred sends her."

"Oh!" She started up and cried aloud, holding out her arms, "My child, come to your mother. Quick! quick!"

Both the girls sprang to their feet. Claude motioned them to wait.

"Yes, mother," he said. "Patience—patience for a moment. You do not know that Polly has been brought up with Lady Mildred's own daughter Beatrice. They are not known apart. No one, but Lady

Mildred herself, knows which is Miss Eldridge and which is Polly. It is her intention that no one shall know yet. I have brought them both to you. They are called Valentine and Violet, but which of the two is your daughter I cannot tell you."

She understood not one word of what Claude was saying, but stood with her outstretched arms feeling in the dark for her child. "Give me my Polly," she cried hoarsely.

Claude led Valentine to her. "Mother," he said, "this is Valentine."

The blind woman passed her hand quickly over Valentine's face, throat, and figure. Then she threw her arms about her and kissed her a hundred times, crying and weeping over her. "Oh! my dear, my dear," she said, "your face is like Claude's. I knew you would take after him and Joe. Tell me your name. Let me hear your voice."

"I am Valentine," said the girl.

"Claude's face, but not his voice. Yet I know the voice. As for Valentine—Valentine—what do I know about Valentine? Kiss your mother, Polly. Your real name, my dear, is Marla, but oh! I have never thought of you as anything but Polly. Oh! what a tall girl you've grown! Claude's face and Claude's head, and oh! Polly—Polly-which-is-Marla"—she hugged and kissed her again—"to think that for all these years I never had you once in my arms! Oh! my dear, I've been thirsting for you."

"But mother," said Claude, "do not be too sure. You have not seen Violet yet. Violet is perhaps——"

"Violet? Oh! I suppose she is my lady's own

daughter, the beautiful Miss Eldridge, that my Polly was so like."

"Mother, you must see the other as well." Claude laid her hands upon Violet's shoulder.

"I am Violet," said the girl. But while Valentine frankly met the hungry mother's embrace, and gave back kiss for kiss, Violet stood shrinking and trembling with pale face.

The blind woman started. Then she laid her hands upon the girl's face as she had done to Valentine, but slowly and critically.

"It is Claude's face too," she said. "But whose voice was that? Speak again, you other, that I took for my girl."

"I am Valentine," said the other.

"What is it, Claude?" asked the poor bewildered woman. "They both have your face, and one of their voices, though they are different, reminds me of your father's, whom they never saw. Tell me what it means. Oh! what does it mean? Which is my Polly?"

"It means, mother, what I told you—one of these young ladies is Miss Eldridge and one is Polly. But I do not know which."

"Will you not kiss me too?" asked Violet.

The old woman kissed her, but with the coldness induced by doubt. "I don't know," she said, "I cannot tell which of you is my Polly. And as for Miss Beatrice——"

"Oh," said Valentine, "never mind Beatrice. Only tell us what we can do for you, and if you are happy."

Mrs. Monument sat down before she made reply. They became aware that she was stiffening. The light of love went out of her face; she remembered that

one of the two was Lady Mildred's daughter; what if she had poured those first kisses upon Miss Beatrice? And how could she sustain enthusiasm for half a daughter? She was chilled and bewildered.

Presently, however, she answered in measured terms. She thanked Miss Beatrice for coming to see her, which she took very kindly, and begged to send her duty to her ladyship. As for herself, she was as happy as a woman in her position has a right to expect. Like many country-bred women, Mrs. Monument held the opinion that poor people have no right to expect happiness except in small bits and irregular rations. Many people in their hearts believe that this remarkable doctrine, with the duties of contentment, resignation to injustice, satisfaction with things as they are, and unquestioning respect for everyone who wears a black coat, is laid down in the Bible and Prayer Book. Mrs. Monument went on to say that during the last winter, which had been mild, and the spring, which was short though severe, she had escaped rheumatism to a surprising extent, though there were days when her hands felt like dropping; that she was daily and faithfully attended by her granddaughter Rhoda; that she was pleased to find her boy Claude still kept on by her ladyship—she imagined that he was a kind of page or assistant butler in the establishment, though for some mysterious reason permitted to prolong his schooling indefinitely—and at this remark Claude looked at the girls and smiled without showing the least confusion. She concluded by saying that when the time came for her Polly to know herself, she hoped the knowledge would lead her to a lowly and grateful spirit, such as became one in her station; and

here both girls blushed, because they understood for the first time that the child of the lowly and the humble, however she be brought up, is born to a "station."

"My dear mother," said Claude, "we are all grateful. Polly will be as grateful as you can desire when she learns the truth. Meantime we are all of us filled with a proper spirit of lowly humbleness. Valentine and Violet are both as meek as nuns; I am grateful; you are grateful; and as for Beatrice, if she is not grateful too, she ought to be ashamed of herself."

"She ought," said the girls together.

"Fie, Claude! to speak of Lady Mildred's daughter in such a manner. And she a lady!"

The girls felt hot and ashamed. Was Claude to speak of Beatrice as a stable-boy speaks of his mistress? But Claude only smiled again.

"And she a lady!" he echoed, gravely; "I had forgotten that."

"Claude, my dear," his mother went on, "if you are in good work, thank Lady Mildred for her help. But don't speak of Miss Beatrice—who is, I suppose, one of those two—those two young persons—as if she was a girl of the same rank as yourself."

"I will not, mother," said Claude, seriously.

"As for Polly——"

"Yes, dear." It was Valentine who spoke, because Violet shrank back as if she were about to receive a blow. "Yes—mother—when the time comes I hope that I shall know how to conduct myself properly and as becomes my station."

They all looked at each other. The situation seemed rather strained. "And so you worked for

twenty years," said Valentine, taking the good woman's hand, "for twenty years to support your children."

"Of course I did, Miss—is it Miss Beatrice or is it Polly? Why shouldn't I? There's no hardship and no shame in having to work if you can get work to do and wages for your work."

"It is time for your tea, mother," said Claude. The kettle was singing on the hob, for there was a fire, although it was the hottest month in the year, and the tea-things were laid. Then, while the two girls looked on in silence, Claude made the tea and cut the bread and butter, and Rhoda poured it out, and they broke bread together.

But the girls were silent and the old lady stiff and starched.

"Come, mother," said Claude, "one of the girls is Polly, you know."

"One of the young ladies is Miss Beatrice, Claude," said his mother, "and very good it is of her, and like my lady, her mother, to come and see her mother's old servant. I only wish I could see her pretty face."

Neither of the girls answered.

"Why, they both have pretty faces, mother; and as for Beatrice, she is so like Polly that you would never tell the difference. And as for Polly, she is so like Beatrice that you would never guess that she wasn't a lady born."

"It's play-actin', Claude," said the old woman, severely. "If I can't have my own gal to myself, it's worse than nothing. What is it to me to be told that she's dressed like her mistress and quite the lady? How can she be a lady when her mother was once an undernurse, and then stood over the wash-tub on

Hackney Marsh, and her father was a working-man? Don't tell me, Claude. As for her not knowing and you not knowing, that's nonsense. You might as well tell me that you've grown up a gentleman."

"I did not go so far as to say that, mother," said the Fellow of Trinity.

"No; you've got too much sense, my son. And as for Polly, if she'll quit play-actin' and behave reasonable, I shall be glad to see her any time that her mistress will spare her for an afternoon."

"Oh! Val," said Violet.

"My dear," said Valentine, kissing the poor old lady's forehead, "we do not know. Indeed we do not know—no one knows except Lady Mildred. We will both come if you will let us, but we cannot come separately because we do not know."

She shook her head. "I do not know which of you it is, the first or the second, but you've got between you your father's voice if it's Polly, and yet it's her ladyship's voice if it's Miss Beatrice. And I can't tell which is which, for the voices have got mixed."

Then another figure appeared in the doorway. It was a working-man—there could be no mistake about that fact. He carried a bag of tools in one hand; on his arm he slung his jacket because it was hot, and he preferred to work in his shirt-sleeves; and he really had that loose red handkerchief which the girls expected to find about their brother's neck. There was also a pipe in his mouth. Quite the working-man. And perhaps in order to make it perfectly clear that he was not play-acting, whatever his sisters might be, his hands were grimed with dirt and oil. He looked in, saw the assembled company, and was astonished.

Then he took his pipe out of his mouth, being a working-man of some politeness.

"Well, mother," he said. Then he kissed his daughter. "Well, Rhoder, my girl." Then he greeted Claude with a handshake. "Admiral, how are you?"

"This is Joe," Claude explained by way of introduction. "Joe lives in Tottenham a little up the road. On Saturdays and Sundays he never fails to come here."

"Joe's a good boy," said the old lady; "he was always a good boy to me—a good son and a good father of nine."

Joe sat on the table, which was the only place left to sit upon, and received these praises unabashed. The girls observed that he was a man of handsome features, and that if his chin was shaven, as it doubtless would be on the Sunday morning, his hair trimmed, his face washed, and his neck put into a white collar, he would be curiously like Claude, only twelve years older, or perhaps more, for sixteen years of married life with nine children ages a man, and he might have passed for five-and-forty. As for his occupation, he was the right-hand man of an eminent house-painter, decorator, and plumber of Tottenham—one of those useful citizens who lay our pipes for us, and lay them wrong; who adjust our taps and clean our cisterns, work mischief with our kitchen ranges, and never leave a house when they are permitted to enter it until there is not a screw or a sink or a tap or a pipe that is not tinkered and ruined. Theirs is a trade so lucrative that it is rapidly rising to the dignity of a profession, and before long it will probably rival the Bar in attracting the brightest and keenest of the English intellect and the flower of the Universities. Joe might

not be clever after the cleverness of his father, but he understood his business, and knew how to make money for his employer if not for himself. And steady with it too, except now and again on Saturday evenings. But we have all of us some weakness, failing, or defect, a moral squint or a halting leg.

"Joe," said Claude, "I have brought your sister Polly—you remember little Polly—to see her mother."

"Oh!" said Joe, unmoved; "you have brought her, have you?"

"It is a long time since you saw her—nineteen years—and she has grown up and is a young lady now."

"So it seems," said Joe; "who'd ha' thought it?" But he seemed to take little interest in the subject.

"She has been brought up entirely with Miss Eldridge, and we do not know them apart. Polly is one of these young ladies, but we do not know which."

Joe looked from one to the other. Then he smiled. Then he passed his hand over his mouth, and the smile went into his eyes, which twinkled.

"Oh!" he said, "you don't know which of these two young ladies is Polly and which is the other. Oh! ah! And don't no one know?"

"No one but Lady Mildred."

"Oh!" Here Joe chuckled but choked. "No one don't know. That's a rum thing, ain't it, Claude?" Claude was looking at his brother, but he was thinking of the two girls and the strange awkwardness of the situation. "Rhoder, my gal, come here. Stand between them two young ladies for a minute. So! That'll do." He chuckled again and choked again.

"No one don't know. That's a rum thing, ain't it? Well, if no one don't know, I don't know, do I?"

"Have you no welcome for your sister, Joe?" asked Claude.

"Tell me which she is and I'll give her a kiss"—Violet shuddered—"but I can't kiss 'em both, can I? Even Sam wouldn't have a workin'-man go so far as that, let alone the missus, when she come to hear of it. No, Claude, if one of 'em's my sister, she's dressed altogether too fine for me and my Rhoder and the kids. Not but what they're a pair of beauties. We workin'-men can't afford to have sisters in satin like ladies. As for the Colonel here"—he laid a friendly hand upon Claude's shoulder—"he's a toff, but we're used to him. I don't quite know how he makes his money, but he says it's honestly come by——"

"Oh!" said Violet, "this is shameful. Claude's money is nobly earned." She could endure a good deal on her own account, but was Claude to be insulted?

"Joe is quite right," said Claude.

"When workin'-men's sisters go dressed in kid gloves and silk ribbons, it's natural for people to ask how they came by the money, and not always easy to answer. So, you see, I can't say as I am pleased to see Polly. As for Claude's work——"

"Claude's work," said Violet, interrupting, "is of a kind which you cannot be expected even to understand."

"Go on," he replied, grinning; "I like a girl with a cheek." He got up and replaced the pipe in his mouth, but it had gone out. "Good-bye, mother. I'll be round in the morning." He nodded to Claude. "Good-bye, Brigadier. As for you two young ladies——" He looked from one to the other, and then he turned

to his daughter Rhoda. Again he smiled, and the smile broadened and his eyes began to dance—if the eyes of a working-man at six-and-thirty can be said to dance—and he laughed aloud. "Ho! ho!" he said; "and no one knows!" He swung out of the little room laughing still. He laughed across the court, and they heard him laughing as he went up the road. Now for a man to go along the Queen's Highway laughing as he goes by himself is a strange and rather a gruesome thing.

"What is he laughing for?" asked Violet.

"Laughter," said Claude, "is produced in many ways, but especially by the unexpected. The situation is new to him, and therefore, I suppose, ludicrous."

"Joe's been a good son always," said his mother, "though not clever like Sam. Oh! Claude, if you'd only followed in Sam's footsteps. You might have been a Board School master by now, like him."

"It can't be helped, mother. But it seems a pity, doesn't it? We had better go now, I think, and I'll bring Polly to see you again as soon as we are quite sure which is Polly; and then you won't be afraid of mistaking Miss Eldridge for her, will you?"

It was trying to them all except to Rhoda, when the old lady rose and folded her hands across her apron, and said slowly, because she was saying the things which are right to say, and good manners must not be hurried: "I wish you humbly good-bye, Miss Beatrice, and I send my humble respects to her ladyship. I hope my Polly will continue to give satisfaction, and I shall be glad to see her when you leave off play-actin', as of course it's your fun and you will have it. She can come in the afternoon and get back

by nine. Or Rhoder'll go home, and she can sleep here if her ladyship can spare her."

CHAPTER V.

THE LAW OF ELEVENPENCE HA'PENNY.

THE girls came away from Lilly's almshouses a good deal cast down. They had only succeeded in causing pain to the old lady and bringing shame upon themselves. Therefore they hung their heads.

"After our mother," said Valentine presently, recovering a little, "it is our duty to call upon our sister. Can we go to-day?"

"I think you had better not," said Claude. "For my own part a visit to Melenda never fails to make me profoundly wretched. I think you had better reserve that visit till another day."

"Does she live near here, Claude?"

"She lives about two miles down the road at a place called Hoxton. We will go on Monday. Courage!"

"We have plenty of courage," said Violet, deceiving herself more than her brother. "But somehow I am afraid we have not quite grasped the situation. Do you think my sister—Melenda—will receive us with a welcome?"

"No, I should think not," Claude replied with decision. "To the best of my knowledge Melenda is always in a rage. You know that she is horribly, shamefully poor."

"I think, Claude," said Valentine, "that we had better take your advice and go on Monday."

It was in a tenement house, and in Ivy Lane,

Hoxton, that Melenda worked all day and slept at night. All the houses in Ivy Lane, or nearly all—because one is a public-house and one or two are shops—are tenement houses. They are mean and squalid houses. The doors and door-posts are black for want of scrubbing; the oldest inhabitant cannot remember when they were painted last; the windows are like the windows in Chancery Lane for griminess; in most of the houses the banisters and some of the steps of the narrow stairs have been broken away for firewood; the plaster of the ceiling has long since cracked and fallen; the street is slovenly and uncared for. But girls who can afford no more than five shillings a week for a roof and four walls sometimes have to fare worse than in Ivy Lane. They might, for instance, live in one of the courts which run out of Ivy Lane.

Melenda's room was the first-floor front. It was furnished with a broad wooden bed, one of those which are built for three at least, and have often to hold six; two wooden chairs and a round table; there was also a chest of drawers, and there was an open cupboard, the lower part of which formed a box for coals. On the hob stood the kettle, in the cupboard were a few plates and cups, and in one corner reposed a fryingpan and a saucepan.

Two grey ulsters and two hats were hanging on nails driven into the door. This was all the furniture, and it would seem difficult to furnish a room for three girls with more simplicity.

There were three occupants of the room, all young, and all at work. One of them sat on the bed, the other two had the chairs beside the table. The girl on the bed was a thin delicate-looking creature, about

twenty-three or twenty-four years of age; she stooped in the shoulders and had a narrow chest; her face was pale and worn, with lines about the mouth; her eyes were lustrous, and looked larger than they were in reality because her cheeks were so thin. They had the patient expression which comes to those who suffer continually. Her brown hair was thin, and was brushed simply back over her temples, and gathered into a knot; she was dressed in an old, a very old, grey stuff frock, and her shoes were long since worn into holes everywhere, sole and heel and toes. But that mattered little, because she never left the house. She sat on the bed because there was something wrong with her backbone—a twist of some kind—so that she was neither so strong nor so tall as other girls, and had to lie down and take rest whenever she "felt her back," which sometimes happened all day and all night long.

This was Lotty. She lived here, though she ought to have been kept warm, well fed, and in idleness in some asylum, or home, or hospital, partly because she knew of no such home; partly out of the deep friendship and affection which she entertained for Melenda; and partly because Melenda would never have suffered her to go so long as she could, by working day and night, provide for her.

As for Melenda, Claude's sister, she sat at the table. She was now a girl of three-and-twenty; she still preserved the red locks of her childhood. Red hair has its artistic value, and I dare say Melenda's would have looked picturesque had it been respectfully treated. But what can you expect of flaming-red hair if you treat it in London girl fashion—that is, if you cut the front part of it short, and comb a great

hunch over the forehead, making a red pillow, and then roll the rest of it up in a knot behind? Such a mode might be taken as a text for the preacher and an illustration of the tyranny of fashion, which does nothing for its votaries except to make them ridiculous, and to destroy any points of beauty that they may possess. The airy, fairy, curly, dainty, delicate arrangement over some young ladies' brows no doubt suggested to the London girl the hunch of hair; but the "fringe" was never intended to darken and to disfigure the face; nor was the fringe meant to be a pillow of hair; nor was it meant for thick red hair with no more curl in it than there is in a cow's tail. If Melenda had been better advised she would have brushed her hair back and disclosed to view a broad, square, and very white forehead which everyone would have respected. And then her eyes, which were as sharp and keen as a pair of electric lights, would have been set in a lighter frame. She was not pretty at all, though, like most red-haired girls, her complexion was good; her face was square; her nose was short and straight; her lips were firmly set; her chin strong. In stature she was shorter than the average; her shoulders were broad and her hands large; she looked a strong girl. But she was thin: her cheeks were hollow, and her figure wanted the filling out which comes of food and enough of it. Polly's sister looked always hungry: she also looked capable, strong-willed, and resolute, and she looked as if she could exhibit temper if she chose: lastly, she looked as if she often chose.

The third girl, Lizzie, was of a type which is not unusual in London and almost peculiar to the great city. It has many variations and breaks out into

eccentricities of all kinds, but, speaking generally, Lizzie belonged to that class of London girls who are all eyes. They have, it is true, other features as well, but their eyes strike one first and most, because they are so large, so round, so deep, so full of all imaginable and possible thoughts, intentions, and desires. Their mouths are also noticeable, because they are small, rosebud mouths, generally with parted lips, as if the soul of the maiden within were waiting to receive the sweet and holy gifts and graces for which her eyes show her yearning. It is impossible to see such a girl without longing immediately to take her away and place her where she may be in perpetual commune with things lofty and spiritual. Lizzie had her fringe too, but her hair was brown, not red: it was curly and not straight; and as she had some glimmering of taste, and did not drag a great solid lump of hair over her forehead, but had a few short curls in its place, the effect was not unpleasing. In figure she was tall but slight, and she was too thin, though she did not look quite so hungry as Melenda. Her head was small and her features possessed a good deal of delicacy. Men, who are more catholic in such matters than ladies, and can discern beauty even where the elbows stick out visibly through the sleeves, would say that here were the elements or makings of a really beautiful girl, if only she could get a fair show.

By one o'clock in the day they had already worked for six hours, because they began at seven. Six hours of almost continuous sewing seems a good day's work; one would not care to sit even over the most delicate embroidery for more than six hours a day: and this was not delicate work at all, but coarse work on

coarse and heavy stuff—the stuff of which the commonest shirts are made—those intended to rasp the skin of the unfortunate native, who would so much prefer to sit in buff, brown or black, and suffer the sun to gently bake him all over. Six hours of steady sewing: no student can read with effect for more than six hours a day: no man can write for more than six hours if he care to write well: few men can dig for more or can carry burdens for more without a good spell of rest. These girls, however, were so strong and so industrious that they were going to work for seven hours longer, that is till daylight cease; if it had been winter they would have worked long after daylight ceased. This is a really good day's work—if you think of it—from seven in the morning till nearly nine at night; this is to work with a will: to work heartily: to expend oneself without stint: to acquiesce in the curse of Adam. It is a day's work which no one but a railway director or an omnibus company dares to exact of men; if a factory were to require such a day there would be a strike, with letters to the papers, even if the men's wages were a shilling an hour. A truly wonderful day's work, only to be understood when one realises the constant presence, felt but not seen, of a Fury with serpents in her hair and an uplifted lash of scorpions in her hands, sometimes called Necessity and sometimes known as Hunger.

The girls generally worked in silence, but to-day there had been a little outbreak on the part of Lizzie, with revolutionary sentiments. She was promptly suppressed by Melenda, who followed up her victory with a few remarks which clinched the submission but left sulkiness and a smouldering fire of rebellion.

When the clock struck one—somebody's clock in some neighbouring street—Melenda looked up and broke the silence.

"Lotty," she said imperiously, "lie down this minute."

Lotty obeyed without a word. She had been sitting up too long, and now she lay back with closed eyes, and her short breathing showed that she was suffering.

The other girl tossed her work impatiently on the table.

"One o'clock," she said. "It ought to be dinner-time soon. What have we got for dinner?" She laughed derisively. "And what shall we have to-morrow? And the next day—and the day after?"

"Don't, Liz," said Melenda softly. "Don't, just now. It makes her back worse. Let her go to sleep."

"I'm not asleep," said Lotty, opening her eyes. "Don't mind me, Liz." She stretched out her hand and caught Lizzie by the wrist. "Patience, my dear."

"Patience! oh!"

"It's only since the concert that it's come on," said Melenda, looking at her companions as a physician looks upon a patient.

"Why shouldn't it be since the concert, then?" asked Lizzie.

"What have gentlemen got to do interfering with work-girls?" asked Melenda in reply.

Lizzie laughed defiantly.

"Why shouldn't he speak to me? Speaking's no harm. Why shouldn't he tell me the truth? That's no harm. Nobody else tells the truth. The clergyman don't, he says, for fear we shouldn't work any longer;

and the district visitors don't, for fear we should strike. And the work is crool, he says, and the wages dreadful; and so they are."

"I've told you that already," said Melenda. "Sam says so too."

"And there's many better ways of living. Some girls go to theatres if they're pretty enough. And some go and get painted in pictures. He says I'm pretty enough for that, and he knows gentlemen who'd like to paint my eyes."

"Liz, he's deceiving you," said Melenda. "Paint your eyes, indeed! He takes you for a fool."

"And he says that it's no good stopping here. He says it's a God-forgotten life. He says we shall never get better money and never any easier work. Think of that, Lotty. We shall get old and die, he says, and never any pretty things to put on and always not enough to eat, and——" Here she stopped, being out of breath.

"It can't be always," said Lotty, "because there must be an end some day."

"Oh! That end!" Lizzie laughed scornfully, because the undertaker and the natural end of man's or woman's life seems so far away to a young girl of seventeen.

"It won't be always," said Melenda, "because Sam says we are going to have no more rich people very soon. We shall divide everything, and after that we shall always have enough, because the people will keep their own when they have got it, and there will be no more masters."

"You're a silly, Melenda," said Lizzie, "to believe such nonsense. Besides, if it were true, what would

the girls get? The men would only keep it all to themselves and spend it at the public-houses."

"Did the gentleman tell you that too?"

"Never mind what else he told me."

"Liz," said Lotty, "you haven't seen him again, have you? Oh! promise you won't talk to him any more. Oh! this is what comes of giving Concerts for the People. Liz! Liz!"

But Lizzie tossed her head, snatched her hat, and ran away, and Lottie sighed and lay back again.

"Who was the gentleman, Melenda?" she asked. "Don't let her go on talking to gentlemen. Has she seen him again? Do you know his name?"

"I do not know. We went to the concert. There was a young lady in a black silk frock, and she sang; and there was another in a pink frock, and she sang; and there was some one else who recited; and one man playing on the piano, and another on the violin. I've told you all that before. When we came away I missed Liz in the crowd, and when she came home she was all trembling like, and cried when you were asleep, and wished she was dead and buried, and told me she'd been for a walk with a gentleman, who'd been talking to her about her work and her wages, and made her discontented."

Lottie sighed, but made no reply.

"If we could strike like the men," said Melenda. "It's the only thing, Sam says. Why, if we could strike, the fine ladies wouldn't get their things so cheap; and they know it, and that's why they go about giving concerts to us and pretending to be our friends, just to keep us from throwing the work in their faces and striking. Sam says so."

"Oh, Melenda! But the ladies don't know. If they knew——"

"They do know." Melenda stamped her foot. She was in one of her rages. "They've been told a thousand times. And they don't care—they don't care—so long as they buy their things cheap. Well, we've got our freedom, Lotty; and we ain't obliged to go to their concerts, are we? And if a gentleman speaks to me, I'll let him know."

Lotty made no reply, but closed her eyes again. She had, in fact, nothing to say that could help or even console. She had never considered the subject of supply and demand, or else no doubt she might have administered solace out of those golden rules which keep wages low, hours long, and work scarce. In the old days Lotty knew a great quantity of texts which she might have found comforting, but she had now forgotten them all. Besides, no amount of texts would have brought consolation to Melenda's bosom, because that young lady was as free and emancipated from the trammels of religion as the most advanced woman in the whole school. It was, in fact, part of her independence not to attend any form of divine service, not from any animosity towards the Christian faith, but simply because all forms of worship make demands upon a girl's freedom.

There was some cold tea standing on the chest of drawers, with a loaf of bread, and some yellow substance flattered by the name of butter. Melenda cut two thick slices and poured out some tea. "Lucky we had a bit of meat for Sunday," she said. "Take your dinner now, Lotty, dear."

"I am better now," said Lotty, after their feast.

"If I rest for half an hour I shall be able to work again. Where's Liz gone?"

"You go to sleep," said Melenda. "As for Liz, she'll come in presently, when she's ramped round a bit."

Lotty obeyed and closed her eyes.

Then Melenda resumed her work. In a few minutes she saw that Lotty was asleep. She might have been dead, so motionless she lay and so waxen-pale were her cheeks. In sleep the closed eyes lost their worn look, and the lines of the forehead were smoothed out, and the face dropped back, so to speak, into the mould in which it was cast. Melenda carefully drew the counterpane—it was old and ragged, alas! and wanted washing—over her friend's arms and chest, and laid her ulster over her feet with tender hand and softened eyes, and then sat down again and began to stitch with a kind of fierceness. It pleased her that she could work twice as fast as the other two, and that while her friend was resting she was doing the share of both.

Meantime, in St. John's Road, close by, there walked together side by side a gentleman and a work-girl.

"You will think of it, won't you?" he asked. "It is a cruel thing for a pretty girl like you to be slaving so hard. Pretty girls were not meant to do hard work, you know. You ought to be beautifully dressed, and standing on the stage, and all the men in the house clapping because you would look so beautiful."

"I can't never leave Lotty and Melenda," the girl replied.

"Meet me again this evening. I will be by the church at nine. Will you promise?"

"I don't care," she said. "Yes, I will then. But it's no use. I won't never leave Melenda and Lotty."

There are many openings and a splendid variety of choice for a girl who insists on her independence and, therefore, refuses to go behind counters or bars, or into offices, or some other people's houses. She may become a dressmaker, a milliner, or a seamstress, she may make shirts, cuffs, collars, or button-holes: she may enter any of the various branches of the great Sewing Mystery: she may go into a Factory—there are quantities of Factories to choose from—but whatever she does and wherever she goes she may quite confidently reckon on short pay and long hours: in all probability she will be bullied by the foreman and snubbed, scolded, and nagged by the forewoman: her independence will be the privilege of sleeping in a room shared with two or three other girls, together with that of keeping any hours she pleases, and she may be certain beforehand that her poverty and her helplessness will be *exploités* to the utmost by her employer as much as if she was an omnibus driver: that her whole life will be spent in bad lodgings, on slender commons, with friends of the poorest and work of the hardest: she may rely upon getting no help from anybody, certainly none from her brothers, who, poor fellows! have to pay for their clubs, their drinks, and their amusements, and cannot do what they would wish for their sisters: none from the political economist to whom an ill-paid work-girl illustrates in a most satisfactory manner the beneficent Law of Supply and Demand, ordained by the Creator in the Day when He created Man and Woman for the ad-

vantage of the Middle-man, chosen of his race, and the Development of His next noblest Creation the Manufacturer: none from politicians, because they think that the working-woman will never be a danger to any party; none—alas!—from ladies, because their injustice is too old and stale, and the Song of the Shirt, which has been sung for forty years, is known by heart, and the sight of the sister, who never cries out or complains, is familiar, and because of that strange hardness of woman's heart towards women, which is a wonderful and a monstrous thing. Nor will the working-girl expect any help from her own class, because they have not learned to combine, and there is none to teach them, and the sharp lessons, including thwacks, kicks, hammerings, rattening, and boycotting, by which the working-men were forced and driven into their unions, are impossible for the girls.

Melenda chose to be a sewing machine. In this capacity she got button-holes to make with her friends. They were three really very industrious girls, and with so much industry, their rent only four shillings, and bread lower than ever it has been known before, and likely to be cheaper still, and tea and sugar always "down again," they ought to do very well indeed, and be able to buy themselves pretty frocks, and perhaps save money, and to go about with rosy cheeks, and they should every morning be ready to greet the rosy sun with a hymn of praise. That they did not do any of these things, that their clothes were ragged, their cheeks pale, their eyelids heavy, their purse empty, was due to the action of a very remarkable Law in Political Economy—a science which most wonderfully

illustrates the Divine Goodness and the Beneficence of Creation. This Law has hitherto, I believe, escaped the observation of all the professors. It is the Law of the Lower Limit, which will be better understood by being named after an outward and visible sign, the most obvious and best-known result of its beneficent operation. I have therefore ventured to call it the Law of Elevenpence Ha'penny. It has been found, in fact, by the employers of woman's labour, who are one and all the most humane, the most considerate, and the most unselfish creatures in existence, that there is a limit of wage below which human life cannot be sustained. It is highly to their credit that they seldom try to get below this limit, which is exactly marked by the wage of elevenpence ha'penny a day. Therefore no working-woman, of those who work at home, is allowed to make more, because this would be a flying in the face of the Eternal Laws. And it would be clearly inhuman to offer less. To be sure the women sometimes get less because they are often out of work: but the employers cannot be blamed for that. The Law of Elevenpence Ha'penny or the Law of the Lower Limit is the only law that humanity is called upon to obey, and the conscience of those who pay the girls at this rate of wages is calm and easy. One positively envies the conscience of the wholesale match-maker, the wholesale jam-maker, the wholesale shirt-maker, the wholesale maker of anything which may be made or sewn by the hands of women and girls. The wickedness of the men who refuse to obey this law (designed at the Creation for them as well as for women) is part of the universal depravity which causes men to think and act for themselves, without any re-

spect for law or authority in religion, politics, morals, manners, and customs.

The law of Elevenpence Ha'penny. As Melenda worked exactly two-and-a-half times faster than Lotty, and Lizzie one-and-a-half times, it follows that to produce an average of elevenpence ha'penny, Melenda should earn seventeenpence and five-twentieths, and Lizzie tenpence and seven-twentieths, and Lotty sixpence and nine-tenths, and that they did so shows how good a worker Melenda was. Sometimes, however, there was less because work has to be taken back and fetched, and there are delays in getting fresh work. At the best, therefore, these girls between them could earn seventeen shillings and threepence a week. Their rent was four shillings, so that there was left the sum of thirteen shillings and threepence for everything else. That is to say, the splendid sum of sevenpence and four-sevenths apiece, or very nearly sevenpence ha'penny a day, remained for all their wants.

My very dear young lady, you who sit at home in ease, how would you like to find yourself in food, frocks, fire, furniture, music, boots, bonnets, books, trinkets, gloves, and all the thousand-and-one things that go to make a girl's life, on sevenpence ha'penny a day? But these girls are not like you? That, I assure you, is not at all the case. It is a falsehood invented by the Devil when he invented the figment of nobility, gentry, and villain. If you desire to know what the work-girl really is, go to the looking-glass and study very carefully, not your bonnet, which is very becoming, nor your face, which is so pretty that one wishes he was young enough to fall in love with

it, nor the dressing of your hair, which might be much more artistic, but the unseen self which lies behind the face. That is the working-girl as well as yourself, my dear young friend.

In half an hour or so Lizzie came back quiet and subdued, but with a rosy flush on her cheek and brightened eyes.

"I've had dinner," she answered when Melenda pointed to the tea-pot. "I've had an egg and a cup of coffee. It was given to me—by—a young girl I know."

Melenda looked at her sharply, but said nothing.

Then there was silence in the room save for the click of the needle and the thimble and the rustling of the stuff in which they were sewing the button-holes. But Melenda was disturbed and ill at ease, partly on account of Lizzie and the unknown gentleman who made her discontented, and partly because it seemed to her—perhaps the bread and butter had not been thick enough—as if a man's voice was repeating aloud, over and over again, banging and beating the words into her head, "All your lives—all your lives;" and then the voice of her brother Sam—it was a deep, rich bass—chimed in saying, "Why don't you strike? Why don't you strike?" This was not agreeable. But the time passed on, and the distant clock struck two three and four while Lotty still slept on and the other two worked in silence.

It was just after the striking of four that the girls heard footsteps in the narrow passage below, and voices which were not the voices of their fellow lodgers. One of the voices said, "Will you wait below, Claude? We would rather go up alone."

And then the door opened, and two young ladies appeared. They were young ladies the like of whom the girls had seldom, if ever, seen, for they were so beautiful and so beautifully dressed, and at sight of their frocks and their hats the soul of Lizzie sank within her. The District Visitor they knew, because she sometimes called and always had a fight with Melenda, but she was not by any means beautifully dressed. Also certain ladies had once or twice come into their street and gone about the houses curiously, and received sharp replies to their questions. But they were not beautiful.

"Is there a girl here named Melenda?" asked one of them.

Lotty awoke, and sat upright with a start. Lizzie stared and dropped her work and her thimble, which rolled under the drawers, and afterwards half an hour was wasted in looking for it. The owner of the name, suspecting a visit from people in the interests of Church services, only looked up and nodded.

Then the two young ladies stepped forward and seized each a hand, saying softly,

"Oh! Melenda, we are your sister Polly."

Alas! that Polly should have chosen this day of all days for her return after an absence of nineteen years.

CHAPTER VI.

AN UNLUCKY DAY.

Claude waited below in Ivy Lane on the shady side of the street. It was full of children playing noisily, and there were soft and murmurous echoes, poetically speaking, from Hoxton Street on the right,

where there is a perpetual market. Presently he became aware of a shrill voice rapidly rising, which he easily recognised as his sister Melenda's voice.

The voice rose so loud that he could catch some of the words. And it seemed to him as if this visit promised to be even a greater failure than that to the Almshouse. At last the voice grew so shrill and the language so unmistakable, that he thought he ought to follow the girls, if only to protect them.

When he opened the door he was greeted by Melenda herself with a derisive laugh.

"Charity boy!" she said, pointing with her forefinger.

He had, however, heard this remark before, and now received it without emotion.

Valentine was standing at the table with flushed face and a look of bewilderment and pain. Violet was cowering in Lizzie's chair—absolutely cowering—and crying. Lotty was looking on, troubled and perplexed. Lizzie sat on the bed beside her, the work in her hands, making believe that the scene neither interested nor concerned her, and that she was wholly occupied and absorbed in her button-holes, which she handled ostentatiously, holding the garment up to the light, spreading it on her knee, contemplating it with the needle in her mouth, and in other ways proclaiming her entire unconsciousness of the Row. Yet she listened and smiled with pride when Melenda surpassed herself, and from time to time she lifted her great eyes and took in some fresh detail of the ladies' dresses. Oh! could she ever have dreamed of things so beautiful?

"Charity boy!" repeated Melenda. "Of course he brought the charity girl with him."

Claude made no reply, which disconcerted her. And he looked at her not angrily but gravely and wonderingly, which made her still more angry.

"What is the matter, Valentine?" he asked, after a pause. "Has my sister been rude to you?"

"Yes," Melenda broke in; "I've been rude to both of 'em. I've told them the truth, and I wish they may like it and get it every day. Rude? Oh! yes, I've been rude. Don't make any error about that, Claude." She stuck—I use the word deliberately—she stuck her elbows on the table and put on her most defiant face.

"What is the truth, Melenda?" Claude asked her; "will you tell it to me as well?"

The aggravating thing with Claude was that you could never make him angry by calling him names, not even by calling him a charity boy. To-day, being in a Rage Royal, Melenda began with this supreme insult. She generally ended with it. People ought to get angry when you call them names, else there is no reason in calling names; and then, what a weapon thrown away! Not to get angry in return is unkind towards one's fellow creatures; it betrays want of sympathy; it arrogates a disgusting superiority; it makes people who have yielded to their wrath, and slung all the names they could find, hot and ashamed of themselves. Common people, ordinary, simple, unaffected people, not stuck-up people, get very angry when they are called names, and retaliate by calling worse names immediately by return post, or they take to punching heads or jumping upon one another. Claude, for his own exasperating part, only looked at his sister with his grave eyes as if he was wondering where she was feeling the pain and what ought to be done for it.

"Let us have the whole truth, Melenda."

"The truth is that we don't want fine ladies here. We're work-girls, and we've got to earn our living, and we ain't ashamed of it. We don't want to be looked at like as if we were elephants in a circus. Let 'em go and look at somebody else. We ain't a show. Lotty ain't a clown; I ain't a jumping-horse; Liz ain't a salamander."

"Don't you want to see your sister again, Melenda?"

"My sister!" She threw her arms with a fine gesture, free and unstudied. "Oh! look at me and look at them. Listen to him—my sister! Look at my frock, and Lotty's frock, and Lizzie's frock, and look at theirs. My sister! And they can't tell which it is. My sister! If you come to that——"

"But one of these young ladies is your sister—and mine."

"It's the first I've heard of Polly being a young lady. Which of 'em is it, then? Is it her, who can't be spoken to but she begins to cry? or her"—Melenda suited gesture with her thumb to words, so that no mistake should be possible—"who wants to shake hands and to kiss? A pretty kiss!"

"They only learned a day or two ago that they had a sister. Was it unkind in them to make themselves known to you as quickly as they could?"

"Well, they're curious, and they've had their curiosity. They've seen me, and now they may go away and boast to all the swells that they've got a sister who makes button-holes. Sooner they go the better. Come! they've wasted time enough already."

"You are very unkind," said Valentine. "If we

were to come again when you were not so busy with work——"

"No," said Melenda, "I don't want to see either of you never again. One of you is Polly, because you say so, and I don't see why you should be proud of being my sister. Well, when Polly leaves off pretending to be a lady she may come here, and not before."

"Your sister," said Claude, "can never lay aside that pretence."

"Mother hadn't ought to let her go," the girl went on; "I always said so. Why should Polly be brought up with nothing to do all her life but to sit down and to eat and drink?"

"On the contrary," said Claude, "she has done a great deal."

"Does she go dressed like this?" asked Melenda, springing to her feet, and displaying with rapid gesture the deficiencies of her scanty wardrobe, the whole of which was upon her. "Does she get up at six and work all day till nine? Does she have bread and butter and tea for all her meals?"

"Oh!" said Valentine, "if you will only let us help you. We did not come here to pry upon you—not out of curiosity—oh! not out of curiosity. We came because we wanted to know our sister."

"Now you know her then, you can go away again. I don't mind. You see what I am. Oh! I know what I'm like, and what Liz is like, and Lotty—only Lotty is different. Fine manners, ours, ain't they? Go away and laugh at us."

"Indeed there is nothing to laugh at," said Valentine.

"Then cry over us like her"—she meant Violet. "I dare say she likes crying. If a girl had said half

to me that I've said to her, I'd have had her hair out of her head."

"You are cruel," said Violet; "is it our fault that Polly was taken from you?"

"Didn't say whose fault it was. It's no concern of mine. You've got my thimble, Liz. Where's your own?"

"Melenda, try to be gracious," said Claude. "Pretend to know something about manners. Make believe that Sam is here. You generally behave, you know, when Sam is present."

Melenda sniffed. "Come," she said, returning to the charge, "you were curious to see your sister, weren't you? Well, you've seen her, and I dare say you'll ask her to tea and shrimps and meet your fine friends. I'll come with Joe and Sam and some of Joe's kids if you like, to make a family party. And now you can go away and be mighty thankful that you weren't left to grow up with your mother and me. Else you'd be sitting here this moment where Liz is sitting, and working like Liz is working."

She sat down, picked up her work, and began to sew again violently.

Valentine sighed. "You *shall* see me again," she said, "whether you like it or not. You cannot lock the door in your sister's face. I will make you want to see me."

Melenda went on sewing without any reply.

Then Valentine turned to Lotty.

"Tell me," she said, "are you perhaps a cousin of Melenda's and mine?"

"No," said Lotty, "I'm only her friend. We've lived together for eight years, Melenda and me."

"And do you sew every day?"

"Unless we're out of work we do. It is all we have learned."

"But you don't look strong enough for the work."

"I'm stronger than I look," said Lotty, smiling. "I can do a good bit of work. It's my back which isn't strong, and makes me cough sometimes. I've got to lie down a great deal. And then Melenda works for me." She looked up shyly. "You won't mind what Melenda said, will you, Miss? She's put out to-day about something—something somebody said to Liz about the work, it was. Please don't mind; she's easy put out, but she's the best heart in the world."

"You'll just have to lie down again, Lotty," said Melenda, "if you talk so much."

"What is your name?" asked Valentine.

"Lotty—Charlotte East. This is Liz. Her father lives downstairs, but she lives and works with us. She's seven years younger than me. I'm twenty-four and Liz is seventeen."

"Do you like your work, my dear?" Valentine asked Lizzie.

The girl turned her great heavy eyes upwards. "No, I don't," she replied slowly.

"If you've got to do it, what's the odds whether you like it or whether you don't?" asked Melenda.

"Come, Valentine," said Violet, "it is no use staying."

"Not a bit," said Melenda.

"Have you no kind word for us at all, Melenda?" Valentine asked.

"Look here," the girl replied; "you don't belong to us, neither of you. Go away to the people you do belong to—you and Claude. They're the people that

keep us girls on a shilling a day, so as they can get their dresses cheap. Stick to them. They're the people who've stolen the land and the labour and everything that's made. Sam says so. Leave us alone. Don't come here and laugh at us. I won't have it. And as for you"—she turned to Violet, who shrank back and caught Claude by the arm—"dare to come again and cry at us! If you do, I'll tear your bonnet off."

"You are behaving very rudely, Melenda," said Claude.

She sniffed again and tossed her head.

Since, however, she continued in this hard and unrepentant mood, and showed no sign of melting, there was nothing left but to withdraw, which they did, retreating in good order, as the history books say, or rolling sullenly over the border, as they also say. That is, the enemy did not shove them downstairs, nor tear off their bonnets, nor hurl things after them, nor call them names, but suffered them to retire unmolested. To be sure, they were routed; there was no possibility of mistake about that.

For at least two hours Melenda continued stitching in absolute silence, but her lips moved. At the expiration of this period she broke out into short interjectional phrases, which showed that her mind was powerfully working. "I'm glad I spoke out—did her good for once—I won't be cried at—we don't want curious ones here — teach them to keep their own places," and so forth—not original or novel phrases, and perhaps wanting in dignity, but with some fire. Then she relapsed into silence again.

It was nearly nine o'clock when it became too dark to see the work any longer, and they put it by.

Then Lizzie began to make certain preparations. She took a hat out of a drawer—a hat with a feather in it. She tied a bright-coloured ribbon round her neck, and she put on her ulster, which is a work-girl's full dress for summer or for winter, only in summer there is not always a frock under it.

"Liz, dear," said Lotty, "you won't be late, will you? And, Liz—don't—oh! Liz—don't talk with any more gentlemen."

Lizzie made no reply, and disappeared.

"She's put on her best ribbon," Lotty said, with a sigh, "her Sunday ribbon. What's that for, I wonder?"

Melenda made no reply. She was thinking of her own sister, not of Lizzie.

"Oh!" she cried presently, throwing out her arms in a gesture unknown to the stage, but natural and very striking; "if she'd only come alone! But to come in a pair, and for both to sit and smile and say they didn't know which of them was Polly, as if it didn't matter what became of her—I suppose because she was a poor girl and her mother was a washer-woman, and you and me and Liz beneath their notice, and it was all pride and curiosity and looking down upon us—I couldn't bear it, Lotty, so I spoke up. I'm glad I did."

She showed her gladness by bursting into tears.

"I'd do it again. If they come again, I'd do it again. With their kid gloves and their real flowers and gold chains, and to look about the room as if we were wild beasts at a show, and a teapot a thing they'd never seen before. We don't want 'em. Let 'em leave us to ourselves. We can do our work with-

out them, and bear what we've got to bear, Lotty, you and me together, can't we?"

"They looked sorry," said Lotty, doubtfully; "they'd got kind faces and they spoke kind."

"I don't know," Melenda went on, "which I hate the most—the one who looked as if the very sight of us made her sick and ashamed—that was the one who began to cry when I up and cheeked her; or the one who wouldn't cry, and on'y stared as if I was something strange, and kep' saying that I was mistaken, and wouldn't get into a rage, say what I liked. Just like Claude—you can't put Claude in a rage. I believe that one must be Polly. All the same I hate her: I hate 'em both."

"I wouldn't hate them if I were you, Melenda," said Lotty. "What's the good? They only came to see if they could help you, p'r'aps."

"They help me? Likely! I wouldn't have their help, nor Claude's neither, if I was starving. As for Polly being my sister, they took her away and we've lost her."

"If it was to dress her up and make her a lady, so much the better for her. I wish somebody would take us all three away and do just the same."

"You've no spirit, Lotty. Of course it's your poor back. But you've no spirit."

Melenda put on her hat and went downstairs into the streets. She always finished the day in this manner. After fifteen hours of sewing in one room and in one position it is necessary to get change and fresh air. Therefore two of the girls roamed the streets, making of Hoxton Street and Pitfield Street and the City Road and Old Street their boulevard

from nine o'clock or so until twelve. The society of the streets is mixed; things are said in them which in other circles are left unsaid; but there is life and a faint semblance of joy, and some kind of laughter and light and fresh air. Melenda passed through the children playing in Ivy Lane, and the groups of mothers standing about and talking together, and turned into Hoxton Street. She avoided for once the crowd on the pavement, and trudged along in the road behind the costers' carts, for it is a street where they hold perpetual market. When she came to the end of Hoxton Street she walked on till she came to the bridge over the canal. It is a strange place. The water lies below black and rather terrible. Melenda had heard legends of girls throwing themselves into that black water when they were tired of things. There is generally visible a barge with its light and its fire. To-night the girl's brain, as she leaned over the parapet, was full of tumult. Her own sister had come back to her, and she had driven her away with shameful words and insults. To be sure she had long forgotten the very existence of her sister. Perhaps, from time to time, she thought of her as one thinks of an old playmate gone away years ago to Australia or to the Western Lands, never to return. But she had come back—the little Polly—transformed into a young lady, and Melenda had used hard words.

It was nearly midnight when she got home. A few of the children were still in the court, but they were sitting on the doorstep, and some of them asleep: these were the children who were afraid to go upstairs because father was drunk and not yet gone to sleep. A few women were still talking, but most had gone

home and to bed. One or two of the men were singing or roaring or crying, according to their habits when drunk; but not many, because it was Monday night, which is generally a sober time. In the room on the first floor front Liz was in bed and sound asleep. Lotty was lying on her back, watching and waiting.

"Melenda," she whispered, "they were beautiful young ladies. They meant to be kind. Don't make them cry if they come again."

"There oughtn't to have been but one," said Melenda severely. "Go to sleep this minute, Lottie. Polly wasn't twins."

CHAPTER VII.

AFTER MELENDA.

In the evening of the same day Lady Mildred was at home. Claude's acquaintance with society was limited, as may be supposed. He who is climbing must wait until he has reached the higher levels before he can think of society. Such an evening as this, with the musical laughter of girls, the continuous murmur of talk, the brightness of the rooms, the atmosphere of happiness and freedom from care, just as if everything was real, solid, and abiding, and everybody was young and happy, and was going to remain young and happy, filled Claude with a kind of intoxication and delight, and to-night he could admire his sister in one of these two girls with a sense of wonder as if it was a dream. His life had been serious—the life of one who had no chance except to succeed by his own efforts. Society,

which has no serious aims, holds no place for such a man until he has succeeded: women hold no place in such a man's life until he has got up to a certain elevation.

"What are you thinking of, Claude," Valentine asked him.

"I was thinking of contrasts and incongruities," he replied.

"The contrast of the afternoon with the evening. Yes. But if you cannot forget those things, you will begin to think that we are mocking at misery. What would Melenda think and say if she were to stand among us suddenly?"

"One can hardly imagine," Claude laughed, "anything more incongruous."

"I suppose she would ask us how we could possibly feel happy on the very day when we had seen her home and her friends. And I am sure she would not understand how we could sing and laugh and yet not forget her or cease to think of her. Society must have its incongruities—I suppose, because we must hide away so much of ourselves."

At the other end of the room was Violet in the middle of a group, talking with bright eyes and apparently the lightest heart in the world.

"Violet had an hysterical fit when we came home this afternoon," Valentine whispered. "Melenda was too much for her. Yet she puts on a brave face, and nobody would suspect the truth."

With her—one of her group—was Jack Conyers. As Valentine crossed the room with Claude he glanced quickly from Violet to Valentine and then to Claude.

Strange! The girls were not only like each other,

but they both looked like Claude. It was the first opportunity Conyers had obtained since hearing of Claude's relations with Lady Mildred's daughters of making a comparison between the girls and their brother. Surely, with the portrait of Sir Lancelot at five-and-twenty, gazing upon the room from the wall; with Lady Mildred herself, present in the flesh; with the two girls, and with Claude their brother, there should be data enough to solve the problem easily. Jack Conyers, however, like everybody else who attempted a solution of a riddle, forgot one essential thing. It is this: if two girls are brought up together from childhood in exactly the same way, with the same education, the same food, the same governors, pastors, and masters, and are kept apart from other girls, and are dressed alike, they may grow very much like each other; little points of resemblance may become accentuated. Chinamen, for instance, who are a very gregarious people, present to the outward world millions of faces all exactly alike. Old married people are often observed to have grown like each other; and if you look at a girls' charity school, where they live all together under one roof, and are subjected to exactly the same rules and influences, you will find that they certainly grow to have the same face.

There is, for instance, a certain Reformatory of my acquaintance in a London suburb. The young ladies belonging to this institution are marched in procession to church every Sunday. As they pass along the road, the admiring bystander becomes presently aware that they are all exactly alike. It is bewildering until philosophy lends its light. For the girls are like so many sisters: here a dozen twins:

here a triplet or two; here more twins. Some are older, some are younger; but they are all of one family—they are apparently of one father and one mother. The Reformatory face is striking, but by no means pleasing. It looks, in fact, as if Monsieur le Diable has had more to do with the girls' fathers or mothers, or both, than with other people's fathers and mothers.

No doubt it was due to the nineteen years of close association and friendship that Valentine and Violet had grown so much alike, and Mr. Conyers, had he been wise, would have looked for points of dissimilarity rather than of resemblance. But this he did not think of. Besides, the young ladies were not like the models who came to his studio: they did not sit to him; he could only study their faces furtively.

"They both look like Claude too," Jack Conyers thought, with troubled brow. "First one looks like him, and then the other. If only they wouldn't dress their hair exactly alike, there might be a chance."

Other eyes besides his own were curiously watching and comparing Claude with the two girls, for some of the people knew that the brother of one was present, and there was a natural anxiety to know which he resembled and what sort of a young man he was. Seeing that he was only the son of a working man, it was rather disappointing to find a young man of good manners and excellent appearance, reported to be a Fellow of Trinity who had distinguished himself, and was now called to the Bar. Except that the face was somewhat like the faces of the girls, cast like theirs in the oval mould, there was nothing at first sight to connect him with one girl more than with the other.

So that everybody was disappointed and went empty away.

Presently Valentine sang. She had a strong and full contralto voice, which had been carefully trained and cultivated. And she had, besides, the heart of the musician. But she would not sing more than once.

"Claude," Violet whispered, when the singing ceased, "can you sing?"

"Not at all. I have no voice."

"Nor have I. That is one point of resemblance between us. Is it part of our inheritance? No voice and no fortune. Of course you can paint and draw?"

"No. I can hardly hold a pencil, and I never tried to paint."

"Oh! That is very strange, because it is the only thing I can do at all. In that respect Valentine is like you. I suppose you cannot embroider? I am clever in embroidery."

"No, unfortunately. But I can make Latin and Greek verses: that is perhaps a branch of embroidery."

"If you could make English verses I would claim this as a point of resemblance. Are you clever at sums?"

"No, not very."

"Oh! I am sorry, because I am. Now Valentine can never add anything correctly. Are you—tidy?"

"No, not all."

"I am so glad, because I am the most untidy person in the world, and Valentine is the neatest. Her room is like a ship's cabin. Are you fond of dogs and animals?"

"Not very."

"What a pity! because I am; and I have the most lovely dogs at home—in the country you know. I would not let the poor things come to town. But Valentine does not care much for them. Do you like music?"

"Yes; but I cannot play."

"Well, I can play, I suppose, but Valentine is really a musician, not an amateur. Well, Claude, this is most exasperating, because one moment you are like Valentine and the next you are like me. Is there anything else that you can do?"

"I know one or two modern languages and a little law. And I can row a little, play cricket a little, play tennis a little——"

"We can play lawn-tennis too. Claude"—she lowered her voice again—"never mind the points of resemblance. But, oh! it was a truly dreadful afternoon. My poor brother!"

What she meant was that if she, in one interview, found Melenda so unspeakably dreadful, what must be his own feelings about her when he had always known her?

"As for me," he replied, intelligently answering her unspoken question, "Melenda has always been my sister. I am used to her. But of course she has not been yours."

"Spare us another interview, Claude. I am selfish, I know. But I cannot bear to go there again— just yet."

"You shall not go again unless you wish, Violet. I am afraid she was—well—outspoken."

"She was—unspeakable."

This was true, and the fact is a sufficient excuse

for the silence of history as regards her actual words. History, like schoolmaster Sam in his class-room, is perpetually wiping out something with a sponge. Also, like Sam, History has a board as black as Erebus itself to write upon.

"Yes;" it was Jack Conyers' voice, which was not loud but penetrating, and he was talking with Valentine. "Yes; since I saw you in Florence I have been irresistibly forced to devote myself wholly to Art. Such other personal ambitions as I may have cherished are now altogether abandoned."

"Indeed! But there is nothing more delightful than Art, Mr. Conyers, or more honourable, is there?"

"I shall hope to see you and your sister in my studio some happy day, Miss Valentine. My picture will not be completed and ready for exhibition for three or four years more. But my friends will be allowed to see it in progress."

"I hope we shall see it in the Academy or the Grosvenor."

He put up his hands and shuddered gently.

"Not that," he murmured; "anything but that."

"Claude," said Violet, "that is the man who paid us so much attention last winter in Florence. He really was very useful to us; and he divided his attentions equally, you see, so as to prevent mistake."

"What mistake?"

"Why, you silly boy, he might have made love to Polly instead of to Beatrice. He has had ten minutes with Valentine, and now he will come to me. Do you believe in him?"

"I knew him at Cambridge. We thought he was clever."

"He talks perpetually about himself, as if he very much wished to be thought clever; and I—don't know—but there does not seem always the right ring about him. Does there? He isn't real."

Presently Claude's turn came with Lady Mildred. She was always gracious—always a *grande dame de par le monde*—but she had never been more gracious or greater than that evening, when she found her opportunity to say a few words for his own ear.

"Do you remember, Claude," she asked him, "a certain day twelve years ago when I took you to the opera, and told you that if you wished you could take your own place among the people you saw there?"

"I remember all that you ever told me, Lady Mildred."

"Well, the time has come; you may take your place. I will, if you please, place you in as good a set as anyone can desire. It helps a young man to be seen occasionally in society."

"I have never thought much of society. My ambition has always been to justify——"

"I know it has, Claude. You have more than justified what was done for you at first. Otherwise, should I have made you known to your sister?"

"But you allowed me to take them to——"

"Yes, Claude. Your sister ought to know her relations. She need not associate with them unless she pleases. Perhaps she would not quite appreciate you unless she understood what you had done. I want her to be proud of you, Claude."

"Thank you," he said.

"You think—you feel—that success and personal distinction will satisfy your soul, Claude?"

"Why," he replied, wondering, "what else is there? We are all fighting for place of some kind, and I am fighting for a front place."

"And you think you will be happy when you get that place?"

"I am sure that nothing else will make me happy. Why do you ask, Lady Mildred?"

"Be happy, my dear boy, in any way you can. Only do not be quite sure that there is no other ambition possible for you."

Claude walked away with Conyers about midnight. His friend was not quite satisfied. He had not discovered anything, and he doubted whether he had made it quite certain that he was going to be a great painter.

"Well," he said, "have you learned anything yet—the truth about these young ladies? That is, if it is not a secret of state."

"Not a secret of state at all. Only that we do not know. Lady Mildred will tell us when she pleases."

They smoked their cigarettes in silence for a while.

"Jack," said Claude, after a pause, "about that girl—the girl you were talking about—you know—the girl with the eyes and the possible face—the girl you talked of making your model."

"I remember. What about her?"

"Don't do it, Jack. Let the girl stay. I have been quite lately among girls of her class. Such a girl might very well be my own sister. Leave her alone, Jack."

"My dear fellow, out of half a million girls—but

have it your own way. There are plenty of models, though not many with such eyes. But have it your own way. As if any girl could be harmed by devoting herself to the service of Art!"

"Yes," said Claude; "the same thing used to be said in Cyprus when they wanted a girl to devote herself to the service of Aphrodite."

"If the girl would sit to me I would paint her. That is all. But you are quite right, Claude. It would be a pity to turn her head. She shall stay with her friends and go on with her sewing, so far as I am concerned.

CHAPTER VIII.

ALICIA.

"WELL, Jack, as you have not thought fit to call upon me, I have come to call upon you."

His visitor was a woman no longer in her first youth, but not yet much past thirty; of an age when one begins to say of a woman that she still keeps her good looks—a handsome woman, large-limbed and tall, with full cheek and smiling mouth; a good-tempered woman, yet one who knew her own mind and had her own way. And though she laughed, her eyes had a look in them which made Jack, who felt guilty, wish that the visit was over.

"Thank you," he said. "It has been very rude of me, but I have been getting settled. You know that I have at last taken a studio."

"Really! You may call me Alicia, you know, Jack, just as you used to do. I am glad to hear that you have begun to do some work."

"I have begun my Work." There is a subtle distinction between beginning to work and beginning one's Work.

"Oh! And—meanwhile, Jack?"

He met those eyes and blushed.

"Meanwhile?" she repeated. "A man can't make himself an independent gentleman quite for nothing, and you've been playing that game now for five years. And a man can't make money by painting, unless he is mighty lucky, all at once. Therefore, meanwhile, Jack, and until the money begins to come in?"

"What do you mean?" But he knew very well what she meant, because this lady knew all his family history and the exact amount of the fortune—a very little one—with which he had started, and it was no use making pretences with her: very few women are so considerate with men as to help them along with their little pretences.

"I mean, how are you going to live?"

"Like the sparrows, I suppose—somehow."

"Sparrows don't belong to clubs, and haven't a taste for claret, and don't pay a hundred and twenty pounds a year for rent. Now, I'm not going to let you take any of their money from the girls—they've got little enough, Lord knows."

"I do not propose to rob my sisters, Alicia."

"Then you will be wanting money very badly indeed before long. Besides, you never will make any by honest work. You can't paint, Jack, that is the truth, and you never will be able. What is the use of deceiving yourself? I didn't live eight years with my poor old man without learning something about pictures. Look here, now." She took up one of the

small portraits on the mantel-shelf. "Here's a thing! Yours, of course. Here's flesh—like putty! The eyes are not straight, and there's no more feeling about the lips than—well—and the worst of it is, you'll never learn. My old man wouldn't have given you half a crown for such a thing. No, you'll never learn, for your only chance is to begin at the bottom of the ladder, where everybody must begin. But you're too conceited for that. Oh! you're a genius, I know, and painting comes by nature, we all know that."

Jack reddened with anger. But he answered mildly, because for many reasons he could not quarrel with this plain-speaking lady.

"Really, Alicia, you carry the license of old friendship too far."

"Not a bit too far, Jack. It does you good to hear the truth. Who was this girl whose head you've got here? I seem to know her face. Some model, I suppose. She sat to you and you paid her a few francs, and now you've stuck her over your mantelpiece for your friends to see, and you pretend she was in love with you, and you brag about your conquests——" A cruelly truthful woman, because that was just exactly what Jack had done. Men like Jack Conyers always do this kind of thing. "Pretty conquests!"

"Did you come here, Alicia, on purpose to insult and wound me?"

"Not on purpose. But I certainly came to have it out with you."

She sat down, as if to contemplate the situation.

"Patience has limits, Jack, I warn you. It may seem to you easy as well as honourable to look out for

a better match in society, and to throw me over if you succeed. Well, I don't think you will succeed. For you see, not many ladies, old or young, in society have got two thousand a year. And what have you got to offer them in exchange for their money, because they are not likely to give themselves away for nothing? If you haven't got fortune or family or brains, what have you got? Pretence—pretence of genius—sham and pretence. It's too thin, Jack. It won't stand washing. Besides, things will have to come out. Fancy your having to confess the little facts you have put away so carefully! Nobody in society cares where you come from so long as you can behave yourself and amuse people. All they want is to be amused; but when it comes to marrying, questions will be asked, my dear boy—will have to be answered too. Don't look so savage, Jack. Your father wasn't much, was he? And mine wasn't in a very lofty social position, was he? And my poor dear old man made his business in the picture-dealing line, didn't he? But then, you see, I don't pretend."

"I suppose it is not a crime to desire social position," said the young man humbly. "I did not say I was trying to marry anybody. Can't I desire social position and success in my Art?"

"Desire away, Jack; desire as much as you like. But how, meanwhile, I ask again, are you going to live? And how long do you think I shall let you play fast and loose with me? This kind of thing will not continue for ever."

Jack murmured that he had no wish at all to play fast and loose with her.

"Look here, then," she said, "I will meet you half

way. I will give you the rest of the summer. Have your fling; have your shy at an heiress. The season is nearly over. I won't give you longer than the summer. Then you must come back to me for good or not at all."

Jack made no reply. I think, however, that in his heart he was grateful both for the length of the rope and the chance at the end of it.

"I know exactly what kind of life you desire. Your name sounds good, and you want to be thought of a good old family. You could hide the family shop, because the name wasn't over the door, and you lived at Stockwell. You want to be thought a man of great refinement, and you want to be thought a genius."

"You can say what you like in these rooms, Alicia."

"I know I can. You also want all the solid comforts. As for them, I can give them to you: and some of the other things as well. You shall pretend to be a genius, if you like—I'm sure, I don't care what you pretend. I'll give you an allowance to keep up appearances with—as for its extent, that will depend on your behaviour—yes—" for Jack's face showed a disposition to be restive—"married women's property is their own nowadays, remember."

"Oh! keep your property."

"You shouldn't have made love to me, Jack, a year ago, unless you intended to hear the truth."

"You certainly make the most of your privilege."

"Oh! Jack, you have always been such a tremendous humbug. You were a humbug when you were a boy and used to brag about the great things you meant to do, and all the time the other boys walking past you easily. Then, you must become a gentleman, and must

needs go to Cambridge and spend most of your little fortune there, pretending all the time that your father wasn't——"

"That is quite enough, Alicia!"

"Why, Jack, weren't the two shops side by side, your father's and mine? And didn't we go to church together? And didn't we go to the theatre together? And didn't you tell me everything? Why shouldn't we speak plain, you and me? When I married my poor dear old man, didn't I promise and vow that you and me should continue friends? You, a great man! You, a great genius! Oh no! But you can look the part, and that is something, isn't it? Good-bye, my dear boy. I don't like you so well as when you were a boy and made us laugh with your conceit, being always as conceited as Old Nick. Come and have dinner with me to-night. I won't interfere with your heiress-hunting. Nobody but yourself, and a bottle of the poor old man's best claret. Good-bye, Jack. Dinner at half-past six sharp."

She lingered a moment and looked at the three portraits again. Then she burst into a loud laugh, natural, long, and hearty: "Don Juan! Conqueror of hearts! Oh! we poor women, how he makes our hearts bleed! I thought I knew the face. Why, I know them all three now. And, Jack, it is really too thin. Every picture dealer knows them. I've got 'em all at home. This one is a Frenchwoman, and sits in Paris. She's been Cleopatra and Ninon Longclothes, and anything else you please; and this is an Italian creature who's Venus coming out of the sea or a Nymph bathing—we've got her in both characters on the staircase wall. The Venus was put up at a hundred, but my

old man never got his price. And the third sits for a Spanish girl, with a guitar, you know—which is stale business now—peeping behind a lattice or kneeling in church. Oh! Jack, Jack, what a terrible humbug you are!"

CHAPTER IX.

SAM.

THERE remained Sam.

After the embarrassments already twice caused by the introduction of the Duplicated Polly, Claude thought it would be best to explain beforehand. He did this, therefore, by letter, and invited her brother to meet the doubtful sister in his own chambers on the Sunday morning.

Sam accepted, but without enthusiasm. He already had one sister of whom he was ashamed, because she remained in poverty. Very likely the other would be just like her and an additional clog on his own respectability. Sam was one of that numerous tribe which dislikes the family clog. Claude, in his letter, spoke of the new sister as a young lady, but then the word Lady in these days of equality covers so wide an area. This is quite right, because, why should a title so gracious and beautiful be limited to the House of Peers and the narrow class of Armigeri?

Yet, everybody must not use it: it has still a distinctive meaning; it has a lower limit, except in the mind of the omnibus conductor, who employs it as a synonym for Madame. Melenda, for instance, was below that limit. She could be properly described as a Young Girl, which is the general name for the work-woman

in youth, but no one would think of calling her a young lady. One who is employed in a shop; one who has been called to the Inner Bar; one who is in the ballet; one who is in the Front with the playbills, may be a young lady: but not a work-girl. Sam very naturally concluded that this other sister—the young lady—would be following such occupation, and he saw no reason for joy at the new addition to the family circle. But he was not unkind: it was only natural, after all, that Polly, on returning to the family circle, should wish to see the brother who had so greatly distinguished himself: the fame and rumour of his own rise had, no doubt, reached her wondering ears; a man's relations only really begin to rally round him when he has shown how strong and tough and brave he is. Sam promised, therefore, to give up a portion of his Sunday morning to family affection. He kept that promise, and when he arrived in King's Bench Walk he found the girls waiting for him.

He was not, however, prepared for the sight of two young ladies, the like of whom he had never before encountered, either for appearance, or for dress, or for manners. They do not make girls, at least not many girls, after this pattern in Haggerston, where Sam's school is situated.

"One of these young ladies, Sam," said Claude, "is your sister, but, as I have already told you, we do not know which."

Sam looked from one to the other, reddening and confused. Their eyes did not say, "Is this the great and distinguished Sam?" Not at all: their expression conveyed another question, which he was quite sharp enough to read, namely, "What will Sam be like?"

One after the other gave him her hand, which Sam accepted with a pump-handle movement, saying to each, "How de do?" just as if they had met after only a week's absence. Then he recovered, in some sort, the sense of himself and his own greatness, and he thought of the awe which he was doubtless inspiring, though the girls concealed it. Yet he was fain to mop his face with a pocket-handkerchief, and he said it was a hot morning, and in his agitation he dropped the aspirate, about which he was sensitive, because his own was the only aspirate to be found in all Haggerston except in church, and he mopped his face again. Then he found a chair and sat down. In this position he immediately rallied and stuck his thumbs into his waistcoat armholes. This is not the most graceful attitude possible for a man, but it suited Sam better than some others would have done. He could not, for instance, stand, like Claude, with no support or background; nor could he lean gracefully over a mantel-shelf. He wanted an attitude which should convey a sense of strength and of complete self-satisfaction.

"You don't know which is Polly, Claude?" he asked, looking from one to the other as if they had been a pair of lay figures. "Well, I'm sure I can't remember. Never mind, my dears," he added, with a reassuring nod, "I'll call you both my sisters."

Claude had used almost the same words, but somehow the effect produced was different. Violet turned away her eyes and Valentine gravely inclined her head.

Sam, as regards the outer man, which people insist on taking in evidence as regards the unseen soul, was stout and strongly built, with square shoulders. He was under the middle height, and his legs, if one

must speak the truth, were short and curly. This is considered to be a sign of strength, though it is the line of beauty in the wrong place. His face as well as his legs showed strength; his forehead was broad and square; his sharp eyes were set back under thick red eyebrows; his coarse red hair rose from his forehead like a cliff; his nose, if short, was also broad; his mouth was firm, and his chin square. Never was there a stronger or more determined-looking young man. Never, certainly, if attitude and expression go for anything, was a young man more self-sufficient.

"You heard, of course," he said, amiably, "how your brother had got on in the world, and then you naturally wanted to see him. Well, here I am. Only don't look to me for a shove up. Everybody for himself, I say."

"We will not ask anyone for a 'shove up,'" said Violet, "even though we do belong to the poor."

"The poor?" Sam started in his chair and turned red. "What do you mean by the poor? You belong to the working class, not the poor. The poor? Why, you are the great backbone of the country."

"Am I?" Violet replied. "Then if all the country has to depend upon——"

"The mainstay and support of the nation," Sam continued. "Don't let me hear you call the working class the poor again. One would think you came out of the Union."

I am told that people in very high place are positively ignorant of rank in the middle class, and actually regard the general practitioner's lady as of no higher position than the wife of the leading draper, and the Vicar's young ladies as occupying the same

level as the auctioneer's daughters. In the same way it is difficult to understand that there is rank and position among working people; so that before one gets to the Poor, properly so called, one has to go very far down. They are, in fact, like the Rich who continually recede the more one advances, so that one begins to suspect that there are no Rich left in this Realm of England.

"Very likely I did come out of the Union," Violet replied, desperately. Was there no graciousness among the Monument family? "Why should we not come out of the Union?"

"As for that," Sam continued, "I suppose you know nothing about your own family. I always said it was folly letting a girl be brought up by her natural enemies."

"Why," asked Valentine, "why her natural enemies?"

"Of course, you know nothing. Who are the enemies of working man unless it's the people who live upon him? Answer me that. What have your friends done for their living—eh? Answer me that." He became suddenly quite fierce, and looked exactly like Melenda. His eyes glowed like hers, and he turned upon Valentine almost wrathfully. "Of course you've been taught to look down upon the working classes and call them the Poor, and that you must be good to the Poor. Why, look at the way you're dressed. Should a decent working man's sister go about with gold chains and silk frocks and kid gloves?"

"You see, Val," said Violet to Valentine, "Joe told us the same thing. We shall both have to dress like Melenda."

"Joe isn't a fool," said Sam, "though he's ignorant."

"Pray tell us all the faults you have to find with

us," said Valentine. "If we know what they are, we may correct them. We have certainly been taught kindness to poor people, and we have not been taught to despise working men. But go on."

"I don't want to find fault with you," Sam replied, more gently, "only for luxury and laziness and living on other people's labour."

"You read about the luxury and laziness in your papers, my brother," said Claude. He had been standing in the window looking on without remark. "Always verify your facts, Sam. I am sure you will not object to that rule. Ask them what they have learned. You will find that their record of work is as good, perhaps, as your own."

"Yes, I know: learning to play music and to read French and paint and make pretty things and to dress up fine. Well, I don't say it is your faults. You can't help it. I hear you've been to see my mother and you've set her back up; and you've seen Joe, and he wants to know what it means, and what you're going to do—whichever of you it is—for a living when her ladyship is tired of you. And you've seen Melenda, and she flew out, being driven most out of her wits by hard work and being always hungry. And now you've seen me."

"Yes," said Violet. This young lady really could convey more meaning in a single word than others can in fifty. "Yes."

Claude's eyes brightened and Valentine looked anxious. But Sam observed nothing. Half tones were in fact lost upon him.

"Yes, now you've seen me. All the rest of them are proud of me, and I'm proud of myself."

"I dare say," said Valentine, because Violet smiled, which might be considered an aggressive movement. "I dare say we shall be proud of you as we are of Claude when we know you."

"Of Claude?" Sam snorted, and drew his feet under his chair. "As proud as you are of Claude? Why, do you know what I am?" He swelled out his chest and squared his elbows. "Do you know what I am? I'm the Master of a Board School. Do you know what that means?"

"Sam has every reason to be proud," said Claude. "When he was only a boy he resolved on making himself a master in a school, and he has done it. He taught himself mostly; I have been taught."

Sam then proceeded to give a short sketch of his own progress, showing how he had scaled Alps, levelled great rocks, crossed mighty floods, in his single-handed struggle. The story lost nothing by being told by the hero. Few stories do, which you may prove by referring to the pages of any contemporary biography. "And for the future," he concluded, "remember that you will have to deal with the Schoolmaster. The working men are the masters of the country, and we are the masters of the working men. They are looking to us already. We are going to be their leaders."

"The House of Commons," said Claude, "will shortly be composed entirely of elementary schoolmasters."

"As soon as members are paid," Sam replied, "there will be a good many. And the more the better. The time has come when you must have men in the House who know something—not Latin and Greek, mind, but something useful. What geography do they

know, now? Nothing at all. With English possessions and colonies all over the world, the members know nothing of geography. There isn't a Sixth Standard boy who wouldn't be ashamed of the way they talk and the blunders they make. What do they know about trade and manufactures? Nothing. What do they know about the working man? Nothing. As for us, we do know him."

"Do you influence him much?" asked Violet, innocently, so that I do not know what it was that made Valentine look alarmed.

"Not so much as we would. They won't let us teach him the truth at school. The Code won't let us—they know very well why. We've got to waste the time teaching him things that will never be any use to him, such as spelling. What's the good of spelling to a man who never writes? And if you do write, what's the odds to a working man whether he spells right or wrong? But we must not teach the rights of humanity. We mustn't tell the boys anything about them. It would be difficult to examine for a grant in the Rights of Man, wouldn't it? and dangerous for some of the Committee of Council. But we know what the working men want and what they mean to have."

"Tell us what do they mean to have," said Valentine.

"What's the use?" It was curious to mark how Sam's rugged face leaped suddenly into rage and even ferocity, and then as suddenly dropped into gentleness. He was quite gentle now, as he answered, looking with a sort of pity upon a creature so beautiful, so dainty, and so unfit for the stern realities of life.

"What's the use?" he said. "You are a young

lady now and you belong to our enemies. What's the use of frightening you? Go home and enjoy yourself and eat and drink."

"But tell us," she persisted.

"I think we had better go home—and eat and drink," said Violet.

"Sam thinks his own opinions are those of all the working men," said Claude. "It is not unusual when people think strongly. Tell them your opinions, Sam."

"They are not my opinions only," said Sam; "don't think it. Well, if you ain't afraid, I am going to tell you just exactly what we mean to do—I and my friends—with you and your friends. You don't know and you don't suspect: it's just the same ignorance that was in France before the Revolution. One or two suspected what was coming, but most thought everything was going on for ever just the same. Very well. Don't you girls go away and say afterwards that you were left in ignorance. Go home and tell your friends that the working men of this country are going to have a Republic at last; not what your friends think and call a Republic, but the real thing. In a real Republic every man must be equal, so we shall of course abolish the Lords and all titles and privileged classes. As for the land, it belongs to the people; so we shall take the land and it shall be cultivated for the nation. And if anybody wants to be a priest, he may if he likes, after his day's work; for of course we shall disestablish the Church and take over Church property of all the churches for the good of the State. There shall be in our Republic no lazy parsons and ministers living on the people; and there shall be no lawyers, because there will be

free justice, and every man may have his case heard for nothing by a jury, and juries will sit every day if they are wanted. There will be no masters, employers, or capitalists, but equal wages for all and the same hours of work, with extra rations for those who have got children to support. There will be free education; there will be no idlers; everybody will be a working man. We shall take over all the railways, abolish the National Debt and the local debts. There will be no tradesmen, because the State—that is, the People—will keep the stores and distribute food and clothing. There will be no rates or taxes, because there will be no money, and labour will be the only coin, and everybody will pay his share by his own labour. There will be annual parliaments sitting every day all the year round, and nobody allowed to speak for more than five minutes. There will be, of course, manhood suffrage."

"Will women vote?" asked Violet.

"Certainly not," Sam replied, with decision. "Women can't govern. Besides, they can't be trusted to work for the public good: they would want private property restored, and they'd set up a church and try to fix things so that their own sons should have nothing to do. Women haven't got any sense of justice."

"Delightful," said Violet. "I was afraid I might be called upon to assist in governing."

"Pray go on," said Valentine.

"There will be plenty for all and no luxury. There will be no saving money, because there will be no money to save, and everybody will have to work, whether he likes it or not, until he is sixty, and then he will be maintained by the State. All buying and

selling will be in the hands of the State. The great houses will be turned into museums; the private parks will be either cultivated or turned into public gardens. Now, do you begin to understand?"

"I think I do," said Valentine. "When is all this to be begun?"

"I don't know. Perhaps in a year or two—perhaps in ten years. We are educating the people. We shall try to keep back those who want to act at once until everybody has been taught our principles."

"Sam is a Socialist," Claude explained. "I ought to have told you that before you came."

"Why, listen to this." Sam was thoroughly roused by this time. "Here are facts for you. Claude can't deny this." He sprang to his feet and stood over Valentine with flaming eyes, breathing like a bull, and hammering his facts into the palm of his left hand with the most determined forefinger ever seen. "Look at this. . . ." Here followed an avalanche of facts. "What, I say, have the capitalist and the landlord done that they should get seventy per cent. of the working man's harvest? When our men are in they will get the whole for themselves. Talk of compensation! Do you compensate a pickpocket when you take the purse out of his hands? Vested rights? Rights of robbery. We shall take all —land, houses, wealth, and all—and we shall give them to the People, to whom they belong."

By this time the indignation of the prophet had touched his lips with fire, and he went on to arraign the class of those who have great possessions with extraordinary vehemence and passion, and prophesied their overthrow, like another Ezekiel. Violet looked on and wondered, thinking how very much he resembled

Melenda. Valentine looked on and wondered, because up to that time she had only heard vaguely of the extreme wickedness of the wealthy class, and because she could not understand at all how they were so wicked, or why they were going to be so dreadfully punished, or what this new world of the Socialist would be like. She was reassured by the attitude of Claude, who still stood at the window gravely listening, but without the least assent in his face or emotion in his grave eyes.

"And now you know," Sam concluded, "something of what is coming, not in this country only, but everywhere. Oh! yes: in the United States, which they pretend to be a land of freedom, and it's a worse country for the working man than this, even. Perhaps it will come there first; and in France, which they pretend to be a Republic—a fine Republic!—and in Germany and Russia, where they don't pretend to anything but despotism, kept up with millions of bayonets for the luxury of the privileged class. Then there shall be no more riches and no more poverty, no more rich and no more poor, no more luxury and no more starvation. If you are wise you will come over to us at once." He seized Valentine's hand and held it tightly. "Come out of it, I say, before the house falls down about your ears. Some declare that it is going to be a bloodless revolution, but I know better. There is too much to lose—money and state and the easy life. Oh! yes—the easy life. They won't give these things up without a fight; they will fight to the death to defend their possessions. They will have all the shopkeepers and the merchants and the professional people on their side, and at first they will have the soldiers. It will

be the working man against the world. It will be a great and terrible struggle. There can be no Revolution —it isn't in the nature of things—without fighting and rivers of blood. Come over to us, you two. I don't care which of you is my sister; you may both call yourselves Polly if you like, and I'll stand by you both. But leave Claude and leave your friends and come over to us."

"How shall we live if we do?" asked Valentine.

"We will find something for you. Not button-holes to sew, like Melenda's work, but something that a decent girl can do. You've been educated, I suppose, in your finicking way. You know something besides looking pretty and putting on fine clothes. Perhaps it's not too late for Board School teaching if you're clever enough. You are the one for schoolwork"—he indicated Valentine; "you wouldn't be afraid, and you are strong. As for you——"

"What could I do?" asked Violet.

"I don't know. You don't look fit for much. Well, every girl can sew if you come to the worst. But there; you've heard what is coming—the greatest Revolution that the world has ever seen, and the People to the front with a rush. When that rush begins——"

"A good many will be carried off their legs," said Claude.

Sam made no reply. He had worked himself up to the redhot pitch and was now cooling down. He was a little ashamed, too, because Claude remained unmoved. As for the girls, he had certainly succeeded in animating one with his dream of the people, and frightening the other by his vehemence. But he cared nothing for that—anybody can work upon the emotions

of women. But Claude, who ought to have argued with him or confessed himself conquered, listened without the least sign of being moved. Yet he listened with attention, as if he had not heard it all a dozen times before. He could not complain that he had not heard the Socialist's arguments.

Sam went away. The courts of the Temple were deserted. He thought of the coming Millennium, when there should be no lawyers at all, but Justice should be free. As these courts were on that Sunday morning, so should they be every morning, in the glorious future of the Socialist, empty and untrodden, except by the feet of the children playing in their gardens. No more lawyers! He had no personal experience of lawyers, but yet his heart glowed within him at the prospect of their suppression. He passed under the cloisters beside the old church. Through the open doors he heard the rolling of the organ and the sweet pure voice of a boy who was singing a solo part in an anthem of prayer and praise. The very sweetness of the music irritated him, but he consoled himself with the thought that religion would shortly be entirely abolished, and that the sensitive ears of such thinkers as himself should no longer be annoyed with the singing of hymns. The Templar's church would be as empty and as deserted as the chambers and courts without. He passed into Fleet Street. All the shops were closed. Why, so it should be every morning and all the year round as soon as his friends were in power. Not a single shop should be left. No more trade, no more masters, no more buying and selling for profit. So, well satisfied with the prospect, Sam went his way.

In the evening there was to be a great social gathering of a certain branch of the Democratic Federation Union, at which some of the members were going to perform a play, and others were to sing and recite, and he himself was to address the meeting. It was going to be an occasion of some importance, and Sam was only sorry that he had not invited the two girls to be present. The evening would have opened their eyes. And though Sam professed to despise women, and was in no hurry to hamper himself by marriage, he did very well understand that the adhesion of two such pretty and well-dressed girls to the Cause, which is at present sadly to seek in the matter of young ladies, would greatly stimulate waverers and bring enthusiasm into the ranks. There is no leader in the world like a girl, if one can be found capable and courageous; but such a girl is rare.

"You have heard Sam's creed," said Claude; "he believes it, every word."

"After all," said Violet, "I can sew. Girls can do so much."

"And I," said Valentine, "can teach after my finicking education. But, Claude, a world with no poverty and no suffering——"

"Come," said Violet, "you must not even talk of it, Val dear, or we shall have you going over to the Socialists. Let us remain with our natural enemies, and eat and drink as much as we possibly can before we are drowned in Sam's rivers of blood. Claude, you will come to luncheon with us, won't you?" She heaved a deep sigh, which expressed some hidden emotion. "We have now seen Sam. He lives a long way off, does he not? We shall see him again, perhaps, when

he is President of the Socialist Republic and chopping off everybody's head with tremendous energy."

CHAPTER X.

THE GREAT RENUNCIATION.

Blessed above their fellows are those who can find relief for an overcharged mind by drawing—I do not mean the sweet copying of flower, fern, and tall grass, but the drawing of faces, heads, and figures, so that in times of oppression and affliction one can caricature one's enemy by representing him as a fool, an ass, a beast, a fox, or a serpent. This is the reason why the London School Board has thoughtfully introduced drawing into the schools, so that workgirls shall be enabled, in their after life, to find some relief and consolation. In the rare times of joy, in the same way, the multiplication of one's friends' portraits increases one's delight, and in times of doubt one can prevent the subject from harassing the mind by drawing likenesses of the personages concerned. Thus, it was highly disagreeable to Violet to think of Joe, with his grimy hands and smeared face and working-man's garb, as perhaps her brother. It was equally disagreeable for her to think that he was perhaps Valentine's brother. She drew him, therefore, in various positions, all more or less ridiculous, but especially that when he sat upon the table and grinned. This greatly relieved her soul. In the same way Sam, who was to her a much more objectionable character, lost half his terrors when she had drawn him triumphantly seated in the Revolutionary Car of Juggernaut, or flourishing

with zeal an executioner's axe, or calmly cutting off heads so as to make everybody the same size. But she could not draw Melenda. There are limits even to this artistic method of consolation.

Valentine had no such relief. Like Saul in his trouble, she turned to music for consolation, but found little. Joe and Rhoda and the blind old lady and Sam were nothing. As connections they were not, it is true, gentlefolk, but they were such as anyone might possess without either shame or pride. Nobody in these days really thinks—though they may pretend—any the better or any the worse of a man for having brothers and cousins who are carpenters or counts, baronets or bakers, Comtists or Baptists, Socialists or Red Republicans, Mormons or Methodists, because a man can no longer as in the good old days acquire fame or notoriety or disgrace by professing any trade or holding any form of belief whatever, unless, indeed, one were to go round with detonators and boxes of whitish paste, and profess himself a practical dynamiter. Sam was a very possible brother, and interesting in his self-sufficiency, his conceit, and his extreme views of politics. But besides Sam and Joe, there was Melenda. For nearly a week Valentine went about with a grisly spectre always before her eyes—the spectre of the workgirl, half-starved, over-worked, resigned, in a rage, uncomplaining. When Sam proclaimed his gospel of universal plenty, she thought of the happy change it would work for Melenda and her friends; when she sat at dinner she thought of Melenda's cold tea with bread-and-butter; when she went to her own chamber at night, she saw before her those three girls crouching together on their miserable bed in the wretched

room; always day and night there was present in her mind that little group of sewing girls; always the hollow eyes of one gazed reproachfully at her from the bed, saying, "Why will you still torment me so? What have I done?" and the large heavy eyes of the other raised in wonder that all women were not as she herself, the uncared-for slave of manufacturers, born to be expended in toil; and the fierce eyes of the third girl asking her how she dared in the insolence of her own luxury and happiness to mock the misery of her sister.

And then she made up a Scheme. No one but Violet knew of it, and when Valentine opened up the subject she first laughed at it and then cried over it. Gautama himself did not devise a more complete thing, so far as it went. No self-tormentor in Egyptian Laura or Syrian desert or Galilean cave ever proposed for himself a thing of greater discomfort.

And then she told Claude.

"It is impossible," he said at once, without the least hesitation. Every really great scheme is always declared impossible until it has been carried out, when it is perceived to have been a perfectly easy thing, and nothing to brag about. Anybody might have done it.

"Oh, Claude!" her face fell; "and I looked forward so confidently to your help."

"Let us find some other way for you."

"There can be no other way. Don't you see, Claude? There is my own sister—my sister and yours. Think how she is living; think of her miserable days. I must go and stay with her. I must help her. I dare

say she will try to drive me away. Very well. I will not be driven away."

"But it is impossible, Valentine. You don't know what it is you propose to do."

The difficulties were in fact enormous. But many enormous difficulties, when faced, turn out to be like the lions which faced Christian with angry roar, and so much terrified that greatly tried pilgrim. The lions are chained, and can do no harm. Or they turn out to be mere goblins, like those gruesome and shapeless and nameless things which whispered horrible suggestions into the pilgrim's ear when he was nervously staggering along that Valley.

"It is quite impossible, Valentine," Claude repeated. "It would kill you. Their life is not yours."

"I will make it mine. Oh, Claude! I thought I should have had your sympathy at least."

The tears stood in her eyes. All night long she had been lying awake filled and possessed by the thought. In the morning it only showed fairer and more beautiful than in the night.

"They are my own people, Claude."

"I do not know that. Besides, how are you to live among them? Will you stay with my brother Joe? or with my mother? or with Sam?"

"Neither. I intend to live with Melenda, or at least as close to her as can be managed. Where she lives I can live."

"But you have seen that Melenda lives in the very poorest way possible. Why, from a single visit it is impossible even to realise how poor and squalid is her life. Things that she does not mind at all would be simply intolerable to you."

"No, Claude. Whatever Melenda endures I can endure."

Claude shook his head.

"And then the place, and the people, and the language, and the drunkenness—oh, Valentine, it is quite—quite impossible."

"Think less of the difficulties and more of what I could do for our sister, Claude—she is our sister, you know—if I went and lived with her. Sit down and think about that. Think a little, Claude."

Claude sat down to think, and Valentine had recourse to white witchcraft.

Every woman—fortunately very few women fully realise this great truth—can do with every man whatever she pleases, provided, first, that she is young and beautiful; next, that the man is a man of imagination and possessed of a right feeling for the sex; and thirdly, that she has the mastery over some musical instrument. All these conditions were satisfied in the case of Claude and Valentine.

Then Valentine began to play. First she played a solemn march with full strong chords—a march full of hope and high resolve—and she watched Claude furtively. Presently the music entered into his soul, and he was fain to rise and to walk about the room. When his step quickened and his eye brightened she changed the music, and began to play one of those songs which need no words, because, when they are played, the thoughts rise naturally to the level of the song and flow rhythmically, and great ideas take form and shape. And still she watched him. Then she changed the air again and played a simple Scotch ditty, one of those which go straight to the heart, be-

cause they came originally from the heart. When she saw that his eyes were soft and his gaze was far away, she paused abruptly in her playing, and he started.

"I will help you," he said, "if I can. I do not know what you will do for Melenda, but you shall try. At all events, you will do something for yourself."

"That is nothing. I must think of those girls, not of myself."

"But—Lady Mildred?"

"Let us get everything quite ready first, and then we will go to her with our plan complete and waiting for nothing but her consent. I think she will consent."

Every scheme, even the noblest, requires machinery and service. Every drama wants to be properly rehearsed and duly mounted. The mounting of the little comedy designed by Valentine was carried out by Claude. It took him two or three days. First he went to Ivy Lane, and there, unknown to Melenda, who was sitting at work upstairs, he ascertained certain facts connected with the lodgers in the house. The ground floor front was occupied by an elderly gentleman of unknown calling, who was reported to be perfectly quiet and harmless though dreadfully poor. The ground floor back was inhabited by an old lady who herself assured Claude of her perfect respectability and unblemished character. If a woman's word is not to be taken for so much, for what can it be taken? As regards her profession, she got occasional employment in the funeral furnishing line. One would not, perhaps, choose this line, but it is necessary to live. Her practice, this lady further explained, in evidence and support of her great respectability, was to "go in" when the winter approached and to "come out"

for the summer. In this euphemistic manner do some ladies speak of the Union. She was not by any means a nice-looking lady, and she looked as if perhaps some portions of her life had not been spent in honest industry. She also confessed, and denied not, that there were times when the possession of a little money tempted her to take a glass; but these occasions, she said truthfully, were rare, because she seldom got the money.

The back room upstairs, behind Melenda's, was occupied by a middle-aged single woman, a machinist who made trousers all day long with the help of a sewing machine, and was in even direr straits than Melenda. She accepted a bribe of five shillings and the week's rent and vacated the room, which Claude proceeded to get thoroughly washed, scoured, scrubbed, and repaired. Then he put furniture in it, and that of a kind which made the collector believe that a district visitor at least was coming to live in Ivy Lane. All this he did without the least knowledge or suspicion of Melenda.

When everything was quite ready, Valentine laid her plan before Lady Mildred. With what eloquence she pleaded her cause, with what tears and entreaties, it needs not to relate. These may be understood.

"Let me go, dear," she concluded. "Oh, let me go. I have no rest for thinking of those girls—one of them my own sister. Let me go and live with them for a little while. I am not afraid of anything that may happen to me. I shall be quite safe among them."

Lady Mildred showed no surprise; nobody is ever surprised in these latter days at any course which is

proposed by daughters. She listened patiently, and bade her wait a day for her reply.

Now whenever Lady Mildred had quite made up her mind about the course she would adopt, she invariably went through the formality of consulting her friend, Miss Bertha Colquhoun. In no single case did she ever adopt that friend's advice, which was always contrary to her own opinion. Taking counsel with your friends, in fact, generally means getting an opportunity of putting your opinion into words, and of seeing how it looks. Much the same may be said as regards argument.

"Of course I knew very well," she said, "that something would happen when I brought Claude to the house and allowed the girls to visit his relations. I confess, however, that I am a little startled to find them so differently affected; for Violet is as much repelled by the poverty of the workgirls as Valentine is attracted."

"But of course, Mildred, even you will not actually suffer Valentine to go and live alone among them?"

"I do not know. Why not?"

"Alone, Mildred? Alone, and among those common people? Your own daughter—well, perhaps your own daughter—brought up as Valentine has been—would you suffer her to run the dreadful and terrible risks of such a thing?"

"What are the terrible risks?"

"Violence—insult—robbery—everything."

"No; I do not fear these at all. The principal risk is that of learning that the world is really a very wicked place. The new theory about woman's education, that she should not be kept in ignorance of evil

any more than the boys, has a good deal to be said for it. Valentine will discover among these people that the world, which has always seemed to her so beautiful and so virtuous, is really full of dark places and injustice."

"Is that good for a girl to learn?"

"Why not, since it is the truth? Will Valentine be made wicked by the discovery of wickedness? I do not think so."

"And Violet? Is she to go with her sister?"

"Violet is of less courageous mould. She will remain with me, and we shall go away together somewhere—to Switzerland or the seaside."

"You would surely not go away and leave that poor girl alone and unprotected in the awful place she is going to?"

"Yes. But she will not be quite alone; there is that sewing-girl—perhaps her sister. Working-men do not generally insult respectable girls, I have learned, though they are thoughtless about them. I think she will be quite safe with her supposed sister."

"Well, Mildred, I do not see that any possible good can come of it."

"Suppose," she replied, "a girl were to learn and understand, in this or some other way, some of the worst wrongs that are inflicted on women in this city—wrongs that can only be realised by actually sharing them or witnessing them day after day; and suppose that she is a brave girl and clear-headed, as well as sound of heart—think, then, what this girl might become and what she might do in after life. My dear Bertha, think of the things you have yourself read and cried over, but never really understood—I mean the

ill-treatment and oppression of workgirls. Do you suppose that women could be treated so if we made up our minds that they should not? We cannot believe that the 'Song of the Shirt' would have any meaning left at all except an ugly memory, if the women of this country once resolved that it should not. It is forty years and more since Hood wrote that song, and word for word, tear for tear, I am sure that it might be written and sung again this very day. Valentine shall learn for herself. Let her go, and let her—if it must be—suffer."

In the morning she gave judgment. There were present at this family council, besides the petitioner and Claude, Violet and Bertha. Everybody, except Lady Mildred herself, looked, for some reason or other, guilty. Bertha, because she had not risen to the level of the situation, and still looked on the step proposed as impossible for a gentlewoman; Violet, because she was ashamed of herself and her own shrinking from the life which Valentine proposed to share; Claude, because he had made all the arrangements beforehand, as if it was quite certain that consent would be obtained, and yet had made them secretly; and Valentine, because she was afraid she might be refused.

"My child," said Lady Mildred, taking both her hands, "you have thought seriously and calmly over this scheme of yours? Have you fully considered what it may mean?—that, for instance, it will colour your whole life, and perhaps sadden it; that you go alone among people of whom you know nothing but that they are rude and coarse?"

"Oh, yes," said Valentine, "I have thought of that.

Claude has told me everything that will happen to me. But I feel as if I must do it."

"I shall not deny you, Valentine." Then she turned to Violet. "And you, my child?"

"No," said Violet, "I *could* not do it. I am ashamed of myself. I am a coward, if you please, but I *could* not do it." She was about to assign as the reason of her dreadful cowardice her own identity with Polly and her close connection with the Monument family, but she refrained. "Valentine sees beautiful things where I see nothing but rude manners and coarse speeches. I could not go to live among those people even if Valentine were beside me. And alone!" she shuddered.

"You shall not be asked, my dear."

"Perhaps it will not be so dreadful as it seems to us," said Valentine. "I have repeated it over and over again to myself. Instead of a beautiful home like this, a single room in a row of dingy houses; instead of the open Park, a great nest of mean streets; noise instead of quiet; in place of your kind voices, there will be quarrels of women, cries of children, and bad language of men; in the place of this sweet home——" Here her voice failed her, and the tears came into her eyes, and Violet kissed her with tears of her own.

"As for your going alone," said Lady Mildred, "of course the world would disapprove, but then we need not consider much what the world may say. An Eastern lady, I believe, estimates her importance by the care taken in guarding her. We all come from the East, which accounts for a lingering of the feeling among ourselves. If we do not guard you, my Valentine, the world will say that we do not care for you."

"But I shall not say so."

"Tell us, then, exactly, what arrangements you propose to make."

Claude explained that there was a room—not a large room nor a very pretty room, but a place weather-proof—on the first floor and at the back of Melenda's room; that he had persuaded the tenant to give up this room to himself; that he had caused it to be cleaned, scrubbed, whitewashed, and fumigated; that he had furnished it; and that Valentine could take possession when she pleased.

"And all before I was consulted at all?" said Lady Mildred.

Claude blushed, but did not explain that Valentine had converted him to her view, and that he had done her bidding.

"But who is to do up your room every day?" asked Violet.

Claude had no proposition to make on this important subject. But Valentine confessed, with a blush and a sigh, because this was a detail less attractive than some others in her scheme, that she would probably have to do it for herself.

"Yourself?" said Violet; "why, there are a thousand things that have to be done. Who will cook your dinner and make your breakfasts and everything?"

"I suppose I must do all this for myself. Melenda does."

"Melenda dines off cold tea and bread. She threw the fact at our heads, and reproached us with living on beef and mutton, and eating more than is good for us—you remember, dear?"

"I do not think I can live on tea and bread," said

Valentine; "but I shall live as simply as I can. And I do not in the least mind boiling a kettle for myself."

"She will come back," said Violet, "with her hands as hard as a housemaid's."

"Then there are the evenings. What will you do in the evenings?"

"The days are long now. Besides, there is Melenda to cultivate."

"Yes," said Violet.

"I will not deny you, my child," said Lady Mildred. "You shall have the desire of your heart. But it must be on one or two conditions."

"Any conditions."

"Then, first of all, you will persist in the scheme for three months, even if you are lonely and unhappy, even if Melenda turns out more obdurate than you expected, and the life and companionship are far more disagreeable than you ever anticipated. You must not give it up unless you fall ill."

"I accept that condition willingly," said Valentine. "Whether I like it or whether I do not, I will stay there for three months."

"The next is that you will be completely separated from Violet and myself. We shall go quite out of your way somewhere—I do not know yet where—and stay out of your way all the summer. You will see nothing of us until next October. You will have no letters from us, nor will you write to us. That will be very hard for us, my dear, will it not?"

"It will be very hard for me, and yet I accept."

"The next condition refers to Claude. It is that he consents to remain in London all the summer, and that he sees you as often as possible—every day if he

can—so that if you fall into any trouble you may always feel that you have some one at hand."

"That is a condition," said Claude, "which I willingly accept."

"He has already promised it," said Valentine.

"Then you must promise, next, that you will not try to live like these poor workgirls. Cold tea and dry bread is bad for them, but it would be far worse for you. You will live on something more substantial."

"That is a very easy condition. I am sure I do not want to live on tea and bread."

"I have no more conditions to make, my dear. But remember that it is useless to take things which one cannot mend too much to heart. And do not give away money to people; and do not believe everybody's story; and do not entangle yourself with too many friendships."

"I will try not to make too many friends," said Valentine.

"And do not give people credit for every virtue simply because they are poor and live in a single room. I dare say some of the minor vices may be found even in this Arcadia of yours, my dear."

"Only untidiness at worst," said Violet sarcastically; "there cannot possibly be anything more in Ivy Lane."

"Then," said Lady Mildred, "when will you go, my dear?"

"Let me go this very day, lest I get frightened and repent in the night."

Violet went with her to her own room, where she changed her dress and put on a plain frock of brown stuff made up for the purpose, a simple hat without

feathers or ornaments, a grey ulster, and a pair of Swedish kid gloves.

"Oh, Val," Violet laughed, but the tears were in her eyes, "you are as much like a London workgirl as a village maid in a comic operetta is like the real rustic. But never mind, my dear, you look as beautiful as the day and as good as any angel, and how, oh, how in the world shall I get on without you?"

Then, together, they packed a box with things absolutely necessary, and a few books, and all was ready.

"You *can't* be going!" cried Violet, clinging to her. "Oh, my dear, my dear, it is always you who think and say the best and noblest things. It is because you are Beatrice and I am only Polly, and she is selfish and cannot tear herself from her luxurious life. But you will be the happier of the two. I shall think of you and be ashamed of myself every day that you are gone. If we were really sisters I think I could do what you are doing. But I am only——"

"No, Violet. I am Polly, and the proof is that I am constrained by an irresistible force to go among my own people. Do you think I shall make them love me?"

"Oh, Valentine, can they help it? You will change them all. Sam, after a little of your society, will cease to yearn for his rivers of blood, and Joe will leave off grinning, and Melenda will become as gentle as a turtle-dove."

BOOK II.

CHAPTER I.

"I AM YOUR SISTER."

It was done, then. Valentine sat alone in her hermitage—a single room on the first floor of a tenement house in Ivy Lane, Hoxton. She was in the middle of the great town, but she was as lonely and as far from the world as if it had been the Hermitage on the Coquet River or a cave beside the Brook Cherith. She also realised with wonder how rapidly the greatest events in the world get themselves accomplished. Only two or three hours before she was torn with doubts as to whether this thing would ever be permitted, and lo! it was already done—that is to say, it was begun, because nothing in this human world ever gets itself finished.

Claude carried her box with brotherly care up the steep and narrow stair, and then looked around expectant, as the railway porter lingereth about the door of the cab. He waited, like the railway porter, for his tip, the meed of praise because he had taken no small pains.

"Tell me," he said, "tell me, Valentine, what you think of it."

"It is very small. But then I am not very big. And you have made it look pretty. I expected nothing half so pretty as this. Thank you, Claude."

"I remembered, first, a certain room in Newnham

which I once saw. It was not much larger than this, and it was very daintily furnished. I hope the girl it belonged to was pretty, and that she got her First Class. Cleverness, you know, and beauty, and taste ought always to go together. Next I read a certain chapter about hermits in 'Hypatia.' After that, I recalled the fittings of a cabin in a little yacht wherein I sailed last year. And then I read a few chapters of 'Robinson Crusoe' and of 'Philip Quarles.' This carried me a long way, and then with just a page or two of Xavier de Maistre and the help of a book on æsthetic furniture, and one visit to an artistic upholsterer, I managed to furnish your room for you. This is the result."

They were both extremely grave and serious, because, now that the thing was begun, it looked horribly beset with perils of all kinds. Perhaps this was the reason why Claude talked with a certain show of frivolity.

"Thank you, Claude." I do not know why, but her eyes became dim.

"Here is your tea service," Claude began, pointing out the things as if it was a private museum—in fact he was almost as proud of them as if he was a collector—"four cups in blue, and here is your dinner service. I hope you will like the pattern." They were ranged on the shelves of a small ebony cabinet fixed on the wall over a chest of drawers: "Here are your book-shelves; the leaves of the table can be let down so as to give you more room. I thought you would like candles better than oil, and I hope you will find this little reading-lamp useful. The view from the window is not extensive and not very nice, but I have put a box outside with mignonette in it. I know

the easy-chair is comfortable, because I tried it myself. You will have no other looking-glass than this mirror over the mantel-shelf. See, here is Violet's photograph, and here is mine. The old fireplace was truly disgraceful. I believe that the previous occupant, poor thing, in her extremity, had eaten two of the bars. So I put in this. It is pretty, I think, and the tiles are really good. As for stores, you will find some in this cupboard—quite a big cupboard, isn't it? Here are coals, but I fear you will find your coal supply a difficulty. This is your filter, and here are your cooking utensils. Try to think if there is anything I have forgotten, or anything else at all I can do for you. Shall I come every day to sit on the stairs and peel potatoes for you?"

"No, Claude, thank you. And now you had better leave me, or else I am afraid I shall begin to cry. I am sure I shall not want anything more."

"You are not—not afraid, Valentine?"

"If I were I should not acknowledge it. But go, Claude. To-day is Thursday. Come to see me on Sunday morning—not before. I think I should like to be quite alone until then. If I am in trouble I shall make Melenda help me. Good-bye, Claude. It is a beautiful thing to have a brother who will take so much trouble for one. I am very grateful. Good-bye. Go and stay with Violet this evening."

When the door was shut and she had wrestled with that inclination to cry—sustaining for a few moments a shameful defeat, but she rallied—she sat on her bed and looked about her. The room was certainly very small, yet Claude had made it pretty. The

walls were of plaster, newly scraped and repaired and stained, and made quite clean; the ceiling was freshly whitewashed; the little green and gold iron bed was covered with a counterpane of pleasing design; two candle-sticks stood on the mantel-shelf, and her lamp was on a three-cornered bracket; an embroidered cloth lay on the table, and there were flowers in a vase; there were pretty curtains to the window, of a soft stuff, pleasant to look upon and to touch, and on the floor lay a rug large enough to serve for carpet. There were only three chairs, one of them an easy-chair, low, long, deep, and luxurious, in which one might meditate and rest; and the fireplace was pretty, with its tiles and its brass fender. In the cupboard she found a loaf of bread, butter, a small ham—already boiled—sugar, tea, coffee, and other things; and on the lowest shelf she discovered, and handled with some curiosity, a saucepan, a pot, a frying-pan, a gridiron, and a Dutch oven; would she have to learn the use of all these things? Besides the mirror over the mantel-shelf, Claude had hung up some fans and feathers and a little picture or two. It really *is* a beautiful thing to have a brother who will work for one. What servant—what army of servants—would have made this place so dainty and so pretty? It is a thing, in fact, which cannot be done to order. And the discovery of so small a detail as a box of matches almost brought her to tears a second time. Claude had remembered the matches! Everybody knows the dreadful carelessness of even good housemaids in the matter of matches.

It certainly seemed as if life was going to become, for a time, a much more simple thing than she had

been accustomed to consider it. Here she was, in a little room only twelve feet square, surrounded by everything necessary for existence, with food, and drink, shelter, bed, and clothes to wear. What else can a reasonable being want? In Park Lane they had one room for sleeping, one for eating, a third for study, and a fourth for society. The things to eat were not kept in the sleeping-room, nor were the clothes kept in the eating-room, nor was the cooking done in the room reserved for society—fancy Violet "gridling" a steak in the large drawing-room! Nor was the coal cellar kept in a bedroom, nor was the pantry confused with the library. Yet here were bedroom, dining-room, drawing-room, library, kitchen, scullery, and coal cellar all combined in one small chamber which Claude had made pretty for its three months' tenant.

She sat on the bed for a long time, thinking. Now that the thing was really begun, and she was alone in the house, and going to remain alone for a long time, she felt more than a little afraid. Suppose that some one were to walk in at the open door and visit her, unasked. The house door was open all day, and there was nothing to prevent any curious or impertinent person—at the thought she sprang to her feet and examined her door. Oh, prudent Claude! He had thought of this too. He had provided the door with a chain, a bolt, a lock, and a wooden bar, which could be dropped into strong iron stanchions, capable of withstanding any ordinary pressure. And besides these fortifications, she had Melenda close at hand, though as yet Melenda was ignorant of her arrival. If anything happened she could call out for her. Surely

Melenda was fierce enough and brave enough for any emergency whatever.

Quite alone! There are many men who all their lives spend more than half the twenty-four hours in loneliness absolute, yet do not seem to mind it. Who can be more lonely, for instance, than the tenant of chambers, who sits in them all day working or waiting for clients, and all night reading or sleeping; and perhaps when the clerks are gone, the only man left on the ghostly staircase? Yet men live on in this solitary way, sometimes without even a club, and never complain of loneliness, and never seem afraid of ghosts. Not long ago there was a man who died at the ripe age of eighty-one, and had lived for thirty years all alone in a country house, seeing no one, and not even admitting a woman to clean up, and not taking the trouble to clean up the place himself, so that when he died the female population to a woman made haste to visit the house in order to gaze and gloat upon the dust. Yet he was quite happy. Men, in fact, live alone from the time when they leave school to the time when they marry, which is very often a long spell. They have their little distractions—their clubs, their friends, their theatres; but they spend most of their evenings and all their nights alone in their rooms. Women, on the other hand, seldom live alone: young women never. They are accustomed to go about together, to sit, work, and even study together. Valentine had never been separated for a single day from Violet. She had never been without the sense of protection with which young ladies are wrapped and clothed as with a suit of armour. Except in her bedroom, which was next to Violet's, she had never once been alone

in all her life. And, needless to point out—though this is of minor importance—she had never done anything at all for herself. Now, like Tommy Merton, she was to discover that if she would eat she must work—that is, she must cook. She got up, therefore, and began to wonder if she could make herself some tea. Again, that most thoughtful youth Claude had remembered everything. The fire was laid, not with sticks—a slow and uncertain method unless you use a whole bundle, which costs a halfpenny, and is never permitted even in the most extravagant household—but with the resinous wheels, which burn fiercely and make a fine fire in two minutes. The kettle, she found, was filled with water; in the cupboard was a caddy full of tea. There was white sugar in the sugar-basin; nobody knew better than Claude that brown sugar was becoming for Polly's position, but he pretended to forget that detail. In the same way he had committed gross incongruities in the French bed, and the pretty lamp with the tinted shade, and the æsthetic table-cover. Then Valentine discovered, further, a saucer full of white eggs—not the "selected" at ten for a shilling—and two or three pots of preserves, besides the bread and the butter already mentioned. There was also a jug of milk. Where, Valentine wondered, would she get her milk for next day? Then, with a solemn feeling, as if she was setting a light to the sacred Hearth of Vesta, or propitiating the Lares, she struck a match upon the magic box and set the fire-wheel crackling and blazing, and made the coals to burn merrily and to dart forth long tongues of flame, licking the bars and the sides of the kettle, and when the water presently began to sing, Valentine

began to feel that she might find happiness even in living alone.

While the kettle was singing, and before it boiled over, Valentine looked out of window over her box of mignonette. The back of Ivy Lane at this point "gives" partly upon Hammond Square, which now consists of a Board School, with its asphalted pavement, where the children were playing. The great red-brick building of the school dominates the mean houses in which it is placed, much as a mediæval castle used to dominate the village which clustered round it. There is, however, an important distinction. The castle was on an eminence above the village; the Board School is on the same level with it. This fact alone is sufficient to prevent the Board Schoolmaster from becoming a proud baron. On the west of Hammond Square is the back of Hemsworth Street, and between the "backs" there are small yards which were once meant to be little gardens, but are innocent of flowers, though here and there stands a solitary tree, the melancholy survivor of the orchard with blackened trunk and grimy branches. The yards are now used for the drying of linen, and there is always a great deal hanging out on fine days, so that at first one feels that Hoxton must be a very clean place, and therefore not far from the Kingdom of Heaven. But that is only a first suspicion, and not a first impression, for the wish is father to the thought. A closer inspection shows grubby yards, filled with rubbish, brickbats, and everywhere cats, a most wonderful collection of cats, sunning themselves upon the walls; and all sleek, all well-fed, fat, and good tempered, and probably quite certain that they are living in a picturesque

country, and in the highest society, among ladies and gentlemen of the greatest refinement. Then Valentine looked across the space between the two "backs," and as she had eyes stronger than most she could see through the open windows opposite, and could catch a glimpse of interiors which filled her soul with pity. One certainly ought, under all conditions of life, and at any juncture, to be clean and to live in clean rooms; but this commandment has never been written. It is not, therefore, felt to be so binding as the others, and in time of pressure and trouble the enthusiasm for cleanliness is apt to decline. Few people have the heart to clean up when there is no work to be done, and no money to spend, and nothing to drink. And Valentine saw another thing; not only were there back-yards and grimy windows, but there were courts at the back with houses even smaller than the one in which she sat. In fact, some of them were only two-roomed houses, and these houses added their little backyards and their dirt, and, as she was to discover later on, their noise as well.

Valentine left her window. And then she made her tea and drank a cup, with a curious sense of unreality, because Violet's voice should have been in her ears; and it was incongruous, and like a nightmare, that she should make her own tea for herself alone in her bedroom.

After her tea she sat reading until about half-past eight, when the sun had set and the twilight was upon the ugly backs and grubby yards. And then, but with misgivings, she left her room and timidly knocked at Melenda's door.

The girls had just finished work for the day.

Melenda was folding it up; Lotty was arranging herself for rest. Lizzie was stretching out her arms as Ixion might have done when they took him down from his wheel and told him he might knock off for the night.

"I have come back," said Valentine.

"Oh," replied Melenda, pretending not to be astonished. But the other two gasped.

"You said that Polly might come if she came by herself. Are you glad to see me again now that I am alone?"

"Not likely," said Melenda shortly.

"I have come to stay here. I have got a room in this very house."

Lizzie opened her great eyes wider, but Melenda, who was not going to be surprised by anything, only sniffed.

"What have you done that for?"

"To be near you. We are sisters, Melenda."

"The other day you didn't know which was which. As if a girl could get lost. And how are you going to live? There's no service about here. There's a young girl wanted at the public-house, I believe, but you must be pretty low down if you'd demean yourself by going there. I wouldn't, no more would Lizzie. Have you saved your money?"

"I have some money for a time." This was delicate ground, and she hastened to get over it quickly. "Claude furnished my room for me. Let me show it to you."

"Well," said Melenda ungraciously, "I can't help it, if you choose to come. You won't stay long, I suppose. Let's see the room."

They all three went with her, impelled by the strongest of feminine instincts.

Valentine had now pulled down the blind, drawn her curtains, and lit the pretty reading lamp with its coloured shade.

"Oh—h!" the girls gasped. They had never before seen a pretty room, and the prettiness of this room took their breath away. Even Melenda, who had been prepared to admire nothing, was taken by surprise. They went round, looking at and examining everything, the easy-chair, the fireplace, the book-shelves, the table, and the pictures.

"See," said Valentine, "here is my cupboard with my stores. We will have dinner together if you will. Here are my books; we will read together every day if you like. Here is my work-box. I will work with you if you will let me. I can work very well."

"What's gone of all your fine clothes and your gold chain?" asked Lizzie, staring at the plain brown frock.

"I have not brought them here. I have only this frock and an ulster like your own." Melenda laughed scornfully.

"It's nothing but play-acting, Polly. Lord! nobody would take you for a workgirl—you and your ulster! Why, it isn't ragged, and your elbows don't stick through. And where's your fringe? And you've got a collar and cuffs: and look at your fingers? I'll just tell you what you look like—nothing but a lady's-maid out o' work." She made this comparison in tones so contemptuous that for a while Valentine was confounded.

"I will pass for a lady's-maid, then," she replied, when she had recovered a little. "You won't be unkind, Melenda, will you?"

Melenda was examining the photographs on the mantel-shelf. "Here's Claude," she said; "he looks a

swell, don't he? What's he got a square thing on his head for? And why does he wear a black gown?"

"Claude is a great scholar. He is photographed in the cap and gown that scholars wear at the University. That is Violet, my sister."

"That's the other one," said Melenda; "her that cried. She won't come again, because I threatened to pull her hair off." She laughed grimly. "Looks a bit like Joe, somehow. But you look a bit like Claude."

"Will you let me sit with you, and go in and out without disturbing you, Melenda?"

It was Lotty who replied for her.

"Don't ask Melenda, else you'll only put her back up, and she'll answer hasty. Come without asking."

"We're workgirls," Melenda added, not a bit offended by this allusion to her temper, "and we've got our work to do, and we can't be chattering. If you won't make Liz chatter and lose her time, you may come. Lotty likes you, if I don't."

Valentine turned grateful eyes to the thin hollow-chested girl with the weak back.

"So Claude took and furnished the room for you, did he?" said Melenda. "Where'd he get the money to spend on it? I suppose you don't mind being beholden to him, do you?"

"Not a bit," said Valentine; "I am glad to be grateful to Claude."

"Humph," Melenda grunted. "He shan't help me if I know it. And he came here and took the room and all—they told me a swell had been about the place—without seeing me or telling me anything about it. He's in a rage with me, I suppose, 'cos I let out the other day."

"You called him names when he came. But he is not in a rage with you at all, I am sure."

"He pretended not to mind. Why didn't he call back then, instead of standing and looking as if he was looking through one with a bradawl? Many a man would have knocked a girl down for less."

"Claude does not knock women down."

Melenda changed the subject.

"How are you going to cook," she asked, "with a finicking stove like that? The water's laid on behind, one cask for every two houses. You'll have to do all your own work yourself. Lotty 'll tell you how to manage, if you'll ask her—she knows how to cook beautiful. You should taste her beef and onions. You can pay her any way you like. Her back's awful bad sometimes—sit down on Polly's bed, Lotty—and she never flies in a rage like I should do if my back was bad. And she isn't so proud as she ought to be. She'll take things from you."

Melenda spoke with the superiority of health and strength, but Lotty hung her head. Pride, independence, and freedom were fine things for girls with strong backs, but she was permitted to be beholden to people. It was a permission of which the poor girl could rarely avail herself. As for Liz, she gazed about her with great eyes and open mouth. The room looked to her like a little garden of Eden, or at least like Eve's Petit Trianon, if she had one in that park.

"I am going to have some supper," said Valentine, pleased to have got on so well. "Here is a ham that Claude gave me, and bread and butter, and we will

light the fire again and make some cocoa, if you would like to have some."

The ham looked splendid when Valentine put it on the table. All three girls became instantly conscious of a hollow and yearning sensation. Lotty turned quite white, and Lizzie clutched the back of a chair, but Melenda flew into a rage because of the temptation.

"I won't eat your ham!" she cried; "I won't eat any of your ham! Do you hear? I won't take anything from you. Lotty may, because she's weak in her back. Lizzie ought to be ashamed—she ought—if she eats any! I shan't. I shall go out for a walk. I shall take and walk up and down Hoxton Street till I'm tired. There! They're a nice lot in Hoxton Street of a night! You'll be proud of your sister, won't you? If I'd got any money to spend I'd go to the Brittannier or else to the Variety Music Hall, and I shan't get home before midnight likely."

She made these announcements with defiance. They illustrated at once her independence, her freedom of action, and her contempt of criticism. With the light of wrath in her eyes, with her parted lips, and the lamp-light softening the effect of that lump of hair on her forehead, Melenda looked her very best. She might have been painted as an actress in a great part. But she ought to have been painted in a rage. She banged out of the room, and they heard her run downstairs. Then she ran back again.

"If you sit with Lotty," she said, while all trembled, "or if Lotty sits with you, prop her up and make her comfortable. Don't go to say that I don't look after Lotty. Don't dare to say that, or I'll serve you——"

Her eyes fell upon the photograph of Claude in the square cap and the gown, who seemed to be asking her, with grave face, if this language was becoming to a girl who respected herself. She stopped, turned, and fled.

"And now," said Valentine, "we will have some supper."

"Do ladies all live in beautiful rooms like this?" asked Lizzie, when that meal of fragrant cocoa with ham and bread and butter, served on a snow-white cloth, was finished and the things put away. She had not spoken a word, but looked about her all the time curiously and wonderingly. "Do they all live like this?"

"I suppose so," said Valentine. "This is a poor little room, but Claude has made it pretty."

"And do they all have as much ham and bread and butter as they like?"

"Yes, I believe they do."

Liz asked no more questions. But presently she rose and put on her ulster and hat, and went out without a word. She was no longer hungry: the sight of the pretty room and the dainty supper filled her with physical content and ease, and with a vague yearning that it might be always like this, and in her mind there echoed certain words which she could not repeat to Lotty and Melenda. "You ought to be a lady," said these words. "You ought to live like a lady in pretty rooms, and be dressed beautifully, and have nothing to do but to please some one with your lovely eyes." Why, she knew now what it was to be a lady and to live in a pretty room. She had never known before, poor Liz. And it seemed an altogether desirable and a lovely life. She went out into the

street thinking how it would be to have every day such a supper, to sit in such a room, to wear such a pretty frock, and to have, put away somewhere, beautiful dresses and gold chains. "You ought to be a lady. You ought to live like a lady in pretty rooms, and be dressed beautifully, and have nothing to do but to please some one with your lovely eyes." Perhaps it was the devil who whispered these words in her ear continually, so that she saw nothing as she walked along the crowded street but the pretty room, with its soft-coloured light, and the sweet face of its owner, and her graceful, gentle ways. "You ought to be a lady." If she only could!

When she got home at twelve, Lotty was already asleep. Generally the pain in her back kept her awake. But now she was sleeping. There was light enough for Liz to see her thin pale face upon the pillow. Something—perhaps it was that—touched the girl's heart.

"I won't never leave Lotty," she murmured, "not even to be a lady."

When they were left alone, Valentine made Lotty lie down upon her bed and propped her up with pillows, and cooled her hot temples with eau de cologne.

"Oh," said Lotty, "it's like Melenda; but she never had any scent, poor thing." She meant that Valentine was as kind and thoughtful for her as her friend Melenda. "Don't anger her, Miss. She's a good sort if you take her the right way."

"You mustn't call me Miss. Call me—no, call me Valentine."

"Oh, but I can't, because you are a young lady. Well, then, Valentine."

"Are you always left alone in the evening?"

"Yes, always. They must go out after the day's work. I know what you think. The streets are rough. But Melenda won't get into mischief. And she's too proud to go into public-houses and drink with the men, as some girls do. And so's Liz."

"Melenda said you were not to talk much. Let me talk to you. What shall I tell you?"

"Tell me whatever you like. You've got such a soft voice. I told Melenda you were kind and didn't come to laugh at us, though you are a lady and all."

"But, my dear, ladies don't laugh at working girls."

"Sam says they laugh at all poor people."

"Sam says what is horribly untrue then. Do not believe Sam."

"He was here the other day. We'd been out of work for three days, and Liz she'd gone to look for it at one house and Melenda at another, and I was lying down. Sam stamped and swore—he's dreadful when his blood's up—and he said, 'What do they care if all the workgirls in London starve? They're worse than the men who call themselves gentlemen, for they have listened to the workmen. They are the cruellest people in the world, and the hardest hearted.' That's what Sam said."

"Who are?" interrupted Valentine.

"The women who call themselves ladies. That's what Sam said; and then he swore again, and then he went on to say that if there had been half the tyranny with the men as there is with the women, all England would have rose. And the ladies know it, he said, and they've been told day after day; the papers, he says, are full of it; they are taught about it in their

poetry books, but they do nothing; and Sam says they never will do nothing, so long as they can get their pretty things cheap, but laugh at us while we work and starve. Not that we really do starve, you know, because there's always somehow been bread and cold tea, but sometimes there's nothing more. That's what Sam says."

"It isn't true, Lotty," said Valentine. But she felt guilty, not of laughing, but of apathy. "Help me to be neither cruel nor hard-hearted, my dear."

Then she was silent, thinking, and Lotty lay resting. Presently Valentine said:

"I will tell you a story, a story about myself, Lotty. Once upon a time, there was a poor widow woman, who had a large family to keep, and took in washing, but she had to work very hard. One day there came to see her a great lady who had known her a long time before, and she said to the poor woman, 'Give me your little girl, your youngest. I will take her away and bring her up with my own child and care for her. Some day you shall see her again.' The poor woman knew that her daughter would be kindly kept, and so she let her go, and for a long time saw the child no more, because she was being taught all kinds of things, and among others to be a young lady. This is not at all easy for any girl to learn, Lotty, because it means all kinds of things besides the wearing of fine clothes; among others it means always thinking the best things and doing the noblest things, so that I am afraid that girl got but a very little way. However, after nineteen years, she went back with her benefactor's daughter to see her mother and her brothers and her sister, who was a workgirl. But they

were not at all pleased to see her, and her sister made herself hard and proud, and could not bear to be helped out of the great lady's treasures, and said very cruel things and drove her away. Then the girl put off her finery and came to live in the same house with her working sister. She came to learn how workgirls live, and what they think, and what they want, and she hoped to make her sister love her. That is all the story, Lotty."

"It isn't finished. And what does she want Melenda to love her for?"

"Oh, Lotty, love makes people happy. Suppose you had neither Melenda nor Lizzie."

"If I hadn't got Melenda," said the girl, "I should wish I was dead and buried."

CHAPTER II.

THE CITY OF HOGSDEN.

It is best to drop a veil over the first few hours of that first night in Ivy Lane. It is sufficient to explain that the evening between eight and twelve is the liveliest time of the day for Ivy Lane; that the Adelaide Tavern then does its briskest business, that the street is fullest, the voices loudest, the children most shrill, the women most loquacious, and the "language" most pronounced. On this evening there was a drunken man in one of the courts somewhere behind the house, and somebody of one sex was beating somebody of the other sex, with oaths on the one hand and screams on the other. Suppose some step should come up the stair, and some unknown person should knock at her door. Suppose the house was quite empty except for

herself. Yet Ivy Lane is not the haunt of criminals; its population is made up of honest working men and women, whose principal fault is that they have not yet learned the virtue of self-restraint.

Towards midnight the noise began to subside, and the street grew rapidly quieter. Presently Valentine fell asleep, though with misgivings in her dreams, which would have become dreadful nightmares had she but known that Lizzie, the latest to return, had left the street door wide open for the night.

When she awoke the morning was already well advanced, which was perceptible even to a new arrival by reason of the stillness. For at nine the men are at work, and the women are "doing up" in their rooms, and the children are at school. A Sabbath calm had fallen upon Ivy Lane and upon its courts to north and south. Valentine lay half asleep, thinking that she was at home, and wondering lazily why her maid did not come to call her. Suddenly she remembered where she was; she sprang to her feet, pulled back the curtains and looked abroad from behind the blind. The sun was high in the heavens, pouring down gracious floods of warmth and heat upon the linen in the yards; in the beginning of all things the sun was created on purpose to dry the linen; there seemed to be a universal calm and restfulness; from the Board School at the back there was heard a soothing murmurous sound of many voices, and from Hoxton Street the distant roll of carts and the shouts of costers. Valentine was the latest riser that morning in Ivy Lane, except perhaps those who were lying down never to get up again any more, and those who were in temporary retirement with fevers and the like.

Thankful and somewhat surprised that the night had passed with no worse adventure than that of the midnight clamour, she proceeded to make her own breakfast. She hesitated, considering whether it would be well to invite her friends in the next room. But the fear of Melenda decided her to breakfast alone. There was no milk, and she did not know where to get any more; there was no water, and she had to go downstairs and fill her own kettle, and to lay her fire, and to brush up the stove, as well as to make her own bed and dust the room. These things are not hardships exactly, but it seems more fitting somehow that other people should do them for one. What the other people think about it has never yet been made known to the world.

When Robinson Crusoe had quite made up his mind that there were neither cannibals nor wild beasts upon his island, the first thing he did was to go exploring. I have often thought how much more interesting his story might have been had there been one, only one, just one man-eating tiger on the island, so that he could have stalked Robinson and failed to catch him, while Robinson could have shot at him from places of ambush and failed to hit him; and so both the tiger and the man would have had a lively time, and the reader would have been kept awake. No doubt in Hoxton there is more than one man-eater, but Valentine never saw any at all, though she was at first horribly afraid of meeting one, and wondered what she should do if that should happen. She began that very morning, and daily continued, the exploration of Hoxton. There was indeed so much to see and to learn that she never got outside the narrow

precincts of that town during the whole of her three months' stay in it.

The city of Hogsden, or Hoxton, as it is now the fashion to write the name, is not to outward view a romantic or a picturesque city; none of its friends have claimed for it that kind of distinction. It does not stand upon a rock overhanging a river, like Quebec or Durham; it is placed, on the other hand, upon a level plain beside a canal; it is not a city of gardens, like Damascus; nor a city of palaces, like Venice; nor a mediæval city with old walls, like Avignon; it has no gardens left at all, except the two black patches of its two little squares; yet once it was all garden. It has no palaces, though once it had great houses; it has few associations or memories of the past, because as a city it is not yet more than a hundred years old. There is nothing at all beautiful or picturesque or romantic in it. There is only the romance of every life in it—there are sixty thousand lives in Hoxton, and every one with its own story to tell; sixty thousand romances beginning, proceeding, and ending; the stories of those who are old and of those who are growing old; of those who are children and those who are young men and maidens; of those who think of love and those who remember the days when they thought about it; of those who desire love to come and those who mourn for love departed. What more, in Heaven's name, is wanted to make romance?

It is a city whose boundaries are as well marked as if it were surrounded, like York and Canterbury, with a high wall, for it has a canal to west and north, with St. Luke's Workhouse standing in the angle like

the Tower of London or the citadel of breezy Troy. On the east side lies the broad highway of the Shoreditch or Kingsland Road, which parteth Hoxton from her sisters, Haggerston and Bethnal Green. The southern march is by the City Road and Old Street. It thus stands compact and complete; it is a city lying secluded and quiet, like the city of Laish. Travellers come not within its borders; few, even among Londoners, wot of it; foreigners never hear of it; to Americans it has no associations, and they never visit its streets; it is content with one line of omnibuses to connect it with the outer world; there is no cabstand in its precincts; it has no railway station. The newspapers do not expect to find anything of interest in Hoxton, and penny-a-liners never visit it for the sake of paragraphs. Its people are quiet and industrious; folk who ask for nothing but steady work and fair wages, and have a rooted aversion to any public appearance, whether in a police court, or a county court, or on a political platform, or at a Gospel revival, just as formerly they disliked appearing publicly in pillory or stocks. There is no habitual criminal class in Hoxton, unless the recent destruction of rookeries in Whitecross Street has driven a few of the rogues to find temporary refuge, before "chivvying" begins again, in the southern streets of this city. As regards civic monuments and public buildings, there are eight churches and quite as many chapels, and some of the inhabitants have been known to visit these architectural marvels on the Sunday morning. There is the great theatre called the "Brittannier 'Oxton," and the smaller or less known Theatre of Varieties in Pitfield Street; there is a splendid great school for boys and girls,

where were once the country almshouses of the Haberdashers; there are the Fullers' Almshouses; there are four Board Schools to beautify four of its streets; there are the famous iron portals of Mary Street; and there are two bridges over the canal. There are no rich residents, no carriages, no footmen; none of the flaunting luxuries which are described by travellers as existing at the West End. The houses are small and mostly low; there is no doubt at all that everybody is quite poor, and that for six days in the week, all the year round, everybody works for ten hours a day at least, and sometimes more. Yet the place has a cheerful look. There may be misery, but it is not apparent; the people in the streets seem well-fed, and are as rosy as London smoke and fog will allow. In the daytime the pavements of the side streets are mostly deserted, and there are not many who lounge, hands in pocket, at the corner of the street. Among the rows of small houses which speak of decent poverty there are not wanting one or two of the old houses, survivors of the time when they stood among green fields and orchards, the country residences of great merchants. The two squares in which they used to live are still left. And the streets are mostly broad, because there was plenty of room when they were built; two or three of them can even boast a double width of pavement, supposed by some, imperfectly acquainted with London, to be a luxury known only in Whitechapel Waste. And lastly, the streets, though certainly not remarkable for originality of design, are at least not all built after the same pattern, as may be seen in Bromley beyond Bow.

This was Valentine's first impression of the quarter,

a first impression which might be modified but would never be quite destroyed. Since Hoxton possesses some eighty streets, it must not be supposed that she went into every one of them in a single morning. In fact she walked down Pitfield Street into Old Street, and up Hoxton Street into Hyde Road and Whitmore Street, and so over the bridge which leads to Kingsland, and back by way of St. John's Road to Ivy Lane —the whole with lingering step and occasional excursions into side streets which seemed to promise something strange or curious. Not this morning only, but many successive mornings, she took this walk among streets where the people live.

She discovered, if one may anticipate, in these daily wanderings, many remarkable things and some remarkable people. Hoxton, by the circumstances of its trade, is calculated to develop character in a manner impossible for some other quarters, such as Kentish Town and Camden Town, which are cities of the little clerk. Hoxton, however, is the city of the smaller industries and the lesser ingenuities. Here they make the little things necessary to civilised life, such things as the Andamanese and the Soudanese can do very well without, but which we must have. Thus, they are workers in mosaic and in lacquer: they are buhl cutters, fret cutters, marqueterie cutters, razor grinders, glass bevellers, and they finish brushes. Some of them are hair hands, some pan hands, and some drawing hands, in the brush trade; they stitch buff, at least they say so, but it may be a dark and allegorical announcement, because one hath never heard of buff, nor knoweth what its nature may be; they gild envelopes, they emboss on steel; as regards the women

they are all classified as "hands"—nothing else is wanted by a woman, not intelligence, or invention, or grace, or beauty, or sweetness—nothing but hands. There are bead hands, feather hands—who are subdivided into curling hands, improvers, mounters, and aigrette hands—mantle hands, skirt hands, bodice hands, mob-cap hands, children's pinafore hands, cape-lining hands, bead hands, butterfly hands, and tie hands, who are again divided into flat-work hands, back stitchers, band hands, slip stitchers, and front hands; they are black borderers, braiders, and a hundred others. Besides all this, these industrious people make towel-horses, upholstery for perambulators, fancy boxes, lace paper for valentines, picture frames, paint brushes, trunk furniture, leather bags, scales, marking ink, trimmings, pipe-clay, show cases, instrument cases, looking-glass backs, frillings and rush-wicks; they carve pianos, dress collars, and work in horn; they make fittings for public-houses; they dye cotton; they deal in grindery and they melt tallow; there linger still in Hoxton one or two of those almost extinct medicine men called herbalists. Lastly, in the manufacture of annatto they are said to have no equal.

These things Valentine did not find out in a single day, but in many. At first she wandered just as one wanders on a first visit to a foreign city, getting lost and then finding her way again, looking into all the shops, reading the names and the trade announcements and watching the people. And at first she was afraid; but as day after day passed and no one molested her she grew more confident.

Perhaps the least desirable of all the streets is the very one in which she had to live. Ivy Lane, by some

called Ivy Street, is vexed by certain courts, one of which was commanded by Valentine's window; they are inhabited by the baser sort; perhaps their presence gives a bad name to the street just as it materially increases the evening noise. Certainly Ivy Lane is not so clean as some of the Hoxton streets; its windows are unwashed; its doors want washing and painting. Yet it has both its chapel and its public-house. The former is small and plain in appearance, with a neat little pediment, a door in the middle, and a window on either side. The doctrine preached in it every Sunday evening is remarkable for purity. As for the public-house, very likely its beer is equally remarkable and for the same reason. But Valentine never tasted either. There are also in the street two chandlers' shops, two second-hand clothes shops, one of them filled with women's dresses, and a carver in wood. Is not that a typical English street in which Religion, Drink, Food, Art, Labour, and Trade all find a place?

It was nearly one o'clock when Valentine returned to her lodgings. She had begun to see Hoxton. There seemed little in the place that was very depressing. A whole city at work is rather cheerful than otherwise. To be sure she had not been within the houses and she knew nothing of the interiors, which are more important from the human point of view than the outside. Very likely clergymen, district visitors, Bible women, and the general practitioners, know enough about the place to depress the most sanguine. And when she came back, she remembered all the girls who, like Melenda and Lotty and Lizzie, must be sitting within those walls stitching all day long for less than a penny an hour, and her heart fell. The cheer-

fulness goes out of honest labour when one learns that it only means a single penny an hour.

As she climbed the steep, narrow stair, she saw, through the half-open door of the ground-floor back, a strange and curious thing. The occupant, an old woman, whom she had not seen before, was solemnly engaged in dancing by herself, to an imaginary audience. She shook her petticoats, pirouetted, executed unheard-of steps, capered and postured, with all the agility and some of the grace of a youthful *danseuse*. Valentine was thinking of the sewing-women; the thing passed before her eyes as she went up the stair; she saw it but took no heed; nor was it till afterwards that she remembered it and wondered what this might mean.

She opened Melenda's door and looked in. Something must have gone wrong. On Melenda's brow, or where her brow should have been but for the fringe, there rested a cloud: it was a cloud much bigger than a man's hand—in fact, it treated her as if she had been a goddess of the good old time, and enwrapped and enfolded her completely, so that she was veiled in cloud. The other two seemed cowed. Lotty, sitting on the bed, hardly dared to raise her eyes. Lizzie turned her head furtively, but without so much as a smile or even a look of recognition. Both waited for Melenda to speak and went on with their work, but self-consciously.

In fact, there had been a discussion carried on with great animation by all three, mostly talking together. This method of controversy is lively, but hardly calculated to settle the points at issue. Lotty's part in it was chiefly one of remonstrance and entreaty.

She had been guilty of eating some of Valentine's ham for supper, and of drinking a cup of cocoa. Perhaps it was the unusual sense of repletion which had given her a good and almost painless night, though Melenda's attitude in the morning filled her with a sense of guilt. Lizzie, on the other hand, who had no excuse, except that of hunger, for selling her independence for a plate of ham, actually gloried in the action, and proclaimed her readiness to do it again if invited, and laughed at Melenda for not taking all she could get. There were rebellious questionings, scoffs, and doubts—all put down to that concert, and the talk with the gentleman afterwards. Lizzie never used to show such spirit before she was tempted. Many bear with pride the ills for which there seems no cure; but when a way is shown, alas! poor Pride! Melenda tried argument, with reduction to first principle, dogmatic assertion, and quotations from the Opinions and Maxims of the Philosopher Sam. Valentine and her ham were only the text. The Independence of Woman was the true theme.

"Do you want anything?" asked Melenda, with an ominous glitter in her eye.

"No," said Valentine, "I only came——"

"Then you can go away," said her sister; "we're working girls, and we've got our bread to earn. We haven't taken money off of rich ladies for nothing. You can go away and eat up all the rest of the ham—you and your ham!"

"But, Melenda——"

"Go away, I say. We've got our work to do. Don't come wasting time. And Lizzie eating such a lot of

supper that she couldn't be waked this morning. Go away."

Valentine meekly obeyed and closed the door. So far she had made very little way with her sister. But she caught the eyes of Lotty as she went out. They said as plainly as eyes could speak, "Forgive her, and don't give up trying."

"Oh, Melenda!" said the possessor of these eyes reproachfully.

Melenda sniffed.

"As for me," said Lizzie, "if I had the good luck to have such a sister I wouldn't turn her out of the room. I'd have better manners."

"You'd beg and borrow all she had to give, I suppose, and call that good manners."

"I'd take anything she wanted to give, and I'd behave pretty to her."

"She ain't your sister, then. And I'm old enough to know how to behave."

This closed the discussion. And all there was for the girls' dinner—while, as Lizzie reflected, plenty reigned in the next room—was a thick slice each of bread and butter.

At Hoxton, I am told, nobody at all, not even any of the eight vicars or the seven curates—but this may be incorrect—ever thinks of dining late. Dinner at half-past seven is not possible; one ceases to think of such a thing the moment one begins to breathe the air of Hoxton. Valentine, therefore, at one o'clock, began naturally to consider the subject of dinner instead of luncheon. She had to look at it from quite a new point of view—namely, to think how it was to be provided, and how she was to use those beautiful

instruments provided for her. To all right-minded and cultivated persons dinner necessarily involves potatoes; you cannot dine without potatoes. Other things may be neglected. Pickles, pudding, fish, soup, may be considered as non-essentials, but not potatoes. I have, it is true, seen a ploughboy sitting under a hedge making what he called his dinner with a lump of bacon fat, a great hunch of bread, and a clasp-knife, but he thought of potatoes; and I have seen a navvy making what he called his dinner with a great piece of underdone beef cut thick, as they love it, those others, and half a loaf. But all this is merely stoking or taking in coal. Both navvy and ploughboy know very well that without potatoes there can be no dinner. There must be potatoes. Valentine had the remains of her ham and part of yesterday's loaf, but she had no potatoes. She spread her cloth, laid out these viands, which looked very much like luncheon so far as they went. What about potatoes? If she wanted them she would have to buy them. Where should she go in search of potatoes? And how was she to buy them? Do they sell potatoes by the dozen, like eggs, or by the peck, like peas, or by the pound, like cherries, or by the pint, like beer, or singly, like peaches? And how do you carry them home? Claude had forgotten one thing. He thought you could live in Hoxton without a basket for marketing. She had, it is true, an apron, but it was not one of those aprons which are designed for the carriage of things like potatoes.

Again, even if she could get over that difficulty she would have to fill her saucepan with water, for which purpose she would have to go downstairs and

fetch some from the cistern, and that old woman below, who danced all by herself, might be looking out of window, and she might make remarks. And she would have to light the fire again. And lastly, if she had got her potatoes and had washed and peeled them and had put them in the pot, how long should they boil? Christmas plum-puddings, she had read somewhere, are boiled for several days and several nights continuously. But in no book had she ever read the length of time required to bring out the full mealiness of a potato. And then, when she had boiled her potatoes and eaten them, she would have all the trouble of clearing everything away and washing up. Truly, as has been already observed, certain things ought to be done for one.

She felt that she could not take all this trouble, at least for that day. To-morrow, perhaps, but not to-day. She would be contented for once with a simple luncheon. She therefore cut some ham and made some sandwiches. When she had eaten these and would have poured out a glass of water, she found that her filter was empty, and the look of the outside of the cistern below did not speak well for its contents. Besides, she did not want to go downstairs. So, like Melenda and the girls in the other room, she contented herself with some cold tea remaining from breakfast, and then pretended, like the navvy and the ploughboy, that she had made her dinner. Thus easy is it to take the downward step, so narrow is the interval between civilisation—of which a modern dinner is by many considered the highest form of expression, and barbarism—in which there is no dinner, so brief is the space which separates us—I mean ourselves,

gentle reader, of the highest culture attainable—from the folk of Ivy Lane.

Consider, however, the time which must be spent every day, by one who lives alone, in the mere preparation of meals and in the cleaning up. The first clean up in the morning; the fetching and carrying of water; the second clean up after breakfast; the clean up after dinner; the clean up after tea; more fetching and carrying water; always more cleaning of dishes and drying of dusters. Good Heavens! one used to wonder how the hermits of old managed to pass their days. Why, they were passed, not in holy meditation at all, for which there was no time, but in continually brushing, brooming, sweeping, washing, laying the cloth, taking it off again and putting it away, cleaning the windows, sweeping up the hearth, buying potatoes and cooking them, making the bed, dressing and undressing—the wonder is that these holy men found any time for meditation at all. Certainly they have left behind them few monuments of their life-long thoughts in seclusion. As for those who did any other work, they, like Melenda and her friends, never washed anything at all.

The dinner over, Valentine rested and read a little, and began the daily journal of her exile, passing lightly over her late skirmish with Melenda, and saying nothing—great is the power of the *suppressio veri*—about the absence of potatoes, so that the impression on the mind of anyone who read those journals would be that there had been no difficulty at all as regards the dinner question. Yet she herself remembered that the question would have to be faced again; and, besides, the ham would not last for ever.

About four o'clock she thought she would go to Tottenham by the tram, and visit the almshouse once more and her blind mother.

CHAPTER III.

ON CURLS AND DIMPLES.

I HAVE always thought it a very remarkable coincidence that on the very first day of Valentine's sojourn among this strange people she should have discovered the great Family Secret—that secret which Lady Mildred thought known to no one but her solicitor and herself. Had the discovery been made earlier, the Great Renunciation might never have been undertaken: had it been made later, it would have been prosecuted in a different spirit. Valentine, in short, on this day established her previously doubtful identity. Perhaps it is as well to know for certain who you are as well as what you are. A Homo in the abstract, male or female, cannot be expected to take as much interest in himself, or to care so much about his own views and opinions, as a Homo who knows at least one generation of his descent, just enough to connect him with the human family. All Philosophy is based upon the sentiment of family as well as individuality. Valentine therefore, after this day, but not before, was capable of constructing a system of Philosophy for herself if she wished. This in itself is an enormous gain.

"I thought you'd come back, Polly," said the old lady with much gratification. "I knew you'd come back by yourself when Miss Beatrice had enjoyed her bit o' fun with the pretending and nonsense. Well, we

must humour 'em, mustn't we? Rhoder, child, you can go home. Your Aunt Polly-which-is-Marla, will make my tea for me to-night. So you go home." The girl obeyed, glad to be released from the embarrassment of taking her tea with an aunt so very much unlike any other aunts she knew belonging either to herself or to her friends.

"And so you're going to stay here three months, while her ladyship goes abroad or somewhere, are you, Polly? Well now. And with Melenda too! Well, my dear, I don't know what your temper may be, but of course you can't show off before my lady, which is a blessed thing for a young girl. And how you'll get on with your sister the Lord knows, because Melenda's awful. Is she friendly?"

"Not very friendly, yet. But I hope she will be."

"She's morning noon and night in a rage. First it's the work, and then it's the wages, and then it's the long hours, and she's always hungry, which makes her snappish. As for that, the last time she came you could count every bone in her body, poor thing."

Valentine made the tea and cut the bread and butter, while the old lady, pleased to have so good a listener, talked without pause about her children and her grandchildren.

"It's a real pleasure to have you back again, Polly. There's not many pleasures left for a blind old woman. And good-natured and willing with it. Well!" This is an interjection which may mean many things, and stands in turns for patience, resignation, hope, sarcasm, approbation, or even despair. This time it was accompanied by a heartfelt sigh, and stood for prayerful gratitude that so good a daughter had been restored

to her. "They've taught you to make a good cup of tea, my dear, though I'm afraid you've a heavy hand with the caddy, and to cut bread and butter as it should be cut, though too much butter and the bread too thin for poor folk. I suppose you often do it for Miss Beatrice?"

"Very often," said Valentine, truthfully.

"And you don't fidget like Rhoder who's always wanting to be off again unless she can sit in a corner and read her book. She's just like your father, Polly, terrible fond of a book."

"Was my father fond of reading?"

"Yes, my dear. He was, and that's the only good thing he ever was fond of. Never mind him, Polly. Some day, perhaps, I'll tell you all about him, but never to Claude. You can tell your daughter everything. That's the comfort of having girls, though a woman's always fondest of her boys. A son's a son till he gets him a wife, but your daughter's your daughter—as you'll find out some day, my dear—all the days of your life, though Melenda has never been the daughter I wanted."

"Then, mother, I am all the more pleased to be of use. Now—what can I do next? I've washed up the things and put them away, and tidied the table. You've got a beautiful geranium in the window, I will cut away the dead leaves. Rhoda ought to do that for you. Or shall I read to you? I'm sure you would like me to read to you sometimes."

"No, Polly," replied the old lady, drawing herself up with dignity, "you shan't do nothing of the kind. I'm feeling very well this summer; I never felt better in my life; nearly all my rheumatics has gone away

and I sleep all night, and I haven't said anything that I remember to make you think I required reading. And as for years I'm sixty turned, but the youngest of them all. If I require reading I believe I can make my wants known and send for a clergyman, unless I am took sudden which may happen to anybody, and one ought to be prepared. Perhaps allowance is made for such. No reading, thank you, my dear."

"I didn't mean religious reading exactly," Valentine made haste to explain. "However, let us talk instead, and I will attend to your flowers. Tell me something more about all of us when we were little—Claude and Melenda and me."

This she said in perfect innocency, and without a thought of what might follow.

"I will, Polly. Well, my dear, you were a fat little thing, with chubby arms and legs and curls all over your forehead, and the most beautiful little laughing face that ever was seen. No wonder my lady fell in love with you at first sight. Oh, my dear, it was a cruel hard thing to part with you, a hard thing it was."

"Why did you then, mother?"

"It was for your own good, my dear, and her ladyship promised to give you a good bringing up, which she's done, I'm sure. Besides, I couldn't bear to think of that pretty face brought to shame and tears——"

"But why shame and tears, mother?"

"Well, dear, some time or other, p'raps I'll tell you. Not to-night. I can't bear to talk of it nor to think of it. But some day I'll tell you, because you're Polly. But not to Claude. If you went away I thought there'd be one of them safe, for how to save them

other blessed innocents I knew not. Oh, it was a great danger, Polly."

She paused and sighed, and her lips moved in silence.

"The Lord only knows," she said presently, "how I got through that time." She shuddered and clasped her hands. "Ah, my dear, it's a wonderful thing when you're old to remember what you've gone through. If the Lord sends the trouble, He gives the strength to bear it."

"You were in trouble, were you, mother?" Valentine laid her hand upon the blind woman's cheek. "Forget it—don't think about it."

"I won't, my dear. Well, when you went away the house was dull and quiet, because Claude was a grave child always, and Melenda never had your pretty ways."

"Had I pretty ways? Oh, I'm afraid I have lost them. What a pity to grow up and lose one's pretty ways!"

"And curls all over your head you had."

"Had I? And now my hair is quite straight."

"And a dimple in your cheek you had."

"The dimple is gone too, I am afraid; gone away with the curls and the pretty ways. What becomes of all these things, and where do they go to?"

"Dimples don't go, Polly, but perhaps it doesn't show as it did. Dimples never go. It is on the left cheek, my dear, and it shows when you laugh. Ah! And you were always laughing."

Then, for some unknown reason, Valentine started and flushed a rosy red.

"And you had, besides, a little brown mark, a

birth mark, on your arm, just above your elbow. You were the only one of all my children with so much as a speck or spot upon their bodies. Clean-skinned and straight-limbed children you were all, and as upright as a lance, except for that little spot on your arm."

Valentine made no reply, but her cheek was now quite pale, and she felt dizzy and was fain to catch at the back of a chair, because the walls began to go round and the solid earth to quake. This extraordinary terrestrial phenomenon, which was not noticed by any of the daily papers, nor even by the other residents in Lilly's, was entirely caused by the sympathy of the great round globe for Valentine, when by these simple words the old lady revealed the secret of her birth and filled her with strange emotions and troubled the calmness of her brain. Strange that Lady Mildred should never have thought of these little signs and proofs. But mothers, like leopardesses, know the spots upon their children which cannot be changed any more than the skin of the Ethiopian.

"On your right arm it is, Polly, my dear. Oh, I remember it very well."

Valentine made no reply.

"Where are you, dearie?" The blind woman stretched out her hands. "Where are you, Polly?"

"I am here, mother," she replied, in an altered voice. "I am here. But the heat of the day—or something—made me giddy. Wait a moment, mother dear. I will be back directly."

She went out into the open court before the cottages. After all these years of uncertainty, now she knew the truth. There was no longer any doubt.

Suppose that Prince Florestan, just before coming

of age, was to discover that he was not the Prince at all, but only the son of Adam the gardener, and that Adam junior, who had always been employed in picking the strawberries, gathering the cherries, choosing the ripe peaches, shelling the peas, and cutting the asparagus for him to eat, was going to change places with him. And suppose Adam junior was suddenly to learn that he was going to eat up himself all the fruits of the earth as they came in due season, and that the former Prince was to be occupied in cultivating the gardens for him? What would be the feelings of those young men?

Valentine's case was not quite this, because there never was any case quite the same as Valentine's; but it was near it. She always knew that one of the two was Adam the gardener's son, and now she knew which it was. Yet it must remain her secret. Nobody—not Claude, nor Violet, nor the blind old lady, nor Joe—must know it, partly because it was Lady Mildred's own secret and must be kept for her sake; and partly because for three months to come she was to depend upon Claude as upon a brother for protection and advice, and partly because neither this poor old woman nor Melenda must know that she was among them on false pretences.

Some girls on such a discovery would have made the most of the situation. They would have gone away and wandered with dazed eyes among the fields or beside the banks of a silver stream; they would have clasped hands and ejaculated; they would have thrown themselves in beautiful attitudes upon sofas or in easy-chairs. Most girls would do, I think, exactly what Valentine did. Like the young lady who went

on cutting bread and butter, Valentine went back to the cottage and resumed her trimming of the flowers in the window. For in fact, the dimple in the cheek, the curly hair which would not be brushed straight or lie down, the brown mark upon the arm, just below the elbow—not to speak, Valentine thought, of the pretty and caressing ways—all these belonged not to herself at all but—to Violet. Violet therefore was Polly-which-is-Marla and she was Beatrice, and Lady Mildred was her mother, and Melenda was not her sister save in the bonds of womanhood.

This was her discovery.

She was not, then, that interesting creature, the poor girl educated and brought up as a gentlewoman: she was nothing in the world but Beatrice Eldridge, the daughter of a highly respectable country gentleman, and the granddaughter of an earl. She was not a child of the people at all. Her mother was not the poor woman who now sat in darkness; nor, a more important thing still, was Claude her brother. Something of her pride was torn from her by the discovery. She had made up her mind ever since she had been able to understand at all what the thing meant, that she was the daughter of these humble people. She honestly believed it. She thought that she was returning to her own folk after many years; and now she was with them indeed, but under false pretences. If the old lady in the cottage knew the truth, first she would freeze, then she would fold her hands over her white apron, and then she would stand up like a village school girl, and say, "Yes, Miss Beatrice, and my humble service to her ladyship." And Claude, if he knew the truth, would instantly lose his fraternal

manner, and could do nothing more for her. Of course Lady Mildred knew that he would regard her as his sister. Why, the position would be intolerable. Melenda, for her part, would be, if possible, more *farouche* than ever; Lizzie would be more shy and reserved; Lotty would be more timid; and as for all the weaker brethren in Ivy Lane, and wherever the bruit and fame of the thing might spread, and as soon as it became known that there was actually living in their midst a young lady who would in a few weeks be the possessor of much treasure, all their worst qualities would come straight to the front with every possible form of cunning, meanness, greed, and self-seeking.

"Polly, my dearie, what's the matter? Is it the heat again?"

"I am better now, mother."

"You ain't cross, my dear, because I wouldn't let you read, are you? I'm sure you read beautiful, and you shall read if you like."

"Cross, mother! That would be a strange thing. No, I do not want to read since you don't want it. Shall I sing to you? I should like you to hear me sing."

"Why, my dear, I should like that better than reading. And then we can go on talking again. None of the other children ever had a singing voice. None of them ever went about singing as most children do. Their father couldn't sing, though he could play. All his cleverness went into his fingers."

Violet could not sing. Her voice was of small compass, and she never sang even alone or with Valentine. All her cleverness, like her father's, went into her fingers. She could play, though not so well as

Valentine. She played to amuse herself; but she painted and drew professionally, so to speak.

"I can sing," said Valentine. "I will sing you a hymn, mother."

She hesisated, and then for some fancied appropriateness—I know not what, perhaps it existed only in her imagination—of the place and the time with the *motif* of the hymn, she chose an old Puritan hymn which has now dropped out of use and been forgotten, since the Churches resolved to stifle the sadness of life and to simulate the voice of one who continually rejoices and is not afraid and has neither doubt nor question. This hymn had very little joy in it, save that of a faith, humble and resigned, with an under-current, an unexpressed feeling of sorrow, and even perhaps of humble remonstrance, that things had not been ordered otherwise from the beginning. This hymn begins with the words, "We've no abiding city here," and as Valentine sang them the blind old woman joined her hands as one who prays, and the tears gathered in her eyes.

"Oh, Polly," she cried, "my own dear Polly! To think that you should ever come back to your old mother, and to be such a good girl and all! Let me kiss you again, my dear. Melenda never had your pretty ways, poor thing! Some day—not yet—some day I'll tell you all my troubles. But you mustn't never tell Claude—mind that. We mustn't never let Claude know. You and me will keep the secret to ourselves, my dear. Come often. Come whenever you can. Oh, my Polly, you have made me so glad and happy, my dear—so glad and happy. Your voice is like her ladyship's. You've caught that by living with

Miss Beatrice. But your ways are all your own—my own little Polly's soft and pretty ways."

CHAPTER IV.

LOTTY'S ROMANCE.

VALENTINE went away with a guilty feeling, as if she had peeped into the sealed chamber: or eaten the forbidden fruit: or searched after the unlawful mystery: or inquired of the wise woman. Yet truly it was not her own seeking, but the simplest accident which disclosed the thing. The discovery was premature. Had she been able to choose she would rather not have made it, because the only course now left to her was to go on precisely and exactly as if she had not found it out, and so she would be among them all under false pretences.

When she got home between nine and ten o'clock the market in Hoxton Street was in full swing, and the matrons of Ivy Lane were gathered together in the street, talking in knots; there was a group of men about the doors of the "Adelaide," and a crowd noisily disputing within the bar.

Was it imagination? or had there already come upon Valentine in one short hour, namely, since the Discovery, a subtle change, so that she no longer regarded the people with quite the same sense of relationship? She was no longer their sister in the narrower sense. We are all of us, to be sure, brothers and sisters—the clergyman tells us so every Sunday, kindly coupling himself with the assurance, "for you and for me, brethren." But the recognition of this fact produces fruits of affection and charity in com-

parative scantiness. One may, besides, acknowledge the relationship, and yet be conscious of a certain natural superiority. Perhaps it was only a passing fancy. Yet there must have been some change. She had come to stay with her own individual sister: she could only now stay with the universal sister, and make believe that she was the private sister. And a great mass of miscellaneous thoughts came crowding into her mind too fast and too numerous for comfortable reception.

As for the people, they already knew Valentine, though only just arrived, as the sister of a workgirl living among them in one of their houses—presumably a shop-girl from her neat dress and respectable appearance, and also apparently "quiet"—a quality which in Ivy Lane, as elsewhere, commands the highest respect. The women parted right and left to let her pass, and then closed in again and carried on their Parliament with talk as copious and faces as animated as if they had been a Conference of Advanced Women assembled for the purpose of destroying religion and reversing the political power of the sexes. What do they talk about, these feminine Parliaments of the Crossways? Indeed, no man knoweth; if any were to stay his steps and listen, that rash person would probably be treated as an intruder into the mysteries of Bona Dea. One might, it is true, imitate the reprehensible example of Clodius. Foolish persons, ignorant of these Parliaments and of other things, speak of streets such as Ivy Lane as dull and monotonous. How can a hive of humanity ever be dull? There is no monotony where there are, constantly happening, common to all, and talked about by all, sickness and suf-

fering, birth and death, good hap and evil hap, and the wonderful and dramatic situations continually worked out upon the stage of the Human Comedy by that mysterious unknown Power, known only to man by one quality, and named accordingly by such as speak of Him as "The Unexpected." Not a day but something happens to redeem such a street from the charge of dulness. Only those places are dull where, though the human ant-hill is divided into streets, the human ants come not forth to exchange words with each other, and one man knoweth not his brother, and each by himself selfishly eateth his own cob nuts and giveth his neighbour none, and each alone bitterly endureth his own pain. It is gentility, especially the first beginning of it, which is dull, when people separate from their fellows and refuse to partake with them of the sacrament of sympathy, whereof quiet conversation is the outward and visible sign. Kingsland, for instance, is dull, and Shepherd's Bush is dull, and Camden Town is inexpressibly dull. The man who once proposed a Palace of Delight for Whitechapel, forgot that it was ever so much more needed in Camden Town.

Now, as Valentine passed through the open doorway, a man who was standing within stepped aside to make room for her and took off his hat to her. It was not until later that she realised the significance of the gesture. Every one does not recognize the fact that the English working-man never takes off his hat to ladies. A man who does so is not a working-man. He is, or has been, among the ranks of those who do take off their hats: that is, he is, or has been, a gentleman. As Valentine went up the stairs this man went

slowly into the ground floor front. She turned to look at him. He looked quite old and was tall, but stooped a good deal. It was too dark to see much of him, but the gaslight in the street outside lit up the narrow passage. She could see that he had long white hair and a great mass of it, and that his chin was white with a week's growth of beard, for it was now Friday, and he only shaved on Sunday morning. His eyes met Valentine's in the doorway, and she remembered afterwards a strange sadness in them, which made her wonder what was the history of the man. In her own room she lit her reading-lamp, and sat down intending to follow out some of the lines of thought opened up to her by her discovery. But she remembered Lotty in the next room, and with self-reproach she went to see her.

The other two girls were out, and Lotty was lying alone. She was in much suffering to-night; her back was bad and her cough was bad; she was moaning as she lay, but in a whisper, so to speak, because when people sleep three in a bed, the habit is acquired of doing one's groans inaudibly for fear of waking the others. The house was nearly opposite the public-house, and the smell of beer and tobacco with the noisy talk of the drinking men came pouring in at the open window.

"What have you eaten to-day?' asked Valentine.

"I am not hungry. Well, then; bread and tea."

"How long did you work?"

"The others worked all day from half-past six o'clock till nearly nine. But I had to lie down sometimes."

From half-past six till nine! Fourteen hours and

a half—all the livelong day. They had been doing this for eight years, and they were going on with it all their lives, with no hope of any change or any improvement or any mitigation. It seems a heavy sentence, my sisters, for the Sin of Eve.

Valentine remembered that in her cupboard there lay a great bagful of grapes—big purple grapes from a hothouse, every one as big a pigeon's egg, and beautiful to look upon for their delicate bloom. Claude left them there for her. Without any more talking, she got a bunch of these and began to put them one by one into Lotty's mouth, just as a nurse gives food to a little child. It was chiefly exhaustion that had brought on the pain. When she had eaten a few of the grapes it was nearly gone.

Then Valentine carried her into her own room, and laid her on her own bed and undressed her.

"You shall stay here to night," she said, "a little out of the noise from the street. And, besides, my bed is softer than yours. I can sleep in the easy-chair. Don't dare to say a word, Lotty. Remember that I am Melenda's sister."—Oh, Valentine!—"and you have never seen me in a rage. I can get into terrible rages if I am contradicted or put out. There, now you are comfortable. Oh, what ragged stockings and shoes! I shall give you a new pair to-morrow. Melenda said you were to have whatever I gave you. And you want everything, you poor thing! And now you must eat some more grapes."

"If you could only persuade Melenda to take some," said Lotty. "But she won't, and she's getting thinner every day."

"What shall I do? How can I persuade her?"

"Don't do anything, and then perhaps, she'll come round."

"Now, Lotty, listen to me. To-morrow is Saturday. The next day is Sunday. I shall do all your work for you to-morrow—do you hear?—and that will give you two days' rest. And then we will see afterwards."

"You can't do my work."

"Yes, I can. Why, I can do all kinds of work. Are you tired?"

"I was tired when you came; but I am not tired now. It was the grapes. You wouldn't rather be out than sitting with me, would you? But, of course, you are a young lady. Lizzie and the City Road isn't fit company for you. Not that it's good for Liz."

"I would rather be here with you." Valentine stroked her thin cheek and soft hair. "It's better for both of us."

"Oh! you are good," said Lotty. "And please don't mind Melenda. She flies out easy, but she comes round again; and she's kind to me, and never out of temper, though sometimes my back's too bad for me to do any work at all. Then she works for both. There's not a quicker girl with her needle anywhere than Melenda."

"I will try not to mind. But, Lotty, is there nothing that can be done for you? Have you no friends anywhere?"

"No, I haven't got any friends. Father and mother were country born and bred, and I don't know where they came from. I've got no friends—only Melenda."

"Let me be your friend too." Valentine stooped

and kissed the girl's forehead. Don't be proud, like Melenda. Let me be your friend too, Lotty."

"Oh! it's wonderful," said Lotty. "Why, you are crying too, and you're a young lady. How can I be friends with a young lady?"

"Why not? And I'm Melenda's sister, you know."

Again—oh, Valentine!

"Melenda says you ought to be like herself, and a workgirl. Sam—that's her brother——"

"I know my brother Sam," said Valentine. A third time? Oh, mendacious one! But it is only the first step which gives trouble.

"Sam says there oughtn't to be gentlemen and ladies—only men and women. But then, ladies don't use language, and they don't drink. It must be a beautiful thing to be a lady, even without the fine things you had on when you came here first."

"If I am a lady, that is all the more reason for my being your friend. Tell me about yourself. How is it you are so friendless? And were you always so poor?"

"It's through father—because he failed and went bankrupt."

"Oh! is that all?" Mere bankruptcy, in the light of Ivy Lane poverty, seemed a very small thing.

"Father had a shop once in the Goswell Road, you know. It wasn't a big place, but oh! it was a most beautiful little shop, with a parlour behind and four bedrooms above. In those days we used to go to school—not a Board school, but a select Academy for young ladies, kept by a real lady who had been a dressmaker in a large way, but met with misfortunes—a beautiful school. On Sunday we all went to

chapel, where he had a pew, and put on our Sunday frocks. I don't think there ever was a man fonder of his business and prouder of his shop than father. He'd be content to spend the whole day in it, setting out the things, sorting his drawers, and talking with his customers. And sometimes he'd go out and stand on the kerb admiring his windows, where the ribbons used to hang up most lovely. But mother she'd make him put on his hat and go out for an hour of fresh air. Mostly he'd go down Aldersgate Street and into Cheapside, just to see how they dressed their windows. After a good day's takings, he'd come in and have supper and talk about bigger premises and of the time when we would be his assistants."

The romance of a small draper's shop! Yet in it were all the elements which make up romance: the hopes and ambitions of a man for himself and those he loved—the family and the home, the wife and the children — and unexpected fate impending over all with cruel and undeserved disaster. No castle with moated keep could contain better elements of romance.

"And no thought," said Lotty, "of what would happen."

"What did happen?"

"Father went bankrupt. He was broke."

"How was he—broke?"

"I don't know. The customers fell off. Everybody said it was bad times and so many out of work. It couldn't be the fault of father; nobody could be more civil and obliging. Perhaps they got things cheaper at the stores and the big shops; but father said everyone must make his profit, else how could people live? Whatever it was, the customers fell off,

and then father he began to get low-spirited and things got worse. As for mother, she'd sit and cry until he came in, and then she'd brisk up and pretend to laugh, and say things would come round, and cheer him up a bit. Oh, poor mother!"

"Poor mother!" Valentine echoed.

"That lasted a long time, and we got poorer every day. There was no more school for us, and we sent away the girl. And one day I remember—it's twelve years ago and more—father came into the back parlour, and sat down and cried as if his heart would break because there was a man in possession, and we were ruined."

"Oh!"

"That's all. They sold everything we had, and the beautiful shop that we'd all been so proud of was empty and shut up. Then we went into lodgings, and father began to look out for work. But there, he was heart-broken, and he went about as if he was silly."

"And then?"

"Why, he came home every day without finding it. Nobody, you see, is so helpless as a draper who's been bankrupt. For the other tradesmen despise a bankrupt, and it makes them think that he must drink or be extravagant. And, besides, he knows too much. They don't like to let shop-assistants learn all the secrets of the trade. So he could get no work. Then mother, she took ill with the misery, and went off her poor head, and no wonder." Lotty stopped to choke. "The parish took her, and she died."

"And what became of your father?"

"Oh! don't blame him, poor dear, because he was

quite broken-hearted. And he began to drink, and then he had to be a roader for the parish at eighteen-pence a day—him who'd kept his own shop: and one day he took a chill from standing in the mud with his broom and his bad boots, and went to hospital, and died there."

"And then you were left alone? You and—had you any brothers or sisters?"

Lotty hesitated.

"Don't tell me more than you like, my dear," said Valentine.

"There was—one—other," Lotty replied with hesitation. "It was Tilly."

"What became of Tilly? Did she die, too?"

"Hush!" Lotty whispered, "I don't know where she is now, whether she's alive or dead. She said she wouldn't stand it, and she went away."

"What did she go away for?"

"She was a beader: she was that clever with her fingers she could do all kinds of things. Once she had very good work as a butterfly-and-bird hand, and did flat-work and slip-stitching. But there wasn't much work; and she couldn't get enough to keep her; and one day she up and said she wouldn't stand it any longer, and so, with only a kiss and a cry, she went right away—Melenda was out, else she'd never ha' let her go—and we've never seen her since. Sometimes Melenda goes to look for her, but she's never found her."

"Where has she gone, then? Where does Melenda look for her?"

Lotty did not answer this question.

"Sometimes," she said, "when I'm alone in the

evening, I think I hear her step upon the stair, and oh! what I would do if Tilly would only come back, and be good again—my poor Tilly!—just as she used to be, and bear it all brave, like Melenda."

"And then I think about Liz," Lotty went on after a pause. "Because she's discontented, like Tilly, and the hard work frets her; and she doesn't get enough to eat, and her father's awful poor, and can't help her."

"Who is her father?"

"It's old Mr. Lane, downstairs. They say he was a gentleman once, and he did something"—"did something," beautiful euphemism!—"and got into trouble. He writes letters for the German Jews at Whitechapel when they first come, and for the German workmen in the Curtain Road, where they are all furniture men. He knows a lot of languages, but he's so dreadful poor he can't give Liz anything."

"My dear, is the whole street full of terrible stories like this?"

"Well, we're poor, and I suppose there's stories about all of us—how we came to be poor."

"There is one thing you've not told me, Lotty: how you came to know Melenda."

Lotty told that story too. It was a story of two girls' friendship for each other—a friendship passing that of David and Jonathan, commonly supposed to be the leading case in friendship; and how one girl who was strong stood by and worked for the other who was weak; and how for her sake she bore patiently with tyrannies, petty cheatings, bullyings, and defraudings; and how the two presently found another girl as helpless and friendless as themselves, and forced her

to remain with them, and kept her in the stony path of labour and of self-respect. Quite a common story —only a wild weed kind of story—a story which may be picked up in every gutter; so that one wonders why Valentine's heart burned within her, and why the tears crowded into her eyes and ran down her cheeks.

"You must talk no more, Lotty," she said, when her story was finished. "They are getting quieter outside and you will be able to sleep very soon. There —the grapes are within your reach. I shall do very well on the chair. Good-night, my dear. Your cough will be better now. Oh! Lotty, Lotty—I never knew there could be such dreadful troubles as these. Poor child!"

"Don't cry. Perhaps Tilly will come back."

"We must all be sisters together, my dear, and love each other," said Valentine, with some incoherence, but she had her meaning. "It is all that we can do. There is nothing else that will help us all—nothing else."

CHAPTER V.

A REAL DAY'S WORK.

"If you please, Melenda," said Valentine, presenting herself in the morning after breakfast, "I am come to do Lotty's work for her to-day."

Lotty was with her, looking guilty and rather frightened.

"I didn't ask her, Melenda," she explained.

"She wants a rest," said Valentine; "I mean to do it. May I work here with you, Melenda, or shall I work in my own room? It will be quieter for Lotty if I sit here."

"It is only another of their whims and fancies," said Melenda, looking at Valentine as if she was a Specimen. "Give her the work, Liz, and let Lotty lie down till she's tired of her fancy. That won't be very long, and it'll rest Lotty. Then she'll put it down and go away and forget all about the work and Lotty too. They've got nothing to do and so they're full of fancies. Here, take the work."

She ungraciously motioned Valentine to a bundle of shirts, as yet without their button-holes, lying on the table.

"Lotty must have rest, Melenda," Valentine replied, without referring to Melenda's analysis of her own character. "She wants more food and less work. Let her lie down and rest in my room because it's cooler

than this." She did not add that it was much cleaner, much sweeter, and much prettier. "She shall have my dinner and I will have hers, if you like."

Lizzie, remembering the ham, chuckled sarcastically. It was her only contribution to the conversation.

"Don't be ungracious, Melenda. I have not offered to give you anything."

"You shan't, then. There!" Melenda dashed her work aside and sprang to her feet in a sudden passion. "I'll take nothing from you—nothing. Not even your cheek, nor your pride. And you shall take nothing from me. Oh! you come here and you think you can make me humble because you've got some money saved and some fine friends, and you've been brought up like a lady and taught to despise us all, and then you think you'll spite me by taking Lotty from me. You shan't have her—no." She laid her arm round her friend's neck and became immediately soft and tender. "No, Lotty dear; she wants to part us, but she shan't, shall she? All these years we've been friends and worked together, you and me, and borne such a lot and never grumbled, and she's only just come. I'll do your work for you as well as my own, Lotty, and welcome, if I have to sit up all night for it. But I can't get ham and grapes for you—work all I know—like she can." The quick tears sprang to her eyes at this consciousness of inferiority.

"She doesn't want to part you and me," said Lotty, "I know she doesn't; and you oughtn't to think I'd ever leave you. Don't be so hard on her, Melenda. Isn't she your sister and all, though she is a young lady?"

Melenda dashed the tears from her eyes. Was Lotty herself going to desert her?

Lizzie went on with her work, her head bent over the button-holes as if her friend's health, and any discussion which might arise upon it, was of no concern at all to herself. But she looked up now and then furtively, just to see whether Melenda was going to catch it or to let some one else catch it. Melenda's tears were but the drops of a short shower which comes before a thunderstorm. She stood with kindling eyes and clenched fists. She was jealous; she was so jealous that she would have liked nothing better than to have fallen upon poor Valentine and—luckily, she did not do it. But she looked so fierce that Valentine remembered what had been said to Violet about the tearing out of ladies' hair, and wondered if she was going to lose her own. She was fierce because she was jealous, and she was jealous because Lotty was visibly drawn towards Valentine, and because for the first time her own sacrifice of work and time could do nothing for her friend compared with the soft words, the grapes, and the creature comforts so freely bestowed by the new-comer.

"You shan't take her from me," she cried again, but with weakened force.

"Don't, Melenda," said Lotty. "I'm not leaving you. Oh! why are you so cruel to her?"

Melenda gave in. She said nothing, but threw herself into her chair and gathered up her work. If Lotty wanted to leave her, she must go. That is what her attitude and action meant.

"Look at her," said Valentine, taking advantage of this momentary weakness which might mean softening;

"look at her pale face. Let her rest to-day and have good food—to-morrow is Sunday. I will go on with her work here, and you may say as many hard things to me as you please."

"I tried to do for you, Lotty—I tried my best, I did."

"You did, Melenda dear. Oh! yes, I know. But it's my back."

"Take her, then," said Melenda with a kind of sullen dignity. "Give her what you like. Give her hot roast beef and potatoes, if you like; but you shan't give none to me."

Valentine led Lotty away, and set her in her own chair with a pillow in the back, and placed some books on the table within her reach. Then she went back to the work-room.

Now, as regards the girl who was sick, she, left to herself, began first to turn over the leaves of a book which had pictures in it. It was a book of poetry. The only poetry Lotty had ever learned or read—because in the Select Academy poetry was not part of the Curriculum—was the verse contained in the hymn-book used by the chapel where in their palmy days her unfortunate family had worshipped. But it was a great many years since she had gone to any church or chapel, and the hymns were well-nigh forgotten by this time and the hymn-book lost. Consequently when first she looked at the "reading" and saw that it was verse, she thought it must be a hymn-book; but when she came to read the hymns in it and found she could not remember to have read anything like them in her own book, and missed all the old tags and phrases, she began to fear that Valentine was a heretic of some kind. Of the narrow creed which had been preached

in that little Primitive Christian Church some few rags and tatters remained; notably, that everybody who did not hold the Catholic Faith as expounded by the Primitive Christians was in a perilous state; and that to be a Papist, or an Anglican, or a Congregationalist, or a Presbyterian, or a Unitarian was to invite certain destruction, while even to continue in the twilight of Baptistdom or Methodism was to incur great risks. It is odd how, when one's early faith is forgotten, the narrowness of it may remain, like the crust in the bottle after the wine has been poured out. So Lotty closed the book, in confusion of spirit, remembering something vague about falling from sound doctrines, and bethinking herself of some half-forgotten phrase about the wiles of Satan. These wiles had never been presented to her in a prettier form than in this dainty volume with its pictures and its poetry.

The ignorance, if you come to think of it, of London workgirls and, very likely, of workgirls everywhere, is colossal; it passeth understanding. They have no books in their rooms, not one single book, not even a Bible or a Prayer-book or a hymn-book—single-room lodgers never have any books; they read nothing at all, neither books, nor newspapers, nor journals, nor magazines, nor tracts. They have no knowledge of literature in any form. They hear nothing of the outer world: the men, for their part, may meet and discuss things with some show of knowledge, because they sometimes read a newspaper, but the girls do not; therefore they have not the least understanding of what is going on anywhere, and in all the Art, Science, and Knowledge which we call the inheritance of the Ages, they do not own the smallest

share. Since, then, they are as ignorant of everything as the inhabitants of the Solomon Islands, without being anything like so well-fed and so comfortable or so pleasantly clothed, would it not have been far better for all these girls if they had been born in that Archipelago instead of Christian England? There at least they would have no shirts to stitch if there were none to wear, and they would have plenty to eat, even if it were only dried *bêche-de-mer*, and there would be sunshine and warmth for all.

Two of these girls had been educated at Board schools, where they had reached the third or fourth standard. If you wish, therefore, to know the extent of their possible knowledge, read the third and fourth standard books, and remember that they have already forgotten almost all they ever learned from those encyclopædic works. And if they are ignorant of book-learning they are equally ignorant of all that is concerned with industry, wages, and trades. They have not the least idea that they could ever better their condition; they do not understand that they might rebel, or strike, or combine, or do anything for themselves at all. They cannot go into service because they know nothing, not even how to lay a table or how to dust a room; they cannot emigrate because they would be of no use in any colony; they can only sew, and, like the steam-engines which are kept going, till they fall to pieces of old age and rust, on coal and water, the sewing-girls are just as simply kept at working-power till something goes wrong with the wheels, on bread and butter and cold tea.

Their ignorance, however, though it was colossal, did not make them unhappy, nor did it humiliate

them. The great Giant Ignorance has one good point: he is, in his way, good-natured; he never suffers his victims to be unhappy or humiliated by reason of their subjection. Melenda, indeed, thought herself possessed of extraordinary knowledge, as well as of immense sagacity.

Presently Lotty began to look about the room and to realise slowly the way in which young ladies live—always in easy-chairs, soft and low, with flowers on the table and grapes in the cupboard, curtains to the window, books on a shelf, pictures on the wall, fans, scent on the mantel-shelf, and laced handkerchiefs. How would it be to live like this always, and never do any work; never to be hungry, and never to have a pain in the back? While she was thinking of this, and wondering vaguely and asking herself if Melenda was right in saying that Valentine would soon go away and forget all about them, her eyes closed and she dropped off to sleep, lulled by the unusual sense of rest, freedom from pain, and physical ease. She had, besides, a great quantity of arrears to make up in the matter of sleep, and the morning was very hot, and there was a most delicious sense of coolness in the room and the unaccustomed fragrance of flowers, all of which reasons may serve for her excuse.

The making of button-holes is one of those occupations in which it is impossible to take an artistic interest. She who sews them is not sustained by a sense of beauty, because when you have finished and turned out your button-hole, you cannot possibly call it beautiful; it is not a thing, for instance, which you can hold up and watch while the sunlight plays among the stitches and the light and shade set off their grace-

ful curves; besides, you have got to go straight on to make another as soon as one is finished. Nothing sustains the work-woman but the reflection that, though it takes a good many stitches to make a button-hole, so many dozen button-holes make so many pence.

The making of button-holes, however, is not difficult for a good needlewoman. Valentine received a few simple instructions from Lizzie, and then, taking Lotty's place on the bed, she began her work. The button-holes were for shirts, but these were of a coarse and common kind, made of rough material, for exportation very likely—shirts warranted to be as uncomfortable and as rasping as the monastic hair shirt. In fact, I think it is very likely they were invented before the Reformation for the use of monks and modern eremites, and then only for the strictest and most profoundly miserable Order of Self-tormentors. They are now, I believe, used for the converts (previously shirtless) made by the missionaries. And the story of "My First Shirt" has yet to be written. So enterprising has always been the Spirit of British Commerce!

Valentine was clever with her needle, and could embroider as beautifully as Penelope. Unfortunately she was as slow and as deliberate as that lady-in-waiting, and loved to linger over her work, and look at it, and think about it, and at times unstitch some of it. Therefore she soon perceived that Melenda turned out button-holes about five times, and Lizzy about three times, as fast as herself. Then she made haste to imitate them, and addressed her mind to the question of rapidity rather than of beauty in her work.

No one spoke: there was no other sound in the

room than the click of thimbles and the rustling of the stuff. Valentine's thoughts wandered from her work, which was monotonous. This, she reflected, was the room in which three girls slept, worked, and lived. They all three lay on one bed, that on which she was sitting. It was a broad wooden bed, with a hard mattress a good deal depressed in the middle, and neither feather bed nor springs. The hot July sun was pouring in at the window, where the yellow blind, which might once have been white and could no longer draw up, was pinned back so as to leave a triangle of sunshine. Valentine sat in the shade, and thought she had never in her life seen so many motes dancing in the sun. The room was neglected, and wanted cleaning horribly; the grate was rusty; there was not a book in it, or a magazine, or a paper—nothing to read; there were no pictures on the wall; there were no ornaments of any kind; the whitewash of the ceiling had fallen down in one corner exposing the laths; there was no carpet; the two or three cooking utensils which lay within the fender seemed to have been long unused. A place, it seemed, built with intention for the abode of grinding, wretched, hopeless poverty; a place exactly fitted for the kind of work, where there was no prospect of improvement, however zealously one worked, or of any higher pay or more regular employment.

Valentine forgot that the girls were young, and that even to workgirls there is hope, while they are young, that these troubles will pass away somehow, and give place to some unknown kind of joy.

"Well," asked Lizzie pertly, "isn't it good enough for you?"

It was at nine o'clock that Valentine began to work. At ten, or thereabouts, she became aware that she must stop, get up, and straighten herself. She did so. Melenda worked on like a machine, and took no notice at all. The other girl looked and smiled grimly. "I thought you'd give in soon," she said. "Lotty has to lie down every half-hour."

"I haven't given in," Valentine replied indignantly. Then she sat down and went on again.

In another hour her head began to reel, and she felt giddy. If two hours of button-holes produced such an effect, what would the whole day do for her? She laid aside her work, and looked up ashamed. By this time the room was very hot, although the door and window were both open, and from the street below, baked by the midday sun, there was wafted upwards a mingled perfume or incense, made up of things lying in the street; of the industries in the houses—such as the pressing of cloth, which is a hot and steamy smell; or the burning of leather straps, which is insidious, and makes one feel sick; with the smell from a fried-fish shop not far off—this is a smell which makes one sad; and the stale reek of yesterday's tobacco and beer—this is a smell which makes one sorry—from the public-house opposite.

"Do you do this every day?" she asked foolishly, because she knew very well that they did.

"Every day," said Lizzie—Melenda still taking no notice—"and all day long. Don't you like it?"

"Don't you ever stop to read, or talk, or sing, or something?"

"Sing! Oh, Lord!" Lizzie replied with infinite contempt. "Stop to sing?"

"All day long," Valentine repeated, "and never any holiday?"

"Only when there's no work. Fine ladies never think how they'd like it themselves"—Lizzie, too, was able to borrow something from the indignant Sam. "Ain't it nice to make cheap things?"

Valentine took up her work again and went on, wondering how long life could be endured if she were doomed to spend it among button-holes. Then she tried to imagine herself the lifelong companion of Melenda, and altogether such an one as Lizzie, and that she had never done anything else and never known any other kind of existence; and she wondered what she would be thinking about. But her imagination failed her, and refused to pretend any such thing, partly because the things worn by poor Lizzie were not nice to look at.

"Do you never do anything at all?" she asked presently, "except work all day and walk the streets in the evening?"

"Some girls go to the Britannier when they've got the money, or anybody treats them. I've never got the money, and I'm not going to be treated by anybody, no more than Melenda. There used to be the Grecian as well, but they've turned that into the Salvation Army: and there's the Theatre of Varieties in Pitfield Street, there's Collins's at Islington, and there's the Foresters in the Cambridge Road. Some girls go to public-houses and drink with the men. We won't, Melenda and me. There's talk of a girls' club, but— well, there's nothing else to do but to walk the streets at night, and you'd walk them, too, if you'd been sitting at work all day."

"And Sundays?"

"We lie abed on Sunday mornings, and go out in the afternoons."

"And on wet and cold evenings?"

"Then we sit at home, and go to bed early to save candle and fire."

"Do you never go to church?"

"Not likely!"—Liz lifted her ragged skirt. "In this?"

"Don't waste your time chattering, Lizzie," said Melenda. Then there was silence.

Soon after noon Valentine was seized with an overwhelming desire to get up and jump, or run, or leap over something.

"I must jump!" she cried, and did it.

"That's fidgets," said Lizzie. "I used to have them, but I'm used to it now."

The attack presently yielded to violent measures, for fidgets are like cramp, and must be dealt with resolutely. In reading of convicts chained to each other, and obliged to sleep side by side, I have often thought how dreadful and intolerable a thing it would be if one of them were to get an attack of fidgets and not be able to spring out of bed. Then Valentine was going to sit down again, when Melenda interposed. Lotty, she said, always rested in the middle of the day. She had better do the same and get her dinner.

"Am I not to have Lotty's?"

"Don't be silly," said Melenda. "As if you could make a dinner off bread and tea! What time did you generally have your dinner?"

"At half-past seven."

"That's supper. What did you have before that?"

"There was tea at five."

"And before that?"

"Luncheon at half-past one." Valentine began to feel guilty of most reckless gluttony.

"Oh! And what did you have at all of them?"

Valentine confessed with shame to meat at luncheon and at dinner, and possibly at breakfast.

"There," said Melenda, "it's ridiculous. You can't have dinner like Lizzie and me. Go away and get something to eat, and give it to Lotty if you like. We don't eat much here, but we're independent."

Valentine obeyed, and the other two girls went on working in silence.

Presently there was heard proceeding from Valentine's room a most curious and remarkable sound. Nothing less than the laughter of two girls, a thing which had never happened in the house in the memory of its residents. Lizzie looked up, curious and envious; Melenda suspicious and jealous.

"They're laughing," said Lizzie. "What are they laughing for?"

"She's made Lotty laugh," said Melenda, who had never even tried to work such a miracle. "What's she said to her? Lotty wouldn't never laugh at us."

The laughing continued, and Lizzie's curiosity increased, and Melenda's face grew cloudier and darker.

The old lady in the room below, sitting by herself with her funeral trimmings in her hands, thought somebody must have gone mad. Who but mad people and children ever laughed in Ivy Lane? But the laughing still went on, and her thoughts flew back to a time long, long ago when the poor old thing herself laughed all day long—living in the Fool's Paradise

which sees nothing around or before but a luminous and sunlit haze. Nobody would ever laugh, I suppose, if that haze were to be suddenly removed. Happy Paradise! Happy fools who live in it! And all to end in the workhouse during the winter, and such sewing as could be got in the summer from Mr. Croquemort of Bethnal Green. Presently she could bear it no longer, this poor old woman, but got up and put down her work, and stealthily crept out of her room and crawled half-way up the narrow stairs, her neck craned, her eyes glaring, her ear turned, to see what they were laughing at, and to hear what they were saying. She neither heard nor saw, but a strange emotion fell upon her withered old soul. The laughter of girls—light-hearted laughter!—she remembered how, long, long ago—fifty years ago—when she was nineteen or twenty, two young girls sat in a carriage on a racecourse, and laughed with handsome and gallant young gentlemen, while the pink champagne foamed and sparkled in the long glasses, and the gipsy woman stood at the carriage-wheel, and the girls crossed her palms with gold. Then that old woman, with something like a sob, felt in her pocket and found twopence, and she went across the street to the "Adelaide" and had a glass of gin. After this she returned to her own room and fell asleep, and, perhaps, dreamed of that long past happy time of unthinking folly.

As for the laughing, it was over nothing at all but the cooking of the dinner, at which Valentine showed herself so awkward and so ignorant. Why, she knew nothing, not even the price of potatoes, or how to buy them, and she had got the very dearest kind of beef,

and such an immense quantity, and Lotty had to tell her everything, even to the rolling-up of her sleeves; but she would do it all herself, and so they both laughed. And the business was no doubt as comic as the making of a pudding on the stage, which is, we know, always most effective business.

And then, with the laughter, the other girls heard a hissing and sputtering, which lasted ten minutes or thereabouts, and was accompanied by an extraordinary fragrance, of the kind which used in the old days to delight those dear, simple Immortal Gods, so easily pleased—the incense, or perfume, namely, of meat, roasted, seethed, or fried.

Then Lizzie sat bolt upright, and said solemnly, with pale cheek, and that far-off look in her eyes which a painter might take for a yearning after Things Invisible and Unattainable—

"Melenda, they've got—it's—it is—STEAK!"

"What does it matter," said Melenda, "what they've got?"

Lizzie was silent for another half minute. But the fragrance mounted to her brain and made her giddy, and filled her with a craving for food.

"Oh, Melenda, I'm so hungry."

"That comes of taking things. If you hadn't eaten that ham two days ago, you wouldn't have been hungry now."

There was once a foolish Greek person, whose history used to be read in the "Analecta Minora," when that work was put in the hands of schoolboys. He had a theory that horses ate too much, and he gradually reduced the rations of corn for his own horse, with a view to making that animal live upon

nothing, and become perfectly independent of food. Just as he was upon the point of success the creature died. Melenda held much the same views.

"For shame!" she added; "where's your independence, Liz?" Just what the Greek person might have said to the horse.

"Bother Independence," replied Lizzie, replying in the very words of the horse, "I am hungry."

"If you eat beefsteak to-day," said Melenda, "there'll be nothing but bread and cold tea to-morrow and——"

But Lizzie was gone. The perfume of the beef drew her as with ropes, and she could not choose but go.

In Valentine's room there was a white cloth spread and the dinner just ready, and Lotty, with flushed cheeks, helping to serve it, and both of them laughing.

"Come in, Lizzie," cried Valentine gaily; "there is plenty for all of us. Will you ask Melenda?"

"She won't come. Don't you go—she might fly in your face."

Valentine hesitated. Then she sat down. During dinner they talked and laughed again — actually laughed and made little jokes together. When had Lotty laughed last?

Dinner done and things washed and cleared away, they went back into the other room. Melenda was still at work, dogged and stern, with hard set mouth and resolute eyes, sick with the yearning that the smell of the roasted meat had caused, but stubborn and obstinate.

"Melenda," said Valentine, "can you live on bread and tea?"

"What's that to you? I've got to."

"Oh," she cried, "it is shameful."

"Then mend it," said Melenda fiercely; "mend it if you can. If you can't let us alone to bear it as well as we can. We can bear it, can't we, Liz?"

Lizzie turned her great eyes to Valentine.

"Can you mend it?" she asked. "It is very hard to bear. Can you mend it?"

"Oh! I can do nothing to mend it. And Melenda will not let me do anything to help it."

"I thought you were going to do Lotty's work."

"She's done more already than Lotty used to do in a whole day," said Liz. "Let her rest a little, Melenda."

"No, no," said Valentine, "I shall do my day's work."

The slow minutes passed slowly. Through the open window there came the murmur and the hum of Hoxton Street and St. John's Road. It was rather a sleepy murmur, because Hoxton is not a noisy place, and there are few omnibuses and fewer cabs, and very few carts and waggons. Presently Valentine felt as if they were all three set down in some far-off place of torture, in an undescribed circle of the Inferno, condemned to work at button-holes without ceasing—button-holes for shirts which would fit nobody—like the unhappy damsels who have to fill sieves with water, and to spend their whole time—they've got all the time there is—in pouring it in and seeing it run out again—a most tedious employment and, one cannot help thinking, with submission and respect to the Court, a foolish punishment, and one can only hope that they get their Sundays at least free, in which case they are no worse off than Melenda and her friends.

Presently Valentine began aloud to shape out a little apologue which occurred to her.

"Once upon a time," she said, "there were three poor girls, and there was a wicked Witch. The Witch was always making spells for the raising of storms and bringing diseases upon good people and thwarting the work of honest people. For use in her charms she wanted a continual supply of Button-holes; but why Button-holes are good for magic I cannot tell you, only I believe that if you work at them long enough you can raise the—the Devil. Anyhow, I know that they are most invaluable for conjuring, incantations, making people mad and miserable, and all kinds of sorcery. The difficulty with this Witch was to find people who would sew the Button-holes for her, because it is horrible work and tedious work, that no one would do if there was anything else to be done, and because it is work which by the laws of the country—but I think this law is an unjust one—is forbidden to be paid for at the rate of more than a farthing apiece, so that the fastest worker cannot earn more than a shilling a day at it. For a long time the Witch looked about in vain. But at last she found three girls who were all so desperately poor that they were ready to take any kind of work that was offered them. It was a very heartless and wicked country, in which the rich ladies took no thought for poor girls, and did not interfere as they ought to have done, or insist upon finding them good work and fair wages, as of course they do in our own country—in England. So she offered them the work. She did not persuade them with honeyed words. She did not say, 'My dears, if you will come and make Button-holes for me, you shall have roast beef and pudding every day, with money to go to all kinds of beautiful places.' Not at

all. She came scowling and cursing, and she threw the work in the middle of them, and she said: 'You girls; take the work or leave it. If you leave it, you will starve; if you take it, you shall taste meat once a week—on Sundays, perhaps—and live for six days on bread and butter and tea. You shall work all day long except Sundays; you shall not have any holidays; you shall waste and throw away in this dreadful work all your youth and beauty; you shall not know any pleasure or rest or fulness; you shall go hungry in body and soul. Don't think the rich ladies will interfere or help you. They care nothing for you——'"

"They don't," said Melenda, now become interested in the story.

"'They have been told about you till they are sick of hearing the story; but they will do nothing for you. So take it or leave it.' That is what the dreadful old Witch said."

"Of course they took the work," said Melenda.

"Of course they did; and of course they grew every day hungrier and more hopeless. And one of them was weak, and she gets weaker. Then the other two worked harder to make up. But they couldn't quite make up; and one grew more miserable, but she worked on still."—Lizzie bent her head—"and one grew harder and more angry, and she worked the hardest of all."

"Very fine talk," said Melenda, with an intelligent sniff. "They've taught you how to talk. You talk as well as Sam almost."

"But I haven't done yet. Suppose a messenger was to come from some rich lady to these girls—a girl like themselves—and suppose she was to offer

them lighter work and better pay. Suppose she was to offer them, out of her own abundance, help of any kind——"

"The girls wouldn't be fools enough to take it," said Melenda. "They want justice. That's what Sam says. 'Take your charity away,' he says, 'and give us justice.'"

"This lady would say through her messenger, 'I cannot get justice. I am quite powerless to get justice for girls in the clutches of black wizards and witches. But I can help you three.' Melenda, suppose her messenger brought this message, would you send her away?"

"You can talk," said Melenda. "But you won't make me take your charity."

At four o'clock Lotty made some tea and brought it to them, Melenda not regarding. Then they went on working again in silence. By this time Valentine's fingers ached so that the needle travelled slowly, and her arms ached so that she could hardly hold the stuff in her lap, and her back, though she was as strong as most girls, ached with the stooping, and her head ached with the heat and closeness of the room, and her fingers were sore with handling the coarse material of which the shirts are made, and her eyes were red and inflamed.

But she would not give in.

Melenda was working as fiercely and as fast as if it was seven in the morning, and she had only just begun, and then after an excellent and invigorating breakfast. Lizzie with the quiet dull patience she habitually gave to the work, but with much greater discontent, for she had now tasted some of the joys of a lady's life. It meant, she perceived, a pretty room

to live in, with soft dresses and gloves, and your hair done beautifully, and beefsteak and cocoa for dinner. "You ought," said the gentleman she knew, "to live like a lady, and have nothing to do all day but to let me paint your eyes. And when Valentine went away, which would be very soon, there would be no more beefsteak.

My brothers, think of it: the mind of man cannot conceive a greater temptation than this, when a girl half-starved and robbed of joy and doomed to the misery of work the most hopeless and the most miserable, perceives that the Unattainable—the life of physical comfort and material well-being, the life she has always longed for, the life that it is natural to desire—is actually within her reach and to be had—just by signing her name to a little piece of parchment, and giving that agreement—of course after it has been duly stamped and entered at Somerset House—to the Devil.

About half-past eight Lotty came in, refreshed after her long day's rest and sleep. "Oh!" she said, tearing the work from Valentine's hands; "oh! Melenda, how could you let her go on?"

For Valentine's cheek was pale and her eyes were swimming, and now she looked dazed, and trembled as she sat.

"I will not give in," she cried; but she did, because she broke into sobbing and crying, "Oh, Lotty—is it every day—all day—all day long, like this?"

"She would do it," said Melenda. "Get a little water, Liz! Quick! Don't stand gaping! It's the heat of the day. Wet her temples. That's right. Don't cry, Polly. I knew you couldn't do it. Get something

out of her cupboard for her, Lotty. Some of them grapes. What can you expect of a girl like this trying to do a day's work like Liz and me?"

Melenda's good temper came back to her when once she had proved her superiority. Why, when you came to try a real day's work, where was Polly, after all? Nowhere.

"You look after her, Lotty." She went on with her work, for there was still a quarter of an hour or so of daylight; but Lizzie threw down hers. As for Valentine, it was only for a few moments that the hysteria held her, and she sat up again recovered and a little ashamed of herself for giving in at the end. But—what a day!

It was Saturday evening, and the lane was noisier than usual. Presently Melenda herself thought she might stop, and they began to put things away for Sunday. It may be proved from religious statistics that button-hole makers, though they never go to church, are more open to conviction on Sabbatic doctrines than any other class of persons. They would even like a Sabbatic week or a Sabbatic year—that is, a whole week or even a whole year of Sabbaths.

"I must sing," said Valentine. "I am so tired, and I ache so much that I must sing. Do you never sing, you people? How can you live without it? I will sing to you."

There must be some recreation after work. Melenda and Lizzie got theirs by walking the streets; Lotty hers by resting. Valentine tried to find hers by singing.

Below in the street, the people were all outside their houses, gathered in groups talking and enjoying

the cool air of twilight. To these people there happened the most wonderful thing in all their experience. Suddenly there struck upon all ears the voice of one who sang—the voice was like unto the sound of a silver clarion. The song they heard went straight to all hearts by reason of the air, for they were careless of the words; it made their pulses quicken and brightened their eyes, and the Parliament of Women was hushed, and the feet of all were drawn towards the house, and even the children ceased their shouting, and sat still to hear. For such singing had they never heard and never dreamed of. What Valentine sang, in fact, was a ditty called the "Kerry Dance."

While she sang there came down the street, not arm in arm, because they were deadly enemies, yet walking together because they loved each other, a certain Assistant Priest—formerly he would have been called the Curate—and a certain young General Practitioner, Medicine-man, Doctor, a person skilled in Physic, Anatomy, Botany, Biology, and all kinds of learned things. Both were young as yet, and poor. I know not which of the two was the more pragmatic, pedantic, and conceited; whether the Assistant Priest, who professed to know the secret ways of the Almighty, and pretended to be entrusted with the most tremendous powers, and measured Law, Order, and Humanity by the little tape of his little sect—he was a Ritualist person and impudently called his Sect "the Church:" or he who knew all about Bacteria and Mikrokokkos and Evolution and Protoplasm, and didn't want any Church at all, and saw no soft place anywhere in his stupendous intellect where he could possibly want any religion.

"Oh Lord!" cried the Doctor, who only believed in himself, and therefore generally called upon the Lord.

"Dear me!" said the Assistant Priest, who didn't believe in himself at all, and therefore swore by his own name.

"This is very wonderful," said the Doctor, listening to the Voice.

"Oh! To think of it,
Oh! To dream of it,"

sang Valentine.

"This," said the Assistant Priest, "is the most wonderful thing I have ever heard. What a Voice!"

He left the Doctor and followed the Voice up the stairs, and found himself unexpectedly in a room filled with four girls, at sight of whom he turned and fled, conscious of intrusion.

But the people in the street were clapping their hands.

Said Lotty, "Oh! it's lovely. But they want another."

Valentine laughed and sang another. The singing quite restored her. This time she sang "Phillis is my only joy."

The people held their breath while they listened. When it was over Valentine shut down the window, to show that the performance was finished.

"It's all very well," said Melenda, once more conscious of inferiority; "anyone could do it if she had been taught."

"Anyone," said Valentine.

"But oh!" said Lotty; "all the same it's wonderful."

"There were four girls in the room," said the Assistant Priest, "and one was lying on the bed. And the one who was singing looked somehow—but it was rather dark—like a lady. I felt I had no business there, so I came away."

"Of course she was a lady," said the Doctor. "Nobody but a lady could sing like that. Well; I hope she'll come again. What a mistake you fellows made when you turned the women out of your choirs! By Jove! That girl's singing would actually make the men go to church!"

What the Assistant Priest replied I shall not report. As he lost his temper every day with the Doctor—they met every day—it would not be fair to set down in cold blood the things he habitually said on these occasions. One may, however, record briefly that he had now began with, "I *do* think"—which is the London clerical equivalent for a well-known Yorkshire idiom; sometimes he added, "I *must* say." But that was only when the controversy raged long and bitterly, and when this, or its equivalent, in nautical language, or the bargee dialect, or the London patois, was absolutely necessary.

CHAPTER VI.

BEHIND ST. LUKE'S.

"OH, Claude!" Valentine opened her door and came out to meet him when he knocked on the Sunday morning. "I never thought I should be so happy to see anybody! And you are ten minutes late, sir. To be sure, you have not been all alone in Ivy Lane for three days."

"The place is truly awful, Valentine. It looks even worse to-day than when we came here with Violet."

Certainly Ivy Lane has a way of looking more mournfully shabby and dirty on Sunday mornings in summer than on any other morning in the week; perhaps this is because there are more potsherds, mouldy crusts, bruised and decaying fruit, bits of paper, cabbage stalks, potato peelings, broken pipes, plugs of tobacco, and other drift and wreckage of life lying about on that than on any other day. It was already past eleven, but very few people were stirring, and no one had yet taken a broom in hand or thrown a bucket of water over the flags. Lizzie and Melenda were not yet dressed; Lotty was lying on Valentine's bed in restful ease, not asleep, because it is foolish to sleep in moments free from pain. She had a book in her hands, but her thoughts were wandering away to the old times of the happy days in the little shop before the custom fell off; and she was a child again with poor impatient Tilly, and her father was proud of

the shop, and her mother was happy in her husband and her children. For what sins, far back in the third or fourth generation of unknown and obscure ancestors, had Fate been so hard upon this poor draper of Goswell Road and his family?

"You are still alive, Valentine, and no one has——"

"No one has offered me the least incivility, Claude, except of course Melenda, who is still unforgiving."

She looked as bright and as fresh as a young girl of twenty can be expected to look. Her long day's work had left no trace behind except a little paleness of cheek, and perhaps a little shading below the eyes; standing among those dingy houses in her youth and grace and beauty she looked as Aphrodite herself might have shown had she imitated the Father of the Gods when he went visiting the slums, and called upon Baucis and Philemon in their squalid hut. She had been waiting for Claude a whole half-hour, quite ready for him, and "with her Things on"—pretty, poetical, feminine locution! To mere man, a woman's dress is the setting and frame of beauty, the mysterious accompaniment of loveliness, a thing to be regarded with wonder and respect: but to superior woman it is but a collection of "Things." Such is the philosophic superiority of the sex, and so readily do they despise mere external trappings and outward show.

"It is a dreadful place," Claude repeated. "I am amazed that you dared to come here. Can you be happy in it?"

A most weak and feeble question. What is the use of asking a girl who is young, strong, beautiful, and relieved from the necessity of work, if she can

make herself happy anywhere, and especially where she is entirely free? No one knows, until he has witnessed it, the happiness which the young lady, even of the best regulated mind, feels when her movements are free and uncontrolled; and to think that, with their liberty yet to gain, women will fight for such vain shadows as female suffrage and a seat on a School Board! Besides which, Valentine was going to spend a whole morning in the company of a young man charming in many respects, but especially in this, that he believed himself to be her brother.

Happiness, again, is so uncertain a quality. Nobody, except a newly engaged couple, is often consciously happy. We do not recognise happiness until it has vanished; and then we lament, yet with pride, as those who have entertained a god unawares. A truly remarkable thing that all the world should ardently desire a possession which nobody understands until it has vanished. A certain ancient philosopher, after he had made an impromptu conundrum, or a double acrostic, upon this paradox, went away and elaborated a Treatise, now happily lost, on the "Folly of Praying for Happiness." I suppose that, even on this Sunday morning, Valentine would hardly have confessed to perfect happiness.

"I am going," she said, "to take you for a walk. There are no parks in Hoxton, and there are no gardens or anything. I suppose there is no place in all London so far from any open space as Ivy Lane. So we can only walk about the streets. But when we are tired, I know of a beautiful churchyard—I found it the other day—where we can sit down and rest. A good many of the people are in bed still, because it

is Sunday morning. Lying in bed saves breakfast; and, besides, it rests them. They get up, I believe, somewhere about dinner time. Melenda and Lizzie are in bed now, for instance. However, we shall find some of the people in the streets."

For her own part Valentine had very little desire to study the People—with a capital initial. She came to Hoxton solely in order to get acquainted with the members of her own particular family, the Monuments: and especially with Melenda Monument. But she was naturally curious about the new strange life she found there. Curiosity has led to a good many remarkable things: to the conversation with the Serpent and the tasting of the Apple; to the breaking of all laws—human and divine, moral and meddlesome, just and unjust; to the acquisition of all the knowledge that has been acquired, and to the growth and development of sympathy. She was by no means a Philanthropist. Her interests, like those of all healthy-minded young people, were as yet chiefly confined to those whom she knew and loved. Her affections as yet limited her sympathies; she had no desire to deduce and to lay down general laws concerning the manners and customs or the instincts of what we feelingly call the "Lower Classes"—philanthropy does sometimes cover such a beautiful contempt for its objects. She just began by being interested in a group of three working girls, from whom she was rapidly learning the one lesson most worth learning, namely, that the People are, in all essentials, exactly the same as the Other People. There are not, in fact, in this any more than in any other country, two races, but one; and the best way of acquiring an exhaustive and

scientific knowledge of that one race is to sit before a looking-glass for a long time and look at it. This is really a most valuable maxim, and the sooner it is generally accepted and acted upon the better for everybody, particularly for those who are ridden by Fads, Fancies, and Old Men of the Sea. Women, for some unknown reason, understand this law better than men, and it is the cause not only why they make better nurses, but also why they are harder in their dealings with the poor and needy. Those who love sweet sentimentality and the pleasures of imagination should not try to understand too many laws of humanity.

Valentine was brimful of things to talk about; but when a lady lives altogether in one room, she cannot very well use it as a salon. This difficulty is generally, by the ladies of Ivy Lane, on the evenings when they are At Home, overcome by receiving their friends upon the kerbstone or by sitting on the doorsteps. Valentine, perhaps in ignorance of this custom, preferred to wander about the streets, and led Claude forth into labyrinthine Hoxton. The city has been, it is true, laid out something like an American town, with parallel streets and cross streets at right angles; but it has happily preserved some of the old winding-ways which were formerly lanes between hedgerows, across fields, and among orchards of plum, cherry, apple, and pear. The lanes remain—some think that Dædalus once lived in Hoxton, about the time when Pythagoras was teaching at Cambridge—but the hedgerows are gone, and houses and shops have taken their place. Valentine piloted Claude among the winding courts, but first she led him into Hoxton Street, where on a Sunday morning there is always a great market

held and all the shops are open. The roadway is covered with the carts of costers, and the pavement is crowded with those who stroll idly along, content to be doing nothing except to lean against something solid, pipe in mouth and hands in pocket. Valentine led the way with the air of an old acquaintance—a two days' old acquaintance—and as one, therefore, competent to become a cicerone. She showed Claude the streets, branching right and left, those where every room in every house is a workshop as well as a living-room and a sleeping-room, and those where every house contains a workshop. There are no other kinds of houses in Hoxton City. In one place she showed him a mysterious court, paved and broad and clean, consisting of little two-storied houses inhabited by cobblers, repairers of umbrellas, sign-writers, feather-finishers, and the like, which is protected and beautified at either end by most magnificent iron gates, solid and splendid, richly worked, and fit for a duke's palace. How did these gates come to Hoxton?

Presently, in their walk, they came to a church, and they looked into it. The morning service was halfway through. Wonderful spectacle! There was not a single man in the church, except the two clergymen, the choir, and the churchwardens: yet everything set out in readiness for a full and enthusiastic congregation of the Faithful, with a lovely row of lighted candles in staring brass candlesticks where no lights were wanted, mocking the sunshine which poured through the windows, quite an extensive choir in surplices, and two officiating clergymen, and in one snug corner a place provided with a curtain and a chair—the whole forming the simple Properties necessary for

a nice little Confessional. Sad indeed that Englishmen should be found to scoff and to stand upright and to think for themselves, and to speak words of derision about this innocent little piece of furniture! Outside the church, benighted scoffers stood about in groups among the carts and the carrots, and even joked and actually laughed among each other; but not at the Church, nor at the Confessional-box, because they were perfectly, wholly, and completely ignorant and careless and indifferent about anything which might be going on within that building.

"This," said Claude when they came out, "reminds me of a procession on the stage where they have forgotten the spectators."

"It is like a concert," said Valentine, "where there is no audience. Isn't it dreadful, Claude, for nobody to go to church?"

"It doesn't seem quite as if the Church had got a strong grip of the people about these parts, does it?"

Then they left that street, and presently stood upon a bridge and gazed upon the romantic waters of the canal which parts Hoxton from Kingsland; and then along St. John's Road, which is a boulevard less popular than Hoxton Street, yet loved by the quiet and the meditative. At the end of the street stands a massive church—one of those churches built in the middle of the last century, with a vast portico of granite pillars and a white spire which is big and high and yet not beautiful. They looked into that church too. There were no confessional cribs and no candles; no one was mumbling; the clergyman, on the contrary, was speaking out plain and clear, and the service preserved something of the ancient severity.

In that church there could be counted no fewer than twenty-five families—father, mother, and children—all worshipping together as they should, and making a grand total of at least a hundred and twenty people, without counting the preacher and the pew-opener. This is very satisfactory indeed, because the parish contains only seventeen thousand six hundred. One churchgoer out of every hundred and fifty! It makes one hopeful, because it reminds one of the Early Church in Rome, as depicted by M. Renan.

Then they walked down Pitfield Street and thought no more about the people but selfishly considered each other, and Valentine narrated all her adventures, and told of Melenda's stubborn independence, and of Lotty, and of Lizzie, and her own experiment of a long day's work. Only she concealed her great discovery.

"You must never do that again, Valentine," said Claude, referring to the day's work. "Promise me you will not."

"I do not think I could. But oh! think of those poor girls working every day and all day long, and for so little! Is it just and right? Who is to blame for it, Claude?"

"The system, I suppose, is to blame—whatever the system may be. I have never considered the subject of the English Industries, except when Sam forces his own opinions upon one."

"But it concerns you, Claude; and Melenda is your—our sister."

"Why do they go on doing such work, I wonder? There are other things to do. But Melenda will not

brook any interference. How can one help a girl who will not accept any help? What can I do?"

Valentine made no reply. She was disappointed. Claude did not respond to her own enthusiasm. To him it was no new thing to hear that working girls are disgracefully paid and cruelly worked. It is, alas! no new thing to any of us. We hear about them every day, yet the thing goes on.

"Melenda might go into a shop, or she might go into some kind of service. Anything," said Claude, "would be better than what she does now. But she will take no help from me."

"You might as well put a zebra in harness as Melenda into any kind of service. Can nothing be done to get them better work?"

"I don't know. I will consult with Sam if you like."

"No, Claude, I don't want you to consult with Sam. Consult with yourself. With all your knowledge and cleverness you need not stoop to take advice of a Board School master."

"My knowledge has not taught me how to deal with workgirls." Here he noticed a change in Valentine's face. "I have disappointed you, Valentine. I knew I should."

"No, Claude. But I thought—I hoped—oh! I am so sorry, Claude, for those poor girls."

"Show me, then, some way to help them."

At this point they reached the junction of Pitfield Street and Old Street. Here Valentine turned to the right, leading her companion past the old wells of Dame Annis le Clair and the Peerless Pool—but they were both, unhappily, ignorant of their historical associations—past the great Hospital named after the

Physician Apostle, where certain Demoniacs, unhappy ones of the earth, wait for their release from the prison of unreason—it is brought to them by a Personage figured generally as a skeleton with a scythe. Then they passed a church which boasts the most amazing spire conceivable. In the whole of the habitable world there is to be found none other like unto it. Country people and strangers flock in multitudes to Old Street only to gaze upon its miracle of ugliness. Travellers are said to cross the Atlantic with no other purpose than to visit this, the ugliest church in the whole world. Why not? Any street might be proud of owning the ugliest thing that ever was built, and if people willingly face the perils of the deep to visit the most beautiful church in the world, why should they not incur the same risks for the sake of the most ugly?

At the back of the church there was formerly a vast burying-ground, because when St. Luke's was built, a hundred and fifty years ago, the ground hereabouts was cheap. It is not venerable, as men generally reckon that quality in churchyards, by age, for the church itself has only baptised and buried five generations of mortal men and women. But it is venerable because here lie at rest the once aching bones of thousands who in their lives knew no rest. Here you will not find the remains of any great or illustrious men; they are all the bones of toilers; their names and histories are clean forgotten—even the histories of those whose heirs, in their pride, had the name and date of birth and death carved upon a headstone. The stones themselves still stand, ranged round the walls and within the railings, but no man readeth

them any more, and if one doth perchance read them, the names, even to the oldest parishioner, awaken no memory. They have long ceased to bury in this Acre of the Lord; the funeral verses of hope and resignation are no longer heard; there is no more rattling of ashes upon ashes and dust to dust, and they have now laid out the ground for the children's play and a place of rest and meditation for the old. The graves are levelled; the headstones are placed back two and three deep within the railings, where the garden mould covers them up within an inch or two of their deathless names, and so they stand or lean, with only the inscriptions visible, and look as if they were not churchyard stones at all, but the stone faces of the very original holders and possessors of the ground, stonily gazing without power either of spoken remonstrance or of approval upon the present use of their sleeping place, yet so great is the power of expression in a headstone that one can plainly distinguish in some of them satisfaction; and in some, doubt; and in some, stern disapprobation. Two or three of the old railed tombs are left upon the grass to serve, perhaps, as the skeleton at the Feast. As for the ground itself, it is laid out in four fair lawns, each with a round bed of shrubs and a narrow bed of flowers. In the middle the ground has been artificially lowered, and one descends by a step or two into an area where they have erected a pedestal. Why a pedestal with nothing on it should have been put up passeth man's understanding: but this is the taste of St. Luke's, and we have only to bow before it. There are, one is pleased to remark, seats in plenty; and the walks are asphalted and easy for the foot of age; and they have planted

trees which will perhaps some day grow tall and be umbrageous.

This morning there were in the garden a goodly number of old men and women with a great quantity of little children. The men sat together, and the women sat together, and they talked after their kind, which is a querulous kind, because old age is a term of life only to be represented in a favourable light by those who know how to conceal things and are rich enough to make themselves comfortable. These old people hear the voice of the grasshopper continually; besides, they all have rheumatism, and they do not attempt to conceal that they hate the voice of the grasshopper and abhor rheumatic pains.

"Let us sit down," said Valentine.

"The problem of Melenda," Claude began sententiously, "is the great problem of labour. It is nothing less than the problem of the age."

"Then solve it, Claude. In the old days a knight was sent forth to kill a dragon or a loathly worm."

"Anybody could kill a dragon."

"Or to find the Holy Grail——"

"If one were to find it now, people would first dispute its authenticity, and then they would stick it in a museum as an archæological curiosity."

"But this is a task of much more interest than a doubtful relic. Is it possible, Claude, that you have never thought about Melenda and her life?"

"Seriously, Valentine, I never have. Do not reproach me with selfishness. Her own independence is one cause, and then we have always been accustomed to go each his own way. Sam goes one way, Joe another, Melenda another. The only way that I can

think of to help such a girl, so fiercely independent, is to alter the system itself, and that so radically that these miserable wages shall be made impossible. And it has never occurred to me that I should try to do this. Had I the lever of Archimedes I could not do it."

"Yet I think—if I were you, Claude—I think that I would try," she replied slowly.

"I have read books and treaties on Rent, Production, and so forth. Everybody reads these things, especially a barrister who wants all the information that he can get from every side. But certainly not with a view of inventing or preaching any new system."

"Never mind the books, Claude. Look at the people, not the theories. Here is our own sister, Melenda. This poor thing is condemned to a life that is only better than a slave's because she thinks she has kept her independence and because she cannot be tied up and flogged. Our own sister, Claude! She is miserably fed and wretchedly clothed; she is always half-starving and she goes in pitiful rags. Her very pride and her independence make her misery cry out the louder for your help. Your own sister—our sister. And she is so brave and so fierce. Our honour is concerned, Claude; we must try; if we cannot help her any other way, we will help her by altering the System, even if we have to call in Sam, and all become Socialists. It is for Violet's sake and mine, Claude, as well as your own. How can we endure to live in happiness while she lives in such misery?"

"Yes, Valentine, yes." Claude was moved by her emotion. "You are right. It concerns me, you, Violet—all of us. And I am a selfish creature. But—what am I to do?"

"I do not know," she replied impatiently. "What is the use of education and knowledge if they cannot be used to find out things? Have you become a Fellow of Trinity and a great scholar and a lawyer only for your own advancement, Claude?"

Claude made no reply, for, you see, his own personal advancement was exactly what he had always considered the ultimate end and object of any success he might make in life. He had always put the thing to himself from this point of view; he intended to get on, to climb as high as he could, and to do the best he might for himself. He had climbed already from the washerwoman's cottage on the edge of Hackney Marsh to the Trinity Combination Room, which is a good way up the hill, and he was continually thirsting for opportunities to climb higher still. When he took the prizes at school; when he carried off scholarships at College; when he stood third in the First Class of the Classical Tripos, he felt himself answering the end of his existence, and justifying Lady Mildred's sagacity in picking him out from among so many. His own advancement! Why yes—his own, and no other's.

"Do not be angry with me, Claude," she pleaded. "Only this morning, before you came, while I was thinking of these poor girls, something I had read somewhere came into my mind. It was to the effect that all great things are done by strong men; each thing by one strong man, who knows what he means and is strong enough to make other men work for him. If that is true, we should be always praying for a strong man."

"I suppose we should."

"Why should not you, Claude, be the strong man?"

"Because I am not a strong man, and because my own work has been laid down for me on other lines."

"That is only your own work for yourself."

"Yes—yes, of course," he replied a little uneasily. "But then it is work which leaves no time for anything else."

Suppose you have chosen deliberately the work which seems to suit you best, and the goal which seems desirable above all others as the noblest and highest; suppose you have good reason to believe that you will succeed; suppose in fact that you are perfectly satisfied with yourself, and that suddenly you are shaken to your very centre by the information that your aims are merely personal and selfish; that you are called upon to undertake certain other work which may cause you to change your whole plan of life; that everything you value must be abandoned if you obeyed that call;—this was the new light which flashed suddenly upon Claude's brain on that July morning as he sat among the ashes of the obscure dead and among the houses of the obscure living. Dead and living, he belonged to them; they were his own forefathers who lay sleeping beneath his feet; they were his sisters who worked in the houses around him. He belonged to them. But never before had it occurred to him that he might work for them instead of for himself.

"Seriously, Valentine, I do not think you understand what it is you propose. Do you really mean that I should set myself to finding out a remedy for evils which have defied every professor of political economy?"

"I mean that seriously."

"But what am I, Valentine, that I should discover

an answer to the questions which have baffled all the greybeards?"

"Perhaps the answer must come from the young. Oh! do you think that Paul waited till he was grey before he began to speak?"

Sometimes it seems to me as if Valentine struck here upon a great and remarkable truth. We have perhaps been all along asking too much of the old. It is perhaps from the young, while their hearts are full of generous emotions and unselfish sacrifice is still possible, that an answer to all great questions may be expected. The world belongs in fact to the young; not only the world to enjoy but the world to fight; the future is in the shaping of their hands; theirs is the inheritance; they are the princes and the governors, the Sheikhs and the Emirs, the Generals and the Captains. The old may go on accumulating and storing, relating and writing; that is properly their department; they are historians. As for new and great ideas, they are too much for them; when one such idea is conceived and one such great scheme is brought forth, the old philosopher, the veteran economist, the defender of Vested interests, the man of sixty-year-old ideas, will very naturally bring out his watering-pot and turn the rose on to that idea, and point out the real wickedness of the world, the selfishness of man, and the unremitting watchfulness required by this project, all of which render the scheme impracticable and impossible. Then the young men will use much the same language as that employed by certain unlucky village children towards a certain Prophet of old, but with a different conclusion to the story. For in my story the children would kill the bears.

"Everything," said Claude, "up to the present has been driving me farther from my own people; even, I thought, the recovery of my sister. It will be strange if she should take me back to them. Let me think, Valentine. I acknowledge the obligation, but I declare that I can do nothing. Why should I waste myself in beating the air?"

For Valentine did not see, which was clear to himself, that such an effort, to be serious, would require nothing short of a man's whole work with all his thoughts and all his strength. And even then he would most likely fail. Yet some small success might be effected. And the thing touched his honour. His own sister—not his sister in the Common bonds of humanity—but the child of his own mother, was one of those who lay tied and bound by strong chains in the dungeons of Castle Famine, held there by the great Bully Giant Competition. His own sister. But what could he do for her, except—and that perhaps in vain—give her all that he had? And so, like the other young man who had great possessions, he was minded to go sorrowfully away. For his own possessions were neither of silver nor of gold, but the far more precious things of knowledge and wit and understanding—the things which would lead him to honour and distinction and men's praise in the brave days before him.

At this point of their discourse there came ambling along the asphalt an old lady. Valentine seemed to know her, but could not recollect where she had seen her—a curious old lady to look at, because she walked delicately and gave herself airs such as might become a young and beautiful woman. There were not now

remaining many traces of former beauty, but as much perhaps as one expects after seventy years of a life not devoted wholly to the contemplation of things spiritual. She was dressed in a frock which looked ridiculously girlish, and as she walked she rolled her eyes about as if to watch the effect produced by her appearance.

"Ho!" said this dear old thing, stopping before Claude and Valentine. "Ho! Indeed! The young lady of the first floor back"—Valentine remembered her now. She was the old woman she had seen dancing all by herself: "The young lady with the new furniture"—she had inspected it through the keyhole. "I hope you are very well this morning, my dear; and I hope you are as happy as you are beautiful. Your lovely dress matches your lovely complexion, and if you didn't make it yourself, it was made in Regent Street, and cost three guineas if a penny, simple as it looks. Your pretty boots match your pretty little feet, and if they were not given to you they cost you a guinea a pair, and your gloves were four-and-six. Quite right. Quite right. Be as happy as you are beautiful, my dear—while your time lasts. Youth is the time for happiness. I was happy myself once."

Neither her words nor her appearance produced an impression of the straitest and most narrow virtue.

"I am very well, thank you," said Valentine coldly.

"With your young man. My dear, I said you had a young man. And he a gentleman. I said that nothing short of a gentleman would do for you. And he knows how a girl should be dressed, he does. Very proper too, my dear. I had the same sentiments as you when I was young."

"Let us go, Claude," said Valentine rising.

Claude gave the old crone a coin, and she ambled away with a parting smile and a nod, very terrifying to behold.

"A reminiscence," said Claude, "or a survival of something in the theatrical way I should say."

"If I thought," said Valentine, "that I could ever come to look like that old woman—it is not her age and her baldness and her poverty, but her terrible eyes—I would go straight into a nunnery at once and hide myself."

CHAPTER VII.

THE PROFESSOR OF YIDDISH.

"I've been doing up the room for father," Lizzie explained. It was Sunday evening, and about nine o'clock, when Valentine came home and met her coming out of the ground-floor room. "I do it every night before I go out."

"And you sit with him sometimes, I suppose?"

"No, I ain't fit company for father. He don't want me. He was a gentleman once, and he talks proper."

"Have you got no mother or sisters, or anybody besides your father, Lizzie?"

"There's Melenda and Lotty. That's all I've got. Before Melenda taught me to sew I used to be a step girl."

"What's that?"

"It's like this, you know. Some people—not here, but Kingsland way, over the Canal—like to have their

doorsteps cleaned once a week. That's what I did for 'em, at a penny a step, and sometimes three-ha'pence. When Melenda taught me to sew I gave up that. It was only a low trade."

"Where is your mother?"

"She died long ago. There's only father, and he can't do nothing for me."

If he knows how to "talk proper," Valentine thought, he might at least have taught his daughter the same art. She remembered the tall old man with stooping shoulders who took off his hat to her. Doubtless this was Lizzie's father.

"Is your father so very poor?"

"Dreadful poor," said the girl. "He was a gentleman once, but that was a long time ago."

"Do you think he would let me call upon him?"

"I don't know." She opened the door. "Go in first and ask afterwards. Father, here's Melenda's sister says may she come in?"

"May she come in?" The old man raised his head slowly and repeated the words. Then he rose and bowed, offering his chair, the only chair in the room. There was no candle, but the gas-lamp in the street outside gave sufficient light to show that the room was furnished with a wooden bed covered with a rug, a table, a chair, a washing-stand, and a candlestick. There seemed to be literally nothing else at all. Strange to say, there was not even a pipe or the smell of tobacco.

"When a young lady comes to see me," he said politely, "the least I can do is to offer her a chair. Pray do me the honour to be seated."

The manner and the voice and the words of the

man were inconceivably out of keeping with the squalid place in which he lived. Valentine accepted the chair and sat down, wondering who this man might be. Lizzie stood at the open door watching her father with undisguised pride. It was long since she had witnessed any of these Reminiscences of Polite Society. "Once he was a gentleman." Why, thought Valentine, is he now a ragged gentleman, and how is it that he has suffered his daughter to grow up without any manners at all, since his own are so good?

"You have been kind to my daughter," he said, still standing. "Nobody, so far as I know, has ever before been kind to her, not even her father."

"You can't help that," said Lizzie loyally. "It ain't your fault, father."

"Therefore I thank you," he added, without noticing the interruption. "My daughter is a workgirl, and is naturally more accustomed to ill-treatment than to kindness."

"But I have done nothing for Lizzie."

"You have given her dinner and supper, and you have spoken kindly to her. Is it something that the girl should find anybody to give her anything. Yesterday evening I heard you singing upstairs. You have a very beautiful voice. I could play and sing myself formerly. But it is thirty-five years since I played last."

"Have you forgotten how to play?"

"I have not played anything for thirty-five years," he repeated.

"And now you live here all alone." It was a weak thing to say, but one cannot always find epigrams, and besides, Valentine was still occupied in wondering what this strange thing might mean—the grey-headed,

ragged man who lived alone in so miserable a room, and his daughter, who seemed to have nothing to do with her father except to look into his rooms once a day—a man in such a place who had the unmistakable manners and language of a gentleman, and the other who was nothing at all but the London workgirl—rough and ignorant, and ill-mannered.

"As you see," he answered, "quite alone."

He sat down on the bed, his hands joined over his knees, looking at his visitor with large and lustrous eyes. His clothes were dilapidated to the last degree—his coat in rags, the elbows in holes, his trousers patched at the knees apparently by an amateur, and his boots gaping at the toes. He was picturesque in his rags. Lying on the bed was a tattered Inverness cape, and on the table an old felt hat.

A broken-down gentleman. It was apparent in his voice, in his speech, and in his carriage. By what unlucky accident had this poor gentleman got down so low?

Girls like Valentine are not accustomed to read a man's past history in his face, but she could discern that on this man's face there was not the seal of drink and vice. It was a face with refinement stamped upon the high white forehead, and gentleness in the blue eyes which met Valentine's steadily and openly, though with a strange sadness such as she had never before seen even in pictures.

"Nobody," said Valentine, "can be quite alone in the world. You must have some friends or relations."

"Most men have. But a singular accident happened to me—a very singular accident"—he raised his voice with a strange smile—"about thirty-five years ago.

All my relations died suddenly. All the relations I had in the world and all the friends in one day. There is not a single person now in the whole world who ever asks if I am living: not one who cares to ask me or wishes me back again. I have passed quite away, even out of remembrance: even out of the prayers of those who once loved me. For they are all dead. They all died on one day."

"And have you made no new friends all this time?"

"None. Those who are so poor as myself make no friends. Twenty years ago I found a woman about the streets as poor and as miserable as myself. I made her my wife, and we shared our misery. Perhaps hers was lessened. Lizzie is her daughter, but she is dead. I have no friends."

"Poor man!"

"I have not complained."

"Perhaps if you were to go 'back again,' as you said, you might find some of your old friends. They did not all die, I am quite sure."

"Yes, they did. Every one. It would be odd, too, to go back to the old world just as I am now, and if they were living, to offer them my hand. Sometimes I have thought of it. But there—what does it matter? As for the past, we live in the present and the past lives in us. Yes"—his voice sank—"the past never dies: every moment lives for ever. That is the dreadful thing. Why, even the souls of the forgiven must go about for ever with hanging heads and shameful foreheads. Always," he repeated, "with shameful foreheads."

This was the man who had "done something," Valentine remembered.

Lizzie at this point, finding the conversation just a note or two above her, went out and shut the door softly.

"You have your daughter."

"Yes. But I can do nothing for her. You wonder that she is what she is. Young lady, there is a level —I have reached it and stand upon it—which the thoughts and habits of such as yourself would turn into a hell. Better for the child of the gutter to grow up in the gutter."

"You must not call Lizzie a child of the gutter. She is your child, and she is a pretty girl, and has refinement in her face if not in her manners."

"Let her remain where she is and what she is. Then perhaps she will never understand the nature of her inheritance."

"What inheritance?"

"Lizzie is a great heiress; she will inherit the whole of my property if she ever finds out of what it consists."

"Your property?"

"The accumulations of thirty-five years, invested at Compound Interest in Shame and Dishonour." The words were strong, but he spoke quite calmly. "It is so great a property that I cannot bear to die and leave it behind me. I should like to rob her of it, and have it buried in my pauper's grave with me. It is all my own making, this Property. I am quite a self-made man. When I began I had nothing of it. Yet that does not avail. I must die and leave it behind me. A man may take into the grave nothing of his labour which he may carry away in his hand. What profit hath he that he hath laboured for the wind?"

"You read the Bible still," said Valentine starting.

"No, I read nothing. There is not a Bible or any book at all in the room: but I remember something of what I used to read. These are the words of the Preacher, who said many wise things. It was he who praised the dead which are already dead more than the living which are yet alive. I too, who am yet alive, praise the dead more than the living. It must be a beautiful thing to be already dead. There the prisoners rest together: they hear not the voice of the oppressor: the small and the great are there, and the servant is free from his master."

He said all this in measured tones, and without the least passion or sign of emotion.

"You have no books. Can I lend you any?"

"No, I do not want to read."

"Do you always sit here doing nothing?"

"Always. It is my happiness to do nothing. Then I can live the past over again, up to a certain point, and I can follow the impossible future. I know," he went on, "that you would like to be helping me. Ladies who come to such places as this think they can set everything right by a few acts of kindness. I thank you, but you cannot help me. Look round the room; you see that I have reduced my life to the simplest form possible. Here is a place to lie down upon, with a rug to keep me warm; here is a roof, and here are walls; a chair, a table, a candlestick, a washing-basin —what more does a man want? I get my breakfast and my supper at a coffee-stall. When I can afford dinner I get it at a coffee-house. I neither drink nor smoke tobacco. I have no other wants than a certain amount of food and a place to lie down."

"You are a philosopher."

"No; a philosopher is contented, but I am not. I live in this wretched way because I have no choice. You are curious to learn how I live. Very well, I will tell you. It is an honest way. I know two or three languages—German and French and Italian. I learned them when I was young. I also—by accident—once learned some Hebrew. I have since learned a little Polish. I know where German immigrants congregate, and I write letters for them, especially for the Polish and German Jews—all kinds of letters, begging letters, letters asking for employment—at twopence each, or whatever I can get for a letter. They tell me their wants in their own language, which is generally Yiddish—that is to say, Polish and German and Hebrew mixed. Sometimes I do well; sometimes I do badly. Very often I do not make as much as a shilling a day. I pay three-and-sixpence a week for my room, and I can live on half a crown—fourpence a day. That is all; that is my life."

"Your present life."

"Yes, my present life. Young lady," he raised himself upright and sighed heavily, "there are some lives, some unhappy lives, across which Fate draws, right in the middle of them, a thick black line. My life has been so divided."

The thick black line meant, perhaps, some kind of failure or bankruptcy, Valentine conjectured, such as reduced Lotty's father to the profession of roader. Yet he spoke of Shame and Disgrace, and he was generally supposed to have "done something."

"I wish I could help you in some way," she said. "Let me try for your daughter's sake."

"You say this because you are a young lady, and

generous. But I want only what I have told you—food and a sleeping-place, and obscurity. Stay, you can do something for me. Will you sing to me?"

Valentine considered a little. Then she joined her hands and sang to him. She sang, "He shall feed His flock," perhaps because it was Sunday evening.

"Thank you," said the man when she had finished. "It is thirty-five years since last I heard that sung."

"May I come again and talk to you sometimes?"

"Yes, if you please. But it is not right for you to come here. Besides, I might get to look for your coming, and that would interfere with my dream."

"Your dream?"

"While I sit here alone in the evening I am possessed by a dream. It is the dream of my old life, carried on just at it should have been. I follow myself in my dream step by step and year by year through the career which might have been mine, had it not been for that—that thick black line. If you were to destroy that dream, you would destroy my only pleasure. Then I should become discontented, and dream of revenge instead. That would be bad and foolish for me; first, because I never shall get my revenge, and next, because thinking of it calls up the devil, who makes me fall into a rage and then claws at my heart and tries to drag it out of my body. One of these days he will succeed, and then the doctor will say I died of angina pectoris, because it is not scientific to say that a man died of a raging devil. If it were not for that I should dream of revenge perpetually."

"Oh, but," said Valentine, in the amiable manner

of one who has no enemies to forgive, "revenge is such a poor thing to desire, and besides, it never satisfies."

"I don't know," the man replied. "Simple killing does not satisfy. But something like the Eternal Revenge of Ugo Foscolo, you know, something to go back to at intervals, and when the old rage rises again in your heart like a flame. Ah!" he clapped his hand to his heart, "it begins again." He gasped, and held his breath as one in sharp and sudden pain. Then he pulled out of his pocket a little bottle, and the room became charged with the faint scent of ether. "I must not talk any more about it. Sometimes I think that for ever and for ever I shall be punished for my sin by this flaming fire in my heart, and the burning desire for revenge. Well, I will not complain. Hush! Do not talk to me any more. Let me get back quickly to my dream."

She turned to go. Just then there came the sound of steps and a kind of scuffle outside the door.

It was caused by the old lady of the back room, who was being dragged, pushed, or assisted to her own room by a young man dressed in a black frock-coat and a tall hat. The old lady was apparently unwilling to go.

"Is she ill?" asked Valentine.

"No; in these cases the illness follows the attack. She will be ill enough to-morrow. Come, old lady, off you go to bed."

The patient began to sing, and even Valentine, in spite of her inexperience, was able to understand that her illness was caused by nothing else than a rush of alcohol to her head. In fact, the poor old creature

was tipsy. She had been spending on gin the shilling which Claude gave her in the morning. The man who was helping her got her into her room with a vigorous effort, and came out, shutting the door upon her.

"There," he said, "she's all right now. You'll hear her making a little noise perhaps, but not much, and she'll soon be asleep. Somebody has given her gin, and I suppose she'd had nothing to eat all day. The boys were chivying her about the street, so I brought her home. She will sleep it off." Then he looked into the front room. "Good evening, Mr. Lane. No more attacks, I hope?"

"I had one just now, Doctor. I began to think——"

"Well, then, you mustn't think. I warned you before. If you get excited you'll just kill yourself. How's the Dream getting on?"

"It is working itself out slowly, Doctor. Slowly the Career approaches its appointed end. A Deanery has been offered him, but he has refused it. A man of such eloquence and learning can't be shelved with a Deanery! A Bishopric is the least that he will take. Sometimes there are thoughts about an Archbishopric. But I doubt whether there will be time on account of my thinking, you know, and the rages I fall into——"

"You must not fall into rages."

"The other day I seemed to hear his voice. But it was only someone talking outside with this young lady. Yet it was his own voice—exactly his own voice."

"I have warned you, remember. Good-night!"

The Doctor shut the door, and turned abruptly to Valentine.

"Well," he asked, "you are the young lady that was singing the other evening. What do you think about us?"

He might just as well have asked what Valentine thought about humanity in the abstract. She replied to that effect.

"I don't suppose you have come here without an object," he went on. "You have got something at work in your brain. It is charity or religion or humanity, I suppose. Whatever it is, if you want information come to me. I know all the people about here."

He had a rugged face; his cheeks were without colour, as often happens to those who have lived always in the streets of a great city; he was neither tall nor short, rather a thin man, about thirty years of age; but he had a big head. His eyes were deep-set under shaggy eyebrows—quick earnest eyes; his forehead was square, and his nose was large, rough hewn and distinctly ugly; his dark hair was parted at the side, and had already begun to "go" at the temple; he carried his head a little on one side habitually. It is a mode which suggests a thoughtful disposition.

"Thank you," said Valentine.

"You will want to know a good deal, I dare say. Very good then. To save you trouble." He spoke in a quick jerky way as if he was wanted elsewhere, which was in fact always the case with him. "Do we go to church? We do not. Do we revere the institutions of our ancestors? We do not. Have we any respect for rank and dignity? Not a bit. Do we care for anything but meat and drink and warmth and ease? We do not. Are we dangerous? Not so long

as we are in regular work. Do we save our money? Not a mag. For whom do we vote? For the Radical, because he promises to tear things down. What is our political programme? The abolition of Church and Lords. Why? Because we think it will raise wages and lower the price of beer."

"Thank you," said Valentine. "But I am not likely to inquire into the politics of the people."

"Do we, then, yearn for Art? No, we do not. Do we love things beautiful? We don't even know what beauty means."

"I do not expect to find Art here."

"Are, then, our morals good? They are not. Have we any virtues at all? A few. We are tolerably honest; we are generous when we have any money, and we stand by each other when we are in trouble: man by man, woman by woman, and girl by girl."

"Girl by girl?"

"Because," he explained, irreverently, "there is none other that fighteth for them, as your Prayer Book says, but only they themselves. So they stand by each other. There's a magnificent example in this very house upstairs."

"Thank you very much. Good-night." She moved towards the staircase, but he stopped her.

"One minute," he said. "I mean what I say. They tell me you are staying here. It is a queer place for a young lady to take lodgings in. Got a little pocket Gospel of your own to run, perhaps?"

"No, I am quite contented with the old Gospel."

"Come to do good, as they call it? Well, you mean the best, I dare say. Don't do more harm than you

can help. I'm always somewhere about the place if you want me. Good-night."

He nodded his head familiarly, without the usual ceremony of lifting his hat, and hurried away.

CHAPTER VIII.

LOTTY'S FOOLISH DREAM.

AFTER her two days' rest, Lotty ought in common decency to have shown some signs of improvement, if not of complete recovery. That she did not was only part of the well-known ingratitude of the poor. You may give them a lift over a bad bit, and they go on stumbling into worse bits: the sick woman basely and ungratefully develops more alarming symptoms and the man out of work continues to meet with new disappointments, so that where you began with a helping hand you must either maintain a pensioner or leave your patient in a worse plight than you found him.

I do not think that Lotty meant to be ungrateful; she would have preferred, I am quite sure, strength to weakness and health to pain, but she did have a very bad night on Sunday, and when on Monday morning Valentine looked in she found the girl in a low way. One bunch of grapes and two days' rest, and a real, not a phantom, dinner on each day, were, you see, insufficient by themselves to meet the case. Valentine thought of what the old man below had said about ladies thinking to set everything right with a few acts of kindness. Even a bunch of hothouse grapes, at

four shillings a pound, is not enough to repair the mischief wrought by eight long years of privation and hard work. Valentine might as well have tried to restore her youth to the old lady on the ground-floor back with a box of violet powder. Acts of kindness are not without their uses, but they cannot actually cure disease.

Lotty was lying on her back, pale and with closed eyes. The two girls were standing by the bedside frightened.

"She's awful bad," said Lizzie. "She's been bad all night. It isn't that she's hungry, because yesterday was Sunday and there was a bit of meat. You can speak to her if you like: she isn't asleep."

"Don't try to speak, Lotty. We will carry you into the other room. It is quieter and the bed is easier. We will all three carry you." Melenda turned her shoulder with an expressive gesture. "Melenda, are you so proud that you cannot even bear to see your friend relieved?"

"Do what you like for her," said Melenda. Then she burst into tears of jealous rage at her own impotence. "You shan't do anything for me. Oh, Lotty!" she flung her arms over her friend. "I can't do anything for you, my dear, and I thought I was to do everything. I'm no use to you when you want my use the most. And now you're going to be helped by a stranger."

Valentine said nothing, and presently Melenda left off crying, and consoled herself by assuming the command in the matter of carrying Lotty.

The other room was certainly quieter and cooler,

and the bed was not so hard. And then they sent for the doctor.

It was the same young man who had spoken to Valentine on the Sunday evening. But this morning he seemed rougher in his speech and manner.

"It's been coming," he said; "I've seen it coming."

"What is it?"

"She's got to rest. Don't tell me, you girls, that she can't. Because she's got to, do you hear? and she's got to have good food."

"Rest and good food!" said Melenda, bitterly. "Oh, Lord! why don't you say she's got to have oysters and chicken and port wine?"

"Good food!" said Lizzie. But she looked at Valentine.

"Rest and good food," the doctor repeated, "and nothing to do for the remainder of her days; and that won't be long," he added in a lower tone.

"She shall have rest and proper food," said Valentine.

The sharpest sting of poverty is when you are made to feel your own impotence to relieve the suffering which wealth can remove; even to avert the death which wealth can stave off. Melenda's eyes flashed, and she made as if she would say something fierce and resentful; but she restrained herself in the presence of the doctor, though the effort cost her a good deal and the tears sprang to her eyes. "Come, Liz," she said, "we'll go back to work."

"There's only you and me now," she said presently, looking up; "Lotty won't come back any more. She won't let her come back. She'll give her grapes and beef and cocoa so that she won't want to come

back. She's given her a new petticoat and new stockings already. She'll try to make her hate us just to spite me because I let her have a bit of my mind. Oh, I know for all her meek ways she's a sly one! If it's good for Lotty"—here she choked. She wished to be loyal to her friend, but it was a bitter thing that she should be taking gifts from anybody but herself. "You'll go next, I suppose, Liz. Very well then. There'll be only me left. If you want to desert me, take and go and do it. Perhaps she'll give you all your meals if you stoop so low as to take 'em."

"Don't talk wild, Melenda. Lotty hasn't deserted us. Why can't you be civil to your own sister? Why shouldn't she help Lotty? I'm glad she came here—there! I'm glad she came. Do you hear that?"

Melenda at other times would have crushed this spirit of revolt, but she was this morning too dejected, and made no reply.

"Desert us?" Lizzie went on. "Why shouldn't Lotty desert us, come to that? What can we give her? Desert us? Why, Melenda, it's so miserable that we may just as well desert each other at once, and give up trying."

Still Melenda made no reply.

"Last night," Lizzie continued, "she went and sat with father. Poor old dad! With him in his rags. Did you ever do that? And she sang to him, and Saturday all day long she worked for Lotty. You never did more. Desert us? What could Lotty do better, I should like to know? Look at this bed and the one she is lying on; look at this room and the other; look at her dinner and ours. I re'lly wonder you should talk such nonsense."

Still Melenda made no reply. She was crushed. Her growing discontent and her newly-born knowledge of better things gave Lizzie a spirit which privation could never give her.

In this way, however, Lotty's chains were taken from her.

Day followed day, but she did not rise from the bed. Sometimes Melenda sat beside her, work in hand, gentle with her, though full of resentment against Valentine. Sometimes Lizzie sat with her. Generally it was Valentine who read to her, sang to her, talked to her, and nursed her. There are some women whose mere presence soothes a patient; whose touch drives away pain; whose voice is a sedative; who are the born nurses. Valentine belonged to them.

A little happiness, even if you do have a bad cough with it, and an aching back, and limbs which feel as if they could never move again, is a medicine delightful to take, and sovereign against many evils, especially lines in the forehead, drawn mouth, and worn eyes. Lotty's thin cheeks did not grow any fuller, but they lost something of their waxen pallor, and a faint glow appeared on them as of winter sunshine. Her hollow chest did not grow any deeper, but her shoulders seemed less contracted. Her eyes were not so weary, and on her thin lips there presently appeared once more the old smile which she had lost about the time when her father went bankrupt, and her mother went mad, and her sister said she wouldn't stand it any longer. She would never get any better; she knew this somehow, but it is not hard, when one has had so long a spell of work, just to lie passive, though the days which slip by so quickly bring death

so very near. Less hard still is it when one has such a nurse as Valentine, and a doctor, who comes every day with something to charm away the aching, and for the first time, after many a long year, dainty and sufficient food. Presently sweet and pleasant thoughts began to linger in her brain; they were thoughts that came to her while Valentine read and sang. The spectre of Famine, with her dreadful uplifted scourge of scorpions, had vanished. She was no longer driven to try, if only for half an hour, to hold the shirts and make the button-holes. She was no longer anxious for the future; though there was no more work for her to do, she should not starve. Valentine was with her; she could close her eyes in peace and sleep without dreaming of an empty shelf in the morning. Is it possible for us, the overfed sons and daughters of a luxurious *bourgeoisie*, our eyes swelling out for fatness, who have never known a single day without its three abundant meals, and never felt the pangs of unsatisfied appetite, even to conceive of an existence such as Melenda and Lotty had lived together for eight years, with never enough to eat on any day from year to year? Why, one asks, what contentment, what resignation, even what acquiescence in life as a gift or a loan, of something precious, can there be when one is always hungry? Of the two other girls, the presence of Valentine made one daily more discontented with her lot because of that terrible temptation of which we have heard. She could any day, only by saying the word, convert herself, she was told, from a workgirl into a "lady"—the word being used to signify one who does no work for her living, and wears fine clothes and lives in comfort. As for the other, it

made her daily more obdurate and more angry, because she was so helpless, and it was Valentine who did everything for her friend.

"I won't be kind to her, then," she said, when for the fiftieth time Lotty besought her and expostulated with her. "I won't give in and be kind to her. Why should I? First, she comes and laughs at us."

"No, she didn't laugh."

"She said she was twins and she didn't know which she was. Do you call that laughing at us? I do. Then she comes again and thinks she can make it up with beefsteak and ham. No, Lotty; and it ain't likely."

"She came to live here of her own accord. She wasn't obliged to come. She's never cross and never unkind; she never says a hard word of anybody; and oh, Melenda, the care she takes of me! Even you, my dear, never took more care. And the nights when she sits up with me, and the things she gets for me, and, oh, Melenda, I ain't her sister, and she'd do more than this for you if you'd only let her." Melenda sniffed. That fact made Valentine's conduct the more intrusive. "And she watches every day for you to give in a bit."

"Let her watch, then," said Melenda.

"No little pocket Gospel after all?" asked the Doctor again. He was standing at the foot of the bed looking at his patient. He had not removed his hat—a ceremony he usually omitted in his rounds—his hands were in his pockets, and his shoulders were a little rounded, and he looked as if he despised the

vulgar details of good manners. "No little pocket Gospel, then?"

"None—why?"

"Because—well—because, the summer is hot and this place is noisome, and you are doing the work of a hospital nurse, and somehow you look as if you ought to be at the seaside, or in some quiet country place under the trees. And, in short, what do you do it for?"

"Why do you ask for motives? You said yourself the other day that there was only one motive, and that was pure selfishness."

"That is so. They call it religion, patriotism, benevolence, charity—whatever they please. It is all self-preservation."

"And there is no disinterested action at all possible for poor humanity?"

"There are illusions. Women do wonderful things for men whom they love, as they call it. Men call it love when they subjugate a woman and get a slave for nothing. Why women delight in being slaves I do not know."

"And so everything is an illusion."

"Everything except what you see; and sometimes that is an illusion too. When life is over, what is the past but illusion? We are born: we live and suffer: and we die: and are forgotten. That is the history of Ivy Lane, where there are eight hundred people, and two births and one funeral every week. But I don't understand you. If we ever do get a lady here, she comes and looks about her, and is disappointed because we are not more unpleasant, and then she does a kind thing or two and goes away with a feeling that

the sum of poverty has been sensibly alleviated by her visit. She has seen a suffering object, which gave her pain; she has relieved her suffering for a little while, which gave her pleasure. But you—why, you have given—Yourself. Well"—he changed the subject abruptly—"what do you think of the working girl? You have got three of them to study. There are thousands just exactly like them."

"I can think of these three only and how to help them."

He answered indirectly. He took up Lotty's arm and bared it to the elbow.

"You see: a strong bone and a good length of limb. Nature designed this arm for a stout strong woman. A fair breadth of shoulder, too. Nature meant this girl to be a really fine specimen. Look at her forehead: it is broad and low—a capable forehead; and her mouth—see how fine are the lines and yet how strong; this was meant to be a very noble woman, strong in her illusions of love for husband and children. Yet, you see, a splendid model ruined."

"Poor Lotty!"

"We are always wasting and ruining fine models. This street is full of human wrecks. You've got two of them below—Mr. Lane, the letter-writer, and the old woman. What does it mean?"

"Can you tell me what it means?"

"Nature says to man, 'Learn my secrets, or I will kill you. I have no pity on anyone—I will kill you unless you learn my secrets.' Very well: some of us, the happy few who can, are always learning these secrets, and saving men from Nature's traps. But man says to his brother, 'If you are not strong enough

to defend yourself against me, I will make you my slave; you shall work for me on my own terms.' I don't know whether Nature is more cruel than man, or man than Nature. Here you see"—he touched Lotty's cheek. The girl did not understand a word of what he was saying, but he was the Doctor, and if he were to cut off her arms she would not dream of resistance. "Here is a case in which man, meeting no power of self-defence, has worked his wicked will, pretending that he is obeying the laws of political economy. That is to say, he turns this girl into a machine for doing what she ought not to have done at all, for longer hours than she ought to work, for less pay than she ought to receive, and for poorer food than any woman ought to eat. Nature, at her worst, would not have trampled on her worse than man has done."

"What are we to do then?"

He sat down and looked in her face blankly.

"I don't know. If I did know everybody else should know. There are only two ways of helping the working women, and one of these, at least, is possible. The impossible way is that the ladies of the country shall unite to form a Protection League for their working sisters."

"Why is that impossible?"

"Because they don't care for their working sisters," he replied, bluntly. "You only care because you have lived among them and know what their sufferings are. Ladies deliberately shut their eyes; they won't take trouble; they won't think; they like things about them to look smooth and comfortable; they will get things cheap if they can. What do they care if the cheap-

ness is got by starving women? What is killing this girl here? Bad food and hard work. Cheapness! What do the ladies care how many working girls are killed? Confess now."

Valentine would not confess.

"Well, there may be another way. It is by the working people themselves, and that by a grand universal League, or Federation, or Brotherhood of Labour—men and women alike—to control wages and work. I do not see why such a League should not be formed. If men can unite for one branch of work they ought to be able to unite for all."

"Why should they not?"

"Because the mass that has to be moved is so gigantic that not one prophet but ten thousand all preaching the same gospel at the same time are wanted. I wonder how it would work out."

"How would it work out?"

"We've always got to take into consideration man's greed and selfishness. However, if we got over that, first of all, a case like this would not be allowed. The League would make it impossible. The League——" he sat down and put his hands in his pockets, looking straight into Valentine's face, but as if he did not see her. "I have often wondered what such a League would do. I suppose it would become a most stupendous tyranny—everything for the general good must be. I think it would try to be just on the whole—there's somehow a natural instinct against injustice; it would be the most powerful instrument ever devised; it would control the whole Government; it would go making all kinds of laws for the restriction of liberty, that is quite certain. I suppose they wouldn't let the

men marry under thirty nor the women under five-and-twenty. As for the men with land and capital, and Corporate Bodies and Companies with property, I should say the League would make itself unpopular with them. One thing, however, the League would do, and that as soon as it was established."

"What is that?"

"It would insist on this girl and her friends working half the time for double the wages."

"I don't see much difference," said Valentine, "between your League and Sam's Socialism."

"I haven't the pleasure of knowing Mr. Samuel, but there is this difference—that my League will be formed by the people for the people, and the Socialists want to impose their scheme on the people."

"Why not, if it is good for them?"

"Because, young lady, you can't improve people by any scheme or law or government at all. They must improve themselves. The best chance is when every man feels that he is part of the Government. You have no idea of their obstinacy. They will neither be led nor driven nor coaxed; they will only go of their own free will. And some ways they will never go at all."

"Then I wish the Brotherhood or League were formed already."

"Perhaps you and your friends would lose your property and your money."

"But we should free Melenda."

"A very good thing for her, and I don't suppose it would be very bad for you. As for me, I have got no money, and my profession brings in as it is only the wages of a mechanic—so I shall not suffer."

He got up and buttoned his coat.

"You, Lotty girl," he said, "keep quiet. I sometimes think"—he turned to Valentine again as he went out—"I sometimes think that I may live to see that great League of Labour."

I know not what Lotty heard or understood of the Doctor's discourse, but it may have been this which suggested a truly wonderful dream that came to her that very afternoon when she fell asleep after dinner while Valentine sat reading, and through the open window came the murmur of the children's voices in the school behind Ivy Lane. According to an ancient authority there are five kinds of dreams; and sometimes they come through the gate of horn and sometimes through that of ivory. This dream came to Lotty through the gate of ivory. It was the kind described as the imagination of a non-existent thing, and yet a holy dream, and one to be received as a gift from heaven and sent to cheer and comfort a dying girl with the vision of what might be. She dreamed that she was in a workshop—lofty, well aired, and beautiful. She was doing some kind of work—I think she was making up white linen robes for the harpers who play before the Throne—and her work filled her with joy. She was quite well and strong, and without pain of any kind, and she felt a strange elasticity in her limbs. Her sister Tilly was beside her dressed in white like herself, and as she recognised her it was as if a sponge had blotted out the past, so that it should be remembered no more, and Lotty rejoiced that Tilly too should have a frock as white as any in the work-room.

Melanda was with her too, the lines gone from her

face, her thin cheeks filled out, looking truly beautiful in the eyes of Lotty and her like; and Lizzie was there, also with work in her hand, but laughing and talking more than she worked. Valentine was there too, dressed just the same as herself, but she looked more lovely than all the rest; and the other one—she who had cried when Melenda spoke up; but now she was sitting beside Melenda with one arm round her neck. They were all so fond of Melenda that they could not make enough of her. There were thousands of workgirls in the room; they were all laughing and talking happily; and outside the open window stretched a great garden with the morning sun lying on it, and orchards filled with trees loaded with ripe apples. The scent of flowers came into the room; and no one was tired, no one was hungry, no one was cross or wicked. Strangest thing of all, Lizzie's father was with them, looking venerable with his long white hair brushed off his forehead. He was not in rags, but dressed like a gentleman, and he sat at a great organ. When he began to play, Valentine stood up to sing, and all the girls tried to sing too, but could not, because of the tears—tears of joy and happiness—and the memories of the cruel past, which choked them.

"Why, Lotty, Lotty!" said Valentine, "what is the matter, dear?"

"It was my dream," she replied, looking about her.

"You laughed and cried together, dear. But you have had a long and refreshing sleep, and it is nearly tea-time. This makes up for last night, doesn't it?"

CHAPTER IX.

SHOWING HOW THE BAND PLAYED.

"MELENDA says Sam's here," said Lizzie, putting her head into the room. "If you want to see him, you'd better come at once. And, I say, you'd better look out. Melenda's in a rage, and the band's a-going to play, sharp!"

Sam Monument, from time to time, remembered that he had a sister, and went to visit her. It was not often; because since his rise to greatness, he was no longer proud of his poor relations. The few among us who have raised themselves to the level of a Board School master will sympathise with Sam. Besides, it made him ashamed even to think of Melenda; and it made him rage like Scylla and Charybdis, and the Maelström, and the rapids of Niagara, actually to see her at her miserable work. Again, there is a rule which should be carefully observed in visiting one's poor relations; but Sam had never heard of this rule; namely, always to visit them in mild and cloudy weather. The former, that one may be spared the bitterness of cold; and the latter, so that there may be no mockery of sunshine. Sam came to Ivy Lane on a splendid summer evening, when the sunshine made everything glorious that was clean and neat, and magnified the meanness of everything that was dingy and ill-kept. When Valentine opened the door he was standing with his back to the empty fireplace

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which gave him the command, so to speak, of the room. Melenda was sitting by the table, her work in her lap, and the thimble on her finger; but she was not sewing; and there was a gleam in her eye which betokened another approaching Triumph of Temper. She looked strangely like her brother; the eyes as bright, the lips as firm, only that her own red hair was long and Sam's was short, rising from his forehead like a cliff, so that his head resembled the rounded back of a hedgehog about to defend its property.

"Oh!" he said, with a kind of snort when Valentine appeared. "You *are* here, then. Claude told me something about it. I hope you are pleased with what you have found. Ever been in this room before? Have you looked round it? Satisfied and pleased with it? Like to feel that your sister lives in it? Nice place, isn't it?" He went on without waiting for an answer. "Nice work, too, they do in it. Wholesome, well-paid work. Work to make a woman rich and happy. Something for your rich friends to be proud of, isn't it?"

The room looked more than commonly dingy. The strings of the blind were broken; the blind itself was pinned up, and a reflection of the evening sun from an opposite window fell upon the side of the room, not so much lighting it up as showing how dingy it was, and how desperately shabby.

"It don't matter much what you think, Sam, nor what she thinks. Thinking can't alter things. Those who've got work to do must do the work they can get. She can give dinners to people who haven't the independence to refuse"—Melenda tossed her head at

Lizzie, who laughed defiance—"and will only be the more discontented afterwards, when she goes away. But she can't get us better work nor better wages. What's the good then?"

"What did you come for?" Sam asked. "What made you leave your friends and come down here? These people are your enemies: the working people are the natural enemies of the people who do nothing. I told you, when I saw you first, that you've got to choose. If you like to give them up, say the word, and I'll find something for you to do. If you won't give them up, then go away back again, and enjoy yourself as long as you can, till the smash comes."

"I shall not give them up, certainly," said Valentine. "And I am not going back again just yet."

"Oh, very well. You're one of those who go tinkering up a rotten place here and painting over a bad place there, and pretending that everything is sound and healthy. I know the sort. You get some people together, and you give a concert, and call it softening the masses. You get a few pictures and hang 'em up in a schoolroom and call it introducing Art among the Lower Orders. Yah! Art and the Lower Orders! Or you have tea and cakes and a hymn, and call it bringing religion home to the people. And then you go around with pennies and oranges for the children and flannel for the old women, and call it bringing the classes together. As long as you choose to stay with them, I tell you all the people are your natural enemies. Melenda here is your enemy, and so is Lizzie, and so is the girl you've got laid up in the other room."

There is a pleasing nursery fiction that accounts

for many disagreeable things by a theory on the right and the wrong way of getting out of bed. Valentine remembered this and felt quite certain that Sam, Melenda, and Lizzie had all three got out of bed the wrong way that morning. There was going to be a Row, and one of uncertain dimensions. And she was invited by Melenda in order that she might assist at that Row and help to make it a Row Royal. Therefore, she made haste with a soft answer.

"I did not come with any ambitious idea of spreading Art or Religion. I simply came because I wanted to know—my sister—Melenda." This was not a fib absolute, because when she came Melenda was a possible sister. But it was so far a fib that Valentine hesitated a little over its utterance.

"Ho!" said Melenda, just to show how very little way in knowledge Valentine had so far advanced.

"Partly I wanted to see with my own eyes the kind of life from which I—that is, Melenda's sister, Polly—had been taken."

"Yes," said Melenda; "to look at us as if we were black savages in a show, and to give us half a sovereign each, and then go away and forget us."

"Melenda is unjust," Valentine replied; "but she tolerates my presence, which is something, though she will not accept any service from me."

"How long are you going to stay? You can't be comfortable here?" Sam asked.

"I didn't ask her to come, and I shan't ask her to stay," said Melenda the Irreconcilable, now in her most stubborn mood, her upper lip stiffened and her eye set stormy. Perhaps she was stimulated by the

example of her brother, who was of mule-like obstinacy. He called it firmness.

"I am to stay here all the summer," Valentine explained. "Then I am going back for a time. After that my plans are not yet certain."

"Humph!" said Sam. "You've taken a great deal of trouble for nothing. That's all. As for wanting to know a girl who hasn't got the spirit to raise herself out of this"—he looked round with the infinite contempt of a self-raised man—"I don't see what you expect to get by it. You've only put her back up so far."

"That's all," said Melenda; "and it is going to keep up."

"There's one thing you might do," he went on. "You might help to make the workwomen discontented. Suppose you got hold of Lizzie here!" He laid his hand upon her shoulder. "Suppose you made her compare her frock with yours, and told her to ask why there is so much difference." Lizzie lifted her great eyes upon Valentine's frock, which really was a very neat and finished piece of work, and fitted her like a glove. Her own, she knew well, could not be compared with it. Little did Sam know of the seeds of discontent already planted in her bosom. "But that you don't dare to try. You and your friends are all for keeping them quiet. Make her feel that she hasn't got what she ought to have; then teach her why she hasn't got it—because she's robbed by your friends. Then there'll be a chance that the girls will combine to get it, and that they'll be backed up by the men. As for these girls, they haven't begun to grumble."

"Haven't we?" said Melenda.

"They *believe* that there isn't more money to be got."

"No more there is," said Melenda.

"They think it is a law of the universe that they should work and live in a room like this, and go in rags, and be paid elevenpence ha'penny a day."

"And find your own cotton," said Lizzie, furnishing a not unimportant detail.

"And fourpence for the workbook, which you can get for a penny outside. And if you dare to complain they make it sixpence," Melenda added.

"And be sworn at if they're Germans, and drilled if they're English. We like it, I suppose."

"You're a fool, Sam," said Melenda, putting the case plainly. "You and your discontent! If you really think we like it, you're a bigger fool than you look. We didn't want her coming here, nor you neither, to teach us that it's a shame."

"Nor to tell me to look at her frock and mine," said Lizzie.

"Come then, Sam," his sister went on while Valentine kept a careful silence, "come then. Have you got anything better for us when we have got discontented? There's machine work and shirts at a penny apiece; we can get twopence a dozen for the buttonholes; there's bottle-washing for five shillings a week, and cigar-makin' for the same; there's the dust yards and the sifting at a shilling a day. Shall we change for that? There's the matchmakers with the stuff that eats away their mouths——"

"Oh, Melenda!" said Valentine.

"What's he come here for, then? How can we find time to keep the place neat and tidy? Why ain't we better off? Let him show us the way, then."

"It's better," said Lizzie, "to help people than it

is to get into a rage with them. Valentine does help me and Lotty in spite of Melenda."

Melenda looked as if she might turn on the other two as well as on her brother. But she refrained. "If that is all you've got to say, Sam, you may as well go."

"Coming here," Lizzie went on, with a laudable desire to assist in the music of the band, "and swearing at us as if it was our own fault."

"I didn't swear," said Sam, in some confusion.

"You did. You always do when you come here."

"Well, then, it's enough to make a pig swear," he replied guiltily, because a Board School master certainly ought not to swear. Language and temper are beneath the dignity of a profession which should be above the minor weaknesses of humanity.

"Well, Sam, please do not swear again," said Valentine, still anxious for peace; "and now—you who know so much and have had so many opportunities for studying the question from your position—your exceptional and high position, Sam—won't you sit down quietly and give us your advice?"

He did not sit down, but he took the chair from her and placed it before him, his hands on the back so that it made a kind of pulpit.

"All he's got to tell us," said Melenda, "is that it's a shame, and we ought to combine and strike."

"It's the system," Sam began. "I am ready to give you the best advice if you'll only follow it. It's the rotten competitive system—you've got to abolish that. As for you girls combining and striking, you won't do it. I told you once to combine, but now I see that women ain't educated up to combination.

Combination means common sense—you haven't got it; you haven't the brains nor the courage to do it."

"We've got our independence, anyhow," said Melenda.

"And much good that does you. Independence! As if anybody is independent who's got to work for your starvation wages. You're slaves—you're white slaves. That's what you are!"

"And what are you, then, I should like to know? You've got no work to do, I suppose?"

"We cannot alter the system," said Valentine, again interposing; "at least, I suppose we cannot alter it without a good deal of trouble and delay. Meantime, don't you think you could devise something temporary for Melenda and Lizzie until you have swept away competition?"

"Who wants his help?" asked Melenda. "I tell you he can only say it's a shame. That's all he ever does say."

"I can't help them," said Sam; "nobody can help them in that way. I tell you again that it's the fault of the system. There are women by thousands no better off. If you can make your ladies leave off trying to get things cheap; if you can make your masters contented with a workman's wage for profit; if you can make the men resolve that the women shall be properly paid, and that they must strike for them and forbid them to take less; well—if you can make everybody think of his neighbour first—then you may let your system alone, because it won't matter. You can't do that, and so you must destroy the system."

"Then there seems a very poor chance for the present generation of shirt-makers. But what are you

going to put in its place? And how do you know that it will be better than the present plan?"

Sam smiled with pity; girls brought up like Valentine were indeed ignorant.

"You know nothing," he replied; "I have told you already some of our scheme, but I suppose Claude laughed at it and told you to forget it at once."

"Tell me again, then, if you please."

"Very well. Now listen. We shall destroy the competitive system. What does that mean? Why, that there will be no masters first, no capitalists, no landowners, no property of any kind."

"Oh! then who will pay the workmen?"

"Listen, and don't interrupt. The State will be the only employer of labour. There will be no rich people. If you have a mountain of gold it will not buy you an hour of luxury, nor will it save you an hour of labour. The stores will be kept by the State, and the food distributed daily. All will work alike and all will live alike. There will be only one rate of wages, and men and women alike will be paid, not in money, but by abundance of everything that is necessary and pleasant to life; no man will be at the beck and call of another. Think of that! Oh, we are on the eve of the most glorious revolution!" He swung his arms, and his eyes glowed. "There will dawn before long the most glorious day. Why, there will be no crime then, because every man will have all he wants, so that there will be no temptation to steal and rob; and every man will be happy, so that there will be no temptation to violence; and every girl contented and well fed, so that every girl shall keep her self-respect. There will be one offence, and only one

against the State—the crime of laziness, which will be punished by bread-and-water diet. There will be one education for all; the government shall be by the people for the people; there will be no rich class, no better class, no priests, no lazy class; everybody for a certain time every day will work at something productive—but production will be regulated by committees; for the rest of the time a man will do as he pleases. Some will become artists, some will study, some, I suppose, will be preachers, some scientific men, some actors, some will write books, some will play music—the only professional men who will not be required to work at production will be doctors of medicine and schoolmasters. These, of course, will be chosen from the cleverest of the boys. The courts of justice will be administered by juries who will sit every day all the year round, every man taking his turn; law shall be open to everybody and will be free, but there will not be much left to dispute about when all property is held in trust for everybody. All the things that are now luxuries—the rare fruits and the costly wines—will be distributed to the sick and the old. Books, pictures, music, and plays will be produced for nothing at all after working hours. Every man will be taught that he must be watchful of his own rights and jealous for the community. Every man will take his turn to be a policeman. There will be no other distinctions among men than those which nature has created: for some will be strong and some weak, some will be quick and some slow. But there will be no titles, no aristocracy, no class, and no pride of one man over another. Think of it! No more poverty—no more disease from luxury or from priva-

tion, no more ignorance, no more indolence, no more vice! Think of it, I say, if ever you think of anything."

He paused, not because he was exhausted, but because he wanted, naturally, to observe the effect of his oration.

Melenda pretended that she was not listening. But she was. She listened against her will; she could not tell that the thing was as yet only a dream, and could never be realised in her own time. Sam's words filled her soul with vague hopes and a warm glow; and he looked so grand while he spoke that she was proud of him, and forgave him for his impatience and contempt. Lizzie for her part was wholly unmoved. She thought of nothing but of Sam's advice to be discontented and to compare Valentine's frock with her own. It was right, then, to be angry and to ask why she must live on slops and go in rags, and Valentine lived like a lady.

As for Valentine, it seemed to her as if in this squalid room the words had altogether a new force and meaning. In Claude's chambers she had only half perceived their significance, but here—in the presence of the two girls—they fell upon her ears like the first preaching of a new gospel. What sacrifice would be too great to bring about the state of things pictured by this young apostle? Surely there has never been since the world began any dream more generous and more noble than this of the Socialist, insomuch that there are some who think that it was first revealed to the world by the Son of God Himself. It is so beautiful that it will never be suffered to be forgotten, so beautiful that mankind will henceforth be continually occupied in trying to make it a

practical reality; and with every successive failure, will always be drawing nearer and nearer to the goal, until at last, if the kind gods consent, even after many years and many generations, it shall be won, and with it the Kingdom long talked of and little understood. But those who expect it in this their lifetime might as well expect the Kingdom of Heaven.

"Thank you, Sam," said Valentine, bringing herself back to the present with an effort. "But this is a scheme for the far future."

"No, it is for the present. Not to-day perhaps, nor to-morrow, but before your hair is grey it will be realised over the whole world."

"Meantime what are Melenda and Lizzie to do?"

"We've got to go on working," said the latter.

"What will you do meantime for your sister, Sam?"

"Melenda may—she may——" he made an heroic effort, "well, she may come and live with me if she'll behave."

"I shan't then, there! I won't live with anybody, and I won't behave, and I'll go in and out just as I please."

"Can you not find any better way of life for them?" Valentine persisted.

"No, I can't. There isn't any better work for girls who can only sew. You must alter the system. The work and the wages are getting worse instead of better. The worse they get, the more injustice there is, the sooner will be the end. You must begin with the beginning, I tell you. Destroy Capital and abolish Property. But what do you care for the people?"

"I care for this room at least and the people in it. Come, Sam, give me credit for a little humanity. I

care for those of the people whom I know. Isn't that enough for a beginning? How if we were all to do as much? Perhaps there would be no need to alter the System."

"You talk like a woman. Well, then"—he picked up his hat, which he had flung on the floor at the earlier stage of the discussion—"I've made my offer. If Melenda likes to accept it, she can. If not, she will please herself. I'm going. Good-night, Melenda."

"Will you let me walk with you a little way?" Valentine asked.

"Just as you like." It seems an ungracious way of putting it, but what he meant was simple consent.

They walked down Hoxton Street, across Old Street, and along the Curtain Road, where the furniture places were closed, and the street quiet, and the German journeymen were out of sight in some hidden dens, smoking pipes, and dreaming like Sam of a New World.

"You belong to the other side," he said after a while. "That is very certain. Yet I should like to talk to you; but there—it is no use, I suppose. You've been brought up in their way, and because it's an easy life you think it is beautiful."

"I only know of one side."

"That's rubbish. In all history there's always two sides: there's the tyrant and there's the slave: there's the oppressor and there's the oppressed: there's the rich and there's the poor: there's the workman and there's the master. The Lord didn't make simple man, you see, He made two classes. There were two Adams. That's what they want us to believe. The land belongs to one of them, and the duty of tilling

it for nothing to the other. Oh, yes, I know the talk. There's two classes when we are quiet; there's only one class when it comes to keeping them contented. Wait till we get our turn."

"In your scheme, Sam, no one is to be lazy, no one is to shirk work, and the best men in the country will think it their highest privilege to work for all. I understand you to mean this. Yes. It is very beautiful. But how are you going to teach and to discipline the people and keep them up to the mark?"

"Oh!" Sam replied superior. "Why, the very question shows your ignorance. You don't understand the first elements of our party. Don't you see that there will be no necessity for teaching at all—that the very establishment of justice for the first time in the history of the world—free and equal justice, with no favours to any, will create such a grand universal jealousy that all injustice of every kind will be made impossible? There never has been any justice hitherto. There have been laws and lawyers, and decisions of courts have been sold to the highest bidders. But there has been no justice. It will be such a beautiful thing that everybody will watch everybody else and himself as well, to see that there is no shirking of duty. There will be an irresistible determination—but of course you cannot understand the force of the Will of the People?"

"Well," said Valentine, to whom the talk about the irresistible Will of the People was a new thing—and indeed it is strange that while cultivated and educated men have never agreed together to have a Will of their own and to pronounce it, we are constantly told that the rough and ignorant are thinking

as one man, and acting together with one consent and in such beautiful unanimity—"well, then, the Will of the People, I suppose, will order everybody to be equally good, and the order will be obeyed without any difficulty. Why, it will be a return to the Promised Land—No, it will be nothing short of a return to the Garden of Eden. And, Sam, just think what a discovery you have made! The flaming sword which turns every way in the hands of the cherubim is nothing else than the Competitive System."

"As you like," Sam replied a little sulkily. There was just a faint hint of ridicule in Valentine's words. No Prophet can abide ridicule. "I don't care what you call it. Call it what you please. Only don't pretend that you misunderstand the meaning."

"Sam, you are so strong and brave," Valentine laid her hand upon his arm, "you are so clever, you know so much, that I am sure you can help us if you think it over. Never mind the Competitive System: that will take a good many years to destroy, I am sure, and perhaps it will outlast our time. Try to find some readier way to help those girls. Consider, one of them is dying slowly; we can't save her; we can only make her easier: the other two are wasting their lives in the most terrible poverty. I could give them money, but indeed it is not alms they want. Melenda will not have it. Won't you try to help them? Think, Sam, oh, think"—she laid her hand upon his arm—"of their rags and their misery and try to help them."

"I do think of their rags. Good God! Valentine, or Polly, or whatever they call you, I think of their rags and their misery for weeks together after I have seen Melenda."

"Then I wish, Sam, that you saw her every day."

"If I did I should only hate the system more and more. That other girl—she'll die, I suppose."

"Yes, she must die. Melenda is stronger. The one who will go next is Lizzie, unless something can be done."

"There's only one thing that can be done—destroy the Competitive System. Abolish property. Sweep away Capital, Lands, and Church, and Masters. Give Socialism a fair start."

Nothing more could be got out of him. A mathematician, we know, tries his theory on elementary cases; Socialism, and the ladies and gentlemen who construct, with infinite labour, constitutions, schemes, and plans for the universal good, do not. The simple case is beyond them. They are full of rage against the old system, but their indignation is expended in deepening their political convictions.

There was once another man who went down the Jericho road and fell among thieves. First there passed by the priest, just as in the former case, his scornful chin in the air: and then the Levite followed. Now this Levite did not immediately pass by, but he stopped and inquired carefully into the particulars of the case and made full notes of them, and then he went his way, and out of the notes he compiled a most tremendous oration, eloquent, fiery, and convincing, which he delivered at a meeting of the Democratic Federal Union, on the wretched system under which robbers are suffered to exist, and propounded another System

by means of which there would be no more robbers in the land at all. And yet the old System goes on still, and still we see coming along the hot and thirsty road the Samaritan with his nimble twopence.

"Good-night, Sam," Valentine said coldly; "I ask you for advice, and you offer me the chance of a new System. Go away and rail at Competition, while we look after its victims."

CHAPTER X.

THE REVEREND RANDAL SMITH.

The Assistant Priest of St. Agatha's—this was the church where the morning congregation did not contain a single man—was at this time—he has just been promoted to the more independent sphere of a mission church—the Rev. Randal Smith. It was he who ran up the stairs when Valentine was singing in order to discover the secret of this strange thing.

This young gentleman became, by a gradual and natural development of events, one of Valentine's friends. Their friendship, it is true, was based upon what the Doctor maintained to be the true basis of all friendship—self-interest. He first introduced himself to her in the street—there was no other common place of meeting—stopping before her and half lifting his hat. It was one of those sweet things in felt with a very broad flat brim and strings and a tassel, and he took it off with the doubtful courtesy which certain Englishmen yield to the Uncertain Person, as if it were a disgrace to lift the hat to any under a recognised social position. This prejudice will vanish when the Board Schools condescend to teach manners, and the working man has learned to lift his hat to the working woman.

"I beg your pardon——"

He affected the quick breathless manner adopted by many young clergymen and by some young masters

in public schools. It is a manner which may mean anything, like an algebraical symbol—perhaps that is the reason why it has been adopted—but it is really understood to be a "note," or outward and visible sign, of earnestness coupled with intellectual superiority. At Toynbee Hall, very oddly, it is not recognised, which makes one suspect the sincerity and the superiority of that institution.

"I beg your pardon. I think I heard you singing the other evening in Ivy Lane."

"It is very likely."

"I—I—have also learnt"—it was difficult to believe —"that you are the—the—sister of one of the girls who live there."

"It is possible."

He was quite a young man, not more than five or six and twenty, slight and small in stature, shaven of cheek and chin, pale-faced, insignificant of aspect. As to his creed, he professed to belong to the small and narrow sect called Ritualists, and this was proclaimed to the general world by the brim of his hat which was so broad, and the length of his skirts. By these symbols he professed the most decided views as to his own authority, and the tremendous powers which he held by virtue of his office; though he was really a most simple creature, who would have been crushed, had he at all understood or realised the nature of his own pretensions, by the mere weight of them; he had never distinguished himself in any way either at school or college; he had read next to nothing, and knew next to nothing, of history, literature, or theology; his creed was narrow, bigoted, unhistorical, and intolerant; his manner was fussy, underbred, and full of little

affectations. With his priestly pretensions, and his ignorance, and his fussiness, he was just exactly the kind of figure that scoffers like to put up in a pillory and pelt with epigrams, new and old, derisive laughter, mocking questions, and sneers and jeers. He was also exactly the kind of man who would not alter his course for any amount of epigrams, whether they cut like flints or whether they broke in his face like rotten eggs; and, when they took him down from his pillory, he would have gone away wondering that the world could be so sinful as actually to scoff and sniff at the sacerdotal office.

In other respects this assistant priest belonged to a kind of mortal which has never been extinct or unknown amongst us, and of late seems to have become common. It is not the cleverest kind, nor is it the most learned, the most critical, the most logical, or the most capable of argument. But it is a kind which has one great distinctive quality: it has perceived very plainly that there is a kind of life, possible to all who choose to follow it, which is an imitation, however humble, of a certain great Exemplar. In fact, no Hermit, no Solitary, no Friar of orders grey, black, white, blue, green, yellow, buff, indigo, magenta, mauve, or alezan, ever more diligently followed that Exemplar than do the men of this kind. At the age of twenty-three, that is to say, as early as it is permitted to them, they absolutely renounce for ever the world and all its delights; they give up society, culture, learning, art, and pleasures of every kind; they plunge head foremost into a vast ocean, mirky and cloudy, whose waves have no brightness and whose waters know no smiles; they become, in fact, assistant priest or curate,

whichever they prefer to be called, in a parish of poverty; they are the slaves, all day long, of the people; they cease to have any individual life; they have no longer any pursuits.

It is a comparatively unimportant detail in such a life, that the man has a church where he must perform certain duties. Yet these take time; he has to read prayers, or to sing matins and evensong, if he prefers that way of describing the Function; he marries and baptises; he has once a week to provide a discourse always full of new thoughts, powerful logic, and words which burn—at least, these things are expected. It does not really matter in the least what he preaches in places like Hoxton, because no one ever goes to church. Generally, he preaches a set of doctrines which the British working man is just as likely to embrace as he is to abandon the franchise, or to dissolve his trade unions, or to give up his beer, or to join goody clubs. But his real work is outside his church. He is the almoner of the parish; he is always administering charitable funds, finding out deserving cases, and dividing eighteenpence equally among thirteen poor people; he is a professor of the conduct of life; because weaker brethren get drunk he has to wear a nasty little blue ribbon, and may not look upon the amber and the froth of the cheerful pewter; because there are so many to be helped, and so little to help them with, he lives with the greatest frugality, and gives away all that he can spare, being paid for the most part in the coin of ingratitude; he has got schools to visit; of late years he has been expected—who has neither Art nor culture—to become the Prophet of culture and the Fosterer of Art; and now, on

top of all these duties, he has had imposed upon him the care of providing and devising amusement, holidays, excursions, concerts, clubs, and institutes for the young and old. He works all day long and regrets that there are not more than sixteen hours available; he is always cheerful. And for the sake of what he does and the life he leads, let us by no means laugh at this young man, but suffer him without sneers or epigrams to believe what it pleases his unhistorical soul to think he believes, so long as he does not try to make us acknowledge that he carries about in his own little waistcoat pocket, on the same bunch as his latch-key, the keys of the Gates of Heaven.

"I—I—I heard you sing," he repeated. "And I was much pleased. For an untrained voice——"

"Quite so," said Valentine gravely. But there was in her eyes a light for which there is no prettier word, I regret to say, than the word "twinkle." Nothing is more delightful than the sudden awakening to a sense of the humorous situation shown by the twinkle of a girl's bright eyes.

"But perhaps you have been trained. I beg your pardon."

"Pray go on."

"I have an Institute of working boys. It occurred to me that perhaps—perhaps—would you sing to them?"

"I do not know. Will you show me your Institute?"

He led her into one of the streets which branch off right and left, and stopped at a corner house.

"This is the place," he said. "We get the working lads here, and teach them and amuse them in the evening."

The door opened, without the intervention of hall

or passage, into a good-sized room of irregular shape, fitted with benches and one or two narrow tables; at one end was a great fire-place with texts displayed above it, and at the other end was a low platform with a piano. On the walls at the end were a few shelves which formed the boys' library.

"Upstairs," said the young clergyman, his eyes kindling as he showed his beloved Institute, "there are class-rooms and a bagatelle board, where the older lads may smoke if they like; outside in the yard is a gymnasium. This is our common sitting and reading room where we sometimes try singing. Unfortunately I was never taught to sing or play. I can intone of course, but I cannot sing, and as for accompaniment I am trying to learn a few simple chords. Perhaps I could help out with something for you."

"Let me hear you," said Valentine.

His knowledge of the art was limited and his simple chords were few. He confessed that he rose every morning at six in order to acquire some mastery over the instrument, but as yet with small success.

"What do you do with your boys?" she asked him.

It appeared on explanation that his evenings were wholly devoted to the care of those boys, with whom he worked, read, taught, and played. While he spoke of them his face lit up, he forgot the little mannerism of speech and became natural. This was the work that he loved.

Valentine felt that she stood on the threshold of a new kind of life. She went on to question him. He had other work, and a great deal of it, of a much less interesting kind. He ought to have had nothing

to do but to look after the boys, whose minds he was filling with thoughts which would lead some of them whither he could not guess. But he had, besides, the church services every day, sick people to visit, poor people to relieve, a mission chapel to serve in some slum or other, addresses to prepare—an endless round of work, with no rest for a single day in the week and no hope that it would ever grow lighter.

"It is a hard life," said Valentine, wondering at the courage of those who embrace such a life.

"It is my Work," he replied, lapsing into breathlessness and folding his hands, after the unreal manner of his kind. Why will they fold their hands?

Valentine thought that he belonged to those heroes who are best left unseen. There are many such, and when they die their lives read most beautifully.

She sat down and suffered her fingers to ramble over the keys, thinking of this man and his life. Presently she looked up. "I will sing for your boys whenever you please."

"Thank you."

"Do you know all the people in your parish? Do you know the working women?"

"I try to know them all," he replied, breathlessly. "It is my duty to know them all. The parish clergy are in charge of them."

"Do you ever think of them? Can you tell me how anything can be done for them?"

"If they would come to church, and submit to discipline."

"I do not speak of their religion, but of their material welfare. Can anything be done to get them better wages and easier work?"

"I do not know. It is not the duty of a parish priest to consider the subject of work."

"You are among these poor working women all day long, and yet you have never considered the subject? Surely it must force itself upon you."

"What would be the use? I can do nothing. I suppose there must always be poverty—'The poor ye have always with you.'"

"Oh!" Valentine cried, impatiently. "Nobody ever tries to help. I have asked a schoolmaster, and a doctor, and a scholar, and now I have asked a clergyman; and there is no help in any of them. Does nobody in the world care what becomes of the working women?"

"The Church cares for all alike," he replied, still breathless and superior.

She bade him good morning and left him. There was then no help to be got from man, not even from those who go continually among the people and see their suffering and the patience of the girls every day. There are men and women working perpetually for every other possible class, but none for the workgirl. She alone is left unprotected and unheeded, and no man regardeth her.

Then an Oracle came to her; the true Oracle is unsuspected and unsought—sudden. You must not go and inquire at Delphi any more. The Voice comes to you of its own accord. It came to Valentine from an old lady. There were two of them standing on the kerbstone; one carried a loaf under her apron, and the other a key. They were clean and respectable old ladies. As Valentine passed them, one said

to the other, "No, mum, it's no use expecting it; and if you want a thing done, you must do it yourself."

These words Valentine rightly and piously accepted as an Oracle or Voice from Heaven.

The assistant priest meanwhile stood at the door of his Institute, and watched her walking down the street with buoyant step and fearless carriage. I suppose he had seen young ladies before, but it seemed a long time, and for the space of two minutes and a half he allowed his thoughts to follow the way of most young men's thoughts in spring, though it was now full summer. In that brief interval he enjoyed in imagination a whole twelve months at least of the Blessed Life, the Life of Love and Ease and Happiness, with such a companion as Valentine. At five-and-twenty there are moments when all other things, and especially the Great Renunciation, seem stark staring Foolishness compared with the Life of Love. I believe that all women in all ages have secretly entertained this doctrine, and that all men have from time to time been tempted by it. The Light of Asia experienced many such painful moments of doubt, though his biographers have passed them over. We know, besides, how hermits and holy men have been wont to keep tubs of ice-cold water and deep snow-drifts ready against these attacks of the Devil. A terrible thing, indeed, should a young man, after he has gone a-hermiting, meanly give it up and sneak back to his sweetheart!

Now, as Valentine walked along the street, just after she received the oracle, she encountered the very last man she would have expected to meet in Hoxton.

"You here, Mr. Conyers!"

It was, in fact, Mr. Conyers himself, and the great man appeared to be confused at the meeting. He actually blushed and stammered.

"I, yes, yes, I am here. And you, Miss Valentine?"

"I am staying with some friends."

"Yes, I remember. Your sister told me. I thought, however, you were gone to Whitechapel. Everybody goes to Whitechapel now. I am travelling about London in search of a new face for my picture. All the faces somehow seem to have been used up."

"Have you succeeded?"

"I hardly know yet."

She left him and went on her way.

"She is staying with friends." Mr. Conyers looked after her thoughtfully. "I am glad she didn't meet me five minutes ago, with that big-eyed girl. It might have been awkward. She is staying with friends—her own people. Violet told me as much, and Claude is looking after her. Is it likely that Lady Mildred would suffer her own daughter to live in such a place as this and be looked after by Claude? Lady Mildred may be liberal in her views, but she must think of her daughter's reputation. Oh, there cannot be any longer a doubt."

A sweet smile—the smile of contentment—played upon his lips. He was thinking of Beatrice Eldrige and of himself, and of a perfectly easy life, with nothing to do but to enjoy and to develop, and then slowly to ripen and to decay. "I think Valentine is better-looking than Violet," he murmured; "but with

such a hatfull of money, who would make comparisons?"

Meantime the big-eyed girl, who was none other than Lizzie, strolled slowly homewards—it was her dinner hour—thinking of the words that she had heard once more and for the tenth time, because this man would not leave her alone. The temptation to have done with her hard and wretched work had grown almost to a desperate yearning for ease. It seemed to lie at her feet ready to be picked up. The more she saw of Valentine the more she longed to be even as she was. The discontent which Sam wished for all women had seized upon her, but without producing quite the effect which he anticipated. Lizzie had no desire to combine with other girls. She wished, on the other hand, to run quite away from them, and never to have anything more to do with them.

In the evening Valentine sang to the boys. There were twenty or thirty of them with the Reverend Randal Smith. She played to them first, and then she sang to them, not one or two, but a dozen rattling good songs which went straight to the boys' hearts and made them all sit with open mouths. And before she sang her last song, which was that pretty old ditty about Sally in our Alley, she made a little speech.

"Boys," she said, "you will soon be men and able to look out for yourselves. Will you remember your sisters, the girls who cannot help themselves? You will have reasonable hours and good pay; they will have to work all day long for cruel pay. It is your business to help them—I don't know how yet—but you must find out if others cannot. They will be your

sweethearts. Can you bear to think that the girls you love are cruelly neglected and shamefully ill-used? Perhaps you will be able to make a union for them. Think of them. I shall come and sing to you again if I am allowed. Every time I come I will remind you of your duty towards your sisters—the girls who work. Now I will sing you a song all about one of them and her sweetheart."

CHAPTER XI.

A DEAD MAN'S STEPS.

In the multitude of counsellors, as we know, purposes are established. Hitherto, however, Valentine's counsellors had advanced her no more than those of the Patriarch Job. She looked from one to the other, asking in vain the questions which everyone asks when he begins to understand the simple facts. But there was no answer from any, save from Sam, and he proposed to meet the case by simply knocking down the house of cards and building it up again.

She thought of the old lady in the almshouse. Perhaps from her she might get something practical, something that would help Melenda at least, something short of Sam's universal revolution and the Doctor's universal confederation of labour. It is by a natural instinct that mankind in all ages, and at every juncture, have sought the advice of old women, because none are so wise as to the conduct of life, especially—which is not generally known—old women in almshouses. Their superiority is due to the happy circumstance that they have nothing to do but to observe, to reflect, and to piece together their experiences.

One must not, however, suppose that all old women know everything. Some are specialists; as, for example, those who know the art of healing, and the properties of herbs. Then there are those who understand the

management of Man; it is a secret, and one man, at least, who has learned this secret, will never reveal it; but it is a very simple secret, the management of Man in all his characters, as brother, lover, father, and husband. Some, again, are deeply versed in the treatment of tender infants. Some can read and foretell the future, plain and clear, for all inquirers, either by the cards, or by the hand, or by signs and omens, or by the appearance of birds. Some can judge, with the greatest accuracy, of character from the face, or a single feature in the face, or from the voice, or the hand, or the foot. Some can read thoughts, and can advise a man by knowing exactly what is passing in his mind. Some can charm warts and order rheumatism to vanish; and some can inform the inquirer exactly, and without any oracular indefiniteness, whether any proposed course of action will be lucky or unlucky. They are Sibyls every one. I do not know what advice Mrs. Monument would have given to Valentine's questions, because, most unfortunately, she was prevented from putting any by a very singular occurrence.

It was this: Valentine found the old lady sitting alone, and in a strange state of nervous agitation, with shaking hands and trembling lips—in the condition known to inebriates as "jumpy."

"What's the matter, mother?" she asked. "Your hands are trembling, and so are your lips. Are you ill?"

"No, Polly, no. Oh, thank Heaven you've come, my dear! I don't know myself to-day. When you spoke just now I actually thought it was her ladyship's voice, and I never even heard your step outside. Give me your hand, child. There! I feel safe while you are here."

"Why, mother, what is it?"

"I sent Rhoder away after dinner, because I couldn't bear her fidgets. I would rather go without my tea. And I went into the chapel; but I couldn't get any rest. And, oh, dear, dear! how glad I am you've come, Polly!"

"Well, mother, you will tell me presently when you feel a little stronger. You shall have your tea earlier this afternoon. I want to talk to you about Melenda."

"What about Melenda, Polly? She's never been the good and dutiful daughter that you are. She doesn't come to see her mother but once a month, and then she's always in a rage. She came last Sunday and tore round and carried on dreadful about you and Lotty. Never mind that. What about Melenda?"

"She is working too hard and living too low. She ought to be made to do some other kind of work. What could she try?"

"I always told her—but you might as well talk to a stick or a stone—that honest service is the best thing in the world for a young woman. What is her freedom after all? She's free to walk the streets and to get into bad company; she's free to learn bad manners, and she's free to go hungry and ragged. Well, my dear, she won't hear my advice, and—Oh, what's that?"

"It's nothing, dear," said Valentine. "But, mother, what makes you so nervous to-day?"

"I can't tell you, child. I can't tell anybody."

It was useless to ask her for advice. The old lady was incoherent and incapable of thought. Valentine made haste to get ready the tea and to talk on indifferent things. And while she talked she saw that

her mother either listened with an effort or did not listen at all, but suffered her lips to move in silence, while the trembling of her hands showed the disquiet of her mind.

When she had taken tea, which is a sedative and restorative of the highest order, the old lady felt herself stronger and breathed more freely.

"Polly," she said, "if you hadn't come to-day, I should have gone clean off my poor head, I should."

"Well, mother, wouldn't you be easier if you told me all the trouble? Is it anything about one of the boys? Is Joe in difficulties?"

"No, no, nothing's the matter with Joe. And I can't tell Joe, because he would only laugh at me. But I must tell somebody. My dear," she stooped forward and whispered, "I've had a most terrible fright."

"A fright? Did thieves try to break in—here?"

"No, Polly; no, not thieves. Bless you! I ain't afraid of thieves. It's far worse than that."

"What was it?"

"I heard a step, Polly."

"A step?"

"Polly, I can't tell you; the young don't understand what a dreadful thing it is to hear a step you haven't heard for twenty years—a dead man's step—and to wonder why it came and what it wanted; and then to remember all the misery that step might have caused if the dead man wasn't dead. I know he's dead. I'm quite certain of that. Yet I'm terrible put out, my dear; if I hadn't told you I think I must have gone out of my senses, so shook I am to-day. Some one I must ha' told. I couldn't tell Rhoder, because Joe would never forgive me if I did. She's one of them

who is never to know. Claude is another, and so is Sam."

"Whose step was it like, then?"

"Polly, give me your hand again. Oh, what a blessing you are to me, my dear! Your Christian name was Marla, because he ordered it; but I've always called you Polly, and I always shall. It was the step of your own father, my dear, who's dead and gone."

"My father? But since he is dead"—for the moment her thoughts turned to a certain portrait, that, namely, representing Sir Lancelot in his uniform as Colonel of Yeomanry Cavalry proudly bestriding a gallant charger. Then she remembered that, unlike any other girl in history, she had, in the mind of most people, two fathers. There are many girls who have only one father between them; but Valentine's is absolutely the only case on record in which a girl has had more than one father. "Why," she added, "it is twenty years since my father died."

"No, my dear, it is only five years. Joe brought me the news, and I cried for joy and thankfulness. Cried for joy, I did."

"Only five years? But we always thought——"

"I told her ladyship twenty years ago that he was dead. It wasn't true; and yet he was as good as dead to me and to the children; and to the world as well. I don't know whether the world or me was better pleased that he was dead to everybody. I don't know which of us prayed the hardest that he would never come to life again."

"Why, mother, what does this mean?" The bitterness of these words, and the intensity with which they were uttered, startled and terrified Valentine. What

could they mean? She turned pale with a sudden presentiment of evil.

"I told Lady Mildred a falsehood. It did her no harm, and I couldn't—no, I couldn't tell her the truth —her who'd known me when I was respectable, and didn't even guess what had happened. It was my secret all to myself and to Joe. There's some things a woman can't tell. As for the truth, Joe and me knew it, and nobody else, and I was then on Hackney Marsh out of the way, and there was plenty of time before me even if he should come back, and I thought to get the children put out to work so as he shouldn't know where they were nor ever be able to do them any harm, or bring shame upon them as he brought it on me."

"Do them harm? Bring shame upon them? Why?"

"You don't know, Polly. But I'll tell you now, because I can talk to you as I can't to Melenda or the boys; and oh, my dear, I feel the comfort of having a daughter I can talk to."

"Go on, mother," said Valentine.

"Well then, my dear, if there was ever a wickeder man than your father in the whole world, Lord help his wife and children! And if ever there was a man who was more bent on wicked ways and more gloried in his wicked life, I never heard of him."

"Where was he then, when he was dead to you and——" Here she stopped, and her cheek flamed suddenly scarlet as if she had received a shameful blow, for she understood where he was. Those who are dead to wife and children, yet living: those whose living death is a subject of rejoicing in the world, are in——

"Mother," she said, "he was in prison."

"Hush! my dear," her mother whispered, "not so loud. Yes, he was in prison. Hush! don't ever say that word out loud again. Nobody knows it but Joe and me. Joe was old enough to know when he was took. Thank God, the knowledge of it frightened him and helped to make him the sober steady man he is. No one else knows—not Joe's wife nor yet his children. They don't know. And none of the rest knows, not Sam, nor Claude, nor Melenda. Don't you tell them, Polly—don't you never tell them. Sam's that proud and set up with his grand position and his success that it would cut him to the heart, and my Claude, too, though, of course, he isn't to compare with Sam. Don't make them hang their proud heads. And Melenda, too—bless the girl—with her independence. Don't shame them, Polly, don't tell them."

"I shall not tell. Oh, mother, why did you tell me?" she asked impatiently.

"When you came here without any play actin', and leaving Miss Beatrice at home with her Mar and kind and thoughtful for your mother, my dear; oh, what a blessing it is to have my Polly back again"—Valentine kissed her and fondled her hand, penitent already for her impatience—"full of your soft and ladylike ways, my dear, which Melenda couldn't never learn, living as she does, slaving and starving, it came into my head that I must some day tell you. What's the good of having a daughter if you can't tell everything that is in your mind?"

"Tell me everything," said Valentine with a sinking heart. "Tell me everything, then, if it will relieve your mind, dear."

"I wouldn't have told you anything, my dear, if it hadn't been for that dreadful step which frightened me out of my wits almost. It was nigh upon the stroke of ten, because I heard the clock soon afterwards. I'd forgotten to lock the door; why, I often leave it ajar when I go to bed so as Rhoder can get in first thing in the morning. I was fast asleep—I must have been asleep though I dreamed I was awake, and all of a sudden in my dream of being awake I heard his step. It came over the flags within the court and walking quickly, as he always walked, stopped at my door and so into the house."

"Oh!" Valentine was trembling now, because that strange horror, which we call the fear of the supernatural, is the most catching thing in the world, much more catching than measles. "Oh! and then you heard his footstep on the flagstones?"

"Yes, and in the house; the step came into the room below. I don't know how long it lasted because I couldn't move hand or foot, and I couldn't breathe even, and my tongue was tied and I couldn't open my mouth. Oh, dear, it was last night." She stopped, overcome by the recollection of that dreadful dream.

"When I came to I got up and crept downstairs and felt about the room. But no one was there. How should there be? Blind people can't see ghosts, like other people, but they can feel them if there's one about. There was a blind woman once in the village when I was a girl, and they said the reason why she always looked frightened was that she was haunted by the ghost of her husband. He'd sit beside her bed all night and say nothing, and she couldn't see him, but she felt him there, and if all tales about her was

true, it served her right. She died young, my dear, because she couldn't bear it. If one blind woman, why not two? Perhaps he came repentant. Well, I'm ready to forgive him, now he's dead; I couldn't before." Many Christians resemble Mrs. Monument in this view of forgiveness as a duty.

"You are quite sure there was no one there?"

"Neither man nor ghost was there, and the door was ajar just as I'd left it."

"And was nothing stolen?"

"No, my dear; there isn't anything worth stealing."

"It was a strange dream," said Valentine; "a strange and a dreadful dream. Did you hear the step again when you went back to bed?"

"No, my dear, not again. But I lay awake all night waiting for it, though I knew it was only a dream."

"Shall I stay with you to-night?"

"No my dear, I am better now I've told you. I am not afraid any longer."

"Well, don't forget to lock and bolt your door."

"Locks and bolts won't keep out ghosts. And never a lock nor a bolt ever made would keep *him* out when he was alive, much less now he's dead."

"Forget your dream, mother, and tell me more about my father. Tell me all, unless it gives you pain to talk about him."

"No, my dear, it eases me, because if I don't talk about him I think about him. I almost wish I hadn't told you anything, Polly. It won't make you any happier to know that. But then I was so upset——"

"Yes, mother, it was better for you. I know now that my father's only legacy to his children was a record of disgrace which you have mercifully concealed."

"Disgrace and shame, Polly," the blind woman echoed.

Presently she went on again.

"When he came to the village first and began courting, my head was turned because he was such a handsome lad and I was such a homely one. His ways were finicking, as if he was a gentleman, and there was nothing that he couldn't do. He'd play the fiddle, which he did most heavenly, till you either laughed, or cried, or danced, just as he wanted you to do; he could do conjuring tricks, and he'd make you believe whatever rubbish he wanted; he could carve most beautiful in wood; and at his own trade, which was locksmithing, I don't suppose there was a cleverer lad in the world. Well, I never asked him what he came into our parts for, and though there was three houses broke open while he was coming and going, nobody ever suspected my James, and least of all could I suspect him. And on Sunday always in his place at church beside me with his book in his hand, so that the vicar thought he was a good young man indeed, and everybody told me I was a lucky woman. A proud woman I was, I can tell you, when I stood with my man and all the people there to see. Little Lady Mildred herself was brought to the wedding because I'd been under-nurse, aud she gave me my white frock, at least her mother did, and said it was her gift, and—there—it's seven-and-thirty years ago. Joe is six-and-thirty, and you are only twenty, but close to twenty-one, being actually fifteen years younger than Joe. My dear," she interrupted her narrative in order to apologise for this difference, "I know it is natural there oughtn't to be such a distance between the eldest and the

youngest of five. You ought to be thirty at least by now if you had your right. But I couldn't help it because your father, you see, he was generally in the place—the place, you know, where he died at last."

"You mean he was in prison," said Valentine stoutly, "and don't mind about the difference between Joe and me. I daresay I shall get to thirty in good time."

"In prison then, my dear. Now though we came to London at first to look for work, I very soon found out that he hadn't got any regular work, and wouldn't take it if it was offered. Half his time he was away, saying it was country jobs which paid him well, and he'd be away sometimes a month at a spell, after which there would be a month's idleness and doing nothing. But always plenty of money and better living we had than many a gentleman's house."

"Did he have any relations?"

"No; not any that I ever heard of—some of the books here on my shelves belonged, he said, to his father; and he said his father was a gentleman, but what kind of a gentleman he was to have such a son I'm sure I don't know. Well, Polly, I lived, as they say, in Fool's Paradise; for he never got drunk and he didn't use language and he was not a striker, and though he would only work when he was obliged and left me so much alone, I loved him and thought I was the happiest woman in the world. Happy? Yes, like the innocent lambs in the fields. It was when Joe was a baby of three months that I found out the truth. He got ten years"—Valentine shuddered—"ten years. It was a bad burglary. His box of tools was in our

lodgings and a chest full of stolen things, and they talked of trying me along with him, but they didn't. My dear, I never so much as suspected. Ten years! Then I took Joe and all the money that I had and went away to Hackney Marsh, and took my maiden name again, and began with the washing."

"And after his ten years he came back again, I suppose?"

"Before then; he came back with a ticket-of-leave, and you may be sure he found me out. I don't know how, but he did; and you might as well try to hide a rabbit from a weasel as try to hide anything from that man. He came back, my dear; and then he lived a very strange life. For he told me he had reformed, and yet he would stay away for a month at a time, and a fine reform it was. He kept quiet when he was at home and gave out to the neighbours he was a seafaring man, and he mostly wore a blue jacket. He never took any of my money and I wouldn't touch none of his, and he never had any meals in the house, but he'd sit in the parlour and read his books, and he'd smoke cigars and drink port wine like a gentleman, all by himself. Twice he went away and didn't come back for eighteen months, so I suppose he'd been took again. But after each spell back he came, and that went on, my dear, for seven long years—seven years—me asking no questions, and him telling no lies, and coming and going just as he pleased. Seven years. Sam came first, and then Claude, and then Melenda. But before you were born, my dear, though not before your name was fixed, which was Marla, as I've told you often, he was took again. It was another burglary, I know, with violence, and he got five-and-twenty years,

which Joe said was as good as a lifer, and we needn't expect to see him ever again."

"Is that all?"

"That's all, my dear. And now you and me have got that secret between us, and we are never to let the two boys nor Melenda know, are we?"

"Never to let the boys know," said Valentine. "Oh, poor Claude!"

"If they never find it out it won't matter to them, will it?" said his mother. "Joe's wife and the children don't know it. Nobody knows it except you and me and Joe. Sometimes I think it's made Joe the good son he's always been to me, because we've had that secret to ourselves."

"Since he is dead—but is he dead?"

"Yes, he is dead," she replied quickly; "Joe heard that for certain. There's no doubt about that."

"Did he never write to you?"

"Never, and I'll tell you why. It was because he thought my cottage was such a good hiding-place, where he could come and go as he pleased and never be suspected at all, and me living under another name. Only mind, I wouldn't have any boxes brought home with him. You see, if he'd written to me the police would have known where to look for him. Why, I've known him—oh, a dozen times—talk to the policeman over the garden palings about himself and his own burglaries as cool as you please."

"What was his name?"

"His name was Carey—James Carey. Why, my dear, you are too young to remember it, but thirty years ago the newspapers were full of his name, and the whole country was ringing with his burglaries.

They wrote a life of him and sold it for a penny all over London. But of course you've never seen the book."

No. Valentine had little wish to see that biographical work. Yet there was just a touch of pride in the old woman's mention of that book.

"Look on the shelves, Polly. There are some of his books. You will find his father's name in them. At least he said they were his father's books; but who knows what his name really was, nor what was his history?"

Valentine had remarked a row of well-bound books on her first visit; chiefly, I suppose, because books are not too often met with in a Tottenham almshouse. Now she took them down and examined them. The first book was the "Divina Commedia di Dante Alighieri," in Italian; a beautifully bound copy of a scarce edition, as Valentine knew. One does not usually expect to find rare editions in an almshouse. She passed on to the next on the shelf. This was "Cupid and Psyche, English'd from the Latin of Apuleius," quarto, in calf, with the date 1741. Then came "Froissart's Chronicles," in four goodly volumes, quarto, and half-calf, the translations of Johnnes. After this came an odd volume of Hutchinson's "Durham;" then another odd volume of La Fontaine's "Contes et Nouvelles," illustrated very beautifully; then two or three volumes of Florian's works, magnificently bound. There were others, but Valentine stopped there because she suddenly apprehended the possible meaning of this thing.

If I desired to possess, and intended to show about for the gratification of vanity and the support of my

pretentions to gentle birth, something solid and not to be disputed, I should not content myself with the ordinary well-known methods. I might, like some of my neighbours, invent and circulate family anecdotes which unkind friends would proceed to quote and to misrepresent in a nasty sniggering spirit. I might, also, as they do, adorn my rooms with family portraits which may be had at a reasonable figure, and are effective so long as there exists a friendly disposition to a give-and-take credulity. I might, in addition, exhibit a family pedigree, going back to the Wars of the Roses at least, and beginning with a valiant knight supposed to be connected with a very illustrious house; this, too, may be procured for a small sum, beautifully written on parchment, and adorned with shields. I should certainly stick up, wherever there was room for them, coats of mail, with trophies of spears, shields, bucklers, and pikes, all family heirlooms, and descending in the male line direct from the Crusaders and Cœur de Lion. I should buy old silver mugs, and have my arms engraved upon them with the names of ancestors. These things are all useful in their way, but they want corroboration. Therefore I should proceed to search for, and to buy, old books of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, *without names in them*, and in these books I should write the names of my ancestors in a pale brown ink, with the date of acquisition and a remark or two in Latin. Nothing is so effective as Latin. I should arrange them upon a shelf about the average height of the human eye, which is five feet seven inches, and I should say, when my friends took them down curiously, "Alas! all

that I have been able to save of the old family library. You will find the names of one or two of my people there. See! here is good old Sir Simon, knighted by Queen Bess, at Tilbury." There might be jealousies and envyings, and unkind remembrance of one's grandfather and the shop; but there would be no flouts or jeers, because nothing more effectually proves the antiquity of the House than old books formerly belonging to ancestors. For modest men it is perhaps sufficient to prove that your grandfather could read Latin and Italian; therefore, books only eighty years of age might be purchased in order to serve that purpose.

Valentine opened the volumes. In each one there was a book plate with a coat of arms, and under the shield in each was written the name of "Francis Denison Carey." Therefore the said Francis must have known Italian and French at least, and he must have been fond of books and bindings, and illustrations, and he must have taken an interest in county history, and therefore, without doubt, he must have been a gentleman by birth.

"Were these books my father's?" she asked.

"They were all his, my dear, and his father's before him."

"Who was his father?"

"I don't know, my dear, because he never told me. I've always thought my husband must have been a love child. He left them with me wherever he went. To be sure he couldn't take them with him when he——"

"No," said Valentine, "certainly he could not."

Even an author's works cannot follow him into

that place, though they may, and generally do, accompany him to the grave.

"Then his father was a gentleman."

"So he always said, my dear. But a love child I think he must have been. And he said that he'd got fine relations; and then he'd laugh and boast that he was bringing great honour on the family, though they would do nothing for him."

"It is strange," said Valentine. "Did he never explain how he came to fall so low?"

"No, never; and as to being fallen low he pretended he'd risen high, and couldn't own that his way of living was shameful and disgraceful. 'Why,' he said, a dozen times after he pretended to be reformed, and could talk Scripture by the half-hour, 'why,' he said, 'it's me against the world: my cleverness against your locks, and your laws, and your police. And I'm the head of them all. There's not a man in the profession but envies me and admires me. Who is there that's got into so many houses as I have? Who's defied the police as I have?' That's the way he used to go on, and as to living by honest work it was nothing but slaving for a slave driver; if he couldn't be a slave driver he wouldn't be a slave."

"And was he any the richer for his robberies?"

"I don't know, my dear, where the money went, because I never asked. But it went in wickedness, I dare say."

"Oh!" cried Valentine, stung by a sudden terror. "Suppose he wasn't dead after all; what misery to see him appear again!"

"He is dead," said the widow, quietly. "It was

his ghost whose step I heard. Well may he walk and be uneasy. If he wasn't dead he'd ha' been out before now. But I know very well that he's dead and buried. And, oh, Polly, I'm half sorry after all that I told you!"

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