GEORGE GISSING

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I

For half an hour there had been perfect silence in the room. The cat upon the hearthrug slept profoundly; the fire was sunk to a still red glow; the cold light of the autumn afternoon thickened into dusk.

Lilian seemed to be reading. She sat on a footstool, her arm resting on the seat of a basket-chair, which supported a large open volume. But her hand was never raised to turn a page, and it was long since her eyes had gathered the sense of the lines on which they were fixed. This attitude had been a favourite one with her in childhood, and nowadays, in her long hours of solitude, she often fell into the old habit. It was a way of inviting reverie, which was a way of passing the time.

She stirred at length; glanced at the windows, at the fire, and rose.

A pleasant little sitting-room, furnished in the taste of our time; with harmonies and contrasts of subdued colour, with pictures intelligently chosen, with store of graceful knick-knacks. Lilian's person was in keeping with such a background; her dark gold hair, her pale, pensive, youthful features, her slight figure in its loose raiment, could not have been more suitably displayed. In a room of statelier proportions she would have looked too frail, too young for significance; out of doors she was seldom seen to advantage; here one recognized her as the presiding spirit in a home fragrant of womanhood. The face, at this moment, was a sad one, but its lines expressed no weak surrender to dolefulness; her lips were courageous, and her eyes such as brighten readily with joy.

A small table bore a tea-tray with a kettle and spirit-lamp; the service for two persons only. Lilian, after looking at her watch, ignited the lamp and then went to the window as if in expectation of some one's arrival.

The house stood in a row of small new dwellings on the outskirts of Clapham Common; there was little traffic along the road at any time, and in this hour of twilight even a passing footstep became a thing to notice. Some one approached on her side of the way she listened, but with disappointment; it was not the step for which she waited. None the less it paused at this house, and she was startled to perceive a telegraph messenger on the point of knocking. At once she hastened to the front door.

"Mrs. Quarrier?" inquired the boy, holding out his missive.

Lilian drew back with it into the passage. But there was not light enough to read by; she had to enter the sitting-room and hold the sheet of paper close to the kettle-lamp.

"Very sorry that I cannot get home before ten. Unexpected business."

She read it carefully, then turned with a sigh and dismissed the messenger.

In a quarter of an hour she had made tea, and sat down to take a cup. The cat, refreshed after slumber, jumped on to her lap and lay there pawing playfully at the trimming of her sleeves. Lilian at first rewarded this friendliness only with absent stroking, but when she had drunk her tea and eaten a slice of bread and butter the melancholy mood dispersed; pussy's sportiveness was then abundantly indulged, and for awhile Lilian seemed no less merry than her companion.

The game was interrupted by another knock at the house-door; this time it was but the delivery of the evening paper. Lilian settled herself in a chair by the fireside, and addressed herself with a serious countenance to the study of the freshly-printed columns. Beginning with the leading-article, she read page after page in the most conscientious way, often pausing to reflect, and once even to pencil a note on the margin. The paper finished, she found it necessary for the clear understanding of a certain subject to consult a book of reference, and for this purpose she went to a room in the

rear—a small study, comfortably but plainly furnished, smelling of tobacco. It was very chilly, and she did not spend much time over her researches.

A sound from the lower part of the house checked her returning steps; some one was rapping at the door down in the area. It happened that she was to-day without a servant; she must needs descend into the kitchen herself and answer the summons. When the nether regions were illumined and the door thrown open, Lilian beheld a familiar figure, that of a scraggy and wretchedly clad woman with a moaning infant in her arms.

"Oh, it's you, Mrs. Wilson!" she exclaimed. "Please to come in. How have *you* been getting on? And how is baby?"

The woman took a seat by the kitchen fire, and began to talk in a whining, mendicant tone. From the conversation it appeared that this was by no means the first time she had visited Lilian and sought to arouse her compassion; the stories she poured forth consisted in a great measure of excuses for not having profited more substantially by the help already given her. The eye and the ear of experience would readily enough have perceived in Mrs. Wilson a very coarse type of impostor, and even Lilian, though showing a face of distress at what she heard, seemed to hesitate in her replies and to entertain troublesome doubts. But the objection she ventured to make to a flagrant inconsistency in the tale called forth such loud indignation, such a noisy mixture of insolence and grovelling entreaty, that her moral courage gave way and Mrs. Wilson whined for another quarter of an hour in complete security from cross-examination. In the end Lilian brought out her purse and took from it half-a-sovereign.

"Now, if I give you this, Mrs. Wilson, I do hope to have a better account"–

Her admonitions were cut short, and with difficulty she managed to obtain hearing for a word or two of what was meant for grave counsel whilst taking leave of her visitor. Mrs. Wilson, a gleam in her red eyes, vanished up the area steps, and left Lilian to meditate on the interview.

The evening passed on, and her solitude was undisturbed. When dinner-time came, she sat down to the wing of a cold chicken and a thimbleful of claret much diluted; the repast was laid out with perfection of neatness, and at its conclusion she cleared the table like the handiest of parlour-maids. Whatever she did was done gracefully; she loved order, and when alone was no less scrupulous in satisfying her idea of the becoming than when her actions were all observed.

After dinner, she played a little on the piano. Here, as over her book in the afternoon, the absent fit came upon her. Her fingers had rested idly on the keyboard for some minutes, when they began to touch solemn chords, and at length there sounded the first notes of a homely strain, one of the most familiar of the Church's hymns. It ceased abruptly; Lilian rose and went to another part of the room.

A few minutes later her ear caught the sound for which she was now waiting—that of a latch-key at the front door. She stepped quickly out into the passage, where the lamp-light fell upon a tall and robust man with dark, comely, bearded visage.

"Poor little girl!" he addressed her, affectionately, as he pulled off his overcoat. "I couldn't help it, Lily; bound to stay."

"Never mind!" was her laughing reply, as she stood on tip-toe and drew down his face to hers. "I was disappointed, but it's as well you didn't come to dinner. Sarah had to go away this morning."

"Oh! How's that? How have *you* managed then?"

They passed into the front room, and Quarrier repeated his inquiries.

"She had a letter from Birmingham," Lilian explained. "Her brother has been all but killed in some dreadful accident, and he's in a hospital. I saw she wished to go—so I gave her some money and sent her off as soon as possible. Perhaps it was her only chance of seeing him alive, Denzil."

"Yes, yes of course you did right," he answered, after a moment's hesitation.

"I knew you wouldn't mind a dinner of my cooking—under the circumstances."

"But what are we to do? You can't take her place in the kitchen till she comes back."

"I'll get some one for a few days."

"But, confound it! how about to-morrow morning? It's very awkward"–

"Oh, I shall easily manage."

"What?—go down at eight o'clock and light fires! Hang it, no! All right; I'll turn out and see to breakfast. But you must get another girl; a second servant, I mean. Yes, you ought really to have two. Get a decent cook."

"Do you think it necessary?"

Quarrier was musing, a look of annoyance on his face.

"It couldn't have happened more inconveniently," he said, without regard to Lilian's objection. "I had better tell you at once, Lily: I've asked a friend of mine to come and dine with us to-morrow."

She started and looked at him with anxious eyes.

"A friend?"

"Yes; Glazzard—the man who spoke to me at Kew Station the other day—you remember?"

"Oh yes!"

Lilian seated herself by the piano and stroked the keys with the tips of her fingers. Standing on the hearth-rug, her companion watched her closely for a moment; his forehead was wrinkled, and he did not seem quite at ease.

"Glazzard is a very good fellow," he pursued, looking about the room and thrusting his hands into his trouser-pockets. "I've known him since I was a boy—a well-read man, thoughtful, clever. A good musician; something more than an amateur with the violin, I believe. An artist, too; he had a 'bust in the Academy a few years ago, and I've seen some capital etchings of his."

"A universal genius!" said Lilian, with a forced laugh.

"Well, there's no doubt he has come very near success in a good many directions. Never *quite* succeeded; there's the misfortune. I suppose he lacks perseverance. But he doesn't care; takes everything with a laugh and a joke."

He reached for the evening newspaper, and glanced absently over the columns. For a minute or two there was silence.

"What have you told him?" Lilian asked at length, in an undertone.

"Why, simply that I have had reasons for keeping my marriage secret."

He spoke in a blunt, authoritative way, but with his usual kindly smile.

"I thought it better," he added, "after that chance meeting the other day. He's a fellow one can trust, I assure you. Thoroughly good-hearted. As you know, I don't readily make friends, and I'm the last man to give my confidence to any one who doesn't deserve it. But Glazzard and I have always understood each other pretty well, and—at all events, he knows me well enough to be satisfied with as much as I choose to tell him."

Quarrier had the air of a man who, without any vulgar patronage, and in a spirit of abundant good-nature, classifies his acquaintance in various degrees of subordination to himself. He was too healthy, too vigorous of frame and frank in manner to appear conceited, but it was evident that his experience of life had encouraged a favourable estimate of his own standing and resources. The ring of his voice was sound; no affectation or insincerity marred its notes. For all that, he seemed just now not entirely comfortable; his pretence of looking over the paper in the intervals of talk was meant to cover a certain awkwardness in discussing the subject he had broached.

"You don't object to his coming, Lily?"

"No; whatever you think best, dear."

"I'm quite sure you'll find him pleasant company. But we must get him a dinner, somehow. I'll go to some hotel to-morrow morning and put the thing in their hands; they'll send a cook, or do something or other. If the girl had been here we should have managed well enough; Glazzard is no snob.—I want to smoke; come into my study, will you? No fire? Get up some wood, there's a good girl, we'll soon set it going. I'd fetch it myself, but I shouldn't know where to look for it."

A flame was soon roaring up the chimney in the little back room, and Quarrier's pipe filled the air with fragrant mist.

"How is it," he exclaimed, settling in the arm-chair, "that there are so many beggars in this region? Two or three times this last week I've been assailed along the street. I'll put a stop to that; I told a great hulking fellow to-night that if he spoke to me again (it was the second time) I would take the trouble of marching him to the nearest police station."

"Poor creatures!" sighed Lilian.

"Pooh! Loafing blackguards, with scarcely an exception! Well, I was going to tell you: Glazzard comes from my own town, Polterham. We were at the Grammar School there together; but he read AEschylus and Tacitus whilst I was grubbing over Eutropius and the Greek declensions."

"Is he so much older then? He seemed to me"–

"Six years older—about five-and-thirty. He's going down to Polterham on Saturday, and I think I shall go with him."

"Go with him? For long?"

"A week, I think. I want to see my brother-in-law. You won't mind being left alone?"

"No; I shall do my best to keep in good spirits."

"I'll get you a batch of new books. I may as well tell you, Liversedge has been persuaded to stand as Liberal candidate for Polterham at the next election. It surprised me rather; I shouldn't have thought he was the kind of fellow to go in for politics. It always seemed to be as little in his line as it is in mine."

"And do you wish to advise him against it?"

"Oh no; there's no harm in it. I suppose Beaconsfield and crew have roused him. I confess I should enjoy helping to kick them into space. No, I just want to talk it over with him. And I owe them a visit; they took it rather ill that I couldn't go with them to Ireland."

Lilian sat with bent head. Casting a quick glance at her, Quarrier talked on in a cheerful strain.

"I'm afraid he isn't likely to get in. The present member is an old fogey called Welwyn-Baker; a fat-headed Tory; this is his third Parliament. They think he's going to set up his son next time—a fool, no doubt, but I have no knowledge of him. I'm afraid Liversedge isn't the man to stir enthusiasm."

"But is there any one to be made enthusiastic on that side?" asked Lilian.

"Well, it's a town that has changed a good deal of late years. It used to be only an agricultural market, but about twenty years ago a man started a blanket factory, and since then several other industries have shot up. There's a huge sugar-refinery, and a place where they make jams. That kind of thing, you know, affects the spirit of a place. Manufacturers are generally go-ahead people, and mill-hands don't support high Tory doctrine. It'll be interesting to see how they muster. If Liversedge knows how to go to work"—he broke into laughter. "Suppose, when the time comes, I go down and harangue the mob in his favour?"

Lilian smiled and shook her head.

"I'm afraid you would be calling them 'the mob' to their faces."

"Well, why not? I dare say I should do more that way than by talking fudge about the glorious and enlightened people. 'Look here, you blockheads!' I should shout, 'can't you see on which side your interests lie? Are you going to let England be thrown into war and taxes just to please a theatrical Jew and the howling riff-raff of London?' I tell you what, Lily, it seems to me I could make a rattling good speech if I gave my mind to it. Don't you think so?"

"There's nothing you couldn't do," she answered, with soft fervour, fixing her eyes upon him.

"And yet I do nothing—isn't that what you would like to add?"

"Oh, but your book is getting on!"

"Yes, yes; so it is. A capital book it'll be, too; a breezy book—smelling of the sea-foam! But, after all, that's only pen-work. I have a notion that I was meant for active life, after all. If I had remained in the Navy, I should have been high up by now. I should have been hoping for war, I dare say. What possibilities there are in every man!"

He grew silent, and Lilian, her face shadowed once more, conversed with her own thoughts.

CHAPTER II

In a room in the west of London—a room full of pictures and bric-a-brac, of quaint and luxurious furniture, with volumes abundant, with a piano in a shadowed corner, a violin and a mandoline laid carelessly aside—two men sat facing each other, their looks expressive of anything but mutual confidence. The one (he wore an overcoat, and had muddy boots) was past middle age, bald, round-shouldered, dressed like a country gentleman; upon his knees lay a small hand-bag, which he seemed about to open, He leaned forward with a face of stern reproach, and put a short, sharp question:

"Then why haven't I heard from you since my nephew's death?"

The other was not ready with a reply. Younger, and more fashionably attired, he had assumed a lounging attitude which seemed natural to him, though it served also to indicate a mood of resentful superiority. His figure was slight, and not ungraceful; his features—pale, thin, with heavy nose, high forehead—were intellectual and noteworthy, but lacked charm.

"I have been abroad till quite recently," he said at length, his fine accent contrasting with that of the questioner, which had a provincial note. "Why did you expect me to communicate with you?"

"Don't disgrace yourself by speaking in that way, Mr. Glazzard!" exclaimed the other, his voice uncertain with strong, angry feeling. "You know quite well why I have come here, and why you ought to have seen me long ago!"

Thereupon he opened the bag and took out a manuscript-book.

"I found this only the other day among Harry's odds and ends. It's a diary that he kept. Will you explain to me the meaning of this entry, dated in June of last year: 'Lent E. G. a hundred pounds'?"

Glazzard made no answer, but his self-command was not sufficient to check a quivering of the lips.

"There can be no doubt who these initials refer to. Throughout, ever since my nephew's intimacy with you began, you are mentioned here as 'E. G.' Please to explain another entry, dated August: 'Lent E. G. two hundred pounds.' And then again, February of this year: 'Lent E. G. a hundred and fifty pounds'—and yet again, three months later: 'Lent E. G. a hundred pounds'—what is the meaning of all this?"

"The meaning, Mr. Charnock," replied Glazzard, "is indisputable."

"You astound me!" cried the elder man, shutting up the diary and straightening himself to an attitude of indignation. "Am I to understand, then, that *this* is the reason why Harry left no money? You mean to say you have allowed his relatives to believe that he had wasted a large sum, whilst they supposed that he was studying soberly in London"–

"If you are astounded," returned the other, raising his eyebrows, "I certainly am no less so. As your nephew made note of these lendings, wasn't he equally careful to jot down a memorandum when the debt was discharged?"

Mr. Charnock regarded him fixedly, and for a moment seemed in doubt.

"You paid back these sums?"

"With what kind of action did you credit me?" said Glazzard, quietly.

The other hesitated, but wore no less stern a look.

"I am obliged to declare, Mr. Glazzard, that I can't trust your word. That's a very strong thing to have to say to a man such as I have thought you—a man of whom Harry always spoke as if there wasn't his like on earth. My acquaintance with you is very slight; I know very little indeed about you, except what Harry told me. But the man who could deliberately borrow hundreds of pounds from a lad only just of age—a simple, trustful, good-natured country lad, who had little but his own exertions to depend upon—*such* a man will tell a lie to screen himself! This money was *not* paid back; there

isn't a word about it in the diary, and there's the fact that Harry had got rid of his money in a way no one could explain. You had it, and you have kept it, sir!"

Glazzard let his eyes stray about the room. He uncrossed his legs, tapped on the arm of his easy-chair, and said at length:

"I have no liking for violence, and I shall try to keep my temper. Please to tell me the date of the last entry in that journal."

Mr. Charnock opened the book again, and replied at once:

"June 5th of this year—1879."

"I see. Allow me a moment." He unlocked a drawer in a writing-table, and referred to some paper. "On the 1st of June—we were together the whole day—I paid your nephew five hundred and fifty pounds in bank-notes. Please refer to the diary."

"You *were* together on that day, but there is no note of such a transaction. 'With E. G. Much talk about pictures, books, and music—delightful!' That's all."

"Have you added up the sums mentioned previously?"

"Yes. They come to what you say. How did it happen, Mr. Glazzard, that you had so large a sum in bank-notes? It isn't usual."

"It is not unheard of, Mr. Charnock, with men who sometimes play for money."

"What! Then you mean to tell me that Harry learnt from you to be a gambler?"

"Certainly not. He never had the least suspicion that I played."

"And pray, what became of those notes after he received them?"

"I have no idea. For anything I know, you may still find the money."

Mr. Charnock rose from his seat.

"I see," he said, "that we needn't talk any longer. I don't believe your story, and there's an end of it. The fact of your borrowing was utterly disgraceful; it shows me that the poor boy had fallen in a trap, instead of meeting with a friend who was likely to guide and improve him. You confess yourself a gambler, and I go away with the conviction that you are something yet worse."

Glazzard set his lips hard, but fell back into the lounging attitude.

"The matter doesn't end here," went on his accuser, "be sure of that! I shall light upon evidence sooner or later. Do you know, sir, that Harry had a sister, and that she earns her own living by giving lessons? You have robbed her—think it over at your leisure. Why, less than a fortnight after that day you and he spent together—the 1st of June—the lad lay dying; yet you could deliberately plan to rob him. Your denial is utterly vain; I would pledge my life on the charge! I read guilt in your face when I entered—you were afraid of me, Mr. Glazzard! I understand now why you never came to see the lad on his death-bed, though he sent for you—and of course I know why he was anxious to speak to you. Oh, you have plenty of plausible excuses, but they are lies! You felt pretty sure, I dare say, that the lad would not betray you; you knew his fine sense of honour; you calculated upon it. All your conduct is of a piece!"

Glazzard rose.

"Mr. Charnock, please to leave me.—I oughtn't to have borrowed that money; but having paid it back, I can't submit to any more of your abuse. My patience has its limits."

"I am no brawler," replied the other, "and I can do no good by talking to you. But if ever I come across any of your acquaintances, they shall know, very plainly, what opinion I have of you. Prosecute me for slander, Mr. Glazzard, if you dare—I desire nothing better!"

And Mr. Charnock went hurriedly from the room.

For several minutes Glazzard kept the same attitude, his eyes fixed on the floor, one hand behind his back, the other thrust into his waistcoat. Then he uttered an inarticulate exclamation, and walked with hurried, jerky step across the room; his facial muscles quivered ceaselessly, distorting the features into all manner of grotesque and ugly expressions. Again the harsh sound escaped him, and again he changed his place as though impelled by a sudden pain. It was a long time before he

took a seat; on doing so, he threw up his feet, and rested them against the side of the fireplace. His hands were thrust into his trouser-pockets, and his head fell back, so that he stared at the ceiling. At one moment he gave out a short mocking laugh, but no look of mirth followed the explosion. Little by little he grew motionless, and sat with closed eyes.

From the walls about him looked down many a sweet and noble countenance, such as should have made the room a temple of serenity. Nowhere was there a token of vulgar sensualism; the actress, the ballet-nymph had no place among these chosen gems of art. On the dwarf book-cases were none but works of pure inspiration, the best of old and new, the kings of intellect and their gentlest courtiers. Fifteen years had gone to the adorning of this sanctuary; of money, no great sum, for Glazzard had never commanded more than his younger-brother's portion of a yearly five hundred pounds, and all his tastes were far from being represented in the retreat where he spent his hours of highest enjoyment and endeavour. Of late he had been beset by embarrassments which a man of his stamp could ill endure: depreciation of investments, need of sordid calculation, humiliating encounters. To-day he tasted the very dregs of ignoble anguish, and it seemed to him that he should never again look with delight upon a picture, or feast his soul with music, or care to open a book.

A knock at the door aroused him. It was a civil-tongued serving-woman who came to ask if he purposed having luncheon at home to-day. No; he was on the point of going forth.

Big Ben was striking twelve. At a quarter-past, Glazzard took a cab which conveyed him to one of the Inns of Court. He ascended stairs, and reached a door on which was inscribed the name of Mr. Stark, Solicitor. An office-boy at once admitted him to the innermost room, where he was greeted with much friendliness by a short, stout man, with gleaming visage, full lips, chubby hands.

"Well, what is it now?" inquired the visitor, who had been summoned hither by a note that morning.

Mr. Stark, with an air of solemnity not wholly jocose, took his friend's arm and led him to a corner of the room, where, resting against a chair-back, was a small ill-framed oil painting.

"What have you to say to that?"

"The ugliest thing I've seen for a long time."

"But—but—" the solicitor stammered, with indignant eagerness—"but do know whose it is?"

The picture represented a bit of country road, with a dung-heap, a duck-pond, a pig asleep, and some barn-door fowls.

"I know whose you *think* it is," replied Glazzard, coldly. His face still had an unhealthy pallor, and his eyes looked as if they had but just opened after the oppression of nightmare. "But it isn't."

"Come, come, Glazzard! you are too dictatorial, my boy."

Mr. Stark kept turning a heavy ring upon his finger, showing in face and tone that the connoisseur's dogmatism troubled him more than he wished to have it thought.

"Winterbottom warrants it," he added, with a triumphant jerk of his plump body.

"Then Winterbottom is either cheating or cheated. That is no Morland; take my word for it. Was that all you wanted me for?"

Mr. Stark's good-nature was severely tried. Mental suffering had made Glazzard worse than impolite; his familiar tone of authority on questions of art had become too frankly contemptuous.

"You're out of sorts this morning," conjectured his legal friend. "Let Morland be for the present. I had another reason for asking you to call, but don't stay unless you like."

Glazzard looked round the office.

"Well?" he asked, more gently.

"Quarrier tells me you are going down to Polterham. Any special reason?"

"Yes. But I can't talk about it."

"I was down there myself last Sunday. I talked politics with the local wiseacres, and—do you know, it has made me think of you ever since?"

"How so?"

Mr. Stark consulted his watch.

"I'm at leisure for just nineteen minutes. If you care to sit down, I have an idea I should like to put before you."

The visitor seated himself and crossed his legs. His countenance gave small promise of attention.

"You know," resumed Mr. Stark, leaning forward and twiddling his thumbs, "that they're hoping to get rid of Welwyn-Baker at the next election?"

"What of that?"

"Toby Liversedge talks of coming forward—but *that* won't do."

"Probably not."

The solicitor bent still more and tapped his friend's knee.

"Glazzard, here is your moment. Here is your chance of getting what you want. Liversedge is reluctant to stand; I know that for certain. To a more promising man he'll yield with pleasure.—St! st! listen to me!—you are that man. Go down; see Toby; see the wiseacres and wire-pullers; get your name in vogue! It's cut out for you. Act now, or never again pretend that you want a chance."

A smile of disdain settled upon Glazzard's lips, but his eyes had lost their vacancy.

"On the Radical side?" he asked, mockingly. "For Manchester and Brummagem?"

"For Parliament, my dear boy! For Westminster, St. Stephen's, distinction, a career! I should perhaps have thought of your taking Welwyn-Baker's place, but there are many reasons against it. You would lose the support of your brother and all his friends. Above all, Polterham will go Liberal—mark my prediction!"

"I doubt it."

"I haven't time to give you all my reasons. Dine with me this evening, will you?"

"Can't. Engaged to Quarrier."

"All right!" said the latter. "To-morrow, then?"

"Yes, I will dine to-morrow."

Mr. Stark jumped up.

"Think of it. I can't talk longer now; there's the voice of a client I'm expecting. Eight sharp tomorrow!"

Glazzard took his leave.

CHAPTER III

Like so many other gentlemen whose function in the world remains indefinite, chiefly because of the patrimony they have inherited, Denzil Quarrier had eaten his dinners, and been called to the Bar; he went so far in specification as to style himself Equity barrister. But the Courts had never heard his voice. Having begun the studies, he carried them through just for consistency, but long before bowing to the Benchers of his Inn he foresaw that nothing practical would come of it. This was his second futile attempt to class himself with a recognized order of society. Nay, strictly speaking, the third. The close of his thirteenth year had seen him a pupil at Polterham Grammar School; not an unpromising pupil by any means, but with a turn for insubordination, much disposed to pursue with zeal anything save the tasks that were set him. Inspired by Cooper and Captain Marryat, he came to the conclusion that his destiny was the Navy, and stuck so firmly to it that his father, who happened to have a friend on the Board of Admiralty, procured him a nomination, and speedily saw the boy a cadet on the "Britannia." Denzil wore Her Majesty's uniform for some five years; then he tired of the service and went back to Polterham to reconsider his bent and aptitudes.

His father no longer dwelt in the old home, but had recently gone over to Norway, where he pursued his calling of timber-merchant. Denzil's uncle—Samuel Quarrier—busied in establishing a sugar-refinery in his native town, received the young man with amiable welcome, and entertained him for half a year. The ex-seaman then resolved to join his parents abroad, as a good way of looking about him. He found his mother on her death-bed. In consequence of her decease, Denzil became possessed of means amply sufficient for a bachelor. As far as ever from really knowing what he desired to be at, he began to make a show of interesting himself in timber. Perhaps, after all, commerce was his *forte*. This, then, might be called a second endeavour to establish himself.

Mr. Quarrier laughed at the idea, and would not take it seriously. And of course was in the right, for Denzil, on pretence of studying forestry, began to ramble about Scandinavia like a gentleman at large. Here, however, he did ultimately hit on a pursuit into which he could throw himself with decided energy. The old Norsemen laid their spell upon him; he was bitten with a zeal for saga-hunting, studied vigorously the Northern tongues, went off to Iceland, returned to rummage in the libraries of Copenhagen, began to translate the Heimskringla, planned a History of the Vikings. Emphatically, this kind of thing suited him. No one was less likely to turn out a bookworm, yet in the study of Norse literature he found that combination of mental and muscular interests which was perchance what he had been seeking.

But his father was dissatisfied; a very practical man, he saw in this odd enthusiasm a mere waste of time. Denzil's secession from the Navy had sorely disappointed him; constantly he uttered his wish that the young man should attach himself to some vocation that became a gentleman. Denzil, a little weary for the time of his Sea-Kings, at length consented to go to London and enter himself as a student of law. Perhaps his father was right. "Yes, I need discipline—intellectual and moral. I am beginning to perceive my defects. There's something in me not quite civilized. I'll go in for the law."

Yet Scandinavia had not seen the last of him. He was backwards and forwards pretty frequently across the North Sea. He kept up a correspondence with learned Swedes, Norwegians, Danes, and men of Iceland; when they came to England he entertained them with hearty hospitality, and searched with them at the British Museum. These gentlemen liked him, though they felt occasionally that he was wont to lay down the law when the attitude of a disciple would rather have become him.

He had rooms in Clement's Inn, retaining them even when his abode, strictly speaking, was at the little house by Clapham Common. To that house no one was invited. Old Mr. Quarrier knew not of its existence; neither did Mr. Sam Quarrier of Polterham, nor any other of Denzil's kinsfolk. The first person to whom Denzil revealed that feature of his life was Eustace Glazzard—a discreet, upright friend, the very man to entrust with such a secret.

It was now early in the autumn of 1879. Six months ago Denzil had lost his father, who died suddenly on a journey from Christiania up the country, leaving the barrister in London a substantial fortune.

This change of circumstances had in no way outwardly affected Denzil's life. As before, he spent a good deal of his time in the rooms at Clement's Inn, and cultivated domesticity at Clapham. He was again working in earnest at his History of the Vikings. Something would at last come of it; a heap of manuscript attested his solid progress.

To-day he had come to town only for an hour or two. Glazzard was to call at half-past six, and they would go together to dine with Lilian. In his report to her, Quarrier had spoken nothing less than truth. "The lady with whom you chanced to see me the other day was my wife. I have been married for a year and a half—a strictly private matter. Be so good as to respect my confidence." That was all Glazzard had learnt; sufficient to excite no little curiosity in the connoisseur.

Denzil's chambers had a marked characteristic; they were full of objects and pictures which declared his love of Northern lands and seas. At work he sat in the midst of a little museum. To the bear, the elk, the seal, he was indebted for comforts and ornaments; on his shelves were quaint collections of crockery; coins of historical value displayed themselves in cases on the walls; shoes and garments of outlandish fashion lay here and there. Probably few private libraries in England could boast such an array of Scandinavian literature as was here exhibited. As a matter of course the rooms had accumulated even more dirt than one expects in a bachelor's retreat; they were redolent of the fume of many pipes.

When Glazzard tapped at the inner door and entered, his friend, who sat at the writing-table in evening costume, threw up his arms, stretched himself, and yawned noisily.

"Working at your book?" asked the other.

"No; letters. I don't care for the Sea-Kings just now. They're rather remote old dogs, after all, you know."

"Distinctly, I should say."

"A queer thing, on the whole, that I can stick so to them. But I like their spirit. You're not a pugnacious fellow, I think, Glazzard?"

"No, I think not."

"But I am, you know. I mean it literally. Every now and then I feel I should like to thrash some one. I read in the paper this morning of some son of a"–(Denzil's language occasionally reminded one that he had been a sailor) "who had cheated a lot of poor servant-girls out of their savings. My fists itched to be at that lubber! There's a good deal to be said for the fighting instinct in man, you know."

"So thinks 'Arry of the music-halls."

"Well, we have heard before of an ass opening its mouth to prophesy. I tell you what: on my way here this afternoon I passed the office of some journal or other in the Strand, where they're exhibiting a copy of their paper returned to them by a subscriber in Russia. Two columns are completely obliterated with the censor's lamp-black,—that's how it reaches the subscriber's hands. As I stood looking at that, my blood rose to boiling-point! I could have hurrah'd for war with Russia on that one account alone. That contemptible idiot of a Czar, sitting there on his ant-hill throne, and bidding Time stand still!"

He laughed long and loud in scornful wrath.

"The Czar can't help it," remarked Glazzard, smiling calmly, "and perhaps knows nothing about it. The man is a slave of slaves."

"The more contemptible and criminal, then!" roared Denzil. "If a man in his position can't rule, he should be kicked out of the back-door of his palace. I have no objection to an autocrat; I think most countries need one. I should make a good autocrat myself—a benevolent despot."

"We live in stirring times," said the other, with a fine curl of the lips. "Who knows what destiny has in store for you?"

Quarrier burst into good-natured merriment, and thereupon made ready to set forth.

When they reached the house by Clapham Common, Denzil opened the door with his latch-key, talked loud whilst he was removing his overcoat, and then led the way into the sitting-room. Lilian was there; she rose and laid down a book; her smile of welcome did not conceal the extreme nervousness from which she was suffering. Quarrier's genial contempt of ceremony, as he performed the introduction, allowed it to be seen that he too experienced some constraint. But the guest bore himself with perfect grace and decorum. Though not a fluent talker, he fell at once into a strain of agreeable chat on subjects which seemed likely to be of interest; his success was soon manifest in the change of Lilian's countenance. Denzil, attentive to both, grew more genuinely at ease. When Lilian caught his eye, he smiled at her with warmth of approving kindness. It must have been a fastidious man who felt dissatisfied with the way in which the young hostess discharged her duties; timidity led her into no *gaucherie*, but was rather an added charm among the many with which nature had endowed her. Speech and manner, though they had nothing of the conventional adornment that is gathered in London drawing-rooms, were those of gentle breeding and bright intelligence; her education seemed better than is looked for among ladies in general. Glazzard perceived that she had read diligently, and with scope beyond that of the circulating library; the book with which she had been engaged when they entered was a Danish novel.

"Do you also look for salvation to the Scandinavians?" he asked.

"I read the languages—the modern. They have a very interesting literature of to-day; the old battle-stories don't appeal to me quite so much as they do to Denzil."

"You ought to know this fellow Jacobsen," said Quarrier, taking up the novel. "'Marie Grubbe' doesn't sound a very aesthetic title, but the book is quite in your line—a wonderfully delicate bit of work."

"Don't imagine, Mrs. Quarrier," pleaded Glazzard, "that I am what is called an aesthete. The thing is an abomination to me."

"Oh, you go tolerably far in that direction!" cried Denzil, laughing. "True, you don't let your hair grow, and in general make an ass of yourself; but there's a good deal of preciosity about you, you know."

Seeing that Mr. Glazzard's crown showed an incipient baldness, the allusion to his hair was perhaps unfortunate. Lilian fancied that her guest betrayed a slight annoyance; she at once interposed with a remark that led away from such dangerous ground. It seemed to her (she had already received the impression from Quarrier's talk of the evening before) that Denzil behaved to his friend with an air of bantering superiority which it was not easy to account for. Mr. Glazzard, so far as she could yet judge, was by no means the kind of man to be dealt with in this tone; she thought him rather disposed to pride than to an excess of humility, and saw in his face an occasional melancholy which inspired her with interest and respect.

A female servant (the vacancy made by Lilian's self-denying kindness had been hastily supplied) appeared with summons to dinner. Mr. Glazzard offered an arm to his hostess, and Quarrier followed with a look of smiling pleasure.

Hospitality had been duly cared for. Not at all inclined to the simple fare which Denzil chose to believe would suffice for him, Glazzard found more satisfaction in the meal than he had anticipated. If Mrs. Quarrier were responsible for the *menu* (he doubted it), she revealed yet another virtue. The mysterious circumstances of this household puzzled him more and more; occasionally he forgot to speak, or to listen, in the intensity of his preoccupation; and at such moments his countenance darkened.

On the whole, however, he seemed in better spirits than of wont. Quarrier was in the habit of seeing him perhaps once a month, and it was long since he had heard the connoisseur discourse so freely, so unconcernedly. As soon as they were seated at table, Denzil began to talk of politics.

"If my brother-in-law really stands for Polterham," he exclaimed, "we must set you canvassing among the mill-hands, Glazzard!"

"H'm!—not impossible."

"As much as to say," remarked the other to Lilian, "that he would see them all consumed in furnaces before he stretched forth a hand to save them."

"I know very well how to understand Denzil's exaggerations," said Lilian, with a smile to her guest.

"He thinks," was Glazzard's reply, "that I am something worse than a high Tory. It's quite a mistake, and I don't know how his belief originated."

"My dear fellow, you are so naturally a Tory that you never troubled to think to what party you belong. And I can understand you well enough; I have leanings that way myself. Still, when I get down to Polterham I shall call myself a Radical. What sensible man swears by a party? There's more foolery and dishonesty than enough on both sides, when you come to party quarrelling; but as for the broad principles concerned, why, Radicalism of course means justice. I put it in this way: If *I* were a poor devil, half starved and overworked, I should be a savage Radical; so I'll go in for helping the poor devils."

"You don't always act on that principle, Denzil," said Lilian, with a rallying smile. "Not, for instance, when beggars are concerned."

"Beggars! Would you have me support trading impostors? As for the genuine cases—why, if I found myself penniless in the streets, I would make such a row that all the country should hear of it! Do you think I would go whining to individuals? If I hadn't food, it would be the duty of society to provide me with it—and I would take good care that I *was* provided; whether in workhouse or gaol wouldn't matter much. At all events, the business should be managed with the maximum of noise."

He emptied his wine-glass, and went on in the same vigorous tone.

"We know very well that there are no such things as natural rights. Nature gives no rights; she will produce an infinite number of creatures only to torture and eventually destroy them. But civilization is at war with nature, and as civilized beings we *have* rights. Every man is justified in claiming food and shelter and repose. As things are, many thousands of people in every English county either lack these necessaries altogether, or get them only in return for the accursed badge of pauperdom. I, for one, am against this state of things, and I sympathize with the men who think that nothing can go right until the fundamental injustice is done away with."

Glazzard listened with an inscrutable smile, content to throw in a word of acquiescence from time to time. But when the necessity of appeasing his robust appetite held Quarrier silent for a few minutes, the guest turned to Lilian and asked her if she made a study of political questions.

"I have been trying to follow them lately," she replied, with simple directness.

"Do you feel it a grievance that you have no vote and no chance of representing a borough?"

"No, I really don't."

"I defy any one to find a dozen women who sincerely do," broke in Denzil. "That's all humbug! Such twaddle only serves to obscure the great questions at issue. What we have to do is to clear away the obvious lies and superstitions that hold a great part of the people in a degrading bondage. Our need is of statesmen who are bold enough and strong enough to cast off the restraints of party, of imbecile fears, of words that answer to no reality, and legislate with honest zeal for the general good. How many men are there in Parliament who represent anything more respectable than the interest of a trade, or a faction, or their own bloated person?"

"This would rouse the echoes in an East-end club," interposed Glazzard, with an air of good-humoured jesting.

"The difference is, my dear fellow, that it is given as an honest opinion in a private dining-room. There's Welwyn-Baker now—thick-headed old jackass!—what right has *he* to be sitting in a national assembly? Call himself what he may, it's clearly our business to get rid of *him*. There's something

infuriating in the thought that such a man can give his hee-haw for or against a proposal that concerns the nation. His mere existence is a lie!"

"He has hardly progressed with the times," assented Glazzard.

Lilian was listening so attentively that she forgot her dinner.

"I didn't think you cared so much about politics," she remarked, gravely.

"Oh, it comes out now and then. I suppose Glazzard's aesthetic neutrality stirs me up."

"I am neither aesthetic nor neutral," remarked the guest, as if casually.

Denzil laughed.

Lilian, after waiting for a further declaration from Glazzard, which did not come, said, in her soft tones:

"You express yourself so vehemently, Denzil."

"Why not? These are obvious truths. Of course I could speak just as strongly on the Conservative side with regard to many things. I can't say that I have much faith in the capacity or honesty of the mass of Radical voters. If I found myself at one of the clubs of which Glazzard speaks, I should very likely get hooted down as an insolent aristocrat. I don't go in for crazy extremes. There'll never be a Utopia, and it's only a form of lying to set such ideals before the multitude. I believe in the distinction of classes; the only class I would altogether abolish is that of the hungry and the ragged. So long as nature doles out the gift of brains in different proportions, there must exist social subordination. The true Radical is the man who wishes so to order things that no one will be urged by misery to try and get out of the class he is born in."

Glazzard agreed that this was a good way of putting it, and thereupon broached a subject so totally different that politics were finally laid aside.

When Lilian rose and withdrew, the friends remained for several minutes in silence. They lighted cigarettes, and contemplatively watched the smoke. Of a sudden, Quarrier bent forward upon the table.

"You shall have the explanation of this some day," he said, in a low friendly voice, his eyes lighting with a gleam of heartfelt confidence.

"Thanks!" murmured the other.

"Tell me—does she impress you favourably?"

"Very. I am disposed to think highly of her."

Denzil held out his hand, and pressed the one which Glazzard offered in return.

"You cannot think too highly—cannot possibly! She has a remarkable character. For one thing, I never knew a girl with such strong sympathies—so large-hearted and compassionate. You heard her remark about the beggars; if she had her own way, she would support a colony of pensioners. Let the sentimentalists say what they like, that isn't a common weakness in women, you know. Her imagination is painfully active; I'm afraid it causes her a great deal of misery. The other day I found her in tears, and what do you think was the reason?—she had been reading in some history about a poor fellow who was persecuted for his religion in Charles the First's time—some dissenter who got into the grip of Laud, was imprisoned, and then brought to destitution by being forbidden to exercise each calling that he took to in hope of earning bread. The end was, he went mad and died. Lilian was crying over the story; it made her wretched for a whole day."

"Rather morbid, that, I'm afraid."

"I don't know; most of us would be better for a little of such morbidness. You mustn't suppose that fiction would have the same effect on her—not at all. That poor devil (his name, I remember, was Workman) was really and truly hounded to insanity and the grave, and she saw the thing in all its dreadful details. I would rather she had got into a rage about it, as I should—but that isn't her nature."

"Let us hope she could rejoice when Laud was laid by the heels."

"I fear not. I'm afraid she would forget, and make excuses for the blackguard."

Glazzard smiled at the ceiling, and smoked silently. Turning his eyes at length, and seeing Quarrier in a brown study, he contemplated the honest face, then asked:

"How old is she?"

"Just one-and-twenty."

"I should have thought younger."

Nothing more was said of Lilian, and very soon they went to the room where she awaited them.

"I know you are a musician, Mr. Glazzard," said Lilian before long. "Will you let me have the pleasure of hearing you play something?"

"Some enemy hath done this," the guest made reply, looking towards Denzil.

But without further protest he went to the piano and played two or three short pieces. Any one with more technical knowledge than the hearers would have perceived that he was doing his best. As it was, Lilian frequently turned to Denzil with a look of intense delight.

"Glazzard," exclaimed his friend at length, "it puzzles me how such a lazy fellow as you are has managed to do so much in so many directions."

The musician laughed carelessly, and, not deigning any other reply, went to talk with his hostess.

CHAPTER IV

The Polterham Literary Institute was a "hot-bed of Radicalism." For the last year or two this had been generally understood. Originating in the editorial columns of the *Polterham Mercury*, the remark was now a commonplace on the lips of good Conservatives, and the liberals themselves were not unwilling to smile an admission of its truth. At the founding of the Institute no such thing was foreseen; but in 1859 Polterham was hardly conscious of the stirrings of that new life which, in the course of twenty years, was to transform the town. In those days a traveller descending the slope of the Banwell Hills sought out the slim spire of Polterham parish church amid a tract of woodland, mead and tillage; now the site of the thriving little borough was but too distinctly marked by trails of smoke from several gaunt chimneys—that of Messrs. Dimes & Nevison's blanket-factory, that of Quarrier & Son's sugar-refinery, and, higher still (said, indeed, to be one of the tallest chimneys in England), that of Thomas & Liversedge's soap-works. With the character of Polterham itself, the Literary Institute had suffered a noteworthy change. Ostensibly it remained non-political: a library, reading-room and lecture-hall, for the benefit of all the townsfolk; but by a subtle process the executive authority had passed into the hands of new men with new ideas. A mere enumeration of the committee sufficed to frighten away all who held by Church, State, and Mr. Welwyn-Baker: the Institute was no longer an Institute, but a "hot-bed."

How could respectable people make use of a library which admitted works of irreligious and immoral tendency? It was an undoubted fact (the *Mercury* made it known) that of late there had been added to the catalogue not only the "Essays of David Hume" and that notorious book Buckle's "History of Civilization," but even a large collection of the writings of George Sand and Balzac —these latter in the original tongue; for who, indeed, would ever venture to publish an English translation? As for the reading-room, was it not characterization enough to state that two Sunday newspapers, reeking fresh from Fleet Street, regularly appeared on the tables? What possibility of perusing the *Standard* or the *Spectator* in such an atmosphere? It was clear that the supporters of law and decency must bestir themselves to establish a new Society. Mr. Mumbray, long prominent in the municipal and political life of the town, had already made the generous offer of a large house at a low rental—one of the ancient buildings which had been spoilt for family residence by the erection of a mill close by. The revered Member for the borough was willing to start the new library with a gift of one hundred volumes of "sterling literature." With dissolution of Parliament in view, not a day should be lost in establishing this centre of intellectual life for right-thinking inhabitants. It was a strange thing, a very strange thing indeed, that interlopers should have been permitted to oust the wealth and reputability of Polterham from an Institute which ought to have been one of the bulwarks of Conservatism. Laxity in the original constitution, and a spirit of supine confidence, had led to this sad result. It seemed impossible that Polterham could ever fall from its honourable position among the Conservative strongholds of the country; but the times were corrupt, a revolutionary miasma was spreading to every corner of the land. Polterham must no longer repose in the security of conscious virtue, for if it *did* happen that, at the coming election, the unprincipled multitude even came near to achieving a triumph, oh what a fall were there!

Thus spoke the *Mercury*. And in the same week Mr. Mumbray's vacant house was secured by a provisional committee on behalf of the Polterham Constitutional Literary Society.

The fine old crusted party had some reason for their alarm. Since Polterham was a borough it had returned a Tory Member as a matter of course. Political organization was quite unknown to the supporters of Mr. Welwyn-Baker; such trouble had never seemed necessary. Through the anxious year of 1868 Mr. Welwyn-Baker sat firm as a rock; an endeavour to unseat him ended amid contemptuous laughter. In 1874 the high-tide of Toryism caused only a slight increase of congratulatory gurgling in the Polterham backwater; the triumphant party hardly cared to notice that a Liberal candidate had

scored an unprecedented proportion of votes. Welwyn-Baker sat on, stolidly oblivious of the change that was affecting his constituency, denying indeed the possibility of mutation in human things. Yet even now the Literary Institute was passing into the hands of people who aimed at making it something more than a place where retired tradesmen could play draughts and doze over *Good Words*; already had offensive volumes found harbourage on the shelves, and revolutionary periodicals been introduced into the reading-room. From time to time the *Mercury* uttered a note of warning, of protest, but with no echo from the respectable middle-class abodes where Polterham Conservatism dozed in self-satisfaction. It needed another five years of Liberal activity throughout the borough to awaken the good people whose influence had seemed unassailable, and to set them uttering sleepy snorts of indignation But the *Mercury* had a new editor, a man who was determined to gain journalistic credit by making a good fight in a desperate cause. Mr. Mumbray, who held the post of Mayor, had at length learnt that even in municipal matters the old order was threatened; on the Town Council were several men who gave a great deal of trouble, and who openly boasted that in a very short time all the affairs of the town would be managed by members of the Progressive party. If so, farewell public morality! farewell religion!

The reading-room of the Literary Institute heard many an animated conversation among the zealous partisans who hoped great things from the approaching contest. The talkers were not men of recognized standing, the manufacturers and landowners whose influence was of most importance —for these personages were seldom seen at the Institute; but certain "small" people, fidgety, or effervescent, or enthusiastic, eager to hear their own voices raised in declamation, and to get spoken of in the town as representatives of public opinion. Such a group had gathered early one afternoon in this month of October. The hour was unusual, for between one o'clock and four the reading-room was generally abandoned to a few very quiet, somnolent persons; but to-day an exciting piece of news had got about in Polterham, and two or three ardent politicians hastened from their dinner-tables to discuss the situation with Mr. Wykes, secretary of the Institute, or any one else who might present himself. It was reported that Mr. Welwyn-Baker had had a seizure of some kind, and that he lay in a dangerous state at his house just outside the town.

"It's perfectly true," affirmed Mr. Wykes. "I saw Dr. Staple on his way there. He'll never survive it. We shall have a bye-election—the very last thing desirable."

The Secretary was a man of intelligent features but painfully distorted body; his right leg, permanently bent double, was supported at the knee by metal mechanism, and his arm on the opposite side ended at the elbow. None the less he moved with much activity, gesticulated frequently with the normal arm, and seemed always to be in excellent spirits. He was a Cambridge graduate, but had never been able to make much use of his education and abilities; having reached middle age, and finding himself without resources, he was glad to accept this post at the Institute.

About him stood three Polterham worthies: Mr. Chown, draper, a member of the Corporation; Mr. Vawdrey, coal-merchant; and Mr. Murgatroyd, dentist. The draper—tall, bearded, with goggle eyes and prominent cheek-bones—had just rushed in; as soon as Mr. Wykes had spoken, he exclaimed in a hard, positive voice:

"It's nothing! it's nothing! I have it on the best assurance that it was only a fall over a footstool. Muscles strained—a bruise or two—nothing worse."

"I'm very glad to hear it, on every ground," said Wykes. "But even if that is quite correct, it'll be a warning. A fall at that age generally dates the beginning of decrepitude. He won't come forward again—I'm convinced he won't."

"Let us hope they'll be foolish enough to set up his son," remarked Mr. Vawdrey, in deep tones, which harmonized with his broad, stunted body and lowering visage. "It'll be their ruin."

Mr. Wykes agreed.

"The waverers can hardly doubt—between Tobias Liversedge and Hugh Welwyn-Baker."

"Bear in mind," rang Mr. Chown's brassy voice, "that it's by no means certain Liversedge is to be our candidate. I am in a position to assure you that many of our most reliable men are not at all satisfied with that choice—not at all satisfied. I don't mind going so far as to declare that I share this dissatisfaction."

"Really," put in Mr. Murgatroyd, the dentist, "it's rather late in the day, Mr. Chown"–

His accents of studious moderation were interrupted by a shout from the dogmatic draper.

"Late? late? I consider that nothing whatever has been decided. I protest—I protest, most emphatically, against any attempt to force a candidate on the advanced section of the Liberal party! I will even go so far as to say—purely on my own responsibility—that the advanced section of the Liberal party is the *essence* of the Liberal party, and must be recognized as such, if we are to fight this campaign in union. I personally—I speak for myself—do *not* feel prepared to vote for Tobias Liversedge. I say it boldly, caring not who may report my words. I compromise no man, and no body of men; but my view is that, if we are to win the next election against the Tory candidate, it must be with the help, and in the name, of a *Radical* candidate!"

At the close of each period Mr. Chown raised his hand and made it vibrate in the air, his head vibrating in company therewith. His eyes glared, and his beard wagged up and down.

"Speaking as an individual," replied Mr. Murgatroyd, who, among other signs of nervousness, had the habit of constantly pulling down his waistcoat, "I can't say that I should regret to be called upon to vote for a really advanced man. But I may say—I really must say—and I think Mr. Wykes will support me—I think Mr. Vawdrey will bear me out—that it wouldn't be easy to find a candidate who would unite all suffrages in the way that Mr. Liversedge does. We have to remember"–

"Well," broke in the coal-merchant, with his muffled bass, "if any one cares to know what I think, I should say that we want a local man, a popular man, and a Christian man. I don't know whom you would set up in preference to Liversedge; but Liversedge suits me well enough. If the Tories are going to put forward such a specimen as Hugh Welwyn-Baker, a gambler, a drinker, and a profligate, I don't know, I say, who would look better opposed to him than Toby Liversedge."

Mr. Chown could not restrain himself.

"I fail altogether to see what Christianity has to do with politics! Christianity is all very well, but where will you find it? Old Welwyn-Baker calls himself a Christian, and so does his son. And I suppose the Rev. Scatchard Vialls calls himself a Christian! Let us have done with this disgusting hypocrisy! I say with all deliberation—I affirm it—that Radicalism must break with religion that has become a sham! Radicalism is a religion in itself. We have no right—no right, I say—to impose any such test as Mr. Vawdrey insists upon!"

"I won't quarrel about names," returned Vawdrey, stolidly, "What I meant to say was that we must have a man of clean life, a moral man."

"And do you imply," cried Chown, "that such men are hard to find among Radicals?"

"I rather think they're hard to find anywhere nowadays."

Mr. Wykes had made a gesture requesting attention, and was about to speak, when a boy came up to him and held out a telegram.

"What's this?" murmured the Secretary, as he opened the envelope. "Well, well, how very annoying! Our lecturer of to-morrow evening can't possibly keep his engagement. No reason given; says he will write."

"Another blank evening!" exclaimed Chown. "This is most unsatisfactory, I must say."

"We must fill it up," replied the Secretary. "I have an idea; it connects with something I was on the point of saying." He looked round the room cautiously, but saw only a young lad bent over an illustrated paper. "There is some one," he continued, subduing his voice, "who might possibly be willing to stand if Mr. Liversedge isn't finally adopted as our candidate—some one who, in my opinion, would suit us very well indeed. I am thinking of young Mr. Quarrier, Liversedge's brother-in-law, Mr. Sam Quarrier's nephew."

"I can't say I know much for or against him," said the draper.

"A barrister, I believe?" questioned Murgatroyd.

"Yes, but not practising his profession. I happened to meet him in the train yesterday; he was coming to spend a few days with his relatives. It occurs to me that he's the man to give us a lecture to-morrow evening."

The others lent ear, and Mr. Wykes talked at some length of Mr. Denzil Quarrier, with whom he had a slight personal acquaintance dating from a year or two ago. He represented that the young man was of late become wealthy, that he was closely connected with people in high local esteem, that his views were those of a highly cultured Radical. Mr. Chown, distrustful regarding any proposition that did not originate with himself, meditated with some intensity. Mr. Vawdrey's face indicated nothing whatever. It was the dentist who put the first question.

"I should like to know," he said, in his usual voice of studied inoffensiveness, "whether Mr. Quarrier is disposed to support the Female Suffrage movement?"

"If he is," growled Mr. Vawdrey, with sudden emphasis, "he mustn't expect *my* vote and interest. We've seen enough in Polterham lately of the Female question."

"Let it wait! Let it wait!" came from the draper. "The man," he glared at little Murgatroyd, "who divides his party on matters of detail, beyond the range of practical politics, is an enemy of popular progress. What *I* should desire to know is, whether Mr. Quarrier will go in heartily for Church Disestablishment? If not—well, I for my humble self must Decline to consider him a Radical at all."

"That, it seems to me," began the dentist, "is distinctly beyond"–

But politic Mr. Wykes interrupted the discussion.

"I shall go at once," he said, "and try to see Mr. Quarrier. A lecture to-morrow we must have, and I think he can be persuaded to help us. If so, we shall have an opportunity of seeing what figure he makes on the platform."

Mr. Vawdrey looked at his watch and hurried away without a word. The draper and the dentist were each reminded of the calls of business. In a minute or two the youth dozing over an illustrated paper had the room to himself.

CHAPTER V

For a characteristic scene of English life one could not do better than take Mr. Liversedge's dining-room when the family had assembled for the midday meal. Picture a long and lofty room, lighted by windows which opened upon a lawn and flower-garden, adorned with large oil paintings (cattle-pieces and portraits) in massive and, for the most part, tarnished frames, and furnished in the solidest of British styles—mahogany chairs and table, an immense sideboard, a white marble fireplace, and a chandelier hanging with ponderous menace above the gleaming expanse of table-cloth. Here were seated eleven persons: Mr. Liversedge and his wife, their seven children (four girls and three boys), Miss Pope the governess, and Mr. Denzil Quarrier; waited upon by two maid-servants, with ruddy cheeks, and in spotless attire. Odours of roast meat filled the air. There was a jolly sound of knife-and-fork play, of young voices laughing and chattering, of older ones in genial colloquy. A great fire blazed and crackled up the chimney. Without, a roaring wind stripped the autumnal leafage of the garden, and from time to time drenched the windows with volleys of rain.

Tobias Liversedge was a man of substance, but in domestic habits he followed the rule of the unpretentious middle-class. Breakfast at eight, dinner at one, tea at five, supper at nine—such was the order of the day that he had known in boyhood, and it suited him well enough now that he was at the head of a household. The fare was simple, but various and abundant; no dishes with foreign names, no drinks more luxurious than sherry and claret. If he entertained guests, they were people of his own kind, who thought more of the hearty welcome than of what was set before them. His children were neither cockered nor held in too strait a discipline; they learnt from their parents that laughter was better than sighing, that it was good to be generous, that they had superiors in the world as well as inferiors, that hard work was the saving grace, and a lie the accursed thing. This training seemed to agree with them, for one and all were pictures of health. Tom, the first-born, numbered fifteen years; Daisy, the latest arrival, had seen but three summers, yet she already occupied a high chair at the dinner-table, and conducted herself with much propriety. The two elder boys went to the Grammar School morning and afternoon; for the other children there was Miss Pope, with her smile of decorum, eyes of intelligence, and clear, decided voice.

Mrs. Liversedge was obviously Denzil Quarrier's sister; she had his eyes and his nose—not uncomely features. It did not appear that her seven children were robust at their mother's expense; she ate with undisguised appetite, laughed readily (just showing excellent teeth), and kept a shapely figure, clad with simple becomingness. Her age was about eight-and-thirty, that of her husband forty-five. This couple—if any in England—probably knew the meaning of happiness. Neither had experienced narrow circumstances, and the future could but confirm their security from sordid cares. Even if seven more children were added to their family, all would be brought up amid abundance, and sent forth into the world as well equipped for its struggles as the tenderest heart could desire. Father and mother were admirably matched; they knew each other perfectly, thought the same thoughts on all essential matters, exchanged the glances of an absolute and unshakeable confidence.

Seeing him thus at the end of his table, one would not have thought Mr. Liversedge a likely man to stand forth on political platforms and appeal to the populace of the borough for their electoral favour. He looked modest and reticent; his person was the reverse of commanding. A kind and thoughtful man, undoubtedly; but in his eye was no gleam of ambition, and it seemed doubtful whether he would care to trouble himself much about questions of public policy. Granted his position and origin, it was natural enough that he should take a stand on the Liberal side, but it could hardly be expected that he should come up to Mr. Chown's ideal of a Progressive leader.

He was talking lightly on the subject with his brother-in-law.

"I should have thought," he said, "that William Glazzard might have had views that way. He's a man with no ties and, I should say, too much leisure."

"Oh," exclaimed Mrs. Liversedge, "the idea of his getting up to make speeches! It always seems to me as if he found it a trouble even to talk. His brother would be far more likely, wouldn't he, Denzil?"

"What, Eustace Glazzard?" replied Quarrier. "He regards Parliament and everything connected with it with supreme contempt. Suggest the thing when he comes this evening, and watch his face."

"What is he doing?" Mr. Liversedge asked.

"Collecting pictures, playing the fiddle, gazing at sunflowers, and so on. He'll never do anything else."

"How contradictory you are in speaking about him!" said his sister. "One time you seem to admire and like him extremely, and another"–

"Why, so I do. A capital fellow! He's weak, that's all. I don't mean weak in the worst way, you know; a more honourable and trustworthy man doesn't live. But—well, he's rather womanish, I suppose."

Mrs. Liversedge laughed.

"Many thanks! It's always so pleasing to a woman to hear that comparison. Do you mean he reminds you of Mrs. Wade?"

The boy Tom, who had been attentive, broke into merriment.

"Uncle Denzil wouldn't dare to have said it in *her* presence!" he cried.

"Perhaps not," conceded Denzil, with a smile. "By-the-bye, is that wonderful person still in Polterham?"

"Oh yes!" Mrs. Liversedge replied. "She has been very prominent lately."

"How?"

The lady glanced at her husband, who said quietly, "We'll talk over it some other time."

But Tom was not to be repressed.

"Mother means that Revivalist business," he exclaimed. "Mrs. Wade went against it."

"My boy, no meddling with things of that kind," said his father, smiling, but firm. He turned to Denzil. "Has Glazzard exhibited anything lately?"

"No; he gave up his modelling, and he doesn't seem to paint much nowadays. The poor fellow has no object in life, that's the worst of it."

The meal was nearly at an end, and presently the two men found themselves alone at the table. Mr. Liversedge generally smoked a cigar before returning for an hour or two to the soap-works.

"Any more wine?" he asked. "Then come into my snuggery and let us chat."

They repaired to a room of very homely appearance. The furniture was old and ugly; the carpet seemed to have been beaten so often that it was growing threadbare by force of purification. There was a fair collection of books, none of very recent date, and on the walls several maps and prints. The most striking object was a great stuffed bird that stood in a glass-case before the window—a capercailzie shot by Quarrier long ago in Norway, and presented to his brother-in-law. Tobias settled himself in a chair, and kicked a coal from the bars of the grate.

"Tom is very strong against religious fanaticism," he said, laughing. "I have to pull him up now and then. I suppose you heard about the crazy goings-on down here in the summer?"

"Not I. Revivalist meetings?"

"The whole town was turned upside down. Such frenzy among the women I never witnessed. Three times a day they flocked in swarms to the Public Hall, and there screeched and wept and fainted, till it really looked as if some authority ought to interfere. If I had had my way, I would have drummed the preachers out of the town. Mary and Mrs. Wade and one or two others were about the only women who escaped the epidemic. Seriously, it led to a good deal of domestic misery. Poor Tomkins's wife drove him to such a pass by her scandalous neglect of the house, that one morning he locked her into her bedroom, and there he kept her on very plain diet for three days. We thought of getting up a meeting to render public thanks to Tomkins, and to give him some little testimonial."

Denzil uttered roars of laughter; the story was exactly of the kind that made appeal to his humorous instincts.

"Has the ferment subsided?" he asked.

"Tolerably well; leaving a good deal of froth and scum, however. The worst of it was that, in the very week when those makebates had departed, there came down on us a second plague, in the shape of Mrs. Hitchin, the apostle of—I don't quite know what, but she calls it Purity. Of course, you know her by repute. She, too, had the Public Hall, and gave addresses to which only women were admitted. I have a very strong opinion as to the tendency of those addresses, and if Rabelais had come to life among us just then—but never mind. The fact is, old Polterham got into a thoroughly unwholesome condition, and we're anything but right yet. Perhaps a little honest fighting between Liberal and Tory may help to clear the air.—Well, now, that brings me to what I really wish to talk about. To tell you the truth, I don't feel half satisfied with what I have done. My promise to stand, you know, was only conditional, and I think I must get out of it."

"Why?"

"Mary was rather tickled with the idea at first; naturally she had no objection to be Mrs. M.P., and she persuaded herself that I was just the man to represent Polterham. I felt rather less sure of it, and now I am getting pretty well convinced that I had better draw back before I make a fool of myself."

"What about your chances? Is there any hope of a majority?"

"That's more than I can tell you. The long-headed men, like your Uncle Sam (an unwilling witness) and Edward Coke, say that the day has come for the Liberals. I don't know, but I suspect that a really brisk and popular man might carry it against either of the Welwyn-Bakers. That fellow Hugh will never do—by the way, that might be the beginning of an election rhyme! He's too much of a blackguard, and nowadays, you know, even a Tory candidate must preserve the decencies of life."

Denzil mused, and muttered something indistinct.

"Now listen," pursued the speaker, shifting about in his chair. "What I want to say is this: why shouldn't *you* come forward?"

Quarrier pursed his lips, knit his brows, and grunted.

"I am very serious in thinking that you might be the best man we could find."

And Mr. Liversedge went on to exhibit his reasons at some length. As he listened, Denzil became restless, crossing and recrossing his legs, spreading his shoulders, smiling, frowning, coughing; and at length he jumped up.

"Look here, Toby!" he exclaimed, "is this a self-denying ordinance? have you and Molly put your heads together to do me what you think a good turn?"

"I haven't spoken to her, I assure you. I am sincere in saying that I don't wish to go through with it. And I should be right heartily glad to see you come out instead."

The face of the younger man worked with subdued excitement. There was a flush in his cheeks, and he breathed rapidly. The emotion that possessed him could not be altogether pleasurable, for at moments he cast his eyes about him with a pained, almost a desperate look. He walked up and down with clenched fist, occasionally digging himself in the side.

"Toby," he burst out at length, "let me think this over I can't possibly decide at once. The notion is absolutely new to me; I must roll it about, and examine it on all sides."

Mr. Liversedge cheerfully agreed, and, after a little more talk, he went his way to business, leaving Denzil alone in the snuggery. There sat the young man in deep but troubled meditation. He sat for nearly an hour. Then his sister came in.

"Denzil, you are wanted. Mr. Wykes wishes to see you. Shall I send him here?"

"Mr. Wykes! What about, I wonder? Yes, let him come."

A clumping was heard without, and the bright face of the Institute's Secretary, so strongly in contrast with his wretched body, presented itself in the doorway. Quarrier received him with a friendly consideration due rather to pity than to any particular interest in the man himself. He placed him in

a comfortable chair, and waited in attentive attitude for an explanation of the call. Mr. Wykes lost no time in making known his business; he told what had happened at the Institute, and respectfully begged for Mr. Quarrier's aid in averting disappointment on the next evening.

"I am sure, sir, that your appearance on our platform would give very general pleasure. I should have time to post announcements here and there. We should have a splendid hall."

"The deuce! But, Mr. Wykes, it is no such simple matter to prepare a lecture in four-and-twenty hours. What am I to talk about?"

"Any subject, sir, that would be of interest to a wide-awake audience. If I might suggest, there are your travels, for instance. And I understand that you are deeply conversant with the Northern literatures; I am sure something"–

"Pardon me. I hardly think I should care to go so far away for a theme."

The Secretary heard this with pleasure.

"All the better, Sir! Any subject of the day; nothing could be more acceptable. You probably know our position at the Institute. In practice, we are something like a Liberal Club. You have heard that the other party are going to start a Society of their own?"

"I have—a Society with an imbecile Dame." He pondered. "Suppose I were to talk about 'The Position of Woman in our Time'?"

"Capital, Mr. Quarrier! Couldn't be better, sir! Do permit me to announce it at once!"

"It's rather a ticklish responsibility I'm undertaking—but—very well, I will do my best, Mr. Wykes. Who is chairman?"

"Mr. William Glazzard, sir."

"Ho ho! All right; I'll turn up to time. Eight o'clock, I suppose? Evening dress, or not? Oh, of course, if it's usual; I didn't know your custom."

Mr. Wykes did not linger. Left alone again, Denzil walked about in excited mood. At length, with a wave of the arm which seemed to announce a resolution, he went to the drawing-room. His sister was reading there in solitude.

"Molly, I'm going to lecture at the Institute tomorrow, *vice* somebody or other who can't turn up. What subject, think you?"

"The Sagas, probably?"

"The Sagas be blowed! 'Woman's Place in our Time,' that's the title."

Mrs. Liversedge laughed, and showed astonishment.

"And what have you to say about her?"

"Wait and see!"

CHAPTER VI

At the distance of a mile and a half from Polterham lay an estate which had long borne the name of Highmead. Here had dwelt three successive generations of Glazzards. The present possessor, by name William, was, like his father and grandfather, simply a country gentleman, but, unlike those respectable ancestors, had seen a good deal of the world, and only settled down amid his acres when he was tired of wandering. His age at present was nearing fifty. When quite a young man, he had married rather rashly—a girl whose acquaintance he had made during a voyage. In a few years' time, he and his wife agreed to differ on a great many topics of moment, and consequently to live apart. Mrs. Glazzard died abroad. William, when the desire for retirement came upon him, was glad of the society of a son and a daughter in their early teens. But the lad died of consumption, and the girl, whose name was Ivy, for a long time seemed to be clinging to life with but doubtful tenure. She still lived, however, and kept her father's house.

Ivy Glazzard cared little for the pleasures of the world—knew, indeed, scarcely more about them than she had gathered from books. Her disposition was serious, inclined to a morbid melancholy; she spent much time over devotional literature, but very seldom was heard to speak of religion. Probably her father's avowed indifferentism imposed upon her a timid silence. When the Revivalist services were being held in Polterham, she visited the Hall and the churches with assiduity, and from that period dated her friendship with the daughter of Mr. Mumbray, Mayor of the town. Serena Mumbray was so uncomfortable at home that she engaged eagerly in any occupation which could excuse her absence for as many hours a day as possible. Prior to the outbreak of Revivalism no one had supposed her particularly pious, and, indeed, she had often suffered Mrs. Mumbray's rebukes for levity of speech and indifference to the conventional norm of feminine behaviour. Though her parents had always been prominent in Polterham society, she was ill-educated, and of late years had endeavoured, in a fitful, fretful way, to make amends to herself for this injustice. Disregarding paternal censure, she subscribed to the Literary Institute, and read at hap-hazard with little enough profit. Twenty-three years old, she was now doubly independent, for the will of a maiden aunt (a lady always on the worst of terms with Mr. and Mrs. Mumbray, and therefore glad to encourage Serena against them) had made her an heiress of no slight consideration. Young men of Polterham regarded her as the greatest prize within view, though none could flatter himself that he stood in any sensible degree of favour with her. There seemed no reason why Miss Mumbray should not marry, but it was certain that as yet she behaved disdainfully to all who approached her with the show of intention. She was not handsome, but had agreeable features. As though to prove her contempt of female vanity and vulgar display, she dressed plainly, often carelessly—a fact which of course served to emphasize her importance in the eyes of people who tried to seem richer than they were.

Miss Glazzard rarely came into the town, but Serena visited Highmead at least once a week. According to the state of the weather, the friends either sat talking in Ivy's room or rambled about the grounds, where many a pretty and sheltered spot was discoverable. At such times the master of the house seldom showed himself, and, on the whole, Highmead reminded one of a mansion left in the care of servants whilst the family are abroad. Miss Mumbray was surprised when, on her arrival one afternoon, she was conducted into the presence of three persons, who sat conversing in the large drawing-room. With Ivy and her father was a gentleman whose identity she could only guess; he proved to be Mr. Eustace Glazzard, her friend's uncle.

To the greetings with which she was received Serena responded formally. It happened that her attire was to-day even more careless than usual, for, the weather being wet and cold, she had just thrown a cloak over the frock in which she lounged at home, and driven out in a cab with the thought of stepping directly into Ivy's sanctum. So far from this, she found herself under the scrutiny of two well-dressed men, whose faces, however courteous, manifested the signature of a critical spirit. The

elder Mr. Glazzard was bald, wrinkled, and of aristocratic bearing; he wore gold-rimmed glasses, which accentuated the keenness of his gaze. The younger man, though altogether less formidable, had a smile which Miss Mumbray instinctively resented; he seemed to be regarding her with some special interest, and it was clear that her costume did not escape mental comment.

Ivy did her best to overcome the restraint of the situation, and for a quarter of an hour something like conversation was maintained, but, of a sudden, Miss Mumbray rose.

"We will go to my room," said Ivy, regarding her nervously.

"Thank you," was the reply, "I mustn't stay longer to-day."

"Oh, why not? But indeed you must come for a moment; I have something to show you."

Serena took leave of the gentlemen, and with show of reluctance suffered herself to be led to the familiar retreat.

"I'm afraid I have displeased you," Ivy addressed her, when the door was closed. "I ought to have asked your permission."

"It doesn't matter, dear—not a bit. But I wasn't quite in the humour for—for that kind of thing. I came here for quietness, as I always do."

"Do forgive me! I thought—to tell the truth, it was my uncle—I had spoken of you to him, and he said he should so much like to meet you."

"It really doesn't matter; but I look rather like the woman who comes to buy old dresses, don't I?"

Ivy laughed.

"Of course not!"

"And what if I do?" exclaimed the other, seating herself by the fire. "I don't know that I've any claim to look better than Mrs. Moss. I suppose she and I are about on a level in understanding and education, if the truth were told. Your uncle would see that, of course."

"Now, don't—don't!" pleaded Ivy, bending over the chair and stroking her friend's shoulder. "It's so wrong of you, dear. My father and Uncle Eustace are both quite capable of judging you rightly."

"What did you tell him about me—your uncle?" asked Serena, pettishly.

"That you were my friend, and that we read together"–

"Oh, of course! What else?"

Ivy faltered.

"I explained who you were."

"That I had a ridiculous name, and was the daughter of silly people!"

"Oh, it *is* unkind of you!"

"Well, and what else? I insist on knowing, Ivy."

"Indeed, I didn't say one word that you mightn't have heard yourself. I think you can believe me, dear?"

"To be sure I can. But then no doubt your father told him the rest, or has done by this time. There's no harm in that. I like people to know that I am independent. Well, now tell me about *him*. He isn't a great favourite of yours, is he?"

"No, not a great favourite." Ivy seemed always to weigh her words. "I don't know him very well. He has always lived in London, and I've never seen him more than once a year. I'm afraid he doesn't care much about the things that I prize most, but he is kind and very clever, I believe. Father always says he might have been a great artist if he had chosen."

"Then why didn't he choose?"

"I can't say. So many people seem to fall far short of what they might have been."

"Women do—what else can you expect? But men are free. I suppose he is rich?"

"No, not rich. He seems to have enough for his needs."

Serena indulged her thoughts.

"I felt I disliked him at first," she said, presently. "But he is improved. He can talk well, I should think. I suppose he is always in clever society?"

"I suppose so."

"And why doesn't he invite you to London, and take you to see people?"

"Oh, he knows me better than that!" replied Ivy, with a laugh.

Whilst the girls talked thus, Eustace Glazzard and his brother were also in confidential chat. They had gone to the library and made themselves comfortable with cigars—a cellaret and glasses standing within reach. The rooms at Highmead gave evidence of neglect. Guests were seldom entertained; the servants were few, and not well looked after.

"She has, I dare say, thirty thousand," William Glazzard was saying, with an air of indifference. "I suppose she'll marry some parson. Let us hope it's one of the fifty-pound curates."

"Deep in the old slough?"

"Hopelessly—or Ivy wouldn't be so thick with her."

When he had spoken, William turned with an expressive smile.

"Still, who knows? I rather like the girl. She has no humbug about her—no pretence, that's to say. You see how she dresses."

"A bad sign, I'm afraid."

"Well, no, not in this case, I think. Her home accounts for it. That old ass, Mumbray, and his wife make things pretty sour for her, as the Germans say; at least, I guess so."

"I don't dislike her appearance—intelligent at bottom, I should imagine."

There followed a long silence. Eustace broke it by asking softly:

"And how do things go with you?"

"The same as ever. Steadily down-hill I had better let the place before it gets into a thoroughly bad state. And you?"

His brother made no answer, but sat with bent head.

"You remember Stark," he said at length, "the lawyer? He wants me to stand for Polterham at the next election."

"You? In place of Welwyn-Baker?"

"No; as Liberal candidate; or Radical, if you like."

"You're joking, I suppose!"

"Where's the impossibility?"

Their eyes met.

"There's no absurdity," said William, "in your standing for Parliament; *au contraire*. But I can't imagine you on the Radical side. And I don't see the necessity of that. Welwyn-Baker is breaking up; they won't let him come forward again, even if he wishes. His son is disliked, and would have a very poor chance. If you cared to put yourself in touch with Mumbray and the rest of them—by love! I believe they would welcome you. I don't know of any one but the Welwyn-Bakers at all likely to stand."

"But," objected his brother, "what's the use of my standing for a party that is pretty sure to be beaten?"

"You think that's the case?"

Eustace repeated Mr. Stark's opinions, and what he had heard from Quarrier. It seemed to cost William an effort to fix his mind on the question; but at length he admitted that the contest would probably be a very close cue, even granting that the Conservatives secured a good candidate.

"That's as much as to say," observed his brother, "that the Liberals stand to win, as things are. Now, there seems to be no doubt that Liversedge would gladly withdraw in favour of a better man. What I want you to do is to set this thing in train for me. I am in earnest."

"You astonish me! I can't reconcile such an ambition with"–

"No, no; of course not." Glazzard spoke with unwonted animation. "You don't know what my life is and has been. Look I must do something to make my blood circulate, or I shall furnish a case for the coroner one of these mornings. I want excitement. I have taken up one thing after another, and gone just far enough to understand that there's no hope of reaching what I aimed at—superlative excellence; then the thing began to nauseate me. I'm like poor Jackson, the novelist, who groaned to me once that for fifteen years the reviewers had been describing his books as 'above the average.' In whatever I have undertaken the results were 'above the average,' and that's all. This is damned poor consolation for a man with a temperament like mine!"

His voice broke down. He had talked himself into a tremor, and the exhibition of feeling astonished his brother, who—as is so often the case between brothers—had never suspected what lay beneath the surface of Eustace's *dilettante* life.

"I can enter into that," said the elder, slowly. "But do you imagine that in politics you have found your real line?"

"No such thing. But it offers me a chance of *living* for a few years. I don't flatter myself that I could make a figure in the House of Commons; but I want to sit there, and be in the full current of existence. I had never dreamt of such a thing until Stark suggested it. But he's a shrewd fellow, and he has guessed my need."

"What about the financial matter?" asked William, after reflection.

"I see no insuperable difficulty. You, I understand, are in no position to help me?"

"Oh, I won't say that," interrupted the other. "A few hundreds will make no difference to me. I suppose you see your way for the ordinary expenses of life?"

"With care, yes. I've been throwing money away, but that shall stop; there'll be no need for it when my nerves are put in tone."

"Well, it strikes me in a comical light, but you must act as you think best. I'll go to work for you. It's a pity I stand so much apart, but I suppose my name is worth something. The Radicals have often tried to draw me into their camp, and of course it's taken for granted that I am rather for than against them. By-the-bye, what is the date? Ah! that's fortunate. To-morrow I am booked to take the chair at the Institute; a lecture—I don't know by whom, or about what. A good opportunity for setting things astir."

"Then you do take some part in town life?"

"Most exceptional thing. I must have refused to lecture and to chairmanize twenty times. But those fellows are persistent; they caught me in a weak moment a few days ago. I suppose you realize the kind of speechifying that would be expected of you? Are you prepared to blaze away against Beaconsfield, and all that sort of thing?"

"I'm not afraid. There are more sides to my character than you suppose."

Eustace spoke excitedly, and tossed off a glass of liqueur. His manner had become more youthful than of wont; his face showed more colour.

"The fact is," he went on, "if I talk politics at all, I can manage the Radical standpoint much more easily than the Tory. I have precious little sympathy with anything popular, that's true; but it's easier for me to adopt the heroic strain of popular leaders than to put my own sentiments into the language of squires and parsons. I should feel I was doing a baser thing if I talked vulgar Toryism than in roaring the democratic note. Do you understand?"

"I have an inkling of what you mean."

Eustace refilled the little glass.

"Of course," he went on, "my true life stands altogether outside popular contention. I am an artist, though only half-baked But I admit most heartily that our form of government is a good one —the most favourable that exists to individual freedom. We are ruled by the balance of two parties; neither could do without the other. This being the case, a man of my mind may conscientiously support either side. Nowadays neither is a foe to liberty; we know that party tall-talk means nothing

—mere playing to the gallery. If I throw whatever weight I represent into the Liberal scales, I am only helping, like every other Member of Parliament, to maintain the constitutional equilibrium. You see, this view is not even cynical; any one might proclaim it seriously."

"Yes; but don't do so in Polterham."

The other laughed, and at the same moment remembered how long it was since such an expression of mirth had escaped his lips.

"Well," he exclaimed, "I feel better to-day than for long enough. I've been going through a devilish bad time, I can tell you. To make things worse, some one has fixed an infernal accusation on me—an abominable calumny. I won't talk about it now, but it may be necessary some day."

"Calumny?—nothing that could be made use against you in public?"

"No danger of that, I think. I didn't mean to speak of it."

"You know that a man on the hustings must look out for mud?"

"Of course, of course!—How do you spend your afternoons? What shall we do?"

William threw away the end of a cigar, and stretched himself.

"I do very little but read," he answered. "A man gets the reading habit, just like the morphia habit, or anything else of that kind. I think my average is six novels a week: French, Russian, German, Italian. No English, unless I'm in need of an emetic. What else should I do? It's a way of watching contemporary life.—Would you like to go and talk with Ivy? Oh, I forgot that girl."

"You wouldn't care to ask some people to dinner one of these days—the right kind of people?"

"Yes, yes; we'll do that. I must warn you not to talk much about art, and above all not to play the piano. It would make a bad impression."

"All right. How shall I deal with Liversedge? I go there this evening, you remember."

"Sound him, if opportunity offers. No hurry, you know. We have probably several months before us. You'll have to live here a good deal."

As the rain had ceased, they presently went out into the garden and strolled aimlessly about.

CHAPTER VII

No sooner had Mr. Liversedge become aware of his brother-in-law's promise to appear on the platform, than he despatched a note to Mr. Wykes, recommending exceptional industry in spreading the announcement. These addresses were not commonly of a kind to excite much interest, nor had the name of Mr. Denzil Quarrier any prestige in Polterham; it occasioned surprise when messengers ran about the town distributing handbills, which gave a general invitation (independent of membership) to that evening's lecture at the Institute. At the doors of the building itself was a large placard, attracting the eye by its bold inscription: "Woman: Her Place in Modern Life"—so had the title been ultimately shaped. Politicians guessed at once that something was in the wind, and before the afternoon there was a distinct rumour that this young man from London would be brought forward as Liberal candidate (Radical, said the Tories) in the place of Mr. Liversedge, who had withdrawn his name. The reading-room was beset. This chanced to be the day on which the Polterham Liberal newspaper was published, and at the head of its "general" column appeared a long paragraph on the subject under discussion. "At the moment of going to press, we learn that unforeseen circumstances have necessitated a change in this evening's programme at the Literary Institute. The indefatigable Secretary, Mr. Wykes, has been fortunate enough to fill the threatened vacancy, and that in a way which gives promise of a rare intellectual treat." Then followed a description of the lecturer (consisting of laudatory generalities), and a few sounding phrases on the subject he had chosen. Mr. Chown, who came and went twenty times in the course of the day, talked to all and sundry with his familiar vehemence.

"If it is true," he thundered, "that Tobias Liversedge has already surrendered his place to this young man, I want to know why these things have been done in a corner? If you ask my opinion, it looks uncommonly like a conspiracy. The Radical electors of Polterham are not going to be made the slaves of a secret caucus! The choice may be a very suitable one. I don't say"–

"Then wait till we know something definite," growled Mr. Vawdrey. "All I can say is that if this Mr. Quarrier is going in for extreme views about women, I'll have nothing to do with him."

"What do you mean by 'extreme views'?" screeched a thin man in dirty clothing.

Thereupon began a furious controversy, lasting half an hour. (It may be noted that a card hung in several parts of the room, requesting members not to converse in audible tones.)

Mr. Liversedge had gone to work like a man of decision. Between six and eight on the previous evening he had seen the members of that "secret caucus" whose existence outraged Mr. Chown—in other words, the half-dozen capable citizens who practically managed the affairs of Liberal Polterham—and had arrived at an understanding with them which made it all but a settled thing that Denzil Quarrier should be their prospective candidate. Tobias was eager to back out of the engagement into which he had unadvisedly entered. Denzil's arrival at this juncture seemed to him providential—impossible to find a better man for their purpose. At eight o'clock an informal meeting was held at the office of the *Polterham Examiner*, with the result that Mr. Hammond, the editor, subsequently penned that significant paragraph which next morning attracted all eyes.

On returning to supper, Mr. Liversedge found his wife and Denzil in conversation with Eustace Glazzard. With the latter he had a bare acquaintance; from Denzil's report, he was disposed to think of him as a rather effeminate old-young man of metropolitan type.

"Well," he exclaimed, when greetings were over, "I don't think you will want for an audience to-morrow, Denzil. We are summoning Polterham indiscriminately."

Glazzard had of course heard of the coming lecture. He wore a smile, but was taciturn.

"Pray heaven I don't make an exhibition of myself!" cried Denzil, with an air of sufficient confidence.

"Shall I send coffee to your bedroom, to-night?" asked his sister, with merry eyes.

"Too late for writing it out. It must be inspiration I know what I want to say, and I don't think the sea of Polterham faces will disturb me."

He turned sharply to his brother-in-law.

"Are you still in the same mind on that matter we spoke of this afternoon?"

"Decidedly!"

"Glazzard, what should you say if I came forward as Radical candidate for Polterham?"

There was silence. Glazzard fixed his eyes on the opposite wall; his smile was unchanged.

"I see no objection," he at length replied. The tones were rather thick, and ended in a slight cough. Feeling that all eyes were fixed upon him, Glazzard made an uneasy movement, and rose from his chair.

"It doesn't astonish you?" said Quarrier, with a broad grin.

"Not overpoweringly."

"Then let us regard the thing as settled. Mr. Liversedge has no stomach for the fight, and makes room for me. In a week's time I shall be a man of distinction."

In the midst of his self-banter he found Glazzard's gaze turned upon him with steady concentration. Their eyes met, and Denzil's expression became graver.

"You will take up your abode here?" Glazzard asked.

"Shortly," was the reply, given with more emphasis than seemed necessary, and accompanied with an earnest look.

Again there was silence, and before the conversation could be renewed there came a summons to supper.

A vivacious political dialogue between Mr. Liversedge and his relative allowed Glazzard to keep silence, save when he exchanged a few words with his hostess or Miss Pope. He had a look of extreme weariness; his eyes were heavy and without expression, the lines of face slack, sullen; he seemed to maintain with difficulty his upright position at the table, and his eating was only pretence. At the close of the meal he bent towards Mrs. Liversedge, declared that he was suffering from an intolerable headache, and begged her to permit his immediate departure.

Denzil went with him out into the road.

"I could see you were not well," he said, kindly. "I want to have a long and very serious talk with you; it must wait till after to-morrow. You know, of course, what I have on my mind. Come and hear my balderdash if you are all right again."

All the next day Denzil was in extravagant spirits. In the morning he made a show of shutting himself up to meditate the theme of his discourse, but his sister presently saw him straying about the garden, and as soon as her household duties left her at leisure she was called upon to gossip and laugh with him. The Polterham Examiner furnished material for endless jesting. In the midst of a flow of grotesque fancies, he broke off to say:

"By-the-bye, I shall have to run over to Paris for a few weeks."

"What to do there?"

"A private affair. You shall hear about it afterwards."

And he went on with his mirthful fantasia. This mood had been frequent with him in earlier years, and his sister was delighted to see that he preserved so much of youth. After all, it might be that he had found his vocation ere it was too late. Certainly he had the gift of speech, and his personality was not a common one. He might strike out a special line for himself in Parliament. They must make his election a sure thing.

The lecture was at eight. About seven, Mr. Liversedge and his relative walked off to the Institute, and entered the committee-room. Two or three gentlemen had already arrived; they were no strangers to Denzil, and a lively conversation at once sprang up. In a few minutes the door again opened to admit Mr. William Glazzard. The chairman of the evening came forward with lounging steps. Regardless

of the others present, he fixed his eye upon Quarrier, and examined him from head to foot. In this case, also, introduction was unnecessary.

"You have lost no time," he remarked, holding out his hand, and glancing from the young man to Mr. Liversedge.

"Your brother has given you a hint?" said the latter.

"Oh yes! How am I to phrase my introductory remarks?"

"Quite without reference to the political topic."

The others murmured an approval.

"Eustace well again?" asked Quarrier. "He went home with a bad headache last night."

"He'll be here," answered Mr. Glazzard, laconically. "Liversedge, a word with you."

The two stepped apart and conversed under cover of the chat that went on in front of the fire. Mr. Glazzard merely wished for a few hints to direct him when he introduced the lecturer; he was silent about his brother's frustrated project.

Fresh members of the committee kept appearing. The room resounded with talk and laughter. Denzil had a higher colour than usual, but he seemed perfectly self-possessed; his appearance and colloquial abilities made a very favourable impression. "Distinct improvement on friend Toby," whispered one committee-man to another; and this was the general opinion. Yet there was some anxiety regarding the address they were about to hear. Denzil did not look like a man who would mince his words and go half-way in his opinions. The Woman question was rather a dangerous one in Polterham just now; that period of Revivalism, and the subsequent campaign of Mrs. Hitchin, had left a sore feeling in not a few of the townsfolk. An old gentleman (he had known Denzil as a boy) ventured to speak of this to the lecturer.

"Don't be afraid, Mr. Toft," was the laughing reply. "You will stand amazed at my moderation; I am dead against Female Suffrage."

"That is safe, I think. You'll find Mrs. Wade down upon you—but that doesn't matter."

"Will she attack me in the hall?"

"No, no; we don't have public discussion; but prepare for an assault to-morrow."

"I shall enjoy it!"

The hall was rapidly filling. Already twice as many people as attended an ordinary lecture had taken seats, and among them were numerous faces altogether strange at the Institute, though familiar enough in the streets of Polterham. Among early arrivals was Mr. Samuel Quarrier, Denzil's uncle, a white-headed but stalwart figure. He abominated Radicalism, and was one of the very few "new" men who supported the old political dynasty of the town. But his countenance manifested no sour displeasure; he exchanged cheery greetings on all hands, and marched steadily to the front chairs, his two daughters following. The Mayor, accompanied by his wife, Miss Mumbray, and young Mr. Raglan Mumbray, was seen moving forward; he acknowledged salutations with a heavy bow and a wave of the hand. Decidedly it was a field-day. From the street below sounded a constant roll of carriages and clatter of hoofs coming to a standstill before the Institute. Never, perhaps, had so many people in evening costume gathered under this roof. Even Mr. Chown, the draper, though scornful of such fopperies, had thought it due to his position as a town-councillor to don the invidious garb; he was not disposed to herd among the undistinguished at the back of the room. Ladies were in great force, though many of them sought places with an abashed movement, not quite sure whether what they were about to hear would be strictly "proper." One there was who betrayed no such tremors; the position she assumed was about the middle of the hall, and from time to time curious looks were cast in that direction.

The clock pointed to eight. Punctually to the moment a side door was thrown open, and a procession of gentlemen ascended the platform. Members of the committee seated themselves in a row of arm-chairs; Mr. William Glazzard took his place not far from the reading-desk, and behind it subsided the lecturer.

In these instants Denzil Quarrier was the prey of sudden panic. He had imagined that his fortitude was proof against stage-fright, but between the door and his seat on the platform he suffered horribly. His throat was parched and constricted; his eyes dazzled, so that he could see nothing; his limbs were mere automatic mechanism; he felt as though some one had set his ears on fire. He strove wildly to recollect his opening sentences; but they were gone. How was he to fill up a mortal hour with coherent talk when he had not command of one phrase? He had often reproved himself for temerity, and now the weakness had brought its punishment. What possessed him to run into such a–?

The chairman had risen and was speaking. "Pleasure – — – introduce – — – Mr. Denzil Quarrier, – — – not unknown to many of you – — – almost at a moment's notice – — – much indebted – — —"

An outbreak of applause, and then dead silence. The ticking of the clock became audible. Some external force took hold upon him, lifted him from the chair, and impelled him a few steps forward. Some voice, decidedly not his own, though it appeared to issue from his throat, uttered the words "Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen." And before the sound had ceased, there flashed into his thoughts a story concerning an enlightened young lady of Stockholm, who gave a lecture to advance the theory that woman's intellect suffered from the habit of allowing her hair to grow so long. It was years since this trifle had recurred to his mind; it came he knew not how, and he clutched at it like the drowning man at a straw. Before he really understood what he was about, he had begun to narrate the anecdote, and suddenly, to his astonishment, he was rewarded with universal peals of laughter. The noise dispelled his anguish of nervousness; he drew a deep breath, grasped the table before him, and was able to speak as freely as if he had been on his own hearth-rug in Clement's Inn.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.