GEORGE GISSING

THE NETHER WORLD

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I
A THRALL OF THRALLS

In the troubled twilight of a March evening ten years ago, an old man, whose equipment and bearing suggested that he was fresh from travel, walked slowly across Clerkenwell Green, and by the graveyard of St. James's Church stood for a moment looking about him. His age could not be far from seventy, but, despite the stoop of his shoulders, he gave little sign of failing under the burden of years; his sober step indicated gravity of character rather than bodily feebleness, and his grasp of a stout stick was not such as bespeaks need of support. His attire was neither that of a man of leisure, nor of the kind usually worn by English mechanics. Instead of coat and waistcoat, he wore a garment something like a fisherman's guernsey, and over this a coarse short cloak, picturesque in appearance as it was buffeted by the wind. His trousers were of moleskin; his boots reached almost to his knees; for head-covering he had the cheapest kind of undyed felt, its form exactly that of the old petasus. To say that his aspect was Venerable would serve to present him in a

measure, yet would not be wholly accurate, for there was too much of past struggle and present anxiety in his countenance to permit full expression of the natural dignity of the features. It was a fine face and might have been distinctly noble, but circumstances had marred the purpose of Nature; you perceived that his cares had too often been of the kind which are created by ignoble necessities, such as leave to most men of his standing a bare humanity of visage. He had long thin white hair; his beard was short and merely grizzled. In his left hand he carried a bundle, which probably contained clothing.

The burial-ground by which he had paused was as little restful to the eye as are most of those discoverable in the byways of London. The small trees that grew about it shivered in their leaflessness; the rank grass was wan under the failing day; most of the stones leaned this way or that, emblems of neglect (they were very white at the top, and darkened downwards till the damp soil made them black), and certain cats and dogs were prowling or sporting among the graves. At this corner the east wind blew with malice such as it never puts forth save where there are poorly clad people to be pierced; it swept before it thin clouds of unsavoury dust, mingled with the light refuse of the streets. Above the shapeless houses night was signalling a murky approach; the sky—if sky it could be called—gave threatening of sleet, perchance of snow. And on every side was the rumble of traffic, the voiceful evidence of toil and of poverty; hawkers were crying their goods; the inevitable organ was clanging before

a public-house hard by; the crumpet-man was hastening along, with monotonous ringing of his bell and hoarse rhythmic wail.

The old man had fixed his eyes half absently on the inscription of a gravestone near him; a lean cat springing out between the iron railings seemed to recall his attention, and with a slight sigh he went forward along the narrow street which is called St. James's Walk. In a few minutes he had reached the end of it, and found himself facing a high grey-brick wall, wherein, at this point, was an arched gateway closed with black doors. He looked at the gateway, then fixed his gaze on something that stood just above—something which the dusk half concealed, and by so doing made more impressive. It was the sculptured counterfeit of a human face, that of a man distraught with agony. The eyes stared wildly from their sockets, the hair struggled in maniac disorder, the forehead was wrung with torture, the cheeks sunken, the throat fearsomely wasted, and from the wide lips there seemed to be issuing a horrible cry. Above this hideous effigy was carved the legend: 'MIDDLESEX HOUSE OF DETENTION.'

Something more than pain came to the old man's face as he looked and pondered; his lips trembled like those of one in anger, and his eyes had a stern resentful gleaming. He walked on a few paces, then suddenly stopped where a woman was standing at an open door.

'I ask your pardon,' he said, addressing her with the courtesy which owes nothing to refined intercourse, 'but do you by chance

know anyone of the name of Snowdon hereabouts?'

The woman replied with a brief negative; she smiled at the appearance of the questioner, and, with the vulgar instinct, looked about for someone to share her amusement.

'Better inquire at the 'ouse at the corner,' she added, as the man was moving away. 'They've been here a long time, I b'lieve.'

He accepted her advice. But the people at the public-house could not aid his search. He thanked them, paused for a moment with his eyes down, then again sighed slightly and went forth into the gathering gloom.

Less than five minutes later there ran into the same house of refreshment a little slight girl, perhaps thirteen years old; she carried a jug, and at the bar asked for 'a pint of old six.' The barman, whilst drawing the ale, called out to a man who had entered immediately after the child:

'Don't know nobody called Snowdon about 'ere, do you, Mr. Squibbs?'

The individual addressed was very dirty, very sleepy, and seemingly at odds with mankind. He replied contemptuously with a word which, in phonetic rendering may perhaps be spelt 'Nay-oo.'

But the little girl was looking eagerly from one man to the other; what had been said appeared to excite keen interest in her. She forgot all about the beer-jug that was waiting, and, after a brief but obvious struggle with timidity, said in an uncertain voice:

'Has somebody been asking for that name, sir?'

'Yes, they have,' the barman answered, in surprise. 'Why?'

My name's Snowdon, sir—Jane Snowdon.'

She reddened over all her face as soon as she had given utterance to the impulsive words. The barman was regarding her with a sort of semi-interest, and Mr. Squibbs also had fixed his bleary (or beery) eyes upon her. Neither would have admitted an active interest in so pale and thin and wretchedly-clad a little mortal. Her hair hung loose, and had no covering; it was hair of no particular colour, and seemed to have been for a long time utterly untended; the wind, on her run hither, had tossed it into much disorder. Signs there were of some kind of clothing beneath the short, dirty, worn dress, but it was evidently of the scantiest description. The freely exposed neck was very thin, but, like the outline of her face, spoke less of a feeble habit of body than of the present pinch of sheer hunger. She did not, indeed, look like one of those children who are born in disease and starvation, and put to nurse upon the pavement; her limbs were shapely enough, her back was straight, she had features that were not merely human, but girl-like, and her look had in it the light of an intelligence generally sought for in vain among the children of the street. The blush and the way in which she hung her head were likewise tokens of a nature endowed with ample sensitiveness.

'Oh, your name's Jane Snowdon, is it?' said the barman. 'Well, you're just three minutes an' three-quarters too late. P'r'aps it's a

fortune a-runnin' after you. He was a rum old party as inquired. Never mind; it's all in a life. There's fortunes lost every week by a good deal less than three minutes when it's 'orses—eh, Mr. Squibbs?'

Mr. Squibbs swore with emphasis.

The little girl took her jug of beer and was turning away.

'Hollo!' cried the barman. 'Where's the money, Jane?—if *you* don't mind.'

She turned again in increased confusion, and laid coppers on the counter. Thereupon the man asked her where she lived; she named a house in Clerkenwell Close, near at hand.

'Father live there?'

She shook her head.

'Mother?'

'I haven't got one, sir.'

'Who is it as you live with, then?'

'Mrs. Peckover, sir.'

'Well, as I was sayin', he was a queer old joker as arsted for the name of Snowdon. Shouldn't wonder if you see him goin' round.'

And he added a pretty full description of this old man, to which the girl listened closely. Then she went thoughtfully—a little sadly—on her way.

In the street, all but dark by this time, she cast anxious glances onwards and behind, but no old man in an odd hat and cloak and with white hair was discoverable. Linger she might not. She reached a house of which the front-door stood open; it looked

black and cavernous within; but she advanced with the step of familiarity, and went downstairs to a front-kitchen. Through the half-open door came a strong odour and a hissing sound, plainly due to the frying of sausages. Before Jane could enter she was greeted sharply in a voice which was young and that of a female, but had no other quality of graciousness.

'You've taken your time, my lady! All right! just wait till I've 'ad my tea, that's all! Me an' you'll settle accounts to-night, see if we don't. Mother told me as she owed you a lickin', and I'll pay it off, with a little on my own account too. Only wait till I've 'ad my tea, that's all. What are you standin' there for, like a fool? Bring that beer 'ere, an' let's see 'ow much you've drank.'

'I haven't put my lips near it, miss; indeed I haven't,' pleaded the child, whose face of dread proved both natural timidity and the constant apprehension of ill-usage.

'Little liar! that's what you always was, an' always will be.–Take that!'

The speaker was a girl of sixteen, tall, rather bony, rudely handsome; the hand with which she struck was large and coarse-fibred, the muscles that impelled it vigorous. Her dress was that of a work-girl, unsubstantial, ill-fitting, but of ambitious cut; her hair was very abundant, and rose upon the back of her head in thick coils, an elegant fringe depending in front. The fire had made her face scarlet, and in the lamplight her large eyes glistened with many joys.

First and foremost, Miss Clementina Peckover rejoiced

because she had left work much earlier than usual, and was about to enjoy what she would have described as a 'blow out.' Secondly, she rejoiced because her mother, the landlady of the house, was absent for the night, and consequently she would exercise sole authority over the domestic slave, Jane Snowdon —that is to say, would indulge to the uttermost her instincts of cruelty in tormenting a defenceless creature. Finally—a cause of happiness antecedent to the others, but less vivid in her mind at this moment—in the next room lay awaiting burial the corpse of Mrs. Peckover's mother-in-law, whose death six days ago had plunged mother and daughter into profound delight, partly because they were relieved at length from making a pretence of humanity to a bed-ridden old woman, partly owing to the fact that the deceased had left behind her a sum of seventy-five pounds, exclusive of moneys due from a burial-club.

'Ah!' exclaimed Miss Peckover (who was affectionately known to her intimates as 'Clem'), as she watched Jane stagger back from the blow, and hide her face in silent endurance of pain. 'That's just a morsel to stay your appetite, my lady! You didn't expect me back 'ome at this time, did you? You thought as you was goin' to have the kitchen to yourself when mother went. Ha ha! ho ho!—These sausages is done; now you clean that fryin'-pan; and if I can find a speck of dirt in it as big as 'arlf a farden, I'll take you by the 'air of the 'ed an' clean it with your face, *that's* what I'll do I Understand? Oh, I mean what I say, my lady! Me an' you's a-goin' to spend a evenin' together, there's no two ways

about that. He ho! he he!'

The frankness of Clem's brutality went far towards redeeming her character. The exquisite satisfaction with which she viewed Jane's present misery, the broad joviality with which she gloated over the prospect of cruelties shortly to be inflicted, put her at once on a par with the noble savage running wild in woods. Civilisation could bring no charge against this young woman; it and she had no common criterion. Who knows but this lust of hers for sanguinary domination was the natural enough issue of the brutalising serfdom of her predecessors in the family line of the Peckovers? A thrall suddenly endowed with authority will assuredly make bitter work for the luckless creature in the next degree of thraldom.

A cloth was already spread across one end of the deal table, with such other preparations for a meal as Clem deemed adequate. The sausages—five in number—she had emptied from the frying-pan directly on to her plate, and with them all the black rich juice that had exuded in the process of cooking—particularly rich, owing to its having several times caught fire and blazed triumphantly. On sitting down and squaring her comely frame to work, the first thing Clem did was to take a long draught out of the beer-jug; refreshed thus, she poured the remaining liquor into a glass. Ready at hand was mustard, made in a tea-cup; having taken a certain quantity of this condiment on to her knife, she proceeded to spread each sausage with it from end to end, patting them in a friendly way as she finished the operation. Next

she sprinkled them with pepper, and after that she constructed a little pile of salt on the side of the plate, using her fingers to convey it from the salt-cellar. It remained to cut a thick slice of bread—she held the loaf pressed to her bosom whilst doing this—and to crush it down well into the black grease beside the sausages; then Clem was ready to begin.

For five minutes she fed heartily, showing really remarkable skill in conveying pieces of sausage to her mouth by means of the knife alone. Finding it necessary to breathe at last, she looked round at Jane. The hand-maiden was on her knees near the fire, scrubbing very hard at the pan with successive pieces of newspaper. It was a sight to increase the gusto of Clem's meal, but of a sudden there came into the girl's mind a yet more delightful thought. I have mentioned that in the back-kitchen lay the body of a dead woman; it was already encoffined, and waited for interment on the morrow, when Mrs. Peckover would arrive with a certain female relative from St. Albans. Now the proximity of this corpse was a ceaseless occasion of dread and misery to Jane Snowdon; the poor child had each night to make up a bed for herself in this front-room, dragging together a little heap of rags when mother and daughter were gone up to their chamber, and since the old woman's death it was much if Jane had enjoyed one hour of unbroken sleep. She endeavoured to hide these feelings, but Clem, with her Bed Indian scent, divined them accurately enough. She hit upon a good idea.

'Go into the next room,' she commanded suddenly, 'and fetch

the matches off of the mantel-piece. I shall want to go upstairs presently, to see if you've scrubbed the bed-room well.'

Jane was blanched; but she rose from her knees at once, and reached a candlestick from above the fireplace.

'What's that for?' shouted Clem, with her mouth full. 'You've no need of a light to find the mantel-piece. If you're not off—'

Jane hastened from the kitchen. Clem yelled to her to close the door, and she had no choice but to obey. In the dark passage outside there was darkness that might be felt. The child all but fainted with the sickness of horror as she turned the handle of the other door and began to grope her way. She knew exactly where the coffin was; she knew that to avoid touching it in the diminutive room was all but impossible. And touch it she did. Her anguish uttered itself, not in a mere sound of terror, but in a broken word or two of a prayer she knew by heart, including a name which sounded like a charm against evil. She had reached the mantel-piece; oh, she could not, could not find the matches I Yes, at last her hand closed on them. A blind rush, and she was out again in the passage. She re-entered the front-kitchen with limbs that quivered, with the sound of dreadful voices ringing about her, and blankness before her eyes.

Clem laughed heartily, then finished her beer in a long, enjoyable pull. Her appetite was satisfied; the last trace of oleaginous matter had disappeared from her plate, and now she toyed with little pieces of bread lightly dipped into the mustard-pot. These *bonnes bouches* put her into excellent humour;

presently she crossed her arms and leaned back. There was no denying that Clem was handsome; at sixteen she had all her charms in apparent maturity, and they were of the coarsely magnificent order. Her forehead was low and of great width; her nose was well shapen, and had large sensual apertures; her cruel lips may be seen on certain fine antique busts; the neck that supported her heavy head was splendidly rounded. In laughing, she became a model for an artist, an embodiment of fierce life independent of morality. Her health was probably less sound than it seemed to be; one would have compared her, not to some piece of exuberant normal vegetation, but rather to a rank, evilly-fostered growth. The putrid soil of that nether world yields other forms besides the obviously blighted and sapless.

'Have you done any work for Mrs. Hewett to-day?' she asked of her victim, after sufficiently savouring the spectacle of terror.

'Yes, miss; I did the front-room fireplace, an' fetched fourteen of coals, an' washed out a few things.'

'What did she give you?'

'A penny, miss. I gave it to Mrs. Peckover before she went.'

'Oh, you did? Well, look 'ere; you'll just remember in future that all you get from the lodgers belongs to me, an' not to mother. It's a new arrangement, understand. An' if you dare to give up a 'apenny to mother, I'll lick you till you're nothin' but a bag o' bones. Understand?'

Having on the spur of the moment devised this ingenious difficulty for the child, who was sure to suffer in many ways

from such a conflict of authorities, Clem began to consider how she should spend her evening. After all, Jane was too poor-spirited a victim to afford long entertainment. Clem would have liked dealing with some one who showed fight—some one with whom she could try savage issue in real tooth-and-claw conflict. She had in mind a really exquisite piece of cruelty, but it was a joy necessarily postponed to a late hour of the night. In the meantime, it would perhaps be as well to take a stroll, with a view of meeting a few friends as they came away from the work-rooms. She was pondering the invention of some long and hard task to be executed by Jane in her absence, when a knocking at the house-door made itself heard. Clem at once went up to see who the visitor was.

A woman in a long cloak and a showy bonnet stood on the step, protecting herself with an umbrella from the bitter sleet which the wind was now driving through the darkness. She said that she wished to see Mrs. Hewett.

'Second-floor front,' replied Clem in the offhand, impertinent tone wherewith she always signified to strangers her position in the house.

The visitor regarded her with a look of lofty contempt, and, having deliberately closed her umbrella, advanced towards the stairs. Clem drew into the back regions for a few moments, but as soon as she heard the closing of a door in the upper part of the house, she too ascended, going on tip-toe, with a noiselessness which indicated another side of her character. Having reached

the room which the visitor had entered, she brought her ear close to the keyhole, and remained in that attitude for a long time—nearly twenty minutes, in fact. Her sudden and swift return to the foot of the stairs was followed by the descent of the woman in the showy bonnet.

'Miss Peckover I' cried the latter when she had reached the foot of the stairs.

'Well, what is it?' asked Clem, seeming to come up from the kitchen.

'Will you 'ave the goodness to go an' speak to Mrs. Hewett for a hinstant?' said the woman, with much affectation of refined speech.

'All right! I will just now, if I've time.'

The visitor tossed her head and departed, whereupon Clem at once ran upstairs. In five minutes she was back in the kitchen.

'See 'ere,' she addressed Jane. 'You know where Mr. Kirkwood works in St. John's Square? You've been before now. Well, you're to go an' wait at the door till he comes out, and then you're to tell him to come to Mrs. Hewett at wunst. Understand? —Why ain't these tea-things all cleared away? All right Wait till you come back, that's all. Now be off, before I skin you alive!'

On the floor in a corner of the kitchen lay something that had once been a girl's hat. This Jane at once snatched up and put on her head. Without other covering, She ran forth upon her errand.

CHAPTER II
A FRIEND IN REQUEST

It was the hour of the unyoking of men. In the highways and byways of Clerkenwell there was a thronging of released toilers, of young and old, of male and female. Forth they streamed from factories and workrooms, anxious to make the most of the few hours during which they might live for themselves. Great numbers were still bent over their labour, and would be for hours to come, but the majority had leave to wend stablewards. Along the main thoroughfares the wheel-track was clangorous; every omnibus that clattered by was heavily laden with passengers; tarpaulins gleamed over the knees of those who sat outside. This way and that the lights were blurred into a misty radiance; overhead was mere blackness, whence descended the lashing rain. There was a ceaseless scattering of mud; there were blocks in the traffic, attended with rough jest or angry curse; there was jostling on the crowded pavement. Public-houses began to brighten up, to bestir themselves for the evening's business. Streets that had been hives of activity since early morning were being abandoned to silence and darkness and the sweeping wind.

At noon to-day there was sunlight on the Surrey hills; the fields and lanes were fragrant with the first breath of spring, and from the shelter of budding copses many a primrose looked

tremblingly up to the vision of blue sky. But of these things Clerkenwell takes no count; here it had been a day like any other, consisting of so many hours, each representing a fraction of the weekly wage. Go where you may in Clerkenwell, on every hand are multiform evidences of toil, intolerable as a nightmare. It is not as in those parts of London where the main thoroughfares consist of shops and warehouses and workrooms, whilst the streets that are hidden away on either hand are devoted in the main to dwellings Here every alley is thronged with small industries; all but every door and window exhibits the advertisement of a craft that is carried on within. Here you may see how men have multiplied toil for toil's sake, have wrought to devise work superfluous, have worn their lives away in imagining new forms of weariness. The energy, the ingenuity daily put forth in these grimy burrows task the brain's power of wondering. But that those who sit here through the livelong day, through every season, through all the years of the life that is granted them, who strain their eyesight, who overtax their muscles, who nurse disease in their frames, who put resolutely from them the thought of what existence *might* be—that these do it all without prospect or hope of reward save the permission to eat and sleep and bring into the world other creatures to strive with them for bread, surely that thought is yet more marvellous.

Workers in metal, workers in glass and in enamel, workers in weed, workers in every substance on earth, or from the waters under the earth, that can be made commercially valuable. In

Clerkenwell the demand is not so much for rude strength as for the cunning fingers and the contriving brain. The inscriptions on the house-fronts would make you believe that you were in a region of gold and silver and precious stones. In the recesses of dim byways, where sunshine and free air are forgotten things, where families herd together in dear-rented garrets and cellars, craftsmen are for ever handling jewellery, shaping bright ornaments for the necks and arms of such as are born to the joy of life. Wealth inestimable is ever flowing through these workshops, and the hands that have been stained with gold-dust may, as likely as not, some day extend themselves in petition for a crust. In this house, as the announcement tells you, business is carried on by a trader in diamonds, and next door is a den full of children who wait for their day's one meal until their mother has come home with her chance earnings. A strange enough region wherein to wander and muse. Inextinguishable laughter were perchance the fittest result of such musing; yet somehow the heart grows heavy, somehow the blood is troubled in its course, and the pulses begin to throb hotly.

Amid the crowds of workpeople, Jane Snowdon made what speed she might. It was her custom, whenever dispatched on an errand, to run till she could run no longer, then to hasten along panting until breath and strength were recovered. When it was either of the Peckovers who sent her, she knew that reprimand was inevitable on her return, be she ever so speedy; but her nature was incapable alike of rebellion and of that sullen callousness

which would have come to the aid of most girls in her position. She did not serve her tyrants with willingness, for their brutality filled her with a sense of injustice; yet the fact that she was utterly dependent upon them for her livelihood, that but for their grace —as they were perpetually reminding her—she would have been a workhouse child, had a mitigating effect upon the bitterness she could not wholly subdue.

There was, however, another reason why she sped eagerly on her present mission. The man to whom she was conveying Mrs. Hewett's message was one of the very few persons who had ever treated her with human kindness. She had known him by name and by sight for some years, and since her mother's death (she was eleven when that happened) he had by degrees grown to represent all that she understood by the word 'friend.' It was seldom that words were exchanged between them; the opportunity came scarcely oftener than once a month; but whenever it did come, it made a bright moment in her existence. Once before she had fetched him of an evening to see Mrs. Hewett, and as they walked together he had spoken with what seemed to her wonderful gentleness, with consideration inconceivable from a tall, bearded man, well-dressed, and well to do in the world. Perhaps he would speak in the same way to-night; the thought of it made her regardless of the cold rain that was drenching her miserable garment, of the wind that now and then, as she turned a corner, took away her breath, and made her cease from running.

She reached St. John's Square, and paused at length by a door

on which was the inscription: 'H. Lewis, Working Jeweller.' It was just possible that the men had already left; she waited for several minutes with anxious mind. No; the door opened, and two workmen came forth. Jane's eagerness impelled her to address one of them.

'Please, sir, Mr. Kirkwood hasn't gone yet, has he?'

'No, he ain't,' the man answered pleasantly; and turning back, he called to some one within the doorway; 'Hello, Sidney! here's your sweetheart waiting for you.'

Jane shrank aside; but in a moment she saw a familiar figure; she advanced again, and eagerly delivered her message.

'All right, Jane! I'll walk on with you,' was the reply. And whilst the other two men were laughing good-naturedly, Kirkwood strode away by the girl's side. He seemed to be absent-minded, and for some hundred yards' distance was silent; then he stopped of a sudden and looked down at his companion.

'Why, Jane,' he said, 'you'll get your death, running about in weather like this.' He touched her dress. 'I thought so; you're wet through.'

There followed an inarticulate growl, and immediately he stripped off his short overcoat.

'Here, put this on, right over your head. Do as I tell you, child!'

He seemed impatient to-night. Wasn't he going to talk with her as before? Jane felt her heart sinking. With her hunger for kind and gentle words, she thought nothing of the character of the night, and that Sidney Kirkwood might reasonably be anxious

to get over the ground as quickly as possible.

'How is Mrs. Hewett?' Sidney asked, when they were walking on again. 'Still poorly, eh? And the baby?'

Then he was again mute. Jane had something she wished to say to him—wished very much indeed, yet she felt it would have been difficult even if he had encouraged her. As he kept silence and walked so quickly, speech on her part was utterly forbidden. Kirkwood, however, suddenly remembered that his strides were disproportionate to the child's steps. She was an odd figure thus disguised in his over-jacket; he caught a glimpse of her face by a street lamp, and smiled, but with a mixture of pain.

'Feel a bit warmer so?' he asked.

'Oh yes, sir.'

'Haven't you got a jacket, Jane?'

'It's all to pieces, sir. They're goin' to have it mended, I think.'

'They' was the word by which alone Jane ventured to indicate her aunt.

'Going to, eh? I think they'd better be quick about it.'

Ha! that was the old tone of kindness! How it entered into her blood and warmed it! She allowed herself one quick glance at him.

'Do I walk too quick for you?'

'Oh no, sir. Mr. Kirkwood, please, there's something I—'

The sentence had, as it were, begun itself, but timidity cut it short. Sidney stopped and looked at her.

'What? Something you wanted to tell me, Jane?'

He encouraged her, and at length she made her disclosure. It was of what had happened in the public-house. The young man listened with much attention, walking very slowly. He got her to repeat her second-hand description of the old man who had been inquiring for people named Snowdon.

'To think that you should have been just too late!' he exclaimed with annoyance. 'Have you any idea who he was?'

'I can't think, sir,' Jane replied sadly.

Sidney took a hopeful tone—thought it very likely that the inquirer would pursue his search with success, being so near the house where Jane's parents had lived.

'I'll keep my eyes open,' he said. 'Perhaps I might see him. He'd be easy to recognise, I should think.'

'And would you tell him, sir,' Jane asked eagerly.

'Why, of course I would. You'd like me to, wouldn't you?'

Jane's reply left small doubt on that score. Her companion looked down at her again, and said with compassionate gentleness:

'Keep a good heart, Jane. Things'll be better some day, no doubt.'

'Do you think so, sir?'

The significance of the simple words was beyond all that eloquence could have conveyed. Sidney muttered to himself, as he had done before, like one who is angry. He laid his hand on the child's shoulder for a moment.

A few minutes more, and they were passing along by the

prison wall, under the ghastly head, now happily concealed by darkness. Jane stopped a little short of the house and removed the coat that had so effectually sheltered her.

'Thank you, sir,' she said, returning it to Sidney.

He took it without speaking, and threw it over his arm. At the door, now closed, Jane gave a single knock; they were admitted by Clem, who, in regarding Kirkwood, wore her haughtiest demeanour. This young man had never paid homage of any kind to Miss Peckover, and such neglect was by no means what she was used to. Other men who came to the house took every opportunity of paying her broad compliments, and some went so far as to offer practical testimony of their admiration. Sidney merely had a 'How do you do, miss?' at her service. Coquetry had failed to soften him; Clem accordingly behaved as if he had given her mortal offence on some recent occasion. She took care, moreover, to fling a few fierce words at Jane before the latter disappeared into the house. Thereupon Sidney looked at her sternly; he said nothing, knowing that interference would only result in harsher treatment for the poor little slave.

'You know your way upstairs, I b'lieve,' said Clem, as if he were all but a stranger.

'Thank you, I do,' was Sidney's reply.

Indeed he had climbed these stairs innumerable times during the last three years; the musty smells were associated with ever so many bygone thoughts and states of feeling; the stains on the wall (had it been daylight), the irregularities of the bare wooden steps,

were remembrancers of projects and hopes and disappointments. For many months now every visit had been with heavier heart; his tap at the Hewetts' door had a melancholy sound to him.

A woman's voice bade him enter. He stepped into a room which was not disorderly or unclean, but presented the chill discomfort of poverty. The principal, almost the only, articles of furniture were a large bed, a wash-hand stand; a kitchen table, and two or three chairs, of which the cane seats were bulged and torn. A few meaningless pictures hung here and there, and on the mantel-piece, which sloped forward somewhat, stood some paltry ornaments, secured in their places by a piece of string stretched in front of them. The living occupants were four children and their mother. Two little girls, six and seven years old respectively, were on the floor near the fire; a boy of four was playing with pieces of fire-wood at the table. The remaining child was an infant, born but a fortnight ago, lying at its mother's breast. Mrs. Hewett sat on the bed, and bent forward in an attitude of physical weakness. Her age was twenty-seven, but she looked several years older. At nineteen she had married; her husband, John Hewett, having two children by a previous union. Her face could never have been very attractive, but it was good-natured, and wore its pleasantest aspect as she smiled on Sidney's entrance. You would have classed her at once with those feeble-willed, weak-minded, yet kindly-disposed women, who are only too ready to meet affliction half-way, and who, if circumstances be calamitous, are more harmful than an enemy to those they

hold dear. She was rather wrapped up than dressed, and her hair, thin and pale-coloured, was tied in a ragged knot. She wore slippers, the upper parts of which still adhered to the soles only by miracle. It looked very much as if the same relation subsisted between her frame and the life that informed it, for there was no blood in her cheeks, no lustre in her eye. The baby at her bosom moaned in the act of sucking; one knew not how the poor woman could supply sustenance to another being.

The children were not dirty nor uncared for, but their clothing hung very loosely upon them; their flesh was unhealthy, their voices had an unnatural sound.

Sidney stepped up to the bed and gave his hand.

'I'm so glad you've come before Clara,' said Mrs. Hewett. 'I hoped you would. But she can't be long, an' I want to speak to you first. It's a bad night, isn't it? Yes, I feel it in my throat, and it goes right through my chest—just 'ere, look! And I haven't slep' not a hour a night this last week; it makes me feel that low. I want to get to the Orspital, if I can, in a day or two.'

'But doesn't the doctor come still?' asked Sidney, drawing a chair near to her.

'Well, I didn't think it was right to go on payin' him, an' that's the truth. I'll go to the Orspital, an' they'll give me somethin'. I look bad, don't I, Sidney?'

'You look as if you'd no business to be out of bed,' returned the young man in a grumbling voice.

'Oh, I *can't* lie still, so it's no use talkin'! But see, I want to

speak about Clara. That woman Mrs. Tubbs has been here to see me, talkin' an' talkin'. She says she'll give Clara five shillin' a week, as well as board an' lodge her. I don't know what to do about it, that I don't. Clara, she's that set on goin', an' her father's that set against it. It seems as if it 'ud be a good thing, don't it, Sidney? I know *you* don't want her to go, but what's to be done? What *is* to be done?'

Her wailing voice caused the baby to wail likewise. Kirkwood looked about the room with face set in anxious discontent.

'Is it no use, Mrs. Hewett?' he exclaimed suddenly, turning to her. 'Does she mean it? Won't she ever listen to me?'

The woman shook her head miserably; her eyes filled with tears.

'I've done all I could,' she replied, half sobbing. 'I have; you know I have, Sidney! She's that 'eadstrong, it seems as if she wouldn't listen to nobody—at least nobody as we knows anything about.'

'What do you mean by that?' he inquired abruptly. 'Do you think there's any one else?'

'How can I tell? I've got no reason for thinkin' it, but how can I tell? No, I believe it's nothin' but her self-will an' the fancies she's got into her 'ead. Both her an' Bob, there's no doin' nothin' with them. Bob, he's that wasteful with his money; an' now he talks about goin' an' gettin' a room in another 'ouse, when he might just as well make all the savin' he can. But no, that ain't his idea, nor yet his sister's. I suppose it's their mother as they take after,

though their father he won't own to it, an' I don't blame him for not speakin' ill of her as is gone. I should be that wretched if I thought my own was goin' to turn out the same. But there's John, he ain't a wasteful man; no one can't say it of him. He's got his fancies, but they've never made him selfish to others, as well you know, Sidney. He's been the best 'usband to me as ever a poor woman had, an' I'll say it with my last breath.'

She cried pitifully for a few moments. Sidney, mastering his own wretchedness, which he could not altogether conceal, made attempts to strengthen her.

'When things are at the worst they begin to mend,' he said. 'It can't be much longer before he gets work. And look here, Mrs. Hewett, I won't hear a word against it; you must and shall let me lend you something to go on with!'

'I dursn't, I dursn't, Sidney! John won't have it. He's always a-saying: "Once begin that, an' it's all up; you never earn no more of your own." It's one of his fancies, an' you know it is. You'll only make trouble, Sidney.'

'Well, all I can say is, he's an unreasonable and selfish man!'

'No, no; John ain't selfish! Never say that! It's only his fancies, Sidney.'

'Well, there's one trouble you'd better get rid of, at all events. Let Clara go to Mrs. Tubbs. You'll never have any peace till she does, I can see that. Why shouldn't she go, after all? She's seventeen; if she can't respect herself now, she never will, and there's no help for it. Tell John to let her go.'

There was bitterness in the tone with which he gave this advice; he threw out his hands impatiently, and then flung himself back, so that the cranky chair creaked and tottered.

'An' if 'arm comes to her, what then?' returned Mrs. Hewett plaintively. 'We know well enough why Mrs. Tubbs wants her; it's only because she's good-lookin', an' she'll bring more people to the bar. John knows that, an' it makes him wild. Mind what I'm tellin' you, Sidney; if any 'arm comes to that girl, her father'll go out of his 'ead. I know he will! I know he will! He worships the ground as she walks on, an' if it hadn't been for that, she'd never have given him the trouble as she is doin'. It 'ud a been better for her if she'd had a father like mine, as was a hard, careless man. I don't wish to say no 'arm of him as is dead an' buried, an' my own father too, but he was a hard father to us, an' as long as he lived we dursn't say not a word as he didn't like. He'd a killed me if I'd gone on like Clara. It was a good thing as he was gone, before—'

'Don't, don't speak of that,' interposed Kirkwood, with kindly firmness. 'That's long since over and done with and forgotten.'

'No, no; not forgotten. Clara knows, an' that's partly why she makes so little of me; I know it is.'

'I don't believe it! She's a good-hearted girl—'

A heavy footstep on the stairs checked him. The door was thrown open, and there entered a youth of nineteen, clad as an artisan. He was a shapely fellow, though not quite so stout as perfect health would have made him, and had a face of singular attractiveness, clear-complexioned, delicate featured, a-

gleam with intelligence. The intelligence was perhaps even too pronounced; seen in profile, the countenance had an excessive eagerness; there was selfish force about the lips, moreover, which would have been better away. His noisy entrance indicated an impulsive character, and the nod with which he greeted Kirkwood was self-sufficient.

'Where's that medal I cast last night, mother?' he asked, searching in various corners of the room and throwing things about.

'Now, do mind what you're up to, Bob!' remonstrated Mrs. Hewett. 'You'll find it on the mantel in the other room. Don't make such a noise.'

The young man rushed forth, and in a moment returned. In his hand, which was very black, and shone as if from the manipulation of metals, he held a small bright medal. He showed it to Sidney, saying, 'What d'you think o' that?'

The work was delicate and of clever design; it represented a racehorse at full speed, a jockey rising in the stirrups and beating it with orthodox brutality.

'That's "Tally-ho" at the Epsom Spring Meetin',' he said. 'I've got money on him!'

And, with another indifferent nod, he flung out of the room.

Before Mrs. Hewett and Kirkwood could renew their conversation, there was another step at the door, and the father of the family presented himself.

CHAPTER III
A SUPERFLUOUS FAMILY

Kirkwood's face, as he turned to greet the new-comer, changed suddenly to an expression of surprise.

'Why, what have you been doing to your hair?' he asked abruptly.

A stranger would have seen nothing remarkable in John Hewett's hair, unless he had reflected that, being so sparse, it had preserved its dark hue and its gloss somewhat unusually. The short beard and whiskers were also of richer colour than comported with the rest of the man's appearance. Judging from his features alone, one would have taken John for sixty at least; his years were in truth not quite two-and-fifty. He had the look of one worn out with anxiety and hardship; the lines engraven upon his face were of extraordinary depth and frequency; there seemed to be little flesh between the dry skin and the bones which sharply outlined his visage. The lips were, like those of his son, prominent and nervous, but none of Bob's shrewdness was here discoverable; feeling rather than intellect appeared to be the father's characteristic. His eyes expressed self-will, perhaps obstinacy, and he had a peculiarly dogged manner of holding his head. At the present moment he was suffering from extreme fatigue; he let himself sink upon a chair, threw his hat on to the

floor, and rested a hand on each knee. His boots were thickly covered with mud; his corduroy trousers were splashed with the same. Rain had drenched him; it trickled to the floor from all his garments.

For answer to Sidney's question, he nodded towards his wife, and said in a thick voice, 'Ask her.'

'He's dyed it,' Mrs. Hewett explained, with no smile. 'He thought one of the reasons why he couldn't get work was his lookin' too old.'

'An' so it was,' exclaimed Hewett, with an angry vehemence which at once declared his position and revealed much of his history. 'So it was. My hair was a bit turned, an' nowadays there's no chance for old men. Ask any one you like. Why, there's Sam Lang couldn't even get a job at gardenin' 'cause his hair was a bit turned. It was him as told me what to do. "Dye your hair, Jack," he says; "it's what I've had to myself," he says. "They won't have old men nowadays, at no price." Why, there's Jarvey the painter; you know him, Sidney. His guvnor sent him on a job to Jones's place, an' they sent him back. "Why, he's an old man," they says. "What good's a man of that age for liftin' ladders about?" An' Jarvey's no older than me.'

Sidney knitted his brows. He had heard the complaint from too many men to be able to dispute its justice.

'When there's twice too many of us for the work that's to be done,' pursued John, 'what else can you expect? The old uns have to give way, of course. Let 'em beg; let 'em starve! What use are

they?'

Mrs. Hewett had put a kettle on the fire, and began to arrange the table for a meal.

'Go an' get your wet things off, John,' she said. 'You'll be havin' your rheumatics again.'

'Never mind me, Maggie. What business have you to be up an' about? You need a good deal more takin' care of than I do. Here, let Amy get the tea.'

The three children, Amy, Annie, and Tom, had come forward, as only children do who are wont to be treated affectionately on their father's return. John had a kiss and a caress for each of them; then he stepped to the bed and looked at his latest born. The baby was moaning feebly; he spoke no word to it, and on turning away glanced about the room absently. In the meantime his wife had taken some clothing from a chest of drawers, and at length he was persuaded to go into the other room and change. When he returned, the meal was ready. It consisted of a scrap of cold steak, left over from yesterday, and still upon the original dish amid congealed fat; a spongy half-quartern loaf, that species of baker's bread of which a great quantity can be consumed with small effect on the appetite; a shapeless piece of something purchased under the name of butter, dabbed into a shallow basin; some pickled cabbage in a tea-cup; and, lastly, a pot of tea, made by adding a teaspoonful or two to the saturated leaves which had already served at breakfast and mid-day. This repast was laid on a very dirty cloth. The cups were unmatched and chipped, the

knives were in all stages of decrepitude; the teapot was of dirty tin, with a damaged spout.

Sidney began to affect cheerfulness. He took little Annie on one of his knees, and Tom on the other. The mature Amy presided. Hewett ate the morsel of meat, evidently without thinking about it; he crumbled a piece of bread, and munched mouthfuls in silence. Of the vapid liquor called tea he drank cup after cup.

'What's the time?' he asked at length. 'Where's Clara?'

'I daresay she's doin' overtime,' replied his wife. 'She won't be much longer.'

The man was incapable of remaining in one spot for more than a few minutes. Now he went to look at the baby; now he stirred the fire; now he walked across the room aimlessly. He was the embodiment of worry. As soon as the meal was over, Amy, Annie, and Tom were sent off to bed. They occupied the second room, together with Clara; Bob shared the bed of a fellow-workman upstairs. This was great extravagance, obviously; other people would have made two rooms sufficient for all, and many such families would have put up with one. But Hewett had his ideas of decency, and stuck to them with characteristic wilfulness.

'Where do you think I've been this afternoon?' John began, when the three little ones were gone, and Mrs. Hewett had been persuaded to lie down upon the bed. 'Walked to Enfield an' back. I was told of a job out there; but it's no good; they're full up. They

say exercise is good for the 'ealth. I shall be a 'ealthy man before long, it seems to me. What do *you* think?'

'Have you been to see Corder again?' asked Sidney, after reflecting anxiously.

'No, I haven't!' was the angry reply; 'an' what's more, I ain't goin' to! He's one o' them men I can't get on with. As long as you make yourself small before him, an' say "sir" to him with every other word, an' keep tellin' him as he's your Providence on earth, an' as you don't know how ever you'd get on without him—well, it's all square, an' he'll keep you on the job. That's just what I *can't* do—never could, an' never shall. I should have to hear them children cryin' for food before I could do it. So don't speak to me about Corder again. It makes me wild!'

Sidney tapped the floor with his foot. Himself a single man, without responsibilities, always in fairly good work, he could not invariably sympathise with Hewett's sore and impracticable pride. His own temper did not err in the direction of meekness, but as he looked round the room he felt that a home such as this would drive him to any degree of humiliation. John knew what the young man's thoughts were; he resumed in a voice of exasperated bitterness.

'No, I haven't been to Corder—I beg his pardon; *Mister* Corder—James Corder, Esquire. But where do you think I went this mornin'? Mrs. Peckover brought up a paper an' showed me an advertisement. Gorbutt in Goswell Bead wanted a man to clean windows an' sweep up, an' so on;—offered fifteen bob a

week. Well, I went. Didn't I, mother? Didn't I go after that job? I got there at half-past eight; an' what do you think I found? If there was one man standin' at Gorbutt's door, *there was five hundred*! Don't you believe me? You go an' ask them as lives about there. If there was one, there was five hundred! Why, the p'lice had to come an' keep the road clear. Fifteen bob! What was the use o' me standin' there, outside the crowd? What was the use, I say? Such a lot o' poor starvin' devils you never saw brought together in all your life. There they was, lookin' ready to fight with one another for the fifteen bob a week. Didn't I come back and tell you about it, mother? An' if they'd all felt like me, they'd a turned against the shop an' smashed it up—ay, an' every other shop in the street! What use? Why, no use; but I tell you that's how I felt. If any man had said as much as a rough word to me, I'd a gone at him like a bulldog. I felt like a beast. I wanted to fight, I tell you—to fight till the life was kicked an' throttled out of me!'

'John, don't, don't go on in that way,' cried his wife, sobbing miserably. 'Don't let him go on like that, Sidney.'

Hewett jumped up and walked about.

'What's the time?' he asked the next moment. And when Sidney told him that it was half-past nine, he exclaimed, 'Then why hasn't Clara come 'ome? What's gone with her?'

'Perhaps she's at Mrs. Tubbs's,' replied his wife, in a low voice, looking at Kirkwood.

'An' what call has she to be there? Who gave her leave to go there?'

There was another exchange of looks between Sidney and Mrs. Hewett; then the latter with hesitation and timidity told of Mrs. Tubbs's visit to her that evening, and of the proposals the woman had made.

'I won't hear of it:' cried John. 'I won't have my girl go for a barmaid, so there's an end of it. I tell you she shan't go!'

'I can understand you, Mr. Hewett,' said Sidney, in a tone of argument softened by deference; 'but don't you think you'd better make a few inquiries, at all events? You see, it isn't exactly a barmaid's place. I mean to say, Mrs. Tubbs doesn't keep a public-house where people stand about drinking all day. It is only a luncheon-bar, and respectable enough.'

John turned and regarded him with astonishment.

'Why, I thought you was as much set against it as me? What's made you come round like this? I s'pose you've got tired of her, an' that's made you so you don't care.'

The young man's eyes flashed angrily, but before he could make a rejoinder Mrs. Hewett interposed.

'For shame o' yourself, John If you can't talk better sense than that, don't talk at all. He don't mean it, Sidney. He's half drove off his head with trouble.'

'If he does think it,' said Kirkwood, speaking sternly but with self-command, 'let him say what he likes. He can't say worse than I should deserve.'

There was an instant of silence. Hewett's head hung with more than the usual doggedness. Then he addressed Sidney, sullenly,

but in a tone which admitted his error.

'What have you got to say? Never mind me. I'm only the girl's father, an' there's not much heed paid to fathers nowadays. What have you got to say about Clara? If you've changed your mind about her goin' there, just tell me why.'

Sidney could not bring himself to speak at once, but an appealing look from Mrs. Hewett decided him.

'Look here, Mr. Hewett,' he began, with blunt earnestness. If any harm came to Clara I should feel it every bit as much as you, and that you ought to know by this time. All the same, what I've got to say is this: Let her go to Mrs. Tubbs for a month's trial. If you persist in refusing her, mark my words, you'll be sorry. I've thought it all over, and I know what I'm talking about. The girl can't put up with the work room any longer. It's ruining her health, for one thing, anybody can see that, and it's making her so discontented, she'll soon get reckless. I understand your feeling well enough, but I understand her as well; at all events, I believe I do. She wants a change; she's getting tired of her very life.'

'Very well,' cried the father in shrill irritation, 'why doesn't she take the change that's offered to her? She's no need to go neither to workroom nor to bar. There's a good home waiting for her, isn't there? What's come to the girl? She used to go on as if she liked you well enough.'

'A girl alters a deal between fifteen and seventeen,' Sidney replied, forcing himself to speak with an air of calmness, of impartiality. 'She wasn't old enough to know her own mind. I'm

tired of plaguing her. I feel ashamed to say another word to her, and that's the truth. She only gets more and more set against me. If it's ever to come right, it'll have to be by waiting; we won't talk about that any more. Think of her quite apart from me, and what I've been hoping. She's seventeen years old. You can't deal with a girl of that age like you can with Amy and Annie. You'll have to trust her, Mr. Hewett. You'll have to, because there's no help for it. We're working people, we are; we're the lower orders; our girls have to go out and get their livings. We teach them the best we can, and the devil knows they've got examples enough of misery and ruin before their eyes to help them to keep straight. Rich people can take care of their daughters as much as they like; they can treat them like children till they're married; people of our kind can't do that, and it has to be faced.'

John sat with dark brow, his eyes staring on vacancy.

'It's right what Sidney says, father,' put in Mrs. Hewett; 'we can't help it.'

'You may perhaps have done harm when you meant only to do good,' pursued Sidney. 'Always being so anxious, and showing what account you make of her, perhaps you've led her to think a little too much of herself. She knows other fathers don't go on in that way. And now she wants more freedom, she feels it worse than other girls do when you begin to deny her. Talk to her in a different way; talk as if you trusted her. Depend upon it, it's the only hold you have upon her. Don't be so much afraid. Clara has her faults—see them as well as any one—but I'll never believe

she'd darken your life of her own free will.'

There was an unevenness, a jerky vehemence, in his voice, which told how difficult it was for him to take this side in argument. He often hesitated, obviously seeking phrases which should do least injury to the father's feelings. The expression of pain on his forehead and about his lips testified to the sincerity with which he urged his views, at the same time to a lurking fear lest impulse should be misleading him. Hewett kept silence, in aspect as far as ever from yielding. Of a sudden he raised his hand, and said, 'Husht!' There was a familiar step on the stairs. Then the door opened and admitted Clara.

The girl could not but be aware that the conversation she interrupted had reference to herself. Her father gazed fixedly at her; Sidney glanced towards her with self-consciousness, and at once averted his eyes; Mrs. Hewett examined her with apprehension. Having carelessly closed the door with a push, she placed her umbrella in the corner and began to unbutton her gloves. Her attitude was one of affected unconcern; she held her head stiffly, and let her eyes wander to the farther end of the room. The expression of her face was cold, preoccupied; she bit her lower lip so that the under part of it protruded.

'Where have you been, Clara?' her father asked.

She did not answer immediately, but finished drawing off her gloves and rolled them up by turning one over the other. Then she said indifferently:

'I've been to see Mrs. Tubbs.'

'And who gave you leave?' asked Hewett with irritation.

'I don't see that I needed any leave. I knew she was coming here to speak to you or mother, so I went, after work, to ask what you'd said.'

She was not above the middle stature of women, but her slimness and erectness, and the kind of costume she wore made her seem tall as she stood in this low-ceiled room. Her features were of very uncommon type, at once sensually attractive and bearing the stamp of intellectual vigour. The profile was cold, subtle, original; in full face, her high cheekbones and the heavy, almost horizontal line of her eyebrows were the points that first drew attention, conveying an idea of force of character. The eyes themselves were hazel-coloured, and, whatever her mood, preserved a singular pathos of expression, a look as of self-pity, of unconscious appeal against some injustice. In contrast with this her lips were defiant, insolent, unscrupulous; a shadow of the naivete of childhood still lingered upon them, but, though you divined the earlier pout of the spoilt girl, you felt that it must have foretold this danger-signal in the mature woman. Such cast of countenance could belong only to one who intensified in her personality an inheritance of revolt; who, combining the temper of an ambitious woman with the forces of a man's brain, had early learnt that the world was not her friend nor the world's law.

Her clothing made but poor protection against the rigours of a London winter. Its peculiarity (bearing in mind her position) was the lack of any pretended elegance. A close-fitting, short

jacket of plain cloth made evident the grace of her bust; beneath was a brown dress with one row of kilting. She wore a hat of brown felt, the crown rising from back to front, the narrow brim closely turned up all round. The high collar of the jacket alone sheltered her neck. Her gloves, though worn, were obviously of good kid; her boots—strangest thing of all in a work-girl's daily attire—were both strong and shapely. This simplicity seemed a declaration that she could not afford genuine luxuries and scorned to deck herself with shams.

The manner of her reply inflamed Hewett with impotent wrath. He smote the table violently, then sprang up and flung his chair aside.

'Is that the way you've learnt to speak to your father?' he shouted. 'Haven't I told you you're not to go nowhere without my leave or your mother's? Do you pay no heed to what I bid you? If so, say it! Say it at once, and have done with it.'

Clara was quietly removing her hat. In doing so, she disclosed the one thing which gave proof of regard for personal appearance. Her hair was elaborately dressed. Drawn up from the neck, it was disposed in thick plaits upon the top of her head; in front were a few rows of crisping. She affected to be quite unaware that words had been spoken to her, and stood smoothing each side of her forehead.

John strode forward and laid his hands roughly upon her shoulders.

'Look at me, will you? Speak, will you?'

Clara jerked herself from his grasp and regarded him with insolent surprise. Of fear there was no trace upon her countenance; she seemed to experience only astonishment at such unwonted behaviour from her father, and resentment on her own behalf. Sidney Kirkwood had risen, and advanced a step or two, as if in apprehension of harm to the girl, but his interference was unneeded. Hewett recovered his self-control as soon as Clara repelled him. It was the first time he had ever laid a hand upon one of his children other than gently; his exasperation came of over-tried nerves, of the experiences he had gone through in search of work that day, and the keen suffering occasioned by his argument with Sidney. The practical confirmation of Sidney's warning that he must no longer hope to control Clara like a child stung him too poignantly; he obeyed an unreasoning impulse to recover his authority by force.

The girl's look entered his heart like a stab; she had never faced him like this before, saying more plainly than with words that she defied him to control her. His child's face, the face he loved best of all! yet at this moment he was searching it vainly for the lineaments that were familiar to him. Something had changed her, had hardened her against him, in a moment. It seemed impossible that there should come such severance between them. John revolted against it, as against all the other natural laws that visited him harshly.

'What's come to you, my girl?' he said in a thick voice. 'What's wrong between us, Clara? Haven't I always done my best for

you? If I was the worst enemy you had, you couldn't look at me crueller.'

'I think it's me that should ask what's come to *you*, father,' she returned with her former self-possession. 'You treat me as if I was a baby. I want to know what you're going to say about Mrs. Tubbs. I suppose mother's told you what she offers me?'

Sidney had not resumed his chair. Before Hewett could reply he said:

'I think I'll leave you to talk over this alone.'

'No; stay where you are,' said John gruffly. 'Look here, Clara. Sidney's been talkin' to me; he's been sayin' that I ought to let you have your own way in this. Yes, you may well look as if it surprised you.' Clara had just glanced at the young man, slightly raising her eyebrows, but at once looked away again with a careless movement of the head. 'He says what it's hard an' cruel for me to believe, though I half begin to see that he's right; he says you won't pay no more heed to what *I* wish, an' it's me now must give way to you. I didn't use to think me an' Clara would come to that; but it looks like it—it looks like it.'

The girl stood with downcast eyes. Once more her face had suffered a change; the lips were no longer malignant, her forehead had relaxed from its haughty frown. The past fortnight had been a period of contest between her father's stubborn fears and her own determination to change the mode of her life. Her self-will was only intensified by opposition. John had often enough experienced this, but hitherto the points at issue had been

trifles, matters in which the father could yield for the sake of pleasing his child. Serious resistance brought out for the first time all the selfish forces of her nature. She was prepared to go all lengths rather than submit, now the question of her liberty had once been broached. Already there was a plan in her mind for quitting home, regardless of all the misery she would cause, reckless of what future might be in store for herself. But the first sign of yielding on her father's part touched the gentler elements of her nature. Thus was she constituted; merciless in egotism when put to the use of all her weapons, moved to warmest gratitude as soon as concession was made to her. To be on ill terms with her father had caused her pain, the only effect of which, however, was to heighten the sullen impracticability of her temper. At the first glimpse of relief from overstrained emotions, she desired that all angry feeling should be at an end. Having gained her point, she could once more be the affectionately wilful girl whose love was the first necessity of John Hewett's existence.

'Well,' John pursued, reading her features eagerly, 'I'll say no more about that, and I won't stand in the way of what you've set your mind on. But understand, Clara, my girl! It's because Sidney persuaded me. Sidney answers for it, mind you that!'

His voice trembled, and he looked at the young man with something like anger in his eyes.

'I'm willing to do that, Mr. Hewett,' said Kirkwood in a low but firm voice, his eyes turned away from Clara. 'No human being can answer for another in the real meaning of the word; but I

take upon myself to say that Clara will bring you no sorrow. She hears me say it. They're not the kind of words that a man speaks without thought of what they mean.'

Clara had seated herself by the table, and was moving a finger along the pattern of the dirty white cloth. She bit her under-lip in the manner already described, seemingly her habit when she wished to avoid any marked expression of countenance.

'I can't see what Mr. Kirkwood's got to do with it at all,' she said, with indifference, which now, however, was rather good-humoured than the reverse. 'I'm sure I don't want anybody to answer for *me*.' A slight toss of the head. 'You'd have let me go in any case, father; so I don't see you need bring Mr. Kirkwood's name in.'

Hewett turned away to the fireplace and hung his head. Sidney, gazing darkly at the girl, saw her look towards him, and she smiled. The strange effect of that smile upon her features! It gave gentleness to the mouth, and, by making more manifest the intelligent light of her eyes, emphasised the singular pathos inseparable from their regard. It was a smile to which a man would concede anything, which would vanquish every prepossession, which would inspire pity and tenderness and devotion in the heart of sternest resentment.

Sidney knew its power only too well; he averted his face. Then Clara rose again and said:

'I shall just walk round and tell Mrs. Tubbs. It isn't late, and she'd like to know as soon as possible.'

'Oh, surely it'll do in the mornin'!' exclaimed Mrs. Hewett, who had followed the conversation in silent anxiety.

Clara paid no attention, but at once put on her hat again. Then she said, 'I won't be long, father,' and moved towards the door.

Hewett did not look round.

'Will you let me walk part of the way with you?' Sidney asked abruptly.

'Certainly, if you like.'

He bade the two who remained' Good-night,' and followed Clara downstairs.

CHAPTER IV
CLARA AND JANE

Rain no longer fell, but the gusty and bitter wind still swept about the black streets. Walking side by side without speech, Clara and her companion left the neighbourhood of the prison, and kept a northward direction till they reached the junction of highways where stands the 'Angel.' Here was the wonted crowd of loiterers and the press of people waiting for tramcar or omnibus—east, west, south, or north; newsboys, eager to get rid of their last batch, were crying as usual, 'Ech-ow! Exteree speciul! Ech-ow! Steendard!' and a brass band was blaring out its saddest strain of merry dance-music. The lights gleamed dismally in rain-puddles and on the wet pavement. With the wind came whiffs of tobacco and odours of the drinking-bar.

They crossed, and walked the length of Islington High Street, then a short way along its continuation, Upper Street. Once or twice Clara had barely glanced at Kirkwood, but his eyes made no reply, and his lips were resolutely closed. She did not seem offended by this silence; on the contrary, her face was cheerful, and she smiled to herself now and then. One would have imagined that she found pleasure in the sombreness of which she was the cause.

She stopped at length, and said:

'I suppose you don't want to go in with me?'

'No.'

'Then I'll say good-night. Thank you for coming so far out of your way.'

'I'll wait. I may as well walk back with you, if you don't mind.'

'Oh, very well. I shan't be many minutes.'

She passed on and entered the place of refreshment that was kept by Mrs. Tubbs. Till recently it had been an ordinary eating-house or coffee-shop; but having succeeded in obtain a license to sell strong liquors, Mrs. Tubbs had converted the establishment into one of a more pretentious kind. She called it 'Imperial Restaurant and Luncheon Bar.' The front shone with vermilion paint; the interior was aflare with many gas-jets; in the window was disposed a tempting exhibition of 'snacks' of fish, cold roast fowls, ham-sandwiches, and the like; whilst farther back stood a cooking-stove, whereon frizzled and vapoured a savoury mess of sausages and onions.

Sidney turned away a few paces. The inclemency of the night made Upper Street—the promenade of a great district on account of its spacious pavement—less frequented than usual; but there were still numbers of people about, some hastening homewards, some sauntering hither and thither in the familiar way, some gathered into gossiping groups. Kirkwood was irritated by the conversation and laughter that fell on his ears, irritated by the distant strains of the band, irritated above all by the fume of frying that pervaded the air for many yards

about Mrs. Tubbs's precincts. He observed that the customers tending that way were numerous. They consisted mainly of lads and young men who had come forth from neighbouring places of entertainment. The locality and its characteristics had been familiar to him from youth upwards; but his nature was not subdued to what it worked in, and the present fit of disgust was only an accentuation of a mood by which he was often possessed. To the Hewetts he had spoken impartially of Mrs. Tubbs and her bar; probably that was the right view; but now there came back upon him the repugnance with which he had regarded Clara's proposal when it was first made.

It seemed to him that he had waited nearly half an hour when Clara came forth again. In silence she walked on beside him. Again they crossed by the 'Angel' and entered St. John Street Road.

'You've made your arrangements?' Sidney said, now that there were few people passing.

'Yes; I shall go on Monday.'

'You're going to live there altogether?'

'Yes; it'll be more convenient, and then it'll give them more room at home. Bob can sleep with the children, and save money.'

'To be sure!' observed the young man with bitter irony.

Clara flashed a glance at him. It was a new thing for Sidney to take this tone with her; not seldom he had expressed unfavourable judgments by silence, but he had never spoken to her otherwise than with deference and gentleness.

'You don't seem in a very good temper to-night, Mr. Kirkwood.' she remarked in a suave tone.

He disregarded her words, but in a few moments turned upon her and said scornfully:

'I hope you'll enjoy the pleasant, ladylike work you've found! I should think it'll improve your self-respect to wait on the gentlemen of Upper Street!'

Irony is not a weapon much in use among working people; their wits in general are too slow. With Sidney, however, it had always been a habit of speech in indignant criticism, and sympathy made him aware that nothing would sting Clara more acutely. He saw that he was successful when she turned her head away and moved it nervously.

'And do you suppose I go there because the place pleases me?' she asked in a cold, hostile voice. 'You make a great mistake, as you always do when you pretend to know anything about me. Wait till I've learned a little about the business; you won't find me in Upper Street then.'

'I understand.'

Again they walked on in silence. They were nearing Clerkenwell Close, and had to pass a corner of the prison in a dark lane, where the wind moaned drearily. The line of the high blank wall was relieved in colourless gloom against a sky of sheer night. Opposite, the shapes of poverty-eaten houses and grimy workshops stood huddling in the obscurity. From near at hand came shrill voices of children chasing each other about—

children playing at midnight between slum and gaol!

'We're not likely to see much of each other after to-night,' said Sidney, stopping.

'The less the better, I should say, if this is how you're going to talk to me.'

'The less the better, perhaps—at all events for a time. But there's one or two things on my mind, and I'll say them now. I don't know whether you think anything about it, but you must have seen that things are getting worse and worse at home. Your mother—'

'She's no mother of mine!' broke in Clara angrily.

'She's been a mother to you in kindness, that's certain, and you've repaid her almost as ill as you could have done. Another girl would have made her hard life a bit easier. No; you've only thought of yourself. Your father walks about day after day trying to get work, and how do you meet him when he comes home? You fret him and anger him; you throw him back ill-tempered words when he happens to think different from you; you almost break his heart, because you won't give way in things that he only means for your good—he that would give his life for you! It's as well you should hear the truth for once, and hear it from me, too. Anyone else might speak from all sorts of motives; as for me, it makes me suffer more to say such things than it ever could you to hear them. Laugh if you like! I don't ask you to pay any heed to what *I*'ve wished and hoped; but just give a thought to your father, and the rest of them at home. I told him to-night

he'd only to trust you, that you never could do anything to make him ashamed of you. I said so, and I believe it. Look, Clara! with all my heart I believe it. But now you've got your way, think of them a little.'

'It isn't your fault if I don't know how bad I am,' said the girl with a half-smile. That she did not resent his lecture more decidedly was no doubt due to its having afforded new proof of the power she had over him. Sidney was shaken with emotion; his voice all but failed him at the last.

'Good-bye,' he said, turning away.

Clara hesitated, looked at him, but finally also said 'Good-bye,' and went on alone.

She walked with bent head, and almost passed the house-door in absence of thought. On the threshold was standing Miss Peckover; she drew aside to let Clara pass. Between these two was a singular rivalry. Though by date a year younger than Clara, Clem gave no evidence of being physically less mature. In the matter of personal charms she regarded herself as by far Miss Hewett's superior, and resented vigorously the tone of the latter's behaviour to her. Clara, on the other hand, looked down upon Miss Peckover as a mere vulgar girl; she despised her brother Bob because he' had allowed himself to be inveigled by Clem; in intellect, in social standing, she considered herself out of all comparison with the landlady's daughter. Clem had the obvious advantage of being able to ridicule the Hewetts' poverty, and did so without sparing. Now, for instance, when Clara was about to

pass with a distant 'Good-night,' Clem remarked:

'It's cold, ain't it? I wonder you don't put on a ulster, a night like this.'

'Thank you,' was the reply. 'I shan't consult you about how I'm to dress.'

Clem laughed, knowing she had the best of the joke.

The other went upstairs, and entered the back-room, where it was quite dark.

'That you, Clara?' asked Amy's voice. 'The candle's on the mantel-shelf.'

'Why aren't you asleep?' Clara returned sharply. But the irritation induced by Clem's triumph quickly passed in reflection on Sidney's mode of leave-taking. That had not at all annoyed her, but it had made her thoughtful. She lit the candle. Its light disclosed a room much barer than the other one. There was one bed, in which Amy and Annie lay (Clara had to share it with them), and a mattress placed on the floor, where reposed little Tom; a low chest of drawers with a very small looking-glass upon it, a washstand, a few boxes. Handsome girls, unfortunate enough to have brains to boot, do not cultivate the patient virtues in chambers of this description.

There was a knock at the door. Clara found her father standing there.

'Have you anything to tell me, my girl?' he asked in a subdued voice, furtively regarding her.

'I shall go on Monday.'

He drew back a step, and seemed about to return to the other room.

'Father, I shall have to give Mrs. Tubbs the five shillings for a few weeks. She's going to let me have a new dress.'

'Your earnin's is your own, Clara.'

'Yes; but I hope very soon to be able to give you something. It's hard for you, having no work.'

John brightened wonderfully.

'Don't you trouble, my dear. That's all right. Things'll come round somehow. You're a good girl. Good-night, my darlin'!'

He kissed her, and went consoled to his rest.

Miss Peckover kept going up and down between the kitchen and the front-door. Down below, Jane was cleaning a copper kettle. Clem, who had her sweetest morsel of cruelty yet in store, had devised this pleasant little job as a way of keeping the child employed till all was quiet.

She had just come down to watch the progress of the work, and to give a smart rap or two on the toiling fingers, when a heavy footstep in the passage caused her to dart upstairs again. It was Bob Hewett, returned from his evening recreations.

'Oh, that's you, is it?' cried Clem. 'Come down; I want to speak to you.'

'Wait till to-morrow,' answered Bob, advancing towards the stairs.

'Wait! we'll see about that!'

She sprang forward, and with a prompt exertion of muscle,

admirable in its way, whirled Bob round and dragged him to the head of the kitchen flight. The young fellow took it in good part, and went down with her.

'You go up into the passage,' said Clem to her servant, and was immediately obeyed.

'Now,' resumed Miss Peckover, when she had closed the door, 'who have you been goin' about with to-night?'

'What are you talking about?' returned Bob, who had seated himself on the table, and was regarding Clem jocosely. 'I've been with some pals, that's all.'

'Pals! what sort o' pals? Do you call Pennyloaf Candy one o' your pals?'

She stood before him in a superb attitude, her head poised fiercely, her arms quivering at her sides, all the stature and vigour of her young body emphasised by muscular strain.

'Pennyloaf Candy!' Bob repeated, as if in scorn of the person so named. 'Get on with you! I'm sick of hearing you talk about her. Why I haven't seen her not these three weeks.'

'It's a – lie!' Clem's epithet was too vigorous for reproduction. 'Sukey Jollop saw you with her down by the meat-market, an' Jeck Bartley saw you too.'

'Jeck did?' He laughed with obstreperous scorn. 'Why, Jeck's gone to Homerton to his mother till Saturday night. Don't be such a bloomin' fool! Just because Suke Jollop's dead nuts on me, an' I won't have nothin' to say to her, she goes tellin' these bloomin' lies. When I see her next, I'll make her go down on her marrow-

bones an' beg my pardon. See if I don't just!'

There was an engaging frankness in Bob's way of defending himself which evidently impressed Miss Peckover, though it did not immediately soothe her irritation. She put her arms a-kimbo, and examined him with a steady suspicion which would have disconcerted most young men. Bob, however, only laughed more heartily. The scene was prolonged. Bob had no recourse to tenderness to dismiss the girl's jealousy. His self-conceit was supreme, and had always stood him in such stead with the young ladies who, to use his own expression, were 'dead nuts on him,' that his love-making, under whatever circumstances, always took the form of genial banter *de haut en bas*. 'Don't be a bloomin' fool!' was the phrase he deemed of most efficacy in softening the female heart; and the result seemed to justify him, for after some half-hour's wrangling, Clem abandoned her hostile attitude, and eyed him with a savage kind of admiration.

'When are you goin' to buy me that locket, Bob, to put a bit of your 'air in?' she inquired pertinently.

'You just wait, can't you? There's a event coming off next week. I won't say nothing, but you just wait.'

'I'm tired o' waitin'. See here; you ain't goin' to best me out of it?'

'Me best you? Don't be a bloomin' fool, Clem!'

He laughed heartily, and in a few minutes allowed himself to be embraced and sent off to his chamber at the top of the house.

Clem summoned her servant from the passage. At the same

moment there entered another lodger, the only one whose arrival Clem still awaited. His mode of ascending the stairs was singular; one would have imagined that he bore some heavy weight, for he proceeded very slowly, with a great clumping noise, surmounting one step at a time in the manner of a child. It was Mr. Marple, the cab-driver, and his way of going up to bed was very simply explained by the fact that a daily sixteen hours of sitting on the box left his legs in a numb and practically useless condition.

The house was now quiet. Clem locked the front-door and returned to the kitchen, eager with anticipation of the jest she was going to carry out. First of all she had to pick a quarrel with Jane; this was very easily managed. She pretended to look about the room for a minute, then asked fiercely:

'What's gone with that sixpence I left on the dresser?'

Jane looked up in terror. She was worn almost to the last point of endurance by her day and night of labour and agitation. Her face was bloodless, her eyelids were swollen with the need of sleep.

'Sixpence!' she faltered, 'I'm sure I haven't seen no sixpence, miss.'

'You haven't? Now, I've caught you at last. There's been nobody 'ere but you. Little thief! We'll see about this in the mornin', an' to-night *you shall sleep in the back-kitchen*!'

The child gasped for breath. The terror of sudden death could not have exceeded that which rushed upon her heart when she was told that she must pass her night in the room where lay the

coffin.

'An' you shan't have no candle, neither,' proceeded Clem, delighted with the effect she was producing. 'Come along! I'm off to bed, an' I'll see you safe locked in first, so as no one can come an' hurt you.'

'Miss! please!—I can't, I durstn't!'

Jane pleaded in inarticulate anguish. But Clem had caught her by the arm, was dragging her on, on, till she was at the very door of that ghastly death-cellar. Though thirteen years old, her slight frame was as incapable of resisting Clem Peckover's muscles as an infant's would have been. The door was open, but at that moment Jane uttered a shriek which rang and echoed through the whole house. Startled, Clem relaxed her grasp. Jane tore herself away, fled up the kitchen stairs, fled upwards still, flung herself at the feet of someone who had come out on to the landing and held a light.

'Oh, help me! Don't let her! Help me!'

'What's up with you, Jane?' asked Clara, for it was she who, not being yet in bed, had come forth at once on hearing the scream.

Jane could only cling to her garment, pant hysterically, repeat the same words of entreaty again and again. Another door opened, and John Hewett appeared half-dressed.

'What's wrong?' he cried. 'The 'ouse o' fire? Who yelled out like that?'

Clem was coming up; she spoke from the landing below.

'It's that Jane, just because I gave her a rap as she deserved. Send her down again.'

'Oh, no!' cried the poor girl. 'Miss Hewett! be a friend to me! She's goin' to shut me up all night with the coffin. Don't let her, miss! I durstn't! Oh, be a friend to me!'

'Little liar!' shouted Clem. 'Oh, that bloomin' little liar! when I never said a word o' such a thing!'

'I'll believe her a good deal sooner than you,' returned Clara sharply. 'Why, anybody can see she's tellin' the truth—can't they, father? She's half-scared out of her life. Come in here, Jane; you shall stay here till morning.'

By this time all the grown-up people in the house were on the staircase; the clang of tongues was terrific. Clem held her ground stoutly, and in virulence was more than a match for all her opponents. Even Bob did not venture to take her part; he grinned down over the banisters, and enjoyed the entertainment immensely. Dick Snape, whose room Bob shared, took the opportunity of paying off certain old scores he had standing against Clem. Mr. Marple, the cab-driver, was very loud and very hoarse in condemnation of such barbarity. Mrs. Hewett, looking as if she had herself risen from a coffin, cried shame on the general heartlessness with which Jane was used.

Clara held to her resolve. She led Jane into the bedroom, then, with a parting shot at Miss Peckover, herself entered and locked the door.

'Drink some water, Jane,' she said, doing her best to reassure

the child. 'You're safe for to-night, and we'll see what Mrs. Peckover says about this when she comes back to-morrow.'

Jane looked at her rescuer with eyes in which eternal gratitude mingled with fear for the future. She could cry now, poor thing, and so little by little recover herself. Words to utter her thanks she had none; she could only look something of what she felt. Clara made her undress and lie down with little Tom on the mattress. In a quarter of an hour the candle was extinguished, and but for the wind, which rattled sashes and doors, and made ghostly sounds in the chimneys, there was silence throughout the house.

Something awoke Clara before dawn. She sat up, and became aware that Jane was talking and crying wildly, evidently re-acting in her sleep the scene of a few hours ago. With difficulty Clara broke her slumber.

'Don't you feel well, Jane?' she asked, noticing a strangeness in the child's way of replying to her.

'Not very, miss. My head's bad, an' I'm so thirsty. May I drink out of the jug, miss?'

'Stay where you are. I'll bring it to you.'

Jane drank a great deal. Presently she fell again into slumber, which was again broken in the same way. Clara did not go to sleep, and as soon as it was daylight she summoned her father to come and look at the child. Jane was ill, and, as everyone could see, rapidly grew worse.

CHAPTER V
JANE IS VISITED

At ten o'clock next morning Mrs. Peckover reached home. She was a tall, big-boned woman of fifty, with an arm like a coalheaver's. She had dark hair, which shone and was odorous with unguents; a sallow, uncomely face, and a handsome moustache. Her countenance was more difficult to read than Clem's; a coarse, and most likely brutal, nature was plain enough in its lines, but there was also a suggestion of self-restraint, of sagacity, at all events of cunning—qualities which were decidedly not inherited by her daughter. With her came the relative whose presence had been desired at the funeral to-day. This was Mrs. Gully, a stout person with a very red nose and bleared eyes. The credit of the family demanded that as many relatives as possible should follow the hearse, and Mrs. Peckover's reason for conducting Mrs. Gully hither was a justifiable fear lest, if she came alone, the latter would arrive in too manifest a state of insobriety. A certain amount of stimulant had been permitted on the way, just enough to assist a genteel loquacity, for which Mrs. Gully had a reputation. She had given her word to abstain from further imbibing until after the funeral.

The news which greeted her arrival was anything but welcome to Mrs. Peckover. In the first place, there would be far more

work than usual to be performed in the house to-day, and Jane could be ill spared. Worse than that, however, Clara Hewett, who was losing half a day's work on Jane's account, made a very emphatic statement as to the origin of the illness, and said that if anything happened to Jane, there would be disagreeable facts forthcoming at a coroner's inquest. Having looked at the sick child, Mrs. Peckover went downstairs and shut herself up with Clem. There was a stormy interview.

'So you thought you'd have yer fling, did you, just because I wasn't 'ere? You must go makin' trouble, just to suit yer own fancies! I'll pay you, my lady! Gr-r-r!'

Whereupon followed the smack of a large hand on a fleshy cheek, so vigorous and unexpected a blow that even the sturdy Clem staggered back.

'You leave me alone, will you?' she roared out, her smitten cheek in a flame. 'Do that again, an' I'll give you somethin' for yerself! See if I don't! You just try it on!'

The room rang with uproarious abuse, with disgusting language, with the terrific threats which are such common flowers of rhetoric in that world, and generally mean nothing whatever. The end of it all was that Clem went to fetch a doctor; one in whom Mrs. Peckover could repose confidence. The man was, in fact, a druggist, with a shop in an obscure street over towards St. Luke's; in his window was exhibited a card which stated that a certain medical man could be consulted here daily. The said medical man had, in fact, so much more business

than he could attend to—his name appearing in many shops—that the druggist was deputed to act as his assistant, and was considerately supplied with death-certificates, already signed, and only needing to be filled in with details. Summoned by Mrs. Peckover, whose old acquaintance he was, the druggist left the shop in care of his son, aged fifteen, and sped to Clerkenwell Close. He made light of Jane's ailment. 'A little fever, that was all—soon pull her round. Any wounds, by-the-by? No? Oh, soon pull her round. Send for medicines.'

'We'll have her down in the back-kitchen as soon as the corffin's away,' said Mrs. Peckover to Mrs. Hewett. 'Don't you upset yerself about it, my dear; you've got quite enough to think about. Yer 'usband got anythink yet? Dear, dear! Don't you put yerself out. I'm sure it was a great kindness of you to let the troublesome thing lay 'ere all night.'

Funeral guests were beginning to assemble. On arriving, they were conducted first of all into the front-room on the ground-floor, the Peckovers' parlour. It was richly furnished. In the centre stood a round table, which left small space for moving about, and was at present covered with refreshments. A polished sideboard supported a row of dessert-plates propped on their edges, and a number of glass vessels, probably meant for ornament alone, as they could not possibly have been put to any use. A low cupboard in a recess was surmounted by a frosted cardboard model of St. Paul's under a glass case, behind which was reared an oval tray painted with flowers.. Over the

mantel-piece was the regulation mirror, its gilt frame enveloped in coarse yellow gauze; the mantel-piece itself bore a 'wealth' of embellishments in glass and crockery. On each side of it hung a framed silhouette, portraits of ancestors. Other pictures there were many, the most impressive being an ancient oil-painting, of which the canvas bulged forth from the frame; the subject appeared to be a ship, but was just as likely a view of the Alps. Several German prints conveyed instruction as well as delight; one represented the trial of Strafford in Westminster Hall; another, the trial of William Lord Russell, at the Old Bailey. There was also a group of engraved portraits, the Royal Family of England early in the reign of Queen Victoria; and finally, 'The Destruction of Nineveh,' by John Martin. Along the window-sill were disposed flower-pots containing artificial plants; one or other was always being knocked down by the curtains or blinds.

Each guest having taken a quaff of ale or spirits or what was called wine, with perhaps a mouthful of more solid sustenance, was then led down into the back-kitchen to view the coffin and the corpse. I mention the coffin first, because in everyone's view this was the main point of interest. Could Mrs. Peckover have buried the old woman in an orange-crate, she would gladly have done so for the saving of expense; but with relatives and neighbours to consider, she drew a great deal of virtue out of necessity, and dealt so very handsomely with the undertaker, that this burial would be the talk of the Close for some weeks. The coffin was inspected inside and out, was admired and appraised,

Mrs. Peckover being at hand to check the estimates. At the same time every most revolting detail of the dead woman's last illness was related and discussed and mused over and exclaimed upon. 'A lovely corpse, considerin' her years,' was the general opinion. Then all went upstairs again, and once more refreshed themselves. The house smelt like a bar-room.

'Everythink most respectable, I'm sure!' remarked the female mourners to each other, as they crowded together in the parlour.

'An' so it had ought to be!' exclaimed one, in an indignant tone, such as is reserved for the expression of offence among educated people, but among the poor—the London poor, least original and least articulate beings within the confines of civilisation—has also to do duty for friendly emphasis. 'If Mrs. Peckover can't afford to do things respectable, who can?'

And the speaker looked defiantly about her, as if daring contradiction. But only approving murmurs replied. Mrs. Peckover had, in fact, the reputation of being wealthy; she was always inheriting, always accumulating what her friends called 'interess,' never expending as other people needs must. The lodgings she let enabled her to live rent-free and rate-free. Clem's earnings at an artificial-flower factory more than paid for that young lady's board and clothing, and all other outlay was not worth mentioning as a deduction from the income created by her sundry investments. Her husband—ten years deceased—had been a 'moulder'; he earned on an average between three and four pounds a week, and was so prudently disposed that, for

the last decade of his life, he made it a rule never to spend a farthing of his wages. Mrs. Peckover at that time kept a small beer-shop in Rosoman Street—small and unpretending in appearance, but through it there ran a beery Pactolus. By selling the business shortly after her husband's death, Mrs. Peckover realised a handsome capital. She retired into private life, having a strong sense of personal dignity, and feeling it necessary to devote herself to the moral training of her only child.

At half-past eleven Mrs. Peckover was arrayed in her mourning robes—new, dark-glistening. During her absence Clem had kept guard over Mrs. Gully, whom it was very difficult indeed to restrain from the bottles and decanters; the elder lady coming to relieve, Clem could rush away and don her own solemn garments. The undertaker with his men arrived; the hearse and coaches drove up; the Close was in a state of excitement. 'Now that's what I call a respectable turn-out!' was the phrase passed from mouth to mouth in the crowd gathering near the door. Children in great numbers had absented themselves from school for the purpose of beholding this procession. 'I do like to see spirited 'orses at a funeral!' remarked one of the mourners, who had squeezed his way to the parlour window. 'It puts the finishin' touch, as you may say, don't it?' When the coffin was borne forth, there was such a press in the street that the men with difficulty reached the hearse. As the female mourners stepped across the pavement with handkerchiefs held to their mouths, a sigh of satisfaction was audible throughout the crowd; the males were

less sympathetically received, and some jocose comments from a costermonger, whose business was temporarily interrupted, excited indulgent smiles.

The procession moved slowly away, and the crowd, unwilling to disperse immediately, looked about for some new source of entertainment. They were fortunate, for at this moment came round the corner an individual notorious throughout Clerkenwell as 'Mad Jack.' Mad he presumably was—at all events, an idiot. A lanky, raw-boned, red-beaded man, perhaps forty years old; not clad, but hung over with the filthiest rags; hatless, shoeless. He supported himself by singing in the streets, generally psalms, and with eccentric modulations of the voice which always occasioned mirth in hearers. Sometimes he stood at a corner and began the delivery of a passage of Scripture in French; how, where, or when he could have acquired this knowledge was a mystery, and Jack would throw no light on his own past. At present, having watched the funeral coaches pass away, he lifted up his voice in a terrific blare, singing, 'All ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord, praise Him and magnify Him for ever.' Instantly he was assailed by the juvenile portion of the throng, was pelted with anything that came to hand, mocked mercilessly, buffeted from behind. For a while he persisted in his psalmody, but at length, without warning, he rushed upon his tormentors, and with angry shrieks endeavoured to take revenge. The uproar continued till a policeman came and cleared the way. Then Jack went off again, singing, 'All ye works of the Lord.' With his voice blended that

of the costermonger, 'Penny a bundill!'

Up in the Hewetts' back-room lay Jane Snowdon, now seemingly asleep, now delirious. When she talked, a name was constantly upon her lips; she kept calling for 'Mr. Kirkwood.' Amy was at school; Annie and Tom frequently went into the room and gazed curiously at the sick girl. Mrs. Hewett felt so ill to-day that she could only lie on the bed and try to silence her baby's crying.

The house-door was left wide open between the departure and return of the mourners; a superstition of the people demands this. The Peckovers brought back with them some half a dozen relatives and friends, invited to a late dinner. The meal had been in preparation at an eating-house close by, and was now speedily made ready in the parlour. A liberal supply of various ales was furnished by the agency of a pot-boy (Jane's absence being much felt), and in the course of half an hour or so the company were sufficiently restored to address themselves anew to the bottles and decanters. Mrs. Gully was now permitted to obey her instincts; the natural result could be attributed to overstrung feelings.

Just when the mourners had grown noisily hilarious, testifying thereby to the respectability with which things were being conducted to the very end, Mrs. Peckover became aware of a knocking at the front-door. She bade her daughter go and see who it was. Clem, speedily returning, beckoned her mother from among the guests.

'It's somebody wants to know if there ain't somebody called Snowdon livin' 'ere,' she whispered in a tone of alarm. 'An old man.'

Mrs. Peckover never drank more than was consistent with the perfect clearness of her brain. At present she had very red cheeks, and her cat-like eyes gleamed noticeably, but any kind of business would have found her as shrewdly competent as ever.

'What did you say?' she whispered savagely

'Said I'd come an' ask.'

'You stay 'ere. Don't say nothink.'

Mrs. Peckover left the room, closed the door behind her, and went along the passage. On the doorstep stood a man with white hair, wearing an unusual kind of cloak and a strange hat. He looked at the landlady without speaking.

'What was you wantin', mister?'

'I have been told,' replied the man in a clear, grave voice, 'that a child of the name of Snowdon lives in your house, ma'am.'

'Eh? Who told you that?'

'The people next door but one. I've been asking at many houses in the neighbourhood. There used to be relations of mine lived somewhere here; I don't know the house, nor the street exactly. The name isn't so very common. If you don't mind, I should like to ask you who the child's parents was.'

Mrs. Peckover's eyes were searching the speaker with the utmost closeness.

'I don't mind tellin' you,' she said, 'that there *is* a child of that

name in the 'ouse, a young girl, at least. Though I don't rightly know her age, I take her for fourteen or fifteen.'

The old man seemed to consult his recollections.

'If it's anyone I'm thinking of,' he said slowly, 'she can't be quite as old as that.'

The woman's face changed; she looked away for a moment.

'Well, as I was sayin', I don't rightly know her age. Any way, I'm responsible for her. I've been a mother to her, an' a good mother—though I say it myself—these six years or more. I look on her now as a child o' my own. I don't know who you may be, mister. P'r'aps you've come from abroad?'

'Yes, I have. There's no reason why I shouldn't tell you that I'm trying to find any of my kin that are still alive, There was a married son of mine that once lived somewhere about here. His name was Joseph James Snowdon. When I last heard of him, he was working at a 'lectroplater's in Clerkenwell. That was thirteen years ago. I deal openly with you; I shall thank you if you'll do the like with me.'

'See, will you just come in? I've got a few friends in the front-room; there's been a death in the 'ouse, an' there's sickness, an' we're out of order a bit, I'll ask you to come downstairs.'

It was late in the afternoon, and though lights were not yet required in the upper rooms, the kitchen would have been all but dark save for the fire. Mrs. Peckover lit a lamp and bade her visitor be seated. Then she re-examined his face, his attire, his hands. Everything about him told of a life spent in

mechanical labour. His speech was that of an untaught man, yet differed greatly from the tongue prevailing in Clerkenwell; he was probably not a Londoner by birth, and—a point of more moment—he expressed himself in the tone of one who is habitually thoughtful, who, if the aid of books has been denied to him, still has won from life the kind of knowledge which develops character. Mrs. Peckover had small experience of faces which bear the stamp of simple sincerity. This man's countenance put her out. As a matter of course, he wished to overreach her in some way, but he was obviously very deep indeed. And then she found it so difficult to guess his purposes. How would he proceed if she gave him details of Jane's history, admitting that she was the child of Joseph James Snowdon? What, again, had he been told by the people of whom he had made inquiries? She needed time to review her position.

'As I was sayin',' she resumed, poking the fire, 'I've been a mother to her these six years or more, an' I feel I done the right thing by her. She was left on my 'ands by them as promised to pay for her keep; an' a few months, I may say a few weeks, was all as ever I got. Another woman would a sent the child to the 'Ouse; but that's always the way with me; I'm always actin' against my own interesses.'

'You say that her parents went away and left her?' asked the old man, knitting his brows.

'Her father did. Her mother, she died in this very 'ouse, an' she was buried from it. He gave her a respectable burial, I'll say that

much for him. An' I shouldn't have allowed anything but one as was respectable to leave this 'ouse; I'd sooner a paid money out o' my own pocket. That's always the way with me. Mr. Willis, he's my undertaker; you'll find him at Number 17 Green Passage. He buried my 'usband; though that wasn't from the Close; but I never knew a job turned out more respectable. He was 'ere to-day; we've only just buried my 'usband's mother. That's why I ain't quite myself—see?'

Mrs. Peckover was not wont to be gossippy. She became so at present, partly in consequence of the stimulants she had taken to support her through a trying ceremony, partly as a means of obtaining time to reflect. Jane's unlucky illness made an especial difficulty in her calculations. She felt that the longer she delayed mention of the fact, the more likely was she to excite suspicion; on the other hand, she could not devise the suitable terms in which to reveal it. The steady gaze of the old man was disconcerting. Not that he searched her face with a cunning scrutiny, such as her own eyes expressed; she would have found that less troublesome, as being familiar. The anxiety, the troubled anticipation, which her words had aroused in him, were wholly free from shadow of ignoble motive; he was pained, and the frequent turning away of his look betrayed that part of the feeling was caused by observation of the woman herself, but every movement visible on his features was subdued by patience and mildness. Suffering was a life's habit with him, and its fruit in this instance that which (spite of moral commonplace) it least

often bears—self-conquest.

'You haven't told me yet,' he said, with quiet disregard of her irrelevancies, 'whether or not her father's name was Joseph Snowdon.'

'There's no call to hide it. That was his name. I've got letters of his writin'. "J. J. Snowdon" stands at the end, plain enough. And he was your son, was he?'

'He was. But have you any reason to think he's dead?'

'Dead! I never heard as he was. But then I never heard as he was livin', neither. When his wife went, poor thing—an' it was a chill on the liver, they said; it took her very sudden—he says to me, "Mrs. Peckover," he says, "I know you for a motherly woman"—just like that—see?—"I know you for a motherly woman," he says, "an' the idea I have in my 'ed is as I should like to leave Janey in your care, 'cause," he says, "I've got work in Birmingham, an' I don't see how I'm to take her with me. Understand me?" he says. "Oh!" I says—not feelin' quite sure what I'd ought to do—see? "Oh!" I says. "Yes," he says; "an' between you an' me," he says, "there won't be no misunderstanding. If you'll keep Janey with you"—an' she was goin' to school at the time, 'cause she went to the same as my own Clem—that's Clemintiner—understand?—"if you'll keep Janey with you," he says, "for a year, or maybe two years, or maybe three years—'cause that depends on cirkinstances"—understand?—"I'm ready," he says, "to pay you what it's right that pay I should, an' I'm sure," he says, "as we shouldn't

misunderstand one another." Well, of course I had my own girl to bring up, an' my own son to look after too. A nice sort o' son; just when he was beginnin' to do well, an' ought to a paid me back for all the expense I was at in puttin' him to a business, what must he do but take his 'ook to Australia.'

Her scrutiny discerned something in the listener's face which led her to ask:

'Perhaps you've been in Australia yourself, mister?'

'I have.'

The woman paused, speculation at work in her eyes.

'Do you know in what part of the country your son is?' inquired the old man absently.

'He's wrote me two letters, an' the last, as come more than a year ago, was from a place called Maryborough.'

The other still preserved an absent expression; his eyes travelled about the room.

'I always said,' pursued Mrs. Peckover, 'as it was Snowdon as put Australia into the boy's 'ed. He used to tell us he'd got a brother there, doin' well. P'r'aps it wasn't true.'

'Yes, it was true,' replied the old man coldly. 'But you haven't told me what came to pass about the child.'

An exact report of all that Mrs. Peckover had to say on this subject would occupy more space than it merits. The gist of it was that for less than a year she had received certain stipulated sums irregularly; that at length no money at all was forthcoming; that in the tenderness of her heart she had still entertained the child,

sent her to school, privately instructed her in the domestic virtues, trusting that such humanity would not lack even its material reward, and that either Joseph Snowdon or someone akin to him would ultimately make good to her the expenses she had not grudged.

'She's a child as pays you back for all the trouble you take, so much I *will* say for her,' observed the matron in conclusion. 'Not as it hasn't been a little 'ard to teach her tidiness, but she's only a young thing still. I shouldn't wonder but she's felt her position a little now an' then; it's only natural in a growin' girl, do what you can to prevent it. Still, she's willin'; that nobody can deny, an' I'm sure I should never wish to. Her cirkinstances has been peculiar; that you'll understand, I'm sure. But I done my best to take the place of the mother as is gone to a better world. An' now that she's layin' ill, I'm sure no mother could feel it more—'

'Ill? Why didn't you mention that before?'

'Didn't I say as she was ill? Why, I thought it was the first word I spoke as soon as you got into the 'ouse. You can't a noticed it, or else it was me as is so put about. What with havin' a burial—'

'Where is she?' asked the old man anxiously.

'Where? Why, you don't think as I'd a sent her to be looked after by strangers? She's layin' in Mrs. Hewett's room—that's one o' the lodgers—all for the sake o' comfort. A better an' kinder woman than Mrs. Hewett you wouldn't find, not if you was to—'

With difficulty the stranger obtained a few details of the origin and course of the illness—details wholly misleading, but devised

to reassure. When he desired to see Jane, Mrs. Peckover assumed an air of perfect willingness, but reminded him that she had nothing save his word to prove that he had indeed a legitimate interest in the girl.

'I can do no more than tell you that Joseph James Snowdon was my younger son,' replied the old man simply. 'I've come back to spend my last years in England, and I hoped—I hope still—to find my son. I wish to take his child into my own care; as he left her to strangers—perhaps he didn't do it willingly; he may be dead—he could have nothing to say against me giving her the care of a parent. You've been at expense—'

Mrs. Peckover waited with eagerness, but the sentence remained incomplete. Again the old man's eyes strayed about the room. The current of his thoughts seemed to change, and he said:

'You could show me those letters you spoke of—of my son's writing?'

'Of course I could,' was the reply, in the tone of coarse resentment whereby the scheming vulgar are wont to testify to their dishonesty.

'Afterwards—afterwards. I should like to see Jane, if you'll be so good.'

The mild voice, though often diffident, now and then fell upon a note of quiet authority which suited well with the speaker's grave, pure countenance. As he spoke thus, Mrs. Peckover rose, and said she would first go upstairs just to see how things were. She was absent ten minutes, then a little girl—Amy Hewett—

came into the kitchen and asked the stranger to follow her.

Jane had been rapidly transferred from the mattress to the bedstead, and the room had been put into such order as was possible. A whisper from Mrs. Peckover to Mrs. Hewett, promising remission of half a week's rent, had sufficed to obtain for the former complete freedom in her movements. The child, excited by this disturbance, had begun to moan and talk inarticulately. Mrs. Peckover listened for a moment, but heard nothing dangerous. She bade the old man enter noiselessly, and herself went about on tip-toe, speaking only in a hoarse whisper.

The visitor had just reached the bedside, and was gazing with deep, compassionate interest at the unconscious face, when Jane, as if startled, half rose and cried painfully, 'Mr. Kirkwood! oh, Mr. Kirkwood!' and she stretched her hand out, appearing to believe that the friend she called upon was near her.

'Who is that?' inquired the old man, turning to his companion.

'Only a friend of ours,' answered Mrs. Peckover, herself puzzled and uneasy.

Again the sick girl called 'Mr. Kirkwood!' but without other words. Mrs. Peckover urged the danger of this excitement, and speedily led the way downstairs.

CHAPTER VI
GLIMPSES OF THE PAST

Sidney Kirkwood had a lodging in Tysoe Street, Clerkenwell. It is a short street, which, like so many in London, begins reputably and degenerates in its latter half. The cleaner end leads into Wilmington Square, which consists of decently depressing houses, occupied in the main, as the lower windows and front-doors indicate, by watchmakers, working jewellers, and craftsmen of allied pursuits. The open space, grateful in this neighbourhood, is laid out as a garden, with trees, beds, and walks. Near the iron gate, which, for certain hours in the day, gives admission, is a painted notice informing the public that, by the grace of the Marquis of Northampton, they may here take their ease on condition of good behaviour; to children is addressed a distinct warning that 'This is not a playing ground.' From his window Sidney had a good view of the Square. The house in which he lived was of two storeys; a brass plate on the door showed the inscription, 'Hodgson, Dial Painter.' The window on the ground-floor was arched, as in the other dwellings at this end of the street, and within stood an artistic arrangement of wax fruit under a glass shade, supported by a heavy volume of Biblical appearance. The upper storey was graced with a small iron balcony, on which straggled a few flower-pots. However,

the exterior of this abode was, by comparison, promising; the curtains and blinds were clean, the step was washed and whitened, the brass plate shone, the panes of glass had at all events acquaintance with a duster. A few yards in the direction away from the Square, and Tysoe Street falls under the dominion of dry-rot.

It was not until he set forth to go to work next morning that Sidney called to mind his conversation with Jane. That the child should have missed by five minutes a meeting with someone who perchance had the will and the power to befriend her, seemed to him, in his present mood, merely an illustration of a vice inherent in the nature of things. He determined to look in at the public-house of which she had spoken, and hear for himself what manner of man had made inquiries for people named Snowdon. The name was not a common one; it was worth while to spend a hope or two on the chance of doing Jane a kindness. Her look and voice when he bade her be of good courage had touched him. In his rejected state, he felt that it was pleasant to earn gratitude even from so humble a being as the Peckovers' drudge.

His workshop, it has been mentioned, was in St. John's Square. Of all areas in London thus defined, this Square of St. John is probably the most irregular in outline. It is cut in two by Clerkenwell Road, and the buildings which compose it form such a number of recesses, of abortive streets, of shadowed alleys, that from no point of the Square can anything like a general view of its totality be obtained. The exit from it on the south side is

by St. John's Lane, at the entrance to which stands a survival from a buried world—the embattled and windowed archway which is all that remains above ground of the great Priory of St. John of Jerusalem. Here dwelt the Knights Hospitallers, in days when Clerkenwell was a rural parish, distant by a long stretch of green country from the walls of London. But other and nearer memories are revived by St. John's Arch. In the rooms above the gateway dwelt, a hundred and fifty years ago, one Edward Cave, publisher of the *Gentleman's Magazine*, and there many a time has sat a journeyman author of his, by name Samuel Johnson, too often *impransus*. There it was that the said Samuel once had his dinner handed to him behind a screen, because of his unpresentable costume, when Cave was entertaining an aristocratic guest. In the course of the meal, the guest happened to speak with interest of something he had recently read by an obscure Mr. Johnson; whereat there was joy behind the screen, and probably increased appreciation of the unwonted dinner. After a walk amid the squalid and toil-infested ways of Clerkenwell, it impresses one strangely to come upon this monument of old time. The archway has a sad, worn, grimy aspect. So closely is it packed in among buildings which suggest nothing but the sordid struggle for existence, that it looks depressed, ashamed, tainted by the ignobleness of its surroundings. The wonder is that it has not been swept away, in obedience to the great law of traffic and the spirit of the time.

St. John's Arch had a place in Sidney Kirkwood's earliest

memories. From the window of his present workshop he could see its grey battlements, and they reminded him of the days when, as a lad just beginning to put questions about the surprising world in which he found himself, he used to listen to such stories as his father could tell him of the history of Clerkenwell. Mr. Kirkwood occupied part of a house in St. John's Lane, not thirty yards from the Arch; he was a printers' roller maker, and did but an indifferent business. A year after the birth of Sidney, his only child, he became a widower. An intelligent, warm-hearted man, the one purpose of his latter years was to realise such moderate competency as should place his son above the anxieties which degrade. The boy had a noticeable turn for drawing and colouring; at ten years old, when (as often happened) his father took him for a Sunday in the country, he carried a sketch-book and found his delight in using it. Sidney was to be a draughtsman of some kind; perhaps an artist, if all went well. Unhappily things went the reverse of well. In his anxiety to improve his business, Mr. Kirkwood invented a new kind of 'composition' for printers' use; he patented it, risked capital upon it, made in a short time some serious losses. To add to his troubles, young Sidney was giving signs of an unstable character; at fifteen he had grown tired of his drawing, wanted to be this, that, and the other thing, was self-willed, and showed no consideration for his father's difficulties. It was necessary to take a decided step, and, though against his will, Sidney was apprenticed to an uncle, a Mr. Roach, who also lived in Clerkenwell, and was a working jeweller. Two

years later the father died, all but bankrupt. The few pounds realised from his effects passed into the hands of Mr. Roach, and were soon expended in payment for Sidney's board and lodging.

His bereavement possibly saved Sidney from a young-manhood of foolishness and worse. In the upper world a youth may 'sow his wild oats' and have done with it; in the nether, 'to have your fling' is almost necessarily to fall among criminals. The death was sudden; it affected the lad profoundly, and filled him with a remorse which was to influence the whole of his life. Mr. Roach, a thick-skinned and rather thick-headed person, did not spare to remind his apprentice of the most painful things wherewith the latter had to reproach himself. Sidney bore it, from this day beginning a course of self-discipline of which not many are capable at any age, and very few indeed at seventeen. Still, there had never been any sympathy between him and his uncle, and before very long the young man saw his way to live under another roof and find work with a new employer.

It was just after leaving his uncle's house that Sidney came to know John Hewett; the circumstances which fostered their friendship were such as threw strong light on the characters of both. Sidney had taken a room in Islington, and two rooms on the floor beneath him were tenanted by a man who was a widower and had two children. In those days, our young friend found much satisfaction in spending his Sunday evenings on Clerkenwell Green, where fervent, if ungrammatical, oratory was to be heard, and participation in debate was open to all whom the

spirit moved. One whom the spirit did very frequently move was Sidney's fellow-lodger; he had no gift of expression whatever, but his brief, stammering protests against this or that social wrong had such an honest, indeed such a pathetic sound, that Sidney took an opportunity of walking home with him and converting neighbourship into friendly acquaintance. John Hewett gave the young man an account of his life. He had begun as a lath-render; later he had got into cabinet-making, started a business on his own account, and failed. A brother of his, who was a builder's foreman, then found employment for him in general carpentry on some new houses; but John quarrelled with his brother, and after many difficulties fell to the making of packing-cases; that was his work at present, and with much discontent he pursued it. John was curiously frank in owning all the faults in himself which had helped to make his career so unsatisfactory. He confessed that he had an uncertain temper, that he soon became impatient with work 'which led to nothing,' that he was tempted out of his prudence by anything which seemed to offer 'a better start.' With all these admissions, he maintained that he did well to be angry. It was wrong that life should be so hard; so much should not be required of a man. In body he was not strong; the weariness of interminable days over-tried him and excited his mind to vain discontent. His wife was the only one who could ever keep him cheerful under his lot, and his wedded life had lasted but six years; now there was his lad Bob and his little girl Clara to think of, and it only made him more miserable to look forward and

see them going through hardships like his own. Things were wrong somehow, and it seemed to him that 'if only we could have universal suffrage—'

Sidney was only eighteen, and strong in juvenile Radicalism, but he had a fund of common sense, and such a conclusion as this of poor John's half-astonished, half-amused him. However, the man's personality attracted him; it was honest, warm-hearted, interesting; the logic of his pleadings might be at fault, but Sidney sympathised with him, for all that. He too felt that 'things were wrong somehow,' and had a pleasure in joining the side of revolt for revolt's sake.

Now in the same house with them dwelt a young woman of about nineteen years old; she occupied a garret, was seldom seen about, and had every appearance of being a simple, laborious girl, of the kind familiar enough as the silent victims of industrialism. One day the house was thrown into consternation by the news that Miss Barnes—so she was named—had been arrested on a charge of stealing her employer's goods. It was true, and perhaps the best way of explaining it will be to reproduce a newspaper report which Sidney Kirkwood thereafter preserved.

'On Friday, Margaret Barnes, nineteen, a single woman, was indicted for stealing six jackets, value 5*l*., the property of Mary Oaks, her mistress. The prisoner, who cried bitterly during the proceedings, pleaded guilty. The prosecutrix is a single woman, and gets her living by mantle-making, She engaged the prisoner to do what is termed "finishing off," that is, making the button-

holes and sewing on the buttons. The prisoner was also employed to fetch the work from the warehouse, and deliver it when finished. On September 7th her mistress sent her with the six jackets, and she never returned. Sergeant Smith, a detective, who apprehended the prisoner, said he had made inquiries in the case, and found that up to this time the prisoner had borne a good character as an honest, hard-working girl. She had quitted her former lodgings, which had no furniture but a small table and a few rags in a corner, and he discovered her in a room which was perfectly bare. Miss Oaks was examined, and said the prisoner was employed from nine in the morning to eight at night. The Judge: How much did you pay her per week? Miss Oaks: Four shillings. The Judge: Did you give her her food? Miss Oaks: No; I only get one shilling each for the jackets myself when completed. I have to use two sewing-machines, find my own cotton and needles, and I can, by working hard, make two in a day. The Judge said it was a sad state of things. The prisoner, when called upon, said she had had nothing to eat for three days, and so gave way to temptation, hoping to get better employment. The Judge, while commiserating with the prisoner, said it could not be allowed that distress should justify dishonesty, and sentenced the prisoner to six weeks' imprisonment.'

The six weeks passed, and about a fortnight after that, John Hewett came into Sidney's room one evening with a strange look on his face. His eyes were very bright, the hand which he held out trembled.

'I've something to tell you,' he said. 'I'm going to get married again.'

'Really? Why, I'm glad to hear it!'

'And who do you think? Miss Barnes.'

Sidney was startled for a moment. John had had no acquaintance with the girl prior to her imprisonment. He had said that he should meet her when she came out and give her some money, and Sidney had added a contribution. For a man in Hewett's circumstances this latest step was somewhat astonishing, but his character explained it.

'I'm goin' to marry her,' he exclaimed excitedly, 'and I'm doing the right thing! I respect her more than all the women as never went wrong because they never had occasion to. I'm goin' to put her as a mother over my children, and I'm goin' to make a happier life for her. She's a good girl, I tell you. I've seen her nearly every day this fortnight; I know all about her. She wouldn't have me when I first asked her—that was a week ago. She said no; she'd disgrace me. If you can't respect her as you would any other woman, never come into my lodging!'

Sidney was warm with generous glow. He wrung Hewett's hand and stammered incoherent words.

John took new lodgings in an obscure part of Clerkenwell, and seemed to have become a young man once more. His complaints ceased; the energy with which he went about his work was remarkable. He said his wife was the salvation of him. And then befell one of those happy chances which supply mankind

with instances for its pathetic faith that a good deed will not fail of reward. John's brother died, and bequeathed to him some four hundred pounds. Hereupon, what must the poor fellow do but open workshops on his own account, engage men, go about crying that his opportunity had come at last. Here was the bit of rock by means of which he could save himself from the sea of competition that had so nearly whelmed him! Little Clara, now eleven years old, could go on steadily at school; no need to think of how the poor child should earn a wretched living. Bob, now thirteen, should shortly be apprenticed to some better kind of trade. New rooms were taken and well furnished. Maggie, the wife, could have good food, such as she needed in her constant ailing, alas! The baby just born was no longer a cause of anxious thought, but a joy in the home. And Sidney Kirkwood came to supper as soon as the new rooms were in order, and his bright, manly face did everyone good to look at. He still took little Clara upon his knee. Ha! there would come a day before long when he would not venture to do that, and then perhaps—perhaps! What a supper that was, and how smoothly went the great wheels of the world that evening!

One baby, two babies, three babies; before the birth of the third, John's brow was again clouded, again he had begun to rail and fume at the unfitness of things. His business was a failure, partly because he dealt with a too rigid honesty, partly because of his unstable nature, which left him at the mercy of whims and obstinacies and airy projects. He did not risk the ordinary kind

of bankruptcy, but came down and down, until at length he was the only workman in his own shop; then the shop itself had to be abandoned; then he was searching for someone who would employ him.

Bob had been put to the die-sinker's craft; Clara was still going to school, and had no thought of earning a livelihood—ominous state of things, When it shortly became clear even to John Hewett that he would wrong the girl if he did not provide her with some means of supporting herself, she was sent to learn 'stamping' with the same employer for whom her brother worked. The work was light; it would soon bring in a little money. John declared with fierceness that his daughter should never be set to the usual needle-slavery, and indeed it seemed very unlikely that Clara would ever be fit for that employment, as she could not do the simplest kind of sewing. In the meantime the family kept changing their abode, till at length they settled in Mrs. Peckover's house. All the best of their furniture was by this time sold; but for the two eldest children, there would probably have been no home at all. Bob, aged nineteen, earned at this present time a pound weekly; his sister, an average of thirteen shillings. Mrs. Hewett's constant ill-health (the result, doubtless, of semi-starvation through the years of her girlhood), would have excused defects of housekeeping; but indeed the poor woman was under any circumstances incapable of domestic management, and therein represented her class. The money she received was wasted in comparison with what might have been

done with it. I suppose she must not be blamed for bringing children into the world when those already born to her were but half-clothed, half-fed; she increased the sum total of the world's misery in obedience to the laws of the Book of Genesis. And one virtue she had which compensated for all that was lacking—a virtue merely negative among the refined, but in that other world the rarest and most precious of moral distinctions—she resisted the temptations of the public-house.

This was the story present in Sidney Kirkwood's mind as often as he climbed the staircase in Clerkenwell Close. By contrast, his own life seemed one of unbroken ease. Outwardly it was smooth enough. He had no liking for his craft, and being always employed upon the meaningless work which is demanded by the rich vulgar, he felt such work to be paltry and ignoble; but there seemed no hope of obtaining better, and he made no audible complaint. His wages were consider ably more than he needed, and systematically he put money aside each week.

But this orderly existence concealed conflicts of heart and mind which Sidney himself could not have explained, could not lucidly have described. The moral shock which he experienced at his father's death put an end to the wanton play of his energies, but it could not ripen him before due time; his nature was not of the sterile order common in his world, and through passion, through conflict, through endurance, it had to develop such maturity as fate should permit. Saved from self-indulgence, he naturally turned into the way of political enthusiasm; thither

did his temper point him. With some help—mostly negative—from Clerkenwell Green, he reached the stage of confident and aspiring Radicalism, believing in the perfectibility of man, in human brotherhood, in—anything you like that is the outcome of a noble heart sheltered by ignorance. It had its turn, and passed.

To give place to nothing very satisfactory. It was not a mere coincidence that Sidney was going through a period of mental and moral confusion just in those years which brought Clara Hewett from childhood to the state of woman. Among the acquaintances of Sidney's boyhood there was not one but had a chosen female companion from the age of fifteen or earlier; he himself had been no exception to the rule in his class, but at the time of meeting with Hewett he was companionless, and remained so. The Hewetts became his closest friends; in their brief prosperity he rejoiced with them, in their hardships he gave them all the assistance to which John's pride would consent; his name was never spoken among them but with warmth and gratitude. And of course the day came to which Hewett had looked forward—the day when Sidney could no longer take Clara upon his knee and stroke her brown hair and joke with her about her fits of good and ill humour. Sidney knew well enough what was in his friend's mind, and, though with no sense of constraint, he felt that this handsome, keen-eyed, capricious girl was destined to be his wife. He liked Clara; she always attracted him and interested him; but her faults were too obvious to escape any eye, and the older she grew, the more was he impressed and

troubled by them. The thought of Clara became a preoccupation, and with the love which at length he recognised there blended a sense of fate fulfilling itself. His enthusiasms, his purposes, never defined as education would have defined them, were dissipated into utter vagueness. He lost his guiding interests, and found himself returning to those of boyhood. The country once more attracted him; he took out his old sketch-books, bought a new one, revived the regret that he could not be a painter of landscape. A visit to one or two picture-galleries, and then again profound discouragement, recognition of the fact that he was a mechanic and never could be anything else.

It was the end of his illusions. For him not even passionate love was to preserve the power of idealising its object. He loved Clara with all the desire of his being, but could no longer deceive himself in judging her character. The same sad clearness of vision affected his judgment of the world about him, of the activities in which he had once been zealous, of the conditions which enveloped his life and the lives of those dear to him. The spirit of revolt often enough stirred within him, but no longer found utterance in the speech which brings relief; he did his best to dispel the mood, mocking at it as folly. Consciously he set himself the task of becoming a practical man, of learning to make the best of life as he found it, of shunning as the fatal error that habit of mind which kept John Hewett on the rack. Who was he that he should look for pleasant things in his course through the world? 'We are the lower orders; we are the working classes,'

he said bitterly to his friend, and that seemed the final answer to all his aspirations.

This was a dark day with him. The gold he handled stung him to hatred and envy, and every feeling which he had resolved to combat as worse than profitless. He could not speak to his fellow-workmen. From morning to night it had rained. St. John's Arch looked more broken-spirited than ever, drenched in sooty moisture.

During the dinner-hour he walked over to the public-house of which Jane had spoken, and obtained from the barman as full a description as possible of the person he hoped to encounter. Both then and on his return home in the evening he shunned the house where his friends dwelt.

It came round to Monday. For the first time for many months he had allowed Sunday to pass without visiting the Hewetts. He felt that to go there at present would only be to increase the parents' depression by his own low spirits. Clara had left them now, however, and if he still stayed away, his behaviour might be misinterpreted. On returning from work, he washed, took a hurried meal, and was on the point of going out when someone knocked at his door. He opened, and saw an old man who was a stranger to him.

CHAPTER VII
MRS. BYASS'S LODGINGS

'You are Mr. Kirkwood?' said his visitor civilly. 'My name is Snowdon. I should be glad to speak a few words with you, if you could spare the time.'

Sidney's thoughts were instantly led into the right channel; he identified the old man by his white hair and the cloak. The hat, however, which had been described to him, was now exchanged for a soft felt of a kind common enough; the guernsey, too, had been laid aside. With ready goodwill he invited Mr. Snowdon to enter.

There was not much in the room to distinguish it from the dwelling of any orderly mechanic. A small bed occupied one side; a small table stood before the window; the toilet apparatus was, of course, unconcealed; a half-open cupboard allowed a glimpse of crockery, sundries, and a few books. The walls, it is true, were otherwise ornamented than is usual; engravings, chromo-lithographs, and some sketches of landscape in pencil, were suspended wherever light fell, and the choice manifested in this collection was nowise akin to that which ruled in Mrs. Peckover's parlour, and probably in all the parlours of Tysoe Street. To select for one's chamber a woodcut after Constable or Gainsborough is at all events to give proof of a capacity for

civilisation.

The visitor made a quick survey of these appearances; then he seated himself on the chair Sidney offered. He was not entirely at his ease, and looked up at the young man twice or thrice before he began to speak again.

'Mr. Kirkwood, were you ever acquainted with my son, by name Joseph Snowdon?'

'No; I never knew him,' was the reply. 'I have heard his name, and I know where he once lived—not far from here.'

'You're wondering what has brought me to you. I have heard of you from people a grandchild of mine is living with. I dare say it is the house you mean—in Clerkenwell Close.'

'So you have found it!' exclaimed Sidney with pleasure. 'I've been looking about for you as I walked along the streets these last two or three days.'

'Looking for me?' said the other, astonished.

Sidney supplied the explanation, but without remarking on the circumstances which made Jane so anxious to discover a possible friend. Snowdon listened attentively, and at length, with a slight smile; he seemed to find pleasure in the young man's way of expressing himself. When silence ensued, he looked about absently for a moment; then, meeting Sidney's eyes, said in a grave voice:

'That poor child is very ill.'

'Ill? I'm sorry to hear it.'

'The reason I've come to you, Mr. Kirkwood, is because she's

called out your name so often. They don't seem able to tell me how she came into this state, but she's had a fright of some kind, or she's been living very unhappily. She calls on your name, as if she wanted you to protect her from harm. I didn't know what to think about it at first. I'm a stranger to everybody—I may tell you I've been abroad for several years—and they don't seem very ready to put trust in me; but I decided at last that I'd come and speak to you. It's my grandchild, and perhaps the only one of my family left; nobody can give me news of her father since he went away four or five years ago. She came to herself this morning for a little, but I'm afraid she couldn't understand what I tried to tell her; then I mentioned your name, and I could see it did her good at once. What I wish to ask of you is, would you come to her bedside for a few minutes? She might know you, and I feel sure it would be a kindness to her.'

Sidney appeared to hesitate. It was not, of course, that he dreamt of refusing, but he was busy revolving all he knew of Jane's life with the Peckovers, and asking himself what it behoved him to tell, what to withhold. Daily experience guarded him against the habit of gossip, which is one of the innumerable curses of the uneducated (whether poor or wealthy), and, notwithstanding the sympathy with which his visitor inspired him, he quickly decided to maintain reserve until he understood more of the situation.

'Yes, yes; I'll go with you at once,' he made haste to reply, when he perceived that his hesitancy was occasioning doubt and

trouble. 'In fact, I was just starting to go and see the Hewetts when you knocked at the door. They're friends of mine—living in Mrs. Peckover's house. That's how I came to know Jane. I haven't been there for several days, and when I last saw her, as I was saying, she seemed as well as usual.'

'I'm afraid that wasn't much to boast of,' said Snowdon. 'She's a poor, thin-looking child.'

Sidney was conscious that the old man did not give expression to all he thought. This mutual exercise of tact seemed, however, to encourage a good understanding between them rather than the reverse.

'You remain in the house?' Kirkwood asked as they went downstairs.

'I stay with her through the night. I didn't feel much confidence in the doctor that was seeing her, so I made inquiries and found a better man.'

When they reached the Close, the door was opened to them by Clem Peckover. She glared haughtily at Sidney, but uttered no word. To Kirkwood's surprise, they went up to the Hewetts' back-room. The mattress that formerly lay upon the floor had been removed; the bed was occupied by the sick girl, with whom at present Mrs. Peckover was sitting. That benevolent person rose on seeing Sidney, and inclined her head with stateliness.

'She's just fell asleep,' was her whispered remark. 'I shouldn't say myself as it was good to wake her up, but of course you know best.'

This was in keeping with the attitude Mrs. Peckover had adopted as soon as she understood Snowdon's resolve to neglect no precaution on the child's behalf. Her sour dignity was meant to express that she felt hurt at the intervention of others where her affections were so nearly concerned. Sidney could not help a certain fear when he saw this woman installed as sick-nurse. It was of purpose that he caught her eye and regarded her with a gravity she could scarcely fail to comprehend.

Jane awoke from her fitful slumber. She looked with but half-conscious fearfulness at the figures darkening her view. Sidney moved so that his face was in the light, and, bending near to her, asked if she recognised him. A smile—slow-forming, but unmistakable at last—amply justified what her grandfather had said. She made an effort to move her hand towards him. Sidney responded to her wish, and again she smiled, self-forgetfully, contentedly.

Snowdon turned to Mrs. Peckover, and, after a few words with regard to the treatment that was being pursued, said that he would now relieve her; she lingered, but shortly left the room. Sidney, sitting by the bed, in a few minutes saw that Jane once more slept, or appeared to do so. He whispered to Snowdon that he was going to see his friends in the next room, and would look in again before leaving.

His tap at the door was answered by Amy, who at once looked back and said:

'Can Mr. Kirkwood come in, mother?'

'Yes; I want to see him,' was the answer.

Mrs. Hewett was lying in bed; she looked, if possible, more wretchedly ill than four days ago. On the floor were two mattresses, covered to make beds for the children. The baby, held in its mother's arms, was crying feebly.

'Why, I hoped you were getting much better by now,' said Sidney.

Mrs. Hewett told him that she had been to the hospital on Saturday, and seemed to have caught cold. A common enough occurrence; hours of waiting in an out-patients' room frequently do more harm than the doctor's advice can remedy. She explained that Mrs. Peckover had requested the use of the other room.

'There's too many of us to be livin' an' sleepin' in this Little place,' she said; 'but, after all, it's a savin' of rent. It's a good thing Clara isn't here. An' you've heard as John's got work?'

He had found a job at length with a cabinet-maker; tonight he would probably be working till ten or eleven o'clock. Good news so far. Then Mrs. Hewett began to speak with curiosity of the old man who claimed Jane as his grandchild. Sidney told her what had just happened.

'An' what did you say about the girl?' she asked anxiously.

'I said as little as I could; I thought it wisest. Do you know what made her ill?'

'It was that Clem as did it,' Mrs. Hewett replied, subduing her voice, And she related what had befallen after Sidney's last

visit. 'Mrs. Peckover, she's that afraid the truth should get out. Of course I don't want to make no bother, but I do feel that glad the poor thing's got somebody to look after her at last. I never told you half the things as used to go on. That Clem's no better than a wild-beast tiger; but then what can you do? There's never any good comes out of makin' a bother with other people's business, is there? Fancy him comin' to see you! Mrs. Peckover's afraid of him, I can see that, though she pretends she isn't goin' to stand him interferin'. What do you think about him, Sidney? He's sent for a doctor out of Islington; wouldn't have nothin' to say to the other. He must have plenty of money, don't you think? Mrs. Peckover says he's goin' to pay the money owin' to her for Jane's keep. As if the poor thing hadn't more than paid for her bits of meals an' her bed in the kitchen! Do you think that woman 'ud ever have kept her if it wasn't she could make her a servant with no wages? If Jane 'ud been a boy, she'd a gone to the workhouse long ago. She's been that handy, poor little mite! I've always done what I could for her; you know that, Sidney. I do hope she'll get over it. If anything happens, mind my word, there'll be a nice to-do! Clara says she'll go to a magistrate an' let it all out, if nobody else will. She hates the Peckovers, Clara does.'

'It won't come to that,' said Sidney. 'I can see the old man'll take her away as soon as possible. He may have a little money; he's just come back from Australia. I like the look of him myself.'

He began to talk of other subjects; waxed wrath at the misery of this housing to which the family had shrunk; urged a removal

from the vile den as soon as ever it could be managed. Sidney always lost control of himself when he talked with the Hewetts of their difficulties; the people were, from his point of view, so lacking in resource, so stubbornly rooted in profitless habit. Over and over again he had implored them to take a rational view of the case, to borrow a few pounds of him, to make a new beginning on clean soil. It was like contending with some hostile force of nature; lie spent himself in vain.

As Hewett did not return, he at length took his leave, and went into the back-room for a moment.

'She's asleep,' said Snowdon, rising from the chair where he had been sitting deep in thought. 'It's a good sign.'

Sidney just looked towards the bed, and nodded with satisfaction. The old man gave him a warm pressure of the hand, and he departed. All the way home, he thought with singular interest of the bare sick-room, of the white-headed man watching through the night; the picture impressed him in a way that could not be explained by its natural pathos merely; it kept suggesting all sorts of fanciful ideas, due in a measure, possibly, to Mrs. Hewett's speculations. For an hour he was so lost in musing on the subject that he even rested from the misery of his ceaseless thought of Clara.

He allowed three days to pass, then went to inquire about Jane's progress. It had been satisfactory. Subsequent visits brought him to terms of a certain intimacy with Snowdon. The latter mentioned at length that he was looking for two rooms,

suitable for himself and Jane. He wished them to be in a decent house, somewhere in Clerkenwell, and the rent was not to be more than a working man could afford.

'You don't know of anything in your street?' he asked diffidently.

Something in the tone struck Sidney. It half expressed a wish to live in his neighbourhood if possible. He looked at his companion (they were walking together), and was met in return with a glance of calm friendliness; it gratified him, strengthened the feeling of respect and attachment which had already grown out of this intercourse. In Tysoe Street, however, no accommodation could be found. Sidney had another project in his thoughts; pursuing it, he paid a visit the next evening to certain acquaintances of his named Byass, who had a house in Hanover Street, Islington, and let lodgings. Hanover Street lies to the north of City Road; it is a quiet byway, of curving form, and consists of dwellings only. Squalor is here kept at arm's length; compared with regions close at hand, this and the contiguous streets have something of a suburban aspect.

Three or four steps led up to the house-door. Sidney's knock summoned a young, healthy-faced, comely woman, who evinced hearty pleasure on seeing who her visitor was. She brought him at once into a parlour on the ground-floor.

'Well, an' I was only this mornin' tellin' Sam to go an' look after you, or write a note, or somethin'! Why can't you come round oftener? I've no patience with you! You just sit at 'ome an'

get humped, an' what's the good o' that, I should like to know? I thought you'd took offence with me, an' so I told Sam. Do you want to know how baby is? Why don't you ask, then, as you ought to do the first thing? He's a good deal better than he deserves to be, young rascal—all the trouble he gives me! He's fast asleep, I'm glad to say, so you can't see him. Sam'll be back in a few minutes; at least I expect him, but there's no knowin' nowadays when lie can leave the warehouse. What's brought you to-night, I wonder? You needn't tell me anything about the Upper Street business; *I* know all about *that*!'

'Oh, do you? From Clara herself?'

'Yes. Don't talk to me about her! There! I'm sick an tired of her—an' so are you, I should think, if you've any sense left. Her an' me can't get along, an' that's the truth. Why, when I met her on Sunday afternoon, she was that patronisin' you'd have thought she'd got a place in Windsor Castle. Would she come an' have a cup of tea? Oh dear, no! Hadn't time! The Princess of Wales, I suppose, was waitin' round the corner!'

Having so relieved her mind, Mrs. Byass laughed with a genuine gaiety which proved how little malice there was in her satire. Sidney could not refuse a smile, but it was a gloomy one.

'I'm not sure you've done all you might have to keep her friends with you,' he said seriously, but with a good-natured look.

'There you go!' exclaimed Mrs. Byass, throwing back her head. 'Of course everybody must be in fault sooner than *her*! She's an angel is Miss Hewett! Poor dear! to think how shameful

she's been used! Now I do wonder how you've the face to say such things, Mr. Kirkwood! Why, there's nobody else livin' would have been as patient with her as I always was. I'm not bad-tempered, I will say that for myself, an' I've put up with all sorts of things (me, a married woman), when anyone else would have boxed her ears and told her she was a conceited minx. I used to be fond of Clara; you know I did. But she's got beyond all bearin'; and if you wasn't just as foolish as men always are, you'd see her in her true colours. Do shake yourself a bit, do! Oh, you silly, silly man!'

Again she burst into ringing laughter, throwing herself backwards and forwards, and at last covering her face with her hands. Sidney looked annoyed, but the contagion of such spontaneous merriment in the end brought another smile to his face. He moved his head in sign of giving up the argument, and, as soon as there was silence, turned to the object of his visit.

'I see you've still got the card in the window. I shouldn't wonder if I could find you a lodger for those top-rooms.'

'And who's that? No children, mind.'

Sidney told her what he could of the old man. Of Jane he only said that she had hitherto lived with the Hewetts' landlady, and was now going to be removed by her grandfather, having just got through an illness. Dire visions of infection at once assailed Mrs. Byass; impossible to admit under the same roof with her baby a person who had just been ill. This scruple was, however, overcome; the two rooms at the top of the house—unfurnished

—had been long vacant, owing to fastidiousness in Mr. and Mrs. Byass, since their last lodger, after a fortnight of continuous drunkenness, broke the windows, ripped the paper off the walls, and ended by trying to set fire to the house. Sidney was intrusted with an outline treaty, to be communicated to Mr. Snowdon.

This discussion was just concluded when Mr. Samuel Byass presented himself—a slender, large-headed young man, with very light hair cropped close upon the scalp, and a foolish face screwed into an expression of facetiousness. He was employed in some clerkly capacity at a wholesale stationer's in City Road. Having stepped into the room, he removed a very brown silk hat and laid it on a chair, winking the while at Sidney with his right eye; then he removed his overcoat, winking with the left eye. Thus disembarrassed, he strode gravely to the fireplace, took up the poker, held it in the manner of a weapon upright against his shoulder, and exclaimed in a severe voice, 'Eyes right!' Then, converting the poker into a sword, he drew near to Sidney and affected to practise upon him the military cuts, his features distorted into grotesque ferocity. Finally, assuming the attitude of a juggler, he made an attempt to balance the poker perpendicularly upon his nose, until it fell with a crash, just missing the ornaments on the mantel-piece. All this time Mrs. Byass shrieked with laughter, with difficulty keeping her chair.

'Oh, Sam,' she panted forth, her handkerchief at her eyes, 'what a fool you are! Do stop, or you'll kill me!'

Vastly gratified, Samuel advanced with ludicrous gestures

towards the visitor, held out his hand, and said with affected nasality, 'How do you do, sir? It's some time since I had the pleasure of seeing you, sir. I hope you have been pretty tolerable.'

'*Isn't* he a fool, Mr. Kirkwood?' cried the delighted wife. 'Do just give him a smack on the side of the head, to please me! Sam, go an' wash, an' we'll have supper. What do you mean by being so late to-night?'

'Where's the infant?' asked Mr. Byass, thrusting his hands into his waistcoat pockets and peering about the room. 'Bring forth the infant! Let a fond parent look upon his child.'

'Go an' wash, or I'll throw something at you. Baby's in bed, and mind, you wake him if you dare!'

Sidney would have taken his leave, but found it impossible. Mrs. Byass declared that if he would not stay to supper he should never enter the house again.

'Let's make a night of it!' cried Sam, standing in the doorway. 'Let's have three pots of six ale and a bottle of old Tom! Let us be reckless!'

His wife caught up the pillow from the sofa and hurled it at him. Samuel escaped just in time. The next moment his head was again thrust forward.

'Let's send to the High Street for three cold roast fowls and a beef-steak pie! Let's get custards and cheese-cakes and French pastry! Let's have a pine-apple and preserved ginger! Who says, Go it for once?'

Mrs. Byass caught up the poker and sprang after him. From

the passage came sounds of scuffling and screaming, and in the end of something produced by the lips. Mrs. Byass then showed a very red face at the door, and said:

'*Isn't* he a fool? Just wait a minute while I get the table laid.'

Supper was soon ready in the comfortable kitchen. A cold shoulder of mutton, a piece of cheese, pickled beetroot, a seed-cake, and raspberry jam; such was the fare to which Bessie Byass invited her husband and her guest. On a side-table were some open cardboard boxes containing artificial flowers and leaves; for Bessie had now and then a little 'mounting' to do for a shop in Upper Street, and in that way aided the income of the family. She was in even better spirits than usual at the prospect of letting her top-rooms. On hearing that piece of news, Samuel, who had just come from the nearest public-house with a foaming jug, executed a wild dance round the room and inadvertently knocked two plates from the dresser. This accident made his wife wrathful, but only for a moment; presently she was laughing as unrestrainedly as ever, and bestowing upon the repentant young man her familiar flattery.

At eleven o'clock Sidney left them, and mused with smiles on his way home. This was not exactly his ideal of domestic happiness, yet it was better than the life led by the Hewetts —better than that of other households with which he was acquainted—better far, it seemed to him, than the aspirations which were threatening to lead poor Clara—who knew whither? A temptation beset him to walk round into Upper Street and pass

Mrs. Tubbs's bar. He resisted it, knowing that the result would only be a night of sleepless anger and misery.

The next day he again saw Snowdon, and spoke to him of Mrs. Byass's rooms. The old man seemed at first indisposed to go so far; but when he had seen the interior of the house and talked with the landlady, his objections disappeared. Before another week had passed the two rooms were furnished in the simplest possible way, and Snowdon brought Jane from Clerkenwell Close.

Kirkwood came by invitation as soon as the two were fairly established in their home. He found Jane sitting by the fire in her grandfather's room; a very little exertion still out-wearied her, and the strange things that had come to pass had made her habitually silent. She looked about her wonderingly, seemed unable to realise her position, was painfully conscious of her new clothes, ever and again started as if in fear.

'Well, what did I say that night?' was Sidney's greeting. 'Didn't I tell you it would be all right soon?'

Jane made no answer in words, but locked at him timidly; and then a smile came upon her face, an expression of joy that could not trust itself, that seemed to her too boldly at variance with all she had yet known of life.

CHAPTER VIII
PENNYLOAF CANDY

In the social classification of the nether world—a subject which so eminently adapts itself to the sportive and gracefully picturesque mode of treatment—it will be convenient to distinguish broadly, and with reference to males alone, the two great sections of those who do, and those who do not, wear collars. Each of these orders would, it is obvious, offer much scope to an analyst delighting in subtle gradation. Taking the collarless, bow shrewdly might one discriminate between the many kinds of neckcloth which our climate renders necessary as a substitute for the nobler article of attire! The navvy, the scaffolder, the costermonger, the cab-tout—innumerable would be the varieties of texture, of fold, of knot, observed in the ranks of unskilled labour. And among these whose higher station is indicated by the linen or paper symbol, what a gap between the mechanic with collar attached to a flannel shirt, and just visible along the top of a black tie, and the shopman whose pride it is to adorn himself with the very ugliest neck-encloser put in vogue by aristocratic sanction. For such attractive disquisition I have, unfortunately, no space; it must suffice that I indicate the two genera. And I was led to do so in thinking of Bob Hewett.

Bob wore a collar. In the die-sinking establishment which

employed him there were, it is true, two men who belonged to the collarless; but their business was down in the basement of the building, where they kept up a furnace, worked huge stamping-machines, and so on. Bob's workshop was upstairs, and the companions with whom he sat, without exception, had something white and stiff round their necks; in fact, they were every bit as respectable as Sidney Kirkwood, and such as he, who bent over a jeweller's table. To John Hewett it was no slight gratification that he had been able to apprentice his son to a craft which permitted him always to wear a collar. I would not imply that John thought of the matter in these terms, but his reflections bore this significance. Bob was raised for ever above the rank of those who depend merely upon their muscles, even as Clara was saved from the dismal destiny of the women who can do nothing but sew.

There was, on the whole, some reason why John Hewett should feel pride in his eldest son. Like Sidney Kirkwood, Bob had early shown a faculty for draughtsmansbip; when at school, he made decidedly clever caricatures of such persons as displeased him, and he drew such wonderful horses (on the race-course or pulling cabs), such laughable donkeys in costers' carts, such perfect dogs, that on several occasions some friend had purchased with a veritable shilling a specimen of his work. 'Put him to the die-sinking,' said an acquaintance of the family, himself so employed; 'he'll find a use for this kind of thing some day.' Die-sinking is not the craft it once was; cheap

methods, vulgarising here as everywhere, have diminished the opportunities of capable men; but a fair living was promised the lad if he stuck to his work, and at the age of nineteen he was already earning his pound a week. Then he was clever in a good many other ways. He had an ear for music, played (nothing else was within his reach) the concertina, sang a lively song with uncommon melodiousness—a gift much appreciated at the meetings of a certain Mutual Benefit Club, to which his father had paid a weekly subscription, without fail, through all adversities. In the regular departments of learning Bob had never shown any particular aptitude; he wrote and read decently, but his speech, as you have had occasion for observing, was not marked by refinement, and for books he had no liking. His father, unfortunately, had spoilt him, just as he had spoilt Clara. Being of the nobly independent sex, between fifteen and sixteen he practically free himself from parental control. The use he made of his liberty was not altogether pleasing to John, but the time for restraint and training had hopelessly gone by. The lad was selfish, that there was no denying; he grudged the money demanded of him for his support; but in other matters he always showed himself so easy-tempered, so disposed to a genial understanding, that the great fault had to be blinked. Many failings might have been forgiven him in consideration of the fact that he had never yet drunk too much, and indeed cared little for liquor.

Men of talent, as you are aware, not seldom exhibit low tastes in their choice of companionship. Bob was a case in point;

he did not sufficiently appreciate social distinctions. He, who wore a collar, seemed to prefer associating with the collarless. There was Jack—more properly 'Jeck'—Bartley, for instance, his bosom friend until they began to cool in consequence of a common interest in Miss Peckover. Jack never wore a collar in his life, not even on Sundays, and was closely allied with all sorts of blackguards, who somehow made a living on the outskirts of turf-land. And there was Eli Snape, compared with whom Jack was a person of refinement and culture. Eli dealt surreptitiously in dogs and rats, and the mere odour of him was intolerable to ordinary nostrils; yet he was a species of hero in Bob's regard, such invaluable information could he supply with regard to 'events' in which young Hewett took a profound interest. Perhaps a more serious aspect of Bob's disregard for social standing was revealed in his relations with the other sex. Susceptible from his tender youth, he showed no ambition in the bestowal of his amorous homage. At the age of sixteen did he not declare his resolve to wed the daughter of old Sally Budge, who went about selling watercress? and was there not a desperate conflict at home before this project could be driven from his head? It was but the first of many such instances. Had he been left to his own devices, he would already, like numbers of his coevals, have been supporting (or declining to support) a wife and two or three children. At present he was 'engaged' to Clem Peckover; that was an understood thing. His father did not approve it, but this connection was undeniably better than

those he had previously declared or concealed. Bob, it seemed evident, was fated to make a *mesalliance*—a pity, seeing his parts and prospects. He might have aspired to a wife who had scarcely any difficulty with her *h*'s; whose bringing-up enabled her to look with compassion on girls who could not play the piano; who counted among her relatives not one collarless individual.

Clem, as we have seen, had already found, or imagined, cause for dissatisfaction with her betrothed. She was well enough acquainted with Bob's repute, and her temper made it improbable, to say the least, that the course of wooing would in this case run very smoothly. At present, various little signs were beginning to convince her that she had a rival, and the hints of her rejected admirer, Jack Bartley, fixed her suspicions upon an acquaintance whom she had hitherto regarded merely with contempt. This was Pennyloaf Candy, formerly, with her parents, a lodger in Mrs. Peckover's house. The family had been ousted some eighteen months ago on account of failure to pay their rent and of the frequent intoxication of Mrs. Candy. Pennyloaf's legal name was Penelope, which, being pronounced as a trisyllable, transformed itself by further corruption into a sound at all events conveying some meaning. Applied in the first instance jocosely, the title grew inseparable from her, and was the one she herself always used. Her employment was the making of shirts for export; she earned on an average tenpence a day, and frequently worked fifteen hours between leaving and returning to her home. That Bob Hewett could interest himself, with whatever

motive, in a person of this description, Miss Peckover at first declined to believe. A hint, however, was quite enough to excite her jealous temperament; as proof accumulated, cunning and ferocity wrought in her for the devising of such a declaration of war as should speedily scare Pennyloaf from the field. Jane Snowdon's removal had caused her no little irritation; the hours of evening were heavy on her hands, and this new emotion was not unwelcome as a temporary resource.

As he came home from work one Monday towards the end of April, Bob encountered Pennyloaf; she had a bundle in her hands and was walking hurriedly.

'Hallo! that you?' ho exclaimed, catching her by the arm. 'Where are you going?'

'I can't stop now. I've got some things to put away, an' it's nearly eight.'

'Come round to the Passage to-night. Be there at ten.'

'I can't give no promise. There's been such rows at 'ome. You know mother summonsed father this mornin'?'

'Yes, I've heard. All right! come if you can; I'll ho there.'

Pennyloaf hastened on. She was a meagre, hollow-eyed, bloodless girl of seventeen, yet her features had a certain charm—that dolorous kind of prettiness which is often enough seen in the London needle-slave. Her habitual look was one of meaningless surprise; whatever she gazed upon seemed a source of astonishment to her, and when she laughed, which was not very often, her eyes grew wider than ever. Her attire

was miserable, but there were signs that she tried to keep it in order; the boots upon her feet were sewn and patched into shapelessness; her limp straw hat had just received a new binding.

By saying that she had things 'to put away,' she meant that her business was with the pawnbroker, who could not receive pledges after eight o'clock. It wanted some ten minutes of the hour when she entered a side-doorway, and, by an inner door, passed into one of a series of compartments constructed before the pawnbroker's counter. She deposited her bundle, and looked about for someone to attend to her. Two young men were in sight, both transacting business; one was conversing facetiously with a customer on the subject of a pledge. Two or three gas-jets lighted the interior of the shop, but the boxes were in shadow. There was a strong musty odour; the gloom, the narrow compartments, the low tones of conversation, suggested stealth and shame.

Pennyloaf waited with many signs of impatience, until one of the assistants approached, a smartly attired youth, with black hair greased into the discipline he deemed becoming, with an aquiline nose, a coarse mouth, a large horseshoe pin adorning his necktie, and rings on his fingers. He caught hold of the packet and threw it open; it consisted of a petticoat and the skirt of an old dress.

'Well, what is it?' he asked, rubbing his tongue along his upper lip before and after speaking.

'Three an' six, please, sir.'

He rolled the things up again with a practised turn of the hand, and said indifferently, glancing towards another box,

'Eighteenpence.'

'Oh, sir, we had two shillin's on the skirt not so long ago,' pleaded Pennyloaf, with a subservient voice. 'Make it twoshillin's —please do, sir!

The young man paid no attention; he was curling his moustache and exchanging a smile of intelligence with his counter-companion with respect to a piece of business the latter had in hand. Of a sudden he turned and said sharply:

'Well, are you goin' to take it or not?'

Pennyloaf sighed and nodded.

'Got a 'apenny?' he asked.

'No.'

He fetched a cloth, rolled the articles in it very tightly, and pinned them up; then he made out ticket and duplicate, handling his pen with facile flourish, and having blotted the little piece of card on a box of sand (a custom which survives in this conservative profession), he threw it to the customer. Lastly, he counted out one shilling and fivepenee halfpenny. The coins were sandy, greasy, and of scratched surface.

Pennyloaf sped homewards. She lived in Shooter's Gardens, a picturesque locality which demolition and rebuilding have of late transformed. It was a winding alley, with paving raised a foot above the level of the street whence was its main approach. To enter from the obscurer end, you descended a flight of steps, under a low archway, in a court itself not easily discovered. From without, only a glimpse of the Gardens was

obtainable; the houses curved out of sight after the first few yards, and left surmise to busy itself with the characteristics of the hidden portion. A stranger bold enough to explore would have discovered that the Gardens had a blind offshoot, known simply as 'The Court.' Needless to burden description with further detail; the slum was like any other slum; filth, rottenness, evil odours, possessed these dens of superfluous mankind and made them gruesome to the peering imagination. The inhabitants of course felt nothing of the sort; a room in Shooter's Gardens was the only kind of home that most of them knew or desired. The majority preferred it, on all grounds, to that offered them in a block of model lodgings not very far away; here was independence, that is to say, the liberty to be as vile as they pleased. How they came to love vileness, well, that is quite another matter, and shall not for the present concern us.

Pennyloaf ran into the jaws of this black horror with the indifference of habit; it had never occurred to her that the Gardens were fearful in the night's gloom, nor even that better lighting would have been a convenience. Did it happen that she awoke from her first sleep with the ring of ghastly shrieking in her ears, that was an incident of too common occurrence to cause her more than a brief curiosity; she could wait till the morning to hear who had half-killed whom. Four days ago it was her own mother's turn to be pounded into insensibility; her father (a journeyman baker, often working nineteen hours out of the twenty-four, which probably did not improve his temper),

maddened by his wife's persistent drunkenness, was stopped just on the safe side of murder. To the amazement and indignation of the Gardens, Mrs. Candy prosecuted her sovereign lord; the case had been heard to-day, and Candy had been east in a fine. The money was paid, and the baker went his way, remarking that his family were to 'expect him back when they saw him.' Mrs. Candy, on her return, was hooted through all the length of the Gardens, a demonstration of public feeling probably rather of base than of worthy significance.

As Pennyloaf drew near to the house, a wild, discordant voice suddenly broke forth somewhere in the darkness, singing in a high key, 'All ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord, praise Him and magnify Him for ever!' It was Mad Jack, who had his dwelling in the Court, and at all hours was wont to practise the psalmody which made him notorious throughout Clerkenwell. A burst of laughter followed from a group of men and boys gathered near the archway. Unheeding, the girl passed in at an open door and felt her way up a staircase; the air was noisome, notwithstanding a fierce draught which swept down the stairs. She entered a room lighted by a small metal lamp hanging on the wall—a precaution of Pennyloaf's own contrivance. There was no bed, but one mattress lay with a few rags of bed-clothing spread upon it, and two others were rolled up in a corner. This chamber accommodated, under ordinary circumstances, four persons: Mr. and Mrs. Candy, Pennyloaf, and a son named Stephen, whose years were eighteen. (Stephen

pursued the occupation of a potman; his hours were from eight in the morning till midnight on week-days, and on Sunday the time during which a public-house is permitted to be open; once a month he was allowed freedom after six o'clock.) Against the window was hung an old shawl pierced with many rents. By the fire sat Mrs. Candy; she leaned forward, her head, which was bound in linen swathes, resting upon her hands.

'What have you got?' she asked, in the thick voice of a drunkard, without moving.

'Eighteenpence; it's all they'd give me.'

The woman cursed in her throat, but exhibited no anger with Pennyloaf.

'Go an' get some tea an' milk,' she said, after a pause. 'There is sugar. An' bring seven o' coals; there's only a dust.'

She pointed to a deal box which stood by the hearth. Pennyloaf went out again.

Over the fireplace, the stained wall bore certain singular ornaments. These were five coloured cards, such as are signed by one who takes a pledge of total abstinence; each presented the signature, 'Maria Candy,' and it was noticeable that at each progressive date the handwriting had become more unsteady. Yes, five times had Maria Candy promised, with the help of God, to abstain,' &c. &c.; each time she was in earnest. But it appeared that the help of God availed little against the views of one Mrs. Green, who kept the beer-shop in Rosoman Street, once Mrs. Peckover's, and who could on no account afford to lose so good

a customer. For many years that house, licensed for the sale of non-spirituous liquors, had been working Mrs. Candy's ruin; not a particle of her frame but was vitiated by the drugs retailed there under the approving smile of civilisation. Spirits would have been harmless in comparison. The advantage of Mrs. Green's ale was that the very first half-pint gave conscience its bemuddling sop; for a penny you forgot all the cares of existence; for threepence you became a yelling maniac.

Poor, poor creature. She was sober to-night, sitting over the fire with her face battered into shapelessness; and now that her fury had had its way, she bitterly repented invoking the help of the law against her husband. What use? what use? Perhaps he had now abandoned her for good, and it was certain that the fear of him was the only thing that ever checked her on the ruinous road she would so willingly have quitted. But for the harm to himself, the only pity was he had not taken her life outright. She knew all the hatefulness of her existence; she knew also that only the grave would rescue her from it. The struggle was too unequal between Mrs. Candy with her appeal to Providence, and Mrs. Green with the forces of civilisation at her back.

Pennyloaf speedily returned with a ha'p'orth of milk, a pennyworth of tea, and seven pounds (also price one penny) of coals in an apron. It was very seldom indeed that the Candys had more of anything in their room than would last them for the current day. There being no kettle, water was put on to boil in a tin saucepan; the tea was made in a jug. Pennyloaf had always

been a good girl to her mother; she tended her as well as she could to-night; but there was no word of affection from either. Kindly speech was stifled by the atmosphere of Shooter's Gardens.

Having drunk her tea, Mrs. Candy lay down, as she was, on the already extended mattress, and drew the ragged coverings about her. In half an hour she slept.

Pennyloaf then put on her hat and jacket again and left the house. She walked away from the denser regions of Clerkenwell, came to Sadler's Wells Theatre (gloomy in its profitless recollection of the last worthy manager that London knew), and there turned into Myddelton Passage. It is a narrow paved walk between brick walls seven feet high; on the one hand lies the New River Head, on the other are small gardens behind Myddelton Square. The branches of a few trees hang over; there are doors, seemingly never opened, belonging one to each garden; a couple of gas-lamps shed feeble light. Pennyloaf paced the length of the Passage several times, meeting no one. Then a policeman came along with echoing tread, and eyed her suspiciously. She had to wait more than a quarter of an hour before Bob Hewett made his appearance. Greeting her with a nod and a laugh, he took up a leaning position against the wall, and began to put questions concerning the state of things at her home.

'And what'll your mother do if the old man don't give her nothing to live on?' he inquired, when he had listened good-naturedly to the recital of domestic difficulties.

'Don't knew,' replied the girl, shaking her head, the habitual

surprise of her countenance becoming a blank interrogation of destiny.

Bob kept kicking the wall, first with one heel, then with the other. He whistled a few bars of the last song he had learnt at the music-hall.

'Say, Penny,' he remarked at length, with something of shamefacedness, 'there's a namesake of mine here as I shan't miss, if you can do any good with it.'

He held a shilling towards her under his hand. Pennyloaf turned away, casting down her eyes and looking troubled.

'We can get on for a bit,' she said indistinctly.

Bob returned the coin to his pocket. He whistled again for a moment, then asked abruptly:

'Say! have you seen Clem again?'

'No,' replied the girl, examining him with sudden acuteness. 'What about her?'

'Nothing much. She's got her back up a bit, that's all.'

'About me?' Pennyloaf asked anxiously.

Bob nodded. As he was making some further remarks on the subject, a man's figure appeared at a little distance, and almost immediately withdrew again round a winding of the Passage. A moment after there sounded from that direction a shrill whistle. Bob and the girl regarded each other.

'Who was that?' said the former suspiciously. 'I half believe it was Jeck Bartley. If Jeck is up to any of his larks, I'll make him remember it. You wait here a minute!'

He walked at a sharp pace towards the suspected quarter. Scarcely had he gone half a dozen yards, when there came running from the other end of the Passage a girl whom Pennyloaf at once recognised. It was Clem Peckover; with some friend's assistance she had evidently tracked the couple and was now springing out of ambush. She rushed upon Pennyloaf, who for very alarm could not flee, and attacked her with clenched fists. A scream of terror and pain caused Bob to turn and run back. Pennyloaf could not even ward off the blows that descended upon her head; she was pinned against the wall, her hat was torn away, her hair began to fly in disorder. But Bob effected a speedy rescue. He gripped Clem's muscular arms, and forced them behind her back as if he meant to dismember her. Even then it was with no slight effort that he restrained the girl's fury.

'You run off 'ome!' he shouted to Pennyloaf. 'If she tries this on again, I'll murder her!'

Pennyloaf's hysterical cries and the frantic invectives of her assailant made the Passage ring. Again Bob roared to the former to be off, and was at length obeyed. When Pennyloaf was out of sight he released Clem. Her twisted arms caused her such pain that she threw herself against the wall, mingling maledictions with groans. Bob burst into scornful laughter.

Clem went home vowing vengeance. In the nether world this trifling dissension might have been expected to bear its crop of violent language and straightway pass into oblivion; but Miss Peckover's malevolence was of no common stamp, and the scene

of to-night originated a feud which in the end concerned many more people than those immediately interested.

CHAPTER IX
PATHOLOGICAL

Through the day and through the evening Clara Hewett had her place behind Mrs. Tubbs's bar. For daylight wear, the dress which had formerly been her best was deemed sufficient; it was simple, but not badly made, and became her figure. Her evening attire was provided by Mrs. Tubbs, who recouped herself by withholding the promised wages for a certain number of weeks. When Clara had surveyed this garment in the bar mirror, she turned away contemptuously; the material was cheap, the mode vulgar. It must be borne with for the present, like other indignities which she found to be inseparable from her position. As soon as her employer's claim was satisfied, and the weekly five shillings began to be paid, Clara remembered the promise she had volunteered to her father. But John was once more at work; for the present there really seemed no need to give him any of her money, and she herself, on the other hand, lacked so many things. This dress plainly would not be suitable for the better kind of engagement she had in view; it behoved her first of all to have one made in accordance with her own taste. A mantle, too, a silk umbrella, gloves—It would be unjust to herself to share her scanty earnings with those at home.

Yes; but you must try to understand this girl of the people,

with her unfortunate endowment of brains and defect of tenderness. That smile of hers, which touched and fascinated and made thoughtful, had of course a significance discoverable by study of her life and character. It was no mere affectation; she was not conscious, in smiling, of the expression upon her face. Moreover, there was justice in the sense of wrong discernible upon her features when the very self looked forth from them. All through his life John Hewett had suffered from the same impulse of revolt; less sensitively constructed than his daughter, uncalculating, inarticulate, he fumed and fretted away his energies in a conflict with forces ludicrously personified. In the matter of his second marriage he was seen at his best, generously defiant of social cruelties; but self-knowledge was denied him, and circumstances condemned his life to futility. Clara inherited his temperament; transferred to her more complex nature, it gained in subtlety and in power of self-direction, but lost in its nobler elements. Her mother was a capable and ambitious woman, one in whom active characteristics were more prominent than the emotional. With such parents, every probability told against her patient acceptance of a lot which allowed her faculties no scope. And the circumstances of her childhood were such as added a peculiar bitterness to the trials waiting upon her maturity.

Clara, you remember, had reached her eleventh year when her father's brother died and left the legacy of which came so little profit. That was in 1878. State education had recently made a show of establishing itself, and in the Hewetts' world

much argument was going on with reference to the new Board schools, and their advantages or disadvantages when compared with those in which working-folk's children had hitherto been taught. Clara went to a Church school, and the expense was greater than the new system rendered necessary. Her father's principles naturally favoured education on an independent basis, but a prejudice then (and still) common among workpeople of decent habits made him hesitate about sending his girl to sit side by side with the children of the street; and he was confirmed by Clara's own view of the matter. She spoke with much contempt of Board schools, and gave it to be understood that her religious convictions would not suffer her to be taught by those who made light of orthodoxy. This attitude was intelligible enough in a child of sharp wit and abundant self-esteem. Notwithstanding her father's indifferentism, little Clara perceived that a regard for religion gave her a certain distinction at home, and elsewhere placed her apart from 'common girls.' She was subject also to special influences: on the one hand, from her favourite teacher, Miss Harrop; on the other, from a school-friend, Grace Rudd.

Miss Harrop was a good, warm-hearted woman of about thirty, one of those unhappy persons who are made for domestic life, but condemned by fate to school-celibacy. Lonely and impulsive, she drew to herself the most interesting girl in her classes, and, with complete indiscretion, made a familiar, a pet, a prodigy of one whose especial need was discipline. By her confidences and her flatteries she set Clara aflame with spiritual

pride. Ceaselessly she excited her to ambition, remarked on her gifts, made dazzling forecast of her future. Clara was to be a teacher first of all, but only that she might be introduced to the notice of people who would aid her to better things. And the child came to regard this as the course inevitably before her. Had she not already received school-prizes, among them a much-gilded little volume 'for religious knowledge'? Did she not win universal applause when she recited a piece of verse on prize-day—Miss Harrop (disastrous kindness!) even saying that the delivery reminded her of Mrs. –, the celebrated actress!

Grace Rudd was busy in the same fatal work. Four years older than Clara, weakly pretty, sentimental, conceited, she had a fancy for patronising the clever child, to the end that she might receive homage in return. Poor Grace! She left school, spent a year or two at home with parents as foolish as herself, and—disappeared. Prior to that, Miss Harrop had also passed out of Clara's ken, driven by restlessness to try another school, away from London.

These losses appeared to affect Clara unfavourably. She began to neglect her books, to be insubordinate, to exhibit arrogance, which brought down upon her plenty of wholesome reproof. Her father was not without a share in the responsibility for it all. Entering upon his four hundred pounds, one of the first things John did was to hire a piano, that his child might be taught to play. Pity that Sidney Kirkwood could not then cry with effective emphasis, 'We are the working classes! we are the lower

orders!' It was exactly what Hewett would not bring himself to understand. What! His Clara must be robbed of chances just because her birth was not that of a young lady? Nay, by all the unintelligible Powers, she should enjoy every help that he could possibly afford her. Bless her bright face and her clever tongue! Yes, it was now a settled thing that she should be trained for a schoolteacher. An atmosphere of refinement must be made for her; she must be better dressed, more delicately fed.

The bitter injustice of it! In the outcome you are already instructed. Long before Clara was anything like ready to enter upon a teacher's career, her father's ill-luck once more darkened over the home. Clara had made no progress since Miss Harrop's day. The authorities directing her school might have come forward with aid of some kind, had it appeared to them that the girl would repay such trouble; but they had their forebodings about her. Whenever she chose, she could learn in five minutes what another girl could scarcely commit to memory in twenty; but it was obviously for the sake of display. The teachers disliked her; among the pupils she had no friends. So at length there came the farewell to school and the beginning of practical life, which took the shape of learning to stamp crests and addresses on note-paper. There was hope that before long Clara might earn thirteen shillings a week.

The bitter injustice of it! Clara was seventeen now, and understood the folly of which she had been guilty a few years ago, but at the same time she felt in her inmost heart the tyranny of

a world which takes revenge for errors that are inevitable, which misleads a helpless child and then condemns it for being found astray. She could judge herself, yes, better than Sidney Kirkwood could judge her. She knew her defects, knew her vices, and a feud with fate caused her to accept them defiantly. Many a time had she sobbed out to herself, 'I wish I could neither read nor write! I wish I had never been told that there is anything better than to work with one's hands and earn daily bread!' But she could not renounce the claims that Nature had planted in her, that her guardians had fostered. The better she understood how difficult was every way of advancement, the more fiercely resolute was she to conquer satisfactions which seemed beyond the sphere of her destiny.

Of late she had thought much of her childish successes in reciting poetry. It was not often that she visited a theatre (her father had always refused to let her go with any one save himself or Sidney), but on the rare occasions when her wish was gratified, she had watched each actress with devouring interest, with burning envy, and had said to herself, 'Couldn't I soon learn to do as well as that? Can't I see where it might be made more lifelike? Why should it be impossible for me to go on the stage?' In passing a shop-window where photographs were exposed, she looked for those of actresses, and gazed at them with terrible intensity. 'I am as good-looking as she is. Why shouldn't *my* portrait be seen some day in the windows?' And then her heart throbbed, smitten with passionate desire. As she walked on there

was a turbid gloom about her, and in her ears the echoing of a dread temptation. Of all this she spoke to nobody.

For she had no friends. A couple of years ago something like an intimacy had sprung up between her and Bessie Jones (since married and become Bessie Byass), seemingly on the principle of contrast in association. Bessie, like most London workgirls, was fond of the theatre, and her talk helped to nourish the ambition which was secretly developing in Clara. But the two could not long harmonise. Bessie, just after her marriage, ventured to speak with friendly reproof of Clara's behaviour to Sidney Kirkwood. Clara was not disposed to admit freedoms of that kind; she half gave it to be understood that, though others might be easily satisfied, she had views of her own on such subjects. Thereafter Mrs. Byass grew decidedly cool. The other girls with whom Clara had formal intercourse showed no desire to win her confidence; they were kept aloof by her reticent civility.

As for Sidney himself, it was not without reason that he had seen encouragement in the girl's first reply to his advances. At sixteen, Clara found it agreeable to have her good graces sought by the one man in whom she recognised superiority of mind and purpose. Of all the unbetrothed girls she knew not one but would have felt flattered had Kirkwood thus distinguished her. Nothing common adhered to his demeanour, to his character; he had the look of one who will hold his own in life; his word had the ring of truth. Of his generosity she had innumerable proofs, and it

contrasted nobly with the selfishness of young men as she knew them; she appreciated it all the more because her own frequent desire to be unselfish was so fruitless. Of awakening tenderness towards him she knew nothing, but she gave him smiles and words which might mean little or much, just for the pleasure of completing a conquest. Nor did she, in truth, then regard it as impossible that, sooner or later, she might become his wife. If she *must* marry a workman, assuredly it should be Sidney. He thought so highly of her, he understood things in her to which the ordinary artisan would have been dead; he had little delicacies of homage which gave her keen pleasure. And yet—well, time enough!

Time went very quickly, and changed both herself and Sidney in ways she could not foresee. It was true, all he said to her in anger that night by the prison wall—true and deserved every word of it. Even in acknowledging that, she hardened herself against him implacably. Since he chose to take this tone with her, to throw aside all his graceful blindness to her faults, he had only himself to blame if she considered everything at an end between them. She tried to believe herself glad this had happened; it relieved her from an embarrassment, and made her absolutely free to pursue the ambitions which now gave her no rest. For all that, she could not dismiss Sidney from her mind; indeed, throughout the week that followed their parting, she thought of him more persistently than for many months. That he would before long seek pardon for his rudeness she felt certain, she felt

also that such submission would gratify her in a high degree. But the weeks were passing and no letter came; in vain she glanced from the window of the bar at the faces which moved by. Even on Sunday, when she went home for an hour or two, she neither saw nor heard of Kirkwood. She could not bring herself to ask a question.

Under any circumstances Clara would ill have borne a suspense that irritated her pride, and at present she lived amid conditions so repugnant, that her nerves were ceaselessly strung almost beyond endurance. Before entering upon this engagement she had formed but an imperfect notion of what would be demanded of her. To begin with, Mrs. Tubbs belonged to the order of women who are by nature slave-drivers; though it was her interest to secure Clara for a permanency, she began by exacting from the girl as much labour as could possibly be included in their agreement. The hours were insufferably long; by nine o'clock each evening Clara was so outworn that with difficulty she remained standing, yet not until midnight was she released. The unchanging odours of the place sickened her, made her head ache, and robbed her of all appetite. Many of the duties were menial, and to perform them fevered her with indignation. Then the mere waiting upon such men as formed the majority of the customers, vulgarly familiar, when not insolent, in their speech to her, was hateful beyond anything she had conceived. Had there been no one to face but her father, she would have returned home and resumed her old occupation at the end of

the first fortnight, so extreme was her suffering in mind and body; but rather than give Sidney Kirkwood such a triumph, she would work on, and breathe no word of what she underwent. Even in her anger against him, the knowledge of his forgiving disposition, of the sincerity of his love, was an unavowed support. She knew he could not utterly desert her; when some day he sought a reconciliation, the renewal of conflict between his pride and her own would, she felt, supply her with new courage.

Early one Saturday afternoon she was standing by the windows, partly from heavy idleness of thought, partly on the chance that Kirkwood might go by, when a young, well-dressed man, who happened to be passing at a slow walk, turned his head and looked at her. He went on, but in a few moments Clara, who had moved back into the shop, saw him enter and come forwards. He took a seat at the counter and ordered a luncheon. Clara waited upon him with her customary cold reserve, and he made no remark until she returned him change out of the coin he offered.

Then he said with an apologetic smile:

'We are old acquaintances, Miss Hewett, but I'm afraid you've forgotten me.'

Clara regarded him in astonishment. His age seemed to be something short of thirty; he had a long, grave, intelligent face, smiled enigmatically, spoke in a rather slow voice. His silk hat, sober necktie drawn through a gold ring, and dark morning-coat, made it probable that he was 'in the City.'

'We used to know each other very well about five years ago,' he pursued, pocketing his change carelessly. 'Don't you remember a Mr. Scawthorne, who used to be a lodger with some friends of yours called Rudd?'

On the instant memory revived in Clara. In her schooldays she often spent a Sunday afternoon with Grace Rudd, and this Mr. Scawthorne was generally at the tea-table. Mr. and Mrs. Rudd made much of him, said that he held a most important post in a lawyer's office, doubtless had private designs concerning him and their daughter. Thus aided, she even recognised his features.

'And you knew me again after all this time?'

'Yours isn't an easy face to forget,' replied Mr. Scawthorne, with the subdued polite smile which naturally accompanied his tone of unemotional intimacy. 'To tell you the whole truth, however, I happened to hear news of you a few days ago. I met Grace Rudd; she told me you were here. Some old friend had told *her*.'

Grace's name awoke keen interest in Clara. She was startled to hear it, and did not venture to make the inquiry her mind at once suggested. Mr. Scawthorne observed her for an instant, then proceeded to satisfy her curiosity. Grace Rudd was on the stage; she had been acting in provincial theatres under the name of Miss Danvers, and was now waiting for a promised engagement at a minor London theatre.

'Do you often go to the theatre?' he added carelessly. 'I have a great many acquaintances connected with the stage in one way

or another. If you would like, I should be very glad to send you tickets now and then. I always have more given me than I can well use.'

Clara thanked him rather coldly, and said that she was very seldom free in the evening. Thereupon Mr. Scawthorne again smiled, raised his hat, and departed.

Possibly he had some consciousness of the effect of his words, but it needed a subtler insight, a finer imagination than his, to interpret the pale, beautiful, harassed face which studiously avoided looking towards him as he paused before stepping out on to the pavement. The rest of the evening, the hours of night that followed, passed for Clara in bet tumult of heart and brain. The news of Grace Rudd had flashed upon her as revelation of a clear possibility where hitherto she had seen only mocking phantoms of futile desire. Grace was an actress; no matter by what course, to this she had attained. This man, Scawthorne, spoke of the theatrical life as one to whom all its details were familiar; acquaintance with him of a sudden bridged over the chasm which had seemed impassable. Would he come again to see her? Had her involuntary reserve put an end to any interest he might have felt in her? Of him personally she thought not at all; she could not have recalled his features; he was a mere abstraction, the representative of a wild hope which his conversation had inspired.

From that day the character of her suffering was altered; it became less womanly, it defied weakness and grew to a

fever of fierce, unscrupulous rebellion. Whenever she thought of Sidney Kirkwood, the injury he was inflicting upon her pride rankled into bitter resentment, unsoftened by the despairing thought of self-subdual which had at times visited her sick weariness. She bore her degradations with the sullen indifference of one who is supported by the hope of a future revenge. The disease inherent in her being, that deadly outcome of social tyranny which perverts the generous elements of youth into mere seeds of destruction, developed day by day, blighting her heart, corrupting her moral sense, even setting marks of evil upon the beauty of her countenance. A passionate desire of self-assertion familiarised her with projects, with ideas, which formerly she had glanced at only to dismiss as ignoble. In proportion as her bodily health failed, the worst possibilities of her character came into prominence. Like a creature that is beset by unrelenting forces, she summoned and surveyed all the craft faculties lurking in the dark places of her nature; theoretic y she had now accepted every debasing compact by which a woman can spite herself on the world's injustice. Self-assertion; to be no longer an unregarded atom in the mass of those who are born only to labour for others; to find play for the strength and the passion which, by no choice of her own, distinguished her from the tame slave. Sometimes in the silence of night she suffered from a dreadful need of crying aloud, of uttering her anguish in a scream like that of insanity. She stifled it only by crushing her face into the pillow until the hysterical fit had passed, and she lay like one dead.

A fortnight after his first visit Mr. Scawthorne again presented himself, polite, smiling, perhaps rather more familiar. He stayed talking for nearly an hour, chiefly of the theatre. Casually he mentioned that Grace Rudd had got her engagement—only a little part in a farce. Suppose Clara came to see her play some evening? Might he take her? He could at any time have places in the dress-circle.

Clara accepted the invitation. She did so without consulting Mrs. Tubbs, and when it became necessary to ask for the evening's freedom, difficulties were made. 'Very well,' said Clara, in a tone she had never yet used to her employer, 'then I shall leave you.' She spoke without a moment's reflection; something independent of her will seemed to direct her in speech and act. Mrs. Tubbs yielded.

Clara had not yet been able to obtain the dress she wished for. Her savings, however, were sufficient for the purchase of a few accessories, which made her, she considered, not unpresentable. Scawthorne was to have a cab waiting for her at a little distance from the luncheon-bar. It was now June, and at the hour of their meeting still broad daylight, but Clara cared nothing for the chance that acquaintances might see her; nay, she had a reckless desire that Sidney Kirkwood might pass just at this moment. She noticed no one whom she knew, however; but just as the cab was turning into Pentonville Road, Scawthorne drew her attention to a person on the pavement.

'You see that old fellow,' he said. 'Would you believe that he

is very wealthy?'

Clara had just time to perceive an old man with white hair, dressed as a mechanic.

'But I know him,' she replied. 'His name's Snowdon.'

'So it is. How do you come to know him?' Scawthorne inquired with interest.

She explained.

'Better not say anything about it,' remarked her companion. 'He's an eccentric chap. I happen to know his affairs in the way of business. I oughtn't to have told secrets, but I can trust you.'

A gentle emphasis on the last word, and a smile of more than usual intimacy. But his manner was, and remained through the evening, respectful almost to exaggeration. Clara seemed scarcely conscious of his presence, save in the act of listening to what he said. She never met his look, never smiled. From entering the theatre to leaving it, she had a high flush on her face. Impossible to recognise her friend in the actress whom Scawthorne indicated; features and voice were wholly strange to her. In the intervals, Scawthorne spoke of the difficulties that beset an actress's career at its beginning.

'I suppose you never thought of trying it?' he asked. 'Yet I fancy you might do well, if only you could have a few months' training, just to start you. Of course it all depends on knowing how to go about it. A little money would be necessary—not much.'

Clara made no reply. On the way home she was mute.

Scawthorne took leave of her in Upper Street, and promised to look in again before long. . . .

Under the heat of these summer days, in the reeking atmosphere of the bar, Clara panted fever-stricken. The weeks went on; what strength supported her from the Monday morning to the Saturday midnight she could not tell. Acting and refraining, speaking and holding silence, these things were no longer the consequences of her own volition. She wished to break free from her slavery, but had not the force to do so; something held her voice as often as she was about to tell Mrs. Tubbs that this week would be the last. Her body wasted so that all the garments she wore were loose upon her. The only mental process of which she was capable was reviewing the misery of days just past and anticipating that of the days to come. Her only feelings were infinite self-pity and a dull smouldering hatred of all others in the world. A doctor would have bidden her take to bed, as one in danger of grave illness. She bore through it without change in her habits, and in time the strange lethargy passed.

Scawthorne came to the bar frequently. He remarked often on her look of suffering, and urged a holiday. At length, near the end of July, he invited her to go up the river with him on the coming Bank-holiday. Clara consented, though aware that her presence would be more than ever necessary at the bar on the day of much drinking. Later in the evening she addressed her demand to Mrs. Tubbs. It was refused.

Without a word of anger, Clara went upstairs, prepared

herself for walking, and set forth among the by-ways of Islington. In half an hour she had found a cheap bedroom, for which she paid a week's rent in advance. She purchased a few articles of food and carried them to her lodging, then lay down in the darkness.

CHAPTER X
THE LAST COMBAT

During these summer months Sidney Kirkwood's visits to the house in Clerkenwell Close were comparatively rare. It was not his own wish to relax in any degree the close friendship so long subsisting between the Hewetts and himself, but from the day of Clara's engagement with Mrs. Tubbs John Hewett began to alter in his treatment of him. At first there was nothing more than found its natural explanation in regret of what had happened, a tendency to muteness, to troubled brooding; but before long John made it unmistakable that the young man's presence was irksome to him. If, on coming home, he found Sidney with Mrs. Hewett and the children, a cold nod was the only greeting he offered; then followed signs of ill-humour, such as Sidney could not in the end fail to interpret as unfavourable to himself. He never heard Clara's name on her father's lips, and himself never uttered it when John was in hearing.

'She told him what passed between us that night,' Sidney argued inwardly. But it was not so. Hewett had merely abandoned himself to an unreasonable resentment. Notwithstanding his concessions, he blamed Sidney for the girl's leaving home, and, as his mood grew more irritable, the more hopeless it seemed that Clara would return, he nursed the suspicion of treacherous

behaviour on Sidney's part. He would not take into account any such thing as pride which could forbid the young man to urge a rejected suit. Sidney had grown tired of Clara, that was the truth, and gladly caught at any means of excusing himself. He had made new friends. Mrs. Peckover reported that he was a constant visitor at the old man Snowdon's lodgings; she expressed her belief that Snowdon had come back from Australia with a little store of money, and if Kirkwood had knowledge of that, would it not explain his interest in Jane Snowdon?

'For shame to listen to such things!' cried Mrs. Hewett angrily, when her husband once repeated the landlady's words, 'I'd be ashamed of myself, John! If you don't know him no better than that, you ought to by this time.'

And John did, in fact, take to himself no little shame, but his unsatisfied affection turned all the old feelings to bitterness. In spite of himself, he blundered along the path of perversity. Sidney, too, had his promptings of obstinate humour. When he distinctly recognised Hewett's feeling it galled him; he was being treated with gross injustice, and temper suggested reprisals which could answer no purpose but to torment him with self-condemnation. However, he must needs consult his own dignity; he could not keep defending himself against ignoble charges. For the present, there was no choice but to accept John's hints, and hold apart as much as was possible without absolute breach of friendly relations. Nor could he bring himself to approach Clara. It was often in his mind to write to her; had he obeyed the voice

of his desire he would have penned such letters as only the self-abasement of a passionate lover can dictate. But herein, too, the strain of sternness that marked his character made its influence felt. He said to himself that the only hope of Clara's respecting him lay in his preservation of the attitude he had adopted, and as the months went on he found a bitter satisfaction in adhering so firmly to his purpose. The self-flattery with which no man can dispense whispered assurance that Clara only thought the more of him the longer he held aloof. When the end of July came, he definitely prescribed to his patience a trial of yet one more month. Then he would write Clara a long letter, telling her what it had cost him to keep silence, and declaring the constancy he devoted to her.

This resolve he registered whilst at work one morning. The triumphant sunshine, refusing to be excluded even from London workshops, gleamed upon his tools and on the scraps of jewellery before him; he looked up to the blue sky, and thought with heavy heart of many a lane in Surrey and in Essex where he might be wandering but for this ceaseless necessity of earning the week's wage. A fly buzzed loudly against the grimy window, and by one of those associations which time and change cannot affect, he mused himself back into boyhood. The glimpse before him of St. John's Arch aided the revival of old impressions; his hand ceased from its mechanical activity, and he was absorbed in a waking dream, when a voice called to him and said that he was wanted. He went down to the entrance, and there found Mrs. Hewett. Her

coming at all was enough to signal some disaster, and the trouble on her face caused Sidney to regard her with silent interrogation.

'I couldn't help comin' to you,' she began, gazing at him fixedly. 'I know you can't do anything, but I had to speak to somebody, an' I know nobody better than you. It's about Clara.'

'What about her?'

'She's left Mrs. Tubbs. They had words about Bank-holiday last night, an' Clara went off at once. Mrs. Tubbs thought she'd come 'ome, but this mornin' her box was sent for, an' it was to be took to a house in Islington. An' then Mrs. Tubbs came an' told me. An' there's worse than that, Sidney. She's been goin' about to the theatre an' such places with a man as she got to know at the bar, an' Mrs. Tubbs says she believes it's him has tempted her away.'

She spoke the last sentences in a low voice, painfully watching their effect.

'And why hasn't Mrs. Tubbs spoken about this before?' Sidney asked, also in a subdued voice, but without other show of agitation.

'That's just what, I said to her myself. The girl was in her charge, an' it was her duty to let us know if things went wrong. But how am I to tell her father? I dursn't do it, Sidney; for my life, I dursn't! I'd go an' see her where she's lodging—see, I've got the address wrote down here—but I should do more harm than good; she'd never pay any heed to me at the best of times, an' it isn't likely she would now.'

'Look here if she's made no attempt to hide away, you may be quite sure there's no truth in what Mrs. Tubbs says. They've quarrelled, and of course the woman makes Clara as black as she can. Tell her father everything as soon as he comes home; you've no choice.'

Mrs. Hewett averted her face in profound dejection. Sidney learnt at length what her desire had been in coming to him; she hoped he would see Clara and persuade her to return home.

'I dursn't tell her' father,' she kept repeating. 'But perhaps it isn't true what Mrs. Tubbs says. Do go an' speak to her before it's too late. Say we won't ask her to come 'ome, if only she'll let us know what she's goin' to do.'

In the end he promised to perform this service, and to communicate the result that evening. It was Saturday; at half-past one he left the workroom, hastened home to prepare himself for the visit, and, without thinking of dinner, set out to find the address Mrs. Hewett had given him. His steps were directed to a dull street on the north of Pentonville Road; the house at which he mad e inquiry was occupied by a drum-manufacturer. Miss Hewett, he learnt, was not at home; she had gone forth two hours ago, and nothing was known of her movements. Sidney turned away and began to walk up and down the shadowed side of the street; there was no breath of air stirring, and from the open windows radiated stuffy odours. A quarter of an hour sufficed to exasperate him with anxiety and physical malaise. He suffered from his inability to do anything at once, from conflict with

himself as to whether or not it behoved him to speak with John Hewett; of Clara he thought with anger rather than fear, for her behaviour seemed to prove that nothing had happened save the inevitable breach with Mrs. Tubbs. Just as he had said to himself that it was no use waiting about all the afternoon, he saw Clara approaching. At sight of him she manifested neither surprise nor annoyance, but came forward with eyes carelessly averted. Not having seen her for so long, Sidney was startled by the change in her features; her cheeks had sunk, her eyes were unnaturally dark, there was something worse than the familiar self-will about her lips.

'I've been waiting to see you,' he said. 'Will you walk along here for a minute or two?'

'What do you want to say? I'm tired.'

'Mrs. Tubbs has told your mother what has happened, and she came to me. Your father doesn't know yet.'

'It's nothing to me whether he knows or not. I've left the place, that's all, and I'm going to live here till I've got another.'

'Why not go home?'

'Because I don't choose to. I don't see that it concerns you, Mr. Kirkwood.'

Their eyes met, and Sidney felt how little fitted he was to reason with the girl, even would she consent to hear him. His mood was the wrong one; the torrid sunshine seemed to kindle an evil fire in him, and with difficulty he kept back words of angry unreason; he even—strangest of inconsistencies—experienced

a kind of brutal pleasure in her obvious misery. Already she was reaping the fruit of obstinate folly. Clara read what his eyes expressed; she trembled with responsive hostility.

'No, it doesn't concern me,' Sidney replied, half turning away. 'But it's perhaps as well you should know that Mrs. Tubbs is doing her best to take away your good name. However little we are to each other, it's my duty to tell you that, and put you on your guard. I hope your father mayn't hear these stories before you have spoken to him yourself.'

Clara listened with a contemptuous smile.

'What has she been saying?'

'I shan't repeat it.'

As he gazed at her, the haggardness of her countenance smote like a sword-edge through all the black humours about his heart, piercing the very core of love and pity. He spoke in a voice of passionate appeal.

'Clara, come home before it is too late! Come with me—now—come at once? Thank heaven you have got out of that place! Come home, and stay there quietly till we can find you something better.'

'I'll die rather than go home!' was her answer, flung at him as if in hatred. 'Tell my father that, and tell him anything else you like. I want no one to take any thought for me; and I wouldn't do as *you* wish, not to save my soul!'

How often, in passing along the streets, one catches a few phrases of discord such as this! The poor can seldom command

privacy; their scenes alike of tenderness and of anger must for the most part be enacted on the peopled ways. It is one of their misfortunes, one of the many necessities which blunt feeling, which balk reconciliation, which enhance the risks of dialogue at best semi-articulate.

Clara, having uttered the rancour which had so long poisoned her mind, straightway crossed the street and entered the house where she was lodging. She had just returned from making several applications for employment—futile, as so many were likely to be, if she persevered in her search for a better place than the last. The wages due to her for the present week she had of course sacrificed; her purchases of clothing—essential and superfluous—had left only a small sum out of her earnings. Food, fortunately, would cost her little; the difficulty, indeed, was to eat anything at all.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.