GEORGE GISSING

NEW GRUB STREET

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Содержание

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PART I

CHAPTER I. A MAN OF HIS DAY

As the Milvains sat down to breakfast the clock of Wattleborough parish church struck eight; it was two miles away, but the strokes were borne very distinctly on the west wind this autumn morning. Jasper, listening before he cracked an egg, remarked with cheerfulness:

'There's a man being hanged in London at this moment.'

'Surely it isn't necessary to let us know that,' said his sister Maud, coldly.

'And in such a tone, too!' protested his sister Dora.

'Who is it?' inquired Mrs Milvain, looking at her son with pained forehead.

'I don't know. It happened to catch my eye in the paper yesterday that someone was to be hanged at Newgate this morning. There's a certain satisfaction in reflecting that it is not oneself.'

'That's your selfish way of looking at things,' said Maud.

'Well,' returned Jasper, 'seeing that the fact came into my head, what better use could I make of it? I could curse the brutality of an age that sanctioned such things; or I could grow doleful over the misery of the poor—fellow. But those emotions would be as little profitable to others as to myself. It just happened that I saw the thing in a light of consolation. Things are bad with me, but not so bad as THAT. I might be going out between Jack Ketch and the Chaplain to be hanged; instead of that, I am eating a really fresh egg, and very excellent buttered toast, with coffee as good as can be reasonably expected in this part of the world.—(Do try boiling the milk, mother.)—The tone in which I spoke was spontaneous; being so, it needs no justification.'

He was a young man of five-and-twenty, well built, though a trifle meagre, and of pale complexion. He had hair that was very nearly black, and a clean-shaven face, best described, perhaps, as of bureaucratic type. The clothes he wore were of expensive material, but had seen a good deal of service. His stand-up collar curled over at the corners, and his necktie was lilac-sprigged.

Of the two sisters, Dora, aged twenty, was the more like him in visage, but she spoke with a gentleness which seemed to indicate a different character. Maud, who was twenty-two, had bold, handsome features, and very beautiful hair of russet tinge; hers was not a face that readily smiled. Their mother had the look and manners of an invalid, though she sat at table in the ordinary way. All were dressed as ladies, though very simply. The room,

which looked upon a small patch of garden, was furnished with old-fashioned comfort, only one or two objects suggesting the decorative spirit of 1882.

'A man who comes to be hanged,' pursued Jasper, impartially, 'has the satisfaction of knowing that he has brought society to its last resource. He is a man of such fatal importance that nothing will serve against him but the supreme effort of law. In a way, you know, that is success.'

'In a way,' repeated Maud, scornfully.

'Suppose we talk of something else,' suggested Dora, who seemed to fear a conflict between her sister and Jasper.

Almost at the same moment a diversion was afforded by the arrival of the post. There was a letter for Mrs Milvain, a letter and newspaper for her son. Whilst the girls and their mother talked of unimportant news communicated by the one correspondent, Jasper read the missive addressed to himself.

'This is from Reardon,' he remarked to the younger girl. 'Things are going badly with him. He is just the kind of fellow to end by poisoning or shooting himself.'

'But why?'

'Can't get anything done; and begins to be sore troubled on his wife's account.'

'Is he ill?'

'Overworked, I suppose. But it's just what I foresaw. He isn't the kind of man to keep up literary production as a paying business. In favourable circumstances he might write a fairly

good book once every two or three years. The failure of his last depressed him, and now he is struggling hopelessly to get another done before the winter season. Those people will come to grief.'

'The enjoyment with which he anticipates it!' murmured Maud, looking at her mother.

'Not at all,' said Jasper. 'It's true I envied the fellow, because he persuaded a handsome girl to believe in him and share his risks, but I shall be very sorry if he goes to the—to the dogs. He's my one serious friend. But it irritates me to see a man making such large demands upon fortune. One must be more modest—as I am. Because one book had a sort of success he imagined his struggles were over. He got a hundred pounds for "On Neutral Ground," and at once counted on a continuance of payments in geometrical proportion. I hinted to him that he couldn't keep it up, and he smiled with tolerance, no doubt thinking "He judges me by himself." But I didn't do anything of the kind.—(Toast, please, Dora.)—I'm a stronger man than Reardon; I can keep my eyes open, and wait.'

'Is his wife the kind of person to grumble?' asked Mrs Milvain.

'Well, yes, I suspect that she is. The girl wasn't content to go into modest rooms—they must furnish a flat. I rather wonder he didn't start a carriage for her. Well, his next book brought only another hundred, and now, even if he finishes this one, it's very doubtful if he'll get as much. "The Optimist" was practically a failure.'

'Mr Yule may leave them some money,' said Dora.

'Yes. But he may live another ten years, and he would see them both in Marylebone Workhouse before he advanced sixpence, or I'm much mistaken in him. Her mother has only just enough to live upon; can't possibly help them. Her brother wouldn't give or lend twopence halfpenny.'

'Has Mr Reardon no relatives!'

'I never heard him make mention of a single one. No, he has done the fatal thing. A man in his position, if he marry at all, must take either a work-girl or an heiress, and in many ways the work-girl is preferable.'

'How can you say that?' asked Dora. 'You never cease talking about the advantages of money.'

'Oh, I don't mean that for ME the work-girl would be preferable; by no means; but for a man like Reardon. He is absurd enough to be conscientious, likes to be called an "artist," and so on. He might possibly earn a hundred and fifty a year if his mind were at rest, and that would be enough if he had married a decent little dressmaker. He wouldn't desire superfluities, and the quality of his work would be its own reward. As it is, he's ruined.'

'And I repeat,' said Maud, 'that you enjoy the prospect.'

'Nothing of the kind. If I seem to speak exultantly it's only because my intellect enjoys the clear perception of a fact.—A little marmalade, Dora; the home-made, please.'

'But this is very sad, Jasper,' said Mrs Milvain, in her half-absent way. 'I suppose they can't even go for a holiday?'

'Quite out of the question.'

'Not even if you invited them to come here for a week?'

'Now, mother,' urged Maud, 'THAT'S impossible, you know very well.'

'I thought we might make an effort, dear. A holiday might mean everything to him.'

'No, no,' fell from Jasper, thoughtfully. 'I don't think you'd get along very well with Mrs Reardon; and then, if her uncle is coming to Mr Yule's, you know, that would be awkward.'

'I suppose it would; though those people would only stay a day or two, Miss Harrow said.'

'Why can't Mr Yule make them friends, those two lots of people?' asked Dora. 'You say he's on good terms with both.'

'I suppose he thinks it's no business of his.'

Jasper mused over the letter from his friend.

'Ten years hence,' he said, 'if Reardon is still alive, I shall be lending him five-pound notes.'

A smile of irony rose to Maud's lips. Dora laughed.

'To be sure! To be sure!' exclaimed their brother. 'You have no faith. But just understand the difference between a man like Reardon and a man like me. He is the old type of unpractical artist; I am the literary man of 1882. He won't make concessions, or rather, he can't make them; he can't supply the market. I —well, you may say that at present I do nothing; but that's a great mistake, I am learning my business. Literature nowadays is a trade. Putting aside men of genius, who may succeed by

mere cosmic force, your successful man of letters is your skilful tradesman. He thinks first and foremost of the markets; when one kind of goods begins to go off slackly, he is ready with something new and appetising. He knows perfectly all the possible sources of income. Whatever he has to sell he'll get payment for it from all sorts of various quarters; none of your unpractical selling for a lump sum to a middleman who will make six distinct profits. Now, look you: if I had been in Reardon's place, I'd have made four hundred at least out of "The Optimist"; I should have gone shrewdly to work with magazines and newspapers and foreign publishers, and—all sorts of people. Reardon can't do that kind of thing, he's behind his age; he sells a manuscript as if he lived in Sam Johnson's Grub Street. But our Grub Street of to-day is quite a different place: it is supplied with telegraphic communication, it knows what literary fare is in demand in every part of the world, its inhabitants are men of business, however seedy.'

'It sounds ignoble,' said Maud.

'I have nothing to do with that, my dear girl. Now, as I tell you, I am slowly, but surely, learning the business. My line won't be novels; I have failed in that direction, I'm not cut out for the work. It's a pity, of course; there's a great deal of money in it. But I have plenty of scope. In ten years, I repeat, I shall be making my thousand a year.'

'I don't remember that you stated the exact sum before,' Maud observed.

'Let it pass. And to those who have shall be given. When I

have a decent income of my own, I shall marry a woman with an income somewhat larger, so that casualties may be provided for.'

Dora exclaimed, laughing:

'It would amuse me very much if the Reardons got a lot of money at Mr Yule's death—and that can't be ten years off, I'm sure.'

'I don't see that there's any chance of their getting much,' replied Jasper, meditatively. 'Mrs Reardon is only his niece. The man's brother and sister will have the first helping, I suppose. And then, if it comes to the second generation, the literary Yule has a daughter, and by her being invited here I should think she's the favourite niece. No, no; depend upon it they won't get anything at all.'

Having finished his breakfast, he leaned back and began to unfold the London paper that had come by post.

'Had Mr Reardon any hopes of that kind at the time of his marriage, do you think?' inquired Mrs Milvain.

'Reardon? Good heavens, no! Would he were capable of such forethought!'

In a few minutes Jasper was left alone in the room. When the servant came to clear the table he strolled slowly away, humming a tune.

The house was pleasantly situated by the roadside in a little village named Finden. Opposite stood the church, a plain, low, square-towered building. As it was cattle-market to-day in the town of Wattleborough, droves of beasts and sheep occasionally

went by, or the rattle of a grazier's cart sounded for a moment. On ordinary days the road saw few vehicles, and pedestrians were rare.

Mrs Milvain and her daughters had lived here for the last seven years, since the death of the father, who was a veterinary surgeon. The widow enjoyed an annuity of two hundred and forty pounds, terminable with her life; the children had nothing of their own. Maud acted irregularly as a teacher of music; Dora had an engagement as visiting governess in a Wattleborough family. Twice a year, as a rule, Jasper came down from London to spend a fortnight with them; to-day marked the middle of his autumn visit, and the strained relations between him and his sisters which invariably made the second week rather trying for all in the house had already become noticeable.

In the course of the morning Jasper had half an hour's private talk with his mother, after which he set off to roam in the sunshine. Shortly after he had left the house, Maud, her domestic duties dismissed for the time, came into the parlour where Mrs Milvain was reclining on the sofa.

'Jasper wants more money,' said the mother, when Maud had sat in meditation for a few minutes.

'Of course. I knew that. I hope you told him he couldn't have it.'

'I really didn't know what to say,' returned Mrs Milvain, in a feeble tone of worry.

'Then you must leave the matter to me, that's all. There's no

money for him, and there's an end of it.'

Maud set her features in sullen determination. There was a brief silence.

'What's he to do, Maud?'

'To do? How do other people do? What do Dora and I do?'

'You don't earn enough for your support, my dear.'

'Oh, well!' broke from the girl. 'Of course, if you grudge us our food and lodging—'

'Don't be so quick-tempered. You know very well I am far from grudging you anything, dear. But I only meant to say that Jasper does earn something, you know.'

'It's a disgraceful thing that he doesn't earn as much as he needs. We are sacrificed to him, as we always have been. Why should we be pinching and stinting to keep him in idleness?'

'But you really can't call it idleness, Maud. He is studying his profession.'

'Pray call it trade; he prefers it. How do I know that he's studying anything? What does he mean by "studying"? And to hear him speak scornfully of his friend Mr Reardon, who seems to work hard all through the year! It's disgusting, mother. At this rate he will never earn his own living. Who hasn't seen or heard of such men? If we had another hundred a year, I would say nothing. But we can't live on what he leaves us, and I'm not going to let you try. I shall tell Jasper plainly that he's got to work for his own support.'

Another silence, and a longer one. Mrs Milvain furtively

wiped a tear from her cheek.

'It seems very cruel to refuse,' she said at length, 'when another year may give him the opportunity he's waiting for.'

'Opportunity? What does he mean by his opportunity?'

'He says that it always comes, if a man knows how to wait.'

'And the people who support him may starve meanwhile! Now just think a bit, mother. Suppose anything were to happen to you, what becomes of Dora and me? And what becomes of Jasper, too? It's the truest kindness to him to compel him to earn a living. He gets more and more incapable of it.'

'You can't say that, Maud. He earns a little more each year. But for that, I should have my doubts. He has made thirty pounds already this year, and he only made about twenty-five the whole of last. We must be fair to him, you know. I can't help feeling that he knows what he's about. And if he does succeed, he'll pay us all back.'

Maud began to gnaw her fingers, a disagreeable habit she had in privacy.

'Then why doesn't he live more economically?'

'I really don't see how he can live on less than a hundred and fifty a year. London, you know—'

'The cheapest place in the world.'

'Nonsense, Maud!'

'But I know what I'm saying. I've read quite enough about such things. He might live very well indeed on thirty shillings a week, even buying his clothes out of it.'

'But he has told us so often that it's no use to him to live like that. He is obliged to go to places where he must spend a little, or he makes no progress.'

'Well, all I can say is,' exclaimed the girl impatiently, 'it's very lucky for him that he's got a mother who willingly sacrifices her daughters to him.'

'That's how you always break out. You don't care what unkindness you say!'

'It's a simple truth.'

'Dora never speaks like that.'

'Because she's afraid to be honest.'

'No, because she has too much love for her mother. I can't bear to talk to you, Maud. The older I get, and the weaker I get, the more unfeeling you are to me.'

Scenes of this kind were no uncommon thing. The clash of tempers lasted for several minutes, then Maud flung out of the room. An hour later, at dinner-time, she was rather more caustic in her remarks than usual, but this was the only sign that remained of the stormy mood.

Jasper renewed the breakfast-table conversation.

'Look here,' he began, 'why don't you girls write something? I'm convinced you could make money if you tried. There's a tremendous sale for religious stories; why not patch one together? I am quite serious.'

'Why don't you do it yourself,' retorted Maud.

'I can't manage stories, as I have told you; but I think you

could. In your place, I'd make a speciality of Sunday-school prize-books; you know the kind of thing I mean. They sell like hot cakes. And there's so deuced little enterprise in the business. If you'd give your mind to it, you might make hundreds a year.'

'Better say "abandon your mind to it."'

'Why, there you are! You're a sharp enough girl. You can quote as well as anyone I know.'

'And please, why am I to take up an inferior kind of work?'

'Inferior? Oh, if you can be a George Eliot, begin at the earliest opportunity. I merely suggested what seemed practicable.

But I don't think you have genius, Maud. People have got that ancient prejudice so firmly rooted in their heads—that one mustn't write save at the dictation of the Holy Spirit. I tell you, writing is a business. Get together half-a-dozen fair specimens of the Sunday-school prize; study them; discover the essential points of such composition; hit upon new attractions; then go to work methodically, so many pages a day. There's no question of the divine afflatus; that belongs to another sphere of life. We talk of literature as a trade, not of Homer, Dante, and Shakespeare. If I could only get that into poor Reardon's head. He thinks me a gross beast, often enough. What the devil—I mean what on earth is there in typography to make everything it deals with sacred? I don't advocate the propagation of vicious literature; I speak only of good, coarse, marketable stuff for the world's vulgar. You just give it a thought, Maud; talk it over with Dora.'

He resumed presently:

'I maintain that we people of brains are justified in supplying the mob with the food it likes. We are not geniuses, and if we sit down in a spirit of long-eared gravity we shall produce only commonplace stuff. Let us use our wits to earn money, and make the best we can of our lives. If only I had the skill, I would produce novels out-trashing the trashiest that ever sold fifty thousand copies. But it needs skill, mind you: and to deny it is a gross error of the literary pedants. To please the vulgar you must, one way or another, incarnate the genius of vulgarity. For my own part, I shan't be able to address the bulkiest multitude; my talent doesn't lend itself to that form. I shall write for the upper middle-class of intellect, the people who like to feel that what they are reading has some special cleverness, but who can't distinguish between stones and paste. That's why I'm so slow in warming to the work. Every month I feel surer of myself, however.

That last thing of mine in The West End distinctly hit the mark; it wasn't too flashy, it wasn't too solid. I heard fellows speak of it in the train.'

Mrs Milvain kept glancing at Maud, with eyes which desired her attention to these utterances. None the less, half an hour after dinner, Jasper found himself encountered by his sister in the garden, on her face a look which warned him of what was coming.

'I want you to tell me something, Jasper. How much longer shall you look to mother for support? I mean it literally; let me

have an idea of how much longer it will be.'

He looked away and reflected.

'To leave a margin,' was his reply, 'let us say twelve months.'

'Better say your favourite "ten years" at once.'

'No. I speak by the card. In twelve months' time, if not before, I shall begin to pay my debts. My dear girl, I have the honour to be a tolerably long-headed individual. I know what I'm about.'

'And let us suppose mother were to die within half a year?'

'I should make shift to do very well.'

'You? And please—what of Dora and me?'

'You would write Sunday-school prizes.'

Maud turned away and left him.

He knocked the dust out of the pipe he had been smoking, and again set off for a stroll along the lanes. On his countenance was just a trace of solicitude, but for the most part he wore a thoughtful smile. Now and then he stroked his smoothly-shaven jaws with thumb and fingers. Occasionally he became observant of wayside details—of the colour of a maple leaf, the shape of a tall thistle, the consistency of a fungus. At the few people who passed he looked keenly, surveying them from head to foot.

On turning, at the limit of his walk, he found himself almost face to face with two persons, who were coming along in silent companionship; their appearance interested him. The one was a man of fifty, grizzled, hard featured, slightly bowed in the shoulders; he wore a grey felt hat with a broad brim and a decent suit of broadcloth. With him was a girl of perhaps two-and-

twenty, in a slate-coloured dress with very little ornament, and a yellow straw hat of the shape originally appropriated to males; her dark hair was cut short, and lay in innumerable crisp curls. Father and daughter, obviously. The girl, to a casual eye, was neither pretty nor beautiful, but she had a grave and impressive face, with a complexion of ivory tone; her walk was gracefully modest, and she seemed to be enjoying the country air.

Jasper mused concerning them. When he had walked a few yards, he looked back; at the same moment the unknown man also turned his head.

'Where the deuce have I seen them—him and the girl too?' Milvain asked himself.

And before he reached home the recollection he sought flashed upon his mind.

'The Museum Reading-room, of course!'

CHAPTER II. THE HOUSE OF YULE

'I think' said Jasper, as he entered the room where his mother and Maud were busy with plain needlework, 'I must have met Alfred Yule and his daughter.'

'How did you recognise them?' Mrs Milvain inquired.

'I passed an old buffer and a pale-faced girl whom I know by sight at the British Museum. It wasn't near Yule's house, but they were taking a walk.'

'They may have come already. When Miss Harrow was here last, she said "in about a fortnight."'

'No mistaking them for people of these parts, even if I hadn't remembered their faces. Both of them are obvious dwellers in the valley of the shadow of books.'

'Is Miss Yule such a fright then?' asked Maud.

'A fright! Not at all. A good example of the modern literary girl. I suppose you have the oddest old-fashioned ideas of such people. No, I rather like the look of her. Simpatica, I should think, as that ass Whelpdale would say. A very delicate, pure complexion, though morbid; nice eyes; figure not spoilt yet. But of course I may be wrong about their identity.'

Later in the afternoon Jasper's conjecture was rendered a certainty. Maud had walked to Wattleborough, where she would meet Dora on the latter's return from her teaching, and Mrs Milvain sat alone, in a mood of depression; there was a ring at

the door-bell, and the servant admitted Miss Harrow.

This lady acted as housekeeper to Mr John Yule, a wealthy resident in this neighbourhood; she was the sister of his deceased wife—a thin, soft-speaking, kindly woman of forty-five. The greater part of her life she had spent as a governess; her position now was more agreeable, and the removal of her anxiety about the future had developed qualities of cheerfulness which formerly no one would have suspected her to possess. The acquaintance between Mrs Milvain and her was only of twelve months' standing; prior to that, Mr Yule had inhabited a house at the end of Wattleborough remote from Finden.

'Our London visitors came yesterday,' she began by saying.

Mrs Milvain mentioned her son's encounter an hour or two ago.

'No doubt it was they,' said the visitor. 'Mrs Yule hasn't come; I hardly expected she would, you know. So very unfortunate when there are difficulties of that kind, isn't it?'

She smiled confidentially.

'The poor girl must feel it,' said Mrs Milvain.

'I'm afraid she does. Of course it narrows the circle of her friends at home. She's a sweet girl, and I should so like you to meet her. Do come and have tea with us to-morrow afternoon, will you? Or would it be too much for you just now?'

'Will you let the girls call? And then perhaps Miss Yule will be so good as to come and see me?'

'I wonder whether Mr Milvain would like to meet her father?

I have thought that perhaps it might be some advantage to him. Alfred is so closely connected with literary people, you know.'

'I feel sure he would be glad,' replied Mrs Milvain. 'But—what of Jasper's friendship with Mrs Edmund Yule and the Reardons? Mightn't it be a little awkward?'

'Oh, I don't think so, unless he himself felt it so. There would be no need to mention that, I should say. And, really, it would be so much better if those estrangements came to an end. John makes no scruple of speaking freely about everyone, and I don't think Alfred regards Mrs Edmund with any serious unkindness. If Mr Milvain would walk over with the young ladies to-morrow, it would be very pleasant.'

'Then I think I may promise that he will. I'm sure I don't know where he is at this moment. We don't see very much of him, except at meals.'

'He won't be with you much longer, I suppose?'

'Perhaps a week.'

Before Miss Harrow's departure Maud and Dora reached home. They were curious to see the young lady from the valley of the shadow of books, and gladly accepted the invitation offered them.

They set out on the following afternoon in their brother's company. It was only a quarter of an hour's walk to Mr Yule's habitation, a small house in a large garden. Jasper was coming hither for the first time; his sisters now and then visited Miss Harrow, but very rarely saw Mr Yule himself who made no

secret of the fact that he cared little for female society. In Wattleborough and the neighbourhood opinions varied greatly as to this gentleman's character, but women seldom spoke very favourably of him. Miss Harrow was reticent concerning her brother-in-law; no one, however, had any reason to believe that she found life under his roof disagreeable. That she lived with him at all was of course occasionally matter for comment, certain Wattleborough ladies having their doubts regarding the position of a deceased wife's sister under such circumstances; but no one was seriously exercised about the relations between this sober lady of forty-five and a man of sixty-three in broken health.

A word of the family history.

John, Alfred, and Edmund Yule were the sons of a Wattleborough stationer. Each was well educated, up to the age of seventeen, at the town's grammar school. The eldest, who was a hot-headed lad, but showed capacities for business, worked at first with his father, endeavouring to add a bookselling department to the trade in stationery; but the life of home was not much to his taste, and at one-and-twenty he obtained a clerk's place in the office of a London newspaper. Three years after, his father died, and the small patrimony which fell to him he used in making himself practically acquainted with the details of paper manufacture, his aim being to establish himself in partnership with an acquaintance who had started a small paper-mill in Hertfordshire.

His speculation succeeded, and as years went on he became a

thriving manufacturer. His brother Alfred, in the meantime, had drifted from work at a London bookseller's into the modern Grub Street, his adventures in which region will concern us hereafter.

Edmund carried on the Wattleborough business, but with small success. Between him and his eldest brother existed a good deal of affection, and in the end John offered him a share in his flourishing paper works; whereupon Edmund married, deeming himself well established for life. But John's temper was a difficult one; Edmund and he quarrelled, parted; and when the younger died, aged about forty, he left but moderate provision for his widow and two children.

Only when he had reached middle age did John marry; the experiment could not be called successful, and Mrs Yule died three years later, childless.

At fifty-four John Yule retired from active business; he came back to the scenes of his early life, and began to take an important part in the municipal affairs of Wattleborough. He was then a remarkably robust man, fond of out-of-door exercise; he made it one of his chief efforts to encourage the local Volunteer movement, the cricket and football clubs, public sports of every kind, showing no sympathy whatever with those persons who wished to establish free libraries, lectures, and the like. At his own expense he built for the Volunteers a handsome drill-shed; he founded a public gymnasium; and finally he allowed it to be rumoured that he was going to present the town with a park. But by presuming too far upon the bodily vigour which

prompted these activities, he passed of a sudden into the state of a confirmed invalid. On an autumn expedition in the Hebrides he slept one night under the open sky, with the result that he had an all but fatal attack of rheumatic fever. After that, though the direction of his interests was unchanged, he could no longer set the example to Wattleborough youth of muscular manliness. The infliction did not improve his temper; for the next year or two he was constantly at warfare with one or other of his colleagues and friends, ill brooking that the familiar control of various local interests should fall out of his hands. But before long he appeared to resign himself to his fate, and at present Wattleborough saw little of him. It seemed likely that he might still found the park which was to bear his name; but perhaps it would only be done in consequence of directions in his will. It was believed that he could not live much longer.

With his kinsfolk he held very little communication. Alfred Yule, a battered man of letters, had visited Wattleborough only twice (including the present occasion) since John's return hither. Mrs Edmund Yule, with her daughter—now Mrs Reardon—had been only once, three years ago. These two families, as you have heard, were not on terms of amity with each other, owing to difficulties between Mrs Alfred and Mrs Edmund; but John seemed to regard both impartially. Perhaps the only real warmth of feeling he had ever known was bestowed upon Edmund, and Miss Harrow had remarked that he spoke with somewhat more interest of Edmund's daughter, Amy, than of

Alfred's daughter, Marian. But it was doubtful whether the sudden disappearance from the earth of all his relatives would greatly have troubled him. He lived a life of curious self-absorption, reading newspapers (little else), and talking with old friends who had stuck to him in spite of his irascibility.

Miss Harrow received her visitors in a small and soberly furnished drawing-room. She was nervous, probably because of Jasper Milvain, whom she had met but once—last spring—and who on that occasion had struck her as an alarmingly modern young man. In the shadow of a window-curtain sat a slight, simply-dressed girl, whose short curly hair and thoughtful countenance Jasper again recognised. When it was his turn to be presented to Miss Yule, he saw that she doubted for an instant whether or not to give her hand; yet she decided to do so, and there was something very pleasant to him in its warm softness. She smiled with a slight embarrassment, meeting his look only for a second.

'I have seen you several times, Miss Yule,' he said in a friendly way, 'though without knowing your name. It was under the great dome.'

She laughed, readily understanding his phrase.

'I am there very often,' was her reply.

'What great dome?' asked Miss Harrow, with surprise.

'That of the British Museum Reading-room,' explained Jasper; 'known to some of us as the valley of the shadow of books. People who often work there necessarily get to know each

other by sight.

In the same way I knew Miss Yule's father when I happened to pass him in the road yesterday.'

The three girls began to converse together, perforce of trivialities. Marian Yule spoke in rather slow tones, thoughtfully, gently; she had linked her fingers, and laid her hands, palms downwards, upon her lap—a nervous action. Her accent was pure, unpretentious; and she used none of the fashionable turns of speech which would have suggested the habit of intercourse with distinctly metropolitan society.

'You must wonder how we exist in this out-of-the-way place,' remarked Maud.

'Rather, I envy you,' Marian answered, with a slight emphasis.

The door opened, and Alfred Yule presented himself. He was tall, and his head seemed a disproportionate culmination to his meagre body, it was so large and massively featured. Intellect and uncertainty of temper were equally marked upon his visage; his brows were knitted in a permanent expression of severity. He had thin, smooth hair, grizzled whiskers, a shaven chin. In the multitudinous wrinkles of his face lay a history of laborious and stormy life; one readily divined in him a struggling and embittered man. Though he looked older than his years, he had by no means the appearance of being beyond the ripeness of his mental vigour.

'It pleases me to meet you, Mr Milvain,' he said, as he stretched out his bony hand. 'Your name reminds me of a paper

in The Wayside a month or two ago, which you will perhaps allow a veteran to say was not ill done.'

'I am grateful to you for noticing it,' replied Jasper.

There was positively a touch of visible warmth upon his cheek. The allusion had come so unexpectedly that it caused him keen pleasure.

Mr Yule seated himself awkwardly, crossed his legs, and began to stroke the back of his left hand, which lay on his knee. He seemed to have nothing more to say at present, and allowed Miss Harrow and the girls to support conversation. Jasper listened with a smile for a minute or two, then he addressed the veteran.'Have you seen The Study this week, Mr Yule?'

'Yes.'

'Did you notice that it contains a very favourable review of a novel which was tremendously abused in the same columns three weeks ago?'

Mr Yule started, but Jasper could perceive at once that his emotion was not disagreeable.

'You don't say so.'

'Yes. The novel is Miss Hawk's "On the Boards." How will the editor get out of this?'

'H'm! Of course Mr Fadge is not immediately responsible; but it'll be unpleasant for him, decidedly unpleasant.' He smiled grimly. 'You hear this, Marian?'

'How is it explained, father?'

'May be accident, of course; but—well, there's no knowing. I think it very likely this will be the end of Mr Fadge's tenure of office. Rackett, the proprietor, only wants a plausible excuse for making a change. The paper has been going downhill for the last year; I know of two publishing houses who have withdrawn their advertising from it, and who never send their books for review. Everyone foresaw that kind of thing from the day Mr Fadge became editor. The tone of his paragraphs has been detestable. Two reviews of the same novel, eh? And diametrically opposed? Ha! Ha!'

Gradually he had passed from quiet appreciation of the joke to undisguised mirth and pleasure. His utterance of the name 'Mr Fadge' sufficiently intimated that he had some cause of personal discontent with the editor of The Study.

'The author,' remarked Milvain, 'ought to make a good thing out of this.'

'Will, no doubt. Ought to write at once to the papers, calling attention to this sample of critical impartiality. Ha! ha!'

He rose and went to the window, where for several minutes he stood gazing at vacancy, the same grim smile still on his face. Jasper in the meantime amused the ladies (his sisters had heard him on the subject already) with a description of the two antagonistic notices. But he did not trust himself to express so freely as he had done at home his opinion of reviewing in general; it was more than probable that both Yule and his daughter did a good deal of such work.

‘Suppose we go into the garden,’ suggested Miss Harrow, presently. ‘It seems a shame to sit indoors on such a lovely afternoon.’

Hitherto there had been no mention of the master of the house. But Mr Yule now remarked to Jasper:

‘My brother would be glad if you would come and have a word with him. He isn’t quite well enough to leave his room to-day.’

So, as the ladies went gardenwards, Jasper followed the man of letters upstairs to a room on the first floor. Here, in a deep cane chair, which was placed by the open window, sat John Yule. He was completely dressed, save that instead of coat he wore a dressing-gown. The facial likeness between him and his brother was very strong, but John’s would universally have been judged the finer countenance; illness notwithstanding, he had a complexion which contrasted in its pure colour with Alfred’s parchmenty skin, and there was more finish about his features. His abundant hair was reddish, his long moustache and trimmed beard a lighter shade of the same hue.

‘So you too are in league with the doctors,’ was his bluff greeting, as he held a hand to the young man and inspected him with a look of slighting good-nature.

‘Well, that certainly is one way of regarding the literary profession,’ admitted Jasper, who had heard enough of John’s way of thinking to understand the remark.

‘A young fellow with all the world before him, too. Hang it, Mr Milvain, is there no less pernicious work you can turn your

hand to?'

'I'm afraid not, Mr Yule. After all, you know, you must be held in a measure responsible for my depravity.'

'How's that?'

'I understand that you have devoted most of your life to the making of paper. If that article were not so cheap and so abundant, people wouldn't have so much temptation to scribble.'

Alfred Yule uttered a short laugh.

'I think you are cornered, John.'

'I wish,' answered John, 'that you were both condemned to write on such paper as I chiefly made; it was a special kind of whitey-brown, used by shopkeepers.'

He chuckled inwardly, and at the same time reached out for a box of cigarettes on a table near him. His brother and Jasper each took one as he offered them, and began to smoke.

'You would like to see literary production come entirely to an end?' said Milvain.

'I should like to see the business of literature abolished.'

'There's a distinction, of course. But, on the whole, I should say that even the business serves a good purpose.'

'What purpose?'

'It helps to spread civilisation.'

'Civilisation!' exclaimed John, scornfully. 'What do you mean by civilisation? Do you call it civilising men to make them weak, flabby creatures, with ruined eyes and dyspeptic stomachs? Who is it that reads most of the stuff that's poured out daily by the

ton from the printing-press? Just the men and women who ought to spend their leisure hours in open-air exercise; the people who earn their bread by sedentary pursuits, and who need to live as soon as they are free from the desk or the counter, not to moon over small print. Your Board schools, your popular press, your spread of education! Machinery for ruining the country, that's what I call it.'

'You have done a good deal, I think, to counteract those influences in Wattleborough.'

'I hope so; and if only I had kept the use of my limbs I'd have done a good deal more. I have an idea of offering substantial prizes to men and women engaged in sedentary work who take an oath to abstain from all reading, and keep it for a certain number of years. There's a good deal more need for that than for abstinence from strong liquor. If I could have had my way I would have revived prize-fighting.'

His brother laughed with contemptuous impatience.

'You would doubtless like to see military conscription introduced into England?' said Jasper.

'Of course I should! You talk of civilising; there's no such way of civilising the masses of the people as by fixed military service. Before mental training must come training of the body. Go about the Continent, and see the effect of military service on loutish peasants and the lowest classes of town population. Do you know why it isn't even more successful? Because the damnable education movement interferes. If Germany would

shut up her schools and universities for the next quarter of a century and go ahead like blazes with military training there'd be a nation such as the world has never seen. After that, they might begin a little book-teaching again—say an hour and a half a day for everyone above nine years old. Do you suppose, Mr Milvain, that society is going to be reformed by you people who write for money? Why, you are the very first class that will be swept from the face of the earth as soon as the reformation really begins!'

Alfred puffed at his cigarette. His thoughts were occupied with Mr Fadge and The Study. He was considering whether he could aid in bringing public contempt upon that literary organ and its editor. Milvain listened to the elder man's diatribe with much amusement.

'You, now,' pursued John, 'what do you write about?'

'Nothing in particular. I make a salable page or two out of whatever strikes my fancy.'

'Exactly! You don't even pretend that you've got anything to say. You live by inducing people to give themselves mental indigestion—and bodily, too, for that matter.'

'Do you know, Mr Yule, that you have suggested a capital idea to me? If I were to take up your views, I think it isn't at all unlikely that I might make a good thing of writing against writing. It should be my literary specialty to rail against literature. The reading public should pay me for telling them that they oughtn't to read. I must think it over.'

'Carlyle has anticipated you,' threw in Alfred.

'Yes, but in an antiquated way. I would base my polemic on the newest philosophy.'

He developed the idea facetiously, whilst John regarded him as he might have watched a performing monkey.

'There again! your new philosophy!' exclaimed the invalid. 'Why, it isn't even wholesome stuff, the kind of reading that most of you force on the public. Now there's the man who has married one of my nieces—poor lass! Reardon, his name is. You know him, I dare say. Just for curiosity I had a look at one of his books; it was called "The Optimist." Of all the morbid trash I ever saw, that beat everything. I thought of writing him a letter, advising a couple of anti-bilious pills before bedtime for a few weeks.'

Jasper glanced at Alfred Yule, who wore a look of indifference.

'That man deserves penal servitude in my opinion,' pursued John. 'I'm not sure that it isn't my duty to offer him a couple of hundred a year on condition that he writes no more.'

Milvain, with a clear vision of his friend in London, burst into laughter. But at that point Alfred rose from his chair.

'Shall we rejoin the ladies?' he said, with a certain pedantry of phrase and manner which often characterised him.

'Think over your ways whilst you're still young,' said John as he shook hands with his visitor.

'Your brother speaks quite seriously, I suppose?' Jasper remarked when he was in the garden with Alfred.

'I think so. It's amusing now and then, but gets rather tiresome

when you hear it often. By-the-bye, you are not personally acquainted with Mr Fadge?'

'I didn't even know his name until you mentioned it.'

'The most malicious man in the literary world. There's no uncharitableness in feeling a certain pleasure when he gets into a scrape. I could tell you incredible stories about him; but that kind of thing is probably as little to your taste as it is to mine.'

Miss Harrow and her companions, having caught sight of the pair, came towards them. Tea was to be brought out into the garden.

'So you can sit with us and smoke, if you like,' said Miss Harrow to Alfred. 'You are never quite at your ease, I think, without a pipe.'

But the man of letters was too preoccupied for society. In a few minutes he begged that the ladies would excuse his withdrawing; he had two or three letters to write before post-time, which was early at Finden.

Jasper, relieved by the veteran's departure, began at once to make himself very agreeable company. When he chose to lay aside the topic of his own difficulties and ambitions, he could converse with a spontaneous gaiety which readily won the good-will of listeners. Naturally he addressed himself very often to Marian Yule, whose attention complimented him. She said little, and evidently was at no time a free talker, but the smile on her face indicated a mood of quiet enjoyment. When her eyes wandered, it was to rest on the beauties of the garden, the moving

patches of golden sunshine, the forms of gleaming cloud. Jasper liked to observe her as she turned her head: there seemed to him a particular grace in the movement; her head and neck were admirably formed, and the short hair drew attention to this.

It was agreed that Miss Harrow and Marian should come on the second day after to have tea with the Milvains. And when Jasper took leave of Alfred Yule, the latter expressed a wish that they might have a walk together one of these mornings.

CHAPTER III. HOLIDAY

Jasper's favourite walk led him to a spot distant perhaps a mile and a half from home. From a tract of common he turned into a short lane which crossed the Great Western railway, and thence by a stile into certain meadows forming a compact little valley. One recommendation of this retreat was that it lay sheltered from all winds; to Jasper a wind was objectionable. Along the bottom ran a clear, shallow stream, overhung with elder and hawthorn bushes; and close by the wooden bridge which spanned it was a great ash tree, making shadow for cows and sheep when the sun lay hot upon the open field. It was rare for anyone to come along this path, save farm labourers morning and evening.

But to-day—the afternoon that followed his visit to John Yule's house—he saw from a distance that his lounging-place on the wooden bridge was occupied. Someone else had discovered the pleasure there was in watching the sun-flecked sparkle of the water as it flowed over the clean sand and stones. A girl in a yellow-straw hat; yes, and precisely the person he had hoped, at the first glance, that it might be. He made no haste as he drew nearer on the descending path. At length his footstep was heard; Marian Yule turned her head and clearly recognised him.

She assumed an upright position, letting one of her hands rest upon the rail. After the exchange of ordinary greetings, Jasper leaned back against the same support and showed himself

disposed for talk.

'When I was here late in the spring,' he said, 'this ash was only just budding, though everything else seemed in full leaf.'

'An ash, is it?' murmured Marian. 'I didn't know. I think an oak is the only tree I can distinguish. Yet,' she added quickly, 'I knew that the ash was late; some lines of Tennyson come to my memory.'

'Which are those?'

> 'Delaying, as the tender ash delays
> To clothe herself when all the woods are green,

somewhere in the "Idylls."'

'I don't remember; so I won't pretend to—though I should do so as a rule.'

She looked at him oddly, and seemed about to laugh, yet did not.

'You have had little experience of the country?' Jasper continued.

'Very little. You, I think, have known it from childhood?'

'In a sort of way. I was born in Wattleborough, and my people have always lived here. But I am not very rural in temperament. I have really no friends here; either they have lost interest in me, or I in them. What do you think of the girls, my sisters?'

The question, though put with perfect simplicity, was embarrassing.

'They are tolerably intellectual,' Jasper went on, when he saw that it would be difficult for her to answer. 'I want to persuade them to try their hands at literary work of some kind or other. They give lessons, and both hate it.'

'Would literary work be less—burdensome?' said Marian, without looking at him.

'Rather more so, you think?'

She hesitated.

'It depends, of course, on—on several things.'

'To be sure,' Jasper agreed. 'I don't think they have any marked faculty for such work; but as they certainly haven't for teaching, that doesn't matter. It's a question of learning a business. I am going through my apprenticeship, and find it a long affair. Money would shorten it, and, unfortunately, I have none.'

'Yes,' said Marian, turning her eyes upon the stream, 'money is a help in everything.'

'Without it, one spends the best part of one's life in toiling for that first foothold which money could at once purchase. To have money is becoming of more and more importance in a literary career; principally because to have money is to have friends. Year by year, such influence grows of more account. A lucky man will still occasionally succeed by dint of his own honest perseverance, but the chances are dead against anyone who can't make private interest with influential people; his work is simply overwhelmed by that of the men who have better opportunities.'

'Don't you think that, even to-day, really good work will

sooner or later be recognised?'

'Later, rather than sooner; and very likely the man can't wait; he starves in the meantime. You understand that I am not speaking of genius; I mean marketable literary work. The quantity turned out is so great that there's no hope for the special attention of the public unless one can afford to advertise hugely. Take the instance of a successful all-round man of letters; take Ralph Warbury, whose name you'll see in the first magazine you happen to open. But perhaps he is a friend of yours?'

'Oh no!'

'Well, I wasn't going to abuse him. I was only going to ask: Is there any quality which distinguishes his work from that of twenty struggling writers one could name? Of course not. He's a clever, prolific man; so are they. But he began with money and friends; he came from Oxford into the thick of advertised people; his name was mentioned in print six times a week before he had written a dozen articles. This kind of thing will become the rule. Men won't succeed in literature that they may get into society, but will get into society that they may succeed in literature.'

'Yes, I know it is true,' said Marian, in a low voice.

'There's a friend of mine who writes novels,' Jasper pursued. 'His books are not works of genius, but they are glaringly distinct from the ordinary circulating novel. Well, after one or two attempts, he made half a success; that is to say, the publishers brought out a second edition of the book in a few months. There was his opportunity. But he couldn't use it; he had no friends,

because he had no money. A book of half that merit, if written by a man in the position of Warbury when he started, would have established the reputation of a lifetime. His influential friends would have referred to it in leaders, in magazine articles, in speeches, in sermons. It would have run through numerous editions, and the author would have had nothing to do but to write another book and demand his price. But the novel I'm speaking of was practically forgotten a year after its appearance; it was whelmed beneath the flood of next season's literature.'

Marian urged a hesitating objection.

'But, under the circumstances, wasn't it in the author's power to make friends? Was money really indispensable?'

'Why, yes—because he chose to marry. As a bachelor he might possibly have got into the right circles, though his character would in any case have made it difficult for him to curry favour.

But as a married man, without means, the situation was hopeless. Once married you must live up to the standard of the society you frequent; you can't be entertained without entertaining in return. Now if his wife had brought him only a couple of thousand pounds all might have been well. I should have advised him, in sober seriousness, to live for two years at the rate of a thousand a year. At the end of that time he would have been earning enough to continue at pretty much the same rate of expenditure.'

'Perhaps.'

'Well, I ought rather to say that the average man of letters

would be able to do that. As for Reardon—'

He stopped. The name had escaped him unawares.

'Reardon?' said Marian, looking up. 'You are speaking of him?'

'I have betrayed myself Miss Yule.'

'But what does it matter? You have only spoken in his favour.'

'I feared the name might affect you disagreeably.'

Marian delayed her reply.

'It is true,' she said, 'we are not on friendly terms with my cousin's family. I have never met Mr Reardon. But I shouldn't like you to think that the mention of his name is disagreeable to me.'

'It made me slightly uncomfortable yesterday—the fact that I am well acquainted with Mrs Edmund Yule, and that Reardon is my friend. Yet I didn't see why that should prevent my making your father's acquaintance.'

'Surely not. I shall say nothing about it; I mean, as you uttered the name unintentionally.'

There was a pause in the dialogue. They had been speaking almost confidentially, and Marian seemed to become suddenly aware of an oddness in the situation. She turned towards the uphill path, as if thinking of resuming her walk.

'You are tired of standing still,' said Jasper. 'May I walk back a part of the way with you?'

'Thank you; I shall be glad.'

They went on for a few minutes in silence.

'Have you published anything with your signature, Miss Yule?' Jasper at length inquired.

'Nothing. I only help father a little.'

The silence that again followed was broken this time by Marian.

'When you chanced to mention Mr Reardon's name,' she said, with a diffident smile in which lay that suggestion of humour so delightful upon a woman's face, 'you were going to say something more about him?'

'Only that—' he broke off and laughed. 'Now, how boyish it was, wasn't it? I remember doing just the same thing once when I came home from school and had an exciting story to tell, with preservation of anonymities. Of course I blurted out a name in the first minute or two, to my father's great amusement. He told me that I hadn't the diplomatic character. I have been trying to acquire it ever since.

'But why?'

'It's one of the essentials of success in any kind of public life. And I mean to succeed, you know. I feel that I am one of the men who do succeed. But I beg your pardon; you asked me a question. Really, I was only going to say of Reardon what I had said before: that he hasn't the tact requisite for acquiring popularity.'

'Then I may hope that it isn't his marriage with my cousin which has proved a fatal misfortune?'

'In no case,' replied Milvain, averting his look, 'would he have used his advantages.'

'And now? Do you think he has but poor prospects?'

'I wish I could see any chance of his being estimated at his right value. It's very hard to say what is before him.'

'I knew my cousin Amy when we were children,' said Marian, presently. 'She gave promise of beauty.'

'Yes, she is beautiful.'

'And—the kind of woman to be of help to such a husband?'

'I hardly know how to answer, Miss Yule,' said Jasper, looking frankly at her. 'Perhaps I had better say that it's unfortunate they are poor.'

Marian cast down her eyes.

'To whom isn't it a misfortune?' pursued her companion. 'Poverty is the root of all social ills; its existence accounts even for the ills that arise from wealth. The poor man is a man labouring in fetters. I declare there is no word in our language which sounds so hideous to me as "Poverty."'

Shortly after this they came to the bridge over the railway line. Jasper looked at his watch.

'Will you indulge me in a piece of childishness?' he said. 'In less than five minutes a London express goes by; I have often watched it here, and it amuses me. Would it weary you to wait?'

'I should like to,' she replied with a laugh.

The line ran along a deep cutting, from either side of which grew hazel bushes and a few larger trees. Leaning upon the parapet of the bridge, Jasper kept his eye in the westward direction, where the gleaming rails were visible for more than a

mile. Suddenly he raised his finger.

'You hear?'

Marian had just caught the far-off sound of the train. She looked eagerly, and in a few moments saw it approaching. The front of the engine blackened nearer and nearer, coming on with dread force and speed. A blinding rush, and there burst against the bridge a great volley of sunlit steam. Milvain and his companion ran to the opposite parapet, but already the whole train had emerged, and in a few seconds it had disappeared round a sharp curve. The leafy branches that grew out over the line swayed violently backwards and forwards in the perturbed air.

'If I were ten years younger,' said Jasper, laughing, 'I should say that was jolly! It enspirits me. It makes me feel eager to go back and plunge into the fight again.'

'Upon me it has just the opposite effect,' fell from Marian, in very low tones.

'Oh, don't say that! Well, it only means that you haven't had enough holiday yet. I have been in the country more than a week; a few days more and I must be off. How long do you think of staying?'

'Not much more than a week, I think.'

'By-the-bye, you are coming to have tea with us to-morrow,' Jasper remarked a propos of nothing. Then he returned to another subject that was in his thoughts.

'It was by a train like that that I first went up to London. Not really the first time; I mean when I went to live there, seven

years ago. What spirits I was in! A boy of eighteen going to live independently in London; think of it!'

'You went straight from school?'

'I was for two years at Redmayne College after leaving Wattleborough Grammar School. Then my father died, and I spent nearly half a year at home. I was meant to be a teacher, but the prospect of entering a school by no means appealed to me. A friend of mine was studying in London for some Civil Service exam., so I declared that I would go and do the same thing.'

'Did you succeed?'

'Not I! I never worked properly for that kind of thing. I read voraciously, and got to know London. I might have gone to the dogs, you know; but by when I had been in London a year a pretty clear purpose began to form in me. Strange to think that you were growing up there all the time. I may have passed you in the street now and then.'

Marian laughed.

'And I did at length see you at the British Museum, you know.'

They turned a corner of the road, and came full upon Marian's father, who was walking in this direction with eyes fixed upon the ground.

'So here you are!' he exclaimed, looking at the girl, and for the moment paying no attention to Jasper. 'I wondered whether I should meet you.' Then, more dryly, 'How do you do, Mr Milvain?'

In a tone of easy indifference Jasper explained how he came

to be accompanying Miss Yule.

'Shall I walk on with you, father?' Marian asked, scrutinising his rugged features.

'Just as you please; I don't know that I should have gone much further. But we might take another way back.'

Jasper readily adapted himself to the wish he discerned in Mr Yule; at once he offered leave-taking in the most natural way. Nothing was said on either side about another meeting.

The young man proceeded homewards, but, on arriving, did not at once enter the house. Behind the garden was a field used for the grazing of horses; he entered it by the unfastened gate, and strolled idly hither and thither, now and then standing to observe a poor worn-out beast, all skin and bone, which had presumably been sent here in the hope that a little more labour might still be exacted from it if it were suffered to repose for a few weeks. There were sores upon its back and legs; it stood in a fixed attitude of despondency, just flicking away troublesome flies with its grizzled tail.

It was tea-time when he went in. Maud was not at home, and Mrs Milvain, tormented by a familiar headache, kept her room; so Jasper and Dora sat down together. Each had an open book on the table; throughout the meal they exchanged only a few words.

'Going to play a little?' Jasper suggested when they had gone into the sitting-room.

'If you like.'

She sat down at the piano, whilst her brother lay on the sofa,

his hands clasped beneath his head. Dora did not play badly, but an absentmindedness which was commonly observable in her had its effect upon the music. She at length broke off idly in the middle of a passage, and began to linger on careless chords. Then, without turning her head, she asked:

'Were you serious in what you said about writing storybooks?'

'Quite. I see no reason why you shouldn't do something in that way. But I tell you what; when I get back, I'll inquire into the state of the market. I know a man who was once engaged at Jolly & Monk's—the chief publishers of that kind of thing, you know; I must look him up—what a mistake it is to neglect any acquaintance!—and get some information out of him. But it's obvious what an immense field there is for anyone who can just hit the taste of the' new generation of Board school children. Mustn't be too goody-goody; that kind of thing is falling out of date. But you'd have to cultivate a particular kind of vulgarity.

There's an idea, by-the-bye. I'll write a paper on the characteristics of that new generation; it may bring me a few guineas, and it would be a help to you.'

'But what do you know about the subject?' asked Dora doubtfully.

'What a comical question! It is my business to know something about every subject—or to know where to get the knowledge.'

'Well,' said Dora, after a pause, 'there's no doubt Maud and I ought to think very seriously about the future. You are aware, Jasper, that mother has not been able to save a penny of her

income.'

'I don't see how she could have done. Of course I know what you're thinking; but for me, it would have been possible. I don't mind confessing to you that the thought troubles me a little now and then; I shouldn't like to see you two going off governessing in strangers' houses. All I can say is, that I am very honestly working for the end which I am convinced will be most profitable.

I shall not desert you; you needn't fear that. But just put your heads together, and cultivate your writing faculty. Suppose you could both together earn about a hundred a year in Grub Street, it would be better than governessing; wouldn't it?'

'You say you don't know what Miss Yule writes?'

'Well, I know a little more about her than I did yesterday. I've had an hour's talk with her this afternoon.'

'Indeed?'

'Met her down in the Leggatt fields. I find she doesn't write independently; just helps her father. What the help amounts to I can't say. There's something very attractive about her. She quoted a line or two of Tennyson; the first time I ever heard a woman speak blank verse with any kind of decency.'

'She was walking alone?'

'Yes. On the way back we met old Yule; he seemed rather grumpy, I thought. I don't think she's the kind of girl to make a paying business of literature. Her qualities are personal. And it's pretty clear to me that the valley of the shadow of books by no means agrees with her disposition. Possibly old Yule is something

of a tyrant.'

'He doesn't impress me very favourably. Do you think you will keep up their acquaintance in London?'

'Can't say. I wonder what sort of a woman that mother really is? Can't be so very gross, I should think.'

'Miss Harrow knows nothing about her, except that she was a quite uneducated girl.'

'But, dash it! by this time she must have got decent manners. Of course there may be other objections. Mrs Reardon knows nothing against her.'

Midway in the following morning, as Jasper sat with a book in the garden, he was surprised to see Alfred Yule enter by the gate.

'I thought,' began the visitor, who seemed in high spirits, 'that you might like to see something I received this morning.'

He unfolded a London evening paper, and indicated a long letter from a casual correspondent. It was written by the authoress of 'On the Boards,' and drew attention, with much expenditure of witticism, to the conflicting notices of that book which had appeared in The Study. Jasper read the thing with laughing appreciation.

'Just what one expected!'

'And I have private letters on the subject,' added Mr Yule.

'There has been something like a personal conflict between Fadge and the man who looks after the minor notices. Fadge, more so, charged the other man with a design to damage him and the paper. There's talk of legal proceedings. An immense joke!'

He laughed in his peculiar croaking way.

'Do you feel disposed for a turn along the lanes, Mr Milvain?'

'By all means.—There's my mother at the window; will you come in for a moment?'

With a step of quite unusual sprightliness Mr Yule entered the house. He could talk of but one subject, and Mrs Milvain had to listen to a laboured account of the blunder just committed by The Study. It was Alfred's Yule's characteristic that he could do nothing lighthandedly. He seemed always to converse with effort; he took a seat with stiff ungainliness; he walked with a stumbling or sprawling gait.

When he and Jasper set out for their ramble, his loquacity was in strong contrast with the taciturn mood he had exhibited yesterday and the day before. He fell upon the general aspects of contemporary literature.

'… The evil of the time is the multiplication of ephemerides. Hence a demand for essays, descriptive articles, fragments of criticism, out of all proportion to the supply of even tolerable work. The men who have an aptitude for turning out this kind of thing in vast quantities are enlisted by every new periodical, with the result that their productions are ultimately watered down into worthlessness.... Well now, there's Fadge. Years ago some of Fadge's work was not without a certain—a certain conditional promise of—of comparative merit; but now his writing, in my opinion, is altogether beneath consideration; how Rackett could be so benighted as to give him The Study

—especially after a man like Henry Hawkridge—passes my comprehension. Did you read a paper of his, a few months back, in The Wayside, a preposterous rehabilitation of Elkanah Settle? Ha! Ha! That's what such men are driven to. Elkanah Settle! And he hadn't even a competent acquaintance with his paltry subject. Will you credit that he twice or thrice referred to Settle's reply to "Absalom and Achitophel" by the title of "Absalom Transposed," when every schoolgirl knows that the thing was called "Achitophel Transposed"! This was monstrous enough, but there was something still more contemptible. He positively, I assure you, attributed the play of "Epsom Wells" to Crowne! I should have presumed that every student of even the most trivial primer of literature was aware that "Epsom Wells" was written by Shadwell.... Now, if one were to take Shadwell for the subject of a paper, one might very well show how unjustly his name has fallen into contempt. It has often occurred to me to do this. "But Shadwell never deviates into sense." The sneer, in my opinion, is entirely unmerited. For my own part, I put Shadwell very high among the dramatists of his time, and I think I could show that his absolute worth is by no means inconsiderable. Shadwell has distinct vigour of dramatic conception; his dialogue....'

And as he talked the man kept describing imaginary geometrical figures with the end of his walking-stick; he very seldom raised his eyes from the ground, and the stoop in his shoulders grew more and more pronounced, until at a little distance one might have taken him for a hunchback. At one point

Jasper made a pause to speak of the pleasant wooded prospect that lay before them; his companion regarded it absently, and in a moment or two asked:

'Did you ever come across Cottle's poem on the Malvern Hills? No?

It contains a couple of the richest lines ever put into print:

> It needs the evidence of close deduction
> To know that I shall ever reach the top.

Perfectly serious poetry, mind you!'

He barked in laughter. Impossible to interest him in anything apart from literature; yet one saw him to be a man of solid understanding, and not without perception of humour. He had read vastly; his memory was a literary cyclopaedia. His failings, obvious enough, were the results of a strong and somewhat pedantic individuality ceaselessly at conflict with unpropitious circumstances.

Towards the young man his demeanour varied between a shy cordiality and a dignified reserve which was in danger of seeming pretentious. On the homeward part of the walk he made a few discreet inquiries regarding Milvain's literary achievements and prospects, and the frank self-confidence of the replies appeared to interest him. But he expressed no desire to number Jasper among his acquaintances in town, and of his own professional or private concerns he said not a word.

'Whether he could be any use to me or not, I don't exactly know,' Jasper remarked to his mother and sisters at dinner. 'I suspect it's as much as he can do to keep a footing among the younger tradesmen. But I think he might have said he was willing to help me if he could.'

'Perhaps,' replied Maud, 'your large way of talking made him think any such offer superfluous.'

'You have still to learn,' said Jasper, 'that modesty helps a man in no department of modern life. People take you at your own valuation. It's the men who declare boldly that they need no help to whom practical help comes from all sides. As likely as not Yule will mention my name to someone. "A young fellow who seems to see his way pretty clear before him." The other man will repeat it to somebody else, "A young fellow whose way is clear before him," and so I come to the ears of a man who thinks "Just the fellow I want; I must look him up and ask him if he'll do such-and-such a thing." But I should like to see these Yules at home; I must fish for an invitation.'

In the afternoon, Miss Harrow and Marian came at the expected hour. Jasper purposely kept out of the way until he was summoned to the tea-table.

The Milvain girls were so far from effusive, even towards old acquaintances, that even the people who knew them best spoke of them as rather cold and perhaps a trifle condescending; there were people in Wattleborough who declared their airs of superiority ridiculous and insufferable. The truth was that

nature had endowed them with a larger share of brains than was common in their circle, and had added that touch of pride which harmonised so ill with the restrictions of poverty. Their life had a tone of melancholy, the painful reserve which characterises a certain clearly defined class in the present day. Had they been born twenty years earlier, the children of that veterinary surgeon would have grown up to a very different, and in all probability a much happier, existence, for their education would have been limited to the strictly needful, and—certainly in the case of the girls—nothing would have encouraged them to look beyond the simple life possible to a poor man's offspring. But whilst Maud and Dora were still with their homely schoolmistress, Wattleborough saw fit to establish a Girls' High School, and the moderateness of the fees enabled these sisters to receive an intellectual training wholly incompatible with the material conditions of their life. To the relatively poor (who are so much worse off than the poor absolutely) education is in most cases a mocking cruelty. The burden of their brother's support made it very difficult for Maud and Dora even to dress as became their intellectual station; amusements, holidays, the purchase of such simple luxuries as were all but indispensable to them, could not be thought of. It resulted that they held apart from the society which would have welcomed them, for they could not bear to receive without offering in turn. The necessity of giving lessons galled them; they felt—and with every reason—that it made their position ambiguous. So that, though they could not help knowing

many people, they had no intimates; they encouraged no one to visit them, and visited other houses as little as might be.

In Marian Yule they divined a sympathetic nature. She was unlike any girl with whom they had hitherto associated, and it was the impulse of both to receive her with unusual friendliness. The habit of reticence could not be at once overcome, and Marian's own timidity was an obstacle in the way of free intercourse, but Jasper's conversation at tea helped to smooth the course of things.

'I wish you lived anywhere near us,' Dora said to their visitor, as the three girls walked in the garden afterwards, and Maud echoed the wish.

'It would be very nice,' was Marian's reply. 'I have no friends of my own age in London.'

'None?'

'Not one!'

She was about to add something, but in the end kept silence.

'You seem to get along with Miss Yule pretty well, after all,' said Jasper, when the family were alone again.

'Did you anticipate anything else?' Maud asked.

'It seemed doubtful, up at Yule's house. Well, get her to come here again before I go. But it's a pity she doesn't play the piano,' he added, musingly.

For two days nothing was seen of the Yules. Jasper went each afternoon to the stream in the valley, but did not again meet Marian. In the meanwhile he was growing restless. A fortnight

always exhausted his capacity for enjoying the companionship of his mother and sisters, and this time he seemed anxious to get to the end of his holiday. For all that, there was no continuance of the domestic bickering which had begun. Whatever the reason, Maud behaved with unusual mildness to her brother, and Jasper in turn was gently disposed to both the girls.

On the morning of the third day—it was Saturday—he kept silence through breakfast, and just as all were about to rise from the table, he made a sudden announcement:

'I shall go to London this afternoon.'

'This afternoon?' all exclaimed. 'But Monday is your day.'

'No, I shall go this afternoon, by the 2.45.'

And he left the room. Mrs Milvain and the girls exchanged looks.

'I suppose he thinks the Sunday will be too wearisome,' said the mother.

'Perhaps so,' Maud agreed, carelessly.

Half an hour later, just as Dora was ready to leave the house for her engagements in Wattleborough, her brother came into the hall and took his hat, saying:

'I'll walk a little way with you, if you don't mind.'

When they were in the road, he asked her in an offhand manner:

'Do you think I ought to say good-bye to the Yules? Or won't it signify?'

'I should have thought you would wish to.'

'I don't care about it. And, you see, there's been no hint of a wish on their part that I should see them in London. No, I'll just leave you to say good-bye for me.'

'But they expect to see us to-day or to-morrow. You told them you were not going till Monday, and you don't know but Mr Yule might mean to say something yet.'

'Well, I had rather he didn't,' replied Jasper, with a laugh.

'Oh, indeed?'

'I don't mind telling you,' he laughed again. 'I'm afraid of that girl. No, it won't do! You understand that I'm a practical man, and I shall keep clear of dangers. These days of holiday idleness put all sorts of nonsense into one's head.'

Dora kept her eyes down, and smiled ambiguously.

'You must act as you think fit,' she remarked at length.

'Exactly. Now I'll turn back. You'll be with us at dinner?'

They parted. But Jasper did not keep to the straight way home. First of all, he loitered to watch a reaping-machine at work; then he turned into a lane which led up the hill on which was John Yule's house. Even if he had purposed making a farewell call, it was still far too early; all he wanted to do was to pass an hour of the morning, which threatened to lie heavy on his hands. So he rambled on, and went past the house, and took the field-path which would lead him circuitously home again.

His mother desired to speak to him. She was in the dining-room; in the parlour Maud was practising music.

'I think I ought to tell you of something I did yesterday, Jasper,'

Mrs Milvain began. 'You see, my dear, we have been rather straitened lately, and my health, you know, grows so uncertain, and, all things considered, I have been feeling very anxious about the girls. So I wrote to your uncle William, and told him that I must positively have that money. I must think of my own children before his.'

The matter referred to was this. The deceased Mr Milvain had a brother who was a struggling shopkeeper in a Midland town. Some ten years ago, William Milvain, on the point of bankruptcy, had borrowed a hundred and seventy pounds from his brother in Wattleborough, and this debt was still unpaid; for on the death of Jasper's father repayment of the loan was impossible for William, and since then it had seemed hopeless that the sum would ever be recovered. The poor shopkeeper had a large family, and Mrs Milvain, notwithstanding her own position, had never felt able to press him; her relative, however, often spoke of the business, and declared his intention of paying whenever he could.

'You can't recover by law now, you know,' said Jasper.

'But we have a right to the money, law or no law. He must pay it.'

'He will simply refuse—and be justified. Poverty doesn't allow of honourable feeling, any more than of compassion. I'm sorry you wrote like that. You won't get anything, and you might as well have enjoyed the reputation of forbearance.'

Mrs Milvain was not able to appreciate this characteristic

remark. Anxiety weighed upon her, and she became irritable.

'I am obliged to say, Jasper, that you seem rather thoughtless. If it were only myself I would make any sacrifice for you; but you must remember—'

'Now listen, mother,' he interrupted, laying a hand on her shoulder; 'I have been thinking about all this, and the fact of the matter is, I shall do my best to ask you for no more money. It may or may not be practicable, but I'll have a try. So don't worry. If uncle writes that he can't pay, just explain why you wrote, and keep him gently in mind of the thing, that's all. One doesn't like to do brutal things if one can avoid them, you know.'

The young man went to the parlour and listened to Maud's music for awhile. But restlessness again drove him forth. Towards eleven o'clock he was again ascending in the direction of John Yule's house. Again he had no intention of calling, but when he reached the iron gates he lingered.

'I will, by Jove!' he said within himself at last. 'Just to prove I have complete command of myself. It's to be a display of strength, not weakness.'

At the house door he inquired for Mr Alfred Yule. That gentleman had gone in the carriage to Wattleborough, half an hour ago, with his brother.

'Miss Yule?'

Yes, she was within. Jasper entered the sitting-room, waited a few moments, and Marian appeared. She wore a dress in which Milvain had not yet seen her, and it had the effect of making

him regard her attentively. The smile with which she had come towards him passed from her face, which was perchance a little warmer of hue than commonly.

'I'm sorry your father is away, Miss Yule,' Jasper began, in an animated voice. 'I wanted to say good-bye to him. I return to London in a few hours.'

'You are going sooner than you intended?'

'Yes, I feel I mustn't waste any more time. I think the country air is doing you good; you certainly look better than when I passed you that first day.'

'I feel better, much.'

'My sisters are anxious to see you again. I shouldn't wonder if they come up this afternoon.'

Marian had seated herself on the sofa, and her hands were linked upon her lap in the same way as when Jasper spoke with her here before, the palms downward. The beautiful outline of her bent head was relieved against a broad strip of sunlight on the wall behind her.

'They deplore,' he continued in a moment, 'that they should come to know you only to lose you again so soon.

'I have quite as much reason to be sorry,' she answered, looking at him with the slightest possible smile. 'But perhaps they will let me write to them, and hear from them now and then.'

'They would think it an honour. Country girls are not often invited to correspond with literary ladies in London.'

He said it with as much jocoseness as civility allowed, then

at once rose.

'Father will be very sorry,' Marian began, with one quick glance towards the window and then another towards the door. 'Perhaps he might possibly be able to see you before you go?'

Jasper stood in hesitation. There was a look on the girl's face which, under other circumstances, would have suggested a ready answer.

'I mean,' she added, hastily, 'he might just call, or even see you at the station?'

'Oh, I shouldn't like to give Mr Yule any trouble. It's my own fault, for deciding to go to-day. I shall leave by the 2.45.'

He offered his hand.

'I shall look for your name in the magazines, Miss Yule.'

'Oh, I don't think you will ever find it there.'

He laughed incredulously, shook hands with her a second time, and strode out of the room, head erect—feeling proud of himself.

When Dora came home at dinner-time, he informed her of what he had done.

'A very interesting girl,' he added impartially. 'I advise you to make a friend of her. Who knows but you may live in London some day, and then she might be valuable—morally, I mean. For myself, I shall do my best not to see her again for a long time; she's dangerous.'

Jasper was unaccompanied when he went to the station. Whilst waiting on the platform, he suffered from apprehension

lest Alfred Yule's seamed visage should present itself; but no acquaintance approached him. Safe in the corner of his third-class carriage, he smiled at the last glimpse of the familiar fields, and began to think of something he had decided to write for The West End.

CHAPTER IV. AN AUTHOR AND HIS WIFE

Eight flights of stairs, consisting alternately of eight and nine steps. Amy had made the calculation, and wondered what was the cause of this arrangement. The ascent was trying, but then no one could contest the respectability of the abode. In the flat immediately beneath resided a successful musician, whose carriage and pair came at a regular hour each afternoon to take him and his wife for a most respectable drive. In this special building no one else seemed at present to keep a carriage, but all the tenants were gentlefolk.

And as to living up at the very top, why, there were distinct advantages—as so many people of moderate income are nowadays hastening to discover. The noise from the street was diminished at this height; no possible tramplers could establish themselves above your head; the air was bound to be purer than that of inferior strata; finally, one had the flat roof whereon to sit or expatiate in sunny weather. True that a gentle rain of soot was wont to interfere with one's comfort out there in the open, but such minutiae are easily forgotten in the fervour of domestic description. It was undeniable that on a fine day one enjoyed extensive views. The green ridge from Hampstead to Highgate, with Primrose Hill and the foliage of Regent's Park in the foreground; the suburban spaces of St John's Wood,

Maida Vale, Kilburn; Westminster Abbey and the Houses of Parliament, lying low by the side of the hidden river, and a glassy gleam on far-off hills which meant the Crystal Palace; then the clouded majesty of eastern London, crowned by St Paul's dome. These things one's friends were expected to admire. Sunset often afforded rich effects, but they were for solitary musing.

A sitting-room, a bedroom, a kitchen. But the kitchen was called dining-room, or even parlour at need; for the cooking-range lent itself to concealment behind an ornamental screen, the walls displayed pictures and bookcases, and a tiny scullery which lay apart sufficed for the coarser domestic operations. This was Amy's territory during the hours when her husband was working, or endeavouring to work. Of necessity, Edwin Reardon used the front room as his study. His writing-table stood against the window; each wall had its shelves of serried literature; vases, busts, engravings (all of the inexpensive kind) served for ornaments.

A maid-servant, recently emancipated from the Board school, came at half-past seven each morning, and remained until two o'clock, by which time the Reardons had dined; on special occasions, her services were enlisted for later hours. But it was Reardon's habit to begin the serious work of the day at about three o'clock, and to continue with brief interruptions until ten or eleven; in many respects an awkward arrangement, but enforced by the man's temperament and his poverty.

One evening he sat at his desk with a slip of manuscript paper

before him. It was the hour of sunset. His outlook was upon the backs of certain large houses skirting Regent's Park, and lights had begun to show here and there in the windows: in one room a man was discoverable dressing for dinner, he had not thought it worth while to lower the blind; in another, some people were playing billiards. The higher windows reflected a rich glow from the western sky.

For two or three hours Reardon had been seated in much the same attitude. Occasionally he dipped his pen into the ink and seemed about to write: but each time the effort was abortive. At the head of the paper was inscribed 'Chapter III.,' but that was all.

And now the sky was dusking over; darkness would soon fall.

He looked something older than his years, which were two-and-thirty; on his face was the pallor of mental suffering. Often he fell into a fit of absence, and gazed at vacancy with wide, miserable eyes. Returning to consciousness, he fidgeted nervously on his chair, dipped his pen for the hundredth time, bent forward in feverish determination to work. Useless; he scarcely knew what he wished to put into words, and his brain refused to construct the simplest sentence.

The colours faded from the sky, and night came quickly. Reardon threw his arms upon the desk, let his head fall forward, and remained so, as if asleep.

Presently the door opened, and a young, clear voice made inquiry:

'Don't you want the lamp, Edwin?'

The man roused himself, turned his chair a little, and looked towards the open door.

'Come here, Amy.'

His wife approached. It was not quite dark in the room, for a glimmer came from the opposite houses.

'What's the matter? Can't you do anything?'

'I haven't written a word to-day. At this rate, one goes crazy. Come and sit by me a minute, dearest.'

'I'll get the lamp.'

'No; come and talk to me; we can understand each other better.'

'Nonsense; you have such morbid ideas. I can't bear to sit in the gloom.'

At once she went away, and quickly reappeared with a reading-lamp, which she placed on the square table in the middle of the room.

'Draw down the blind, Edwin.'

She was a slender girl, but not very tall; her shoulders seemed rather broad in proportion to her waist and the part of her figure below it. The hue of her hair was ruddy gold; loosely arranged tresses made a superb crown to the beauty of her small, refined head. Yet the face was not of distinctly feminine type; with short hair and appropriate clothing, she would have passed unquestioned as a handsome boy of seventeen, a spirited boy too, and one much in the habit of giving orders to inferiors. Her nose would have been perfect but for ever so slight a crook which

made it preferable to view her in full face than in profile; her lips curved sharply out, and when she straightened them of a sudden, the effect was not reassuring to anyone who had counted upon her for facile humour. In harmony with the broad shoulders, she had a strong neck; as she bore the lamp into the room a slight turn of her head showed splendid muscles from the ear downward. It was a magnificently clear-cut bust; one thought, in looking at her, of the newly-finished head which some honest sculptor has wrought with his own hand from the marble block; there was a suggestion of 'planes' and of the chisel. The atmosphere was cold; ruddiness would have been quite out of place on her cheeks, and a flush must have been the rarest thing there.

Her age was not quite two-and-twenty; she had been wedded nearly two years, and had a child ten months old.

As for her dress, it was unpretending in fashion and colour, but of admirable fit. Every detail of her appearance denoted scrupulous personal refinement. She walked well; you saw that the foot, however gently, was firmly planted. When she seated herself her posture was instantly graceful, and that of one who is indifferent about support for the back.

'What is the matter?' she began. 'Why can't you get on with the story?'

It was the tone of friendly remonstrance, not exactly of affection, not at all of tender solicitude.

Reardon had risen and wished to approach her, but could not do so directly. He moved to another part of the room, then

came round to the back of her chair, and bent his face upon her shoulder.

'Amy—'

'Well.'

'I think it's all over with me. I don't think I shall write any more.'

'Don't be so foolish, dear. What is to prevent your writing?'

'Perhaps I am only out of sorts. But I begin to be horribly afraid. My will seems to be fatally weakened. I can't see my way to the end of anything; if I get hold of an idea which seems good, all the sap has gone out of it before I have got it into working shape. In these last few months, I must have begun a dozen different books; I have been ashamed to tell you of each new beginning. I write twenty pages, perhaps, and then my courage fails. I am disgusted with the thing, and can't go on with it—can't! My fingers refuse to hold the pen. In mere writing, I have done enough to make much more than three volumes; but it's all destroyed.'

'Because of your morbid conscientiousness. There was no need to destroy what you had written. It was all good enough for the market.'

'Don't use that word, Amy. I hate it!'

'You can't afford to hate it,' was her rejoinder, in very practical tones. 'However it was before, you must write for the market now. You have admitted that yourself.'

He kept silence.

'Where are you?' she went on to ask. 'What have you actually done?'

'Two short chapters of a story I can't go on with. The three volumes lie before me like an interminable desert. Impossible to get through them. The idea is stupidly artificial, and I haven't a living character in it.'

'The public don't care whether the characters are living or not. —Don't stand behind me, like that; it's such an awkward way of talking. Come and sit down.'

He drew away, and came to a position whence he could see her face, but kept at a distance.

'Yes,' he said, in a different way, 'that's the worst of it.'

'What is?'

'That you—well, it's no use.'

'That I—what?'

She did not look at him; her lips, after she had spoken, drew in a little.

'That your disposition towards me is being affected by this miserable failure. You keep saying to yourself that I am not what you thought me. Perhaps you even feel that I have been guilty of a sort of deception. I don't blame you; it's natural enough.'

'I'll tell you quite honestly what I do think,' she replied, after a short silence. 'You are much weaker than I imagined. Difficulties crush you, instead of rousing you to struggle.'

'True. It has always been my fault.'

'But don't you feel it's rather unmanly, this state of things?

You say you love me, and I try to believe it. But whilst you are saying so, you let me get nearer and nearer to miserable, hateful poverty. What is to become of me—of us? Shall you sit here day after day until our last shilling is spent?'

'No; of course I must do something.'

'When shall you begin in earnest? In a day or two you must pay this quarter's rent, and that will leave us just about fifteen pounds in the world. Where is the rent at Christmas to come from?

What are we to live upon? There's all sorts of clothing to be bought; there'll be all the extra expenses of winter. Surely it's bad enough that we have had to stay here all the summer; no holiday of any kind. I have done my best not to grumble about it, but I begin to think that it would be very much wiser if I did grumble.'

She squared her shoulders, and gave her head just a little shake, as if a fly had troubled her.

'You bear everything very well and kindly,' said Reardon. 'My behaviour is contemptible; I know that. Good heavens! if I only had some business to go to, something I could work at in any state of mind, and make money out of! Given this chance, I would work myself to death rather than you should lack anything you desire. But I am at the mercy of my brain; it is dry and powerless. How I envy those clerks who go by to their offices in the morning! There's the day's work cut out for them; no question of mood and feeling; they have just to work at something, and when the evening comes, they have earned their wages, they are free to rest and enjoy themselves. What an insane thing it is to

make literature one's only means of support! When the most trivial accident may at any time prove fatal to one's power of work for weeks or months. No, that is the unpardonable sin! To make a trade of an art! I am rightly served for attempting such a brutal folly.'

He turned away in a passion of misery.

'How very silly it is to talk like this!' came in Amy's voice, clearly critical. 'Art must be practised as a trade, at all events in our time. This is the age of trade. Of course if one refuses to be of one's time, and yet hasn't the means to live independently, what can result but breakdown and wretchedness? The fact of the matter is, you could do fairly good work, and work which would sell, if only you would bring yourself to look at things in a more practical way. It's what Mr Milvain is always saying, you know.'

'Milvain's temperament is very different from mine. He is naturally light-hearted and hopeful; I am naturally the opposite.

What you and he say is true enough; the misfortune is that I can't act upon it. I am no uncompromising artistic pedant; I am quite willing to try and do the kind of work that will sell; under the circumstances it would be a kind of insanity if I refused. But power doesn't answer to the will. My efforts are utterly vain; I suppose the prospect of pennilessness is itself a hindrance; the fear haunts me. With such terrible real things pressing upon me, my imagination can shape nothing substantial. When I have laboured out a story, I suddenly see it in a light of such contemptible triviality that to work at it is an impossible

thing.'

'You are ill, that's the fact of the matter. You ought to have had a holiday. I think even now you had better go away for a week or two. Do, Edwin!'

'Impossible! It would be the merest pretence of holiday. To go away and leave you here—no!'

'Shall I ask mother or Jack to lend us some money?'

'That would be intolerable.'

'But this state of things is intolerable!'

Reardon walked the length of the room and back again.

'Your mother has no money to lend, dear, and your brother would do it so unwillingly that we can't lay ourselves under such an obligation.'

'Yet it will come to that, you know,' remarked Amy, calmly.

'No, it shall not come to that. I must and will get something done long before Christmas. If only you—'

He came and took one of her hands.

'If only you will give me more sympathy, dearest. You see, that's one side of my weakness. I am utterly dependent upon you. Your kindness is the breath of life to me. Don't refuse it!'

'But I have done nothing of the kind.'

'You begin to speak very coldly. And I understand your feeling of disappointment. The mere fact of your urging me to do anything that will sell is a proof of bitter disappointment. You would have looked with scorn at anyone who talked to me like that two years ago. You were proud of me because my work

wasn't altogether common, and because I had never written a line that was meant to attract the vulgar. All that's over now. If you knew how dreadful it is to see that you have lost your hopes of me!'

'Well, but I haven't—altogether,' Amy replied, meditatively. 'I know very well that, if you had a lot of money, you would do better things than ever.'

'Thank you a thousand times for saying that, my dearest.'

'But, you see, we haven't money, and there's little chance of our getting any. That scrubby old uncle won't leave anything to us; I feel too sure of it. I often feel disposed to go and beg him on my knees to think of us in his will.' She laughed. 'I suppose it's impossible, and would be useless; but I should be capable of it if I knew it would bring money.'

Reardon said nothing.

'I didn't think so much of money when we were married,' Amy continued. 'I had never seriously felt the want of it, you know. I did think—there's no harm in confessing it—that you were sure to be rich some day; but I should have married you all the same if I had known that you would win only reputation.'

'You are sure of that?'

'Well, I think so. But I know the value of money better now. I know it is the most powerful thing in the world. If I had to choose between a glorious reputation with poverty and a contemptible popularity with wealth, I should choose the latter.'

'No!'

'I should.'

'Perhaps you are right.'

He turned away with a sigh.

'Yes, you are right. What is reputation? If it is deserved, it originates with a few score of people among the many millions who would never have recognised the merit they at last applaud. That's the lot of a great genius. As for a mediocrity like me—what ludicrous absurdity to fret myself in the hope that half-a-dozen folks will say I am "above the average!" After all, is there sillier vanity than this? A year after I have published my last book, I shall be practically forgotten; ten years later, I shall be as absolutely forgotten as one of those novelists of the early part of this century, whose names one doesn't even recognise. What fatuous posing!'

Amy looked askance at him, but replied nothing.

'And yet,' he continued, 'of course it isn't only for the sake of reputation that one tries to do uncommon work. There's the shrinking from conscious insincerity of workmanship—which most of the writers nowadays seem never to feel. "It's good enough for the market"; that satisfies them. And perhaps they are justified.

I can't pretend that I rule my life by absolute ideals; I admit that everything is relative. There is no such thing as goodness or badness, in the absolute sense, of course. Perhaps I am absurdly inconsistent when—though knowing my work can't be first rate—I strive to make it as good as possible. I don't say this in irony,

Amy; I really mean it. It may very well be that I am just as foolish as the people I ridicule for moral and religious superstition. This habit of mine is superstitious. How well I can imagine the answer of some popular novelist if he heard me speak scornfully of his books. "My dear fellow," he might say, "do you suppose I am not aware that my books are rubbish? I know it just as well as you do. But my vocation is to live comfortably. I have a luxurious house, a wife and children who are happy and grateful to me for their happiness. If you choose to live in a garret, and, what's worse, make your wife and children share it with you, that's your concern." The man would be abundantly right.'

'But,' said Amy, 'why should you assume that his books are rubbish? Good work succeeds—now and then.'

'I speak of the common kind of success, which is never due to literary merit. And if I speak bitterly, well, I am suffering from my powerlessness. I am a failure, my poor girl, and it isn't easy for me to look with charity on the success of men who deserved it far less than I did, when I was still able to work.'

'Of course, Edwin, if you make up your mind that you are a failure, you will end by being so. But I'm convinced there's no reason that you should fail to make a living with your pen. Now let me advise you; put aside all your strict ideas about what is worthy and what is unworthy, and just act upon my advice. It's impossible for you to write a three-volume novel; very well, then do a short story of a kind that's likely to be popular. You know Mr Milvain is always saying that the long novel has had its day,

and that in future people will write shilling books. Why not try?

Give yourself a week to invent a sensational plot, and then a fortnight for the writing. Have it ready for the new season at the end of October. If you like, don't put your name to it; your name certainly would have no weight with this sort of public. Just make it a matter of business, as Mr Milvain says, and see if you can't earn some money.'

He stood and regarded her. His expression was one of pained perplexity.

'You mustn't forget, Amy, that it needs a particular kind of faculty to write stories of this sort. The invention of a plot is just the thing I find most difficult.'

'But the plot may be as silly as you like, providing it holds the attention of vulgar readers. Think of "The Hollow Statue", what could be more idiotic? Yet it sells by thousands.'

'I don't think I can bring myself to that,' Reardon said, in a low voice.

'Very well, then will you tell me what you propose to do?'

'I might perhaps manage a novel in two volumes, instead of three.'

He seated himself at the writing-table, and stared at the blank sheets of paper in an anguish of hopelessness.

'It will take you till Christmas,' said Amy, 'and then you will get perhaps fifty pounds for it.'

'I must do my best. I'll go out and try to get some ideas. I—'

He broke off and looked steadily at his wife.

'What is it?' she asked.

'Suppose I were to propose to you to leave this flat and take cheaper rooms?'

He uttered it in a shamefaced way, his eyes falling. Amy kept silence.

'We might sublet it,' he continued, in the same tone, 'for the last year of the lease.'

'And where do you propose to live?' Amy inquired, coldly.

'There's no need to be in such a dear neighbourhood. We could go to one of the outer districts. One might find three unfurnished rooms for about eight-and-sixpence a week—less than half our rent here.'

'You must do as seems good to you.'

'For Heaven's sake, Amy, don't speak to me in that way! I can't stand that! Surely you can see that I am driven to think of every possible resource. To speak like that is to abandon me. Say you can't or won't do it, but don't treat me as if you had no share in my miseries!'

She was touched for the moment.

'I didn't mean to speak unkindly, dear. But think what it means, to give up our home and position. That is open confession of failure. It would be horrible.'

'I won't think of it. I have three months before Christmas, and I will finish a book!'

'I really can't see why you shouldn't. Just do a certain number of pages every day. Good or bad, never mind; let the pages be

finished. Now you have got two chapters—'

'No; that won't do. I must think of a better subject.'

Amy made a gesture of impatience.

'There you are! What does the subject matter? Get this book finished and sold, and then do something better next time.'

'Give me to-night, just to think. Perhaps one of the old stories I have thrown aside will come back in a clearer light. I'll go out for an hour; you don't mind being left alone?'

'You mustn't think of such trifles as that.'

'But nothing that concerns you in the slightest way is a trifle to me—nothing! I can't bear that you should forget that. Have patience with me, darling, a little longer.'

He knelt by her, and looked up into her face.

'Say only one or two kind words—like you used to!'

She passed her hand lightly over his hair, and murmured something with a faint smile.

Then Reardon took his hat and stick and descended the eight flights of stone steps, and walked in the darkness round the outer circle of Regent's Park, racking his fagged brain in a hopeless search for characters, situations, motives.

CHAPTER V. THE WAY HITHER

Even in mid-rapture of his marriage month he had foreseen this possibility; but fate had hitherto rescued him in sudden ways when he was on the brink of self-abandonment, and it was hard to imagine that this culmination of triumphant joy could be a preface to base miseries.

He was the son of a man who had followed many different pursuits, and in none had done much more than earn a livelihood. At the age of forty—when Edwin, his only child, was ten years old—Mr Reardon established himself in the town of Hereford as a photographer, and there he abode until his death, nine years after, occasionally risking some speculation not inconsistent with the photographic business, but always with the result of losing the little capital he ventured. Mrs Reardon died when Edwin had reached his fifteenth year. In breeding and education she was superior to her husband, to whom, moreover, she had brought something between four and five hundred pounds; her temper was passionate in both senses of the word, and the marriage could hardly be called a happy one, though it was never disturbed by serious discord. The photographer was a man of whims and idealisms; his wife had a strong vein of worldly ambition. They made few friends, and it was Mrs Reardon's frequently expressed desire to go and live in London, where fortune, she thought, might be kinder to them. Reardon had all but made up his mind to try

this venture when he suddenly became a widower; after that he never summoned energy to embark on new enterprises.

The boy was educated at an excellent local school; at eighteen he had a far better acquaintance with the ancient classics than most lads who have been expressly prepared for a university, and, thanks to an anglicised Swiss who acted as an assistant in Mr Reardon's business, he not only read French, but could talk it with a certain haphazard fluency. These attainments, however, were not of much practical use; the best that could be done for Edwin was to place him in the office of an estate agent. His health was indifferent, and it seemed likely that open-air exercise, of which he would have a good deal under the particular circumstances of the case, might counteract the effects of study too closely pursued.

At his father's death he came into possession (practically it was put at his disposal at once, though he was little more than nineteen) of about two hundred pounds—a life-insurance for five hundred had been sacrificed to exigencies not very long before. He had no difficulty in deciding how to use this money. His mother's desire to live in London had in him the force of an inherited motive; as soon as possible he released himself from his uncongenial occupations, converted into money all the possessions of which he had not immediate need, and betook himself to the metropolis.

To become a literary man, of course.

His capital lasted him nearly four years, for, notwithstanding

his age, he lived with painful economy. The strangest life, of almost absolute loneliness. From a certain point of Tottenham Court Road there is visible a certain garret window in a certain street which runs parallel with that thoroughfare; for the greater part of these four years the garret in question was Reardon's home. He paid only three-and-sixpence a week for the privilege of living there; his food cost him about a shilling a day; on clothing and other unavoidable expenses he laid out some five pounds yearly. Then he bought books—volumes which cost anything between twopence and two shillings; further than that he durst not go. A strange time, I assure you.

When he had completed his twenty-first year, he desired to procure a reader's ticket for the British Museum. Now this was not such a simple matter as you may suppose; it was necessary to obtain the signature of some respectable householder, and Reardon was acquainted with no such person. His landlady was a decent woman enough, and a payer of rates and taxes, but it would look odd, to say the least of it, to present oneself in Great Russell Street armed with this person's recommendation. There was nothing for it but to take a bold step, to force himself upon the attention of a stranger—the thing from which his pride had always shrunk. He wrote to a well-known novelist—a man with whose works he had some sympathy. 'I am trying to prepare myself for a literary career. I wish to study in the Reading-room of the British Museum, but have no acquaintance to whom I can refer in the ordinary way. Will you help me—I mean, in this

particular only?' That was the substance of his letter. For reply came an invitation to a house in the West-end. With fear and trembling Reardon answered the summons. He was so shabbily attired; he was so diffident from the habit of living quite alone; he was horribly afraid lest it should be supposed that he looked for other assistance than he had requested. Well, the novelist was a rotund and jovial man; his dwelling and his person smelt of money; he was so happy himself that he could afford to be kind to others.

'Have you published anything?' he inquired, for the young man's letter had left this uncertain.

'Nothing. I have tried the magazines, but as yet without success.'

'But what do you write?'

'Chiefly essays on literary subjects.'

'I can understand that you would find a difficulty in disposing of them. That kind of thing is supplied either by men of established reputation, or by anonymous writers who have a regular engagement on papers and magazines. Give me an example of your topics.'

'I have written something lately about Tibullus.'

'Oh, dear! Oh, dear!—Forgive me, Mr Reardon; my feelings were too much for me; those names have been my horror ever since I was a schoolboy. Far be it from me to discourage you, if your line is to be solid literary criticism; I will only mention, as a matter of fact, that such work is indifferently paid and in

very small demand. It hasn't occurred to you to try your hand at fiction?'

In uttering the word he beamed; to him it meant a thousand or so a year.

'I am afraid I have no talent for that.'

The novelist could do no more than grant his genial signature for the specified purpose, and add good wishes in abundance. Reardon went home with his brain in a whirl. He had had his first glimpse of what was meant by literary success. That luxurious study, with its shelves of handsomely-bound books, its beautiful pictures, its warm, fragrant air—great heavens! what might not a man do who sat at his ease amid such surroundings!

He began to work at the Reading-room, but at the same time he thought often of the novelist's suggestion, and before long had written two or three short stories. No editor would accept them; but he continued to practise himself in that art, and by degrees came to fancy that, after all, perhaps he had some talent for fiction. It was significant, however, that no native impulse had directed him to novel-writing. His intellectual temper was that of the student, the scholar, but strongly blended with a love of independence which had always made him think with distaste of a teacher's life. The stories he wrote were scraps of immature psychology—the last thing a magazine would accept from an unknown man.

His money dwindled, and there came a winter during which he suffered much from cold and hunger. What a blessed refuge

it was, there under the great dome, when he must else have sat in his windy garret with the mere pretence of a fire! The Reading-room was his true home; its warmth enwrapped him kindly; the peculiar odour of its atmosphere—at first a cause of headache—grew dear and delightful to him. But he could not sit here until his last penny should be spent. Something practical must be done, and practicality was not his strong point.

Friends in London he had none; but for an occasional conversation with his landlady he would scarcely have spoken a dozen words in a week. His disposition was the reverse of democratic, and he could not make acquaintances below his own intellectual level. Solitude fostered a sensitiveness which to begin with was extreme; the lack of stated occupation encouraged his natural tendency to dream and procrastinate and hope for the improbable. He was a recluse in the midst of millions, and viewed with dread the necessity of going forth to fight for daily food.

Little by little he had ceased to hold any correspondence with his former friends at Hereford. The only person to whom he still wrote and from whom he still heard was his mother's father—an old man who lived at Derby, retired from the business of a draper, and spending his last years pleasantly enough with a daughter who had remained single. Edwin had always been a favourite with his grandfather, though they had met only once or twice during the past eight years. But in writing he did not allow it to be understood that he was in actual want, and he felt that he must come to dire extremities before he could bring himself to beg

assistance.

He had begun to answer advertisements, but the state of his wardrobe forbade his applying for any but humble positions. Once or twice he presented himself personally at offices, but his reception was so mortifying that death by hunger seemed preferable to a continuance of such experiences. The injury to his pride made him savagely arrogant; for days after the last rejection he hid himself in his garret, hating the world.

He sold his little collection of books, and of course they brought only a trifling sum. That exhausted, he must begin to sell his clothes. And then—?

But help was at hand. One day he saw it advertised in a newspaper that the secretary of a hospital in the north of London was in need of a clerk; application was to be made by letter. He wrote, and two days later, to his astonishment, received a reply asking him to wait upon the secretary at a certain hour. In a fever of agitation he kept the appointment, and found that his business was with a young man in the very highest spirits, who walked up and down a little office (the hospital was of the 'special' order, a house of no great size), and treated the matter in hand as an excellent joke.

'I thought, you know, of engaging someone much younger—quite a lad, in fact. But look there! Those are the replies to my advertisement.'

He pointed to a heap of five or six hundred letters, and laughed consumedly.

'Impossible to read them all, you know. It seemed to me that the fairest thing would be to shake them together, stick my hand in, and take out one by chance. If it didn't seem very promising, I would try a second time. But the first letter was yours, and I thought the fair thing to do was at all events to see you, you know. The fact is, I am only able to offer a pound a week.'

'I shall be very glad indeed to take that,' said Reardon, who was bathed in perspiration.

'Then what about references, and so on?' proceeded the young man, chuckling and rubbing his hands together.

The applicant was engaged. He had barely strength to walk home; the sudden relief from his miseries made him, for the first time, sensible of the extreme physical weakness into which he had sunk. For the next week he was very ill, but he did not allow this to interfere with his new work, which was easily learnt and not burdensome.

He held this position for three years, and during that time important things happened. When he had recovered from his state of semi-starvation, and was living in comfort (a pound a week is a very large sum if you have previously had to live on ten shillings), Reardon found that the impulse to literary production awoke in him more strongly than ever. He generally got home from the hospital about six o'clock, and the evening was his own. In this leisure time he wrote a novel in two volumes; one publisher refused it, but a second offered to bring it out on the terms of half profits to the author. The book appeared, and was well spoken

of in one or two papers; but profits there were none to divide. In the third year of his clerkship he wrote a novel in three volumes; for this his publishers gave him twenty-five pounds, with again a promise of half the profits after deduction of the sum advanced. Again there was no pecuniary success. He had just got to work upon a third book, when his grandfather at Derby died and left him four hundred pounds.

He could not resist the temptation to recover his freedom. Four hundred pounds, at the rate of eighty pounds a year, meant five years of literary endeavour. In that period he could certainly determine whether or not it was his destiny to live by the pen.

In the meantime his relations with the secretary of the hospital, Carter by name, had grown very friendly. When Reardon began to publish books, the high-spirited Mr Carter looked upon him with something of awe; and when the literary man ceased to be a clerk, there was nothing to prevent association on equal terms between him and his former employer. They continued to see a good deal of each other, and Carter made Reardon acquainted with certain of his friends, among whom was one John Yule, an easy-going, selfish, semi-intellectual young man who had a place in a Government office. The time of solitude had gone by for Reardon. He began to develop the power that was in him.

Those two books of his were not of a kind to win popularity. They dealt with no particular class of society (unless one makes a distinct class of people who have brains), and they lacked local

colour. Their interest was almost purely psychological. It was clear that the author had no faculty for constructing a story, and that pictures of active life were not to be expected of him; he could never appeal to the multitude. But strong characterisation was within his scope, and an intellectual fervour, appetising to a small section of refined readers, marked all his best pages.

He was the kind of man who cannot struggle against adverse conditions, but whom prosperity warms to the exercise of his powers. Anything like the cares of responsibility would sooner or later harass him into unproductiveness. That he should produce much was in any case out of the question; possibly a book every two or three years might not prove too great a strain upon his delicate mental organism, but for him to attempt more than that would certainly be fatal to the peculiar merit of his work. Of this he was dimly conscious, and, on receiving his legacy, he put aside for nearly twelve months the new novel he had begun. To give his mind a rest he wrote several essays, much maturer than those which had formerly failed to find acceptance, and two of these appeared in magazines.

The money thus earned he spent—at a tailor's. His friend Carter ventured to suggest this mode of outlay.

His third book sold for fifty pounds. It was a great improvement on its predecessors, and the reviews were generally favourable. For the story which followed, 'On Neutral Ground,' he received a hundred pounds. On the strength of that he spent six months travelling in the South of Europe.

He returned to London at mid-June, and on the second day after his arrival befell an incident which was to control the rest of his life. Busy with the pictures in the Grosvenor Gallery, he heard himself addressed in a familiar voice, and on turning he was aware of Mr Carter, resplendent in fashionable summer attire, and accompanied by a young lady of some charms. Reardon had formerly feared encounters of this kind, too conscious of the defects of his attire; but at present there was no reason why he should shirk social intercourse. He was passably dressed, and the half-year of travel had benefited his appearance in no slight degree. Carter presented him to the young lady, of whom the novelist had already heard as affianced to his friend.

Whilst they stood conversing, there approached two ladies, evidently mother and daughter, whose attendant was another of Reardon's acquaintances, Mr John Yule. This gentleman stepped briskly forward and welcomed the returned wanderer.

'Let me introduce you,' he said, 'to my mother and sister. Your fame has made them anxious to know you.'

Reardon found himself in a position of which the novelty was embarrassing, but scarcely disagreeable. Here were five people grouped around him, all of whom regarded him unaffectedly as a man of importance; for though, strictly speaking, he had no 'fame' at all, these persons had kept up with the progress of his small repute, and were all distinctly glad to number among their acquaintances an unmistakable author, one, too, who was fresh from Italy and Greece. Mrs Yule, a lady rather too pretentious

in her tone to be attractive to a man of Reardon's refinement, hastened to assure him how well his books were known in her house, 'though for the run of ordinary novels we don't care much.' Miss Yule, not at all pretentious in speech, and seemingly reserved of disposition, was good enough to show frank interest in the author. As for the poor author himself, well, he merely fell in love with Miss Yule at first sight, and there was an end of the matter.

A day or two later he made a call at their house, in the region of Westbourne Park. It was a small house, and rather showily than handsomely furnished; no one after visiting it would be astonished to hear that Mrs Edmund Yule had but a small income, and that she was often put to desperate expedients to keep up the gloss of easy circumstances. In the gauzy and fluffy and varnishy little drawing-room Reardon found a youngish gentleman already in conversation with the widow and her daughter. This proved to be one Mr Jasper Milvain, also a man of letters. Mr Milvain was glad to meet Reardon, whose books he had read with decided interest.

'Really,' exclaimed Mrs Yule, 'I don't know how it is that we have had to wait so long for the pleasure of knowing you, Mr Reardon. If John were not so selfish he would have allowed us a share in your acquaintance long ago.'

Ten weeks thereafter, Miss Yule became Mrs Reardon.

It was a time of frantic exultation with the poor fellow. He had always regarded the winning of a beautiful and intellectual

wife as the crown of a successful literary career, but he had not dared to hope that such a triumph would be his. Life had been too hard with him on the whole. He, who hungered for sympathy, who thought of a woman's love as the prize of mortals supremely blessed, had spent the fresh years of his youth in monkish solitude. Now of a sudden came friends and flattery, ay, and love itself. He was rapt to the seventh heaven.

Indeed, it seemed that the girl loved him. She knew that he had but a hundred pounds or so left over from that little inheritance, that his books sold for a trifle, that he had no wealthy relatives from whom he could expect anything; yet she hesitated not a moment when he asked her to marry him.

'I have loved you from the first.'

'How is that possible?' he urged. 'What is there lovable in me? I am afraid of waking up and finding myself in my old garret, cold and hungry.'

'You will be a great man.'

'I implore you not to count on that! In many ways I am wretchedly weak. I have no such confidence in myself.'

'Then I will have confidence for both.'

'But can you love me for my own sake—love me as a man?'

'I love you!'

And the words sang about him, filled the air with a mad pulsing of intolerable joy, made him desire to fling himself in passionate humility at her feet, to weep hot tears, to cry to her in insane worship. He thought her beautiful beyond anything his

heart had imagined; her warm gold hair was the rapture of his eyes and of his reverent hand. Though slenderly fashioned, she was so gloriously strong. 'Not a day of illness in her life,' said Mrs Yule, and one could readily believe it.

She spoke with such a sweet decision. Her 'I love you!' was a bond with eternity. In the simplest as in the greatest things she saw his wish and acted frankly upon it. No pretty petulance, no affectation of silly-sweet languishing, none of the weaknesses of woman. And so exquisitely fresh in her twenty years of maidenhood, with bright young eyes that seemed to bid defiance to all the years to come.

He went about like one dazzled with excessive light. He talked as he had never talked before, recklessly, exultantly, insolently—in the nobler sense. He made friends on every hand; he welcomed all the world to his bosom; he felt the benevolence of a god.

'I love you!' It breathed like music at his ears when he fell asleep in weariness of joy; it awakened him on the morrow as with a glorious ringing summons to renewed life.

Delay? Why should there be delay? Amy wished nothing but to become his wife. Idle to think of his doing any more work until he sat down in the home of which she was mistress. His brain burned with visions of the books he would henceforth write, but his hand was incapable of anything but a love-letter. And what letters! Reardon never published anything equal to those. 'I have received your poem,' Amy replied to one of them. And she was right; not a letter, but a poem he had sent her, with every word

on fire.

The hours of talk! It enraptured him to find how much she had read, and with what clearness of understanding. Latin and Greek, no. Ah! but she should learn them both, that there might be nothing wanting in the communion between his thought and hers. For he loved the old writers with all his heart; they had been such strength to him in his days of misery.

They would go together to the charmed lands of the South. No, not now for their marriage holiday—Amy said that would be an imprudent expense; but as soon as he had got a good price for a book. Will not the publishers be kind? If they knew what happiness lurked in embryo within their foolish cheque-books!

He woke of a sudden in the early hours of one morning, a week before the wedding-day. You know that kind of awaking, so complete in an instant, caused by the pressure of some troublesome thought upon the dreaming brain. 'Suppose I should not succeed henceforth? Suppose I could never get more than this poor hundred pounds for one of the long books which cost me so much labour? I shall perhaps have children to support; and Amy—how would Amy bear poverty?'

He knew what poverty means. The chilling of brain and heart, the unnerving of the hands, the slow gathering about one of fear and shame and impotent wrath, the dread feeling of helplessness, of the world's base indifference. Poverty! Poverty!

And for hours he could not sleep. His eyes kept filling with tears, the beating of his heart was low; and in his solitude he

called upon Amy with pitiful entreaty: 'Do not forsake me! I love you! I love you!'

But that went by. Six days, five days, four days—will one's heart burst with happiness? The flat is taken, is furnished, up there towards the sky, eight flights of stone steps.

'You're a confoundedly lucky fellow, Reardon,' remarked Milvain, who had already become very intimate with his new friend. 'A good fellow, too, and you deserve it.'

'But at first I had a horrible suspicion.'

'I guess what you mean. No; I wasn't even in love with her, though I admired her. She would never have cared for me in any case; I am not sentimental enough.'

'The deuce!'

'I mean it in an inoffensive sense. She and I are rather too much alike, I fancy.'

'How do you mean?' asked Reardon, puzzled, and not very well pleased.

'There's a great deal of pure intellect about Miss Yule, you know. She was sure to choose a man of the passionate kind.'

'I think you are talking nonsense, my dear fellow.'

'Well, perhaps I am. To tell you the truth, I have by no means completed my study of women yet. It is one of the things in which I hope to be a specialist some day, though I don't think I shall ever make use of it in novels—rather, perhaps, in life.'

Three days—two days—one day.

Now let every joyous sound which the great globe can utter

ring forth in one burst of harmony! Is it not well done to make the village-bells chant merrily when a marriage is over? Here in London we can have no such music; but for us, my dear one, all the roaring life of the great city is wedding-hymn. Sweet, pure face under its bridal-veil! The face which shall, if fate spare it, be as dear to me many a long year hence as now at the culminating moment of my life!

As he trudged on in the dark, his tortured memory was living through that time again. The images forced themselves upon him, however much he tried to think of quite other things—of some fictitious story on which he might set to work. In the case of his earlier books he had waited quietly until some suggestive 'situation,' some group of congenial characters, came with sudden delightfulness before his mind and urged him to write; but nothing so spontaneous could now be hoped for. His brain was too weary with months of fruitless, harassing endeavour; moreover, he was trying to devise a 'plot,' the kind of literary Jack-in-the-box which might excite interest in the mass of readers, and this was alien to the natural working of his imagination. He suffered the torments of nightmare—an oppression of the brain and heart which must soon be intolerable.

CHAPTER VI. THE PRACTICAL FRIEND

When her husband had set forth, Amy seated herself in the study and took up a new library volume as if to read. But she had no real intention of doing so; it was always disagreeable to her to sit in the manner of one totally unoccupied, with hands on lap, and even when she consciously gave herself up to musing an open book was generally before her. She did not, in truth, read much nowadays; since the birth of her child she had seemed to care less than before for disinterested study. If a new novel that had succeeded came into her hands she perused it in a very practical spirit, commenting to Reardon on the features of the work which had made it popular; formerly, she would have thought much more of its purely literary merits, for which her eye was very keen. How often she had given her husband a thrill of exquisite pleasure by pointing to some merit or defect of which the common reader would be totally insensible! Now she spoke less frequently on such subjects. Her interests were becoming more personal; she liked to hear details of the success of popular authors—about their wives or husbands, as the case might be, their arrangements with publishers, their methods of work. The gossip columns of literary papers—and of some that were not literary—had an attraction for her. She talked of questions such as international copyright, was anxious to get an insight into the

practical conduct of journals and magazines, liked to know who 'read' for the publishing-houses. To an impartial observer it might have appeared that her intellect was growing more active and mature.

More than half an hour passed. It was not a pleasant train of thought that now occupied her. Her lips were drawn together, her brows were slightly wrinkled; the self-control which at other times was agreeably expressed upon her features had become rather too cold and decided. At one moment it seemed to her that she heard a sound in the bedroom—the doors were purposely left ajar—and her head turned quickly to listen, the look in her eyes instantaneously softening; but all remained quiet. The street would have been silent but for a cab that now and then passed—the swing of a hansom or the roll of a four-wheeler—and within the buildings nothing whatever was audible.

Yes, a footstep, briskly mounting the stone stairs. Not like that of the postman. A visitor, perhaps, to the other flat on the topmost landing. But the final pause was in this direction, and then came a sharp rat-tat at the door. Amy rose immediately and went to open.

Jasper Milvain raised his urban silk hat, then held out his hand with the greeting of frank friendship. His inquiries were in so loud a voice that Amy checked him with a forbidding gesture.

'You'll wake Willie!'

'By Jove! I always forget,' he exclaimed in subdued tones. 'Does the infant flourish?'

'Oh, yes!'

'Reardon out? I got back on Saturday evening, but couldn't come round before this.' It was Monday. 'How close it is in here! I suppose the roof gets so heated during the day. Glorious weather in the country! And I've no end of things to tell you. He won't be long, I suppose?'

'I think not.'

He left his hat and stick in the passage, came into the study, and glanced about as if he expected to see some change since he was last here, three weeks ago.

'So you have been enjoying yourself?' said Amy as, after listening for a moment at the door, she took a seat.

'Oh, a little freshening of the faculties. But whose acquaintance do you think I have made?'

'Down there?'

'Yes. Your uncle Alfred and his daughter were staying at John Yule's, and I saw something of them. I was invited to the house.'

'Did you speak of us?'

'To Miss Yule only. I happened to meet her on a walk, and in a blundering way I mentioned Reardon's name. But of course it didn't matter in the least. She inquired about you with a good deal of interest—asked if you were as beautiful as you promised to be years ago.'

Amy laughed.

'Doesn't that proceed from your fertile invention, Mr Milvain?'

'Not a bit of it! By-the-bye, what would be your natural question concerning her? Do you think she gave promise of good looks?'

'I'm afraid I can't say that she did. She had a good face, but —rather plain.'

'I see.' Jasper threw back his head and seemed to contemplate an object in memory. 'Well, I shouldn't wonder if most people called her a trifle plain even now; and yet—no, that's hardly possible, after all. She has no colour. Wears her hair short.'

'Short?'

'Oh, I don't mean the smooth, boyish hair with a parting—not the kind of hair that would be lank if it grew long. Curly all over. Looks uncommonly well, I assure you. She has a capital head. Odd girl; very odd girl! Quiet, thoughtful—not very happy, I'm afraid. Seems to think with dread of a return to books.'

'Indeed! But I had understood that she was a reader.'

'Reading enough for six people, probably. Perhaps her health is not very robust. Oh, I knew her by sight quite well—had seen her at the Reading-room. She's the kind of girl that gets into one's head, you know—suggestive; much more in her than comes out until one knows her very well.'

'Well, I should hope so,' remarked Amy, with a peculiar smile.

'But that's by no means a matter of course. They didn't invite me to come and see them in London.'

'I suppose Marian mentioned your acquaintance with this branch of the family?'

'I think not. At all events, she promised me she wouldn't.'

Amy looked at him inquiringly, in a puzzled way.

'She promised you?'

'Voluntarily. We got rather sympathetic. Your uncle—Alfred, I mean—is a remarkable man; but I think he regarded me as a youth of no particular importance. Well, how do things go?'

Amy shook her head.

'No progress?'

'None whatever. He can't work; I begin to be afraid that he is really ill. He must go away before the fine weather is over. Do persuade him to-night! I wish you could have had a holiday with him.'

'Out of the question now, I'm sorry to say. I must work savagely. But can't you all manage a fortnight somewhere—Hastings, Eastbourne?'

'It would be simply rash. One goes on saying, "What does a pound or two matter?"—but it begins at length to matter a great deal.'

'I know, confound it all! Think how it would amuse some rich grocer's son who pitches his half-sovereign to the waiter when he has dined himself into good humour! But I tell you what it is: you must really try to influence him towards practicality. Don't you think—?'

He paused, and Amy sat looking at her hands.

'I have made an attempt,' she said at length, in a distant undertone.

'You really have?'

Jasper leaned forward, his clasped hands hanging between his knees. He was scrutinising her face, and Amy, conscious of the too fixed regard, at length moved her head uneasily.

'It seems very clear to me,' she said, 'that a long book is out of the question for him at present. He writes so slowly, and is so fastidious. It would be a fatal thing to hurry through something weaker even than the last.'

'You think "The Optimist" weak?' Jasper asked, half absently.

'I don't think it worthy of Edwin; I don't see how anyone can.

'I have wondered what your opinion was. Yes, he ought to try a new tack, I think.'

Just then there came the sound of a latch-key opening the outer door. Jasper lay back in his chair and waited with a smile for his expected friend's appearance; Amy made no movement.

'Oh, there you are!' said Reardon, presenting himself with the dazzled eyes of one who has been in darkness; he spoke in a voice of genial welcome, though it still had the note of depression. 'When did you get back?'

Milvain began to recount what he had told in the first part of his conversation with Amy. As he did so, the latter withdrew, and was absent for five minutes; on reappearing she said:

'You'll have some supper with us, Mr Milvain?'

'I think I will, please.'

Shortly after, all repaired to the eating-room, where conversation had to be carried on in a low tone because of the

proximity of the bedchamber in which lay the sleeping child. Jasper began to tell of certain things that had happened to him since his arrival in town.

'It was a curious coincidence—but, by-the-bye, have you heard of what The Study has been doing?'

'I should rather think so,' replied Reardon, his face lighting up. 'With no small satisfaction.'

'Delicious, isn't it?' exclaimed his wife. 'I thought it too good to be true when Edwin heard of it from Mr Biffen.'

All three laughed in subdued chorus. For the moment, Reardon became a new man in his exultation over the contradictory reviewers.

'Oh, Biffen told you, did he? Well,' continued Jasper, 'it was an odd thing, but when I reached my lodgings on Saturday evening there lay a note from Horace Barlow, inviting me to go and see him on Sunday afternoon out at Wimbledon, the special reason being that the editor of The Study would be there, and Barlow thought I might like to meet him. Now this letter gave me a fit of laughter; not only because of those precious reviews, but because Alfred Yule had been telling me all about this same editor, who rejoices in the name of Fadge. Your uncle, Mrs Reardon, declares that Fadge is the most malicious man in the literary profession; though that's saying such a very great deal—well, never mind! Of course I was delighted to go and meet Fadge. At Barlow's I found the queerest collection of people, most of them women of the inkiest description. The great Fadge himself surprised me; I

expected to see a gaunt, bilious man, and he was the rosiest and dumpiest little dandy you can imagine; a fellow of forty-five, I dare say, with thin yellow hair and blue eyes and a manner of extreme innocence. Fadge flattered me with confidential chat, and I discovered at length why Barlow had asked me to meet him; it's Fadge that is going to edit Culpepper's new monthly—you've heard about it?—and he had actually thought it worth while to enlist me among contributors! Now, how's that for a piece of news?'

The speaker looked from Reardon to Amy with a smile of vast significance.

'I rejoice to hear it!' said Reardon, fervently.

'You see! you see!' cried Jasper, forgetting all about the infant in the next room, 'all things come to the man who knows how to wait. But I'm hanged if I expected a thing of this kind to come so soon! Why, I'm a man of distinction! My doings have been noted; the admirable qualities of my style have drawn attention; I'm looked upon as one of the coming men! Thanks, I confess, in some measure, to old Barlow; he seems to have amused himself with cracking me up to all and sundry. That last thing of mine in The West End has done me a vast amount of good, it seems. And Alfred Yule himself had noticed that paper in The Wayside. That's how things work, you know; reputation comes with a burst, just when you're not looking for anything of the kind.'

'What's the new magazine to be called?' asked Amy.

'Why, they propose The Current. Not bad, in a way; though

you imagine a fellow saying "Have you seen the current Current?" At all events, the tone is to be up to date, and the articles are to be short; no padding, merum sal from cover to cover. What do you think I have undertaken to do, for a start? A paper consisting of sketches of typical readers of each of the principal daily and weekly papers. A deuced good idea, you know—my own, of course—but deucedly hard to carry out. I shall rise to the occasion, see if I don't. I'll rival Fadge himself in maliciousness—though I must confess I discovered no particular malice in the fellow's way of talking. The article shall make a sensation. I'll spend a whole month on it, and make it a perfect piece of satire.'

'Now that's the kind of thing that inspires me with awe and envy,' said Reardon. 'I could no more write such a paper than an article on Fluxions.'

"Tis my vocation, Hal! You might think I hadn't experience enough, to begin with. But my intuition is so strong that I can make a little experience go an immense way. Most people would imagine I had been wasting my time these last few years, just sauntering about, reading nothing but periodicals, making acquaintance with loafers of every description. The truth is, I have been collecting ideas, and ideas that are convertible into coin of the realm, my boy; I have the special faculty of an extempore writer. Never in my life shall I do anything of solid literary value; I shall always despise the people I write for. But my path will be that of success. I have always said it, and now

I'm sure of it.'

'Does Fadge retire from The Study, then?' inquired Reardon, when he had received this tirade with a friendly laugh.

'Yes, he does. Was going to, it seems, in any case. Of course I heard nothing about the two reviews, and I was almost afraid to smile whilst Fadge was talking with me, lest I should betray my thought. Did you know anything about the fellow before?'

'Not I. Didn't know who edited The Study.'

'Nor I either. Remarkable what a number of illustrious obscure are going about. But I have still something else to tell you. I'm going to set my sisters afloat in literature.'

'How!'

'Well, I don't see why they shouldn't try their hands at a little writing, instead of giving lessons, which doesn't suit them a bit. Last night, when I got back from Wimbledon, I went to look up Davies. Perhaps you don't remember my mentioning him; a fellow who was at Jolly and Monk's, the publishers, up to a year ago. He edits a trade journal now, and I see very little of him. However, I found him at home, and had a long practical talk with him. I wanted to find out the state of the market as to such wares as Jolly and Monk dispose of. He gave me some very useful hints, and the result was that I went off this morning and saw Monk himself—no Jolly exists at present. "Mr Monk," I began, in my blandest tone—you know it—"I am requested to call upon you by a lady who thinks of preparing a little volume to be called 'A Child's History of the English Parliament.' Her idea is,

that"—and so on. Well, I got on admirably with Monk, especially when he learnt that I was to be connected with Culpepper's new venture; he smiled upon the project, and said he should be very glad to see a specimen chapter; if that pleased him, we could then discuss terms.'

'But has one of your sisters really begun such a book?' inquired Amy.

'Neither of them knows anything of the matter, but they are certainly capable of doing the kind of thing I have in mind, which will consist largely of anecdotes of prominent statesmen. I myself shall write the specimen chapter, and send it to the girls to show them what I propose. I shouldn't wonder if they make some fifty pounds out of it. The few books that will be necessary they can either get at a Wattleborough library, or I can send them.'

'Your energy is remarkable, all of a sudden,' said Reardon.

'Yes. The hour has come, I find. "There is a tide"—to quote something that has the charm of freshness.'

The supper—which consisted of bread and butter, cheese, sardines, cocoa—was now over, and Jasper, still enlarging on his recent experiences and future prospects, led the way back to the sitting-room. Not very long after this, Amy left the two friends to their pipes; she was anxious that her husband should discuss his affairs privately with Milvain, and give ear to the practical advice which she knew would be tendered him.

'I hear that you are still stuck fast,' began Jasper, when they had smoked awhile in silence.

'Yes.'

'Getting rather serious, I should fear, isn't it?'

'Yes,' repeated Reardon, in a low voice.

'Come, come, old man, you can't go on in this way. Would it, or wouldn't it, be any use if you took a seaside holiday?'

'Not the least. I am incapable of holiday, if the opportunity were offered. Do something I must, or I shall fret myself into imbecility.'

'Very well. What is it to be?'

'I shall try to manufacture two volumes. They needn't run to more than about two hundred and seventy pages, and those well spaced out.'

'This is refreshing. This is practical. But look now: let it be something rather sensational. Couldn't we invent a good title—something to catch eye and ear? The title would suggest the story, you know.'

Reardon laughed contemptuously, but the scorn was directed rather against himself than Milvain.

'Let's try,' he muttered.

Both appeared to exercise their minds on the problem for a few minutes. Then Jasper slapped his knee.

'How would this do: "The Weird Sisters"? Devilish good, eh? Suggests all sorts of things, both to the vulgar and the educated. Nothing brutally clap-trap about it, you know.'

'But—what does it suggest to you?'

'Oh, witch-like, mysterious girls or women. Think it over.'

There was another long silence. Reardon's face was that of a man in blank misery.

'I have been trying,' he said at length, after an attempt to speak which was checked by a huskiness in his throat, 'to explain to myself how this state of things has come about. I almost think I can do so.'

'How?'

'That half-year abroad, and the extraordinary shock of happiness which followed at once upon it, have disturbed the balance of my nature. It was adjusted to circumstances of hardship, privation, struggle. A temperament like mine can't pass through such a violent change of conditions without being greatly affected; I have never since been the man I was before I left England. The stage I had then reached was the result of a slow and elaborate building up; I could look back and see the processes by which I had grown from the boy who was a mere bookworm to the man who had all but succeeded as a novelist. It was a perfectly natural, sober development. But in the last two years and a half I can distinguish no order. In living through it, I have imagined from time to time that my powers were coming to their ripest; but that was mere delusion. Intellectually, I have fallen back. The probability is that this wouldn't matter, if only I could live on in peace of mind; I should recover my equilibrium, and perhaps once more understand myself. But the due course of things is troubled by my poverty.'

He spoke in a slow, meditative way, in a monotonous voice,

and without raising his eyes from the ground.

'I can understand,' put in Jasper, 'that there may be philosophical truth in all this. All the same, it's a great pity that you should occupy your mind with such thoughts.'

'A pity—no! I must remain a reasoning creature. Disaster may end by driving me out of my wits, but till then I won't abandon my heritage of thought.'

'Let us have it out, then. You think it was a mistake to spend those months abroad?'

'A mistake from the practical point of view. That vast broadening of my horizon lost me the command of my literary resources. I lived in Italy and Greece as a student, concerned especially with the old civilisations; I read little but Greek and Latin. That brought me out of the track I had laboriously made for myself. I often thought with disgust of the kind of work I had been doing; my novels seemed vapid stuff so wretchedly and shallowly modern. If I had had the means, I should have devoted myself to the life of a scholar. That, I quite believe, is my natural life; it's only the influence of recent circumstances that has made me a writer of novels. A man who can't journalise, yet must earn his bread by literature, nowadays inevitably turns to fiction, as the Elizabethan men turned to the drama. Well, but I should have got back, I think, into the old line of work. It was my marriage that completed what the time abroad had begun.'

He looked up suddenly, and added:

'I am speaking as if to myself. You, of course, don't

misunderstand me, and think I am accusing my wife.'

'No, I don't take you to mean that, by any means.'

'No, no; of course not. All that's wrong is my accursed want of money. But that threatens to be such a fearful wrong, that I begin to wish I had died before my marriage-day. Then Amy would have been saved. The Philistines are right: a man has no business to marry unless he has a secured income equal to all natural demands. I behaved with the grossest selfishness. I might have known that such happiness was never meant for me.'

'Do you mean by all this that you seriously doubt whether you will ever be able to write again?'

'In awful seriousness, I doubt it,' replied Reardon, with haggard face.

'It strikes me as extraordinary. In your position I should work as I never had done before.'

'Because you are the kind of man who is roused by necessity. I am overcome by it. My nature is feeble and luxurious. I never in my life encountered and overcame a practical difficulty.'

'Yes; when you got the work at the hospital.'

'All I did was to write a letter, and chance made it effective.'

'My view of the case, Reardon, is that you are simply ill.'

'Certainly I am; but the ailment is desperately complicated. Tell me: do you think I might possibly get any kind of stated work to do? Should I be fit for any place in a newspaper office, for instance?'

'I fear not. You are the last man to have anything to do with

journalism.'

'If I appealed to my publishers, could they help me?'

'I don't see how. They would simply say: Write a book and we'll buy it.'

'Yes, there's no help but that.'

'If only you were able to write short stories, Fadge might be useful.'

'But what's the use? I suppose I might get ten guineas, at most, for such a story. I need a couple of hundred pounds at least. Even if I could finish a three-volume book, I doubt if they would give me a hundred again, after the failure of "The Optimist"; no, they wouldn't.'

'But to sit and look forward in this way is absolutely fatal, my dear fellow. Get to work at your two-volume story. Call it "The Weird Sisters," or anything better that you can devise; but get it done, so many pages a day. If I go ahead as I begin to think I shall, I shall soon be able to assure you good notices in a lot of papers. Your misfortune has been that you had no influential friends. By-the-bye, how has The Study been in the habit of treating you?'

'Scrubbily.'

'I'll make an opportunity of talking about your books to Fadge. I think Fadge and I shall get on pretty well together. Alfred Yule hates the man fiercely, for some reason or other. By the way, I may as well tell you that I broke short off with the Yules on purpose.'

'Oh?'

‘I had begun to think far too much about the girl. Wouldn’t do, you know. I must marry someone with money, and a good deal of it. That’s a settled point with me.’

‘Then you are not at all likely to meet them in London?’

‘Not at all. And if I get allied with Fadge, no doubt Yule will involve me in his savage feeling. You see how wisely I acted. I have a scent for the prudent course.’

They talked for a long time, but again chiefly of Milvain’s affairs. Reardon, indeed, cared little to say anything more about his own. Talk was mere vanity and vexation of spirit, for the spring of his volition seemed to be broken, and, whatever resolve he might utter, he knew that everything depended on influences he could not even foresee.

CHAPTER VII. MARIAN'S HOME

Three weeks after her return from the country—which took place a week later than that of Jasper Milvain—Marian Yule was working one afternoon at her usual place in the Museum Reading-room. It was three o'clock, and with the interval of half an hour at midday, when she went away for a cup of tea and a sandwich, she had been closely occupied since half-past nine. Her task at present was to collect materials for a paper on 'French Authoresses of the Seventeenth Century,' the kind of thing which her father supplied on stipulated terms for anonymous publication. Marian was by this time almost able to complete such a piece of manufacture herself and her father's share in it was limited to a few hints and corrections. The greater part of the work by which Yule earned his moderate income was anonymous: volumes and articles which bore his signature dealt with much the same subjects as his unsigned matter, but the writing was laboured with a conscientiousness unusual in men of his position. The result, unhappily, was not correspondent with the efforts. Alfred Yule had made a recognisable name among the critical writers of the day; seeing him in the title-lists of a periodical, most people knew what to expect, but not a few forbore the cutting open of the pages he occupied. He was learned, copious, occasionally mordant in style; but grace had been denied to him. He had of late begun to perceive the fact

that those passages of Marian's writing which were printed just as they came from her pen had merit of a kind quite distinct from anything of which he himself was capable, and it began to be a question with him whether it would not be advantageous to let the girl sign these compositions. A matter of business, to be sure —at all events in the first instance.

For a long time Marian had scarcely looked up from the desk, but at this moment she found it necessary to refer to the invaluable Larousse. As so often happened, the particular volume of which she had need was not upon the shelf she turned away, and looked about her with a gaze of weary disappointment. At a little distance were standing two young men, engaged, as their faces showed, in facetious colloquy; as soon as she observed them, Marian's eyes fell, but the next moment she looked again in that direction. Her face had wholly changed; she wore a look of timid expectancy.

The men were moving towards her, still talking and laughing. She turned to the shelves, and affected to search for a book. The voices drew near, and one of them was well known to her; now she could hear every word; now the speakers were gone by. Was it possible that Mr Milvain had not recognised her? She followed him with her eyes, and saw him take a seat not far off he must have passed without even being aware of her.

She went back to her place and for some minutes sat trifling with a pen. When she made a show of resuming work, it was evident that she could no longer apply herself as before. Every

now and then she glanced at people who were passing; there were intervals when she wholly lost herself in reverie. She was tired, and had even a slight headache. When the hand of the clock pointed to half-past three, she closed the volume from which she had been copying extracts, and began to collect her papers.

A voice spoke close behind her.

'Where's your father, Miss Yule?'

The speaker was a man of sixty, short, stout, tonsured by the hand of time. He had a broad, flabby face, the colour of an ancient turnip, save where one of the cheeks was marked with a mulberry stain; his eyes, grey-orbed in a yellow setting, glared with good-humoured inquisitiveness, and his mouth was that of the confirmed gossip. For eyebrows he had two little patches of reddish stubble; for moustache, what looked like a bit of discoloured tow, and scraps of similar material hanging beneath his creasy chin represented a beard. His garb must have seen a great deal of Museum service; it consisted of a jacket, something between brown and blue, hanging in capacious shapelessness, a waistcoat half open for lack of buttons and with one of the pockets coming unsewn, a pair of bronze-hued trousers which had all run to knee. Necktie he had none, and his linen made distinct appeal to the laundress.

Marian shook hands with him.

'He went away at half-past two,' was her reply to his question.

'How annoying! I wanted particularly to see him. I have been running about all day, and couldn't get here before. Something

important—most important. At all events, I can tell you. But I entreat that you won't breathe a word save to your father.'

Mr Quarmby—that was his name—had taken a vacant chair and drawn it close to Marian's. He was in a state of joyous excitement, and talked in thick, rather pompous tones, with a pant at the end of a sentence. To emphasise the extremely confidential nature of his remarks, he brought his head almost in contact with the girl's, and one of her thin, delicate hands was covered with his red, podgy fingers.

'I've had a talk with Nathaniel Walker,' he continued; 'a long talk—a talk of vast importance. You know Walker? No, no; how should you? He's a man of business; close friend of Rackett's—Rackett, you know, the owner of The Study.'

Upon this he made a grave pause, and glared more excitedly than ever.

'I have heard of Mr Rackett,' said Marian.

'Of course, of course. And you must also have heard that Fadge leaves The Study at the end of this year, eh?'

'Father told me it was probable.'

'Rackett and he have done nothing but quarrel for months; the paper is falling off seriously. Well, now, when I came across Nat Walker this afternoon, the first thing he said to me was, "You know Alfred Yule pretty well, I think?" "Pretty well," I answered; "why?" "I'll tell you," he said, "but it's between you and me, you understand. Rackett is thinking about him in connection with The Study." "I'm delighted to hear it." "To tell you the truth,"

went on Nat, "I shouldn't wonder if Yule gets the editorship; but you understand that it would be altogether premature to talk about it." Now what do you think of this, eh?'

'It's very good news,' answered Marian.

'I should think so! Ho, ho!'

Mr Quarmby laughed in a peculiar way, which was the result of long years of mirth-subdual in the Reading-room.

'But not a breath to anyone but your father. He'll be here to-morrow? Break it gently to him, you know; he's an excitable man; can't take things quietly, like I do. Ho, ho!'

His suppressed laugh ended in a fit of coughing—the Reading-room cough. When he had recovered from it, he pressed Marian's hand with paternal fervour, and waddled off to chatter with someone else.

Marian replaced several books on the reference-shelves, returned others to the central desk, and was just leaving the room, when again a voice made demand upon her attention.

'Miss Yule! One moment, if you please!'

It was a tall, meagre, dry-featured man, dressed with the painful neatness of self-respecting poverty: the edges of his coat-sleeves were carefully darned; his black necktie and a skull-cap which covered his baldness were evidently of home manufacture. He smiled softly and timidly with blue, rheumy eyes. Two or three recent cuts on his chin and neck were the result of conscientious shaving with an unsteady hand.

'I have been looking for your father,' he said, as Marian turned.

'Isn't he here?'

'He has gone, Mr Hinks.'

'Ah, then would you do me the kindness to take a book for him? In fact, it's my little "Essay on the Historical Drama," just out.'

He spoke with nervous hesitation, and in a tone which seemed to make apology for his existence.

'Oh, father will be very glad to have it.'

'If you will kindly wait one minute, Miss Yule. It's at my place over there.'

He went off with long strides, and speedily came back panting, in his hand a thin new volume.

'My kind regards to him, Miss Yule. You are quite well, I hope? I won't detain you.'

And he backed into a man who was coming inobservantly this way.

Marian went to the ladies' cloak-room, put on her hat and jacket, and left the Museum. Some one passed out through the swing-door a moment before her, and as soon as she had issued beneath the portico, she saw that it was Jasper Milvain; she must have followed him through the hall, but her eyes had been cast down. The young man was now alone; as he descended the steps he looked to left and right, but not behind him. Marian followed at a distance of two or three yards. Nearing the gateway, she quickened her pace a little, so as to pass out into the street almost at the same moment as Milvain. But he did not turn his head.

He took to the right. Marian had fallen back again, but she still followed at a very little distance. His walk was slow, and she might easily have passed him in quite a natural way; in that case he could not help seeing her. But there was an uneasy suspicion in her mind that he really must have noticed her in the Reading-room. This was the first time she had seen him since their parting at Finden. Had he any reason for avoiding her? Did he take it ill that her father had shown no desire to keep up his acquaintance?

She allowed the interval between them to become greater. In a minute or two Milvain turned up Charlotte Street, and so she lost sight of him.

In Tottenham Court Road she waited for an omnibus that would take her to the remoter part of Camden Town; obtaining a corner seat, she drew as far back as possible, and paid no attention to her fellow-passengers. At a point in Camden Road she at length alighted, and after ten minutes' walk reached her destination in a quiet by-way called St Paul's Crescent, consisting of small, decent houses. That at which she paused had an exterior promising comfort within; the windows were clean and neatly curtained, and the polishable appurtenances of the door gleamed to perfection. She admitted herself with a latch-key, and went straight upstairs without encountering anyone.

Descending again in a few moments, she entered the front room on the ground-floor. This served both as parlour and dining-room; it was comfortably furnished, without much attempt at adornment. On the walls were a few autotypes and old

engravings. A recess between fireplace and window was fitted with shelves, which supported hundreds of volumes, the overflow of Yule's library. The table was laid for a meal. It best suited the convenience of the family to dine at five o'clock; a long evening, so necessary to most literary people, was thus assured. Marian, as always when she had spent a day at the Museum, was faint with weariness and hunger; she cut a small piece of bread from a loaf on the table, and sat down in an easy chair.

Presently appeared a short, slight woman of middle age, plainly dressed in serviceable grey. Her face could never have been very comely, and it expressed but moderate intelligence; its lines, however, were those of gentleness and good feeling. She had the look of one who is making a painful effort to understand something; this was fixed upon her features, and probably resulted from the peculiar conditions of her life.

'Rather early, aren't you, Marian?' she said, as she closed the door and came forward to take a seat.

'Yes; I have a little headache.'

'Oh, dear! Is that beginning again?'

Mrs Yule's speech was seldom ungrammatical, and her intonation was not flagrantly vulgar, but the accent of the London poor, which brands as with hereditary baseness, still clung to her words, rendering futile such propriety of phrase as she owed to years of association with educated people. In the same degree did her bearing fall short of that which distinguishes a lady. The London work-girl is rarely capable of raising herself or being

raised, to a place in life above that to which she was born; she cannot learn how to stand and sit and move like a woman bred to refinement, any more than she can fashion her tongue to graceful speech. Mrs Yule's behaviour to Marian was marked with a singular diffidence; she looked and spoke affectionately, but not with a mother's freedom; one might have taken her for a trusted servant waiting upon her mistress. Whenever opportunity offered, she watched the girl in a curiously furtive way, that puzzled look on her face becoming very noticeable. Her consciousness was never able to accept as a familiar and unimportant fact the vast difference between herself and her daughter. Marian's superiority in native powers, in delicacy of feeling, in the results of education, could never be lost sight of. Under ordinary circumstances she addressed the girl as if tentatively; however sure of anything from her own point of view, she knew that Marian, as often as not, had quite a different criterion. She understood that the girl frequently expressed an opinion by mere reticence, and hence the carefulness with which, when conversing, she tried to discover the real effect of her words in Marian's features.

'Hungry, too,' she said, seeing the crust Marian was nibbling. 'You really must have more lunch, dear. It isn't right to go so long; you'll make yourself ill.'

'Have you been out?' Marian asked.

'Yes; I went to Holloway.'

Mrs Yule sighed and looked very unhappy. By 'going to

Holloway' was always meant a visit to her own relatives—a married sister with three children, and a brother who inhabited the same house. To her husband she scarcely ever ventured to speak of these persons; Yule had no intercourse with them. But Marian was always willing to listen sympathetically, and her mother often exhibited a touching gratitude for this condescension—as she deemed it.

'Are things no better?' the girl inquired.

'Worse, as far as I can see. John has begun his drinking again, and him and Tom quarrel every night; there's no peace in the 'ouse.'

If ever Mrs Yule lapsed into gross errors of pronunciation or phrase, it was when she spoke of her kinsfolk. The subject seemed to throw her back into a former condition.

'He ought to go and live by himself' said Marian, referring to her mother's brother, the thirsty John.

'So he ought, to be sure. I'm always telling them so. But there! you don't seem to be able to persuade them, they're that silly and obstinate. And Susan, she only gets angry with me, and tells me not to talk in a stuck-up way. I'm sure I never say a word that could offend her; I'm too careful for that. And there's Annie; no doing anything with her! She's about the streets at all hours, and what'll be the end of it no one can say. They're getting that ragged, all of them. It isn't Susan's fault; indeed it isn't. She does all that woman can. But Tom hasn't brought home ten shillings the last month, and it seems to me as if he was getting careless.

I gave her half-a-crown; it was all I could do. And the worst of it is, they think I could do so much more if I liked. They're always hinting that we are rich people, and it's no good my trying to persuade them. They think I'm telling falsehoods, and it's very hard to be looked at in that way; it is, indeed, Marian.'

'You can't help it, mother. I suppose their suffering makes them unkind and unjust.'

'That's just what it does, my dear; you never said anything truer. Poverty will make the best people bad, if it gets hard enough. Why there's so much of it in the world, I'm sure I can't see.'

'I suppose father will be back soon?'

'He said dinner-time.'

'Mr Quarmby has been telling me something which is wonderfully good news if it's really true; but I can't help feeling doubtful.

He says that father may perhaps be made editor of The Study at the end of this year.'

Mrs Yule, of course, understood, in outline, these affairs of the literary world; she thought of them only from the pecuniary point of view, but that made no essential distinction between her and the mass of literary people.

'My word!' she exclaimed. 'What a thing that would be for us!'

Marian had begun to explain her reluctance to base any hopes on Mr Quarmby's prediction, when the sound of a postman's knock at the house-door caused her mother to disappear for a

moment.

'It's for you,' said Mrs Yule, returning. 'From the country.'

Marian took the letter and examined its address with interest.

'It must be one of the Miss Milvains. Yes; Dora Milvain.'

After Jasper's departure from Finden his sisters had seen Marian several times, and the mutual liking between her and them had been confirmed by opportunity of conversation. The promise of correspondence had hitherto waited for fulfilment. It seemed natural to Marian that the younger of the two girls should write; Maud was attractive and agreeable, and probably clever, but Dora had more spontaneity in friendship.

'It will amuse you to hear,' wrote Dora, 'that the literary project our brother mentioned in a letter whilst you were still here is really to come to something. He has sent us a specimen chapter, written by himself of the "Child's History of Parliament," and Maud thinks she could carry it on in that style, if there's no hurry. She and I have both set to work on English histories, and we shall be authorities before long. Jolly and Monk offer thirty pounds for the little book, if it suits them when finished, with certain possible profits in the future. Trust Jasper for making a bargain! So perhaps our literary career will be something more than a joke, after all. I hope it may; anything rather than a life of teaching. We shall be so glad to hear from you, if you still care to trouble about country girls.'

And so on. Marian read with a pleased smile, then acquainted her mother with the contents.

'I am very glad,' said Mrs Yule; 'it's so seldom you get a letter.'

'Yes.'

Marian seemed desirous of saying something more, and her mother had a thoughtful look, suggestive of sympathetic curiosity.

'Is their brother likely to call here?' Mrs Yule asked, with misgiving.

'No one has invited him to,' was the girl's quiet reply.

'He wouldn't come without that?'

'It's not likely that he even knows the address.'

'Your father won't be seeing him, I suppose?'

'By chance, perhaps. I don't know.'

It was very rare indeed for these two to touch upon any subject save those of everyday interest. In spite of the affection between them, their exchange of confidence did not go very far; Mrs Yule, who had never exercised maternal authority since Marian's earliest childhood, claimed no maternal privileges, and Marian's natural reserve had been strengthened by her mother's respectful aloofness. The English fault of domestic reticence could scarcely go further than it did in their case; its exaggeration is, of course, one of the characteristics of those unhappy families severed by differences of education between the old and young.

'I think,' said Marian, in a forced tone, 'that father hasn't much liking for Mr Milvain.'

She wished to know if her mother had heard any private remarks on this subject, but she could not bring herself to ask

directly.

'I'm sure I don't know,' replied Mrs Yule, smoothing her dress. 'He hasn't said anything to me, Marian.'

An awkward silence. The mother had fixed her eyes on the mantelpiece, and was thinking hard.

'Otherwise,' said Marian, 'he would have said something, I should think, about meeting in London.'

'But is there anything in—this gentleman that he wouldn't like?'

'I don't know of anything.'

Impossible to pursue the dialogue; Marian moved uneasily, then rose, said something about putting the letter away, and left the room.

Shortly after, Alfred Yule entered the house. It was no uncommon thing for him to come home in a mood of silent moroseness, and this evening the first glimpse of his face was sufficient warning. He entered the dining-room and stood on the hearthrug reading an evening paper. His wife made a pretence of straightening things upon the table.

'Well?' he exclaimed irritably. 'It's after five; why isn't dinner served?'

'It's just coming, Alfred.'

Even the average man of a certain age is an alarming creature when dinner delays itself; the literary man in such a moment goes beyond all parallel. If there be added the fact that he has just returned from a very unsatisfactory interview with a publisher,

wife and daughter may indeed regard the situation as appalling. Marian came in, and at once observed her mother's frightened face.

'Father,' she said, hoping to make a diversion, 'Mr Hinks has sent you his new book, and wishes—'

'Then take Mr Hinks's new book back to him, and tell him that I have quite enough to do without reading tedious trash. He needn't expect that I'm going to write a notice of it. The simpleton pesters me beyond endurance. I wish to know, if you please,' he added with savage calm, 'when dinner will be ready. If there's time to write a few letters, just tell me at once, that I mayn't waste half an hour.'

Marian resented this unreasonable anger, but she durst not reply.

At that moment the servant appeared with a smoking joint, and Mrs Yule followed carrying dishes of vegetables. The man of letters seated himself and carved angrily. He began his meal by drinking half a glass of ale; then he ate a few mouthfuls in a quick, hungry way, his head bent closely over the plate. It happened commonly enough that dinner passed without a word of conversation, and that seemed likely to be the case this evening.

To his wife Yule seldom addressed anything but a curt inquiry or caustic comment; if he spoke humanly at table it was to Marian.

Ten minutes passed; then Marian resolved to try any means

of clearing the atmosphere.

'Mr Quarmby gave me a message for you,' she said. 'A friend of his, Nathaniel Walker, has told him that Mr Rackett will very likely offer you the editorship of The Study.'

Yule stopped in the act of mastication. He fixed his eyes intently on the sirloin for half a minute; then, by way of the beer-jug and the salt-cellar, turned them upon Marian's face.

'Walker told him that? Pooh!'

'It was a great secret. I wasn't to breathe a word to any one but you.'

'Walker's a fool and Quarmby's an ass,' remarked her father.

But there was a tremulousness in his bushy eyebrows; his forehead half unwreathed itself; he continued to eat more slowly, and as if with appreciation of the viands.

'What did he say? Repeat it to me in his words.'

Marian did so, as nearly as possible. He listened with a scoffing expression, but still his features relaxed.

'I don't credit Rackett with enough good sense for such a proposal,' he said deliberately. 'And I'm not very sure that I should accept it if it were made. That fellow Fadge has all but ruined the paper. It will amuse me to see how long it takes him to make Culpepper's new magazine a distinct failure.'

A silence of five minutes ensued; then Yule said of a sudden.

'Where is Hinks's book?'

Marian reached it from a side table; under this roof, literature was regarded almost as a necessary part of table garnishing.

'I thought it would be bigger than this,' Yule muttered, as he opened the volume in a way peculiar to bookish men.

A page was turned down, as if to draw attention to some passage. Yule put on his eyeglasses, and soon made a discovery which had the effect of completing the transformation of his visage. His eyes glinted, his chin worked in pleasurable emotion. In a moment he handed the book to Marian, indicating the small type of a foot-note; it embodied an effusive eulogy—introduced a propos of some literary discussion—of 'Mr Alfred Yule's critical acumen, scholarly research, lucid style,' and sundry other distinguished merits.

'That is kind of him,' said Marian.

'Good old Hinks! I suppose I must try to get him half-a-dozen readers.'

'May I see?' asked Mrs Yule, under her breath, bending to Marian.

Her daughter passed on the volume, and Mrs Yule read the footnote with that look of slow apprehension which is so pathetic when it signifies the heart's good-will thwarted by the mind's defect.

'That'll be good for you, Alfred, won't it?' she said, glancing at her husband.

'Certainly,' he replied, with a smile of contemptuous irony. 'If Hinks goes on, he'll establish my reputation.'

And he took a draught of ale, like one who is reinvigorated for the battle of life. Marian, regarding him askance, mused on what

seemed to her a strange anomaly in his character; it had often surprised her that a man of his temperament and powers should be so dependent upon the praise and blame of people whom he justly deemed his inferiors.

Yule was glancing over the pages of the work.

'A pity the man can't write English.' What a vocabulary! Obstruent—reliable—particularization—fabulosity—different to—averse to—did one ever come across such a mixture of antique pedantry and modern vulgarism! Surely he has his name from the German hinken—eh, Marian?'

With a laugh he tossed the book away again. His mood was wholly changed. He gave various evidences of enjoying the meal, and began to talk freely with his daughter.

'Finished the authoresses?'

'Not quite.'

'No hurry. When you have time I want you to read Ditchley's new book, and jot down a selection of his worst sentences. I'll use them for an article on contemporary style; it occurred to me this afternoon.'

He smiled grimly. Mrs Yule's face exhibited much contentment, which became radiant joy when her husband remarked casually that the custard was very well made to-day. Dinner over, he rose without ceremony and went off to his study.

The man had suffered much and toiled stupendously. It was not inexplicable that dyspepsia, and many another ill that literary flesh is heir to, racked him sore.

Go back to the days when he was an assistant at a bookseller's in Holborn. Already ambition devoured him, and the genuine love of knowledge goaded his brain. He allowed himself but three or four hours of sleep; he wrought doggedly at languages, ancient and modern; he tried his hand at metrical translations; he planned tragedies. Practically he was living in a past age; his literary ideals were formed on the study of Boswell.

The head assistant in the shop went away to pursue a business which had come into his hands on the death of a relative; it was a small publishing concern, housed in an alley off the Strand, and Mr Polo (a singular name, to become well known in the course of time) had his ideas about its possible extension. Among other instances of activity he started a penny weekly paper, called All Sorts, and in the pages of this periodical Alfred Yule first appeared as an author. Before long he became sub-editor of All Sorts, then actual director of the paper. He said good-bye to the bookseller, and his literary career fairly began.

Mr Polo used to say that he never knew a man who could work so many consecutive hours as Alfred Yule. A faithful account of all that the young man learnt and wrote from 1855 to 1860—that is, from his twenty-fifth to his thirtieth year—would have the look of burlesque exaggeration. He had set it before him to become a celebrated man, and he was not unaware that the attainment of that end would cost him quite exceptional labour, seeing that nature had not favoured him with brilliant parts. No matter; his name should be spoken among men unless he killed

himself in the struggle for success.

In the meantime he married. Living in a garret, and supplying himself with the materials of his scanty meals, he was in the habit of making purchases at a little chandler's shop, where he was waited upon by a young girl of no beauty, but, as it seemed to him, of amiable disposition. One holiday he met this girl as she was walking with a younger sister in the streets; he made her nearer acquaintance, and before long she consented to be his wife and share his garret. His brothers, John and Edmund, cried out that he had made an unpardonable fool of himself in marrying so much beneath him; that he might well have waited until his income improved. This was all very well, but they might just as reasonably have bidden him reject plain food because a few years hence he would be able to purchase luxuries; he could not do without nourishment of some sort, and the time had come when he could not do without a wife. Many a man with brains but no money has been compelled to the same step. Educated girls have a pronounced distaste for London garrets; not one in fifty thousand would share poverty with the brightest genius ever born. Seeing that marriage is so often indispensable to that very success which would enable a man of parts to mate equally, there is nothing for it but to look below one's own level, and be grateful to the untaught woman who has pity on one's loneliness.

Unfortunately, Alfred Yule was not so grateful as he might have been. His marriage proved far from unsuccessful; he might have found himself united to a vulgar shrew, whereas the girl had

the great virtues of humility and kindliness. She endeavoured to learn of him, but her dulness and his impatience made this attempt a failure; her human qualities had to suffice. And they did, until Yule began to lift his head above the literary mob. Previously, he often lost his temper with her, but never expressed or felt repentance of his marriage; now he began to see only the disadvantages of his position, and, forgetting the facts of the case, to imagine that he might well have waited for a wife who could share his intellectual existence. Mrs Yule had to pass through a few years of much bitterness. Already a martyr to dyspepsia, and often suffering from bilious headaches of extreme violence, her husband now and then lost all control of his temper, all sense of kind feeling, even of decency, and reproached the poor woman with her ignorance, her stupidity, her low origin. Naturally enough she defended herself with such weapons as a sense of cruel injustice supplied. More than once the two all but parted. It did not come to an actual rupture, chiefly because Yule could not do without his wife; her tendance had become indispensable. And then there was the child to consider.

From the first it was Yule's dread lest Marian should be infected with her mother's faults of speech and behaviour. He would scarcely permit his wife to talk to the child. At the earliest possible moment Marian was sent to a day-school, and in her tenth year she went as weekly boarder to an establishment at Fulham; any sacrifice of money to insure her growing up with the tongue and manners of a lady. It can scarcely have been a light

trial to the mother to know that contact with her was regarded as her child's greatest danger; but in her humility and her love for Marian she offered no resistance. And so it came to pass that one day the little girl, hearing her mother make some flagrant grammatical error, turned to the other parent and asked gravely: 'Why doesn't mother speak as properly as we do?' Well, that is one of the results of such marriages, one of the myriad miseries that result from poverty.

The end was gained at all hazards. Marian grew up everything that her father desired. Not only had she the bearing of refinement, but it early became obvious that nature had well endowed her with brains. From the nursery her talk was of books, and at the age of twelve she was already able to give her father some assistance as an amanuensis.

At that time Edmund Yule was still living; he had overcome his prejudices, and there was intercourse between his household and that of the literary man. Intimacy it could not be called, for Mrs Edmund (who was the daughter of a law-stationer) had much difficulty in behaving to Mrs Alfred with show of suavity. Still, the cousins Amy and Marian from time to time saw each other, and were not unsuitable companions. It was the death of Amy's father that brought these relations to an end; left to the control of her own affairs Mrs Edmund was not long in giving offence to Mrs Alfred, and so to Alfred himself. The man of letters might be inconsiderate enough in his behaviour to his wife, but as soon as anyone else treated her with disrespect that was quite another

matter. Purely on this account he quarrelled violently with his brother's widow, and from that day the two families kept apart.

The chapter of quarrels was one of no small importance in Alfred's life; his difficult temper, and an ever-increasing sense of neglected merit, frequently put him at war with publishers, editors, fellow-authors, and he had an unhappy trick of exciting the hostility of men who were most likely to be useful to him. With Mr Polo, for instance, who held him in esteem, and whose commercial success made him a valuable connection, Alfred ultimately broke on a trifling matter of personal dignity. Later came the great quarrel with Clement Fadge, an affair of considerable advantage in the way of advertisement to both the men concerned. It happened in the year 1873. At that time Yule was editor of a weekly paper called The Balance, a literary organ which aimed high, and failed to hit the circulation essential to its existence. Fadge, a younger man, did reviewing for The Balance; he was in needy circumstances, and had wrought himself into Yule's good opinion by judicious flattery. But with a clear eye for the main chance Mr Fadge soon perceived that Yule could only be of temporary use to him, and that the editor of a well-established weekly which lost no opportunity of throwing scorn upon Yule and all his works would be a much more profitable conquest. He succeeded in transferring his services to the more flourishing paper, and struck out a special line of work by the free exercise of a malicious flippancy which was then without rival in the periodical press. When he had thoroughly got his

hand in, it fell to Mr Fadge, in the mere way of business, to review a volume of his old editor's, a rather pretentious and longwinded but far from worthless essay 'On Imagination as a National Characteristic.' The notice was a masterpiece; its exquisite virulence set the literary circles chuckling. Concerning the authorship there was no mystery, and Alfred Yule had the indiscretion to make a violent reply, a savage assault upon Fadge, in the columns of The Balance. Fadge desired nothing better; the uproar which arose—chaff, fury, grave comments, sneering spite—could only result in drawing universal attention to his anonymous cleverness, and throwing ridicule upon the heavy, conscientious man. Well, you probably remember all about it. It ended in the disappearance of Yule's struggling paper, and the establishment on a firm basis of Fadge's reputation.

It would be difficult to mention any department of literary endeavour in which Yule did not, at one time or another, try his fortune. Turn to his name in the Museum Catalogue; the list of works appended to it will amuse you. In his thirtieth year he published a novel; it failed completely, and the same result awaited a similar experiment five years later. He wrote a drama of modern life, and for some years strove to get it acted, but in vain; finally it appeared 'for the closet'—giving Clement Fadge such an opportunity as he seldom enjoyed. The one noteworthy thing about these productions, and about others of equally mistaken direction, was the sincerity of their workmanship. Had Yule been content to manufacture a novel or

a play with due disregard for literary honour, he might perchance have made a mercantile success; but the poor fellow had not pliancy enough for this. He took his efforts au grand serieux; thought he was producing works of art; pursued his ambition in a spirit of fierce conscientiousness. In spite of all, he remained only a journeyman. The kind of work he did best was poorly paid, and could bring no fame. At the age of fifty he was still living in a poor house in an obscure quarter. He earned enough for his actual needs, and was under no pressing fear for the morrow, so long as his faculties remained unimpaired; but there was no disguising from himself that his life had been a failure. And the thought tormented him.

Now there had come unexpectedly a gleam of hope. If indeed, the man Rackett thought of offering him the editorship of The Study he might even yet taste the triumphs for which he had so vehemently longed. The Study was a weekly paper of fair repute. Fadge had harmed it, no doubt of that, by giving it a tone which did not suit the majority of its readers—serious people, who thought that the criticism of contemporary writing offered an opportunity for something better than a display of malevolent wit. But a return to the old earnestness would doubtless set all right again. And the joy of sitting in that dictatorial chair! The delight of having his own organ once more, of making himself a power in the world of letters, of emphasising to a large audience his developed methods of criticism!

An embittered man is a man beset by evil temptations. The

Study contained each week certain columns of flying gossip, and when he thought of this, Yule also thought of Clement Fadge, and sundry other of his worst enemies. How the gossip column can be used for hostile purposes, yet without the least overt offence, he had learnt only too well. Sometimes the mere omission of a man's name from a list of authors can mortify and injure. In our day the manipulation of such paragraphs has become a fine art; but you recall numerous illustrations. Alfred knew well enough how incessantly the tempter would be at his ear; he said to himself that in certain instances yielding would be no dishonour. He himself had many a time been mercilessly treated; in the very interest of the public it was good that certain men should suffer a snubbing, and his fingers itched to have hold of the editorial pen. Ha, ha! Like the war-horse he snuffed the battle afar off.

No work this evening, though there were tasks which pressed for completion. His study—the only room on the ground level except the dining-room—was small, and even a good deal of the floor was encumbered with books, but he found space for walking nervously hither and thither. He was doing this when, about half-past nine, his wife appeared at the door, bringing him a cup of coffee and some biscuits, his wonted supper. Marian generally waited upon him at this time, and he asked why she had not come.

'She has one of her headaches again, I'm sorry to say,' Mrs Yule replied. 'I persuaded her to go to bed early.'

Having placed the tray upon the table—books had to be

pushed aside—she did not seem disposed to withdraw.

'Are you busy, Alfred?'

'Why?'

'I thought I should like just to speak of something.'

She was using the opportunity of his good humour. Yule spoke to her with the usual carelessness, but not forbiddingly.

'What is it? Those Holloway people, I'll warrant.'

'No, no! It's about Marian. She had a letter from one of those young ladies this afternoon.'

'What young ladies?' asked Yule, with impatience of this circuitous approach.

'The Miss Milvains.'

'Well, there's no harm that I know of. They're decent people.'

'Yes; so you told me. But she began to speak about their brother, and—'

'What about him? Do say what you want to say, and have done with it!'

'I can't help thinking, Alfred, that she's disappointed you didn't ask him to come here.'

Yule stared at her in slight surprise. He was still not angry, and seemed quite willing to consider this matter suggested to him so timorously.

'Oh, you think so? Well, I don't know. Why should I have asked him? It was only because Miss Harrow seemed to wish it that I saw him down there. I have no particular interest in him. And as for—'

He broke off and seated himself. Mrs Yule stood at a distance.

'We must remember her age,' she said.

'Why yes, of course.'

He mused, and began to nibble a biscuit.

'And you know, Alfred, she never does meet any young men. I've often thought it wasn't right to her.'

'H'm! But this lad Milvain is a very doubtful sort of customer. To begin with, he has nothing, and they tell me his mother for the most part supports him. I don't quite approve of that. She isn't well off, and he ought to have been making a living by now.

He has a kind of cleverness, may do something; but there's no being sure of that.'

These thoughts were not coming into his mind for the first time. On the occasion when he met Milvain and Marian together in the country road he had necessarily reflected upon the possibilities of such intercourse, and with the issue that he did not care to give any particular encouragement to its continuance. He of course heard of Milvain's leave-taking call, and he purposely refrained from seeing the young man after that. The matter took no very clear shape in his meditations; he saw no likelihood that either of the young people would think much of the other after their parting, and time enough to trouble one's head with such subjects when they could no longer be postponed. It would not have been pleasant to him to foresee a life of spinsterhood for his daughter; but she was young, and—she was a valuable assistant.

How far did that latter consideration weigh with him? He

put the question pretty distinctly to himself now that his wife had broached the matter thus unexpectedly. Was he prepared to behave with deliberate selfishness? Never yet had any conflict been manifested between his interests and Marian's; practically he was in the habit of counting upon her aid for an indefinite period.

If indeed he became editor of The Study, why, in that case her assistance would be less needful. And indeed it seemed probable that young Milvain had a future before him.

'But, in any case,' he said aloud, partly continuing his thoughts, partly replying to a look of disappointment on his wife's face, 'how do you know that he has any wish to come and see Marian?'

'I don't know anything about it, of course.'

'And you may have made a mistake about her. What made you think she—had him in mind?'

'Well, it was her way of speaking, you know. And then, she asked if you had got a dislike to him.'

'She did? H'm! Well, I don't think Milvain is any good to Marian. He's just the kind of man to make himself agreeable to a girl for the fun of the thing.'

Mrs Yule looked alarmed.

'Oh, if you really think that, don't let him come. I wouldn't for anything.'

'I don't say it for certain.' He took a sip of his coffee. 'I have had no opportunity of observing him with much attention. But he's not the kind of man I care for.'

'Then no doubt it's better as it is.'

'Yes. I don't see that anything could be done now. We shall see whether he gets on. I advise you not to mention him to her.'

'Oh no, I won't.'

She moved as if to go away, but her heart had been made uneasy by that short conversation which followed on Marian's reading the letter, and there were still things she wished to put into words.

'If those young ladies go on writing to her, I dare say they'll often speak about their brother.'

'Yes, it's rather unfortunate.'

'And you know, Alfred, he may have asked them to do it.'

'I suppose there's one subject on which all women can be subtle,' muttered Yule, smiling. The remark was not a kind one, but he did not make it worse by his tone.

The listener failed to understand him, and looked with her familiar expression of mental effort.

'We can't help that,' he added, with reference to her suggestion. 'If he has any serious thoughts, well, let him go on and wait for opportunities.'

'It's a great pity, isn't it, that she can't see more people—of the right kind?'

'No use talking about it. Things are as they are. I can't see that her life is unhappy.'

'It isn't very happy.'

'You think not?'

'I'm sure it isn't.'

'If I get The Study things may be different. Though—But it's no use talking about what can't be helped. Now don't you go encouraging her to think herself lonely, and so on. It's best for her to keep close to work, I'm sure of that.'

'Perhaps it is.'

'I'll think it over.'

Mrs Yule silently left the room, and went back to her sewing.

She had understood that 'Though—' and the 'what can't be helped.' Such allusions reminded her of a time unhappier than the present, when she had been wont to hear plainer language. She knew too well that, had she been a woman of education, her daughter would not now be suffering from loneliness.

It was her own choice that she did not go with her husband and Marian to John Yule's. She made an excuse that the house could not be left to one servant; but in any case she would have remained at home, for her presence must needs be an embarrassment both to father and daughter. Alfred was always ashamed of her before strangers; he could not conceal his feeling, either from her or from other people who had reason for observing him. Marian was not perhaps ashamed, but such companionship put restraint upon her freedom. And would it not always be the same? Supposing Mr Milvain were to come to this house, would it not repel him when he found what sort of person Marian's mother was?

She shed a few tears over her needlework.

At midnight the study door opened. Yule came to the dining-room to see that all was right, and it surprised him to find his wife still sitting there.

'Why are you so late?'

'I've forgot the time.'

'Forgotten, forgotten. Don't go back to that kind of language again. Come, put the light out.'

PART TWO

CHAPTER VIII. TO THE WINNING SIDE

Of the acquaintances Yule had retained from his earlier years several were in the well-defined category of men with unpresentable wives. There was Hinks, for instance, whom, though in anger he spoke of him as a bore, Alfred held in some genuine regard. Hinks made perhaps a hundred a year out of a kind of writing which only certain publishers can get rid of and of this income he spent about a third on books. His wife was the daughter of a laundress, in whose house he had lodged thirty years ago, when new to London but already long-acquainted with hunger; they lived in complete harmony, but Mrs Hinks, who was four years the elder, still spoke the laundress tongue, unmitigated and immitigable. Another pair were Mr and Mrs Gorbutt. In this case there were no narrow circumstances to contend with, for the wife, originally a nursemaid, not long after her marriage inherited house property from a relative. Mr Gorbutt deemed himself a poet; since his accession to an income he had published, at his own expense, a yearly volume of verses; the only result being to keep alive rancour in his wife,

who was both parsimonious and vain. Making no secret of it, Mrs Gorbutt rued the day on which she had wedded a man of letters, when by waiting so short a time she would have been enabled to aim at a prosperous tradesman, who kept his gig and had everything handsome about him. Mrs Yule suspected, not without reason, that this lady had an inclination to strong liquors. Thirdly came Mr and Mrs Christopherson, who were poor as church mice. Even in a friend's house they wrangled incessantly, and made tragi-comical revelations of their home life. The husband worked casually at irresponsible journalism, but his chosen study was metaphysics; for many years he had had a huge and profound book on hand, which he believed would bring him fame, though he was not so unsettled in mind as to hope for anything else. When an article or two had earned enough money for immediate necessities he went off to the British Museum, and then the difficulty was to recall him to profitable exertions. Yet husband and wife had an affection for each other. Mrs Christopherson came from Camberwell, where her father, once upon a time, was the smallest of small butchers. Disagreeable stories were whispered concerning her earlier life, and probably the metaphysician did not care to look back in that direction. They had had three children; all were happily buried.

These men were capable of better things than they had done or would ever do; in each case their failure to fulfil youthful promise was largely explained by the unpresentable wife. They should have waited; they might have married a social equal at something

between fifty and sixty.

Another old friend was Mr Quarmby. Unwedded he, and perpetually exultant over men who, as he phrased it, had noosed themselves. He made a fair living, but, like Dr Johnson, had no passion for clean linen.

Yule was not disdainful of these old companions, and the fact that all had a habit of looking up to him increased his pleasure in their occasional society. If, as happened once or twice in half a year, several of them were gathered together at his house, he tasted a sham kind of social and intellectual authority which he could not help relishing. On such occasions he threw off his habitual gloom and talked vigorously, making natural display of his learning and critical ability. The topic, sooner or later, was that which is inevitable in such a circle—the demerits, the pretentiousness, the personal weaknesses of prominent contemporaries in the world of letters. Then did the room ring with scornful laughter, with boisterous satire, with shouted irony, with fierce invective. After an evening of that kind Yule was unwell and miserable for several days.

It was not to be expected that Mr Quarmby, inveterate chatterbox of the Reading-room and other resorts, should keep silence concerning what he had heard of Mr Rackett's intentions. The rumour soon spread that Alfred Yule was to succeed Fadge in the direction of The Study, with the necessary consequence that Yule found himself an object of affectionate interest to a great many people of whom he knew little or nothing. At the

same time the genuine old friends pressed warmly about him, with congratulations, with hints of their sincere readiness to assist in filling the columns of the paper. All this was not disagreeable, but in the meantime Yule had heard nothing whatever from Mr Rackett himself and his doubts did not diminish as week after week went by.

The event justified him. At the end of October appeared an authoritative announcement that Fadge's successor would be—not Alfred Yule, but a gentleman who till of late had been quietly working as a sub-editor in the provinces, and who had neither friendships nor enmities among the people of the London literary press. A young man, comparatively fresh from the university, and said to be strong in pure scholarship. The choice, as you are aware, proved a good one, and The Study became an organ of more repute than ever.

Yule had been secretly conscious that it was not to men such as he that positions of this kind are nowadays entrusted. He tried to persuade himself that he was not disappointed. But when Mr Quarmby approached him with blank face, he spoke certain wrathful words which long rankled in that worthy's mind. At home he kept sullen silence.

No, not to such men as he—poor, and without social recommendations. Besides, he was growing too old. In literature, as in most other pursuits, the press of energetic young men was making it very hard for a veteran even to hold the little grazing-plot he had won by hard fighting. Still, Quarmby's story had not

been without foundation; it was true that the proprietor of The Study had for a moment thought of Alfred Yule, doubtless as the natural contrast to Clement Fadge, whom he would have liked to mortify if the thing were possible. But counsellors had proved to Mr Rackett the disadvantages of such a choice.

Mrs Yule and her daughter foresaw but too well the results of this disappointment, notwithstanding that Alfred announced it to them with dry indifference. The month that followed was a time of misery for all in the house. Day after day Yule sat at his meals in sullen muteness; to his wife he scarcely spoke at all, and his conversation with Marian did not go beyond necessary questions and remarks on topics of business. His face became so strange a colour that one would have thought him suffering from an attack of jaundice; bilious headaches exasperated his savage mood. Mrs Yule knew from long experience how worse than useless it was for her to attempt consolation; in silence was her only safety. Nor did Marian venture to speak directly of what had happened. But one evening, when she had been engaged in the study and was now saying 'Good-night,' she laid her cheek against her father's, an unwonted caress which had a strange effect upon him. The expression of sympathy caused his thoughts to reveal themselves as they never yet had done before his daughter.

'It might have been very different with me,' he exclaimed abruptly, as if they had already been conversing on the subject. 'When you think of my failures—and you must often do so now you are grown up and understand things—don't forget the

obstacles that have been in my way. I don't like you to look upon your father as a thickhead who couldn't be expected to succeed. Look at Fadge. He married a woman of good social position; she brought him friends and influence. But for that he would never have been editor of The Study, a place for which he wasn't in the least fit. But he was able to give dinners; he and his wife went into society; everybody knew him and talked of him. How has it been with me? I live here like an animal in its hole, and go blinking about if by chance I find myself among the people with whom I ought naturally to associate. If I had been able to come in direct contact with Rackett and other men of that kind, to dine with them, and have them to dine with me, to belong to a club, and so on, I shouldn't be what I am at my age. My one opportunity —when I edited The Balance—wasn't worth much; there was no money behind the paper; we couldn't hold out long enough. But even then, if I could have assumed my proper social standing, if I could have opened my house freely to the right kind of people —How was it possible?'

Marian could not raise her head. She recognised the portion of truth in what he said, but it shocked her that he should allow himself to speak thus. Her silence seemed to remind him how painful it must be to her to hear these accusations of her mother, and with a sudden 'Good-night' he dismissed her.

She went up to her room, and wept over the wretchedness of all their lives. Her loneliness had seemed harder to bear than ever since that last holiday. For a moment, in the lanes about

Finden, there had come to her a vision of joy such as fate owed her youth; but it had faded, and she could no longer hope for its return. She was not a woman, but a mere machine for reading and writing. Did her father never think of this? He was not the only one to suffer from the circumstances in which poverty had involved him.

She had no friends to whom she could utter her thoughts. Dora Milvain had written a second time, and more recently had come a letter from Maud; but in replying to them she could not give a true account of herself. Impossible, to them. From what she wrote they would imagine her contentedly busy, absorbed in the affairs of literature. To no one could she make known the aching sadness of her heart, the dreariness of life as it lay before her.

That beginning of half-confidence between her and her mother had led to nothing. Mrs Yule found no second opportunity of speaking to her husband about Jasper Milvain, and purposely she refrained from any further hint or question to Marian. Everything must go on as hitherto.

The days darkened. Through November rains and fogs Marian went her usual way to the Museum, and toiled there among the other toilers. Perhaps once a week she allowed herself to stray about the alleys of the Reading-room, scanning furtively those who sat at the desks, but the face she might perchance have discovered was not there.

One day at the end of the month she sat with books open before her, but by no effort could fix her attention upon them.

It was gloomy, and one could scarcely see to read; a taste of fog grew perceptible in the warm, headachy air. Such profound discouragement possessed her that she could not even maintain the pretence of study; heedless whether anyone observed her, she let her hands fall and her head droop. She kept asking herself what was the use and purpose of such a life as she was condemned to lead. When already there was more good literature in the world than any mortal could cope with in his lifetime, here was she exhausting herself in the manufacture of printed stuff which no one even pretended to be more than a commodity for the day's market. What unspeakable folly! To write—was not that the joy and the privilege of one who had an urgent message for the world?

Her father, she knew well, had no such message; he had abandoned all thought of original production, and only wrote about writing.

She herself would throw away her pen with joy but for the need of earning money. And all these people about her, what aim had they save to make new books out of those already existing, that yet newer books might in turn be made out of theirs? This huge library, growing into unwieldiness, threatening to become a trackless desert of print—how intolerably it weighed upon the spirit!

Oh, to go forth and labour with one's hands, to do any poorest, commonest work of which the world had truly need! It was ignoble to sit here and support the paltry pretence of

intellectual dignity. A few days ago her startled eye had caught an advertisement in the newspaper, headed 'Literary Machine'; had it then been invented at last, some automaton to supply the place of such poor creatures as herself to turn out books and articles? Alas! the machine was only one for holding volumes conveniently, that the work of literary manufacture might be physically lightened. But surely before long some Edison would make the true automaton; the problem must be comparatively such a simple one. Only to throw in a given number of old books, and have them reduced, blended, modernised into a single one for to-day's consumption.

The fog grew thicker; she looked up at the windows beneath the dome and saw that they were a dusky yellow. Then her eye discerned an official walking along the upper gallery, and in pursuance of her grotesque humour, her mocking misery, she likened him to a black, lost soul, doomed to wander in an eternity of vain research along endless shelves. Or again, the readers who sat here at these radiating lines of desks, what were they but hapless flies caught in a huge web, its nucleus the great circle of the Catalogue? Darker, darker. From the towering wall of volumes seemed to emanate visible motes, intensifying the obscurity; in a moment the book-lined circumference of the room would be but a featureless prison-limit.

But then flashed forth the sputtering whiteness of the electric light, and its ceaseless hum was henceforth a new source of headache. It reminded her how little work she had done to-day;

she must, she must force herself to think of the task in hand. A machine has no business to refuse its duty. But the pages were blue and green and yellow before her eyes; the uncertainty of the light was intolerable. Right or wrong she would go home, and hide herself, and let her heart unburden itself of tears.

On her way to return books she encountered Jasper Milvain. Face to face; no possibility of his avoiding her.

And indeed he seemed to have no such wish. His countenance lighted up with unmistakable pleasure.

'At last we meet, as they say in the melodramas. Oh, do let me help you with those volumes, which won't even let you shake hands. How do you do? How do you like this weather? And how do you like this light?'

'It's very bad.'

'That'll do both for weather and light, but not for yourself. How glad I am to see you! Are you just going?'

'Yes.'

'I have scarcely been here half-a-dozen times since I came back to London.'

'But you are writing still?'

'Oh yes! But I draw upon my genius, and my stores of observation, and the living world.'

Marian received her vouchers for the volumes, and turned to face Jasper again. There was a smile on her lips.

'The fog is terrible,' Milvain went on. 'How do you get home?'

'By omnibus from Tottenham Court Road.'

'Then do let me go a part of the way with you. I live in Mornington Road—up yonder, you know. I have only just come in to waste half an hour, and after all I think I should be better at home. Your father is all right, I hope?'

'He is not quite well.'

'I'm sorry to hear that. You are not exactly up to the mark, either. What weather! What a place to live in, this London, in winter! It would be a little better down at Finden.'

'A good deal better, I should think. If the weather were bad, it would be bad in a natural way; but this is artificial misery.'

'I don't let it affect me much,' said Milvain. 'Just of late I have been in remarkably good spirits. I'm doing a lot of work. No end of work—more than I've ever done.'

'I am very glad.'

'Where are your out-of-door things? I think there's a ladies' vestry somewhere, isn't there?'

'Oh yes.'

'Then will you go and get ready? I'll wait for you in the hall. But, by-the-bye, I am taking it for granted that you were going alone.'

'I was, quite alone.'

The 'quite' seemed excessive; it made Jasper smile.

'And also,' he added, 'that I shall not annoy you by offering my company?'

'Why should it annoy me?'

'Good!'

Milvain had only to wait a minute or two. He surveyed Marian from head to foot when she appeared—an impertinence as unintentional as that occasionally noticeable in his speech—and smiled approval. They went out into the fog, which was not one of London's densest, but made walking disagreeable enough.

'You have heard from the girls, I think?' Jasper resumed.

'Your sisters? Yes; they have been so kind as to write to me.'

'Told you all about their great work? I hope it'll be finished by the end of the year. The bits they have sent me will do very well indeed. I knew they had it in them to put sentences together. Now I want them to think of patching up something or other for The English Girl; you know the paper?'

'I have heard of it.'

'I happen to know Mrs Boston Wright, who edits it. Met her at a house the other day, and told her frankly that she would have to give my sisters something to do. It's the only way to get on; one has to take it for granted that people are willing to help you. I have made a host of new acquaintances just lately.'

'I'm glad to hear it,' said Marian.

'Do you know—but how should you? I am going to write for the new magazine, The Current.'

'Indeed!'

'Edited by that man Fadge.'

'Yes.'

'Your father has no affection for him, I know.'

'He has no reason to have, Mr Milvain.'

'No, no. Fadge is an offensive fellow, when he likes; and I fancy he very often does like. Well, I must make what use of him I can.

You won't think worse of me because I write for him?'

'I know that one can't exercise choice in such things.'

'True. I shouldn't like to think that you regard me as a Fadge-like individual, a natural Fadgeite.'

Marian laughed.

'There's no danger of my thinking that.'

But the fog was making their eyes water and getting into their throats. By when they reached Tottenham Court Road they were both thoroughly uncomfortable. The 'bus had to be waited for, and in the meantime they talked scrappily, coughily. In the vehicle things were a little better, but here one could not converse with freedom.

'What pestilent conditions of life!' exclaimed Jasper, putting his face rather near to Marian's. 'I wish to goodness we were back in those quiet fields—you remember?—with the September sun warm about us. Shall you go to Finden again before long?'

'I really don't know.'

'I'm sorry to say my mother is far from well. In any case I must go at Christmas, but I'm afraid it won't be a cheerful visit.'

Arrived in Hampstead Road he offered his hand for good-bye.

'I wanted to talk about all sorts of things. But perhaps I shall find you again some day.'

He jumped out, and waved his hat in the lurid fog.

Shortly before the end of December appeared the first number of The Current. Yule had once or twice referred to the forthcoming magazine with acrid contempt, and of course he did not purchase a copy.

'So young Milvain has joined Fadge's hopeful standard,' he remarked, a day or two later, at breakfast. 'They say his paper is remarkably clever; I could wish it had appeared anywhere else.

Evil communications, &c.'

'But I shouldn't think there's any personal connection,' said Marian.

'Very likely not. But Milvain has been invited to contribute, you see.

'Do you think he ought to have refused?'

'Oh no. It's nothing to me; nothing whatever.'

Mrs Yule glanced at her daughter, but Marian seemed unconcerned. The subject was dismissed. In introducing it Yule had had his purpose; there had always been an unnatural avoidance of Milvain's name in conversation, and he wished to have an end of this. Hitherto he had felt a troublesome uncertainty regarding his position in the matter. From what his wife had told him it seemed pretty certain that Marian was disappointed by the abrupt closing of her brief acquaintance with the young man, and Yule's affection for his daughter caused him to feel uneasy in the thought that perhaps he had deprived her of a chance of happiness. His conscience readily took hold of an excuse for justifying the course he had followed.

Milvain had gone over to the enemy. Whether or not the young man understood how relentless the hostility was between Yule and Fadge mattered little; the probability was that he knew all about it. In any case intimate relations with him could not have survived this alliance with Fadge, so that, after all, there had been wisdom in letting the acquaintance lapse. To be sure, nothing could have come of it. Milvain was the kind of man who weighed opportunities; every step he took would be regulated by considerations of advantage; at all events that was the impression his character had made upon Yule. Any hopes that Marian might have been induced to form would assuredly have ended in disappointment. It was kindness to interpose before things had gone so far.

Henceforth, if Milvain's name was unavoidable, it should be mentioned just like that of any other literary man. It seemed very unlikely indeed that Marian would continue to think of him with any special and personal interest. The fact of her having got into correspondence with his sisters was unfortunate, but this kind of thing rarely went on for very long.

Yule spoke of the matter with his wife that evening.

'By-the-bye, has Marian heard from those girls at Finden lately?'

'She had a letter one afternoon last week.'

'Do you see these letters?'

'No; she told me what was in them at first, but now she doesn't.'

'She hasn't spoken to you again of Milvain?'

'Not a word.'

'Well, I understood what I was about,' Yule remarked, with the confident air of one who doesn't wish to remember that he had ever felt doubtful. 'There was no good in having the fellow here. He has got in with a set that I don't at all care for. If she ever says anything—you understand—you can just let me know.'

Marian had already procured a copy of The Current, and read it privately. Of the cleverness of Milvain's contribution there could be no two opinions; it drew the attention of the public, and all notices of the new magazine made special reference to this article. With keen interest Marian sought after comments of the press; when it was possible she cut them out and put them carefully away.

January passed, and February. She saw nothing of Jasper. A letter from Dora in the first week of March made announcement that the 'Child's History of the English Parliament' would be published very shortly; it told her, too, that Mrs Milvain had been very ill indeed, but that she seemed to recover a little strength as the weather improved. Of Jasper there was no mention.

A week later came the news that Mrs Milvain had suddenly died.

This letter was received at breakfast-time. The envelope was an ordinary one, and so little did Marian anticipate the nature of its contents that at the first sight of the words she uttered an exclamation of pain. Her father, who had turned from the table

to the fireside with his newspaper, looked round and asked what was the matter.

'Mrs Milvain died the day before yesterday.'

'Indeed!'

He averted his face again and seemed disposed to say no more. But in a few moments he inquired:

'What are her daughters likely to do?'

'I have no idea.'

'Do you know anything of their circumstances?'

'I believe they will have to depend upon themselves.'

Nothing more was said. Afterwards Mrs Yule made a few sympathetic inquiries, but Marian was very brief in her replies.

Ten days after that, on a Sunday afternoon when Marian and her mother were alone in the sitting-room, they heard the knock of a visitor at the front door. Yule was out, and there was no likelihood of the visitor's wishing to see anyone but him. They listened; the servant went to the door, and, after a murmur of voices, came to speak to her mistress.

'It's a gentleman called Mr Milvain,' the girl reported, in a way that proved how seldom callers presented themselves. 'He asked for Mr Yule, and when I said he was out, then he asked for Miss Yule.' Mother and daughter looked anxiously at each other. Mrs Yule was nervous and helpless.

'Show Mr Milvain into the study,' said Marian, with sudden decision.

'Are you going to see him there?' asked her mother in a

hurried whisper.

'I thought you would prefer that to his coming in here.'

'Yes—yes. But suppose father comes back before he's gone?'

'What will it matter? You forget that he asked for father first.'

'Oh yes! Then don't wait.'

Marian, scarcely less agitated than her mother, was just leaving the room, when she turned back again.

'If father comes in, you will tell him before he goes into the study?'

'Yes, I will.'

The fire in the study was on the point of extinction; this was the first thing Marian's eye perceived on entering, and it gave her assurance that her father would not be back for some hours. Evidently he had intended it to go out; small economies of this kind, unintelligible to people who have always lived at ease, had been the life-long rule with him. With a sensation of gladness at having free time before her, Marian turned to where Milvain was standing, in front of one of the bookcases. He wore no symbol of mourning, but his countenance was far graver than usual, and rather paler. They shook hands in silence.

'I am so grieved—' Marian began with broken voice.

'Thank you. I know the girls have told you all about it. We knew for the last month that it must come before long, though there was a deceptive improvement just before the end.'

'Please to sit down, Mr Milvain. Father went out not long ago, and I don't think he will be back very soon.'

'It was not really Mr Yule I wished to see,' said Jasper, frankly. 'If he had been at home I should have spoken with him about what I have in mind, but if you will kindly give me a few minutes it will be much better.'

Marian glanced at the expiring fire. Her curiosity as to what Milvain had to say was mingled with an anxious doubt whether it was not too late to put on fresh coals; already the room was growing very chill, and this appearance of inhospitality troubled her.

'Do you wish to save it?' Jasper asked, understanding her look and movement.

'I'm afraid it has got too low.'

'I think not. Life in lodgings has made me skilful at this kind of thing; let me try my hand.'

He took the tongs and carefully disposed small pieces of coal upon the glow that remained. Marian stood apart with a feeling of shame and annoyance. But it is so seldom that situations in life arrange themselves with dramatic propriety; and, after all, this vulgar necessity made the beginning of the conversation easier.

'That will be all right now,' said Jasper at length, as little tongues of flame began to shoot here and there.

Marian said nothing, but seated herself and waited.

'I came up to town yesterday,' Jasper began. 'Of course we have had a great deal to do and think about. Miss Harrow has been very kind indeed to the girls; so have several of our old friends in Wattleborough. It was necessary to decide at once what

Maud and Dora are going to do, and it is on their account that I have come to see you.

The listener kept silence, with a face of sympathetic attention.

'We have made up our minds that they may as well come to London. It's a bold step; I'm by no means sure that the result will justify it. But I think they are perhaps right in wishing to try it.'

'They will go on with literary work?'

'Well, it's our hope that they may be able to. Of course there's no chance of their earning enough to live upon for some time. But the matter stands like this. They have a trifling sum of money, on which, at a pinch, they could live in London for perhaps a year and a half. In that time they may find their way to a sort of income; at all events, the chances are that a year and a half hence I shall be able to help them to keep body and soul together.'

The money of which he spoke was the debt owed to their father by William Milvain. In consequence of Mrs Milvain's pressing application, half of this sum had at length been paid and the remainder was promised in a year's time, greatly to Jasper's astonishment. In addition, there would be the trifle realised by the sale of furniture, though most of this might have to go in payment of rent unless the house could be relet immediately.

'They have made a good beginning,' said Marian.

She spoke mechanically, for it was impossible to keep her thoughts under control. If Maud and Dora came to live in London it might bring about a most important change in her life; she could scarcely imagine the happiness of having two such friends

always near. On the other hand, how would it be regarded by her father? She was at a loss amid conflicting emotions.

'It's better than if they had done nothing at all,' Jasper replied to her remark. 'And the way they knocked that trifle together promises well. They did it very quickly, and in a far more workmanlike way than I should have thought possible.'

'No doubt they share your own talent.'

'Perhaps so. Of course I know that I have talent of a kind, though I don't rate it very high. We shall have to see whether they can do anything more than mere booksellers' work; they are both very young, you know. I think they may be able to write something that'll do for The English Girl, and no doubt I can hit upon a second idea that will appeal to Jolly and Monk. At all events, they'll have books within reach, and better opportunities every way than at Finden.'

'How do their friends in the country think of it?'

'Very dubiously; but then what else was to be expected? Of course, the respectable and intelligible path marked out for both of them points to a lifetime of governessing. But the girls have no relish for that; they'd rather do almost anything. We talked over all the aspects of the situation seriously enough—it is desperately serious, no doubt of that. I told them fairly all the hardships they would have to face—described the typical London lodgings, and so on. Still, there's an adventurous vein in them, and they decided for the risk. If it came to the worst I suppose they could still find governess work.'

'Let us hope better things.'

'Yes. But now, I should have felt far more reluctant to let them come here in this way hadn't it been that they regard you as a friend. To-morrow morning you will probably hear from one or both of them. Perhaps it would have been better if I had left them to tell you all this, but I felt I should like to see you and—put it in my own way. I think you'll understand this feeling, Miss Yule. I wanted, in fact, to hear from yourself that you would be a friend to the poor girls.'

'Oh, you already know that! I shall be so very glad to see them often.'

Marian's voice lent itself very naturally and sweetly to the expression of warm feeling. Emphasis was not her habit; it only needed that she should put off her ordinary reserve, utter quietly the emotional thought which so seldom might declare itself, and her tones had an exquisite womanliness.

Jasper looked full into her face.

'In that case they won't miss the comfort of home so much. Of course they will have to go into very modest lodgings indeed. I have already been looking about. I should like to find rooms for them somewhere near my own place; it's a decent neighbourhood, and the park is at hand, and then they wouldn't be very far from you. They thought it might be possible to make a joint establishment with me, but I'm afraid that's out of the question.

The lodgings we should want in that case, everything

considered, would cost more than the sum of our expenses if we live apart. Besides, there's no harm in saying that I don't think we should get along very well together. We're all of us rather quarrelsome, to tell the truth, and we try each other's tempers.'

Marian smiled and looked puzzled.

'Shouldn't you have thought that?'

'I have seen no signs of quarrelsomeness.'

'I'm not sure that the worst fault is on my side. Why should one condemn oneself against conscience? Maud is perhaps the hardest to get along with. She has a sort of arrogance, an exaggeration of something I am quite aware of in myself. You have noticed that trait in me?'

'Arrogance—I think not. You have self-confidence.'

'Which goes into extremes now and then. But, putting myself aside, I feel pretty sure that the girls won't seem quarrelsome to you; they would have to be very fractious indeed before that were possible.'

'We shall continue to be friends, I am sure.'

Jasper let his eyes wander about the room.

'This is your father's study?'

'Yes.'

'Perhaps it would have seemed odd to Mr Yule if I had come in and begun to talk to him about these purely private affairs. He knows me so very slightly. But, in calling here for the first time—'

An unusual embarrassment checked him.

'I will explain to father your very natural wish to speak of these things,' said Marian, with tact.

She thought uneasily of her mother in the next room. To her there appeared no reason whatever why Jasper should not be introduced to Mrs Yule, yet she could not venture to propose it. Remembering her father's last remarks about Milvain in connection with Fadge's magazine, she must wait for distinct permission before offering the young man encouragement to repeat his visit. Perhaps there was complicated trouble in store for her; impossible to say how her father's deep-rooted and rankling antipathies might affect her intercourse even with the two girls. But she was of independent years; she must be allowed the choice of her own friends. The pleasure she had in seeing Jasper under this roof, in hearing him talk with such intimate friendliness, strengthened her to resist timid thoughts.

'When will your sisters arrive?' she asked.

'I think in a very few days. When I have fixed upon lodgings for them I must go back to Finden; then they will return with me as soon as we can get the house emptied. It's rather miserable selling things one has lived among from childhood. A friend in Wattleborough will house for us what we really can't bear to part with.'

'It must be very sad,' Marian murmured.

'You know,' said the other suddenly, 'that it's my fault the girls are left in such a hard position?'

Marian looked at him with startled eyes. His tone was quite

unfamiliar to her.

'Mother had an annuity,' he continued. 'It ended with her life, but if it hadn't been for me she could have saved a good deal out of it. Until the last year or two I have earned nothing, and I have spent more than was strictly necessary. Well, I didn't live like that in mere recklessness; I knew I was preparing myself for remunerative work. But it seems too bad now. I'm sorry for it. I wish I had found some way of supporting myself. The end of mother's life was made far more unhappy than it need have been. I should like you to understand all this.'

The listener kept her eyes on the ground.

'Perhaps the girls have hinted it to you?' Jasper added.

'No.'

'Selfishness—that's one of my faults. It isn't a brutal kind of selfishness; the thought of it often enough troubles me. If I were rich, I should be a generous and good man; I know I should. So would many another poor fellow whose worst features come out under hardship. This isn't a heroic type; of course not. I am a civilised man, that's all.'

Marian could say nothing.

'You wonder why I am so impertinent as to talk about myself like this. I have gone through a good deal of mental pain these last few weeks, and somehow I can't help showing you something of my real thoughts. Just because you are one of the few people I regard with sincere respect. I don't know you very well, but quite well enough to respect you. My sisters think of you in the same

way. I shall do many a base thing in life, just to get money and reputation; I tell you this that you mayn't be surprised if anything of that kind comes to your ears. I can't afford to live as I should like to.'

She looked up at him with a smile.

'People who are going to live unworthily don't declare it in this way.'

'I oughtn't to; a few minutes ago I had no intention of saying such things. It means I am rather overstrung, I suppose; but it's all true, unfortunately.'

He rose, and began to run his eye along the shelves nearest to him.

'Well, now I will go, Miss Yule.'

Marian stood up as he approached.

'It's all very well,' he said, smiling, 'for me to encourage my sisters in the hope that they may earn a living; but suppose I can't even do it myself? It's by no means certain that I shall make ends meet this year.'

'You have every reason to hope, I think.'

'I like to hear people say that, but it'll mean savage work. When we were all at Finden last year, I told the girls that it would be another twelve months before I could support myself. Now I am forced to do it. And I don't like work; my nature is lazy. I shall never write for writing's sake, only to make money. All my plans and efforts will have money in view—all. I shan't allow anything to come in the way of my material advancement.'

'I wish you every success,' said Marian, without looking at him, and without a smile.

'Thank you. But that sounds too much like good-bye. I trust we are to be friends, for all that?'

'Indeed, I hope we may be.'

They shook hands, and he went towards the door. But before opening it, he asked:

'Did you read that thing of mine in The Current?'

'Yes, I did.'

'It wasn't bad, I think?'

'It seemed to me very clever.'

'Clever—yes, that's the word. It had a success, too. I have as good a thing half done for the April number, but I've felt too heavy-hearted to go on with it. The girls shall let you know when they are in town.'

Marian followed him into the passage, and watched him as he opened the front door. When it had closed, she went back into the study for a few minutes before rejoining her mother.

CHAPTER IX. INVITA MINERVA

After all, there came a day when Edwin Reardon found himself regularly at work once more, ticking off his stipulated quantum of manuscript each four-and-twenty hours. He wrote a very small hand; sixty written slips of the kind of paper he habitually used would represent—thanks to the astonishing system which prevails in such matters: large type, wide spacing, frequency of blank pages—a passable three-hundred-page volume. On an average he could write four such slips a day; so here we have fifteen days for the volume, and forty-five for the completed book.

Forty-five days; an eternity in the looking forward. Yet the calculation gave him a faint-hearted encouragement. At that rate he might have his book sold by Christmas. It would certainly not bring him a hundred pounds; seventy-five perhaps. But even that small sum would enable him to pay the quarter's rent, and then give him a short time, if only two or three weeks, of mental rest. If such rest could not be obtained all was at an end with him. He must either find some new means of supporting himself and his family, or—have done with life and its responsibilities altogether.

The latter alternative was often enough before him. He seldom slept for more than two or three consecutive hours in the night, and the time of wakefulness was often terrible. The various sounds which marked the stages from midnight to dawn had

grown miserably familiar to him; worst torture to his mind was the chiming and striking of clocks. Two of these were in general audible, that of Marylebone parish church, and that of the adjoining workhouse; the latter always sounded several minutes after its ecclesiastical neighbour, and with a difference of note which seemed to Reardon very appropriate—a thin, querulous voice, reminding one of the community it represented. After lying awake for awhile he would hear quarters sounding; if they ceased before the fourth he was glad, for he feared to know what time it was. If the hour was complete, he waited anxiously for its number. Two, three, even four, were grateful; there was still a long time before he need rise and face the dreaded task, the horrible four blank slips of paper that had to be filled ere he might sleep again. But such restfulness was only for a moment; no sooner had the workhouse bell become silent than he began to toil in his weary imagination, or else, incapable of that, to vision fearful hazards of the future. The soft breathing of Amy at his side, the contact of her warm limbs, often filled him with intolerable dread. Even now he did not believe that Amy loved him with the old love, and the suspicion was like a cold weight at his heart that to retain even her wifely sympathy, her wedded tenderness, he must achieve the impossible.

The impossible; for he could no longer deceive himself with a hope of genuine success. If he earned a bare living, that would be the utmost. And with bare livelihood Amy would not, could not, be content.

If he were to die a natural death it would be well for all. His wife and the child would be looked after; they could live with Mrs Edmund Yule, and certainly it would not be long before Amy married again, this time a man of whose competency to maintain her there would be no doubt. His own behaviour had been cowardly selfishness. Oh yes, she had loved him, had been eager to believe in him. But there was always that voice of warning in his mind; he foresaw—he knew—

And if he killed himself? Not here; no lurid horrors for that poor girl and her relatives; but somewhere at a distance, under circumstances which would render the recovery of his body difficult, yet would leave no doubt of his death. Would that, again, be cowardly? The opposite, when once it was certain that to live meant poverty and wretchedness. Amy's grief, however sincere, would be but a short trial compared with what else might lie before her. The burden of supporting her and Willie would be a very slight one if she went to live in her mother's house. He considered the whole matter night after night, until perchance it happened that sleep had pity upon him for an hour before the time of rising.

Autumn was passing into winter. Dark days, which were always an oppression to his mind, began to be frequent, and would soon succeed each other remorselessly. Well, if only each of them represented four written slips.

Milvain's advice to him had of course proved useless. The sensational title suggested nothing, or only ragged shapes of

incomplete humanity that fluttered mockingly when he strove to fix them. But he had decided upon a story of the kind natural to him; a 'thin' story, and one which it would be difficult to spin into three volumes. His own, at all events. The title was always a matter for head-racking when the book was finished; he had never yet chosen it before beginning.

For a week he got on at the desired rate; then came once more the crisis he had anticipated.

A familiar symptom of the malady which falls upon outwearied imagination. There were floating in his mind five or six possible subjects for a book, all dating back to the time when he first began novel-writing, when ideas came freshly to him. If he grasped desperately at one of these, and did his best to develop it, for a day or two he could almost content himself; characters, situations, lines of motive, were laboriously schemed, and he felt ready to begin writing. But scarcely had he done a chapter or two when all the structure fell into flatness. He had made a mistake. Not this story, but that other one, was what he should have taken. The other one in question, left out of mind for a time, had come back with a face of new possibility; it invited him, tempted him to throw aside what he had already written. Good; now he was in more hopeful train. But a few days, and the experience repeated itself. No, not this story, but that third one, of which he had not thought for a long time. How could he have rejected so hopeful a subject?

For months he had been living in this way; endless

circling, perpetual beginning, followed by frustration. A sign of exhaustion, it of course made exhaustion more complete. At times he was on the border-land of imbecility; his mind looked into a cloudy chaos, a shapeless whirl of nothings. He talked aloud to himself, not knowing that he did so. Little phrases which indicated dolorously the subject of his preoccupation often escaped him in the street: 'What could I make of that, now?' 'Well, suppose I made him—?' 'But no, that wouldn't do,' and so on. It had happened that he caught the eye of some one passing fixed in surprise upon him; so young a man to be talking to himself in evident distress!

The expected crisis came, even now that he was savagely determined to go on at any cost, to write, let the result be what it would. His will prevailed. A day or two of anguish such as there is no describing to the inexperienced, and again he was dismissing slip after slip, a sigh of thankfulness at the completion of each one. It was a fraction of the whole, a fraction, a fraction.

The ordering of his day was thus. At nine, after breakfast, he sat down to his desk, and worked till one. Then came dinner, followed by a walk. As a rule he could not allow Amy to walk with him, for he had to think over the remainder of the day's toil, and companionship would have been fatal. At about half-past three he again seated himself; and wrote until half-past six, when he had a meal. Then once more to work from half-past seven to ten. Numberless were the experiments he had tried for the day's division. The slightest interruption of the order for the

time being put him out of gear; Amy durst not open his door to ask however necessary a question.

Sometimes the three hours' labour of a morning resulted in half-a-dozen lines, corrected into illegibility. His brain would not work; he could not recall the simplest synonyms; intolerable faults of composition drove him mad. He would write a sentence beginning thus: 'She took a book with a look of—;' or thus: 'A revision of this decision would have made him an object of derision.' Or, if the period were otherwise inoffensive, it ran in a rhythmic gallop which was torment to the ear. All this, in spite of the fact that his former books had been noticeably good in style. He had an appreciation of shapely prose which made him scorn himself for the kind of stuff he was now turning out. 'I can't help it; it must go; the time is passing.'

Things were better, as a rule, in the evening. Occasionally he wrote a page with fluency which recalled his fortunate years; and then his heart gladdened, his hand trembled with joy.

Description of locality, deliberate analysis of character or motive, demanded far too great an effort for his present condition. He kept as much as possible to dialogue; the space is filled so much more quickly, and at a pinch one can make people talk about the paltriest incidents of life.

There came an evening when he opened the door and called to Amy.

'What is it?' she answered from the bedroom. 'I'm busy with Willie.'

'Come as soon as you are free.'

In ten minutes she appeared. There was apprehension on her face; she feared he was going to lament his inability to work. Instead of that, he told her joyfully that the first volume was finished.

'Thank goodness!' she exclaimed. 'Are you going to do any more to-night?'

'I think not—if you will come and sit with me.'

'Willie doesn't seem very well. He can't get to sleep.'

'You would like to stay with him?'

'A little while. I'll come presently.'

She closed the door. Reardon brought a high-backed chair to the fireside, and allowed himself to forget the two volumes that had still to be struggled through, in a grateful sense of the portion that was achieved. In a few minutes it occurred to him that it would be delightful to read a scrap of the 'Odyssey'; he went to the shelves on which were his classical books, took the desired volume, and opened it where Odysseus speaks to Nausicaa:

'For never yet did I behold one of mortals like to thee, neither man nor woman; I am awed as I look upon thee. In Delos once, hard by the altar of Apollo, I saw a young palm-tree shooting up with even such a grace.'

Yes, yes; THAT was not written at so many pages a day, with a workhouse clock clanging its admonition at the poet's ear. How it freshened the soul! How the eyes grew dim with a rare joy in the sounding of those nobly sweet hexameters!

Amy came into the room again.

'Listen,' said Reardon, looking up at her with a bright smile. 'Do you remember the first time that I read you this?'

And he turned the speech into free prose. Amy laughed.

'I remember it well enough. We were alone in the drawing-room; I had told the others that they must make shift with the dining-room for that evening. And you pulled the book out of your pocket unexpectedly. I laughed at your habit of always carrying little books about.'

The cheerful news had brightened her. If she had been summoned to hear lamentations her voice would not have rippled thus soothingly. Reardon thought of this, and it made him silent for a minute.

'The habit was ominous,' he said, looking at her with an uncertain smile. 'A practical literary man doesn't do such things.'

'Milvain, for instance. No.'

With curious frequency she mentioned the name of Milvain. Her unconsciousness in doing so prevented Reardon from thinking about the fact; still, he had noted it.

'Did you understand the phrase slightingly?' he asked.

'Slightingly? Yes, a little, of course. It always has that sense on your lips, I think.'

In the light of this answer he mused upon her readily-offered instance. True, he had occasionally spoken of Jasper with something less than respect, but Amy was not in the habit of doing so.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.