



# SIR GEORGE TRESSADY

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XV.

GEORGE went back to the House, and stayed for half an hour or so, listening to a fine speech from a member of a former Liberal cabinet. The speech was one more sign of the new cleavage of parties that was being everywhere brought about by the pressure of the new collectivism.

"We always knew," said the speaker, referring to a ministry in which he had served seven years before, "that we should be fighting socialism in good earnest before many years were over; and we knew, too, that we should be fighting it as put forward by a Conservative government. The hands are the hands of the English Tory, the voice is the voice of Karl Marx."

The Socialists sent forth mocking cheers, while the government benches sat silent. The rank and file of the Conservative party already hated the bill. The second reading must go through. But if only some rearrangement were possible without rushing the country into the arms of revolutionists, if it were only conceivable that Fontenoy, or even the old Liberal gang, should form a government and win the country, the committee stage would probably not trouble the House long.

Meanwhile, in the smoking-rooms and lobbies the uncertainties of the coming division kept up an endless hum of gossip and conjecture. Tressady wandered about it all like a ghost, indifferent and preoccupied, careful, above all, to avoid any more talk with Fontenoy. While he was in the House itself he stood at the door or sat in the cross benches, so as to keep a space between him and his leader.

A little before twelve he drove home, dressed hastily, and went off to a house in Berkeley Square, where he was to meet Letty. He found her waiting for him, a little inclined to be reproachful, and eager for her ball. As they drove toward Queen's Gate she chattered to him of her evening, and of the people and dresses she had seen.

"And, you foolish boy," she broke out, laughing, and tapping him on the hand with her fan, "you looked so glum this morning when I could n't go to see Lady Tressady; and—what do you think? Why, she has been at a party to-night—at a party, my dear!—and *dressed*! Mrs. Willy Smith told me she had seen her at the Webers'."

"I dare say," said George, rather shortly; "all the same, this morning she was very unwell."

Letty shrugged her shoulders, but she did not want to be disagreeable and argue the point. She was much pleased with her dress, —with the last glance of herself that she had caught in the cloak-room looking-glass before leaving Berkeley Square,—and, finally, with this well-set-up, well-dressed husband beside her. She glanced at him every now and then as she put on a fresh pair of gloves. He had been very much absorbed in this tiresome Parliament lately, and she thought herself a very good and forbearing wife not to make more fuss. Nor had she made any fuss about his going down to see Lady Maxwell at the East End. It did not seem to have made the smallest difference to his opinions.

The thought of Lady Maxwell brought a laugh to her lips.

"Oh, do you know, Harding was so amusing about the Maxwells to-day," she said,

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turning to Tressady in her most good-humored and confiding mood. "He says people are getting so tired of her,—of her meddling and her preaching, and all the rest of it,—and that everybody thinks him so absurd not to put a stop to it. And Harding says that it does n't succeed even—that Englishmen will never stand petticoat government. It's all very well—they have to stand it in some forms!"

Stretching her slim neck, she turned and gave her husband a tiny flying kiss on the cheek.

Mechanically grateful, George took her hand in his, but he did not make her the pretty speech she expected. Just before she spoke he was about to tell her of his evening—of the meeting, and of his drive home with Lady Maxwell. He had been far too proud hitherto, and far too confident in himself, to make any secret to Letty of what he did. And, luckily, she had raised no difficulties. In truth, she had been too well provided with amusements and flatteries of her own since their return from the country to leave her time or opportunities for jealousy. Perhaps, secretly, the young husband would have been more flattered if she had been more exacting.

But as she quoted Harding something stiffened in him. Later, after the ball, when they were alone, he would tell her—he would try to make her understand what sort of woman Marcella Maxwell was. In his trouble of mind a confused plan crossed his thoughts of trying to induce Lady Maxwell to make friends with Letty. But a touch of that charm, that poetry—he asked no more.

He glanced at his wife. She looked pretty and young as she sat beside him, lost in a pleasant pondering of social successes. But he wondered uncomfortably why she must use such a thickness of powder on her still unspoiled complexion, and her dress seemed to him fantastic, and not over-modest. He had begun to have the strangest feeling about their relation, as though he possessed a double personality, and were looking on at himself and her, wondering how it would end. It was characteristic, perhaps, of his half-developed moral life that his sense of ordinary husbandly responsibility toward her was not strong. He always thought of her as he thought of himself—as a perfectly free agent, dealing with him and their common life on equal terms.

The house to which they were going belonged to very wealthy people, and Letty was looking forward feverishly to the cotillion.

"They say, at the last dance they gave the cotillion gifts cost eight hundred pounds," she

said gleefully to George. "They always do things extraordinarily well."

No doubt it was the prospect of the cotillion that had brought such a throng together. The night was stifling; the stairs and the supper-room were filled with a struggling mob; and George spent an hour of purgatory wondering at the gaieties of his class.

He had barely more than two glimpses of Letty after they had fought their way into the room. On the first occasion, by stretching himself to his full height so as to look over the intervening crowd, he saw her seated in a chair of state, a mirror in one hand and a lace handkerchief in the other. Young men were being brought up behind her to look into the glass over her shoulder, and she was merrily brushing their images away. Presently a tall, dark fellow, with jet-black mustache and red cheeks, advanced. Letty kept her handkerchief suspended a moment over the reflection in the glass. George could see the corners of her lips twitching with amusement. Then she quietly handed the mirror to the leader of the cotillion, rose, gathered up her white skirt a little, the music struck up joyously, and she and Lord Cathedine spun round the room together, followed by the rest of the dancers.

George, meanwhile, found few people to talk to. He danced a few dances, mostly with young girls in the white frocks of their first season—a species of partner for which, as a rule, he had no affinity at all. But, on the whole, he passed the time leaning against the wall in a corner, lost in a reverie which was a vague compound of this and that, there and here: of the Manx Road school-room, its odors and heats, its pale, uncleanly crowd absorbed in the things of daily bread, with these gay, scented rooms, and this extravagance of decoration, that made even flowers a vulgarity, with these costly cotillion gifts—pins, bracelets, rings—that were being handed round and wondered over by people who had already more of such things than they could wear; of these rustling women, in their silks and diamonds, with that gaunt, stooping image of the loafer's wife, smiling her queer defiance at pain and fate, and letting meddling "ladies" know that without sixteen hours' "settin'" she could not keep her husband and children alive. Stale commonplace, that all the world knows by heart—the squalor of the *pauperum tabernæ* dimming the glory of the *regum turrets*. Yet there are only a few men and women in each generation who really pass into the eclipsing shadow of it. Others talk; *they* feel and struggle. There were many elements in Tres-

sady's nature that might seem destined to force him into their company. Yet hitherto he had resolutely escaped his destiny, and enjoyed his life.

About supper-time he found himself near Lady Cathedine, a thin-faced, silent creature, whose eyes suddenly attracted him. He took her down to supper, and spent an exceedingly dull time. She had the air of one pining to talk, to confide herself; yet in practice it was apparently impossible for her to do it. She fell back into monosyllables or gentle banalities, and George noticed that she was always restlessly aware of the movements in the room,—who came in, who went out,—and throwing little frightened glances toward the door.

He was glad, indeed, when his task was over. On their way to the drawing-rooms they passed a broad landing which on one side led out to a balcony, and had been made into a decorated bower for sitting out. At the farther end he saw Letty sitting beside Harding Watton. Letty was looking straight before her, with a flushed and rather frowning face. Harding was talking to her, and, to judge from his laughing manner, was amusing himself, if not her.

George duly found Lady Cathedine a seat, and returned himself to ask Letty whether it was not time to go. He found, however, that she had been carried off by another partner, and could only resign himself to a fresh twenty minutes of boredom. He leaned, against the wall, yawning, and feeling the evening interminable.

Then a Harrow and Oxford acquaintance came up to him, and they chatted for a time behind a stand of flowers that stood between them and one of the doorways to the ball-room. At the end of the dance George saw Lady Cathedine hurrying up to this door with the quick, furtive step that was characteristic of her. She passed on the other side of the flowers, and George heard her say to some one just inside the room:

«Robert, the carriage has come.»

A pause; then a thick voice said in an emphatic undertone:

«D——n the carriage! Go away!»

«But, Robert, you know we *promised* to look in at Lady Tuam's on the way home.»

The thick voice dropped a note lower.

«D——n Lady Tuam! I shall come when it suits me.»

Lady Cathedine fell back, and George saw her cross the landing and drop into a chair beside an old general who was snoozing in a peaceful corner till his daughters should see

fit to take him home. The old general took no notice of her, and she sat there, playing with her fan, her rather prominent gray eyes staring out of her white face.

Both George and his friend, as it happened, had heard the conversation. The friend raised his eyebrows in disgust.

«What a brute that fellow is! They have been married four months. However, she was amply warned.»

«Who was she?»

«The daughter of old Wickens, the banker. He married her for her money, and lives upon it religiously. By now, I should think, he has dragged her through every torture that marriage admits of.»

«So soon?» said George, dryly.

«Well,» said the friend, laughing, «no doubt it admits of a great many.»

«I am ready to go home,» said a voice at Tressady's elbow.

Something in the intonation surprised him, and he turned quickly.

«By all means,» he said, throwing an astonished look at his wife, who had come up to him on Lord Cathedine's arm. «I will go and look for the carriage.»

What was the matter, he asked himself, as he ran down-stairs—what was the meaning of Letty's manner and expression?

But by the time he had sent for the carriage the answer had suggested itself. No doubt Harding Watton had given Letty news of that hansom in Pall Mall, and no doubt also—He shrugged his shoulders in annoyance. The notion of having to explain and excuse himself was particularly unpalatable. What a fool he had been not to tell Letty of his East End adventure on their way to Queen's Gate!

He was standing in a little crowd at the foot of the stairs when Letty swept past him in search of her wraps. He smiled at her, but she held her head erect, as though she did not see him.

So there was to be a scene. George felt the rise of a certain inner excitement. Perhaps it was as well. There were a good many things he wished to say.

At the same time the Cathedine episode had filled him with a new disgust for the violences and brutalities to which the very intimacy of the marriage relation may lead. If a scene there was to be, he meant to be more or less frank, and at the same time to keep both himself and her within bounds.

«You can't deny that you made a secret of it from me,» cried Letty, angrily. «I asked you what had been doing in the House, and you

never let me suspect that you had been anywhere else the whole evening."

"I dare say," said George, quietly; "but I never meant to make any mystery. Something you said about Lady Maxwell put me off telling you—then. I thought I would wait till we got home."

They were in George's study—the usual back room on the ground floor, which George could not find time to make comfortable, while Letty had never turned her attention to it. Tressady was leaning against the mantelpiece. He had turned up a solitary electric light, and in the cold glare of it Letty was sitting opposite to him, angrily upright. The ugly light had effaced the half-tones of the face and deepened the lines of it, while it had taken all the grace from her extravagant dress and tumbled flowers. She seemed to have lost her prettiness.

"Something I said about Lady Maxwell?" she repeated scornfully. "Why should n't I say what I like about Lady Maxwell? What does she matter either to you or to me that I should not laugh at her if I please? Everybody laughs at her."

"I don't think so," said Tressady, quietly. "I have seen her to-night in a curious and touching scene—in a meeting of very poor people. She tried to make a speech, by the way, and spoke badly. She did not carry the meeting with her, and toward the end it got noisy. As we came out she was struck with a stone, and I got a hansom for her, and drove her home to St. James's Square. We were just turning into the square when Harding saw us. I happened to be with her in the crowd when the stone hit her. What do you suppose I could do but bring her home?"

"Why did you go? and why did n't you tell me at once?"

"Why did I go?" Tressady hesitated, then looked down upon his wife. "Well, I suppose I went because Lady Maxwell is very interesting to watch; because she is sympathetic and generous, and it stirs one's mind to talk to her."

"Not at all!" cried Letty, passionately. "You went because she is handsome—because she is just a superior kind of flirt. She is always making women anxious about their husbands, under this pretense of politics. Heaps of women hate her, and are afraid of her."

She was very white, and could hardly save herself from the tears of excitement. Yet what was working in her was not so much Harding Watton's story as this new and strange manner of her husband's. She had

sat haughtily silent in the carriage on their way home, fully expecting him to question her—to explain, entreat, excuse himself, as he had generally been ready to do whenever she chose to make a quarrel. But he too said nothing, and she could not make up her mind how to begin. Then, as soon as they were shut into his room, her anger had broken out, and he had not yet begun to caress and appease her. Her surprise had brought with it a kind of shock. What was the matter? Why was she not mistress, as usual?

As she made her remark about Marcella, Tressady smiled a little, and played with a cigarette he had taken up.

"Whom do you mean?" he asked her. "One often hears these things said of her in the vague, and never with any details. I myself don't believe it. Harding, of course, believes anything to her disadvantage."

Letty hesitated; then, remembering all she could of Harding's ill-natured gossip, she flung out some names, exaggerating and inventing freely. The emphasis with which she spoke reddened all her small face again, and made it hot and common.

Tressady raised his shoulders as she came to the end of her tirade.

"Well, you know I don't believe all that, and I don't think Harding believes it. Lady Maxwell, as you once said yourself, is not, I suppose, a woman's woman. She gets on better, no doubt, with men than with women. These men you speak of are all personal and party friends. They support Maxwell, and they like her. But if some are jealous, I should think they might remember that there is safety in numbers."

"Oh, that's all very well; but she wants power, and she does n't care a rap how she gets it. She is a dangerous, intriguing woman, and she just trades upon her beauty!"

Tressady, who had been leaning with his face averted from her, turned round with sparkling eyes.

"You foolish child!" he said slowly; "you foolish child!"

Her lips twitched. She put out a shaking hand to her cloak, which had fallen from her arms.

"Oh, very well. I sha'n't stay here to be talked to like that, so good night."

He took no notice. He walked up to her, and put his hands on her shoulders.

"Don't you know what it is"—he spoke with a curious imperiousness—"that protects any woman—or any man either, for the matter of that—from Marcella Maxwell's beauty? Don't you know that she adores her husband?"



«That's a pose, of course, like everything else,» cried Letty, trying to move herself away; «you once said it was.»

«Before I knew her. It's not a pose; it's the secret of her whole life.»

He walked back to the mantelpiece, conscious of a sudden rise of inward bitterness.

«Well, I shall go to bed,» said Letty, again half rising. «You might, I think, have had the kindness and the good taste to say you were sorry I should have the humiliation of finding out where my husband spends his evenings from Harding Watton!»

Tressady was stung.

«When have I ever concealed what I did from you?» he asked her hotly.

Letty, who was standing stiff and scornful, tossed her head without speaking.

«That means,» said Tressady, after a pause, «that you don't take my word for it—that you suspect me of deceiving you before to-night?»

Letty still said nothing. His eyes flashed. Then a pang of conscience smote him. He took up his cigarette again, with a laugh.

«I think we are both a pair of babies,» he said, as he pretended to look for matches. «You know very well that you don't really think I tell you mean lies. And let me assure you, my dear child, that fate did not mean Lady Maxwell to have lovers, and that she never will have them. But when that's said there's something else to say.»

He went up to her again, and touched her arm.

«You and I could n't have this kind of scene, Letty, could we, if everything was all right?»

Her breast rose and fell hurriedly.

«Oh, I supposed you would want to retaliate—to complain on your side.»

«Yes,» he said deliberately, «I think I do want to complain. Why is it that—I began to like going down to see Lady Maxwell? Why did I like talking to her at Castle Luton? Well, of course it's pleasant to be with a beautiful person—I don't deny that in the least. But she might have been as beautiful as an angel, and I might n't have cared twopence about her. She has something much less common than beauty. It's very simple, too; I suppose it's only sympathy—just that. Everybody feels the same. When you talk to her, she seems to care about it; she throws her mind into yours. And there's a charm about it; there's no doubt of that.»

He had begun his little speech meaning to be perfectly frank and honest—to appeal to her better nature and his own. But something stopped him abruptly, perhaps the sudden

perception that he was after playing the hypocrite, perhaps the consciousness that he was only making matters worse.

«It's a pity you did n't say all these things before,» she said, with a hard laugh, «instead of denouncing the political woman, as you used to do.»

He sat down on the arm of the chair beside her, balancing lightly, with his hands in his pockets.

«Did I denounce the political woman? Well, the Lord knows I'm not in love with her now. It is n't politics, my dear, that are attaching; it's the kind of human being. Ah, well, don't let's talk of it; let's go back to that point of sympathy. There's more in it than I used to think. Suppose, for instance, you were to try to take a little more interest in my political work than you do. Suppose you were to try to see money matters from my point of view, instead of driving us»—he paused a moment, then went on coolly, lifting his thin, long-chinned face to her, as she stood quivering beside him—«driving us into expenses that will sooner or later be the ruin of us, that rob us, too, of self-respect. Suppose you were to take a little more account, also, of my taste in people. I am afraid I don't like Harding, though he is your cousin, and I don't certainly see why he should furnish our drawing-rooms and empty our purse for us, as he has been doing. Then, as to Lord Cathedine, I'm really not over particular, but when I hear that fellow's in the house, my impulse is to catch the nearest hansom and drive away from it. I heard him speak to his wife to-night in a way for which he ought to be kicked down Oxford street; and in general, I should say that it takes the shine off a person to be much seen with Cathedine.»

The calm attitude, the voice, just a shade interrogative, exasperated Letty still more. She too sat down, her cheeks flaming.

«I am *extremely* obliged to you! You really could n't have been more frank. I am sorry that *nothing* I do pleases you. You must be quite sorry by now you married me; but really, I did n't force you. Why should I give up my friends? You know very well you won't give up Lady Maxwell.»

She looked at him keenly, her little foot beating the ground. George started.

«But what is there to give up?» he cried. «Come and see her yourself; come with me, and make friends with her. You would be quite welcome.»

But as he spoke he knew that he was talking absurdly, and that Letty had reason for her laugh.

«Thank you! Lady Maxwell made it *quite* plain to me at Castle Luton that she did n't want my acquaintance. I certainly sha'n't force myself upon her any more. But if you'll give up going to see her—well, perhaps I'll see what can be done to meet your wishes; though, of course, I think all you say about Harding and Lord Cathedine is just unreasonable prejudice.»

George was silent. His mind was torn between the pricks of a conscience that told him Letty had in truth, as far as he was concerned, a far more real grievance than she imagined, and a passionate intellectual contempt for the person who could even distantly imagine that Marcella Maxwell belonged to the same category as other women, and was to be won by the same arts as they. At last he broke out impatiently:

«I cannot possibly show discourtesy to one who has been nothing but kindness to me, as she is to scores of others—to old friends like Edward Watton, or new ones like—»

«She wants your vote, of course,» threw in Letty, with an excited laugh. «*Either* she is a flirt—*or* she wants your vote. Why should she take so much notice of you? She is n't your side; she wants to get hold of you, and it makes you ridiculous. People just laugh at you and her.» She turned upon him passionately. A little more, and the wish to say the wounding, venomous thing would have grown like a madness upon her. But George kept his self-possession.

«Well, they may laugh,» he said, with a strong effort to speak good-humoredly; «but politics are n't managed like that, as you and they will find out. Votes are not so simple as they sound.»

He got up and walked away from her as he spoke. As usual, his mood was beginning to cool. He saw no way out. They must both accept the *status quo*. No radical change was possible. It is character that makes circumstance, and character is inexorable.

«Well, of course I did n't altogether believe that you would really be such a fool, and wreck all your prospects,» said Letty, violently, her feverish eyes intent the while on her husband and on the thin fingers once more busied with the cigarette. «There, now! I think we have had enough of this. It does n't seem to have led to much, does it?»

«No,» said George, coolly; «but perhaps we shall come to see more alike in time. I don't want to tyrannize—only to show you what I think. Shall I carry up your cloak for you?»

He approached her punctiliously. Letty gathered her wraps upon her arm in disdain-

ful silence, warding him off with a gesture. As he opened the door for her she turned upon him:

«You talk of my extravagance, but you never seem to consider what you might do to make up to me for the burden of being your mother's relative. You expect me to put up with the annoyance and ridicule of belonging to her, and to let her spend all your money besides. I give you fair warning that I sha'n't do it. I shall try and spend it on my side, that she sha'n't get it.»

She was perfectly aware that she was behaving like a vixenish child, but she could not restrain herself. This strange new sense that she could neither bend nor conquer him was becoming more than she could bear.

George looked at her, half inclined to shake her first, and then insist on making friends. He thought that he could probably assert himself with success if he tried. But the impulse failed him. He merely said, without any apparent temper, «Then I shall have to see if I can invent some way of protecting both myself and you.»

She flung herself through the door, and almost ran through the long passage to the stairs, in a sobbing excitement. A sudden thought struck George as he stood looking after her. He pursued her, caught her at the foot of the stairs, and held her arm strongly.

«Letty, I was n't to tell you, but I choose to break my promise. Don't be too cruel, my dear, or too angry. My mother is dying!»

She scanned him deliberately, the flushed face, the signs of strongly felt yet strongly suppressed emotion. The momentary consciousness flew through her that he was at bottom a very human, impressionable creature; that if she could but have broken down and thrown herself on his neck, this miserable evening might open for both of them a new way. But her white heat of passion was too strong. She pushed him away.

«She made you believe that this morning? Then I'd better hurry up at Ferth, for of course it only means that there will be a fresh list of debts directly.»

He let her go, and she heard him walk quickly back to his study and shut the door. She stared after him triumphantly for a moment, then rushed up-stairs.

In her room her maid was waiting for her. Grier's sallow face and gloomy eyes showed considerable annoyance at being kept up so late. But she said nothing, and Letty, who in general was only too ready to admit the woman to a vulgar familiarity, for once held her tongue. Her state of excitement and ex-

haustion, however, was evident, and Grier bestowed many furtive examining glances upon her mistress in the course of the undressing. She thought she had heard «them» quarrelling on the stairs. What a pity she had been too tired and cross to listen!

Of course they must come to quarreling. Grier's sympathies were tolerably impartial. She had no affection for her mistress, and she cordially disliked Sir George, knowing perfectly well that he thought ill of her. But she had a good place, and meant to keep it if she could; to which end she had done her best to strengthen a mean hold on Letty. Now, as she was brushing out Letty's brown hair, and silently putting two and two together the while, an idea occurred to her which pleased her.

After Grier had left her, Letty could not make up her mind to go to bed. She was still pacing up and down the room in her dressing-gown when she heard a knock—Grier's knock.

«Come in!»

«Please, my lady,» said Grier, appearing with something in her hand, «does n't this belong to your photograph-box? I found it on the floor in Sir George's dressing-room this morning.»

Letty hastily took it from her, and, in spite of an instant effort to control herself, the red flushed again into a cheek that had been very pale when Grier came in.

«Where did you find it?»

«It had tumbled off Sir George's table, I think,» said Grier, with elaborate innocence; «some one must have took it out of your photo-box.»

«Thank you,» said Letty, shortly. «You may go, Grier.»

The maid went, and Letty was left standing with the photograph in her hands.

Two days before, Tressady had been in Edward Watton's room in St. James's street, and had seen this amateur photograph of Marcella Maxwell and her boy on Watton's table. The poetic charm of it had struck him so forcibly that he had calmly put it in his pocket, telling the protesting owner that he, in his rôle of great friend, could easily procure another, and must beware of a grudging spirit. Watton had laughed and submitted, and Tressady had carried off the picture, honestly meaning to present it to Letty for a collection of contemporary «beauties» she had just begun to make.

Later in the day, as he was taking off his coat to dress for dinner, Tressady drew out the photograph. A sudden instinct, which

Vol. LII.—24-25.

he himself could hardly have explained, made him delay handing it over to Letty. He thrust it into the top tray of his collar-and-shirt wardrobe. Two days later the butler, coming in a hurry before breakfast to put out his master's clothes, shook the photograph out of the folds of the shirt, where it had hidden itself, without noticing what he had done. The picture slipped between the wardrobe and the wall of the recess in which it stood, was discovered later in the day by the housemaid, and given to Lady Tressady's maid.

Letty laid the photograph down on the dressing-table, and stood leaning upon her hands looking at it. Marcella was sitting under one of the cedars of Maxwell Court, with her boy beside her. A fine corner of the old house made a background, and the photographer had so dealt with his picture as to make it a whole full of significance, and culminating in the two faces—the sensitive, speaking beauty of the mother, the sturdy strength of the child. Marcella had never looked more wistful, more attaching. It was the expression of a woman at rest, in the golden moment of her life, yet conscious—as all happiness is conscious—of the common human doom that nothing escapes. Meanwhile the fine, lightly furrowed brow above the eyes spoke of action and power; so did the strong waves of black hair blown back by the breeze. A noble, strenuous creature, yet quivering through and through with the simplest, most human instincts. So one must needs read her, as one looked from the eyes to the eager clasp of the arm about the boy.

Letty studied it as though she would pierce and stab it with looking. Then, with a sudden wild movement, she took up the picture and tore it into twenty pieces. The pieces she left strewn on the floor, so that they must necessarily strike the eye of any one coming into the room. In a few more minutes she was in bed, lying still and wakeful, with her face turned away from the door.

About an hour afterward there was a gentle knock at her door. She made no answer, and Tressady came in. He stepped softly, thinking she was asleep, and presently she heard him stop, with a stifled exclamation. She made no sound, but from his movement she guessed that he was picking up the litter on the floor. Then she heard it thrown into the basket under her writing-table, and she waited, holding her breath.

Tressady walked to a far window, drew a curtain back softly, and stood looking out at the starlight over the deserted street. Once,

finding him so still, she ventured a hasty glance at him over the edge of the sheet. But she could see nothing. After a time he turned and came to his accustomed place beside her. In twenty minutes at latest she knew, much to her chagrin, that he was asleep.

She herself had no sleep. She was stung to wakefulness by that recurrent sense of the irrevocable which makes us say to ourselves in wonder, «How can it have happened? Two hours ago—such a little while—it had not happened!» And the mind clutches at the bygone hour, so near, so eternally distant—clutches at its ghost, in vain.

Yet it seemed to her now that she had been jealous from the first moment when she and George had come into contact with Marcella Maxwell. During the long hours of this night her jealousy burned through her like a hot pain—jealousy mixed with reluctant memory. Half consciously she had always assumed that it had been a piece of kindness on her part to marry George Tressady at all. She had almost condescended to him. After all, she had played with ambitions so much higher! At any rate, she had taken for granted that he would always admire and be grateful to her; that in return for her pretty self she might at least dispose of him and his as she pleased.

And now what galled her intolerably was this discernment of the way in which, at least since their honeymoon, he must have been criticizing and judging her—judging her by comparison with another woman. She seemed to see at a glance the whole process of his mind, and her vanity writhed under it.

How much else than vanity? As she turned restlessly from side to side, possessed by plans for punishing George, for humiliating Lady Maxwell, and avenging herself, she said to herself that she did not care, that it was not worth caring about, that she would either bring George to his senses or manage to amuse herself without him.

But in reality she was held, tortured and struggling all the time, in the first grip of that masterful hold wherewith the potter lifts his clay when he lays it on the eternal whirling of the wheel.

#### XVI.

THE newspapers of the morning following these events—that is to say, of Saturday, July 5—gave very lively accounts of the East End meeting, at which, as some put it, Lady Maxwell «had got her answer» from the East End mob. The stone-throwing, the blow, the

woman, and the cause, were widely discussed that same day throughout the clubs and drawing-rooms of Mayfair and Belgravia, no less than among the clubs and «publics» of the East End; and the guests at country-house parties, as they hurried out of town for the Sunday, carried the gossip of the matter far and wide. The Maxwells went down alone to Brookshire, and the curious visitors who called in St. James's Square «to inquire» came away with nothing to report.

«A put-up thing, the whole business,» said Mrs. Watton indignantly to her son Harding, as she handed him the «Observer» on the Sunday morning, in the dining-room of the family house in Tilney street. «Of course a little martyrdom just now suits her book excellently. How that man *can* let her make him a laughing-stock in this way—»

«A laughing-stock?» said Harding, smiling. «Not at all. Don't spoil your first remark, mother. For, of course, it is all practical politics. The handsomest woman in England does n't give her temple to be gashed for nothing. You will see what her friends will make out of it—and out of the brutal violence of our mob.»

«Disgusting!» said Mrs. Watton, playing severely with the lid of the mustard-pot that stood beside her.

She and Harding were enjoying a late breakfast *tête-à-tête*. The old squire had finished long before, and was already doing his duty with a volume of sermons in the library up-stairs, preparatory to going to church. Mrs. Watton and Harding, however, would accompany him thither presently, for Harding was a great supporter of the Establishment.

The son raised his shoulders at his mother's adjective.

«What I want to know,» he said, «is whether Lady Maxwell is going to bag George Tressady or not. He brought her home from the meeting on Friday.»

«Brought her home from the meeting? George Tressady?»

Mrs. Watton raised her masculine head, and frowned at her son, as though he were in some sense personally responsible for this unseemly fact.

«He has been haunting her in the East End for weeks. I got that out of Edward. But, of course, one knew that was going to happen as soon as one saw them together at Castle Luton. She throws her flies cleverly, that woman!»

«All I can say is,» observed Mrs. Watton, ponderously, «that in any decent state of society such a woman would be banned.»



Harding rose, and stood by the open window caressing his mustache. He had long known that his mother, in spite of her general ability, had no wit, but only a kind of forcibleness.

"It seems to me," his mother resumed, after a pause, "that some one at least should give Letty a hint."

"Oh, Letty can take care of herself," said Watton, laughing. He might have said, if he had thought it worth while, that somebody had already given Letty a hint. Tressady, it appeared, disliked him. Well, people that disliked you were fair game. However, in spite of Tressady's dislike, he had been able to amuse himself a good deal with Letty and Letty's furnishing during the last few months. Harding, who prided himself on the finest of tastes, liked to be consulted; he liked anything, also, that gave him importance, if it were only with the master of a curiosity-shop; and under cover of Letty's large dealings he had carried off various spoils of his own for his rooms in the Temple—spoils which were not to be despised—at a very moderate price indeed.

"Who could have thought George Tressady would be such a weak creature," said his mother, rising, "when one remembers how Lord Fontenoy believed in him?"

"And does still believe in him, more or less," said Harding; "but Fontenoy will have to be warned."

He looked at the clock to see if there was time for a cigarette before church, lighted it, and, leaning against the window, gazed toward the hazy park with a meditative air.

"Do you mean there is any question of his ratting?" said his mother.

Harding raised his eyebrows.

"Well, no; hardly anything so gross as that. But you can see all the spirit has gone out of him. He does no work for us. The party gets nothing out of him."

Harding spoke as if he had the party in his pocket. His mother looked at him with a severely concealed admiration. There were few limits to her belief in Harding. But it was not her habit to flatter her sons.

"What makes one so mad," she said, as she sailed toward the door in a stiff rustle of Sunday brocade, "is the way in which the people who admire her talk of her. When one thinks that all this 'slumming,' and all this stuff about the poor, only means keeping her husband in office, and surrounding herself with a court of young men, it turns one sick."

"My dear mother, we must all have our little amusements," said Harding, indulgently.

"Don't forget, besides, that Lady Maxwell provides me with a deal of good copy."

And after his mother had left him he smoked on, thinking with pleasure of an article of his on "The Woman of the Slums," packed with allusions to Marcella Maxwell, which was to appear in the next number of the paper that he and Fontenoy were now running. Harding was not the editor. He disliked drudgery and office hours, and his father was good for enough to live upon. But he was a powerful adviser in the conduct of the new journal, and wrote, perhaps, the smartest articles.

The paper, indeed, was written by the smartest people conceivable, and had achieved the smartest combinations. "Liberty" was its catchword, but the employer must be absolute. To care or think about religion was absurd; but whoso threw a stone at the Established Church, let him die the death. There were only three crimes worth considering, and to be gibbeted on all occasions. The first was the crime of "doing good"; for no one ever supposed he could do his neighbor any "good" but a prig and a fool. The second was like unto it, and was known as the idiocy of "culture for the people." To help a man who had toiled his ten or twelve hours in the mill or the mine to read Homer or Dante in the evening—that was the unpardonable sin, which struck at the roots of the State. Harding and his crew had required a good deal of help in their time toward the reading of those authors; that, however, was only their due, and in the order of the universe. The same universe had sent the miner below to dig coals for his betters, while Harding Watton went to college.

But the last and worst demerit in the eyes of Harding and his set was that old primitive offense that Cain already found so hard to bear. Half the violence which the new paper had been lavishing on Maxwell—apart from passionate conviction of the Fontenoy type, which also spoke through it—sprang from this source. Maxwell, in spite of his obvious drawbacks, threatened to succeed, to be accepted, to take a large place in English political life. And his wife, too, reigned and had her way without the help of clever young men who write. There was the sting. Harding, at any rate, found it intolerable.

MEANWHILE, in spite of newspapers to right of it and newspapers to left of it, the political coach clattered on.

The following day—Monday—was a day of early arrivals, packed benches, and much ex-

citement in the House of Commons; for the division on the second reading was to be taken after the Home Secretary's reply on the debate. Dowson was expected to get up about ten o'clock, and it was thought that the division would be over by eleven.

On this afternoon and evening Fontenoy was ubiquitous. At least, so it seemed to Tressady. Whenever one put one's head into the smoking-room or the library, whenever one passed through the lobby, or rushed on to the terrace for ten minutes' fresh air, Fontenoy's great brow and rugged face were always to be seen, and always in fresh company.

The heterogeneous character of the opposition with which the government was confronted, the conflicting groups and interests into which it was split up, offered large scope for the intriguing, contriving genius of the man. And he was spending it lavishly. The small eyes were less perceptible, the circles round them more saucer-like, than ever.

Meanwhile George Tressady had never been so keenly aware as on this critical afternoon that his party had begun to drop him out of its reckonings. Consultations that would once have included him as a matter of course were going on without him. During the whole of this busy day Fontenoy even had hardly spoken to him; the battle was leaving him on one side.

Well, what room for bitterness?—though, with the unreason that no man escapes, he was not without bitterness. He had disappointed them as a debater, and in other ways what had he done for them since Whitsuntide? No doubt, also, the mention of his name in the reports of the Mile End meeting had not been without its effect. He believed that Fontenoy's personal regard for him still held. Otherwise he was beginning to feel himself placed in a tacit isolation.

What wonder! During the dinner-hour he found himself in a corner of the library, dreaming over a biography of Lord Melbourne. Poor Melbourne! in those last tragic years of waiting and pining, every day expecting the proffer of office that never came, and the familiar recognition that would be his no more. But Melbourne was old, and had had his day.

"I wanted to speak to you," said a hoarse voice over his shoulder.

"Say on, and sit down," said George, smiling, and pushing forward a chair beside him. "I should think you'll want a week's sleep after this."

"Have you got some time to spare this week?" said Fontenoy, as he sat down.

George hesitated.

"Well, no. I ought to go down to the country immediately, and see after my own affairs and the strike before committee begins. There is a meeting of coal-owners on Wednesday."

"What I want would n't take long," said Fontenoy, persistently, after a pause. "I hear you have been going round workshops lately."

His keen, peremptory eyes fixed his companion.

"I had a round or two with Everard," said George. "We saw a fair representative lot."

The thought that flashed through Fontenoy's mind was, "Why the deuce did n't you speak of it to me?" Aloud he said with impatience:

"Representing what Everard chose to show, I should think. However, what I want is this. You know the series of extracts from reports that has been going on lately in the ('Chronicle')?"

George nodded.

"We want something done to correct the impression that has been made. You and I know perfectly well that the vast majority of workshops work factory hours and an average of four and a half days a week. You have just had personal experience, and you can write. Will you do three or four signed articles for the ('Haymarket Reporter') this week or next? Of course the office will give you every help."

George considered.

"I think not," he said presently, looking up. "I should n't do it well. Perhaps I have become too aware of the exceptions—the worst cases. Frankly, the whole thing has become more of a problem to me than it was."

Fontenoy moved and grunted uneasily.

"Does that mean," he said at last, in his harshest manner, "that you will feel any difficulty in—"

"In voting? No; I shall vote right enough. I am all for delay. This bill does n't convince me any more than it did. But I don't want to take a strong public part just at present."

The two men eyed each other in silence.

"I thought there was something brewing," said Fontenoy at last.

"Well, I'm not sorry to have had these few words," was George's reply, after a pause. "I wanted to tell you that, though I shall vote, I don't think I shall speak much more. I don't believe I'm the stuff people in Parliament ought to be made off. I shall be remorseful presently for having led you into a mistake." He forced a smile.

"I made no mistake," said Fontenoy, grimly,

and departed; then, as he walked down the corridor, he completed his sentence: "except in not seeing that you were the kind of man to be made a fool of by women."

First of all, a hasty marriage with a silly girl who could be no help to him or to the cause; now, according to Watton (who had called upon Fontenoy that morning, at his private house, to discuss various matters of business), the Lady Maxwell fever in a pronounced form. Most likely. It was the best explanation.

The leader's own sense of annoyance and disappointment was considerable. There was no man for whom he had felt so much personal liking as for Tressady since the fight began.

SOMEWHERE before midnight the division on the second reading was taken, amid all those accompaniments of crowd, expectation, and commotion, that are usually evoked by the critical points of a contested measure. The majority for the government was forty-four—less by twenty-four votes than its normal figure.

As the cheers and counter-cheers subsided, George found himself borne into the lobby with the crowd pouring out of the House. As he approached the door leading to the outer lobby a lady in front of him turned. George received a lightning impression of beauty, of a kind of anxious joy, and recognized Marcella Maxwell.

She held out her hand.

"Well, the first stage is over," she said.

"Yes, and well over," he said, smiling. "But you have shed a great many men already."

"Oh, I know—I know. The next few weeks will be intolerable; one will feel sure of nobody." Then her voice changed—took a certain shyness. "A good many people from here are coming down to us at Mile End during the next few weeks, to meet workers of different kinds. I think it will be interesting. Will you come some time, and bring Lady Tressady?"

"Thank you," said George, rather formally. "It is very kind of you." Then, in another voice, "And you are really none the worse?"

His eyes sought the injured temple, and she instinctively put up her hand to the black wave of hair that had been drawn forward so as to conceal the mark.

"Oh, no. That boy was not an expert, luckily. How absurd the papers have been!"

George shook his head.

"I don't know what else one could expect," he said, laughing.

"Not at all." The flush mounted in the

delicate hollow of the cheek. "Why should there be any more fuss about a woman's being struck than a man? We don't want any of this extra pity and talk."

"Human nature, I am afraid," said George, raising his shoulders. Did she really suppose that women could mix in the political fight on the same terms as men—could excite no more emotion there than men? Folly!

Then Maxwell, who was standing behind her, came forward, greeted Tressady kindly, and they talked for a few minutes about the evening's debate. The keen look of the elder scanned the younger's face and manner the while with some minuteness. As for George, his dialogue with the minister, at which more than one passer-by threw looks of interest and amusement, gave him no particular pleasure. Maxwell's qualities were not of the kind that specially appealed to him; nor was he likely to attract Maxwell. Nevertheless, he could have wished their ten minutes' talk to last interminably, merely because of the excuse it gave him to be near her, played upon by her movements and her tones. He talked to Maxwell of speeches and votes and little incidents of the day. And all the time he knew how she was surrounded; how the crowd that was always gathering about her came and went; with whom she talked; above all, how that eager, sensitive charm, which she had shown in its fullness to him,—perhaps to him only, beside her husband, of all this throng,—played through her look, her voice, her congratulations, and her dismays. For had he not seen her in distress and confusion—seen her in tears, wrestling with herself? His heart caressed the thought like a sacred thing all the time that he was aware of her as the center of this political throng—the adored, detested, famous woman, typical in so many ways of changing custom and of an expanding world.

Then, in a flash as it were, the crowd had thinned, the Maxwells had gone, and George was running down the steps of the members' entrance into the rain outside. He seemed to carry with him the scent of a rose—the rose she had worn on her breast, and his mind was tormented with the question he had already asked himself: "How is it going to end?"

He pushed on through the wet streets, lost in a hundred miseries and exaltations. The sensation was that of a man struggling with a rising tide, carried helplessly in the rush and swirl of it. Yet conscience had very little to say, and when it did speak got little but contempt for its pains. What had any clumsy code, social or moral, to do with it? When

would Marcella Maxwell, by word or look or thought, betray the man she loved? Not till

A' the seas gang dry, my dear,  
An' the rocks melt wi' the sun.

How he found his way home he hardly knew, for it was a moment of blind crisis with him. All that crowded, dramatic scene of the House, its lights, its faces, its combinations, had vanished from his mind. What remained was a group of three people, contemplated in a kind of terror—terror of what this thing might grow to. Once, in St. James's street, the late hour, the soft, gusty night, suddenly reminded him of that other gusty night in February, when he had walked home after his parting with Letty, so well content with himself and the future, and had spoken to Marcella Maxwell for the first time amid that little crowd in the Mall. Nothing had been irreparable then. He had his life in his hands.

As for this passion that was creeping into all his veins, poisoning and crippling all his vitalities, he was still independent enough of it to be able to handle it with the irony it deserved. For it was almost as ludicrous as it was pitiable. He did not want any man of the world—any Harding Watton—to tell him that.

What amazed him was the revelation of his own nature that was coming out of it. He had always been rather proud to think of himself as an easy-going fellow with no particular depths. Other men were proud of a «storm period» of feasting and drinking deep; made a pose of it. Tressady's pose had been the very opposite. Out of a kind of good taste he had wished to take life lightly, with no great emotion; and marriage with Letty had seemed to satisfy this particular canon.

Now, for the first time, certain veils were drawn aside, and he knew what this hunger for love and love's response can do with a man—could do with *him*, were it allowed its scope.

Had Marcella Maxwell been another woman, less innocent, less secure!

As it was, Tressady no sooner dared to give a sensuous thought to her beauty than his own passion smote him back, bade him beware lest he should be no longer fit to speak and talk with her, actually or spiritually. For in this hopeless dearth of all the ordinary rewards and encouragements of love he had begun to cultivate a sort of second or spiritual life, in which she reigned. Whenever he was alone he walked with her, consulted her, watched her dear eyes, and the soul playing through

them. And so long as he could maintain this dream he was conscious of a sort of dignity, of reconciliation with himself; for the passions and tragedies of the soul always carry with them this dignity, as Dante, of all mortals, knew first and best.

But he could not long maintain the dream. It would break down, overwhelmed by very natural concrete thoughts—longing for what he could never have, impatient despair as to his marriage, remorse toward Letty, scornful disgust with himself.

Now, as he turned into Upper Brook street and mounted his own steps, he could think only of the problem which the house contained for him. What was he to do with it? What relation was he going to establish with his wife through all these years that stretched so interminably before them?

During the three days which had passed since their quarrel their common life had been such a mere confusion of jars and discomforts that George's hedonist temper was almost at the end of its patience; yet so far, he thought, he had not done badly in the way of forbearance. After the first moment of angry disgust, he had said to himself that the tearing up of the photograph was a jealous freak which Letty had a right to if it pleased her. At any rate, he had made no comment whatever upon it, and had done his best to resume his normal manner with her the next day. She had been, apparently, only the more enraged, and although there had been no open quarreling since, her cutting, contemptuous little airs had been very hard to bear. Nor was it possible for George to ignore her exasperated determination to have her own way in the matter both of friends and expenses.

As he took his latch-key out of the lock, and turned up the electric light, he saw two handsome marquetry chairs standing in the hall. He went to look at them in some perplexity. Ah, no doubt they had been sent as specimens. Letty had grown dissatisfied with the chairs originally bought for the dining-room. He remembered having heard her say something about a costly set at a certain Asher's, that Harding had found.

He studied them for a few moments, his mouth tightening. Then, instead of going upstairs, he went into his study, and sat down at his table to write a letter.

Yes; he had better go off to Staffordshire by the early train, and this letter, which he would put upon her writing-desk in the drawing-room, should explain him to Letty.

The letter was long and candid, yet by no means without tenderness.



«I have written to Asher,» it said, «to direct him to send in the morning for the chairs I found in the hall. They are too expensive for us, and I have told him that I will not buy them. I need not say that in writing to him I have avoided every word that could be annoying to you. If you would only trust me, and consult me a little about such things, trifles as they are, life just now would be easier than it is.»

Then he passed to a very frank statement of their financial position, and of his own steady resolve not to allow himself to drift into hopeless debt. The words were clear and sharp, but not more so than the course of the preceding six weeks made absolutely necessary. And their very sharpness led him to much remorseful kindness at the end. No doubt she was disappointed both in him and in his circumstances; and certainly differences had developed between them that they had never foreseen at the time of their engagement. But to «make a good thing» of living together was never easy. He asked her not to despair, not to judge him hardly. He would do his best, and if she would only give him back her confidence and affection all might be well. He would let no one stand between them if she would promise the same.

He closed the letter, and then paced restlessly about the little room for a time. It seemed to him that he was caught in a vise—that neither happiness, nor decent daily comfort, nor even the satisfactions of ambition, were ever to be his.

Next day he was off to Euston before Letty was properly awake. She found his letter waiting for her when she descended, and spent the day in a pale excitement. Yet by the end of it she had pretty well made up her mind. She would have to give in on the money question. George's figures and her natural shrewdness convinced her that the ultimate results of fighting him in this matter could only be more uncomfortable for herself than for him. But as to her freedom in choosing her own friends, or as to her jealousy of Lady Maxwell, she would never give in. If George had ceased to court his wife, then he could have nothing to say if she looked for the amusement and admiration that were her due from other people. There was no harm in that. Everybody else did it, and she was not going to be pretty and young for nothing. Whereupon she sat down and wrote a line to Lord Cathedine to tell him that she and «Tully» would be at the opera on the following night, and to beg him to make sure that she got her «cards for Clarence House.» Moreover, she meant to make use of

him to procure her a card for a very smart ball, the last of the season, which was coming off in a fortnight. That could be arranged, no doubt, at the opera.

GEORGE returned from the North in a few days, looking, if possible, thinner and more careworn than when he went. He had found the strike a very stubborn business. Burrows was riding the storm triumphantly; and while upon his own side Tressady looked in vain for a «man,» there was a dogged determination to win among the masters. George's pugnacity shared it fully. But he was beginning to ask himself a number of questions about these labor disputes which, apparently, his co-employers did not ask themselves. Was it that here, no less than in matters that concerned the bill before Parliament, *her* influence, helped by the power of an expanding mind, had developed in him that fatal capacity for sympathy, for the double-seeing of compromise, which takes from a man all the joy of battle?

Letty, at any rate, was not troubled by anything of the sort. When he came back he found that she was ready to be on fairly amicable terms with him. Moreover, she had postponed the more expensive improvements and changes she had begun to make at Ferth against his will; nor was there any sign of the various new purchases for the London house with which she had threatened him. On the other hand, she ceased to consult him about her own engagements, and she let him know, though without any words on the subject, that she had entirely broken with his mother—would neither see her nor receive her. As her attitude on this point involved, or apparently must involve, a refusal to accept her husband's statement made solemnly under strong emotion, George's pride took it in absolute silence. No doubt it was her revenge upon him for their crippled income—and for Lady Maxwell.

The effect of her behavior on this point was to increase his own pity for his mother. He told her frankly that Letty could not get over the inroads upon their income and the shortening of their resources produced by the Shapetsky debt, just at a time when they should have been able to spend, and were already hampered by the state of the coal trade. It would be better that she and Letty should not meet for a time. He would do his best to make it up.

Lady Tressady took his news with a curious equanimity.

«Well, she always hated me,» she said; «I

don't exactly know why—and was a little jealous of my gowns, too, I think. Don't mind, George; I must say it out. You know, she does n't really dress very well, Letty does n't. Though, my goodness, the bills! Wait till you see them before you call me extravagant. You should make her go to that new woman—what do they call her? She's a darling, and such a style! Never mind about Letty; you need n't bother. I dare say she is n't very nice to you about it. But if you don't come and see me I shall cut my throat, and leave a note on the dressing-table. It would spoil your career dreadfully, so you'd better take care.»

But, indeed, George came without any pressing almost every day. He saw her in her bursts of gaiety and affectation, when the habits of a lifetime asserted themselves as strongly as ever, and he saw her in her moments of pain and collapse, when she could hide the omens of inexorable physical ill neither from herself nor him. By the doctor's advice, he ceased to press her to give in, to resign herself to bed and invalidism. It was best, even physically, to let her struggle on; and he was both astonished and touched by her pluck. She had never been so repellent to him as on those many occasions in the past when she had feigned illness to get her way. Now that Death was really knocking, the half-gay, half-frightened defiance with which she walked the palace of life, one moment listening to the sounds at the gate, the next throwing herself passionately into the revelry within, revealed to the son a new fact about her—a fact of poetry unutterably welcome.

Even her fawning dependents, the Fullertons, ceased to annoy him. They were poor parasites, but she thought for them, and they professed to love her in return. She had emptied her life of finer things; but this relation of patron and flatterer, such as it was, did something to fill the vacancy, and George made no further effort to disturb it.

It was surprising, indeed, how easily, as the weeks went on, he came to bear many of those ways of hers which had once set him most on edge—even her absurd outbursts of affection toward him, and preposterous praise of him in public. In time he submitted even to being flown at and kissed before the Fullertons. Amazing into what new relations that simple perspective of the end will throw all the stuff of life!

Meanwhile he discovered that she was actually trying to be economical in silly, spasmodic ways; and it looked like an attempt to thank him for giving her so much more of his time. He took notice of it by providing

her with one or two invalid luxuries which, as she had rather ostentatiously announced, she could not provide for herself. To his surprise, she received them in a kind of anger, showing a disposition to cry. But he could not get out of her what she meant.

IN Parliament the weeks rushed by. The first and comparatively non-contentious sections of the bill passed with a good deal of talk and delay. George spoke once or twice, without expecting to speak, instinctively pleasing Fontenoy where he could. They had now but little direct intercourse. But George did not feel that his leader had become his enemy, and was not slow to recognize a magnanimity he had not foreseen. Yet, after all, he had not offered the worst affront to party discipline. Fontenoy could still count on his vote. As to the rest of his party, he saw that he was to be finally reckoned as a «crank,» and let alone.

It was not, he found, altogether to be regretted. The position gave him a new freedom of speech. Meanwhile he and Marcella Maxwell rarely met. Week after week passed, and still Tressady avoided those gatherings at the Mile End house, of which he heard full accounts from Edward Watton. He once formally asked Letty if she would go with him to one of Lady Maxwell's East End «evenings,» and she, with equal formality, refused. But he did not take advantage of her refusal to go himself. Was it fear of his own weakness, or compunction toward Letty, or the mere dread of being betrayed into something at once ridiculous and irreparable?

At the same time, it was surprising how often during these weeks he had occasion to pass through St. James's Square. Once or twice he saw her go out or come in, and sometimes was near enough to catch the sudden smile and look which surely must be the smile and look she gave her friends, and not to every passing stranger. Once or twice, also, he met her for a few minutes in the lobby, or on the terrace, but always in a crowd. She never repeated her invitation. He divined that she was, perhaps, vexed with herself for having seemed to press the point on the night of the second reading.

JULY drew to an end. The famous «workshop clause» had been debated for nearly ten days, the whole country, as it were, joining in. One evening in the last week of the month Naseby and Lady Madeleine were sitting together in a corner of a vast drawing-room in Carlton House Terrace. The drawing-room was Mrs.

Allison's. She had returned about a fortnight before from Bad Wildheim, and was now making an effort, for the boy's sake, to see some society. As she moved about the room in her black silk and lace, she was more gentle, but in a sense more inaccessible, than ever. She talked with every one, but her eyes followed her son's auburn head, with its strange upstanding tufts of hair above the fair, freckled face, or they watched the door, even when she was most animated. She looked ill and thin, and the many friends who loved her would have gladly clung about her and cherished her. But it was not easy to cherish Mrs. Allison.

«Do you see how our hostess keeps a watch for Fontenoy?» said Naseby, in a low voice, to Lady Madeleine.

Madeleine turned her startled face to him. Nature had given her this hunted look—the slightly open mouth, the wide eyes, of one who perpetually hears or expects bad news. Naseby did not like it, and had tried to laugh her out of her scared ways before this. But he had no sooner laughed at her than he found himself busy—to use Watton's word—in «stroking» and making it up to her, so tender and clinging was the girl's whole nature, so golden was her hair, so white her skin.

«Is n't it the division news she is expecting?»

«Yes; but don't look so unhappy. She will bear up, even if they are beaten; and they will be beaten. Fontenoy's hopes have been going down. The government will get through this clause, at all events, by a shave.»

«What a fuss everybody is making about this bill!»

«Well, you don't root up whole industries without a fuss. But, certainly, Maxwell has roused the country finely.»

«*She* will break down if it goes on,» said Lady Madeleine, in a melancholy voice.

Naseby laughed.

«Not at all. Lady Maxwell was made for war; she thrives on it. Don't you, too, enjoy it?»

«I don't know,» said the girl, drearily. «I don't know what I was made for.»

And over her feather fan her wide eyes traveled to the distant ogress figure of her mother, sitting majestical in black wig and diamonds beside the Russian ambassador. Naseby's also traveled thither—unwillingly. It was a disagreeable fact that Lady Kent had begun to be very amiable to him of late.

Lady Madeleine's remark made him silent a moment. Then he looked at her oddly.

«I am going to offend you,» he said delib-

erately; «I am going to tell you that you were made to wear white satin and pearls, and to look as you look this evening.»

The girl flushed hotly.

«I knew you despised women,» she said in a strained voice, staring back at him reproachfully. During her months of distress and humiliation she had found her only comfort in «movements» and «causes»—in the moral aspirations generally—so far as her mother would allow her to have anything to do with them. She had tried, for instance, to work with Marcella Maxwell—to understand her.

But Naseby held his ground.

«Do I despise women because I think they make the grace and poetry of the world?» he asked her. «And, mind you, I don't draw any lines. Let them be county councilors and guardians and inspectors and queens as much as they like. I'm very docile. I vote for them; I do as I'm told.»

«Only you don't think that I can do anything useful.»

«I don't think you're cut out for a «platform woman,» if that's what you mean,» he said, laughing; «even Lady Maxwell is n't. And if she was, she would n't count. The women who matter just now (and you women are getting a terrible amount of influence—more than you've had any time this half-century) are the women who sit at home in their drawing-rooms, wear beautiful gowns, and attract the men who are governing the country to come and see them.»

«Lady Maxwell does n't sit at home and wear beautiful gowns.»

«I vow she does!» said Naseby, with spirit. «I can vouch for it. I was caught that way myself; not that I belong to the men who are governing the country. And now she has roped me to her chariot for good and all. Ah, Ancoats, how do you do?»

He got up to make room for the master of the house as he spoke. But as he walked away he said to himself, with a kind of delight, «Good! She did n't turn a hair.»

Lady Madeleine, indeed, received her former suitor with a cool dignity that might have seemed impossible to any one so plaintively pretty. He lingered beside her, twirling his carefully pointed mustache, that matched the small Richelieu chin, and looking at her with a furtive closeness from time to time.

«Well, so you have just come back from Paris?» she said indifferently.

«Yes; I stayed a day or two after my mother. One did n't want to come back to this dull hole.»

«Did you see the new piece at the Français?»

He made a face.

«Not I. One could n't be caught by such *vieux jeu* as that. There was a splendid woman in one of the *cafés chantants*—but I suppose you don't go to *cafés chantants*?»

«No,» said Madeleine, eying him over her fan with a composure that astonished herself—«no; I don't go to *cafés chantants*.»

Ancoats looked blank a moment, then resumed with fervor:

«This woman's divine—*épatant!* Then, at the Chat Noir—but—ah! well, perhaps you don't go to the Chat Noir?»

«No; I don't go to the Chat Noir.»

He fidgeted for a minute. She sat silent. Then he said:

«There are some new French pictures in the next room. Will you come and see them?»

«Thank you; I think I'll stay here,» she said coldly.

He lingered another second or two, then departed. The girl drew a long breath, then instinctively turned her white neck to see if Naseby had really left her. Strange! he too from far away was looking round. In another moment he was making his way slowly back to her.

«Ah, there's Tressady! Now for news.»

The remark was Naseby's. He and Lady Madeleine were, as it happened, inspecting the very French pictures that the girl had just refused to look at in Ancoats's company.

But now they hurried back to the main drawing-room, where the Tressadys were already surrounded by an eager crowd.

«Eighteen majority,» Tressady was saying. «The Socialists saved it at the last moment, after growling and threatening till nobody knew what was going to happen. Forty Ministerialists walked out, twenty more, at least, were away unpaired, and the old Liberals voted against the government to a man.»

«Oh! they'll go—they'll go on the next clause,» said an elderly peer, whose ruddy face glowed with delight. «Serve them right, too. Maxwell's whole aim is revolution made easy. The most dangerous man we have had for years. Looks so precious moderate, too, all the time. Tell me, how did Slade vote after all?»

And Tressady found himself buttonholed by one person after another; pressed for the events and incidents of the evening—how this person had voted, how that; how ministers had taken it; whether, after this Pyrrhic victory, there was any chance of the bill's

withdrawal, or, at least, of some radical modification in the coming clauses. Almost every one in the crowded room belonged, directly or indirectly, to the governing political class. Barely three people among them could have given a coherent account of the bill itself; but to their fathers and brothers and cousins would belong the passing or the destroying of it. And in this country there is no game that amuses so large a number of intelligent people as the political game.

«I don't know why he should look so d—d excited over it,» said Lord Cathedine to Naseby, in a contemptuous aside, with a motion of the head toward Tressady, showing pale and tall above the crowd. «He seems to have voted straight this time, but he's as shaky as he can be. You never know what that kind of fellow will be up to. Ah, my lady! and how are you?»

He made a low bow, and Naseby, turning, saw young Lady Tressady advancing.

«Are you, too, talking politics?» said Letty with affected disgust, giving her hand to Cathedine, and a smile to Naseby.

«We will now talk of nothing but your scarlet gown,» said Cathedine in her ear. «Amazing!»

«You like it?» she said, with nonchalant self-possession. «It makes me look dreadfully wicked, I know.» And she threw a complacent glance at a mirror near, which showed her a gleam of white shoulders in a setting of flame-colored tulle.

«Well, you would n't wish to look good,» said Cathedine, pulling his black mustache. «Any fool can do that!»

«You cynic!» she said, laughing. «Come and talk to me over there. Have you got me my invitations?»

Cathedine followed, a disagreeable smile on his full lips, and they settled themselves in a corner out of the press. Nor were they disturbed by the sudden hush and parting of the crowd, when, five minutes later, amid a general joyous excitement, Fontenoy walked in.

Mrs. Allison forgot her usual dignity, and hurried to meet the leader as he came up to her, with his usual flushed and haggard air.

«Magnificent!» she said tremulously. «Now you are going to win.»

He shook his head, and would hardly let himself be congratulated by any of the admirers, men or women, who pressed to shake hands with him. To most of them he said impatiently that it was no good hallooing till one was out of the wood; that, for his own part, he had expected more, and that the government might very well rally on the next clause.



Then, when he had effectively chilled the enthusiasm of the room, he drew his hostess aside.

«Well, and are you happier?» he said to her in a low voice, his whole expression changing.

«Oh, dear friend, don't think of me!» she said, putting out a thin hand to him with a grateful gesture. «Yes, the boy has been very good; he gives me a great deal of his time. But how can one *know*—how can one possibly know?»

Her pale, small face contracted with a look of pain. Fontenoy, too, frowned as he looked across at Ancoats, who was leaning against the wall in an affected pose, and quoting bits from a new play to George Tressady.

After a pause he said:

«I think if I were you I should cultivate Tressady. Ancoats likes him. It might be possible some time for you to work through him.»

The mother assented eagerly; then said, with a smile:

«But I gather you don't find him much to be depended on in the House.»

Fontenoy shrugged his shoulders.

«Lady Maxwell has bedeviled him somehow. You're responsible.»

«Poor Castle Luton! You must tell me how it and I can make up. But you don't mean that there is any thought of his going over?»

«His vote's all safe—I suppose. He would make too great a fool of himself if he failed us there. But he has lost all heart for the business. And Harding Watton tells me it's all her doing. She has been taking him about in the East End—getting her friends to show him round.»

«And *now* you are in the mood to put the women down—to show them their place?»

She looked at him with gentle humor, a very delicate, high-bred figure, in her characteristic black and white. Fontenoy's whole aspect changed as he caught the reference to their own relation. The look of premature old age, of harsh fatigue, was for the moment effaced by something young and ardent as he bent toward her.

«No; I take the rough with the smooth. Lady Maxwell may do her worst. We have the countercharm.»

A flush showed itself in her lined cheek. She was fourteen years older than he, and had refused a dozen times to marry him; but she would have found it hard to live without his devotion, and she had brought him by now into such good order that she dared to let him know it.

Half an hour later George and Letty mounted another palatial staircase, and at the top of it Letty put on fresh smiles for a new hostess. George, tired out with the drama of the day, could hardly stifle his yawns; but Letty had treated the notion of going home after one party when they might, if they pleased, «do» four, with indignant amazement.

So here they were at the house of one of the greatest of bankers, and George stalked through the rooms in his wife's train, taking comparatively little part in the political buzz all about him, and thinking mostly of a hurried little talk with Mrs. Allison that had taken up his last few minutes in her drawing-room. Poor thing! But what could he do for her? The lad was as stage-struck as ever; could barely talk sense on any other subject, and not much on that.

But if he, owing to the clash of an inner struggle, was weary of politics, the world in general could think and speak of nothing else. The rooms were full of politicians and their wives, of members just arrived from the House, of ministers smiling at each other with lifted eyebrows, like boys escaped from a birching. A tempest of talk surged through the rooms—talk concerned with all manner of great issues, with the fate of a government, the rousing of a country, the fortunes of individual statesmen. Through it all the little host himself, a small, fair-haired man, with the tired eyes and hothouse air of the financier, walked about from group to group, gossiping over the incidents of the division, and now and then taking up some new-comer to be introduced to his pretty and fashionable wife.

Somewhere in the din George stumbled across Lady Leven, who was talking merrily to young Bayle, and found her, notwithstanding, very ready to turn and chat with him.

«Of course, we are all waiting for the Maxwells,» she said to him. «Will they come, I wonder?»

«Why not?»

«Do people show on their way to disaster? I think I should stay at home if I were she.»

«Why, they have to hearten their friends.»

«No good,» said Betty, pursing her pretty lips; «and they have fought so hard.»

«And may win yet,» said George, an odd sparkle in his eye, as he stood looking over his tiny companion to the door. «Nobody is sure of anything, I can tell you.»

«I don't believe *you* care,» she said audaciously, shaking her golden head at him.

«Pray, why?»

«Oh! you don't seem at all desperate,» she

said coolly. «Perhaps you 're like Frank: you think the other side make so much better points than you do. (If Dowson makes another speech,) Frank said to me yesterday, (I vow I shall rat.) There 's a way of talking of your own chiefs! Oh, I shall have to take him out of politics!»

And she unfurled her fan with a jerk half melancholy, half decided. Then suddenly a laugh flashed over her face; she raised herself eagerly on tiptoe.

«Ah, bravo!» she said. «Here they are!»

George turned with the crowd, and saw them enter, Marcella first, in a blaze of diamonds, then the quiet face and square shoulders of her husband.

Nothing, he thought, could have been better than the manner in which both bore themselves as they passed through the throng, answering the greetings of friend and foe, and followed by the keen or hostile scrutiny of hundreds. There was no bravado, no attempt to disguise the despondency that must naturally follow on a division so threatening and in many ways so wounding. Maxwell looked gray with fatigue and short nights, while her black eyes passed wistfully from friend to friend, and had never been more quick, more responsive. Their cause was in danger; nevertheless, the impression on Tressady's mind was of two people consciously in the grip of forces infinitely greater than they—forces that would hold on their path whatever befell their insignificant mortal agents.

I steadier step when I recall,  
Howe'er I slip, thou canst not fall.

So cries the thinker to his mistress Truth. And in the temper of that cry lies the secret of brave living. One looker-on, at least,—and that an opponent,—recalled the words as he watched Marcella and her husband taking their way through the London crowd, amid the doubts of their friends and the half-concealed triumph of their foes.

It seemed to him that he could have no chance of speech with her. But presently, from the other side of the room, he saw that she had recognized and was greeting him, and, do what he would, he must needs make his way to her.

She welcomed him with great friendliness, and without a word of small reproach on the score of the weeks he had let pass without coming to see her. They fell into talk about the speeches of the evening. George thought he could see that she, or Maxwell speaking through her, was dissatisfied with Dowson's

conduct of the bill in the House, and chafing under the constitutional practice that made it necessary to give him so large a share in the matter. But she said nothing ungenerous; nor was there any bitterness toward the many false friends who had deserted them that night in the division lobby. She spoke with eager hope of a series of speeches Maxwell was about to make in the North, and then she turned upon her companion.

«You have n't spoken since the second reading—on any of the fighting points, at least. I have been wondering what you thought of many things.»

George threw his head back against the wall beside her, and was silent a moment. At last he said, looking down upon her:

«Perhaps very often I have n't known what to think.»

She started, reddened ever so little. «Does that mean»—she hesitated for a phrase—«that you have moved at all on the main question?»

«No,» he said deliberately, — «no; I think as I always did—that you are calling in law to do what law can't do. But perhaps I appreciate better than I once did what provokes you to it. It seems to me difficult now to meet the case your side is putting forward by a mere *non possumus*. One wants to stop the machine a bit, and think it out. So much I admit.»

She met his smile with a curious, tremulous look. Instinctively he guessed that this partial triumph in him of her cause—of Maxwell's cause—had let flow some inner fount of feeling.

«If you only knew,» she said, «how all this parliamentary rush and clatter seem to me beside the mark. People talk to me of divisions and votes. I think all the time of persons I know—of faces of children—sick-beds, horrible rooms.»

She had turned her face from the crowd toward the open window, in the recess of which they were standing. As she spoke they both fell back a little into comparative solitude, and he drew her on to talk, trying in his kindness, in a young, eager way, to make her rest, to soothe her weariness and disappointment. And as she spoke he clutched at the minutes; he threw more and more sympathy at her feet to keep her talking, to enchain her there beside him, in her lovely whiteness and grace. And, mingled with it all, was the happy guess that she liked to linger with him; that, amid all this hard clamor of public talk and judgment, she felt him a friend in a peculiar sense, a friend whose loyalty grew with misfortune.

As for this wild-beast world that was thwarting and libeling her, he began to think of it with a blind, up-swelling rage—a desire to fight and win for her, to put down—

«Tressady, your wife sent me to find you. She wishes to go home.»

The voice was Harding Watton's. That observant young man advanced bowing, and holding out his hand to Lady Maxwell.

When Marcella had drifted once more into the fast-melting crowd George found himself face to face with Letty. She was very white, and stared at him with wide, passionate eyes.

And on the way home George, with all his efforts, could not keep the peace. Letty flung at him a number of bitter and insulting things that he found very hard to bear.

«What do you wish me to do?» he said to

her at last, impatiently. «I have hardly spoken six sentences to Lady Maxwell since the meeting till to-night—I suppose because you wished it. But neither you nor any one else shall make me rude to her. Don't be such a fool, Letty! Make friends with her, and you will be ashamed of saying, or even thinking, such things.»

Whereat Letty burst into hysterical tears, and he soon found himself involved in all the remorseful, inconsequent speeches to which a man in such a plight feels himself driven. She allowed herself to be calmed, and they had a dreary making up. When it was over, however, George was left with the uneasy conviction that he knew very little of his wife. She was not of a nature to let any slight to her go unpunished. What was she planning? What would she do?

(To be continued.)

Mary A. Ward.

## THE RETURN.

NOW at last I am at home—  
Wind abeam and flooding tide,  
And the offing white with foam,  
And an old friend by my side  
Glad the long, green waves to ride.

Strange how we've been wandering  
Through the crowded towns for gain,  
You and I who loved the sting  
Of the salt spray and the rain  
And the gale across the main!

What world honors could avail  
Loss of this—the slanted mast,  
And the roaring round the rail,  
And the sheeted spray we cast  
Round us as we seaward passed?

As the sad land sinks apace,  
With it sinks each thought of care;  
Think not now of aging face;  
Question not the whitening hair:  
Youth still beckons everywhere.

And the light we thought had fled  
From the sky-line glows there now;  
Bends the same blue overhead;  
And the waves we used to plow  
Part in beryl at the bow.

Hours like this we two have known  
In the old days, when we sailed  
Seaward ere the night had flown,  
Or the morning star had paled  
Like the shy eyes love has veiled.

Round our bow the ripples purred,  
As the swift tide outward streamed  
Through a hushed and ghostly world,  
Where our harbor reaches seemed  
Like a river that we dreamed.

Then we saw the black hills sway  
In the waters' crinkled glass,  
And the village wan and gray,  
And the startled cattle pass  
Through the tangled meadow-grass.

Through the glooming we have run  
Straight into the gates of day,  
Seen the crimson-edged sun  
Burn the sea's gray bound away—  
Leap to universal sway.

Little cared we where we drove  
So the wind was strong and keen.  
Oh, what sun-crowned waves we clove!  
What cool shadows lurked between  
Those long combers pale and green!

Gray-beard pleasures are but toys;  
Sorrow shatters them at last:  
For this brief hour we are boys;  
Trim the sheet and face the blast;  
Sail into the happy past!

L. Frank Tooker.