

# Lady Clemency Welcomes a Guest

BY MAUD STEPNEY RAWSON

I

THE sudden state which it pleased my Lady Clemency Honeyfoot, of Pages Court in Sussex, to assume after three years of deepest mourning for her brother, the young Earl of Oxney, was the source of much gossip in the neighborhood of the Five Ports and the two "ancient towns" of Rye and Winchelsea. Her silver plate, it was said, had been lately fetched from Rye Bank, where it had reposed ever since the tragedy, and she had even engaged extra servants in order to do justice to her position as lady of Pages. Every one was sure that she must be going to entertain at least some rich lover from a foreign country, and that she desired to make upon him a good impression, because, having refused every gentleman between Hastings and Dover, she thought it high time, seeing she must at least be thirty-two, to secure some kind of a husband. Further, her housekeeper whispered that a specially fine dinner was to be prepared for New-year's eve, the night of the arrival of this guest; whereupon the neighborhood anticipated that, like a sensible woman, Lady Clemency would once more return to social uses and keep the New-year with all the old dignity which had marked the festival in the days of the well-loved young Earl, whose cruel and mysterious death had given the Romney Marshes something to puzzle over ever since.

It was fully three years since the tragedy. People had told the story again and again in the neighborhood to strangers whose attention had been fettered by the sight of the young and beautiful figure of a lady closely veiled as she drove about the Kentish and Sussex lanes, between Tenterden and Rye. The general version was that upon one storm-sodden night of February—and, strangely enough, on the same fateful date (the 15th) as that on which Sir George Barclay and his comrades in evil had plotted to attempt the

life of King William III. as he went a-hunting from Turnham Green to Richmond Forest—a sudden summons had come to her ladyship after midnight, and a warning that she must ride ten miles in an hour if she would see her dear brother the Earl alive and give his mind peace. Persons who had known others intimately acquainted with one who actually witnessed the delivery of this sinister message told how Lady Clemency had gone out in her bedgown with her riding-dress over it, and her bare feet thrust into French riding-boots, and her hair hanging loose, to ride with the speed of a witch over the Kentish border to a mysterious house filled with armed men wearing the Orange badge. Here, stretched on a common floor of dirty stone, she had found the brother to whom all her love and youth were sacred. For half an hour she had knelt with the whole weight of his dying body in her arms, turning pitifully from one to another of the officers about her for explanation which none could give. For they were surely all guilty bunglers, who had shot the wrong man, in the hope of the reward promised by the government to all who could bring to book traitors to the Orange King and plotters on behalf of James the Fugitive and his Jesuits. The same tattler went on to say that the Earl, ere he died, had whispered in the ear of his sister the name of the true offender, and that she had given but one cry, and then sat like a stone image as his life ebbed and his eyes closed like those of a sleeping child. From which it was concluded that the name of the real sinner was one not unknown to his sister—indeed, that she had more than a passing interest in him.

After the realization of so enormous a tragedy she had been seen no more for many months. And lately she had stinted herself of every luxury, had made strange journeys to London, had visited

the sheriffs at Rye often, but always at dusk . . . and so forth.

The news that after three years a guest, and one who was not of the neighborhood, should be admitted to Pages caused positive sensation in Rye, in Winchelsea, in Ashford, and the length of the Marshes from Ore to Littlestone, from Bodiam to the Rother's mouth.

The Lady Clemency thought only of the enterprise before her, the splendid welcome, the audacious stroke by which she would once and for all gain possession of the man for whom her whole being yearned these long five years. For so many months had she anticipated such preparation, and now that it summoned her energy and wit, her supreme discretion, she was almost overweighted by its detail. No one, except the old steward, who knew all her story, could have told that anything more than sheer business braced her at this moment. In the dairy, in the kitchens, in the stable, in the court itself, she had her finger upon everything, caring for each pan or caldron, each scrap of harness or well-packed press, as in the old days, when it was her joy to see that everything at Pages Court, from the smallest nail-head to the largest sconce, reflected the honor and beauty of her brother, its lord. Compared with him, other men had meant so little to her. He was her joy and her delight—nay, a holy charge—this boy five years her junior, born when his mother died, and commended to Clemency's care by their dead father. No man ever seemed to her so innocently gay, so passionately honorable, so delicately sensitive, but without effeminacy, as this boy, Ludlow Debonair Honeyfoot.

Clemency thought much in these days of the sudden change in their relationship which his coming of age had brought, remembering how she, till then the adviser of the boy, the head of Pages and all its tenants, had in a twinkling become only the secondary personage in authority, the mouthpiece of the boy's wishes. She welcomed the change, for it left her the more freedom for those cares and graces which were due to her brother's guests from the lady of Pages. The Earl ere he was seventeen had learned to spend and to give in a month more than his ancestors could

have earned in six, and Clemency had made many a painful sacrifice in the latter years. Women adored him; men—even the hardest, the most conscienceless—would go out of their way to do him a service, even to the risking of their own necks. And he was partial to neither this woman nor that, neither more nor less than each man's perfect comrade—unless there was between him and Otway Romilly, the soldier, more tenderness than is usual between average good fellows.

She remembered the sudden revulsion of feeling, the shock of glad surprise, when their fortunes bettered. She remembered, with a sudden spasm of the heart, the very moment at which she had news of it,—when, seated by her window one cold spring evening, she slaved at the stitching of a new riding-vest for the boy, cut out of a skirt of her own. She listened now, breathless, for it seemed she could actually hear that swinging step of his as he raced up the stairs, burst into her room, tossed the stitching and needles and threads right and left, and poured into her lap many coins, and more gold than she had seen in one place for at least two years. Then came the delirium, the laughter, her inquiries, his mysterious evasions, her anxious wonder and fears—all allayed at last by his loving assurance that all was well, his creditors paid, and his own bad debts made good to him by the help of some genial friend whose name he must not yet divulge. "Honest gold, honestly come by." How those words, often repeated, were burnt in upon her brain! Then the dazzling gayety of the days which followed—days which told the round of the year in a circle of innocent joys, pretty extravagances, happy anticipations, days when Pages stood open to many a friend and many a stranger, days when it seemed to the lady of Pages that time halted; others full of strange surprises, half fearful, half delicious, holding hours in which her thoughts absolutely forgot for a time the dear young Earl, because intercourse with the closer of his friends—this Otway Romilly—was so different from anything else of the kind in her experience. These memories culminated in the shock of sharp disappointment that overwhelm-

ed her when Otway, absent in London but for a few days, had his orders for Devonport and his regiment, and went without good-by, save a hurried letter to her. And from that time uncertainty had closed in upon her, distrust of the ever-ready gold, of the Earl's good spirits, of his sudden journeys made at an hour's notice—presumably to London. She remembered once how one day, thinking him far away in the city, she had seen him leaping a fence to meet a man whose face she could not see, but whose figure she knew for that of her brother's friend. She had been too proud to question, awaiting explanation. But the Earl was silent, though the next day he was once more merry and the house full of guests. And then— She had a hundred times forbidden herself any more to recall that last horror of his death and parting in the half-ruined Kentish farmhouse to which she had been summoned in such ghastly haste. Now she controlled herself once more, rose from her seat, and went on her way through the house. She was right. She had no more need for economies; all the money she required was saved: it had been saved coin for coin, paid out slowly for the attainment of her purpose—the arrest of the friend for whom the boy had been sacrificed.

## II

These were her brother's rooms. Hither would my Lady Clemency presently lead her guest; here at last would her promise to the dead find its fulfilment.

The wind whistled; the sleet stung the casements. She looked out into the bitter, darkening afternoon,—to the right, on to deep brown oak woods; to the left, upon hills, through a little depression of which the road glimmered gray-white, two miles off—the road by which Major Romilly must come to Pages at dusk. The northeast wind would be driving direct in his face, she reflected. What if the snow thickened; what if he took the wrong road, were struck down by frost, were to be found dead,—dead before she could greet him as she thirsted to greet?

She passed out on to a wide landing to enter a small cabinet at the end of a curious little passage. It had been a hiding-place in the days when the Earls of Ox-

ney had found such things needful for purposes of political or religious intrigue. A vague smile played about her mouth. Then the color of shame rose to her forehead. Had not intrigue as petty served to screen the one she loved? Base means, perhaps, but to what an end! The political guise thrown over the rumors of the Earl's death—who but herself had fostered this by her silence, her non-denial? Any rumor was preferable to the one which should couple his name with that of the false coiner, the treacherous friend. Not till the guilty man were trapped, not till his own lips had confessed the treachery, would she tell to the world the true story. And then a thousand trumpeters should hardly suffice for the telling—so bravely should the memory of the dead be lauded, so pitilessly blared the guilt of the living!

She locked the door of the closet on entering and stood still with her thoughts. It was her brother who had opened up this little corridor and used the small chamber at the end of it for his muskets and whips and swords and other tools. These, all but the sword he wore on the day of his death, she had moved, making the little place, with its deep projecting window, into a closet for retreat and solitary council. No one entered but herself; no hand but hers touched the few objects in the place. Inquisitive servants declared to the outside world that here hung two pictures, one of the Earl, the other of a lover who had wronged her ladyship. They were but partly right. There hung here only one portrait. It was not that of the Earl.

Lady Clemency drew aside the curtain over the picture. The man in it looked down upon her with grave composure, and she flung back a look, if fiercer, at least as fearless as his. He had been painted by Huysman, not in court dress or hunting costume as a fop would have it, but in his shirt and military breeches after sword exercise, his favorite pastime as an Irish soldier. Behind him was a rough curtain of brown sack-ing, such as a corner of the tent under which the Earl and he had slept like brothers when William of Orange summoned his militia upon the many alarms of French incursion that checkered the first years of his reign. The face

of the man in the portrait was not full-colored, but boldly, almost ruggedly modelled. The nose was straight, with square tip; the mouth needed no hair to hide it, for the shape was firm and generous without the beauty that is ideal; and the eyes, full-lidded, had a softness and color rare in a man. The short eyebrows, sweeping upwards, hinted rather at energy than foresight; the figure was easy and not overmassive. There was no jewel about the dress, no single carrying and bunch of black ribbon such as delighted the Stuart dandies, but only a silver buckle which clasped the belt confining the shirt, and a seal-ring worn on the right hand. The wig, however, was dressed in the fashionable way—divided into three, with a queue in the centre, and tresses or cadenettes on either side. This was the only point in the portrait in which there was any concession to conventionality.

Clemency looked long at the picture, leaning forward from her chair to gaze defiantly into the painted eyes; and while she leant, the black ribbon about her neck was loosened, and the miniature it bore fell into her lap. She caught it up and looked from portrait to miniature again and again, with a bitter smile.

"So shall you two meet to-night," she whispered,—*"you who accuse and you who have betrayed. So shall I—who, if Heaven had not been merciful, might have linked you more closely than friendship could link you—so shall I bring your soul face to face to-night, when no disguise or lie can serve the betrayer. To-night, before cockerow, shall God measure out His slow justice to the three of us."*

She moved to a high desk, lighted another taper, and took out a thin scroll. "For the last time," she whispered to herself, "the very last, lest my courage fail me, my dear, my heart." She laid the miniature of the Earl against her cheek for a moment and unrolled the paper. Her eyes grew bright and hard as she read, her pulse cooler and stronger. One of the tapers sputtered. She paused to trim it, and went back to the beginning of the document, though she knew every word by heart:

"I, Ludlow Debonair Honeyfoot, Earl Oxney, do swear in my death that I

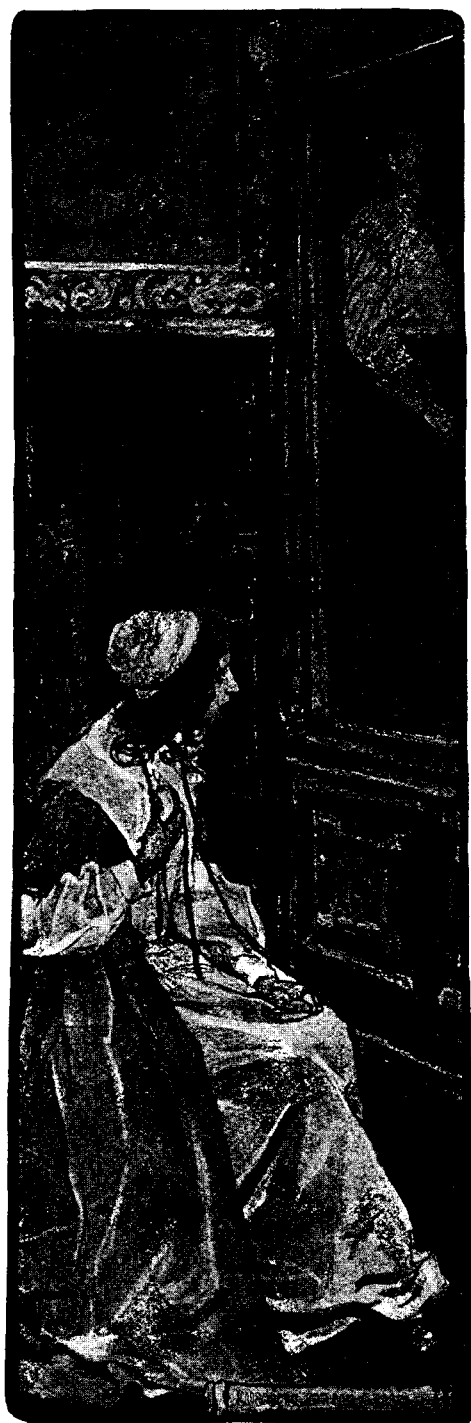
die innocent and have no part in any scheme to utter false coin, in despite of His Majestie's order or any command of ye Parliament; that the smelting-furnace and other chattels likewise in no way pertain to me, and are hereby delivered by me to ye officers of His Majestie with the tenement thereto; that I have been decoyed here by those who should hang for it, knowing nothing of the making of either gold coins, pence or medals, whether counterfeiting ye mintage of Rye Towne or of other mints in His Majestie's Realm. Let justice find the guilty—for I . . ." Here the confession ceased abruptly—unsigned. For the "breaking of the golden bowl" had cut off speech and consciousness. Only in the last flickering flashes of life had that bitter cry against his dearest friend reached the sister's ear—a cry born of delirium, of wild remorse, at which she could not guess. At this moment, with agonized inquiry in her eyes, her heart bursting with misery and rage against the slayers of her beloved, her brain seized the name he uttered and took it for the answer to her wild question. Leaning low to look into his face, in a very madness of hunger for his voice, his answer, she saw there all that she took for unspoken accusation. Once again, low and steadily, she had begged for the truth. To her "Who is guilty?" his piteous lips had striven to reply, till, bending low to hear—yet jealously, for fear of losing even for a second the sight of his face in life,—she had heard once more the name she had hoped yet dreaded to hear, the name which, in wiping the stain from one so dear, clove in two the honor of another on whom her thoughts hung in strange gentleness.

Then she curtained the picture deliberately and went away to her own bedchamber.

### III

Here upon the square canopied French bedstead of brass with rose-colored hangings my lady's "highest dress" was set out by her orders—a white one with lace collar and a vest stiff with spangles and silvery beads. The light of a splendid fire made her neck and arms like ivory as she unrobed and robed anew, without haste. Her tirewoman did her best to chatter, but the mistress was deaf to it. In silence

the toilet was finished, and in less time than Clemency expected. She sent away her woman, took up one of the branching candlesticks and held it so that she could see herself in the long mirror—startled at this sight of herself in forgotten finery. The mirror framed for her a woman in her prime, dressed in full toilet such as was the vogue under the last of the Stuarts; for in her country seclusion Lady Clemency had not yet felt herself constrained to adopt either the towering head-dress or the Dutch hoop which Mary of England and Orange had brought with her in 1689. Full and flowing, the lines of her skirt gave Clemency's fine proportions their true grace; the stiffness of the stomacher could not add more than a delicate rigidity to her figure. The lace collar drooped widely, giving the utmost breadth to her beautiful shoulders, while it sprang out a little stiffly from the nape to frame her face. Over her left ear she wore with a looping of pearls a rosette of the Earl's favorite color, apple green. Of all the black ribbons and crêpe sashes and gauzes set out by her woman, she donned not one shred that night. Instead of these she drew from her press a long broad scarf, green like her ear-knot, but heavily fringed with gold—a man's sword-sash. There was a stain upon it; she tied it carefully to hide the rusty blot. Then she put out the lights in the wall sconces and left the room, with a taper in her hand. Half-way down the first flight, she swept back, returned to the press, and fetched from it a large, battered, tarnished silver coin. Its detail showed very distinctly in the candle-light as she threaded it on to the long chain she wore on her neck. One side of the disc bore a three-masted galleon in full sail; on the other were cut the picture of a church and the words *Sancta Maria de Ria*, with the date of coining—1696—which was the date of the Earl's death. For a moment she let the coin hang outside her bodice, then



CLEMENCY LOOKED LONG AT THE PICTURE



hurriedly, as if time were short, thrust it inside her laces and went quickly on her way.

All the lower stairways were bright with candles; there were blazing logs in the hall and living-rooms, and she despatched a servant to see that the chamber for her guest was curtained and prepared. Down a long stone corridor she passed to that wing of Pages which had once been sacred to the menkind of her people. Hither they had withdrawn for their smoking and cards, their political squabbles, their rougher jests, their magisterial administration (for many an earl had coolly dealt out justice in his own fashion without reference to his weaker neighbors), for their money transactions, their chatter over horses and dogs, woodlands and waterlands.

She stopped for a moment in a little lobby and rang a bell. Instantly a movement was audible in the room beyond. An old man, her steward, opened the door of communication and saluted.

"Is the officer here?" she asked.

"Yes, my lady, with two other men."

"Are they of the neighborhood?"

"They are from Canterbury, my lady, and will go back there."

"It is good. Rye men would have chattered out their business before it was begun. Why has the sheriff only two guards? I told him four."

"Two suffice, my lady."

She regarded the old man with a hard smile. "Yes, Ruffany, three to one is accounted fair odds in fair love and open war."

"And what if this be both?" muttered the old steward, in his beard, as she passed him and went into the stone-paved room beyond. Upon the rustle of her thick silk the heavily booted men rose to their feet and pushed aside their chairs. They fell back from the fireplace and stood stiffly to attention.

"You have had food and rest?" she asked. "You are warm and merry? That is right. You will usher in the New-year pleasantly with an easy task, I think. All laborers are not so fortunate."

The biting tone of her voice, the contemptuous smile, the half-closed deep eyelids, the proud, lovely head, made an impression of concentrated coolness and

autoocracy. There was almost a touch of gallantry in the dry voice of the sheriff as he answered her:

"It is not often that so much of my labor is already done at the beginning, or by such hands as yours, my lady."

"All I require of you is that you act like gentlemen—as my brother would have wished. Give me the warrant here a moment."

He laid it before her.

"That is good," she said. "No word is left out, and my name as accuser is properly written. For the rest—I do not care. His Majesty has given me the right to deliver this man to punishment. Punish—but do it like gentlemen. And if he struggles, defend yourselves. And if he thrusts, thrust you also, and do it clean and straight—as the Earl would have had it."

She handed the warrant back composedly.

"You know the signal, my men. A quarter of an hour before midnight I will send my steward for the loving-cup to be drunk in the New-year. That shall be your summons. You, Master Sheriff, shall knock three times at the door of the upper parlor, and I will open it to you and pass out. The rest is your affair."

Once more the men saluted as the lady of Pages recrossed the threshold and went to the dining-parlor.

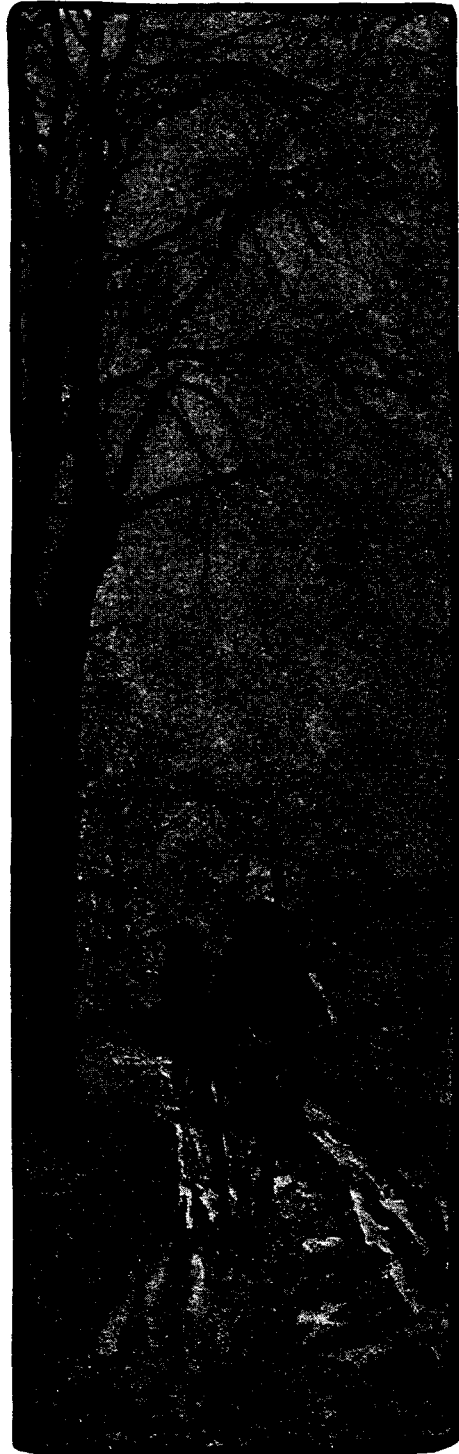
#### IV

In the face of the northeast, with his servant, also mounted, behind him, rode Otway Romilly from Croydon across Surrey heaths and Kentish vales to Pages in the Sussex hills. His head was bent low, his hat thrust down over his keen eyes, his mouth set. But the cruel sleet had not more to do with the drawing of the lines in his face or the compression of his lips than the thoughts which beat in his brain. For he was not like my Lady Clemency. To him long waiting had not brought coolness nor counsel, and this because the motive at the heart of his delay was not that of a revenge which already apprehends the first-fruits of satisfaction. For him the stake was also very great, but it was not the stake for which her ladyship had played so carefully for three years. Time had

brought him no nearer to the method by which he could best approach this woman after her coldness, her strangeness, and, above all, in the face of the secret which parted them. And yet there was her sudden invitation to Pages! It perplexed him extraordinarily. As his mind travelled again and again over the old ground, he felt this barrier of the secret rise once more in all its sinister impregnability. So slight a thing it seemed—at times a mere network of sentimental scruples, a flimsy structure which he had but to destroy at one thrust, sharp and quick, but deadly. Yet even as he contemplated it he knew the flimsiness was only apparent, and that though it were but a network which divided him from the woman, it was as strong as death itself. Again, hope leaped up. Surely her sudden welcome to Pages was enough! On the strength of it he could speak to her, win her, before memories of the tragedy should engulf them both and bring the constraint he dreaded. Perhaps afterwards in the blessed days—Heaven grant they might come to him at last—she would forgive him for concealing a certain ghastly truth.

The broad stream of light from the great open door almost blinded him as he went round the sharp corner of the last turn of the avenue. The sense of being awaited was almost too much for him. Clemency's open arms could not have excited him more intensely than these wide, significant, beautiful portals with their radiance pouring out upon the frozen, jaded rider. He checked his horse sharply and caught his breath. It could not be merely imagination which made him behold the figure of a woman waiting in the inner vestibule at the head of the steps.

Clemency started up as she saw in the path of light a man on a horse which reared at a shadow. For a second the sorrow of her life was forgotten. This man was her brother's friend. So had he ridden many times round that very clump



IN THE FACE OF THE NORTHEAST RODE OTWAY  
ROMILLY

of ivied elms, and she had loved to see him come—why, she could not tell at first. And when she knew the reason, too late, she wished herself dead, like the Earl.

Her memories, chasing one another in a mad circle, brought her back to the present. She went half-way down the broad flight of rounded stone steps to meet her guest, her bare neck with its pearls unsheltered from the wind, her cheeks white, and all her body dry and burning.

# V

The steward had set the wine on the table and removed the last course, and many untasted dishes before it. He seemed, Otway thought, to be possessed by a sense of ceremonial that touched insanity, for half his tripping journeys between sideboard and table, and table and door, appeared to be for no reason but to remove clean silver and replace it with fresh. Never for a moment did the hostess and her guest appear to be alone. He chafed under it for an hour. And yet, even so, the hunger of his eyes was beginning to be appeased. When at last the door closed and the two sat at the table, she in her high chair—the Earl always liked to see his sister so enthroned—and Otway sitting, a little sideways, with his arm on the table, so that he could command her face without appearing to stare too closely—when the two so sat together he wondered why he had longed for this moment, so painfully did he fear lest she should lapse into sorrow and anger or shrink icily if he boldly put his own business first. In his pouch was a trifle or two, gifts he had brought her, a rosary of Irish beads, a soft tippet of Irish lace. He told her little anecdotes of the way he chose them; he asked her to wear them, some day.

She smiled and looked at the beads. Then she took up the tiny silver crucifix they carried and examined it.

"They say that this Man suffered for all the sins of the world," she said, bitterly, "but it is an old tale which does not help me. Men like Deb are falsely done to death hour after hour. And still the whole world sins and goes free, because some men are cowards and others are dolts and are afraid for their own skins. Tell me, is it not true?"

"It is true that half the world sins

and the other half must pay," he answered, gently; "but we cannot read the end of the tale, my Lady Clemency. And it is often well we cannot read it."

Her fingers twined themselves absently in the delicate lace tippet, and she looked away from him. But her silence gave him courage.

"Will you not wear it now, that I may see how it becomes you? For, if not, we will give it to the nearest almswoman and I will bring you another scarf," he said. His tone rallied her, his eyes besought. He did not see the hard look in her eyes, for she looked down; he only saw the quiver of her fine lips, and took it as a sign of gentleness towards him. He rose and courteously hung the lace upon her shoulders, never once daring to touch even her sleeve as he did so. He waited, standing with a little nervous smile, to see if her cheek would color, or her lips find a word or two which might tell him how he stood with her. She pushed back her big chair and rose. It seemed as with an effort that she looked at him then and said:

"I must see the lace in a mirror. Come; there is one up-stairs. Give me your arm, Major Romilly."

His heart misgave him as they mounted the stairs. Just so—to the eye—might a betrothed pair have passed to the joyous shelter of the fires in the parlors above, he reflected. But she never looked at him, nor leant on his arm. They might have been ghosts, so impersonal, so unreal seemed the link.

"You know these rooms," she said, in a low tone, as she took her arm suddenly from his and led the way.

"Yes, yes," he answered. He feared this mood of hers yet; he knew that the subject which filled both their minds could no longer be avoided.

"Come and see how well I have tended Deb's favorite toys," she said. Her tone was lighter—and yet he hated that cold, hard look of the eyes, so new in her, so strange.

She beckoned, and he followed. She rested now and again in a seat, then would start up to pass on and point to some familiar relie.

Otway moved as she moved, but always remained standing.

"Here is his library," she said. "You





SHE WENT HALF WAY DOWN THE STEPS

remember how he chose his books? 'Not for men's wisdom, but for a man's pleasure'—those were his words."

"I remember well."

"You gave him many of his books."

"I remember."

"Some of them he never opened."

"I can well believe it. No man dares choose his friend's whole library."

"But Deb left the leaves unturned, he told me, because you taught him more than all these volumes."

Why should she have said this with that cold smile? he asked himself.

"I would my teaching could have saved him," he cried, bitterly.

She winced a little, but passed on and took up a wooden shield on which was the pad of a hare.

"You remember the day we went coursing over the Rother Level and I begged him to spare the hare and call back the greyhounds?"

"Very well. We could not stop them."

"The black hound bit Deb. The mark was clear on his wrist up to the day he died." She moved on and paused before a half-finished bust. "Do you remember how he loved his 'puddling in clay'? If he had not been a great gentleman with other duties, I would have had him be a second Angelo."

"Deb always had a rare skill of finger," replied Otway.

"If I had it, I would make a hundred clay counterfeits of him," she answered, passionately. She turned suddenly upon him. "It is surely not so hard—to make counterfeits?"

Her eyes pierced him through. He caught his breath; his hands which held the bust she gave him shook. And he knew that she saw it.

"It is the hardest thing in the world to make a good counterfeit—when the original is a thing that you love well," he said as he replaced the bust.

She sank down in the nearest settle. He found her gazing at him in cold scrutiny when he returned to the hearth.

"And yet some men have wonderful art in these things," she murmured on.

She drew the coin in her bosom slowly forth by its chain and swung it nervously to and fro. It glittered in the fire-light. Otway watched it swing. He would have given the world to snatch it

from her neck, fling it out of the window, then seize her hands and bid her be dumb and forget her misery. Suddenly she took the coin off its chain and put it in his palm.

"Do you know what it is?" she said, slowly. "It is the pledge of another man's wickedness, the token which caused Deb his death."

"It might well pass for true stuff," he said. "The die must have been very good."

"Yes—it is good. But there is an ugly mark upon it. I have not rubbed it away. It was on the floor where—where he fell when they shot him. I found it caught in his cloak when—when they brought him here. In the olden days if such a token were touched by the hand of the real culprit, this stain, they say, would become moist—and so proclaim him a murderer."

She leant her chin on her hand and regarded him steadily. His eyes never swerved from hers. His mind was battling with a new idea, so preposterous that for the moment it engulfed him, and he made no reply. He clasped the coin tightly, vowing inwardly that she should possess it no longer.

"Will you give this to me?" he asked, abruptly.

"It cannot be spared. It is one of my treasures, a link in the chain of many proofs of the guilt of the man I pursue."

His opportunity seemed to have come. He turned the coin round and round and spoke tenderly but with irony. "Does such pursuit make my Lady Clemency happy? Does it feed and sustain her soul? Does it bury sorrow and heal the great wound?"

"I desire it," she said—"I desire it because it is due to the dead, due to me who mourn."

"That which we owe to the dead is nothing more nor less than love, my lady."

"And service—which implies justice."

"If justice could bring back the dead—"

She gave a bitter cry—but regained her self-possession. "It can bring peace to the living," she said, sternly.

"Peace? There is no peace for you, my Lady Clemency, so long as you let this thought tear at your heart." He spoke sadly, almost sternly.

"How admirably you can assume that superior air!" she cried. "How easy for you—who know not the guilty man—to bid me forget! He is nothing to you. Or perhaps you desire to shield him. Is it so?" She went close to him and looked mockingly in his face. "You dare not say you do not know him," she whispered. "The truth is in your face. What now? Will you shield him any more?"

"Yes—for your sake."

"But I hate him. I desire his death. He can no more justify himself. Now—dare you shield him?"

"I dare," he returned.

"For my sake!" she mocked. "Do you think I love him, then,—love him in secret, and that my love is greater than my loathing of his betrayal?"

Gradually the mystery of her mood had unfolded itself. The notion which had at first come to him as a blinding shock now stood out clearly, explaining her, her words, all the hysteria in her letters of the past three years. His heart leaped, for now he knew that he had the mastery of the situation. He answered her question boldly, with a grave smile:

"Your love is greater than your loathing, inasmuch as all love is greater than all hate."

She laughed long and bitterly. Then she stood up in the middle of the room to taunt him. "See here," she said; "here is the case of a young nobleman, honest and generous, with many friends, one of them closer than all the rest perhaps, his playfellow in mind and soul, but wiser, more crafty, more secret. He, being a penniless, careless fellow, turns his wits to account. Money, he thinks, though it cannot be plucked from the trees, can grow under a man's hand. And so he sets up the coining-machines; but, lest others should be jealous of his skill, he borrows the name of his friend to put over his workshop. And in the hour of discovery it is his friend who dies for him, his friend's name which is dragged in the dust, his friend's house which is left desolate. Tell me what punishment would you mete out to such a man."

"None so cruel as God Himself will assign."

"Oh! you play with words and I desire the truth. You, knowing Deb—what would you do?"

"I would gladly have died for him, for thereby I should have turned sorrow away from you," he answered, with a shaking voice.

She started, looked at him, reeled, recovered herself. "It is not too late for that supreme sacrifice," she said. Her words charged with malice, her glittering eyes, her rigid, tense figure, were those of a maddened creature. So she stood in the firelight in her pearly dress, vindictive, triumphant, cruelly beautiful. "It is not too late," she said again. Her hand moved towards the bell by which she summoned her steward.

"If you desire it," he said, "here, by Deb's sword, I will make that sacrifice. But it is too late. For the man you pursue—whom I also know—is dead. The justice of God was far quicker than yours, my Lady Clemency. He is dead, and I have far greater proofs than this" (he touched the coin) "of his guilt."

"How can I trust you now?" she gasped. "You could have saved Deb. You went away. Who was the man who led him into that coiner's trap? Tell me."

"I cannot."

"Deb told me his name," she said. "Upon that I have acted, have waited, have pursued."

"Yes, and Deb told me also. I have it here"—he touched a packet in his breast—"in writing. I have the man's very signature; I have a hundred proofs of his death. More I am not permitted to tell you. The house, you know, was burnt; the traces of the evil are gone."

"Do you know the name that Deb whispered to me?"

"I have guessed," he said, "but the error is yours. He was a dying man when he spoke. His mind wandered."

"He named you—Otway."

"So your actions to-night have told me."

"And I believed him."

"What else could you do?"

"Tell me—tell me the man's name," she entreated. Her face was ashy white.

He put his arms about her. "Trust me but now—Clemency, and some day I will tell you, if you wish it."

"His name! Show me the letter." Her fingers sought his pocket eagerly. His hand closed over them.

"No—remember it is against my oath



"DO YOU KNOW WHAT IT IS?" SHE SAID, SLOWLY



to Deb, sworn on your behalf. Would you have me false to the dead?" he said. He put her into a chair forcibly and walked away.

"Ah! but it is because I want to trust you," she faltered—"I want to . . . make amends. How hard you are! Give me peace!—Give me the truth!"

The struggle was bitter, but he won it, loving her too well to deal the worst of wounds.

"If I tell you that it is for Deb's honor that I am silent more than for your sake, will you trust me?" he said, gently going down on his knee by her chair to take her hand in pity.

She stared at him vaguely. Then looked away and fixed her eyes upon the fire. A blank look crept into her eyes; her hands grew ice-cold. She sat like a woman of stone, and he dared not speak lest she should put to him the last question. Her lips at last began to move.

"It is not always well that we can read the end of the story," she whispered with dry lips, quoting him like a child trying to comfort itself with a formula. She repeated the phrase twice. After many minutes she lifted her lips to his ear. "The dead are always curs," she whispered.

"And their honor also," he whispered back, tenderly.

The three-quarters before midnight clanged out so suddenly from the servants' quarters that ere his ears and hers had ceased to throb the door was opened and the old steward, pale and bent, came in. In his hand was a gigantic silver goblet of wine, and a page behind carried a napkin on a tray. Lady Clemency rose abruptly.

"Go and call the others," she said. The page went out. Otway, perplexed, drew back and waited. He heard the clank of swords, the heavy steps of the sheriff and his officers as they mounted the stairs and knocked thrice, as she had told them to do.

"Your warrant," cried her ladyship, as the man in command saluted. "Nay, you need not guard the door."

She took the roll and gave it to Otway with a strange smile. There were tears in her eyes; her throat was quivering. "Read," she said; "your name is in it."

He looked deliberately at it, smiled also, and handed it back with a bow.

"I do not want it!" she said, like a frightened child. "Ah! wait!"

She took from the rack of weapons on the wall a short knife and slashed the document through twice. Then tore it into many pieces, which fell at her feet.

"See, my men, how easy I make your work to-night. Witness that I hereby withdraw my accusation."

She walked to the tottering old steward, and took the cup from him and touched it with her lips.

"Let us drink to peace and good faith, to honor and truth—!" Her voice broke.

"And to hope," said Otway, taking the cup to drink from it where her lips had touched it.

In turn, by her order, did the other men drink also, and then she told them good night, standing at her full height, defying their inquiry and their comment, till the last heavy footstep had died away. Then she turned away and flung out her arms in a kind of very madness, walking to and fro in the room with little shivering sighs.

Otway caught her as she turned. He saw she could stand no more.

"I am dizzy," she cried; "my brain seethes. The fire burns me, Otway. Come—take me to the house door—set it wide. Give me air."

He could not restrain her, but took her down the flight as best he could.

"My dear," he answered, as she leaned on his arm, "there is frost outside: the air is ice-cold; it will give you your death!"

"Fling open the door," she begged, "for I cannot breathe."

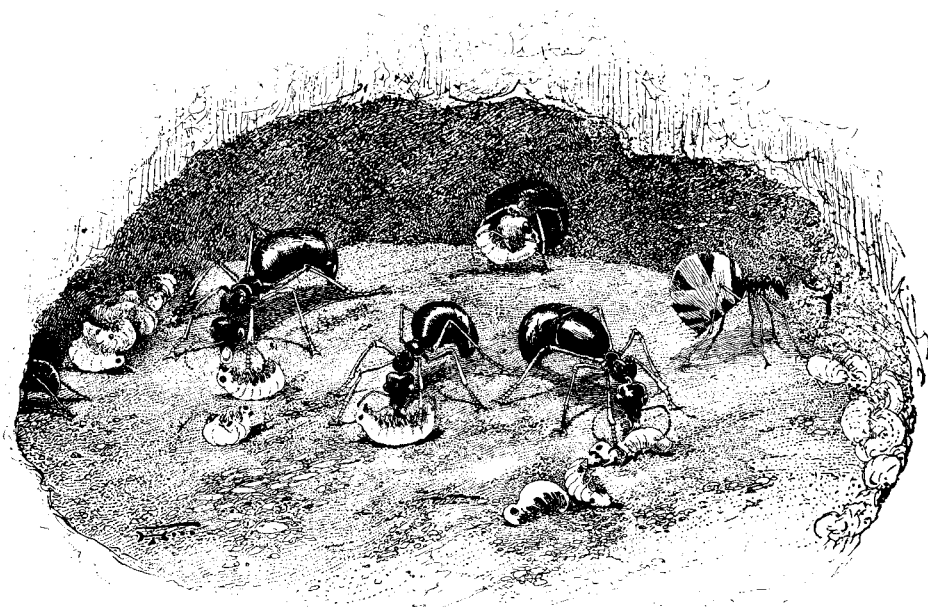
Close wrapped in his cloak, she leaned out into the night like a dreamy child. Her hand crept up to his heart.

"I do assure you, sir," she said, "the wind is in the south; can you not hear the voices of the bells of Rye travelling up to us through that dell?"

He stopped also to listen, while the breath of the New-year swept into Pages, lightly brushing their heads.

"The wind is surely from the south," she repeated. Her limbs glowed; the lines of her mouth were as soft as the ripple on summer waters.





NURSE ANTS FEEDING AND WASHING BABY ANTS  
The figure to the right is a honey-bearer

## Insect Commonwealths

BY HENRY C. McCOOK, D.D., Sc.D., LL.D.

THE best-known social insects are ants, bees, wasps, and hornets, of the order Hymenoptera, and termites, or white ants, of the Neuroptera.

Service is the supreme law of insect commonwealths. Their members are proverbial for industry and foresight. The younglings fall into the work of hive, formicary, or nest even before the marks of their callow maturity have disappeared. The only non-workers are the infants, and young males and females reserved for the founding of new republics. The special instinct that compels social insects to live not only in communities but in "walled towns" like men, has undoubtedly stimulated if it has not originated such fine examples of architectural industry and skill as the hornets' wood-pulp

commune, with its pillars, arches, and dome; the cells and comb of the honey-bee, and the formicaries of mound-making ants.

The largest insect commonwealths known are those of ants and termites. Bees keep down their numbers by their persistent habit of colonization. A rare example of a populous community may be seen—or could have been seen a quarter-century ago—in an "ant city," to use a local phrase, on the western slope of Brush Mountain, near Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania. The writer once encamped within the precincts of this city to study its inhabitants. Scattered over a space of fifty acres were seventeen hundred conical hills, not counting moundlets that marked the beginnings of new enterprises. They varied greatly in height,