

# The Testing of Diana Mallory

A NOVEL

BY MRS. HUMPHRY WARD

## CHAPTER XI

"**H**ER ladyship will be here directly, sir."

Lady Lucy's immaculate butler opened the door of her drawing-room in Eaton Square, ushered in Sir James Chide, noiselessly crossed the room to see to the fire, and then as noiselessly withdrew.

"Impossible that any one should be as respectable as that man looks!" thought Sir James, impatiently. He walked forward to the fire, warmed hands and feet chilled by a nipping east wind; and then, with his back to the warmth, he examined the room.

It was very characteristic of its mistress. At Tallyn, Henry Markham had worked his will; here, in this house taken since his death, it was the will and taste of his widow which had prevailed. A gray paper with a small gold sprig upon it, sofas and chairs not too luxurious, a Brussels carpet, dark and unobtrusive, and chintz curtains; on the walls, drawings by David Cox, Copley Fielding, and De Wint; a few books with Mudie labels; costly photographs of friends and relations, especially of the relations' babies; on one table, and under a glass case, a model in pith of Lincoln Cathedral, made by Lady Lucy's uncle, who had been a Canon of Lincoln; on another a set of fine carved chessmen; such was the furniture of the room. It expressed—and with emphasis—the tastes and likings of that section of English society in which, firmly based as it is upon an ample supply of all material goods, a seemly and intelligent interest in things ideal and spiritual is also to be found. Everything in the room was in its place; and had been in its place for years. Sir James got no help from the contemplation of it.

The door opened, and Lady Lucy came quietly in. Sir James looked at her

sharply, as they shook hands. She had more color than usual; but the result was to make the face look older, and certain lines in it disagreeably prominent. Very likely she had been crying. He hoped she had.

"Oliver told you to expect me?"

She assented. Then, still standing, she looked at him steadily.

"This is a very terrible affair, Sir James."

"Yes. It must have been a great shock to you."

"Oh! that does not matter," she said, impatiently—"I must not think of myself. I must think of Oliver. Will you sit down?"

She motioned him, in her stately way, to a seat. He realized, as he faced her, that he beheld her in a new aspect. She was no longer the gracious and smiling hostess, as her familiar friends knew her, both at Tallyn and in London. Her manner threw a sudden light on certain features in her history:—Markham's continued dependence on his mother, and inadequate allowance, the autocratic ability shown in the management of the Tallyn household and estates, management in which Markham was allowed practically no share at all, and other traits and facts long known to him. The gentle, scrupulous, composed woman of every day had vanished in something far more vigorously drawn; he felt himself confronted by a personality as strong as and probably more stubborn than his own.

Lady Lucy seated herself. She quietly arranged the folds of her black satin dress; she drew forward a stool and rested her feet upon it. Sir James watched her, uncertain how to begin. But she saved him the decision.

"I have had a painful interview with my son," she said, quietly. "It could not be otherwise; and I can only hope

that in a little while he will do me justice. Oliver will join us presently. And now,—first, Sir James, let me ask you—you really believe that Miss Mallory has been till now in ignorance of her mother's history?"

Sir James started.

"Good heavens, Lady Lucy!—Can you—do you—suppose anything else?"

Lady Lucy paused before replying.

"I cannot suppose it—since both you and my son—and Mr. Ferrier—have so high an opinion of her. But it is a strange and mysterious thing that she should have remained in this complete ignorance all these years,—and a cruel thing, of course—to everybody concerned."

Sir James nodded.

"I agree. It was a cruel thing; though it was done no doubt from the tenderest motives. The suffering was bound to be not less but more, sooner or later."

"Miss Mallory is very greatly to be pitied. But it is of course clear that my son proposed to her, not knowing what it was essential that he should know."

Sir James paused.

"We are old friends, Lady Lucy,—you and I," he said at last, with deliberation, and as he spoke he bent forward and took her hand; "I am sure you will let me ask you a few questions."

Lady Lucy made no reply. Her hand—without any movement of withdrawal or rebuff—gently dropped from his.

"You have been, I think, much attracted by Miss Mallory herself?"

"Very much attracted. Up to this morning I thought that she would make an excellent wife for Oliver. But I have been acting, of course, throughout under a false impression."

"Is it your feeling that to marry her would injure Oliver's career?"

"Certainly. But that is not what weighs with me most heavily."

"I did not for a moment believe that it would. However, let us take the career first. This is how I look at it. If the marriage went forward, there would no doubt be some scandal and excitement at first, when the truth was known. But Oliver's personality, and the girl's charm, would soon live it down.

In this strange world, I am not at all sure it might not in the end help their future. Oliver would be thought to have done a generous and romantic thing; and his wife's goodness and beauty would be all the more appreciated for the background of tragedy."

Lady Lucy moved impatiently.

"Sir James—I am a plain person, with plain ideas. The case would present itself to me very differently; and I believe that my view would be that of the ordinary man and woman. However, I repeat, that is not what I think of first,—by any means."

"You think of the criminal taint?—the risk to Oliver—and to Oliver's children?"

She made a sign of assent.

"Character—and the protection of character—is not that what we have to think of—above all—in this world of temptation? We can none of us afford to throw away the ordinary helps and safeguards. How can I possibly aid and abet Oliver's marriage with the daughter of a woman who first robbed her own young sister, in a peculiarly mean and cruel way, and then committed a deliberate and treacherous murder?"

"Wait a moment!" exclaimed Sir James, sharply, holding up his hand. "Those adjectives, believe me, are unjust."

"I know that you think so," was the animated reply. "But I remember the case; I have my own opinion."

"They are unjust," repeated Sir James, with emphasis. "Then it is really the horror of the thing itself—not so much its possible effect on social position and opinion—which decides you?"

"I ask myself—I must ask myself," said his companion, with equal emphasis, forcing the words—"can I help Oliver to marry the daughter—of a convicted murderess—and adulteress?"

"No!" said Sir James, holding up his hand again—"No!"

Lady Lucy fell back in her chair. Her unwonted color had disappeared, and the old hand lying in her lap—a hand thin to emaciation—shook a little.

"Is not this too painful for us both, Sir James?—can we continue it? I have my duty to think of; and yet—I cannot, naturally, speak to you with entire frank-

ness. Nor can I possibly regard your view as an impartial one. Forgive me. I should not have dreamt of referring to the matter, in any other circumstances."

"Certainly, I am not impartial," said Sir James, looking up. "You know that, of course, well enough."

He spoke in a strong full voice. Lady Lucy encountered a singular vivacity in the blue eyes, as though the whole power of the man's personality backed the words.

"Believe me," she said, with dignity, and not without kindness, "it is not I who would revive such memories."

Sir James nodded quietly.

"I am not impartial; but I am well informed. It was my view which affected the judge, and ultimately the Home Office. And since the trial,—in quite recent years,—I have received a strange confirmation of it which has never been made public. Did Oliver report this to you?"

"He told me certain facts," said Lady Lucy, unwillingly; "but I did not see that they made much difference."

"Perhaps he did not give them the right emphasis," said Sir James, calmly. "Will you allow *me* to tell you the whole story?—as it appears to me."

Lady Lucy looked distressed.

"Is it worth while," she said, earnestly, "to give yourself so much pain? I cannot imagine that it could alter the view I take of my duty."

Sir James flushed, and sternly straightened himself. It was a well known gesture, and ominous to many a prisoner in the dock.

"Worth while!" he said—"Worth while!—when your son's future may depend on the judgment you form."

The sharpness of his tone called the red also to Lady Lucy's cheek.

"Can anything that may be said now alter the irrevocable?" she asked, in protest.

"It cannot bring the dead to life; but if you are really more influenced in this matter by the heinousness of the crime itself, by the moral infection, so to speak—that may spring from any kinship with Juliet Sparling, or inheritance from her—than by any dread of social disgrace or disadvantage—if that be true!—then for Oliver's sake—for that poor child's

sake—you *ought* to listen to me! There, I can meet you—there, I have much to say."

He looked at her earnestly. The slight, involuntary changes of expression in Lady Lucy, as he was speaking, made him say to himself, "She is *not* indifferent to the social stigma—she deceives herself!" But he made no sign of his perception; he held her to her word.

She paused, in evident hesitation, saying at last, with some coldness:

"If you wish it, Sir James, of course I am quite ready to listen. I desire to do nothing harshly."

"I will not keep you long."

Bending forward, his hands on his knees, his eyes upon the ground, he thought a moment. When he began to speak, it was in a quiet and perfectly colorless tone:

"I knew Juliet Wentworth first—when she was seventeen. I was on the Midland Circuit, and went down to the Milchester Assizes. Her father was High Sheriff, and asked me, with other barristers of the Circuit, not only to his official dinner in the county-town, but to luncheon at his house, a mile or two away. There I saw Miss Wentworth. She made a deep impression on me. After the Assizes were over, I stayed at her father's house and in the neighborhood. Within a month I proposed to her. She refused me. I merely mention these circumstances for the sake of reporting my first impressions of her character. She was very young, and of extraordinarily nervous and sensitive organization. She used to remind me of Horace's image of the young fawn trembling and starting in the mountain paths, at the rustling of a leaf or the movement of a lizard. I felt then that her life might very well be a tragedy, and I passionately desired to be able to protect and help her. However, she would have nothing to do with me; and after a little while I lost sight of her. I did happen to hear that her father, having lost his first wife, had married again, that the girl was not happy at home, and had gone off on a long visit to some friends in the United States. Then for years I heard nothing. One evening, about ten years after my first meeting with her, I read in the evening papers the accounts of a 'Supposed Mur-

der at Brighton.' Next morning Riley and Bonner retained me for the defence. Mr. Riley came to see me, with Mr. Sparling, the husband of the incriminated lady, and it was in the course of my consultation with them that I learned who Mrs. Sparling was. I had to consider whether to take up the case or not; I saw at once it would be a fight for her life, and I accepted it."

"What a terrible—terrible—position!" murmured Lady Lucy, who was shading her eyes with her hand.

Sir James took no notice. His trained mind and sense were now wholly concerned with the presentation of his story.

"The main facts, as I see them, were these. Juliet Wentworth had married—four years before this date—a scholar and archæologist whom she had met at Harvard during her American stay. Mr. Sparling was an Englishman, and a man of some means, who was devoting himself to exploration in Asia Minor. The marriage was not really happy, though they were in love with each other. In both there was a temperament touched with melancholy, and a curious incapacity to accept the common facts of life. Both hated routine, and were always restless for new experience. Mrs. Sparling was brilliant in society. She was wonderfully handsome, in a small slight way; her face was not unlike Miss Curran's picture of Shelley—the same wildness and splendor in the eyes, the same delicacy of feature, the same slight excess of breadth across the cheek bones, and curly mass of hair. She was odd, passionate, eccentric,—yet always lovable and full of charm. He was a fine creature in many ways, but utterly unfit for practical life. His mind was always dreaming of buried treasure—the treasure of the archæologist: tombs, vases, gold ornaments, papyri—he had the passion of the excavator and explorer.

"They came back to England from America shortly after their marriage, and their child was born. The little girl was three years old, when Sparling went off to dig in a remote part of Asia Minor. His wife resented his going; but there is no doubt that she was still deeply in love with him. She herself took a little house at Brighton for the child's sake. Her small startling beauty soon made her

remarked; and her acquaintances rapidly increased. She was too independent and unconventional to ask many questions about the people that amused her; she took them as they came—"

"Sir James!—dear Sir James!"—Lady Lucy raised a pair of imploring hands—"What good can it do that you should tell me all this? It shows that this poor creature had a wild, undisciplined character. Could any one ever doubt it?"

"Wild? undisciplined?" repeated Sir James. "Well!—if you think that you have disposed of the mystery of it by those adjectives! For me—looking back—she was what life, and temperament, and heredity had made her. Up to this point it was an innocent wildness. She could lose herself in art or music; she did often the most romantic and generous things; she adored her child; and but for some strange kink in the tie that bound them she would have adored her husband. Well!"—he shrugged his shoulders mournfully—"there it is:—she was alone—she was beautiful—she had no doubt a sense of being neglected—she was thirsting for some deeper draught of life than had yet been hers—and by the hideous irony of fate she found it—in gambling!—and in the friendship which ruined her!"

Sir James paused. Rising from his chair, he began to pace the large room. The immaculate butler came in, made up the fire, and placed the tea—domestic and comfortable rites, in grim contrast with the story that held the minds of Lady Lucy and her guest. She sat motionless meanwhile; the butler withdrew, and the tea remained untouched.

"—Sir Edward and Lady Wing—the two fiends who got possession of her—had been settled at Brighton for about a year. Their debts had obliged them to leave London, and they had not yet piled up a sufficient mountain of fresh ones to drive them out of Brighton. The man was the disreputable son of a rich and hard-working father, who, in the usual way, had damned his son by removing all incentives to work, and turning him loose with a pile of money. He had married an adventuress—a girl with a music-hall history, some beauty, plenty of vicious ability, and no more conscience than a stone. They were the

centre of a gambling and racing set; but Lady Wing was also a very fine musician, and it was through this talent of hers that she and Juliet Sparling became acquainted. They met first—at a charity concert! Mrs. Sparling had a fine voice, Lady Wing accompanied her. The Wings flattered her, and professed to adore her. Her absent whimsical character prevented her from understanding what kind of people they were; and in her great ignorance of the world, combined with her love of the romantic and the extreme, she took the persons who haunted their house for Bohemians, when she should have known them—the majority of them—for scoundrels. You will remember that baccarat was then the rage. The Wings played it incessantly, and were very skilful in the decoying and plunder of young men. Juliet Sparling was soon seized by the excitement of the game, and her beauty, her evident good breeding and good faith, were of considerable use to the Wings' *ménage*. Very soon she had lost all the money that her husband had left to her credit, and her bankers wrote to notify her that she was overdrawn. A sudden terror of Sparling's displeasure seized her; she sold a bracelet, and tried to win back what she had lost. The result was only fresh loss, and in a panic she played on and on, till one disastrous night,—she got up from the baccarat table heavily in debt to one or two persons, including Sir Francis Wing. With the morning came a letter from her husband, remonstrating in a rather sharp tone on what her own letters—and probably an account from some other source—had told him of her life at Brighton; insisting on the need for economy, owing to his own heavy expenses in the great excavation he was engaged upon, and expressing the rather peremptory hope that she would make the money he had left her last for another two months—”

Sir James lingered in his walk. He stared out of window at the square garden for a few moments, then turned to look frowning at his companion.

“Then came her temptation. Her father had died a year before, leaving her the trustee of her only sister, who was not yet of age. It had taken some little

time to wind up his affairs; but on the day she received her husband's letter of remonstrance, six thousand pounds out of her father's estate was paid into her banking account. By this time she was in one of those states of excitement and unreasoning terror to which she had been liable from her childhood. She took the trust money in order to pay the debts, and then gambled again in order to replace the trust money. Her motive throughout was the motive of the hunted creature. She was afraid of confessing to her husband, especially by letter. She believed he would cast her off—and in her despair and remorse she clung to his affection, and to the hope of his coming home, as she had never yet done.

“In less than a month—in spite of ups and downs of fortune, probably skilfully contrived by Francis Wing and his accomplices—for there can be no question that the play was fraudulent—she had lost four thousand out of the six; and it is clear that more than once she thought of suicide as the only way out, and nothing but the remembrance of the child restrained her. By this time Francis Wing, who was a most handsome, well bred, and plausible villain, was desperately in love with her—if one can use the word love for such a passion. He began to lend her money in small sums. She was induced to look upon him as her only friend, and forced by the mere terror of the situation in which she found herself to propitiate and play him as best she might. One day, in an unguarded moment of remorse, she let him guess what had happened about the trust money. Thenceforward she was wholly in his power. He pressed his attentions upon her; and she, alternately civil and repellent, as her mood went, was regarded by some of the guests in the house as not unlikely to respond to them in the end. Meanwhile he had told his wife the secret of the trust money for his own purposes. Lady Wing, who was an extremely jealous woman, believed at this time that he was merely pretending a passion for Mrs. Sparling in order the more securely to plunder what still remained of the six thousand pounds. She therefore aided and abetted him; and her plan no doubt was to wait till they and their accomplices had absorbed the last



of Mrs. Sparling's money, and then to make a midnight flitting, leaving their victim to her fate.

"The *dénouement*, however, came with frightful rapidity. The Wings had taken an old house at the back of the downs for the summer, no doubt to escape from some of the notoriety they had gained in Brighton. There—to her final ruin—Juliet Sparling was induced to join them, and gambling began again; she still desperately hoping to replace the trust money, and salving her conscience, as to her sister, by drawing for the time on sums lent her by Francis Wing. Here at last Lady Wing's suspicion was aroused, and Mrs. Sparling found herself between the hatred of the wife and the dishonorable passion of the husband. Yet to leave them would be the signal for exposure. For some time the presence of other guests protected her. Then the guests left, and one August night, after dinner, Francis Wing, who had drunk a great deal of champagne, made frantic love to her. She escaped from him with difficulty, in a passion of loathing and terror, and rushed indoors, where she found Lady Wing in the gallery of the old house, on the first floor, walking up and down in a jealous fury. Juliet Sparling burst in upon her with the reproaches of a woman driven to bay, threatening to go at once to her husband and make a clean breast of the whole history of their miserable acquaintance. She was practically beside herself,—already, as the sequel showed, mortally ill, worn out by remorse and sleeplessness, and quivering under the insult which had been offered her. Lady Wing recovered her own self-possession under the stimulus of Juliet's breakdown. She taunted her in the cruelest way, accused her of being the temptress in the case of Sir Francis, and of simulating a hypocritical indignation in order to save herself with her husband, and finally charged her with the robbery of her sister's money, declaring that as soon as daylight came she would take steps to set the criminal law in motion, and so protect both herself and her husband from any charge such a woman might bring against them. The threat, of course, was mere bluff. But Mrs. Sparling in her frenzy and her ignorance took it for truth. Finally, the fierce

creature came up to her, snatching at a brooch in the bosom of her dress, and crying out in the vilest language that it was Sir Francis's gift. Juliet, pushed up against the panelling of the gallery, caught at a dagger belonging to a trophy of Eastern arms displayed on the wall, close to her hand, and struck wildly at her tormentor. The dagger pierced Lady Wing's left breast,—she was in evening dress and *décolletée*; it penetrated to the heart, and she fell dead at Juliet's feet as her husband entered the gallery. Juliet dropped the dagger, and as Sir Francis rushed to his wife, she fled shrieking up the stairs—her white dress covered with blood—to her own room, falling unconscious before she reached it. She was carried to her room by the servants,—the police were sent for—and the rest—or most of the rest—you know."

Sir James ceased speaking. A heavy silence possessed the room.

Sir James walked quickly up to his companion.

"Now I ask you to notice two points in the story as I have told it. My cross-examination of Wing served its purpose as an exposure of the man,—except in one direction. He swore that Mrs. Sparling had made dishonorable advances to him, and had finally become his mistress, in order to buy his silence on the trust money and the continuance of his financial help. On the other hand, the case for the defence was that—as I have stated—it was in the maddened state of feeling, provoked by his attack upon her honor, and made intolerable by the wife's taunts and threats, that Juliet Sparling struck the fatal blow. At the trial the judge believed me; the jury—and a large part of the public—you, I have no doubt, amongst them,—believed Wing. The jury were probably influenced by some of the evidence given by the fellow guests in the house, which seemed to me simply to amount to this—that a woman in the strait in which Juliet Sparling was, will endeavor out of mortal fear to keep the ruffian who has her in his power in a good humor. However, I have now confirmatory evidence for my theory of the matter—evidence which has never been produced—and which I tell you now simply because the happiness of her child—and of your son—is at stake."

Lady Lucy moved a little. The color returned to her cheeks. Sir James, however, gave her no time to interrupt. He stood before her, smiting one hand sharply against another, to emphasize his words, as he continued:

"Francis Wing lived for some eighteen years after Mrs. Sparling's death. Then, just as the police were at last on his track as the avengers of a long series of frauds, he died at Antwerp in extreme poverty and degradation. The day before he died he dictated a letter to me, which reached me, through a priest, twenty-four hours after his death. For his son's sake, he invited me to regard it as confidential. If Mrs. Sparling had been alive, I should of course have taken no notice of the request. But she had been dead for eighteen years; I had lost sight completely of Sparling and the child, and, curiously enough, I knew something of Wing's son. He was about ten years old at the death of his mother, and was then rescued from his father by the Wing kindred, and decently brought up. At the time the letter reached me he was a promising young man of eight-and-twenty; he had just been called to the Bar, and he was in the chambers of a friend of mine. By publishing Wing's confession I could do no good to the dead, and I might harm the living. So I held my tongue. Whether, now, I should still hold it, is no doubt a question.

"However, to go back to the statement. Wing declared to me in this letter that Juliet Sparling's relation to him had been absolutely innocent, that he had persecuted her with his suit, and she had never given him a friendly word, except out of fear. On the fatal evening he had driven her out of her mind, he said, by his behavior in the garden; she was not answerable for her actions; and his evidence at the trial was merely dictated either by the desire to make his own case look less black, or by the fiendish wish to punish Juliet Sparling for her loathing of him.

"But he confessed something else!—more important still. I must go back a little. You will remember my version of the dagger incident? I represented Mrs. Sparling as finding the dagger on the wall as she was pushed or dragged up against the panelling by her antagonist—

as it were under her hand. Wing swore at the trial that the dagger was not there, and had never been there. The house belonged to an old traveller and sportsman who had brought home arms of different sorts from all parts of the world. The house was full of them. There were two collections of them on the wall of the dining-room, one in the hall, and one or two in the gallery. Wing declared that the dagger used was taken by Juliet Sparling from the hall trophy, and must have been carried upstairs with a deliberate purpose of murder. According to him, their quarrel in the garden had been a quarrel about money matters, and Mrs. Sparling had left him in great excitement, convinced that the chief obstacle in the way of her complete control of Wing and his money lay in the wife. There again—as to the weapon—I had no means of refuting him. As far as the appearance—after the murder—of the racks holding the arms was concerned, the weapon might have been taken from either place. And again—on the whole—the jury believed Wing. The robbery of the sister's money—the incredible rapidity of Juliet Sparling's deterioration—had set them against her. Her wild beauty, her proud and dumb misery in the dock, were of a kind rather to alienate the plain man than to move him. They believed her capable of anything—and it was natural enough.

"But Wing confessed to me that he knew perfectly well that the dagger belonged to the stand in the gallery. He had often examined the arms there, and was quite certain of the fact. He swore this to the priest. Here again you can only explain his evidence by a desire for revenge."

Sir James paused. As he moved a little away from his companion, his expression altered. It was as though he put from him the external incidents and considerations with which he had been dealing, and the vivacity of manner which fitted them. Feelings and forces of another kind emerged, clothing themselves in the beauty of an incomparable voice, and in an aspect of humane and melancholy dignity.

He turned to Lady Lucy.

"Now then," he said, gently, "I am in a position to put the matter to you

finally, as—before God—it appears to me. Juliet Sparling, as I said to Oliver last night, was not a bad woman! She sinned deeply; but she was never false to her husband in thought or deed; none of her wrongdoing was deliberate; she was tortured by remorse; and her murderous act was the impulse of a moment, and partly in self-defence. It was wholly unpremeditated; and it killed her no less than her victim. When next day she was removed by the police, she was already a dying woman. I have in my possession a letter—written to me by her—after her release, in view of her impending death, by the order of the Home Office,—a few days before she died. It is humble,—it is heartrending,—it breathes the sincerity of one who had turned all her thoughts from earth; but it thanked me for having read her aright; and if ever I could have felt a doubt of my own interpretation of the case—but, thank God, I never did!—that letter would have shamed it out of me! Poor soul, poor soul!—She sinned, and she suffered,—agonies, beyond any penalty of man's inflicting. Will you prolong her punishment in her child?"

Lady Lucy had covered her face with her hand. He saw her breath flutter in her breast. And sitting down beside her, blanched by the effort he had made and by the emotion he had at last permitted himself, yet fixing his blue eyes steadily on the woman before him, he waited for her reply.

## CHAPTER XII

LADY LUCY did not reply at once. She slowly drew forward the neglected tea table, made tea, and offered it to Sir James. He took it impatiently, the Irish blood in him running hot and fast; and when she had finished her cup, and still the silence lasted, except for the trivial question and answer of the tea-making, he broke in upon it with a somewhat peremptory—

"Well?"

Lady Lucy clasped her hands on her lap. The hand which had been so far bare was now gloved like the other; and something in the spectacle of the long fingers, calmly interlocked, and clad in

spotless white kid, increased the secret exasperation in her companion.

"Believe me, dear Sir James," she said at last, lifting her clear brown eyes, "I am very grateful to you. It must have been a great effort for you to tell me this awful story; and I thank you for the confidence you have reposed in me."

Sir James pushed his chair back.

"I did it of course for a special reason," he said, sharply. "I hope I have given you cause to change your mind."

She shook her head slowly.

"What have you proved to me? That Mrs. Sparling's crime was not so hideous as some of us supposed?—that she did not fall to the lowest depths of all?—and that she endured great provocation? But could anything, really, be more vile than the history of those weeks of excitement and fraud?—of base yielding to temptation—of cruelty to her husband and child?—even as you have told it. Her conduct led directly to adultery and violence. If, by God's mercy, she was saved from the worst crimes imputed to her, does it make much difference to the moral judgment we must form?"

He looked at her in amazement.

"No difference!—between murder and a kind of accident?—between adultery—and fidelity?"

Lady Lucy hesitated,—then resumed with stubbornness: "You put it—like an advocate. But look at the indelible facts—look at the future. If my son married the daughter of such a woman and had children, what must happen? First of all, could he, could any one, be free from the dread of inherited lawlessness and passion? A woman does not gamble, steal, and take life in a moment of violence, without some exceptional flaw in temperament and will; and we see again and again how such flaws reappear in the descendants of weak and wicked people. Then again—Oliver must renounce and throw away all that is implied in family memories and traditions. His wife could never speak to her children and his of her own mother and bringing up. They would be kept in ignorance, as she herself was kept, till the time came that they must know. Say what you will, Juliet Sparling was condemned to death for murder in a notorious case,—after a trial which also branded her as a thief.



Think of a boy at Eton or Oxford—a girl in her first youth—hearing for the first time—perhaps in some casual way—the story of the woman whose blood ran in theirs! What a cloud on a family!—what a danger and drawback for young lives!”

Her delicate features, under the crown of white hair, were once more flooded with color, and the passion in her eyes held them steady under Sir James’s penetrating look. Through his inner mind there ran the cry: “Pharisee!—Hypocrite!”

But he fought on.

“Lady Lucy!—your son loves this girl—remember that! And in herself you admit that she is blameless—all that you could desire for his wife,—remember that also.”

“I remember both. But I was brought up by people who never admitted that any feeling was beyond our control, or ought to be indulged,—against right and reason.”

“Supposing Oliver entirely declines to take your view?—supposing he marries Miss Mallory?”

“He will not break my heart,” she said, drawing a quicker breath. “He will get over it.”

“But if he persists?”

“He must take the consequences. I cannot aid and abet him.”

“And the girl herself? She has accepted him. She is young, innocent, full of tender and sensitive feeling. Is it possible that you should not weigh her claim against your fears and scruples?”

“I feel for her most sincerely.”

Sir James suddenly threw out a restless foot, which caught Lady Lucy’s fox-terrier, who was snoozing under the tea table. He hastily apologized, and the speaker resumed:

“But in my opinion she would do a far nobler thing if she regarded herself as bound to some extent to bear her mother’s burden,—to pay her mother’s debt to society. It may sound harsh—but is it? Is a dedicated life necessarily an unhappy life? Would not everybody respect and revere her? She would sacrifice herself, as the Sister of Mercy does, or the missionary,—and she would find her reward. But to enter a family with an unstained record, bearing with her such a name and

such associations, would be in my opinion a wrong and selfish act!”

Lady Lucy drew herself to her full height. In the dusk of the declining afternoon, the black satin and white ruffles of her dress, her white head in its lace cap, her thin neck and shoulders, her tall slenderness, and the rigidity of her attitude, made a formidable study in personality. Sir James’s whole soul rose in one scornful and indignant protest. But he felt himself beaten. The only hope lay in Oliver himself.

He rose slowly from his chair.

“It is useless, I see, to try and argue the matter further. But I warn you—I do not believe that Oliver will obey you, and—forgive me, Lady Lucy!—but—frankly—I hope he will not. Nor will he suffer too severely, even if you, his mother, desert him. Miss Mallory has some fortune—”

“Oliver will not live upon his wife!”

“He may accept her aid till he has found some way of earning money. What amazes me—if you will allow me the liberty of an old friend—is that you should think a woman justified in coercing a son of mature age in such a matter!”

His tone, his manner, pierced Lady Lucy’s pride. She threw back her head nervously, but her tone was calm.

“A woman to whom property has been entrusted must do her best to see that the will and desires of those who placed it in her hands are carried out?”

“Well, well!”—Sir James looked for his stick—“I am sorry for Oliver,—but”—he straightened himself—“it will make a bigger man of him.”

Lady Lucy made no reply, but her expression was eloquent of a patience which her old friend might abuse if he would.

“Does Ferrier know? Have you consulted him?” asked Sir James, turning abruptly.

“He will be here, I think, this afternoon,—as usual,” said Lady Lucy, evasively. “And of course he must know what concerns us so deeply.”

As she spoke, the door bell was heard.

“That is probably he.” She looked at her companion uncertainly. “Don’t go, Sir James,—unless you are really in a hurry.”

The invitation was not urgent; but Sir James stayed all the same. Ferrier was

a man so interesting to his friends that no judgment of his could be indifferent to them. Moreover, there was a certain angry curiosity as to how far Lady Lucy's influence would affect him. Chide took inward note of the fact that his speculation took this form, and not another. Oh! the hypocritical obstinacy of decent women!—the lack in them of heart, of generosity, of imagination!

The door opened, and Ferrier entered, with Markham and the butler behind him. Mr. Ferrier, in his London frock coat, appeared rounder and heavier than ever, but for the contradictory vigor and lightness of his step, the shrewd cheerfulness of the eyes. It had been a hard week in Parliament, however, and his features and complexion showed signs of overwork and short sleep.

For a few minutes, while tea was renewed and the curtains closed, he maintained a pleasant chat with Lady Lucy, while the other two looked at each other in silence.

But when the servant had gone, Ferrier put down his cup unfinished. "I am very sorry for you both," he said, gravely, looking from Lady Lucy to her son; "I need not say your letter this morning took me wholly by surprise. I have since been doing my best to think of a way out."

There was a short pause—broken by Markham, who was sitting a little apart from the others, restlessly fingering a paper-knife.

"If you could persuade my mother to take a kind and reasonable view," he said, abruptly, "that is really the only way out."

Lady Lucy stiffened under the attack. Drawn on by Ferrier's interrogative glance, she quietly repeated, with more detail, and even greater austerity, the arguments and considerations she had made use of in her wrestle with Sir James. Chide clearly perceived that her opposition was hardening with every successive explanation of it. What had been at first no doubt an instinctive recoil was now being converted into a plausible and reasoned case, and the oftener she repeated it, the stronger would she become on her side, and the more in love with her own contentions.

Ferrier listened attentively, took note

of what she reported as to Sir James's fresh evidence, and when she ceased, called to Chide to explain. Chide's second defence of Juliet Sparling, as given to a fellow lawyer, was a remarkable piece of technical statement, admirably arranged, and unmarked by any trace of the personal feeling he had not been able to hide from Lady Lucy.

"Most interesting—most interesting," murmured Ferrier, as the story came to an end. "A tragic and memorable case."

He pondered a little, his eyes on the carpet, while the others waited. Then he turned to Lady Lucy and took her hand.

"Dear lady!" he said, gently, "I think—you ought to give way!"

Lady Lucy's face quivered a little. She decidedly withdrew her hand.

"I am sorry you are both against me," she said, looking from one to the other. "I am sorry you help Oliver to think unkindly of me. But if I must stand alone, I must. I cannot give way."

Ferrier raised his eyebrows with a little perplexed look. Thrusting his hands into his pockets, he went to stand by the fire, staring down into it a minute or two as though the flames might bring counsel.

"Miss Mallory is still ignorant, Oliver,—is that so?" he said at last.

"Entirely. But it is not possible she should continue to be so. She has begun to make inquiries, and I agree with Sir James it is right she should be told—"

"I propose to go down to Beechcote to-morrow," put in Sir James.

"Have you any idea what view Miss Mallory would be likely to take of the matter—as affecting her engagement?"

"She could have no view that was not unselfish and noble—like herself," said Markham, hotly. "What has that to do with it?"

"She might release you," was Ferrier's slow reply.

Markham flushed.

"And you think I should be such a hound as to let her!"

Sir James only just prevented himself from throwing a triumphant look at his hostess.

"You will of course inform her of your mother's opposition?" said Ferrier.

"It will be impossible to keep it from her."

"Poor child!" murmured Ferrier—"poor child!"

Then he looked at Lady Lucy.

"May I take Oliver into the inner room a little while?" he asked, pointing to a further drawing-room.

"By all means. I shall be here when you return."

Sir James had a few hurried words in private with Markham, and then took his leave. As he and Lady Lucy shook hands, he gave her a penetrating look.

"Try and think of the girl!" he said in a low voice; "*the girl*—in her first youth."

"I think of my son," was the unmoved reply. "Good-by, Sir James. I feel that we are adversaries, and I wish it were not so."

Sir James walked away, possessed by a savage desire to do some damage to the cathedral in pith, as he passed it on his way to the door; or to shake his fist in the faces of Wilberforce and Lord Shaftesbury, whose portraits adorned the staircase. The type of Catholic woman which he most admired rose in his mind; compassionate, tender, infinitely soft and loving—like the saints; save where "the faith" was concerned,—like the saints, again. This Protestant rigidity and self-sufficiency were the deuce!

But he would go down to Beechcote; and he and Oliver between them would see that child through.

Meanwhile Ferrier and Markham were in anxious conclave. Ferrier counselled delay. "Let the thing sleep a little. Don't announce the engagement. You and Miss Mallory will of course understand each other. You will correspond. But don't hurry it. So much consideration at least is due to your mother's strong feeling."

Markham assented,—but despondently.

"You know my mother; time will make no difference."

"I'm not so sure. I'm not so sure," said Ferrier, cheerfully. "Did your mother say anything about—finances?"

Markham gave a gloomy smile.

"I shall be a pauper of course—that was made quite plain to me."

"No, no!—that must be prevented!" said Ferrier, with energy.

Markham was not quick to reply. His

manner as he stood with his back to the fire, his distinguished head well thrown back on his straight, lean shoulders, was the manner of a proud man suffering humiliation. He was thirty-five, and rapidly becoming a politician of importance. Yet here he was—poor and impotent, in the midst of great wealth, wholly dependent, by his father's monstrous will, on his mother's caprice—liable to be thwarted and commanded, as though he were a boy of fifteen. Up till now Lady Lucy's yoke had been tolerable; to-day it galled beyond endurance.

Moreover, there was something peculiarly irritating, at the moment, in Ferrier's intervention. There had been increased Parliamentary friction of late between the two men, in spite of the intimacy of their personal relations. To be forced to owe fortune, career, and the permission to marry as he pleased, to Ferrier's influence with his mother, was at this juncture a bitter pill for Oliver Markham.

Ferrier understood him perfectly, and he had never displayed more kindness or more tact than in the conversation which passed between them. Markham finally agreed that Diana must be frankly informed of his mother's state of mind, and that a waiting policy offered the only hope. On this they were retiring to the front drawing-room, when Lady Lucy opened the communicating door.

"A letter for you, Oliver."

He took it and turned it over. The handwriting was unknown to him.

"Who brought this?" he asked of the butler standing behind his mother.

"A servant, sir, from Beechcote Manor. He was told to wait for an answer."

"I will send one. Come when I ring."

The butler departed, and Markham went hurriedly into the inner room, closing the door behind him. Ferrier and Lady Lucy were left, looking at each other in anxiety. But before they could put it into words, Markham reappeared, in evident agitation. He hurried to the bell and rang it.

Lady Lucy pointedly made no inquiry. But Ferrier spoke.

"No bad news, I hope?"

Markham turned.

"She has been told," he said, hoarsely.

"Mrs. Colwood, her companion, speaks of 'shock.' I must go down at once."

Lady Lucy said nothing. She too had grown white.

The butler appeared. Markham asked for the Sunday trains, ordered some packing, went downstairs to speak to the Beechcote messenger, and returned.

Ferrier retired into the farthest window, and Markham approached his mother.

"Good-by, mother. I will write to you from Beechcote, where I shall stay at the little inn in the village. Have you no kind word that I may carry with me?"

Lady Lucy looked at him steadily.

"I shall write myself to Miss Mallo-ry, Oliver."

His pallor gave place to a flush of indignation.

"Is it necessary to do anything so cruel, mother?"

"I shall not write cruelly."

He shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"Considering what you have made up your mind to do, I should have thought least said, soonest mended. However, if you must, you must. I can only prepare Diana for your letter and soften it when it comes."

"In your new love, Oliver, have you quite forgotten the old?" Lady Lucy's voice shook for the first time.

"I shall be only too glad to remember it when you give me the opportunity," he said, sombrelly.

"I have not been a bad mother to you, Oliver. I have claims upon you."

He did not reply, and his silence wounded Lady Lucy to the quick. Was it her fault if her husband, out of an eccentric distrust of the character of his son, and moved by a kind of old fashioned and Spartan belief that a man must endure hardness before he is fit for luxury, had made her and not Oliver the arbiter and legatee of his wealth? But Oliver had never wanted for anything. He had only to ask. What right had she to thwart her husband's decision?

"Good - by, mother," said Markham again. "If you are writing to Isabel, you will, I suppose, discuss the matter with her. She is not unlikely to side with you,—not for your reason, however,—but because of some silly nonsense about politics. If she does, I beg she

will not write to me. It could only embitter matters."

"I will give her your message. Good-by, Oliver."

He left the room, with a gesture of farewell to Ferrier.

Ferrier came back towards the fire. As he did so, he was struck—painfully struck—by a change in Lady Lucy. She was not pale and her eyes were singularly bright. Yet age was for the first time written in a face from which Time had so far taken but his lightest toll. It moved him strangely; though, as to the matter in hand, his sympathies were all with Oliver. But through thirty years Lady Lucy had been the only woman for him. Since first, as a youth of twenty, he had seen her in her father's house, he had never wavered. She was his senior by five years, and their first acquaintance had been one of boy-adoration on his side, and a charming elder-sisterliness on hers. Then he had declared himself, and she had refused him, in order to marry Henry Markham and Henry Markham's fortune. It seemed to him then that he would soon forget her; soon find a warmer and more generous heart. But that was mere ignorance of himself. After a while he became the intimate friend of her husband, herself, and her child. Something, indeed, had happened to his affection for her. He felt himself in no danger beside her, so far as passion was concerned; and he knew very well that she would have banished him forever at a moment's notice rather than give her husband an hour's uneasiness. But to be near her, to be in her world, consulted, trusted, and flattered by her, to slip daily into his accustomed chair, to feel year by year the strands of friendship and of intimacy woven more closely between him and her—between him and hers—these things gradually filled all the space in his life left by politics or by thought. They deprived him of any other home; and this home became a necessity.

Then Henry Markham died. Once more Ferrier asked Lady Lucy to marry him; and again she refused. He acquiesced; their old friendship was resumed; but, once more, with a difference. In a sense he had no longer any illusions

about her. He saw that while she believed herself to be acting under the influence of religion and other high matters, she was in truth a narrow and rather cold hearted woman, with a strong element of worldliness, disguised in much placid moralizing. At the bottom of his soul he resented her treatment of him, and despised himself for submitting to it. But the old habit had become a tyranny not to be broken. Where else could he go for talk, for intimacy, for rest? And for all his disillusion, there were still at her command occasional felicities of manner, and strains of feeling—ethereally delicate and spiritual, like a stanza from the *Christian Year*,—that moved him and pleased his taste, as nothing else had power to move and please; steeped as they were in a far off magic of youth and memory.

So he stayed by her; and she knew very well that he would stay by her to the end.

He sat down beside her and took her hand.

"You are tired."

"It has been a miserable day."

"Shall I read to you? It would be wise, I think, to put it out of your mind for a while and come back to it fresh."

"It will be difficult to attend." Her smile was faint and sad. "But I will do my best."

He took up a volume of Dean Church's sermons and began to read. Presently, as always, his subtler self became conscious of the irony of the situation. He was endeavoring to soothe her trouble by applying to it some of the noblest religious thought of our day, expressed in the noblest language. Such an attempt implied some moral correspondence between the message and the listener. Yet all the time he was conscious himself of cowardice and hypocrisy. What part of the religious message really applied to Lady Lucy this afternoon but the searching words, "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?"

Yet he read on. The delicate ascetic face of his companion grew calmer; he himself felt a certain refreshment and rest. There was no one else in the world with whom he could sit like this, to whom he could speak or read of the inner life.

Lucy Markham had made him what he was, a childless bachelor, with certain memories in his past life of which he was ashamed,—representing the revenge of a strong man's temperament and physical nature. But in the old age she had all but reached, and he was approaching, she was still the one dear and indispensable friend. If she must needs be harsh and tyrannical—well, he must try and mitigate the effects, for herself and others. But his utmost effort must restrain itself within certain limits. He was not at all sure that if offended in some mortal point, she might not do without him. But so long as they both lived he could not do without her.

Early the following morning Alicia Drake appeared in Eaton Square, and by two o'clock Mrs. Fotheringham was also there. She had rushed up from Leeds by the first possible train, summoned by Alicia's letter. Lady Lucy and her daughter held conference; and Miss Drake was admitted to their counsels.

"Of course, mamma," said Isabel Fotheringham, "I don't at all agree with you in the matter. Nobody is responsible for their mothers and fathers. We make ourselves. But I shall not be sorry if the discovery frees Oliver from a marriage which would have been a rope round his neck. She is a foolish, arrogant, sentimental girl, brought up on the most wrongheaded principles, and she could *never* have made a decent wife for him. She will, I hope, have the sense to see it,—and he will be well out of it."

"Oliver at present is very determined," said Lady Lucy, in a tone of depression.

"Oh, well, of course, having just proposed to her, he must of course behave like a gentleman—and not like a cad. But she can't possibly hold him to it. You will write to her, mamma—and so shall I."

"We shall make him, I fear, very angry."

"Oliver? Well, there are moments in every family when it is no use shirking. We have to think of Oliver's career,—and what he may do for his party—and for reform. You think he proposed to her in that walk on the hill?" said Mrs. Fotheringham, turning to her cousin Alicia.

Alicia woke up from a brown study



of her own. She was dressed with her usual perfection in a gray cloth, just suggesting the change of season. Her felt hat with its plume of feathers lay on her lap, and her hair, slightly loosened by the journey, captured the eye by its abundance and beauty. The violets on her breast perfumed the room, and the rings upon her hands flashed just as much as is permitted to an unmarried girl, and no more. As Mrs. Fotheringham looked at her she said to herself: "Another Redfern! Really, Alicia is too extravagant!"

On that head no one could have reproached herself. A cheap coat and skirt, much worn, a hat of no particular color or shape, frayed gloves and disreputable boots, proclaimed both the parsimony of her father's will and the independence of her opinions.

"Oh, of course he proposed on the hill," replied Alicia, thoughtfully. "And you say, Aunt Lucy, that *he* guessed—and she knew nothing? Yes!—I was certain he guessed."

"But she knows now," said Lady Lucy; "and of course we must all be very sorry for her."

"Oh, of course!" said Isabel. "But she will soon get over it. You won't find it will do her any harm. People will make her a heroine."

"I should advise her not to go about with that cousin," said Alicia, softly.

"The girl who told you?"

"She was an outsider! She told me, evidently to spite her cousin, who seemed not to have paid her enough attention,—and then wanted me to swear secrecy."

"Well, if her mother was a sister of Juliet Sparling, you can't expect much, can you? What a mercy it has all come out so soon! The mess would have been infinitely greater if the engagement had gone on a few weeks."

"My dear," said her mother, gravely, "we must not reckon upon Oliver's yielding to our persuasions."

Isabel smiled and shrugged her shoulders. Oliver condemn himself to the simple life!—to the forfeiture of half a million of money—for the sake of the *beaux yeux* of Diana Mallory! Oliver, who had never faced any hardship or gone without any luxury in his life!

Alicia said nothing; but the alertness of her brilliant eyes showed the activity of the brain behind them. While Mrs. Fotheringham went off to committees, Miss Drake spent the rest of the day in ministering to Lady Lucy, who found her company, her gossip about Beechcote, her sympathetic yet restrained attitude towards the whole matter, quite invaluable. As to Lady Lucy, the hours of waiting and suspense passed heavily, and Alicia said to herself that she was beginning to look frail.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

## The Way of a Dream

BY RICHARD LE GALLIENNE

I HAD a dream, and it went this way—  
 It went the way of a bird in the air,  
 It went the way of the butterfly,  
 It went the way of the moon in the sky,  
 It went the way of all things fair:  
 It went to dwell with a sleeping face  
 That rests in a hidden marble place,  
 Where no foot falls, no word is said,  
 Only sometimes a bird will call,  
 Or a little wintry leaf will fall,  
 Or a snowdrop lift its head.