

The Testing of Diana Mallory

A NOVEL

BY MRS. HUMPHRY WARD

CHAPTER XIX

A SAD hurrying and murmuring filled the old rooms and passages of Beechcote. The village doctor had arrived, and under his direction the body of John Ferrier had been removed from the garden to the library of the house. There, amid Diana's books and pictures, Ferrier lay, shut-eyed and serene, that heavy or common touch which in life had tempered the power and humanity of his aspect entirely lost and drowned in the dignity of death.

Chide and the doctor were in low-voiced consultation at one end of the room; Lady Lucy sat beside the body, her face buried in her hands; Markham stood behind her.

Brown, the butler, noiselessly entered the room, and approached Chide.

"Please, sir, Lord Broadstone's messenger is here. He thinks you might wish him to take back a letter to his lordship."

Chide turned abruptly.

"Lord Broadstone's messenger?"

"He brought a letter for Mr. Ferrier, sir, half an hour ago."

Chide's face changed.

"Where is the letter?"—He turned to the doctor, who shook his head.

"I saw nothing when we brought him in."

Markham, who had overheard the conversation, came forward—

"Perhaps, on the grass—?"

Chide—pale, with drawn brows,—looked at him a moment in silence.

Markham hurried to the garden, and to the spot under the yews, where the death had taken place. Round the garden chairs were signs of trampling feet,—the feet of the gardeners who had carried the body. A medley of books, opened letters, and working materials lay on the grass. Markham looked through them; they all belonged to Diana or Mrs. Col-

wood. Then he noticed a cushion which had fallen beside the chair, and a corner of newspaper peeping from below it. He lifted it up.

Below lay Broadstone's opened letter, in its envelope, addressed first in the Premier's well known handwriting to "The Right Honble. John Ferrier, M.P."—and secondly, in wavering pencil, to "Lady Lucy Markham, Tallyn Hall."

Markham turned the letter over, while thoughts hurried through his brain. Evidently Ferrier had had time to read it. Why that address to his mother?—written, it seemed, with the weakness of death already upon him.

The newspaper? Ah!—the *Herald*!—lying as though, after reading it, Ferrier had thrown it down, and let the letter drop upon it, from a hand that had ceased to obey him. As Markham saw it, the color rushed into his cheeks. He stooped and raised it. Suddenly he noticed on the margin of the paper a pencilled line, faint and wavering like the words written on the envelope. It ran beside a passage in the article "From a Correspondent"; and as he looked at it consciousness and pulse paused in dismay. There, under his eye, in that dim mark,—was the last word and sign of John Ferrier.

He was still staring at it—when a sound disturbed him. Lady Lucy came to him feebly across the grass. Markham dropped the newspaper, retaining Broadstone's letter.

"Sir James wished me to leave him a little," she said, brokenly. "The ambulance will be here directly. They will take him to Lytchett. I thought it should have been Tallyn. But Sir James decided it."

"Mother!" Markham moved towards her reluctantly. "Here is a letter,—no doubt of importance. And—it is addressed to you."

Lady Lucy gave a little cry. She looked at the pencilled address, with quivering lips; then she opened the envelope, and, on the back of the closely written letter, she saw at once Ferrier's last words to her.

Markham, moved by a son's natural impulse, stooped and kissed her hair. He drew a chair forward, and she sank into it with the letter. While she was reading it, he raised the *Herald* again, unobserved, folded it up hurriedly, and put it in his pocket; then walked away a few steps, that he might leave his mother to her grief. Presently Lady Lucy called him.

"Oliver!" The voice was strong. He went back to her and she received him with sparkling eyes, her hand on Broadstone's letter.

"Oliver, this is what killed him! Lord Broadstone must bear the responsibility."

And hurriedly, incoherently she explained that the letter from Lord Broadstone was an urgent appeal to Ferrier's patriotism and to his personal friendship for the writer; begging him for the sake of party unity, and for the sake of the country, to allow the Prime Minister to cancel the agreement of the day before; to accept a peerage, and the War Office, in lieu of the Exchequer and the leadership of the House. The Premier gave a full account of the insurmountable difficulties in the way of the completion of the Government, which had disclosed themselves, during the course of the afternoon and evening following his interview with Ferrier. Refusals of the most unexpected kind, from the most unlikely quarters; letters and visits of protest from persons impossible to ignore—most of them no doubt engineered by Lord Philip; "finally the newspapers of this morning,—especially the article in the *Herald* which you will have seen before this reaches you,—all these, taken together, convince me that if I cannot persuade you to see the matter in the same light as I do,—and I know well that, whether you accept or refuse, you will put the public advantage first—I must at once inform Her Majesty that my attempt to construct a Government has broken down."

Markham followed her version of the

letter as well as he could; and as she turned the last page, he too perceived the pencilled writing, which was not Broadstone's. This, she did not offer to communicate; indeed she covered it at once with her hand.

"Yes, I suppose it was the shock," he said in a low voice. "But it was not Broadstone's fault. It was no one's fault."

Lady Lucy flushed, and looked up.

"That man Barrington!" she said vehemently. "Oh, if I had never had him in my house!"

Oliver made no reply. He sat beside her, staring at the grass. Suddenly Lady Lucy touched him on the knee.

"Oliver!"—her voice was gasping and difficult—"Oliver!—you had nothing to do with that?"

"With what, mother?"

"With the *Herald* article? I read it this morning. But I laughed at it! John's letter arrived at the same moment—so happy, so full of plans—"

"Mother!—you don't imagine that a man in Ferrier's position can be upset by an article in a newspaper?"

"I don't know—the *Herald* was so important—I have heard John say so. Oliver!"—her face worked painfully—"I know you talked with that man that night—you didn't—"

"I didn't say anything of which I am ashamed," he said sharply, raising his head.

His mother looked at him in silence. Their eyes met in a flash of strange antagonism; as though each accused the other.

A sound behind them made Lady Lucy turn round. Brown was coming over the grass.

"A telegram, sir, for you. Your coachman stopped the boy and sent him here."

Markham opened it hastily. As he read it his gray and haggard face flushed again heavily.

"I must write an answer, but I will come back," he said, addressing his mother.

Lady Lucy asked no question. When he left her, she sat on in the July sun which had now reached the chairs, mechanically drawing her large country hat forward to shield her from its glare; a

forlorn figure, with staring absent eyes; every detail of her sharp slenderness, her blanched and quivering face, the elegance of her black dress, the diamond fastening the black lace hat-strings tied under her pointed chin,—set in the full and searching illumination of midday. It showed her an old woman—left alone.

Her whole being rebelled against what had happened to her. Life without John's letters, John's homage, John's sympathy—how was it to be endured? Disguises that shrouded her habitual feelings and instincts even from herself dropped away. That Oliver was left to her did not make up to her in the least for John's death.

The smart that held her in its grip was something new to her. She had never felt it at the death of the imperious husband, to whom she had been nevertheless decorously attached. Her thoughts clung to those last broken words under her hand, trying to wring from them something that might content and comfort her remorse.

"Dear Lucy—I feel ill—it may be nothing—Chide and you may read this letter. Broadstone couldn't help it. Tell him so. Bless you—Tell Oliver—Yours, J. F."

The greater part of the letter was all but illegible even by her,—but the "bless you—" and the "J. F." were more firmly written than the rest, as though the failing hand had made a last effort.

Her spiritual vanity was hungry and miserable. Surely, though she would not be his wife, she had been John's best friend!—his good angel. Her heart clamored for some warmer, graterful word,—that might justify her to herself. And instead, she realized, for the first time, the desert she had herself created, the loneliness she had herself imposed. And with prophetic terror, she saw in front of her the daily self-reproach that her self-esteem might not be able to kill.

"Tell Oliver—"

Did it mean—"if I die, tell Oliver"? But John never said anything futile or superfluous in his life. Was it not rather the beginning of some last word to Oliver that he could not finish? Oh, if her son had indeed contributed to his death!

She shivered under the thought; hurrying recollections of Mr. Barrington's

visit, of the *Herald* article of that morning, of Oliver's speeches and doings during the preceding month, rushing through her mind. She had expressed her indignation about the *Herald* article to Oliver already that morning, on the drive which had been so tragically interrupted.

"Dear Lady Lucy—"

She looked up. Sir James Chide stood beside her.

The first thing he did was to draw her to her feet, and then to move her chair into the shade.

"You have lost more than any of us," he said, as she sank back into it, and holding out his hand, he took hers into his warm compassionate clasp. He had never thought that she behaved well to Ferrier; and he knew that she had behaved vilely to Diana; but his heart melted within him at the sight of a woman—and a gray-haired woman—in grief.

"I hear you found Broadstone's letter?" He glanced at it on her lap. "I too have heard from him. The messenger, as soon as he knew I was here, produced a letter for me that he was to have taken to Lytchett. It is a nice letter—a very nice letter—as far as that goes. Broadstone wanted me to use my influence—with John—described his difficulties—"

Chide's hand suddenly clenched on his knee—

"If I could only get at that creature, Lord Philip!"

"You think it was the shock—killed him?" The hard slow tears had begun again to drop upon her dress.

"Oh! he has been an ill man since May," said Chide evasively. "No doubt there has been heart mischief—unsuspected for a long time. The doctors will know—presently. Poor Broadstone!—it will nearly kill him too."

She held out the letter to him.

"You are to read it—" and then, in broken tones—pointing—"look! he said so."

He started, as he saw the writing on the back, and again his hand pressed hers kindly.

"He felt ill—" she said brokenly—"he foresaw it. Those are his last words—his precious last words."

She hid her face. As Chide gave it back to her, his brow and lip had settled

into the look which made him so formidable in Court. He looked around abruptly.

"Where is the *Herald*? I hear Mrs. Colwood brought it out."

He searched the grass in vain, and the chairs. Lady Lucy was silent. Presently she rose feebly.

"When—when will they take him away?"

"Directly. The ambulance is coming—I shall go with him. Take my arm." She leant on him heavily, and as they approached the house, they saw two figures step out of it—Markham and Diana.

Diana came quickly in her light white dress. Her eyes were red, but she was quite composed. Chide looked at her with tenderness. In the two hours which had passed since the tragedy, she had been the help and the support of everybody, writing, giving directions, making arrangements, under his own guidance, while keeping herself entirely in the background. No parade of grief, no interference with himself or the doctors; but once, as he sat by the body in the darkened room, he was conscious of her coming in, of her kneeling for a little while at the dead man's side, of her clinging kiss on the cold hands,—of her soft, stifled weeping. He had not said a word to her, nor she to him. They understood each other.

And now she came, with this wistful face, to Lady Lucy. She stood between that lady and Markham, in her own garden, without, as it seemed to Sir James, a thought of herself. As for him, in the midst of his own sharp grief, he could not help looking covertly from one to the other,—remembering that February scene in Lady Lucy's drawing-room. And presently he was sure that Lady Lucy too remembered it. Diana timidly begged that she would take some food—some milk or wine—before her drive home. It was three hours—incredible as it seemed—since she had called to them in the road. Lady Lucy, looking at her, and evidently but half-conscious—at first—of what was said, suddenly colored, and refused,—courteously but decidedly.

"Thank you. I want nothing. I shall soon be home. Oliver?"

"I go to Lytchett with Sir James,

mother. Miss Mallory begs that you will let Mrs. Colwood take you home."

"It is very kind,—but I prefer to go alone. Is my carriage there?"

She spoke like the stately shadow of her normal self. The carriage was waiting. Lady Lucy approached Sir James, who was standing apart, and murmured something in his ear, to the effect that she would come to Lytchett that evening, and would bring flowers. "Let mine be the first—" she said, inaudibly to the rest. Sir James assented. Such observances, he supposed, count for a great deal with women; especially with those who are conscious of having trifled a little with the weightier matters of the law.

Then Lady Lucy took her leave; Markham saw her to her carriage. The two left behind watched the receding figures—the mother, bent and tottering, clinging to her son.

"She is terribly shaken," said Sir James; "but she will never give way."

Diana did not reply, and as he glanced at her, he saw that she was struggling for self-control, her eyes on the ground.

"And that woman might have had her for daughter!" he said to himself, divining in her the rebuff of some deep and tender instinct.

Markham came back.

"The ambulance is just arriving," he said to Sir James.

Sir James nodded, and turned towards the house. Markham detained him,—dropping his voice.

"Let me go with him,—and you take my fly." Sir James frowned.

"That is all settled," he said, peremptorily. Then he looked at Diana. "I will see to everything indoors. Will you take Miss Mallory into the garden?"

Diana submitted; though, for the first time, her face reddened faintly. She understood that Sir James wished her to be out of sight and hearing while they moved the dead.

That was a strange walk together for these two! Side by side, almost in silence, they followed the garden path which had taken them to the downs, on a certain February evening. The thought of it hovered, a ghost unladen, in both their minds. Instinctively, Markham guided her by this path, that they might avoid that spot on the further lawn,

where the scattered chairs, the trampled books and papers, still showed where Death and Sleep had descended. Yet, as they passed it from a distance, he saw the natural shudder run through her; and, by association, there flashed through him intolerably the memory of that moment of divine abandonment in their last interview, when he had comforted her, and she had clung to him. And now, how near she was to him—and yet how infinitely remote! She walked beside him, her step faltering now and then, her head thrown back, as though she craved for air and coolness on her brow, and tear-stained eyes. He could not flatter himself that his presence disturbed her; that she was thinking at all about him. As for him, his mind, held as it still was, in the grip of catastrophe, and torn by new compunctions, was still conscious from time to time of the most discordant and agitating recollections. Her face in the moonlight—her voice in the great words of her promise—"all that a woman can!"—that wretched evening in the House of Commons when he had finally deserted her,—a certain passage with Alicia, in the Tallyn woods,—these images quivered, as it were, through nerve and vein, disabling and silencing him.

But presently, to his astonishment, Diana began to talk, in her natural voice, without a trace of preoccupation or embarrassment. She poured out her latest recollections of Ferrier. She spoke—brushing away her tears sometimes—of his visit in the morning, and his talk as he lay beside them on the grass, of his recent letters to her, and her remembrance of him in Italy.

Markham listened in silence. What she said was new to him, and often bitter. He had known nothing of this intimate relation which had sprung up so rapidly between her and Ferrier. While he acknowledged its beauty and delicacy, the very thought of it, even at this moment, filled him with an irritable jealousy. The new bond had arisen out of the wreck of those he had himself broken; Ferrier had turned to her, and she to Ferrier, just as he, by his own acts, had lost them both; it might be right and natural; he winced under it—in a sense, resented it—none the less.

And all the time, he never ceased to be conscious of the newspaper in his breast pocket, and of that faint pencilled line that seemed to burn against his heart.

Would she shrink from him, finally and irrevocably, if she knew it? Once or twice he looked at her curiously; wondering at the power that women have of filling and softening a situation. Her broken talk of Ferrier was the only possible talk that could have arisen between them at that moment, without awkwardness, without risk. To that last ground of friendship she could still admit him; and a wounded self-love suggested that she chose it, for his sake, as well as Ferrier's.

Of course she had seen him with Alicia; and she would have drawn her conclusions. Four months after the breach with her!—and such a breach! Suddenly, as he walked beside her, through the radiant scented garden, with its massed roses and delphiniums, its tangles of poppy and lupin, he felt and saw himself as a kind of outcast,—distrusted and disliked by an old friend like Chide, suspected even by his mother, and separated for ever from the good opinion of this girl whom he had loved.

Then his whole being reacted in a flame of protesting irritation. He had been the victim of circumstance almost as much as she,—victim, in the first place, of his own temperament which had forbidden him to carry through the struggle with his mother, as other men might have carried it through; victim in the second place of a habit of mind which did not permit him to swear to other men's words; which made him as critical of his Whig leader, as of his comrades on the left wing.

And with the irritation came also a hardening of the will. The past was done with. The modern man no longer confesses his sins. He knows, to begin with, that there is no forgiveness for them; but he also knows that there are few penalties that will and brain cannot avert. The future was still his; and ambition must shape it, if not love.

They passed into the orchard, where amid the old trees, covered with tiny green apples, some climbing roses were running at will, hanging their trails of

blossom, crimson and pale pink, from branch to branch. Linnets and black-birds made a pleasant chatter; the grass beneath the trees was rich and soft, and through their tops, one saw white clouds hovering in a blazing blue.

Diana turned suddenly towards the house.

"I think we may go back now," she said, and her hand contracted and her lip, as though she realized that her dear dead friend had left her roof for ever.

They hurried back, but there was still time for conversation.

"You knew him, of course, from a child?" she said to him, glancing at him with timid interrogation.

In reply he forced himself to play that part of Ferrier's intimate—almost son—which indeed she had given him, by implication, throughout her own talk. In this she had shown a tact, a kindness for which he owed her gratitude. She must have heard the charges brought against him by the Ferrier party during the election, yet, noble creature that she was, she had not believed them. He could have thanked her aloud, till—with discomfort—he remembered again that marked newspaper in his pocket.

Once, a straggling rose-branch caught in her dress. He stooped to free it. Then for the first time he saw her shrink. The instinctive service had made them man and woman again,—not mind and mind; and he perceived, with a miserable throb, that she could not be so unconscious of his identity, his presence, their past, as she had seemed to be.

She had lost—he realized it—the bloom of first youth. How thin was the hand which gathered up her dress!—the hand once covered with his kisses. Yet she seemed to him lovelier than ever,—and he divined her more woman than ever, more instinct with feeling, life, and passion.

Sir James's messenger met them half way. At the door the ambulance waited.

Chide, bareheaded, and a group of doctors, gardeners, and police, stood beside it.

"I follow you," said Markham to Sir James. "There is a great deal to do."

Chide assented coldly. "I have written to Broadstone; and I have sent a preliminary statement to the papers."

"I can take anything you want to town," said Markham hastily. "I must go up this evening."

Chide turned abruptly, his hand on the door of the ambulance.

"You're summoned?"

Markham assented. Chide stared at him a moment. Then in silence Sir James entered the ambulance, taking his seat beside the shrouded form within. Slowly it drove away, mounted police accompanying it. It took a back way from Becchecote, thus avoiding the crowd, which on the village side had gathered round the gates.

Diana on the steps saw it go, following it with her eyes; standing very white and still. Then Markham lifted his hat to her, conscious through every nerve of the curiosity among the little group of people standing by. Suddenly—he thought—she too divined it. For she looked round her, bowed to him slightly, and disappeared with Mrs. Colwood.

He spent two or three hours at Lytchett, making the first arrangements for the funeral, with Sir James. It was to be at Tallyn, and the burial in the churchyard of the old Tallyn church. Sir James gave a slow and grudging assent to this; but in the end he did assent, after the relations between him and Markham had become still more strained.

Further statements were drawn up for the newspapers. As the afternoon wore on, the grounds and hall of Lytchett betrayed the presence of a number of reporters, hurriedly sent thither by the chief London and provincial papers. By now the news had travelled through England.

Markham worked hard, saving Sir James all he could. Another messenger arrived from Lord Broadstone, with a pathetic letter for Sir James. Chide's face darkened over it. "Broadstone must bear up," he said to Markham, as they stood together in Chide's sanctum. "It was not his fault; and he has the country to think of. You tell him so. Now, are you off?"

Markham replied that his fly had been announced.

"What 'll they offer you?" said Chide, sharply.

"It doesn't much matter, does it?—on

a day like this?" Markham's tone was equally curt. Then he added—"I shall be here again to-morrow."

Chide acquiesced. When Markham had driven off, and as the sound of the wheels died away, Chide uttered a fierce, inarticulate sound. His hot Irish heart swelled within him. He walked hurriedly to and fro, his hands in his pockets.

"John!—John!—" he groaned—"They'll be dancing and triumphing on your grave to-night, John; and that fellow you were a father to—like the rest. But they shall do it without me, John,—they shall do it without me!"

And he thought with a grim satisfaction of the note he had just confided to the Premier's second messenger refusing the offer of the Attorney-Generalship. He was sorry for Broadstone; he had done his best to comfort him; but he would serve in no government with John's supplanters.

Meanwhile Markham was speeding up to town. At every wayside station, under the evening light, he saw the long lines of placards—"Sudden death of Mr. Ferrier. Effect on the new Ministry." Every paper he bought was full of comments, and hasty biographies. There was more than a conventional note of loss in them. Ferrier was not widely popular, in the sense in which many English statesmen have been popular, but there was something in his personality that had long since won the affection and respect of all that public, in all classes, which really observes and directs English affairs. He was sincerely mourned; and he would be practically missed.

But the immediate effect would be the triumph of the Cave; a new direction given to current politics. That no one doubted.

Markham was lost in tumultuous thought; and, to do him justice, his approaching interview with Broadstone accounted for but a fraction of the turmoil in his brain.

The truth was that the two articles in the *Herald* of that morning, which had arrived at Tallyn by nine o'clock, had struck Markham with nothing less than consternation.

Ever since his interview with Barrington he had persuaded himself that in it

he had laid the foundations of party reunion; and he had since been eagerly scanning the signs of slow change in the attitude of the party paper, combined—as they had been up to this very day—with an unbroken personal loyalty to Ferrier. But the article of this morning had shown a complete—and in Oliver's opinion, as he read it at the breakfast table—an extravagant *volte-face*. It amounted to nothing less than a vehement appeal to the new Prime Minister to entrust the leadership of the House of Commons, at so critical a moment, to a man more truly in sympathy with the forward policy of the party.

"We have hoped against hope,—” said the *Herald*; "we have supported Mr. Ferrier against all opposition; but a careful reconsideration and analysis of his latest speeches,—taken together with our general knowledge, public and private, of the political situation—have convinced us, sorely against our will, that whilst Mr. Ferrier must of course hold one of the most important offices in the new Cabinet, his leadership of the Commons—in view of the two great measures to which the party is practically pledged—could only bring calamity. He will not oppose them; that of course we know; but is it possible that he can *fight them through*, with success? We appeal to his patriotism, which has never yet failed him or us. If he will only accept the peerage he has so amply earned, together with either the War Office or the Admiralty,—and represent the Government in the Lords, where it is sorely in need of strength, all will be well. The leadership of the Commons must necessarily fall to that section of the party which, through Lord Philip's astonishing campaign, has risen so rapidly in public favor. Lord Philip himself, indeed, is no more acceptable to the moderates than Mr. Ferrier to the left wing. Heat of personal feeling alone would prevent his filling the part successfully. But two or three men are named, under whom Lord Philip would be content to serve, while the moderates would have nothing to say against them."

This was damaging enough. But far more serious was the "communicated" article on the next page—"from a correspondent,"—on which the "leader" was based.

Markham saw at once that the "correspondent" was really Barrington himself, and that the article was wholly derived from the conversation which had taken place at Tallyn, and from the portions of Ferrier's letters, which Markham had read or summarized, for the journalist's benefit.

The passage in particular, which Ferrier's dying hand had marked—he recalled the gleam in Barrington's black eye as he had listened to it, the instinctive movement in his powerful hand, as though to pounce, vulturelike, on the letter—and his own qualm of anxiety—his insistence on discretion.

Discretion indeed! The whole thing was monstrous treachery. These very sentences, preserved in a viselike memory,—sentences written in the abandonment of intimacy, and with an ironic tinge which had disappeared in the adaptation—had been made to serve as the damning point of the article; and lent an air of complete justification to the *Herald's* emphatic yet dignified retreat.

Again and again, as the train sped on, did Markham go back over the fatal interview. His mind, full of an agony of remorse he could not still, was full also of storm and fury against Barrington. Never had a journalist made a more shameful use of a trust reposed in him.

With torturing clearness, imagination built up the scene in the garden; the arrival of Broadstone's letter; the hand of the stricken man groping for the newspaper; the effort of those pencilled lines; and finally that wavering mark, John Ferrier's last word on earth.

If it had indeed been meant for him, Oliver,—well, he had received it; the dead man had reached out and touched him; he felt the brand upon him; and it was a secret for ever between Ferrier and himself.

The train was nearing St. Pancras. Markham roused himself with an effort. After all, what fault was it of his—this tragic coincidence of a tragic day? If Ferrier had lived, all could have been explained; or if not all, most. And because Ferrier had died of a sudden ailment, common among men worn out with high responsibilities, was a man to go on reproaching himself eternally for another man's vile behavior—for the re-

sults of an indiscretion committed with no ill intent whatever? With a miserable impatience, Oliver turned his mind to his approaching interview with the Prime Minister.

Markham found the Premier much shaken. He was an old man; he had been a warm personal friend of Ferrier's; and the blow had hit him hard.

Evidently for a few hours he had been determined to resign; but strong influences had been brought to bear, and he had wearily resumed his task.

Reluctantly, Markham told the story. Poor Lord Broadstone could not escape from the connection between the arrival of his letter, and the seizure which had killed his old comrade. He sat bowed beneath it for a while; then with a fortitude and a self-control which never fails men of his type, in time of public stress and difficulty, he roused himself to discuss the political situation which had arisen; so far at least as was necessary and fitting, in the case of a man not in the inner circle.

The telegram which Markham had received had, it appeared, been dictated on the preceding afternoon; when the major offices of the Government having been apparently filled up, the turn of the lesser men had arrived.

"I could not imagine that it would reach you at such a moment," said the Premier, with melancholy courtesy. "I beg you to excuse it. But this rough-and-tumble world has to be carried on,—and if it suits you, I shall be happy to recommend your appointment to Her Majesty—as a Junior Lord of the Treasury—carrying with it, as of course you understand, the office of Second Whip."

Ten minutes later, Markham left the Prime Minister's house. As he walked back to St. Pancras, he was conscious of yet another smart added to the rest. If *anything* were offered him, he had certainly hoped for something more considerable.

It looked as though while the Ferrier influence had ignored him, the Darcy influence had not troubled to do much for him. That he had claims could not be denied. So this very meagre bone had been flung him. But if he had refused it, he would have got nothing else.

The appointment would involve re-election. All that infernal business to go through again!—probably in the very midst of disturbances in the mining district. The news from the collieries was as bad as it could be.

He reached home very late,—close on midnight. His mother had gone to bed, ill and worn out, and was not to be disturbed. Isabel Fotheringham and Alicia awaited him in the drawing-room.

Mrs. Fotheringham had arrived in the course of the evening. She herself was peevish with fatigue, incurred in canvassing for two of Lord Philip's most headlong supporters. Personally, she had broken with John Ferrier some weeks before the election; but the fact had made more impression on her own mind than on his.

"Well, Oliver!—This is a shocking thing. However, of course, Ferrier had been unhealthy for a long time; any one could see that. It was really better it should end so."

"You take it calmly!" he said,—scandalized by her manner and tone.

"I am sorry of course. But Ferrier had outlived himself. The people I have been working among, felt him merely in the way. But of course I am sorry. Mamma is dreadfully upset. That one must expect. Well, now then,—you have seen Broadstone?"

She rose to question him; the political passion in her veins asserting itself against her weariness. She was still in her travelling dress. From her small, haggard face, the reddish hair was drawn tightly back; the spectacled eyes, the dry lips, expressed a woman whose life had hardened to dusty uses. Her mere aspect chilled and repelled her brother, and he answered her questions shortly.

"Broadstone has treated you shabbily!" she remarked with decision; "but I suppose you will have to put up with it. And this terrible thing which has happened to-day may tell against you, when it comes to the election. Ferrier will be looked upon as a martyr—and we shall suffer."

Oliver turned his eyes for relief to Alicia. She, in a soft black dress, with many slender chains, studded with beautiful turquoises, about her white neck,

rested and cheered his sight. The black was for sympathy with the family sorrow; the turquoises were there because he specially admired them; he understood them both. The night was hot, and without teasing him with questions she had brought him a glass of iced lemonade, touching him caressingly on the arm while he drank it.

"Poor Mr. Ferrier! It was terribly, terribly sad!" Her voice was subtly tuned and pitched. It made no fresh claim on emotion, of which, in his mental and moral exhaustion, he had none to give; but it more than met the deficiencies of the situation, which Isabel had flouted.

"So there will be another election?" she said presently, still standing in front of him, erect and provocative, her eyes fixed on his.

"Yes—but I sha'n't be such a brute as to bother you with it this time."

"I shall decide that for myself," she said lightly. Then—after a pause—"So Lord Philip has won!—all along the line! I should like to know that man!"

"You do know him."

"Oh, just to pass the time of day. That's nothing. But I am to meet him at the Treshams' next week." Her eyes sparkled a little. Markham glanced at his sister, who was gathering up some small possessions at the end of the room.

"Don't try and make a fool of him!" he said in a low voice. "He's not your sort."

"Isn't he?" She laughed. "I suppose he's one of the biggest men in England now. And somebody told me the other day that after losing two or three fortunes, he had just got another."

Markham nodded.

"Altogether an excellent *parti*."

Alicia's infectious laugh broke out. She sat down beside him, with her hands round her knees.

"You look miles better than when you came in. But I think—you'd better go to bed!"

As Markham, in undressing, flung his coat upon a chair, the copy of the *Herald* which he had momentarily forgotten fell out of the inner pocket. He raised it—irresolute. Should he tear it up, and throw the fragments away?

No. He could not bring himself to do it. It was as though Ferrier, lying still and cold at Lytchett, would know of it; as though the act would do some roughness to the dead.

He went into his sitting-room, found an empty drawer in his writing-table, thrust in the newspaper, and locked the drawer.

CHAPTER XX

"I REGARD this second appeal to West Brookshire as an insult!" said the Vicar of Beechcote, hotly. "If Mr. Markham must needs accept an office that involved re-election he might have gone elsewhere. I see there is already a vacancy by death—and a Liberal seat too—in Sussex. We told him pretty plainly what we thought of him last time."

"And now I suppose you will turn him out?" asked the Doctor lazily. In the beatitude induced by a completed article, and an afternoon smoke, he was for the moment incapable of taking a tragic view either of Markham's shortcomings or his prospects.

"Certainly, we shall turn him out."

"Ah!—a Labor candidate?" said the Doctor, showing a little more energy.

Whereupon the Vicar, with as strong a relish for the *primeur* of an important piece of news as any secular fighter, described a meeting held the night before in one of the mining villages, at which he had been a speaker. The meeting had decided to run a miners' candidate; expenses had been guaranteed; and the resolution passed meant, according to Lavery, that Markham would be badly beaten, and that Colonel Simpson, his Conservative opponent, would be handsomely presented with a seat in Parliament, to which his own personal merits had no claim whatever.

"But that we put up with," said the Vicar grimly. "The joy of turning out Markham is compensation."

The Doctor turned an observant eye on his companion's clerical coat.

"Shall we hear these sentiments next Sunday from the pulpit?" he asked mildly.

The Vicar had the grace to blush slightly.

"I say, no doubt, more than I should

say," he admitted. Then he rose, buttoning his long coat down his long body deliberately, as though by the action he tried to restrain the surge within; but it overflowed all the same. "I know now," he said, with a kindling eye, holding out a gaunt hand in farewell, "what our Lord meant by sending, not peace—but a sword!"

"So, no doubt, did Torquemada!" replied the Doctor, surveying him.

The Vicar rose to the challenge.

"I will be no party to the usual ignorant abuse of the Inquisition," he said firmly. "We live in days of license, and have no right to sit in judgment on our forefathers."

"Your forefathers," corrected the Doctor. "Mine burnt."

The Vicar first laughed; then grew serious. "Well, I'll allow you two opinions on the Inquisition,—but not"—he lifted a gesticulating hand—"not two opinions on mines which are death-traps for lack of a little money to make them safe—not on the kind of tyranny which says to a man 'Strike, if you like—and take a week's notice at the same time to give up your cottage which belongs to the colliery:—or—'Make a fuss about allotments if you dare—and see how long you keep your berth in my employment—we don't want any agitators here!—or maintains, against all remonstrance, a brutal manager in office, whose rule crushes out a man's self-respect, and embitters his soul!'"

"You charge all these things against Markham?"

"He—or rather his mother—has a large holding in collieries against which I charge them."

"H'm. Lady Lucy isn't standing for West Brookshire."

"No matter. The son's teeth are set on edge. Markham has been appealed to—and has done nothing—attempted nothing. He makes eloquent Liberal speeches; and himself spends money got by grinding the poor!"

"You make him out a greater fool than I believe him," said the Doctor. "He has probably attempted a great deal, and finds his power limited. Moreover, he has been eight years Member here, and these charges are quite new."

"Because the spirit abroad is new!"

cried the Vicar. "Men will no longer bear what their fathers bore. The old excuses, the old pleas serve no longer. I tell you the poor are tired of their patience! The Kingdom of Heaven, in its earthly aspect, is not to be got that way. No! 'The violent take it by force!' And as to your remark about Markham,—half the champions of democracy in this country are in the same box; prating about liberty and equality abroad; grinding their servants, and underpaying their laborers at home. I know scores of them; and how any of them keep a straight face at a public meeting I never could understand. There is a French proverb that exactly expresses them—"

"I know," murmured the Doctor—"I know. '*Joie de rue, douleur de maison.*' Well, and so, to upset Markham, you are going to let the Tories in, eh?—with all the old tyrannies and briberies on their shoulders?—naked and unashamed. Hullo!"—he looked round him—"don't tell Patricia I said so—or Hugh."

"There is no room for a middle party," was the Vicar's fierce reply. "Socialists on the one side—Tories on the other!—that 'll be the Armageddon of the future."

The Doctor, declining to be drawn, nodded placidly through the clouds of smoke that enwrapped him. The Vicar hurried away, accompanied, however, furtively to the door, even to the gate of the drive, by Mrs. Roughsedge, who had questions to ask.

She came back presently with a thoughtful countenance.

"I asked him what he thought I ought to do about those tales I told you of."

"Why don't you settle for yourself?" cried the Doctor, testily. "That is the way you women flatter the pride of these priests!"

"Not at all. *You* make him talk nonsense; I find him a fount of wisdom."

"I admit he knows some moral theology," said Roughsedge, thoughtfully. "He has thought a good deal about 'sins' and 'sin.' Well,—what was his view about these particular 'sinners'?"

"He thinks Diana ought to know."

"She can't do any good—and it will keep her awake at nights. I object altogether."

However, Mrs. Roughsedge, having first dropped a pacifying kiss on her husband's gray hair, went up-stairs to put on her things, declaring that she was going there and then to Beechcote.

The Doctor was left to ponder over the gossip in question, and what Diana could possibly do to meet it. Poor child!—was she never to be free from scandal and publicity?

As to the couple of people involved—Fred Birch and that odious young woman Miss Fanny Merton—he did not care in the least what happened to them. And he could not see for the life of him why Diana should care either. But of course she would. In her ridiculous way, she would think she had some kind of responsibility, just because the girl's mother and her mother happened to have been brought up in the same nursery.

"A plague on Socialist vicars,—and a plague on dear good women!" thought the Doctor, knocking out his pipe. "What with philanthropy, and this delicate altruism that takes the life out of women, the world becomes a kind of impenetrable jungle, in which everybody's business is intertwined with everybody else's, and there is nobody left with primitive brutality enough to hew a way through! And those of us that might lead a decent life on this ill-arranged planet are all crippled and hamstrung by what we call unselfishness." The Doctor vigorously replenished his pipe. "I vow I will go to Greece next spring, and leave Patricia behind!"

Meanwhile Mrs. Roughsedge walked to Beechcote—in meditation. The facts she pondered were these,—to put them as shortly as possible. Fred Birch was fast becoming the *mauvais sujet* of the district. His practice was said to be gone, his money affairs were in a desperate condition, and his mother and sister had already taken refuge with relations. He had had recourse to the time-honored expedients of his type: betting on horses and on stocks, with other people's money. It was said that he had kept on the safe side of the law; but one or two incidents in his career had emerged to light quite recently, which had led all the scrupulous in Duncombe to close their doors upon him; and as he had no means of bribing the unscrupulous, he had now become a

mere object-lesson for babes, as to the advantages of honesty.

At the same time Miss Fanny Merton, first introduced to Brookshire by Brookshire's favorite, Diana Mallory, was constantly to be seen in the black sheep's company. They had been observed together, both in London and the country,—at race-meetings, and theatres; and a brawl in the Duncombe refreshment room, late at night, in which Birch had been involved, brought out the scandalous fact that Miss Merton was in his company. Birch was certainly not sober; and it was said by the police that Miss Merton also had had more port wine than was good for her.

All this Brookshire knew; and none of it did Diana know. Since her return, she and Mrs. Colwood had lived so quietly within their own borders that the talk of the neighborhood rarely reached her; and those persons who came in contact with her were far too deeply touched by the signs of suffering in the girl's face and manner, to breathe a word that might cause her fresh pain. Brookshire knew also, through one or other of the mysterious channels by which such news travels, that the two cousins were uncongenial; that it was Fanny Merton who had revealed to Diana her mother's history, and in an abrupt, unfeeling way; and that the two girls were not now in communication. Fanny had been boarding with friends in Bloomsbury, and was supposed to be returning to her family in Barbadoes in the autumn.

The affair of the refreshment room was to be heard of at Petty Sessions, and would therefore get into the local papers. Mrs. Roughsedge felt there was nothing for it; Diana must be told. But she hated her task.

On reaching Beechcote she noticed a fly at the door, and paused a moment to consider whether her visit might not be inopportune. It was a beautiful day, and Diana and Mrs. Colwood were probably to be found in some corner of the garden. Mrs. Roughsedge walked round the side of the house to reconnoitre.

As she reached the beautiful old terrace at the back of the house, on which the drawing-room opened, suddenly, a figure came flying through the drawing-room window,—the figure of a girl in

a tumbled muslin dress, with a large hat, and a profusion of feathers and streamers fluttering about her. In the descent upon the terrace she dropped her gloves; stooping to pick them up, she dropped her boa; in her struggle to recapture that, she trod on and tore her dress.

"Damn!" said the young lady, furiously.

And at the voice, the word, the figure, Mrs. Roughsedge stood arrested, and open-mouthed, her old woman's bonnet slipping back a little on her gray curls.

The young woman was Fanny Merton. She had evidently just arrived, and was in search of Diana. Mrs. Roughsedge thought a moment, and then turned and sadly walked home again. No good interfering now! Poor Diana would have to tackle the situation for herself.

Diana and Mrs. Colwood were on the lawn, surreptitiously at work on clothes for the child in the spinal jacket, who was soon going away to a convalescent home, and had to be rigged out. The grass was strewn with pieces of printed cotton and flannel, with books and work-baskets. But they were not sitting where Ferrier had looked his last upon the world three weeks before. There, under the tall limes, across the lawn, on that sad and sacred spot, Diana meant in the autumn to plant a group of cypresses, the tree of mourning,—*"for remembrance."*

"Fanny!" cried Diana, in amazement, rising from her chair.

At her cousin's voice, Fanny halted, a few yards away.

"Well!" she said, defiantly, "of course I know you didn't expect to see me!"

Diana had grown very pale. Muriel saw a shiver run through her, the shiver of the victim, brought once more into the presence of the torturer.

"I thought you were in London," she stammered, moving forward and holding out her hand mechanically. "Please come and sit down." She cleared a chair of the miscellaneous needlework upon it.

"I want to speak to you very particularly," said Fanny. "And it's private!" She looked at Mrs. Colwood, with whom she had exchanged a frosty greeting. Diana made a little imploring sign, and Muriel—unwillingly—moved away towards the house.

"Well, I don't suppose you want to have anything to do with me," said Fanny, after a moment, in a sulky voice. "But after all, you're mother's niece. I'm in a pretty tight fix,—and it mightn't be very pleasant for you, if things came to the worst."

She had thrown off her hat, and was patting and pulling the numerous puffs and bandeaux in which her hair was arranged, with a nervous hand. Diana was aghast at her appearance. The dirty finery of her dress had sunk many degrees in the scale of decency and refinement since February. Her staring brunette color had grown patchy and unhealthy, her eyes had a furtive audacity, her lips a coarseness, which might have been always there; but in the winter, youth and high spirits had to some extent disguised them.

"Aren't you soon going home?" asked Diana, looking at her, with a troubled brow.

"No, I'm—I'm engaged. I thought you might have known that!" The girl turned fiercely upon her.

"No—I hadn't heard—"

"Well, I don't know where you live all your time!" said Fanny impatiently. "There's heaps of people at Dunscombe know that I've been engaged to Fred Birch for three months. I wasn't going to write to you of course, because I—well—I know you thought I'd been rough on you—about that—you know."

"*Fred Birch!*" Diana's voice was faltering, and amazed.

Fanny twisted her hat in her hands.

"He's all right!" she said, angrily—"if his business hadn't been ruined by a lot of nasty crawling tale-tellers. If people 'ld only mind their own business! However there it is—he's ruined—he hasn't got a penny piece—and of course he can't marry me, if—well, if somebody don't help us out."

Diana's face changed.

"Do you mean that I should help you out?"

"Well, there's no one else!" said Fanny, still as it seemed defying something or some one.

"I gave you—a thousand pounds."

"You gave it to *mother!* I got precious little of it. I've had to borrow lately, from people in the boarding-house. And

I can't get any more—there! I'm just broke—stony."

She was still looking straight before her, but her lip trembled.

Diana bent forward impetuously.

"Fanny!" she said, laying her hand on her cousin's—"Do go home!"

Fanny's lip continued to tremble.

"I tell you I'm engaged," she repeated, in a muffled voice.

"Don't marry him!" said Diana, imploringly. "He's not—he's not a good man."

"What do you know about it? He's well enough—though I dare say he's not your sort. He'd be all right, if somebody would just lend a hand—help him with the debts—and put him on his feet again. He suits me anyway. I'm not so thin-skinned."

Diana stiffened. Fanny's manner—as of old—was almost incredible, considered as the manner of one in difficulties asking for help. The sneering insolence of it inevitably provoked the person addressed.

"Have you told Aunt Bertha," she said coldly, "asked her consent?"

"Mother?—Oh, I've told her I'm engaged. She knows very well that I manage my own business."

Diana withdrew her chair a little.

"When are you going to be married? Are you still with those friends?"

Fanny laughed.

"Oh Lord, no! I fell out with them long ago. They were a wretched lot! But I found a girl I knew,—and we set up together. I've been in a blouse shop—earning thirty shillings a week—there! And if I hadn't, I'd have starved!"

Fanny raised her head. Their eyes met,—Fanny's full of mingled bravado and misery,—Diana's suddenly stricken with deep and remorseful distress.

"Fanny!—I told you to write to me—if there was anything wrong—why didn't you?"

"You hated me!" said Fanny sullenly.

"I didn't!" cried Diana, the tears rising to her eyes. "But—you hurt me so!"—Then again, she bent forward, laying her hand on her cousin's, speaking fast and low. "Fanny—I'm very sorry!—if I'd known you were in trouble, I'd have come or written—I thought you were with friends, and I knew the money had been paid. But, Fanny, I *implore*

you!—give up Mr. Birch! Nobody speaks well of him!—You'll be miserable!—you must be!"

"Too late to think of that!" said Fanny, doggedly.

Diana looked up in sudden terror. Fanny tried to brazen it out. But all the patchy color left her cheeks; and dropping her head on her hands, she began to sob. Yet even the sobs were angry—

"I can go and drown myself!" she said passionately—"and I suppose I'd better. Nobody cares whether I do or not. He's made a fool of me—I don't suppose mother 'll take me home again. And if he doesn't marry me,—I'll kill myself somehow—it don't matter how—before— I've got to!"

Diana had dropped on her knees beside her visitor. Unconsciously—pitifully—she breathed her cousin's name. Fanny looked up. She wrenched herself violently away.

"Oh, it's all very well!—but we can't all be such saints as you. It 'ld be all right if he'd marry me directly—*directly*," she added, hurriedly.

Diana knelt still immovable. In her face was that agonized shock and recoil with which the young and pure, the tenderly cherished and guarded, receive the first withdrawal of the veil which hides from them the more brutal facts of life. But, as she knelt there, gazing at Fanny, another expression stole upon and effaced the first. Taking shape and body, as it were, from the experience of the moment, there rose into sight the new soul developed in her by this tragic year. Not for her—not for Juliet Sparling's daughter—the plea of cloistered innocence! By a sharp transition her youth had passed from the Chamber of Maiden Thought, into the darkened Chamber of Experience. She had steeped her heart in the waters of sin and suffering; she put from her in a flash the mere maiden panic which had drawn her to her knees.

"Fanny,—I'll help you!" she said, in a low voice, putting her arms round her cousin. "Don't cry—I'll help you."

Fanny raised her head. In Diana's face there was something which, for the first time, roused in the other a nascent sense of shame. The color came rush-

ing into her cheeks; her eyes wavered painfully.

"You must come and stay here," said Diana, almost in a whisper. "And where is Mr. Birch?—I must see him."

She rose as she spoke; her voice had a decision, a sternness, that Fanny for once did not resent. But she shook her head despairingly.

"I can't get at him. He sends my letters back. He'll not marry me unless he's paid to."

"When did you see him last?"

Gradually the whole story emerged. The man had behaved as the coarse and natural man face to face with temptation and opportunity is likely to behave. The girl had been the victim first and foremost of her own incredible folly. And Diana could not escape the idea that on Birch's side there had not been wanting from the first an element of sinister calculation. If her relations objected to the situation, it could of course be made worth his while to change it. All his recent sayings and doings, as Fanny reported them, clearly bore this interpretation.

As Diana sat, dismally pondering, an idea flashed upon her. Sir James Chide was to dine at Beechcote that night. He was expected early, would take Beechcote indeed on his way from the train to Lytchett. Who else should advise her, if not he? In a hundred ways, practical and tender, he had made her understand, that, for her mother's sake and her own, she was to him as a daughter.

She mentioned him to Fanny.

"Of course"—she hurried over the words—"we need only say—that you have been engaged. We must consult him, I suppose, about—about breach of promise of marriage."

The odious, hearsay phrase came out with difficulty. But Fanny's eyes glistered at the name of the great lawyer.

Her feelings towards the man who had betrayed her were clearly a medley of passion and of hatred. She loved him, as she was able to love; and she wished, at the same time, to coerce and be revenged on him. The momentary sense of shame had altogether passed. It was Diana who, with burning cheeks, stipulated that while Fanny must not return to town, but must stay at Beechcote till matters were arranged, she should not

appear during Sir James's visit; and it was Fanny who said with vindictive triumph, as Diana left her in her room—"Sir James 'll know well enough what sort of damages I could get!"

After dinner, Diana and Sir James walked up and down the lime walk, in the August moonlight. Diana had told the story so far as she meant to tell it. Her cousin was in love with this wretched man, and had got herself terribly talked about. She could not be persuaded to give him up; while he could only be induced to marry her by the prospect of money. Could Sir James see him, and find out how much would content him?—and whether any decent employment could be found for him?

Sir James held his peace, except for the "Yesses" and "Noes" that Diana's conversation demanded. He would certainly interview the young man; he was very sorry for her anxieties; he would see what could be done.

Meanwhile he never communicated to her that he had travelled down to Beechcote in the same carriage with Lady Fenton, the county gossip, and that in addition to other matters—of which more anon—the refreshment-room story had been discussed between them, with additions and ramifications leading to very definite conclusions in any rational mind as to the nature of the bond between Diana's cousin and the young Dunscombe solicitor. Lady Fenton had expressed her concern for Miss Mallory. "Poor thing!—do you think she knows? Why on earth did she ever ask him to Beechcote! Alicia Drake told me she saw him there."

These things Sir James did not disclose. He played Diana's game with perfect discretion. He guessed even that Fanny was in the house; but he said not a word. No need at all to question the young woman. If in such a case he could not get round a rascally solicitor, what could he do?—and what was the good of being the leader of the criminal bar?

Only when Diana, at the end of their walk, shyly remarked that money was not to stand in the way; that she had plenty; that Beechcote was no doubt too expensive for her, but that the tenancy

was only a yearly one, and she had but to give notice at Michaelmas, which she thought of doing:—only then did Sir James allow himself a laugh.

"You think I am going to let this business turn you out of Beechcote—eh?—you preposterous little angel!"

"Not this business," stammered Diana, "but I am really living at too great a rate."

Sir James grinned, patted her ironically on the shoulder, told her to be a good girl, and departed.

Fanny stayed for a week at Beechcote, and at the end of that time, Diana and Mrs. Colwood accompanied her on a Saturday to town, and she was married, to a sheepish and sulky bridegroom, by special license, at a Marylebone church,—Sir James Chide, in the background, looking on. They departed for a three days' holiday to Brighton; and on the fourth day, they were due to sail by a West Indian steamer for Barbadoes, where Sir James had procured for Mr. Frederick Birch a post in the office of a large sugar estate, in which an old friend of Chide's had an interest. Fanny showed no rapture in the prospect of thus returning to the bosom of her family. But there was no help for it.

By what means the transformation scene had been effected it would be waste of time to inquire. Much to Diana's chagrin, Sir James entirely declined to allow her to aid in it financially, except so far as equipping her cousin with clothes went, and providing her with a small sum for her wedding journey. Personally, he considered that the week during which Fanny stayed at Beechcote was as much as Diana could be expected to contribute; and that she had indeed paid the lion's share.

Yet that week—if he had known—was full of strange comfort to Diana. Often Muriel, watching her, would escape to her own room to hide her tears. Fanny's second visit was not as her first. The first had seen the outraging and repelling of the nobler nature by the ignoble. Diana had frankly not been able to endure her cousin. There was not a trace of that now. Her father's papers had told her abundantly how flimsy, how nearly fraudulent, was the financial

claim which Fanny and her belongings had set up. The thousand pounds had been got practically on false pretences, and Diana knew it now, in every detail. Yet neither towards that, nor towards Faunty's other and worse lapses, did she show any bitterness, any spirit of mere repulsion and reprobation. The last vestige of that just, instinctive Pharisaism which clothes an unstained youth had dropped from her. As the heir of her mother's fate, she had gone down into the dark sea of human wrong and misery, and she had emerged transformed, more akin by far to the wretched and the unhappy than to the prosperous and the untempted. She took Fanny now as she found her—bearing with her,—accepting her,—loving her as far as she could. So that at the last even that stubborn nature was touched. And when Diana kissed her after the wedding, with a few tremulous good wishes, Fanny's gulp was not all excitement. Yet it must still be recorded, that on the wedding-day Fanny was in the highest spirits, only marred by some annoyance that she had let Diana persuade her out of a white satin wedding-dress.

Diana's preoccupation with this matter carried her through the first week of Markham's second campaign, and deadened so far the painful effect of the contest now once more thundering through the division. For it was even a more odious battle than the first had been. In the first place, the moderate Liberals held a meeting very early in the struggle, with Sir William Fenton in the chair, to protest against the lukewarm support which Markham had given to the late leader of the Opposition, to express their lamentation for Ferrier, and their distrust of Lord Philip; and to decide upon a policy.

At the meeting a heated speech was made by a gray-haired squire, an old friend and Oxford contemporary of John Ferrier's, who declared that he had it on excellent authority that the communicated article in the *Herald*, which had appeared on the morning of Ferrier's sudden death, had been written by Oliver Markham.

This statement was reported in the newspapers of the following morning,

and at once denied by Markham himself, in a brief letter to the *Times*.

It was this letter which Lady Fenton discussed hotly with Sir James Chide, on the day when Fanny Merton's misdeemeanors also came up for judgment.

"He says he didn't write it. Sir William declares—a mere quibble! He has it from several people that Barrington was at Tallyn two days before the article appeared, and that he spoke to one or two friends next day of an 'important' conversation with Markham, and of the first-hand information he had got from it. Nobody was so likely as Oliver to have that intimate knowledge of poor Mr. Ferrier's intentions and views. William believes that he gave Barrington all the information in the article, and wrote nothing himself, in order that he might be able to deny it."

Sir James met these words with an impenetrable face. He neither defended Markham, nor did he join in Lady Fenton's denunciations. But that good lady, who though voluble was shrewd, told her husband afterwards that she was certain Sir James believed Markham to be responsible for the *Herald* article.

A week later the subject was renewed at a very heated and disorderly meeting at Dunscombe. A bookseller's assistant, well known as one of the leading Socialists of the division, got up and in a suave mincing voice accused Markham of having—not written, but—"inspired" the *Herald* article, and so dealt a treacherous blow at his old friend and Parliamentary leader,—a blow which had no doubt contributed to the situation culminating in Mr. Ferrier's tragic death.

Markham, very pale, sprang up at once, denied the charge, and fiercely attacked the man who had made it. But there was something so venomous in the manner of his denial; so undignified in the personalities with which it was accompanied; that the meeting suddenly took offence. The attack, instead of dying down, was renewed. Speaker after speaker got up and heckled the candidate. Was Mr. Markham aware that the editor of the *Herald* had been staying at Tallyn two days before the article appeared?—Was he also aware that his name had been freely mentioned, in the *Herald* office, in connection with the article?

Markham in vain endeavored to regain sangfroid and composure under these attacks. He haughtily repeated his denial, and refused to answer any more questions on the subject.

The local Tory paper rushed into the fray, and had presently collected a good deal of what it was pleased to call evidence on the matter, mainly gathered from London reporters. The matter began to look serious. Markham appealed to Barrington to contradict the rumor publicly, as "absurd and untrue." But unfortunately, Barrington, who was a man of quick and gusty temper, had been nettled by an incautious expression of Markham's, with regard to the famous article, in his Dunscombe speech:—"If I had had any intention whatever of dealing a dishonorable blow at my old friend and leader, I could have done it a good deal more effectively, I can assure you; I should not have put what I had to say in a form so confused and contradictory."

This—together with the general denial—happened to reach Barrington, and it rankled. When therefore Markham appealed to him, he brusquely replied:

"Dear Mr. Markham—You know best what share you had in the *Herald* article. You certainly did not write it. But to my mind it very faithfully reproduced the gist of our conversation on a memorable evening. And, moreover, I believed and still believe that you intended the reproduction. Believe me, yours faithfully, Ernest Barrington."

To this Markham returned a stiff answer, giving his own account of what had taken place, and regretting that even a keen journalist should have thought it consistent with his honor to make such injurious and unfair use of "my honest attempt to play the peacemaker," between the different factions of the party.

To this letter Barrington made no reply. Markham, sore and weary, yet strung by now to an obstinacy and a fighting passion which gave a new and remarkable energy to his personality, threw himself afresh into a hopeless battle. For a time indeed the tide appeared to turn. He had been through two Parliaments a popular and successful member; less popular no doubt in the second than in the first, as the selfish and bitter strains in his character became more

apparent. Still he had always commanded a strong personal following, especially among the younger men of the towns and villages, who admired his lithe and handsome presence, and appreciated his reputation as a sportsman and volunteer. Lady Lucy's subscriptions too were an element in the matter, not to be despised.

A rally began in the Liberal host, which had felt itself already beaten. Markham's meetings improved; the *Herald* article was apparently forgotten.

The anxiety now lay chiefly in the mining villages, where nothing seemed to affect the hostile attitude of the inhabitants. A long series of causes had led up to it, to be summed up perhaps in one,—the harsh and domineering temper of the man who had for years managed the three Tallyn collieries, and who held Lady Lucy and her co-shareholders in the hollow of his hand. Lady Lucy, whose curious obstinacy had been roused, would not dismiss him; and nothing less than his summary dismissal would have placated the dull hatred of six hundred miners.

Markham had indeed attempted to put through a number of minor reforms, but the effect on the temper of the district had been, in the end, little or nothing. The colliers, who had once fervently supported him, thought of him now, either as a fine gentleman profiting pecuniarily by the ill deeds of a tyrant, or as sheltering behind his mother's skirts; and for some time every meeting of his in the colliery villages was broken up. But in the more hopeful days of the last week, when the canvassing returns, together with Markham's astonishing energy, and brilliant speaking, had revived the failing heart of the party, it was resolved to hold a final meeting, on the night before the poll, at Hartingfield, the largest of the mining villages.

Markham left Dunscombe for Hartingfield about six o'clock on an August evening, driving the coach, with its superb team of horses, which had become by now so familiar an object in the division. He was to return in time to make the final speech in the concluding Liberal meeting of the campaign, which was to be held that night, with the help of some half-dozen other members of Parliament, in the Dunscombe Corn Exchange.

A body of his supporters, gathered in the market-place, cheered him madly as the coach set off. Markham stopped the horses for a minute outside the office of the local paper. The weekly issue came out that afternoon. It was handed up to him, and the coach rattled on.

McEwart, who was sitting beside him, opened it, and presently gave a low involuntary whistle of dismay. Markham looked round.

"What's the matter?"

McEwart would have gladly flung the paper away. But looking round him he saw that several other persons on the top of the coach had copies, and that whispering consternation had begun.

He saw nothing for it but to hand the paper to Markham. "This is playing it pretty low down!" he said, pointing to an item in large letters on the first page.

Markham handed the reins to the groom beside him and took the paper. He saw, printed in full, Barrington's curt letter to himself on the subject of the *Herald's* article; and below it the jubilant and scathing comments of the Tory editor.

He read both carefully, and gave the paper back to McEwart. "That decides the election," he said calmly. McEwart's face assented.

Markham however never showed greater pluck than at the Hartingfield meeting. It was a rowdy and disgraceful business, in which from beginning to end he scarcely got a hearing for more than three sentences at a time. A shouting mob of angry men, animated by passions much more than political, held him at bay. But on this occasion he never once lost his temper; he caught the questions and insults hurled at him, and threw them back with unfailing skill; and every now and then, at some lull in the storm, he made himself heard, and to good purpose. His courage and coolness propitiated some, and exasperated others.

A group of very rough fellows pursued him shouting and yelling as he left the schoolroom where the meeting was held.

"Take care!" said McEwart, hurrying him along. "They are beginning with stones, and I see no police about."

The little party of visitors made for the coach, protected by some of the villagers. But, in the dusk, the stones came flying fast and freely. Just as Markham was climbing into his seat he was struck. McEwart saw him waver, and heard a muttered exclamation.

"You're hurt!" he said, supporting him. "Let the groom drive."

Markham pushed him away.

"It's nothing." He gathered up the reins, the grooms who had been holding the horses' heads clambered into their places; a touch of the whip—and the coach was off, almost at a gallop, pursued by a shower of missiles.

After a mile at full speed, Markham pulled in the horses, and handed the reins to the groom. As he did so, a low groan escaped him.

"You *are* hurt!" exclaimed McEwart. "Where did they hit you?"

Markham shook his head.

"Better not talk," he said, in a whisper. "Drive home."

An hour afterwards, it was announced to the crowded gathering in the Dunscombe Corn Exchange that Mr. Markham had been hurt by a stone at Hartingfield, and could not address the meeting. The message was received with derision rather than sympathy. It was universally believed that the injury was a mere excuse, and that the publication of that most damning letter, on the very eve of the poll, was the sole and only cause why the Junior Lord of the Treasury failed on this occasion to meet the serried rows of his excited countrymen, waiting for him in the packed and stifling hall.

It was the Vicar who took the news to Beechcote. As in the case of Diana herself, the misfortune of the enemy transformed a roaring lion into a sucking dove. Some instinct told him that she must hear it gently. He therefore invented an errand, saw Muriel Colwood and left the tale with her—both of the blow and the letter.

Muriel, trembling inwardly, broke it as lightly and casually as she could. An injury to the spine—so it was reported. No doubt rest and treatment would soon amend it. A London surgeon had been sent for. Meanwhile the election was said

to be lost. Muriel reluctantly produced the letter in the *West Brookshire Gazette*; knowing that in the natural course of things Diana must see it on the morrow.

Diana sat bowed over the letter, and the news; and presently lifted up a white face, kissed Muriel, who was hovering round her, and begged to be left alone.

She went to her room. The windows were wide open to the woods, and the golden August moon shone above the Down in its bare full majesty. Most of the night she sat crouched beside the window, her head resting on the ledge. Her whole nature hungered—and hun-

gered—for Oliver. As she lifted her eyes, she saw the little dim path on the hill-side; she felt his arms round about her, his warm life against hers. Nothing that he had done, nothing that he could do, had torn him, or would ever tear him, from her heart. And now he was wounded—defeated—perhaps disgraced; and she could not help him, could not comfort him.

She supposed Alicia Drake was with him. For the first time, a torment of fierce jealousy ran through her nature, like fire through a forest glade, burning up its sweetness.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

The Afterthought

BY HARRIET PRESCOTT SPOFFORD

IN the sweet summer-time she said,
 When the leaf falls I shall be dead.
 I shall be lying still and cold
 Beneath my weight of dark grave mould.
 I shall not know how time is sped,
 Nor midnight's bloom, nor morning's gold,
 Nor if the honeyed rose be red—
 When the leaf falls I shall be dead.

Nay, said the Spirit then. Because
 That light shines far which never was
 On sea or land, thy path is made
 Where the infinities are laid.
 Thou, while the source of being draws,
 Wrapped in that light, and unafraid,
 Through slow ascent of lovely laws
 From life to life shall pass nor pause.

Though all the purpling seas shall shoal,
 Though constant stars forsake their pole,
 Thou still shalt mount from gyre to gyre
 And seek the founts of primal fire.
 For who am I would spell thy scroll?
 I am the strength of thy desire,
 Part am I of the deathless whole,—
 Thine own inviolable soul!