

The Case of Richard Meynell

by Mrs. Humphry Ward

XIII

"SO I see your name this morning, Stephen, on their list."

Henry Barron held up a page of the *Times* and pointed to its first column.

"I sent it in some time ago."

"And pray what does your parish think of it?"

"They won't support me."

"Thank God!"

Barron rose majestically to his feet, and from the rug surveyed his thin, fair-haired son. Stephen had just ridden over from his tiny vicarage, twelve miles away, to settle some business with his father connected with a family legacy. Since the outbreak of the Reform Movement there had been frequent disputes between the father and son — if aggressive attack on the one side and silent endurance on the other make a dispute. Barron scorned his elder son as a faddist and a dreamer; while Stephen could never remember the time when his father had not seemed to him the living embodiment of prejudice, obstinacy, and caprice. He had always reckoned it, indeed, the crowning proof of Meynell's unworldly optimism that, at the moment of his father's accession to the White House estate, there should have been a passing friendship between him and the Rector. Yet, whenever thoughts of this kind presented themselves explicitly to Stephen, he tried to suppress them. His life, often, was a constant struggle between a genuine and irrepressible dislike of his father, and a sore sense that no Christian priest could permit himself such a feeling.

He made no reply to his father's interjection.

But Barron knew very well that his son's self-control was no indication of lack of will — quite the contrary; and the father was conscious of a growing exasperation as he watched the patient compression of the young mouth. He wanted somehow to convict and crush Stephen; and he believed that he held the means thereto in his hand. He had not been sure, before Stephen arrived, whether he should reveal the situation or not. But the temptation was too great. That the son's mind and soul should finally have escaped his father, "like a bird out of the snare of the fowler," was the unforgivable offence. What a gentle, malleable fellow he had seemed in his school and college days! — how amenable to the father's spiritual tyranny! It was Barron's constant excuse to himself for his own rancorous feeling — that Meynell had robbed him of his son.

"You probably think it strange," he resumed harshly, "that I should rejoice in what, of course, is your misfortune — that your people reject you; but there are higher interests than those of personal affection concerned in this business. We who are defending her must think first of the Church!"

"Naturally," said Stephen.

His father looked at him in silence for a moment — at the mild, pliant figure, the downcast eyes.

"There is, however, one thing for which I have cause — we all have cause — to be grateful to Meynell," he said, with emphasis.

Stephen looked up.

"I understand he refused to sanction your engagement to Hester Fox-Wilson."

The young man flushed.

"It would be better, I think, father, if we are to talk over these matters quietly,—which I understood is the reason you asked me to come here to-day,—that you should avoid a tone towards myself and my affairs which can only make frank conversation difficult or impossible between us."

"I have no desire to be offensive," said Barron, checking himself with difficulty, "and I have only your good in view — though you may not believe it. My reason for approving Meynell in the matter is that he was aware, and you were not aware" — he fell into the slow phrasing he always affected on important occasions — "of facts bearing vitally on your proposal; and that, in the light of them, he acted as any honest man was bound to act."

"What do you mean?" cried Stephen, springing to his feet.

"I mean" — the answer was increasingly deliberate — "that Hester Fox-Wilson — it is very painful to have to go into these things, but it is necessary, I regret to say — is not a Fox-Wilson at all, and has no right whatever to her name!"

Stephen walked up to the speaker.

"Take care, father! This is a question of a *girl* — an unprotected girl! What right have you to say such an abominable thing?"

He stood, panting and white, in front of his father.

"The right of truth," said Barron. "It happens to be true."

"Your grounds?"

"The confession of the woman who nursed her mother — who was *not* Lady Fox-Wilson."

Barron had now assumed the habitual attitude — thumbs in his pockets, legs slightly apart — that Stephen had associated, from his childhood, with the long bullying, secular and religious, that Barron's family owed to Barron's temperament.

In the pause, Stephen's quick breathing could be heard.

"Who was she?"

The son's tone had caught the father's sharpness.

"Well, my dear Stephen, I am not sure that I shall tell you while you look at me in that fashion! Believe me, it is not my fault, but my misfortune, that I happen to be acquainted with this very disagreeable secret. And I have one thing to say: you must give me your promise that you will regard any communication from me as entirely confidential, before I say another word."

Stephen walked away to the window, and came back.

"Very well; I promise."

"Sit down. It is a long story."

The son obeyed mechanically, his frowning eyes fixed upon his father. Barron at once plunged into an account of his interview with Judith Sabin, omitting only those portions of it that connected the story with Meynell. It was evident, presently, that Stephen — to the dawning triumph of his father — listened with an increasingly troubled mind. And, indeed, at the first whisper of the story there had flashed through the young man's memory the vision of Meynell arguing and expostulating on that July afternoon when he, Stephen, had spoken so confidently, so unsuspectingly, of his love for Hester. He recalled his own amazement, his sense of shock and strangeness — what Meynell said on that occasion seemed to have so little relation to what Meynell habitually was. Meynell, for whom love, in its spiritual aspect, was the salt and significance of life, the foundation of all wisdom — Meynell on that occasion had seemed to make comparatively nothing of love! — to deny its simplest rights — to put it despotically out of count. Stephen, as he had long recognised, had been overborne and silenced by Meynell's personality rather than by Meynell's arguments — by the disabling force mainly of his own devotion to the man who bade him wait and renounce. But, in his heart, he had never quite forgiven, or understood; and for all the subsequent trouble about Hester, all his own jealousy and pain, he had not been able to prevent himself from blaming Meynell. And now — now! If this story were true, he began to understand. Poor child — poor mother! With the marriage of the child must come — he felt the logic of it — the confession of the mother. A woman like Alice Puttenham, a man like Meynell, were not likely to give Hester to her lover without telling that lover what he had a right to know. Small blame to them if they were not prepared to bring about that crisis prematurely, while Hester was still so young! It must be faced, but not, *not* till it must!

Yes, he understood. A rush of warm and pitiful love filled his heart, while his intelligence dismally accepted and endorsed the story his father was telling with that heavy, tragic touch which the son instinctively hated as insincere and theatrical.

"Now, then, perhaps," Barron wound up, "you will realise why it is I feel Meynell has acted considerably, and as any true friend of yours was bound to act. He knew — and you were ignorant. Such a marriage could not have been for your happiness, and he rightly interposed."

"What difference does it make to Hester herself!" cried Stephen hotly, "supposing the thing is true. I admit — it may be true." And, as

he spoke, a host of small confirmations came thronging into his unwilling mind. "But in any case —"

He walked up to his father again.

"What have you done about it, father?" he said sharply. "I suppose you went to Meynell at once."

Barron smiled, with a lift of the eyebrows. He knocked off the end of his cigarette, and paused.

"Of course you have seen Meynell?" Stephen repeated.

"No, I haven't."

"I should have thought that was your first duty."

"It was not easy to decide what my duty was," said Barron, with the same emphasis, — "not at all easy."

"What do you mean, father? There seems to be something more behind. If there is, considering my feeling for Hester, it seems to me that, having told me so much, you are bound to tell me *all* you know. Remember — this story concerns the girl I love!"

Passion and pain spoke in the young man's voice. His father looked at him with an involuntary sympathy.

"I know. I am very sorry for you. But it concerns other people also."

"What is known of the father?" said Stephen abruptly.

"Ah, that is the point!" said Barron, making an abstracted face.

"It is a question to which I am surely entitled to have an answer!"

"I am not sure that I can give it you. I can tell you, of course, what the view of Judith Sabin was — what the facts seem to point to. But — in any case, whether I believed Judith Sabin or no, I should not have said a word to you on the subject but for the circumstance that — unfortunately — there are other people in the case."

Whereupon — watching his son carefully — Barron repeated the story that he had already given to Flaxman.

The effect upon Meynell's young disciple and worshipper may be imagined. He grew deadly pale, and then red; choked with indignant scorn; and could scarcely bring himself to listen at all, after he had once gathered the real gist of what his father was saying.

Yet, by this time, the story was much better worth listening to than it had been when Barron had first presented it to Flaxman. By dint of much brooding, and under the influence of an angry obstinacy that must have its prey, Barron had made it a good deal more plausible than it had been to begin with, and would, no doubt,

make it more plausible still. He had brought in, by now, a variety of small local observations bearing on the relations between the three figures in the drama — Hester, Alice Puttenham, Meynell — which Stephen must and did often recognise as true and telling. It was true that there was much friction and difference between Hester and the Fox-Wilson family; that Alice Puttenham's position and personality had always teased the curiosity of the neighbourhood; that the terms of Sir Ralph's will were perplexing; and that Meynell was Hester's guardian in a special sense, a fact for which there was no obvious explanation. It was true, also, that there emerged at times a singular likeness in Hester's beauty — a likeness of expression and gesture — to the blunt and powerful aspect of the Rector. . . .

And yet! Did his father believe, for a moment, the preposterous things he was saying? The young man sharpened his wits as far as possible for Hester's and his friend's sake, and came presently to the conclusion that it was one of those violent, intermittent half-beliefs which, in the service of hatred and party spirit, can be just as effective and dangerous as any other. And when the circumstantial argument passed presently into the psychological — even the theological — this became the more evident.

For, in order to explain to himself and others how Meynell could possibly have behaved in a fashion so villainous, Barron had invented a whole psychological sequence. He was prepared to show in detail how the thing had probably evolved — to trace the processes of Meynell's mind. The sin once sinned, what more natural than Meynell's proceeding? Marriage would not have mended the disgrace or averted the practical consequences of the intrigue. He certainly could not have kept his living had the facts been known. On the one hand, his poverty — his brothers to educate, his benefice to be saved. On the other, the natural desire of the Fox-Wilsons and of Alice Puttenham to conceal everything that had occurred. The sophistries of love would come in — repentance, the desire to make a fresh start, to protect the woman he had sacrificed.

And all that might have availed him against sin and temptation, a steadfast Christian faith, was already deserting him, must have been already undermined. What was there to wonder at? What was there incredible in the story? The human heart was corrupt and desperately wicked; and nothing stood between any man, however apparently holy, and moral catastrophe, except the grace of God.

Stephen bore the long, incredible harangue as best he could, for Meynell's sake. He sat with

his face turned away from his father, his hand closing and unclosing on his knee, his nerves quivering under the exasperation of his father's monstrous premises and still more monstrous deductions. At the end he faced round abruptly.

"I do not wish to offend you, father, but I had better say at once that I do not accept, for a single instant, your arguments or your conclusion. I am positive that the facts, whatever they may be, are *not* what you suppose them to be! I say that, to begin with. But now the question is, what to do? You say there are anonymous letters about. That decides it. It is clear that you must go to Meynell at once! And, if you do not, I must."

Barron's look flashed.

"You gave me your promise," he said imperiously, "before I told you this story, that you would not communicate it without my permission. I withhold the permission."

"Then you must go yourself," said the young man vehemently. "You must!"

"I am not altogether unwilling to go," said Barron slowly. "But I shall choose my own time."

And, as he raised his cold eyes upon his son, it pleased his spirit of intrigue, and of domination through intrigue, that he had already received a letter from Flaxman giving precisely opposite advice, and did not intend to tell Stephen anything about it. Stephen's impulsive candour, however, appealed to him much more than Flaxman's reticence. It would, indeed, be physically and morally impossible for him — anonymous letters or no — to lock the scandal much longer within his own breast. It had become a living and burning thing — like some wild creature straining at a leash.

A little while later Stephen found himself alone. He believed himself to have got an undertaking from his father that Meynell should be communicated with promptly — perhaps that very evening. But the terms of the promise were not very clear, and the young man's mind was full of a seething wrath and unhappiness. If the story were true, so far as Hester and her unacknowledged mother were concerned — and, as we have seen, there was that in his long and intimate knowledge of Hester's situation, which, as he listened, suddenly fused and flashed in a most unwilling conviction — then what dire, what pitiful need, on their part, of protection and of help! If, indeed, any friendly consideration for him, Stephen, had entered into Meynell's conduct, the young man angrily resented the fact.

He paced up and down the library for a time, divided thus between a fierce contempt for

Meynell's slanderers and a passionate pity for Hester.

His father had gone to Markborough. Theresa was, he believed, in the garden, giving orders. Presently the clock on the bookcase struck three, and Stephen awoke, with a start, to the engagements of the day.

He was in the act of opening the library door when he suddenly remembered: Maurice!

He blamed himself for not having remembered earlier that Maurice was at home — for not having asked his father about him. He went to look for him, could not find him in any of the sitting-rooms, and finally mounted to the second-floor bedroom that had always been his brother's.

"Maurice!" He knocked. No answer; but there was a hurried movement inside, and something that sounded like the opening of a drawer.

He called again, and tried the door. It was locked. But, after further shuffling inside, as if some one were handling papers, it was thrown open.

"Well, Maurice, I hope I haven't disturbed you in anything very important. I thought I must come and have a look at you. Are you all right?"

"Come in, old fellow," said Maurice, with affected warmth. "I was only writing a few letters. No room for anybody downstairs but the pater and Theresa, so I have to retreat up here."

"And lock yourself in?" said Stephen, laughing. "Any secrets going?" And, as he took a seat on the edge of the bed, while Maurice returned to his chair, he could not prevent himself from looking with a certain keen scrutiny both at the room and his younger brother.

He and Maurice had never been friends. There was a gap of nearly ten years between them, and certain radical and profound differences of temperament. And these differences nature had expressed, with an entire absence of subtlety, in their physique — in the slender fairness and wholesomeness of Stephen as contrasted with the sallowness, the stoop, the thin black hair, the furtive, excitable look of Maurice.

"Getting on well with your new work?" he asked, as he took unwilling note of the half-consumed brandy-and-soda on the table, of the saucer of cigarette ends beside it, and the general untidiness and stuffiness of the room.

"Not bad," said Maurice, resuming his cigarette.

"What is it?"

"An agency; one of these new phonographs — Yankee, of course. I manage the office. A lot of cads — but I make 'em sit up."

And he launched into boasting of his success in the business — the orders he had secured, the

economies he had brought about in the office. Stephen found himself wondering, meanwhile, what kind of a business it could be that entrusted its affairs to Maurice. But he betrayed no scepticism, and the two talked in more or less brotherly fashion for a few minutes, till Stephen, with a look at his watch, declared that he must find his horse and go.

"I thought you were only coming for the week-end," he said, as he moved towards the door.

"I got seedy — and took a week off. Besides, I found pater in such a stew."

Stephen hesitated.

"About the Rector?"

Maurice nodded.

"Pater is in an awful way about it. I've been trying to cheer him up. Meynell will be turned out, of course."

"Probably," said Stephen gravely. "So shall I."

"What'll you do?"

"Become a preacher somewhere — under Meynell."

The younger brother looked curiously at the elder.

"You believe in him as much as that? Father's dead set against him, and I've no use for him! Never had!"

"That's because you didn't know him," said Stephen briefly. "What did you ever have against him?"

He looked sharply at his brother. The disagreeable idea crossed his mind that his father, whose weakness for Maurice he well knew, might have told the story to the lad.

Maurice laughed, and pulled his scanty moustache as he turned away.

"Oh! I don't know — we never hit it off. My fault, of course. Ta, ta."

As Stephen rode away, he was haunted for a few minutes by some disagreeable reminiscences of a school holiday when Maurice had been discovered drunk in one of the public-houses of the village by the Rector, who had firmly dug him out and walked him home. But this recollection soon passed away under the steady assault of others far more compelling.

He took the bridle-path through Maudeley, and was presently aware, in a clearing of the wood, of the figure of Meynell in front of him.

The Rector was walking in haste, without his dogs. He was, therefore, out on business, which, indeed, was implied by the energy of his whole movement.

He looked round, frowning as Stephen overtook him.

"Is that you, Stephen? Are you going home?"

"Yes. And you?"

Meynell did not immediately reply. The autumn wood, a splendour of gold and orange leaf overhead, of red-brown leaf below, with passages here and there, where the sun struck through the beech trees, of purest lemon-yellow or intensest green, breathed and murmured round them. A light wind sang in the tree-tops, and every now and then the plain broke in, purple through the gold, with its dim colliery chimneys, its wreaths of smoke, and its paler patches that stood for farms and villages.

Meynell walked by the horse in silence for a while, till suddenly, wiping a hot brow, he turned and looked at Stephen.

"I think I shall have to tell you, Stephen, where I am going, and why," he said, eyeing the young man with a deprecating look, almost a look of remorse.

Stephen stared at him in silence.

"Flaxman walked home with me last night — came into the Rectory, and told me that yesterday he saw Meryon and Hester together in Howlett's wood — as you know, a lonely place where nobody goes. It was a great blow to me. I had every reason to believe him safely abroad. All his servants have clearly been instructed to lie. And Hester! — well, I won't trust myself to say what I think of her conduct! I went up this morning to see her — found the whole household in confusion! Nobody knew where Hester was. She had gone out immediately after breakfast, with the maid who is supposed to be always with her. Then, suddenly — about an hour later — one of the boys appeared, having seen the woman at the station — and no Hester. The woman, taken by surprise, — young Fox-Wilson just had a few words with her as the train was moving off, — confessed she was going into Markborough to meet Hester and come back with her. She didn't know where Miss Hester was. She had left her in the village and was to meet her at a shop in Markborough. After that, things began to come out. The butler told tales. The maid is clearly an unprincipled hussy, and has probably been in Meryon's pay all the time."

"Where is Hester? — where are you going to?" cried Stephen, in impatient misery, slipping from his horse, as he spoke, to walk beside the Rector.

"In my belief, she is at Sandford Abbey."

"At Sandford!" cried the young man, under his breath. "Visit that scoundrel in his own house!"

"It appears she has once or twice declared that, in spite of us all, she would go and see his house and his pictures. In my belief, she has done it this morning. It is her last chance."

We go to Paris to-morrow. However, we shall soon know."

The Rector pushed on at redoubled speed. Stephen kept up with him, his lips twitching.

"Why did you separate us!" he broke out at last, in a low, bitter voice.

And yet he knew why — or suspected! But the inner smart was so great, he could not help the reproach.

"I tried to act for the best," said Meynell, after a moment, his eyes on the ground.

Stephen watched his friend uncertainly. Again and again he was on the point of crying out:

"Tell me the truth about Hester!" — on the point, also, of warning and informing the man beside him. But he had promised his father. He held his tongue with difficulty.

When they reached the spot where Stephen's path diverged from that which led by a small bridge across the famous trout stream to Sandford Abbey, Stephen suddenly halted.

"Why shouldn't I come too? I'll wait at the lodge. She might like to ride home. She can sit anything — with any saddle. I taught her."

"Well — perhaps," said Meynell dubiously. And they went on together.

Presently Sandford Abbey emerged above the road, on a rising ground — a melancholy, dilapidated pile; and they struck into a long and neglected evergreen avenue leading up to it. At the end of the avenue there was an enclosure and a lodge, with some iron gates. A man saw them, and came out to the gate.

"Sir Philip's gone abroad, sir," he said affably, when he saw them. "Shall I take your card?"

"Thank you; I prefer to leave it at the house," said Meynell shortly, motioning to him to open the gate. The man hesitated, then obeyed. The Rector went up the drive, while Stephen turned back a little along the road, letting his horse pasture on its grassy fringe. The lodge-keeper, sulky and puzzled, watched him a few moments, and then went back into the house.

The Rector paused to reconnoitre as he came in sight of the house. It was a strange, desolate, yet most romantic spot. Although, seen from the road and the stream, it seemed to stand on an eminence, it was really at the bottom of a hill that encircled it on three sides; and what with its own dilapidation, its broken fences and gates, the trees that crowded about it, and the large green-grown pond in front of it, it produced a dank and sinister impression. The centre of the building, which had evidently been rebuilt about 1700, to judge from its rose-red brick, its French classical lunettes, its pedimented doors and windows, and its fine *perron*, was clearly the

inhabited portion of the building. The two wings of much earlier date, remains of the old Abbey, were falling into ruin. In front of one a garage had evidently been recently made, and a motor was standing at its door. To the left of the approaching spectator was a small deserted church, of the same date as the central portion of the Abbey, with twin busts of William and Mary still inhabiting a niche above the classical entrance, and marking the triumph of the Protestant succession over the crumbling buildings of the earlier faith. The windows of the church were boarded up, and a few tottering tombstones surrounded it.

No sign of human habitation appeared as the Rector walked up to the door. A bright sunshine played on the crumbling brick, the small-paned windows, the touches of gilding in the railings of the *perron*; and on the slimy pond a few ducks moved to and fro, in front of a grass-grown sun-dial. Meynell walked up to the door and rang.

The sound of the bell echoed through the house behind, but, for a while, no one came. One of the lunette windows under the roof opened overhead, and, after another pause, the door was slowly opened a few inches by a man in a slovenly footman's jacket.

"Very sorry, sir, but Sir Philip is not at home."

"When did he leave?"

"The end of last week, sir," said the man, with a jaunty air.

"That, I think, is not so," said Meynell sternly. "I shall not trouble you to take my card."

The youth's expression changed. He stood silent and sheepish, while Meynell considered a moment, on the steps.

Suddenly a sound of voices from a distance became audible through the grudgingly opened door. It appeared to come from the back of the house. The man looked behind him, his mouth twitching with repressed laughter. Meynell ran down the steps and turned to the left, where a door led through a curtain-wall to the garden. Meanwhile the house door was hastily banged behind him.

"Uncle Richard!"

Behind the house, Meynell came upon the persons he sought. In an overgrown formal garden, full of sun, he perceived an old stone bench under an overhanging yew. Upon it sat Hester, bareheaded, the golden masses of her hair shining against the blackness of the tree. Don mounted guard beside her, his nose upon her lap; and on a garden-chair in front of her lounged Philip Meryon, smoking and chatting.

At sight of Meynell they both sprang to their feet. Don growled at first, and then, as soon as he recognised Meynell, wagged his tail. Philip, with a swaying step, advanced towards the newcomer, cigar in hand.

"How do you do, Richard! It is not often you honour me with a visit."

For a moment Meynell looked from one to the other in silence.

And they, whether they would or no, could not but feel the power of the rugged figure in the short clerical coat and wide-awake, and of the searching look with which he regarded them. Hester nervously began to put on her hat. Philip threw away his cigar, and braced himself angrily.

"Your mother has been anxious about you, Hester," said Meynell, at last. "And I have come to bring you home."

Then, turning to Meryon, he said: "With you, Philip, I will reckon later on. The lies you have instructed your servants to tell are a sufficient indication that you are ashamed of your behaviour. This young lady is under age. Her mother and I, who are her lawful guardians, forbid her acquaintance with you."

"By what authority, I should like to know?" said Philip sneeringly. "Hester is not a child — nor am I."

"All that we will discuss when we meet," said the Rector. "I propose to call upon you after breakfast to-morrow."

"This time you may really find me fled," laughed Philip insolently. But he had turned white.

Meynell made no reply. He went to Hester, and, lifting the girl's silk cape, which had fallen off, he put it round her shoulders. He felt them trembling. But she looked at him fiercely, put him aside, and ran to Meryon.

"Good-bye, Philip, good-bye — it won't be for long!"

And she held out her two hands — pleadingly. Meryon took them, and they stared at each other — while the Rector was conscious of a flash of dismay.

What if there was now more in the business than mere mischief and wantonness? Hester was surprisingly lovely, with this touching, tremulous look, so new and, to the Rector, so intolerable!

"I must ask you to come at once," he said, walking up to her; and the girl, with compressed lips, dropped Meryon's hands and obeyed.

Meryon walked beside them to the garden door, very pale, and breathing quick.

"You can't separate us," he said to Meynell, "though, of course, you'll try. Hester, don't believe anything he tells you — till I confirm it."

"Not I!" she said proudly.

Meynell led her through the door, and then, turning peremptorily, desired Meryon not to follow them. Philip hesitated, and yielded. He stood in the doorway, his hands in his pockets, watching them, a splendid figure, with his melodramatic good looks and vivid colour.

XIV

HESTER and Meynell walked down the avenue side by side. Behind them, the lunette window under the roof opened again, and a woman's face, framed in tousled black hair, looked out, grinned, and disappeared.

Hester carried her head high, a scornful defiance breathing from the flushed cheeks and tightened lips. Meynell made no attempt at conversation till, just as they were nearing the lodge, he said: "We shall find Stephen a little farther on. He was riding, and thought you might like his horse to give you a lift home."

"Oh, a *plot*!" cried Hester, raising her chin still higher, "and Stephen in it too! Well, really, I shouldn't have thought it was worth anybody's while to spy upon my very insignificant proceedings like this. What does it matter to him, or you, or any one else, what I do?"

She turned her beautiful eyes — tragically wide and haughty — upon her companion. There was absurdity in her pose, and yet, as Meynell uncomfortably recognised, a new touch of something passionate and real.

The Rector made no reply, for they were at the turn of the road, and beyond it Stephen and his horse were to be seen waiting.

Stephen came to meet them, the bridle over his arm.

"Hester, wouldn't you like my horse? It is a long way home. I can send for it later."

She looked proudly from one to the other. Her colour had suddenly faded, and from the pallor the firm yet delicate lines of the features emerged with unusual emphasis.

"I think you had better accept," said Meynell gently. As he looked at her, he wondered whether she might not faint on their hands with anger and excitement. But she controlled herself, and, as Stephen brought the brown mare alongside and held out his hand, she put her foot in it, and he swung her to the saddle.

"I don't want both of you," she said passionately. "One warder is enough!"

"Hester!" cried Stephen reproachfully. Then he added, trying to smile: "I am going into Markborough. Any commission?"

Hester disdained to answer. She gathered up the reins and set the horse in motion. Stephen's

way lay with them for a hundred yards. He tried to make a little indifferent conversation, but neither Meynell nor Hester replied. Where the lane they had been following joined the Markborough road, he paused to take his leave of them; and, as he did so, he saw his two companions brought together, as it were, into a common picture by the overcircling shade of the autumnal trees which hung over the road; and he perceived as he had never done before the strange likeness between them. Perplexity, love, despairing and jealous love; a passionate championship of the beauty which seemed to him outraged and insulted by the common talk and speculation of indifferent and unfriendly mouths; an earnest desire to know the truth, and the whole truth, that he might the better prove his love and defend his friend; and a dismal certainty through it all that Hester had been finally snatched from him — these conflicting feelings very nearly overpowered him. It was all he could do to take a calm farewell of them. Hester's eyes, under their fierce brows, followed him along the road.

Meanwhile she and Meynell turned into a bridle-path through the woods. Hester sat erect, her slender body adjusting itself with unconscious grace to the quiet movements of the horse, which Meynell was leading. Overhead the October day was beginning to darken, and the yellow leaves, shaken by occasional gusts, were drifting mistily down on Hester's hair and dress, and on the glossy flanks of the mare.

At last Meynell looked up. There was intense feeling in his face — a deep and troubled tenderness.

"Hester! — is there no way in which I can convince you that if you go on as you have been doing — deceiving your best friends, and letting this man persuade you into secret meetings — you will bring disgrace on yourself and sorrow on us? A few more escapades like to-day's, and we might not be able to save you from disgrace."

He looked at her searchingly.

"I am going to choose for myself!" said Hester, after a moment, in a low, resolute voice. "I am not going to sacrifice my life to anybody."

"You *will* sacrifice it if you go on flirting with this man — if you will not believe me, who am his kinsman and have no interest whatever in blackening his character, when I tell you that he is a bad man, corrupted by low living and self-indulgence, with whom no girl should trust herself. The action you have taken to-day, your deliberate defiance of us all, make it necessary that I should speak in even plainer terms to you than I have done yet — that I should warn you, as roughly as I can, that by allowing this man to make love to you, perhaps to pro-

pose a runaway match to you — how do I know what villainy he may have been proposing? — you are running risks of utter disaster and disgrace."

"Perhaps. That is my affair."

The girl's voice shook with excitement.

"No! — it is not your affair only. No man liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself! It is the affair of all those who love you — of your family, of your poor Aunt Alice, who cannot sleep for grieving —"

Hester raised her free hand and angrily pushed back the masses of fair hair that were falling about her face.

"What is the good of talking about love, Uncle Richard?" She spoke with a passionate impatience. "You know very well that *nobody* at home loves me! Why should we all be hypocrites? I have got, I tell you, to look after *myself* — to plan my life for myself! My mother can't help it if she doesn't love me. I don't complain, but I do think it a shame you should say she does when you know — know — *know* — she doesn't! My sisters and brothers just dislike me — that's all there is in that! All my life I've known it — I've felt it. Why, when I was a baby they never played with me — they never made a pet of me — they wouldn't have me in their games. My father positively disliked me. Whenever the nurse brought me downstairs, he used to call to her to take me up again. Oh, how tired I got of the nursery! I hated it. I hated nurse; I hated all the old toys — for I never had any new ones. Do you remember" — she turned on him — "that day when I set fire to all the clean clothes that were airing before the fire?"

"Perfectly!" said the Rector, with an involuntary smile that relaxed the pale gravity of his face.

"I did it because I hadn't been downstairs for three nights. I might have been dead, for all anybody cared. Then I was determined they should care — and I got hold of the matches. I thought the clothes would burn first, and then my starched frock would catch fire, and then — everybody would be sorry for me at last. But, unfortunately, I got frightened, and ran up the passage screaming. Silly little fool! That might have made an end of it — once for all —"

Meynell interrupted.

"And after it," he said, looking her in the eyes, "when the fuss was over, I remember seeing you in Aunt Alsie's arms. Have you forgotten how she cried over you, and defended you — and begged you off? You were ill from the excitement. She took you off to the cottage and nursed you till you were well again and it had all blown over — as she did again and again

afterwards. Have you forgotten *that* — when you say that no one loved you?"

He turned upon her with that bright, penetrating look, with its touch of accusing sarcasm, which had so often given him the mastery over erring souls. For Meynell had the pastoral gift almost in perfection — the courage, the ethical self-confidence, and the instinctive tenderness that belong to it. The certitudes of his mind were all ethical; and in this region he might have said, with Newman, that "a thousand difficulties cannot make one doubt."

Hester had often yielded to this power of his in the past, and it was evident that she trembled under it now. To hide it, she turned upon him with fresh anger:

"No, I haven't forgotten it! — and I'm *not* an ungrateful fiend — though, of course, you think it. But Aunt Alsie's like all the others now. She — she's turned against me!" There was a break in the girl's voice that she tried in vain to hide.

"It isn't true, Hester; I think you know it isn't true."

"It *is* true! She has secrets from me — and when I ask her to trust me — then she treats me like a child — and shakes me off as if I were just a stranger. If she holds me at arm's length, I am not going to tell her all *my* affairs!"

The rounded bosom under the little black mantle rose and fell tumultuously, and angry tears shone in the brown eyes. Meynell had raised his head with a sudden movement, and regarded her intently.

"What secrets?"

"I found her, one day, with a picture. She was crying. It — it was some one she had been in love with; I am certain it was — a handsome, dark man. And I begged her to tell me, and she just got up and went away — so then I took my own line!"

Hester furiously dashed away the tears she had not been able to stop.

Meynell's look changed. His voice grew strangely pitiful and soft.

"Dear Hester, if you knew — you couldn't be unkind to Aunt Alice."

"Why shouldn't I know? Why am I treated like a baby?"

"There are some things too bitter to tell," he said gravely — "some griefs we have no right to meddle with. But we can heal them — or make them worse. You" — his kind eyes scourged her again — "have been making everything worse for Aunt Alsie for a long time past."

Hester shrugged her shoulders passionately, as though to repel the charge, but she said nothing. They moved on in silence for a little. In Meynell's mind there reigned a medley of feel-

ings — tragic recollections, moral questionings, which time had never silenced, perplexity as to the present and the future, and with it all the liveliest and sorest pity for the young, childish, violent creature beside him. It was not for those who, with whatever motives, had contributed to bring her to that state and temper to strike any note of harshness.

Presently, as they neared the end of the woody path, he looked up again. He saw her sitting sullenly on the gently moving horse, a vision of beauty at bay. The sight determined him towards frankness.

"Hester! — I have told you that if you go on flirting with Philip Meryon you run the risk of disgrace and misery, because he has no conscience and no scruples, and you are ignorant and inexperienced and have no idea of the fire you are playing with. But I think I had better go further. I am going to say what you force me to say to you — young as you are. My strong belief is that Philip Meryon is either married already, or so entangled that he has no right to ask any decent woman to marry him. I have suspected it a long time. Now you force me to prove it."

Hester turned her head away.

"He told me I wasn't to believe what you said about him!" she said in her most obstinate voice.

"Very well. Then I must set about proving it at once. The reasons that make me believe it are not for your ears." Then his tone changed. "Hester — my child! You can't be in love with that fellow — that false, common fellow! You can't!"

Hester compressed her lips and would not answer. A rush of distress came over Meynell as he thought of her movement towards Philip in the garden. He gently resumed:

"Any day, now, might bring the true lover, Hester! — the man who would comfort you for all the past and show you what joy really means. Be patient, dear Hester — be patient! If you wanted to punish us for not making you happy enough, well, you have done it! But don't plunge us all into despair. And take a little thought for your old guardian, who seems to have the world on his shoulders, and yet can't sleep at nights for worrying about his ward, who won't believe a word he says and sets all his wishes at defiance."

His manner expressed a playful and reproachful affection. Their eyes met. Hester tried hard to maintain her antagonism, and he was well aware that he was but imperfectly able to gauge the conflict of forces in her mind. He resumed his pleading with her — tenderly, urgently. And at last she gave way, at least

apparently. She allowed him to lay a friendly hand on hers that held the reins, and she said, with a long, bitter breath:

"Oh, I know I'm a little beast!"

"My old-fashioned ideas don't allow me to apply that epithet to young women! But if you'll say 'I want to be friends, Uncle Richard, and I won't deceive you any more,' why, then you'll make an old fellow happy! Will you?"

Slowly she let her cold fingers slip into his warm, protecting palm as he smiled upon her. She yielded to the dignity and charm of Meynell's character, as she had done a thousand times before; but in the proud, unhappy look she bent upon him there were new and disquieting things — prophecies of the coming womanhood, not to be unravelled. Meynell pressed her hand, and put it back upon the reins with a sigh he could not repress.

He began to talk with a forced cheerfulness of their coming journey — of the French *milieu* to which she was going. Hester answered in monosyllables, every now and then, he thought, repressing a sob. And again and again the discouraging thought struck through him, "Has this fellow touched her heart?" — so strong was the impression of an emerging soul and a developing personality.

Suddenly, through the dispersing trees, a light figure came hurriedly towards them. It was Alice Puttenham. She was pale and weary, and when she saw Hester, with Meynell beside her, she gave a little cry. But Meynell, standing behind Hester, put his finger on his lips, and she controlled herself. Hester greeted her without any sign of emotion; and the three went homeward along the misty ways of the park. The sun had been swallowed up by rising fog; all colour had been sucked out of the leaves and the heather, even from the golden glades of fern. Only Hester's hair, and her white dress as she passed along, uplifted, made of her a kind of luminous wraith; and beside her, like the supports of an altar-piece, moved the two pensive figures of Meynell and Alice.

From a covert of thorn in the park, a youth, who had retreated into its shelter on their approach, watched them with malicious eyes. Another man was with him — a sheepish, red-faced person, who peered curiously at the little procession as it passed, about a hundred yards away.

"Quite a family party!" said Maurice Barron, with a laugh.

In the late evening Meynell returned to the Rectory, a wearied man, but with hours of occupation and correspondence still before him. He had left Hester with Alice Puttenham, in a state

which Meynell interpreted as at once alarming and hopeful: alarming because it suggested that there might be an element of passion in what had seemed to be a mere escapade dictated by vanity and temper; and hopeful because of the emotion the girl had once or twice betrayed, for the first time in the experience of any one connected with her. When they entered Alice Puttenham's drawing-room, for instance, — for Hester had stipulated that she was not to be taken home, — Alice had thrown her arms round her, and Hester had broken suddenly into crying, a thing unheard of. Meynell, of course, had hastily disappeared.

Since then the parish had taken its toll. Visits to two or three sick people had been paid. The Rector had looked in at the schools, where a children's evening was going on, and had told the story of Aladdin with riotous success; he had taken off his coat to help in putting up decorations for an entertainment in the little Wesleyan meeting-house of corrugated iron; the parish nurse had waylaid him with reports; and he had dashed into the back parlour of an embarrassed small tradesman, in mortal fear of collapse and bankruptcy, with the offer of a loan, sternly conditional upon facing the facts and getting in an auditor. Lady Fox-Wilson, of course, had been seen, and the clamour of her most unattractive offspring allayed as much as possible. And now, emerging from this tangle of personal claims and small interests, in the silence and freedom of the night hours Meynell was free to give himself once more to the intellectual and spiritual passion of the Reform movement. His table was piled with unopened letters; on his desk lay a half-written article and two or three foreign books, the latest products of the Modernist movement abroad. His crowded, belittered room smiled upon him as he shut its door upon the outer world; for within it he lived more truly, more vividly, than anywhere else — and all the more since its threadbare carpet had been trodden by Mary Elsmere.

Yet, as he settled himself by the fire with his pipe and his letters for half an hour's ease before going to his desk, his thoughts were still full of Hester. The incurable optimism, the ready faith where his affections were concerned, which was so strong a note of his character, was busy persuading him that all would be well. At last, between them, they had made an impression on the poor child; and as for Philip, he should be dealt with this time with a proper disregard of either his own or his servants' lying. Hester was now to spend some months with a charming and cultivated French family. Plenty of occupation, plenty of amusement, plenty of appeal to her intelligence. Then, perhaps, travel for a

couple of years, with Aunt Alice — as much separation as possible, anyway, from the Northleigh family and house. Alice was not rich, but she could manage as much as that, if he advised it, and he would advise it. Then, with her twenty-first year, the crisis must be met and the child must know! Lovers would be a difficulty then, as now; but it would be a cold-blooded lover that would weigh her story against her face.

Yet, comfort himself as he would, dream as he would, Meynell's conscience was always sore for Hester. Had they done right — or hideously wrong? Had not the child been sacrificed to the mother? Were not all their devices a mere trifling with nature — a mere attempt to "bind the courses of Orion," with the inevitable result in Hester's unhappy childhood and perverse youth?

The Rector, as he pulled at his pipe, could still feel the fluttering of her thin hand in his. It seemed to stir in him again all the intolerable pity, the tragic horror, of the past. Poor, poor little girl! But she should be happy yet, "with rings on her fingers," and everything proper!

Then, from this fatherly and tender preoccupation he passed into a more intimate and poignant dreaming. Mary in the moonlight, under the autumn trees, was the vision that held him — varied sometimes by the consciousness of her in that very room, sitting ghostly in the chair beside him, her lovely eyes wandering over its confusion of books and papers. He thought of her exquisite neatness of dress and delicacy of movement, and smiled happily to himself. "She must have wanted to tidy up!" And he dared to dream of a day when she would come and take possession of him — books, body, and soul — and gently order his life. . . .

"Why, you rascals!" he said jealously to the dogs, "she fed you — she stroked and petted you — I know she did. Out with it! She likes dogs — you may thank your lucky stars she does!"

But they only raised their eager heads and turned their loving eyes upon him, prepared to let loose pandemonium as soon as he showed signs of moving.

"Well, you don't expect me to take you out for a walk at ten o'clock at night, do you — idiots!" he hurled at them reprovingly; and, after another moment of bright-eyed interrogation, disappointment descended, and down went their noses on their paws again.

His trust in the tender steadfastness of Mary's character made itself powerfully felt in these solitary moments. She knew that while these strenuous days were on he could allow himself no personal aims. But the knowledge

that he was approved by a soul so pure and so devout had both strung up all his powers and calmed the fevers of battle. He loved his cause the more because it was ever more clear to him that she passionately loved it, too. And, sensitive and depressed as he often was, — the penalty of the optimist, — her faith in him had doubled his faith in himself.

There was a singular pleasure, also, in the link his love for her had forged between himself and Elsmere — the dead leader of an earlier generation. "Latitudinarianism is coming in upon us like a flood!" cried the *Church Times*, wringing its hands. "In other words," thought Meynell, "a New Learning is at last penetrating the minds and consciences of men — in the Church no less than out of it." And Elsmere had been one of its martyrs. Meynell thought with emotion of the emaciated form he had last seen in the thronged hall of the New Brotherhood. "Our venture is possible — because *you* suffered," he would say to himself, addressing not so much Elsmere as Elsmere's generation, remembering its struggles, its thwarted hopes, and starved lives.

And Elsmere's wife? — that rigid, pathetic figure, who, before he knew her in the flesh, had been to him, through the reports of many friends, a kind of legendary presence — the embodiment of the Old Faith. Meynell only knew that, as far as he was concerned, something had happened — something which he could not define. She was no longer his enemy; and he blessed her humbly in his heart. He thought also, with a curious thankfulness, of her strong and immovable convictions. Each thinking mind, as it were, carries within it its own Pageant of the Universe, and lights the show with its own passion. Not to quench the existing light in any human breast, but to kindle and quicken where no light is; to bring for ever new lamp-bearers into the Lampadephoria of life, and marshal them there in their places, on equal terms with the old, neither excluded nor excluding: this, surely, this was the ideal of Modernism.

Elsmere's widow might never admit his own claim to equal rights within the Christian society. What matter! It seemed to him that in some mysterious way she had now recognised the spiritual necessity laid upon him to fight for that claim; had admitted him, so to speak, to the rights of a belligerent. And that had made all the difference.

He did not know how it had happened. But he was strangely certain that it had happened.

But soon the short interval of rest and dream he had allowed himself was over. He turned to his writing-table.

What a medley of letters! Here was one from a clergyman in the Midlands:

"We introduced the new liturgy last Sunday, and I cannot describe the emotion, the stirring of all the dead bones, it has brought about. There has been, of course, a secession; but the church at Patten End amply provides for the seceders, and among our own people one seems to realise at last something of what the simplicity and sincerity of the first Christian feeling must have been! No 'allowances' to make for scandalous mistranslations and misquotations — no foolish legends or unedifying tales of barbarous people — no cursing psalms — no old Semitic nonsense about God resting on the seventh day, delivered in the solemn singsong which seems to make it not only nonsense but hypocrisy. . . .

"I have held both a marriage and a funeral this week under the new service-book. I think that all persons accustomed to think of what they are saying felt the strangest delight and relief in the disappearance of the old marriage service. It was like the dropping of a weight to which our shoulders had become so accustomed that we hardly realised it till it was gone. Instead of pompous and futile absurdity — as in the existing exhortation and homily — beautiful and dignified quotation from the unused treasures of the Bible. Instead of the brutal speech, the crudely physical outlook of an earlier day, the just reticence and nobler perceptions of our own, combined with perfectly plain and tender statement as to the founding of the home and the family. Instead of besmirching bits of primitive and ugly legend, like the solemn introduction of Adam's rib, in the prayers, a few new prayers of great beauty. Some day you must tell me who wrote them, for I suppose you know? — (and, by the way, why should we not write as good prayers to-day as in any age of the Christian Church?) Instead of the old 'obey' for the woman, which has had such a definitely debasing effect, as I believe, on the position of women, especially in the working classes — a formula, only slightly altered, but the same for the man and the woman. . . . In short, a seemly, and beautiful, and moving thing, instead of a ceremony which, in spite of its few fine, even majestic elements, had become an offence and a scandal. All the fine elements have been kept and only the scandal amended. Why was it not done long ago?

"Then, as to the burial service. The Corinthian chapter stripped of its arguments which are dead, and confined to its cries of poetry and faith which are immortal, made a new and thrilling impression. I confess I thought I should

have broken my heart over the omission of 'I know that my Redeemer liveth'; and yet, now that it is gone, there is a sense of moral exhilaration in having let it go! One knew all the time that whoever wrote the poem of Job neither said what he was made to say in the famous passage, nor meant what he was supposed to mean. One was perfectly aware, from one's Oxford days, as the choir chanted the great words, that they were a flagrant mistranslation of a corrupt and probably interpolated passage. And yet, the glory of Handel's music, the glamour of association, overcame one. But now that it is cut ruthlessly away from those moments in life when man can least afford any make-believe with himself or his fellows — now that music alone declaims and fathers it — there is the strangest relief! One feels, as I have said, the joy that comes from something difficult and righteous *done* — in spite of everything!

"I could go on for hours telling you these very simple and obvious things which must be so familiar to you. To me the amazement of this movement is that it has taken so long to come. We have groaned under the oppression of what we have now thrown off, so long and so hopelessly; the Revision that the High-Churchmen made such a bother about a few years ago came to so little; that now, to see this thing spreading like a great springtide over the face of England is marvellous indeed! And when one knows what it means — no mere liturgical change, no mere lopping off here and changing there, but a transformation of the root ideas of Christianity; a transference of its whole proof and evidence from the outward to the inward field, and therewith the uprush of a certainty and joy unknown to our modern life — one can but bow one's head, as those that hear mysterious voices on the wind.

"For so into the temple of man's spirit, age by age, comes the renewing Master of man's life — and makes His tabernacle with man. 'Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in.'"

Meynell bowed his head upon his hands. The pulse of hope and passion in the letter was almost overpowering. It came, he knew, from an elderly man, broken by many troubles, and tormented by arthritis, yet a true saint and at times a great preacher.

The next letter he opened came from a priest in the diocese of Aix:

"The effect of the various encyclicals and of the ill-advised attempt to make both clergy and

laity sign the Modernist decrees has had a prodigious effect all over France — precisely in the opposite sense to that desired by Pius X. The spread of the movement is really amazing. Fifteen years ago I remember hearing a French critic say — Edmond Schérer, I think, the successor of Sainte-Beuve: ‘The Catholics have not a single intellectual of any eminence — and it is a misfortune for *us*, the Liberals. We have nothing to fight — we seem to be beating the air.’

“Schérer could not have said this to-day. There are Catholics everywhere — in the University, the École Normale, the front ranks of literature. But, with few exceptions, *they are all Modernist*; they have thrown overboard the whole *fatras* of legend and tradition. Christianity has become to them a symbolical and spiritual religion, not only personally important and efficacious, but of enormous significance from the national point of view. But, as you know, *we* do not at present aspire to outward or ceremonial changes. We are quite content to leaven the meal from within; to uphold the absolute right and necessity of the two languages in Christianity — the popular and the scientific, the mythological and the mystical. If the Pope could have his way, Catholicism would soon be at an end — except as a peasant-cult — in the Latin countries. But, thank God, he will not have his way. One hears of a Modernist freemasonry among the Italian clergy — of a secret press — an enthusiasm like that of the Carboneria in the ‘40’s. So the spirit of the Most High blows among the dead clods of the world — and, in a moment, the harvest is there!”

Meynell let the paper drop. He began to write, and he wrote without stopping, with

great ease and inspiration, for nearly two hours. Then, as midnight struck, he put down his pen and gazed into the dying fire. He felt as Wordsworth’s skater felt on Esthwaite, when, at a sudden pause, the mountains and cliffs seemed to whirl past him in a vast headlong procession. So it was, in Meynell’s mind, with thoughts and ideas. Gradually they calmed and slackened, till at last they passed into an abstraction and ecstasy of prayer.

When he rose, the night had grown very cold. He hurriedly put his papers in order before going to bed, and, as he did so, he perceived two unopened letters which had been overlooked.

One was from Hugh Flaxman, communicating the news of the loss of two valuable gold coins from the collection exhibited at the party: “We are all in tribulation. I wonder whether you can remember seeing them when you were talking there with Norham? One was a gold stater of Velia with a head of Athene.”

The other letter was addressed in Henry Barron’s handwriting. Meynell looked at it in some surprise as he opened it, for there had been no communication between him and the White House for a long time.

“I should be glad if you could make it convenient to see me to-morrow morning. I wish to speak with you on a personal matter of some importance — of which I do not think you should remain in ignorance. Will it suit you if I come at eleven-thirty?”

Meynell stood motionless. But the mind reacted in a flash. He thought:

“*Now* I shall know what she told him in those two hours!”

TO BE CONTINUED

UNDER THE WILLIAMSBURG BRIDGE

BY

FLORENCE WILKINSON

I LOVE the massed humanity, each curious wrinkled face
Of this crude helter-skelter market-place
Beneath the huge abutments of the bridge.

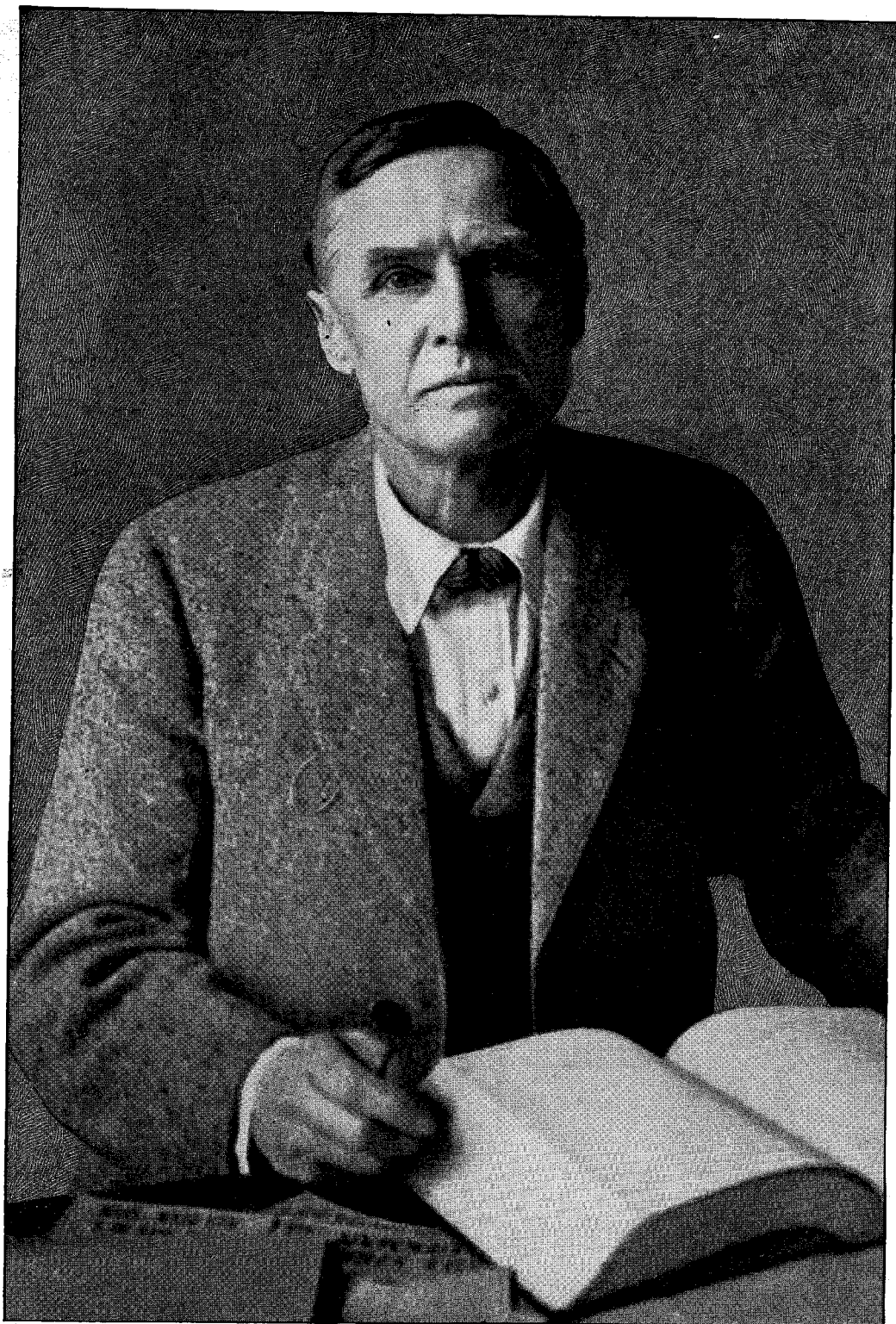
In the vast cluttered twilight of the piers
The shiny heaps of horrible fishes lie,
Each with an opaline leer in his flat eye.
How adamant their courage who take and touch
These limp, long monsters of the slimy smutch!

The ancient women have abundant wit,
And like staunch bales they plant their knees and sit.
Frisled femininity — what do they know of it?
They shake their cotton stuffs, and woe, say I,
To him who lingers, lingering not to buy!

There stride two Russians in tall furzy caps;
They wore them on the frozen steppes, perhaps.
Now by the East River in the grotesque dark,
They wear them still, distinguished, passionate, stark,

In this gross nether circle, full of red-rimmed eyes,
Of fins and smutty wings and harpy cries,
Where these two bushy bonneted black kings
Rule the grim realm of startling under-things.

Such epic arms, such Chaldee length of beard,
And the wolf-glare of men in tyranny reared.
Always the colloquial frenzy of these folk
Seems murderous, such the madness of their croak
In the fierce tongue their Slav forefathers spoke.
Absorbed they with the solemn primitive greed
That spurs us all, each soul unto his need.



WILLIAM S. U'REN, THE LEADER OF THE MOVEMENT FOR
POPULAR GOVERNMENT IN OREGON