

The Case of Richard Meynell

by Mrs. Humphry Ward

X

MEANWHILE, in the room upstairs, Alice Puttenham, lying with her face pressed against the back of the chair into which she had feebly dropped, heard Hester run down the steps — tried to call, or rise, and could not. Since the death of Judith Sabin she had had little or no sleep, and much less food than usual, with, all the while, the pressure of a vague, corrosive terror on nerve and brain. The shock of that miniature in Hester's hands had just turned the scale: endurance had given way.

The quick footsteps receded. Yet she could do nothing to arrest them. Her mind floated in darkness.

Presently out of the darkness emerged a sound, a touch, a warm hand on hers.

"Dear — dear Miss Puttenham!"

"Yes."

Her voice seemed to herself a sigh — the faintest — from a great distance.

"The servants said you were here. Ellen came up to knock, and you did not hear. I was afraid you were ill — so I came in — you'll forgive me."

"Thank you."

Silence for a while. Mary brought cold water, chafed her friend's hands, and rendered all the services that women in such straits know how to lavish on a sufferer. Gradually Alice mastered herself, but more than a broken word or two still seemed beyond her, and Mary waited in patience. She was well aware that some trouble of a nature unknown to her had been

weighing on Miss Puttenham for a week or more; and she realised too, instinctively, that she would get no light upon it.

Presently there was a knock at the door, and Mary went to open it. The servant whispered, and she returned at once.

"Mr. Meynell is here," she said, hesitating. "You will let me send him away?"

Alice Puttenham opened her eyes.

"I can't see him. But, please — give him some tea. He'll have walked — from Mark-borough."

Mary prepared to obey.

"I'll come back afterwards."

Alice roused herself further.

"No — there is the meeting afterwards. You said you were going."

"I'd rather come back to you."

"No, dear — no. I'm — I'm better alone. Good night, kind angel. It's nothing" — she raised herself in the chair — "only bad nights! I'll go to bed; that'll be best. Go down — give him tea. And Mrs. Flaxman's going with you?"

"No. Mother said she wished to go," said Mary slowly. "She and I were to meet in the village."

Alice nodded feebly.

"Just time. The meeting is at seven."

Then, with a sudden movement: "Hester! — is she gone?"

"I met her and the maid — in the village — as I came in."

A silence — till Alice roused herself again. "Go, dear. Don't miss the meeting. I — I want you to be there. Good night."

And she gently pushed the girl from her, putting up her pale lips to be kissed, and asking

that the little parlour-maid be sent to help her undress.

Mary went unwillingly. She gave Miss Puttenham's message to the maid, and, when the girl had gone up to her mistress, she lingered a moment at the foot of the stairs, her hands lightly clasped on her breast, as if to quiet the life within.

Meynell, expecting to see the lady of the house, could not restrain the start of surprise and joy with which he turned towards the incomer. He took her hand in his, pressing it involuntarily. But it slipped away; and Mary explained, with her soft composure, why she was there alone — that Miss Puttenham was suffering from a succession of bad nights and was keeping her room, that she sent word the Rector must rest a little before going home, and allow Mary to give him tea.

Meynell sank obediently into a chair by the open window, and Mary ministered to him. The lines of his strong, worn face relaxed. His look returned to her again and again, wistfully, involuntarily, yet not so as to cause her embarrassment.

She was dressed in some thin grey stuff that singularly became her; and with the grey dress she wore a collar or ruffle of soft white that gave it a slight Puritan touch. But the tumbling red-gold of the hair, the frank dignity of expression, belonged to no mere cloistered maid.

Meynell heard the news of Miss Puttenham's collapse with a sigh — checked at birth. He asked few questions about it — so Mary reflected afterwards. He would come in again on the morrow, he said, to enquire for her. Then, with some abruptness, he asked whether Hester had been much seen at the cottage during the preceding week.

Mary reported that she had been in and out as usual, and seemed reconciled to the prospect of Paris.

"Are you — is Miss Puttenham sure that she hasn't still been meeting that man?"

Mary turned a startled look upon him.

"I thought he had gone away?"

"There may be a stratagem in that. I have been keeping what watch I could; but at this time — what use am I?"

The Rector threw himself back wearily in his chair, his hands behind his head. Mary was conscious of some deep throb of feeling that must not come to words. Even since she had known it, the face had grown older — the lines deeper, the eyes finer. She stooped forward a little.

"It is hard that you should have this anxiety too. Oh, but I *hope* there is no need!"

He raised himself again with energy.

"There is always need with Hester. Oh, don't suppose I have forgotten her! I have written to that fellow, my cousin. I went, indeed, to see him, the day before yesterday; but the servants at Sandford declared he had gone to town, and they were packing up to follow. Lady Fox-Wilson and Miss Alice, here, have been keeping a close eye on Hester herself, I know; but, if she chose, she could elude us all!"

"She couldn't give such pain — such trouble!" cried Mary indignantly.

The Rector shook his head sadly. Then he looked at his companion.

"Has she made a friend of you? I wish she would."

"Oh, she doesn't take any account of me," said Mary, laughing. "She is quite kind to me: she tells me when she thinks my frock is hideous — or my hat's impossible — or she corrects my French accent. She is quite kind, but she would no more think of taking advice from me than from the sofa-cushion."

Meynell shrugged his shoulders.

"She has no bump of respect — never had!" And he began to give a half-humorous account of the troubles and storms of Hester's bringing up. "I often ask myself whether we haven't all — whether I in particular — haven't been a first-class bungler and blunderer all through with regard to Hester. Did we choose the wrong governesses? They seemed most estimable people. Did we thwart her unnecessarily? I can't remember a time when she didn't have everything she wanted!"

"She didn't get on very well with her father?" suggested Mary timidly.

Meynell made a sudden movement, and did not answer for a moment.

"Sir Ralph and she were always at cross purposes," he said, at last. "But he was kind to her — according to his lights; and — he said some very sound and touching things to me about her — on his death-bed."

There was a short silence. Meynell had covered his eyes with his hand. Mary was at a loss how to continue the conversation, when he resumed:

"I wonder if you will understand how strangely this anxiety weighs upon me — just now."

"Just now?"

"Here am I preaching to others," he said slowly, "leading what people call a religious movement, and this homely, elementary task seems to be all going wrong. I don't seem to be able to protect this child confided to me."

"Oh, but you will protect her!" cried Mary. "You will! She mayn't seem to give way —

when you talk to her; but she has said things to me — to my mother, too —”

“That show her heart isn’t all adamant? Well, well! — you’re a comforter, but —”

“I mean that she knows — I’m sure she does — what you’ve done for her — how you’ve cared for her,” said Mary, stammering a little.

“I have done nothing but my plainest, simplest duty,” he said impatiently. “I have made innumerable mistakes; and if I fail with her — it’s quite clear that I’m not fit to teach or lead anybody.”

They said no more of Hester. Mary’s hunger for news of the Reform movement could not be hid. It was clear she read everything she could, and fed upon it in a loneliness and under a constraint that touched him profoundly. The conflict in her between a spiritual heredity — the heredity of her father’s message — and her tender love for her mother had never been so plain to him. He could not feel that he was abetting any disloyalty in allowing the conversation. She was mature. Her mind had its own rights!

So the craving in her led him on, once again, as it had done on their first meeting. His fatigue passed away under the charm of the girl’s refined and noble personality. He drew for her the progress of the campaign — its astonishing development, the kindling on all sides of the dry bones of English religion.

The new — or rewritten — liturgy of the Reform was, it seemed, almost completed. From all parts — from the universities, from cathedral cloisters, from quiet country parishes, from the clash of life in the great towns — men had emerged, as if by magic, to bring to the making of it their learning and their piety, the stored passion of their hearts. And the mere common impulse, the mere release of thoughts and aspirations so long repressed, had brought about an extraordinary harmony, a victorious selflessness, among the members of the Commission charged with the task. The work had gone with rapidity, yet with sureness, as in those early years of Christianity that saw so rich and marvellous an upgrowth from the old soil of humanity. With surprising ease and spontaneity the old had passed over into the new, just as, in the first hundred years after Christ’s death, the psalms and hymns and spiritual songs of the later Judaism had become, with but slight change, the psalms and hymns of Christianity, and a new sacred literature had flowered on the stock of the old.

“At last we have a marriage service that is not an offence! — and a burial service that keeps the Pauline poetry, while it cuts away the Pauline philosophising. To-night — here! — we

submit them both to the Church Council. And the same thing will be happening, at the same moment, in all the churches of the Reform — scattered through England.”

“How many churches now?” she asked, with a quickened breath.

“Eighteen in July — this week more than a hundred.”

But in his aspect, as he spoke, there was no trace of any mere triumph in success; and the emotion which it momentarily betrayed was instantly replaced by the practical note of the organiser, as he went on to describe some of the developments of the preceding weeks — the founding of a newspaper, the collection of propagandist funds, the enrolment of teachers and missionaries, in connection with each Modernist church. Yet, at the end of it all, feeling broke through again.

“They have been wonderful weeks! — *wonderful!* Which of us could have hoped to see the spread of such a force in this dusty modern world! You remember the fairy story of the prince whose heart was bound with iron bands — and how, one by one, the bands gave way? I have seen it like that, in life after life!”

“And the fighting?”

She had propped her face on her hands, and her eyes, with their eager sympathy, their changing lights, rained influence on the man beside her — an influence insensibly mingling with and colouring the passion for ideas which held them both in its grip.

“Has been hot! — will be, of course, infinitely hotter still! But yet, again and again, with one’s very foes one grasps hands! They seem to feel with us the ‘common wave’ — to be touched by it — touched by our hope. It is as though we had made them realise, at last, how starved, how shut out, we have been — we, half the thinking nation! — for so long!”

“Don’t — don’t be too confident!” she entreated. “Aren’t you? Isn’t it natural you should miscalculate the forces against you? Oh, they are so strong!” She drew in her breath — and he understood her.

“Strong indeed,” he said gravely. “But —” Then the vivid smile that was the charm of his face broke in:

“Have I been bragging? You see some signs of swelled head? Make me tell you, then, what the other side are doing. That chastens one! There is a conference of bishops next week — there was one a week ago. The English Church Union has an Albert Hall meeting — it will be magnificent. A ‘League of the Trinity’ has started against us, and will soon be campaigning all over Eng-

land. The orthodox newspapers are all in full cry. Meanwhile, the bishops are only waiting for the decision of my case — the test case — in the lower court to take us all, by detachments. Every case, of course, will go to the Supreme Court — the Privy Council. A hundred cases! That will take time. Meanwhile, from us, a monster petition — first to the bishops for the assembling of a full Council of the English Church; then to Parliament, for radical changes in the conditions of membership of the Church, clerical and lay."

Mary drew in her breath.

"You *can't* win! You *can't* win!"

And he saw in her clear eyes her sorrow for him, and her horror of the conflict before him.

"That," he said quietly, "is nothing to us. We are but soldiers under command."

He rose; and, suddenly, she realised with a fluttering heart how empty that room would be when he was gone. He held out his hand to her.

"I must go and prepare what I have to say to-night."

"To your Church Council?"

"Yes. Some thirty people — two thirds of them miners."

"Oh! but they *can't* understand you!"

"Come and see!"

Then he paused, a little embarrassed; the words had slipped out. Mary coloured and looked down.

"I — I am coming!"

His start of pleasure was evident.

"I'm glad! — I want you to hear some of these men."

"And — my mother is coming with me."

Her voice was constrained. Meynell — in his great surprise — hesitated a moment.

"I don't think — there will be anything to hurt — or wound her. At any rate — for her — there will be nothing strange or unexpected."

"Oh, no!" Then, after a moment's awkwardness, she said: "We shall soon be going away."

His face changed and quivered.

"Going away? I thought you would be here for the winter!"

"No. Mother is so much better — we are going to our little house in the Lakes — in Long Whindale. We came here because Mother was so ill — and Aunt Rose begged us. But —"

"Do you know," — he interrupted her impetuously, — "that, for six months, I've had a hunger for just *one* fortnight — up there — among the fells — and by the streams."

"You love them?" she said eagerly, her face flushing like a child's. "You love the mountains?"

He smiled.

"It doesn't do to think of them, does it? You should see the letters on my table! But I may have to take a few days' rest sometime. Should I find you in Long Whindale — if I dropped down on you — over Goat Scar?"

"Yes — from December till March. Oh, do come!" Then she checked herself. "It's always beautiful."

"Even when it rains? And how it rains! And everybody pretends it doesn't matter. The lies one tells!"

She laughed.

They stood looking at each other. What did it signify what they said? Words were nothing. But an atmosphere seemed to have sprung up round them in which every tone and movement had suddenly become magnified and strangely significant.

Then Meynell recovered himself. He stepped back from her, conscious of a stab of self-reproach, and held out his hand. She gave hers shyly; he scarcely dared to press it, before he turned away.

But he had scarcely reached the door before she made a startled movement towards the open window.

"What is that?"

There was a sound of shouting and running in the street outside. A crowd seemed to be approaching. Meynell ran out into the garden to listen. By this time the noise had grown considerably, and he thought he distinguished his own name among the cries.

"Something has happened at the colliery!" he said to Mary, who had followed him.

And he hurried towards the gate, bareheaded, just as a grey-haired lady in black entered the garden.

"Mother!" cried Mary, in amazement.

Catherine Elsmere paused — one moment. She looked from her daughter to Meynell. Then she hurried to the Rector.

"You are wanted," she said, struggling to get her breath. "A terrible thing has happened. They think four lives have been lost. Some accident to the cage — and people blame the man in charge. They've got him shut up in the colliery office — and declare they'll kill him. The crowd looks dangerous, and there are very few police. I heard you were here — some one, the postman, saw you come in. You must stop it. The people will listen to you!"

Her fine, pale face, framed in her widow's veil, did not so much ask as command. He replied by a gesture — then by two or three rapid enquiries. Mary, bewildered, saw them for an instant as allies and equals, each recognising the other. Then Meynell ran to the gate, and

was at once swallowed up in the moving groups that had gathered there, and seemed to carry him back with them towards the colliery.

Catherine Elsmere turned to follow — Mary at her side. Mary looked at her in anxiety, dreading the physical strain for one, of late, so frail.

“Mother darling! — ought you?”

Catherine took no heed whatever of the question.

“It is the women who are so terrible,” she said in a low voice, as they hurried on. “Their faces were like wild beasts’. They have telephoned to Cradock for police. If Mr. Meynell can keep them in check for half an hour, there may be hope.”

They ran on, swept along by the fringe of the crowd till they reached the top of a gentle descent at the farther end of the village. At the bottom of this hill lay the colliery, with its two huge chimneys, its shed and engine-houses, its winding-machinery, and its heaps of refuse. Within the enclosure, from the height where they stood, could be seen a thin line of police surrounding a small shed — the pay-office. On the steps of it stood the manager; and the Rector, to be recognised by his long coat and his bare head, had just joined him. Opposite to the police, and separated from the shed by about ten yards and a wooden paling, was a threatening and vociferating mob, which stretched densely across the road and up the hill on either side — a mob largely composed of women — dishevelled, furious women — their white faces gleaming amid the coal-blackened forms of the miners.

“They’ll have ’im out,” said a woman in front of Mary Elsmere. “Oh, my God! — they’ll have ’im out! It was he caused the death of the boy — yo’ mind ’im — young Jimmy Ragg — a month sen — though the crowner’s jury did let ’im off, more shame to them! An’ now they say as how he signalled for ’em to bring up the men from the Albert pit afore he’d made sure as the cage in the Victory pit was clear!”

“Explain to me, please,” said Mary, touching the woman’s arm.

Half a dozen turned eagerly upon her.

“Why, you see, Miss, as the two cages is like buckets in a well — the yan goes down as the other cooms up. An’ there’s catches as yo’ mun knock away to let ’un go down. An’ this banksman — ee’s a devil! — he niver so much as walked across to the other shaft to see — and there was the catches fast, and, instead o’ goin’ down, there was the cage stuck, and the rope uncoilin’ itsel’, and fallin’ off the drum, and foul’in’ the other rope. An’ then, all of a sudden, just as them poor fellows wor nearin’ top,

the drum began to work t’other way — run back’ards; you un’erstan’? And the engineman lost ’is head, and niver thowt to put on t’ brakes — an’ — oh, Lord save us! — whether they was drownt at t’ bottom i’ the sump, or killt afore they got there — theer’s no one knows yet — they’re getten o’ ’em up now.”

And, as she spoke, a great shout which became a groan ran through the crowd. Men climbed up the railings at the side of the road, that they might see better. Women stood on tiptoe. A confused clamour came from below, and in the colliery yard there could be seen a gruesome sight — four stretchers, borne by colliers, their burdens covered from view. Beside them were groups of women and children, and in front of them the crowd made way. Up the hill they came, a great wail preceding and surrounding them, behind them the murmurs of an ungovernable indignation.

As the procession neared them, Mary saw a grey-haired woman throw up her arm, and heard her cry out in a voice harsh and hideous with excitement:

“Let ’im as murdered them pay for ’t! What’s t’ good o’ crowner’s juries? Let’s settle it ourselves!”

Deep murmurs answered her.

“An’ it’s this same Jenkins,” said another fierce voice, “as had a sight to do wi’ bringing them blacklegs down here, in the strike last autumn. He’s been a great man sence, has Jenkins, wi’ the masters; but he sha’n’t murder our husbinds an’ sons for us, while he’s loafin’ round an’ playin’ the lord — not he! Have they got ’un safe?”

“Aye, he’s in the pay-house, safe enoof,” shouted another — a man. “An’ if them as is defendin’ o’ ’un won’t give ’un oop, there’s ways o’ makin’ them.”

The procession of the dead approached — all the men baring their heads, and the women waiting. In front came a piteous group — a young half-fainting wife, supported by an older woman, with children clinging to her skirts. Catherine went forward, and lifted a baby of two that was being dragged along the ground. Mary took up another child, and they both joined the procession.

As they did so, there was a shout from below.

Mary, white as her dress, asked an elderly miner beside her, who had shown no excitement whatever, to tell her what had happened. He clambered up on the bank to look, and came back to her.

“They’ve beaten ’un back, Miss,” he said in her ear. “They’ve got the surface men to help, and Muster Meynell, he’s doing his best. If there’s anybody can hold ’em, he can, and

there's some of his Church Council fellows got to him by now; but there's terrible few on 'em. It is time as the Cradock men came up. They'll be trying fire before long, an' the women is like devils."

On went the procession into the village, leaving the fight behind them. In Mary's heart, as she was pushed and pressed onward, burnt the memory of Meynell on the steps — speaking, gesticulating — and the surging crowd in front of him.

There was that to do, however, which deadened fear. In the main street the procession was met by hurrying doctors and nurses. For those broken bodies, indeed, — young men in their prime, — nothing could be done, save to straighten the poor limbs, to wash the coal-dust from the strong faces, and cover all with the white linen of death. But the living — the crushed, stricken living — taxed every energy of heart and mind. Catherine, recognised at once by the doctors as a pillar of help, shrank from no office and from no sight, however terrible. But she would not permit them to Mary, and they were presently separated.

Mary had a trio of sobbing children on her knee, in the living-room of one of the cottages, when there was a sudden tramp outside. Everybody in Miners' Row, including those who were laying out the dead, ran to the windows.

"The police from Cradock!" — fifty of them.

The news passed from mouth to mouth, and even those who had been maddest half an hour before felt the relief of it.

Meanwhile, detachments of shouting men and women ran clattering at intervals through the village streets. Sometimes stragglers from them would drop into the cottages alongside — and, from their panting talk, what had happened below became roughly clear. The police had arrived only just in time. The small band defending the office was worn out. The Rector had been struck. The palings had been torn down, and in another half hour the rioters would have set the place on fire and dragged out the man of whom they were in search.

The narrator's story was broken by a howl: "Here he comes!" And once again, as though by a rush of muddy water, the street filled up, and a strong body of police came through it, escorting the banksman who had been the cause of the accident. A hatless, hunted creature, with white face and loosened limbs, he was hurried along by the police, amid a grim silence that had suddenly succeeded to the noise.

Behind came a group of men, officials of the colliery, and to the right of them, amid a small crowd of miners who were clearly his body-guard, walked the Rector, bareheaded as before,

a bandage on the left temple. His eyes ran along the cottages, and he presently perceived Mary Elsmere standing at an open door, with a child that had cried itself to sleep in her arms.

Stepping out of the ranks, he approached her. The people made way for him, a few here and there with sullen faces, but in the main with a friendly and remorseful eagerness.

"It's all over," he said in Mary's ear. "But it was touch and go. An unpopular man — suspected of telling union secrets to the masters last year. He was concerned in another accident to a boy, a month ago; they all think he was in fault, though the jury exonerated him. And now, a piece of abominable carelessness! — manslaughter, at least. Oh, he'll catch it hot! But we weren't going to have him murdered on our hands. If he hadn't got safe into the office, the women alone would have thrown him down the shaft. By the way, are you learned in 'first aid'?"

He pointed, smiling, to his temple, and she saw that the wound beneath the rough bandage was bleeding afresh.

"It makes me feel a bit faint," he said, with annoyance; "and there is so much to do!"

"May I see to it?" said her mother's voice, behind her. And Catherine, who had just descended from an upper room, went quickly to a nurse's wallet that had been left on a table in the kitchen, and took from it an antiseptic dressing and some bandaging.

Meynell sat down by the table, shivering a little from shock and strain while she ministered to him. One of the women near brought him brandy; and Catherine deftly cleaned and dressed the wound. Mary looked on, handing what was necessary to her mother, and, in spite of herself, a ray of strange sweetness stole through the tragedy of the day.

In a very few minutes Meynell rose. They were in the cottage of one of the victims. The dead lay overhead, and the cries of wife and mother could be heard through the thin flooring.

"Don't go up again!" he said peremptorily to Catherine. "It is too much for you — and the children want you." He pointed to the huddled group about the doorway. Then, to Mary:

"Gather some of the people, if you can, outside. I want to speak to them when I come down. I must give a notice about the church to-night." Then he mounted the cottage stairs. Violent sounds of grief broke out overhead, and the murmur of his voice could be heard between.

Mary quietly sent a few messengers into the street, and when the Rector descended there was a small crowd waiting outside.

Meanwhile evening had fallen — a late September evening, shot with gold and purple.

Behind the village the yellow stubble stretched up to the edge of the Chase, and drifts of bluish smoke from the colliery chimneys hung in the still air.

Meynell, standing on the raised footpath above the crowd, gave notice that a special service of mourning would be held in the church that evening. The meeting of the Church Council would, of course, be postponed.

During his few words Mary found herself at the farther edge of the gathering, looking over it towards the speaker. Behind him ran the row of cottages, and in the doorway opposite she saw her mother, with her arm tenderly folded round a sobbing girl, the sister of one of the dead. The sudden tranquillity, the sudden pause from tumult and anguish, seemed to draw a "wind-warm space" round Mary; and she had time, for a moment, to think of herself and the strangeness of this tragic day.

How was it her mother was here at all? How was it she had suddenly proposed to come — nay, insisted on coming — to this meeting of the Reform that was to have been held in the village that evening? As a spectator, of course, and with the general public; but how it must have troubled her! It was strange — inexplicable.

The name of Richard Meynell had scarcely been mentioned, of late, between mother and daughter; and it often seemed to Mary as if the silent antagonism in her mother's mind had reached to terrifying heights.

And yet, at the same time, she had been constantly aware of reactions in the noble woman beside her — of passing moments of weakness in the strong will. And she would say to herself, piteously, "It is because she loved my father so!" And then hope would rise, only to be crushed again by indications of another sort.

How beautiful was the lined face, so pale in the golden dusk, amid its heavy frame of black! Mary could not take her eyes from it. It betrayed an animation, a passion of life, that had been foreign to it for months. In these few crowded hours, when every word and action had been simple, instructive, inevitable, — love to God and man working at their swiftest and purest, — through all the tragedy and the horror, some burden seemed to have dropped from Catherine's soul. She met her daughter's eyes, and smiled.

When Meynell had finished, the crowd silently drifted away, and he came back to the Elsmers. They noticed the village fly coming towards them — saw it stop in the roadway.

"I sent for it," Meynell explained rapidly. "You mustn't let your mother do any more. Look at her! Please, will you both go to the

Rectory? My cook will give you tea — I have let her know. Then the fly will take you home."

They protested in vain — must, indeed, submit. Catherine flushed a little at being so commanded, but there was no help for it.

"I would like indeed to come and show you my den!" said Meynell, as he put them into the carriage. "But there's too much to do here."

He pointed sadly to the cottages, shut the door, and they were off.

During the short drive Catherine sat rather stiffly upright. Saint as she was, she was accustomed to have her way.

They drove into the dark shrubbery that lay between the Rectory and the road. At the door of the little house stood Ann, in a white cap and clean apron. But the white cap sat rather wildly on its owner's head; nor would she take any interest in her visitors till she had got from them a fuller account of the tumult at the pit than had yet reached her, and assurances that Meynell's wound was but slight. But, when these were given, she pounced upon Catherine.

"Eh, but you're droppin'!"

And, with many curious looks at them, she hurried them into the study, where a hasty clearance had been made among the books, and a tea-table spread.

She bustled away to bring the tea-pot.

Then exhaustion seized on Catherine. She submitted to be put on the sofa, after it had been cleared of its pile of books; and Mary sat by, her a while, holding her hands. Death and the agony of broken hearts overshadowed them.

But then tea came in, and with it the dogs, discreet at first, but presently, at scent of buttered toast, effusively friendly. Mary fed them all, and Catherine watched the color coming back to her face and the dumb sweetness in the grey eyes.

Presently, while her mother still rested, Mary took courage to wander round the room, looking at the books, the photographs on the walls, the rack of pipes, the carpenter's bench, and the panels of half-finished carving. Timidly, yet eagerly, she breathed in the message it seemed to bring her from its owner — of strenuous and frugal life. Was that half-faded miniature of a soldier his father — and that sweet, grey-haired woman his mother? Her heart thrilled to each discovery.

Then Ann invaded them, for conversation; and while Catherine, unable to hide her fatigue, lay speechless, Ann chattered about her master. Her indignation was boundless that any hand could be lifted against him in his own parish. "Why, he strips 'imself bare for them, he does!"

And — with Mary unconsciously leading her — out came story after story, in the racy West-

Cumbrian vernacular, illustrating a good man's life, and those hidden, "unremembered acts" which attest and consecrate it.

As they drove slowly home through the sad village street, they perceived Henry Barron calling at some of the stricken houses. The Squire was always punctilious, and his condolences might be counted on. Beside him walked a young man with jaunty step, a bored sallow face, and a long moustache which he constantly caressed. Mary supposed him to be the Squire's second son, "Mr. Maurice," whom nobody liked.

Then the church, looming through the dusk, lights shining through its fine Perpendicular windows, and the sound of familiar hymns surging out into the starry twilight.

Catherine turned eagerly to her companion. "Shall we go in?"

The emotion of one, to whom religious utterance is as water to the thirsty spoke in her voice. But Mary caught and held her.

"No, dearest, no! Come home and rest." And, when Catherine had yielded and they were safely past the lighted church, Mary breathed more freely. Instinctively she felt that certain barriers had weakened before the tragic tumult, the human appeal, of the day. Let well alone!

And, for the first time, as she sat in the darkness, holding her mother's hand and watching the blackness of the woods file past under the stars, she confessed her love to her own heart — trembling, yet exultant.

Meanwhile, in the crowded church, men and women, who had passed that afternoon through the extremes of hate and sorrow, unpacked their hearts in singing and prayer. The hymns rose and fell through the dim red sandstone church — symbol of the endless plaint of human life, for ever clamouring in the ears of Time; and Meynell's address, as he stood on the chancel steps, almost among the people, — the disfiguring strips of plaster on the temple and brow sharply evident between the curly black hair and the dark hollows of the eyes, — sank deep into grief-stricken souls. Written down, it might not have satisfied an expert in religious eloquence. But it was the utterance of a man with the prophetic gift, speaking to human beings to whom, through years of chequered life, he had given all that a man can give of service and of soul. He stood there as the living expression of their conscience, their better mind, conceived as the mysterious voice of a divine power in man; and in the name of that power, and its direct message to the human soul embodied in the tale we call Christianity, he bade them repent their blood-thirst and take comfort

for their dead. He spoke amid weeping; and from that night forward one might have thought his power unshakeable — at least, among his own people.

But there were persons in the church who remained untouched by it. In the left aisle, Hester sat a little apart from her sisters, her hard, curious look ranging from the preacher through the crowded benches. She surveyed it all as a spectacle — half thrilled, half critical. And, at the western end of the aisle, the Squire and his son stood during the greater part of the service, showing plainly, by their motionless lips and folded arms, that they took no part in what was going on.

Father and son walked home together in close conversation.

And two days afterwards the first anonymous letter in the Meynell case was posted in Markborough, and duly delivered the following morning to an address in Upcote Minor.

XI

"WHAT on earth can Henry Barron desire a private interview with me about?" said Hugh Flaxman, looking up from his letters, as he and his wife sat together after breakfast in Mrs. Flaxman's sitting-room.

"I suppose he wants subscriptions for his heresy hunt? The Church party seem to be appealing for funds in most of the newspapers."

"I should have thought he knew I am not prepared to support him," said Flaxman quietly.

"Where are you, old man?" His wife laid a caressing hand on his shoulder. "I don't really quite know."

Flaxman smiled at her.

"You and I are not theologians, are we, darling?" He kissed the hand. "I don't find myself prepared to swear to Meynell's precise 'words' any more than I was to Robert's. But I am ready to fight to prevent his being driven out."

"So am I!" said Rose, erect, with her hands behind her.

"We want all sorts."

"Ye-es," said Rose doubtfully. "I don't think I want Mr. Barron."

"Certainly you do! A typical product — with just as much right to a place in English religion as Meynell — and no more."

"Hugh! You must behave very nicely to the Bishop to-night."

"I should think I must! — considering the *omnium gatherum* you have asked to meet him. I really do not think you ought to have asked Meynell."

"There we must agree to differ," said Rose firmly. "Social relations in this country must be maintained — in spite of politics, in spite of religion, in spite of everything."

"That's all very well — but if you mix people too violently you make them uncomfortable."

"My dear Hugh! how many drawing-rooms are there?" His wife waved a vague hand towards the folding doors on her right, implying the suite of Georgian rooms that stretched away beyond them. "One for every *nuance*, if it comes to that. If they positively won't mix, I shall have to segregate them. But they will mix." Then she fell into a reverie for a moment, adding at the end of it: "I must keep one drawing-room for the Rector and Mr. Norham —"

"That, I understand, is what we're giving the party for. Intriguer!"

Rose threw him a cool glance.

"You may continue to play Gallio if you like. I am now a partisan."

"So I perceive. And you hope to turn Norham into one."

Rose nodded. Mr. Norham was the Home Secretary, the most important member in a Cabinet headed by a Prime Minister in rapidly failing health; to whose place, either by death or retirement, it was generally expected that Edward Norham would succeed.

"Well, darling, I shall watch your manoeuvres with interest," said Flaxman, rising and gathering up his letters. "And, *longo intervallo*, I shall humbly do my best to assist them. Are Catherine and Mary coming?"

"Mary certainly — and, I think, Catherine. The Fox-Wilsons of course, and that mad creature Hester, who goes to Paris the day after to-morrow — and Alice Puttenham. How that sister of hers bullies her — horrid little woman! And Mr. Barron!" — Flaxman made an exclamation — "and the deaf daughter — and the nice elder son — and the unpresentable younger one — in fact, the whole menagerie."

Flaxman shrugged his shoulders.

"A few others, I hope, to act as buffers."

"Heaps!" said Rose. "I have asked half the neighbourhood — our first big party. And as for the week-enders, you chose them yourself." She ran through the list, while Flaxman vainly protested that he had never in their joint existence been allowed to do anything of the kind. "But to-night you're not to take any notice of them at all. Neighbours first! Plenty of time for you to amuse yourself to-morrow. What time does Mr. Barron come?"

"In ten minutes!" said Flaxman, hastily departing — only, however, to be followed into his study by Rose, who breathed into his ear:

"And if you see Mary and Mr. Meynell colloquing — play up!"

Flaxman turned round with a start.

"I say! is there really anything in that?"

Rose, sitting on the arm of his chair, did her best to bring him up to date. Yes; from her observation of the two, she was certain there was a good deal in it.

"And Catherine?"

Rose's eyebrows expressed the uncertainty of the situation.

"But such an odd thing happened last week! You remember the day of the accident — and the Church Council that was put off?"

"Perfectly."

"Catherine made up her mind suddenly to go to that Church Council — after not having been able to speak of Mr. Meynell, or the Movement, for weeks. *Why* — neither Mary nor I know. But she walked over from the cottage — the first time she has done it. She arrived in the village just as the dreadful thing had happened. Then, of course, she and the Rector took command. Nobody who knew Catherine would have expected anything else. And now she and Mary and the Rector are busy looking after the poor survivors. 'It's propinquity does it,' my dear!"

"Catherine could never — never — reconcile herself."

"I don't know," said Rose doubtfully. "What did she want to go to that Council for?"

"Perhaps to lift up her voice?"

"No. Catherine isn't that sort. She would have suffered dreadfully — and sat still."

"What Meynell will be going through presently he is not likely to ask other people to share," said Flaxman gravely.

Rose shook her head thoughtfully, as if to indicate that the veins of meditation opened up by the case were rich and various, and went slowly away.

Then Hugh was left to his *Times*, and to speculations on the reasons why Henry Barron — a man whom he had never liked and often thwarted — should have asked for this interview in a letter marked "Private." He made an agreeable figure, as he sat pondering by the fire, while the *Times* gradually slipped from his hands to the floor. And he was precisely what he looked — an excellent fellow, richly endowed with the world's good things, material and moral. He was of spare build, with grizzled hair, long-limbed, clean-shaven, and grey-eyed. In general society he appeared as a person of polished manners, with a gently-ironic turn of mind. His friends were more numerous and more devoted than is generally the case in middle age, and his family were rarely happy out

of his company. Certain, indeed, of his early comrades in life were inclined to accuse him of a too facile contentment with things as they are, and a rather Philistine estimate of the value of machinery. He was absorbed in "business," which he did admirably. Not so much of the financial sort, although he was a trusted member of important boards. But for all that unpaid multiplicity of affairs — magisterial, municipal, social, or charitable — which make the country gentleman's sphere, Hugh Flaxman's appetite was insatiable. He was a born chairman of a County Council, and a heaven-sent treasurer of a hospital.

And no doubt this natural bent, terribly indulged of late years, led occasionally to "holding forth"; at least, those who took no interest in the things that interested Flaxman said so. And his wife, who was much more concerned for his social effect than for her own, was often nervously on the watch lest it should be true. That her handsome, popular Hugh should ever, even for a quarter of an hour, sit heavy on the soul even of a youth of eighteen was not to be borne; she pounced on each incipient harangue with mingled tact and decision.

But, though Flaxman was a man of the world, he was by no means a worldling. Tenderly, unflinchingly, with a modest and cheerful devotion, he had made himself the stay of his brother-in-law Elsmere's harassed and broken life. His supreme and tyrannical common sense had never allowed him any delusions as to the ultimate permanence of heroic ventures like the "New Brotherhood"; and as to his private opinions on religious matters, it is probable that not even his wife knew them. But, outside the strong affections of his personal life, there was at least one enduring passion in Flaxman which dignified his character. For liberty of experiment and liberty of conscience, in himself or others, he would gladly have gone to the stake. Himself the loyal upholder of an established order, which he helped to run decently, he was yet in curious sympathy with many obscure revolutionists in many fields. To brutalize a man's conscience seemed to him worse than to murder his body. Hence a constant sympathy with minorities of all sorts, which no doubt interfered often with his practical efficiency. But perhaps it accounted for the number of his friends.

"We shall, I presume, be undisturbed?"

The speaker was Henry Barron; and he and Flaxman stood for a moment surveying each other after their first greeting.

"Certainly; I have given orders. For an hour, if you wish, I am at your disposal."

"Oh, we shall not want so long."

Barron seated himself in the chair pointed out to him. His portly presence, in some faultlessly new and formal clothes, filled it substantially; and his colour, always high, was more emphatic than usual. Beside him Flaxman made but a thread-paper appearance.

"I have come on an unpleasant errand," he said, withdrawing some papers from his breast pocket; "but — after much thought — I came to the conclusion that there was no one in this neighbourhood I could consult upon a very painful matter with greater profit — than yourself."

Flaxman made a rather stiff gesture of acknowledgment.

"May I ask you to read that?"

Barron selected a letter from the papers he held, and handed it to his host.

Flaxman read it. His face changed and worked as he did so. He read it twice, turned it over to see if it contained any signature, and returned it to Barron.

"That's a precious production! Was it addressed to yourself?"

"No — to Dawes, the colliery manager. He brought it to me yesterday."

Flaxman thought a moment.

"He is — if I remember right — with yourself, one of the five aggrieved parishioners in the Meynell case?"

"He is. But he is by no means personally hostile to Meynell. Quite the contrary. He brought it to me in much distress, thinking it well that we should take counsel upon it, in case other documents of the same kind should be going about."

"And you, I imagine, pointed out to him the utter absurdity of the charge, advised him to burn the letter and hold his tongue?"

Barron was silent a moment. Then he said, with slow distinctness:

"I regret I was unable to do anything of the kind."

Flaxman turned sharply on the speaker.

"You mean to say you believe there is a word of truth in that preposterous story?"

"I have good reason, unfortunately, to know that it cannot at once be put aside."

Both paused, regarding each other. Then Flaxman said, in a raised accent of wonder:

"You think it possible — conceivable — that a man of Mr. Meynell's character — and transparently blameless life — should have not only been guilty of an intrigue of this kind twenty years ago, but should have done nothing since to repair it — should actually have settled down to live in the same village side by side with the lady whom the letter declares to be the mother of his child — without making any attempt to

marry her — though perfectly free to do so? Why, my dear sir, was there ever a more ridiculous, a more incredible tale!”

Flaxman sprang to his feet, and, with his hands in his pockets, turned upon his visitor, impatient contempt in every feature.

“Wait a moment before you judge,” said Barron drily. “Do you remember a case of sudden death in this village a few weeks ago? — a woman who returned from America to her son, John Broad, a labourer living in one of my cottages — and died forty-eight hours after arrival, of brain disease?”

Flaxman’s brow puckered.

“I remember a report in the *Sentinel*. There was an inquest, and some curious medical evidence?”

Barron nodded assent.

“By the merest chance, I happened to see that woman the night after she arrived. I went to the cottage to remonstrate on the behaviour of John Broad’s boys in my plantation. She was alone in the house, and she came to the door. By the merest chance, also, while we stood there, Meynell and Miss Puttenham passed in the road outside. The woman — Mrs. Sabin — was terribly excited on seeing them, and she said things which astounded me. I asked her to explain them, and we talked — alone — for nearly an hour. I admit that she was scarcely responsible; that she died, within a few hours of our conversation, of brain disease. But I still do not see — I wish to Heaven I did! — any way out of what she told me, when one comes to combine it with — well, with other things. But whether I should finally have decided to make any use of the information I am not sure. But, unfortunately,” — he pointed to the letter still in Flaxman’s hand, — “that shows me that other persons — persons unknown to me — are in possession of some, at any rate, of the facts — and therefore that it is now vain to hope that we can stifle the thing altogether.”

“You have no idea who wrote the letter?” said Flaxman, holding it up.

“None whatever,” was the emphatic reply.

“It is a disguised hand,” mused Flaxman, “but an educated one — more or less. However, we will return presently to the letter. Mrs. Sabin’s communication to you was of a nature to confirm the statements contained in it?”

“Mrs. Sabin declared to me that having herself, independently, become aware of certain facts, while she was a servant in Lady Fox-Wilson’s employment, that lady — no doubt in order to ensure her silence — took her abroad, with herself and her young sister Miss Alice, to a place in France she had some difficulty in pronouncing — it sounded to me like Grenoble;

that there Miss Puttenham became the mother of a child, which passed thenceforward as the child of Sir Ralph and Lady Fox-Wilson, and received the name of Hester. She herself nursed Miss Puttenham, and no doctor was admitted. When the child was two months old, she accompanied the sisters to a place on the Riviera, where they took a villa. Here Sir Ralph Wilson, who was terribly broken and distressed by the whole thing, joined them, and he made an arrangement with her by which she agreed to go to the States and hold her tongue. She wrote to her people in Upcote — she had been a widow for some years — that she had accepted a nurse’s situation in the States, and Sir Ralph saw her off from Genoa for New York. She seems to have married again in the States, and in the course of years to have developed some grievance against the Fox-Wilsons which ultimately determined her to come home. But all this part of her story was so excited and incoherent that I could make nothing of it. Nor does it matter very much to the subject — the real subject — we are discussing.”

Flaxman, who was standing in front of the speaker, intently listening, made no immediate reply. His eyes, half absently, considered the man before him. In Barron’s aspect and tone there was not only the pompous self-importance of the man possessed of exclusive and sensational information: there were also indications of triumphant trains of reasoning behind that outraged his listener.

“What has all this got to do with Meynell?” said Flaxman abruptly.

Barron cleared his throat.

“There was one occasion,” he said slowly, “and one only, on which the ladies at Grenoble — we will say it was Grenoble — received a visitor. Miss Puttenham was still in her room. A gentleman arrived, and was admitted to see her. Mrs. Sabin was bundled out of the room by Lady Fox-Wilson. But it was a small wooden house, and Mrs. Sabin heard a good deal. Miss Puttenham was crying and talking excitedly. Mrs. Sabin was certain from what, according to her, she could not help overhearing, that the man —”

“Must one go into this back-stairs story?” asked Flaxman with repulsion.

“As you like,” said Barron impassively. “I should have thought it was necessary.” He paused, looking quietly at his questioner.

Flaxman restrained himself with some difficulty.

“Did the woman have any real opportunity of seeing this visitor?”

“When he went away, he stood outside the house, talking to Lady Fox-Wilson. Mrs. Sabin

was at the window, behind the lace curtains, with the child in her arms. "She watched him for some minutes."

"Well?" said Flaxman sharply.

"She had never seen him before, and she never saw him again until — such, at least, was her own story — from the door of her son's cottage, while I was with her, she saw Miss Puttenham — and Meynell — standing in the road outside."

Flaxman took a turn along the room, and paused.

"You admit that she was ill at the time she spoke to you — and in a distracted, incoherent state?"

"Certainly I admit it." Barron drew himself erect, with a slight frown, as tacitly protesting against certain suggestions in Flaxman's manner and voice. "But now let us look at another line of evidence. You, as a newcomer, are probably quite unaware of the gossip there has always been in this neighbourhood, ever since Sir Ralph Wilson's death, on the subject of Sir Ralph's will. That will in a special paragraph committed Hester Fox-Wilson to Richard Meynell's guardianship in remarkable terms; no provision whatever was made for the girl under Sir Ralph's will, and it is notorious that he treated her quite differently from his other children. From the moment, also, of the French journey, Sir Ralph's character and temper appeared to change. I have cautiously enquired of a good many persons as to this — of course, with absolute discretion. He was a man of narrow Evangelical opinions," — at the word "narrow" Flaxman threw a sudden glance at the speaker, — "and of strict veracity. My belief is that his later life was darkened by the falsehood to which he and his wife committed themselves. Finally, let me ask you to look at the young lady herself — at the extraordinary difference between her and her supposed family; at her extraordinary likeness — to the Rector."

Flaxman raised his eyebrows at the last words — his aspect expressing disbelief and disgust even more strongly than before. Barron glanced at him, and then, after a moment, resumed in another manner, loftily explanatory:

"I need not say that personally I find myself mixed up in such a business with the utmost reluctance."

"Naturally," put in Flaxman drily. "The risks attaching to it are simply gigantic."

"I am aware of it. But, as I have already pointed out to you, by some strange means, — connected, I have no doubt, with the woman Judith Sabin, though I cannot throw any light upon them, — the story is no longer in my ex-

clusive possession, and how many people are already aware of it, and may be aware of it, we cannot tell. I thought it well to come to you in the first instance, because I know that — you have taken some part lately — in Meynell's campaign."

"Ah!" thought Flaxman, "now we've come to it!"

Aloud he said:

"By which I suppose you mean that I am a subscriber to the Reform Fund, and that I have become a personal friend of Meynell's? You are quite right. Both my wife and I greatly like and respect the Rector." He laid stress on the words.

"It was for that very reason — let me repeat — that I came to you. You have influence with Meynell; and I want to persuade you, if I can, to use it." The speaker paused a moment, looking steadily at Flaxman. "What I venture to suggest is that you should inform him of the stories that are now current. It is surely just that he should be informed. And then — we have to consider the bearings of this report on the unhappy situation in the diocese. How can we prevent its being made use of? It would be impossible. You know what the feeling is — you know what people are. In Meynell's own interest, and in that of the poor lady whose name is involved with his in this scandal, would it not be desirable in every way that he should now quietly withdraw from this parish, and from the public contest in which he is engaged? Any excuse would be sufficient: health, overwork — anything. The scandal would then die out of itself. There is not one of us — those on Meynell's side or those against him — who would not in such a case do his utmost to stamp it out. But if he persists — both in living here and in exciting public opinion as he is now doing — the story will certainly come out! Nothing can possibly stop it."

Barron leant back and folded his arms. Flaxman's eyes sparkled. He felt an insane desire to run the substantial gentleman sitting opposite to the door, and dismiss him with violence. But he restrained himself.

"I am greatly obliged to you for your belief in the power of my good offices," he said, with a very frosty smile, "but I am afraid I must ask to be excused. Of course, if the matter became serious, legal action would be taken very promptly."

"How can legal action be taken?" interrupted Barron roughly. "Whatever may be the case with regard to Meynell and her identification of him, Judith Sabin's story is true. Of that I am entirely convinced."

But he had hardly spoken before he felt that

he had made a false step. Flaxman's light blue eyes fixed him.

"The story with regard to Miss Puttenham?"

"Precisely."

"Then it comes to this. Supposing that woman's statement to be true, the private history of a poor lady who has lived an unblemished life in this village for many years is to be dragged to light—for what? In order—excuse my plain speaking—to blackmail Richard Meynell, and to force him to desist from the public campaign in which he is now engaged? These are hardly measures likely, I think, to commend themselves to some of your allies, Mr. Barron!"

Barron had sprung up in his chair.

"What my allies may or may not think is nothing to me. I am, of course, guided by my own judgment and conscience. And I altogether protest against the word you have just employed. I came to you, Mr. Flaxman, I can honestly say, in the interests of peace!—in the interests of Meynell himself."

"But you admit that there is really no evidence worthy of the name connecting Meynell with the story at all!" said Flaxman, turning upon him. "The crazy impression of a woman dying of brain disease—some gossip about Sir Ralph's will—a likeness that many people have never perceived! What does it amount to? Nothing!—nothing at all!—less than nothing!"

"I can only say that I disagree with you."

The voice was that of a rancorous obstinacy at last unveiled. "I believe that the woman's identification was a just one—though I admit that the proof is difficult. But then, perhaps I approach the matter in one way, and you in another. A man, Mr. Flaxman, in my belief, does not throw over the faith of Christ for nothing. No! Such things are long prepared. Conscience, my dear sir, conscience breaks down first. The man becomes a hypocrite in his private life before he openly throws off the restraints of religion. That is the sad sequence of events. I have watched it many times."

Flaxman had grown rather white. The man beside him seemed to him a kind of monstrosity. He thought of Meynell,—of the eager refinement, the clean idealism, the visionary kindness of the man,—and compared it with this "muddy vesture," this gross embodiment, mental and physical, of Meynell's prosecutor.

Nevertheless, as he held himself in with difficulty, he began to perceive more plainly than he had yet done some of the intricacies of the situation.

"I have nothing to do," he said, in a tone that he endeavoured to make reasonably calm, "nor has anybody, with generalisation of that kind,

in a case like this. The point is, could Meynell, being what he is, what we all know him to be, have not only betrayed a young girl, but have then failed to do her the elementary justice of marrying her? And the reply is that the thing is incredible!"

"You forget that Meynell was extremely poor and had his brothers to educate —"

Flaxman shrugged his shoulders in laughing contempt.

"Meynell desert the mother of his child—because of poverty—because of his brothers' education! *Meynell!* You have known him some years, I only for a few months. But go into the cottages here—talk to the people—ask them, not what he believes, but what he *is*—what he has been to them. Get one of them, if you can, to credit this absurdity!"

"The Rector's intimate friendship with Miss Puttenham has long been an astonishment—sometimes a scandal—to the village!" exclaimed Barron doggedly.

Flaxman stared at him in a blank amazement, then flushed. He took a turn up and down the room, after which he returned to the fireside, composed. What was the use of arguing with such a disputant? He felt as if the mere conversation were an insult to Meynell, in which he was forced to participate.

He took a seat deliberately, and put on his magisterial manner, which, however, was much more delicately and unassumingly authoritative than that of other men.

"I think we had better clear up our ideas. You bring me a story—a painful story—concerning a lady with whom we are both acquainted, which may or may not be true. Whether it is true or not is no concern of ours. Neither you nor I have anything to do with it, and legal penalties would probably follow the diffusion of it. You invite me to connect with it the name of a man for whom I have the deepest respect and admiration; who bears an absolutely stainless record; and you threaten to make use of the charge in connection with the heresy trials now coming on. Now, let me give you my advice—for what it may be worth. I should say,—as you have asked my opinion,—have nothing whatever to do with the matter! If anybody else brings you anonymous letters, tell them something of the law of libel—and something, too, of the guilt of slander! After all, with a little good will, these are matters that are as easily quelled as raised. A charge so preposterous has only to be firmly met to die away. It is your influence, and not mine, which is important in this matter. You are a permanent resident, and I a mere bird of passage. And"—Flaxman's countenance kindled

— “let me just remind you of this. If you want to strengthen Meynell’s cause, if you want to win him thousands of new adherents, you have only to launch against him a calumny which is sure to break down — and will certainly recoil upon you!”

The two men had risen. Barron’s face, handsome in feature, save for some thickened lines and the florid tint of the cheeks, had somehow emptied itself of expression while Flaxman was speaking.

“Your advice is no doubt excellent,” he said quietly, as he buttoned his coat, “but it is hardly practical. If there is one anonymous letter, there are probably others. If there are letters, there is sure to be talk — and talk cannot be stopped. And, in time, everything gets into the newspapers.”

Flaxman hesitated a moment. Something warned him not to push matters to extremities — to make no breach with Barron — to keep him in play.

“I admit, of course, if this goes beyond a certain point it may be necessary to go to Meynell — it may be necessary for Meynell to go to his Bishop. But, at present, if you *desire* to suppress the thing, you have only to keep your own counsel — and wait. Dawes is a good fellow, and will, I am sure, say nothing. I could, if need be, speak to him myself. I was able to get his boy into a job not long ago.”

Barron straightened his shoulders slowly.

“Should I be doing right — should I be doing my duty — in assisting to suppress it, — always supposing that it could be suppressed, — my convictions being what they are?”

Then, suddenly, it was borne in on Flaxman that in the whole interview there had been no genuine desire whatever on Barron’s part for advice and consultation. He had come determined on a certain course, and the object of the visit had been, in truth, merely to convey to one of Meynell’s supporters a hint of the coming attack, and some intimation of its strength. The visit had been, in fact, a threat — a move in Barron’s game.

“That, of course, is a question which I cannot presume to decide,” said Flaxman, with cold politeness. His manner changed instantly. Peremptorily dismissing the subject, he became, on the spot, the mere suave and courteous host of an interesting house; he pointed out the pictures and the view, and led the way to the hall.

As he took leave, Barron stiffly intimated that he should not himself be able to attend Mrs. Flaxman’s party that evening; but his daughter and sons hoped to have the pleasure of obeying her invitation.

“Delighted to see them,” said Flaxman,

standing in the doorway, with his hands in his pockets. “Do you know Edward Norham?”

“I have never met him.”

“A splendid fellow — likely, I think, to be the head of the Ministry before the year’s out. My wife was determined to bring him and Meynell together. He seems to have the traditional interest in theology without which no English Premier is complete.”

Pursued by this parting shot, Barron retired, and Flaxman went back thoughtfully to his wife’s sitting-room. Should he tell her? Certainly. Her ready wits and quick brain were indispensable in the battle that might be coming. Now that he was relieved of Barron’s bodily presence, he was by no means inclined to pooh-pooh the communication that had been made to him.

As he approached his wife’s door he heard voices. Catherine! He remembered that she was to lunch and spend the day with Rose. Now what to do! Devoted as he was to his sister-in-law, he was scarcely inclined to trust her with the incident of the morning.

But, as soon as he opened the door, Rose ran upon him, drew him in, and closed it. Catherine was sitting on the sofa, with a pale, kindled look, a letter in her hand.

“Catherine has had an abominable letter, Hugh! — the most scandalous thing!”

Flaxman took it from Catherine’s hand, looked it through, and turned it over. The same script, a little differently disguised, and practically the same letter, as that which had been shown him in the library! But it began with a reference to the part which Mrs. Elsmere and her daughter had played in the terrible accident of the preceding week; which showed that the rogue responsible for it was at least a rogue possessed of some local and personal information.

Flaxman laid it down, and looked at his sister-in-law.

“Well?”

Catherine met his eyes with the clear intensity of her own.

“Isn’t it hard to understand how anybody can do such a thing as that?” she said, with her patient sigh — the sigh of an angel grieving over the perversity of men.

Flaxman dropped on the sofa beside her.

“You feel, with me, that it is a mere clumsy attempt to injure Meynell, in the interests of the campaign against him?” he asked her eagerly.

“I don’t know about that,” said Catherine slowly — a shining sadness in her look. “But I do know that it could only injure those who are trying to fight his errors — if it could be supposed that they had stooped to such weapons!”

“You dear woman!” cried Flaxman impul-

sively, and he raised her hand to his lips. Catherine and Rose looked their astonishment. Whereupon he gave them the history of the hour he had just passed through.

XII

BUT, although what one may call the natural freemasonry of the children of light had come in to protect Catherine from any touch of that greedy credulity which had fastened on Barron, though she and Rose and Hugh Flaxman were at one in their contemptuous repudiation of Barron's reading of the story, the story itself, so far as it concerned Alice Puttenham and Hester, found in all their minds but little resistance.

"It may — it may be true," said Catherine gently. "If so — what she has gone through! Poor, poor thing!"

And, as she spoke, her thin fingers clasped on her black dress, the nunlike veil falling about her shoulders, her aspect had the frank simplicity of those who for their Lord's sake have faced the ugly things of life.

"What a shame — what an outrage — that any of us here should know a word about it!" cried Rose, her small foot beating on the floor, the hot colour in her cheek. "How shall we ever be able to face her to-night?"

Flaxman started.

"Miss Puttenham is coming to-night?"

"Certainly. She comes with Mary — who was to pick her up after dinner."

Flaxman patrolled the room a little, in meditation. Finally he stopped before his wife.

"You must realise, darling, that we all may be walking on the edge of a volcano to-night."

"If only Henry Barron were! — and I might be behind to give the last little *chiquenaude*!" cried Rose.

Flaxman devoutly echoed the wish.

"But the point is, are there any more of these letters out? If so, we may hear of others to-night. Then — what to do? Do I make straight for Meynell?"

They pondered it.

"Impossible to leave Meynell in ignorance," said Flaxman. "If the thing spreads, Meynell, of course, would be perfectly justified — in his ward's interests — in denying the whole matter absolutely, true or no. But can he? — with Barron in reserve — using the Sabin woman's tale for his own purposes?"

Catherine's face, a little sternly set, showed the obscure conflict behind.

"He cannot say what is false," she said stiffly. "But he can refuse to answer."

Flaxman looked at her with an expression as confident as her own.

"To protect a woman, my dear Catherine, a man may say anything in the world — almost."

Catherine made no reply, but her quiet face showed she did not agree with him.

"That child Hester!" Rose emerged suddenly from a mental voyage of recollection and conjecture. "Now one understands why Lady Fox-Wilson — stupid woman! — has never seemed to care a rap for her. It must indeed be annoying to have to mother a child so much handsomer than your own."

"I think I am very sorry for Sir Ralph Fox-Wilson," said Catherine, after a moment.

Rose assented.

"Yes! Just an ordinary, dull, pig-headed country gentleman confronted with a situation that only occurs in plays to which you don't demean yourself by going! — and obliged to tell and act a string of lies, when lies happen to be just one of the vices you're not inclined to! And then, afterwards, you find yourself let in for living years and years with a bad conscience — hating the cuckoo-child, too, more and more as it grows up. Yes! I am quite sorry for Sir Ralph!"

"By the way!" — Flaxman looked up, — "do you know, I am sure that I saw Miss Fox-Wilson — with Philip Meryon — in Howlett's spinney this morning. I came back from Markborough by a path I had never discovered before — and there, sure enough, they were. They heard me on the path, I think, and vanished most effectively. The wood is very thick. But I am sure it was they — though they were some distance from me."

Rose exclaimed.

"Naughty, *naughty* child! She has been absolutely forbidden to see him, the whole Fox-Wilson family have made themselves into jailers and spies — and she just outwits them all! Poor Alice Puttenham hovers about her, trying to distract and amuse her, and has no more influence than a fly. And as for the Rector, it would be absurd, if it weren't enraging! Look at all there is on his shoulders just now — the way people appeal to him from all over England to come and speak, or consult, or organise. (I don't want to be controversial, Catherine darling, but there it is!) And he can't make up his mind to leave Upcote for twenty-four hours, till this girl is safely off the scene! He means to take her to Paris himself on Monday. I only hope he has found a proper sort of Gorgon to leave her with!"

Flaxman could not but reflect that the whole relation of Meynell to his ward might well give openings to scoundrels like the writer of the anonymous letters, who was certainly acquainted

with local affairs. But he did not express this feeling aloud. Meanwhile Catherine, who showed an interest in Hester that surprised both him and Rose, began to question him on the subject of Philip Meryon. Meryon's mother, it seemed, had been an intimate friend of one of Flaxman's sisters, Lady Helen Varley, and Flaxman was well acquainted with the young man's most unsatisfactory record. He drew a picture of the gradual degeneracy of the handsome lad who had been the hope and delight of his warm-hearted, excitable mother — of her deepening disappointment and premature death.

"Helen kept up with him for a time, for his mother's sake; but, unluckily, he has put himself beyond the pale now, one way and another. It is too disastrous about this pretty child! What on earth does she see in him?"

"Simply a means of escaping from her home," said Rose — "the situation working out! But who knows whether he hasn't got a wife already? Nobody should trust this young man farther than they can see him."

"It mustn't — it can't be allowed!" said Catherine, with energy. And, as she spoke, she seemed to feel again the soft bloom of Hester's young cheek against her own, just as when she had drawn the girl to her in that instinctive caress. The deep maternity in Catherine had never yet found scope enough in the love of one child.

Then, with a still keener sense of the various difficulties rising along Meynell's path, Flaxman and Rose returned to the anxious discussion of Barron's move and how to meet it. Catherine listened, saying little; and it was presently settled that Flaxman should himself call on Dawes, the colliery manager, that afternoon, and should write strongly to Barron, putting on paper the overwhelming arguments, both practical and ethical, in favour of silence — always supposing there were no further developments.

"Tell me," said Rose presently, when Flaxman had left the sisters alone, — "Mary, of course, knows nothing of that letter?"

Catherine flushed.

"How could she?" She looked almost haughtily at her sister.

Rose murmured an excuse. Would it be possible to keep all knowledge from Mary that there was a scandal — of some sort — in circulation, if the thing developed?

Catherine, holding her head high, thought it would not only be possible, but imperative.

Rose glanced at her uncertainly. Catherine was the only person of whom she had ever been afraid. But at last she took the plunge.

"Catherine! — don't be angry with me — but I think Mary is interested in Richard Meynell."

"Why should I be angry?" said Catherine. She had coloured a little, but she was perfectly composed. With her grey hair and her plain widow's dress, she threw her sister's charming mondanity into bright relief. But beauty, loftily understood, lay with Catherine.

"It is ill luck — his opinions!" cried Rose, laying her hand upon her sister's.

"Opinions are not 'luck,'" said Catherine, with a rather cold smile.

"You mean we are responsible for them? Perhaps we are, if we are responsible for anything — which I sometimes doubt. But you like him — personally?" The tone was almost pleading.

"I think he is a good man."

"And if — if — they do fall in love — what are we all to do?"

Rose looked half whimsically, half entreatingly, at her sister.

"Wait till the case arises," said Catherine, rather sharply. "And please don't interfere. You are too fond of matchmaking, Rose!"

"I am — I just ache to be at it, all the time. But I wouldn't do anything that would be a grief to you."

Catherine was silent a moment. Then she said, in a tone that went to the listener's heart:

"Whatever happens — will be God's will."

She sat motionless, her eyes drooped, her features a little drawn and pale, her thoughts — Rose knew it — in the past.

Flaxman came back from his interview with Dawes, reporting that nothing could have been in better taste or feeling than Dawes' view of the matter. As far as the Rector was concerned, — and he had told Mr. Barron so, — the story was ridiculous — the mere blunder of a crazy woman; and, for the rest, what had they to do in Upcote with ferreting into other people's private affairs? He had locked up the letter, in case it might sometime be necessary to hand it to the police, and didn't intend himself to say a word to anybody. If the thing went any further, why, of course the Rector must be informed. Otherwise silence was best. He had given a piece of his mind to Mr. Barron, and "didn't want to be mixed up in any such business. As far as I'm concerned, Mr. Flaxman, I'm fighting for the Church and her Creeds — I'm not out for backbiting!"

"Nice man!" said Rose, with enthusiasm. "Why didn't I ask him to-night!"

"But," resumed Flaxman, "he warned me

that if any letter of the kind got into the hands of a certain Miss Nairn, in the village, there might be trouble."

"Miss Nairn — Miss Nairn?" The sisters looked at each other. "Oh, I know — the lady in black we saw in church, the day the revolution began — a strange little shrivelled spinster thing who lives in that house by the post-office. She quarrelled mortally with the Rector last year, because she ill-treated a little servant-girl of hers, and the Rector remonstrated."

"Well, she's one of the 'aggrieved.'"

"They seem to be an odd crew! There's the old sea-captain that lives in that queer house with the single yew tree and the boarded-up window on the edge of the heath. He's one of them. He used to come to church about once a quarter, and wrote the Rector interminable letters on the meaning of Ezekiel. Then, there's the publican, East, who nearly lost his license last year — he always put it down to the Rector, and vowed he'd be even with him. I must say, the Church in Upcote seems rather put to it for defenders!"

"In Upcote," corrected Flaxman. "That's because of Meynell's personal hold. Plenty of 'em — quite immaculate — elsewhere. However, Dawes is a perfectly decent, honest man, and grieved to the heart by the Rector's performances."

Catherine had waited silently to hear this remark, and then went away to write a letter.

"Poor darling! Will she go and call on Dawes — for sympathy?" said Flaxman mischievously to his wife, as the door closed.

"Sympathy?" Rose's face grew soft. "It's much as it was with Robert. It ought to be so simple — and it is so mixed! Nature, of course, *ought* to have endowed all unbelievers with the proper horns and tail. And there they go, stealing your heart away! — and your daughter's."

The Flaxmans and Catherine — who spent the day with her sister, before the evening party — were more and more conscious of oppression as the hours went on, as if some moral thunder hung in the air.

Flaxman asked himself again and again, "Ought I to go to Meynell at once?" — and could not satisfy himself with any answer; while he, his wife, and his sister-in-law, being persons of delicacy, were all ashamed of finding themselves the possessors, against their will, of facts — supposing they were facts — to which they had no right. Meynell's ignorance — Alice Puttenham's ignorance — of their knowledge, tormented their consciences. And it added to their discomfort that they shared their knowledge with such a person as Henry Barron.

However, there was no help for it.

A mild autumn day drew to its close, with a lingering gold in the west, and a rising moon. The charming old house, with its faded furniture and its out-at-elbows charm, was lit up softly with lamps that made a dim but friendly shining in its wide spaces. It had never belonged to rich people, but always to people of taste. It boasted no Gainsboroughs or Romneys, but there were lesser men of the date, possessed of pretty talents of their own, painters and pastelists, who had tried their hands on the family, of whom they had probably been the personal friends. The originals of the portraits on the walls were known to neither history nor scandal; but their good, modest faces, their brave red or blue coats, their white gowns and drooping feathers, looked winningly out from the soft shadows of the rooms. At Maudeley, Rose wore her simplest dresses, and was astonished at the lightness of the household expenses. The house, indeed, had never known display, or any other luxury than space; and to live in it was to accept its tradition.

The week-enders arrived at tea-time: Mr. Norham, with a secretary and a valet, much pre-occupied, and chewing the fag-end of certain Cabinet deliberations in the morning; Flaxman's charming sister, Lady Helen Varley, and her husband; his elder brother, Lord Wanless, unmarried, an expert on armour, slightly eccentric, but still, in the eyes of all intriguing mothers, and to his own annoyance, more than desirable as a husband, owing to the Wanless collieries and a few other trifles of the same kind; the Bishop of Markborough; Canon France and his sister; a young poet whose very delicate muse had lodged itself oddly in the frame of an athlete; a high official in the local Government Board, Mr. Spearman, whom Rose regarded with distrust, as likely to lead Hugh into too much talk about workhouses; Lady Helen's two girls, just out, as dainty and well dressed, as gaily and innocently sure of themselves and their place in life, as the "classes," at their best, know how to produce; and two or three youths, bound for Oxford by the end of the week — samples, these last, of a somewhat new type in that old University, combining the dash, family, and insolence of the old "tuft" or Bullenden man with an amazing aptitude for the classics, rare indeed among the "tufts" of old. Two out of the three had captured almost every distinction that Oxford offers; and all three had been either 'gated for lengthy periods, or "sent down," or otherwise castigated by an angry University, puzzled by the queer connection between Irelands and Hertfords, on the one hand, and tipsy frolics on the other.

Meynell appeared for dinner — somewhat late. It was only with great difficulty that the Flaxmans had prevailed on him to come, for the purpose of meeting Mr. Norham. But the party within the Church which, foreseeing a Modernist defeat in the Church courts, was appealing to Parliament to take action, was strengthening every week; Meynell's Saturday articles in the *Modernist*, the paper founded by the Reformers' League, were already providing these parliamentarians with a policy and inspiration; and, if the movement were to go on swelling during the winter, the Government might have to take very serious cognisance of it in the spring. Mr. Norham, therefore, had expressed a wish for some conversation with the Modernist leader, who happened to be Rector of Upcote; and Meynell, who had by now cut himself adrift from all social engagements, had with difficulty saved an evening.

As far as Norham was concerned, he would have greatly preferred to take the Home Secretary for a Sunday walk on the Chase; but he had begun to love the Flaxmans, and could not make up his mind to say no to them. Moreover, was it not more than probable that he would meet at Maudeley "one simple girl," of whom he did not dare in these strenuous days to let himself think too much?

So that Rose, as she surveyed her dinner-table, could feel that she was maintaining the wide social traditions of England by the mingling of as many contraries as possible; but the oil and vinegar were, after all, cunningly mixed, and the dinner went well. The Bishop was separated from Meynell by the length of the table, and Norham was carefully protected from Mr. Spearman, in his eyes a prince of bores, who was always bothering the Home Office.

The Bishop, who was seated beside Rose at one end of the table, noticed the black patch on Meynell's temple, and enquired its origin. Rose gave him a graphic account of both the accident and the riot. The Bishop raised his eyebrows.

"How does he contrive to live the two lives?" he said, in a tone slightly acid. "If he continues to lead this movement, he will have to give up fighting mobs and running up and down mines."

"What is going to happen to the movement?" Rose asked him, with her most sympathetic smile. Socially, and in her own house, she was divinely all things to all men; but the Bishop was rather suspicious of her.

"What can happen to it but defeat? The only other alternative is the break-up of the Church. And for that, thank God, they are not strong enough."

"And no compromise is possible?"

"None. In three months Meynell and all his friends will have ceased to belong to the English Church. It is very lamentable. I am particularly sorry for Meynell himself — who is one of the best of men."

Rose felt her colour rising. She longed to ask: "But supposing *England* has something to say? Suppose she chooses to transform her national Church? Hasn't she the right and the power?"

But her instincts as hostess stifled her pugnacity. And the little Bishop looked so worn and fragile that she had no heart for anything but cosseting him. At the same time, she noticed — as she had done before, on other occasions — the curious absence of any ferocity, any smell of brimstone in the air! How different from Robert's day! Then the presumption underlying all controversy was of an offended authority ranged against an apologetic rebellion. A tone of moral condemnation on the one side, a touch of casuistry on the other, confused the issues. And now, behind and around the combatants, the clash of equal hosts! — over ground strewn with dead assumptions. The conflict might be no less strenuous; nay, from a series of isolated struggles it had developed into a world-wide battle; but the bitterness between man and man was less.

Yes! — for the nobler spirits — the leaders and generals of each army. But what of the rank and file? And at the thought of Barron she laughed at herself for supposing that religious rancour and religious slander had died out of the world!

"Can we have some talk somewhere?" said Norham languidly in Meynell's ear, as the gentlemen left the dining-room.

"I think Mrs. Flaxman will have arranged something," said Meynell, with a smile, detecting the weariness of the political Atlas.

And, indeed, Rose had all her dispositions made. They found her in the drawing-room, amid a bevy of bright gowns and comely faces, illumined by the cheerful light of a big wood fire — a circle of shimmering stuffs and gems, the blaze sparkling on the pointed slippers, the white necks, and glossy hair of the girls, and on the diamonds of their mothers.

But Rose, the centre of the circle, sprang up at once, at sight of her two *gros bonnets*.

"The green drawing-room!" she murmured in Meynell's ear, and tripped on before them, while the incoming crowd of gentlemen, mingling with the ladies, served to mask the movement.

Not, however, before the Bishop had perceived the withdrawal of the politician and the

heretic. He saw that Canon France, who followed him, had also an eye to the retreating figures.

"I trust we, too, shall have our audience!" said the Bishop ironically.

Canon France shrugged his shoulders, smiling.

Then his small, shrewd eyes scanned the Bishop intently. Nothing in that delicate face beyond the sentiments proper to the situation?—the public situation? As to the personal emotion involved, that, the Canon knew, was for the time almost exhausted. The Bishop had suffered much during the preceding months—in his affections, his fatherly feeling towards his clergy, in his sense of the affront offered to Christ's seamless vesture of the Church. But now, France thought, pain had been largely deadened by the mere dramatic interest of the prospect ahead, by the anodyne of an immense correspondence, a vast increase in the business of the day, caused by the various actions pending.

Nothing else—new and disturbing—in the Bishop's mind? He moved on, chatting and jesting with the young girls who gathered round him. He was evidently a favourite with them, and with all nice women. Finally he sank into an arm-chair beside Lady Helen Varley, exchanging Mrs. Flaxman's cossetting for hers. His small figure was almost lost in the arm-chair. The firelight danced on his slender stockinged legs, on his episcopal shoe-buckles, on the cross that adorned his episcopal breast, and then on the gleaming snow of his hair, above his blue eyes with their slight unearthliness, so large and flowerlike in his small white face. He seemed very much at ease, throwing off all burdens.

No! the Slander that had begun to fly through the diocese, like an arrow by night, had not yet touched the Bishop.

Nor Meynell himself?

Yet France was certain that Barron had not been idle, that he had not let it drop. "I advised him to let it drop," he said uneasily to himself; "that was all I could do."

Then he looked round him, at the faces of the women present. He knew scarcely any of them. Was she among them—the lady of Barron's tale? He thought of the story as he might have thought of the plot of a novel. When medieval charters were not to be had, it made an interesting subject of speculation. And Barron could not have confided it to any one in the diocese so discreet, so absolutely discreet, as he.

"I gather this movement of yours is rapidly becoming formidable?" said Norham to his companion.

He spoke with the affectation of interest that all politicians in office must learn. But there was no heart in it, and Meynell wondered why the great man had desired to speak with him at all.

He replied that the growth of the movement was certainly a startling fact. "It is now clear that we must ultimately go to Parliament. The immediate result in the Church courts is of course, not in doubt. But our hope lies in such demonstrations in the country as may induce Parliament"—he paused, laying a quiet emphasis on each word—"to reconsider—and resettle—the conditions of membership and office in the English Church."

"Good heavens!" cried Norham, throwing up his hand. "What a prospect! If that business once gets into the House of Commons, it'll have everything else out."

"Yes. It's big enough to ask for time—and take it."

Norham suppressed a slight yawn as he turned in his chair.

"The House of Commons, alas! never shows to advantage in an ecclesiastical debate. You'd think it was in the condition of Sydney Smith with a cold—not sure whether there were nine Articles and thirty-nine Muses—or the other way on!"

Meynell looked at the Secretary of State in silence, his eyes twinkling. He had heard from various friends of this touch of insolence in Norham. He awaited its disappearance.

Edward Norham was a man still young—under forty, indeed, though marked prematurely by hard work and hard fighting. His black hair had receded on the temples, and was obviously thinning on the crown of the head. He wore spectacles, and his shoulders had taken the stoop of office work. But the eyes behind the spectacles lost nothing that they desired to see, and the general impression was one of bull-dog strength, which could be impertinent and aggressive, and could also masquerade itself in a good humour and charm by no means insincere. In his political career, he was on the eve of great things; and he would owe them mainly to a power of work, supreme even in these hard-driven days. This power of work enabled him to glean in many fields and keep his eye on many chances that his colleagues perforce neglected. The Modernist movement was one of these chances. For years he had foreseen great changes ahead in the relations of Church and State; and this group of men seemed to be forcing the pace.

Suddenly, as his eyes perused the strong humanity of the face beside him, Norham changed his manner. He sat up and put down the paper—

knife he had been teasing. As he did so, there was a little clash at his elbow, and something rolled on the floor.

"What's that?"

"No harm done," said Meynell, stooping. "One of our host's Greek coins. What a beauty!" He picked up the little case, and the coin that had rolled out of it — a gold coin of Velia, with a head of Athene, one of the great prizes of the collector.

Norham took it with eagerness. He was a Cambridge man and a fine scholar, and such things delighted him.

"I didn't know Flaxman cared for these things."

"He inherited them," said Meynell, pointing to the open cabinet on the table. "But he loves them, too. Mrs. Flaxman always has them put out on great occasions. It seems to me they ought to have a watcher! They are quite priceless, I believe. Such things are soon lost."

"Oh — they are safe enough here," said Norham, returning the coin to its place, with another loving look at it. Then, with an effort, he pulled himself together and with great rapidity began to question his companion as to the details and progress of the movement. All the facts up to date — the number of Reformers enrolled since the foundation of the League, the League's finances, the astonishing growth of its petition to Parliament, the progress of the movement in the universities among the ardent and intellectual youth of the day, its spread from week to week among the clergy — these things came out steadily and clearly in Meynell's replies.

"The League was started in July — it is now October. We have fifty thousand enrolled members, all communicants in Modernist churches. Meetings and demonstrations are being arranged at this moment all over England; and in January there will be a formal inauguration of the new Liturgy in Dunchester Cathedral."

"Heavens!" said Norham, dropping all signs of languor. "Dunchester will venture it?"

Meynell made a sign of assent.

"It is, of course, possible that the episcopal proceedings against the Bishop, which, as you see, have just begun, may have been brought to a close, and that the Cathedral may be no longer at our disposal, but —"

"The Dean, surely, has power to close it!"

"The Dean has come over to us, and the majority of the canons."

Norham threw back his head with a laugh of amazement.

"The first time in history that a dean has been of the same opinion as his Bishop! Upon

my word, the Government has been badly informed! We had no idea — simply no idea — that things had gone so far. Markborough, of course, gives us very different accounts — he and the bishops acting with him."

"A great deal is going on which our Bishop here is quite unaware of."

"You can substantiate what you have been saying?"

"I will send you papers to-morrow morning. But, of course," added Meynell, after a pause, "a great many of us will be out of our berths in a few months, temporarily at least. It will rest with Parliament whether we remain so!"

"The Non-Jurors of the twentieth century!" murmured Norham, with a half-sceptical intonation.

"Ah, but this *is* the twentieth century!" said Meynell, smiling. "And, in our belief, the *dénouement* will be different."

"What will you do — you clergy — when you are deprived?"

"In the first place, it will take a long time to deprive us — and, so long as there are any of us left in our livings, each will come to the help of the other."

"But you yourself?"

"I have already made arrangements for a big barn in the village," said Meynell, smiling — "a great tithe-barn of the fifteenth century, a magnificent old place, with a forest of wooden arches and a vault like a church. The village will worship there for a while. We shall make it beautiful!"

Norham was silent for a moment. He was stupefied by the energy, the passion of religious hope, in the face beside him. Then the critical temper in him conquered his emotion, and he said, not without sarcasm:

"This is all very surprising — very interesting; but what are the *ideas* behind you? A thing like this cannot live without ideas — and I confess I have always thought the ideas of Liberal Christianity a rather beggarly set-out — excuse the phrase!"

"There is nothing to excuse! — the phrase fits. A 'reduced Christianity,' as opposed to a 'full Christianity' — that is the description lately given, I think, by a divinity professor. I don't quarrel with it at all. Who can care for a 'reduced' anything! But a *transformed* Christianity — that is another matter."

"Why 'Christianity' at all?"

Meynell looked at him in a smiling silence. He, the man of religion, was unwilling in these surroundings to play the prophet, to plunge into the central stream of argument. But Norham, the outsider and dilettante, was conscious of a kindled mind.

"That is the question to which it always seems to me there is no answer," he said easily, leaning back in his chair. "You think you can take what you like of a great historical religion and leave the rest — that you can fall back on its presuppositions and build it anew. But the presuppositions themselves are all crumbling! 'God,' 'soul,' 'free will,' 'immortality,' — even human identity, — is there one of the old fundamental notions that still stands unchallenged? What are we, in the eyes of modern psychology, but a world of automata — dancing to stimuli from outside? What has become of conscience — of the moral law — of Kant's imperative — in the minds of writers like these?"

He pointed to two recent novels lying on the table, both of them brilliant glorifications of sordid forms of adultery.

Meynell's look fired.

"Ah! — but let us distinguish! *We* are not anarchists — as those men are. Our claim is precisely that we are, and desire to remain, a part of a *society* — a definite community with definite laws — of a National Church — of the nation, that is, in its spiritual aspect. The question for which we are campaigning is as to the terms of membership in that society. But terms and conditions there must always be. The 'wild living intellect of man' must accept conditions in the Church as *we* conceive it, no less than in the Church as Newman conceived it."

Norham shrugged his shoulders.

"Then why all this bother?"

"Because the conditions must be adjusted from time to time! Otherwise the Church suffers, and souls are lost wantonly, without reason. But there is no church, no religion, without some venture, some leap of faith! If you can't make any leap at all — any venture — then you remain outside — and you think yourself, perhaps, entitled to run amuck — as these men do!" He pointed to the books. "But *we* make the venture! — *we* accept the great hypothesis — of faith."

The sound of voices came dimly to them from the farther rooms. Norham pointed towards them.

"What difference, then, between you — and your Bishop?"

"Simply that in his case — as *we* say — the hypothesis of faith is weighted with a vast mass of stubborn matter that it was never meant to carry — bad history, bad criticism, an outgrown philosophy. To make it carry it — in our belief — you have to fly in the face of that gradual education of the world, education of the mind, education of the conscience, which is the chief mark of God in the world. But the hypothesis of

faith, itself, remains — take it at its lowest — as rational, as defensible, as legitimate as any other."

"What do you mean by it? God — conscience — responsibility?"

"Those are the big words!" said Meynell, smiling — "and, of course, the true ones. But what the saint means by it, I suppose, in the first instance, is that there is in man something mysterious, superhuman, a Life in life — which can be indefinitely strengthened, enlightened, purified, till it reveal to him the secret of the world, till it 'toss him' to the 'breast' of God! — or, again, can be weakened, lost, destroyed, till he relapses into the animal. Believe it, we say! Live by it! Make the venture. *Verificatur vivendo!*"

Again the conversation paused. From the distance once more came the merry clamour of the farther drawing-room. A din of young folk chaffing and teasing one another — a girl's defiant voice above it — outbursts of laughter. Norham, who had in him a touch of dramatic imagination, enjoyed the contrast between the gay crowd in the distance, and this quiet room where he sat face to face with a visionary — surely altogether remote from the marrying, money-making, sensuous world. Yet, after all, the League was a big, practical, organised fact.

"What you have expressed — very finely, if I may say so — is, of course, the mystical creed," he replied at last, with suave politeness. "But why call it Christianity?"

As he spoke, he was conscious of a certain pride in himself. He felt complacently that he understood Meynell, and appreciated him; and that hardly any of his colleagues would, or could, have done so.

"Why call it Christianity?" he repeated.

"Because Christianity is this creed! — 'embodied in a tale.' And mankind must have tales and symbols."

"And the life of Christ is your symbol?"

"More! — it is our sacrament — the supreme sacrament — to which all other symbols of the same kind lead — in which they are summed up."

"And that is why you make so much of the eucharist?"

"It is — to us — just as full of mystical meaning, just as much the meeting-place of God and man, as to the Catholic — Roman or Anglican."

"Strange that there should be so many of you!" said Norham, after a moment, with an incredulous smile.

"Yes; that has been the discovery of the last six months. But we might all have guessed it."

The fuel has been long laid. Now comes the kindling, and the blaze!"

There was a pause. Then Norham said abruptly:

"Now, what is it you want of Parliament?"

The two men plunged into a discussion in which the politician became presently aware that the parish priest, the visionary, possessed a surprising amount of practical and statesmanlike ability.

Meanwhile, a room or two away, in the great bare drawing-room, with its faded tapestries and its warm mixture of lamplight and firelight, the evening guests had been arriving. Rose stood at the door of the drawing-room, receiving, her husband beside her, Catherine a little way behind.

"Oh!" cried Rose suddenly, under her breath, heard only by Hugh — a little sound of perturbation.

Outside, in the hall, hardly lit at intervals by oil-lamps, a group could be seen advancing: in front, Alice Puttenham and Mary; and, behind, the Fox-Wilson party, Hester's golden head and challenging gait drawing all eyes as she passed along.

But it was on Alice Puttenham that Rose's gaze was fixed. She came dreamily forward; and Rose saw her marked out by the lovely oval of the face, its whiteness, its melancholy, from all the moving shapes around her. She wore a dress of black gauze over white; a little scarf of old lace lay on her shoulders; her still abundant hair was rolled back from her high brow and sad eyes. She looked very small and childish — as frail as thistledown.

And, behind her, Hester's stormy beauty! Rose gave a little gulp. Then she found herself pressing a cold hand, and was conscious of sudden relief. Miss Puttenham's shy composure was unchanged. She could not have looked so, she could not surely have confronted such a gathering of neighbours and strangers, if —

No, no! The Slander — Rose, in her turn, saw it under an image, as if a dark night-bird hovered over Upcote — had not yet descended on this gentle head. With eager kindness, Hugh came forward, and Catherine. They found her a place by the fire, where presently the glow seemed to make its way to her pale cheeks, and she sat, silent and amused, watching the triumph of Hester.

For Hester was no sooner in the room than, resenting, perhaps, the decidedly cool reception that Mrs. Flaxman had given her, she at once set to work to extinguish all the other young women there. And she had very soon succeeded. The Oxford youths, Lord Wanless, the sons of

two or three neighbouring squires, they were all presently gathered about her, as thick as bees on honeycomb, recognising in her instantly one of those beings endowed from their cradle with a double portion of sex-magic, who leave such a wild track behind them in the world.

By her chair stood poor Stephen Barron, absorbed in her every look and tone. Occasionally she threw him a word, — Rose thought for pure mischief, — and his whole face would light up.

In the centre of the circle round Hester stood one of the Oxford lads, a magnificent fellow, radiating health and gaiety, who was trying to wear her down in one of the word-games of the day. They fought hard and breathlessly, everybody listening, partly for the amusement of the game, partly for the pleasure of watching the good looks of the young creatures playing it. At last the man turned on his heel with a cry of victory:

"Beaten! — beaten! — by a hair. But you're wonderful, Miss Fox-Wilson. I never found anybody near so good as you at it before, except a man I met once at Newmarket — Philip Meryon. Do you know him? Never saw a fellow so good at games. But an awfully queer fish!"

It seemed to the morbid sensitiveness of Rose that there was an instantaneous and a thrilling silence. Hester tossed her head; her colour, after the first start, ebbed away; she grew pale.

"Yes, I do know him. Why is he a queer fish? You only say that because he beat you!"

The young man gave a half-laugh, and looked at his friends. Then he changed the subject. But Hester got up impatiently from her seat, and would not play any more. Rose caught the sudden intentness with which Alice Puttenham's eyes pursued her.

Stephen Barron came to the help of his hostess, and started more games. Rose was grateful to him — and quite intolerably sorry for him.

"But why was I obliged to shake hands with the other brother?" she thought rebelliously, as she watched the disagreeable face of Maurice Barron, who had been standing in the circle not far from Hester. He had a look of bad company that displeased her; and she resented what seemed to her an inclination to stare at the pretty women — especially at Hester and Miss Puttenham. Heavens! if that odious father had betrayed anything to such a son! Surely, surely, it was inconceivable!

The party was beginning to thin when Meynell, impatient to be quit of his Cabinet Minis-

ter, that he might find Mary Elsmere before it was too late, hurried from the green drawing-room, in the wake of Mr. Norham, and stumbled against a young man who, in the very imperfect illumination, had not perceived the second figure behind the Home Secretary.

"Hullo!" said Meynell brusquely, stepping back. "How do you do? Is Stephen here?"

Maurice Barron answered in the affirmative — and added, as though from the need to say something, no matter what:

"I hear there are some coins to be seen in there?"

"There are."

Meynell passed on, his countenance showing a sternness, a contempt even, that was rare with him. He and Norham passed through the next drawing-room, and met various acquaintance at the farther door. Maurice Barron stood watching them. The persons invading the room had come intending to see the coins; but, meeting the Home Secretary, they turned back with him, and Meynell followed them, eager to disengage himself from them. At the door some impulse made him turn and look back. He saw Maurice Barron disappearing into the green drawing-room.

The night was soft and warm. Catherine and Mary had come prepared to walk home, Catherine eagerly resuming, now that her health allowed it, the Spartan habits of their normal life. Flaxman was drawn by the beauty of the moonlight and the park to offer to escort them to the lower lodge. Hester declared that she, too, would walk, and carelessly accepted Stephen's escort. Meynell stepped out from the house with them, and, in the natural sequence of things, he found himself with Mary.

Flaxman and Catherine, who led the way, hardly spoke to each other. They walked, pensive and depressed. Each knew what the other was thinking of, and each felt that nothing was to be gained, for the moment, by

any fresh talk about it. Just behind them they could hear Hester laughing and sparring with Stephen; and, when Catherine looked back, she could see Meynell and Mary, far away in the distance of the avenue they were following.

The great lime trees on either side threw long shadows on grass covered with the fresh-fallen leaf, which gleamed a pale orange through the dusk. The sky was dappled with white cloud, and the lime boughs overhead broke it into patterns of delight. The sharp scent of the fallen leaves was in the air, and the night, for all its mildness, prophesied winter. Meynell seemed to himself to be moving on enchanted ground, beneath enchanted trees. The tension of his long talk with Norham, the cares of his leadership, the voices of a natural ambition, dropped away. Mary, in a blue cloak, a white scarf wound about her head, summed up for him the pure beauty of nature and the night. For the first time, he did not attempt to check the thrill in his veins; he began to hope. It was impossible to ignore the change in Mrs. Elsmere's attitude towards him. He had no idea what had caused it, but he felt it. And he realised, also, that, through unseen and inexplicable gradations, Mary had come mysteriously near to him. He dared not have spoken a word of love to her; but such feeling as theirs, however restrained, penetrates speech and gesture, and irresistibly makes all things new.

They spoke of the most trivial matters, and hardly noticed what they said. He all the time was thinking, "Beyond this tumult, there will be rest some day — then I may speak. We could live hardly and simply; neither of us wants luxury. But *now* it would be unjust; it would bring too great a burden on her — and her poor mother. I must wait! But we shall see each other — we shall understand each other!"

Meanwhile she, on her side, would perhaps have given the world to share the struggle from which he debarred her. Nevertheless, for both, it was an hour of happiness and hope.

TO BE CONTINUED

In an article on "McAdoo and the Subway," by Burton J. Hendrick, printed in the March McClure's, the Public Service Corporation of New Jersey was referred to as "a crowd of stock-waterers." The author, on reconsideration, is convinced that the remark was unfounded in fact. It is the policy of this magazine, in case it unintentionally does any man or corporation an injustice, to make retraction; and, in accordance with this policy, it withdraws this statement about the Public Service Corporation.

AN OLD WOMAN OF THE ROADS

BY

PÁDRAIC COLUM

O H, to have a little house!
To own the hearth and stool and all!
The heaped-up sods upon the fire,
The pile of turf against the wall!

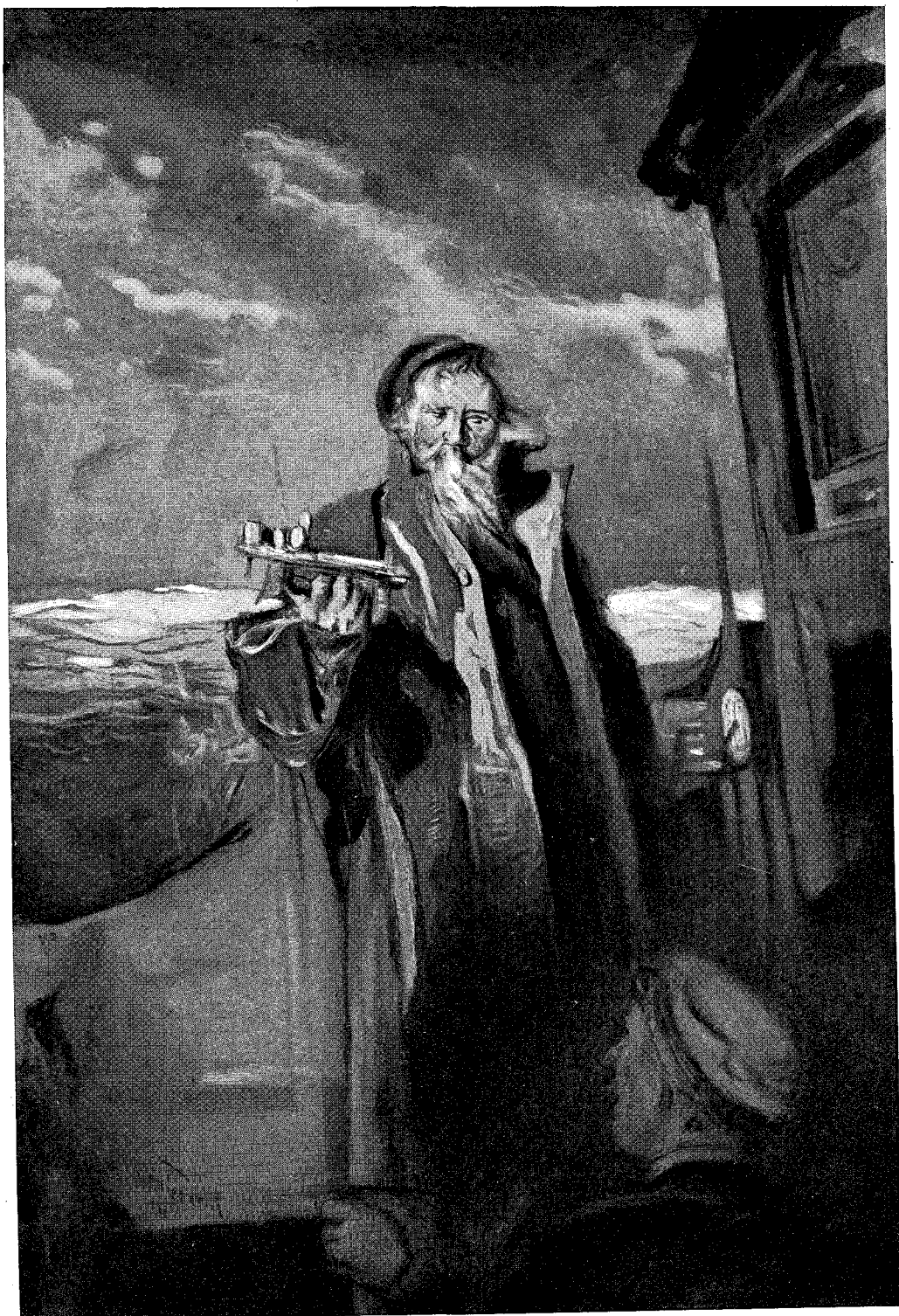
To have a clock with weights and chains,
And pendulum swinging up and down!
A dresser filled with shining delf,
Speckled and white and blue and brown!

I could be busy all the day
Clearing and sweeping hearth and floor,
And fixing on their shelf again
My white and blue and speckled store!

I could be quiet there at night,
Beside the fire and by myself,
Sure of a bed, and loath to leave
The ticking clock and the shining delf!

Och! but I'm weary of mist and dark,
And roads where there's never a house or bush,
And tired I am of bog and road,
And the crying wind and the lonesome hush!

And I am praying to God on high,
And I am praying Him night and day,
For a little house—a house of my own—
Out of the wind's and the rain's way.



Drawing by Henry Reuterdaahl

"THEN I WENT TO THE BRIDGE TO EXPLAIN TO THE MAHALA'S CAPTAIN
THAT HIS WIRELESS OPERATOR WAS DEAD"

See "Sparks," page 149