

THE FRUIT OF THE TREE

BY EDITH WHARTON

ILLUSTRATION BY ALONZO KIMBALL

BOOK I—(Continued)

IV



JOHN AMHERST was no one-sided idealist. He felt keenly the growing complexity of the relation between employer and worker, the seeming hopelessness of permanently harmonizing their claims, the recurring necessity of fresh compromises and adjustments. He hated rant, demagoguery, the rash formulating of emotional theories; and his contempt for bad logic and subjective judgments led him to regard with distrust the immediate panaceas offered for the cure of economic evils. But his heart ached for the bitter throes with which the human machine moves on. He felt the menace of industrial conditions when viewed collectively, their poignancy when studied in the individual lives of the toilers among whom his lot was cast; and clearly as he saw the need of a philosophic survey of the question, he was sure that only through sympathy with its personal, human side could a solution be reached. The disappearance of the old familiar contact between master and man seemed to him one of the great wrongs of the new industrial situation. That the breach must be further widened by the ultimate substitution of the stock-company for the individual employer, was obvious to any student of economic tendencies, and presented to Amherst's mind one of the most painful problems in the scheme of social readjustment. But it was characteristic of him to dwell rather on the removal of immediate difficulties than in the contemplation of those to come, and while the individual employer was still to be reckoned with, the essential thing was to bring him closer to his workers. Till he entered personally into their hardships and aspirations—till he learned what they wanted and why they wanted it—Amherst believed that no mere law-making, however enlightened, could suffice to create a wholesome relation between the two.

VOL. XLI.—17

This feeling was uppermost as he sat with Mrs. Westmore in the carriage which was carrying them to the mills. He had meant to take the trolley back to Westmore, but at a murmured word from Mr. Trédegart, Bessy had offered him a seat at her side, leaving the others to follow in a second carriage. This culmination of his hopes—the unlooked-for chance of a half-hour alone with her before reaching the mills—left Amherst oppressed with the swiftness of the precious minutes. He had so much to say—so much to prepare her for—yet how begin, while he was in utter ignorance of her character and her point of view, and while her lovely nearness left him so little chance of perceiving anything except itself?

But he was not often the victim of his sensations, and presently there emerged, out of the very consciousness of her grace and her completeness, an acuter sense of the conditions which, in a measure, had gone to produce them. Her dress could not have hung in such subtle folds, her white chin have nestled in such rich depths of fur, the pearls in her ears have given back the light from such unblemished curves, if thin shoulders in shapeless gingham had not bent, day in, day out, above the bobbins and carders, and weary ears throbbed even at night with the relentless tumult of the looms. Amherst, however, felt no sensational resentment at the contrast. He had lived too much with ugliness and wanted not to believe in human nature's abiding need of their opposite. He was glad there was room for such beauty in the world, and sure that its purpose was an ameliorating one, if only it could be used as a beautiful spirit would use it.

The carriage had turned into one of the nondescript thoroughfares, half incipient street, half decaying lane, which dismally linked the mill-village to Hanaford. Bessy looked out on the ruts, the hoardings, the starved trees dangling their palsied leaves in

153

the radiant October light; then she sighed and said: "What a good day for a gallop!"

Amherst felt a momentary chill, but the naturalness of the exclamation disarmed him, and the words called up thrilling memories of his own college days, when he had ridden his grandfather's horses in the famous hunting valley not a hundred miles from Hanaford.

Bessy met his smile with a glow of understanding. "You like riding too, I am sure?"

"I used to; but I haven't been in the saddle for years. Factory managers don't keep hunters," he said laughing.

Her embarrassed murmur showed that she took this as an apologetic allusion to his reduced condition, and in his haste to correct this impression he added: "If I regretted anything in my other life, it would certainly be a gallop on a day like this; but I chose my trade deliberately, and I've never been sorry for my choice."

He had hardly spoken when he felt the inappropriateness of this personal avowal; but her prompt response showed him, a moment later, that it was, after all, the straightest way to his end.

"You find the work interesting? I'm sure it must be. You'll think me very ignorant—my husband and I came here so seldom . . . I feel as if I ought to know so much more about it," she explained.

At last the note for which he waited had been struck. "Won't you try to—now you're here? There's so much worth knowing," he broke out impetuously.

Mrs. Westmore coloured, but rather with surprise than displeasure. "I'm very stupid—I have no head for business—but I will try to," she said gently.

"It's not business that I mean; it's the personal relation—just the thing the business point of view leaves out. Financially, I don't suppose your mills could be better run; but there are over seven hundred women working in them, and there's so much to be done, just for them and their children."

He caught a faint hint of withdrawal in her tone. "I have always understood that Mr. Truscomb did everything——"

Amherst flushed; but he was beyond caring for the personal rebuff. "Do you leave it to your little girl's nurses to do everything for her?" he asked.

Now indeed her surprise seemed about to verge on annoyance: he saw the prelimi-

nary ruffling of the woman who is put to the trouble of defending her dignity. "Really, I don't see—" she began with distant politeness; then her face changed and melted, and again her blood spoke for her before her lips.

"I am glad you told me that, Mr. Amherst. Of course I want to do whatever I can. I should like you to point out everything——"

Amherst's resolve had been taken while she spoke. He *would* point out everything, would stretch this matchless opportunity to its limit. All thoughts of personal prudence were flung to the winds—her blush and tone had routed the waiting policy. He would declare war on Truscomb at once, and take the chance of immediate dismissal. At least, before he went he would have brought this exquisite creature face to face with the wrongs from which her luxuries were drawn, and set in motion the regenerating impulses of indignation and pity. He did not stop to weigh the permanent advantage of this course. His only feeling was that the chance would never again be given him—that if he let her go away, back to her usual life, with her eyes unopened and her heart untouched, there would be no hope of her ever returning. It was better that he should leave for good, and that she should come back, as come back she must, more and more often, if once she could be made to feel the crying need of her presence.

But where was he to begin? How give her even a glimpse of the packed and intricate situation?

"Mrs. Westmore," he said hastily, "there's no time to say much now, but before we get to the mills I want to ask you a favour. If, as you go through them, you see anything that seems to need explaining, will you let me come and tell you about it tonight? I say tonight," he added, meeting her look of enquiry, "because later—tomorrow even—I might not have the chance. There are some things—a good many—in the management of the mills that Mr. Truscomb doesn't see as I do. I don't allude to business questions: wages and dividends and so on—those are out of my province. I speak merely in the line of my own work—my care of the hands, and what I believe they need and don't get under the present system. Naturally, if Mr. Truscomb were well, I shouldn't have had this chance of putting

the case to you; but since it's come my way, I must seize it and take the consequences."

Even as he spoke, by a swift reaction of thought, those consequences rose before him in all their seriousness. It was not only, or chiefly, that he feared to lose his place; though he knew his mother had not spoken lightly in instancing the case of the foreman whom Truscomb, to gratify a personal spite, had for months kept out of a job in his trade. And there were special reasons why Amherst should heed her warning. In adopting a manual trade, instead of one of the gentlemanly professions which the men of her family had always followed, he had not only disappointed her hopes, and to a great extent thrown away the benefits of the education she had pinched herself to give him, but had disturbed all the established habits of her life by removing her from her normal surroundings to the depressing exile of a factory-settlement. However much he inwardly blamed himself for exacting this sacrifice, it had been made with such cheerfulness of spirit that the consciousness of it never clouded his daily life with his mother; but her self-effacement made him the more alive to his own obligations, and having placed her in a difficult situation he had always been careful not to increase its difficulties by any imprudence in his conduct toward his employers. Yet, grave as these considerations were, they were really less potent than his personal desire to remain at Westmore. Lightly as he had just resolved to risk the chance of dismissal, all his future was bound up in the hope of retaining his place. His heart was in the work at Westmore, and the fear of not being able to get other employment was a small factor in his intense desire to keep his post. What he really wanted was to speak out, and yet escape the consequences: by some miraculous reversal of probability to retain his position and yet effect Truscomb's removal. The idea was so fantastic that he felt it merely as a quickening of all his activities, a tremendous pressure of will along undetermined lines. He had no wish to take the Superintendent's place; but his dream was to see Truscomb superseded by a man of the new school, in sympathy with the awakening social movement—a man sufficiently practical to "run" the mills successfully, yet imaginative enough to regard that task as the least of his duties.

He saw the promise of such a man in Louis Duplain, the overseer who boarded with Mrs. Amherst: a young fellow of Alsatian extraction, a mill-hand from childhood, who had worked at his trade in Europe as well as in America, and who united with greater manual efficiency, and a greater nearness to the workman's standpoint, all Amherst's enthusiasm for the experiments in social betterment that were being made in some of the English and continental factories. His strongest wish was to see such a man as Duplain in control at Westmore before he himself turned to the larger work which he had begun to see before him as the sequel to his factory-training.

All these thoughts swept through him in the instant's pause before Mrs. Westmore, responding to his last appeal, said with a graceful eagerness: "Yes, you must come tonight. I want to hear all you can tell me—and if there is anything wrong you must show me how I can make it better."

"Yes, I'll show her, and Truscomb shan't turn me out for it," was the vow he passionately registered as the carriage drew up at the office-door of the main building.

How this impossible result was to be achieved he had no farther time to consider, for in another moment the rest of the party had entered the factory with them, and speech was swallowed up in the vast roar of the machinery.

Amherst's zeal for his cause was always quickened by the sight of the mills in action. He loved the work itself as much as he hated the conditions under which it was performed; and he longed to see on the operatives' faces something of the ardour that lit up his own when he entered the work-rooms. It was this irresistible passion for machinery that at school had turned him from his books, at college had drawn him to the courses least in the line of his destined profession; and it always mastered him afresh when he was face to face with the monstrous energies of the mills. It was not only the sense of power that thrilled him—he felt a beauty in the ordered activity of the whole intricate organism, in the rhythm of dancing bobbins and revolving carders, the swift continuous outpour of doublers and ribbon-laps, the steady ripple of the long ply-frames, the terrible voracious play of the gnashing looms—all these varying subordinate motions, gathered up

into the throb of the great engines which fed the giant's arteries, and which were in turn ruled by the invisible action of quick thought and obedient hands, always produced in Amherst a responsive rush of life.

He knew this sensation was too specialized to affect his companions; but he expected Mrs. Westmore to be all the more alive to the other side—the dark side of monotonous human toil, of the perpetual banquet of flesh and blood and brain served up to the monster whose jaws the insatiable looms so grimly typified. Truscomb, as he had told her, was a good manager from the profit-taking standpoint. Since it was profitable to keep the machinery in order, he maintained throughout the factory a high standard of mechanical supervision, except where one or two favoured overseers—for Truscomb was given to favouritism—shirked the duties of their departments. But it was of the essence of Truscomb's policy—and not the least of the qualities which made him a "paying" manager—that he saved money scrupulously where its outlay would not have resulted in larger earnings. To keep the floors continually scrubbed, the cotton-dust swept up, the rooms freshly whitewashed and well-ventilated, far from adding the smallest fraction to the quarterly dividends, would have deducted from them the slight cost of this additional labour; and Truscomb therefore economized on scrubbers, sweepers and window-washers, and on all expenses connected with improved ventilation and other hygienic precautions. Though the whole factory was over-crowded, the newest buildings were more carefully planned, and had the usual sanitary improvements; but the old mills had been left in their original state, and even those most recently built were fast lapsing into disrepair and squalor. It was no wonder, therefore, that workers imprisoned within such walls should reflect their long hours of brain-deadening toil in dull eyes and anæmic skins, and in the dreary lassitude with which they bent to their tasks.

Surely, Amherst argued, Mrs. Westmore must feel this; must feel it all the more keenly, coming from an atmosphere so different, from a life where, as he instinctively divined, all was in harmony with her own graceful person. But a deep disappointment awaited him. He was still under the spell of their last moments in the carriage, when her face

and voice had promised so much, when she had seemed so deeply, if vaguely, stirred by his words of passionate appeal. But as they passed from one resounding room to the other—from the dull throb of the carding-room, the groan of the ply-frames, the long steady pound of the slashers, back to the angry shriek of the fierce unappeasable looms—the light faded from her eyes and she looked merely bewildered and stunned.

Amherst, hardened to the merciless din of the factory, could not measure its effect on nerves accustomed to the subdued sounds and spacious stillnesses which are the last refinement of luxury. Habit had made him unconscious of that malicious multiplication and subdivision of noise that kept every point of consciousness vibrating to a different note, so that while one set of nerves was torn as with pincers by the dominant scream of the looms, others were thrilled with a separate pain by the accompaniment of drumming, hissing, grating and crashing that shook the great buildings with a relentless torment of sound. Amherst felt this tumult only as a part of the atmosphere of the mills; and to ears trained like his own he could make his voice heard without difficulty. But his attempts at speech were unintelligible to Mrs. Westmore and her companions, and after vainly trying to communicate with him by signs they hurried on as if to escape as quickly as possible from the pursuing whirlwind.

Amherst could not allow for the depressing effect of this enforced silence. He did not realize that if Bessy could have questioned him the currents of sympathy might have remained open between them, whereas, compelled to walk in silence through interminable ranks of meaningless machines, to which the human workers seemed mere automatic appendages, she lost all perception of what the scene signified. He had forgotten, too, that the swift apprehension of suffering in others is as much the result of training as the immediate perception of beauty. Both perceptions may be inborn, but if they are not they can be developed only through the slow discipline of experience.

"That girl in the hospital would have seen it all," he reflected, as the vision of Miss Brent's small resolute profile rose before him; but the next moment he caught the light on Mrs. Westmore's hair, as she

bent perfunctorily above a carder, and the paler image was submerged like a late moon in the sunrise.

Meanwhile Mrs. Ansell, seeing that the detailed inspection of the buildings was as trying to Mr. Langhope's lameness as to his daughter's nerves, had proposed to turn back with him and drive to Mrs. Amherst's house, where he might leave her to call on her old friend while the others were completing their rounds. It was one of Mrs. Ansell's gifts to detect the first symptoms of *ennui* in her companions, and produce a remedy as patly as old ladies whisk out a peppermint or a cough-lozenge; and Mr. Langhope's look of relief showed the timeliness of her suggestion.

Amherst was too preoccupied to wonder how his mother would take this unexpected visit; but he welcomed Mr. Langhope's departure, hoping that the withdrawal of his ironic smile would leave his daughter open to gentler influences. Mr. Tredegar, meanwhile, was projecting his dry glance over the scene, trying to converse by signs with the overseers of the different rooms, and pausing now and then to contemplate, not so much the workers themselves as the special tasks which engaged them.

How these stolid spectators of the party's progress took Mrs. Westmore's appearance among them, even Amherst, for all his sympathy with their views, could not detect. They knew that she was the "boss," that a disproportionate measure of the result of their toil would in future pass through her white hands, spread carpets for her steps, and hang a setting of beauty about her lovely eyes; but the knowledge seemed to produce no special interest in her personality. A change of employer was not likely to make any change in their lot: they knew their welfare would probably continue to depend on Truscomb's favour. The men hardly raised their heads as Mrs. Westmore passed; the women stared, but with curiosity rather than interest; and Amherst could not tell whether their sullenness reacted on Mrs. Westmore, or whether they were unconsciously chilled by her apparent indifference. The result was the same: the distance between them seemed to increase instead of diminishing; and he smiled ironically to think of the form his appeal had taken—"If you see anything that seems to need explaining." Why, she saw nothing—nothing but the greasy floor

under her feet, the cotton-dust in her eyes, the dizzy incomprehensible whirring of innumerable belts and wheels. Once out of it all, she would make haste to forget the dreary scene without pausing to ask for any explanation of its dreariness.

In the intensity of his disappointment he sought a pretext to abridge the tour of the buildings, that he might remove his eyes from the face he had so vainly watched for any sign of awakening. And then, just as he despaired of it, the change came.

They had entered the principal loom-room, and were half-way down its long central passage, when Mr. Tredegar, who led the procession, paused suddenly before one of the looms.

"What's that?" he asked, pointing to a ragged strip of black cloth tied conspicuously to the frame of the loom.

The overseer of the room, a florid young man with dissipated eyes, who, at Amherst's signal, had attached himself to the party, stopped short and turned a furious glance on the surrounding operatives.

"What in hell . . . ? It's the first I seen of it," he exclaimed, making an ineffectual attempt to snatch the mourning emblem from its place.

At the same instant the midday whistle boomed through the building, and at the signal the machinery stopped, and a merciful silence fell upon the mills. The more distant workers at once left their posts to catch up the hats and coats heaped untidily in the corners; but those nearer at hand, attracted by the commotion around the loom, stood spell-bound, fixing the group of visitors with a stare of dull curiosity.

Amherst had reddened to the roots of his hair. He knew in a flash what the token signified, and the sight stirred the chords of pity in his breast; but it also jarred on his strong sense of discipline, and he turned sternly toward the operatives.

"What does this mean?"

There was a momentary silence; then one of the hands, a thin bent man with mystic eyes, raised his head and spoke.

"We done that for Dillon," he said.

Amherst's frown swept the press of faces. "But Dillon was not killed," he exclaimed, while the overseer, drawing out his pen-knife, ripped off the cloth and tossed it contemptuously into a heap of cotton-refuse at his feet.

"Might better ha' been." came from an-

other hand; and a deep "That's so" of corroboration ran through the knot of workers.

Amherst felt a touch on his arm, and met Mrs. Westmore's eyes. "What has happened? What do they mean?" she asked in a startled voice.

"There was an accident here two days ago: a man got caught in the loom behind him, and his right hand was badly crushed."

"Oh——" she cried, her face paling with the shock of the words.

Mr. Tredegar intervened with his dry note of command. "How serious is the accident? How did it happen?" he enquired.

"Through the man's own carelessness—ask the Superintendent," the overseer interposed before Amherst could answer.

A deep murmur of dissent ran through the crowd, but Amherst, without noticing the overseer's reply, said to Mr. Tredegar: "He's at the Hope Hospital. He will lose his hand, and probably the whole arm."

He had not meant to add this last phrase. However strongly his sympathies were aroused, it was against his rule, at such a time, to say anything which might inflame the quick passions of the workers: he had intended to make light of the accident, and dismiss the operatives with a sharp word of reproof. But Mrs. Westmore's face was close to his: he saw the pity in her eyes, and feared, if he checked its expression, that he might never again have the chance of calling it forth.

"His right arm? How terrible! But then he will never be able to work again!" she exclaimed, in all the horror of a first confrontation with the inexorable fate of the poor.

Her eyes turned from Amherst and rested on the wan faces pressing about her. There were many women's faces among them—the faces of fagged middle-age, and of sallow sedentary girlhood. For the first time Mrs. Westmore seemed to feel the bond of blood between herself and these dim creatures of the underworld: as Amherst watched her the lovely miracle was wrought. Her palour gave way to a quick rush of colour, her eyes widened like a startled child's, and two tears rose and rolled slowly down her face.

"Oh, why wasn't I told? Is he married? Has he children? What does it matter whose fault it was?" she cried, her questions pouring out incoherently on a great wave of anger and compassion.

"It warn't his fault. . . . The looms

are too close. . . . It'll happen again. . . . He's got three kids at home," broke from the operatives; and suddenly a voice exclaimed "Here's his wife now," and the crowd divided to make way for Mrs. Dillon, who, passing through the farther end of the room, had been waylaid and dragged toward the group.

She shrank away, wincing back from the murderous machine, which she beheld for the first time since her husband's accident; then she recognized Amherst, guessed the identity of the lady at his side, and flushed up to her haggard forehead. Mrs. Dillon had been good-looking in her earlier youth, and sufficient prettiness lingered in her hollow-cheeked face to show how much more had been sacrificed to sickness and unwholesome toil.

"Oh, ma'am, ma'am, it warn't Jim's fault—there ain't a steadier man living. The looms is too crowded," she sobbed out.

Some of the other women began to cry: a wave of sympathy ran through the circle, and Mrs. Westmore moved forward with an answering exclamation. "You poor creature. . . . You poor creature. . . ." She opened her arms to Mrs. Dillon, and the scrubber's sobs were buried in the laces on her employer's breast.

"I will go to the hospital—I will come and see you—I will see that everything is done," Bessy reiterated. "But why are you here? How is it that you have had to leave your children?" She freed herself to turn a reproachful glance on Amherst. "You don't mean to tell me that, at such a time, you keep the poor woman at work?"

"Mrs. Dillon has not been working here lately," Amherst answered. "The Superintendent took her back today at her own request, that she might earn something while her husband was in the hospital."

Mrs. Westmore's eyes shone with indignation. "Earn something? But surely——"

She met a silencing look from Mr. Tredegar, who had stepped between Mrs. Dillon and herself.

"My dear child, no one doubts—none of these good people doubt—that you will look into the case, and do all you can to alleviate it; but let me suggest that this is hardly the place——"

She turned from him with an appealing glance at Amherst.

"I think," the latter said, as their eyes met,

"that you had better let me dismiss the hands now: they have only an hour at midday."

She signed an agitated assent, and he turned to the operatives and said quietly: "You have heard Mrs. Westmore's promise; now take yourselves off, and give her a clear way to the stairs."

They dropped back at his bidding, and Mr. Tredegear drew Bessy's arm through his; but as he began to move away she turned and laid her hand on Mrs. Dillon's shoulder.

"You must not stay here—you must go back to the children. I will make it right with Mr. Truscomb," she said in a reassuring whisper; then, through her tears, she smiled a farewell at the lingering knot of operatives, and followed her companions to the door.

In silence they descended the many stairs and crossed the shabby unfenced grass-plot between the mills and the Superintendent's office. It was not till they reached the carriage that Mrs. Westmore spoke.

"But Maria is waiting for us—we must call for her!" she said, rousing herself; and as Amherst opened the carriage-door she added: "You will show us the way? You will drive with us?"

During the short drive from the factory to Mrs. Amherst's cottage, Bessy relapsed into silence, as if re-absorbed in the distress of the scene she had just witnessed; and Amherst found himself automatically answering Mr. Tredegear's questions while his own mind had no room for anything but the sense of her tremulous lips and of her eyes still enlarged by tears. He had been too much engrossed in the momentous issues of her visit to the mills to remember that she had promised to call at his mother's for Mrs. Ansell; but now that they were on their way thither he found himself wishing that the visit might have been avoided. He was too proud of his mother to feel any doubt of the impression she would produce; but what would Mrs. Westmore think of their way of living, of the cheap jauntiness of the cottage, and the smell of dinner penetrating all its thin partitions? Duplain, too, would be coming in for dinner; and Amherst, in spite of his liking for the young overseer, became conscious of a rather overbearing freedom in his manner, the kind of misplaced ease which the new-made American affects as the readiest sign of equality. All these trifles, usually non-existent or supremely indifferent to Amherst, now assumed a sudden im-

portance, behind which he detected the uneasy desire that Mrs. Westmore should not regard him as less of her own class than his connections and his bringing-up entitled him to be thought. In a flash he saw what he had forfeited by his choice of a calling—equal contact with the little circle of people who gave life its crowning grace and facility; and the next moment he was blushing at this complete reversal of his standards, and wondering, almost contemptuously, what could be the inner nature of the woman whose mere presence could produce such a change.

But there was no struggling against her influence; and as, the night before, he had looked at Westmore with the nurse's eyes, so he now found himself seeing his house as it must appear to Mrs. Westmore. He noticed the shabby yellow paint of the palings, the neglected garden of their neighbour, the week's wash flaunting itself indecently through the denuded shrubs about the kitchen porch; and as he admitted his companions to the narrow passage they were assailed by the expected whiff of "boiled dinner," with which the steam of wash-tubs was familiarly mingled.

Duplain was in the passage; he had just come out of the kitchen, and the fact that he had been washing his hands in the sink was made evident by his rolled-back shirt-sleeves, and by the shiny redness of the knuckles he was running through his stiff black hair.

"Hallo, John," he said, in his aggressive voice, which rose abruptly at sight of Amherst's companions; and at the same moment the frowsy maid-of-all-work, crimson from stooping over the kitchen stove, thrust her head out to call after him: "See here, Mr. Duplain, don't you leave your cravat laying round here in my dough."

V



MR. WESTMORE stayed just long enough not to break in too abruptly on the flow of her friend's reminiscences, and to impress herself on Mrs. Amherst's delighted eyes as an embodiment of tactfulness and grace—looking sympathetically about the little room, which, with its books, its casts, its photographs of memorable pictures, seemed, after all, a not incongruous setting to her

charms; so that when she rose to go, saying, as her hand met Amherst's, "Tonight, then, you must tell me all about those poor Dillons," he had the absurd sense of having penetrated so far into her intimacy that a new Westmore must inevitably result from their next meeting.

"Say, John—the boss is a looker," Duplain commented across the dinner-table, with the slangy grossness he sometimes affected; but Amherst left it to his mother to look a quiet rebuke, feeling himself too high above such contacts to resent them.

He had to rouse himself with an effort to take in the overseer's next observation. "There was another lady at the office this morning," Duplain went on, while the two men lit their cigars in the porch. "Asking after you—tried to get me to show her over the mills when I said you were busy."

"Asking after me? What did she look like?"

"Well, her face was kinder white and small, with an awful lot of black hair fitting close to it. Said she came from Hope Hospital."

Amherst looked up. "Did you show her over?" he asked with sudden interest.

Duplain laughed slangily. "What? Me? And have Truscomb get on to it and turn me down? How do I know she wasn't a yellow reporter?"

Amherst uttered an impatient exclamation. "I wish to heaven a yellow reporter *would* go through these mills, and show them up in head-lines a yard high!"

He regretted not having seen the nurse again: he felt sure she would have been interested in the working of the mills, and quick to notice the signs of discouragement and ill-health in the workers' faces; but a moment later the thought of her was dispelled by the vivid anticipation of his visit to Mrs. Westmore. The afternoon hours dragged slowly by in the office, where he was bound to his desk by Truscomb's continued absence; but at length the evening whistle blew, the clerks in the outer room caught their hats from the rack, Duplain presented himself with the day's report, and the two men were free to walk home to supper.

An hour later Amherst was mounting Mrs. Westmore's steps; and his hand was on the bell when the door opened and Dr. Disbrow emerged. The physician drew back, as if surprised and slightly discon-

certed; but his smile promptly effaced all signs of vexation, and he held his hand out good-humouredly.

"A fine evening, Mr. Amherst. I'm glad to say I have been able to bring Mrs. Westmore an excellent report of both patients—Mr. Truscomb, I mean, and poor Dillon. This mild weather is all in their favour, and I hope my brother-in-law will be about in a day or two." He passed on to his carriage with a nod.

Amherst was once more shown into the library where he had found Mrs. Westmore that morning; but on this occasion it was Mr. Tredegar who rose to meet him, and curtly waved him to a seat at a respectful distance from his own. Amherst at once felt a change of atmosphere, and it was easy to guess that the lowering of temperature was due to Dr. Disbrow's recent visit. The thought roused the young man's combative instincts, and caused him to say, as Mr. Tredegar continued to survey him in silence from the depths of a capacious easy-chair—"I understood from Mrs. Westmore that she wished to see me this evening."

It was the wrong note, and he knew it as soon as he had spoken; but he had been unable to conceal his sense of the vague current of opposition in the air.

"Quite so: I believe she asked you to come," Mr. Tredegar assented, laying his hands together vertically, and surveying Amherst above the acute angle formed by his parched finger-tips. As he leaned back, small, dry, dictatorial, in the careless finish of his evening dress and pearl-studded shirt-front, his appearance put the finishing touch to Amherst's irritation. He felt the incongruousness of his rough clothes in this atmosphere of after-dinner ease, the mud on his walking-boots, the clinging cotton-dust which seemed to have entered into the very pores of the skin; and again his annoyance escaped in his voice.

"Perhaps I have come too early—" he began; but Mr. Tredegar interposed with glacial amenity: "No, I believe you are exactly on time; but Mrs. Westmore is unexpectedly detained. The fact is, Mr. and Mrs. Halford Gaines are dining with her, and she has therefore delegated to me the duty of hearing what you have to say."

Amherst hesitated. His first impulse was to exclaim: "There is no duty about it!" but a moment's thought showed the

folly of thus throwing up the game. Since Disbrow had told him that Truscomb would be about again in a day or two, it might well be that this was his last chance of reaching Mrs. Westmore's ear; and he was bound to put his case while he could, irrespective of personal feeling. But his disappointment was nevertheless too keen to be denied, and after a moment he said: "Could I not speak with Mrs. Westmore later?"

Mr. Tredegar's cool survey deepened to a frown. The young man's importunity was really out of proportion to what he signified. "Mrs. Westmore has asked me to replace her," he said, putting his previous statement more concisely.

"Then I am not to see her at all?" Amherst exclaimed; and the lawyer replied indifferently: "I am afraid not, as she leaves tomorrow."

Mr. Tredegar was in his element when refusing a favour. Not that he was by nature an unkind man; he was, indeed, capable of acts of a cold beneficence; but to deny what it was in his power to accord was the readiest way of proclaiming his authority, that power of loosing and binding which made him regard himself as almost consecrated to his office.

Having sacrificed to this principle, he felt free to add, as a gratuitous concession to politeness: "You are perhaps not aware that I am Mrs. Westmore's lawyer, and one of the executors under her husband's will."

He dropped this negligently, as though conscious of the absurdity of presenting his credentials to a subordinate; but his manner no longer incensed Amherst: it merely strengthened his resolve to sink all sense of affront in the supreme effort of obtaining a hearing.

"With that stuffed canary to advise her," he reflected, "there's no hope for her unless I can assert myself now"; and the unconscious wording of his thought expressed his inward sense that Bessy Westmore stood in greater need of help than her work-people.

Nevertheless he hesitated, hardly knowing how to begin. To Mr. Tredegar he was no more than an underling, without authority to speak in his superior's absence; and the lack of an official warrant, which he could have disregarded in appealing to Mrs. Westmore, made it hard for him to find a good opening in addressing her representative. He saw, too, from Mr. Tredegar's

protracted silence, that the latter counted on the effect of this embarrassment, and was determined not to minimize it by giving him a lead; and this perception had the effect of increasing his caution.

At length he looked up and met the lawyer's eye. "Mrs. Westmore," he began, "asked me to let her know something about the condition of the people at the mills——"

Mr. Tredegar raised his hand. "Excuse me," he said, "I understood from Mrs. Westmore that it was you who asked her permission to call this evening and set forth certain grievances on the part of the operatives."

Amherst reddened. "I did ask her—yes. But I don't in any sense represent the operatives. I simply wanted to say a word in their behalf."

Mr. Tredegar folded his hands again, and crossed one lean little leg over the other, bringing into his line of vision the glossy tip of a patent-leather pump, which he studied for a moment in silence.

"Does Mr. Truscomb know of your intention?" he then enquired.

"No, sir," Amherst answered energetically, glad that he had forced the lawyer out of his passive tactics. "I am here on my own responsibility—and in direct opposition to my own interests," he continued with a slight smile. "I know that my proceeding is quite out of order, and that I have, personally, everything to lose by it, and in a larger way probably very little to gain; but I thought Mrs. Westmore's attention ought to be called to certain conditions at the mills, and no one else seemed likely to speak of them."

"May I ask why you assume that Mr. Truscomb will not do so when he has the opportunity?"

Amherst could not repress a smile. "Because it is owing to Mr. Truscomb that they exist."

"The real object of your visit then," said Mr. Tredegar, speaking with deliberation, "is—er—an underhand attack on your Superintendent's methods?"

Amherst's face darkened, but he kept his temper. "I see nothing especially underhand in my course——"

"Except," the other interposed ironically, "that you have waited to speak till Mr. Truscomb was not in a position to defend himself."

"I never had the opportunity before. It was at Mrs. Westmore's own suggestion that I took her over the mills, and feeling as

I do on the subject I should have thought it cowardly to shirk the chance of pointing out to her the conditions there."

Mr. Tredegar mused, his eyes still bent on his gently-oscillating foot. Whenever a sufficient pressure from without parted the thick fog of self-complacency in which he moved, he had a shrewd enough outlook on men and motives; and it may be that the vigorous ring of Amherst's answer had effected this momentary clearing of the air.

At any rate, his next words were spoken in a more accessible tone. "To what conditions do you refer?" he asked.

"To the conditions under which the mill-hands work and live—to the whole management of the mills, in fact, in relation to the people employed."

"That is a large question. Pardon my possible ignorance——" Mr. Tredegar paused to make sure that his hearer took in the full irony of this—"but surely in this state there are liability and inspection laws for the protection of the operatives?"

"There are such laws, yes—but most of them are either a dead letter, or else so easily evaded that no employer thinks of conforming to them."

"No employer? Then your specific charge against the Westmore mills is part of a general arraignment of all employers of labour?"

"By no means, sir. I only meant that, where the hands are well treated, it is due rather to the personal good-will of the employer than to any fear of the law."

"And in what respect do you think the Westmore hands unfairly treated?"

Amherst paused to measure his words. "The question, as you say, is a large one," he rejoined. "It has its roots in the way the business is organized—in the traditional attitude of the company toward the operatives. I hoped that Mrs. Westmore might return to the mills—might visit some of the people in their houses. Seeing their way of living, it might have occurred to her to ask a reason for it—and one enquiry would have led to another. She spoke this morning of going to the hospital to see Dillon."

"She did go to the hospital: I went with her. But as Dillon was sleeping, and as the matron told us he was much better—a piece of news which, I am happy to say, Dr. Disbrow has just confirmed—she did not go up to the ward."

Amherst was silent, and Mr. Tredegar

pursued: "I gather, from your bringing up Dillon's case, that for some reason you consider it typical of the defects you find in Mr. Truscomb's management. Suppose, therefore, we drop generalizations, and confine ourselves to the particular instance. What wrong, in your view, has been done the Dillons?"

He turned, as he spoke, to extract a cigar from the box at his elbow. "Let me offer you one, Mr. Amherst: we shall talk more comfortably," he suggested with distant affability; but Amherst, with a gesture of refusal, plunged into his exposition of the Dillon case. He tried to put the facts succinctly, presenting them in their bare ugliness, without emotional drapery; setting forth Dillon's good record for sobriety and skill, dwelling on the fact that his wife's ill-health was the result of perfectly remediable conditions in the work-rooms, and giving explicit reasons for the belief that the accident had been caused, not by Dillon's carelessness, but by the over-crowding of the loom-room. Mr. Tredegar listened attentively, though the cloud of cigar-smoke between himself and Amherst masked from the latter his possible changes of expression. When he removed his cigar, his face looked smaller than ever, as though desiccated by the fumes of the tobacco.

"Have you ever called Mr. Gaines's attention to these matters?"

"No: that would have been useless. He has always refused to discuss the condition of the mills with any one but the Superintendent."

"H'm—that would seem to prove that Mr. Gaines, who lives here, sees as much reason for trusting Truscomb's judgment as Mr. Westmore, who delegated his authority from a distance."

Amherst did not take this up, and after a pause Mr. Tredegar went on: "You know, of course, the answers I might make to such an indictment. As a lawyer, I might call your attention to the employé's waiver of risk, to the strong chances of contributory negligence, and so on; but happily in this case such arguments are superfluous. You are apparently not aware that Dillon's injury is much slighter than it ought to be to serve your purpose. Dr. Disbrow has just told us that he will probably get off with the loss of a finger; and I need hardly say that, whatever may have been Dillon's own share

in causing the accident—and as to this, as you admit, opinions differ—Mrs. Westmore will assume all the expenses of his nursing, besides making a liberal gift to his wife.” Mr. Tredegar laid down his cigar and drew forth a silver-mounted note-case. “Here, in fact,” he continued, “is a cheque which she asks you to transmit, and which, as I think you will agree, ought to silence, on your part as well as Mrs. Dillon’s, any criticism of Mrs. Westmore’s dealings with her operatives.”

The blood rose to Amherst’s forehead, and he just restrained himself from pushing back the cheque which Mr. Tredegar had laid on the table between them.

“There is no question of criticizing Mrs. Westmore’s dealings with her operatives—as far as I know, she has had none as yet,” he rejoined, unable to control his voice as completely as his hand. “And the proof of it is the impunity with which her agents deceive her—in this case, for instance, of Dillon’s injury. Dr. Disbrow, who is Mr. Truscomb’s brother-in-law, and apt to be influenced by his views, assures you that the man will get off with the loss of a finger; but some one equally competent to speak told me last night that he would lose not only his hand but his arm.”

Amherst’s voice had swelled to a deep note of anger, and with his tossed hair, and eyes darkening under furrowed brows, he presented an image of revolutionary violence which deepened the disdain on Mr. Tredegar’s lip.

“Some one equally competent to speak? Are you prepared to name this anonymous authority?”

Amherst hesitated. “No—I shall have to ask you to take my word for it,” he returned with a shade of embarrassment.

“Ah—” Mr. Tredegar murmured, giving to the expressive syllable its utmost measure of decent exultation.

Amherst quivered under the thin lash, and broke out: “It is all you have required of Dr. Disbrow—” but at this point Mr. Tredegar rose to his feet.

“My dear sir, your resorting to such arguments convinces me that nothing is to be gained by prolonging our talk. I will not even take up your insinuations against two of the most respected men in the community—such charges reflect only on those who make them.”

Amherst, whose flame of anger had sub-

sided with the sudden sense of its futility, received this rebuke in silence and the lawyer, reassured, continued with a touch of condescension: “My only specific charge from Mrs. Westmore was to hand you this cheque; but, in spite of what has passed, I take it upon myself to add, in her behalf, that your conduct of today will not be allowed to weigh against your record at the mills, and that the extraordinary charges you have seen fit to bring against your superiors will—if not repeated—simply be ignored.”

When, the next morning at about ten, Mrs. Eustace Ansell joined herself to the two gentlemen who still lingered over a desultory breakfast in Mrs. Westmore’s dining-room, she responded to their greeting with less than her usual animation.

It was one of Mrs. Ansell’s arts to bring to the breakfast-table just the right shade of sprightliness, a warmth subdued by discretion as the early sunlight is tempered by the lingering coolness of night. She was, in short, as fresh, as temperate, as the hour, yet without the concomitant chill which too often marks its human atmosphere: rather her soft effulgence dissipated the morning frosts, opening pinched spirits to a promise of midday warmth. But on this occasion a mist of uncertainty hung upon her smile, and veiled the glance which she turned on the contents of the heavy silver dishes successively presented to her notice. When, at the conclusion of this ceremony, the servants had withdrawn, she continued for a moment to stir her tea in silence, while her glance travelled meditatively from Mr. Tredegar, sunk in his morning mail, to Mr. Langhope, who leaned back resignedly in his chair, trying to extract what solace he might from the Hanaford Banner, till the midday post should revive him with a sight of the metropolitan press.

“I suppose you know,” she said suddenly, “that Bessy has telegraphed for Cicely, and made her arrangements to stay here another week.”

Mr. Langhope’s stick slipped to the floor with the sudden displacement of his whole lounging person, and Mr. Tredegar, removing his tortoise-shell reading-glasses, put them hastily into their case, as though to declare for instant departure.

“My dear Maria——” Mr. Langhope gasped, while she rose and restored his stick.

"She considers it, then, her duty to wait and see Truscomb?" the lawyer enquired; and Mrs. Ansell, regaining her seat, murmured discreetly: "She puts it so—yes."

"My dear Maria——" Mr. Langhope repeated helplessly, tossing aside his paper and drawing his chair up to the table.

"But it would be perfectly easy to return: it is quite unnecessary to wait here for his recovery," Mr. Tredegar pursued, as though setting forth a fact which had not hitherto presented itself to the more limited intelligence of his hearers.

Mr. Langhope emitted a short laugh, and Mrs. Ansell answered gently: "She says she detests the long journey."

Mr. Tredegar rose and gathered up his letters with a gesture of annoyance. "In that case—if I had been notified earlier of this decision, I might have caught the morning train," he interrupted himself, glancing resentfully at his watch.

"Oh, don't leave us, Tredegar," Mr. Langhope entreated. "We'll reason with her—we'll persuade her to go back by the three-forty."

Mrs. Ansell smiled. "She telegraphed at seven. Cicely and the governess are already on their way."

"At seven? But, my dear friend, why on earth didn't you tell us?"

"I didn't know till a few minutes ago. Bessy called me in as I was coming down to breakfast."

"Ah——" Mr. Langhope murmured, meeting her eyes for a fraction of a second. In the encounter, she appeared to communicate something more than she had spoken, for as he stooped to pick up his paper he said, more easily: "My dear Tredegar, if we're in a box there's no reason why we should force you into it too. Ring for Ropes, and we'll look up a train for you."

Mr. Tredegar appeared slightly ruffled at this prompt acquiescence in his threatened departure. "Of course, if I had been notified in advance, I might have arranged to postpone my engagements another day; but in any case, it is quite out of the question that I should return in a week—and quite unnecessary," he added, snapping his lips shut as though he were closing his last portmanteau.

"Oh, quite—quite," Mr. Langhope assented. "It isn't, in fact, in the least necessary for any of us either to stay on now or to

return. Truscomb could quite well come to Long Island when he recovers, and answer any questions we may have to put; but if Bessy has sent for the child, we must of course put off going for to-day—at least I must," he added sighing, "and, though I know it's out of the question to exact such a sacrifice from you, I have a faint hope that our delightful friend, with the altruistic spirit of her sex——"

"Oh, I shall enjoy it—my maid is unpacking already," Mrs. Ansell gaily affirmed; and Mr. Tredegar, shrugging his shoulders, said curtly: "In that case I will ring for the time-table."

When he had withdrawn to consult it in the seclusion of the library, and Mrs. Ansell, affecting a sudden desire for a second cup of tea, had reseated herself to await the replenishment of the kettle, Mr. Langhope exchanged his own chair for a place at her side.

"Now what on earth does this mean?" he asked, lighting a cigarette in response to her slight nod of consent.

Mrs. Ansell's gaze lost itself in the depths of the empty tea-pot.

"A number of things—or any one of them," she said at length, extending her arm toward the tea-caddy.

"For instance——?" he rejoined, following appreciatively the movements of her long slim hands.

She raised her head and met his eyes clearly. "For instance: it may mean—don't resent the suggestion—that you and Mr. Tredegar were not quite well-advised in persuading her not to see Mr. Amherst yesterday evening."

Mr. Langhope uttered an exclamation of surprise. "But, my dear Maria—in the name of reason. . . . Why, after the doctor's visit—after his coming here last night, at Truscomb's request, to put the actual facts before her—should she have gone over the whole business again with this interfering young fellow?—How, in fact, could she have done so," he added, after vainly waiting for her reply, "without putting a sort of slight on Truscomb, who is, after all, the only person entitled to speak with authority?"

Mrs. Ansell received his outburst in silence, and the butler, reappearing with the kettle and fresh toast, gave her the chance to prolong her pause for a full minute. When

the door had closed on him, she said: "Judged by reason, your arguments are unanswerable; but when it comes to a question of feeling——"

"Feeling? What kind of feeling? You don't mean to suggest anything so preposterous as that Bessy——?"

She made a gesture of smiling protest. "I confess it is to be regretted that his mother is a lady, and that he looks—you must have noticed it?—so amazingly like the portraits of the young Schiller. But I only meant that Bessy forms all her opinions emotionally; and that she must have been very strongly affected by the scene Mr. Tredegar described to us."

"Ah," Mr. Langhope interjected, replying first to her parenthesis, "how a woman of your good sense stumbled on that idea of hunting up the mother——!" but Mrs. Ansell answered, with a slight grimace: "My dear Henry, if you could see the house they live in you'd think I had been providentially guided there!" and, reverting to the main issue, he pursued fretfully: "But why, after hearing the true version of the facts, should Bessy still be influenced by that sensational scene? Even if it was not, as Tredegar suspects, cooked up expressly to take her in, she must see that the hospital doctor is, after all, as likely as any one to know how the accident really happened, and how seriously the fellow is hurt."

"There's the point. Why should Bessy believe Dr. Disbrow rather than Mr. Amherst?"

"For the best of reasons—because Disbrow has nothing to gain by distorting the facts, whereas this young Amherst, as Tredegar pointed out, has the very obvious desire to give Truscomb a bad name and shove himself into his place."

Mrs. Ansell contemptively turned the rings upon her fingers. "From what I saw of Amherst I'm inclined to think that, if that is his object, he is too clever to have shown his hand so soon. But if you are right, was there not all the more reason for letting Bessy see him and find out as soon as possible what he was aiming at?"

"If one could have trusted her to find out—but you credit my poor child with more penetration than I've ever seen in her."

"Perhaps you've looked for it at the wrong time—and about the wrong things. Bessy has the penetration of the heart."

"The heart! You make mine jump when you use such expressions."

"Oh, I use this one in a general sense. But I want to help you to keep it from acquiring a more restricted significance."

"Restricted—to the young man himself?"

Mrs. Ansell's expressive hands seemed to commit the question to fate. "All I ask you to consider for the present is that Bessy is quite unoccupied and excessively bored."

"Bored? Why, she has everything on earth she can want!"

"The ideal state for producing boredom—the only atmosphere in which it really thrives. And besides—to be humanly inconsistent—there's just one thing she hasn't got."

"Well?" Mr. Langhope groaned, fortifying himself with a second cigarette.

"An occupation for that rudimentary little organ, the mention of which makes you jump."

"There you go again! Good heavens, Maria, do you want to encourage her to fall in love?"

"Not with a man, just at present, but with a hobby, an interest, by all means. If she doesn't, the man will take the place of the interest—there's a void to be filled, and human nature abhors a void."

Mr. Langhope shrugged his shoulders impatiently. "I don't follow you. She adored her husband."

His friend's fine smile was like a magnifying glass silently applied to the gross stupidity of his remark. "Oh, I don't say it was a great passion—but they got on perfectly," he corrected himself.

"So perfectly that you must expect her to want a little storm and stress for a change. The mere fact that you and Mr. Tredegar objected to her seeing Mr. Amherst last night has roused the spirit of opposition in her. A year ago she hadn't any spirit of opposition."

"There was nothing for her to oppose—poor Dick made her life so preposterously easy."

"My ingenuous friend! Do you still think that's any reason? The fact is, Bessy wasn't awake, she wasn't even born, then. . . . She is now, and you know the infant's first conscious joy is to smash things."

"It will be rather an expensive joy if the mills are the first thing she smashes."

"Oh I imagine the mills are pretty sub-

stantial. I should, I own," Mrs. Ansell smiled, "not object to seeing her try her teeth on them."

"Which, in terms of practical conduct, means——?"

"That I advise you not to disapprove of her staying on, or of her investigating the young man's charges. You must remember that another peculiarity of the infant mind is to tire soonest of the toy that no one tries to take away from it."

"*Que diable!* But suppose Truscomb turns rusty at this very unusual form of procedure? Perhaps you don't realize how

completely he represents the prosperity of the mills."

"All the more reason," Mrs. Ansell persisted, rising at the sound of Mr. Tredegar's approach. "For don't you perceive, my poor distracted friend, that if Truscomb turns rusty, as he undoubtedly will, the inevitable result will be his manager's dismissal—and that thereafter there will presumably be peace in Warsaw?"

"Ah, you divinely wicked woman!" cried Mr. Langhope, snatching at an appreciative pressure of her hand as the lawyer reappeared in the doorway.

(To be continued.)

THE SLEEPER

By George Cabot Lodge

I

TO-DAY the Lord sleeps in the House of Life.
 Round him the dark is dumb, deserted, deep;
 And all the haste we make, the feast we keep,
 The law we serve with cross and cord and knife,
 The gods we supplicate, the tears we weep,
 The crowns we win as victors in the strife,
 The forms and fears with which our days are rife,
 Like vague, fantastic dreams perturb his sleep.
 He sleeps and dreams to-day and yesterday . . .
 When shall he wake?—and in his eyes the breath
 Of day-break burn with truth's eternal beams?
 When shall he wake? We ask in wild dismay!—
 Haste! lest he sleep, as now he sleeps and dreams,
 Dreamless to-morrow in the House of Death!

II

Yet, as the truth's new testament contrives,
 Daily within the meditative mind,
 Orbits of light where thought before was blind,
 And where was doubt supreme imperatives;
 So, in the high adventure of our lives,
 As we are real, receptive, unresigned,
 Seeking the Lord we shall not fail to find,
 Till strength by strength his regency revives!
 Then shall his will and work alone be done
 In all we do, his voice alone resound
 In all we say, and he alone confound—
 Imperishable when all else perisheth—
 With eyes of daring and dominion,
 The void, vast vision of the Sphinx of Death!