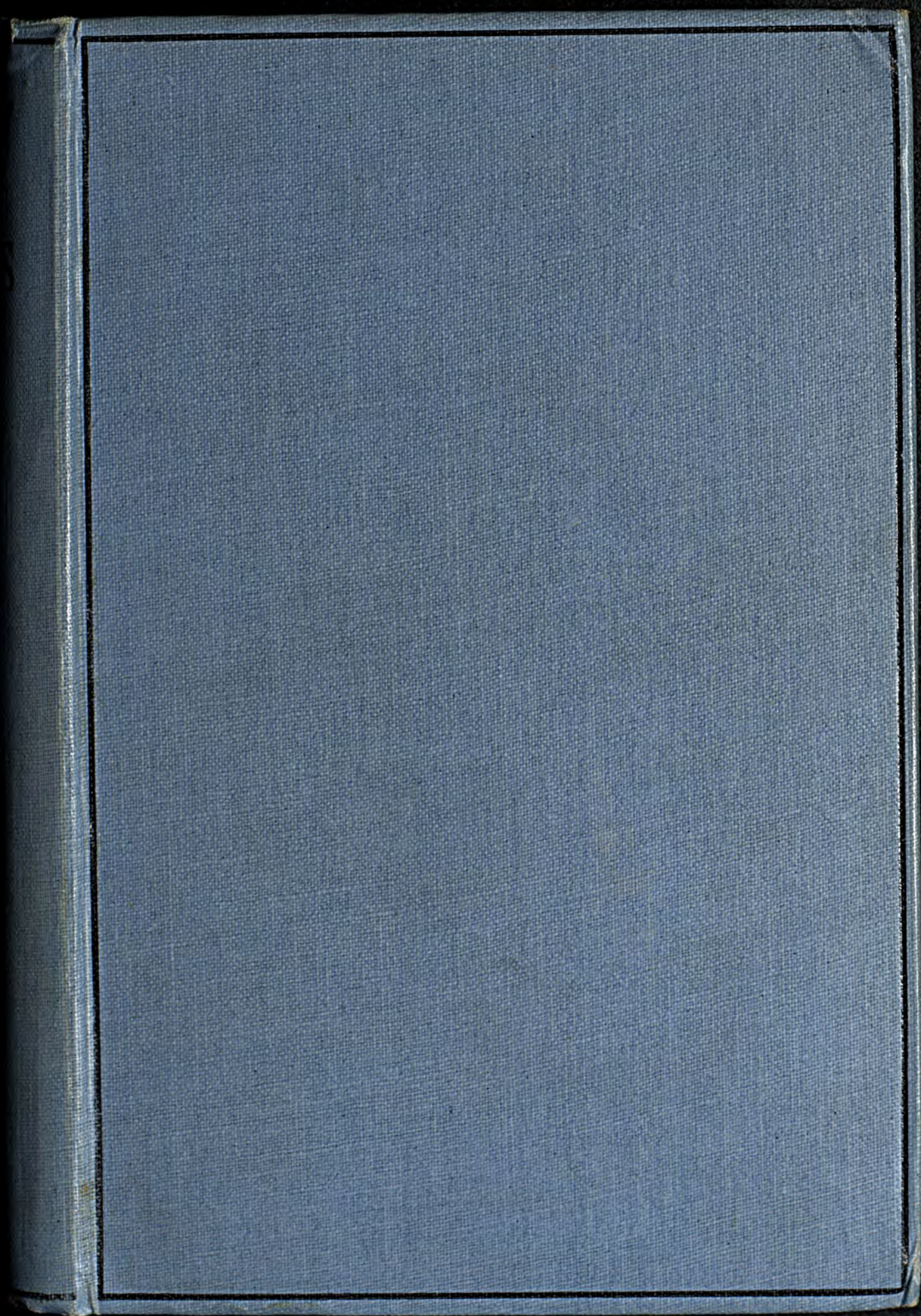
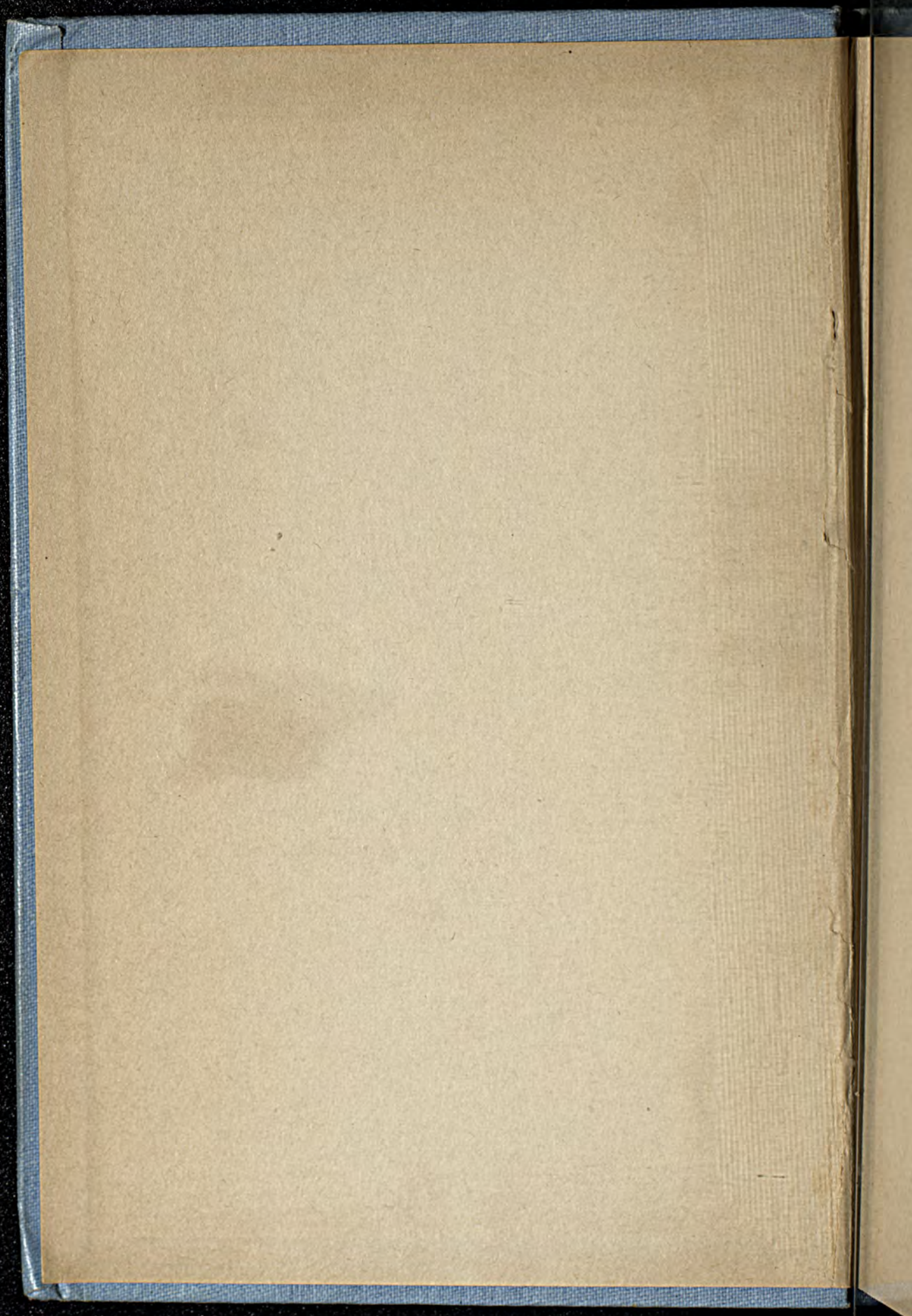
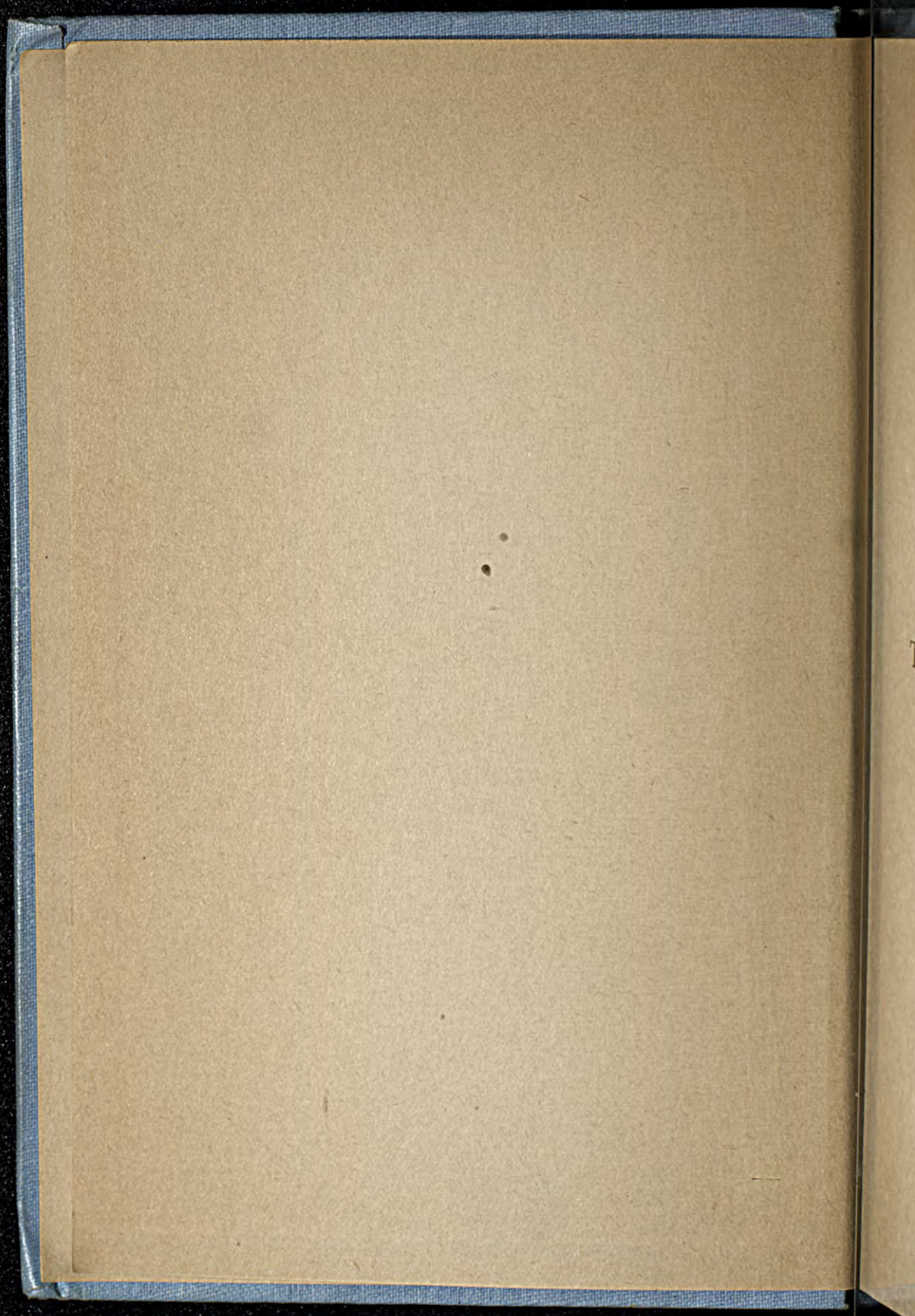


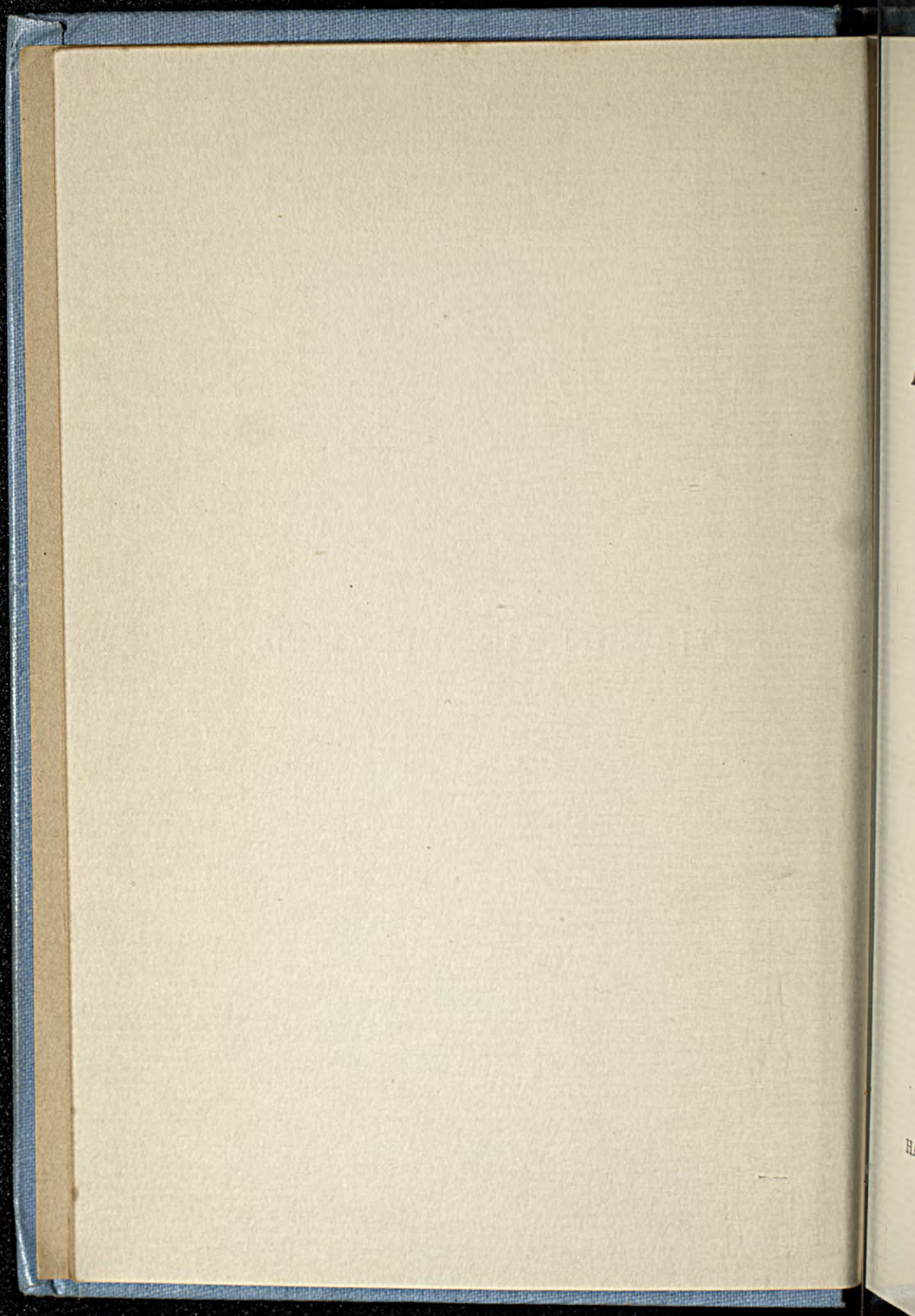




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THE SIN OF ATLANTIS

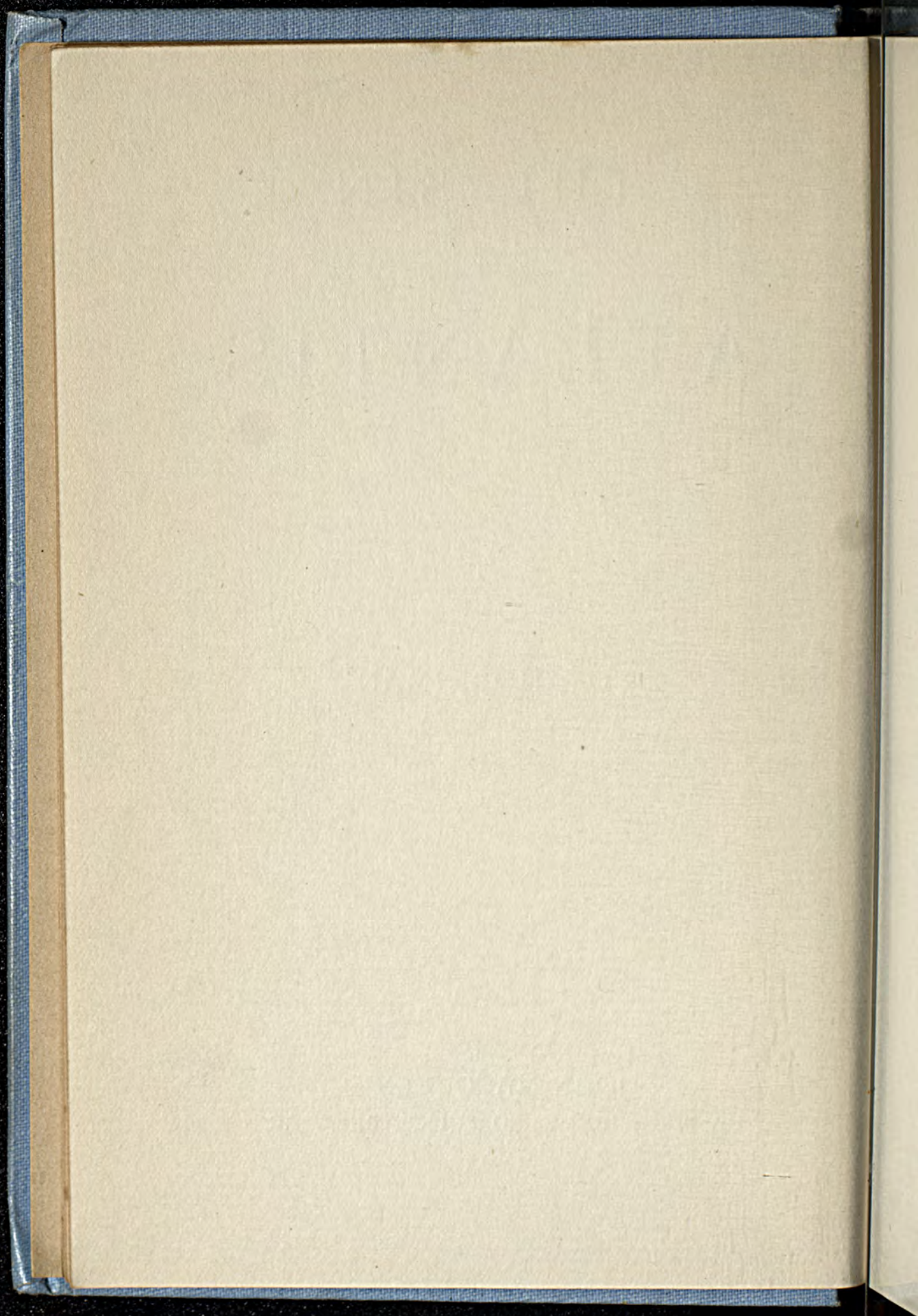


THE SIN
OF
ATLANTIS

BY
ROY HORNIMAN

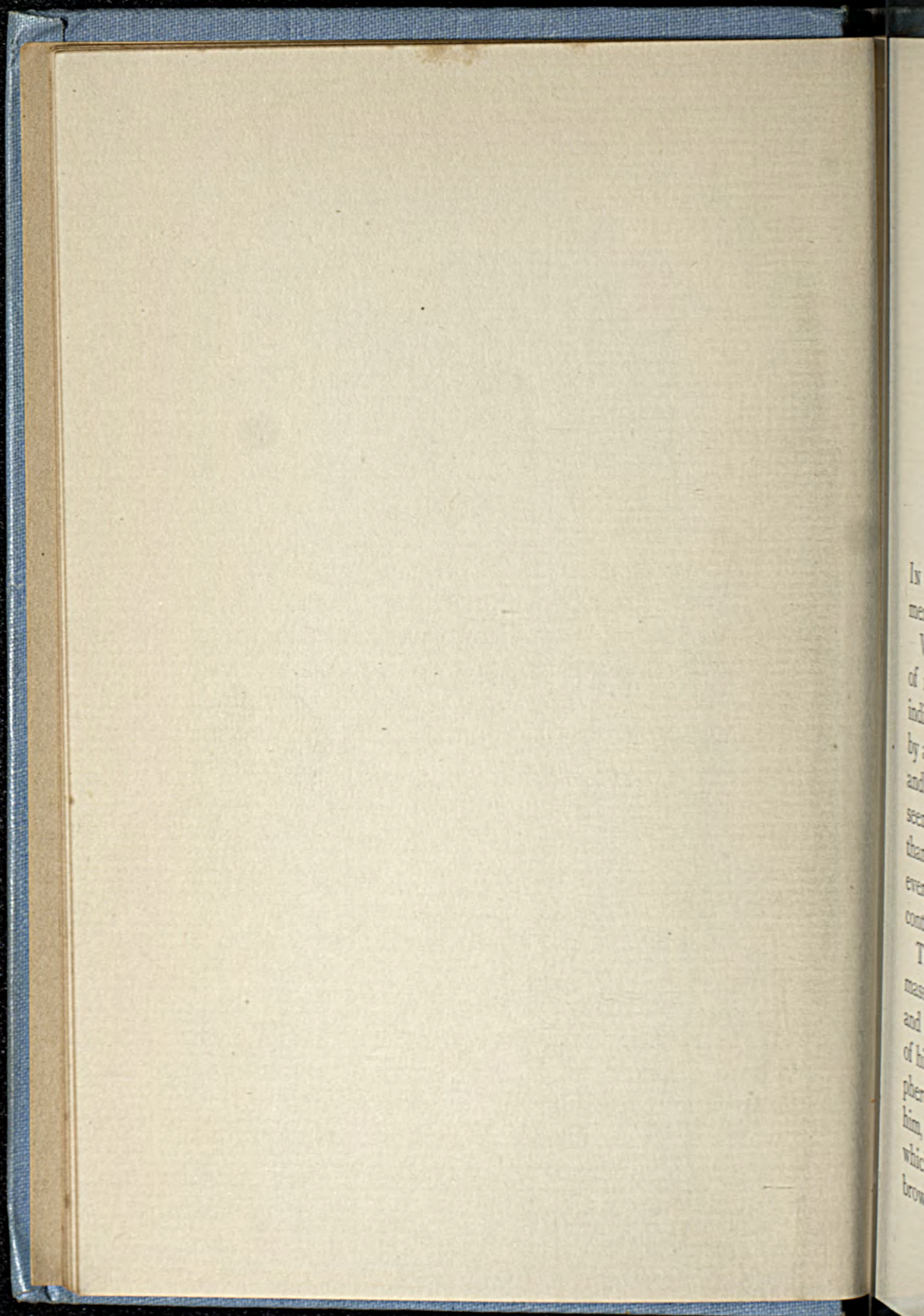
LONDON
JOHN MACQUEEN
HASTINGS HOUSE, NORFOLK STREET, E.C.

1900



To

KATE EMIL-BEHUKE.



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THE SIN OF ATLANTIS

CHAPTER I

IN a small garden in St John's Wood sat two men of singular appearance.

Without possessing any marked eccentricity of manner or dress they were both strongly individual. The features of both were refined by an evident, but not too extreme, asceticism, and their eyes—though direct and piercing—seemed to be gazing further and seeing more than the average man and woman. Here, however, the resemblance ended. Physically the contrast was strong.

The one, tall, with a leonine head set on massive shoulders, broad, benevolent brows, and a generosity and freedom in the outline of his features which, together with the atmosphere of serenity and repose which surrounded him, conveyed an Olympian effect—an effect which was the greater because of the full, brown, uncut beard, the size and luxuriance

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of which would have seemed grotesque on anyone less dignified in manner and in build.

His companion was smaller, and lacked the generous physical traits of the other. His figure was suggestive of a curious agility, and his face conveyed an instant impression of intellectual vitality. His restlessness was in strong contrast to the quiet which brooded over the other, as silence on a mountain. More than once he had left his chair to stride the length of the garden. The other rarely stirred, but when he did so—despite his massive frame—there was a definite muscularity about his least movement which was the very antithesis of physical inertia.

They were still conversing, as they had been for some hours, earnestly ; and in their separate manner of speech the external difference was continued.

In the corners of the garden, beneath the trees, the shadow deepened. The brilliant colouring of the flower-beds blackened, and still the men talked ; neither the calm, even tones of the one, nor the more explosive manner of the other, showing any sign of fatigue.

At long intervals, the quiet eyes of the one would flash at some remark of the other's which had roused a fleeting resentment ; but the expression was so sudden, and so quickly did the

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eyes regain their mildness, that he was hardly able to regard it as a point scored.

The shorter of the two men was Edwin Lever, occultist and individualist.

The other was Michael Broadhurst, occultist and altruist, and everything which the latter carries with it.

For the twentieth time since he had entered Broadhurst's garden, Edwin Lever rolled himself a cigarette. Then he leaned back and reflected, as if he were arranging his ideas. Broadhurst watched him attentively, waiting for him to speak.

"So I impress you as a pseudo-occultist?" he said, blowing rings of blue smoke that floated mistily in the dying light. "I think you are wrong," he continued. "It is you who are unable to accept the vast responsibility of utilising and organising evil. Your courage fails, and you seek repose in an airy fabric of imagination which you call the 'spiritual plane.'"

Broadhurst, unruffled, smiled almost humorously. "Was it to organise evil that you went to Tibet ten years ago?"

"When you delivered me out of the hands of the Lamas, I was on the verge of discovering that for which I journeyed to Tibet."

"Permit me to say," answered Broadhurst, "that you were never within any distance

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of discovering it. It will surprise you to learn that I not only delivered you out of their hands, but that I first delivered you into them. I and those who worked with me were determined that you should not succeed. By the way, how did you discover that the particular thing you wanted was in that monastery?"

"My master had told me so. He had even drawn me a chart." There was a pause. "I am wondering," continued Lever, "why you should have chosen to be the one to bring myself and this *protégé* of yours—who does not even know his protector—together?"

"The reason is obvious."

"Oh, I suppose that when the inevitable and disagreeable which concerns oneself arrives, it is best to be there on the chance of being able to modify results."

Broadhurst nodded.

"Exactly," he said, shortly.

"Do you remember," asked Lever—again at the interminable work of rolling cigarettes—"the words you said to me when we parted on the Tibetan frontier?"

"Perfectly; I said that this life holds for us a strange mutuality. It seems I was right."

"And you think that the same may be said of the relations of both of us to this young man?"

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Broadhurst smiled, and replied with the faintest suggestion of sarcasm :

"Surely you thank me for having brought you together? Your search for him has been a long one, and were it not for my aid, it would have been longer still."

"I wonder that in your wisdom and power you have not kept us apart."

Broadhurst was silent. The altruist in him cried for vindication; but he knew that it was useless to try and make Lever see matters from his point of view.

Lever turned his chair round, and looked at Broadhurst keenly.

"Do you know what I believe?" he said. "I believe that you have accidentally stumbled upon the secret which rules my life's work, and that on the strength of such a discovery you are attempting to impress me——" he stopped. The futility of continuing was obvious. He realised that, directed to the man before him, it was the merest vulgarity. The word had been dashed against the armour of an impenetrable dignity.

"I wonder if you even know," said Broadhurst, calmly, "who the man is who is coming here to-night? Your master was a wonderful person, as far as a store of knowledge could make him so; but did he know the particular work he was helping to complete?"

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"I have proved it to myself," said Lever, "by a hundred details, that this is the ego I want; what more is there to know?"

Broadhurst answered in a low, grave voice:

"Whatever we were, we three—together with the fourth ego, that of the woman—were inevitably, from the eternal logic of things, bound to come together in this life for a special purpose."

Edwin Lever sank back in his chair, and at that moment a white figure appeared at the open window, and, descending the few steps, crossed the darkening grass noiselessly.

"His Grace the Duke of Havant."

Lever looked inquiringly at Broadhurst, who nodded affirmatively.

He turned to the Indian servant.

"Show the Duke out here."

The Indian left them.

"What is he like?" asked Lever.

"I don't know; I have never seen him in the flesh."

"How old is he?"

"Twenty-seven. And, by the way, he is supposed to be quite a model among the younger peers. You may perhaps remember that his minority was a long one. His father died when he was five years old. His mother

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is now the wife of a Suffragan Bishop. It was considered a *mésalliance* at the time, but he was soon hurried into preferment."

The servant again appeared in the doorway, standing aside as he did so to allow the Duke to precede him into the garden. Broadhurst rose to receive his guest, both he and Lever taking in minutely every detail of his appearance. Not too tall for a certain suggestion of innate agility and grace, Broadhurst became conscious of his strong, nervous muscularity in the firm grip of his hand. The face he scanned eagerly. The head was small, and poised with amazing dignity on his shoulders; the brow, low and broad, across which the hair of nondescript colour lay in crisp, graven curls. The face, oval, with resolute jaws; the nose straight, the mouth perfectly cut; while beneath the brows of almost pencilled perfection were eyes that held a wonder and innocence that were childlike, albeit that their expression might also have claimed subtlety. It was significant that the Duke had at first advanced towards Lever, assuming him to be the host. He turned apologetically to Broadhurst; and the two, standing thus, irresistibly reminded Lever, despite their modern attire, of Jove and Mercury.

Broadhurst introduced Lever, and unostentatiously the Indian brought another chair into

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the garden, at the same time placing upon the table cigarettes and matches.

"I am glad you were able to see me to-night, Mr Broadhurst, as I leave London on Saturday."

Broadhurst smiled a welcome.

"The parchments Professor Carnforth spoke to you about are quite ready. I thought perhaps you might like to take them away with you, and so I have had a case made for them."

The Duke flushed slightly.

"I had no idea," he answered, "that you intended to trust me with them. It is excessively generous."

"If you will permit me I should like you to keep them. You have the larger collection, and my contribution would, I believe, make it one of the most complete records of early Egyptian manners and morals existing out of the British Museum. We are talking of the Memphis parchments," said Broadhurst, turning to Lever, as if to include him in the conversation.

The Duke, who had been glancing furtively at Lever, always to find his somewhat too brilliant eyes fixed searchingly upon him, turned eagerly. He was anxious to hear Lever's voice; and Broadhurst, although he had foreseen the inevitable, sighed as he

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noted how soon the tie between these two had begun to assert itself.

"A wonderful age," said Lever. His manner had altered curiously since the Duke's appearance. The restlessness had disappeared, and his voice was more even and melodious. "An age," he continued, "marked out by the extreme tendency of its philosophic thought towards occultism. The vulgar of course even now conceive it as a time when priests claimed an authority on the strength of certain mechanical tricks that would have disgraced Maskelyne and Cooke. Personally, I consider the lower psychic type has never been so completely manifested."

"The lower psychic type?" and the Duke looked inquiringly at Lever.

Broadhurst stood aside. His time had by no means come.

Lever, whose manner seemed to gain in polish and suavity each moment, made an apologetic gesture.

"Your interest is, I take it, archæology for its own sake?" And then, as if to change the subject, he added, "Your Grace is a straggler; surely your world left London a full fortnight ago?"

"My world?" began the Duke, as if he hardly comprehended. "Oh, I see what you mean. I am afraid I am very disloyal to my

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world; and I often wonder whether it is they who are stupid or I. You see, I hold that there are no bores, only the bored. Surely a really clever man could find entertainment in an idiot."

These two men were obviously intellectually head and shoulders above the men the Duke was accustomed to meet, and yet he felt neither shyness nor constraint. Perhaps he realised that the really clever are far more eager to discern capacity than to note short-comings.

"I can imagine being entertained by an idiot," said Broadhurst; "but it is the mediocrity who would frighten me. You mean, Duke, that you don't go out much?"

"Seldom," and the young man looked a little apologetic. "Sometimes I have a quaint sense of guilt at fighting shy of the frivolities of my order. I don't altogether believe in hereditary legislation, but while the country trusts us I think we ought to be faithful; and I'm really afraid that my constant attendances at the House of Lords are being noticed. Then, I don't care to leave too much to my agents; I like to be in touch with my people. By the time I have finished with duties I have little leisure left for the things I like, and none at all for those which the people I know like. I am afraid you will think me a prig."

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"That fear," said Lever, "is the sign-post to perdition."

"When," asked Broadhurst, "did you develop a taste for archæology?"

"My step-father is rather well known in that line, isn't he?"

"Ah, of course," said Broadhurst, "the Bishop of Camberwell; I had forgotten."

"Do you know him?"

"Very slightly. We had a correspondence which at one time threatened to become quite heated, till we found out that we were both right, and have respected each other ever since."

"He is a splendid fellow," said the Duke enthusiastically; "very broad, but firm. Next to my mother, I owe everything to him."

The two men, as he spoke, grasped the cause of the singular difference between the young man and those of his class. He was practically a clergyman's son. A rigid clerical household as a rule breeds profligates and the like. The sons of a genuinely broad-minded parson are about as good specimens as can be found anywhere—broad-mindedness, however, not including the ecclesiastic who interprets liberal views into liberal living.

Both Lever and Broadhurst knew the Bishop's few published works, and were honestly able to echo the Duke's admiration.

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"The Bishop is an authority on comparative religion," said Broadhurst. "Have you ever studied anything of the kind?"

"My mother has a horror of questioning, and my step-father had naturally a fastidious disinclination to interfere too much in my education. I was brought up on the Catechism. Of late I have often wished I saw more of my step-father. There are many things I should like him to explain," and a slight shadow crossed the Duke's face.

"As things are," said Lever, "it is no great danger for an intelligent brain to grow up in a single faith. It is not everyone whose heart can survive mathematics."

Both the Duke and Broadhurst laughed. What impressed the Duke more than anything else about these two men was their apartness. Their conversation had already conveyed to him their indifference to the ordinary every-day nothings of life. He was mentally comparing them, and crediting Lever with the larger sympathy. Such a deduction was obtained somewhat on the same principle that the sentimentalist is invariably called sympathetic; the truth of the matter being that he is rarely so, his so-called sympathy being a selfish dislike to the sight of pain or sorrow. Removed to a heaven of his own, the world might consume in agonies, and

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welcome, providing he were not by for his susceptibilities to be affected.

The servant entered the garden and said something in a low tone to Broadhurst, who turned to the Duke.

"If you have not dined, will you join us? I can only promise you a hermit's meal, strictly vegetarian."

The look of inquiry, which had been growing on the Duke's face since he entered the garden, deepened.

"I shall be delighted, only you must tell me frankly if I am in the way."

"I will," said Broadhurst, smiling; and they entered the house just as the moon rose.

CHAPTER II

THE dining-room was charming. It was in the front of the house, and opened on to a smaller garden, beyond which was the road.

The walls of the room were whitewashed, and round them, some three feet from the ground, ran a plain deal shelf, scrubbed scrupulously clean. Upon this shelf was a shining array of china and silver. Not the china of a collector, but such things as are used in any ordinary household meal. The fireplace was roughly tiled, with a small stove, on which in winter time the plates and food were kept hot, to prevent restless movement of servants in and out of the room. The table was simplicity itself—the whole room, indeed, giving the impression of an extremely well-kept kitchen. It seemed, however, the only correct way of furnishing a feeding-room, everything being light, clean, and wholesome.

Broadhurst himself remarked, as he motioned the Duke to a wooden seat of perfectly simple structure, but individual grace, "I think all

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strong colours and superfluous furniture should be banished from a dining-room."

"Being oppressive, they certainly interfere with digestion," said Lever. "I wonder if William Morris accounts for the prevalence of dyspepsia?"

The Duke laughed—a loud laugh, fresh, unrestrained, and unspoilt.

The servant placed before each of the men a circular pewter bowl filled with water, and Broadhurst immediately plunged in his hands, as if to show his guests their use.

"The Easterns have the advantage of us in many ways," he remarked. "This appeals to me as being right."

The meal struck the Duke as being delicate and palatable. Lever and Broadhurst drank only water, and, although he was offered wine, the Duke did the same.

"Please don't take water out of compliment to us. You will find the hock extremely good. It was my father's, and he was, I think, at one time, the most reputed wine connoisseur in London. It was his trade."

The Indian waited upon them deftly and silently. The Duke, however, noticed the perfect independence of his manner towards Broadhurst. It was an attitude of absolute respect without any of that cringing so often found in the Oriental in the position of service.

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Had the Duke been asked what he was eating, he would probably have been at a loss, possibly for the reason that lentils, beans, and rice had not any very definite personality for him. Fruit and cream followed these, and the coffee had a rare flavour. The meal and its surroundings, the absence of strong aromas, and the cool light of the unshaded wax-candles, seemed to deprive the eating of its coarser animal side. To rise from the table buoyant as when he sat down, and yet with a complete sense of hunger appeased, was a new sensation.

"Of course your vegetarianism is the result of principle?" he ventured.

Lever answered :

"It seems to me the whole thing resolves itself into the question whether man can live without meat. If it be proved, and I think it has been so proved, then there is absolutely no argument left in favour of meat-eating. I am prepared, however, to admit that it is a moot point how far a man who has not been brought up to it from infancy can become a vegetarian. I once heard someone argue that, having been given a palate, there was nothing wrong in gratifying it moderately. Now, meat-eating destroys the palate and makes one incapable of appreciating the rare and more delicate flavour of vegetarian diets."

The Duke bent forward with eager attention.

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Lever's speech seemed to interest him more than that of Broadhurst, who, sooth to say, appeared to him a little cold and remote.

"Surely we owe our virile superiority over the Orientals to our stronger food?"

"Large numbers of the Highlanders seldom, if ever, see meat; and yet nobody would complain of their physique. The same may be said of many pastoral people. Meat-eating is brutalising."

"But surely the Oriental is more cruel than the Western, and, if I may say so, more lustful?"

Lever paused for a moment, and Broadhurst interposed.

"It is hardly a fair comparison. The difference is racial in the sense that they are of a lower type. If you follow my meaning, I should say that, with certain notable exceptions, the mass of egos incarnated into Oriental types are younger than those of the Western peoples. Climate, of course, must be taken into consideration to account for their lack of virility; and when we consider that their egos, being younger, are lower in moral sense, we arrive at an explanation to which vegetarianism is only adjunctive."

"Modern science," said the Duke, "seems to take very little interest in vegetarianism either way."

"It wouldn't be popular," answered Lever.

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"All modern science is popular, if you come to analyse it."

"For instance, vivisection," said Broadhurst, scornfully. "However, we won't talk of vivisection. It is a bad dream, and common-sense and sanity are on its track. This fetish, modern science," he continued. "Man is somewhat like a child with a new toy. Somebody discovered the laws of gravity, and somebody else invented the spinning-jenny. Man, bewildered by the after all somewhat insignificant engines he was creating, elected them as his gods, just as surely as the tribes created to themselves the golden calf and worshipped it. He was prepared to sacrifice every ideal he had ever had on the altar of so-called science. The theories which have, after all, dominated the most beautiful intellects were to be thrown aside; and with a pretty affectation of heroism in the face of a belief in the annihilation of the ego, he proceeded to assert that man's task was the perpetual exploitation of matter on the physical plane. I use the word 'plane' to argue with; the materialist neither knows the existence of other planes nor cares to seek for them."

"Surely," said the Duke, "it is fair to ask the occultist for results?"

"There you have it," answered Broadhurst. "Results? who can show results but the oc-

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cultist? Who have been the regenerators of the world? Surely, in recorded ages, Abraham, Buddha, Pythagoras, Mahomet, and that very sap of love, Jesus of Nazareth—what results, in the name of all that is reasonable, have the materialists to point to that shall compare with the work of these sages? Are the poor less poor? Personally, I aver that, except in the matter of spiritual comfort, the poor are worse off than when as savages they were inured to cold and hunger. Luxury is on a more extended scale, certainly; but such is the corruption and rot that so-called civilisation has brought, that the earth shall surely be purged again with fire or water, while the spiritual residuum is refuged in the ark. And, believe me, the dove shall once more go forth and return with the assurance of peace."

The Duke listened, fascinated, like a thirsty traveller meeting one with a wine gourd.

"It is a commonly accepted theory that there is something in occultism, which ends in a subjugation of free-will," said the Duke.

"Such study as I have made of it," said Lever, and his eyes gleamed, "has taught me that the possibilities of the individual are boundless—there is always a throne waiting for those who dare to crown themselves. Our lives increase in power as we will them to."

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He broke off. "The Duke," he said, turning to Broadhurst, "will think us a terrible couple of faddists."

Broadhurst rose.

"Let us go and look at the parchments." He led the way into a long, low room on the other side of the hall. It was lined with bookshelves, beneath which were innumerable drawers; in the centre was a long table covered with papers, and about the room were several comfortable lounges. Pedestalled in corners sat Buddhist effigies with calm, inscrutable eyes, a bronze Hermes brooded in beauty, while Pan blew music from his pipes. With eyes of sad and kingly patience, a maimed Christ hung from a cross of blackened oak; while near, a tinselled Virgin smirked at the waxen infant held stiffly in her arms. The Jumbo gods, with their just-achieved resemblance to humanity, grinned from the top of the bookshelf. Cross and crescent, zodiacal symbol, and a great bull of Assyria, sprawled across the ceiling. The room, like the other, was lighted by wax-candles. Through the window came the delicious scent of the roses. Upon the table lay what to the uninitiated would have seemed a veritable chaos of books and papers. Upon a blotter was a half-filled sheet of foolscap. Near it there was what looked like a small leather portfolio, to which

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Broadhurst immediately called the Duke's attention.

The Duke carried it eagerly to a table, and, drawing a chair to the light, opened it.

"I believe," said Lever, who had seated himself in one of the lounges and was examining the Duke's unconscious face attentively, "that they are the mere fragments of a social correspondence. Is it not so?"

"Quite right," answered Broadhurst. "Can there be any better key to the inner life of a nation? Historians, philosophers, poets, and the like, are always on stilts; we never see the man in his every-day clothes; but the correspondence between the Brown, Jones, and Robinson of the period—what wonderful material for reconstruction! See here," and Broadhurst courteously drew the portfolio from beneath the Duke's hand. "I think I know them all by heart, and can translate them at sight. Here is a letter from a girl to her friend.

"She is going to be married, and writes to her friend on the subject; and in the details of her wedding, her *trousseau*, and her lover, lies the history of the nation. Here is another—two friends making arrangements for a dinner together, for all the world like any young men-about-town of the present day. The same message—that the fair-haired woman the other

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has so much admired has promised to be present.

"A schoolboy, writing to his father." Broadhurst paused, and Lever looked at him, even more earnestly. "This letter is a little more interesting," and Broadhurst drew it from the elastic bands that fastened it. "It is a wild letter of unhappiness from a young man to his former tutor. He writes for comfort and advice. He would fain devote himself to the higher things of life. He is rich, and wishes for a career; but the whirl of life spins him round and round with it, and he is unable to regain his self-control and turn his hours of pleasure into hours of profit. The passion for vulgar dissipation, which holds him, offends the higher philosophy of which he seems to have a fair share. Listen to what he says: 'You say, master, that I must reap that which I have sown, but that every pure aspiration shall repeat itself in better living in another life.' You see," said Broadhurst, parenthetically, "they were reincarnationists in those days. 'And yet,' he goes on to say, 'you warned me that sensuality was too deeply grown into my nature to be uprooted in one life. It is an agonising thought, this return to earth almost unchanged.' The purport of the master's answer may be gathered from the youth's next letter. 'If I be as you

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suggest, some great soul retrograde which has condemned itself by lives of desire to evil companionship, why should my conscience trouble me? why have I not stifled that with other good qualities? Ah! if we but knew the past, or if there were but something to show what we have been.' Here, you see, the lettering becomes obscure, and soon after breaks off abruptly."

Lever leant forward.

"It is excessively interesting to hear the sort of advice the ordinary good parson of the day ladled out. Isn't there an evil influence somewhere?—a Mephistophelian fiend to balance this master of his?"

There was a new note in his voice, an almost imperceptible sneer, which the Duke's nervous and sympathetic temperament detected instantaneously. He turned, however, to Lever, as if relieved at the point of view from which he had taken the letters, for Broadhurst's voice as he read them had depressed him with a sense of their harmony with certain mental phases of his own. Broadhurst, perhaps, realised this, for with ease he changed the conversation, and as he did so, closed the portfolio, and handed it to the Duke, who received it with murmured thanks.

Some time was spent in looking at Broadhurst's books. It was a small but unique

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collection. The teachings of Buddha, Confucius, Zoroaster, and the Carpenter Jesus Christ, the sacred Jewish books; in fact, forty or fifty volumes that summarised the known religions of the world, ancient and modern. Magician and philosopher lay cheek by jowl. Of Christian theology there was little.

"Christian theology," said Broadhurst, "is always a lame attempt to defend the Church at the expense of Christianity. I suppose most Christians, clergy and laity alike, would be astonished to hear that there are not more than a hundred men in the whole Christian Church who know what their religion really means. And, after all, what has been the supreme work of the visible Church? It has outlawed a whole nation."

The Duke looked inquiringly at Broadhurst.

Lever answered, "Broadhurst means the Jews."

The Duke drew forward a chart which was hanging on the wall.

"This is a curious map," he said, turning to Broadhurst; "there is no Atlantic Ocean." And he laughed.

"No," said Broadhurst; "it is a map designed by an occultist. It represents the world as it was eighty thousand years ago, and this is the continent of Atlantis."

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The Duke bent over the map, examining it keenly.

The other two watched him earnestly, and for fully a minute there was silence in the room.

CHAPTER III

SOME ten years before the evening spent by the Duke with Broadhurst and Lever, a curious scene was taking place in an inner room of a Tibetan monastery.

The monastery was situated some eighty miles from Lhasa, the capital, on the abrupt finish of an expanse of table-land. Below it lay a great plain, now—for it was the wintry time of the year—completely covered with snow.

It was already dusk, and for miles around no living thing was to be seen; except far away, just emerging from the long, low line of night, was moving over the field of snow what might have been a horseman, or some yak which had strayed from its herd; but whether it was moving at a quick or a moderate speed, it would have been difficult to decide at the distance.

Around the bare walls of the building the wind whistled and howled, and nothing could have been more in harmony with its dreariness

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than the soul of Edwin Lever, a prisoner in the hands of his enemies.

He was bound hand and foot, in a room which was almost destitute of furniture. He was standing up, tied to a ring in the wall.

In a corner lay some iron instruments of vicious make, while by their side stood a small red-hot brazier, into the fire of which was thrust a metal bar. Lever, his face stained to the colour of a Tibetan's, shaven head, and wearing the garment of a red Lama, would hardly have been recognised as the neatly-dressed, academic-looking man whom the Duke of Havant met in Broadhurst's garden.

Though emaciated by semi-starvation, his eyes were still brilliant with intelligence. He seemed, despite his perilous position, to be mentally taking notes, systematically, like a practised experimentalist. It was as if his intellect were profiting by the experience, unconscious the while of bodily suffering. The Lama seated in front of him was a man with a powerful brow and firm-set lips. There were three others in the room, but they were of totally different appearance, being puny and unsexed. For twelve hours Lever had wrestled with repeated attempts on the part of the Chief Lama to hypnotise him. Discs inscribed with cabalistic characters had been spun dizzily

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before his eyes, the lids of which had been forcibly opened so that he should not escape seeing them. With his head held as if in a vice, he had almost been obliged to succumb to the intense, burning gaze of the head inquisitor. He had been threatened with torture, and one implement after another had been thrown aside as it was in turn powerless to make him flinch.

And all the time the moving thing coming along the road from Lhasa drew nearer. It might now have been defined in the gathering gloom as a man and two horses, one of which he rode, the other being riderless.

"You must know what you came for," demanded the Chief Lama of Lever.

"I know, but I will not say," answered Lever, speaking the Tibetan language fluently.

"Why should you come all the way from Europe, direct to this place, unless you knew that——?" Here the questioner paused, and Lever's face brightened.

"It was because I knew——" began Lever; but the other broke in abruptly:

"I know what you would say; but if you say it, they shall tear your tongue out. Had we not discovered your identity, you would have robbed us. What impelled you to this undertaking?"

"That same power which creates in us the desire for knowledge," replied Lever.

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"You know that we cannot let you leave this place alive?"

Lever shrugged his shoulders. He was too complete a fatalist, and also held too sanguine views of the hereafter, for him to regard the mere incident of death morbidly.

"You find such a decision consistent with your priestly office?" he asked, dryly.

"I think it necessary," replied the other, coolly, and with a certain Satanic gentleness. Then he rose.

"I give you twelve hours," and he moved towards the door.

"Why not now?"

The Lama turned in amazement. With whatever courage a man may meet death, however much he may have desired to die, it is seldom that he foregoes one second of possible grace.

And outside the monastery gates the horseman and the spare steed had halted. As the rider dismounted, he showed no trace of eagerness or anxiety, knowing full well that he was in time. He passed through the outer court without question; in fact, serving Lamas bowed with the deference due to someone having authority; and on the threshold of the room in which Lever was, he met the Chief Lama. The latter started, and bit his lip with mortification; but, without waiting for the stranger to speak, said:

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"You would loose a tiger."

"Nevertheless, it must be; and at any rate he is better than you. He is no retrograde."

"You will be our guest to-night?"

The refusal, given with studied courtesy, would have been contemptuous but for the lack of littleness in all that belonged to this man, and the kindly gleam of his eye, which even had in it something humorous.

The Lama returned to the room, making way for the stranger to pass in first.

Lever raised his head in astonishment as the European entered and advanced towards him. The stranger, seeing him bound, turned to the priest.

"You will release him?"

The Lama shook his head, doggedly.

The stranger made a gesture of impatience and contempt; and, plunging his hand into his breast-pocket, produced something which he held in his palm, away from Lever. The Lama started violently, and looked irresolutely at the eyes which were fixed sternly upon him. Then, as if unable to help himself, he signalled to his subordinates to set the prisoner free.

"I am afraid they have been putting you to some inconvenience," the stranger said, holding out his hand.

Lever took it wonderingly.

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"Relations have been a little strained. You are an Englishman?"

"Thorough," answered the stranger.

And then his eye fell upon the iron instruments in the corner. He turned them over with his foot; and his eyes, till then kindly, became cold and glittering.

The Lama stood doggedly by.

"Have they been using these beastly things?"

Lever shrugged his shoulders.

"It really doesn't matter;" but even as he spoke he sank weakly on to a seat. The stranger produced a flask, into the cup of which he poured some pale, colourless liquid.

"Drink this, and then let us get out of this hole. It reeks. I sometimes wonder that the whole wretched country is not swept away." Giving Lever his arm they passed out, down the corridors, into the court-yard.

A young Lama, impassive, with drooping jaw and feebly mystical eyes, held the horses.

"Do you think you can manage to ride a few miles?"

"Oh, yes. I'm beginning to feel all right again."

"I want to get at least five miles on the road to the frontier. I've plenty of provender, and when we've lit a fire, and had something to eat, we shall feel quite cheery."

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"Anything will be better than this hole," answered Lever; on whose nerves, now that the danger was past, the place was beginning to tell. The other unstrapped a fur garment and cap from the spare horse and handed them to Lever.

"You will want it on the plain—the thermometer is twenty-six degrees."

They mounted, and rode out into the night. Lever was wondering, all the while, why, although this man had saved his life, he could feel no glow of gratitude. Perhaps it was the passionless way in which it had been done. He was in no way drawn to his deliverer—the man's grand apartness, his manner of acting, filled Lever with the impression that what he had done was not for an individual, but for a principle. He was curious to discover how the stranger had known of his difficulty and whereabouts.

They rode for about half a mile, having to dismount more than once to rearrange their baggage, before there was a chance of general conversation.

"May I ask whether you came to the monastery purposely to save me?"

"I did."

"How did you discover where I was?"

"I heard of it last night, at Lhasa."

"I thought——" began Lever.

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"You thought," interrupted the other, "that no European had been there during the last fifty years? I believe that was so till I went there by invitation. I am returning after I have seen you across the frontier. Yes," he continued, as though divining what was in Lever's mind; "you are right; it would be quite impossible to take you with me." And, as if to check further questioning, he added, "Let us talk of something else. Come, tell me—how did you enter Tibet?"

"Not very easily. It took me years to learn the language, and even then it was the language that gave me away."

For many years Lever remembered that ride, and the unfathomable man beside him, his reiterated attempts to discover the mode and cause of his deliverance, the neat fencing of his companion whenever he attempted to discover his status in the country, and the means by which he was enabled to remain in it. Lever would fain have rebelled and turned his head towards Lhassa; but there was something about the other man, an intangible force, which told him the attempt would be useless. After awhile the plain became broken and undulating, and soon they found themselves traversing the winding path that ran between two fairly high hills. The night was clear and brilliant, and they found,

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without difficulty, the native resting-place for travellers for which they were seeking. Finding plenty of fuel they lit a fire, and the stranger's manner was as well-bred, and his conversation as entertaining, as if he were playing the host in England; and yet, various as were the subjects on which he talked, Lever felt, when they lay down to rest, that he knew as little of his companion as when they first came face to face in the monastery. An occultist, he knew at once, he must be. No other could have been so privileged amongst the exclusive religious orders of Tibet. Again, the sudden submission of the Lama; what was that which he had held in his hand, which had so immediately overcome his opposition?

The stranger seemed to have replaced it in his breast-pocket. Might it not be one of the identical secrets for which Lever had imperilled his life in coming to Tibet?

He lay awake long after the measured breathing of his companion told him that he slept, thinking nervously, intensely. Perhaps some part of that sublime knowledge which meant power was by this means given into his hands. What if it lay there on the man's heaving breast in the form of some lost mathematical symbol? The desire to discover grew upon him every moment. He looked up

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through a crevice to the jewelled enamel-blue of the Asiatic night. A million mysteries of the stars seemed to flash signals of encouragement to him to do and dare.

As if strung by a force not altogether of the earth plane, he rose, and moved towards the sleeping man. Kneeling beside him, with one hand nervously outstretched, he heard a swaying sound behind him, and felt a cold gust of wind on his neck. He turned round, startled, to see that the door had swung wide open, while from the hillside facing came the faint wail of a lamb in distress. The night, so bright and clear hitherto, seemed to have become charged with a menace for which there was no visible reason; yet, still impelled by the nervous exaltation which possessed him, he turned to complete his task, only to find the eyes of the stranger wide open and fixed sternly upon him. Lever sprang to his feet, but the other did not move from where he lay.

"I must ask you to give me your word of honour that you will not do that again."

He paused.

"I may understand that you give it?"

Lever nodded his head.

"Thank you," and the stranger turned round, and apparently fell asleep.

The next morning he made no allusion to

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the incident, and for two days they continued their journey as the most ordinary of acquaintance. Apparently there was no resentment felt at Lever's treachery, and the stranger's manner forbade any allusion to it.

On the evening of the third day, they stood on the slope at the base of a high mountain.

"That is the road to India. Good-bye." He held out his hand, and added, "This incarnation bears for us a strong mutuality. Time will show."

Lever took his hand and, despite all that had been done for him, could only say:

"May I ask whom I have to thank?"

The stranger mounted his pony, and gathered up the reins before answering.

"My name is Michael Broadhurst;" and, with a courteous inclination of the head, he rode slowly away.

CHAPTER IV

EDWIN LEVER was, as far as he knew, without a relation in the world. His father had been an actor, and his mother an actress, both of the most ordinary and uninteresting type; that is to say, as far as their profession was concerned. They met and married because it was palpably improvident so to do, and because they neither appeared to have anybody belonging to them who might have advised otherwise.

When Lever was nine years of age, they were taken ill, in a dingy Bloomsbury lodging, of typhoid, contracted in the first really good engagement they had ever had.

The boy always remembered those days of suspense, when he sat alone, tearful and terrified, in the shabby sitting-room, while the advisability of removing his sick parents to a hospital was discussed and carried out. His mother's mantle, a showy silk thing, in cheap, theatrical taste, brought a lump to his throat whenever, hanging meagrely behind the door, it caught his eye.

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During the few days of sickness the landlady was kind enough to him, having received his mother's savings and admonitions to take care of him. Then the news came that his parents were dead, and the landlady began to feel a little uncomfortable as to how long he might be on her hands.

The company of which his father and mother had been members swooped down, hysterical and unpractical; organised a benefit, and made twelve pounds, thirteen and fourpence, which it was decidedly difficult to know what to do with.

Then for weeks the boy's life was made miserable, and he was tortured as only an orphan can be tortured. He was hawked abroad, and hourly presented to a different somebody, who had a friend who knew somebody on the committee of some charitable institution or other. The landlady grew dictatorial, and confined her remarks to such hard facts as she thought might benefit one so unprotected. Finally, one of her children, whose couch he was now compelled to share, confided to him one night in the dark, that his mother had said he would have to go to the workhouse. This decided the lad, who was not particularly affectionate, but proud, and with already an instinct of his own intellectual importance. He rose before the family

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were out of bed, and stole down the creaky staircase, across which the golden light of a midsummer morning lay in irregular patches. The front door, with its great rusty lock, was difficult to open, and made some noise.

As he stepped out he thought he heard alarmed voices from the bedroom floor. He closed the door behind him with a bang, and ran as fast as his legs could carry him across the quiet and shady squares of Bloomsbury. It was not long before he felt that he was out of danger of immediate pursuit.

Then he spent the first enjoyable day he had known for months. He had two or three shillings that he had found in a dress belonging to his mother, for he had, with singular acuteness, ransacked his parents' belongings before the landlady had had the chance.

He fed himself on buns and milk, and spent the morning roaming about the streets. He avoided the parks, because his landlady's children were sent to play in them daily, and he was afraid to be seen. Towards night he found himself in a part of the town where the houses were more detached, and some of which had large gardens. He walked and walked, till his legs refused to carry him any further. If he could only get in somewhere and rest for a little, he would be quite refreshed. His courage was enormous, and

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though the position was one which would have frightened most boys of his age, he never shed a tear. He was afraid to rest by the roadside, or even on the seats, of which there were some at long intervals, for fear of awkward questions from policemen. He tried one garden-gate, but drew back at the growl of a dog. The next door was one set in a deep wall, so high that he was unable to see the house which lay beyond. To his delight the door, which was studded with nails, gave way, and he entered, fearfully closing it behind him. Overcome with weariness he sank on to a grass slope which bordered a path, intending to rest but for a few moments. The grass slope, however, seemed to have been made for such a tired little vagabond, and daylight was already appearing when he sank into a deep and dreamless sleep.

He woke with the feeling that somebody was looking at him; and, slowly opening his eyes, saw in front of him, with his hands clasped behind his back, gazing at him intently, an old man whose eyes seemed actually to dart fire from beneath their compressed, bushy brows.

"How did you get over the wall?"

The voice somewhat reassured him. It was not that it was particularly gentle, but, on the other hand, it was free from menace. It was

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not the way the boy had been accustomed to be spoken to; there was a curious assumption of equality between them—one reasonable being asking another reasonable being a reasonable question.

"I didn't climb the wall. I came through the door; it was open."

The old man went to the door, tried it, found it as he had stated, shot to the bolt, and turned again to the boy.

"What's the matter?"

It was really a very long story; how was he to begin to tell it? The first thing he did was to rise to his feet, and then to pitch dizzily forward, nearly sending the old gentleman backwards on to the other slope.

"Hungry, I suppose? You had better have something to eat."

He took him by the arm and walked him quickly and energetically towards the house. The passage was dark and cool, and the room they entered was cool also. There was one window in it, the entire wall besides being concealed by books—books everywhere.

Having placed the boy in an arm-chair, he walked to the door, and called:

"Mrs Bailey! bring breakfast for two. Some ragamuffin has invited himself."

His guest did not mind being called a ragamuffin; the tone was so perfectly matter-of-

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fact and without offence. Then he told his story, and, as a comment upon it, the old man said :

"Well, it's unfortunate ; but I know of worse things. Finish your breakfast, and get back to your friends as soon as possible."

The boy put his hands to his head with a nervous gesture of reflection peculiar to him, and bent his eyes thoughtfully on the table.

"Come here!" The tone had changed ; the cold, callous old gentleman was excited, his eyes positively blazed as he leant forward and seized the boy's hands. He turned them over, bent them back, and examined them ; then he rose and strode up and down the room.

"It must be," he murmured to himself ; "it must be. A pupil!—a gift! You may stay here for the present," he said, and then left the room. He returned in a few minutes with the queerest old hat, and called again to Mrs Bailey.

"Mrs Bailey, make this young man take a bath and tidy himself. I shall probably be out all day. Get a bedroom ready for him, and a sleep wouldn't do him any harm."

Years afterwards Lever discovered what had happened. The supposed vulgar trick of palmistry was, as understood by the old man, a very real and exact science ; and he had read from the boy's hand the qualities which would

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make him an occult scientist of the first order. His protector, who was decision and energy itself, was within a month his legally-appointed guardian, and had made him his heir. Of this he gathered something as a child, but the real reason which brought about such a change in his fortunes he never knew till he was already a man. He went to school much as other boys—he played with other boys; the other boys were allowed to come and play with him, for his benefactor was too wise an old man to attempt what he meant to do except by working in harmony with the forces of nature. He even tore himself away from his beloved books, his curious charts, his wonderful mathematical figures and diagrams, his splendid telescope, through which he first taught the boy to look at the heavens, to study the stars, and to understand them.

Gradually the process of an occult education deepened the intellectual gulf between himself and those who had been the friends of his school-days and of his youth. He was prepared in a hundred ways to stand the assaults of animalism, not that there was much of that in his nature to begin with. His guardian had made no mistake. His theory began to prove itself from the first; the dominant note in Edwin Lever's character was a thirst for intellectual power.

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At eighteen he read with avidity the works of the magicians of the world, from Hermes Trismegistus to Alphonse Louis Constant. At twenty-three he had taken honours in several modern scientific subjects. At twenty-seven his guardian died ; died as far as the ordinary world was concerned, but left Edwin Lever so accomplished psychically that communication with him was not absolutely broken. Nobody, not even Lever, knew his age ; but it must have been extreme. He left a sufficient fortune, inalienably invested in State securities, to maintain his adopted son and pupil. He also left him the following instructions :

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"To my adopted son.

"The fates of the four individuals, the second of whom I have told you is yourself, are rapidly converging. The fourth, a woman, and the most necessary, can naturally only be placed in communication with the first and yourself by means of the third. In the third ego remains, perfect in form and unknown to the owner, the figure which means such power as no human being has ever held. You must subdue the tendency of this ego to withdraw itself entirely from our circle, that of complete individualism. The moral fall between the third and fourth places the secret in your hands, providing you first, of course, control the will of the third. The first is your opponent, who would sacrifice the treasure on the altar of a vain spiritual imagining."

CHAPTER V

THE Duke of Havant and Lever left Broadhurst's house together. The former was fascinated by his two new acquaintances. Probably a few months before he would have described them as cranks; but, as if to prepare him for such a meeting, he had lately come across a curious book—a book, the contents of which flung into his impressionable brain had made it seethe. It seemed to have placed an interrogatory after most of his convictions. Since reading the book in question, it had occurred to him more than once that common-sense is the name often given to an earthly explanation of the supernatural; that Western science might not be the final word in modern progress. It seemed to be the writer's aim to prove that the extremes, as exemplified by the Eastern occultist and the material experimentalist, were about to find common ground; that traditional magic might not be entirely the dream of fanatics and fools; and that a great deal of the unseen world had been denied

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because of wilful blindness or incapacity to see. It had struck him as being, to say the least of it, peculiar that the latter-day critic, while pouring abuse and scepticism on those claiming to be in touch with the supernatural, should be one who invariably refused to test it by the necessary training, childishly asking for miracles which, if performed, would prove nothing to him who was not prepared by severe training to see the inner meaning of the mystery. It seemed to him as if the trumpet tones of an intellectual *reveille*, faint at first to the half-awakened sleeper, grew stronger and stronger, louder and louder, as his senses became more acute, till, increasing as the day broke, the sound struck unmistakably upon his ears. Intellectually we make our own night; we may sleep through the day if we wish.

Perhaps, to the attitude of the mere materialist or atheist, if such there be, he could not find much reason to object, except to reply that the ever-recurring search for the divine by the soul of man was in itself the revelation of a divine existence.

Broadhurst had spoken of a system of comparative symbolism, had pointed out that the harmony of symbols and rites in the different religions of the world was in itself either a coincidence or a revelation. Surely the former supposition could not hold water. Religious

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discussion with the Duke, brought up, as he had been, in the household of a high Church dignitary, had meant arguments on the Real Presence or questions of ritual. It was not good form for people to deny the premises of the Christian Church. It would have been tantamount to depreciating the army as a profession in the house of a soldier.

Something of what he felt he imparted to Lever as they walked down the cool, moon-lit road in which Broadhurst's house was situated. He found in Lever a companion of eclectic sympathies, who, although his erudition on such matters seemed enormous, appeared to have no difficulty in seeing where the Duke stood.

They had not gone far before Lever mentioned the word magic, but in such a way as to make the Duke turn to him in surprise.

"Magic?" he echoed.

"Oh, of course," said Lever. "The word used seriously is unintelligible to you. I wonder what sort of reception the Röntgen Rays and wireless telegraphy would have had half a century ago. There are individuals whose natural eyesight will do the work of the Röntgen Rays. Medical men are amazed. We occultists are not. We have been asserting it for centuries. It is a homely proverb, but it fits the case, and my remark to the average

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scientific man is, 'None so blind as those who won't see.' The magician has been at all times misunderstood, but perhaps never so much as at the present day. One hears people talking of the works of Hermes and others as a farrago of nonsense. To me it is inexplicable. They have tabulated a few bones, reconstructed indifferently some hundreds of thousands of years of the world's history, and found themselves up a blind alley."

"Then you do not think," asked the Duke, "that the limitations of a human being are purely physical?"

"The difficulty has been," said Lever, "that directly the spirit-side of things is revealed to us at all, the average person rushes off to give it an ethical value. That is where the mistake lies. Everything extra-physical must, to the average man, belong either to heaven or hell. If he would simply be content to explore the extra-physical worlds, just as he would explore a newly-discovered continent on this earth, he would learn so much more."

"You believe," said the Duke, "that man is capable of exploring the spirit-worlds?"

"Believe me, my dear Duke, the time is not far distant when some Columbus will find a means to carry us across the intermediate gulf, and our great-great-grandchildren will say, 'How simple!'"

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"There are no such means, then, already?" asked the Duke.

"Yes, there are!" said Lever, pausing to draw down a rose that drooped over a wall, and to inhale its perfume ere he allowed it to swing back and oscillate, like a small white bird, in the moonlight.

"Means for all of us?"

"No," answered Lever, decisively. "At present its principle is Calvinistic. It is only for the elect. But, like Calvinism, it is for whosoever will."

"A paradox which I, for one, have never been able to understand. You hold the doctrine of reincarnation, do you not?"

"If it did not savour of bigotry, I should say no one but a fool could doubt it!"

"I am afraid I am very ignorant. I should like to hear more about it, if the flounderings of a neophyte would not bore you."

Lever produced a pocket-book, tore out a sheet, and wrote something on it.

"If you care to come and see me, I shall be delighted; only, let me know when you are coming."

"What day will suit you?" the Duke asked, eagerly.

"Whenever you like." He held out his hand, adding, with a curiously winning manner:

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"If you will allow me to say so, I think we were destined for friendship."

Then, as his companion showed no resentment :

"Am I not right in saying that you have been a little starved hitherto?"

"If you mean that you have put into words some of those dreams which I have been taught to deride as phantasies, you are right."

The driver of a hansom, seeing the two men parting, slackened his pace. The Duke entered it and drove away. Lever watched the crimson eyes retreating.

"I wonder," he murmured to himself; "I wonder. He is an idealist; all idealists are wax."

CHAPTER VI

As the Duke entered his house in Park Lane, he met his wife. She was as agitated as it was possible for her to be, and petulantly told him that she had been wired for to return to town, "as they think mamma is dying. Of course I came at once," she added, as though she had not quite seen the necessity. They went together into the Duke's study.

"Will you come with me?" She had a habit of asking him to accompany her in any unpleasant undertaking.

"Of course I will."

His wife's mother had never particularly appealed to his affection. He was her favourite son-in-law, but then he happened to be higher in social rank than any of the others; and he found himself cynically reflecting that she was the sort of woman who might die happier if she thought that the morning papers would announce that their Graces the Duke and Duchess of Havant had been present.

A death-bed is not the place to deny anybody

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small pleasures. Not that the Duke put it to himself in this way; he was too unsophisticated and good-natured. And so they left the house together—he thinking a little sadly as to what purpose such a life could have been; the Duchess mentally calculating how much mourning would balance a spoilt autumn.

On reaching the house, it was with a little nervous disappointment that she noticed that some of the blinds were not drawn down.

Surely the sooner these things are over the better.

His wife's only unmarried sister, a tall, gaunt woman of forty—who never forgot the injury of being the only plain member of a singularly good-looking family—came out to meet them.

"I thought you were never coming. Mamma has been asking for you."

Her voice sounded dull and tired, and her eyes looked a little weary with watching. It had struck her, during the last few hours, as being a little curious—a little hard—that the dying mother upstairs should think most of her two younger children, the boy and girl who had never shown themselves other than brainless and callous to all excepting their own comfort. She had even hoped that she might be alone with her mother at the last. At any rate, she had been a devoted daughter in her own morbid manner.

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They all ascended the stairs together; a nurse met them at the bedroom door.

"Quick! or you will be too late," she said, making room for them to pass in.

Though the impress of death was strong upon the face on the pillow, it seemed at this moment to have regained some of that exquisite chiselling and outline which had made its possessor for years the most beautiful woman in London.

The Duchess saw nothing in it but approaching death, and clung closely to her husband, in a manner which might have touched him had he not probed the possible depths of her nature in the first six months of their marriage.

Feeling vaguely that there were new-comers by her bedside, the dying woman opened her eyes. She managed to hold out her arms, and the Duchess approached timorously, terrified, as selfish people will be, by harmless death. Her grasp tightened on the girl's wrists, and large tears coursed down her cheeks as her eyes sought her daughter's yearningly, almost appealingly, as if asking for forgiveness for a bringing-up which had been wholly frivolous and worldly. And thus they sat for almost an hour, with only the distant rumble of traffic in a busy street hard by, or the faint rustling of delicate curtains stirred by the breeze.

She died almost without their knowing it;

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and the Duke, for the first time in his life, stood in the presence of death.

The Duchess sobbed bitterly with fright, and because, for the moment, it had put life in an altogether disagreeable light.

In the Duke's brain the abrupt severance, palpable as it seemed, roused a storm of logical protest. In all his life the thing which had convinced him least of death was death itself, of which till then he had had no actual experience. Suddenly he started violently and drew back, for there, above the body, he almost fancied he saw a shadowy reflection of the form on the bed.

"Agatha, look!" and he turned to his sister-in-law.

The eyes of Agatha Challoner followed his pointing hand, and, seeing nothing, but thinking he was overstrung, drew her sister from the room. The Duke followed.

Finding he could do nothing, and promising to call the next morning, he drove home with his wife, who—what with hunger, terror, and general nerves—was completely unstrung.

CHAPTER VII

THE marriage of Maurice Hedley, Duke of Havant, Marquis of Abshott, Earl of Emsworth, and Baron Waterloo, with Gertrude Challoner, had been largely the work of his wife's mother. With the exception of Agatha, her eldest, who, besides being plain, had a conscience which was adamant at the idea of a marriage of convenience, she had married all her children brilliantly. When she had contrived, with infinite scheming, to unite her youngest boy Lynn to a very considerable heiress, she deemed that she had done well, peculiar though that young gentleman's character was; but her success with Havant, she justly felt, had electrified her set. As they were all so well married she could leave Agatha a fortune, which, though it had been insufficient for herself and her children, would make her quite a wealthy spinster, an appropriate finishing touch to a prosperous family.

The Duke, fresh from Oxford, with a passionate feeling for beauty, had imagined himself to be in love with Gertrude Challoner.

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Possibly, had she shown a spark of temperament, he might, with his own warm and responsive nature, have become really so. He could hardly say she was bad-tempered, but she certainly at times made him so. She had judgment up to a point; but as it was the result of an entire lack of sympathy—prejudice in favour of anybody but herself never disturbing her equanimity—it was hardly calculated to help her development. She was an admirable cushion on which to display the family diamonds, and the very distinction of her eyebrows added to the glory of her tiara. The Duke looked and yearned for love, and found only a woman who was not ashamed of having been sold.

His mother, dear woman as she was, felt that she must not complain, as at any rate he had not made a *mésalliance*, which was what she feared his artistic instincts might bring him to.

The Duke, with the temperament for culture—if at his age it was impossible to expect real culture—tried to interest his wife in one artistic pursuit after another, but soon found that she positively enjoyed the social treadmill; and so, with an almost blank, hopeless feeling, he settled down to a life somewhat more lonely than that of bachelorhood, for the reason that he had lost most of its advantages.

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His equals were chiefly domestic or disreputable. The Duke had no taste for the disreputable; there was a distinct vein of earnestness in his character which balanced him, and prevented his finding excitement in a demoralising life.

Religion in his step-father's household had been presented to him with such breadth and lack of prejudice that, though the dogmas of the Church could not satisfy him, the moral effects on his character had been good.

Wealth, position, bringing with them deference, had been his from boyhood, and were therefore unable to spoil an unaffected character.

It was his spiritual appetite that was keenly alive, and it was a bitter experience when his conscience forbade his accepting any longer the dogmas of the Christian faith.

For some weeks after Mrs Challoner's death he saw nothing of either Lever or Broadhurst. The former, however, sent a line of condolence; from Broadhurst he heard nothing. Directly after the funeral he took his wife down to Abshott Castle, where they remained for a month.

Agatha Challoner came to them as soon as she could leave town.

For the first two Sundays his wife went to church morning and evening. The third

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Sunday she went in the morning, and the fourth Sunday not at all. It was probable that if she had an affection in the world it was for her brother Lynn, and he, having arrived the fourth Saturday, they spent the Sabbath in flattering each other and complaining of everybody else. The Duke did not like Lynn. It was not so much his lack of principle he objected to, as his shallowness; and from the bottom of his heart he pitied the earnest, deep-thinking girl who—though both she and her great wealth came from the middle-classes—was far too good for the frivolous-minded youth to whom she was married. She had a painful and humiliating sense of being dull amongst the smart, dressy set which he affected; and, though not in the least prudish, the consummate viciousness of what they called their toleration terrified her. As for Lynn, as well off as any young man could wish to be, directly after the marriage he proceeded to shift the entire responsibilities of his life on to his wife; and, by way of adding insult to injury, dogmatised and bullied whenever he was hard up for excitement. His wife had imagined a face so eminently good-looking must necessarily be good. Perhaps it was the keenest part of her disillusion that he was neither good nor bad. He would have endowed any sin with littleness.

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The Duke soon got tired of these beautiful children with their ugly natures.

Agatha Challoner and he respected each other, while having literally nothing in common. Lynn's wife might have interested him, but she left almost immediately to go to her own friends in the North, to her father's house, where, at any rate, what brains were about—and there were a good many—had been cultivated.

The Duke hurried back to town, and asked Broadhurst and Lever to dinner; then, horror-struck, remembered that they were vegetarians, and wondered what on earth he was to do. He debated whether the mere word vegetarian would not result in the immediate resignation of the *chef* and the entire kitchen staff.

Broadhurst, instead of answering his invitation, called one morning when the Duke was just out of his bath. He sent up word that he was on his way to Victoria, and had only ten minutes to spare. He was shown up at once.

The Duke could not help noticing what might almost be called the atmospheric refinement of this man. The spotless purity of his linen, the freshness and vigour of his physique, and the well-brushed, serviceable clothes he wore, were in complete and marked contrast to the exotic surroundings of the Duke.

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"Luxurious, but loves light," quickly noted Broadhurst. "Hellenic to the finger-tips."

The Duke, having seen some copies of books by Broadhurst in the latter's study, had obtained them from his bookseller. The first one he had already read and re-read. It was called *The Truth about Death*. The theories enunciated were startling, and had at first seemed extravagant, till the writer proceeded to argue that, far from being novel, they were the oldest in the world.

The Duke welcomed Broadhurst warmly. "You can't come and dine? I'm so sorry. There are so many things I have been wanting to talk to you about."

Broadhurst took up his book from the table.

"You've been reading this?"

"Yes;—I have been thinking a good deal lately about death——" The Duke paused, with almost boyish awkwardness. The Englishman will probably be self-conscious at the Judgment Day.

"How does it strike you?" asked Broadhurst. "As a fairy tale, or a possibility?"

"Both," said the Duke.

Broadhurst inwardly marked the answer.

"Till I read your book, I don't think anybody could have had a more morbid horror of death. I hope I'm not a coward; but

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sometimes—and more particularly when life seemed at its best—a terror of it has leapt at my throat almost like a wild beast; and now I—well, I'm glad I read your book. These views that you and Lever hold——”

Broadhurst interrupted him quickly.

“Pardon me; for all practical purposes, the views of Lever and myself are diametrically opposed.”

The Duke paused in amazement.

“You needn't wait, King,” he said; and his man left them together.

He turned again to Broadhurst.

Somehow, because these two men had been together when he first met them, and because their knowledge on certain special subjects seemed identical, he had conceived them as being intellectually in sympathy. He had ascribed to them a common theology, from which he might draw impartially spiritual theories, if not certainties. The tone of Broadhurst's reply was decisive, and evidently intended to convey even more than he said.

“You both believe in reincarnation?”

“Yes, we both believe in that,” and Broadhurst rose, looking at his watch. He went over to the window, round which the creepers trailed luxuriantly. Then he turned and faced the Duke.

“I have something to say to you, and I

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left my house early so as to say it. I only made up my mind this morning."

"Something about me?" The Duke looked at him inquiringly.

"Yes. What I am going to say you are at liberty to treat either as the wanderings of a visionary, or as the words of one who would be glad to give you some beacon by which to steer aright in the times that are coming. You have struck up a friendship with Lever. Well, you and he were bound to come together. Fly him now—avoid him—and the stronger will be the reaction; that is to say, the ultimate attraction. Do you follow me?"

Nothing could have been saner or more possessed than Broadhurst's manner, and the Duke was completely at a loss.

"There is a great deal for you and him to work out in this life. I am convinced of it. Possibly he may use you, and hurl you back down that path up which you have toiled so painfully more than once. Arm yourself with patience and courage. I shall be back in London in a month, and shall be always ready to help you. One word more. You have certain powers which, if you allow them to be wielded by Lever, may bring about consequences greater than you have ever even guessed. In skilful hands you might be dominated and put into communication with

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the unseen world. Be careful how you tread. And now, if I am not very quick, I shall lose my train. Good-bye!" And before the Duke could answer he had gone, leaving, as he had intended, a vague feeling of discomfort, perhaps of alarm.

CHAPTER VIII

AFTER Broadhurst left the Duke stood thinking deeply, and more than once the idea crossed his mind that he would, if possible, drop the acquaintance of both men. And yet, so had the world of thought, which they had opened, enthralled him, that he was convinced such a course was out of the question. His life, he felt, was taking an entirely new direction.

He was roused from his abstraction by the entrance of his step-father. In his present perplexed state of mind there was perhaps no human being more welcome.

It was impossible to view life from its more subtle stand-point in the presence of the Bishop of Camberwell. His Lordship was thought by the mass of the laity to be an ideal churchman. From the point of view of the extreme sections he represented the most dangerous forces of toleration. To-day, even the Bishop's usual brightness was wanting.

He sank into a chair with a deep sigh of

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relief; and, on his step-son asking him what was the matter, burst forth:

"My dear boy, don't you read your papers?"

"Yes."

"Well, the squabble between the determined brawler of the Low Church and the no less determined and cultured High Churchman is getting worse and worse. They would be at each other's throats if it were not that we poor Bishops furnish excellent targets for the present. If they are not very careful, they will soon have no Church to squabble over!"

"Admonish the one and censure the other indefinitely," suggested his step-son.

"Don't talk nonsense! The tragic thing about it all is that one will be compelled, sooner or later, to take a side. My conscience tells me to side with the rabble; my finer feelings urge a comfortable retreat with the rest to the one Church that knows its mind. Havant, in the name of all that's reasonable, why is the rabble always in the right?"

"Perhaps because they don't take the trouble to think. Don't you think, though, that we are inclined to assume that the rabble is in the right because we moderns are squeamish about the consequences of high-handed action?"

"My dear boy, I knew it! That remark of yours is typical of what one hears all round. The Church is going—to the Jesuits!"

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"Your Lordship is very pessimistic this morning."

"Who wouldn't be? We Bishops confer, we issue pastorals, we enjoin, and we thunder in our own dioceses, only to find that we have contradicted the Bishop next door."

"Who is responsible?"

"Culture, of course. In my early days we lived amongst hideous furniture, we wore hideous whiskers, and we were educated in a plain, unvarnished manner. We were a simple-hearted race. It wasn't likely that a nation with an aroused sense for exotic beauty was going to worship in four whitewashed walls with an unsurpliced choir. Our grandfathers didn't know one note from another; when they developed a taste for music, they naturally thought it was more respectful for the choir to sing in tune. - And the worst of it is that we might leave matters to time and the studios, if one were not convinced that there is a large and fanatical minority who will never know tune, or an oleograph from an oil-painting."

"Mark time," suggested the Duke.

"It isn't in me—I love my Church far too well."

"Isn't there room for you all?"

"No, as a matter of fact, there isn't. I can see that plainly, and I'm English enough to hate the confessional. I suppose I ought to

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suspend Pelham-Gore—you remember Pelham-Gore—looks like a tub on wheels. If all they say is true, he must be utterly devoid of humour, and yet I don't believe there's a man in my diocese who has done more good. The last tussle I had with him, he bowed to my authority, increased the ritual, and perambulates the Church like a Jack in the Green; and for the life of me, I can't discover where the flaw in his reasoning comes in."

The Bishop rose.

"There, I've eased my mind. Will you lunch with me? I don't want to go to the Athenæum. They talk of nothing else there but the rubric. Take me to White's, and let me hear snatches of the latest racing odds—it will be an antidote. And, by the way, let's have a good look at you; if I don't tell your mother exactly how you are looking, down to the loss of an eyelash, she frets."

"I had intended to be with you in a day or two."

"Don't forget. Your mother has been rather seedy lately. Good-bye—two o'clock."

As the Bishop left the room, the servant entered with a note for the Duke. The handwriting caught his eye at once. It was peculiarly childish, almost unformed, and written in a thin, pointed, foreign style.

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"The young woman insisted on waiting for an answer, your Grace."

The Duke tore it open and read :

"To the Duke of Havant.

"I have courage to address your Lordship, as I am quite alone in London, and it was my brother your Lordship had as guide, when your Lordship fished at Goltheim, in Norway. Please, please see me, or I know not what I can do."

The Duke looked up questioningly.

"What is the woman like?"

"She is quite young, your Grace; a little thin and peaky——"

"Peakiness?"

"Well, your Grace, she seem in trouble. She look as though food wouldn't do her no 'arm."

"I will come to her in a minute." The Duke hurriedly finished dressing and went downstairs.

As he opened the door of the library, a small, frail figure rose from a high, uncomfortable chair. One hand fumbled nervously with the edge of the short cloth cape—the other rested on the table by her side.

"Please sit down."

Silently the girl resumed her seat. The small figure in its agitation was infinitely

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pathetic. The Duke leant forward from his chair, and said very gently, so gently that he hardly knew his own voice :

"Please will you tell me what I can do for you?"

Then, for the first time, the girl raised her face, and the Duke felt the blood surge to his head when her eyes met his. The face was small—curiously so; a perfect oval, half framed by hair of pale golden threads, the fineness of which scarcely conveyed an impression of its luxuriance. The eyes were large and grey; and no briar-rose could have conveyed an impression of the purity and delicacy of her colouring. She answered him in a voice which was little more than that of a child, and her request had in it the appeal of a child that had lost its way.

"I so much wish to return to my home."

He consulted the note in his hand.

"You are in London quite alone?"

And as he spoke he knew that he was glad he could help her. Something of what he felt she must have seen in his look, for the frightened, scared expression faded from her face, and was replaced by a timid glance of confidence.

"You have seen me in Norway?"

"No, I did not see you. My brother was your guide. He told me your name."

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"And is mine the only name you know in London?"

The frightened look stole again over the girl's face.

"No; there was a girl from our village, who came to London three years ago. Her mother showed my mother her letters. She said she was making many friends, and would it not be better for me to come where there was money to be earned. At first my mother would not consent, but at last she said that I might come; and I wrote to my friend. She told me she would meet me. When I arrived at the station she was there. She had changed. There was something I did not like. I—— I——" her voice trembled, and her eyes were bent on the ground.

"Please go on," said the Duke, gently.

"She—oh! it was terrible!" The child hid her face in her hands, while up to the roots of her hair flowed the crimson wave of a hot blush.

"I understand—I understand." The Duke rose to his feet, and strode to the window.

"How horrible!" he murmured to himself, "how infinitely horrible!" He never thought of questioning her; he would as soon have thought of doubting an angel.

He looked again at the small figure, so very helpless. He could see that she was brave;

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for though she had spoken till this moment without tears or hysteria, the heaving breast and nervous fingers showed how strong was the effort for control.

"How long have you been in London?"

"For two weeks."

"Where have you been living?"

For a reply she held out a small slip of paper, on which was written an address in St John's Wood, and as she did so her courage gave way, and great sobs of misery shook her.

The Duke resumed his chair, and, bending forward, took her hand.

"Don't cry, little girl, don't cry! Of course you shall go back to your home, and in the meanwhile you have absolutely nothing to fear. I will see that you are taken care of by somebody—somebody who will be to you as your mother."

At first he thought of taking her round to his aunt, almost a next-door neighbour. Lady Catherine Pennell was a philanthropist, and would of course know what to do. Then he changed his mind. Lady Catherine would first of all commit her to the care of servants. The idea of her in a servants' hall revolted him. The butler might be paternally kind to her—the thought was unpleasant. Then, after having subjected her to a close cross-

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examination, Lady Catherine would probably make her the subject of a correspondence with the Swedish Consul. Then she would be returned to her native land in a manner strictly according to rule. Lady Catherine prided herself on not giving way to sentiment, declaring that the sentimental philanthropist was a curse. She would say :

“There is a Society for everything, and every Society in its place.”

On the other hand, if the housekeeper reported favourably of her industry, she would probably make her a parlour-maid, or recommend her to a friend, or dispose of her according to her own views most satisfactorily.

Mrs Maltby, his housekeeper, was a good-natured person, and he almost had his hand on the bell—no, that would not do. Then he remembered as if by an inspiration his old nurse; and perhaps the knowledge that in her eyes he could do nothing wrong made him view the idea more favourably.

The servant knocked at the door.

“The carriage is at the door, your Grace.”

It was fortunate he had ordered it. He turned again to the girl.

“What is your name?”

“Helga Sandt.”

“I am going to take you to a very kind old lady. Will you come with me?”

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"Yes."

They went out into the hall, and down the steps. For one moment she looked terrified, as if she thought he was going to enter the carriage and leave her standing there with some vague words of comfort. He made her get in, and they drove away in the direction of Bayswater.

Mrs Hardwick, who had been the Duke's nurse, lived on a pension he allowed her.

The Duke took tea with her at least three or four times in the year; and whatever the rest of the world might think of Maurice, Duke of Havant, Mrs Hardwick knew no more loved object. Her king, at any rate, could do no wrong. In a sense he was the romance in her life, her *beau-ideal* of a cavalier and a gentleman. If she was a little fond of saying, in the course of conversation with neighbours, that the Duke had made such and such a remark, or that the Duke had given such and such a decision, it was pardonable in their eyes. It is not everyone who has corrected a Duke in his childish faults.

The Duke rang Mrs Hardwick's bell and banged at her knocker to no purpose. She was evidently out, and he would have to wait. After some minutes a neighbour opened her door and explained that Mrs Hardwick was

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staying with her sister at Highgate for a couple of days, but was expected back the next morning. The Duke was at a loss. The thought of Lady Catherine's servants in association with this girl became more unpleasant the more he considered it. His own house was out of the question. There was nothing for it but an hotel. He shrank sensitively from the idea of offering her money.

The Duke's idea of an hotel was Claridge's, and he was half-way there before the thought struck him that it was hardly the thing for a young girl without luggage to have rooms taken for her in an hotel. He could feel that she was nervously afraid of worrying him; and she stole a glance every now and then at his face, as if expecting him to show some irritability.

"You said your things are at that house in St John's Wood, did you not?"

"Yes. But, oh, I am giving you so much trouble."

"Please don't think that. Now, I tell you what I will do. While you remain in this carriage I will go into the house, and make them put your luggage on to a cab. You shall then get into the cab with it, and drive straight to Claridge's Hotel, where you will ask for rooms with absolute courage."

All this he said quite slowly, and added a

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further explanation as to the mode of procedure in English hotels. He was determined that there should be nothing more to frighten or perplex.

She looked a little nervous at the prospect, but felt that she must summon up her courage, as he had been so good to her.

They drove to the address in St John's Wood, but he left her in the carriage some distance from the house. He saw the other girl—a big, blonde Norwegian, who looked terribly frightened when she heard what had been done.

"Your friends will be told what you are doing."

She whitened to the lips.

"If you would like to give up your life and go back, I will see that it is managed. That is my address." And as she made no answer, he left her.

He drove away with Helga's things. If she was in any trouble she was simply to send for him, he told Helga.

"I will come and see you to-morrow morning, after I have called on Mrs Hardwick."

The last he saw of her was her little pale face smiling bravely at him through the glass, full of determination to do as he told her. Then he drove back to Park Lane, to leave

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exact information as to his whereabouts for the rest of the day.

He was late for lunch, and the Bishop was cross, and found him fidgety and restless.

Before the afternoon was over he had sent his man to see if she was safely lodged.

The man returned with the news that everything was quite right, and that the lady had as good a suite of apartments as he could wish.

The Duke looked at his man sharply as he uttered the last few words. He had almost opened his mouth to explain, and then realised that it was bound to sound forced.

CHAPTER IX

THE next morning early, the Duke drove over to Mrs Hardwick's. She had not returned, so he decided, after all, to call on his aunt, Lady Catherine Pennell. The Duke was a great favourite with all his relations. He was of the highest rank, enormously wealthy, and quite respectable.

Lady Catherine, not understanding his real character, privately thought that such an imposing edifice of the virtues was safe to come to the ground; but he was the head of the family, and had, so far, filled his position consummately.

She listened to his story with deep attention, and at once put on, as it were, her thinking-cap.

"You are quite right, Havant; something must be done, but all in good time. Now, let me see—there's the Society for assisting foreigners to get out of the country. There's the Society for Fallen——"

Lady Catherine checked herself, and tried to look as though she had not said it.

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"I hardly think——" began the Duke.

"I hope you are not going to suggest some altogether unnecessary and expensive way of helping the girl. Now, what's her name?" Lady Catherine seated herself at her writing-table, a historic Chippendale, and opened a book like a ledger.

The Duke felt himself becoming irritable.

"Helga Sandt," he answered.

"How do you spell it? Z-o-n-t?"

"S-a-n-d-t," said the Duke, moving restlessly in his chair.

"A most undesirable name—at least the surname," answered Lady Catherine. "If she went into domestic service one would have to change it, and call her 'Sands.'"

"My dear aunt, surely the name is quite immaterial?"

"Oh, I don't know, Havant. I always judge my servants by their names. I once had a servant called Crookes, and she was anything but straight! I never trusted her from the first. Perhaps you remember her, because a diamond star of mine disappeared while she was here."

"I don't think I recollect," answered the Duke, helplessly.

"I got her into a reforming laundry."

"A reforming laundry?" asked the Duke in surprise.

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"Of course they reformed the women, not the laundry. I only wish they had! She turned out anything but well. She poured boiling soap-suds over the matron, and there was quite a scandal. Some of the more respectable criminals declined to stay."

The Duke knew it was no use trying to check his aunt in this mood, so he waited till the story of the disappointing Crookes was over.

"But about this young girl?" he said, gently luring her back to the subject.

"Really, Havant, don't be so irrelevant! I was telling you about Crookes, because one can always learn more about one thing from another." And Lady Catherine beamed triumphantly at her nephew, as if she had proved a great philosophic proposition.

"Of course," he acquiesced meekly.

"Now, the first thing is to find out whether the girl's story is correct."

The Duke rose from his chair and strode to the window, startling a somnolent pug. The question was a sacrilege. The memory of a pair of appealing grey eyes was with him still.

"What class is she, Havant? Is she the sort of person who reminds one of a scullery-maid or a lady's-maid?"

Lady Catherine considered she had given him a sufficiently wide range.

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"Neither," said the Duke sharply.

"Maurice dear, don't speak so loudly; you disturb Mimi. What is her address?"

The Duke suddenly felt with something of a shock that it would not do to tell his aunt she was staying at Claridge's, so he answered vaguely:

"She is to stay with Hardwick."

"Hardwick?—Hardwick?" said Lady Catherine cloudily, as if she were trying to place a historical character in her memory.

"My nurse," explained the Duke. "You must remember Hardwick?"

"Remember Hardwick? I should think I do!" said Lady Catherine, quite hotly for her. "Why, when your poor father died, I came to Abshott to be near your mother, and Hardwick as good as told me that I knew nothing about children. It's a wonder you are alive, my dear Havant!"

The Duke held out his hand. The sketchiness of Lady Catherine was shattering his nerves.

"Good-bye, aunt. You have her address."

"Of course she's staying with Hardwick, my dear Havant—you've told me so." Lady Catherine quite forgot that she had not the remotest idea where Mrs Hardwick lived.

As Havant left the house he decided to write and tell his aunt that everything was arranged.

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She evidently had not the slightest idea that Helga might require more gentle treatment than a recalcitrant parlour-maid.

As he walked down Park Lane he wondered at the peculiar connection that the three most prominent events of the few recent weeks seemed to have with each other. There was the meeting with Broadhurst and Lever, which had, as it were, vitalised a side of his intellect—the existence of which was almost unsuspected by himself—the death of Mrs Challoner, and the mysterious thing he had seen by her bedside. Finally, the coming of Helga Sandt. True, he had seen her but once, but there was that in her personality which had affected him strongly, and he was the more impressed with the truth of this because as the hours passed, the memory of her, and the desire to see her again, were still with him, and for the present did not abate in strength. He reflected that, after all, Mrs Hardwick would probably be the best person to settle the matter. She had common-sense, and she had a heart. To Lady Catherine the lower classes never suggested themselves otherwise than in bulk. She supplied chunks of philanthropy, as it were, without due consideration as to whether the quality might be digestible or indigestible to the individual concerned. In one conspicuous case she had ruined the delicate moral susceptibilities of a girl who

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had made a slip, by bundling her, with total lack of judgment, into a Home for Fallen Women.

The Duke threw himself into a cab, and once more drove to Mrs Hardwick's.

This time she was at home, and opened the door, divided as to whether there was time to slip on another cap and apron, or whether the lesser of the two evils would be to appear as she was, and not to keep his Grace waiting.

"I'm afraid I am hardly fit to be seen, your Grace," said Mrs Hardwick, who would have passed for a model of neatness and cleanliness at any moment in the twenty-four hours.

They went into the pretty little front room, the principal attractions of which were innumerable pictures and photographs of Havant from the age of one upwards.

Briefly, he told Helga Sandt's story, and the warm-hearted soul at one time positively quivered with indignation.

"The base wretch!" she said indignantly.

"I want her for a few days," said the Duke, "to be where she will feel quite secure, and get over her fright. I should like to bring her to you. You will be good to her, Nanna?"

Mrs Hardwick did not answer for a moment; she was furtively wiping her eyes. The Duke had spoken with singular fervour.

"Of course I will; but, oh, your Grace, I

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don't suppose she speaks English—you said a foreigner?"

"She speaks English wonderfully. She and her family spend half the year amongst English people. The Norwegians are excellent linguists."

"But surely she isn't with that dreadful woman now?" asked Mrs Hardwick.

"No," said the Duke. "Well, you see, Nanna, I'm afraid I have done rather a silly thing. I brought her here yesterday, and you were not at home, and there didn't seem anywhere for her to go."

"Well, she had to go somewhere, poor dear!"

"That's just what I said," said the Duke, catching wildly at any excuse; "so I sent her to Claridge's."

"Claridge's?" said Mrs Hardwick vaguely, the name being to her at first merely suggestive of a Bloomsbury boarding-house.

"Claridge's Hotel," added the Duke.

Mrs Hardwick flung up her hands.

"I am afraid it was thoughtless," he apologised.

"What will people think, your Grace?"

"Nobody need know."

"The hotel people will talk, mark my words!"

"I had better bring her here at once," said Havant.

When he had gone she realised that it would

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perhaps have been as well if she had fetched Helga, and she blamed herself for not having thought of it. To her the Duke's conduct only showed that he was the Bayard she had always thought him to be. "If he had been bad, he would never have made a mistake like that."

The Duke sped towards Claridge's, without reflecting that going to fetch Helga himself was not calculated to mend matters. He found her looking somewhat piteous and forlorn, occupying a room in which an Ambassadors might have received.

She was so frankly, unfeignedly glad to see him, there was, as he entered, such a gleam of confidence and trust in her eyes, that a great wave of happiness surged up within him.

If she had struck him as beautiful the day before, he thought her infinitely more so now; and he was more than ever impressed by the marked personality of her beauty. Without being in the faintest degree aggressive, it was a beauty that shone. He told her of all that he had done, and found himself speaking with dangerous ease.

"I don't think it is necessary to wait for your things. We will have them sent on."

She went and put on her hat, and came back to him flushed with excitement.

On their way they talked and chatted gaily,

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till, with almost a chill at his heart, the Duke remembered that he was nearing the time when she would be taken out of his hands.

Helga, too, must have felt something of the kind, for as they neared Mrs Hardwick's house she also became silent, and the flush faded till she grew almost as pale as she had been when he first met her.

The Duke gave something like a sigh as the cab stopped.

Mrs Hardwick clasped Helga to her motherly bosom, and bade her welcome.

The Duke found no pretext for remaining, and said good-bye, promising to come again. And the last he saw of his *protégée* was Mrs Hardwick herself unfastening her cape.

"That is good," he murmured; "she likes her."

Then he sank back, feeling as if he had suddenly come out of the sunlight.

CHAPTER X

THAT evening Lever dined with the Duke.

After dinner, they sat at an open window and watched the sun set in primitive crimson over the Serpentine. The Duke had just been telling him what he had seen the night of Mrs Challoner's death, and he had looked interested and thoughtful during the recital.

"It is quite possible," said Lever. "The old alchemists knew that everybody had a double formed of what we now call ether. It is invisible to purblind humanity, but it exists for those whose occult sight is developed. This body is attached to the physical form by the magnetism of the life-current."

"The life-current?" asked the Duke.

"Ah, if you want a definition of that, you must ask Broadhurst. Personally, I believe it to be what I call the 'not-to-be-solved.' Broadhurst calls it the ethical foundation of everything. But then, ethical premises limit all that Broadhurst says or does."

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"What becomes of this other form?" asked the Duke, eagerly.

"Well, death snaps the cord that binds it to the earthly body, and—and, to speak plainly—it rots in a precisely similar manner, with the differences which are the result of the finer matter."

"Then what I saw was not the spirit?"

"Good Heavens, no! The spirit had gone to its own place."

"To the spirit-land?"

"Yes, if you call everything outside this earth spirit-land."

"I read in one of Broadhurst's books that people on the next plane—you call them planes, do you not?"

"Yes; but occultists usually differ when it comes to a definition."

"Broadhurst says," continued the Duke, "that people on the next plane are purged, as it were, of their sins by keeping their physical desires after they have lost their physical bodies, and therefore the means of gratifying them."

Lever smiled ironically as he stirred his coffee.

"Ah, you see, the school to which Broadhurst belongs is always attempting to confine the immense in the four walls of a Methodist Chapel. My personal experience of the

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spirit-planes is that each is a law unto itself, as this world is. There is more in that German's doctrine of compensation than people would believe—a doctrine of appalling subtlety, true; and because of that mankind jibs and swerves aside. But on the next plane you have to pay for everything as you have to pay for it in this life. Balance—that is the secret of everything.”

“Does Broadhurst believe that too?”

“Heaven knows what Broadhurst believes, and what he doesn't believe!” answered Lever, with a laugh.

“Broadhurst is one of those people who ever repeat the same error. They are always wanting to found a new religion. They recoil before fact. Man is an individual. The cultivation of the individual is the great lesson of science.”

“It sounds a little selfish, doesn't it?” said the Duke.

“You are like everyone else. You are possessed of a moral timidity in the face of a teaching which appears at first sight to be a little cold. Frankly,” continued Lever, turning his chair fully round, and facing the Duke, “Broadhurst and I both believe in an extra-physical life, because we both experience it. It is the beyond that we quarrel about.”

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"How do you mean—an 'extra-physical life'?"

"Well, all around us there is a finer form than this earth-matter which has an evolution of its own. Man—and by man I mean the principle of intellect individualised—has a body of that matter, just as he has a body on this earth."

"I suppose I must be a very undeveloped person, for I don't remember ever having had an experience of anything supernatural till the other night."

"And yet all around you lies unexplored a country far more marvellous than anything this earth can show."

"It is difficult to believe in anything of the kind," answered the Duke. "I often think a miracle might help one."

"You shall have a miracle now, and it will not help you in the least. It cannot make a mystic of you, for that you are already."

"A mystic?"

"By 'mystic,' I mean one who has made good use enough of his evolution to be ready for the higher impressions of another world. Now for your miracle. I will give you a present—something for you to remember me by. Choose anything you care to have and I'll give it you."

The Duke smiled.

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"I'm afraid you are laughing at me," he said.

"Try me."

The Duke thought for the space of two or three minutes; and then remembered that, during the afternoon, while interviewing his wife's jeweller in Bond Street, he had seen a novelty—a copper cigarette-case. He looked at Lever and almost hesitated, as if disinclined to make him look foolish.

"I should like a copper cigarette-case."

"There is no metal so beautiful as copper," said Lever, to his infinite amazement throwing an identical case across the table.

The Duke took it in his hand, expecting to find it impalpable, the child of his fancy, born of an almost morbid desire to believe in Lever.

"Is there a trick?"

"Of course there is," answered Lever.

"Or rather, it is the operation of a very natural law—I placed the idea of a copper cigarette-case in your brain. I bought this in Bond Street this afternoon."

"But," said the Duke eagerly, "I chose this cigarette-case because I saw one in Bond Street this afternoon."

"That is a coincidence. The two ideas on the same subject, that which I had given you, and that which you already had, naturally paired off."

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"Then it is hardly a miracle?" said the Duke.

"That is merely a question of degree and explanation. It would have remained a miracle had I not told you how it was done."

"Does my susceptibility show a natural weakness?"

"Oh, no—oh, no. To be sensitive is not necessarily to be weak."

"Should I be easily hypnotised?"

"Yes, I should say so. Why do you ask?"

"You say that you and Broadhurst have experienced an extra-physical life—do you seriously mean that?"

"Decidedly. Extravagant as the idea seems in the face of modern scepticism, I assure you most solemnly, that I am able to project myself into an entirely different state of existence, where I meet new forms and new surroundings."

"If you, why not other people?"

"That is a very wide question. In the first place, a great many people if they cared to try, and if they tried in the proper manner, certainly could do so. The vast majority of both scientific professors and the laity are too sceptical even to make the experiment, and it is not one which can be made without great sacrifices and careful preparation. You will probably say that it is peculiar that so few

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should have made such experiment, and that those who have do not make finer use of their power. My dear Duke, the man who had been wise enough to have discovered the philosopher's stone, would be too wise to use it for the purpose, say, of such a vulgar trick as transmuting baser metal into gold. Again, fancy a great scientist trying to explain an abstruse point of physics to an ordinarily educated school-boy; or, to take another case, to expect a child to grasp a result in mathematics before it had learnt the process."

"I have read Broadhurst's book, *The Truth about Death*. Do you agree with it?"

"Absolutely, so far as it goes. It has ethical meanderings, which seem to me beside the point; but as to his facts about the after-life, I am positive he is correct."

"I wish you would come to Abshott and pay me a visit. We might go into the whole matter."

"I seldom leave home, but if you will promise that I need not be social, I shall be delighted to spend a fortnight."

"You shall do exactly as you like, if you will only come—eat, drink, and live by yourself, so long as I may come and talk to you."

The Duke, perhaps unconsciously, forebore to mention any precise date for Lever's visit to Abshott. Possibly two days before he

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might have done so, but since then his life had changed radically, and every thought, every contemplated action, was influenced by Helga. He had not confessed as much to himself, and in this lay the danger of her personality interpenetrating his while he was still unaware of how much she meant to him. He had been longing all day to talk to someone of her. The only friend in whom he might have confided was George St. George, who had fled to Scotland directly Parliament—of which he was a young and promising member—rose. He told Lever the story of how she had come to him; told it, as he thought, impassively, without giving the least suggestion that she had made an individual impression upon him; but Lever caught at certain features of his story and wondered. No man, he decided, would have lingered so lovingly over the description of Helga, or have endeavoured so earnestly to convey an impression of her charm, unless she had appealed to him as woman.

The Duke, too, got back to the subject again and again, when, for the purpose of testing him, Lever intentionally spoke of other things; and Lever wondered more and more.

“The fourth is of course a woman, and she, the most necessary, can naturally only be—

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placed in communication with the first and yourself by means of the third. The moral fall between the third and fourth places the secret in your hands, providing your first, of course, control his will."

The words rose up in Lever's brain, even as he questioned the Duke.

"What do you intend to do with her?"

"To send her——" Here he broke off abruptly.

There was nothing in Lever's look which could be construed into an expression of cynical interrogation, and the Duke unconsciously groped in his own brain for some evil thought which might have explained his confusion, and at the time found none. Then he avoided the subject with as much care as he had before insisted on it, and an imperceptible smile of triumph stole across Lever's face as he noted this.

The Duke reverted to Broadhurst's book.

"Would it be possible for me to train my consciousness so as to be able to pass from the earth to the next higher form of life without a break?"

"I could do so for you if you will let me try."

"Do you mean that?" The Duke rose and strode up and down the room excitedly.

"You mean that you can do that as surely as you produced this cigarette-case?"

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“Just as surely; and when it is done you
will find in it just as little of the miraculous.”
And Lever rose and held out his hand.

CHAPTER XI

THE next day the Duke walked over to Bayswater and saw Mrs Hardwick. Helga was out.

"She seems so anxious to work that if I am not very careful she'll leave me nothing to do," said Mrs Hardwick.

"I am glad she is out," answered the Duke; and perhaps he was not altogether sorry, especially as she had only gone on some small errand. It would enable him to have a talk about her future.

"You see, Nanna, I knew her people in Norway, and it seems so brave of such a little creature to come all this way with the idea of helping them. Of course, I could send her back with enough money to set them up for life; but that would be robbing her of half her glory. No; I want to find her something to do. Couldn't she be apprenticed to something? One could pay enough for her to have a salary, and she will never know; and if she is a trouble to you, Nanna——"

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"A trouble? She's as willing as can be, and as quiet as a mouse—except when she sings. And really, your Grace, I've always heard that foreigners can sing, but she warbles like a bird!"

"She ought to be in some quiet business."

If Mrs Hardwick had had the slightest inkling of the truth she would have noticed how very complete the Duke's arrangements were. This was not to be wondered at, for he had fallen asleep thinking of Helga, had dreamt of Helga, and if for the first few seconds after waking she did not actually come to his mind, he woke, nevertheless, with the sensation of being changed, of life being fuller, richer. And then, as the memory of Helga came back, it was as though his heart would have burst, so violently did it beat. He had lain and thought of her and wondered if she were happy.

But Mrs Hardwick was accustomed to the Duke's erratic philanthropy. She remembered that, as a little boy, he had taken off his warm covert-coat and scarf to give to a derisive street urchin, whose gutter sarcasms could not blunt the little Marquis's pity for his cold and wretchedness. His habit of embracing any little children, of no matter what station in life, had led, on one memorable occasion, to scarlet fever. His nurse had decided,

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ere he was out of short frocks, that he was all heart; and to this cause she put down his interest in Helga. Well, she was right.

They decided between them that Mrs Hardwick should look out for suitable employment for Helga, that the girl should live with her, and that, so far as money went, it was to be no bar to obtaining the most desirable place that could be found. Mrs Hardwick was not to tell her that her apprenticeship was being paid for, and that the salary she received came in reality out of the Duke's pocket. The Duke discussed the matter at length, and yet Helga had not returned.

To go away without seeing her was out of the question, and so he remained, ever finding some new detail to talk of. Mrs Hardwick was becoming nervous; she felt she ought not to have allowed Helga to venture out alone. The Duke was equally nervous, and volunteered to go in search. Mrs Hardwick protested strongly against such an infringement of etiquette; nevertheless he walked to the end of the street, and looked anxiously up and down the main thoroughfare for Helga.

As if he were always to be just in time to help her, there on the other side of the road, some thirty yards away, she was standing, looking a

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little frightened and gathering courage to cross the stream of traffic. When she saw him advancing across the dangerous road to her rescue, the small features, tense with apprehension, relaxed, and a look of complete confidence came into her face.

He walked back with her, and carried one of her parcels. He paused and looked with her into shop windows so as to draw out the moments of happiness to their utmost.

Mrs Hardwick was a little horrified to see the Duke waving a small parcel of soap and baking-powder done up in brown paper, with a twine loop passed over his finger; not that it was the danger to Helga's purchases which disturbed her.

The Duke was obliged to say good-bye, and as the door closed, Mrs Hardwick turned somewhat severely on Helga.

"Of course, my dear, you can't be expected to know, because you're not an English girl, and I'm told foreign dukes are not of much account; but you must never allow his Grace to do such a thing again."

"To do what, Mrs Hardwick?" asked the girl, fearful lest she had displeased.

"Why, my dear, to turn himself into an errand-boy—to carry that parcel!"

"But he offered to. He said he must do it, and took it from me."

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"Of course he would offer to—that's because he is a gentleman. It was your place to say, 'Oh, no, your Grace, I couldn't think of it.'"

"Then you think he may be angry—that he will think me ungrateful?"

"Oh, no, my dear, there's no need to worry yourself," said Mrs Hardwick, mollified by the girl's distress.

"You are very kind. I must write and tell my father and mother how good everybody is to me."

"My dear, haven't you written to them since you have been in London?"

"Yes, but I was afraid to tell them where I was. My poor mother! it would have killed her. Oh, Mrs Hardwick!" said the girl, with a burst of gratitude, "what should I have done if the Duke had not been so good. I think I should have killed myself."

"There, there," said the elder woman soothingly, "don't let's think about that. Let's have a cup of tea—that's always comforting."

Helga had already been taught to make tea properly, the first attempt having proved a ghastly failure. That it should have done so was rather a comfort to Mrs Hardwick who, fond as she was of Helga, was never tired of expatiating on the incapacity of foreigners in general.

"Ah, my dear, you ought to think yourself a

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lucky girl, despite your troubles, for being in England at all; and you must never forget your dear father and mother and brothers and sisters, still left in those outlandish parts. I was only reading in the paper the other day of the war and strife they're so fond of stirring up. Believe me, my dear—and I don't wish to hurt your feelings—that there will never be real peace or comfort in this world so long as there are foreigners."

Helga looked wonderingly at Mrs Hardwick, whose stately cap wobbled judicially as she delivered herself of these statesman-like remarks.

"But there," she added cheerfully, "we must find some nice young fellow who'll see you at your true worth and love you for yourself, and then you'll forget all about being a foreigner." And Mrs Hardwick positively glowed at the prospect.

"You should see our country," said Helga with sweet dignity. "It is very beautiful."

"I dare say, my dear, I dare say," answered Mrs Hardwick, as an inhabitant of some gorgeous tropical island might have patronised someone from a slum.

Helga was not in the least offended. She had grasped with true instinct Mrs Hardwick's genuine nature, and for her it was sufficient.

In the evening they walked together in

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Kensington Gardens. Mrs Hardwick beguiled the time with stories of the Duke's childhood, stories which had become so altered by constant repetition, that they tended to make of the young man a hero more wonderful than King Arthur and all his knights put together. Such glorification was not likely to diminish the favour which Havant had already found in the girl's eyes.

On the subject of the Duchess, of whom Mrs Hardwick had disapproved from the first, she was silent. She held strong views on what a duchess should be, and Maurice's mother was the foundation on which her ideal was built. The Duchess of Havant might be as beautiful as a goddess, which she was, but Mrs Hardwick, with the keen instinct of the upper servant class, had at once detected the unsuitable commonness of her nature. Had Maurice's old nurse been a conscious student of psychology, instead of only possessing a happy knack of hitting off character, she would, if she had been asked, have described Helga as being a creature of abnormal instinct. She gathered knowledge from everything round her in an altogether remarkable way. It was not so much that her knowledge grew, as it was as if the light of advancing experience served to illuminate corners of her brain where knowledge was already stored.

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Perhaps there is no such thing as instinct in its spontaneous sense ; there is the experience accumulated in former lives, the weapons which we ourselves have forged lying ready to hand.

CHAPTER XII

MRS HARDWICK soon found the place to suit Helga in the millinery establishment of Mrs Algernon Brigwater.

Mrs Brigwater was one of those people who, having been born and having married into the circle of the socially important, find themselves without a sufficient income to keep afloat. That her husband would ever earn anything was out of the question; as he always said, "What could I do?" and it would have been difficult to find an answer to the question. The brains, such as they were, were all on her side; and if her business did not produce the profit that her extravagant imagination had contemplated, it served two purposes: to keep her busy and out of debt.

She was only too ready to accept Helga as an apprentice; it meant a substantial cheque and probably a useful assistant. If she turned out apt, so much the better; if otherwise, Mrs Brigwater would take good care that she did not interfere with her own valuable time. She was smart

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in the worst sense of that offensive word, and discreetly held her tongue on receiving somewhat unexpectedly the cheque for Helga's tuition signed by Havant. She assumed the worst, and cashed it at once. After all, as she told herself, it was a purely business arrangement; if women went into business they had no right to inquire into the doings of their employees out of work-hours.

The apprenticing of Helga to any business seemed to her superfluous, but no doubt there were excellent reasons of which she knew nothing.

It was with these feelings and ideas on the subject of the girl that she took her. Before a day was over, she began to feel perplexed, and to wonder if she had made a mistake. It was impossible to be with Helga long and not to be conscious of her extraordinary simplicity. Mrs Brigwater's smart chatter was absolute Greek to her, and at her somewhat naughty little stories, Helga would open her eyes and knit her brows with an effort to understand that was almost painful. She had the most charming taste in the world, as Mrs Brigwater soon discovered; and in her selection and arrangement of colours her innate refinement displayed itself.

Mr Algernon Brigwater, whose wife had made him, for the sake of her own dignity, nominal partner in the concern, came down

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every day when he was in town, according to her instructions, solemnly fumbled among letters and papers, and walked through the workrooms. Then he went to lunch, and was seen no more, except by the privileged and elevated set, who called him 'bonnets' behind his back.

Once in these daily visits of form he saw Helga, and made a remark to her, which his wife overheard and would have felt bound to apologise for, had she not realised at once that it had conveyed no meaning to the girl. Mrs Brigwater, however, took good care that he should not offend again.

Helga liked her work, and in the evenings, as soon as she was free, flew home to help Mrs Hardwick.

The Duke thought of her constantly. Except for a visit to Abshott, where he spent a whole Saturday and Sunday, he lingered in town unable to tear himself away from the place where there was the chance of meeting her.

It was the week after his conversation with Lever that the situation had been found for her, and once only since then, and that while with Mrs Hardwick, had he seen her. He now realised that the matter was serious.

All people know more or less when they have met the one great passion of their lives ;

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and so changed had the Duke's whole attitude towards love become, that he was constantly searching for some spark, or recollection of a spark, of the true sentiment that he had ever felt for his wife.

He had written to Helga's parents, and trembled lest the reply should bring a wish that she should return home ; but somehow it seemed as if they were too unsophisticated to grasp the reality of the peril she had been in. Profusely grateful to the Duke, they thanked him for having put them into communication with the good woman who was taking care of their daughter.

The Duke almost gave a sigh of relief when he heard that Helga was to be there, near him, within his reach, for an indefinite period.

He guessed the time at which it was most likely she would leave her work, and fought with the desire to come across her as if by chance.

It was now the end of August, and there was something sympathetic to his mood in the loneliness of the town. Whole days passed without his seeing a soul, except perhaps some semi-acquaintance at the deserted clubs. He put off one engagement after the other, and all his friends began to wonder what had become of him, his town house being the last place where they expected him to be at that time of

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year. He probably saw more of London in the restless walks he took than he had ever done before. He thoroughly explored the district of Bayswater. The street itself he never dared to enter, except once, and then it was after dark. As he passed the house he heard Helga's laughter through an open window, and hurried on as if he had been found out.

He re-read the books by Broadhurst. And all through the new lines of thought on immortality which they opened up, Helga played a large part. They seemed to shadow forth, vaguely at first perhaps, a more perpetual meaning for his love; and, though it may have been that there was within him at that moment more particularly a strong inclination to accept a doctrine which was specially comforting, they were surely, but resistlessly, appealing to his logic, his reason, and his sense of justice. Now and then he would stumble across a philosophic harmony which set up vibrations in his own sense, vibrations denoting such strong intellectual sympathy that it seemed strange that they had not before sounded for themselves some expression.

One evening, as if it were ordained by Fate that he should receive the full measure of temptation, he met Helga. She was walking through the Park on her way home from work.

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She blushed when he stopped to speak to her, and he was hardly less nervous. Mrs Hardwick, she told him, had gone to visit her sister. To her amazement he turned and walked with her; and she glanced almost fearfully around as if expecting to meet Mrs Hardwick's disapproving glance, for she felt that that lady would have regarded such a proceeding as undesirable. She inwardly cross-examined herself to find out whether she was in any way at fault. After one or two remarks, to which she answered only in monosyllables, the Duke found himself drifting into a hopeless silence. He cast about for some subject which would be likely to loosen her tongue.

"Don't you long just a little to be back in your own country?"

"For an hour or so, yes—just to see how they are all looking."

"Then you are not tired of us yet?"

"Oh, no; I am learning so much here. This great city. It was terrifying at first; no one cared who was suffering or who was wretched. At least it seemed so; but it is very wonderful."

"It is very monstrous."

"Why do you say that?"

"Doesn't it strike you as being a terrible thing that a city should have reached these huge proportions without the sum of human

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kindliness and happiness being perceptibly advanced?"

The child looked at him wonderingly. She hardly knew what he was talking about, and yet she instinctively felt that it was a compliment to the sympathy between them that he should talk thus feelingly.

They paused some hundred yards from a band and listened in silence. The Duke was glad of anything to delay her by his side. The last notes of a plaintive melody were being played, and Helga drew a deep breath of ecstasy.

"It is beautiful!"

"You love music? But of course you do. I don't believe people when they say they don't care about it; do you?"

"I don't know, I have heard so little."

"But you sing? I have heard you. We cannot sing in this country; the climate won't let us. Don't you feel how heavy it is after Norway? Let us sit down; they are going to play again."

And Helga, forgetting everything but the music, and the unconscious pleasure she felt at being near to him, sat still and happy. And he talked on and on, not so much caring whether she followed his words, but because his instinct told him that whatever he said could not, somehow, bore her. He certainly forgot the difficulty of their relative positions.

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"One of these days I must take you to the Opera; it is the most wonderful thing in the world, one's first visit to the Opera. The first flight of the violins almost hurts. And then the singers sound so wonderful; their voices never seem the same anywhere else. There is the story to help both them and you."

"The Opera is the theatre, isn't it, your Grace?"

She had suddenly remembered Mrs Hardwick's admonitions as to the proper and respectful way of addressing him. The words were timidly spoken, but they had the effect of indicating the barrier between them, and silencing for the moment the easy flow of his natural talk. For a little neither spoke. He was wondering how he could ask her not to say it again.

"Don't call me 'your Grace' again, please."

"But Mrs Hardwick told me——"

"Yes, I know, but—in an ordinary way she would be right, but——" He paused, hardly knowing what to say. "We are friends, are we not?" Every moment the passion within him was growing more impetuous.

"I could not be your friend; you are so far above me."

"Don't say those sort of things; they pain me."

And then suddenly he remembered his wife.

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A wave of agony passed over him, and he sat by her side speechless, while the band played a quick movement which struck unmeaningly upon his ear. She saw that something was amiss, and her eyes looked out sadly before her, as if she were dreaming of her own fate.

Soon they rose, and she was almost afraid, by his change of manner, that she had offended him. It was with a feeling of terror she thought that perhaps he would never speak to her again. What could she do? She longed to ask his forgiveness.

By-and-bye he began to talk again, and by the time the Park railings near Bayswater had come into view, he had managed to convey to her that it was not she who had offended.

The Duke left her before they reached the street in which Mrs Hardwick lived. He would have given worlds to ask when he might meet her again, but somehow he was afraid. Yet he was happier for having been with her for even so short a time, and he went home to dream about her.

CHAPTER XIII

THE Duke had promised to return to Abshott that afternoon, but had changed his mind, persuading himself that there was nothing for him to do there. The servants in Park Lane began to grow fidgety, and to wonder whether his Grace was ever going to leave town for any considerable time.

Helga was constantly in his thoughts, and a dozen times in an hour he asked himself why he should not do as he liked, and go and sit in that little room in Bayswater and talk to Mrs Hardwick and her charge.

Probably, had he been able to see Helga whenever he wished, he might have neglected Lever, but the next morning he drove out to St. John's Wood to call on him.

The house which Lever had inherited, together with most of his benefactor's property, remained much as it had been the morning he had stolen through the garden-door and slept on the bank which bordered the path.

Lever came to the Duke in the dining-room.

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There was one peculiar feature about him which was that, though his life was passed in study and research, he had none of the mustiness of a bookworm. There was, perhaps, even a touch of foppishness in the ample expanse of white linen and the close-cut, well-brushed hair. It was the gold *pince-nez* and the concentrated gaze that gave him such a distinctively academic appearance.

"How very quiet you are here. The sudden silence of your garden is quite startling."

"Yes; it was built by a student who took pretty nearly all the exercise he wanted in it. Come upstairs."

The Duke followed Lever to a room which was at the top of, and ran nearly the whole length of, the house. It was lighted from the roof like a studio. In the centre stood an enormous telescope. At one end there was a smaller room without any furniture, save a divan that ran right round it, with bookcases above.

Lever paused in the larger room.

"This is where I study the stars."

"I should have thought," said the Duke, "that for a man with your tastes and habits the country would have been more attractive. How often does the London atmosphere permit you to see the stars?"

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"As regards the country, you are right; it would perhaps be more attractive to most men of my own pursuits, but I am not altogether a solitary; I like to see life round me, if only as a spectacle. Besides, it preserves one's pride in one's personal appearance. There's nothing so elusive as the art of dressing; once forgotten, it is never recovered."

The Duke laughed; the sentiment was pleasing to him, but seemed incongruous in one who led such a life as Lever.

"What a remarkable face," he said, pausing before a large framed photograph of Lever's benefactor and friend.

"He was a very remarkable man."

The two stood looking at the picture, and again in the eyes before him the Duke saw the same peculiarity of expression as he had noticed in Broadhurst and Lever. The peculiarity lay in a duality of vision; for, while the eyes seemed to be looking at the particular object of interest with more than ordinary intensity and comprehension, there appeared to be a further power of seeing something beyond not visible to others. Another point that attracted the Duke's attention strongly was the same apartness, in which, perhaps, the portrait more resembled Broadhurst than Lever.

"You must read his works, Duke. His erudition is amazing. I doubt if any man of

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the present century, not even Louis Constant, has had such a complete grasp of traditional magic."

"Magic?" echoed Havant wonderingly.

"I suppose the word has no more than a Maskelyne and Cooke significance for you?"

"One assumes," said the Duke frankly, "that magic has been discredited for always."

"I believe," answered Lever, "that there have at various times been periods of absolute materialism when man has crawled about his little sun-baked or ice-frozen earth, denying the knowledge of anything beyond; and all because he won't see. I fancy we are just nearing the end of such a period. Magic is as potent a fact as it has ever been. If the vast majority of men deny its existence, and refuse to make use of it, that is their fault. Of course it is a deadly enemy to gross animalism; therein lies the great bar to the understanding of it by the many. Your scientist does not mind devoting his life to the attempt at solving the great mysteries, but he is not prepared even to entertain the idea of a creed which regards asceticism as part of a student's stock-in-trade. Research—yes; but not at the expense of his stomach."

"This transference to another life—that is what fascinates me at this moment. It seems, at any rate, a step towards something higher.

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Will it be a long process for me to attain to it?"

"Hardly; I should say it is a power which is dormant in you, and merely requires awakening. There are only two things I require of you; they are: abstinence from alcohol and flesh-eating."

"I don't think that either of them has a very strong hold over me. I think I could drop them with ease."

"To feel like that is to be able to do so, and"—said Lever, darting a swift look at him,—"be as chaste as possible."

He led the way into the inner room, and offered the Duke a cigarette.

"I think you will find these very good. For myself, I always make my own. I estimated once that I spend one solid hour during the day making cigarettes." And he threw himself on to one of the divans near the Duke. "You must trust yourself in this matter implicitly to me," he continued.

"Of course I shall do so; but how am I to tell, if I have such an experience on the next plane, that I am not simply the victim of a hypnotic experiment like that of the cigarette-case?"

"I am not afraid that you will think that. The thing itself will convince you; you must remember that, when I referred to the power of

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psychic abstraction which is dormant in you, I meant that you were considerably more developed than most egos. You will remember past experiences, and they will prove the present. If I were called upon to judge, I should say that your social position, your wealth, your appearance, the prosperous nation into which you have been incarnated, show that at any rate you have created for yourself a life of power."

"Perhaps"—answered the Duke, "although I don't wish to pose as being interesting, or to play the morbid young man misunderstood—things may not be all that they seem."

"You lack something?" asked Lever, without, however, more than an average show of curiosity.

"What does man need most?" asked the Duke.

"Well, after a sufficient income to feed and clothe him, I should say knowledge—knowledge standing for that power which is worth having."

"Surely a man wants something higher than that?"

"There is nothing higher than knowledge," replied Lever. "Knowledge is everything. Real knowledge includes everything."

"Surely the highest thing is love?"

"It is the fault of all schools of thought that sooner or later they give way to sentiment.

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Follow even the atheist, that inexplicable being ; he, professing most absolute materialism, sooner or later wanders away from the strait, difficult path into the pleasant meadows and pastures of sentiment and surmise."

"You believe, then, that those who wish to progress should give up love?"

"Certainly not ; it may be necessary, or it may not be. A man may be at such a point of evolution that an earthly love and marriage will be of the greatest use to him."

"Tell me, do you believe in marriage as a good institution?"

"Most decidedly. It diminishes indiscriminate passion ; therefore it must be good."

"Would such powers as you say are dormant in me lead to my acquiring any greater influence over my surroundings?"

"Directly, perhaps not ; indirectly, decidedly. When you have acquired a certain amount of occult knowledge, it will not be on this plane that you will think of using it. Will you define love for me?"

The Duke's face lighted, and he opened his mouth as if to speak. Lever's question seemed to him at that moment the easiest one in the world to answer. And yet, on seeking suitable words, he could find none which would not in some way degrade the being he loved.

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Lever watched him curiously, till at length he hazarded an answer.

"Sacrifice."

"Define sacrifice."

"I should define sacrifice," answered the Duke, speaking slowly, and weighing every word, "as absolute unselfishness where the being one loved was concerned."

"You mean that you would do everything to make her path easy?"

"Yes."

"I should define love," said Lever, "as the wish to educate the other soul to the same power as that possessed by oneself; or failing that—and if one is utterly attracted, and, as it is called, 'in love'—get it over as soon as possible."

The Duke could have throttled him; and yet Lever was but echoing, as it were, the evil thought that was struggling to assert itself deep down in his consciousness. It was not that the Duke was a prig; there had been passages in his life which debarred him from playing the part of a Joseph; but there are degrees of guilt, in spite of the crime having but one name. Though it be impossible in this world to consider the delicate shades of responsibility, the reckoning must come. The responsibility of which the law is unable to take cognisance may be termed the occult guilt,

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and it is that which has to be reckoned with afterwards.

Although the Duke had as yet hardly confessed to himself the enormous strength of Helga's attraction for him, he could feel, as surely as he could distinguish between right and wrong, that she was to him a sacred thing, and that, where her virtue was concerned, blasphemy both to herself and himself was possible. He instinctively felt that in this case his occult guilt would be enormous. He could not perhaps have argued the matter logically from the point of view of this life; yet he knew that a whole list of ordinary passions would not burden his account with such a heavy reckoning as would the yielding to this exquisite and subtle temptation.

And Lever saw what was passing in his mind—the growth of his earthly passion for Helga. The spiritual meaning of the temptation, its triumph or its defeat, was hidden from him, and that was why Lever was the Duke's enemy and became—without an absolutely definite intention of playing a Mephistophelian part—his tempter. To him the Duke was nothing; his own ends, everything. His development had been along the lines of intellect; he could have no knowledge, therefore, of the Duke's real, spiritual importance, or that he was an ego on the whole more

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developed than himself. As has been said, 'Only spirit can know spirit.' He had never—as Broadhurst had told him in his garden—come face to face with the principle of spirituality, the key to which is unselfishness. Sooner or later he must do so. No one but the Duke was responsible for the fact that Lever was in a position to do him serious harm, and though he was unable with his earthly eyes to see clearly the power for evil and the helpers for good that were all around him, he dimly sensed a mighty crisis.

Lever resumed.

"I am to understand that you are in love?"

The Duke stiffened a little. He was, after all, accustomed to subservience, and Lever was taking a leading tone which annoyed him. The inclination to talk of Helga to someone, however, mastered him.

"Yes," and for the moment he smiled in a happy, boyish way, forgetful of the fact that there was a gulf between Helga and himself. Then, as he remembered his wife—who had probably not given him a second thought since he left Abshott—his brow clouded.

"That is very unfortunate, isn't it?" asked Lever.

"I suppose it is. Perhaps I shall get over it. Perhaps I am feeling it all now. It hurts rather, though."

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He found himself wondering at his confiding so much to one who was almost a stranger.

Lever was not astonished, as he himself was forcing the confidence from the Duke. He had that morning waited near the house in Bayswater till Helga had come out. It was necessary that he should see her, and he recognised her at once. He launched a vivid mental picture of her into the Duke's brain, who shivered as Helga's image—always before him—reinforced by Lever's remembrance of her, gathered in warmth and reality.

Lever noticed the physical tremor with interest.

"As you are a married man," he said, lingering purposely over the word 'married,' "I suppose it would be indiscreet and in bad taste to ask who she is?"

"I have neither thought of nor intended any harm towards her. I only know that I love her more and more every moment, so much that at present I feel that it is impossible to pull myself together. I must indulge myself just for a little in my dream. I may as well tell you who it is—it will be a relief to me. It is the Norwegian girl who came to me the other day."

"May I ask, Duke, why you have confided in me so much? Don't think that I in any way wish to avoid helping you; but will you

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answer me frankly—supposing one of your own friends had been in town, would you have confided the matter to him?”

“George St. George—you may have heard of him—he sits for Bretworth——”

Lever nodded.

“Well, he is perhaps the only person I might have told; but I don’t think somehow that I should have done.”

“Does she care for you?”

“How can I tell? I don’t see why she should.”

“Of course you cannot ask her?”

“How could I? The very fact that she came to me for help would forbid it, if nothing else.”

“Supposing you could find out without her knowing, would you do so?”

The Duke’s face was a sufficient answer. He was desperately, hopelessly in love. He suffered; and it was beginning to rob him of some of his dignity.

Lever rose, and handed the cigarettes to the Duke.

“I promise you that if you follow my directions you shall meet her in that world which is the next higher state of matter to this. You shall hear the truth from her lips.”

A lover, as a rule, can be made to believe anything which may be favourable to his

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passion, but the Duke looked up incredulously at Lever to see if he were serious. He at once grasped that, though Lever might be deceiving himself, he at any rate believed in the deception.

Then the Duke remembered the cigarette-case. Could it be possible? He was too broad-minded to label as absurd what he did not understand. He bent his eyes and thought deeply.

"Will you let me try the experiment?"

"Yes; why not?" The Duke rose to his feet.

"Then you will avoid the two things I mentioned. And let me see—in three weeks' time, you shall know the truth."

CHAPTER XIV

SOMETIMES the Duke was inclined to make a confidant of his step-father. He might have done so in this case, had he been prepared to hear the truth; for with the Bishop there would have been no sophistry possible. One sentence would have contained his notions of duty on the subject; but then the Bishop was not a man who suggested ever having been anything but an extremely reasonable lover.

Besides, it would have been difficult to confide about Helga without alluding to the new views which seemed on the point of convincing him. So the Duke gave no other confidence but that which he had already given to Lever. He struggled by himself. To do him credit, the struggle was a keen one. Helga had roused too much of the best part of his nature for this to be otherwise.

However, two days after they had walked together in the Park, he met her again, and in such a way that he was not to be blamed.

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She had not told Mrs Hardwick of their meeting, not that she had intended to deceive in the matter, but timidity prevented her doing so the same evening, and she let the opportunity pass till it was too late; and for this reason the Duke began to mean unhappiness to her, her acquaintance with him to gather a guilty atmosphere.

Thus, when they met again, it was with a mutual recognition of secrecy, and both were ashamed. She was growing dangerously happy when he was near her, and he to be conscious of it.

He did not deceive himself; in Helga's case there was no possibility of robbing her, and of then drying her tears by means of pretty things. Her nature was earnest, desperately so; and what he had already discovered—namely, a rare sense of humour—showed her to be too intelligent for relief in the anodyne of indifference. Her imagination, which was vivid, would tend rather to magnify sorrow than to diminish it.

He would not have been so much in love, had he not grasped speedily the light and shade of her character, its superlative capacity for suffering. If he should hurt her, he could not plead to himself that he had under-estimated the consequences.

More and more, as she threw away her

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armour of reserve, unconsciously depriving herself of her defence, she appealed to the higher part of his love for her; yet, as must always be the case in dealing with flesh and blood, the animal was there, panting thirstily for the strong drink of love and life.

And there lay the torment.

With the woman we are to suppose the matter is different; neither does the animal in her receive the excellent material education which in the man but aggravates the creature's appetite.

Not that the Duke was as bad as his fellows; in the first place, his ego was altogether more advanced than is the case with the majority. Had this not been so, he would probably have played the rôle of an earthy squire with the worst of them, and prided himself on the refined and gentlemanly occupation of fox-torturing, have been a decently indifferent husband and father, but without spiritual struggles or aspirations. The Duke could not hide from himself the fact that he was in the position of advantage, that he had been kind to Helga; and her conduct might after all be no more than a natural disinclination to offend him in any way.

What would the eventful evening at Lever's bring forth?

The excitement of this anticipation, and the

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craving from which he suffered whenever Helga was out of his sight, began to tell upon him.

His mother, passing through town on her way to Scotland, grew anxious at his worn appearance, and wanted to take him with her. She had realised that the Duchess was not a source of the greatest comfort and solace to her son. If his happiness had not been the dearest thing to her on earth, she would, mother-like, have felt a tiny thrill of triumph.

"If you won't come to Carrackness, get away somewhere, Maurice. You ought not to be in town. London seems to have bewitched you."

The Duke shrugged his shoulders.

"Gertrude is quite happy, Lynn is with her."

"But you do look tired, Maurice. Remember me, and take care of yourself."

The Duke smiled a little vaguely. He was thinking of Helga. Still, it was pleasant to have a sweet and gracious mother, anxious about his health. A thought also crossed his mind that, had he been free, his mother would have welcomed Helga as a daughter. Then his conscience smote him. After all, it was not his wife's fault that she was unsympathetic; he should have judged her character before marriage.

He grew fearful that Mrs Hardwick might

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have guessed something of the truth; and he plucked up courage to go and see her.

He found her anxious about Helga; the girl was losing her colour. According to Mrs Hardwick, she required a rest, although she had only been a few weeks in London. Still, it would take some time for such a country-bred girl to get used to the oppressive atmosphere of the town. What she wanted was the sea; and Mrs Hardwick proposed to take her away, if only for a week.

And what could the Duke say? The mere idea made him acutely wretched; he could not possibly follow her.

For the moment the thought of a yacht crossed his brain. No; to his somewhat guilty conscience such a device seemed bound to arouse Mrs Hardwick's suspicions. He wondered also if Helga being out of town would make any difference to Lever's experiment.

However, there was no help for it; the old lady had made up her mind.

He met Helga the next day, and she told him that Mrs Brigwater had consented to do without her for a few days. The girl seemed excited, and the Duke was hurt. She was evidently delighted at the prospect.

"You are glad to go away?" he said, questioningly.

Helga was silent. She in her turn was

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hurt that he should have misunderstood her. She was certainly not glad to go away. Her sensitive nature concluded at once that this was to be the end; she was not even quite sure that the meetings on his part had not been purely accidental. The tears rose to her eyes, tears which happily he did not see, or they might have assured him of that which he trusted to Lever's experiment to discover.

He would feel happier if she took away some remembrance of him, and yet he hardly knew how to offer it. They were passing a jeweller's shop, and he paused. He was nervous of committing an impertinence.

"Will you let me give you something as a token that we are friends?" And then, as the girl hesitated, he added hastily, "Please tell me if I ought not to have asked you."

"Oh, no, it is not that."

He perceived, with a strange joy, that from him a gift would not be an offence.

Helga was not the girl to care about a gift apart from the giver.

They went in, and he chose a small gold cross, suspended by a delicate chain.

The features of the jeweller, who knew him well by sight, remained impassive at the smallness of the purchase, although at first sight of the Duke he had assumed a large profit.

Then the Duke spent a wretched five

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minutes trying to find out how to give it to Helga gracefully.

They parted in the crowded street, both acutely wretched. To Helga, the little package she clasped tightly in her hand, and which she could hardly prevent herself from opening, was a link between the Duke and herself. He felt as though he had lost her for ever.

London in August with Helga had been Heaven, but when it became a case of simply London in August, the Duke found it insupportable and fled to Abshott.

At Abshott there was quite a large house-party, and the Duchess was not sorry to see Havant arrive. She felt that his prolonged absence was being remarked, and had told her brother Lynn as much.

That young gentleman—whose only attention to his wife had been an absolute neglect—was naturally indignant, and, by way of smoothing matters, worked his sister up to a high pitch of protest, although advising her to wait till he had left; as, if he were in the house, the Duke might think he had been making mischief. It was quite in Lynn's character to make this latter suggestion, as though his intention had really been most pacific.

The Duchess, however, would have thought an explanation with the Duke thrown away, if Lynn had not been there to talk it over

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with; and as soon as she and her husband were alone, began to complain loudly.

Seeing that all she said passed over his head, she had only to report to Lynn that the greatest sorrow a married woman could have was a husband who declined to quarrel.

This was not exactly the way she put it—'callous' was the word she used.

Among the guests were several of the latter-day Church party, and Mrs Burford-White and Sir Percy Landon, the former a recent convert to the Infallible Church.

To Mrs Burford-White, the Duchess also confided the fact that she was a much ill-used and neglected woman, and received the sweetest sympathy from that lady; who, when she was not compromising her reputation, was compromising with the Church, and was quite 'devote,' at least in Holy Week.

"Ah, my dear Gertrude, our crosses are so much easier to bear if we are members of the true Church. I never knew what peace was before."

And then it struck Mrs Burford-White what an extremely brilliant conversion a Duchess's would be. She determined to talk the matter over with Sir Percy Landon on the first opportunity.

Sir Percy's enormous wealth gave him considerable weight in Catholic society. He

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was building, in his own park at Landon, a monastery, which he hoped might have a spiritualising effect on the county.

If it was inevitable that it should lack the mellowness of an old-established institution, he was giving it every advantage which wealth could provide; and the numberless modern improvements would, of course, leave the inmates more time for devotion and meditation. It was a beautiful thought that there should rise up near his own home, and on a piece of ground given by him, a haven of rest where holy men, who had not become intoxicated with the rush and restlessness of our present-day life, could reflect with a leisure, which was mediæval, on the immortality of the soul. Perhaps future generations of Landons might contribute a member here and there to the Brotherhood.

As for Sir Percy himself, he was convinced that his place was out in the great world, demonstrating—by a judicious mixture of the man of fashion and the earnest Churchman—the benign influence of Rome.

He was a passionate proselytiser, and fell in at once with Mrs Burford-White's views.

"Just think, my dear Sir Percy, of the effect of such a conversion! Perhaps her own friends, and those who have measured her intellectual standard, won't be impressed, but

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the effect on the woman of the upper middle-classes would be prodigious."

"Do you think she is strong-minded enough to take such a decided step?"

Mrs Burford-White inwardly thought the Duchess obstinate enough, but forbore to correct Sir Percy's adjective. His pose was at any rate a trifle more serious than her own, and she was a little afraid of him.

"Poor dear! she is in trouble. I am sure Father Bernard could do much for her."

"It seems," said Sir Percy, meditatively, "as if the Church were indeed about to reclaim her wandering child. England is aroused; one hears of conversions everywhere."

"I wish," she replied, "that the men who come over came from the more energetic classes of the community. Now, doesn't it strike you that the converts of your own sex are just—well—just a little emotional?"

"The Church has its picturesque side, which appeals strongly to the imaginative. Who shall judge the means by which salvation is attained?"

"I must speak to Father Bernard. He understands women so thoroughly."

"True," said Sir Percy. "How few of the English clergy there are of whom one can say that. I wonder if it is because they are married?"

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"Ah! matrimony is limiting," said Mrs Burford-White, gently, and with the air of one announcing a novel spiritual doctrine, though her own matrimonial ties had not limited her much. "Father Bernard is dining at the Castle to-morrow night; I must prepare Gertrude's mind for a little talk with him."

"There are people," continued Sir Percy, "who can look upon the Anglican clergy and still boast of the Reformation."

"Ah, that dreadful Reformation!" And Mrs Burford-White shivered, as though it had been an event within her own personal experience.

"It was exceedingly vulgar, and whatever is vulgar must be wrong."

The Duke moved about amongst his guests as in a dream. He fed the hunger of his soul with memories.

His wife vaguely felt that something was amiss, for if he had ceased to persuade himself that he was in love with her, yet he had till now been more or less companionable.

Now she got on his nerves, and he could no longer treat the negations of her character with tolerance.

She was at heart not particularly sorry to hear that he could not accompany her on her journey to Scotland; but, with the instinct that the stupidest woman is never

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devoid of, she grew suspicious as to the cause. Her own reason for being glad to go alone was that she hoped to meet an admirer with whom she had had more than one flirtation. She was one of those shallow women who can enjoy any amount of flirtation. To a woman who thinks deeply, the normal relations of the sexes make the position undignified.

There was, however, a week to be got through before the party at Abshott broke up. At the end of that time the Duke was to go to Lever and the Duchess was going to the North.

CHAPTER XV

MRS BURFORD-WHITE spoke to the Duchess, as she had intended. Sir Percy Landon, though perhaps even more keenly bent on the reclaiming of heretics, hesitated, from motives of good taste, to take any active steps while he was the Duke's guest. As a woman, Mrs Burford-White had perhaps a right to be less scrupulous on the point, the same *nuance* of behaviour not demanding her abstention.

She was some two or three years older than the Duchess, and a woman of considerably more intellectual importance. She had known her from a child, and had always more or less influenced her.

Mrs Burford-White had been led by her keener brain into a love-match. Her friend had been content to be disposed of to the best advantage by her mother. The great difficulty that she contemplated in dealing with the Duchess, arose from the fact that she had never detected any spiritual yearnings in her character. There was so little to go upon.

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The fact that she dressed perfectly did not even argue an instinct for beauty or colour, which might have served as a weapon. It was a supreme mimetic capacity for being smart, which many other dull-brained women possess with her. She was High Church because most of her friends were. She had never known what is generically termed trouble—which may mean anything, from widowhood to the reduction of one's income.

No, there was certainly very little to catch hold of. As a weak character, the spiritual despotism of Rome would hold her when once it got her. It is a great thing, a Church that knows her own mind. Cardinal Newman's conversion is an enigma which can only be explained by his portrait.

Unfortunately, the Duchess was not Cardinal Newman, and had no intellect to be appealed to. Perhaps an Easter in Rome might do much good—Mrs Burford-White had known it decide so many waverers. Her own was a case in point. The magnificent festivities of the Holy City impress the weak as practical demonstration of world-wide power, whilst to the intellectual it is proof positive of the Church's effectiveness.

Mrs Burford-White came to the conclusion, without perhaps consciously working the matter out, or without having any actual desire to be

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Jesuitical, that perhaps a trifling aggravation of the Duchess's sense of injury, and a priest with charm and tact, might be her most effective allies.

She found herself, during the mystic hour before bed, alone with her friend. The windows of the room where they were sitting were wide open. Below them the land sloped precipitously to the river; to the right, the wooded hills of Abshott were revealed from end to end by moonlight.

The men's laughter now and then broke in on their conversation; they were smoking on the terrace below, some distance off.

The Duchess, who never could keep anything to herself, began to communicate her suspicions about her husband, and found her friend more than sympathetic.

"Ah, my dear!" said that lady, "the awakening comes to us all. We give to men all that is most precious to us—the flower of our womanhood, the truest and deepest affection; and with what reward? It is only a matter of time how soon they trample us under foot. The world is still at heart barbarian, if not in externals. Men have never really advanced from their savage state; sooner or later the wife—let us call her 'the queen-wife'—is relegated to a position of domestic utility, and he reserves his lordly caresses and gracious love-speeches for some younger and prettier attraction."

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"Oh! but you don't think I have gone off, do you?" asked her friend anxiously.

Mrs Burford-White was angry that her sentimental weakness for the philosophy of man's wickedness should have caused her to make a mistake. Verbose facility is so apt to draw people away from the point.

"My dear Gertrude, you are only just achieving yourself from a physical point of view; you are every day becoming a more and more beautiful woman."

The Duchess, who had been sitting bolt upright with anxiety, sank back into her chair with a sigh of relief. She felt she could believe it.

"No," continued Mrs Burford-White, drawing herself nearer to the window so that if she were witnessed from the terrace it might not be an altogether displeasing picture; "men are essentially shallow; they fall in love with our beauty, and if we suit them, that is to say, feed them well and flatter them—and, though you may not believe it Gertrude, the latter is the more important—they imagine that their love has lasted. If, when they have tired, we happen to be selfish and have no compensation to offer them, they seek consolation elsewhere. Of course, I am not talking of the middle-classes, where the mother and not the wife is the attraction, and is judged accordingly."

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"I have never flattered Maurice," mused the Duchess. "It doesn't seem quite natural to flatter a man."

"Ah, that's just where good-looking women give the battle away to the plain ones. The plain woman learns the lesson at once. Of course there is this to be said—that a beautiful woman will always have admirers; but I am talking of the time when it becomes necessary to flatter the particular man she wants, if she wishes to keep him."

"I don't know how you can go on in that clever way, Marie. I listened to you and Sir Percy Landon at lunch, and thought every moment that one of you must break down."

Mrs Burford-White smiled in a way that admitted her cleverness, but deprecated the praise.

"But, Gertrude, I want you to tell me what it is that is troubling you. Do you know that you have looked quite sad lately?"

Mrs Burford-White felt just the slightest of twinges at so misrepresenting an expression of mere sulkiness.

"Oh, it doesn't matter—only, Maurice isn't as nice as he used to be."

"Poor child!" sympathised the other. "Your fairy castle of sentiment and romance is crumbling to dust, and to the beautiful gardens in which it stood, winter has come. Ah,

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Gertrude, I could never have borne my own disappointment if I had not found rest and consolation in the true Church. I wish you were with us—what an example you would be! It is people like you that we want, people with distinguished and assured positions." Here she paused, carefully noting the effect of her words.

The Duchess was wondering how her husband would take such an event as her conversion; and although the idea of such a thing had not actually crossed her mind before, she felt that it would annoy him.

"Tell me, Marie, how does one go over to Rome?"

Mrs Burford-White was not herself quite sure 'how one did,' but was too accustomed to fence with the question for it to put her out of countenance now.

"Oh, my dear, one begins to realise that the English Church is merely schismatic, one wavers a little, and then one receives instruction, and finally one is received into the Church just like a poor, lost lamb."

The good lady's metaphor was perhaps more incomplete than mixed, but she felt that she had put the case very nicely.

"And do you feel happier?" asked the Duchess, quite earnestly for her.

"Of course. Things are so much more real.

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Religion itself seems to enter more into your daily life. You feel at once that you are being taken better care of."

"Of course it is very nice to feel that people are interested in you. I shall look at Father Bernard to-morrow night with more interest."

"You should talk to him, dear; he would clear away many of your doubts."

The Duchess began to wonder what her doubts might be; but she had a great respect for her friend's discernment, and hardly liked to ask about that connected with herself which was unknown to her, and evidently so obvious to her friend.

CHAPTER XVI

THE Duke had read somewhere, long before he had met either Broadhurst or Lever, that much of the ancient wisdom which moderns term occultism had been acquired by the Jesuits. Apart from this fact, the inscrutable Brotherhood had always possessed a fascination for him; the subtle nature of their power, the breadth of their knowledge, and the peculiar passion of their faith had struck him more than once as being the most extraordinary of all paradoxes. He therefore welcomed Father Bernard with the pleasure which he always felt on meeting anyone in whom the spiritual seemed active.

Mrs Burford-White thought she detected a diplomacy in Father Bernard's preliminary deference to the Duke. Before assaulting the heretic citadel of the Duchess's faith, if so strong a term could be applied to that lady's negative beliefs, it was as well to be on terms with her husband.

She would probably have been surprised to

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learn that Father Bernard would have been the first to despise so vulgar a method. He knew Mrs Burford-White's converts of old. He would, of course, do his duty, and bring back any wandering sheep to the fold—dogma demanded that; but it would not be a difficult matter to convert the Duchess, if it were to be done at all.

He was a distant kinsman of the Duke's; and, though he had never met him before, the absence of the usual scandals which are apt to be associated with young men of his position and wealth had puzzled him. He was curious to see whether he was a prig. A glance convinced him that the Duke was an exception to the prevailing rule of prig or profligate.

There is this charm about the Church of Rome—that all her priests have the same atmosphere of authority. A reforming clergyman, no matter of what church or of what nationality, is ridiculously ineffective before the servants of this Church which knows no compromise. Even the Archbishop of Canterbury might feel a little apologetic in the presence of an ordinary village curé.

At dinner, the priest talked to the Duchess, and he wondered at a mind retaining so much of its natural vulgarity when it was enshrined in so beautiful a form, and placed among surroundings so propitious. He detected none

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of those spiritual yearnings for which Mrs Burford-White's enthusiasm had prepared him; and he only found one topic in which they were commonly interested—horses.

The Duke was somewhat silent, listening and wondering at the ease with which the priest adapted himself to that which might entertain the Duchess.

Lady Catherine Pennell, at the other end of the table, was discussing and treating, with the derision born of ignorance, a new sect which had arisen in America.

"An American cleric gives me a positive shock," said Mrs Burford-White. "There is something blasphemous in an ecclesiastic with a twang. A sermon in Americanese seems hardly reverent."

Then the name 'Broadhurst' was mentioned.

"I know whom you mean," answered Mrs Burford-White, quickly; "he's that dreadful fraud who shows you your own dead grandmother, isn't he?"

"Well, I don't know about that exactly, and I should hardly call a man a fraud who can show you your dead grandmother. He is supposed to spend as much time out of his body as in it," replied Sir Percy Landon.

"Yes, I saw him once," said Mrs Burford-White. "It looks as though it hadn't had much wear and tear."

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"I believe that years ago he was in India, and there was a great exposure," added Sir Percy.

"Indeed?" asked the Duke. "Where was that?"

Everyone had ceased talking; the subject was an interesting one. The priest raised a glass of water to his lips, and listened attentively.

"Well, I don't know exactly where it was; but I know someone who was in Bombay at the time, and who knew all about it."

"A little vague, don't you think?" asked the Duke. "I know Mr Broadhurst. He does not strike me as the kind of man who would lend himself to a fraud."

"But surely you do not consider his teachings as other than a farrago of nonsense?"

"You have read his works?" said the Duke, looking inquiringly at Sir Percy.

"Oh dear, no!" And Sir Percy glanced for a moment at the impassive and sphynx-like countenance of the priest. "The Church would not permit it."

"There are so many cranks nowadays that it is quite impossible to keep up with all of them. We all took to palmistry last year, but, personally, I think it was money wasted." And Mrs Rupert Wynn looked as though she had contributed materially to the conversation.

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"Mr Broadhurst is a great influence, is he not?"

The priest, who had hitherto been silent, watched the Duke's face keenly as he waited for a reply.

"I should say, with so strong a personality, it is inevitable. He holds doctrines that were new to me. They had enough logic in them to fascinate me."

The priest did not pursue the subject; such a conversation held dangerous possibilities which it was desirable to avoid when any of his flock were present. It interested him that the Duke should have had such an acquaintance. The rest of the party were under the impression that merely some new fad had been under consideration.

Suddenly Lady Catherine's voice, with a tremulous carrying power, reached the Duke. Her remark, though it was quite a natural one, struck him like an electric shock.

"What's become of that little Norwegian girl you spoke to me about, Havant?"

To the Duke's brain, momentarily confused, it was as though everyone was reading the story of his heart in his face. For an instant he was silent.

"Has she found a place?" pursued Lady Catherine.

Mrs Rupert Wynn interposed.

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"A Norwegian girl who wants a place? I wonder if she would make a good maid? I never can keep my maids, and I'm sure I treat them very kindly. The present one says she never gets any sleep."

"A good maid is a very rare thing," said Lady Catherine, happily diverted from the subject of Helga by Mrs Wynn. "Poor Anne Shipright had a most dreadful experience the other day. She offended her maid, an Italian, who evidently was determined to be revenged."

"Swore a vendetta, I suppose?" said Sir Percy Landon.

"I don't know what she swore, but she braided Anne's hair to the back of her chair, caught her a violent box on the ears, and walked downstairs and into a cab on which her luggage was already piled. And the worst of it was, she had had her wages in advance."

"Of course she's in prison?" said Mrs Rupert Wynn, breathlessly.

"I don't think so," said Lady Catherine, reflectively, adding suddenly, as if the thought had not before occurred to her, "I wonder why Anne didn't prosecute her."

"Perhaps Lady Shipright appreciates the danger of prosecuting one's own maid. A barrister cross-examining a lady's-maid is rather like dipping one's arm in a bran-tub. One never knows what one may fish up."

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Everyone laughed, and the Duchess rose.

Left alone, the priest drew nearer to the Duke. Sir Percy Landon was, with the aid of nut-shells, arranging and explaining a plan of his monastery on the table-cloth. Lynn smoked innumerable cigarettes, drank a great deal too much Hendaye, and wondered how he managed to endure the tedium of Abshott. Two other men listened to Sir Percy, because they had no conversation.

"This Mr Broadhurst that you have mentioned," said Father Bernard—"you say his views interest you. May I ask in what way?"

"If you will permit me to say so, they primarily reconcile the divergence of creeds claiming to be inspired."

"Surely the divinity of a creed can only be judged by its effect. The highest manifestation of God is that which secures the best moral results."

"And which creed can claim that?" asked the Duke. "You would not deny that the morality of nations—that is, their sense of obligation to each other and their populations—has increased in a way never before witnessed during the last hundred years. Can you claim that result for Christianity?"

"I should have said so," answered the priest, meditatively. He was anxious to sound the heights and depths of the Duke's intelligence.

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"It seems to me that the voice of freedom in Europe was heard first from the lips of men like Voltaire and Rousseau. Of course it might be answered that they had the true Christian spirit; personally, I believe they had, but from your point of view it is right, is it not, to accept the Church as the sole authoritative exponent of Christianity?"

"You mean," said Father Bernard, "that the Church has failed—the Church of Rome?"

"Oh, I concede to you that, for the purposes of Christianity, there is no other Church than that of Rome."

"I merely defined for the purposes of argument."

"It seems to me that where there is dogma, there must be unquestioned authority. Three hundred years of dissent have proved that. The condition of the dissenting churches shows that you cannot preserve a dogma and your own conscience."

"In what way do the doctrines of this Mr Broadhurst supply the place of a dogmatic faith?"

"He formulates a theory of the evolution of the soul, at any rate analogous to the evolution of the material things which we see all around us. It has the advantage of being harmonious and logical. You must own that

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the Christian theory of the soul is a little spasmodic."

"It is assumed," said Father Bernard, putting the tips of his fingers gently together, "that the Church denies the progression of the soul after this life. The purgatorial condition is ignored."

"But am I not right in supposing the teaching to be that purgatory is a place where the faults of this life are definitely cancelled by repentance or atonement, after which the soul ascends to its rest? The Church does not seem to teach a further struggle."

"You must allow for the symbol, and the limitation of those it has to teach." The Jesuit had dropped his voice.

"I wonder whether you would have made that admission to Sir Percy Landon?"

"Admitted," said the priest, "that all creeds emanate from one source; as the highest revelation the Catholic Church should be supported by all intelligent men as that most suited for the mass of the uneducated. Surely it should be the policy of those who see further to hold their tongues, and not to place combustible material in the hands of children."

This was indeed broad, coming from a Romish priest.

"You admire this Mr Broadhurst?" he continued.

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"I cannot say," answered the Duke, slowly, "that I know him well enough to assert that definitely. I am inclined to admire him. The man emanates honesty. It is irritating to hear him described as a crank by people who have not one-thousandth part of his intellect. Here is a man who is no mere hysterical faddist. He has taken the most brilliant degrees in the exact sciences. His erudition on the subject of comparative religion is enormous. He himself is calm and unfeverous as can be, with an extraordinarily impartial stand-point. And yet, thousands who have never thought out one serious subject thoroughly, pipe the word 'crank' with all the smugness and complacency imaginable."

"It has been the reward of many great men," said the priest gently.

The Duke detected in the reply the genius which had smoothed the susceptibilities of so many, and brought them into the fold of the Church. The remark was so indicative of the breadth and sympathy which prompted it.

"Your intellect inclines to the mystical, and that being so the Church need never despair of you."

"Am I to be made the object of a siege?" asked the Duke, smilingly.

"When we contemplate an attack, I will let you know."

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The priest felt half inclined to warn him of Mrs Burford-White's plans regarding the Duchess, but held his tongue. It was in his training to do so.

Lynn was querulously demanding billiards. No one seemed inclined to oblige him.

"Will you give me sixty in a hundred?" asked the priest laughingly.

"Certainly, Father Bernard," replied Lynn, whom the prospect of a game of billiards with the Jesuit awed not a little.

The Duke rose.

CHAPTER XVII

THE Duke left Abshott and returned to town without seeing Father Bernard again.

He regretted this, as his conversation with the priest was the one thing which had interested him since he had parted from Helga.

Sir Percy Landon would have argued Ritual with him all day long, but on the wider issues which disturbed the Duke's conscience he had never had any doubts.

The strain of being away from Helga had been insupportable, and his anxiety to see her feverish.

Mrs Hardwick had taken her to Broadstairs. Helga could not honestly say that she found the place interesting; it was uncomfortably crowded, and the visions of a country life, which Mrs Hardwick's announcement of the holiday had conjured up, were by no means realised.

The Duke's old nurse noticed a far-away look in the girl's eyes, and wondered whether she had left a lover in Norway; and to this

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end began a system of gentle cross-examination.

Finding that her roundabout inquiries produced no results, she asked Helga bluntly whether her heart was her own.

Helga laid her hand nervously on the bosom of her dress, beneath which lay the cross the Duke had given her, and said she thought so.

"You've not made any promise then, my dear?"

"Oh, no," said Helga quickly.

But Mrs Hardwick was not to be thus put off. What old lady scenting information on such a subject would have held her tongue?

"You've not left your heart behind you in your own home, then?"

"Oh, no, no!" The reply was given with such emphasis that Mrs Hardwick turned and looked at her in surprise. There was something in the girl's tone which to her quick understanding inferred that there might possibly be someone in England; and Mrs Hardwick began to suspect that Mrs Algernon Brigwater's business had already furnished Helga with an admirer. It was hardly in Helga's nature not to mention it, and she was puzzled.

However, she did not question her further, but she had aroused something which, until

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now, the girl had hidden from herself. In her own room at night, with the door locked, she drew the little gold cross from her breast and kissed it passionately, and then blushed as though, instead of being alone, there had been an audience to witness her spontaneity.

The Duke, following Lever's advice, waited anxiously for the day which was to bring the fulfilment or failure of the latter's promise; he doubted exceedingly whether it would be of a totally convincing nature, and expected to be disappointed by a new interpretation of some constantly recurring phenomena.

The idea of meeting Helga and speaking to her in an under-world, or a higher state, as the case might be, seemed to him incredible, although Broadhurst's books supported the possibility of Lever's promise being fulfilled. He called on Lever once, and wondered at finding him out of town, as his reason for being vague about the Abshott invitation had been his reluctance to leave home. On the morning before the experiment was to take place, he received a note from Lever to say that he expected him at eleven o'clock the next evening. By this time the suffering he endured at not seeing Helga was very real indeed.

As is the way with lovers, a fortnight's absence had told on him to such an extent that

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it seemed as if she had passed out of his life for ever. He wondered if she thought of him, and also if she wore his cross.

He dined early and drove to Lever's house. He was shown at once into the upper room, where he found Lever with the inevitable cigarette between his lips.

"I have been away for three days; I hear you called during that time."

"Hardly much of a holiday?"

"I never take holidays—I don't want them. These are my holidays when I lie here and smoke. Won't you sit down? Try that divan you used the other day—it's comfortable. I hope you don't feel as though you were going to have a tooth out. It's perfectly simple, and I can see you have observed the conditions."

"How can you tell that?"

"There is nothing so vitiating to the etheric surroundings of a man as alcohol. Its effects, to those that can see, are unmistakable. I never can understand how an entire nation can set about poisoning itself. You are looking thinner. Would you mind lying back and trying to go to sleep whilst retaining to the last moment, if possible, your power of thought."

"I suppose we have, most of us, made that experiment at some time or other?"

"Exactly. Then you will understand what

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I mean. Keep to the last a vivid mental picture of the person you wish to see. Don't hurry; when you are ready," said Lever, without leaving his seat.

It was one of the Duke's peculiarities that he was able to sleep at will, and he told Lever so.

"That's capital; it halves the difficulty."

He had thought of Helga so much, had treasured up the details of her beauty so lovingly, that they rose into his brain vivid, clear-cut, at will.

* * * * *

After a short interregnum of unconsciousness, he became aware that the conditions around him were changed. That Lever was with him he knew, and although there was a great silence, he also knew that Lever was endeavouring to reassure him, to hold and to steady his own wavering perceptions. He knew that he had come into the present place borne thither by a current of will, and that this current might turn before his mental foothold was assured.

At first he felt that he was groping in night, and yet it was not exactly night as he had known it on earth. There was a strange blankness and emptiness around him. It was as if he had been suddenly deprived of air and yet was able to live on, sustained by some more subtle element.

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By degrees his vision cleared, and he was conscious of shapes, repulsive and terrifying, gliding thick and fast around him. Above his head, also, the shadows fled like the wind, while eyes that seemed to possess a previous knowledge of him threatened. He recoiled, and though he could hear no voice, a phrase came to his brain from Lever's.

"Don't be afraid. Face them with courage, and they do not exist."

He made an effort, and his confidence returned. As he did so, the apparitions sank away from him, and a vast plain unrolled before his sight, finally ending in a chain of lofty mountains. He and Lever began to move swiftly across it, and there were people like themselves also journeying towards the mountains. By this time everything around him had assumed a more or less familiar aspect.

The light, however, was different to anything he had known in his physical life. It was finer, clearer, and yet less tiring to the eyes. The figures, which were moving across the plain with himself and Lever, had most of them a garment of luminous colour, while Lever was framed in a haze suffused with orange light. Far away, across the undulating plain, were seen woods and rivers and fields, being only differentiated from the same objects of earth by the ultra-vividness of the general colouring.

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The lack of atmosphere, as he had known it, reduced distance, and, as a consequence, enhanced the size of things.

Suddenly Lever had left his side, and Helga was before him. The mantle of light she wore was a wondrously delicate shade of rose-red. She appeared etherealised beyond imagination, and on her bosom glittered the little cross of gold.

Even as he looked upon her, the colour in the aureole surrounding her shone with a more intense glow, and under-colours of subtle beauty wove themselves through it like threads; while to the surface rose warmer hues, as if the sea of light had been stirred to its depths.

They looked frankly into one another's eyes, as if the necessity for self-deception no longer existed; neither was there any need for speech, for the thoughts that were in each other's minds were conveyed from one to the other by a process inexplicable and unquestioned.

"I love you, Helga."

"And I love you, Maurice."

Had they spoken, this was all they would have said. There was a wonderful, tense pleasure in being there together.

The Duke looked earnestly at the cross that lay upon her bosom. Neither felt wonder or curiosity at finding themselves there together in another world.

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They had stood like this, face to face in this light, many times since their first meeting. It was only that the Duke on this occasion was aware of the existence of the earth he had just left, while the spirit-world in which Helga found herself was, for the time being, the circumference of her consciousness.

They had no sense of motion, but ever as they moved the character of their surroundings changed and became more beautiful. Once only, when Helga sent him a thought which reproached him for not having seen her for so long, the scenery around was altered as if by the wand of a magician, and by their side sped a deep, black, and icy river; while, beyond, lay frost-bound fields with leafless trees and desolate hedge-rows.

The Duke noticed that since Helga and he had met they had come across no one else.

She told him of all her love for him. He knew that she had no recollection of their meetings in earth-life. She accepted him and the surroundings without question, as she might have done in a dream.

Although he had the exquisite joy of her presence, and the admission from her own lips that she loved him, there was a certain pain in the knowledge that she was impalpable to touch; for, once he had stretched out his hand to her, only to find that he could sense nothing.

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And then he was alone, Helga passing from him, suddenly, swift as a thought. He stood and pondered, though without amazement, over her disappearance; till he felt Lever leading him back to earth, and stretched out his arm to feel the embroidered surface of the divan. He opened his eyes to find Lever watching him intently from his seat beneath the crimson-shaded lamp, as he was doing before sleep overtook him. He sat up, with a curious sense of fatigue.

"You remember?" said Lever.

"Absolutely."

"And you are satisfied?"

The blood flew to the Duke's cheeks as he remembered Helga's words, 'And I love you, Maurice.' The admission from her lips carried with it a new danger; knowing that she loved him, the struggle not to wrong her would be the greater.

"It was a wonderful experience," murmured the Duke; and, almost overcome with lassitude, he sank back on the piled-up cushions, and lit a cigarette.

"It seemed to you unreal?"

"Not in the least; it was wonderfully vivid. Tell me, what is the meaning of the light which surrounded her?"

"Our lives and pasts build that light. She is a very advanced soul. That is why the

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colours in the arc about her were so resplendent."

"How was it," asked the Duke, "that I met her so soon?"

"I led you straight to her. It took me a week of work to find out the particular part of that world to which she belongs."

"But when I have been unconsciously myself in that world, as you say I have, had I no place where she is?"

"Not where she is," said Lever, quietly; "but not very far off." He might have added that the Duke's place was higher than that of Helga.

"You have been very kind to me," said the Duke rising. "And why should you be?"

"One day you may be able to do something for me—who knows?"

The Duke drove home to Park Lane full of the one thought—that Helga loved him.

Everything was transformed. The pain which had gnawed at his heart for weeks was gone.

It was broad daylight when he sprang into bed and fell into a dreamless sleep.

CHAPTER XVIII

INSTEAD of leaving Broadstairs with regret, Helga stepped into the train for London her heart throbbing with delight; Broadstairs had seemed to her exile, it was so far away from him. In London, though she saw him seldom, she was always near him. There was always the chance that they might meet, that she might see him accidentally as she had done before; for she was not convinced that their meetings had been other than pure accident.

Mrs Hardwick wondered, and was a little hurt at Helga's evident delight at leaving Broadstairs. She had expected regrets, and here was the girl laughing in gleeful anticipation of getting back to London.

Mrs Hardwick was a dear, and very kind; but all the same it had been dull—the day's programme varying very little.

Breakfast, the beach, an early dinner. In the afternoon Mrs Hardwick slept, and Helga read. Tea, made by Helga from the tea Mrs Hardwick herself had brought. After

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tea, the parade and the band ; then home to a light supper, bed, and sleep.

Helga was at a loss to discover where the fun came in. If she glanced somewhat enviously at the other young people of her own age enjoying themselves, it was not because she wanted to join them, but because, in driving her to reflections on her own loneliness, she could not help thinking of Havant. She was a girl of warm feelings and strong sympathies ; but she was in love, however little she had confessed it to herself ; and, in the manner of womankind, even in his absence, she wanted no one else.

This is a curious difference between the two sexes. The woman is certainly more concentrated in her affections ; but it is, if analysed, a selfish indulgence of her own emotions. It is exemplified in the maternal instinct.

How many mothers are there who can hold the scales of justice between their own offspring and those of a stranger ? It is not to be supposed that men are without prejudice in favour of their own children, but they are infinitely less so.

If a man's wife has a quarrel, he will probably see both sides of the question ; the average wife would deem it an act of disloyalty to hint that there could be another side to the question.

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It is this very same principle, this concentration on one individual, that enables a woman to live quietly, and without companion, when her husband is abroad. It is the more generous and world-experienced male nature that, being more human, demands the sympathy of companionship.

Helga had a great soul, but she was woman before everything; and it was the subtle perfection of sex, so strong in her, which had charmed the Duke.

Though Helga could never by any circumstance have been seduced into a love of finery or gaudy apparel for its own sake, she had lost the almost countrified simplicity of dress and manner; and the wonder was that she had done so without sacrificing any of her freshness and purity. Her instinctive refinement taught her to choose the best, either in dress or style, from the multi-coloured throng around her. She had, strangely enough, the fine points that are associated with the traditions of breeding.

Mrs Hardwick would watch in amazement the dexterity with which, by some touch that amounted to genius, she would invest an ordinary garment with grace and individuality.

Her love for the Duke was as yet a vague exaltation of feeling which the memory or presence of him produced in her. It had not

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as yet assumed a definite relation to her conduct. This was because she never dreamt that he regarded her as other than one for whose misfortune he had great sympathy. His further interest, after having extricated her from Thea's clutches, she put down to the earnestness of his nature, which, having once undertaken a task, would go through with it. Her love and gratitude were things to be hidden in her own heart, and not to be shown unless they could be of service.

She had followed the Duke's movements in the papers, and knew that he had returned to town from Abshott. With a sinking heart, she reflected that it was probable she might not see him again. That he would call on his old nurse was certain, but that he would do so when Helga was at home was scarcely likely. He would call as usual in the afternoon, a time when Helga was in Bond Street.

They got back to town on a Saturday, and on Sunday Mrs Hardwick trotted off to her sister, leaving Helga in charge. Helga had taken her tea into the tiny garden, the brick walls of which were mantled everywhere thickly with creeper, which autumn was staining red and brown, when from the front door, down the narrow, shadowed hall, there echoed a knock. She opened it, expecting to find some friend of Mrs Hardwick's.

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The Duke stood before her.

It was the first time he had seen her since they had met in that other-world, and he scanned her face eagerly, seeking in her expression some consciousness of that meeting. He found none.

Of course, on hearing that his old nurse was away from home he should have gone away, but he made no movement to do so; and Helga confused—hardly knowing what she was doing, but feeling vaguely that Mrs Hardwick would be angry if he were sent unceremoniously from her door—asked him in, and, finding nothing else to say, murmured:

“I was in the garden.”

“May I come into the garden, too?”

What could she do? She felt that there was something wrong in the situation, but could not think of any way to escape from it.

“May I have some tea?” he asked, seeing the little table with its small tray and the snowy cloth.

She flew indoors. It was with a feeling of relief she got away from him for a moment, she was so bewildered.

Left alone in the garden, he reflected that this was a thing he should not do. He ought to get up and go away at once; but somehow, with the idea in his brain of Helga being there with him alone, giving him tea in the most

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informal manner in the world, he could not tear himself away.

Besides, although the Duke's character was in the main ethical, and earnestness and a sense of duty its chief concomitants, he had never been in love before ; and much must be forgiven to every man and woman in the first real love-affair of their lives. He had suffered much when he confessed to himself that there was only one course open to him under the circumstances. He loved Helga so much, that he almost hoped that what she had confessed to him in that hidden world she did not feel in her own earth self. Sooner or later he would, from his very character, throw even this sophistry aside, and face the truth. Then would come the struggle. If the better part of him lost, it was in him to go absolutely to pieces. Even as a boy he had felt that sin meant more to him than to most, and that responsibility is in proportion to knowledge. Still, he played with the fire ; because as yet he was not sure that Helga's feelings were involved, and because he believed himself strong enough to cry ' Halt ' at any moment.

Helga returned to the garden with another cup, but no chair. The Duke rose and placed his own for her.

" Wait a bit," and he dashed into the house, and reappeared with a specimen known as ' kitchen.'

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So Helga's one little attempt to prevent a *tête-à-tête* was foiled.

The Duke posed a little, as people are apt to when they are doing wrong. He was at first almost exaggeratedly boyish and friendly, as if to assure her of the absence of any deeper feeling. He could see that she was ill at ease. He drank his tea, and talked volubly. He asked her how she had enjoyed her holiday.

Yes, Helga loved the sea, but not as at Broadstairs. And the Duke agreed with her. She should see the sea at Carrackness.

Carrackness, he explained, was his castle in Scotland. It was built almost in the solid rock. The sea, which nearly surrounded it, was seldom calm, and there were always dangerous currents. In the winter, it screamed and howled threateningly at the Castle, as it had done for centuries, throwing up white arms of foam and spray, as if greedy to assail and drag down its battlemented walls. Thousands of sea birds wheeled around the cliffs at the Castle's base, their cries sounding like those of sea ghosts through the rattling of the tempest. There, even in the summer, the storms rose up as if some chance word had roused the ocean to anger.

Then, landwards, there were the woodlands, stretching for miles in great, undulating sweeps of gorse and heather, over which as a boy he

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had tramped in the mist and rain, the dreary grandeur lifting his soul to those great questions of the universe, some of which now seemed to him on the point of being answered.

He spoke on thus till the quiet Sunday evening came, for the constraint which had been between them at first had given place to the freedom of the perfect pleasure of being with one another. She listened to his description of Carrackness, and the same thought that was in his brain wandered uninvited into hers.

How perfect it would be if they could be there together. And then, with a hot blush, she put the idea from her.

The Duke could not tear himself away. They might never again be together like this.

And then they talked of her home. It was a relief to her to speak of Norway to someone who knew it. He, too, loved her deep blue fjords, walled in by the majestic, towering granite—at times so high that the light fails as it descends, till gloom and shadow brood upon the waters; the fertile patches that break out upon the barren land like laughter; its villages nestling unexpectedly at the foot of some stern, rugged mountain; the houses fashioned of timber from the valleys, and painted gaily in primitive colours.

All these things they talked of. They did not directly deal with the sentiment of love,

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but it coloured everything; and through the conversation there was an atmosphere of deep feeling which was dangerous.

The hard clang of a church-bell struck on their ears.

"One of these days you will go back and leave us?"

"Perhaps it ought not to be so, but I am very happy here; although, at night, I dream of my home, and I can see them all quite plainly, down to my little brother Frithjof—he is our youngest."

At the word 'dream' the Duke started. Since he had entered the garden he had been mentally comparing the dream-picture with their present meeting. In the world which Lever had conjured up for him she had appeared more ethereal, and it had seemed good that it should be so. Still, now that he saw her again on earth, he would not have had her other than she was at the moment.

"Dreams are vivid things sometimes, are they not?"

She looked up inquiringly. It was the word 'vivid' that puzzled her. Good as her knowledge of English was, she was bewildered by words that were unusual.

He grasped the reason of her glance at once, and added:

"I mean, they are very real."

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Helga laughed.

"I have to pinch myself sometimes when I wake up, so as to be sure I am safe and sound in bed. My dreams carry me such a long way."

"Where do they carry you?" asked the Duke, eagerly; and although he almost expected that she would recall the place where they had met in that other world, he was none the less amazed when she answered:

"To places quite different from any of those I have seen when awake. I sometimes dream of a land where everyone walks in a flame of beautiful light. I can never remember quite what the colours of that light are, but I know they are far more beautiful than anything I have ever seen on earth."

"Have you had such a dream lately?"

"Yes. One night last week I dreamt that I went on a long journey. I had a companion, but who it was I can't remember."

The Duke bent forward eagerly.

"Do you think you could remember if you tried hard?" And the anxious tone in his voice made Helga look at him in surprise.

"I don't think so. One never can remember, you know; one always means to, just before waking, but somehow the people one has seen, and the things they have said, hardly ever come back."

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"I have read somewhere that when we are asleep our souls leave their bodies and wander in their own fatherland."

"Perhaps that is true. That may be the meaning of sleeping."

He noticed that she did not wear his cross; he had thought it was possible that, in her entire innocence, she might have told Mrs Hardwick of his gift. Somehow he felt sure she had not; and this trifling deception—spoiling, through a fault of his, the sweet honesty of her character—pained him.

Helga began to feel a little nervous. Mrs Hardwick might be back at any moment, and still the Duke showed no sign of going. Not that she did not feel the keenest delight in his presence; and as for the Duke—they were the happiest hours he had ever spent in his life. At last he rose to go.

In hastening to prevent her opening the door for him, his hand met hers for the first time other than in a formal hand-shake. It thrilled him through and through, and he almost stumbled into the street like a drunken man.

The door closed, and Helga leant back against the wall, both hands pressed tightly to her bosom, as if to stop the wild beating of her heart. She felt that there had been danger in the air.

She went out into the garden, and stood for

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some time, recalling every incident of his visit. She was as pure in thought as a girl well could be, and her bringing-up had been too primitive for her to analyse the ethics of the situation as yet.

She took the tea-things into the small kitchen; and, having washed them, hung the cups on their little brass hooks on the dresser, and placed the plates in the shining row beloved of Mrs Hardwick.

Then she went out into the garden again, and dreamed till the moon rose up.

Mrs Hardwick came home late. She had, as she put it, sat talking and talking, and had then been prevailed upon to stay to supper. She was surprised to hear that the Duke had been. She had never known him call on a Sunday before. Had he come in? Mrs Hardwick was a little astonished to hear that he had, and still more astonished when she discovered, by further questioning, that he had had tea.

"I hope you served it to him in the front room, my dear?"

"He asked if he might have it in the garden," said Helga falteringly. Fortunately for the girl, Mrs Hardwick did not carry her questioning further.

Still, the old lady felt that things were a little peculiar, without in the least suspecting Helga of any departure from rigid conduct.

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Helga reached down the Bible, out of which it was the old lady's long habit to read a few verses before going to bed.

"What time did you have your supper, my dear?" she said suddenly.

Helga was standing before her, a far-away look in her eyes, and the book held limply in her hand.

"I forgot all about supper."

She spoke as though awaking from a dream.

"Then you can just get yourself some, and eat it at once. Why is it that young girls always want to starve themselves if they are left alone? I could understand it if you were in love, because I used to be most dreadfully afraid of eating before Hardwick, when he and I were keeping company. I was always afraid he'd think it indelicate."

Then she returned to the subject of the Duke, asking how he was dressed, what he came in, whether he looked well, and what he had said about her.

"I see his wife's gone to Scotland."

Helga was dumb. For a space there was silence in the room.

"Whose wife?" She felt as if her life were depending on the answer.

"Whose wife? Why, his Grace's wife, of course—the present Duchess. Although, my dear, I think the less said about her the better.

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I sometimes think that if his mother hadn't married again, it might never have happened. My dear, what is the matter?"

Helga was leaning forward in her chair, deadly white.

Mrs Hardwick had only just time to reach her when, with a little sigh, she fell forward into her arms in a faint.

The first thing she heard on coming to, was Mrs Hardwick's voice, far away, saying:

"This comes of forgetting to have your supper."

The old lady put her to bed, and brought her a respectable-sized glass of port-wine. Then, seeing that she was quite recovered, she left her.

Alone in the darkness, the child—for she was little more—lay with her eyes painfully straining at the gloom, her lips apart in wondering terror. Then, suddenly, with a little choking sob, she raised her hands with a passionately prayerful gesture above her head, as if entreating to be spared from the blow.

CHAPTER XIX

THE Duke began to realise that his meetings with Helga were having a dangerous effect. There was no doubt as to what the incident at Mrs Hardwick's door had meant to both of them ; a volume of protestations could not have been so convincing. He reproached himself for not having resisted the temptation in the first place.

At breakfast the next morning he opened a letter from Lever. It was to ask him to call. Lever wrote that he was about to try a novel experiment—the projection of objects through space, the process being first to reduce them to their ultimate atoms.

It was part of Lever's plan to bewilder the Duke with phenomena. To extract from him the figure which he possessed—unknown even to himself—it was necessary first to teach him certain occult secrets. Lever's fear was that such knowledge, acting on a nature like the Duke's, would render it repugnant to him to use it other than for some specific moral purpose.

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The next few days the Duke spent almost entirely in Lever's society. With feverish interest he plunged headlong into certain magical studies, which Lever took care should be made attractive. The Duke had always had a passion for chemistry; and the way in which Lever would prove some of the most startling of his theories and practices by an appeal to modern science, fascinated his pupil. The only thing that Lever asked him to do was to come to the subject without prejudice.

The memories of Helga must, the Duke said to himself, gradually fade if he gave himself wholly up to this new and enthralling study.

By his experiment in that other-world where the Duke had met Helga, Lever had made out a strong case for himself as an authority and as a man who was no mere theorist.

Sometimes the Duke felt that he would like to have had Broadhurst at some of his conversations with Lever. He could not say that Broadhurst's companionship charmed him as did that of the other, but he instinctively felt that his researches were actuated by a higher principle than those of Lever.

Lever was amazed at the quickness with which the Duke absorbed the information he gave him. It was as though his mind were reasserting itself over certain branches of knowledge which had been lying dormant. The

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process was not unlike that of developing a negative: the plate is dipped into the developing solution, and the objects that were there the whole time are then plainly to be seen.

Lever had not absolutely a tyro to deal with. Besides being a very fair chemist, the Duke had some knowledge of astronomy. They also studied astrology. It was here that the Duke's amazing intuition was most noticeable. Lever found it necessary to be more and more careful, lest he should wake some Titanic power which would be far beyond his control.

The readiness with which the Duke had adapted himself to the other-world where he had seen Helga, had astonished him; but the speed with which he grasped truths connected with occult science was amazing.

If Lever had been a propagandist, the conversion of so important a person as the Duke would have meant much to him; but this was hardly his aim. It was for personal ends that he wanted the Duke's secret. It was so as to be able to control and wield those forces beyond the veil.

Interested and fascinated though the Duke was by his new studies, Helga's personality obtruded through them all. He had, somehow, felt no inclination to ask Lever to repeat the experiment, and bring Helga and himself together again in that mysterious other-world,

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partly from a disinclination that his meeting with Helga should in any way be subject to Lever's will. He had tried by himself to achieve the same result, but without success; and when he had faintly suggested that Lever should teach him the process, the latter had always found some means of avoiding the subject.

He had not seen Helga for over a week, and the desire to do so was so strong, that he found himself in Bond Street at the hour she usually left business, without having absolutely told himself that he was going to meet her. He waited some time beyond her hour of leaving, and she had not appeared. He had seen Mrs Brigwater's smart little victoria drive away in an opposite direction. He waited on for another half-hour, unable to tear himself away while there was the least hope.

Just as he was about to leave in despair, she emerged from the small side-door. He could see at once, even from where he stood, that she was looking very changed; and, as she drew near, the pallor and sadness of her face startled him. She did not see him till she was quite close, and, coming upon him suddenly, she started, her face growing even paler than before.

After she had shaken hands with him, she made no movement that was suggestive of accepting him as a companion, such as, in all innocence, she had done before. There ensued

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an awkward silence. He tried to speak as if nothing unusual had happened, but he realised that, for some reason, their relations had entirely changed.

"May I walk a little way with you?"

She had shown him plainly that she did not want him to. The remark was the result of the lack of pride peculiar to those who are in love.

"Have you been ill? You look very white."

"No; I am quite well."

"What did Mrs Hardwick say at my staying and having tea with you?"

"She was sorry to have missed you."

The Duke could not make Helga speak, except to reply directly to his questions. He was wondering whether Mrs Hardwick had blamed the girl for having allowed him to stay so long, the afternoon he had called. To ask her if she were offended with him would be to venture on dangerous ground. He felt that if he were to do this, he might end by declaring his love and asking her to go away with him.

They walked in silence the last hundred yards of Bond Street, and at the corner Helga paused as if to say good-bye. If he could have known what a pitiful struggle for control was going on within her, he would have done one of two things—have implored her to go away

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with him, or have left her, never to see her again.

There was no mistaking the dismissal implied in her manner. She left him feeling desperately unhappy and not a little foolish.

He threw himself into a hansom. Half-way down Oxford Street he passed Lynn and Algernon Brigwater. He had forgotten, in placing Helga with the latter's wife, that his brother-in-law and Brigwater were bosom friends. It was Lynn who had invented the name 'Bonnets.'

They were driving, and Lynn flourished his whip effusively. Seeing the pair together, conveyed vaguely to the Duke the impression that there was a link between Lynn and Helga. He hated the idea.

CHAPTER XX

THE Duke had already seen Lever that morning, having left him towards the afternoon. Had he stayed a few minutes longer, he would have met Broadhurst, who showed himself up, and found Lever poring over an astrological chart. As he seated himself, he did so without the physical collapse peculiar to a man of his physique. He occupied his chair, but without any suspension of alertness.

"You are a hard worker," he said, casting his eye round the room and taking in at a glance the contents.

"Time is very short," said Lever, as he carefully placed one of the fine points of a compass and drew a semi-circle. "Where have you been?"

"Well, my last visit was to the bottom of the Pacific Ocean. A curious case. A burning ship sank, and most of the passengers were drowned. One poor woman could not persuade herself that she had not been burned, so great

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was the impression of terror that the conflagration had left on her."

"She is all right now?—quite comforted?" And Lever peered sardonically over the gold rim of his *pince-nez*.

"Quite."

"I cannot understand how a man of your abilities can waste his time trying to spare a lot of nobodies those experiences which will probably do them good."

"The moral aspect of the case is this," answered Broadhurst, stroking his beard, "that when the power to save people suffering is ours, it is a proof that their experience has gone far enough."

"I am afraid those moral obligations don't appeal to me. Perhaps I am wrong." He counted some of the stars on his chart, doing at the same time small algebraical sums on a waste piece of paper.

"Do you care for astrology?"

"I did a good deal of it once; not here—in Egypt, a couple of thousand years ago. May I look?" and Broadhurst stretched out his hand.

Lever hesitated a moment, and then passed it to him.

"Oh! his horoscope," Broadhurst said, glancing up.

He studied it in silence for a few moments,

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Lever meanwhile turning over the pages of a small volume of Plato.

"You are almost right," said Broadhurst, handing it back and pointing to a certain place on the chart. "You have the sign of the macrocosmos correct; but surely you have used ether, mercury, and salt in the wrong order?"

Lever drew the paper back, and studied it attentively for a moment.

"I see," he said—"I see." He made one or two alterations rapidly. "Do you agree with that?"

Broadhurst looked at the alteration and nodded.

"You find him an apt pupil?"

And Broadhurst walked to the window, and looked down into the garden with its paths and dark shadows beneath great trees.

"He has amazing intuition."

"Naturally."

"At the first suggestion of a new line of thought his mind rushes along at railway speed. Sometimes it quite out-distances one."

"His college career was brilliant—exceedingly so, considering its temptations."

Lever felt that Broadhurst was trying to gauge exactly how much progress he had made with the Duke, and he was not inclined to satisfy him.

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Broadhurst surveyed him with a quiet smile. Lever felt it, and it made him irritable.

"If you were asked what would be the end of his life's journey, what would you say?"

Lever rose, took a cigarette and lit it. He threw himself on one of the divans and thought deeply.

"I don't think I could give an idea. He puzzles me. I don't know how much there is behind him."

"You have not been able to study his previous incarnations?"

"No," said Lever. "I rather doubt whether anybody, however occultly developed, can do that."

"Ah! that is your weakness. You are a materialist. All the brothers of your Lodge are."

Lever looked up with a half-startled look in his eyes.

"My Lodge?" he repeated, slowly.

"Yes. You surely did not imagine that the existence of your Society was unknown?"

"No, I didn't think exactly that; and, after all, it has not played much of a part in my life of late years. I wanted to learn what they could teach me, and found that that was very little."

"As I was saying," said Broadhurst, seating himself on the divan opposite Lever, "all the members of your Lodge are materialists—the

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fact of their having penetrated a certain distance into the super-natural is to them no proof that there is anything further than that which they know. The rampant materialism of the middle of this century could not go further."

"I am ready to be convinced." And Lever raised his hands deprecatingly.

"What a cant phrase that is, 'I am ready to be convinced.' That is just what the Western scientist and materialist is not; or rather, he will only be convinced by an argument carried along those lines which he himself considers philosophic. However, argument is out of place. I might just as well try to convince you of what a catastrophe you are bringing about by attempting to filch from Havant that dangerous secret which he possesses."

"I should make good use of it."

"In what way?"

"It will help me to advance my intellectual development."

"On the contrary, it will for the time being destroy you."

"I take the risk."

"Have you seen the woman?" Broadhurst fixed the full power of his gaze on Lever.

"Yes. She is very beautiful."

"Have you spoken to her?"

"Not yet."

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"I see that you supervised a meeting of theirs out of the body."

The slightest shade of annoyance crossed Lever's face.

"You are a wonderful man, Michael Broadhurst, and I would give something to know who you are."

"You have tried hard enough to find out."

"And failed. I always see you," continued Lever reflectively, "coming through a low doorway into a room dimly lit by a small oil lamp."

"You were having a bad time of it."

"You have never written anything about Tibet, have you?"

"No. It is hardly a country from which much good can be learnt."

"I should have thought otherwise."

"Why?"

"Surely its store of occult science is unrivalled?"

"Science," retorted Broadhurst, "too advanced to be of use to any but the most developed. Even then, it is terribly encrusted with error."

"You are the first European to have journeyed at will in it since Gabet and Huc?"

"No, there was one before me—years ago. His name was Moore. He was killed, it was supposed. As a matter of fact, he died in the place where I found you. He lived for ten years tied to a ring in the wall. They cut out

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his tongue and blinded him. Gabet and Huc were two dear, simple men who were annoyed at seeing in all around them the ceremonials of those religions from which Christianity sprang. It was a great shock to them to find their Ritual, as they thought, so closely copied; and they ingeniously explained the mystery by an impossible story of some early Christian missionary."

"What became of them?" asked Lever.

"Someone bundled them back to China. They were fine fellows—suffered awful privations on their way to Lhasa. But I should have thought you knew about them. By the way, I wonder at the Duke devoting his time to you if he is so much in love?"

"I think," said Lever, "the hours spent here make him forget. He can't see her very often."

"Poor boy," said Broadhurst. "He is capable of great suffering."

Lever looked at him in surprise. To feel such sympathy would never have struck him. He could not honestly say that he had the least liking for the Duke. It was not in his nature to have likings. The extraordinary efforts he made to fascinate him were merely the result of ambition to make use of him. He wondered in his own mind whether it was Broadhurst's intention, when matters had reached a certain point, to interfere. If so, he

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was afraid of him. He was the one man in all his life whom he had feared. There was a Sphinx-like suggestion of reserve-power about him which filled Lever with apprehension.

"I wonder," he said, looking keenly at Broadhurst, "that you don't go to him and tell him the truth. With your power and knowledge you could easily prove it to him."

"The time is not ripe for his struggle. When it comes it must settle the matter once and for always."

Broadhurst took up his hat.

CHAPTER XXI

BROADHURST went from Lever back to his own house. Emerging some two hours later, he walked down to Park Lane, and was just in time to meet the Duke on his doorstep.

The face of the latter was still shadowed by the glimpse he had caught of Lynn and Brigwater, whilst the trouble he felt at Helga's unexpected manner had deepened the lines about his mouth. He was suffering real pain. Broadhurst noticed this at once. There was a repose and calm about him which had a soothing effect upon the Duke's nerves. They went in and sat in the room where Helga had first waited for the Duke.

"You have been away some time—longer than you intended, wasn't it?"

"Yes. There were several things I had to do." He did not tell the Duke of his mission to help the drowned woman.

"You surely have not been in town ever since I left?"

"Oh, no; I have been away."

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Broadhurst was noticing the difference in the Duke's manner and appearance. His face had a peculiar, restless expression. There was a permanent concentration of the brows, and the pained look in his eyes was pathetic.

"I called on Lever this morning. I've been seeing a great deal of him lately. He's a wonderfully interesting man."

"He tells me that you have been studying all sorts of strange subjects together. Take care."

"What do you mean?"

"The things that he can teach should be approached with great caution. You may find that, instead of mastering them, they will master you. Beware of dangerous experiments. And, by the way, you are not looking as well as you did when I went away."

"Oh, I'm all right. I shall get away to Scotland——"

He stopped suddenly. He knew that, so long as he suffered for Helga as he was doing, he could not tear himself away.

Broadhurst saw something of what was passing in his mind. He was a man with an infinite fund of pity, though he could survey suffering, one side of his nature pitying while the other philosophically reflected upon its value and inevitability. He would have liked the Duke to have made a confidant of him

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on the subject of Helga; but he could see that Lever had used a pretended sympathy in this direction as another means of ingratiating himself with the Duke, and his own nature was fastidiously opposed to vying with Lever for his confidence.

"May I ask," said the Duke, "in what way Lever is dangerous to me? You have warned me against him before."

"Hardly," answered Broadhurst. "I don't quite like the expression 'warn against.' I only ask you to be on your guard."

"But why?"

Broadhurst leant forward.

"What does the word 'magician' convey to you?"

"I should have said three months ago, an effete superstition."

"Exactly. And now, because certain things have been shown to you which savour of the miraculous, you are prepared to admit the existence of so-called magic. Hermes Trismegistus, you think, may have known more than all your Western scientists put together."

The Duke nodded affirmatively.

"Well, you are right. The magician of the present day is, as a rule, too advanced a creature to be filled with worldly ambitions. I use the word 'worldly' as applied to this

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earth. This world contains very little that is worth his having, except as a means to an end. Mere worldly power is not one of these means. That is why he is seldom prominently before human gaze."

"Do you suggest that Lever——?"

"There are," interrupted Broadhurst, "as many grades of magicians as there are gradations of light from darkest night to broadest sunlight. Those who are of the night we know, but those who unconsciously to themselves have worked very near to the light hold a more subtle danger. Lever is one of these."

"And you?"

"I?" There was a growing power about Broadhurst's voice, an authority about his manner, which almost inspired the young man before him with awe. "I am one who has suffered, and who has power in proportion to his suffering. Lean on me."

There was something in the atmosphere of the room that thrilled the Duke through and through. The twilight was deepening, and the other became strangely quiet, although, while he was there, there was the consciousness of a great presence. Soundless voices seemed to be telling the Duke that on this earth Helga could never be his, that for truth and love's sake this must be so. He bent his head, and,

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with a bursting heart, buried his face in his hands, while the hot tears welled up and streamed through his outstretched fingers. While he wept, the door of the room was closed gently and he was alone.

CHAPTER XXII

THE next day the Duchess returned to town unexpectedly. She was accompanied by Mrs Burford-White, who had never left her victim since she had determined on her conversion. She had quite succeeded in convincing the Duchess that her stodgy nature was in a very spiritual condition. She had avoided the mistake, which she had made in a former attempted conversion, of dragging her victim up for Mass, and so frightening her for ever.

No—everything had been done in a smooth, indolent manner, eminently suited to the Duchess's temperament, if temperament it could be called. She had been brought to seriously discussing the question of 'going over,' and Mrs Burford-White, quite unconsciously—to do her justice—had shown her that, with judicious management, it might be the event of the year.

"You see, my dear, Duchesses don't go over every day."

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"They couldn't very well," said her friend; "there aren't enough of them."

"Quite true—how clever of you! Still, you know what I mean. It will be so nice being in the same Church." Mrs Burford-White spoke as if they were both about to take rooms in the same hotel.

"We shall be able to get up to——" She was about to allude to the more rigid requirements of Holy Week, but stopped just in time.

"You know, I've always been very High Church, Marie. Don't you think that will do?"

"My dear Gertrude, it's just what won't do! You see, if you have leanings towards us and don't follow them out, you are worse than the Low Church party. And then, whatever can you expect in the next world?"

"I don't know," said the Duchess, with a sigh which might have been the result indifferently of stodginess or sadness. "From what Mr Blake, the chaplain at Abshott, says, there doesn't seem much hope for anyone in the next world. He makes me feel perfectly wretched whenever I go to church."

"Ah!" said Mrs Burford-White eagerly, "I know what you mean. But you won't hear those sort of sermons in our Church. You see, there's Purgatory, and that's so comforting."

"I thought," said the Duchess vaguely, "that

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it was a place where one's sins were burned out of one?"

"Only for a time," said her friend; "and it becomes quite comforting when you think of the other alternative. And, of course, there's always the chance that one might go straight to Heaven."

Mrs Burford-White lowered her voice at the word 'Heaven,' as if she were mentioning some doubtful resort.

To do the Duchess justice, she did not consider that in her case the latter was probable.

For so enthusiastic a proselytiser, it will be seen that Mrs Burford-White's theology was of the sketchiest.

The great difficulty she found in bringing the Duchess over, was the apparently lukewarm interest of the Roman Catholic clergy she had spoken to in the matter. They were all perfectly ready to do their duty, but they did not seem to think that that involved an assault on the Duchess's present beliefs. Perhaps, like Father Bernard, they scarcely credited that the Duchess was in what Mrs Burford-White called a state of spiritual struggle.

Spiritual struggles are hardly consistent with the physical placidity invariably displayed by the Duchess. Mrs Burford-White had instinctively used as her ally the apparent neglect of the Duke.

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As a matter of fact, the Duchess had always considered a husband to be a thing which should only be in use certain weeks in the year, and those in the country.

Without any deliberate intention of making mischief, her friend had pointed out to her that it was extremely undesirable that such a very young wife should be going everywhere alone.

"You see, Maurice doesn't care about the things I like. Even on our honeymoon—which, you remember, we spent at the Château d'Arc—we hardly found anything to talk about. We were to have stayed there a month, but we only stayed a fortnight. I managed that!"

"You've always had great presence of mind, Gertrude."

"Maurice talked the whole time of things which I didn't understand. Of course, at first that didn't matter, because when you're in love it doesn't matter what a person talks about!"

The Duchess made this remark with a gruesome effort at the romantic.

"He is very handsome," said Mrs Burford-White, reflecting what a much better Duchess she herself would have made.

"If you were a member of the true Church, you would not feel so lonely."

The Duchess was not conscious of having felt particularly lonely; but somehow her friend

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had a way of suggesting qualities and circumstances for her which inferred an interesting atmosphere; and the Duchess could have lived on flattery, had it been physically sustaining.

"Of course men have a great many interests and occupations which a woman cannot share. Still, at the same time, the line should be drawn somewhere; and the Duke's absence is becoming a little marked."

If the Duchess had been given to introspection, she would have remembered that she had gone to Scotland for the special purpose of flirtation; but her friend was, so to speak, working her up.

"I think it is a woman's place to suffer," and the Duchess made a futile attempt at the sweet smile of the martyr.

"I want you to meet Father Byng. I think he is more in earnest than Father Bernard—Father Bernard is quite lax on certain subjects."

This was Mrs Burford-White's revenge for his failure to make a passionate campaign for the possession of the Duchess's soul. As she said to Sir Percy Landon, "What is the good of working and slaving for the Church if her own appointed servants are backward?"

Father Byng was a convert from the Established Church of England, therefore he was far more likely to be enthusiastic. Who so

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Catholic as the Anglican convert? He had also been Mrs Burford-White's instructor. She rather pitied the Duchess, because he would most likely turn her inside out.

For conscience sake, Father Byng had given up a fine West End living. He had gone up as high as he could, and had toppled over, candles, vestments, and all, into the arms of Mother Church.

He fell in at once with Mrs Burford-White's scheme. He was a fanatic, having none of Father Bernard's broad culture and kindly tolerance. He knew that he had 'gone over' because it was imperative for the satisfaction of his conscience; therefore, what he considered absolutely essential, it was right to impress on other people whenever there was the chance. He had gone to Rome because it seemed to him the religious, and, therefore, the social and political, foundation of all things.

He explained to the Duchess that, with whatever sophistry the Eastern Orthodox and the Protestant Churches might cover themselves, they were—when all was said and done—schismatic and rebellious. He told her of the immense moral influence her conversion would have, and bade her beware lest she allowed family considerations to stand in the way of her soul's salvation.

The Duke dined at home one evening in

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company with his wife ; and, with all the goodwill in the world, found himself unable to repeat the experiment. He could not help mentally comparing her with Helga, and the comparison was little to the advantage of the Duchess.

It never struck the latter to complain to her husband, chiefly because her friend had not stirred her up to it.

An explanation and possible reconciliation would not have suited Mrs Burford-White's book at all.

This possibility would not have frightened her, had she been a woman of perception. The Duke and his wife were as far asunder as the Poles. They had absolutely nothing in common ; and, left to herself, the Duchess would have accepted the situation with perfect equanimity.

The Duke heard nothing at all of the attempted conversion of his wife ; and, even had he done so, it was not likely that he would have moved to prevent it. The idea would certainly have been distasteful, and he might have put the other side of the case before her ; although her limited comprehension would have denied his right to a religious opinion at all, inasmuch as she had heard him argue on Scriptural subjects in a free, unprejudiced spirit which was quite inconsistent with her idea of a good Christian.

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She might have given in at once but that she was a little afraid of what he might say.

She confided her ideas to Lynn, who thought it would be rather interesting—in fact, something to do.

Of course, as he said, he believed in that sort of thing for women. It wasn't much good men going to church, and he supposed someone must go—and why not the women?

Lynn was somewhat depressed. His wife was in town, and, somehow, her presence always made him feel a little small. She had a curious way of looking at him with her truthful eyes, as though she were reading in his face the last particular escapade he had been guilty of.

As a matter of fact, she was sincerely sorry for him. The good looks, which she honestly admitted had been a large part of his original attraction for her, were not improving by the life he led; and though, like a beautiful woman of mature years, he looked very well in the evening, there was something in his face in the morning which gave her a distinct repulsion. He could make himself agreeable enough when he wanted anything—and money he wanted very often. When first married, he had tried to bully his wife into granting any exaction he might choose to make; but she had a great deal of the shrewdness of her North

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Country father, and saw that her fortune—large as it was—would, if he had his way, melt into thin air. So she reduced the expenditure on their town and country houses to within definite limits, and declined to overstep by one penny her income. This, Lynn had more than once chosen to regard as absolute hard-heartedness. He could not, however, say that she behaved otherwise than would lead the world to believe that he had entire control of her fortune, and he certainly had a good deal of it. She had few uses for the money herself, and he had many. As for his own private fortune, he spent it entirely on himself, and since their wedding-day had never made his wife a present.

Of her relations, and especially her brothers, he stood in awe. He tried to feel the superiority and contempt due from an aristocrat to merely prosperous tradespeople, and found himself of no importance in the presence of these hard-headed men and their healthy-minded wives. He would not have dared to tell them the stories with which he regaled certain smart and exceedingly select dinner-tables. Had he done so, he would have been shown the door. His wife's relations, although they had never approved of the marriage, had still been prepared to make the best of it; but they had rapidly summed up his selfish, calculating nature,

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and were only amazed that their sister should have been taken in.

Brigwater was one of Lynn's best friends. The word 'friend,' to Lynn's mind, meant a companion with whom he could viciously waste as much time as possible. They thought of little else but intrigue. Brigwater, as Lynn had plenty of money to spare, was content to flatter him, and put up with the worse half of whatever portion of pleasure came along.

When Mr Algernon Brigwater discovered Helga, her beauty, at a first glance, made a great impression on him, which was not unnoticed by his wife. Mrs Brigwater determined to take precautions. She might have known that it was useless. For hunting down game of this kind, her husband had a positive genius.

Over the dinner-table at the club he told Lynn of Helga and her beauty.

"My dear Lynn, an exquisite face! I don't know whether she noticed me. She didn't look at me twice, although I tried to catch her eye; but that's a promising sign with women."

"The woman who appears interested is generally bored," said Lynn, trying to imitate a friend who made epigrams.

"Oh! but there's no sense in that."

Brigwater's intellect was incapable of grasping a well-placed paradox. He was one of

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those people who receive abstruse witticisms—to them incomprehensible—with blatant abuse.

“What’s her colouring?”

“Golden hair, with a most exquisite complexion.”

“Oh, I expect it’s one of those ‘finds’ of yours, which never look like anything on earth by daylight. You remember that woman last week? We went miles into the suburbs to see her, and what was she like when we got there?”

“You were out of temper. You were not in a condition to appreciate beauty.”

“My dear chap, you yourself said she was a sight!”

It was perfectly true that Brigwater had a habit of arriving at his friend’s house full of some new and startling discovery in beauty. Arrangements would be made for inspection; and then he would slowly back down, saying first, “Well, some people wouldn’t admire her”; then it would be, “I can’t say I think much of her myself”; and, finally, “Well, I must say I quite agree with you—the woman’s an object!”

Lynn was more fastidious. He supposed that Helga was some over-coloured shop-girl, idealised by the not over-discriminating taste of his friend.

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"Where did your wife find her?" he asked.

"Can't say. My wife never mentioned her. If I hadn't been a man who takes things in, I might never have noticed her."

Brigwater spoke in an injured voice, as though, in not telling him of her beautiful employee, his wife had done him out of his rights.

"I suppose you ogled her, and made the girl feel sick?"

Lynn thought nothing of insulting his friend when he was irritable himself, being convinced that Brigwater was a worm whom no amount of bruising could goad into turning.

"What are you going to do?" he added.

"Oh, I shall wait till Nina is out, and then I shall go in and talk in a kindly way to the girls. Mark my words, she'll be quite pleased to be taken notice of."

"Well—what then?"

"I shall ask her to a little dinner."

"I should advise you to be careful. I can imagine your wife getting rid of you on a very slight pretext."

"Then you imagine wrong. Nina would as soon think of doing without me as flying. Don't you see, she'd be bound to marry again; she might get somebody who'd worry her a good deal more than I do. Where are we going to-night?"

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"I don't know," said Lynn. "If you come to think of it seriously, there's not a single place of amusement in London."

"Let's go to a music-hall."

"Oh, please not—they're so depressing!"

The next day Brigwater, accompanied by Lynn, called at his wife's establishment in the afternoon, at a time when he knew perfectly well she was at the other end of London. He, however, asked for her, at the same time indicating Helga to Lynn. He walked round, admiring the stock, till he found himself some way from anyone else in the room and near Helga. He chatted to her on the subject of the work she had in hand; and, coarsely misinterpreting her ready answer and innocent smile, paid her some vulgar, *banal* compliment. She knew enough English to understand what lay behind it, and he positively quailed before the contempt of her glance, and returned to Lynn feeling particularly foolish.

Lynn had started at the first sight of Helga. He had seen her before; but, for a moment, could not recollect where.

Then he remembered a little drawing-room in St. John's Wood, and Helga's white, unhappy face looking at him with disgust while he bandied stupid, questionable jokes with Thea. She had left them together with an almost terrified expression on her face, and, after a

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few minutes, they had heard the front door close.

"She will come back," said Thea, airily, as she smoothed Lynn's hair with her large peasant hands.

Lynn remembered that after that Thea had bored him, and he could only think of the small white face that had gone out into the night. She had troubled his mind for a whole day, and that, for Lynn, was a long time.

Now she was having precisely the same effect, and he never doubted but that, if he were careful, he would succeed.

Helga had looked at him without any recognition. She was thinking, quite frankly, how very handsome he was, too good-looking almost for a man.

Lynn and Brigwater left; and no sooner were they outside than the latter commenced a voluble appreciation of Helga's appearance, but Lynn interrupted him.

"I think she's the most beautiful girl I've ever seen."

He did not say that he had met her before. Lynn was sufficiently impressed to dislike the idea of Brigwater knowing where he had first seen her.

Notwithstanding her indignation in the house at St. John's Wood, it had never struck him otherwise than that she was a higher

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variation of Thea's class. He had not seen Thea since that night, or she might have told him of the Duke's visit.

He came to the conclusion that he did not want Mr Brigwater's assistance in the matter at all, at least for the present.

When Mrs Brigwater heard that her husband had been hanging round in Bond Street and had spoken to Helga, she gave him clearly to understand that it must not be repeated. She further thought it politic, after swearing him to secrecy, to tell him who had paid for Helga's apprenticeship; and explained that the preliminary cheque that the Duke had handed her was not all she expected to get out of him.

"The girl is as clever as she can be, Algernon. Later, we might form a partnership, and Havant might probably, for the girl's sake, come into the concern for a large amount."

Brigwater gave a long whistle.

"Lynn would give his head to know that," he chuckled, as his wife kissed him on the forehead, preparatory to starting for business.

Algernon was in bed; and he and his wife had discussed these matters, she seated on the edge.

He rolled himself up and went to sleep again, with the departing wheels of his wife's brougham sounding in his ears.

CHAPTER XXIII

HELGA had certainly roused as much earnestness as Lynn's nature contained. He thought over the possibility of an introduction carefully. To see her in Bond Street was evidently impossible. In the first place, he did not want Brigwater to know anything about the matter at all; and he certainly did not wish the introduction to come through him. There was Thea. He wondered whether Helga still had any relations with her. It was highly improbable that Thea was still living in the same place.

He called, however, and Thea waltzed into the room under the impression that the visit was due to her charms. It was ethically wrong, no doubt, but Thea was extremely happy. She had money enough to keep her from poverty all her life; she had some very respectable jewellery, and any number of admirers. Of remorse she knew nothing—why should she?

Hers was one of those natures with an immense capacity for liking the thing nearest to them. The little homestead in the Valders,

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her parents, her brothers and sisters, all the friends of her youth, were even now becoming almost unreal, the memories of a dream.

Lynn was careful at first to conceal the real object of his visit, and made himself exceedingly agreeable. He did not quite know how to introduce Helga into the conversation, and he wondered whether his doing so, without the subtle process of amalgamation with ordinary small talk, might not make Thea suspicious.

"How's your little friend whom I scandalised so that evening?"

"She never came back."

"What! You don't mean to say you've never seen her since?"

"No, the wretched little hypocrite! She pretended to be so good, and she managed to hook a duke."

"What do you mean?" said Lynn.

"Oh, the Duke of Havant called for her things. Dignified, wasn't it? It was through him that my people got to hear all about me. I don't suppose I shall ever be able to go home again now."

Lynn looked at her in bewilderment.

"Havant?" he murmured helplessly.

"Yes, I think that was the name. To avoid suspicion, and because my lady is so very particular about her reputation, she is in a

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shop in Bond Street. She wrote and told me so, and said she prayed that I might lead a better life. She was pretty, though—she might have done anything."

Lynn's brain was moving quickly in its shallows. He turned to Thea.

"Thea," he said.

She was wondering why he was sitting so far away from her.

"Well, what is it?"

"If you can manage a meeting between that little girl and myself, I'll give you some diamonds."

It was characteristic of Lynn to use the word 'diamonds' generally.

"My dear boy, she'll never come and see me. I don't know why, but she thinks herself quite respectable."

"Write and tell her you are wretched—lonely, homesick, and all that sort of thing. She looked the sort of girl who would be taken in by that."

"You're right. That's the sort of girl she is. I don't mind doing it for you, because I'm sure you'll behave yourself."

"Look here," said Lynn, coming over to her, "be my friend in this, won't you?"

His manner had a curious caress when dealing with women. It was eminently successful—till he was found out. He took

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Thea's hand, and began to turn one of the rings on her finger.

"I'll do my best, but you'll find it's no good."

"I'm awfully gone on her."

"So you were on me for a time."

"My dear Thea, I shall love you till I die. You are a brilliant woman of the world. She is only a silly little girl, who is making me miserable for the time being."

Thea was flattered. She was neither brilliant nor, in its right sense, a woman of the world; neither was Helga silly, and he knew it by the one glance he had had of her face. But he was a young gentleman who was clever at any rate in this kind of game, having pretty well devoted himself to it from his teens.

Had Thea been a woman of the world, she would have seen through him, and she did not. The pleading way in which he had asked for her assistance was a species of compliment to herself, or at least he had made it appear so. She agreed to write to Helga, and did so there and then.

She asked Lynn's advice as to the wording of the letter, but he refused to help her. His brain had enough breeding to make him avoid soiling his hands with the work itself. By way of thoroughly securing Thea's assistance, he asked her to a dinner and theatre in the course of the next few days.

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Lynn took his leave. Driving home, he leant back in the cab and chuckled. Havant—the man who had always shown a contemptuous tolerance for Lynn's mode of living—was found out, and by the merest accident. The wrong to his sister did not trouble him at all; marriages, in his eyes, were social alliances.

“Why doesn't he give the girl an establishment like a gentleman? He always was mean.”

The last sentence was the result of his brother-in-law's persistent refusal to be his banker whenever he was in need of money. Had he known the amount the Duke was in the habit of giving away in charities, even he must have eaten his words.

It would be rather fun stalking Havant's property. He had no doubt whatever as to his success. He usually came off fairly well in affairs of the kind.

Thea received a reply to her note the next day. Helga did not want to come to St. John's Wood; she suggested that they should meet in town. In fact, she had almost thought of asking permission for Thea to call at Mrs Hardwick's. Reflecting on the matter, she had concluded that, even if she had obtained her consent, it would be imposing on the old lady's good nature to bring a woman of Thea's character to her house.

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Thea was equal to the difficulty. She thought it worth while to oblige Lynn, and wrote again, explaining that she was ill and could not possibly come out for some days.

Helga confided the difficulty to Mrs Hardwick and asked her advice, and the advice she gave was excellent.

"Well, my dear, after all, you've known the woman all your life; and even if she's as wicked as she can be, the sight of your face in her trouble may soften her heart towards her own home. So, I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll take a hansom and go there together. I'll sit in the hansom outside while you go in. Then you'll feel perfectly safe. So write and tell her you'll come after work this afternoon, and I'll call for you in Bond Street."

Mrs Hardwick rolled off her scheme with the air of a general planning a great campaign.

Thea, receiving Helga's letter only an hour and a half before she herself was to call, was obliged to send a frantic wire to Lynn, who arrived somewhat injured, feeling that the unseemly hurry and scurry might have been avoided.

Lynn did not like things to happen in this way. He wanted the whole matter to proceed so smoothly that the vulgarity of the intrigue might not be too apparent.

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Lynn, when Helga came down from Thea's room, intended to enlist her sympathies as if he were a friend of Thea's who wished her to go back to her home.

Helga came, and Mrs Hardwick sat outside in the cab. Thea was unfeignedly glad to see Helga, having been, in her way, fond of her. She forgot all about the reason for which she had been induced to come—a reason which was not in her eyes very dreadful. She had intended to chaff her about the Duke, and the fact of his calling for her things; but there was something in Helga's face which repelled the suggestion that matters were as Thea had imagined them to be.

She found it rather difficult to play up to the mood of the invalid and the penitent. In fact, when Helga first entered the room, she explained to her that she was so much better that the doctor had said she might get up the next day.

She avoided any discussion on the subject of her return home, and Helga realised herself that, with the extravagant notions and habits that Thea had acquired of life and luxury, such a return was impossible.

She kissed Thea as she left her, and went downstairs. As soon as she was out of the room, Thea hopped from her bed and did a hasty semi-toilette.

Helga met Lynn in the hall. She was about

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to pass out without noticing him when he spoke to her.

"You are a friend of Thea's, are you not?"

"I have known her since she was a little girl."

Although Helga had not recognised Lynn at the shop in Bond Street, here, amid the same surroundings, she recognised him at once. She was about to pass on, and already had her hand on the door, when Lynn stopped her.

"I should so much like to speak to you. I want you to advise me."

He opened the door of Thea's dining-room. "Will you come in here for a minute?"

Helga, not knowing exactly what to say, assented. He closed the door, and spoke to her for some minutes about Thea. He had put a chair for her by a table, upon which her hand was resting. He let his own fall upon it as if by accident, but left it there. It was an unmistakable action, and Helga rose to go.

"I shall see you again?" he said, almost pleadingly.

She swept past him into the hall and out of the house, and Lynn sank into a seat, conscious that the whole business had been a miserable fiasco.

He took up his hat and stick, as Thea, who had watched the cab drive off from behind her bedroom curtains, entered the room.

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"You are not going?"

"Yes—must. I've got an appointment. See you on Thursday."

Lynn was not anxious to be cross-examined. As regards the promised dinner, he meant to send up the diamonds with a note of excuse. Helga's absolute indifference had made him furious. He could think of no one else. Had she been spotless, he could have understood it; but considering that there was Havant, it was not to be forgiven.

He drove back to Park Lane to see his sister.

CHAPTER XXIV

LYNN found Father Byng with the Duchess.

It was the first visit the priest had made to her house, and she was really afraid of the consequences. If the Duke saw him, it was more than likely that he would require some explanation, and then the truth would have to come out that the Duchess had practically made up her mind to 'go over.'

Lynn himself was rather astonished to see the priest, as he had not taken the Duchess's talk about the matter seriously.

As the Father retired, Lynn came over and sat by his sister. They certainly cared for each other a good deal more than they cared for anybody else.

"What's that depressing individual doing here?"

But the Duchess was in earnest.

"My dear Lynn, I must ask you not to talk of Father Byng in that way. He has been the greatest comfort to me in my troubles."

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Lynn immediately wondered whether she knew anything about Helga, and if so, whether she were exalting it into a trouble.

"I suppose I shall have to tell Havant some time?"

"Tell him what?" asked her brother.

"That I am to be received into the Church."

"What! You're converted? You're really going to be a Roman Catholic?"

"Yes, Lynn. The Church of England has ceased to satisfy me."

She spoke with a sublime air of martyrdom, as if she expected to be burned for her beliefs.

Lynn gave a whistle.

"I shouldn't do it if I were you."

"Why not?"

"Oh! there will be all sorts of family rows. To begin with, Havant won't like it; and then there's Agatha."

"Oh, Agatha's a cat!" The Duchess spoke with most irreligious spitefulness. Even had she been conscious of the incongruity between her words and the affectation of religious sweetness in her countenance, she would have missed the humour of it.

"Granted," said Lynn, "and for that reason she can make herself very unpleasant."

"I shall tell her that I must go where my conscience guides me."

Lynn laughed irreverently.

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"You can't talk like that to Agatha. She'll probably know twice as much about it as you do ; and somehow it's no use resenting Agatha's interference—one has got to put up with it. Don't do it, Gertie, for Heaven's sake!"

"Why, when I spoke to you about it before, you rather agreed with me."

"Oh, I only thought the idea was a little exciting. I didn't think you meant it seriously."

"Ah, you don't know how I've suffered!" said his sister.

"What about?"

The Duchess hesitated. She hardly liked the idea of complaining to her brother about her husband, and yet Mrs Burford-White had made her feel that her wrongs were very real indeed.

"You haven't been quarrelling with Havant, have you?"

This was just the little bridge that the Duchess had wanted built. She tripped across it with alacrity.

"Well," she said, plumping herself down on the other side, "he doesn't seem to care about me as he used to."

Nobody knew better than Lynn that there had not been much love on his sister's side from the beginning. At the time of the marriage, he had thought her an exceedingly smart girl to have made such a good market ;

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and when he saw that, on realising her true character, his brother-in-law had not gone to the dogs with a broken heart, he had appreciated it as a right and proper thing that these two should be dignifiedly tolerant of each other, and should at any rate keep away from the ordinary quarrels of couples who are unsuited; the Duke from a sense of pride, the Duchess because—having beautiful houses and clothes, with a high position—she was exceedingly comfortable. Lynn had concluded the whole thing to be admirable.

"Women are never satisfied," he said, musingly. "Here you have everything that a woman could desire, and you begin to worry because your husband isn't always at your beck and call."

"It isn't that, Lynn," said his sister, with a sadness which was comic. "As Marie White says, a woman must have love in her life."

"Now, there's a dangerous woman, if you like," interrupted Lynn; "she's jolly pretty, but I wouldn't trust her."

"She's my dearest friend," said the Duchess.

"You can't expect to have Havant all to yourself."

"Lynn, you don't think there's somebody else?"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, another—another woman!"

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Lynn hesitated. The memory of the snub he had received from Helga roused all the anger of his not too generous nature; but there might be a mistake, and his sister was exactly the sort of woman to swear secrecy and to tax her husband on the very first opportunity. Lynn's fondness for her did not rest on any fallacies as to her nature.

"I don't suppose so," he answered slowly. "I shouldn't be suspicious if I were you. It's undignified."

The Duchess was not satisfied, and determined to be watchful.

It was curious that these two shallow people should be the means of preparing sorrow for those so infinitely above them.

"You see," continued Lynn, who considered it best to avoid the subject of Helga for the present, "your father-in-law is a Bishop—at least your step-father-in-law. You'll find the whole thing dreadfully complicated."

"Good gracious, Lynn, you can't expect me to lose salvation because my relations are—who they are!"

"Of course, if you really mean it seriously, there's nothing more to be said; but I expect you'll find Havant awfully sick at the idea."

Lynn left his sister feeling distinctly nervous about her project.

The Duchess had expected opposition, but

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Lynn had mentioned Agatha, and Agatha was one of the people of whom the Duchess was distinctly afraid. It was Agatha who, when she was a beautiful child, had remonstrated with her mother on the way in which she was spoiled. It was Agatha who had often stepped in and saved her to some extent from her mother's over-indulgence. Agatha was different to her brothers and sisters; she thought of them constantly: they—hardly ever gave her a thought.

Havant came in soon after Lynn had gone, looking pale and worried. He and his wife had not seen each other much of late. With the knowledge of the place Helga was filling in his heart, his conscience smote him. The Duchess's suspicions had been vaguely aroused by Lynn's manner, and she was jealous in a weak sort of way. She could not very well cross-examine her husband, and she hardly knew how to begin fishing for evidence. It was not in Havant's nature to pretend an affection which was entirely dead, and the conversation was upon ordinary topics.

"Are you going to spend the autumn in London, Maurice? I'm dying to get away."

For the Duchess this was brilliant. She noticed at once the reluctance to leave town that lay behind his reply.

"I must stay in town a little longer. Why

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not go to Carrackness? I should be with you in two or three weeks."

"What is it that keeps you in town?"

The Duke answered with an effort, "I have a great deal of business."

"What sort of business?"—she spoke casually.

"Nothing that you would understand, Gertrude."

"Surely there are heaps of people who can do that sort of thing for you?"

The Duke was silent, and the Duchess—noting the expression of his face—was not reassured. It was certainly a matter to be submitted to Mrs Burford-White.

The Duke was entirely wretched. He had not seen Helga since the afternoon she had almost dismissed him from her side. He had, as before, been constantly with Lever, and had more than once been tempted to ask him to repeat the former experiment. But, somehow, he was sure that Helga still cared for him.

He had called at Mrs Hardwick's more than once, and had found the old lady alone. He did not dare to ask after Helga too earnestly; and day after day went by, and still the memory of the small, white, unhappy face lay in his brain to torture him.

How to meet her he knew not. To write to her at Bond Street seemed to assume that she

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was prepared to enter into a clandestine correspondence, which was an insult.

Then again, he was not insensible, as most men would have been, to the wrong he was doing his wife by thinking of Helga in the way in which he did. He knew that he ought to give up thinking of her, but found it a sheer impossibility.

To wait for her and to speak to her when she left Bond Street, when there was the chance that perhaps she might object, would be a vulgarity. Till she showed him that she wished him to do so, it was impossible. But it is always the unexpected that happens, and he received a note from Mrs Hardwick to say that she wished to ask his advice about Helga, whose work, she was afraid, must be too much for her. She would call on his Grace any time he might suggest.

The Duke sent her a message to say that he would come and see her the day after, at about seven o'clock, although he was already engaged to take the chair at the dinner of a Philanthropic Society.

It was a curious time, Mrs Hardwick thought, on receiving the letter; but the Duke had chosen it because he concluded that, if he arrived a quarter of an hour late and stayed some time, there was a very good chance of his seeing Helga.

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With a slight blush he sat down and wrote his excuses to the Society, pleading indisposition. How full of art the most honest become in managing their love affairs. He salved his conscience by doubling the amount he had intended to contribute to the Society's funds.

Most of the next day the Duke spent with Lever. He drove over in the morning, and found him looking pale and anxious. Lever explained that he was suffering from an attack of nerves. As a matter of fact, he had, ever since the Duke had been in the habit of coming to his house, been tracking through the mazes of Havant's intellect the secret for which he was in search.

He had, unknown to the Duke, been making experiments with him in that other-world where he had met Helga; and he had discovered that the secret was contained within a casket of matter which, being spiritual, defied his efforts to break: only the Duke's own fall in his earthly body could so corrupt the casing that it would disintegrate and give up its contents.

They worked all day; and in the evening the Duke went on to Mrs Hardwick's.

He found her seated in state awaiting him, but a little anxious to know what she could offer him. He had always been in the habit of coming to tea.

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He was hardly seated before she attacked the subject in hand.

"She seems to have lost all her spirits, and I think it must be the London air," she said. "I should be very sorry to lose her; but if that is the case, your Grace, don't you think it would be better if she were sent back home?"

"Has she seen a doctor?"

"Yes, your Grace, I took her to see Dr Crumpshall, and he gave her a tonic; but it doesn't seem to have done her much good." Dr Crumpshall was a distinguished practitioner and the Duke's own medical adviser.

"Take her for another holiday," he suggested.

"She can't go on having holidays all the year round, your Grace. She's only been back two months."

"Still, every time she goes away she will feel the London climate less," said the Duke, weakly.

"Perhaps her hours are too long?" he added.

"No, it isn't that, your Grace," said Mrs Hardwick, bending forward and nodding her head sagely. "I believe there's somebody in Norway!"

"Somebody in Norway?" he repeated vaguely.

"Somebody she's left behind."

"What do you mean?"

"Her young man. When girls go like that

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—from the highest to the lowest—there's only one explanation."

"What makes you think so?" asked the Duke, his heart almost standing still at the possibility.

"Why, your Grace, one evening I went into her room when she was lying asleep, and round her neck was a little gold chain with a cross hanging from it—the sort of thing, your Grace, that an ignorant foreigner would give his sweetheart!"

The Duke smiled faintly. Since he had submitted to Lever's experiment, and heard, as he thought, from Helga's own lips that she loved him, he had become a little sceptical about an incident which was unusual and had not been repeated. But, now, here was evidence which he could grasp to support the supernatural.

"I should wait a week or two, Nanna, and then, if she doesn't get any better, go down with her to Abshott. Mrs Blunt is always glad to see you." Mrs Blunt was the housekeeper at Abshott.

He sat and talked as the firelight danced over Mrs Hardwick's prim furniture; and although she was delighted at his condescension in calling on her at this hour and staying so long, it struck her as being a little odd. His appearance also made her anxious;

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he looked careworn, and she told him so. He laughed, and said there was nothing the matter.

Mrs Hardwick inwardly came to the conclusion that the Duchess was worrying him.

The inquiry as to his health led to a laughing conversation on the subject of his early ailments; of how he had insisted on jumping out of bed when he had the mumps, of his first pony, of how he had fought one of the gamekeeper's sons and got two black eyes and refused to say who had done it.

And all the time the Duke was listening, straining his ears for the sound of a key in the small front door.

At last it came, and his heart gave a great leap.

"She used to come in singing like a bird when she first came. Now listen to the way she shuts that front door. It makes one feel quite wretched."

The Duke was straining to catch every sound.

She went through, down the narrow passage, into the little kitchen; but not finding Mrs Hardwick there, came back, and, opening the door of the sitting-room, entered.

As she did so he involuntarily rose. He could hardly steady his voice as he asked her questions in accordance with what Mrs Hardwick had told him.

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And then there was an awkward pause, he feeling that it was impossible for him to sit down again.

Finally, with the greatest reluctance, he took up his hat and stick.

Helga went to the door outside and held it open. As he passed her in the gloom he lost all self-control, and whispered :

"In God's name, tell me where I can see you."

The girl made no answer, but stood, one hand on the door and her eyes full of tears, looking at him appealingly. He raised the disengaged hand and pressed it to his lips.

Still she made no answer, and he left her, more wretched than ever. For now he knew for very certain that she loved him, and it was not till he reached Park Lane that he reflected, with a shock, that he had done the first dishonourable thing—that he had in his wild appeal to her told his love.

While the Duke was parting from Helga at the door of Mrs Hardwick's house, Lever was examining intently a curious crystal globe which was pedestalled on a small silver stand before him.

Suddenly he rose with a smile of triumph.

"They are coming my way," he whispered.

CHAPTER XXV

ON reaching home the Duke was told that Father Bernard was waiting to see him.

"Father Bernard?" said the Duke questioningly.

"Yes, your Grace. He has been here more than an hour. As I expected your Grace every moment, he said he would wait."

"Her Grace is gone out?"

"Yes, your Grace."

The man wondered at his pallor and the restless, indefinite expression in his eyes.

"I've had no dinner, King. Get something for me. Perhaps Father Bernard will join me."

Father Bernard rose from a deep chair as the Duke entered. He was immersed in the contents of a Quarterly, and had been reading an article dealing with evidences of the Deluge.

"Extraordinarily interesting article—this," he said, waving it in one hand as he greeted the Duke with the other. "The legends of

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the Deluge all over the world bear a resemblance which is quite startling."

"Yes, it is only in the deductions that men vary," said the Duke smiling.

"Oh, of course it is only the story of the lost Atlantic continent," and the priest laid the magazine down.

"The lost Atlantic continent?" asked the Duke, surprised at the Jesuit's interest.

"Yes; I think there is little doubt that where the Atlantic now rolls there was formerly a vast inhabited continent; in fact, some who have made it a special study affirm that its inhabitants had reached a pitch of civilisation which has never since been equalled."

The Duke was silent. He could see before him a bird's-eye view of a vast continent in the throes of dissolution, the terrible groaning of earthquakes, the roar of thunder, the rushing of many waters over a drowning land. For one second the image was before him, grand and terrible.

He sat down opposite the priest, thrilled, and almost trembling.

"I am afraid I have come," said the Jesuit, raising a white hand deprecatingly, "on an extremely delicate mission."

"Indeed?"

Father Bernard paused, as if he were carefully weighing his words.

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"I have undertaken the mission entirely of my own accord, as I thought that I might be able to pour oil on troubled waters with more effect than Father Byng. Father Byng, as you know, is a convert, and a convert is always more Catholic than the Catholics."

The Duke looked absolutely mystified.

"The Duchess has, I have been informed, decided to enter the bosom of Mother Church."

The priest, although he did not believe in the sincerity or depth of the Duchess's conversion, lowered his voice to a tone of reverent gratitude that even a formal conversion had been made.

"My wife is going to be a Roman Catholic?"

The Father noticed, with satisfaction, that he was not indignant. He had not thought he would be, if properly managed.

"Let me tell you the whole story. This is a proselytising age, and, as you know, Rome sees with joy and gratitude the prospect of England returning to her becoming brighter. If the Cardinalate were not so exclusive, the prospects would be still more promising. It is the Italian element, with all its complications, secular and religious, which keeps so many out of the Church. An English Pope might do marvels." The priest was almost talking to himself, as if he were musing upon an idea often brooded over.

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The Duke waited patiently.

"Mrs Burford-White thought she detected leanings in the Duchess towards the Catholic Communion."

Father Bernard took a somewhat malicious pleasure in giving Mrs Burford-White away. He was determined, at any rate, that the Duke should know that she was the initiator of the affair.

"She asked me to undertake the work of instruction; but afterwards found, as she thought, an abler man in Father Byng."

"Father Byng? Oh, yes, he came to see the Duchess once. I never inquired, but I thought it was about a charity. Of course, if my wife feels that she is doing the right thing, I have nothing to say. I am afraid, although I don't claim to be an authority, that my view of the matter would be too abstruse for her to comprehend."

The priest looked a little uncomfortable, and opened his mouth as if he were going to speak.

The Duke added very slowly and firmly, "If we should have any children they would be Protestants, and everyone round them would be Protestant."

"The girls also?" asked the priest, raising his eyebrows. He had expected a compromise.

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"Decidedly," said the Duke. "There could be absolutely no other arrangement, and I cannot even discuss the subject. You see—you will pardon my saying so—I consider Roman Catholicism dangerous to political and religious liberty."

The priest shrugged his shoulders.

"Protestantism is, at any rate, negative. If it does not contain the germs of religious enthusiasm, it has nothing dangerous in it to the liberty of the subject. It is content practically to efface itself politically. It is an excellent moral training, and a good ground-work for intellectual development."

The priest accepted an invitation to accompany the Duke to the dining-room.

"What a nightmare you English make of the Papacy."

"We endured the Hanoverian horrors; we waded through the reigns of four kings who were anything but patriots—except, perhaps, George the Fourth—kings who embroiled us in endless European wars, and lost us the American colonies; we exiled the Stuarts, who, after all, loved their country; and all to establish a dynasty which should make the Papacy impossible in England."

"And," said the priest slowly, "two hundred years have but passed, and already the tide is on the turn. The genius of Cardinal

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Manning and his successor has made the Archbishopric of Westminster a force to be reckoned with."

"I do not think," said the Duke, "the Catholic movement goes as deep as some people would imagine."

"Time will show."

Left alone, he sat down to think the matter over.

That his wife's conversion was founded on deep conviction he did not believe for one moment. He knew that she had always affected the very High Church party; but thought this was merely the result of family training, as her mother would never have sanctioned anything so *bourgeois* as the Low or Broad Church. He was inclined to think that once women leaned at all towards Roman Catholic dogma, they went over. As a sex, women like that which is definite; and the unswerving dogma of the Roman Church is decidedly coming to business after the uncertain theology of the various Protestant denominations.

He supposed that Mrs Burford-White, whom he despised, had gone on arguing with his wife till she had consented to look into the matter, and then the thing was done.

The Duchess came in late, and brought Lynn with her. She knew that Father Ber-

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nard had called in the course of the evening, and was a little nervous at what she expected to be strong opposition on her husband's part. Perhaps, in her inmost heart, she would not have objected to his putting his foot down on the whole thing. She was surprised, however, to find her husband greeting her with perfect cordiality.

The Duke wondered whether Lynn was going over too; it would certainly have been rather like him, and would have completed the comedy.

Lynn was afraid of his brother-in-law, and never felt comfortable in his presence; and although his sister had said that she wanted him to return with her so as to be there to share the first brunt of the attack, he—seeing that the Duke had no intention of opening the subject before him—soon departed.

When he had gone the Duke turned to his wife.

"Father Bernard has been here to-night. Perhaps you knew?"

"Yes, Maurice," the Duchess answered, rather weakly.

She had intended to deliver an irrefutable defence of her action, but, somehow, there was that in his manner which seemed to say that it was unnecessary.

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"You have, of course, carefully considered this step you are going to take?"

"Yes." Then feeling that it was absurd for her not to say something, she added, "One does not take a step like that without thinking about it very deeply."

"You see," said Havant slowly, "your going over will cause rather a stir. They will make the most of it; and my step-father and my mother, to begin with, will feel very strongly on the subject. Of course, on a matter like this, if you are absolutely convinced, you cannot draw back because of the few family obstacles."

The Duchess had not expected this tone. He was perfectly quiet, and was treating her as though she were a person of some power of thought. Had he known it, he could not have taken any line more calculated to disarm and embarrass her. She had expected that she would only be called upon to exercise her powers of obstinacy. In such a case she would have felt perfectly safe; but here he was assuming, with a gravity which befitted the occasion, that she knew all about what she was doing.

The Duke, after pausing for a reply, continued in a low tone of voice, and as if he regretted the necessity of touching on such a subject :

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"Our children, if there should be any, will be brought up as Protestants." To him there was something sacrilegious in his suggesting their family, when his whole soul was filled with the being of Helga.

The Duchess looked surprised.

"Surely the usual thing is that the girls should be Catholic and the boys Protestant."

"I cannot consider what is usual. Of course, you must think for yourself." The Duke somewhat enjoyed saying this. "It will be as I have said."

His manner was new to the Duchess. He had, up till now, wearily allowed her her own way, but there was no mistaking the determination in his voice.

Father Byng had urged her to be firm on this matter. Well, Father Byng must fight the battle himself. It was a comfortable way of her Grace's to leave matters to arrange themselves, in order to avoid discomfort.

"I should, however, like to make one request, and that is, that the whole affair should be done quite quietly, and that there should be as little parade of the matter as possible."

She could not fail to detect his indifference, and it angered her. She had felt a certain placid content when, after having unconsciously exposed to him her soulless nature, he had

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dropped into a condition of well-bred resignation. It had pleased her to feel that at any rate she was first in his thoughts; but now there was a change in his manner which told her, as well as words could have done, that he no longer looked upon her as other than a necessary evil. He would never have confessed as much to himself, but his wife felt it, as the most stupid of women will do; and in unconsciously letting her know this, he had let loose a danger which he had never even suspected. So long as there was no one else, she would not inconvenience herself to please him, but jealousy roused in her a spurious sense of injustice and wrong.

"It does not seem to worry you much, Havant?"

"Why should it?"

"I don't think you quite appreciate the seriousness of religion."

The Duke could have laughed outright.

"It is because I appreciate the seriousness of it that I do you the credit of not arguing a matter which, I am sure, you have thought over carefully."

"You might be interested," she answered feebly.

"You forget that to-night is the first I have heard of it, although you must have been thinking of it for some time deeply."

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His position was impregnable; and the Duchess, secretly furious, fled.

Father Byng was not to be put off with the Duke's decision regarding the children by Father Bernard and the Duchess. They had not argued the matter. The Duke was a young man, and was not taking it seriously. He had probably never been in earnest about religion. Father Byng saw the possibility of another and more brilliant triumph.

"I think," said Father Bernard, "that you will find him by no means superficial on such questions."

"Some of the Church's own servants are not as earnest as they might be," retorted the other.

Father Bernard's eyes gleamed. He was a Jesuit, and that meant a great deal; but he was a man who was considered brilliant even amongst the Order itself. He, however, allowed the impertinence to pass unnoticed.

Father Byng called on the Duke, and wished he had not.

With his wife the Duke could not be angry, even if he had felt strongly on the matter. It was also impossible to resent Father Bernard. Whatever lay behind his silken manner, his breeding was unquestioned. But with this weak bigot, his unscientific, impossible line of thought, and his inability to see that his

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method had been dishonest, the Duke was very angry indeed. He guessed what the priest had come about, but waited.

Father Byng began in a somewhat patronising manner, but the Duke pulled him up short.

"You will understand that I mean what I say, when I tell you that any children of mine will be educated in the Protestant faith. I resent most strongly the secrecy with which the Duchess's feelings have been worked upon."

He rang the bell, and Father Byng was shown out.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE Duchess was received into the Church, but, in deference to the Duke's wishes, quite quietly.

Henceforward she had a father confessor, and life one more attraction.

A very high dignitary of the Church had a correspondence with the Duke on the subject of his problematical daughters, and found him courteous, but firm.

To Mrs Burford-White's disappointment, the whole thing fell rather flat. The Duchess was by no means a personality. Even her beauty, remarkable as it was, could not make her one. She was also a little annoyed that the Duke appeared to feel no resentment at all. She had expected him to consider her of some importance in the matter. However, she had triumphed—that was the great thing.

The Duke was wretched, eating his heart out.

Lynn had learned from Brigwater about Helga's position at his wife's shop. Algernon was in his cups when he made the disclosure.

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"You see, Lynn, my wife knew nothing about who was going to pay the money when the arrangement was made, and of course she couldn't very well refuse the cheque. She had no reason to give. You see, she might have been had up for libel," said Brigwater, feeling that he had given his wife away, and hitting out wildly in her defence.

Lynn smiled. The idea of Mrs Algernon Brigwater declining a cheque under any circumstances, excepting a suspicion as to its genuineness, was amusing.

He had made one more effort to see Helga, and had met with another rebuff. The more he thought about her, the more he found his resentment against the Duke growing. In reality, his vanity was wounded. By degrees, and with unconscious humour, he began to get indignant on his sister's account. Had he been able to accomplish his own ends, the supposed wrong to the Duchess would never have struck him at all; but now his nature cast about for some means of revenge. In a very short space of time he had convinced himself that it was his duty to give the Duchess a hint of what was going on.

This was exactly what Brigwater had feared; and from the moment he had told Lynn of the Duke's cheque to his wife, he lived in holy terror of a row. He was almost on the

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point of telling her of the mistake he had made, on the chance of her being more likely to carry it through dignifiedly if she were warned.

Lynn refused to listen to any suggestion of hushing the matter up. He was by this time in a condition of virtuous indignation, and declined, as he said, to stand by and see his favourite sister martyred.

"Oh, hang it all," said Algernon, "that's all nonsense! She will never know."

"It isn't that; it's the principle of the thing," retorted his friend.

Brigwater looked at him in blank amazement, and finally answered:

"I believe it's because you are gone on the girl yourself."

This angered Lynn, as only the truth can.

"If you're going to talk damned nonsense, you had better hold your tongue."

Lynn was too useful for Brigwater to quarrel with him. Besides, he was Lynn's guest at the midday meal; so he went on eating his friend's lunch and loathing him from the bottom of his heart.

"Selfish, doll-faced puppy!" he reflected; "I should like to kick him."

"You see, Gert and I have always been such friends. It would be a mean thing to leave her in the lurch."

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"Don't see any 'lurch' about it," answered Brigwater; "and I don't believe you'd have been so beastly particular if the girl had been struck by you."

"She's never looked at me properly, or she would have been," said Lynn, intentionally making a remark, the conceit of which should aggravate Brigwater.

"My wife will be awfully sick. She's safe to discover who let the cat out of the bag. She always finds out everything that she isn't wanted to."

"An excellent wife for you, Algy. I'm sorry to say you've got anything but an open nature."

Lynn called on his sister the day before he and his wife were to leave London. This would prevent any inconvenient visits from the Duke, and would result in all parties fighting the matter out in their own way. The only difficulty was that Helga would not, as far as he could see, feel the weight of his displeasure in the matter.

He did not want absolutely to tell his sister the truth in a crude, unprepared manner, and he hardly knew how to begin.

The Duchess was, however, in the mood for giving him the cue, for although the Duke had seen nothing of Helga, he had, on the other hand, seen very little of his wife. He had been

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most of the time at Lever's. He was there at that moment.

Lynn somehow found the task very much more difficult than he had expected; and in the midst of an attempt to tell her the story a brilliant idea struck him. He would not tell the Duchess herself, he would tell Mrs Burford-White, and the mischief would be done without his appearing too much the maker of it.

Mrs Burford-White lived in a narrow white house in Connaught Square, which, from the outside, looked only capable of containing a staircase; but inside there was an exquisitely-appointed little dining-room on the ground floor, where, with effort, she could dine four people, although two was a more comfortable number.

Behind the dining-room there was the smallest of boudoirs. There were four stories, each story having a pair of rooms to match those on the ground floor—the back room in each case making a compromise with the staircase.

Lynn found Mrs Burford-White at home, and she asked him to stay to lunch. He told her the whole story—at least, as much of it as he knew—and said he hoped that she would just warn Gertrude without telling her exactly everything. Having thus made himself fairly secure, he left the lady to do the work.

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Mrs Burford-White was only too anxious, and tore round to dear Gertrude.

"How is Havant?" she asked, by way of opening the ball.

The Duchess had not seen him that day.

"When do you leave town?" Mrs Burford-White added.

"I really don't know," said the Duchess, irritably. "Havant doesn't seem to care about moving."

"I dare say—I dare say." And the Duchess's friend nodded her head gravely.

"What do you mean, Marie?"

"Well, Gertrude, perhaps it's as well I should tell you. People are beginning to talk."

"Talk? What about?"

"About yourself and Havant."

The Duchess looked mystified.

"People say, although it's very good and patient of you, you ought not to put up with it. Why, I suppose you know that he is being seen about everywhere with a girl called—dear me! I forget her name, only it's something foreign. She's in a milliner's shop, my dear; but that's a blind. I expect she goes there just when it suits her. Perhaps she's got relations to whom it's necessary to pose as being in business. There must be something in it, for what does a man in Havant's position want with a milliner?"

The Duchess was furious. If she herself

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could have been the only one cognisant of the Duke's affair, she would not have minded ; but for her greatest friend to be the one to come and tell her the truth was maddening.

"If this is true, I'll divorce him. I've been treated shamefully lately."

"Divorce him, my dear? Nonsense! You will do nothing of the kind. In the first place, my dear, our Church doesn't like divorce, and certainly permits no advantage to be derived from it ; and secondly, it's your duty to hold on to your position. It would be a crime if you helped Havant to make this girl into a duchess ; and if you take my advice, you won't even quarrel with him on the subject, because, after all, Gertrude, it isn't as though you were in love with your husband."

The Duchess began to wish she had not confided in her friend quite so much.

"No ; you must come to some understanding with Havant. You must be seen about with him more often. Believe me, it's the best way. After all, men soon get sick of women of that kind ; it is only in very rare cases that it is a lifelong attachment."

"It's all very well to give advice, Marie, but you don't understand my feelings. You don't expect me to sit down and countenance the whole thing?"

"There is a great difference between coun-

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tenancing a thing and having a scandal. I know it sounds a terrible thing, but, believe me, ninety per cent. of husbands are, or have been, unfaithful; and although it sounds paradoxical, I am sometimes inclined to think that their affection for us feeds on their infidelity."

"I wonder what she is like?" meditated the Duchess.

"I'm told she is perfectly lovely!" and Mrs Burford-White lingered over the adjective. She knew it must be far from pleasant to her friend.

The Duchess was, on the contrary, rather pleased to hear it. A plain woman would have meant danger. This beautiful woman was probably stupid. The Duchess's instinct taught her that.

"But if I'm not to take any steps, why did you come and tell me?"

Mrs Burford-White might have told the truth, and have explained that she had done it for the mere pleasure of the thing.

"Of course, if you think 'Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise,' I am sorry I have told you. Personally, I could forgive my husband if I had known all about it; but to find out, long after, that one had been living in a fool's paradise would be exasperating."

"But what can I do?" reiterated the Duchess.

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"Well, at any rate, Gertrude, you must let him know in some way that you have found him out."

Privately, the Duchess thought that it was an exceedingly silly thing to make the position uncomfortable, when by a little pretence it might be kept as it was. She had been, however, too accustomed to defer to her friend's opinion to absolutely oppose her.

"What shall I do, then?"

"Well, of course, Gertrude, you must behave with perfect dignity, but as though you were strangers under the same roof. Of course, you know what I mean," and Mrs Burford-White gave a delicate little cough.

The Duchess was angry enough, but, left to herself, her resentment would hardly have taken so decided a turn.

"We don't see very much of each other as it is!"

"You must see less," said Mrs Burford-White decisively. "And, by the way, do you know an old lady called Mrs Hardwick?"

"Mrs Hardwick?" The Duchess repeated the name twice before she remembered. Then she answered, "There is a Mrs Hardwick who was Maurice's old nurse. She is devoted to him."

"Ah! then the whole story is as plain as it can be. This girl is living with her."

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"But you surely don't suggest that Mrs Hardwick countenances it?"

"It certainly looks like it. Of course, she may know nothing about it. The girl seems desperately anxious to stand well with the world, or else she would be having horses and carriages and jewels. Personally, I think the latter kind of woman much safer. There's something very dangerous about a girl who poses as respectable, whilst luring a man of Havant's rank into her clutches."

"It seems to me the best thing I can do is to go back to Scotland, and then, perhaps, when he's tired of her, he'll come to Carrackness," and the Duchess shed a tear or two of mortification.

"He's hardly likely to tire of her as soon as that. You see the whole thing is so remarkable in Havant. He has always been an example among the younger peers. Personally, I thought he would have to sow his wild oats sooner or later."

"I think I shall go and see Mrs Hardwick," said the Duchess.

"Not a bad idea. Perhaps the poor old thing doesn't know anything about it, after all."

The Duchess, however, returned to her former argument.

"If Maurice and I are not going to clear the

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matter up, why should I know any more about it? It will only make me more unhappy."

The notion of wanting an excuse for gathering every bit of information about a probable scandal had never struck Mrs Burford-White. It seemed so natural to find out everything she could whenever she got the chance.

"Of course," she said, as though she were airing a highly moral theory, "I don't think a woman in your position should expect too much of her husband. Remember, he is bound to have a great many temptations."

She kindly consented, however, to accompany the Duchess to Mrs Hardwick's house.

CHAPTER XXVII

Two or three days before Lynn did his best to make mischief between the Duke and his wife, the Duke had decided to leave London and go abroad. The decision had been arrived at during a conversation with Lever; in fact, the idea had emanated from him.

Lever was anxious to bring Helga and the Duke together again; and from what he had learned of Helga, he was certain that she would not see the Duke except at the prospect of its being a last interview. To make the scheme plausible, he proposed that they should travel in Tibet with a large escort, and enter it from the Indian frontier.

He had roused the Duke's hunger for things mystical by his description of his former journey. He always forbore, however, to tell him of his rescue by Broadhurst. He insinuated to the Duke that perhaps Helga might go with them, and was rewarded by an explosion of rage at the mere idea.

"I will tell her why I am going, and I think

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she will understand. The party will, of course, be entirely under your direction, Lever," he added.

But, in spite of his anger, he could not help dreaming of a long journey like this spent with Helga.

Lever was anxious for the journey himself. It would suit his purpose; and if Helga would only accompany them, he would have them both there to his hand. He thought that either she would go with them, or that the Duke would not go at all. He could see that Havant had clutched at the idea of the expedition because it would give him a chance of meeting Helga on terms of emotion. The Duke, of course, was unconscious of his own subtlety, or he would never have been guilty of it.

"I wonder what Broadhurst would say to the idea?"

"He would say 'Don't,' tell us not to mix ourselves up with things that might be dangerous to us, and throw at us all the jargon of authority. You know, Broadhurst is a great believer in authority."

"How do you mean?" asked the Duke.

"Oh, when you come to analyse his beliefs, you will find that it is the Holy Catholic Church under another aspect—an original God, Mind, Spirit, or whatever you like to call it—a whole hierarchy of angels and archangels, and all the

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appanage of so-called moral authority, ending, from whichever way you like to get at it, in an obscurantist church."

"The 'obscurantist' is a matter of opinion, and the general application is rather a proof of its inspiration, is it not?"

Lever shrugged his shoulders.

"True, from a certain point of view; but therein lies its speciousness."

"When could we start?"

"Oh, when you like. In a week's time, if you care to. Most of the things we shall want can't be bought here."

The Duke seized on the closeness of their departure to write to Helga, asking if he could see her once again before he left, saying that he would be in Bond Street the next day at lunch-time.

Helga received the letter in the presence of the other girls in the shop. She glanced at the signature and turned very white. Luckily, she had her back to the others in the room. She thrust the letter into her pocket, and waited until she was alone to read it.

It ran :

"I am about to leave England; it may be for a very long time. May I say good-bye to you alone? I shall be in Bond Street to-morrow at two o'clock."

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Helga's first inclination was to write and ask him not to insist. Then she remembered all he had done for her; and although she knew he would prefer that she should not consider it, with her it counted. Besides, she was but a woman, and in love; and it seemed so good and true an excuse for seeing him.

The day he had arranged to see her was the same on which Lynn told Mrs Burford-White of the relations which he supposed existed between Helga and the Duke.

Helga was terribly agitated when she left Mrs Brigwater's to meet him.

Algernon was sitting in a victoria outside waiting for his wife, and he gave her one of those leers with which he usually showed his approval of a strange female, and which even used to enrage Lynn. It was like an invertebrate Mephistopheles mocking Marguerite on her way to meet Faust.

She hurried on, too nervous to be indignant.

They met; and there was something in Helga's face that loosened Havant's tongue. He had thrown the dust of a long parting into her eyes and his own, and had told himself that there could be no harm in saying how much he respected and admired her. The word 'love' he avoided, although he might as well have used it as not.

In an upper story of Burlington House there

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is a quiet little picture-gallery of four rooms. It would seem that few are even aware of its existence, or else its solitude would tempt more to visit it, if only for rest and surcease from the rush and turmoil outside. At times it is empty for whole hours together, and the porter at the door reads his paper, or snoozes quietly, undisturbed by any necessity for watchfulness.

It was here that the Duke brought Helga. The guardian of the place looked at them curiously, for they would have been a striking couple anywhere.

A hundred times it was almost on the tip of Havant's tongue to ask Helga to do what Lever had suggested, and come with him. He was wondering how he should tear himself away from her; and he shuddered at the prospect.

With Helga it was different. She was conscious that what she was doing was not strictly right; but she also had the knowledge that she was determined that this should really be their parting. Therefore she had undertaken to see him without so much feeling of guilt as there might have been if her determination were less certain.

"It is sad," he said, as they sat together in the furthest room, "to think that, though I shall never meet anyone whom I worship as entirely as I worship you, we must never see each other again."

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"We must forget," said Helga. Her hands lay loosely clasped in her lap, and her eyes were fixed on the picture of a woman with a face almost as sad as her own.

"One can be strong without forgetting," said the Duke, looking up with a sudden alarm at the decision in her voice. He began to feel that he had not been honest with himself, and that he could not tear himself away.

"No; we must forget," said Helga; "at least, in one way we must forget. I shall only remember that I had a friend once—a friend who was different to anyone else. You have been very good to me."

She raised her eyes, full of truth and honesty, to his, and even as she did so, they brimmed over with the tears that would come.

To hold her close to him, to feel his lips to hers, to have her arms round his neck, he would have given his soul; but had Helga been hemmed round by an enchanted power, she could not have been safer. There was that which he could not break through, which destroyed and confounded the worse part of his love.

"We will say good-bye now," she said imploringly.

"Won't you give me something of yours that I can keep?"

"I will send you something," she said.

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They went downstairs, and as they came out into Piccadilly Mrs Hardwick saw them. She had been into the City on business, and coming back, had called for Helga, that they might lunch together. For one moment, after seeing the two together, Mrs Hardwick was tempted to go after the girl—who had parted from Havant—and ask her for an explanation. Then she changed her mind. She was too agitated. She did not feel equal to anything that might further work on her feelings, so she went back to Bayswater in a whirl of worry.

That which had aroused her suspicion was the peculiar earnestness with which they were talking to each other. There was something in the face of both which left little room for doubt. Yet she might be wrong. She would wait.

She arrived home, and had hardly had time to compose herself a little when the Duchess drove up. As soon as Mrs Hardwick opened the door, she guessed what Havant's wife had come for.

The Duchess had been well schooled for the interview by Mrs Burford-White, who had decided to be present. It was a treat she could not deprive herself of.

Neither was prepared for the quiet dignity and grief of the old lady. The combined evidence of the Duchess and her friend,

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together with the incident of the morning, quite convinced her. She had been made a fool of by the Duke, whom she had worshipped, and by the girl who had found her way irresistibly into her heart. Despite her indignation with Helga, her class instinct taught her to resent any expressions of contempt applied by these two smart, well-bred, perfectly-dressed women to a girl of Helga's rank.

She declined to sit down when the Duchess asked her, and remained standing, a picture of dignity and wounded feelings.

"I can only say, your Grace, that I should have thought better of him."

"Nanna, you know it may not be his fault."

"Begging your pardon, your Grace, but I cannot believe that a young girl like her would have raised her eyes so high without encouragement."

"I thought you were so fond of Maurice, Nanna; that's why we came."

Mrs Hardwick was silent. She had too much pride to argue the question of her affection for the Duke with his wife, whom she despised.

"Of course," said Mrs Burford-White, patronisingly, "you will be very careful not to gossip. You see, the Duchess is acting very magnanimously, and wishes the girl to be sent

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away somewhere, quite quietly. She is sacrificing herself for her duty to society."

The old lady glanced at the martyr to duty, and her hard, set lips almost relaxed into a smile. The sting contained in the word 'gossip' she allowed to pass unnoticed.

She remembered the Sunday afternoon the Duke had called when she was out. Had that been premeditated?

She remembered a hundred and one little things, which made her wonder whether she had not been duped every day since Helga had been brought to her. The poor old lady's belief in human nature was becoming utterly demoralised.

Mrs Burford-White felt distinctly uncomfortable at the comprehensive glance Mrs Hardwick gave her when she showed them out.

The two ladies drove away quite in the dark as to how Mrs Hardwick was going to behave, she having declined to be drawn to any purpose. They drove back to Park Lane, hardly feeling that the matter was settled as they had intended it should be.

In the Park they saw Lynn and somebody he ought not to have been with. It was lucky for him that his sister was compelled to pretend that she did not see him, otherwise she would have dragged him off to tea and confidences; and he would have been in the thick of the

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complication he had helped to create, but which he devoutly hoped to be able to keep out of.

Mrs Burford-White declined her friend's invitation to come in and talk matters over. Like most of her kind, having done the mischief, she was anxious to sheer off for the time being.

"Do you think we could go to Scotland to-night, Marie?" asked the Duchess.

"Why not? I'll go home and tell my maid to pack at once. London's very dreary, and I can't imagine why I came back."

"If I send over and ask you to come by the night-mail, will you?"

"Of course I will. You know my ideal of friendship, Gertrude dear. Anything to help or comfort you."

"You see, it will be rather uncomfortable being with Maurice, and that dreadful girl coming between us."

The man who opened the door to the Duchess told her that the Duke had asked to be informed when she came in.

The Duke had determined to tell his wife of his intention of leaving London, and when he heard that she had come in he went to her for the purpose of doing so.

At the first glance he could see that something was the matter; and when he told her what he intended doing, she at once concluded that it was a plan to get away in company with

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Helga. The idea seemed to her so far-fetched. The Duchess had heard of the existence of Broadhurst and Lever only in the vaguest way, and was quite unaware that the latter and her husband had been on such intimate terms. It was little wonder, therefore, that she put the whole thing down to Helga's account.

How to introduce the question of Helga into the conversation she knew not. She would have liked to consider Havant an absolute hypocrite, but her previous knowledge of him gave her an uncomfortable feeling that, after all, his conduct was probably a great deal better than it appeared to be.

"How long shall you be away?" she asked.

"About two years."

The Duchess looked up in amazement. She had not dreamt that he meant anything so serious as that.

"Perhaps when I come back in two years we may understand each other better," he said gravely.

To the Duchess this remark savoured of too much hypocrisy.

"You are going quite alone with this Mr Lever?"

The Duke looked at her quickly. There was insinuation in the tone in which she spoke.

"Yes. Why do you ask?"

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"Nothing. Only, it all seems very sudden and curious."

The Duchess rose. She had not the courage to strike her blow and stand by the consequences. She reached the door, and turned.

"It is very painful, Maurice, for me to have to mention such a subject, but I can only say that I hope you are not going to take that poor, unfortunate girl with you."

The Duchess opened the door and went out.

The Duke sat for a long time after she had left him, as though he had received a blow. That she knew enough about Helga for her suspicions to be awakened was obvious. That she should think the worst of her infuriated him.

He was aroused by the pattering of rain-drops against the window. He looked out. The fine autumn afternoon had changed to a chill and dreary evening.

He cursed himself for having brought suspicion upon Helga's name. Whatever else happened, he must see his wife and force her to hear and believe the truth. He went to the Duchess's rooms, and was told that she had a bad headache.

He went out and dined at his club. There was a hard, steady drizzle. Several men spoke to him, and wondered at his monosyllabic replies. Afterwards he drove to Lever's, and

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the garden, with its drenched trees and sopping grass, looked the drearier that there was no light to be seen from the house.

Lever was out, and although the Duke was at perfect liberty to move about his apartments as he liked, the prospect of that long, cold upstairs room, with its many mysteries, was too depressing.

He drove away, and told the man to go to the corner of the street where Mrs Hardwick lived. They threaded their way through an intricate network of by-ways.

Suddenly, under a lamp, with a great shock, he thought he saw Helga. She was looking about her helplessly, as if undecided which way to turn.

He told the cabman to pull up, and leapt out, but could see nothing. He began to be afraid of himself, and turned back to Park Lane.

His man handed him a note in the Duchess's handwriting. It ran :

"I have gone to Carrackness with Marie. I think you will quite understand that I did not care about being in the same house with you at present."

"What time did her Grace go?" he asked.

"Her Grace left the house in time to catch the night-mail."

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The Duchess evidently did not intend to hurt Helga in any way.

He had made up his mind as to what course of action he would follow. He would tell his mother the whole truth, and ask her to explain matters to his wife. He could do this, as he was able to speak of Helga with all innocence. He went to bed and slept fitfully, and all his dreams were full of the suggestion that something had happened to Helga.

In the morning his man came hurriedly into the room, and told him that Mrs Hardwick was below, and wished to see his Grace at once, if possible. She was in the greatest distress.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE Duke found Mrs Hardwick in a terrible state of agitation, and her first words, as soon as she could control herself, were a reproach.

"Your Grace, how could you? I would have trusted you anywhere, and now——"

"For God's sake, tell me what it is, Nanna!" asked the Duke, his face white with anxiety.

"Her Grace called on me yesterday and told me the truth about yourself and Helga."

"Told you the truth? What did she tell you?"

By degrees he got the whole story of how Mrs Hardwick had seen them together coming out of Burlington House; of how, immediately following this, the Duchess had called upon her.

"I was wrong to see her," he said; "but it was my fault. I swear to you, Nanna, that if you think the worst of her, you are wrong. She is as pure as my own mother."

Mrs Hardwick looked at him in sudden terror. If that were so, how could she tell him the rest?

"Her Grace said she knew otherwise, and

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that was why I spoke to her as I did. And now she's gone!"

"Gone! What do you mean?"

A sickening presentiment of what Mrs Hardwick was about to say stole over him.

"I said something to her that made her leave me then and there, your Grace. She went right out into the night. That was yesterday evening, and she's not been back since."

The memory of the face he had seen under a street lamp came back to the Duke. Then it had been she after all. He groaned, and wrung his hands in despair as he remembered the hopelessness in her face and the wild gaze with which she had looked about her.

"May God forgive you, Nanna," he said. And then, seeing the grief and misery in the old lady's face, for she had been very fond of Helga, he added, "Why didn't you come to me? You know I would have told you the truth."

He turned from her and looked hopelessly out of the window. Where should he look for Helga in this wilderness?

"The horror of such a thing," he murmured; "oh, the horror of it—and to her."

He knew what such an accusation would mean to Helga's temperament — Helga, who had hated herself for her deceit every moment of their clandestine meeting. To such a delicate mental and moral organisation as hers,

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so rude a shock might result in any catastrophe. He shuddered.

It was still raining dismally, and the morning was dark from the depression of the elements. Had she been out in this wretchedness all the night, wandering she knew not where, and with this horror of a hideous accusation ringing in her ears?

His first thought was of Thea. Had she gone there?

He communicated his idea to Mrs Hardwick, who shook her head sadly.

"Not if the poor lamb was innocent. It's just the place she wouldn't go to."

"I must try, however. You go home, Nanna, and if I find her I'll bring her back to you. You will take her in, won't you?"

The Duke hurried away to Thea's.

Thea displayed a good deal of curiosity, but had no information to give.

He wondered if Lever could help him.

Lever listened to his story, but made no suggestion. Things were shaping themselves as he wished. The longer these two suffered for each other, the longer they were kept away from each other, the surer would be the outburst when they met.

Suddenly the idea of Broadhurst struck the Duke. He drove to his house, leaving Lever with a slight smile of cynicism on his lips.

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Broadhurst was away. His servant said he expected him back in the course of the afternoon.

The Duke had remembered the tone in which Broadhurst bade him lean on him, and it was with a curious sense of inspiration that he had turned to him.

He wandered hither and thither all day long. The cold was exceptional for October, and the rain was ceaseless.

He called on Mrs Brigwater, and asked her, as calmly as he could, whether Helga was in. She had not been there that day.

He threw himself back in his brougham and groaned.

His servants wondered at the pallor of his face and the pain in it.

He had thought of the police, but the idea almost revolted him; till towards evening, unable to bear the suspense any longer, and unwilling to let a single chance escape him of finding her, he went to Scotland Yard.

The man whom he saw had that quiet deadliness of manner peculiar to his kind.

"You don't suppose the young woman had any tendency towards self-destruction, do you?"

The man spoke in a calm, business-like tone, and the Duke winced.

"I hope not," he said huskily.

"Didn't leave any letter behind?"

"No. I don't care what it costs"—and

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then he suddenly burst out, "Spend money like water—only find her."

"We'll do our best, your Grace. What clothes was she wearing?"

The Duke concluded that she would have on the same things as when he saw her last. He thought hard for a moment.

"She was wearing," he said slowly, "a black dress of some very soft material"—he repeated the words caressingly—"of some very soft material."

The official, although respecting the young man's obvious grief, nearly smiled. Perhaps he realised that the clothes of the woman one loves are always of some very soft material.

The Duke continued, more slowly, "She also had on a black jacket and a white——" the Duke made a gesture with both hands at his neck.

"Bow?" the official suggested.

"Yes."

"White muslin bow?"

The Duke nodded.

The official was an expert at screwing a correct description out of friends and relatives of disappearing people.

"She also had on a black hat with a grey feather—a large grey feather;" and he added with pathetic simplicity, "she is very, very beautiful."

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This time the man did not feel inclined to smile. He only thought how intensely tragic the words sounded.

The Duke, almost worn out, drove straight to Mrs Hardwick to verify his description.

It was correct but for the white muslin bow.

"She had just begun to take off her things," said Mrs Hardwick, trying to keep back her tears, "and she laid this here."

They stood on either side of the table, looking at the pathetic wisp of muslin with its frilled ends, until the old lady could bear it no longer.

"Oh, my boy, my boy, forgive your old nurse."

"I love her so, Nanna," he said, looking hopelessly before him. "I meant nothing but good towards her, and now, perhaps——" His head sank forward with something like a sob, and the old woman took his hand in hers and stroked it, as she might have done years ago in the nursery at Abshott.

He sat in Mrs Hardwick's room for a long time. At last he rose.

"I'll go now. Perhaps she might come back to you, and it wouldn't do for me to be here."

He had sent his carriage away, and he walked some little distance, unconscious of the rain, till he found a hansom.

He had eaten nothing all day. When he

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reached Park Lane, he asked his man to get him some wine. It was all he could touch. Then he sent him to bed, and sat down to think.

By degrees the nervous tension produced by absolute quiet made him rise and go hastily out into the corridor.

Down in the great, gloomy hall below, the night-porter was reading in his chair. He went back into his room, and, going to the window, opened the curtains, and, almost as soon as he did so, drew them together again. Then he strode to the electric light, and put the room into total darkness. Once again he drew aside the curtains and saw that he had been right.

"It's Helga—it's Helga," he found himself repeating joyously.

She was standing, not opposite the house, but a little way down the road. A yard further and she would have been out of sight.

"She thinks I can't see her." He found himself laughing hysterically as he sped down the stairs, where the porter looked at him in amazement.

"Open the door," he said, "and keep it open. I shall be back in a minute."

As he went out he brushed past a policeman who had been standing on the pavement, arrested by the noise of unbolting and unbar-ring. He watched the figure speeding towards

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the girl, who was leaning with her head against the railings.

"It can't be the Duke," he murmured—"it can't be the Duke himself; and yet I ought to know him."

He hurried up as the Duke held out his arms and caught the falling figure of the girl. When he reached the couple he recognised that he was right, that it was the Duke of Havant.

"Can I do anything, your Grace?"

"No, thanks." The Duke's face was radiant with joy. He carried Helga, as if she had been a feather, into the house. The porter gazed at him in amazement.

"Light me into the library, Leech," he said. They went up two or three steps and down a long passage to the back of the house. The porter unlocked the door. While he was fumbling with it Helga stirred, and the Duke trembled lest she should be terrified on finding herself in that great, gloomy passage with two men whom the lantern hardly revealed.

At last the door was opened, and the Duke touching several electric buttons, the room became a blaze of light.

"Give me all those cushions, Leech."

The man, who had been standing helplessly by while the Duke placed Helga on a deep Chesterfield, collected the cushions with clumsy celerity.

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He sent the man for some brandy, and was left alone with Helga.

Till the servant returned, she did not stir; and the Duke, on his knees before her, watched her, fascinated.

"Can I do anything else, your Grace?"

"No, thanks—you can go." The man, marvelling, left them.

After a minute or two Helga opened her eyes. Seeing him she put out both her hands and laid them in his, as if too weak to struggle. Her head sank back on the cushions, while the tears coursed down her cheeks from beneath the closed lids.

"Do you know me?"

She gently moved her head without opening her eyes, while a word, that was almost a sigh, escaped her.

He asked because her eyes, when he had first seen her outside, had been full of an almost mindless despair. He held some brandy to her lips, and a slight colour came into her cheeks.

"Helga, won't you forgive me?"

For answer she turned her eyes upon him, and he knew that she had never blamed him.

At first the room had seemed warm enough to her, coming out of the cold, but now she began to shiver. The Duke went over to the fireplace and struck a match, and in a minute the flames were roaring up the chimney.

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He would, he told himself, send the porter for Mrs Hardwick. That is to say, he would do so in a few minutes. Helga was here in his own house, and he could not forego the luxury of the moment.

He wheeled the couch close to the blaze. That Helga should be there did not seem in his eyes a wrong to his wife, for in a minute or two he meant to send for Mrs Hardwick. Yet a spirit of rebellion was rising up within him. He wondered if it would not be better to end the mockery of his married life. His future stretched before him waste and arid as a desert; for what could come of a union so poor in love and sympathy? Here, he told himself, was his mate. Here, beside him, was the soul that could help him to live. Both of them would be the poorer because of cowardice. Why not take up his fate, and hold Helga against the world?

And all the time there was another voice within him, the expression of the logical part of him, brushing away with resistless argument his thin sophistry—sophistry the weaker because the moral principle of him was strong. In his inmost heart he knew that, for a man in his position, there was little or no career unless his domestic concerns were according to rule; that is to say, no such career as the world expected, and had a right to expect from him.

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For all his wealth, he would be robbing Helga of something which he could never give back to her.

The struggle within him became fiercer and fiercer. To keep from taking her in his arms, he was obliged to use almost physical force with himself. It seemed to him as if he were fighting some great battle out of all proportion to the usual range of his intellect. As he sat there, with the intoxication of Helga's being gradually taking possession of him, the struggle within him grew.

Helga lay back on the cushions, half slumbering. The fatigue of the last day and night had evidently worn her out. He hazarded one glance at her unconscious face, and then, in terror of himself, made a movement, intending to rise, ring the bell, and put an end to it.

The movement was arrested by Helga, vaguely conscious that he was leaving her side. At the touch of her hand upon his arm, he sank back trembling in every limb, seized by an uncontrollable shivering. As he did so, her hand dropped upon his. The touch of her warm flesh burst the dams of control, and the mighty river of passion surged up, carrying all before it.

She was in his arms, and he had rained kisses on her lips ere he knew it. She clung

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to him, her eyes wide open, looking at him, fixed and fascinated.

"Oh, my dearest, my dearest."

She would have been content to die now, at the moment, in his arms.

"Will you come with me, away, where you and I can be quite alone?"

Her head drooped, and she strained closer to him.

Suddenly he realised what he was doing, and as if aided by a power stronger than himself, he rose and stood away from her. Helga, wondering, covered her face with her hands.

He went to the door, walked down the long corridor, and called, "Leech!"

"Yes, your Grace."

"Take a cab and drive to 15 Bury Street, Bayswater. Knock Mrs Hardwick up at all costs, and bring her back with you. Stay—I don't want you to ring when you come back. You know the window of the room I am in—it looks out on that side street. Knock at that window and I will let you in."

Left alone, the Duke returned to Helga. He found her standing away from the fire, as if she were making ready to leave.

"I must go now," she said.

"I have sent for Mrs Hardwick."

"Oh, no, please! Oh, please don't do that."

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"I have already done so."

"But she——"

"You mustn't think of what she said," he answered quickly. "She is sorry—she did not understand. I have seen her and told her the truth. She knows that you are quite blameless. Won't you sit down till she comes?"

Fearful lest he might think that she mistrusted him, she went back to her seat by the fire. There was something peculiarly broken-hearted in her movements—a pathos in them that went straight to his heart. It was her wretchedness that had made her weak. He felt that he must explain himself.

"Helga, I asked you to go away with me. Would you have done so?"

She looked before her, and her eyes filled with tears.

"I don't know," she answered simply.

"I won't ask you that again."

"I want to go home," said Helga—"back to my own people."

"Do you really wish that?"

The girl bent her head.

"You have not been very happy here in England."

She looked at him, with almost a reproach in her eyes, for she had been happier than ever before in her life, and all the misery that she

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had endured since she first found Thea to be what she was, till the time she fled from Mrs Hardwick's house, could not mar the joy of love that had been hers. She felt that it was for her sake that he had not repeated his request, and she knew that to do this he must love her very much.

Then they sat silent for some time, he looking drearily into the future when there would be no Helga, yet not realising it. While the beloved is still with us, it is always more or less impossible to conceive a lifelong separation.

With Helga it was in a sense different. From the first moment she had heard that the Duke was married, she had been convinced of the impossibility of any relations between them. It was not probable that, even after her momentary weakness, she would have consented to go away with him. The guilt of such an action would have been to her horrible. She would always remember him, and she would always love him; but she was already thinking of home with the sentiment of a tired child after a weary day.

As if divining her thoughts, the Duke said :

"I shall never be able to come to Norway again. If I did, it would show that I had forgotten you."

The Duke's nature was too chivalrous to

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contemplate the possibility of an incident occurring which might enable him to marry Helga.

"I shall never forget you," she answered. "And I want to say——" She hesitated for a moment, and then looked him straight in the face. "It has made me very proud and happy to know how much you have thought of me."

The Duke restrained himself with an effort. Her speech roused in him all his mad desire for her love and companionship.

Then they again became silent, and continued so till there came a slight tap at the window.

For a moment he almost sighed with regret at the thought that the delicious danger was over, and that he was giving her back of his own free will, without taking advantage of her surrender to him.

"There is Mrs Hardwick," he said, and went towards the door. When he reached it he looked back. He caught her eyes looking after him with an infinite yearning. He stepped back and took her hands in his.

"Kiss me, Helga, once. Remember, it is our good-bye. We shall never see each other again."

She kissed him gently and serenely on the lips, almost as simply as a child might have done, and passed her hand lightly over his cheek, as if to comfort him.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE next day was one of misery and depression. A dozen times the Duke tried to rouse himself to resume some of those interests which the meeting with Helga had interrupted. He fought for the mastery of himself with supreme courage. The struggle was an unequal one, and he felt that he was being tossed here and there by his emotions like a ship without a rudder.

Once or twice he actually sat down to write to Helga and tell her that he had been wrong, that he could not live without her. Yet, each time he did so, the singular intuition for the logical consequence of things drew for him the inevitable future that their union would bring to them, with a relentlessness that made him brutal to himself.

And again and again the unclean animal that fights with man for the possession of his tenement renewed the attack.

The creature is feline, and his victim could feel the claws as they opened in anger.

Should he surrender they would once

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again conceal themselves behind the velvet and fur.

A dishonourable surcease from pain was the bribe.

The evening was far advanced when, for the twentieth time, he threw a half-completed letter into the fire, and determined to go and see Broadhurst.

Luckily he found him at home. Had the Duke known it, Broadhurst expected him.

At first the Duke was amazed at his appearance. He wore an Oriental robe of some soft, white, woollen material, gathered round him in many folds.

He looked at the Duke gravely as the latter entered the room.

"I suppose you would call this an affectation?" he said, pointing to his dress. "Believe me, I have a very special reason for wearing it."

It was part of the man's character not to brazen it out; but, as it was out of the common, to apologise for it.

The Duke, begging him not to make any excuses, sank into a chair.

"You are ill," said Broadhurst, bending towards him.

The Duke leant back. He was afraid he might give way, the tone of the other was so tender and sympathetic.

"I am not exactly ill, but I am worried."

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Broadhurst said at once :

"And you have come to tell me all about it."

The Duke looked at him in surprise.

"What you said to me once encourages me to do so," he answered.

By degrees, Broadhurst heard the whole story, although—if the Duke had known—it was not new to him. Step by step, he had watched the progress of it.

"I came to you to-night because I almost feel tempted to go back on my word and take her away with me."

"Do you remember," said Broadhurst, "the first night you came here—the night you met Lever?"

"I almost wish I had never met Lever."

"It was I who arranged that meeting. By doing so, I lessened the force of a shock which was bound to come. As it is, the results have justified me. Poor Lever! He is nearer to discovering the truth of what he calls 'ethical fads' than he imagines."

The Duke rose, and took a hurried turn up and down the room. At last he paused and said :

"Who are you? Who is Lever? Be frank with me."

Broadhurst did not answer for a moment; neither did he move from the impassive attitude he had taken up after he had first greeted the Duke.

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"Do you remember those Egyptian parchments?" he asked at length.

The Duke had to think for a minute. They had been given to him on the eve of his meeting with Helga. Since then he had forgotten them.

"You have not read them?" Broadhurst added, after pausing for a reply.

"No."

"And yet they were in your own handwriting."

"Mine?" The Duke stared at him in amazement.

"You remember the letters?"

"Yes," said the Duke slowly.

"Most of them were written by a young man of the day with some aspiration towards good. They were written to his tutor. The young man was your soul incarnate in early Egypt, and they were written by you to me."

Broadhurst spoke with authority, and there was no doubting his sanity.

"But how do you know this?"

Broadhurst looked at the young man with exceeding tenderness.

"Once your soul had climbed almost to the end of its earth-cycle. In its final trial, which was to decide its worth, it failed and fell. Around this earth spreads a wider chain of

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glorious revolving souls. My place was with them, but I remained behind to help you."

The Duke sank into a chair. There was no disbelieving or doubting what this man said.

"Is it possible to follow a human soul like that?" asked the Duke. "How shall memory grapple with such a stupendous task?"

"Your battle has been a keen one. I know how its proportions have exceeded those of an ordinary struggle. Believe me, the average soul is not capable of even contemplating it. You have earned your revelation. I will show you that which can help you."

Broadhurst rose, and as he did so the clock struck ten. He took a seat by the Duke, and held out his hand.

"Take my hand, and come with me."

The Duke did as he was told.

Immediately he was travelling down the same road that he had taken that memorable night when he met Helga; but he knew that he was being led by an infinitely safer and surer guide, and that the road was shorter.

Soon Broadhurst and he were moving through a murky atmosphere not unlike a thick London fog. He felt that jets of light were around him, but as yet he was unable to distinguish their uses or their positions. Neither could he distinguish and classify the life which he knew was moving near him.

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"I have brought you this way," said Broadhurst, "so that you may see what the real hell is like that man makes for himself."

Suddenly they came across a group of what looked like degraded men and women. The Duke was conscious of the atmosphere round them being impregnated with the fumes of alcohol. Trembling and sodden they stood, with a strained look of expectancy in their eyes. The Duke thought he had never seen anything so revolting as their appearance. On some, the flesh hung so loosely as almost to hide the human shape. Now and then one or the other would give a deep sigh, and the gross lips would open thirstily, only to sink back again to the mobile attitude of animal expectancy.

"Here men have, owing to the more plastic matter of which their bodies on this plane are composed, forms corresponding to the elevation or degradation of their animal natures. In life, drink will coarsen and render loathsome a man's body, as will evil living of all kind. In this world the effects of such evil living are proportionately greater.

"You cannot see it," continued Broadhurst; "but these people are standing round an ordinary public-house of the worst kind. They have drunk themselves to death in it, and are now spurring their fellows on earth to the same

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course, while they suffer the agonies of an unsatisfied desire."

He spoke in a tone of the deepest commiseration.

They passed on, seeming, as it were, to force their way through the pitchy atmosphere. Unexpectedly there rose up before him a figure and face which, despite the circumstances in which they were revealed, the Duke knew at once. The blood streamed from an open wound in the temple and stained the white shirt-front, and in his hand he held the small, glittering instrument of his death. The features, which in life had been singularly handsome, were moulded pitilessly by the life he had led on earth. What had been attractive was now repulsive. He passed from them, the muscles of his face contracting, and his features working in mental agony.

"A suicide," said Broadhurst, "must live out here that which would have been the natural span of his life."

The Duke, who might have been moved to tears by a recital of what he had seen, could only feel awe in the presence of the working of a newly-revealed side of the philosophy of perfect justice.

"It is well you should see these things," Broadhurst said. "You have shown that you are ready."

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Then there fled past them a child who seemed to be running unconsciously, and pursuing it there came a man with an evil and brutal countenance; and ever the child fled, and ever the man pursued, coming no nearer to his victim.

"The child, you see, is not conscious of its pursuer. The man is its murderer."

Then, as the Duke became more accustomed to the place, the shapes came thick and fast. They gazed at him inquisitively, for the Duke wore a form corresponding to the real beauty of his character. The faces he saw around filled him with horror.

At times the magnetic current that ties, once formed, set up, drew towards him people he had known on earth. A woman who had been a great beauty came towards him. The Duke remembered that she had died suddenly under mysterious circumstances. Her face, which on earth had been so beautiful, was now an index to the loathsome moral life she had secretly led. The coarsened features more resembled those of one of the lower animals than those of a human being, and she ambled up, leering at him with an expression of sensual desire aggravated by the lack of a physical body.

About all the forms there was the same restless, feverish manner. They had the

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anxious gaze of the caged animal, which paces day after day, year after year, the narrow limits of its prison-house, always eagerly looking for the means of escape.

By degrees, the atmosphere became clearer, and the shapes around them more pleasant to look upon, till they found themselves in a land similar to that in which he had met Helga.

Then the voice of Broadhurst said :

"Dream not that Time blots out anything. All that has been is recorded. This is your soul's progress since its fall. Look and learn."

Broadhurst's voice died away, and before the Duke passed on almost endless series of pictures.

It was no confused procession of disconnected events, but a logical sequence of existence, which the Duke recognised as the history of his own soul. Sometimes so real, so vivid, were the incidents portrayed, that he again lived in the emotions and passions that were older far than man's recorded histories.

Terrible, woeful, and piteous as were some, bright and happy as were others, there were none that had the vast significance of the first. As it passed before him, it roused the voice of a memory which said :

"This is the City of the Golden Gates,

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Lord of the Empire of Atlantis, hidden now beneath a vast ocean. In its monarch see thyself. Hundreds of fathoms down after its fall, the living things of the deep sea sailed through its spacious ways and lofty halls, gazing curiously into the open, drowned eyes of a race more beautiful than the gods of Hellenic dreams, brushing smoothly and mysteriously past the rising and falling limbs, decked with useless gold and precious stones. Gradually the streets—once trodden by gilded sandal, the bared feet of slaves, and the ivoryed hoofs belonging to beasts of now fabled symmetry and grace—have become carpeted with clinging parasite and crawling ocean reptile."

Then the Duke realised why this thing was; and as he did so, his soul shook his physical body with moans of penitence.

There rose before him the City of the Golden Gates, resplendent and magnificent, its majestic buildings, its groves and gardens, its superb water-ways, the palace of the king, glittering and gorgeous. He saw his soul incarnate in the person of the King himself, a young man so beautiful that his subjects cried out that he was a god. Daily the incense of flattery floated about him as a cloud, and hid from his sight the truth of things. By his side was a maiden, stolen

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from her shepherd parents, and baptised with wine as his harlot.

He was the last of a long line of Priest-Kings. His ancestors had been semi-gods, great souls come down to human bodies to govern a beloved and advancing people.

There had then been no scepticism amongst the priests and people as to the glorious hierarchy of the spirit-world; but by degrees the Kings had fallen away from their divine mission of teacher, and had given themselves up with their people to coarse and vicious indulgences, till the gross atmosphere thus created became a veil to hide from them the subtle and finer spirit-worlds.

And now he was the last, almost a boy in years, with the known world as his vassal. Two men, his secular minister and the Arch-Priest of the temple, were his advisers.

The Duke saw in them at once Broadhurst and Lever.

He saw himself at the banquet, the maiden by his side drinking from his cup, the profligate courtiers and a courtesan aristocracy fawning for his smile. Before him swayed, with rhythmic motion, the dancers of his court, the gauze that covered them so light as only to accentuate the delicate colouring of their skin and not to conceal it. Singing-boys, grouped round the banqueting hall,

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sang with clear, sweet voices, to the accompanying chatter of sycophant and concubine. An ape-like creature—the more hideous that the physical type around him was so beautiful—swung from a golden hoop, performing feats of extraordinary agility and strength, till those at the table threw him fruit and sweetmeats.

The city without, swollen with wealth wrung by its armies from conquered nations, imitated servilely the weaknesses of the young King and his court.

Every morning, the King set forth from his palace and ascended to the Chief Temple, built on a high hill, from whence he blessed the people. In olden time, this blessing had been a very real thing; now it was little more than a form.

The ancient Priest-Kings had gone forth alone, girded like hermits, to stand in all humility before the high altar, where the sacred, magical symbol lay encased in a golden casket.

But now the King went daily forth accompanied by a splendid retinue. Mammoth reptiles, trained to obey the slightest touch of the warriors mounted on their backs, came first, casting malevolent glances on the shouting people. Though moving at a slow pace, in battle they were capable of incredible speed; and though other nations

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also used them for the same purpose, none were so effective and splendid as these which preceded the King of the Golden Gates. Next came the musicians, playing a sweet, wild march, using subtle gradations of tone, the complexity and sweetness of which are known in modern times only to the Mongol races. They were followed by the King's own guard, the creatures these picked warriors rode answering the purpose of horses, but not wholly like them, having cartilaginous wings like those of a huge bat, which, though not giving them the power of aërial flight, added enormously to their speed. Then the King's chariot, a heavy slab of ivory upon low, thick golden wheels, drawn by twelve animals with scarlet, silken fur flowing to the ground, and having the appearance of enormous cats. Each of these was led alternately by a boy and girl, naked but for a loin-girdle of flowers, their bare skins gilded, till they moved like things of gold. The King, clothed in white, with the sacred symbol of his forefathers on his brow, was seated on an ivory chair. Behind him rose the gigantic, clay-red figures of two Lemurian warriors, with their long shooting-tubes, the modern gun simplified to its most scientific form. At the King's feet crouched one of the degenerate race of Yaval.

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Then came a vast array of foot-soldiers, men with bodies covered with hair like animals—by no means savage, but keen-witted enough—followed by others with squat, powerful lower limbs and huge, muscular arms and shoulders. Each with her lover, the invincible regiment of Amazon women, doomed to death if they should experience the weakness of maternity. Held in leash by slaves, the fighting dogs, of vivid colours, used in night-attacks.

Lastly, creatures of the pterodactyl type, their black wings hanging idly like loose pieces of flesh. They were hooded as were hawks in the Middle Ages, and wore a silver collar round their long, sinister necks. Now and then, with an evil lighting of their eyes, they shewed their long rows of formidable teeth, at the same time emitting a low, almost terrifying sound, a mixture of a hiss and a growl.

This daily pageant held the people in awe.

On the King's arrival at the temple, the Arch-Priest would meet him with rebukes and reproaches which, though they stung him at the time, were soon forgotten in the honeyed flattery of his secular minister.

It was for the Vestal Virgin, custodian of the golden casket, that his soul yearned.

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And the Duke saw, with a thrill of amazement, that this was Helga—Helga, even more beautiful than she was to-day, the same kindred soul lighting up a body, different, but which could not disguise it.

Every day when the King entered the cool shadows of the temple, his eyes sought her, and he hungered. If he could possess her, he might also persuade her to find some means to give the golden casket into his own hands. Then he would possess her, and divine power as well.

"Take her," whispered his secular minister, "you are the King—why should you not? Do not heed what you have been told about that golden bauble placed there by your forefathers. Either it contains nothing, or it contains that which will make you more than King." For the minister knew the power its possession would give, and coveted it.

The Arch-Priest looked, and saw what was in their hearts, and sighed.

"Take her," again whispered the soul who was now Lever.

The King went back to his palace, and dreamed.

The Arch-Priest came to him, saying :

"If you do this thing, you will destroy yourself and your people. Corrupt as they have become, by restraining yourself you may

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achieve a victory which may leaven your whole character, and thus lead you to influence your people for good. You are their last hope. Betray them, and countless ages shall pass ere your sin be expiated."

And the Vestal Virgin dreamed of him also, and as she dreamed she woke, and found the King by her side, his arms already round her neck, his lips to hers.

"Now that you are mine," said the King, "lead me to the golden casket and give it to me."

The girl, with the love-light in her eyes, knew that she must do all that he told her, because of that which had made him her lord. And she led him through the moon-lit arches to where the casket lay, and as they looked upon it, it was dawn. She placed it in his hands.

Impatiently, yet with superstitious awe of the sacrilege he was about to commit, he broke the sacred seal. What he saw burnt itself into his soul for ever. Then he grew sick at heart.

The maiden had seen nothing, because her eyes were fixed on him.

Then the picture became one of the most awful desolation the world has ever witnessed. The land cracked asunder in a thousand places, chasms engulfed cities as a beast swallows its prey. In all the cities of Atlantis, the

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people, mad with fear, ran to and fro, while the unsound earth was convulsed beneath their feet. The King and the woman with him essayed to reach his palace, but were struck down and massacred by the people, who saw the golden casket in his hands.

For days the skies belched flame upon the tortured land—for days the general devastation continued. Then the earth sank down, and the waters rushed over it.

Where there had been smiling fields and pleasant valleys, there was a raging ocean, and the City of the Golden Gates and the continent it had ruled were no more.

* * * * *

And the Duke saw his soul depart from the earth into the Land of Sleep, and after many years it returned again to expiate the Sin of Atlantis.

Away up to his present life the pictured records were unfolded before him, complete in every detail.

* * * * *

A country, barren, ice-bound, lapped by a sinister, dreary-looking sea. A man, dwelling in a cave like a wild beast. In the long twilight winter, fashioning pieces of rock into spear-heads, that, when the summer came, he

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could go forth and make provision. A lurid animal brain, through which fled, fitfully, incoherent dreams of lust and cruelty. The brain, an inferior physical material through which the already developed soul strove with a spiritual agony to manifest itself, yet all its noble thoughts and high ideals turned to grossness and absurdity.

His mate, a woman with a stupid, savage countenance, bearing him children as she lay on skins spread across the floor of the cave. In the woman—whose nature knew but two things, an animal affection for her lord, and the fierce maternal sentiment of protection for her children—the Duke recognised the soul of Helga. In the bodies of his children manifested the soul of many of the sycophants of Atlantis. And the horror of it smote him like a blow.

* * * * *

The Duke looked, and saw a city belonging to an antique and forgotten civilisation. There were kings and aristocrats—there were paupers and criminals. And of this last class the Duke was one.

A convulsive shudder shook his semi-conscious frame when he gazed on the body which his own deeds had prepared as a habitation for his soul. It was that of a

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thief and cut-throat of the most degraded type.

With him was a woman, little better than himself, and once more he recognised the soul of Helga within a torture-chamber of flesh. They quarrelled, and drank, and fought.

And one night, when the city lay in sleep, and the cold, impassive moon looked on the deed with quiet eyes—even as she looks on the restless horrors of modern nights unmoved—the man rose, and, with the lust of murder in his heart, strangled her, and with fierce blows destroyed the semblance of humanity.

* * * * *

And the Duke realised that where he went Helga must go, and that what he did, she too must do.

The soul passed on through many lives of terror and horror, and the Duke wept tears of anguish and pity as he saw himself as he had been.

* * * * *

He lay as a beggar at the rich man's gate. His soul was bitter; for disease, poverty, and low birth had made of him a loathsome beggar. From the rich man's house, servants threw him bread as if he were a dog. He

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cursed the day he was born, wondering the reason of it; for his former life and its sin were hidden from him. The empty pity, which was freely given, enraged him. The children jeered as they passed, and he snarled at them like an angry beast. And again the soul of Helga was drawn to him. This time, in the form of a serving-girl, she came day after day and spoke to him gently and cheerfully. Till at last she came no more, and they told him she lay sick to death. At night he crawled to his den with thieves and beggars like himself. In the morning he stole forth to catch the first warm ray of sunshine; and, as he lay wishing that death might come down the sunlight way and take him up by the hand, he saw the people running and shouting, as if heralding the approach of a king. And there came a man clad in robes which, though spotless, were poor and simple. And he stood by the beggar and said:

"Hail! King."

And the beggar asked why he called him king, who was so poor and wretched; and the man in simple raiment said with a great sweetness:

"More king than when thou ruledst a kingdom of this earth."

And the beggar, his heart softening, though he knew not why, said:

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"Wherefore more king?"

And the other said:

"Because thou hast known suffering such as few men have known. It is set to thy account."

And the beggar, seeing the beauty of suffering, and its need, bowed his head and said:

"I am content."

And when he said this the filthy rags of flesh, which had been his prison-house, fell away from him, and he was free.

And as his spirit departed again to the land of rest, they bore out the body of the young serving-girl who had been the one person who had really pitied him; and their souls fled swiftly to the Land of Sleep.

* * * * *

By degrees the struggles of his soul grew more and more intellectual and less animal. The scenes he witnessed did not repeat the earlier horrors of the beggar and the murderer. Slowly, side by side with Helga, he was fighting his way back to his throne.

The minor details of his lives fled by with extraordinary rapidity. It was only when some event of first importance took place that it remained before him, retained, as it were, by the force of interest; and, curiously enough, these incidents of first importance were not

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great, dramatic effects such as deaths, battles, or great personal antagonisms. Although everything counted, these might be of comparatively little moment.

He analysed, with supreme coolness and judgment, the passions and emotions which had been so real to him in lives past. He traced the landmarks of his soul's progress by, as it were, ethical resolves, resulting from a multitude of facts and circumstances, the sum total of figures that refused to be longer ignored.

At first, he would appreciate that a thing was good without any sense of the duty of personal application. Then, by a similar process, the need for this would be borne in upon him also.

As the happy, light-hearted boy, the dreamy youth, in ambitious middle age, and as the disappointed or successful old man, he watched with fascination and eagerness the kaleidoscopic development of character in its innumerable traits. Here, a collection of vices would in their ultimate action sow the seed of some single virtue, or *vice versa*. In one life certain abilities were a curse; in another, they became a blessing.

Besides Helga, there were amongst the thousands of souls with whom the ties he made continued to strengthen, two powerful personal

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influences which he saw affecting him everywhere—one for evil and one for good.

For some reason it was very difficult to trace them, and the Duke perceived that their power had been more felt than seen. The higher his intellectual life grew, the more clearly their relations to himself became visible ; and at last, as a citizen of Memphis, when at the height of its power and glory, he detected these two influences to be Broadhurst and Lever. And he saw himself writing the very letters from pupil to master that Broadhurst had given him the first evening they met.

Then all these pictures faded and gave way to that one which came last before his present incarnation. He saw himself, a former favourite of the Court of Nero, a patrician of patricians, standing in the arena surrounded by the plebeian Christians, ready and glad to die for that creed in which he conceived himself to have found ultimate salvation.

* * * * *

The Duke returned to himself with the same peculiar shock to his system as he had experienced the night Lever had taken him into the unknown land to meet Helga. But, inasmuch as Broadhurst had given him an infinitely stronger support on his journey thither, so the shock of his return was equally lessened.

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His glance fell on the clock. It was five minutes past ten.

The infinite succession of picture-recollections of his soul's life—recollections which seemed to have taken years in passing before him, some of them dealing with lives of great length—had taken just five minutes.

He stood looking at Broadhurst in amazement. The latter seemed to divine his thoughts, for he said :

"You are quite right. We have seen a great deal in five minutes. But you are shaken. Come with me."

They went into the dining-room where the Duke had first supped with Broadhurst and Lever. The curtains were close drawn, and a fire burned in the stove. Broadhurst poured out some unfermented wine and gave it to the Duke, saying :

"This stuff is a wonderful tonic."

The thing that amazed the Duke most about Michael Broadhurst was the astoundingly matter-of-fact way in which he talked of, and passed through, occult experiences. There was not a trace of excitement in his manner.

The wine that Broadhurst gave him dispelled the peculiar depression which he had felt on returning to himself.

Broadhurst sat down opposite to him.

"It is strange to us, as human beings, that a

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great culmination like this should take place in so prosaic a manner. I suppose, to the average mind, it would be devoid of effect, but to me it is intensely dramatic—though perhaps it lacks theatricals."

The Duke listened to him in silence. He was remembering as well as he could what he had seen.

"And a more curious fact is," resumed Broadhurst, "that the knowledge you have gained to-night, and the philosophy it embodies, will not prevent your feeling as strongly in the future. Perhaps I am wrong in saying 'as strongly,' for additional wisdom, however small, must temper emotion."

"It is very wonderful," said the Duke. "More wonderful than any human being could have conceived."

The suffering in his heart returned with the memory of Helga.

Broadhurst seemed to divine what was in his thoughts, for he said :

"We must let her go back. Do this thing, and your souls shall know a greater joy than they have ever known."

"She is going back," he said, a little drearily. "I have asked my old nurse to take her back herself."

Then suddenly he looked at Broadhurst.

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"Why am I chosen from other ordinary men for these mysteries?"

"If you could see yourself—I mean the self that is literally you—stripped of fleshly disguise, and could compare it with other egos so stripped, you would understand that you are nearer the end of your earthly cycle than they."

"You mean that I shall not live long?"

"No—not at all. I mean that reincarnation in this world will be of no further use. You will have learnt its lesson."

"What!—I, who know so little? Just think of the things there are to learn."

"You misunderstand," returned Broadhurst. "You are confusing the principle of earthly matter with the more spiritual agents which manifest through it. You are given a body with certain limitations—limitations necessary for you to break down. It does not follow that your self may not have accumulated knowledge that it is not to the purpose you should use in this particular earth form."

The Duke thought deeply for a moment.

"I must believe you," he answered, "for you have shown me things that it is more logical to believe are real than that you should have invented them; and there is behind all you say that sanity of conviction which only authority possesses."

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He rose and walked up and down the room, whilst Broadhurst watched him sympathetically.

The Duke stopped before him.

"You are helping me more than Lever."

Broadhurst could have smiled at the idea of Lever helping anybody.

"You have never been in love?" asked the Duke, with an almost boyish eagerness.

Broadhurst looked at him, and his face grew radiant, almost effulgent.

"Till we learn to love everyone as ourselves—and more than that, everyone as well as the beloved—there is for each of us a fellow-soul which is always with us. When we meet it on earth, it fires us to stronger effort. The higher our souls, the higher that effort is."

"And you?" He spoke in the hushed voice he might have used on entering a temple.

"She is at peace. She has earned a long, long rest."

There was silence in the room for some minutes, and the Duke felt as if the atmosphere had become purer and sweeter by reason of the fleeing of evil things. And he felt that he had found something for which he had thirsted—an example, a distant glimpse of the goal for which he and Helga were making.

The veil had lifted for a moment, and the beyond had been illuminated by the radiance

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of Broadhurst's face when he spoke of his fellow-soul at peace.

Would it not be easier for Helga if she too could see the things he had seen?

Something of this he suggested to Broadhurst, who said:

"You do not realise. Were she to do so, she would not understand."

They sat and talked, and the Duke felt as if he were sitting by the side of one whose words could heal.

At last he rose to go, feeling calmer in spirit than he had done for weeks.

"Lever told me that you intend to go on an expedition to Tibet with him. When do you start?"

"I have changed my mind," said the Duke. "I am not going."

"It is strange that you should both have thought of that expedition."

"Why so?" asked the Duke.

"I had intended to enter Tibet by the north-east route. I have friends there, and am welcome. That route is new to me, and will, I think, be interesting."

"Are you going alone?" asked the Duke, tentatively.

"I had intended doing so, but—you would like to come with me?"

The Duke's face lightened. He saw a

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possibility of escaping from the misery and depression of the next few months. But before he could answer, Broadhurst had added :

"I start the day after to-morrow—come if you care to."

"You are too good."

"Why, have we not always been friends? You were my pupil three thousand years ago. Good-night. Come and see me to-morrow; we will pick out a good train."

Broadhurst spoke as though he were going away from Saturday to Monday.

"We will get the things we want as we go along. It will be so much more interesting," he added.

The Duke left him. Whenever he remembered that he and Helga must see each other no more, a spasm of pain contracted his features, but Broadhurst had convinced him of its inevitability; and there is great curative power in that.

CHAPTER XXX

ON leaving Broadhurst, he went straight to Lever. He had received a note from him in the morning, asking him to call and make some final arrangements for their Tibetan journey.

The Duke was anxious that Lever should thoroughly understand how their relations had altered. He could not say what it was, but the finer atmosphere of Broadhurst, the recollection of Lever's advice as regards Helga, and the more exalted condition which sacrifice brings, all gave him a sudden distaste for the man and his ways.

The Duke was still willing to bear the cost of the expedition if Lever cared to go; only he wanted frankly to tell him—and to do so himself, in order that there might be no suggestion of anything underhand—that he was going to travel with Broadhurst instead.

There would be something evasive about settling such a matter by letter.

Lever's servant was not surprised at the Duke calling so late. Long years had accus-

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tomed her to the eccentricities of her master's friends. She told him that her master had been up most of the night before, and was now in bed. She would tell him that his Grace was waiting.

Lever entered the room looking, as the Duke thought, ghastly. Although he smiled with an attempt at his usual manner, it was easy to see that he was undergoing either extreme physical suffering or a great mental strain.

As he greeted him, the Duke noticed that his hands were very cold.

"You look fearfully seedy."

Lever looked at him fixedly for a moment.

"I was about to say the same of you."

"Oh, I haven't slept for twenty-four hours."

"Neither have I. I have been working at an experiment which has failed. It means a good deal, and has worried me somewhat. Let us talk of something else."

They went upstairs. Lever, from force of habit, took up some of his ceaseless work.

"I am afraid," said the Duke, "that our trip to Tibet will have to be abandoned. At least, so far as I am concerned."

Lever was glancing over some tracings, and, without raising his eyes from them, murmured:

"Indeed?"

"That is to say——" The Duke paused. He was anxious not to hurt the other's feelings.

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"I do not intend to go myself, but if you will take somebody in my place, and let me bear the cost of the expedition, its objects will be met. You see, occult science wouldn't gain much by my going, and mankind at large would be benefited by such an addition to your knowledge." The Duke could not resist this gentle gibe.

"It is not a question of mankind at large. I am not interested in them. I leave that to Broadhurst."

He spoke a little coldly. His remark, however, set the Duke thinking of how sympathetic Broadhurst had been in his present suffering.

"What do you think?" he asked Lever. "Will you oblige me?"

Lever thought deeply for a moment. The night before, he had suffered a defeat which was rankling. His defeat had been the Duke's victory.

To have money enough to pursue such an investigation had long been his desire. The Duke had mentioned a certain sum as the cost of the expedition, and Lever knew in his heart that he could exceed this amount by three times. He saw that the Duke felt that he owed him some compensation.

He would go.

"You are very generous, Duke," he said,

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looking up. "I shall be glad to go. It will help me enormously."

Though the Duke did not grudge the money, he was for the moment a little taken aback at the readiness of the acceptance.

"Shall you take anyone with you?"

Lever paused again.

"I think not," he said. He was inwardly deciding to take a friend from Delhi, whom he had never seen, but with whom he had long been in correspondence.

"I think it only honest to tell you that I am going a journey with Broadhurst."

There was silence between them.

At last Lever looked up. His smile was unruffled.

"I perfectly understand," he said.

For some minutes they talked distantly on general topics, and then the Duke rose. He was in that state of mind when it is impossible to remain long in a confined space.

"Good-bye. I will give Coutts instructions to let you have what you want."

"We shall meet again?"

"Of course—of course," answered the Duke vaguely. He was thinking of Helga.

"By the way," said Lever, "how are the affairs of your heart?"

The Duke looked at him for a moment defiantly.

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"She is going back to Norway. It is better."

Lever took his hand ; and, with keen appreciation of the comedy, said :

"Duke, you are a splendid fellow. You have thrown away that which without trouble was yours. Do you think she will thank you for it? I wonder."

The Duke left him, his distaste for the man growing momentarily.

As he let himself in at Park Lane, the clock in the hall chimed two.

Amongst the letters his man handed to him, there was one in the handwriting he had not seen since the morning he first met Helga. As he took it up he felt something hard, and, opening it, took out first a little gold circle set with one tiny pearl. He had seen it on her finger.

"Good-bye, my best and dearest friend. I shall always pray for you. I have spoken to Mrs Hardwick, and she thinks I might keep the chain and cross. I am sending you my ring. You said you would like to have something to remind you of—
HELGA."

"Why this?" he said, "for she is with me always."

But he kissed it and sighed.

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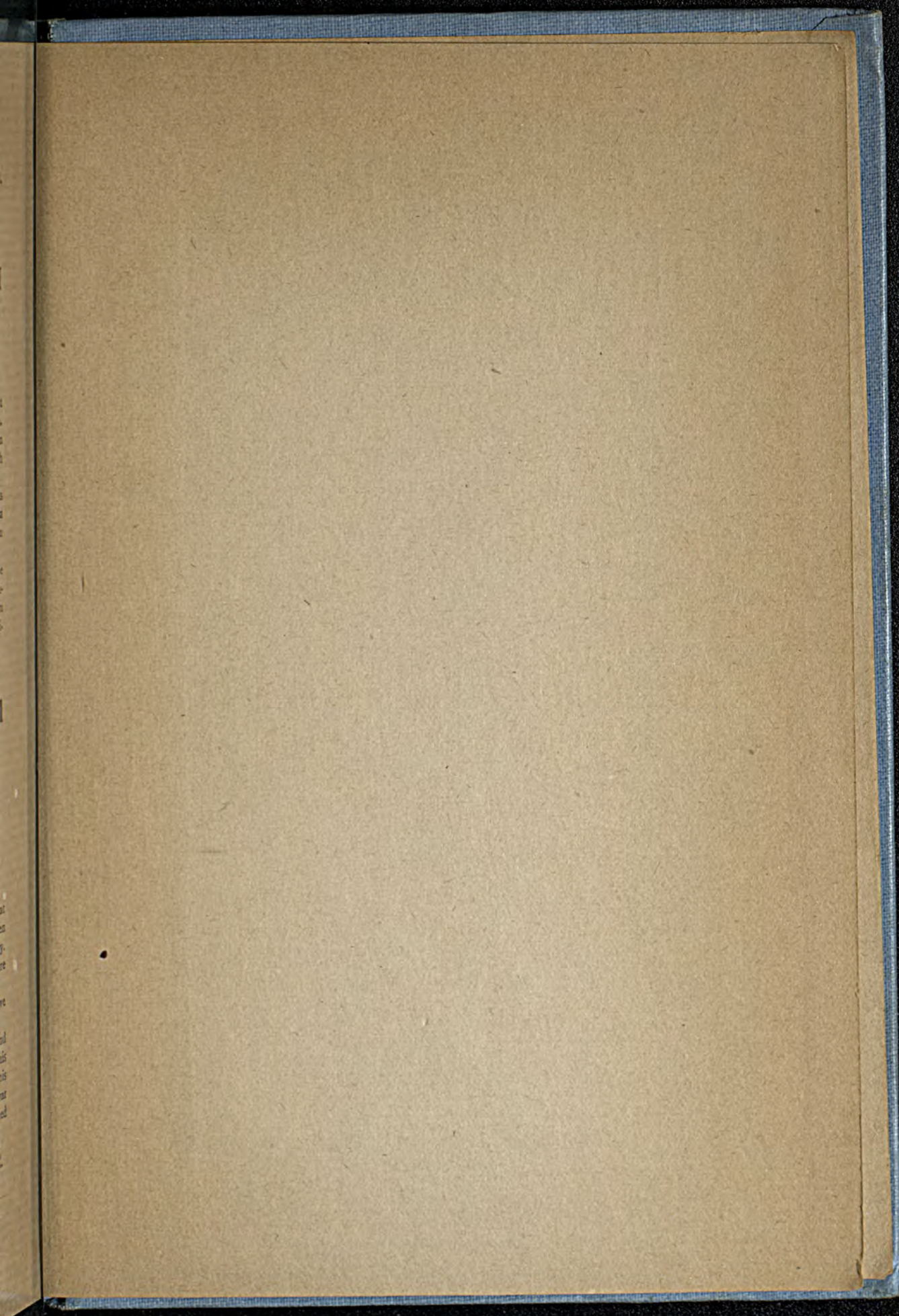
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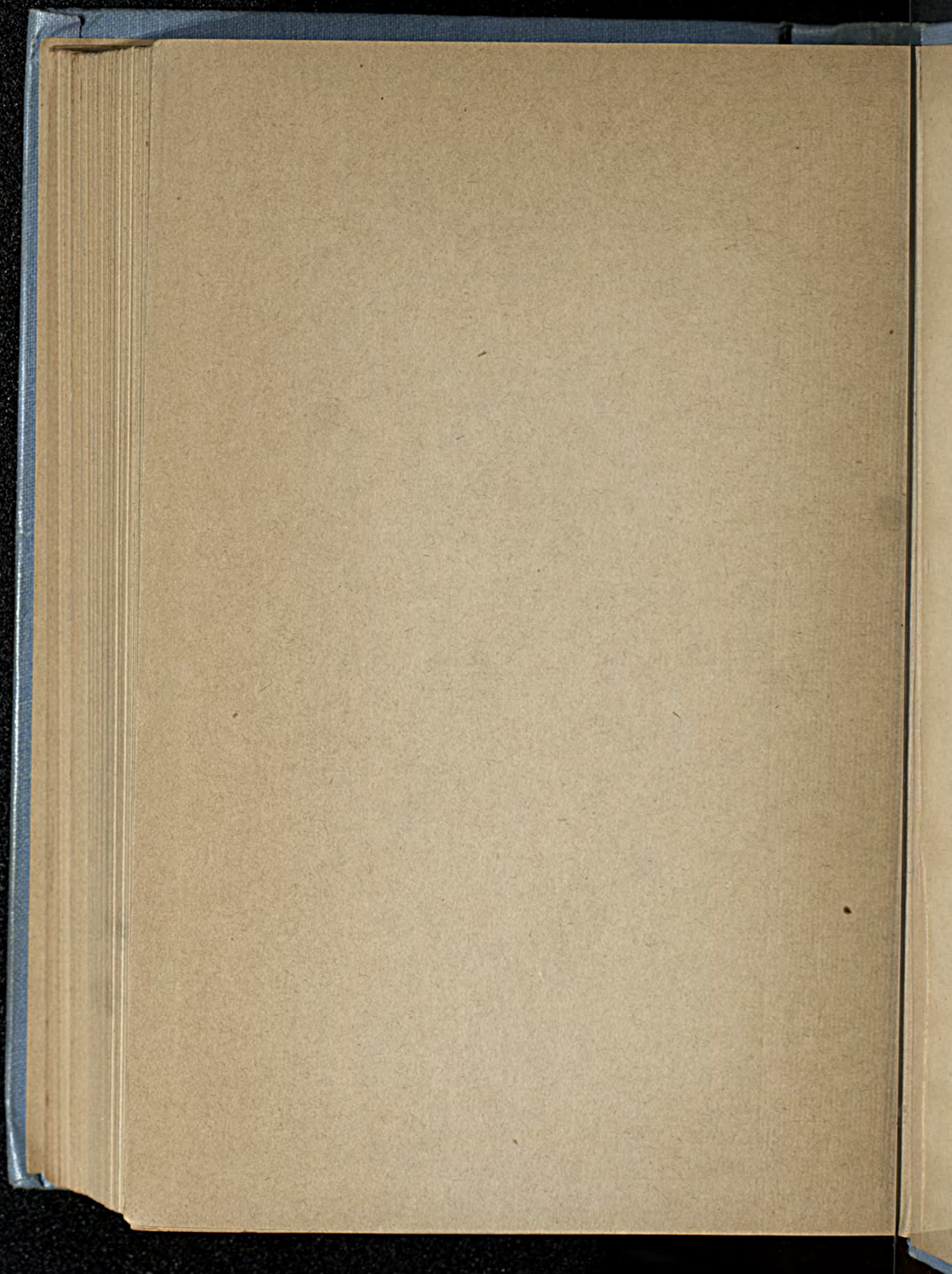
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